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DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM,  
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# SPREADING THE MESSAGE?

Populism in German newspapers and their  
presentation of a populist party

**Marika Philippsen**

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## Abstract

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In academia, the concept of *populism* is a topic that is treated as frequently as it is controversially. In trying to grasp the concept, this study takes a two-parted approach as it is not only considering the concept in its entirety and examines the extent of its existence in German daily newspapers, but also how those newspapers deal with populist-minded politicians and parties. Through a theory-based breakdown of populism into its *stylistic* and *ideological* components as well as the additional consideration of the concept of *media populism*, which is closely related to populism, corresponding insights are gained. To this end, this study examines the content of two national German daily newspapers, a tabloid (the BILD Zeitung) and one broadsheet newspaper (the Süddeutsche Zeitung), in three open ways, that allow for all possible outcomes: by means of a quantitative and two qualitative content analyses. Each of these analyses is characterised by different focal points and approaches to the concept of populism.

The findings allow the conclusion that both newspapers show clear populist characteristics, especially the stylistic aspect of populism stands out. In addition, it can be determined that the tabloid newspaper tends to show more populist traits than the broadsheet newspaper. A critical attitude towards populist German parties can be found in both newspapers, but here the broadsheet dominates the tabloid. With reference to media populism, this study additionally establishes which role can be assigned to the two newspapers in the context of their reporting in a populist sense and how said reporting can ultimately be named for both.

## Foreword

Before the main part of this work begins however, I would like to show gratitude to those people who basically contributed as much to getting this work done as I did.

First off, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Mats Ekström for the time and patience he offered, when putting me back on the track that eventually led to the completion of this thesis.

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# 1. Introduction

“Sunday was a dark day for Germany. For the first time in its postwar history, a far-right party won enough votes to enter the Bundestag. [...] It’s shocking. It’s a catastrophe.“ (Sauerbrey, 2017).

These words could be read in the *New York Times* on September 25, 2017, one day after the 19<sup>th</sup> Bundestag elections in Germany. The day before, the “far-right party” to which the US daily refers here, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), had not only become the first new party to enter the Bundestag since 1990, but it also became the third strongest force and largest opposition party in the German parliament gaining 12.6% of the votes (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019).

In less than five years since its founding, the party achieved what seemed impossible for a long time in post-war Germany, as other parties with a similar political approach were unable to gain a foothold in the country (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). The reason for this is not the lack of such parties (cf. Fawzi et al., 2017), but rather Germany's National Socialist past (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). This past is not only the basis for a hesitancy of many voters to place their cross with a right-wing party (Kitschelt, 1995), but also for the reluctance of many politicians to be associated with such political stances (Art, 2011).

For the understanding, what made the AfD succeed despite this in 2017, two circumstances can be named as central. First, the AfD did not appear as a right-wing populist party from the outset (cf. Arzheimer, 2015; Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). At the time of its founding in 2013, the party rather positioned itself as a largely liberal Eurosceptic party that primarily wanted to appeal to intellectuals and the financially well-off (Diermeier, 2020). At the beginning, it saw itself as a direct competitor to the Christian Democratic Union. Within two years, however, the AfD experienced a rise of its right wing (ibid.) and a resulting radicalisation and development of thematic focuses that no longer corresponded to the original idea of the party (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). At the same time as these developments, and here lies the second relevant circumstance that helped the AfD to succeed, Europe was in the middle of the so-called refugee crisis. The newly structured AfD was able to successfully profit from this (ibid).

Since then, the party, its contents and electorate have been the focus of numerous academic studies (cf. Hansen & Olsen, 2019; Diermeier, 2020). For this paper, too, its rise in importance in German politics can be seen as the starting point, but not the focus. Rather, this paper aims to explore and understand the possible consequences of this rise. Guided by the question about

the extent to which populist ideas have found their way into the German perception alongside the AfD, this work examines German media and their reporting in this regard since 2017.

## 1.1 Populism in research

In their 2008 published book about populism in western Europe, Albertazzi and McDonnell note, that since the turn of the centuries “the main area of sustained populist growth and success” (p.1) was nowhere more observable than in western European democracies. Around 15 years after this statement, a look at national elections, such as the one in Germany from 2017, shows the role that parties classified as populist still play in Europe today (cf. Hameleers et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018). It therefore seems unsurprising that scholars worldwide are increasingly addressing the issue of populism and that the number of academic papers about the topic has “skyrocketed” (Brown & Mondon, 2020, p. 297) since the turn of the millennium. In the field of social sciences, one of the focal points in this regard has been the link between the observed rise of populist parties and voter behaviour in individual countries (cf. Arzheimer, 2009; Hansen & Olsen, 2019; Otjes et al., 2020). However, as scholars like Vliegthart et al. (2012) or Esser et al. (2017) call attention to, the possible link between the rise of populist parties and the mass media has remained comparatively under-explored in the process. In fact, much of the literature that to this day is considered inextricably linked to populism (for example, Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000) does not address the role of the media at all (Esser et al., 2017). This lack of research is remarkable for several reasons. First, as Esser et al. (2017) point out, just like the political landscape in Europe has changed over the past decades, so have the media systems in it; a process said to have largely facilitated populist actors and the delivery of their messages. Further, the media is generally seen as an essential part of a society, as a “link between parties and citizens” (Vliegthart et al., 2012, p.316). It gets frequently associated with the role of a *watchdog* that keeps an eye on national and international political events and presents them transparently to the public (Owen, 2017) and is ascribed relevance as a “lens through which people view society and the world” (Fletcher & Park, 2017, p. 1281). It is all these factors that lend relevance to the question of why media have been paid comparably little academic attention to in the context of populism to date. The ongoing call from academia for further, in-depth research in this area therefore does not seem surprising (cf. Hameleers et al. 2019).

This continuing request for further studies is certainly in large parts due to the fact that the knowledge gained so far in this area appears promising and highly relevant: Several studies have been able to show a connection between media and (mostly right-wing) populist parties

through a wide variety of methodological approaches. For example, Vliegenthart et al. (2012) showed that for five of the six populist parties that were considered in their study, media coverage had a positive effect on the public perception of these parties. Similarly, the researchers continue, this effect is also found when media reporting focus on the leader of a populist party. Furthermore, as can be read in their study but also in the text by Esser et al. (2017) for example, it does not initially seem to matter whether the coverage by the media is positively or negatively connoted. It is the visibility that matters. Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2007) controlled for the effect of reporting about immigration-related topics to the willingness of people to vote for anti-immigrant parties. Their findings are clear: “We found a significant positive influence of news on vote intention for anti-immigrant parties” (p.413).

Seeing this, it appears easy to conclude that populist parties are dependent on the media covering them and their topics. Indeed, Vliegenthart et al. (2012) write in their study, that populist parties, more than other established or governing parties, depend on media attention to convey their political messages to the electorate. This is mainly because these parties cannot rely on a stable voter base in the same way as other parties and generally tend to operate on the outer fringes of their respective party systems. Some media providers or even countries, as Wettstein et al. (2018) write, are aware of this fact and join a so-called *cordon sanitaire*, in which they refuse to cover any populist-related topics at all or only report in a negative or critical tone. Such media treatment of populist parties could be observed, for example, in Sweden, France but also Germany. In Germany, where research about the relationship between media and populism is considered equally scarce as it is internationally (cf. Fawzi et al., 2017), journalists are said to generally exclude reports about parties like the *National Democratic Party of Germany* or the *German People's Union* in their reporting and even keep this up, when those parties reach notable election results (Schellenberg, 2005; Esser et al., 2017), an event that would generate coverage from other media outlets in other countries after all (Vliegenthart et al., 2012). However, none of these mentioned parties were able to reach electoral success comparable to that of the AfD, a resumption of such investigations therefore appears reasonable.

But regardless of whether a media outlet or a country joined a *cordon sanitaire* or not, actors of populist parties have, over time, found ways to generate media attention for themselves, for example by communicating controversial statements (Vliegenthart et al., 2012). Cases like Sweden show how successfully a populist party can use the media to its advantage. The media there, originally taking part in the *cordon sanitaire*, did not want to comment at all on the populist party *Swedish Democrats*, and when they did the coverage was almost entirely negative.



Even though the media were initially reluctant to report on the party, the coverage about them increased over time and at a certain point surpassed that of established Swedish parties, thus demonstrably giving the Swedish Democrats an advantage at the ballot box (Esser et al., 2017).

It is at this point, that it becomes apparent that the media-populism relationship is not a one-sided one: populism and its actors are newsworthy (Mazzoleni, 2008) and hence generally of interest for media outlets. As Hameleers and colleagues state in their study from 2019, many journalists are inclined to present populist issues or actors, as they usually generate increased public attention and thus more readership than other issues and actors would. No matter if journalists do this because they are simply following media logic or not, Hameleers et al. regard this aspect as a strong explanatory factor for the success of populist parties in Europe.

## 1.2 Focus of the study

As Hameleers et al. (2019) further state in their study, it is also conceivable that populism is spreading in Europe due to media content being populist *in itself*. This can happen when journalists, consciously or not, provide content with populist features and accordingly carry this way of thinking into the population (see also Mazzoleni, 2008). As Hameleers and colleagues (2019) further point out, the question about the extent to which media itself formulates populist content, has received even less empirical consideration than the question of how much attention populist political actors and issues receive in general by the media (see Bos & Brants, 2014) and, as mentioned before, how this attention can affect the public perception of those actors and issues.

Studies that have tried to shed a light on this under-investigated question, are for example that of Hameleers et al. (2019). The researchers were able to demonstrate in their quantitative comparative study of media content, that "journalists are not just passive reporters" (p. 1146), but oftentimes actively shape reporting and add populist features to it. Relevant findings in this area could also be obtained by Ekström, Thornborrow and Patrona in their repeated scientific collaboration. By applying a variety of methodological approaches, the researchers contributed significantly to further confirm the increasing legitimisation of populist issues and ideas in several European media offerings (cf. Ekström et al., 2020, 2021; Thornborrow et al., 2021). Regarding this, it does not only seem interesting but also necessary to further investigate the extent to which media report in a populist way on their own initiative. With a shift towards a more *media-centric* perspective rather than an *actor-centric* perspective, as Wettstein et al. (2018, p. 491) refer to it, this study intends to further fill in this scientific gap with a focus on the country

of Germany. This first and main research interest of this study can thus be summarised in the following preliminary research question: How populist is the news reporting in Germany?

Given the aforementioned fact, that the entering of the AfD into the German parliament ended a period in post-war-Germany when right-wing populist parties appeared unelectable, this study further seeks to investigate the media's coverage about these parties. In this respect, the AfD is used as a proxy for all parties with a similar populist orientation in Germany, as it has presented itself as the most relevant of those by entering the German parliament. While it has been established, that smaller parties oriented to the right were mainly excluded from media coverage in Germany, the same has not been as clearly stated for the case of the AfD. Hence, as a second research interest, this study plans pursuing the exploratory question of how the media's treatment of the AfD looks like and in what way it differs from that of other German parties.

## 2. Theory

The theory that will be used to answer these main research interests is essentially based on two concepts: the concept of *populism* and the closely related concept of *media populism*. By understanding what exactly constitutes these phenomena and how other studies have systematically operated with them before, this study seeks to find methodological ways enabling it to examine German media regarding its possible populist reporting. This understanding is to be established with the following section.

### 2.1 The concept of populism

The party that is said to have first put a name to the idea of populism is the People's Party from the United States (Bos & Brants, 2014). Based on their party history, the first ideologies associated with populism tend to be considered liberalism and socialism. Looking at modern engagements with the topic, it becomes apparent that the understanding of populism has changed since then, while also definitely varying in different geographical areas. In South America, for example, the term continues to be associated with socialism, while people in Northern Europe tend to associate it with liberalism. In Central and Eastern Europe, populism is rather understood as a conservative, often nationalist phenomenon (ibid.).

This first rough classification of the concept already gives an idea of the complexity that seems to constantly surround the terminological debate on the term. Indeed, few studies leave a doubt about how difficult it is to grasp the "far from homogenous phenomenon" (Ribeiro & Zelizer, 2020, p. 114), this "notoriously vague term" (Canovan, 1999, p.3) of populism. In Germany, as

Fawzi et al. (2017) write, this debate gets so intense among scholars that some have already advocated to exclude populism altogether as a subfield of social sciences.

But even though there is still no clear, scientific definition and thus no clear scientific way of dealing with or investigating the phenomenon, promising attempts and ideas can be found in the literature. One reoccurring approach to conceptualise populism is its three-part composition as (1) an ideology, (2) a type of political movement and (3) a type of rhetoric or political style (cf. Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Krämer, 2014; Moffitt, 2016; Fawzi et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018).

Each of these parts is marked by certain characteristics and scholars tend to focus on one of these elements in their research, but for the study planned here, each of the parts is relevant, which is why each will be discussed individually in the following. In this context, the political classification of the AfD will also be conducted.

Firstly however, it should be mentioned that even though populism is a phenomenon that is observed and investigated at both ends of the political spectrum - left and right - and even though some of the explanations of the phenomenon mentioned below apply to both extremes, this paper only deals with the right end of the spectrum. This is because, as was shown before and will be further highlighted in the upcoming explanation, the AfD can also be placed in this part of the spectrum. Furthermore, and in order to prevent possible confusion, a circumstance should be mentioned which, as for example De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) point out, often appears in research on populism but is rarely addressed. This circumstance is the mix of concepts – most frequently the concepts of populism and *nationalism*. Despite overlaps in content, both concepts have different cores and views, but are often considered as one in many studies. Since this study focuses on the idea of populism, it therefore orientates itself on the main differences between the two concepts as highlighted by De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) in order to avoid such mixture as much as possible.

### **2.1.1 Populism as an ideology**

Starting with the idea of populism as an ideology, one definition almost suggests itself. Mudde's (2004) description of the phenomenon is widely accepted and frequently mentioned by scholars and hence almost seems inevitable when wanting to define populism as an ideology. To Mudde, populism is a *thin ideology*, according to which a society divides itself into two parts, that of the *pure people* and that of the *evil elite* (Mudde, 2004, p. 562). In the literature, a third group is often added at this point, that of the *dangerous others* (cf. Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008) by which one usually refers to non-members of a certain area, such as immigrants or refugees.

However, as De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) state, the juxtaposition of ‘the people’ and the ‘dangerous others’ is an idea of nationalism, while populism focuses entirely on the confrontation between ‘the people’ as underdogs and the powerful elite. While references to the dangerous others can be found in populist circles, these references are then usually linked back to the faulty behaviour of the elite, hence are not exclusively directed against this group of dangerous others (Moffitt, 2016). For populism, ‘the people’ are the centre of all its ideas and doing, the representation of their will and the emphasize on the contrast to the elite is the essence of its ideology (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Hence, populist actors often actively position themselves as one of the people. Nationalism on the other hand surrounds all its ideas around the signifier *nation*. The nation is “envisaged as a limited and sovereign community that exists through time and is tied to a certain space” (p.308) while being constantly threatened through certain non-members of the nation or other nations. Accordingly, nationalists normally refer to themselves as citizens of their nation (ibid).

With regard to this, the present study will refrain from using the word citizens to describe people living in Germany as this expression is so closely linked to the ideology of nationalism. Instead, the word inhabitants will be used.

Literature that put both discourses, nationalism and populism, together often translate the enemy images of the elite and the dangerous others to the idea of in- and out-groups. Accompanying explanations such as this one by Hameleers et al. (2019) accordingly bear the hallmarks of both ideologies: "The in-group is commonly referred to as the innocent people who belong to the imagined community of the heartland. The out-group can be constructed both *vertically* as the elites and *horizontally* [emphasises in original] as societal out-groups" (p. 1146). In accordance with De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), this study will only take the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite into consideration.

When trying to explain what exactly is meant by ‘the people’ in the ideology of populism, it becomes apparent that there is once again not one clear definition. Instead, this definition often seems to depend on context and circumstances. The people may be voters, the working society, farmers, or no particular group at all (Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000). Stanyer et al. (2017) write, that populists also refer to individuals as the people who share common features, such as religion, race, nationality, or region. Regarding the text by De Cleen and Stavrakakis however, this kind of distinction between people is a highly relevant part for the ideology of nationalism as well, where people justify their right to a nation through the same language and origin of the people in it. For this study, it was decided to mainly consider references to the people as

populist, that undermine their underdog role in a society and highlight their difference to the elite, in accordance with what has been described as the core of populism (cf. Stanley, 2008; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Fitting references to the people are accordingly phrases like *ordinary people*, *little man*, *common man* as well as *man in the street* (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017, p.311)

When researching characteristics that the literature associates with the people, one often finds words like authenticity, honesty, hard-working and rule-following (Stanyer et al., 2017). Whenever it fits the narrative of a populist actor however, the people might as well be referred to as hopeless, unhappy, angry, poor, or similar negatively connoted words (Caiani & Della Porta, 2011). These kind of characteristics, presenting the inhabitants as disadvantaged and worse off than other, as well as the fact that this group is often portrayed as the hopeless victims of the elite, victims that need guidance in the joint effort to renew political processes (Caiani & Della Porta, 2011; Stanyer et al., 2017) also seems to reflect De Cleen and Stavrakakis's description of populism the best and is hence relevant for this study.

Nevertheless, characteristics with positive connotations in relation to this group are also recognised as relevant to the study, since a strongly positive portrayal of inhabitants can also have significance in terms of how the newspaper relates to them.

The elite on the other hand is composed of members of the establishment, primarily politicians from established parties. Oftentimes, the elite may also include intellectuals, business people, the media or external players such as the EU (Stanyer et al., 2017). Regarding the group of the elite, it was decided for this study to focus on politicians as possible representatives of this group. Common populist references in regard to politicians specifically are for example *the ruling class* or *the political caste* (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 311). Characteristics assigned to this group include being deceitful, corrupt, backstabbing, ineffective as well as favouring their own or foreign interests (Stanyer et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018). In Germany, as Caiani and Della Porta (2011) state in their research, criticism targeted at the political elite “is above all framed with reference to the national historical past and national identity” (p.195). Politicians are seen as too politically correct and afraid of stating the truth due to a continuing feeling of guilt.

### **2.1.2 Populism as a political style**

In addition to its understanding as an ideology, there are also numerous publications highlighting the increasingly prominent role of populism as a political style (cf. Moffitt, 2016; Ekström et al., 2018). When considering this partial aspect of populism, one is faced with the

same complex terminal debate that surrounds the main phenomenon: there is no clear definition of what constitutes populism as a political style. While there seems to be agreement that populism, or a *populist style*, has joined the ranks of other political styles in the political landscape, there is far less agreement on how exactly to outline it. Descriptions that are often found in the literature dealing with the phenomenon include a strongly emotional, straightforward, critical, moralistic, sometimes aggressive expression as well as a simplified slogan-using language reminiscent of the style of tabloid newspapers (cf. Canovan, 1999; Mazzoleni, 2003; Bos & Brants, 2014; Krämer, 2014; Ribeiro & Zelizer, 2020). However, as Ekström et al. (2018), with reference to Higgins (2013) point out in their study on the style of right-wing populists, populist style is a highly dynamic one that is flexibly handled by its users. On the one hand, this is because populists want to distinguish their style from that of other political styles and thus stand out. On the other hand, other political actors often use elements of the populist style in their statements. Since populists want to position themselves as anti-political, they have to change their style continuously. Furthermore, and as with populism as an ideology, differences in perception of what constitutes this style appear when looking at it from different social-cultural perspectives (Ekström et al., 2018).

In order to find a description that is nevertheless applicable for this study, the work of Moffitt (2016) is resorted to. In his extensive discussion of the concept of populism, the researcher also recognises the complexity of defining populism in general as well as a political style. However, based on a comprehensive study of politicians classified as populist worldwide, he is able to identify three essential characteristics of a populist style. These are (1) *appealing to 'the people'* while highlighting their *division from 'the elite'*, (2) the presentation of *bad manners* or (3) the pointing out of *crises, dangers, and breakdowns* within a society (Moffitt, 2016, p. 43 ff.). With the first characteristic, Moffitt alludes to the aforementioned essence of populism, underlining how relevant it is also in the rhetoric of a populist to portray the elite as the enemy, responsible for everything that seems to go wrong in a society and bringing nothing but crises and problems to the people, who are the true holders of sovereignty. As bad manners, Moffitt (2016) essentially still understands today what scholars such as Canovan (1999) and Mazzoleni (2003) already noted in this context twenty years ago: an expression of populism reminiscent of the style of a tabloid newspaper. Hence, politically incorrect language, consisting of slang and swear words and an overly colourful phrasing are typical in this regard. Bad manners are used by populists to distinguish themselves verbally from the rational and carefully formulating elite. Finally, the populist style is also characterised by the highly simplified presentation and highlighting of (apparent) crises and threats in a society. These crisis situations can occur between

people and the elite, but also between people and other aspects within a society, such as social or economic change or even immigration (Moffitt, 2016).

In the discussion about a populist style, another aspect that is often mentioned in literature seems relevant for this study as well: the attribution of blame. Not only are populist actors generally more likely to attribute blame in their communication than other actors from different political backgrounds (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014) but, with regard to Germany, this fact seems also to be of interest because there, as mentioned before, populist actors often resort to it to call out politicians of other parties for their lack of courage and their persistent sense of shame regarding the nationalistic past of the country.

