The AfD on Facebook:

Fear, Anti-CDU posts and Abuse of AI

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About Democracy Reporting International

DRI is an independent organisation dedicated to promoting democracy worldwide. We believe that people are active participants in public life, not subjects of their governments. Our work centres on analysis, reporting, and capacity-building. For this, we are guided by the democratic and human rights obligations enshrined in international law.

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Executive Summary

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party made significant gains in Germany's 23 February 2025 federal elections. In the 2021 elections, the party secured only 10.4 per cent of the vote, losing 11 seats in the Bundestag. In the years since, however, the party has made significant gains. In September 2024, the AfD made history as the first far-right party to win a German state election, emerging as the most popular choice in Thuringia, while also securing a strong second-place finish in Saxony.[1] The party's success continued into the federal elections, with the AfD gaining 20.6 per cent of the national vote.

This study investigates the major themes and narratives present in official AfD-affiliated Facebook posts in the three months leading up to the 2025 Federal election, from 1 December 2024 to 17 February 2025. In total, this analysis encompassed over 53,000 posts by more than 950 AfD accounts on Facebook during the period of analysis. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, we analyse AfD messaging across party-affiliated pages, and identify the most engaged content and major themes. These are the main findings:

- Overall messaging by the AfD often included nostalgic appeals to a past Germany, sometimes identified as before 2015, when Germany began accepting large numbers of refugees, and other times left vague. Word pair analysis further revealed recurring themes of national crisis and descriptions of a nation at a turning point.

- Many of the AfD posts during the period of analysis consisted of attacks on political opponents and other parties. Of these, the CDU and its leadership were the most frequently targeted.

- In early December, AfD accounts celebrated the collapse of the regime of former Syrian president Bashar Assad[2] as an opportunity to quickly withdraw asylum to the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Germany, calling for "remigration" – a euphemism for deportations.

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[1] DW, "Germany: Far-Right AfD Wins First State Vote Since WWII", 9 February 2024.
[2] Rob Picheta and Helen Regan, "After decades of brutal rule, Bashar al-Assad's regime has been toppled. Here's what you need to know", CNN World, 9 December 2024.

- Terror attacks, such as the 20 December 2024 Christmas market car attack in Magdeburg,[3] 22 January knife stabbing in Aschaffenburg,[4] and 13 February car attack in Munich, were all extensively covered by AfD accounts. Pages cited the attacks as proof of the need for tighter borders and stricter asylum laws, while directly describing the dead as victims of their opponent party's policies (e.g.,: Brandmauertote, "firewall deaths").

- Political figures from the United States loomed large in the dataset. Some of the posts by AfD accounts with the greatest engagement were those promoting Elon Musk's public video call with lead AfD candidate Alice Weidel,[5] or celebrating the Trump administration's announcements to aggressively deport illegal immigrants.

- The decision by Meta to abolish fact checking on its platforms in the United States was hailed by the AfD as a victory against "censorship" and a sign that similar changes are needed in Europe.

- Qualitative analysis of AfD posts revealed that pages of all sizes frequently accompanied their messages with AI-generated images or videos. These visuals were rarely labeled and served multiple purposes, from mocking political opponents to portraying Germany as impoverished and in decline. Particularly notable was the frequent use of AI to depict dark-skinned migrants in threatening contexts.

Together, these findings reaffirm the AfD's established approach to campaign messaging – leveraging cultural anxieties and economic grievances to demonise its opponents and position itself as the only true alternative to Germany's political establishment. By mythologising a "pre-immigration" Germany and contrasting it to a supposedly impoverished, crime-ridden, and multicultural present, AfD accounts construct a narrative of national decline and political betrayal, placing full blame on the "old parties" (Altparteien). This narrative is further bolstered by the party's frequent use of AI-generated imagery to depict both an idealised past and a dystopian present, leaning heavily on highly emotive visuals, such as racist stereotypes, to frame German culture as under existential threat.

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[3] ZDFHeute, "Anschlag in Magdeburg: Ablauf, Täter, Opfer - Was wir wissen", 22 December 2024.
[4] ZDFHeute, "Messerangriff in Aschaffenburg: Was bisher bekannt ist", 23 January 2025.
[5] Ben Knight, "Elon Musk praises Alice Weidel's far-right AfD in X chat", DW, 10 January 2025.

Methodology

The data for this analysis was collected using the Meta Content Library (MCL), Meta's tool that grants researchers access to public data from its social media platforms. Via the MCL, we obtained Facebook posts from 957 official AfD-affiliated profiles and pages at the federal, state, and municipal levels, covering content published between 1 December 2024 and 17 February 2025 – effectively a majority of the pre-election period.

It is important to note that the MCL does not provide unrestricted access to all public pages and accounts. Instead, access to downloadable data is limited to Facebook profiles with verified badges or at least 25,000 followers, and pages with over 15,000 likes or followers. As a result, the quantitative section of this report reflects the most widely followed AfD profiles and pages. Of the roughly 53,000 posts published by pages and accounts in this analysis, only 13,597 (25.7 per cent) were downloadable. The quantitative aspect of this report was therefore supplemented by qualitative analysis using the MCL's public content dataset, which allows users to view and query all 53,000 posts, including those that would otherwise not be downloadable.[6]

Capturing the AfD media landscape on Facebook

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the AfD's online presence on Facebook, this page included the official accounts of AfD groups at the federal, state, and municipal levels.

