CeMAS

Authoritarian Strategies Online: Analysis and Monitoring of Digital Risks During the German Federal Election 2025

Content

Executive Summary

○ **At least four Russian actors and campaigns attempted to influence public opinion in Germany before the federal election.** The *Doppelganger* campaign continued to post links to websites impersonating established media outlets on X, with the 1,374 posts documented by CeMAS reaching 5.1 million views based on the platform's metrics. The disinformation actor *Storm-1516*, which had previously been more active in the United States, interfered in the German election campaign with false documents and AI-manipulated videos. Similar content was disseminated by the associated Russian organization *Foundation to Battle Injustice (R-FBI)*. Combined, *Storm-1516* and *R-FBI* achieved at least 23 million views on X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Telegram. Another pro-Kremlin network of inauthentic accounts on X used short videos, quote tiles and hijacking of popular hashtags to spread pro-Russian narratives on the Russian war against Ukraine support the AfD (Alternative for Germany) and the BSW (Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance).

○ **For the first time, *Doppelganger* placed a stronger focus on discrediting the CDU (Christian Democratic Union).** While the campaign had previously targeted the parties of Germany's "traffic light" coalition[1], it attacked the Greens, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), and for the first time also the CDU on a larger scale in the run-up to the 2025 federal election. It blamed the Greens for economic woes while accusing Chancellor Olaf Scholz of supporting Ukraine to the detriment of Germany. The campaign aimed to portray the CDU as untrustworthy and its chancellor candidate Friedrich Merz as being too close to business. In doing so, *Doppelganger* accounts pushed contradictory narratives: Merz was accused of having a leadership style that was at once too weak and too authoritarian. Mentioning the AfD, the actors behind the campaign made a mistake revealing its Russian origins: Instead of the German abbreviation AfD, they twice used the Russian abbreviation ADG (Alternativa Dlya Germanii).

○ **False claims regarding the integrity of the federal election have received millions of views on social media platforms.** CeMAS documented the 221 posts with the highest reach containing such false claims on X, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram between November 6, 2024 (the

---

[1] The "traffic light" coalition is a nickname for the German federal government which was formed in 2021 and consisted of SPD (party colour: red), the FDP (party colour: yellow) and the Green Party.

dissolution of the traffic light coalition) and March 2, 2025 (one week after election day). Together, these achieved a total of 10.6 million views. The most common false claim was that the election would be annulled in the event of an AfD victory (93 posts, 5.3 million views). Other narratives focused on alleged election manipulation, e.g. due to a supposed discrepancy between the provisional election results reported by the Federal Returning Officer and the results on websites of individual municipalities, the alleged destruction of ballot papers with AfD votes in Hamburg, or the alleged absence of the party on ballot papers in Leipzig.

o   **TikTok and X were strategically relevant platforms for AfD campaign communication – with different results.** AfD accounts shared at least 44,000 posts on X and 5,700 videos on TikTok between November 2024 and February 2025. Their videos on TikTok achieved on average four times as much engagement in the form of likes, shares and comments as posts on X. The accumulated number of likes of all AfD posts remained similarly high across the two platforms and significantly increased during the election campaign: While the AfD accounts generated around 700,000 likes per week on TikTok and X in November, the corresponding figures were 2.2 million (X) and 2.6 million (TikTok) during the week of the election.

o   **The majority of actors from the far-right and conspiracy-ideological milieu on Telegram supported the AfD.** Channels and groups within the scene sharply criticized the traffic light coalition, stoked fears of further inflation or immigration, and spread conspiracy narratives concerning the so-called "deep state". The sources they shared included both established journalistic media such as BILD (around 43,000 mentions), Die Welt (17,000), and the Berliner Zeitung (12,500), as well as alternative media such as Apollo News (24,500), AUF1 (13,000) and Nius (13,000). Elon Musk's X account was shared in at least 592 conspiracy-ideological or far-right groups and channels, making it the most shared source from X.

o   **The AfD used AI-generated images as an election campaigning tool, albeit to a so far limited extent.** 6.5 percent of the examined images in AfD posts on X contained AI-generated elements, which were, however, increasingly used to represent current events and construct images of political enemies. In 47 percent of cases, they contained attack narratives, primarily against democratic parties and migrants. Around 22 percent of the images glorified the AfD party or its representatives and around 16 percent used victim narratives, e.g. depicting Germany as a victim of migrant violence. The use of AI was only explicitly labelled as such in 25 percent of cases. 71

percent of the AI images used by the AfD were photorealistic, making it possible to deceive and manipulate viewers.