### **2.1.3 Populism as a political movement**

Finally, looking again at the party landscape in Europe, populism can and must also be seen as a politically motivated movement. Here, these parties regularly present themselves as innovators who want to change the political process by making democracy more direct and aiming for popular sovereignty (Stanley, 2008; Stanyer et al., 2017). Often, these political movements in Europe and their representatives are also said to have an anti-immigrant stance and to advocate nationalism (Stanyer et al., 2017). Well-known and partly politically established populist parties in Europe are for example the French *National Rally*, the *Finns*, the *Law and Justice Party* in Poland as well as the *Freedom Party of Austria*.

Germany, as mentioned in the introduction, is a special case in this respect. Unlike other European countries, the populist momentum developed late (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019) but eventually successful in the form of the party *Alternative für Deutschland*. Doubts expressed by some scholars in the early days of the AfD's history, as to whether the party could be identified as a populist one (cf. Arzheimer, 2015) have now been overcome in the most recent literature on the topic, which concurs that the party can be classified as populist (cf. Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Hansen & Olsen, 2019; Diermeier, 2020). Meanwhile, there continues to be disagreement about the specifics; while Diermeier (2020) refers to the AfD as a *right-wing populist party*, scholars such as Arzheimer and Berning (2019) or Hansen and Olsen (2019) go a step further by calling the AfD a *radical populist right-wing party*.

In order to provide clarity, the work of Mudde (2007) can again be drawn upon. In his book on radical populist right-wing parties in Europe, he forms several party families that differ from each other by certain characteristics and attitudes. As in his 2004 publication, he writes that a party can be considered populist if it believes in the division of society into two groups (pure people versus the elite) and pursues policies that follow the idea of a *volonté générale* (Mudde,

2007, p.23). A party can additionally be described as *radical* if, for example, it displays authoritarian traits or represents the idea of nativism and thus, for example, rejects everything foreign in its respective country. Finally, according to Mudde (2007), a party is *extreme* right-wing if they reject the principle of democracy generally or even threaten it.

In the past, efforts have been made by German officials to place the AfD under official observation in order to investigate whether the party should be classified as extremist and hence as a threat to democracy (cf. Connolly, 2019; Bennhold, 2021). Most recent developments in that regard indicate, that such an investigation will take place (Schumacher, 2022). As, however, these developments are still underway during the writing of this paper (May 2022), this study will refrain from describing the AfD as extreme. Instead, the party is referred to as a *radical populist right-wing party*. In this study however, the main focus is laid on the populist aspect in the labelling of the party.

## 2.2 The concept of media populism

Despite its still young history as an object of academic study, media populism, or the research approaches that make it up, have already become a research focus in journalism as well as populism research (Wettstein et al., 2018). Similar to the concept of populism, various explanatory approaches to media populism can be found in the literature, some of which complement and condition each other and therefore cannot always be entirely separated.

In general, as Krämer writes in his 2014 discussion of the concept, media populism can be seen as populism that is practised by the media themselves, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly. This happens in complete independence of any kind of relationship to populist or general political parties. Krämer also points out that this is not a phenomenon that can be observed across all media, but that it only occurs in some media outlets and with sometimes strong differences in type and frequency.

In the case of media that exhibit media populism, three types can be distinguished. Some of media outlets deliberately use populist language, i.e. they intentionally spread populist ideas among their readership (Esser et al., 2017). This type of populism, *populism by the media*, has already been observed in several European countries. Another form of media populism is when media use populist forms of expression but do so more for stylistic than ideological reasons. Here Esser et al. speak of *populism through the media* and refer to the work of Mazzoleni (2008) who speaks of a conscious or unconscious complicity between the media and populist parties. Lastly, Esser et al. (2017) also mention *populist citizen journalism*, which describes the expression of populism in the media through the voices of inhabitants. Thus, when media give people



in a society the opportunity to express their populist opinions publicly, for example in the comment columns on their website, they are also performing media populism.

How media populism looks in practice can, inter alia, be read in the study by Hameleers et al. (2017). They distinguish between three types: *people centrality*, *anti-elites*, and *monocultural media populism* (p.482). As in the previous explanations of the phenomenon of populism, the people and the elite also play a central role here.

The first, people centrality, can be regarded as the most minimal or even empty type of media populism. It solely focuses and highlights the will of the common people within a society. Their opinions and experiences stand in the centre of media coverage. Anti-elite populism in the media is correspondingly expressed through the portrayal of the harsh contrast of these good, innocent people to the corrupt elite. An elite that is portrayed as untrustworthy and unimportant. Finally, in monocultural media populism, the priority is the deliberate exclusion of other groups considered dangerous, such as minorities or refugees. These groups are given as little media attention as possible, while the pure people, the true members of society, get all the more attention. (Hameleers et al., 2017). This last-mentioned type clearly bears marks of nationalism and hence does not, in contrast to the other two stated types, appear highly relevant for this study

As mentioned earlier, media populism can be practised both intentionally and direct or unintentionally and indirect by media providers. In Western democracies, as Wettstein et al. (2018) point out, media tend not to consciously endorse populist ideas or use populist stylistics, thus tend to practice media populism unintentionally, if at all. Often, they even actively try to counter it, for example by contesting or criticising populist ideas and actors (ibid.).

As with populism, media populism is obviously a multifaceted concept that can be empirically investigated using a variety of approaches. In their 2018 study, Wettstein and colleagues address this challenge by defining three roles that journalists can take on in relation to populism: The role of (1) a *gatekeeper*, (2) an *interpreter* or (3) an *initiator/organiser*. While the former role is generally a high relevant one, it can not be addressed within the planned methodology of this paper, but will be referred back at a later point of this study. The ideas behind the other two roles, on the other hand, are of great importance for this study. As will become clear, both role ideas are closely related to the explanatory approaches to media populism mentioned before.

By the role of an interpreter, Wettstein et al. (2018) understand the idea that when journalists write about populist content, they may deliberately present and portray it negatively or

positively and thus actively influence the public's perception of populism. By the role of an organiser, Wettstein and colleagues basically understand the aforementioned media populism *by the media together with the focus on the people and anti-elitism*. Here, journalists see themselves "as a voice of the people and a countervailing power to governments, parties and the political establishments" (Wettstein et al., 2018, p. 491).

### 3. Data and study design

As the two main concepts forming the framework of this study have been discussed, the next step lies in presenting the theory building the pillars that this framework will stand on. These pillars are (1) the media selection, (2) the choice of the study periods and (3) the basis for the cases selection.

#### 3.1 Media selection

Beginning with the first of these pillars, the selection of the media for this study, the choice seems to lie between the medium of newspaper and television, as these are the two mediums most frequently used by studies dealing with a similar research focus. While the choice for the medium of television could well be argued for as it is not only one of the most important sources of information for people living in Germany (Newman et al., 2020) but has also been thoroughly investigated in some studies, like the one by Bos and Brants (2014) about populist rhetoric in media presented before. Their study could be considered a helpful guide in this regard. However, the present study chose to focus on the medium newspaper, following the approach of studies as done by Vliegenthart et al. in 2012 or Hameleers et al. from 2019. It should be mentioned in this regard that while print newspapers in Germany are generally struggling with steadily declining readership figures, there are nevertheless some specific newspaper brands (e.g. DIE ZEIT or Süddeutsche Zeitung) that are highly trusted by the public in Germany (Newman et al., 2020). In addition, many recipients in Germany today obtain their news from online sources, and in this area the online offerings of German print media continue to play an important role (ibid.). It therefore seems sensible for this study to also include the online offerings of the relevant print media.

With the focus on print media and their relationship to populism, a further essential debate quickly arises: tabloid versus broadsheet. Hardly any study on the topic can avoid this debate, and the information and opinions are correspondingly diverse. Roughly speaking, however, the debate can be divided into two camps: the first and seemingly bigger one, regards tabloid newspapers as generally more populist than broadsheet or quality newspapers, while the other camp considers this clear division to be wrong. Mazzoleni, who can be seen as a representative of the

first camp writes in his often-cited text from 2003, that unlike elite-oriented newspapers, tabloid newspapers like to oppose the status quo, criticise elites and also tend to publish more critical opinions about politics or immigration. Traits, that seemingly go hand in hand with what populism was described as earlier in this text. Mazzoleni, but also other researchers like Klein (1998) or Art (2006), argue in this context that quality newspapers are more interested in a strengthened connection with the elite/the establishment, while tabloid newspapers are more dependent on the broad masses, orient themselves towards them and are thus more responsive to their possible opinions and interests. With that, as Krämer (2014) writes, tabloid papers consciously feed the populist divide between the people and the elite. Furthermore, tabloid media are said to be more angled towards the principle of entertaining reporting and place less emphasis on objectivity than broadsheet newspapers (Skovsgaard, 2014). Accordingly, some studies, like that of Wettstein et al. (2018), in which they comparatively examined the journalistic treatment of populism in ten countries, summarize their findings that the tabloid orientation of a newspaper is a strong "predictor for the extent and nature of populism in news" (p. 491).

Representatives of the other camp, the one that is less convinced of the clear separation between tabloid and broadsheet in that regard, includes scholars like Bos and Brants (2014), Akkerman (2011) or Rooduijn (2013). In none of their studies could the "tabloid hypothesis" (Bos & Brants, 2014, p. 705) be scientifically confirmed. Esser et al. (2017), while admitting that populist logic can often be seen in tabloid newspapers, emphasize that it also can be found in other type of outlets.

Even when accounting for the different focal points as well as framework conditions (such as country differences) of these studies, it can be concluded from this juxtaposition of the two camps that there is (still) no clear answer as to how science should deal with the debate about broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. In this uncertainty, however, there is also potential for further studies, including the one presented here. Therefore, both a German national broadsheet and a tabloid newspaper will serve as the unit of analysis for this paper.

The newspapers chosen in this context are the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) and the *BILD Zeitung* (BILD). While both are among the highest-circulation national daily newspapers in Germany (Statista, 2022), there are also crucial differences between the two, which their selection for this study is based on. Founded in 1945, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is now considered one of Germany's largest quality media (Eurotopics, n.d.(b)). The political orientation of the broadsheet can be described as left-liberal (ibid.). Seven years after the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the *BILD Zeitung* was founded and has since become the country's best-selling daily newspaper (Eurotopics,

n.d.(a)). In contrast to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the tabloid stands for a more conservative political course. In the past, the *BILD* has often been criticised for its simplistic and sensationalist reporting and its often harsh stance in controversial topics such as immigration (Akkerman, 2011; Eurotopics, n.d.(a)). Both newspapers under investigation here can be seen as prototypes of a broadsheet and a tabloid respectively. Further considering the two very divergent political orientations of the papers, this study is optimistic that the two newspapers chosen can shed a significant light on the extent to which German newspapers report in a populist manner.

### 3.2 Study periods

For the derivation of the second mentioned relevant pillar of this paper, the study by Hameleers et al. (2019) is once again of interest. There, the researchers examined both media content from election times and non-election times in their analysis. As the authors point out, this approach is rather rare, as most studies focus on media analyses within election times. Indeed, this latter approach seems to be holding some advantages. First, as Vliegthart et al. (2012) make clear with reference to an earlier work by Vliegthart and van Aelst (2010), media coverage of one's political persona is at no time as relevant as during election times; it is, Vliegthart et al. (2012) write, the "*conditio sine qua non*" (p.317) if a person wants to achieve political electoral success. Even more, as Hopmann et al. (2010), among others, were able to show in the context of Danish national elections, there is a clear correlation between the visibility of a party in the media and the will of people to vote for that party. Election periods can therefore be seen as a battle between politicians and parties for media attention. And even though Hameleers and colleagues (2019) could not find any serious differences in media coverage during election and non-election times in their study, it was also decided for this study to focus on media coverage during elections due to the arguments mentioned before.

The elections selected for this study are the 2017 and 2021 federal elections in Germany. It was decided to choose elections that were held nationwide, as on this occasion it can be assumed that there will be increased political media coverage by national newspapers and that correspondingly relevant material will be generated for this study. The decision for the election years 2017 and 2021 is firstly based on the fact that 2017 was the first federal election in which a right-leaning populist party had a serious chance and eventually managed to enter the *Bundestag* and thus changed the political landscape in Germany. As a consequence, the media had the opportunity to report on a party and thus also on issues and perspectives that had been avoided in Germany up to that point. The assumption here is that if media show populist traits in any way, these could be evoked in the election year 2017. With this in mind, including the following

election in 2021 in order to determine how the tendencies that emerged in 2017 have developed over four years appears plausible. In order to get a as comprehensive picture of the reporting as possible, it was also decided to examine one week before and one week after each of the two federal elections. For 2017, this then concerns the period 17.09 to 01.10.2017, with the election day on 24<sup>th</sup> of September and for 2021 the period between 19.09 and 03.10.2021 with the election on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September.

### 3.3 Case selection

The final decisive pillar of this work is the focus, or rather the reason, on which basis newspaper articles are selected for a possible analysis and this reason goes hand in hand with what has been said before about the relevance of media attention for political actors. Namely, the concept of *personalised coverage* comes into play here. It refers to the media process of increased concentration on individual political persons in the coverage and the simultaneous neglect of parties, issues or other organisations (Kriesi, 2012). At the same time, personalised coverage also means that politicians are increasingly judged on the basis of their personality rather than their professional performance. The main reasons for this are the general weakening of the party system and the increasing relevance of the media in the political sphere. Moreover, as part of the media logic, it is an effective means of generating an audience for one's own medium (ibid.).

Connected to this, scholars further distinguish between *centralised* and *decentralised personalisation*: the former focuses on the best-known faces of a party, the latter takes the opposite approach and deliberately focuses on individuals who are not among the best-known of their party (Balmas et al., 2014). When working with a populist party, it seems appropriate to follow the idea of centralised personalization, as these parties in particular are characterised by a clear hierarchy and often charismatic leaders (Vliegenthart et al., 2012).

As shown, media seemingly focus more on political actors than on issues or parties in its reporting. Regarding that, this study argues that by focussing on political leaders in Germany, it enhances its chance to find relevant units for an in-depth analysis, as the explorable field promises to be wide. While it appears logical that populist leaders might “trigger” reporting that bears populist features the most, this study is aiming to investigate and compare the overall reporting of the two newspapers in the relevant time periods. To enable a comparison of possible results it was decided to not only look at cases featuring the top politicians of the AfD but also all other leading politicians of the other parties that made it into the Bundestag in the two election periods. Consequently, a total of nine top candidates for the election in 2017 and eight top candidates for the election in 2021 from overall six parties can be named here as the basis

of the case selection. An overview of these candidates and parties can be found in the following tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1:** Overview of the top candidates and parties for the German federal election 2017

<b>Party</b>	<b>Top Candidates</b>
Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU)	Angela Merkel
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland (SPD)	Martin Schulz
Die Linke	Dr. Sahra Wagenknecht Dietmar Bartsch
Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen (Grünen)	Katrin Göring-Eckardt Cem Özdemir
Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP)	Christian Lindner
Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD)	Dr. Alice Weidel Dr. Alexander Gauland

*Source: Own illustration, data taken from Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg (2017). Common abbreviation of the parties in brackets.*

**Table 2:** Overview of the top candidates and parties for the German federal election 2021

<b>Party</b>	<b>Top Candidates</b>
Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU)	Armin Laschet
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland (SPD)	Olaf Scholz
Die Linke	Janine Wissler Dietmar Bartsch
Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen (Grünen)	Annalena Baerbock
Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP)	Christian Lindner
Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD)	Dr. Alice Weidel Tino Chrupalla

*Source: Own illustration, data taken from Mendelson (2021). Common abbreviation of the parties in brackets.*

In this context, the fact that the CDU has a sister party, the Christlich-Soziale Union (CSU), in the federal state of Bavaria should be mentioned. Although this is not relevant for the selection of the material, since the CSU-candidates only run for elections in Bavaria, the party and its politicians will be included in the examination of the material, as its politicians are also represented in the Bundestag.

## 4. Research aim

The framework of this study is the product from the combination of the concepts of populism and media populism supported by the three relevant pillars presented above. The resulting research approach can be summed up as follows: Two different, national German daily newspapers, one tabloid and one broadsheet, will be analysed and examined for their possible populist coverage, online and in print, during two national elections in Germany. The relevant material will be chosen based on its inclusion of the leading candidates of the six major parties in Germany. Putting this into practice and choosing a fitting methodological approach to answer the main research question of this paper requires the formulation of further sub-research questions that help investigating different aspects of said question. In the following, the main research question as well as the five further developed sub-research questions will be presented and explained.

*RQ: How populist is German newspaper reporting in general and how do they present a populist party?*

SRQ1: How are German inhabitants presented in the articles?

SRQ2: How are German politicians and their parties presented in the articles?

SRQ3: How does the phrasing and choice of words in the articles reflect a populist style?

SRQ4: How do the articles present the AfD and its politicians in contrast to other parties and politicians?

SRQ5: How does the possible populist reporting of the two newspapers develop over four years?

As the first part of the main research question of this paper investigates populism in the media, three of the five sub-research questions (abbreviated to SRQ in the following) examine the previously presented essential parts of what could possibly indicate such populism in the reporting. While the first SRQ focus solely on what is regarded as ideological populism in this study, i.e. the possible depiction of inhabitants as ‘the people’, the second SRQ can provide information about both ideological and stylistic aspects, as a possible representation of politicians as elite would indicate ideological populism while clear criticism and a negative portrayal of them would rather stand for stylistic populism. SRQ3 then concentrates entirely on finding possible style aspects of populism, looking for formulations and certain text peculiarities in the articles that might indicate said style.

With SQR4 the second part of the main research question comes into the spotlight. Here, the representation of the party AfD and its politicians is directly compared to that of the other six relevant parties and politicians. The aim is to find any possible differences in the reporting, which in turn allow conclusions to be drawn as to whether or not the newspapers are behaving conspicuously differently in their dealings with the AfD. Finally, SRQ5 compares the two newspapers and their reporting over the span of the four years covered to find out, if one of them shows more signs of populist reporting than the other and to understand, how a possible populist reporting may have developed. A finding to this question could also contribute to the previously mentioned discussion between two camps (see p. 13f.), whether or not tabloid papers are generally more populist than broadsheet ones. Furthermore, an answer to this question might also reveal a first glimpse on the matter of whether or not Germany is heading into a future, where populist reporting in (political) journalism will become more common.

As mentioned before, the concept of populism and that of media populism have many common interfaces. While the presented SRQs seemingly focus on aspects of populism, they will also allow conclusions about media populism in the two papers. This means that by answering these questions, this study will be able to conclude, how media populism is, if at all, practiced in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *BILD Zeitung*. In more concrete terms: it can be determined whether populism is practiced *by* those papers or rather *through* them, an important distinction within the concept of media populism. Further it can be clarified, which type of populism, as presented with regards to the study by Hameleers et al. (2017) seems to be dominating in the two papers: people centrality or anti-elites. Lastly, the findings of this study will allow to determine which role the journalists of the two papers rather play when dealing with populist content: that of an organiser or that of an interpreter.

How this study intends to find answers to all these open questions will be explained in the following methodological part of this paper.

## 5. Methodology

In order to achieve the set goal of this thesis, it is necessary to deal not only with the newspaper articles of the two newspapers, but also with the meaning conveyed by them and thus with something that is not always immediately obvious to the reader. For dealing with such content, latent content, several possible methodological approaches present themselves. Mainly based on Schreier's explanations in her 2012 book on applied *qualitative content analysis*, that approach was chosen for this work. The reasons for this decision lie primarily in the characteristics and advantages that a qualitative content analysis (QCA) brings with it. First of all, Schreier



writes, the aim of QCA is to describe while at the same time leaving room for interpretation. QCA allows to capture what is actually present in the text without examining it with prior expectations or assumptions. In this paper, too, the aim is to capture an actual state of affairs, i.e. to determine whether the units of analysis, as the relevant material is referred to in the context of a QCA, show populist traits or not. The procedure is, at the same time, open to all outputs of the analysis. The main research question as well as the additionally formulated sub-research questions reflect this openness as well. In keeping with this, another decisive advantage of this method is that it makes an intensive examination of the material possible, while simultaneously allowing to concentrate on individual aspects in a unit of analysis. Hence and unlike other qualitative methods of analysis, QCA allows the reduction of data (Schreier, 2012).

To be able to eventually obtain scientifically reliable results with this research method, a scientific triad was created for this study: (1.) The identification of the relevant units of analysis by means of a quantitative content analysis. (2.) The creation and implementation of the first of two qualitative content analyses. This in-depth analysis focuses on the first part of the main research question and SRQ1 to SRQ3 respectively. The final step of the triad, step (3.) then consists of the second qualitative content analysis, centring the last part of the main research question and SRQ4 in its investigation. These steps and their implementation are described in more detail below.