- **Federal Level:** This includes the official national AfD Facebook page, the page of lead candidate (Spitzenkandidat) Alice Weidel, profiles of AfD Bundestag members, AfD representatives in the European Parliament, and federal-level AfD accounts, such as AfD im Bundestag and the youth wing – Junge Alternative. Additionally, pages representing announced candidates for federal electoral districts (Listenplätze) were included. Of the 171 federal-level accounts active within the period of analysis, 79 had a sufficient number of followers to have downloadable data, with a total of 6,001 posts.

- **State Level:** This category comprises the official AfD pages for all 16 federal states, profiles of AfD politicians in state parliaments (Landtage), official AfD parliamentary faction pages at the state level (e.g., AfD-Fraktion Sachsen-Anhalt), and the youth wing's state-

[6] The limitation of being unable to download and, therefore, quantitatively analyse data from public – often county-level – pages with less than 15,000 followers is particularly constraining. Many of these groups are relatively large when accounting for smaller, county-level populations, but with the MCL's cap on downloadable content these checks on their messaging are only possible with manual and qualitative methods.

level pages. Of the 274 accounts identified, 64 were both active and followed enough to be downloadable, resulting in a total of 6,248 posts within the period of analysis.

- **Municipality:** This includes the official AfD pages for municipalities. Of the 513 pages identified, most had between 5,000 and 10,000 followers, and were therefore unable to provide downloadable data for quantitative analysis. Only 12 accounts had large enough followings to provide data, for a total of 1,348 posts.

Results

The results section of this report is broken up into four separate analyses. First, we examine engagement metrics, assessing how much attention these posts received and identifying the top ten most popular AfD accounts, based on average engagement per post. We then perform a topic analysis using machine learning to identify the key narratives recurring in AfD's Facebook posts. Next, we move to a linguistic analysis, using N-gram modeling to uncover the most frequently occurring word pairs, which highlight common framing and rhetoric across the entire dataset. Finally, to provide a more complete picture of the AfD's messaging strategy, we present additional qualitative findings focusing on the party's use of AI-generated images and videos.

Engagement Analysis

To gauge the levels of engagement AfD posts generated, this analysis unites four indicators from Facebook posts – reactions, likes, comments, and shares – into a single metric, called "engagement".

Figure 1: Number of AfD Posts by Engagement Level Received
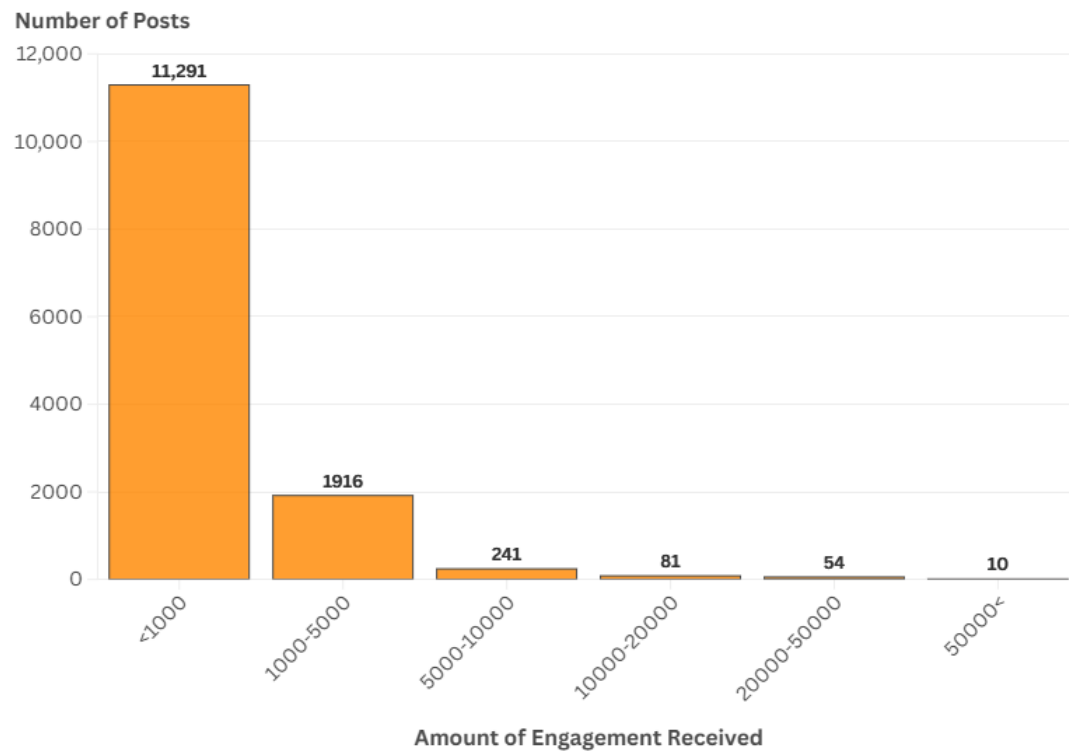
Of the total amount of downloadable posts, the vast majority (11,291 or 83 per cent) received less than 1,000 total engagements. Notably, just 64 posts (0.4 per cent) managed to generate more than 20,000 engagements. This uneven distribution indicates that, while the party maintains a high level of activity on Facebook, most posts generate only limited engagement from small groups of local followers, with only a few managing to reach a broader audience.