Introduction

The early federal election in 2025 took place in the context of an increasing global strengthening of authoritarian forces. The USA called into question the transatlantic alliance and support for Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression, while at the same time seeking dialogue with Moscow.

High-ranking representatives of the US administration openly expressed their support for far right and right-wing populist forces in Europe and reinforced their narratives. Elon Musk, Trump's advisor and owner of the X platform, called on the Germans to vote for the AfD in numerous posts on his platform and in a guest article in Welt am Sonntag. He hosted an interview with AfD chairwoman Alice Weidel, which gave her a considerable audience on X.

At the same time, Russia intensified its efforts to undermine trust in democratic institutions and processes through targeted influence campaigns and promoted the AfD and its narratives. CeMAS was able to identify at least four pro-Russian campaigns and disinformation actors that attempted to influence the German federal election. Their narratives concerning alleged election fraud were seen millions of times and widely discussed on Telegram, not least by the conspiracy-ideological and far-right scene.

The German election campaign was also overshadowed by the attacks in Magdeburg, Solingen and Aschaffenburg, which led to a wave of anti-immigration rhetoric. In connection with the votes on the five-point plan on migration policy and the Union parties' motion on the so-called "influx limitation law", differentiation from the far-right AfD also became one of the dominant campaign issues. The AfD itself also seized on the topic of the firewall against the far right and used it to attack established parties and blame them for the series of attacks.

Fundamental changes were predicted for the 2025 federal election in terms of online campaigning: It was the first nationwide election since generative AI tools became available to the general public. However, concerns regarding a flood of manipulated images in the election campaign could not (yet) be warranted. It was also assumed that TikTok would play a central role in the AfD's election campaign. CeMAS was able to identify 191 TikTok accounts belonging to the AfD and its representatives, but X, with 284 accounts, still appears to be the more established platform for AfD actors.

In the context of the Bundestag elections, CeMAS carried out comprehensive monitoring of foreign influence campaigns and anti-democratic activities by domestic political forces. The results and up-to-date data were continuously published on the website btw2025.cemas.io. This compilation offers a summary of the most important findings with in-depth retrospective evaluations

MEISTER URIAN

GRENZEZANK

Arbeitspause

Besuchszweck

...IT DIE IN DEN ME...

...sive wird
...reffen

6as2f6.petfay.com/if9
9qwt3i.petfay.com/fq
a01q4e.hochimgnuss.
fihh6a.yarrandale.gro
htgyqt.sadecekonyaha
hwiahu.sadecekonyaha
k3g42n.bloggleonline
kspwd8.avaliador-ofic
lb6grx.fashiontrendsu
lkyu5w.vivekramaswam
mvr3ra.mejoreshosting
ogd14q.petfay.com/hq
oixrsr.yarrandale.gro
ovm0hc.vivekramaswa
pdbk7t.fashiontrendsh
sugdk0.vivekramaswan
http://synkat.sadecekonyaha
http://t3a7cn.hochimgnuss.
http://vxpe2j.petfay.com/r6
http://169cv8.anesongbosio4
http://8ss11g.anesongbosio4
http://jd8057.nicegame115.c
http://x7virr.maridatang3.cl

2024-07-08

AUF1   Startseite   Videos

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference around the federal election

Lea Frühwirth

While illegitimate foreign attempts to exert influence, such as disinformation campaigns, represent a permanent burden as background noise to democratic discourse, the weeks surrounding elections are typically particularly affected. In the context of the federal election 2025, CeMAS documented several attempts at manipulation during campaign and after the election day.

Mass, not class: The ongoing Russian *Doppelganger* campaign targeted the 2025 federal elections

The Russian *Doppelganger* campaign publishes misleading pro-Russian content on a continuous basis, including during the 2025 federal election. While the campaign typically spreads more long-term "core" narratives, e.g. to influence public opinion in favor of Russian interests in the war against Ukraine, more direct statements on the election campaign were also observed. Between December 17, 2024 and February 17, 2025, CeMAS documented a total of 1,374 *Doppelganger* posts on X, 880 of which were written in German.