## 5.1 Units of analysis selection

When conducting a QCA, as Schreier also writes in her book (2012), the selection of the material to be studied and the actual study do not usually go hand in hand: „you apply the method to the material that you have generated or selected at an earlier stage in your research“ (p. 130). For this first selection of the potentially relevant material, the concept of *personalised coverage*, explained in Section 3.3, serves as the starting point. The articles are selected based on the mention of the respective top candidates, or more precisely: their surnames, of the six parties that made it into the German Bundestag in the election years 2017 and 2021. Relevant articles were then identified using *Factiva*, a digital database accessible through the University of Gothenburg. For the selection through Factiva, both types of topics, those characterised as hard-news and those characterised as soft-news were considered, as this study aims to get a comprehensive overview of all the content the readers of the papers are presented with. Only articles marked as interviews, agency reports, or summaries were excluded from the search.

To further ensure that the top candidates are not just peripherally mentioned in the article but are more or less the focus of the reporting, only articles that mention the surname, in the case

of parties with two top candidates at least one of the two surnames, at least five times in the entire text were shortlisted. Since some of the surnames of the relevant politicians are relatively widespread surnames in Germany, a few articles had to be sorted out from the output by Factiva. Those articles, while containing the right name, referred to a different person with the same name, not to the politician in question. After cleaning up the data set accordingly, a total of 436 articles remained for a possible qualitative analysis.

A first rough overview of the material quickly revealed that some of the articles given out by Factiva were available in multiple versions. On one hand, this is due to the fact that articles from both the digital and the print editions of the newspapers were used, resulting in individual overlaps. On the other hand, it is also due to the circumstance that in some of the articles not only one of the relevant politician's names was mentioned five times, but several of the relevant politician's names. To avoid multiple coding, these duplicates were also sorted out, which ultimately led to a total number of 357 potentially relevant articles. Specifically, 88 articles could be identified for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for the year 2017 and 126 articles for the year 2021. For the *BILD Zeitung*, 68 articles could be isolated for 2017 and 75 articles for the year 2021.

Given the size of this data set, it was decided to first further separate relevant from irrelevant material by means of a less in-depth analysis. For this step, it was chosen to develop and apply a quantitative content analysis first.

Quantitative content analysis in itself is already a comprehensive research tool in communication science; describing it in its entirety would exceed the scope of this paper. In addition, since it does not serve as the primary means of analysis in this work, but rather as an investigator of relevant material, the concept of quantitative content analysis will only be outlined below and its concrete implementation for this study will then be discussed in more detail.

According to Riffe et al. (2019) a quantitative content analysis is essentially an “examination of symbols of communication” (p.23) which considers the content of a linguistic unit of whatever kind as the central point for the understanding of “processes and effects of communication” (p.12). As a rule, as Riffe and colleagues go on to point out, quantitative content analyses serve to build theory based on the investigation of manifest content. By means of a codebook, which usually contains an empirically based category system and all relevant coding instructions, as well as by means of an associated code sheet, values are collected for a subsequent statistical evaluation.

However, Riffe et al. (2019) also emphasise the possible use of the instrument as a primarily descriptive tool in a study, with the purpose of depicting reality as accurately as possible. The present study also understands the use of quantitative content analysis as this descriptive means.

Regarding its concrete implementation, a quantitative codebook and a corresponding code sheet were first developed, with the aim of identifying relevant articles from the 357 possible ones. To understand what constitutes a relevant article for a qualitative analysis in this study, the codebook and its content are indispensable, which is why it will be discussed in more detail first. The codebook itself and the corresponding code sheet for this quantitative content analysis can be found in the appendix of this paper (see pp. 80-87).

The codebook developed follows the deductive approach of identifying the concepts of populism and media populism in the two newspapers. It consists of a total of six categories, two formal and four content categories, all of which were developed on a theoretical basis, i.e. based on literature identified as relevant in advance. Three of the four content categories have additional sub-categories. All categories and sub-categories are provided with coding instructions, some with additional "coding help". All categories or sub-categories have been assigned two coding options of a nominal nature. Since quantitative content analysis is "restricted primarily to manifest content" (Riffe et al., 2019, p. 33), the coding instructions and additional help were formulated as clearly as possible and clear indicators for coding were given in order to leave as little room for interpretation as possible for the coder.

In addition to the first two formal categories ("Election Period" and "Media Outlet"), which are primarily intended to facilitate a later classification of the articles, three of the content categories serve to identify populist elements in the articles and a fourth content category to identify the AfD party or its politicians in the articles. These four content categories thus capture what is also relevant for the two later qualitative content analyses.

Broken down more precisely, category 3 ("Representation of inhabitants") focuses on the representation of German inhabitants in the articles. The two sub-categories 3a. "Depiction as 'the People'" and 3b. "Relevance of inhabitants" represent the two aspects identified as relevant to allow conclusions about the representation of inhabitants. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, populism as an ideology attaches great importance to the depiction of inhabitants as 'the people' and their contrast to the elite. In order to capture a possible representation of inhabitants as 'the people', the codebook provides the coder with a number of specific formulations and clear indicators for such a representation. A similar approach was taken for the second sub-category: indicators and examples are provided to enable the coder to identify whether the

mentioned inhabitants play a role in the articles beyond their mere mentioning. Possible uncertainties discovered in the course of numerous trial coding are to be minimised by means of the additional assistance offered.

Category 4 ("Representation of politicians") then takes up the contrast of the people with the elite in more detail. For this, two sub-categories were created to examine the aspects relevant. Sub-category 4a. ("Depiction as 'elite'") inspects whether the politicians mentioned are depicted in an elite way, as understood by populism. Sub-category 4b. ("Stances against") on the other hand studies, whether the article clearly takes a stand against the politicians mentioned. For this, the coder is provided with aids, indicators and examples again.

Both sub-categories used in category 4, as with category 3 and its sub-categories, result from the theory presented on the concept of populism. However, while the sub-categories 3a., 3b. and 4a. fall under the ideological aspect of the concept, sub-category 4b. reflects an essential aspect of populism as a political style, as already mentioned with reference to the work of Moffitt (2016): the defamation of the supposed elite. This is then followed seamlessly by the fifth category of the codebook, which focuses entirely on identifying all other aspects that Moffitt identifies as part of the populist communication style: bad manners and the overemphasis on alleged crises and threats. Four sub-categories were developed for category 5 in order to investigate these aspects in the texts. Three of the four sub-categories represent aspects of bad manners, as depicted by Moffitt (2016): the use of slang, curse words and overemphasising expressions.

The three content categories now presented serve exclusively to identify relevant articles for the first of the two planned qualitative analyses, i.e. the one that investigates the question of how populist the two newspapers report in general. At this point, the bridge should be built back to the decision on which basis articles are ultimately considered relevant for the qualitative analyses.

Regarding the first planned qualitative analysis, this study considers those articles relevant that show the strongest populist traits after the quantitative analysis has been carried out. As an inspiration for this approach, other rudimentarily comparable studies on the concept of populism and its dissemination by different actors can be mentioned. In their study of populism as a communication style of politicians in Belgium, for example, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) distinguish four types in which populism can appear as a style: *empty*, *exclusionary*, *anti-elitist*, and *complete populism*. Mazzoleni and Bracciale (2018) take a similar approach when they

classify the statements of Italian politicians in social media on a four-part populist scale: from *zero-level populism* to *bold populism*.

Similarly, this study will also differentiate four types of populism in the articles, from (1) *no populism*, through (2) *ideological populism* and (3) *stylistic populism* to (4) *complete populism*. The former stands for the case that no populist characteristics, neither ideological nor stylistic, are found in the articles. Ideological populism on the other hand describes all those articles that exclusively show traces of the ideology of populism, i.e. either present inhabitants as 'the people', politicians as the elite or clearly emphasise aspects regarding inhabitants in some way. Accordingly, the type of stylistic populism stands for the case that no ideological, but only stylistic populist features occur in the articles, meaning overly clear criticism of politicians, bad manners or overemphasis on crises and dangers. Finally, complete populism stands for the case that both types of ideological populism and stylistic populism occur in the articles. Only in this case would the articles qualify for this first qualitative analysis.

Specifically, this means that only if the coder marks at least one of the sub-categories 3a., 3b. or 4a. as well as at least one of the sub-categories 4b. or 5a. to 5d. as present in the code sheet, the corresponding article is considered relevant.

The selection of relevant articles for the second qualitative content analysis, the one focusing on the treatment of the AfD in comparison to other German parties, is less complex. The last content category listed in the codebook, category 6 ("Presence of the AfD"), plays a decisive role here. This category is about identifying whether the AfD or at least one of its politicians is mentioned in the relevant text passages or not. If mentioned, the article in question is automatically relevant for the second QCA.

Before moving on to the second step of the mentioned scientific triad, one aspect that is essential in working with quantitative content analysis is still to be mentioned: The consideration of the criteria of validity and reliability (cf. Riffe et al., 2019).

First of all, with regard to validity, the codebook developed in the context of this study can rely primarily on so-called *theoretical validity*. This presupposes that the foci of analysis are based on theory that has been studied in detail in advance. This is the case for this study: all aspects examined in the codebook can be traced back to the facts presented in the theoretical part of this paper.

For the establishment of reliability, the implementation and evaluation of an *intercoder reliability test* is an efficient option and was hence carried out for this study. For this purpose, two

persons, whose mother tongue is German, were intensively trained in the subject matter of the codebook. After several trial codings which were carried out in the presence of the main coder of this work and resulting further adjustments to the codebook, the two test coders then coded four randomly selected articles per newspaper and year, 16 overall.

The values obtained for the articles were then compared with those of the main coder for the same articles. Using the statistical and analysis software *SPSS* and its option for reliability testing, the corresponding reliability values for both coders were obtained by using the statistical measure *Cohen's Kappa*. The choice for this measure is based on the explanations of Riffe et al. (2019) according to which Cohen's Kappa is well suited for values of a nominal nature.

Performing the calculation of Cohen's Kappa resulted in a value of 0.791 for the first coder and a value of 0.842 for the second coder. Both values are significant with a p-value of  $<.001$ . Following Landis and Koch (1977), according to which values between 0.61 and 0.80 can be described as substantial and values between 0.81 and 1.00 as almost perfect, reliability can be established for this quantitative study.

## 5.2 Investigating populism in the media

With the identification of the relevant units of analysis for the two qualitative content analyses, the two further relevant methodological steps of this work can be considered: The development of the corresponding coding frames. The aim of such a frame, as Schreier (2012) refers to it, is also to gain insights from the texts under investigation by means of categories, although the coding frame leaves more room for interpretation than a quantitative codebook. This is highly relevant when working with latent content.

The developed coding frames for the qualitative analyses are predominantly theory or, as Schreier (2012) calls it, concept-driven and follow a deductive approach. This means that the developed categories and their contents are largely based on the knowledge gained about populism and media populism through literature relevant to the topic. Furthermore, it means that it is entirely possible that no evidence at all can be found in the articles for one or more of the aspects examined. In contrast to a data-driven approach, where the categories are filtered directly from the material, thus ensuring that they will reappear in an examination of the material, this is not the case in a concept-driven approach (cf. Schreier, 2012).

The categories thus identified as relevant to investigate the research interest of this paper are examined by means of questions to the text. This allows for the coder to find out *how* aspects are presented instead of “just” investigating, *if* they are present or not, as it is typical for a

quantitative analysis. All questions are openly formulated and thus also allow for an open coding and interpretation of the text.

For the first of the two QCAs, the one that looks at general populist reporting, two elements were again of essence here: ideological and stylistic elements. Due to the preceding quantitative content analysis, it could be ensured beforehand, that the articles to be examined in this first QCA contain both elements at least once.

To examine these ideological and populist elements more deeply in the units of analysis, this first coding frame also looks at three specific categories: inhabitants, politicians and the style of the text.

The examination of the representation of inhabitants in the units of analysis also follows exclusively the ideological view of populism. In order to capture the representation of the inhabitants and their possible assignment as 'the people', the coding frame poses questions to the text which refer to a total of seven aspects that are based on the literature presented in the theoretical part of this thesis. For example, aspect one refers to the characterisation of the inhabitants. As highlighted before by mentioning the work of Caiani and Della Porta (2011) or Stanyer et al. (2017), a certain characterisation of inhabitants in the papers would speak for a populist view of them. A similar idea underlies those aspects of the category for inhabitants that examine how the text relates to inhabitants and what role they seem to be assigned in society. Publications such as those by Stanley (2008) or De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) suggest that there are clear signs for when a communicator presents inhabitants in a populist way, for example, presenting them as victims in a society.

Other aspects that are looked at within this category examine how the articles evaluate inhabitants when reporting on them generally and how when referring to specific statements or actions. Another aspect asks how the articles criticise inhabitants. All these aspects can ultimately provide information about how the article, or ultimately the journalist, relates to the group of inhabitants. If the text had a populist view of this group, the evaluation would be predominantly positive, and the criticism would almost be omitted or would also be positive in nature.

In line with this, the coding frame also looks at the question of how the article/journalist positions himself/herself in relation to inhabitants, how he/she speaks for them or about them, presents their wishes and thoughts or equates himself/herself with them in some way. As already explained with the text by De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), in populism 'the people' are at the centre of all actions. Thus, if the article reflects such a central role of inhabitants, this would be

a strong indicator of ideological populism. Another part of the centrality of inhabitants in ideological populism is the contrast with the elite. Accordingly, one aspect of the category of inhabitants also looks for this contrast in the texts.

In the category that refers to the portrayal of the mentioned politicians and/or their parties, ideological and stylistic aspects of populism converge, as they did in the codebook. The aspects developed for this category are basically the same as those from the category of inhabitants. The logic behind this decision can be seen in the role that politicians play in the understanding of populism. Politicians, as part of the *evil elite*, are the opposite of the *pure people* (Mudde, 2004) and thus the unpopular group in populism. Their characterisation, the reference to them, the evaluation of their actions and statements as well as the criticism of them in the articles should therefore be the opposite of that of inhabitants: negative and clearly identifying them as elitist, as described in the literature relevant to the topic (cf. De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Stanyer et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018). Furthermore, one aspect of this category also looks at how politicians or their parties are contrasted to inhabitants.

However, an additional aspect to examine politicians in the texts was added to this category, following the findings by Vasilopoulou et al. (2014) and those by Caiani and Della Porta (2011) that were mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis. The fact that populist politicians are more prone to blame others (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014), together with the fact that German populist actors often accuse other German politicians of being under a lingering sense of guilt about the country's Nazi past that prevents them from speaking "the truth" (Caiani & Della Porta, 2011), were put together in the coding frame to explore how the articles assign guilt to politicians in relation to this part of the German history, as this would also be a classic populist act.

The last of the three categories in this first coding frame, the one that focuses exclusively on the possible occurrence of a populist style in the articles, does so with regard to five aspects. These relate, as in the codebook, to two of the three characteristics of a populist communication style as presented by Moffitt (2016): bad manners and emphasize on crisis. The third relevant characteristic, stances against the elite, has already been included in the category on politicians.

Aspect one in this category asks about words and phrases in the text that tend to be rather unconventional. In this context, the coder is asked to pay particular attention to slang, curse words or phrases that can be considered offensive. The other four aspects within this category ask (1) how the article highlights certain aspects, words or phrases, (2) how aspects are presented that seem to go beyond the mere naming of facts, (3) how situations are described that would pose a serious threat to society and (4) how the article responds to these possible threats.



### 5.3 Investigating the media's handling of the AfD

The second coding frame then focuses entirely on the possibly different representation of two political sides: the populist one, embodied by the AfD and its politicians, and the non-populist one, represented by all other parties and politicians in the German Bundestag.

For the examination of the articles identified as relevant for this purpose, no further categories were created in the coding frame apart from the main category ("AfD in contrast to other German parties"), as this category summarises the focus of this second frame satisfactorily. In general, six questions were developed that can provide information about the possibly different treatment of the AfD and the other parties in the articles. Five of these questions are duplicated, each with a focus on the AfD and the other parties respectively.

These five questions are largely similar to those from the first coding frame, but now focus exclusively on German politicians and parties. Accordingly, this coding frame also asks about characterisations, references, criticism and evaluations of those politicians in the articles. In addition, the coder is also asked to examine in what way the author of the article under investigation expresses sympathy or antipathy towards the AfD or the other parties and politicians. Finally, this coding frame also asks about the direct contrast between AfD and its politicians and the other parties and politicians.

As mentioned, this second QCA serves to answer the second part of the main research question of this thesis as well as SRQ4. The aim here is therefore less to capture populist elements, as in the first coding frame presented, but more to capture the position of the journalist/newspaper towards the populist party AfD in comparison to all other parties. The questions and their contents were therefore formulated accordingly. A decisive inspiration for this was, among other things, the publication by Wettstein et al. (2018) and the associated question of which role journalists/newspapers play in dealing with populist content, that of the organiser or that of the interpreter.

For both qualitative analyses, a full text analysis was chosen, i.e. the entire text body of the article is analysed, excluding only pictures, charts, tables, any texts under those or any other part of the article that is not clearly part of the text body of the unit of analysis. The decision is based on the approach of other, comparable studies, such as that of Akkerman (2011). In this study, the researcher justifies his decision to code entire articles, with reference to Althaus (2003), on the grounds that there is a risk of over-interpretation of the data if the focus is only on certain sections.

As already with the quantitative content analysis, the assessment of the quality of the research instrument is also important with qualitative content analyses. For the two QCAs in this study, this assessment was ensured in two ways. First, by establishing validity. In her book, Schreier (2012) defines this criterion in relation to quantitative content analyses as follows: "An instrument is considered valid to the extent that it captures what it sets out to capture. A coding frame is valid to the extent that the categories adequately represent the concepts under study" (p. 175). With regard to concept-driven coding frames, as they are developed and used in this study, Schreier primarily proposes the type of *content validity*. This is given when the research instrument successfully captures all relevant dimensions of the concepts under study. In order to fulfil this criterion, both coding frames were presented to and confirmed by an experienced expert in this field, as suggested by Schreier (2012). In the case of this work, this expert was Prof. Mats Ekström from the University of Gothenburg.

Another way of ensuring the quality of the instrument is, again according to Schreier (2012), the repeated trial coding of units, the resulting adjustment of the frame if necessary, but above all the repetition of the main analysis by the same coder after a few days to ensure that nothing has been overlooked or that the result does not differ. This requirement will also be met within the framework of this work.

The coding frames for the two qualitative content analyses can also be found in the appendix of this paper (see pp. 88-90).

## 6. Findings

In this section, the relevant results of the quantitative and the two qualitative content analyses needed to find answers to the research questions of this paper are presented and interpreted.

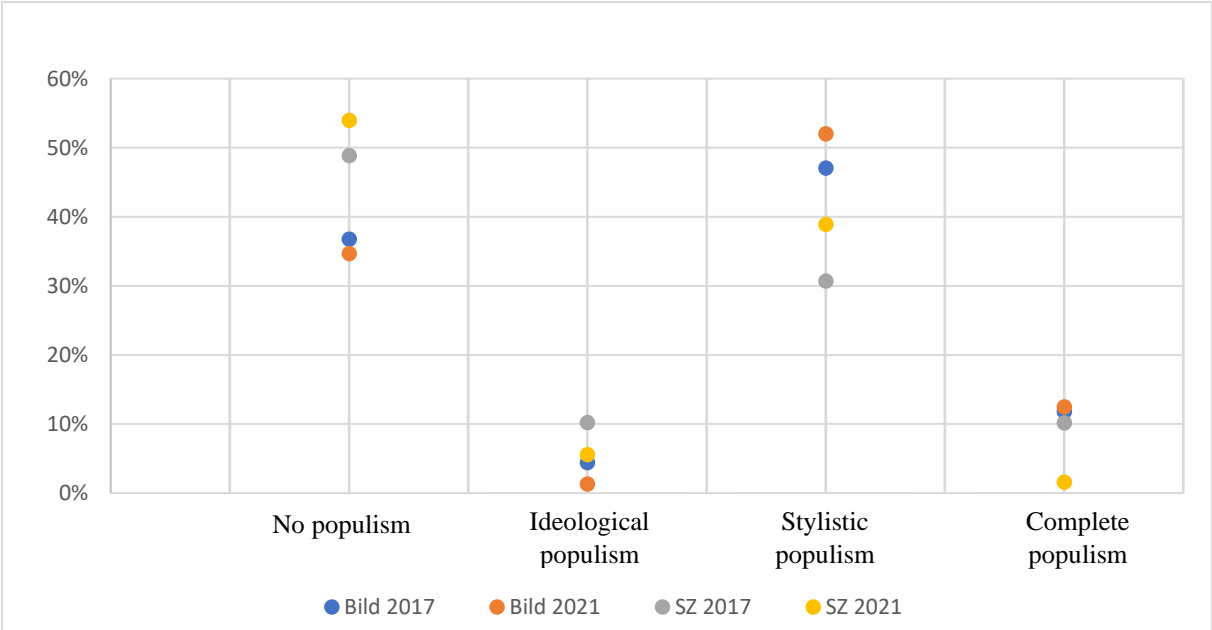
### 6.1 The dominance of stylistic populism

For the first of the three content analyses, the quantitative one, a total of 357 articles from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *BILD Zeitung* from 2017 and 2021 were partly analysed using a code-book and code sheet to determine the relevant units of analysis for the two subsequent qualitative content analyses.

In addition to its role as an identifier of relevant articles for the qualitative analyses however, the evaluation of the quantitative content analysis also allows initial foreshadowing of the extent and nature of populist reporting in the two media under investigation, as it already shows which of the two newspapers may have more *complete populism* in its headline and leading paragraph

and in which year, 2017 or 2021, more articles with populist features were published. Therefore, the outcomes of this first analysis are also presented in more detail in the following.