Figure 2: Top Ten Most-Engaged AfD Accounts on Facebook

Average Number of Engagements per Post
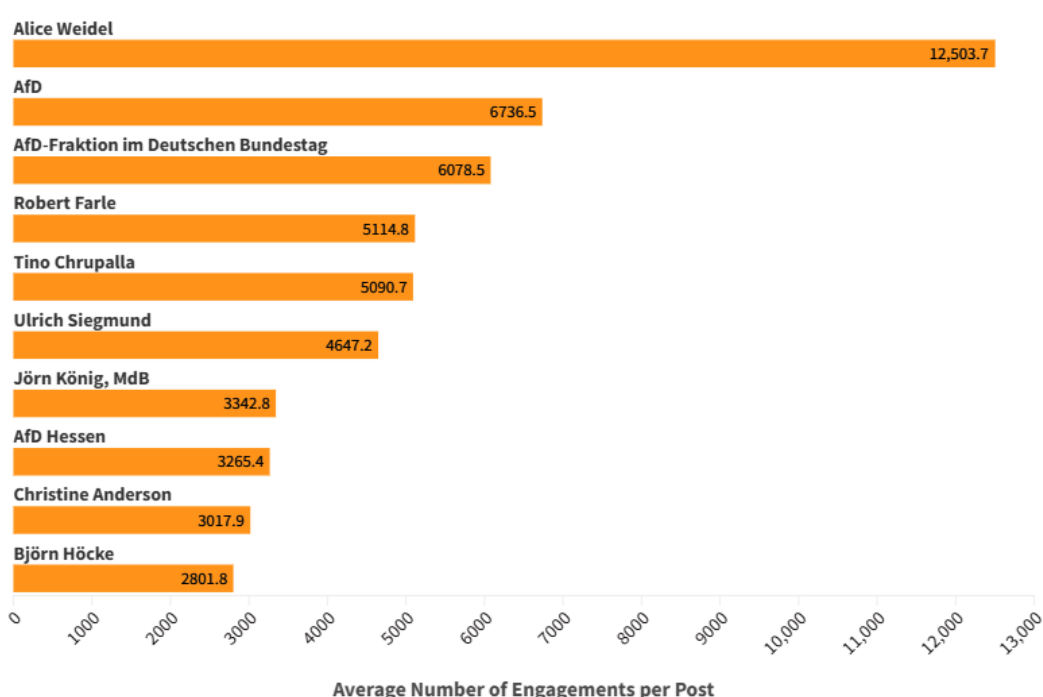
The party's lead candidate, Alice Weidel, stands out as the figure generating the most engagement, with each post receiving on average 12,000 engagements, nearly double that of the official national AfD account, which ranked second. Other high-engagement accounts include prominent figures such as Tino Chrupalla and Björn Höcke. Notably, the AfD parliamentary group (AfD-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag) and AfD Hessen accounts also ranked high, suggesting that institutional party messaging can still generate significant traction. The dominance of individual politicians in engagement rankings suggests, however, that personal brands within the party remain the most effective at mobilising audiences and attracting attention.

To gain deeper insight into specific AfD content, the next section explores the dominant themes and narratives driving the party's campaign discourse, highlighting examples that generated high levels of engagement for each topic.

Topic Analysis

Figure 3: Major Topics of AfD Posts

Topic analysis was conducted using BERTopic, a machine learning technique that identifies recurring word patterns in a dataset, and clusters posts accordingly. Applying this method to the downloadable dataset revealed several expected recurrent themes in AfD posts, particularly a strong emphasis on economic issues and the dangers of mass immigration. Other major topics included the war in Ukraine, Elon Musk, the new Trump administration, and Germany's education system. Notably, many of these posts blended multiple topics, making clear-cut categorisation limited. Our qualitative analysis further supported this finding, showing how AfD posts often weaved various topics to push a larger narrative of ongoing national decline.

Direct Party Promotion

As would be expected during an election campaign, AfD accounts on Facebook mostly engaged in promotion of their own party and candidates. These posts made up roughly 70 per cent of the total posts available for download from the MCL. Posts in this category often employed positive language, celebrating the AfD's growing popularity in the polls, and declaring Alice Weidel as Germany's soon-to-be chancellor. Many posts emphasised the upcoming election as a decisive moment for Germany,

and time for important changes. It should be noted, however, that the high number of posts in this category does not necessarily translate to impact or resonance with users online; as seen in the engagement analysis, many of the downloadable posts generated low engagement, and were often posted by smaller, county, or state-level accounts.

Promotional media also frequently featured appeals to the past. For example, one of the posts in the dataset generating the most engagement was a video posted on Alice Weidel's official page. "Do you remember how beautiful Germany used to be?" asks Weidel, over a video including AI-generated, warmly-lit segments of smiling children and dancing young women. This footage was then interrupted with an AI-generated clip of hundreds of male refugees walking down a street, filtered through a cold and washed-out color palette. A section featuring former Chancellor Angela Merkel taking a selfie with a refugee was even digitally altered to make Merkel appear more aged and confused.[7] The video received over 29,000 reactions and over 8,100 shares.