Doppelgänger Posts on X

CeMAS investigations into the Doppelgänger campaign on X
during the 2025 Bundestag elections

	Doppelgänger general	Doppelgänger vs Merz	Doppelgänger sanctions video
Time period	Dec 17, 2024 - Jan 14, 2025	Dec 27, 2024 - Feb 2, 2025	Feb 3 - 17, 2025
Posts	630	119	637 (143 in German)
Total views	2,800,000 up to Jan 15, 2025	522,000 up to Feb 3, 2025	1,830,00 (414,000 for German posts) up to Feb 19, 2025
Content	All German Doppelgänger posts	All German Doppelgänger posts on the CDU/CSU, Friedrich Merz	All Doppelgänger posts with sanctions video in German, English, French, Italian, Polish, Turkish, Greek or Spanish

© CeMAS

Figure 1: Overview of CeMAS investigations into the *Doppelganger* campaign ahead of the 2025 Bundestag election

According to X's platform metrics, the 1,374 posts achieved a total of at least 5.1 million views. This metric should be interpreted only as a rough indication, as artificial amplification of the original posts by the campaign itself means that distortions of the metric cannot be ruled out.

Negative frames for democratic parties at the turn of the year

Between December 17, 2024, and January 14, 2025, the campaign posted 630 German-language tweets on X, which reached 2.8 million views according to the platform's metrics (Frühwirth 2025a). Content-wise, the campaign focused on fueling concerns regarding energy and the economy as well as spreading divisive statements on Ukraine and the US. While there were no direct calls to vote for a specific party, articles on relevant parties and candidates were used to link these with particular issues. Negative comments were mainly directed at the Greens, who were blamed for economic woes. Olaf Scholz was criticized above all for his support for Ukraine, and the CDU was portrayed as untrustworthy. The AfD was mentioned four times, exclusively in a positive context. Two of these posts contained a conspicuous error: Instead of the German abbreviation AfD, they twice referred to the Russian abbreviation ADG (Alternativa Dlya Germanii).

Figure 2: Screenshot of an AfD-friendly post from the *Doppelganger* campaign in which the Russian abbreviation ADG is used. The post reads: "The constant confrontation with Russia only harms us. It's time for a policy change. The ADG is showing us the way."

Discrediting the CDU and Friedrich Merz

While the campaign had previously tended to criticize the traffic light coalition or the Greens, an additional focus on the CDU and Friedrich Merz emerged over the course of the campaign. Between December 27, 2024 and February 2, 2025, CeMAS recorded a total of 119 relevant Doppelganger posts on X[2], with the number increasing towards the end of January 2025 ([Frühwirth 2025c](#)). Merz and the CDU were criticized in the posts from different lines of argumentation. For example, the posts claimed that Merz was too close to business interests (19) and would pose a threat to social security as chancellor (29), e.g. with respect to the pension or healthcare system. Statements on Merz's political style (26) were also negative, but contradictory in terms of content: In addition to uncertainty or disinterest, some posts accused the candidate of having a weak leadership style, while others portrayed him as too authoritarian. According to X's platform metrics, the posts achieved at least 522,000 views in total.
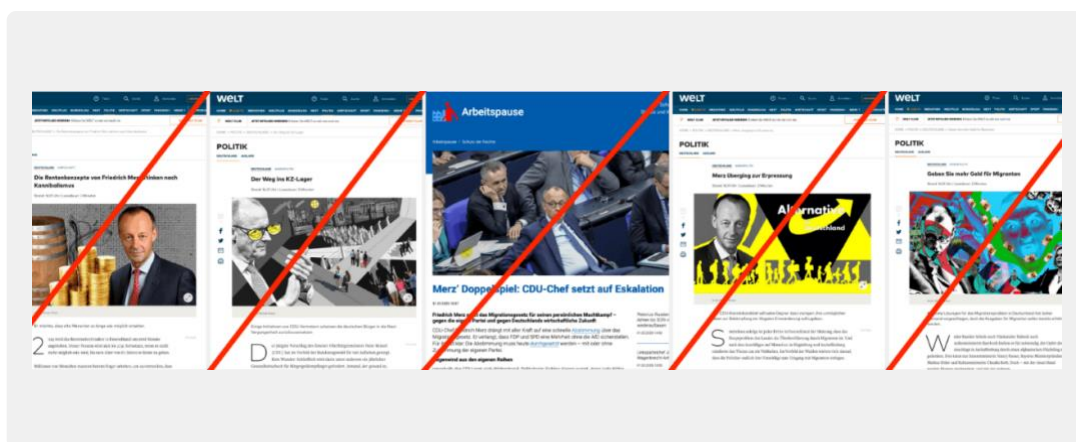
Figure 3: Screenshots of Doppelgänger articles concerning Friedrich Merz.