For the first of the two planned qualitative analyses on the general populist reporting of the two newspapers, a total of 28 units of analysis could be determined. This means that, according to the understanding of this work, 28 of the 357 articles are of the type *complete populism*, i.e. they contain both ideological and stylistic elements that can also be found in populism. Eight of these 28 articles were published in the BILD Zeitung in 2017. This corresponds to 11.76% of all articles from this newspaper from 2017 that were examined. In 2021, the value for the BILD Zeitung was 12% or nine articles. The Süddeutsche Zeitung accounted for nine articles for 2017 (10.23%) and correspondingly two for 2021 (1.59%). While the trend for the BILD has hardly changed, it is declining for the SZ. A graphical overview of the corresponding percentage distribution of newspapers for this type of populism can be found in Figure 1.



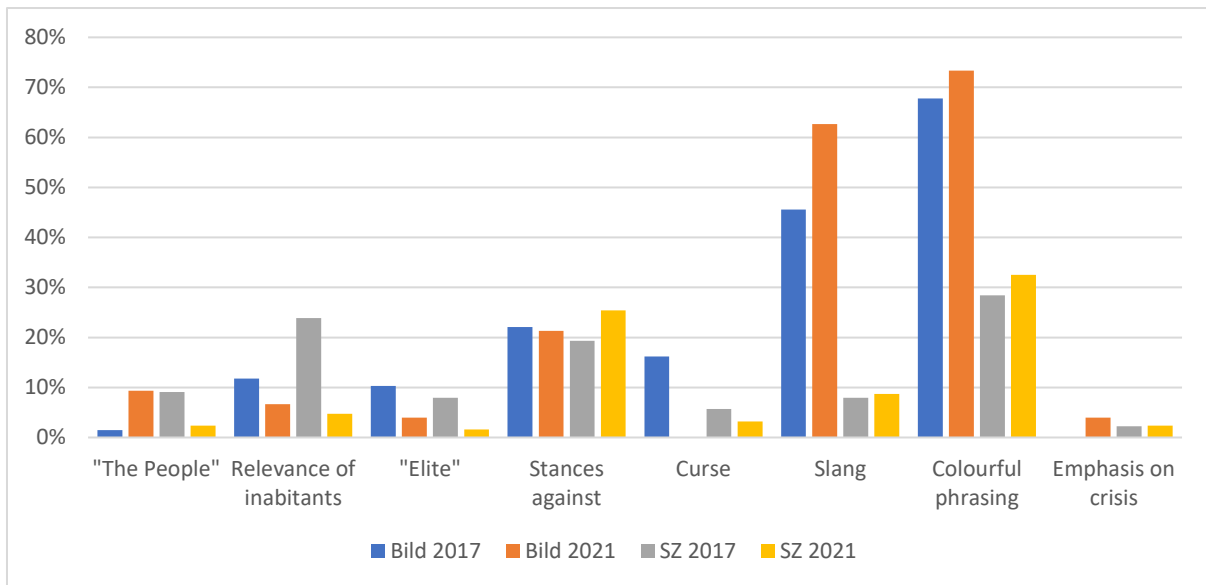
**Fig. 1:** Degree of occurrence of the four types of populism in all articles studied. This figure shows how frequent each newspaper featured what type of populism in relation to all the articles studied for that newspaper and year.

In addition to the distribution of articles that fall under the type of complete populism, Figure 1 also shows the distribution of the remaining 329 articles among the three other types of populism. The types of *no populism* and *stylistic populism* stand out as the most frequent types in the articles, while *ideological* and *complete populism* occur much less frequently. A direct comparison of the two newspapers also indicates initial differences. For example, the Süddeutsche Zeitung dominates the BILD Zeitung relatively clearly in terms of the frequency of reporting that does not show any populist traits: 48.86% of all examined articles from the Süddeutsche

Zeitung from 2017 did not show any populist elements. For 2021, the value is even higher, at 53.97%. In the case of the BILD Zeitung, the same applies to around a third of the publications in both years, although the trend for this newspaper is rather slightly declining (2017: 36.76%; 2021: 34.67%). If populist elements were identified in the texts, these are most often of a stylistic nature. Especially the BILD seems to preferentially resort to one or more elements examined for this type of populism: 47.06% of all examined articles in 2017 and 52% of all articles in 2021 showed typical elements of stylistic populism. For the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the values lie lower, but also indicate an increase in the use of stylistic populist elements between the years 2017 (30.68%) and 2021 (38.89%). Regarding the use of ideological populism, the Süddeutsche Zeitung is dominating. However, the values for both newspapers are not only significantly lower here than for stylistic populism, but also show a downward trend.: both the SZ and the BILD Zeitung resort to ideological elements in the populist sense more frequently in 2017 (SZ: 10.23%; BILD: 4.41%) than in 2021 (SZ: 5.56%; BILD: 1.33%).

Delving even deeper into the data set, it is also possible to identify how often which (sub-)category of the codebook was coded. Figure 2 displays this distribution and reflects, inter alia, what Figure 1 already showed: the clear dominance of populist stylistic elements in the articles in both newspapers examined.

Regarding style, the BILD Zeitung mainly uses the elements *slang* and *colourful phrasing* and does so with an increasing tendency. For the year 2017, slang was detected in 45.59% of all articles examined and colourful phrasing in 67.65% of them. In 2021, the former value in particular increased: 62.67% of the articles now contained slang, 73.33% of all articles colourful phrasing. This selection is somewhat different for the Süddeutsche Zeitung. Although here, too, colourful phrasing is used most frequently and with an increasing tendency over the years (2017: 28.41%; 2021:32.54%), the use of slang is far less frequent than in the BILD Zeitung. In 2017, the SZ's score is 82.65% lower than that of the BILD, and in 2021 86.07% lower. Instead, SZ tends to use the stylistic device of opposing politicians second most often. In 2017 the paper did so in 19.32% of cases, in 2021 in 25.4% of the cases. The populist stylistic mean of mentioning a *curse word* or *overemphasising a crisis* are used least frequently by both newspapers. What is particularly interesting here is that the BILD Zeitung contained the most curse-words in 2017 (16.18%), but four years later none could be identified for the paper. The opposite is true for the newspaper regarding the overemphasis of crises: in 2017 this did not occur once, in 2021 it occurred in 4% of the cases.



**Fig. 2:** Frequency of mentions of the studied aspects of ideological and stylistic populism. This figure shows how often each newspaper included aspects of ideological or stylistic populism in relation to all the articles studied for that newspaper per year.

For the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the fluctuations in this respect are smaller: with regard to curse words, there is a reduction from 5.68% to 3.17% between 2017 and 2021, and with regard to the emphasis on crises, there is a small increase from 2.27% to 2.38% between 2017 and 2021. Considering the ideological elements of populism, the newspapers essentially stay below the ten-percent-value over the years, five times even below the five-percent-value. The SZ stands out most clearly in this regard with its articles from 2017. In more than 23% of them, the newspapers highlight inhabitants or their wishes or opinions.

With a view to the units of analysis for the second QCA, 48 articles that mentioned the AfD or one of its politicians in the relevant text passages could be identified by means of the quantitative analysis. A corresponding mention therefore took place in 13.45% of the 357 articles examined. When looking at the attribution of these 48 articles between the two newspapers and in the two years 2017 and 2021, the contrast between the years is rather striking. While in 2017, 23 articles out of the 68 articles (33.82%) published in the BILD mentioned the AfD or one of its politicians in the title or leading paragraph, only one article out of the 75 possible ones (1.33%) did so in 2021. The picture is similar but less distinct for the SZ, where in 2017 17 articles (19.32%) mention the AfD or a AfD-politician, but in 2021 only seven do so (5.56%).

The results should also be viewed against the background that articles were also included in this analysis that focus on one of the AfD's leading candidates. Regarding the BILD, this was therefore the case at most once in 2021.

## 6.2 The ambivalent picture

The first qualitative content analysis focused on the general reporting of the two newspapers in order to investigate, how populist it potentially is. This was examined on the basis of three categories. The relevant findings and hence the aspects needed to answer the first part of the main research question as well as the SRQs 1 to 3 of this paper are presented below.

Whenever it was possible and appeared sensible, the formulations from the papers used here as examples were translated into English. When not possible, an analogous translation is given in brackets behind it. The code identifying each article is added in brackets after the citations.

### 6.2.1 Representation of inhabitants

Starting with the characterisation and the way in which this essential group in the ideology of populism is referred to in the articles, the QCA was able to identify three main types for both newspapers: (1) the factual reference to inhabitants or a group of them, which does not contain any valuation or characterisation, (2) the reference to inhabitants in their role as part of German democracy and (3) a generally rather negative reference to inhabitants. Relevant examples of the first of these three types look like the following for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2017:

*"In front of the minister, a costumed man now passes the market, and if the police later asked you to be an eyewitness, the man would clearly be described as an executioner. 'Greetings' says Dobrindt, the man greets back"* (S17s-10).

*"The event is over. In small groups the visitors give a brief critique"* (S17s-1).

And very similarly in 2021:

*"Not bad, for example, was the interlude now at the third Triell. A passer-by, questioned about the performance of politicians in general and perhaps even in particular, said [...]"* (C21s-27).

The same can be observed in the *BILD Zeitung* in 2017 and 2021.

*"'It's nothing special, we all have these fates in our families....'. The elders nod, tears in their eyes"* (C17-13).

*"A week after the federal election, Germans are once again giving the chief negotiators a clear trend of opinion to take into the talks."* (C21-5)

However, both newspapers also tend to mention the inhabitants in a role that falls to them within the framework of a democracy. Both newspapers therefore use phrases such as "*electorate*" (C17s-15), "*swing voters*" (G21-11) or simply "*voters*" (C21-18). In connection with political

events, both newspapers also frequently refer to "*demonstrators*" (C21-23), "*protesters*" (C17s-17) or "*critics*" (C17-16).

This last aspect is followed seamlessly by the third type of possible reference to inhabitants mentioned above, because both the BILD and the SZ contain formulations that are critical or negative about the inhabitants and their expression of opinion. One main topic that serves as the occasion for these negative references to inhabitants was a political election event of the then Chancellor. In 2017, BILD wrote about this event:

*"[The police] is currently marching in the back rows to ensure some calm between the CSU supporters and the others (leftists, rightists, malcontents and anti-everything rabble-rousers)"* (C17-14).

Similar references to the inhabitants can also be found in the articles of the SZ on the same topic. They speak of "*Krakkeler*" (similar to "troublemaker"), "*squaller*" (both C17s-13) or "*Hundreds of right-wing and left-wing disruptors*" (C17s-17). In 2021, the BILD still uses comparable phrases such as "*A few scattered members of the Junge Union sing 'Armin Laschet will be chancellor...' at the barrier railing to the radical brothers*" (C21-23), but less often and less clearly. The SZ dispenses entirely with such negative formulations in 2021.

One aspect that appears striking about the SZ's reporting in 2017 beyond those mentioned, is the distinction in the reference to voters and voter groups. The supporters of the Alternative für Deutschland party are specifically separated from those of all other parties. Thus, there is talk of the "*majority of AfD voters*" (C17s-15), of "*AfD supporters*" or "*AfD activists*" (both A17s-12), whereas such specifications are not made for any electorate of any other party.

Looking at these presented references, no clear ideological-populist characteristics for either newspaper can be found. No explicit reference is made to this group presenting them as something like a victim in society. On the contrary, in addition to the value-free reference, a negatively connoted referencing dominates in both newspapers, with which they both strongly condemn the behaviour of some inhabitants in certain situations, whereby the BILD Zeitung is somewhat more negative than the SZ.

With regard to concrete characterisations by means of adjectives, both newspapers in both years hold back. Clear characterisations such as "*A dashing CSU girl bravely waves the blue and white flag*" (C17-14) from the BILD Zeitung in 2017 or "*At some point, enough is enough for the resolute convent sister*" (C17s-17) as written by the SZ in 2017 remain the exception.

One article (S17s-10) that stands out in this respect appeared in the SZ in 2017. As the article makes clear right at the beginning, its content consists of a mood survey of Germans before the election. The article differs from all others not only because of this focus, but also because of its length. Findings from this are, accordingly, to be viewed against this background, but should nevertheless not go unmentioned here. In addition to the representation of the inhabitants by means of terms that fall under the three groups already mentioned, this article also uses job titles ("*craftsmen in non-blue blue coats*", "*mobile salesman*") but also critical-ironic terms such as "*bio-green Baden-Württemberg women*", "*men in Geox shoes and neckerchiefs*" or "*people with scabbed, bloated faces*". Characterisations are also more frequently made here than in other articles in this regard. Examples are "*eager to read*", "*interested in politics*", "*nerdy*" or "*completely dreamy*".

Leaving this article aside, the characterisation of inhabitants does not present them as worse-off in society, as populism likes to present them, nor is the characterisation overly positive, which would at least indicate a sympathetic attitude of the papers towards inhabitants.

While it is debatable whether the third of the identified ways, the negatively connoted one, of referring to inhabitants could also be identified as evaluating or criticising them, the articles also contained concrete and clear examples of such evaluation and criticism of inhabitants.

Looking at the evaluation of inhabitants first, it initially becomes apparent that, similar to the characterisation of inhabitants, the newspapers tend to hold back from evaluating inhabitants, their statements and actions. When they do, the reporting is mainly free of judgement and the terms used do not show any clear positive or negative tendency. When there is a tendency however, it is more often negative than positive. Hence, clearly positive evaluations as "*with the patience of an angel*" (C17s-17) about a woman trying to talk to a protestor that can be read in the SZ from 2017 remain the exception. When the newspapers evaluate inhabitants negatively, they are most likely to do so, as with the references, in connection with their behaviour at demonstrations. Both newspapers write in their reporting in relation to the protesters that they "*bluster*", "*massively disrupt*" or utter "*vile invective*" (all C17s-17) as here in the SZ. The BILD uses similar language.

While in 2021 such evaluations no longer occur in the SZ, the BILD evaluates the behaviour of protesters rather negatively here as well:

*"One must 'listen, not shout each other down'. But that does not diminish the rage behind the barricades by one bit. Squad cars wait in the narrow streets of the old town.*



*They remain in the background. 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern will remain associated with the name Angela Merkel for many years to come'. A nicety that hardly anyone here appreciates" (C21-23).*

Outside of its coverage of political campaign events, the BILD also largely refrains from evaluations, but when they do occur, they always are explicit. With this, the BILD reveals a tendency that will become even clearer in connection with reporting on politicians: it gives an interpretation of the events or statements it covers. For example, the BILD writes about a woman's statement in a talk-show "*It all always sounds good, it's just not realisable in reality,*" a female viewer grumbles, and makes a massive dig at the candidate: "*It's always these stories!*" (S17-7) while, in the same article, also describing the demands of another woman as the "*emotion of the evening*".

While some of the examples mentioned here could also be interpreted as somewhat of a criticism of the inhabitants, no unambiguously critical formulations towards them could be found in either of the two newspapers and in neither of the two years in the context of this first QCA. Hence, a clearly critical attitude of the newspapers towards inhabitants can be ruled out.

When examining how the newspapers position themselves in relation to the inhabitants, it is noticeable that they tend to speak about them or for them. The focus here lies on expressing what the inhabitants feel, want or do. Accordingly, the SZ writes in 2017:

*"Clearly more than four-fifths of all Germans have not voted for the AfD; many of this large majority consider the party a disgrace in the Bundestag" (C17s-15).*

And in 2021:

*"Right at the beginning, it puts the accent on an area that stirs the people, social justice" (C21s-27).*

This is no different in the BILD, which wrote in 2017: "People have heard of Schulz, but hardly know him" (S17-10). And formulated similar in 2021: "Germany is talking about this photo", and "The Republic is now puzzling with excitement" (both F21-2) or "Germany is looking forward to the big negotiation weekend" (C21-5).

Likewise, the newspapers give explanations for the behaviour of inhabitants, as can be read in the SZ from 2017:

*"Moreover, the majority of AfD voters did not vote for the party because they agreed*

*with the programme or even the quarrelling leading candidates, but because the AfD is a black-white-red projection surface for anti-Merkel and anti-establishment feelings"* (C17s-15).

In this talking-about of inhabitants, it is typical for both newspapers to make such statements without clear reference, but rather just reporting on a lot of people without providing evidence for these statements. While this kind of reporting can be found in both newspapers, the BILD nevertheless dominates in the sense that it tends to put itself on the same level with inhabitants or address them directly more often than the SZ. Corresponding examples from 2017 and 2021 are as follows:

*"We should be honest here: things could have been worse"* (C17-22).

*"This is why BILD looks even closer for you"* (S17-10).

*"What this photo tells us [...]. What do they want this photo to tell us?"* (F21-2).

In the SZ, once the headline is *"We are Germany"* (S17s-10) and another time it is written that *"These debacles cost us - because as we know, the state and the taxpayer are us - conservatively estimated, 500 million euros"* (C21s-26). These formulations are clear but remain the exception for the newspaper.

An examination of the positioning of the newspapers in relation to inhabitants thus reveals clear populist traits for the first time within this focus on the reporting on inhabitants of both papers. Overall, the BILD shows more of these traits than the SZ does.

### **6.2.2 Representation of politicians and parties**

Again, starting with the characterisation of and reference to this group, the differences between the two newspapers are initially less apparent than the differences between the two years.

Starting with the year 2017, in both newspapers, apart from the mere mention of the party or politicians name, a total of six main ways of referring to politicians and parties in the articles could be identified. The type that occurs most recurrently in both newspapers is the naming of the respective (current) political role of the politician. Correspondingly, there are frequent references to *"candidates"*, *"state chairmen"* (both S17s-1), the *"co-leader of the party"* (S17-2) as well as the *"prime minister"* (C17-7) or *"former chancellor"* (S17-10).

The remaining five identified types generally occur less often. In addition to the second type of referring to several politicians and at the same time while simultaneously describing their relationship to each other (*"coalition partners"* (C17-3), *"Merkel's loyalists"* (C17-7), *"opponents"* (C21s-27)), there are also, as a third type, references to the politicians or parties by means of the party name (*"SPD people"* (C17s-15), *"professorial party"* (A17s-12) or *"Merkel-CDU"*

(C17-13). The last three identified types of references to politicians and parties then also tend to reflect a valuation of them by the newspaper, i.e. they go beyond a description of facts. Beginning with the fourth way, it can be determined that both newspapers refer to politicians and parties by highlighting their role and relevance in politics or society. For example, the BILD refers to the then Chancellor Merkel as "*the most powerful woman in Europe*" (C17-3) and to a former mayor as "*SPD-Größe von Dohnanyi*" (similar to: "von Dohananyi the Great") (S17-2). The SZ uses comparable phrases, describing the then AfD top candidate as the party's "*most powerful man*" (A17s-12), or writing about another politician: "*Andrea Nahles is now not only the most powerful woman, from now on she is also the most powerful figure in the SPD*" (C17s-4). Once, the SZ also refers to some parties by means of the term "*establishment*" (C17s-15).

Further, the articles also refer to politicians with a clearly negative undertone. In 2017, the BILD wrote about the SPD's candidate for chancellor:

*"Schulz has been touring the country's election campaign stages for a few days now. He speaks in the German provinces as a victim of a crash, as a 22-percent man instead of a 32-percent man. The bearer of hope as a shrinking candidate"* (C17-13).

In the same article, the newspaper also calls the then Chancellor a "*shirker*", in another it compares a top politician to a "*film villain*" (C17-22). The SZ also refers negatively to politicians, but formulates it less impressively in this respect:

*"For years he was the face of the Bavarian SPD's poor poll ratings"* (S17s-1).

*"The detail-loving file-eater Merkel was impressed by the competence of her labour minister from day one"* C17s-4).

In a last way of referring to politicians in 2017, both newspapers make references to politicians that can be described as ironically critical. For example, the SZ refers to an SPD politician as a "*political rubble woman*" (C17s-4) and to the then Chancellor as a "*true foreign minister*", while the actual foreign ministers were only "*side foreign ministers*" (C17s-18). In the BILD Zeitung there are altogether somewhat more of these types of formulations. For example, politicians are described as "*sheriff*", "*egg dancers*" (both A17-8), "*democracy pedagogue*" (C17-7) or "*little man from Würselen*" (C17-13).

From a populist point of view, the observation of these references is particularly striking because of the aforementioned emphasis on the positions of power of some politicians, which can certainly be seen as a positioning as elite. The usage of negative references and the simultaneous lack of positive ones, also points more in a populist direction than in any other.

With regard to concrete characterisations of politicians by means of adjectives, both newspapers are clearly less restrained in 2017 than they were with regard to inhabitants. Due to the relevance of these adjectives for finding answers to the research interest as well as their general number, an overview of them can be found in the following table 3.