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[7] Kathrin Wesolowski & Joscha Weber, "Fact check: AI influencers targeting German elections", DW, 5 February 2025.

Direct Attacks on Opponents

The second-most frequent topic identified in the dataset was attacks on political opponents. While posts in the self-promotion category would sometimes refer to the incompetence of the "old parties" (Altparteien) and the need for change, posts in this category directly attacked specific candidates, politicians, and policies. These made up roughly seven per cent of the downloadable posts. The AfD focused much of their criticism of political opponents towards the CDU, the only other party polling above 20 per cent in Germany. Queries of party mentions in the MCL public dataset revealed over 3,800 posts by AfD accounts in the period of interest mentioning the CDU, compared to 2,100 mentioning the SPD, 2,100 mentioning Alliance 90/The Greens, and over 800 mentioning the FDP. Posts blamed former CDU party leader Angela Merkel and current party leader Friedrich Merz as being responsible for or complicit in creating Germany's perceived ills, whether rising prices or crime committed by migrants. Qualitative analysis revealed that many of these posts also featured AI-generated images or videos, often used to mock or parody CDU leadership:

The video to the left, posted on the AfD Brandenburg page, is titled "Friedrich Merz has the courage to tell the truth", and features a crude deepfake of Merz with an AI voice-over declaring CDU's achievements proudly: "We the CDU are the party that opened the borders in 2015 and invented illegal mass immigration … we have successfully made the lives of citizens more expensive."

Outside of CDU leadership, Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Vice-Chancellor Robert Harbeck were also frequent subjects of attack, being the main candidates for the SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens, respectively. Smaller state and county level politicians were also targeted, however.

Above, left: A post on the AfD Offenback-Land page "How Robert Habeck reacted when the TV duel put him up against Weidel". Habeck, the lead candidate for Alliance 90/The Greens, cancelled a television debate with Weidel in December.[8] The post received 1,600 likes and over 300 shares. Above, right: "The Left have their government mascot!" A post from Björn Höcke, which received 1,600 likes and 1,200 shares, portraying the CDU minister-president of Thuringia as a dog "mascot" and puppet for the Left party.

Migration and Asylum

In line with their stated objectives, AfD pages and politicians on Facebook frequently issued calls for stricter asylum laws, tighter border controls, and more deportations. While some posts cited crime by migrants or the cost of social welfare as reasons for these policies, others simply claimed the presence of migrants was eroding German culture. One of the most posts in the dataset with the greatest engagement, with 21,000 likes and 2,600 shares, posted on the AfD Schleswig-Holstein page, asked the audience if they were fed up with "Talahons" – a youth slang term frequently used by the party, often derogatorily, to describe young men with a migrant background. The post had an elitist undertone, portraying the men as lower class.[9]

[8] Tagesschau.de, "After Habeck's cancellation: ARD and ZDF cancel second TV duel", 20 December 2014.
[9] Matthias Kempterl, "Was bedeutet 'Talahon'? - Bedeutung & Herkunft erklärt", stuttgarter-nachrichten.de, 24 October 2024.

The image above, which was generated by AI, accompanied by text that reads: "Our city centers are degenerating into catwalks for sweatpants warriors, who admire themselves in the reflection of shop windows. While hardworking citizens are at work, this particular group of 'cultural enrichers' are chilling in shisha bars and posting videos with fake Louis Vuitton belts. On 23 February, you have a choice. Do you want to continue living in a society in which these young migrant groups shape the social climate with their attitudes? Or will you take a stand against this trend?"

The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in early December 2024 was also celebrated by AfD accounts. Pages claimed the country had returned to stability and called, in a cruel and mocking tone, for an immediate return of refugees to Syria.

Above left: An image shared by AfD Thüringen politician Björn Höcke. "Nothing stands in the way of the return of the approximately one million Syrian asylum seekers who have been accepted here, especially as the Federal Office for Migration is also covering the travel costs," Höcke writes.[10] Above right: Multiple AI-generated images posted by state and county level AfD pages, with titles such as "End of the Assad-led government: Time for the return of Syrian 'refugees'!", "Start home flights today!", and "Have a good return flight".

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[10] Facebook

Several AfD posts warned of how remnants of the toppled Assad regime and its supporters were taking advantage of Germany's asylum laws. (Two days after the fall of the Assad government, the German government paused asylum applications from the country).[11]

Above, left: "Syrians in Germany – the Federal government is clueless". Above right: A post by Martin Hess reads: "Assad-fighters and Syrian Islamists are on their way to Germany – we have to finally protect our country!"

Crime and Terror

AfD-affiliated pages also highlighted cases of crimes committed by migrants or individuals with a migrant background. Not surprisingly, AfD accounts gave significant attention to the three deadly attacks by perpetrators with a refugee background (Magdeburg, Aschaffenburg, Munich).