**Table 3:** Overview of the adjectives used by the BILD Zeitung and the Süddeutsche Zeitung to characterise politicians in articles in 2017

	<b>Süddeutsche</b>	<b>BILD</b>
<b>Rather positive</b>	Irreplaceable, subtle, proud, great, funny, young, optimistic, highly motivated, united, rhetorically brilliant, passionate, in a good mood, younger, strong-willed, experienced, cheeky, committed, moderate	Experienced, combative, social, strong, new, not used up, not worn out, open-minded, friendly, electable, combative, assiduous
<b>Rather negative</b>	Hysterical, polemical, pointed, headline-grabbing, rather pale, impassive, authoritarian, exhausted, heavily plucked, weakened, hardened, vehement	Offensive, small, alone, worn out, aggressive, tired, controversial, stodgy, cool, weak, politically weakened, unmoved, morally charged, piqued, not up to the job, edgy, stubborn, beastly

Even if the table initially gives a different impression due to the removal of duplicate terms, both newspapers use adjectives to characterise politicians in roughly the same quantity. In the BILD, adjectives with negative connotations predominate, which in itself can be regarded as rather populist. The adjectives actually used by the paper however speak a less pure populist language. Hardly any words recorded in this context clearly reflect how ideological populism would typically depict politicians/ the elite. In the SZ the positive adjectives slightly prevail.

From this list, as well as the preceding presentation of the ways in which politicians and parties are referred to in the articles in 2017, one article from the BILD (A17-6) was taken out. In this article, the AfD is commented on in a strongly evaluative way, in a quality and quantity that can hardly be found in the other units of analysis examined. Due to this, as well as the fact that the second qualitative content analysis looks intensively at the way newspapers deal with the AfD, this article was omitted from this presentation of results in order not to distort the results unnecessarily.

In 2021, many of the ways of characterising and referring to politicians and parties already mentioned for 2017 can also be found. However, for both the SZ and the BILD in a smaller scope and significantly less judgmental than in 2017.

The BILD in particular stands out in this context. Whereas four years earlier, predominantly negative adjectives were used for politicians, in 2021 there are significantly fewer adjectives used with an overall more positive connotations in all the articles examined. An example:

*"Even Lindner, who appeared confident and calm, could not help a brief twitch of the corners of his mouth" (F21-1).*

With regard to the reference to politicians, simple references to their political roles in the BILD ("*Union candidate for chancellor*" (C21-5), "*SPD secretary-general*" (C21-18), "*ex-party leader*" (C21-18)) also dominated in 2021.

Though the newspaper refrains from clearly negative references in 2021, it still highlights politicians and parties in a somewhat populist way:

*"There are TWO kingmaker parties - and together they would have so much power over the next chancellor as junior partners in a government have never had before" (F21-4).*

*"HE went in the offensive with his speech at the Green Party Conference and became the hero of the campaign-ridden Greens!" (G21-11).*

A somewhat different picture emerges for the SZ, since only two articles can be referred to here. While one of them is also characterised, as for the BILD, by fewer evaluative adjectives and rarer references to politicians and parties that go beyond the mere naming of their political position or attitude, the same cannot be said for the second article, a text on the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU (C21s-26). In this article, the two parties and their politicians are evaluated and characterised in a strongly negative way. Exemplary for this are these formulations:

*"Yes, he is not a rising star in the political sky and not a brilliant orator"*

*"The Union [is] currently not a Union at all, but a bickering and quarrelling bunch among themselves with constant snipers from Bavaria".*

Moving on to the evaluation of and the criticism towards politicians and parties it is apparent that, as in the case of inhabitants, these two aspects are not always entirely distinct from those just mentioned for the reference and characterisation of politicians. However, examples for a clear evaluation and criticism of politicians can also be found in the two papers, much more so than with regard to inhabitants. While, again, differences between the years are noticeable in

this regard, different approaches to this kind of reporting also crystallise more clearly between the newspapers. The most apparent of these is a fact that was alluded to before in relation to the reporting on inhabitants: the tendency of the BILD Zeitung to evaluate statements and thus prescribe an interpretation of them. The BILD does so in regard to politicians and parties not only more often than in regard to inhabitants, but also often formulates in a way that personally attacks the politicians. Relevant examples from the reporting in 2017 look like this:

*"Künast, morally charged to the core, wants to do politics 'only with democratic parties'. Petry reacts angrily: "There are no undemocratic parties as long as they are not banned by the Federal Constitutional Court!" (S17-2).*

*"Göring-Eckardt is fermenting under the turnip crust, and she misunderstands Herrmann's criticism as much as possible in order to craft an accusation full of disgust and indignation on it: 'You don't go collecting bottles because there's a miscalculation in the statistics!' Herrmann counters in typical CSU style: with attack. 'The lowest risk of poverty is in Bavaria,' he says. 'I wish all people in Germany that they are as well off as the majority in Bavaria is at the moment!' [...] 'I find that unbelievable!' scolds Wagenknecht, dishing out moral punches: 'Outrageous!'" (A17-7).*

In 2021, similar formulations can also be found in the daily newspaper:

*"Özdemir is annoyed by Klingbeil's announcements: 'Climate protection, digitalisation - it sounds a bit like you spent the last few years somewhere else', the Green teases. The SPD general countered with an attack on the expansion of wind power in the green state of Baden-Württemberg and scoffed: 'I think we can now slowly get out of this election campaign mode...'. Most provocative question. But the Green does not let himself be shaken off: 'We managed to get the CO2 price raised from ten to 25 euros,' he continues. 'The finance minister, who now wants to become chancellor, was the toughest opponent!' His question: 'In future, will the SPD do more than just climate protection in Sunday speeches?' Rumble! Most urgent appeal. 'We are actually all doing well in Germany,' Haseloff says conciliatory"* (C21-18).

Besides this, in both 2017 and 2021, the BILD also tends to evaluate politicians in general and their actions:

*"Yes, he is back, the bearer of hope for his party, who for a long time seemed too inert for hope. Too late? Probably. Pushed onto the launch pad too early. Ignited too late." (C17-13).*

*"Chancellor candidate Baerbock did not manage to run a successful election campaign" (G21-11).*

In contrast to evaluating the statements of politicians however, these general evaluations, or that of actions are not only less frequent, but also less explicit.

The Süddeutsche Zeitung also contains evaluations of politicians, their actions and their words. In direct comparison to the BILD, however, these are not only less frequent and less explicit, but also less personal. Statements by politicians in 2017, for example, are evaluated like this:

*"But then Lower Saxony's Prime Minister Stephan Weil only brings these dull conditional sentences from the maths textbook for the election campaign [...]. Schulz, in turn, later loses himself verbally in Europe" (S17s-10).*

*"The Chancellor reacted calmly to the disruptors: 'You will not shape Germany's future with whistling and with shouting' she said" (C17s-17).*

Similarly in 2021:

*"When the candidate Laschet  rubs the rival Scholz's allegedly pure election campaign hit "higher minimum wage", then he usually has the prospect of a safe point with it. Accusing the other party of using campaign methods in an election campaign is never fundamentally wrong. Remarkable here, however, is Scholz's counterattack" (C21s-27).*

In addition to these statement evaluations, the SZ also conducts general evaluations of politicians and parties, that can be both positive and negative:

*"Candidate Scholz (SPD), carried by his own race, is now playing the whole thing down with a sovereignty that has changed from the Scholzomat-like to the statesmanlike with astonishing smoothness" (C21s-27).*

*"Horst Seehofer, in his stare at the fate of his party in Bavaria - the CSU wanted to be the better AfD and the better CDU - was partly responsible for the election outcome" (C17s-15).*

The latter example could also serve as an example of the criticism that the SZ formulates about politicians and parties. In this respect, the SZ is sparing but clear. In 2017, the criticism essentially concerns the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel:

*"Merkel is largely responsible for the fact that it has come to this. Her greatest achievement in the current legislative period was to show humanity on the night of 5 September 2015 and open the border to Austria. Her greatest mistake: In the months that followed,*

*by constantly repeating her incantation "We can do it", she gave the impression that she wanted to gloss over the problems caused by the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees" (C17s-18).*

The AfD party and its politicians is also clearly criticised in one article (A17s-12) ("*With the second top candidate Alice Weidel, he shares the willingness to throw principles overboard for success*"). In 2021, most of the SZ's criticism is directed at the CDU and CSU. The respective article has been highlighted before (C21s-26), as it is hardly comparable to other articles in its explicitness and critical attitude towards the two parties. For example, it is written there about the CSU's top candidates:

*"In first place was Mr Dobrindt, whose scandals and blunders as 'infrastructure minister' (even named by the Federal Audit Office) are only surpassed by the toll debacle of Mr Scheuer".*

And goes on about the party leader Markus Söder:

*"Söder is just Söder, ever since he became a member of the Bavarian parliament in 1994. Always looking for a ruckus, always 'smarter' than the others, always offended when his dirty way of doing politics at the expense of others is exposed, always ready to change his mind within hours if he thinks he has to follow a 'trend'".*

The BILD Zeitung also makes specific criticisms of politicians and parties, but much more so in 2017 than in 2021. In 2017, the SPD candidate for chancellor is one of the main targets of BILD's criticism:

*"Mr Schulz was the wrong choice from the start. He is not up to the job. He was already a man who did not recognise the truth when he was president of parliament in Europe" (S17-2).*

But also the AfD party gets criticised in article A17-6, which was identified earlier as being conspicuous in the context of characterisation and reference to politicians as it is characterised by an extremely critical attitude towards the AfD:

*"Storch is hardly too good for anything to produce headlines. On the social network Twitter, she repeatedly attracts attention with gaga tweets or fake news forwarded by her. Most recently, she met for an embarrassing interview with rapper Bushido".*

Looking at the evaluation and criticism of politicians by the two newspapers as a whole, it is



clear that the BILD generally takes a more negative position, and hence also a more populist conforming one, with regard to them. It often interprets statements in a negative way and often goes to a more personal level in its criticism and evaluation. The SZ's reporting also includes evaluations and criticism of politicians, but not to the same extent as the BILD. In contrast to the latter, the SZ also finds clearly positive words about politicians

A look at the way the two newspapers evaluate and criticise the politicians allows first deep insights into the way the newspapers and ultimately the journalists position themselves in relation to them. Examples given before such as "*Candidate Scholz (SPD), carried by his own race, is now playing the whole thing down with a sovereignty that has changed from the Scholzomat-like to the statesmanlike with astonishing smoothness*" (C21s-27) at least suggest that the Süddeutsche Zeitung is not entirely dismissive of the SPD's leading candidate.

In sharp contrast to this stand the articles in the SZ and the BILD, which have been singled out several times before as particularly critical (A17-6, A17s-12 and C21s-26). There, negative statements about the AfD and CDU/CSU parties are increasingly represented and suggest a negative attitude on the part of the authors.

In addition to the texts already mentioned, there are also other examples in the articles that indicate the journalists' sympathy or antipathy towards the parties and politicians. For example, the BILD 2017 sums up its article on an election campaign event of SPD's top candidate Schulz with the words: "*Final sprint accomplished, the candidate remains electable until the end*" (S17-7) and thus positions itself positively towards Schulz.

In 2017, the SZ writes ironically-critically about a CSU politician:

*"The fact that Dobrindt, of all people, is being thought of again now must be an unfortunate coincidence"* (S17s-10).

Overall, it can be summarised in regard to this that, with a few exceptions, the newspapers' positioning regarding parties and politicians is not entirely uniform over the years. Both critical and laudatory words can be found in the articles.

One aspect that was only examined in connection with the politicians is the way in which the articles possibly attribute blame to them in connection with Germany's National Socialist past. Within the framework of the analysis, two possibly corresponding formulations were

discovered, which were both published in the BILD in 2017 and both in connection to the AfD.

*"[Gauland:] 'I am in favour of teaching more about National Socialism and its crimes in schools', he says with an innocent look on his face. So far, this has not exactly been topic number one for the AfD" (A17-7).*

*"Obviously a matter of honour that he invited as a guest of honour to his last rally before the election the party right-winger Höcke, of all people, who disdains the Holocaust memorial as a 'monument of shame' and should therefore be thrown out of the AfD" (A17-6).*

However, none of these two statements does indeed reflect what Caiani and Della Porta (2011) meant when they wrote about the typical way of German populists to attribution blame in context of the nationalistic past of Germany. Hence, these statements of the BILD cannot be regarded as populist here.

Two aspects that are examined in the coding frame for both the inhabitants and the politicians/parties have not yet been mentioned in this results section: the role assigned to both groups in society, as well as the way in which both groups are possibly contrasted against each other. This assessment will now be done for both groups together.

A positioning in society for the groups tends to take place in the SZ rather than in the BILD Zeitung. There, however, not by means of clear terminology, but rather by means of descriptions. In the case of inhabitants, descriptions of the living conditions of this group can be identified in the SZ. An example from the paper in 2017:

*"At the same time, however, many people, especially children, still live at or below the poverty line in wealthy Germany" (C17s-18).*

And from 2021:

*"[...] who lined their pockets with millions of euros of taxpayers' money during the pandemic, while many citizens had to fight for their economic existence" (C21s-26).*

Both statements can be regarded as carrying a high degree of ideological populism in them, as they position the inhabitants as the sufferers in society.

With regard to the group of politicians, the SZ primarily predicts or notes where they stand or will stand politically in society, a positioning that is much less populist than that of inhabitants.

*"After this chancellor, the Union will move to the right. For the SPD, there is once again the place in the middle where you win elections" (C17s-4).*

In the case of BILD, such placements and forecasts cannot be found.

With regard to the contrasting of inhabitants and politicians, however, examples can again be found in both newspapers: in the case of the BILD, the focus in this respect is again primarily on the confrontation between inhabitants and politicians at political events or the antipathy of both sides for each other, as here in 2017:

*"Now the chancellor must stand alone against the anti-Merkel demonstrators. There are more of them than ever before. As always, she has only one sentence for the screamers ('I don't think you can change anything with whistles and screams'). And not a glance at the posters ('Voting for Merkel means torturing Germany', 'Merkel in jail' [...])"* (C17-14).

But also in 2021:

*"But what was meant to be a powerful home game for the last days until the election on 26 September was lost in the cool September rain - and in the shrill whistling of the protesters. [...]. And the protesters pull out all the stops too. 'Get lost! Get out!' they chant. 'We are the people' and 'traitors to the people' tirelessly to the end" (C21-23).*

Apart from these emphases in the context of election campaign events, few other confrontations can be identified in the BILD. Moreover, these primarily refer to a confrontation between the AfD and inhabitants, with the latter appearing more positive than the AfD. For example, one BILD headline in 2017 reads:

*"Student targets Weidel on "Hart aber fair""; "The AfD stirs up hatred - what are you doing about it?"" (A17-8).*

The same year, the BILD also reports as follows on the AfD's top candidate's appearance in a talk-show:

*"Gauland: 'That's not our job right now.' The audience groans in astonishment. Gauland rebukes the audience: 'You can stop laughing!' - Next volley of laughter" (C17-7).*

The SZ also resorts to political election rallies as a stage for contrasting the two groups ("*[...] massively disrupting the Union's election campaign closing with a non-stop concert of whistles, angry tirades and nasty invective" (C17s-17)), but, unlike the BILD, also goes beyond this and increasingly addresses other aspects, which also tend to portray the politicians negatively:*

*"This anti-Merkel election will lead to a weakened CDU chairwoman remaining chancellor. The Martin Schulz option is gone; the SPD has been humiliated by the electorate" (C17s-15).*

*"[...] the candidate slips briskly into a limousine behind the stage. Because of this, he no longer hears the request of a boy who had already been standing guard at the car with a Bismarck biography in his hand: 'Mr Schulz, may I ask you for an autograph?' Door closed, limousine drives off, boy stamps his feet – oh, bollocks" (S17s-10).*

Or as in an example used before but also appropriate here:

*"[...] protagonists from the CDU, who lined their pockets with millions of euros of taxpayers' money during the pandemic, while many citizens had to fight for their economic existence [...]" (C21s-26).*

In addition to the presented confrontation between protestants and politicians, whereby the side of the inhabitants tends to come off worse in both newspapers, the SZ in particular stands out due to a clear negative portrayal of politicians in contrast to inhabitants and thus satisfies populist demands more strongly than the BILD in this respect.

### **6.2.3 Style of writing**

The result presentation of this final category of the first QCA, starts by elaborating the variety of linguistic means utilised by the two newspapers to formulate unconventionally and to emphasise aspects.

For the BILD, the first thing that stands out in this context is the strong tendency to recombine words. In most cases, two or more German words are simply strung together, sometimes in abbreviated form, to create a new word. For example, the newspaper headlines 2021: "Secret yellow-green negotiations; The citrus-selfie-pact" (F21-2) or summarises the statements of SPD top candidate Schulz in 2017 like this:

*"He prefers not to talk too much about Russian-President and Sozen-buddy (similar to: socialist friend) Putin. He talks to applause about the day-care-fees-insanity, the care-crisis, school-chaos, the part-time-trap and wage-injustice for women. He promises a social-pension" (C17-13).*

However, the BILD also uses this means of word composition to create entirely new words. The clearest example of this is the Zoff-o-Meter, a word used by the newspaper when it wants to make assessments about the degree of contention between politicians:

*"The 'election' talk in the Zoff-0-Meter: A talk in which the scrapes fly" (C17-7) or  
"The Zoff-O-Meter gets up to speed" (S17-2).*

This type of summary is the most popular means of unconventional formulation in the BILD

and is intended to simplify the readability and comprehensibility of the text. At the same time, it is an efficient means of saying a lot in just a few words while, as in some cases, simultaneously giving an evaluation ("*Scandal-exit*" (S17-2), "*Anti-Schulz-Paper*" (S17-10)).

The tendency of the BILD Zeitung to let a valuation of things resonate in its formulations has now been mentioned more often in this collection of results and is also found in this assessment of the newspaper's writing style. Again and again, the BILD evaluates facts, partially interprets them to its readers and thus gives them a direction of interpretation:

*"Gauland continues to reminisce: 'In the past, the Bundestag was a sounding board for the country and its problems.' Now it's just yakking. But: 'We will discuss.' Is that promise or threat? More like a threat" (C17-7).*

*"But then it crashes again. The SPD man tramples with both shoes on Haseloff's attempt to pave the way for a Jamaica coalition" (C21-18).*

It also appears relevant here to mention the newspaper's peculiarity of commenting on statements or deeds by third parties, mostly politicians, by means of short exclamations at the end of those:

*"He promises a social pension: 'Those who have worked and paid in full for 35 years must receive a pension that is 10 per cent above the Hartz IV rate!' Cheers! Bonfire!" (C17-13).*

*"His explicit thanks go to the Greens, who together with the SPD prevented Maaßen from being appointed. Whew!" (C21-18)*

Equally characteristic for the BILD's way of emphasizing aspects and formulate unconventionally is the use of very figurative language, as well as metaphors, especially sports metaphors. Typical representations of the former look like this:

*"Then the SPD grandee takes his boss fully on the horns" (S17-2).*

*"ARD presenter Andreas Cichowicz wants to nail the pudding to the wall" (S17-7)*

*"The federal Greens around Annalena Baerbock (40) and Robert Habeck (52) could possibly now be just as naively led into the forest by Scholz" (S21-2).*

Sports metaphors used by the paper are then formulated like this:

*"Line-up in a 3-2-2 system, three from the GroKo, two in midfield, plus left and right wingers: [...]. Almost all of them enter in their club colours: red, green, blue - and*

*brown...*" (A17-7).

Frequently, the BILD Zeitung also resorts to capital letters to underline and emphasise aspects:

*"HE made the speech SHE should have made! HE struck the tone SHE never struck! HE said what SHE never said"* (G21-11).

Another linguistic device that can be mentioned for the BILD is the use of colloquial language, i.e. the use of words that do not correspond to the standard language or spelling: "*Today we're talking turkey*" (S17-2). Or in this example, where a number of German words are shortened, sounding very colloquial as a result:

*"Some said: Leave it! (German: Lass et!) The others said: Do it! (Mach et!) Does the voter now mean: Not yet, or: Not at all? (Noch net, oder: Gar net?)"* (C21-18).

Finally, it should be noted with regard to the BILD Zeitung that it often uses words that go beyond what is necessary to understand the content:

*"Nowhere else is the election campaign raging as intensely as on the internet"* (S17-10).

*"The SPD is staggering into disaster"* (C17-7).

*"One thing is clear: For the Union's candidate for chancellor, Armin Laschet (60), both polls mean a bitter blow!"* (C21-5).

The Süddeutsche Zeitung generally falls back to similar means of communication. Unlike in the BILD Zeitung, however, the use of compound words does not dominate here, although these also occur ("*Martin-Schulz-festival*" (S17s-1), "*quality-offensive*" (C21s-27)), but rather the emphasis of statements: By means of the mention of several adjectives or the multiple use of the same word, facts are emphasised here:

*"A top candidate should theoretically be a drawing card, a media magnet. Theoretically. In practice, Pronold is considered by many to be the invisible candidate"* (S17s-1).

*"It was loud and ugly what happened in some corners of Marienplatz on Friday evening"* (C17s-13).

*"[...] one will slump in front of this woman - enlightened, endlessly exhausted, but in quite a good mood"* (S17s-10).

Metaphors and figurative language can also be identified as important language devices in the SZ's texts. For example, in 2017 the SZ describes a political event as a "*neat immune reaction of the political system*" (S17s-10) or reacts to the election result of the CDU, whose party colour is black, by saying, "*My black heart is bleeding*" (C21s-26).

As in the BILD, the Süddeutsche Zeitung also uses colloquial language from time to time, but in contrast to the tabloid it does so almost exclusively as part of quotations incorporated into the article:

*"There a passer-by, asked about the performance of politicians in general and perhaps even in particular, said: 'They always just blah blah blah around it, and out comes nothing (German: raus kommt nüschts).'" (C21s-27).*

Other linguistic devices, still quite typical for the BILD, hardly occur in the SZ. Instead, the SZ resorts to irony more often than the BILD:

*"Why doesn't it say 'bicycle transport possible', why isn't the opportunity emphasised but hemmed in, and, God forbid, do you have to join the FDP in the end when you ask yourself such questions?" (S17s-10).*

Clearly lurid wording as well as the concrete naming of offensive words occur rather rarely in both newspapers and when they do, they tend to be in the context of quotations by third parties. Further, no excessive emphasis on crises and dangers for society could be identified in either newspaper, and thus no demands by the newspapers on how to deal with them.

The last point relevant to the area of style then refers to the tendency of newspapers to report on aspects in a way that goes beyond what seems necessary in its formulation. The fact that some of the points mentioned earlier would also fit here highlights once again that the clear separation of the individual aspects of the study is not always possible here. However, there are other references in the texts for both newspapers that should be mentioned here.

For example, in 2017 the BILD states: *"The sun has shone, it hasn't for a long time for Martin Schulz"* (C17-13) or writes in 2021: *"That's why some Greens are already pondering: 'Under a weakening CDU there might be more in it for us...'. Dreaming must be allowed"* (S21-2).

In 2017, the SZ wrote about the candidacy of an SPD politician for the Bundestag: *"It will take a medium-sized miracle for her to make it into the Bundestag"* (S17s-1) or described two German private TV stations in 2021 as the *"domain of cheap TV"* (C21s-27). The quantity of those formulations is significantly higher however for both the BILD and the SZ in 2017 than in 2021.

Overall, the analysis of a possible populist style in the newspapers revealed not only a clear dominance of the aspect of bad manners, but also a different implementation of these for both

newspapers. The BILD stands out here primarily because of its simplification of words, its evaluation and partial over-dramatization of statements, as well as the use of figurative language and colloquialisms. The tabloid thus exhibits a variety of indicators that are typical of stylistic populism. The SZ, on the other hand, relies more on irony and the emphasis of statements through figurative language and the use of several words. The SZ thus also contains stylistic populist elements, albeit to a lesser extent than the BILD.

On the other hand, and thus with regard to those indicators that speak against populist reporting, both newspapers largely refrain from using plainly insulting or lurid formulations, as well as from the highlighting of crises. This absence of stylistic populist features stands in clear contrast to the dominance of slang and overemphasis of statements found in the two papers.

### 6.3 The critical stance towards the AfD

The second coding frame developed and carried out focused on the representation of the AfD and its politicians in direct comparison to that of the other politicians and parties in the German Bundestag, with the aim, to find answers to the second part of the main research question as well as SRQ4. In the analysis and evaluation of this, many of the points that have been addressed before in the result presentation of the first QCA shine through. The presentation of results for this coding frame therefore refers primarily to additionally gained insights.

After an overview of the results, it seems sensible to look at the years and the newspapers separately and individually.

#### 6.3.1 BILD Zeitung 2017

As already noted in the context of the quantitative content analysis, most of the articles relevant to this second QCA were published in the BILD in 2017. A detailed examination of these articles revealed differences between the presentation of the AfD and the other parties with regard to all aspects considered.

Starting with the way in which the newspaper refers to the parties and politicians, it can first be seen that here, too, the simple job title or political position is primarily used, both in the case of the AfD and all the other parties. An examination of the other references made in the texts, however, reveals differences. In the case of the AfD and its politicians, an emphasis on their politically right-wing stance in the reporting is noticeable time and again. For example, the articles refer to the "*far-right party*" (B17-5), the "*populist party*" (B17-14) or the "*right-extremist AfD*" (B17-13). Similar references are also made to specific persons. For example, one party's top candidate is referred to as a "*right-wing man*" (B17-1).



This kind of reference to the party is particularly striking in contrast to the BILD's reference to the other parties. The latter is by no means characterised to a comparable degree by an emphasis on political attitudes.

It is also noticeable that the BILD Zeitung refers to AfD politicians much more frequently by means of references to their age, their origin and their previous professions and activities. When presenting some of the AfD's new members of parliament, the BILD writes accordingly about a former "*Stasi-employee*", a "*77-year-old East Prussian*" or a "*native Romanian*" (all B17-5). Although the meaning of these references can only be conjectured in the context of this analysis, it is possible that the tabloid wants to emphasise that the AfD politicians themselves have non-German backgrounds or a questionable past. This stands further out as here too, similar references are absent in relation to other politicians.

What the references to the AfD and the other politicians have in common, however, is that both are partly made with a negative evaluative tone. In the case of the AfD, for example, the BILD refers to a politician as "*the offended one*" (B17-3) and compares the same person elsewhere to a "*film villain*" (B17-15).

With regard to the other parties and politicians, formulations such as "*party of prohibition*" (B17-5) or "*angry head of the SPD*" (B17-12) occur.

While these negatively connoted references tend to be the rule with the AfD, there are exceptions with regard to the other politicians. For example, there are references to politicians as "*political pop star*" (B17-21) or "*left-wing icon*" (B17-5).

Unlike in the case of the AfD, however, some references to politicians of other parties are characterised by an ironic, almost disparaging formulation. For example, two leading Green politicians are referred to as "*egg dancer*" (B17-7) and "*green dyke keeper*" (B17-10).

With regard to the concrete characterisation of the politicians of the various parties, it can first be stated that, for both the AfD and the other parties, this is primarily branded by adjectives with negative connotations. However, there are also conspicuous features here: while some positive adjectives are also mentioned in connection with the other parties, they are almost completely omitted in connection with the AfD. In addition, the adjectives that are mentioned in connection with the AfD can be interpreted as loaded with meaning. Adjectives in this context include "*hated*" (B17-4), "*isolated*" (B17-5) or "*loyal to Moscow*" (B17-5). Adjectives used to characterise other politicians are not only apparently less extreme ("*tarnished*", "*belligerent*"

(both B17-5), "*morally charged*" (B17-18)) but also tend to be positively charged at times ("*calm*", "*strong*" (both B17-5) or "*clever*" (B17-15)).

Now looking at the way the BILD criticised the parties in 2017 and evaluated their actions and statements, differences worth mentioning but also clear similarities become apparent. In its evaluation of the parties and politicians, the BILD places a lot of emphasis on pre-interpreting the politicians' statements for its readership. This fact was discovered before in the context of the first qualitative content analysis and accordingly also asserts itself here as the primary means of evaluation, across all parties. With regard to the AfD politician Alice Weidel, the BILD writes, for example:

*"The AfD woman shifts the blame far away from herself: 'We are all victims of a messed-up perception [...]. Weidel gets snotty, Blome pushes: 'Do you want to send every child of refugees to school?' - Weidel blurts out: 'You have to read and understand our election programme'" (B17-7).*

In another article, the BILD comments on the statement of a CDU politician as follows:

*"'I believe that we are all united here in shaping our relationship with Israel in awareness of history' Seibert said evasively" (B17-2).*

In addition to this clear tendency to interpret statements, the BILD also tends to evaluate the AfD's political behaviour:

*"During the election campaign, the AfD had drawn attention to itself with aggressive online campaigns in which it repeatedly placed the refugee issue. The tasteless highlight was a thousand-fold shared motif showing bloody tyre tracks running through Europe's metropolises - an allusion to the terrorist attacks" (B17-5).*

Furthermore, statements by AfD politicians are often exposed or presented in a negative light. For example, the BILD titled one of its articles:

*"AfD leader Gauland; dangerous sentences about Israel's right to exist" (B17-4).*

Looking at the evaluation that the BILD makes for the other parties, not a clearly more positive picture can be found here, as, for example, political appearances are described as "*aggro-appearances*" (B17-5) or "*wild TV attacks*" (B17-19). The BILD also comments on politicians' actions with an amused, sometimes almost cynically tone:

*"Habeck is already practising the role of mediator: blaming Merkel alone would be the 'stupidest answer'. That's how you make yourself popular in the chancellery" (B17-10).*

Although there are also positive evaluations with reference to other parties from time to time, overall, neither the AfD nor the other parties have a clearly more positive or more negative image in this respect.

The situation is different when looking at the concrete criticism levelled at the AfD and the other parties. The criticism of the AfD done by the BILD is sparing, but clear:

*"The AfD is not a party like the others in parliament. It is the only one that leaves nationalist racism unpunished in its ranks and openly propagates xenophobia" (B17-5).*

*"Gauland's party friends like to play tough, while he himself prefers the ravioli tactic: soft on the outside, soft on the inside" (B17-6).*

The other parties and politicians are also criticised by the BILD. However, as already noted with other aspects, this criticism appears less explicit and more objective than with the AfD. Here, the criticism refers primarily to the political work and decisions of the parties and their politicians:

*"Since Gerhard Schröder was voted out of office in the 2005 Bundestag elections, the SPD has been losing voters and has not yet been able to stop the negative trend. The party reacted to this by sharpening its left profile. In doing so, it has failed to score points with the centre of society" (B17-5).*

*"In August 2015, Angela Merkel said, "We can do it!" And, she will most likely be correct. But to this day, she has hardly found a word or a gesture towards those who are saying, "We don't want to do it!" [...]. "I want to solve real problems," the chancellor outlined yesterday her old (and new) recipe to win AfD voters back. It hasn't proved effective yet" (B17-9).*

In this context, it should also be emphasised how clearly the BILD criticises not only Angela Merkel but also the other parties in the Bundestag during that time for their handling of the refugee crisis and thus explicitly accuses them of being responsible for the growth of the AfD:

*"What was thought in large parts of the population about the consequences and risks of this policy was reflected in the parliamentary debates in trace elements at best. Criticism, even if presented calmly and objectively, was quickly given labels such as 'right-wing populism', 'xenophobia', 'Islamophobia' and the critics were placed in the right-*

*wing corner. There the AfD was waiting and welcomed them with open arms. Many felt - finally - understood as a result. And the more the public was lectured from above about what they should think - the wider the gap between voters and the elected" (B17-5).*

Closely connected to this expression of criticism towards the AfD and the other parties, is the formulation of clear antipathy against both sides. In relation to the AfD, for example, antipathy is established by statements about the party's election victory, which is called a "*frightening election triumph*" (B17-1) and "*A shock. A cut*" (B17-5). In addition, the newspaper writes in an article that it is correct to generally distrust the AfD (B17-1) and elects, in the context of reporting on a political talk show, a quote from a SPD politician that clearly opposes the AfD as the "*quote of the evening*" (B17-3).

However, the BILD also formulates its statements about the other parties in a way that suggests a certain antipathy. A clear example is the reporting on the leading candidate of the Greens:

*"Göring-Eckardt is fermenting under the turnip crust, and she misunderstands Herrmann's criticism as much as possible in order to craft an accusation full of disgust and indignation on it [...]" (B17-6).*

In addition, a dislike of Germany's previous government also becomes clear:

*"So let's look on the bright side: Merkel saves herself to the finish line, and the country is spared a new edition of the Grand Coalition" (B17-15).*

In direct comparison to the antipathy identified for the AfD, that for the other politicians and parties again appears less extreme, although not always objective.

Clear formulations that suggest sympathy are not found with great frequency, neither in relation to the AfD nor to the other parties. With regard to the AfD, only one statement can be identified, which seems to somewhat protect the AfD's leading candidate, but at the same time primarily criticises all other parties:

*"It is true that immediately after her Knesset speech, massive volleys of criticism were fired at the Chancellor as early as spring 2008. They were similar in form and content to the current Gauland thoughts. There is, of course, one difference: "The same thing is certainly not the identical thing when it is uttered by someone who is subject to general suspicion" (B17-1).*

The expressions of sympathy for the other parties are marginally more frequent and then also tend to refer to specific politicians. A clear example can be found in an article about an election campaign event of the SPD's top candidate:

*"It fascinates me how he fights. A great guy! He is a better speaker than Merkel. But he will lose. He knows it and is running anyway. I like this fighter" (B17-17).*

Lastly, the coding frame looked at how the AfD is contrasted to the other parties. Here, four primary ways stood out in the BILD's 2017 reporting. First, in its election analyses, the BILD repeatedly emphasises how many voters the parties lost to the AfD or how the other parties performed in contrast to the AfD:

*"The CDU lost more than 1 million of its 2013 voters to the AfD, and the AfD got 1.2 million votes from past non-voters" (B17-9)*

*"The only damper: the FDP lost the race for third place against the AfD" (B17-5)*

*"Because: the Left Party has lost especially its so important "protest voter potential" to the AfD and others in the past months" (B17-5).*

Another way to contrast the parties is to describe or quote other politicians in their dislike of the AfD:

*"But whoever wants to misuse the Bundestag for extreme right-wing provocations, 'we will oppose with all determination', Maas said" (B17-16).*

*"Huber spoke of a disaster. One should have fought the AfD much more massively much earlier" (B17-5).*

Likewise, in a third way of contrasting, the BILD gives space to AfD politicians for their opinions and statements towards the other parties and politicians:

*"Höcke stressed that his party would fundamentally oppose the stance of the other parties on issues of immigration and euro bailout policy" (B17-16).*

*"AfD top candidate Alexander Gauland announced a tough confrontation course against the new federal government on Sunday evening. 'The federal government, whatever it looks like, can dress warmly, we will hunt it down,' Gauland told supporters" (B17-22).*

Last, in a fourth way of contrasting AfD and the other parties, then Chancellor Angela Merkel is repeatedly singled out as the culprit for the rise of the AfD:

*"The rise of the far-right is also a legacy of the Merkel era" (B17-5)*

*"In that respect, Angela Merkel's passion for large coalitions has contributed to the AfD election success" (B17-9).*

Overall, although the contrast tends to be negative for both sides, it is clear that most of the formulations, statements or accusations relevant here are those that refer to the rise of the AfD. The result is that the AfD generally comes off worse in the contrasts.

### **6.3.2 Süddeutsche Zeitung 2017**

Again, starting with the way politicians and parties are referred to, one fact stands out particularly quickly. While the parties CDU/CSU, SPD, LINKE, GRÜNE and FDP are primarily referred to by mentioning their political role ("*Left-wing top candidate*" (S17-39), "*FDP leader*" (S17-38), "*Federal Chancellor*" (S17-29), this is different in the case of the AfD. Here, other aspects dominate the reference to the party and its politicians. What stands out is the frequent mention of the political right-wing sentiment of the party. Accordingly, references to the AfD such as "*right-wing grouping in the Bundestag*" (S17-29), "*right-wing populist AfD*" (S17-30) or "*a very right-wing to right-wing extremist party*" (S17-31) can be found in the texts.

In a different way of referring to AfD politicians, the SZ often highlights constellations or positions within the party:

*"Gauland, officially only party vice-president and once her companion, blocked Petry's attempts to demarcate the AfD from the far-right fringe. In spring, she was able to push through a resolution in the party executive against the far-right man Björn Höcke. [...]. However, this expulsion did not take place, and the proceedings rippled along, much to the delight of Höcke-friend Gauland" (S17-24).*

In addition, the articles also emphasise the power and leadership of individual persons in the party. Accordingly, there is talk of a "*central leadership figure*" or the "*most powerful man in the AfD*" (both S17-24).

Lastly, there are also references to the AfD and its politicians that can be perceived as disparaging, even if the SZ usually includes them in reference to the opinions or statements of others. For example, the AfD is called a "*satirical party*" (S17-32), a "*fermented bunch*" (S17-24) or a "*disgrace in the Bundestag*" (S17-31).

Unlike the BILD, however, the SZ does not excessively name age, origin or learned professions in reference to AfD politicians.

In view of this variety of ways of referring to the AfD, the abstinence of those when referring to the other parties and politicians is all the more striking. As mentioned earlier, the value-free designation by means of political position clearly dominates here. There is no emphasis on political views, positions of power or constellations between parties or politicians. Only irony and an occasional apparent disparagement of politicians could be identified here as additional types of reference. Corresponding formulations with regard to irony are, for example, "*Sneaker-Fischer*" or, somewhat longer: "*[The government] has guided the Republic, with Merkel as the true foreign minister and the secondary foreign ministers Steinmeier and Gabriel, well through the perils of international politics*" (both S17-34).

As examples of tendentious disparagement, phrases such as the following are representative:

*"[Transport minister Dobrindt,] the toll-man has created a monument for himself with the diesel emissions affair, and for Toni Hofreiter the transport minister is just a 'wind-bag from the CSU'. If the CSU presents itself as a representative of law and order, 'then finally dare to use these laws against large corporations', the parliamentary group leader shouts"* (S17-32).

It should be noted here, however, that the majority of these disparagements also tend to occur in the context of statements by others, as in the example provided here.

With regard to the concrete characterisation of AfD politicians and those of other parties, clear differences again emerge: the characterisation of AfD politicians has two essential features: it is negative and focuses on the right-wing political views of the party.

The negativity is reflected in mentioned characteristics such as "*polemical, pointed, headline-grabbing*", "*shrill*" (both S17-24) or "*politically isolated*" (S17-29).

The emphasis on political sentiment is evident, for example, in phrases such as "*For the first time in more than 50 years, a nationalist, radical right-wing, largely racist party will again sit in the Bundestag*" (S17-34).

The characterisation of the other parties can be seen in relatively strong contrast to this. Here, the adjectives used are branded by a predominantly positive connotation: "*[Merkel] is seen as more likeable, more credible and above all more competent*" (S17-36). Or also "*Schulz, [...] conducted the election campaign more committed than his predecessors*" (S17-34). Adjectives

that can be interpreted negatively also occur ("*strongly plucked*" (S17-31), "*hardly oppositional*" (S17-26)), but they are much rarer.

However, this clearly more positive portrayal of the other parties in comparison to the AfD does not run through all the aspects examined for the SZ. Looking at how the daily newspaper makes concrete criticisms of the various politicians and parties, both AfD and the other parties are judged negatively for their political actions. Regarding the AfD, criticism is formulated like this:

*"The aggressiveness and hatred with which the AfD and some of the rabble-rousers sympathising with it have attacked the chancellor in particular ("liar" "traitor to the people", "oath-breaker") will enter parliament. The other parties may find it difficult to deal with this contempt for democratic practices" (S17-34).*

*"The AfD has entered 13 of Germany's 16 state parliaments since its founding in spring 2013, but for its leaders like Gauland, these successes have always been only incidental landmarks towards the Bundestag. With exceptions, the majority of their state parliamentary groups care little about state politics. They use the parliaments as a forum to attack the Chancellor's refugee policy" (S17-24).*

But the SZ also criticises the political actions of the other parties, especially those of the SPD and CDU/CSU.

*"The policies the party offered were often so lacking in opposition that the relevant papers did not even rustle. The SPD's time in opposition from 2009 to 2013, during the Merkel II cabinet, were not exactly years of toning up either. They were years in which the SPD learned to make itself so small that it could then crawl under Merkel's door again in 2013" (S17-26).*

*"The Union has 'a clear mandate to govern', Merkel says. That's what all CDU politicians who have been held up to a microphone have been saying since Sunday evening. Some perhaps without a microphone, one or the other probably even in their sleep. [...]. That's just the way the DCU is. The main thing is to stay in power" (S17-27).*

With regard to the evaluation of politicians' statements and actions, more differences between the AfD and the other parties are then again noticeable. In addition to evaluating statements, the AfD is primarily evaluated in terms of its role in society and politics as well as in terms of processes within the party.



An example of the latter can be found, among others, in the article S17-24:

*"Like Lucke before her, Frauke Petry was now considered an irreplaceable leader of the AfD, and yet she was not. Soon she too reached her limits within the leadership".*

On the role of the AfD in society and politics, the SZ evaluates, among other things, as follows:

*"Moreover, the majority of AfD voters did not vote for the party because they agreed with the programme or even the quarrelling leading candidates, but because the AfD is a black-white-red projection surface for anti-Merkel and anti-establishment feelings. Borrowing from Trump, the AfD stands for "make me and Germany great again" (S17-31).*

*"With the rise of the AfD, German society has a dented shield, but not a broken one [...]. The AfD will not be a defining factor for Germany's politics, whether on the European or global stage" (S17-29).*

Furthermore, looking at the way in which statements by AfD politicians are evaluated, phrases such as *"[...] from the stage of a converted truck, Meuthen shouts down attacks [...] and strings together nasty slogan after slogan for 35 minutes" (S17-32)* fall out above all.

Lastly, and like the BILD before, the SZ also awards a politician's statement against the AfD, this time as *"best candidate slogan"* (S17-32).

In relation to the evaluation of other parties, what stands out, apart from the evaluation of statements, is rather evaluations of political actions. In addition, the SZ again often resorts to irony in this respect.