The knife attack in Aschaffenburg and the February car attack in Munich were used by the AfD to directly blame other parties: AfD parties frequently invoked the "Firewall" (Brandmauer) – the mainstream parties' commitment to isolating the AfD – as a direct cause of the attacks. The victims were framed not just as casualties of violence, but as sacrifices of the political establishment, with posts describing them as victims of "old party politics" (Altparteienpolitik) or even labeling them "firewall deaths" (Brandmauertote).

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[11] Reuters, "Germany pauses asylum applications for Syrians after fall of Assad", 9 December 2024.

Above, left: "The latest victims of old party politics". Above, middle: "Firewall deaths in Aschaffenburg: The CSU made this possible, the AfD would prevent it!" Above, right: A Hans-Jürgen Goßner post of an image of the actual car used in the Munich attack altered to be covered in logos of their opponent parties and of news channels. "The car of the Afghan assassin who crashed into a march of the "trade union" ver.di in Munich yesterday. (Of course, it's a photomontage, in case another "dirty @Correctiv lie" is being fabricated)".

Elon Musk

Elon Musk also featured in the dataset, being mentioned in 315 posts (2.3 per cent of all downloadable posts). Queries for "Musk" on the MCL's public content dataset – which allows researchers to view non-downloadable posts – further revealed over 1,000 total posts by AfD accounts at all levels mentioning the billionaire.
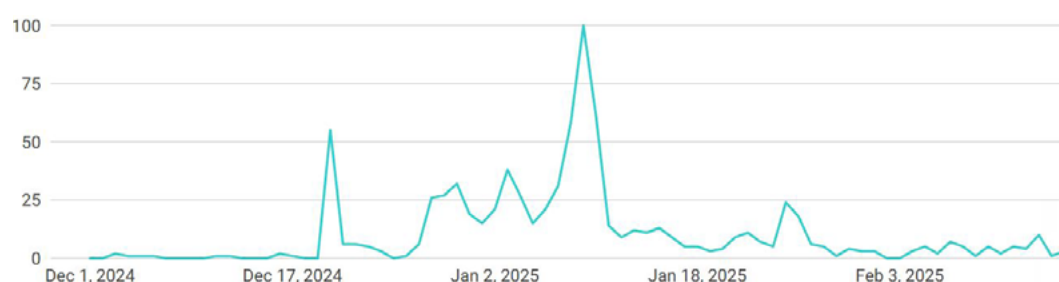
Above: A visualisation produced by the MCL of the number of AfD posts mentioning Elon Musk over time, peaking with his discussion on 9 January with Alice Weidel, and spiking again during his appearance at an AfD rally.

Such coverage is hardly surprising: In December, Musk publicly endorsed the AfD on X, writing "Only the AFD can save Germany". On 9 January, he streamed a discussion with Alice Weidel to over 200,000 live viewers, with AfD accounts heavily promoting the event. Later, on 25 January, he made a surprise appearance at the AfD's campaign launch, addressing over 4,000 supporters with a speech against

multiculturalism – an appearance widely celebrated by the AfD on Facebook.

Donald Trump and the United States

Frequent mentions of US President Donald Trump (over 700 times, or 1.3 per cent) and Vice President JD Vance (over 200 times, or 0.3 per cent) underscore the party's alignment with the Trump administration. Trump's inauguration, which was attended by AfD Co-Leader Tino Chrupalla and Chairwoman of the parliamentary faction Beatrix von Storch, received extensive coverage by AfD accounts on Facebook,[12] which championed the series of executive orders signed on day one of the incoming administration to crack down on illegal immigration. Posts by the AfD about Trump included promises that the AfD would tackle immigration equally aggressively if voted into power: "All this would be possible in Germany too – you just have to want it," reads a post on Alice Weidel's official page that received over 39,000 likes.

AfD accounts were gave much attention to US Vice-President Vance's 14 February speech at the Munich Security Conference.[13] Vance's speech, along with his decision to meet with Alice Weidel, rather than Olaf Scholz, was interpreted by the AfD as the US government's explicit endorsement of the party and condemnation of the "Firewall" (Brandmauer).

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[12] Liv Stroud, "AfD's co-leader Tino Chrupalla to attend Trump's inauguration on Monday", 16 January 2025.
[13] Paul McCleary, Suzanne Lynch & Robbie Gramer, "JD Vance attacks Europe over migration, free speech", Politico, 9 February 2025.

Above left: An image shared by the official AfD account reads "Trump's mega-decisions within 24 hours: The AfD will also act so consistently!". It received over 16,000 likes. Above, right: An AI-generated image of US Vice President JD Vance, posted by Björn Höcke, accompanied by the text "The US government takes on the Firewall..." The post received over 5,100 likes.

Other Topics

Cost of Living

AfD accounts posted often about rising costs of living, high taxes, and expensive energy costs. A total of 405 posts in the downloadable dataset, or roughly 3 per cent of all posts, focused directly on these topics. Posts cited the expansion of social welfare programmes to migrants and refugees as an especially heavy burden on taxpayers. "More and more benefit recipients, including mainly migrants, Ukrainians, and foreigners, are using the welfare state – financed by the few who are still working." reads one AfD post. "Those who work are the losers: High taxes and levies leave hardly any room to breathe."