Beginning with the evaluation of statements, it becomes apparent that, in contrast to the AfD, statements by the other parties are increasingly evaluated by means of the typical "BILD style" already identified in this study, i.e. interpretations of the statements made are given in advance:

*"The 38-year-old attacks not only the Union and the SPD, but also the opposition: 'The Left and the Greens have not controlled the government, they just want more of the wrong thing. [...]. Lindner cleverly positions his party as a liberal counter-model" (S17-32).*

*"The SPD state premier Manuela Schwesig nevertheless attacks him harshly" (S17-25).*

For the political actions of parties and politicians, both positive and negative evaluations can be found in the SZ, as here about the SPD:

*"He has declared that his party is going into opposition. That was and is important for the SPD, that is right for the country"*

*"The splitting of party and parliamentary group chairmanship that he has now announced does not make an opposition party more powerful" (both S17-28).*

The critical irony sometimes used by the SZ in its statements, comes to the fore again frequently in the evaluation of other parties:

*"In order to make such conditions possible nationwide, he would be willing to bring his experience to the federal cabinet, says Herrmann. In view of the persistent praise for the Free State, however, it would also not be surprising if he would prefer to stay at home after all" (S17-25).*

*"And suddenly the summer is over. It's ten degrees at Marienplatz, an icy wind blows - and then the rain starts. The onset of winter. Schulz's summer has been over there for months anyway" (S17-32).*

In this context, the figurative-ironic description of Chancellor Merkel's reaction to the question of whether she intended to accept former AfD politicians into her party also seems relevant:

*"It looks as if Angela Merkel has bitten into a lemon. She shakes her head, her facial muscles flap back and forth, her mouth becomes pointed, her eyes are closed for a short time. But it is only a question that brings this disgusted expression to the Chancellor's face" (S17-27).*

This formulation can not only be seen as an evaluation of the politician's behaviour, but also an implicit criticism of the AfD.

The analysis of communicated antipathy and sympathy, or the lack thereof, is also informative for determining the attitude of the SZ towards the AfD and the other parties. It is indeed striking that no formulation could be found for the AfD that would suggest a sympathetic attitude on the part of SZ. Conversely, with regard to the other parties, no formulation was found that would suggest a clear antipathy towards them. Thus, there is only dislike for the AfD, and only sympathy for the other parties.

In addition, the dislike statements against the AfD and its politicians are also comparatively explicit. For example, the SZ published the following wording before the election:

*"According to polls, the AfD could become the third-strongest force in the Bundestag. What the far-right party wants to achieve there beyond provocations and riots remains unclear" (S17-32).*

And after the election, the newspaper reacts clearly to the AfD's electoral success: *"This is sad, shameful and will change the climate in the country" (S17-34).*

The SZ's clearly negative attitude towards individual AfD personalities is also evident from time to time. For example, it refers to one of the AfD's top candidates as an: *"economist with the gesture of a higher daughter disgusted by the course of the world" (S17-24).*

In clear contrast, no such obvious expressions of dislike for the other parties could be found; on the contrary, only expressions of sympathy are given to them. The SZ, for example, highlights the *"entertainer qualities"* of a left-wing politician or writes about the leading candidate of the Greens: *"And at this moment, one can imagine this Swabian quite well as the new transport minister"* (both S17-32).

In line with this, the analysis also shows that when the AfD is clearly contrasted with the other parties, the AfD is usually portrayed worse than the other parties and politicians:

*"Lücker's proseminar-style speeches have been replaced by slogans chanted at party conventions and demonstrations, especially one: "Merkel must go!" The rejection of the euro bailout plays a minor role, while resentment against refugees and Muslims as well as anger and hatred towards the chancellor determined the AfD's appearance" (S17-24).*

Otherwise, the SZ proceeds similarly to the BILD Zeitung in contrasting the two sides. Thus, the it gives comparatively much space to voices and actions of third parties, primarily other politicians, to express feelings towards the AfD. One article is, for example, titled as follows:

*"Liberals and Greens attack AfD; Both parties want to prevent the right-wing from becoming the third strongest force in the Bundestag. FDP leader Lindner speaks of 'nationalist-authoritarian ideas'" (S17-38).*

In another article, the behaviour of politicians towards the AfD is described:

*"Three days before the election, the top politicians would have every reason to really lash out at each other again. But in case of doubt, as can be seen in the roundtable, the front against the AfD is closed across party lines, Gauland is isolated" (S17-25).*

*"Speakers from the other parties not only talk a lot about the AfD, they warn against it" (S17-32).*

Furthermore, the SZ, like the BILD, also names the losses that some parties had to accept in the election results due to the AfD, as well as the reasons behind those:

*"The question remains whether there is already something Merkel wants to do differently in response to this result and especially to around one million voters lost to the AfD by the CDU" (S17-27).*

*"The 12.6 per cent AfD is the result of a massive opposition deficit in the last legislative period" (S17-28).*

Like the BILD, the SZ also publishes how the AfD behaves towards the other parties, albeit less frequently:

*"Apparently, the AfD had vigorously mobilised Merkel opponents for the Union election campaign finale: The protests were even louder and ruder than at comparable rallies in Bavaria, campaign observers said" (S17-33).*

*"It is thus clearly the third strongest force behind the Union and the SPD. Four years ago, the party had failed the five per cent hurdle with 4.7 per cent. "We will chase Mrs Merkel," said top candidate Alexander Gauland" (S17-30).*

The richness and diversity of the insights gained from the reporting of both newspapers in 2017 is all the more striking when looking at the year 2021. As mentioned in the context of the results of the quantitative analysis, only eight relevant articles could be identified for this year in total, seven of them in the SZ. The findings now presented should be viewed accordingly.

### **6.3.3 BILD Zeitung 2021**

The article analysed for the BILD Zeitung is particularly striking in that no hint could be found for any of the AfD-focused aspects of the coding frame. The AfD is mentioned, but only in connection with the fact that the top candidates of the CDU and SPD do not want to form a coalition with it in the event of an election victory, which, following the logic of the coding frame, corresponds to a contrasting of the two sides, which also does not turn out in favour of the AfD: *"Laschet does not want to work with either the AfD or the Left". Scholz - as usual - only distanced himself from the AfD and left everything open with the Left"* (B21-41).

Otherwise, the article can only provide insights into BILD's dealings with the other parties. What is primarily striking here is that the politicians are named exclusively on the basis of their

political role ("CDU candidate for chancellor", "opposing candidate") and are primarily given positive connotations ("brave", "passionate").

With regard to the evaluation of the politicians' statements and actions, a familiar pattern emerges: the offering of interpretations to the reader.

*"In the final three-way fight, Scholz and Baerbock kept a minimum physical distance, but were politically closer than ever before, allying against CDU chancellor candidate Laschet at many points! There were fierce arguments on the topics of minimum wage"*

*"Laschet attacked bravely, but had a hard time against the two opposing candidates"*

For other aspects relevant in the coding frame, such as criticism, expressions of sympathy or antipathy, no indicators could be found in the article.

### **6.3.4 Süddeutsche Zeitung 2021**

For the reporting of the Süddeutsche Zeitung in 2021, a total of seven relevant articles were examined, of which five were mainly focused on the AfD and hardly even mentioning any other politicians.

With regard to the reference to politicians, now both AfD politicians and politicians from other parties are primarily mentioned by means of their political role ("party leader" (S21-45), "top politician" (S21-42)). However, the tendency of the SZ to continue to make references to AfD politicians by means of their political orientation still stands out clearly in 2021. Instead of simply naming AfD politician Björn Höcke, the newspaper refers to the politician as follows:

*"The former mastermind of the far-right, officially disbanded 'wing' of the party". (S21-45).*

In another article there are references like:

*"The, by AfD standards, moderate forces around Meuthen want to lead their party into a more bourgeois future in the next few months, to break with the far right side of the party in order to appeal to a broader electorate again, perhaps even to join the government at some point. Chrupalla and Weidel, on the other hand, want to prevent this with all their might. Their influence is far too much linked to the far right fringe of the party, which they want to integrate" (S21-46).*

In regard to the other politicians, only one mention stands out. It refers to the former SPD Chancellor Schröder, whom the SZ calls the "Hömma- and Samma-chancellor" (S21-43), apparently as a satire on his manner of articulation.

The characterisation of politicians and parties by means of adjectives is relatively sparse in the SZ articles, more so for the other parties than for the AfD. For the former, the words "*honestly endeavouring*" and "*brave*" (S21-42), which are positively connoted, could be identified. The characterisation of the AfD, on the other hand, is dominated by negative adjectives: "*too radical*", "*too weak*" (both S21-46) or "*irreconcilable*" (S21-48). Positive adjectives in connection to the AfD are rather rare.

When criticising the AfD or the other parties, familiar patterns tend to emerge. The criticism of the AfD is conspicuous for its negative undertone and the repeated use of irony:

*"If something is striking about the AfD's election campaign in 2021, it is its enormous difficulty in attracting attention. This is also the case for their top candidate Alice Weidel this evening. Only four years ago, she and her party friends were able to attract a lot of attention with rule-breaking and provocative formulations" (S21-42).*

This is very similar in the criticism of the other parties, here primarily the CDU and CSU or their two leaders: The criticism is negative in tone and has ironic features.

*"It is really astonishing how Laschet and Söder, regardless of at least details of the election results, immediately strive to govern again like moths to a flame. Even if this striving should once again be successful, it also seems sad and somewhat delusional, for all the love of the parameter fighting spirit" (S21-42).*

Particularly with regard to the AfD, however, there is also clear criticism that is formulated without any irony:

*"In the past four years, the AfD has already turned the Bundestag into a stage for xenophobic attacks". (S21-46).*

The aspect for which the SZ articles offered the most material here is evaluation. With regard to the AfD, one of the SZ's main focuses of evaluation are the leading politicians of the party. In this regard, a negative, often almost disrespectful as well as partly ironic tone prevails:

*"Weidel first whispers creepily a few times when it is not her turn ("really?"), and then presents an interpretation of her party's result that would be awarded stars at a milkmaid boarding school. From the AfD's point of view, the votes drawn by the parties Die Basis and Freie Wähler had to be assessed as 'special effects'. Adjusted for these, the AfD's election result was even better than in 2017. This is so funny that it hurts. Maybe the other way round too" (S21-43).*

*"Chrupalla had not expected to be asked for his favourite poem. This was followed by a blank expression on his face, a short rambling and, after the 'um', the admission: 'I'd have to think about it first, I can't think of any right now'" (S21-48).*

However, something similar can also be determined with regard to the other parties. Besides the usage of a primarily critical-ironic undertone, evaluations of statements and actions of politicians are presented more frequently than in 2017, sometimes even with an associated interpretation.

*"Then Lindner takes a cautious approach to the Greens. Conceivable, he says, is a write-off programme for climate-neutral technology, a speedy reduction of bureaucracy - a Green wish - and 'desirably' the abolition of the solidarity surcharge. By Lindner standards, that is at least an offer of friendship. The thaw between Yellow and Green, however, will soon give way to a little ice age" (S21-42).*

*"Söder, that much can be said after the 90 minutes, at least made an honest effort. Against his nature, he manages not to point out what Bavaria, the CSU and above all he can do better. When Laschet speaks, Söder shows himself to be an interested listener. He sometimes inserts the remark: "As Armin Laschet rightly says." And he dutifully affirms that it is his "clear goal that Armin Laschet becomes chancellor" (S21-42).*

With regard to expressions of sympathy or antipathy, no clear expressions of those could be identified in any of the seven articles towards any of the parties. However, it seems appropriate to mention in this context that the SZ seems to make fun of the AfD and its politicians in some places, which, in the context of this analysis, can be understood as an expression of antipathy in a way as well.

*"By AfD standards, party leader Jörg Meuthen held himself fairly steady on the podium on the day one after the election" (S21-46).*

*"Weidel does not think much at all of the German government's climate policy. Climate change has always existed. The nuclear phase-out is nonsense, she says, and would so very much like to explain what a thorium reactor is" (S21-42).*

Finally, the possible contrast that the SZ presents between the AfD and the other parties should be addressed. In this context, two formulations were found in the seven articles that primarily express the dislike of both sides:

*"For even if their own expectations are far from being fulfilled, the disenchantment with the poll results is not only great in the AfD camp. It is also clear that the political competition will not succeed in preventing the AfD from entering the Bundestag for the second time (S21-48).*

*"At the start of the AfD's election campaign in August, together with Chrupalla, the head of the Bundestag parliamentary group, Alice Weidel, put it bluntly at a press conference in Berlin: "This federal government has turned this country into a hippie state". "Unbelievable!" And, "Where have we actually come to?" (S21-48).*

Nevertheless, in view of how the statements of the AfD politician Weidel are evaluated in the second example, the AfD seems to come off worse here overall.

## 7. Conclusion

How, in view of all these findings, can the main research question of this paper, namely how populist the two newspapers report in general and how they report on a populist party, be answered?

For the first part of this question, the findings of the first qualitative content analysis are of essence. When looking at the group of inhabitants, it was determined in advance that both newspapers would have to centre these groups opinions and wishes in the reporting as well as emphasising their character and role in society in a way, that portrays them predominantly positive or as an essential part of society, which at the same time suffers from other members of society, in order to report in the sense of populism. With a view to the findings obtained, it can be stated that both the Süddeutsche Zeitung and the BILD do not meet these populist requirements. While both newspapers do not clearly criticise the inhabitants in any way, they do not highlight them in a strong positive way either. Neither through characterisation nor through the evaluation of inhabitants and their statements and deeds is a clearly positive picture of them drawn. Regarding evaluations, both newspapers are also conspicuous for their partly negative tones. This impression is reinforced by the way the newspapers refer to this group or parts of it when they do not seem to agree with their behaviour, as the references are mainly negative then. Classic populist references to inhabitants such as "victims" or "the ordinary people" are missing completely. The most striking indication of (ideological) populism in both newspapers is the fact that both often report for or in the name of inhabitants, sometimes even addressing them directly or putting themselves on one level with them



A direct comparison of the two newspapers to see which one is more populist in this respect reveals an interesting picture. The BILD stands out with a generally more negative tone towards the inhabitants than the SZ, which would speak for a less populist approach of the tabloid paper in this respect. On the other hand, the BILD not only speaks for the inhabitants, but also addresses them directly or puts itself on an equal level with them much more frequently than the SZ. Which is again a rather strong indicator for (ideological) populism. The SZ, even if less negative in relation to inhabitants, does not stand out with an excessively positive portrayal of this group either. The strongest indicator of populism in the SZ is the identified placement of inhabitants as victims of others. However, since this does not occur excessively, it can be summarised, also with regard to SRQ1, that although there are indications of populism in the reporting on inhabitants in both papers, these are at least relativised, if not dominated, by clearly negative statements in both newspapers.

The reporting about German politicians should be roughly the opposite of that on inhabitants, in order to meet populist standards: a dominantly negative portrayal or one that presents them as elitist, clear criticism and, ideally, the accusation of a persistent sense of guilt regarding the German nationalist past. And indeed, looking at the way both newspapers refer to politicians reveals rather clear populist traits. Both present politicians, at least in part, as being higher up in society and use negative and critical labels. Although these kinds of terms decrease in quantity over the years and non-judgemental references still dominate the reporting in both newspapers and years, the existence of ideological-populist elements is undeniable here.

In view of the characterisation of politicians, a predominating negative tone was identified in the reporting of the BILD, at least in 2017. However, as the concrete look at the adjectives used by the tabloid revealed, their meaning tended to be less of what populism would typically make use of in this regard. In the SZ, positive characterisations predominate in both 2017 and 2021, strongly indicating a non-populist approach in this regard. In contrast, the aspects of evaluations and criticism of politicians in both newspapers stand out as clearly more negative overall and therefore serve rather populist ideas in this respect.

However, the judgement looks different again with regard to the general positioning of the articles/journalists towards the politicians, the attribution of blame as well as the attributed role in society. For the last two aspects, no relevant examples in the newspapers could be found, hence no traces of (stylistic) populism. For the former mentioned aspect, the position of the journalist to the politicians, no clear judgment as to whether this is done in a populist way or not

can be drawn, as, apart from a few conspicuously judgmental articles, both newspapers express sympathy as well as antipathy for the politicians.

Finally, looking at the contrast between residents and politicians, the picture is ambivalent again. Seemingly depending on the context of the reporting, both sides can be portrayed as more negative than the other. However, and this leads to the direct comparison of both papers regarding their populist reporting here, for the SZ, the negative portrayal of politicians in contrast to inhabitants prevails, other than in the BILD. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that in other aspects examined here, the BILD tends to be more conspicuous for its more negative portrayal of politicians and thus also shows more populist attitudes towards them. Even though those attitudes decrease rather strongly in the BILD reporting in 2021, the SZ reporting remains less explicit and negative overall about politicians and thus also less populist than the BILD.

Regarding the main research question and SRQ2, it can hence be stated that, if aspects relevant to identify populism in the articles were found, the reporting on them tends to be more populist than that on inhabitants in both papers. In 2017, the BILD in particular exhibited a rather clear attitude that can be classified as populist. However, the absence of some aspects that are important in populism, such as the attribution of blame regarding Germany's Nazi past which is completely absent from a populist point of view, as is the clear positioning of politicians in society as responsible for the suffering of others, with the exception of a strongly judgmental article in the SZ. However, while in the case of the inhabitants the facts seemed to predominate, which spoke against a classification as populist reporting, here it is the other way round: the populist elements seem to outweigh slightly.

For the last category of the first QCA, the focus was on two aspects of stylistic populism, i.e. bad manners and an emphasis on crisis. As the results of the quantitative content analysis already indicated, the populist style of bad manners dominated in both papers in this regard. The BILD especially stood out with a usage of a multitude of aspects that can be regarded populist: it used slang to simplify, its colourful phrasing and tendency to over-dramatize statements as well as its use of figurative language and colloquialisms. For the SZ the usage of figurative language as well as the emphasis of statements could be identified as the most clear populist style traits. In strong contrast to this stands the lack of other typically populist style aspects in the articles: hardly any insulting or lurid formulations and no highlighting of crises could be found. The assessment of how populist the writing style of the SZ and BILD is, can therefore not be done distinctly, however, the existence of the features found seems to overall outweigh

the absence of other features. Further, it can be determined that the BILD is more inclined to use stylistic-populist elements than the SZ.

In addition to these relatively clear answers for SRQ one to three, the answer to the last SRQ, i.e. the question of how the populist reporting in the two newspapers has developed between the years 2017 and 2021 is less clear. First of all, and in view of the conflict between the two camps mentioned earlier in this paper about the question of whether tabloid papers generally report more populist than other newspapers, it can be stated that in a direct comparison of the two papers, the BILD Zeitung does indeed seem to report more populist overall than the SZ. The development of the tabloid's populist reporting over the years however appears rather ambivalent. Although a decrease in the characteristics to be classified as populist could be determined with regard to some aspects examined (e.g. less negative characterisation and criticism of politicians), their increase or maintenance (less critical of inhabitants, use of populist stylistic means) could also be determined. As implied in the results of the quantitative content analysis, the differences between the years are not striking, a clear answer to SRQ5 is therefore not possible, but the insights gained in the context of this QCA at least indicate a tendency to a decrease. In case of the SZ, a definite answer to SRQ5 can hardly be given either, as only two articles could be examined for the year 2021. However, this fact alone may already provide a partial answer for SRQ5, since complete populism could only be determined for these two articles. The results of the quantitative analysis at least suggest that (especially complete and ideological) populism has become less present in the newspaper between 2017 and 2021.

In view of all this, the first part of the main research question of this thesis can be answered as follows: The most populist features in the reporting of the two German newspapers could be identified in relation to the writing style and in relation to the reporting on politicians. The view of inhabitants in Germany hardly reflects populist ideas in both papers. Comprehensive populism in all its facets does not exist in the two papers at all. Moreover, there seems to be a slight downward trend over time in populist reporting. In the comparison of both papers, the BILD established itself to include overall more populist features than the SZ.

Moving on to the findings of the second qualitative content analysis and thus to the answers to the second part of the main research question and SRQ4, a rather clear judgement can be made. The portrayal of the AfD is generally more negative than that of the other parties and politicians in both years and in both newspapers investigated. The Süddeutsche Zeitung in particular is almost universally more critical of the AfD than the other parties. Already in relation to inhabitants in the first QCA, the newspaper showed a tendency to distinguish between those who

vote for the AfD and those who do not. What cautiously suggested a differentiation of this party from all others there, asserted itself further in the second QCA. The SZ not only emphasises the right-wing sentiments in the party excessively often, it also criticises the AfD more strongly and more clearly, evaluates it negatively more frequently and expresses no sympathy but only antipathy towards it.

The portrayal by the BILD can be described in a similar way, even if it tends to be less explicit than in the SZ, as there are also disparaging formulations and criticism of other parties and politicians. As a rule, however, these appear less strong.

The question of how to interpret the fact that in 2021 almost no article in the BILD mentions the AfD at all can only be speculated about within the resources of this study. It is possible that in 2021 the BILD has simply recognised the populist party as part of the political landscape and no longer considers its excessive emphasis relevant four years after it entered the Bundestag. This would be supported by the fact that the Left Party was also not mentioned more often by the newspaper. However, given the fact that all other parties were represented in the study with at least twelve articles each, this is not necessarily likely. Perhaps the absence of articles on the AfD should rather be understood in the context of the newspaper's role as gatekeeper, as briefly touched on earlier in the study published by Wettstein et al. (2018). This would indicate that the newspaper deliberately avoids the topic of the populist party.