Above: "The Last Taxpayer" – an image shared by the AfD-Fraktion im Landtag von Baden-Württemberg page. The post received 4,700 likes and over 800 shares. Above, left: A post by the AfD Faktion in Baden Wuttenberg account reads "Unequal treatment in Weinsberg – Refugees get more than Germans. Enough of this!" The post generated over 900 engagements.

Climate and Energy Costs

Other times, AfD pages tied Germany's efforts to transition to more renewable energy as directly responsible for high energy costs, promising to prioritise affordable, non-renewable energy instead. Further, AfD messaging portrayed concerns about climate change as "hysterical", and education about the issue as indoctrination. "For years, one industry after another has been destroyed and driven out of the country by the excessive climate cult of the established parties," claims one post by the official AfD account.[14] Another reads "It is frightening to see how far climate ideology has already gone in Germany. Children are bombarded with false facts and apocalyptic scenarios in schoolbooks, theater plays, and even apps. Fear of the end of the world instead of joy for the future – that is the message being conveyed to our children."

[14] Facebook

Two AI generated images shared on the official AfD account. To the left: "Climate hysteria: Time for facts!" To the right: "The 'Climate Council' wants your money: Time for a strong industry instead of climate hysteria!" Both generated over 4,000 engagements.

The War in Ukraine

Germany's economic and military support for Ukraine was also blamed as responsible for rising costs. While Ukraine is frequently blamed for requiring foreign aid, AfD pages did not assign any responsibility to the instigator of the conflict, Russia. "Many parents are asking themselves: Will our children have to pay for the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the resulting increase in inflation?" read one post on the AfD Faktion Sachsen account. Other posts portray support for Ukraine as an "escalation" that risks dragging Germany into a war with Russia.

Above, left: An image posted on the official AfD page that received 5,500 likes and 2,500 shares. "Peace negotiations instead of escalation!" Above, right: An AI-generated image posted by Robert Farle that reads "3 more billion for Ukraine before the federal elections – cartel parties agree: CDU, FDP and Grune urge a quick release!"

Children and Schools

Posts focusing on education and schooling in Germany appeared 171 times in the downloadable dataset. Some of the posts in this category generating the most engagement included outrage over

a "migrant bonus", where the grades of students with migration backgrounds are boosted over those of German students. The basis for these claims was a study into discrimination in the German education system.[15] Some accounts also cited studies about trends in violence in German schools, and the mental health affect they have on teachers,[16] and placed the blame squarely on mass migration.

Above, left: An image post by the official AfD account, which received over 6,100 likes and 700 shares, and reads "Instead of a migrant-bonus in school, for us, you come first!" The accompanying text reads "An entire generation of young Germans is being robbed of their future, while migrants are given preference with artificially improved grades. This is not fair, it is unjust – and it must end!" Above, right: An image shared by Björn Höcke "So much for 'it's always men': girl-gang bullies 'school against racism.'" It received 1,500 likes.

Meta and Censorship

Meta's decision to replace fact-checking efforts with Community Notes, similar to the system used on X, was widely praised (79 posts) by prominent AfD-affiliated accounts, which described it as a "step in the right direction." Although Mark Zuckerberg's announced changes currently apply only to the United States, AfD politicians and party pages seized on the decision, arguing that similar reforms were necessary in Europe. "Europe remains trapped in Meta's censorship net," reads one post from the official AfD account. Other posts called for the repeal of the EU's Digital Services Act, claiming it "belongs in the dustbin of history".[17]

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[15] News4Teachers, "Study: Teachers do not discriminate against children with a migrant background in grading – on the contrary", 19 January 2025.
[16] Florentine Anders, "Survey - Violence in schools – almost every second teacher reports problems, Deutsches Schulportal, 24 April 2024.
[17] Facebook

Above, left: "Zuckerberg removes Facebook 'factcheckers'. Söder and Mehring [CSU leadership] want greater censorship in Bavaria!" Above, middle: A post by the AfD Faktion in Hessian-Landstag (the state's parliament) reads "More freedom of opinion online: Victory for democracy, defeat for censorship!"

Word Pair Analysis

While topic analysis highlights the dominant narratives in AfD's Facebook messaging, examining the most common word pairings provides deeper insight into how the party conveys its messages. Using N-gram analysis, we identified the most frequently repeated two-word phrases (bigrams), offering a clearer view of the key themes and focal points shaping AfD's communication strategy.