In addition to answering the research questions guiding this work, the insights gained also allow conclusions to be drawn about the concept of media populism and its appearance in the two newspapers. In this context, aspects raised in the publications by Esser et al. (2017), Hameleers et al. (2017) and Wettstein et al. (2018) are particularly interesting. Esser and colleagues are concerned with distinguishing three types of populism, should it be discovered in a media outlet. Based on their explanations listed in the theory section of this paper, the type of populism identified in the BILD is most likely what the researchers call *populism through the media*, since the BILD is primarily characterised by populism in the form of stylistic features. The classification of populism in the Süddeutsche is less clear, as the broadsheet is characterised by a less clear use of stylistic populism overall. In view of the other two options mentioned by Esser et al. (2017) however, which do not describe more accurately the populism found in the SZ, the paper is also counted to the type of populism through the media. Closely related to this distinction by Esser et al. is that mentioned by Hameleers and colleagues (2017). In their study, the researchers distinguished between *people centrality* and *anti-elites* media populism. In view of the findings of the study, the anti-elites media populism describes the populist reporting more

precisely. Wettstein et al. (2018) finally, mention the roles that journalists can play in dealing with populism: that of an *organiser* or that of an *interpreter*. On the basis of the findings obtained, the role of interpreter can be attributed quite clearly to the newspapers, as both not simply convey populist content and expression, as an organiser would, but also often evaluate and criticise it.

## 8. Limitations

The aim of this study was to capture an impression of the appearance of the two concepts populism and media populism in the German media landscape as comprehensive as possible by means of an open concept. The chosen approach for this does not come without shortcomings however. The most essential ones of these will be discussed in the following.

First of all, the explanatory power of this study for the German media landscape must be questioned. Germany is characterised by a multitude of media offerings, whereby newspapers, whether online or print, represent only one part of many (cf. Newman et al., 2020). The findings of this study can therefore only be applied, if at all, to German newspapers that have a similar political orientation as the SZ and BILD and apply similar qualitative demands on their reporting. However, the investigation done of both newspapers allows for a judgement to be made on the type and quantity of populism that a large part of the newspaper readership in Germany sees itself exposed to, since both newspapers investigated here are among the most consumed in the country (cf. Statista, 2022).

Considered critical again are the methodological decisions of this study to base the selection of articles on the mention of politicians as well as to commit to the two study periods in 2017 and 2021.

The former may have manipulated the investigation of the representation of inhabitants in the articles from the outset, as the chosen method relied on inhabitants being mentioned despite the focus on politicians. This should be critically questioned, especially in view of the relevance of both groups in populism. For similar future studies, it is suggested to base the selection of material on criteria that ensure that both groups, politicians and inhabitants, are mentioned in the research material. Possible approaches could be political events or talk shows, since these, as could be seen in the context of this study, often address both groups.

In view of the selection of the period of investigation for this study, one week before and one week after the elections in 2017 and 2021, shortcomings also stand out. Only a comparison with the coverage before the AfD entered the German Bundestag can eventually provide real insight

into how populist coverage has possibly changed with the party's entry into parliament. Accordingly, further studies on the topic that look at election coverage in the years before 2017 seem both promising and relevant. Equally interesting are future election coverage in order to be able to make better statements about a possible trend in populist media coverage in Germany.

Further interesting findings could lie in the detailed examination of the differences in the representation between the AfD and individual parties. The fact that the BILD also did not mention the left-wing party in its coverage in 2021 could be a clue to focus on their treatment in the BILD compared to that of the AfD. Concerning the accentuation of the AfD in this study further, it must also be critically questioned how realistic it is to focus on this party alone in contrast to all other parties. This singling out of the AfD could imply that only this party has populist traits or is the only party in the German parliament that can be critically questioned, which is most likely not the case.

With a focus on the BILD Zeitung, this study was able to capture populist, especially stylistic populist elements, but not whether these were actually published for populist motives or primarily for other reasons. Particularly in the case of the BILD Zeitung, "the prototypical representative of tabloid journalism in Germany" (p. 79), as Klein (1998) once referred to the newspaper, the tendency to report more negatively and more strongly than the SZ could also be due to the fact that the newspaper simply wants to attract more attention and generate more controversy, as it did oftentimes before in its history.

With regard to the topic of gatekeeping of newspapers towards populist topics and personalities, which could only be touched upon in this study, a promising picture already emerged in this study, as the SZ published fewer articles with complete populism and the BILD mentioned the party in only one article in 2021. A more intensive examination of this role of the media thus also seems highly relevant.

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# 10. Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Codebook: Unit of Analysis Selection

### 1. Research Problem, Aim & Purpose

Using the entering of the populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in the German parliament in 2017 as a starting point, this study is concerned with the question of how populist German media coverage is to be assessed overall and how it presents the AfD in contrast to other German parties and politicians. The aim of this quantitative content analysis is therefore to identify relevant units of analysis for the two subsequent qualitative content analyses out of the possible cases selected for this study. It does so by identifying populist traits in the material on the basis of three categories.

### 2. Sampling Units in News Media

Two German national daily newspapers were chosen as the objects of observation in this study. Besides newspapers, the medium of television appears like a relevant object to study in this context as well, as it is also one of the most popular means of obtaining information for Germans. However, taking other studies with similar approaches as a model and due to the fact that some newspapers still enjoy great prestige in Germany, it was decided to focus on newspapers only in this study, taking both their online and print articles into consideration.

#### 2.1 *BILD Zeitung*

The conservative tabloid BILD is the most popular national daily newspaper in Germany with a total circulation of over one million.

#### 2.2 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

This national daily *Süddeutsche* (SZ) is one of Germany's largest quality papers characterised by a left-liberal political orientation. It is the second most popular national newspaper in the country with a total circulation of over 300.000.

### 3. Timeframe

Two national elections in Germany, one in 2017 and one in 2021, were set as the general study periods for this analysis. Specifically, a total of two weeks (14 days) is examined for each of the two elections: one week before the election date and one week after the election date. For 2017, this then concerns the period between September 17<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup> with the election day on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September. For 2021 the two-week period between September 19<sup>th</sup> and October 3<sup>rd</sup>, with the election on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September are relevant.

### 4. Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis are articles from both presented daily papers, published online or in print. The articles were chosen based on their mentioning of those German politicians, who represented their parties in the two elections 2017 and 2021 and eventually made it into the German parliament.

## **5. News Content**

While the quantitative content analysis is designed to investigate manifest content to eventually provide results that can be evaluated on a statistical basis, it is also possible to use it as a rather descriptive tool to see what is present in the material and what is not. In this study and for this codebook, the quantitative content analysis is used as this rather descriptive tool, to determine which classic features of populism are present or absent in the articles.

For the coding of this codebook, only the headline, any sub-headline, and the leading paragraph of each article is relevant. Pictures, diagrams, tables, underlying text, or other parts of the article that may appear and are not clearly part of the relevant sections are not to be coded. Any direct or indirect quotation mentioned in the relevant parts of the article should be considered as part of the text and hence coded. Text passages that seem to fit into two (sub-)categories, should be coded for both. The coding is to be done on the provided code sheet for each of the articles.

## **6. Generalizability of Results**

The level of generalizability of the results found within the frame of this quantitative content analysis, are mainly limited to the two papers they are based on. It can be argued however that similar findings might at least seem possible with regard to German newspapers with a comparable political orientation and comparable quality standards, as the categories and their contents used in this codebook are exclusively based on theory allowing to capture the concepts dealt with in a general sense. They were not tailored in any way to the two newspapers under investigation. With regard to other types of media, such as television and radio for example, this codebook cannot be meaningful, as the coding instructions in particular focus on the way newspapers communicate information. For radio and television and the distinctive way in which information is conveyed in these media, other focal points would have to be set.

## Categories

### 1. Election Period

It is to be coded here, whether the article under investigation was published during the first federal elections, 2017, or during the second federal elections, 2021. For 2017, code (1) and for 2021 code (2).

(1) 2017

(2) 2021

### 2. Media Outlet

With this category, a distinction between the two relevant media outlets for this study should be coded. Code (1), if the unit under investigation is the *BILD Zeitung*, code (2) for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

(1) BILD Zeitung

(2) Süddeutsche Zeitung

### 3. Representation of inhabitants

This category examines whether the article under investigation features a presentation of German inhabitants in a populist way and further looks at whether the inhabitants play a relevant role in the articles. In this context, inhabitants are considered all people living in Germany that are presented only or mainly in their role as such. Further (a job title etc.) or different description (“spectator”, “protestor” etc.) to an inhabitant or a group of inhabitants can be given but the focus needs to lay on the person/ group living in Germany. If the person/ group is cited, it must be clear that they speak in their role of inhabitants.

#### 3a. Depiction as ‘the People’

If any of the following indicators for a depiction of inhabitants as ‘the people’ can be found in the relevant parts of the article, code (1), if none of these indicators can be found, code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The mentioned inhabitant or group of inhabitants of Germany are put in a certain light that makes them appear weaker or worse off in society, that downplays their role as an inhabitant or depicts them as some kind of underdog, that lack power or suffer due to others. Typical examples to refer to an inhabitant/ group of inhabitants that way are phrases such as: “the man/woman *of the street*”, “the *simple* man/woman/ people”, “*normal* people/voters/families”, “the *little* man/woman”, “the *common* man/woman”, “*ordinary* people/man/woman”
- The inhabitant mentioned or a group of inhabitants mentioned are referred to in a general sense that also highlights their weaker role in the German society. Terms that could be used for that purpose are for example: “underdog”, “victim” or “sufferer”

- The author or the people/groups cited in the article phrase their words in a way, that makes it appear that they are speaking on behalf of an inhabitant or see themselves on one level with them. A sign for that could be the use of the word “we”

Further help:

- When identifying a phrase in the article where the author or the cited person seem to state to be one of/speak for inhabitants, the coder should make sure that this phrasing is really in regard to inhabitants and not any other group. The context is to be considered here
- Simply mentioning an inhabitant or a group of inhabitants without presenting them as ‘we’ in any way or without stating to be one of them/speak for them, is not to be coded here. For example, the statement: “*People are working, celebrating, learning. We wanted to know: How does Germany feel after the election?*” would not satisfy the requirements for this sub-category

### 3b. Relevance of inhabitants

If any of the following can be found in the relevant parts of the article and hence a relevance of inhabitants can be identified, code (1). If no relevance of inhabitants can be found, code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The article directly or indirectly cites an inhabitant
- The article mentions what German inhabitants want, think, experienced, do or similar by clearly referring to a specific inhabitant/ a group of inhabitants
- The article seems to assume what German inhabitants want, think, experienced, do or similar without referring to a specific inhabitant or a group of inhabitants but rather talking in a general manner
- The hopes, opinions, actions or similar of inhabitants are referred to
- The article brings up an action by an inhabitant/ group of inhabitants that stands in close connection to an expression of opinion, hope etc. An example for that would be the mentioning of a demonstration against/for something

Further help:

- The mere mention of an election result or the (percentage) mention of the number of voters for a party or similar does not fall under this sub-category
- A mere mentioning of inhabitants as in “Many spectators came to the last election campaign event” without further emphasize on them is not to be coded here



#### 4. Representation of politicians

This category investigates whether the mentioned parties and politicians are presented in a populist way by looking at their possible depiction as ‘elite’ as well as at the question if they tend to be overly criticised in the articles or not. The coding for this category should only be applied to seven German parties and the politicians active in them. All other possibly mentioned parties and politicians, nationally or internationally, are not to be coded here. The seven relevant parties and the commonly used abbreviation for their party names are: (1) *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU), (2) *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland* (SPD), (3) *Die Linke* (Links-Partei), (4) *Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen* (Grünen), (5) *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP) (6) *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CSU) and (7) *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD).

##### 4a. Depiction as ‘elite’

If any of the following indicators for a depiction of politicians and/or their parties as ‘elite’ can be found in the relevant parts of the article, code (1), if none of these indicators can be found, code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The mentioned politician(s) are presented in a way that goes beyond stating their political role or position and instead also highlights their education, their income, their influential contacts, or any other aspect that underlines their higher influence/status and differentness from others
- Instead of a politician's name, he/she is referred to in the article with a term that also speaks for a higher status of some kind or clearly makes that person stand out in the article
- The article refers to a politician, a group of politicians, a party or several parties with a term that also speaks for a higher status of some kind. Examples for such descriptions are “the establishment”, “the political caste” or “the ruling class”.

##### Further help:

- A mere mentioning of a higher degree as in “Dr.” or “Prof.” is not considered a highlighting of this politician’s higher status if it is only put in front of a person’s name without underlining it further
- Simply stating the job description in any way as in “Minister of Environment”, “party leader” or “CDU-Boss” is not to be coded here
- Summary terms for politicians/parties that are not indicating a higher level of them are for example “members of the AfD” or “colleagues”

#### 4b. Stances against

If any of the following can be found in the relevant parts of the article and hence a stance against politicians and/or their parties is discovered, code (1). If no stances against politicians and/or their parties can be identified, code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The article takes a clear stance against or expresses obvious dissatisfaction/dislike with one or more politicians/parties and does so in a manner that goes beyond what seems necessary and/or beyond seemingly just stating facts
- The article directly attacks one or more politicians/parties or calls them out for alleged misbehaviour

Further help:

- When identifying a possible attack/stance against politicians/parties, the coder should make sure that the corresponding formulation is really in regard to one or more politicians/parties and not any other group. The context is to be considered here
- When indirect speech is used to express criticism as in “allegedly, the finance minister and candidate for chancellor had failed in the fight against money laundering” and the article takes no clear stance for or against it, this should not be coded here

#### 5. Populist style

This category looks at several aspects that can indicate a populist style in the article. There are four relevant indicators to focus on here: curse words, the use of slang, an overly expressive way of writing as well as an overly expressive way of pointing out problems and/or crisis in society.

##### 5a. Curse words

If the relevant part of the article entails a curse word or any other word/ phrase that falls under the following definition, code (1), otherwise code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The article contains words or phrases that can be considered generally offensive or curse words. These insults or curse words do not have to, but can refer to persons or groups of persons

##### 5b. Slang

If the relevant part of the article features slang in a way that is described in the following definition, code (1), otherwise code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The article contains words or phrases which may be considered slang, i.e. words or phrases which do not conform to the usual spelling, which seem to have been recomposed outside of what is usual in German or which go beyond the usual abbreviations of words

### *5c. Overly Colourful*

If the relevant part of the article is written in a way that is described in the following definition, code (1), otherwise code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The article contains statements or words that seem to be presented in an overly demonstrative, emphasised or colourful way. An overly demonstrative way of presenting often goes beyond simply stating facts and can be found in both the choice of words as well as in the spelling/way words are written (only upper case letters etc.)

### *5d. Problems and crisis*

If the relevant part of the article describes problems and/or crisis in a way that seems to reflect the following definition, code (1), otherwise code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

- The article points out a problem or (alleged) crisis with possible severe consequences and/or possible damaging effects in any way and does so to a greater extent than appears necessary and/or beyond seemingly just stating facts

## 6. Presence of the AfD

This last category investigates the presence of the party ‘Alternative für Deutschland’ (AfD) or its politicians in the relevant parts of the article. For this, it should be codes (1) if the party’s name is mentioned and/or one or more politicians of that party are brought up in the text. If the party and/or its politicians are not referred to at all, code (0).

(0) Not present

(1) Present

## Appendix 2 – Code sheet: Unit of Analysis Selection

### 1. Election Period

(1) 2017

(2) 2021

### 2. Media

(1) BILD Zeitung

(2) Süddeutsche Zeitung

### 3. Representation of inhabitants

#### *3a. Depiction as 'the People'*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

#### *3b. Relevance of inhabitants*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

### 4. Representation of politicians

#### *4a. Depiction as 'elite'*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

#### *4b. Stances against*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

### 5. Populist style

#### *5a. Curse words*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

#### *5b. Slang*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

#### *5c. Overly Colourful*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

#### *5d. Problems and crisis*

(0) Not present

(1) Present

### 6. Presence of the AfD

(0) Not present

(1) Present

## Appendix 3 – Coding Frame I: Populist reporting

This coding frame investigates all units of analysis that have been coded relevant with the first coding frame and takes a qualitative in-depth look at the possible populist reporting of the two newspapers. Several questions with different focuses will guide the coder through the process. For this coding, the coder is asked to read and code the whole article, including the headline and any possible sub-headline. Direct and indirect quotes included in those relevant parts are also to be coded. Pictures, charts, tables, any texts under those or any other part of the article that is not clearly part of the text body of the article, is not to be coded.

If relevant elements were identified in the text, the coder is asked to mark them directly in the article.

Note: (1) When coding the characterisation of inhabitants and politicians, it is sufficient to focus on adjectives used in the regard. (2) When coding the criticism towards inhabitants and politicians, it is sufficient to focus on negative criticism mentioned.

### 1. Representation of inhabitants

This category investigates how inhabitants are presented in the article. For this, the following questions are of relevance when reading the text:

- How are the mentioned inhabitants characterised?
- How are groups of inhabitants referred to in the article?
- How does the journalist evaluate when he/she is reporting about an inhabitant/group of inhabitants without referring to a specific statement/action?
- How does the journalist evaluate a direct or indirect statement by an inhabitant/ group of inhabitants?
- How does the journalist evaluate an action done by an inhabitant/ group of inhabitants?
- How does the journalist position himself/herself in regard to the inhabitants?
  - o Is the journalist speaking for them, about them, stating what they think/feel/want etc.?
- How does the journalist criticize inhabitants beyond simply stating facts?
- How is the role of inhabitants in a society presented?
- How are inhabitants presented in direct contrast to politicians/parties?

### 2. Representation of politicians

This category examines how politicians, and their parties are portrayed in the articles. The coder is asked to only look for answers to the following question that refer to the seven relevant German parties and the politicians active in them. All other possibly mentioned parties and politicians, nationally or internationally, are not to be coded here. The seven relevant parties and the commonly used abbreviation for their names are: (1) *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU), (2) *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland* (SPD), (3) *Die Linke* (Links-Partei), (4) *Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen* (Grünen), (5) *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP), (6) *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CSU) and (7) *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD).

- How are the mentioned politicians/parties characterised?
- How are groups of politicians and/or parties referred to in the article?
- How does the journalist evaluate when he/she is reporting about a politician/party without referring to a specific statement/action?

- How does the journalist evaluate a statement by a politician or a party?
- How does the journalist evaluate a direct action by a politician or party?
- How does the journalist position himself/herself in regard to the politicians and/or parties?
- How does the journalist criticize politicians/ and or parties beyond simply stating facts?
- How does the article assign a role in society to the politician?
- How are politicians/ parties presented in direct contrast to inhabitants?
- How does the journalist blame politicians for something with a reference to the National Socialist past of Germany?

### 3. Populist Style

This category looks for several aspects in the articles that can indicate a populist style. For this, the following questions are of relevance:

- How open does the journalist seem to be regarding rather unconventional phrasing and usage of words?
  - o Especially regarding slang words and curse words/offensive language
- How does the journalist emphasize aspects in the article?
- How keen is the journalist to report in a way that goes beyond stating facts?
- How are situations described that have the potential to have severe consequences for the society and/or the people in it?
- How does the article call for action regarding these potentially dangerous situations?

## Appendix 4 –

### Coding frame II: The AfD in contrast to other German parties

This coding frame investigates all units of analysis that have been coded to feature a mentioning of the AfD or one of its politicians in the headline or leading paragraph.

This frame focuses on the comparison of the AfD to all other relevant parties for this study. For this coding, the coder is asked to read and code the whole text, including the headline and any possible sub-headline. Direct and indirect quotes included in those relevant parts are also to be coded. Pictures, charts, tables, any texts under those or any other part of the article that is not clearly part of the text body of the article, is not to be coded.

The coder is further asked to only look for answers to the upcoming question in the article that refer to the following seven parties and the politicians active in them. All other possibly mentioned parties and politicians, nationally or internationally, are not to be coded here. The seven relevant parties and the commonly used abbreviation for their names are: (1) *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU), (2) *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland* (SPD), (3) *Die Linke* (Links-Partei), (4) *Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen* (Grünen), (5) *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP), (6) *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CSU) and (7) *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD).

If relevant elements were identified in the text, the coder is asked to mark them directly in the article.

Note: (1) When coding the characterisation, it is sufficient to focus on adjectives used in regard to the AfD and its politicians and to the other parties and politicians. (2) When coding the criticism, it is sufficient to focus on negative criticism mentioned in regard to the AfD and its politicians and to the other parties and politicians.

- How does the journalist refer to the AfD and its politicians?
- How does the journalist refer to the other parties and politicians?
  
- How does the journalist characterise the AfD and its politicians?
- How does the journalist characterise the other parties and politicians?
  
- How does the journalist criticize the AfD and its politicians?
- How does the journalist criticize other parties and politicians?
  
- How does the journalist evaluate statements and actions by politicians of the AfD?
- How does the journalist evaluate statements and actions by politicians from other parties?
  
- How does the journalist express sympathy/dislike for the AfD and its politicians?
- How does the journalist express sympathy/dislike for the other parties and politicians?
  
- How are the AfD and its politicians directly contrasted to the other parties and politicians?