Figure 4: Most Frequently Occurring Word Pairs in AfD Facebook Posts
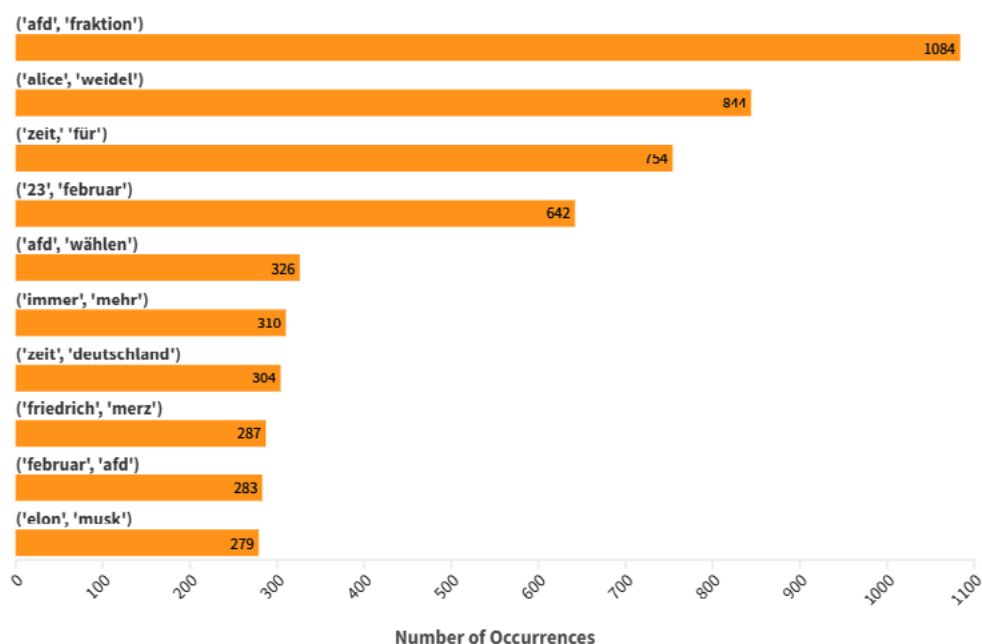
The above bigrams highlight the AfD's high coverage of both internal figures and external rivals. The prominence of "AfD Fraktion" (1,084 occurrences) and "Alice Weidel" (844 occurrences) suggests a strong emphasis on party identity and leadership. Meanwhile, frequent mentions of "Friedrich Merz" (287 occurrences), the leader of the CDU, indicate a focus on criticising and contrasting themselves with their largest rival. The repeated appearance of "Elon Musk" (279 occurrences) is especially notable, though not surprising, as the billionaire's endorsement of the party, naturally, was covered extensively by the AfD.

Beyond its coverage of political figures, the analysis also reveals extensive efforts by the AfD to engage supporters and shape public narratives. This can be seen in phrases with direct calls to action, such as "23 February" (642 occurrences), "vote for the AfD" (326 occurrences) and "February AfD", encouraging their followers to vote ahead of the election date. Moreover, rhetorical phrases like "increasingly" (immer mehr) and "for years" (seit Jarhen) frame current issues as ongoing crises and reinforce a sense of urgency. Examples of this messaging can be seen in quotes from two posts below:

> *"Workers in Germany are being increasingly burdened: immense immigration, development assistance, social and NGO costs make up a large part of the federal budget." (Arbeitnehmer in Deutschland werden immer mehr belastet: Immense Migrations-, Entwicklungshilfe-, Sozial- und NGO-Kosten machen einen Großteil des Bundeshaushaltes aus.) – the official AfD account, 13 February, 35,000 likes.*

> *"For years we have been experiencing uncontrolled mass migration that destabilises our country" (Seit Jahren erleben wir eine unkontrollierte Massenzuwangerung, die unser Land destabilisiert) – the AfD Hessen page, 6 February, 9,300 likes.*

AfD posts repeatedly issued calls for change, and insisted Germany was at a cultural tipping point. This can be seen in the frequent occurrence of word pairs such as "time, Germany" (zeit, Deutschland) and "time for" (zeit für), which appeared in the text of 304 and 754 posts, respectively. These phrases were often used in slogans like "time for a real immigration turnaround" (Zeit für eine ECHTE Migrationswende!) or "time for free opinions!" (Zeit für freie Meinung!). Together, these findings suggest that, outside of self-promotion, the AfD's approach to messaging was quite alarmist, portraying Germany as deeply mired in a series of crises to which the party alone has solutions.

Qualitative Findings: How GenAI Supports AfD Messaging

Qualitative analysis of all AfD posts via the MCL's public content dataset, as well as manual checks on Facebook, revealed a large use of generative AI (genAI) in the campaign imagery and videos shared

by the party. Across all levels – municipal, state, and federal – we found extensive use of AI-generated content. AfD promotional materials frequently employed genAI to caricature its opponents, portray an impoverished Germany, demonise migrants, and champion a post-AfD-victory vision of the country. Often, the same images would be posted across party accounts at all levels, featuring AI-generated images alongside slogans of party campaign promises, such as "time for secure borders!" and "time for our culture". A stark tonal contrast can be observed between how these generated images portray Germans and immigrants, often showing smiling white Germans celebrating over AfD promises, while, in contrast, the AI generated images of immigrants portray groups of dark-skinned men glowering and scheming.

Above: A collection of campaign images shared by the official national AfD page on Facebook. Slogans across the top include "finally be free in your own country" and "finally be allowed to say what you want again", with slogans across the bottom including "time for quick deportations!" and "the CDU is making Germany a Clan paradise!".

AI-generated images and videos were also used extensively by county-level accounts. Sometimes images would feature pictures of AfD coffee cups, wishing viewers a good morning. Other times they would use AI to mock political opponents, glorify the AfD, or express grief for victims of terror attacks:

The AfD's use of AI-generated images and videos in campaigning is dubious in terms of respect for platforms terms of services In previous reporting, DRI has flagged the use of unlabelled AI content by far-right parties across Europe.[18] In this analysis, we similarly saw that several of the AI generated images and videos, including deepfakes of elected politicians, were not labelled as such.

To the left: a series of AI-generated images shared on the AfD Faktion in Baden Wüttenberg page during the period of the analysis, several of which received over 1,000 likes. Top right: "Should he be granted asylum?" Top left: "There are things that one cannot buy."

[18] DRI, Will you spot AI content in the next election campaign?", 12 December 2024.

In January, the Berlin-Brandenburg state media authorities ruled that the AfD must restrict access to a video shared on their accounts in September that featured "people with dark skin color... shown in threatening representations."[19] The ruling, which was legally contested by the AfD as "censorship", ordered the video to either be deleted or limited in such a way that children and young people under the age of 16 could not view it.[20] Despite this, the video had already attracted over 30,000 views on Facebook, and was shared widely on the party's affiliate TikTok and Instagram accounts in the five months it was publicly available.[21]

Above: stills from the video in question, which was shared ahead of the state elections in September and portrays an AI-generated, traditionalist vision of Brandenburg under assault by AI-generated migrants.

Just days after the ruling, the AfD Brandenburg page on Facebook shared a similar AI-generated video, featuring threatening caricatures of black men harassing German women and dealing drugs in parks. The video ended with fake footage of migrants crying as they are deported, while political figures such as German Minister of Health Karl Lauterbach and Vice-Chancellor Robert Harbeck are being arrested or forced to get new jobs.

[19] Rrb24, "Brandenburg: Reprimand for "blanket stereotypes": Brandenburg AfD must restrict access to election campaign video", 20 January 2025.

[20] Luis Kuminka, "Brandenburg: AfD must delete video from TikTok and Instagram because of racism", Märkische Allgemeine, 13 February 2025.

[21] Hanno Fleckenstein, "Reprimand for racist AfD video: The damage has long been done", (in German), TAZ.de, 20 January 2025.
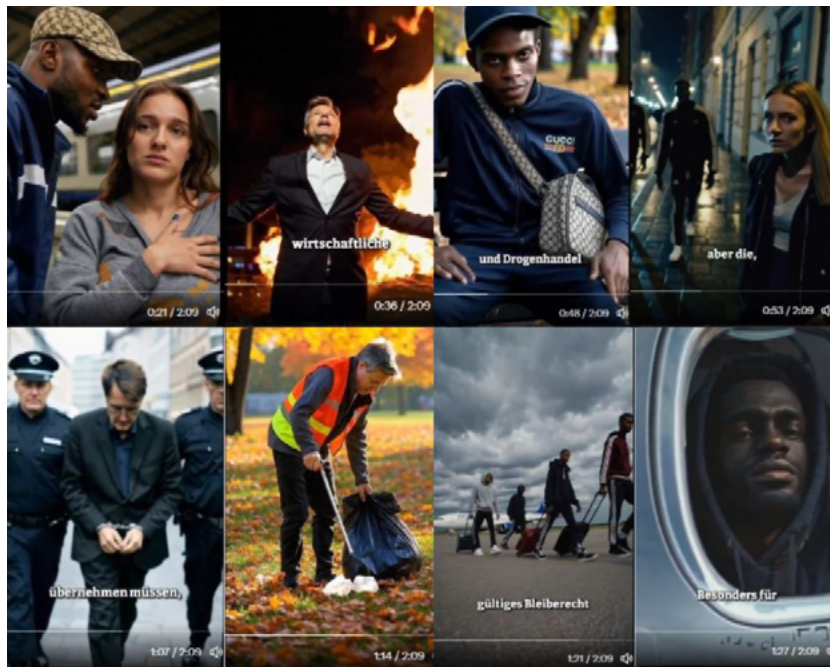
To the left: stills from the video shared by AfD Brandenburg. The video attracted 7,600 views on Facebook and over 30,000 views on X.

What Do the Findings Show?

While this analysis categorises these posts by primary topic, it should be stressed that AfD messaging consistently intertwines these issues and presents them as deeply interconnected parts of a broader crisis. AfD pages frame the climate transition, aid to Ukraine, social support for asylum seekers, and debates over free speech not as distinct policy arenas, but as symptoms of the same overarching problem – a reckless and ideologically driven government dead-set on squandering resources, censoring its critics, and putting their own citizens last. At the same time, examples of violence in schools, crime, and terror attacks are regularly served up as potent examples of the human costs of these policies.

This message is further reinforced through the persistent use of AI in AfD campaigning. With AI, the impression of reality is changed. For example, in the case of case of the Aschaffenburg attack, the child who was killed had an immigrant background.[22] But Björn Höcke shared a generated image of a dark-skinned man looming behind three light-haired children.

To the left: "Afghan kills a two-year-old: our children are no longer safe!" Reads a post by Björn Höcke in the wake of the attack. The post generated 3,900 reactions and 2,100 shares.

These campaigns do not aim at providing information, but instead at emotional priming, creating a sense of crisis and urgency that reinforces the party's calls to action.

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[22] Peter Hille & Wolker Witting. "Aschaffenburg: What we know about the deadly knife attack" DW News, 23 Janurary 2025