Anti-sanctions video mocks candidates using AI

In the days leading up to the election, the spread of a video partially created with AI was documented in 637 *Doppelganger* posts, 143 of which were written in German ([Frühwirth 2025d](#)). While the video primarily criticized sanctions against Russia, it also disparaged several Western politicians, evidently making use of generative AI and actors. Chancellor candidates Olaf Scholz and Robert Habeck were also mocked in the video and blamed for problems such as a supposed gas shortage. According to X's platform metrics, the posts achieved a total of 1.8 million views, the German-language posts received 414,000 views.

---

[2] The investigation "*Doppelgänger* gegen Merz" (*Doppelganger* vs. Merz) contains 12 posts that were already included in the previous overall *Doppelganger* investigation for the purpose of chronological presentation.

Figure 4: Mocking portrayal of Habeck in an anti-sanctions video.

Verified accounts spread pro-Russian narratives and praise for the AfD on X

In addition to X posts following the familiar *Doppelganger* pattern, CeMAS documented inauthentic activity following another campaign pattern which had already been documented by Reset.Tech back in July 2024 (Reset.Tech 2024). Between December 20, 2024 and January 21, 2025, CeMAS was able to document 563 German-language pro-Russian posts originating from 18 accounts, 15 of which had paid verification badges (Frühwirth 2025b). The posts contained videos and quote tiles that pushed positive portrayals of Russia, critical descriptions of Ukraine, and pro-Russian framing of the full-scale invasion. A further 28 posts addressed the AfD, always in a positive frame. Eleven positive posts on the BSW took advantage of a speech by Oskar Lafontaine in which he criticized the USA. According to data from X, the posts reached over 190,000 views by January 22, 2025.
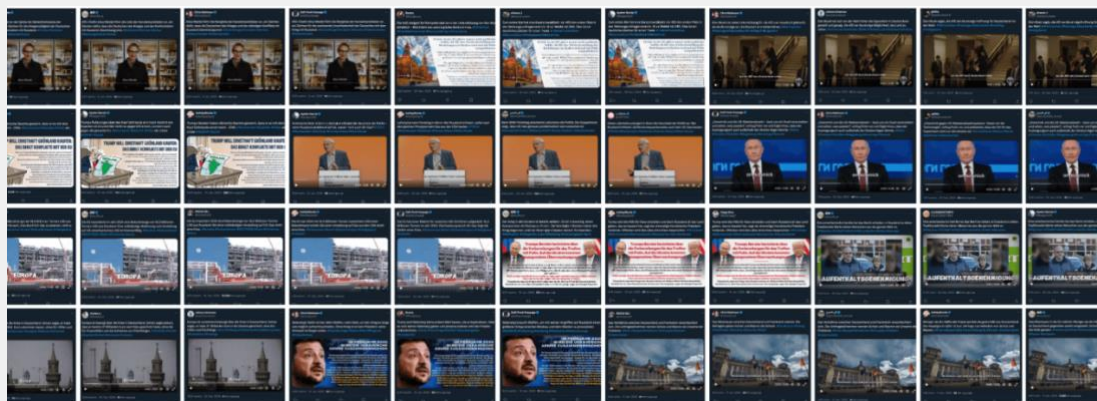

Figure 5: Screenshots of campaign posts on X illustrate the coordinated distribution of content.

Fake videos on fake websites

The *Doppelganger* was not the only influence campaign utilizing fake websites to spread pro-Russian narratives. Research by CORRECTIV, NewsGuard, and the Gnida Project showed that the disinformation actor Storm-1516, previously known to act primarily in the US context, turned towards the German election campaign and set up almost 100 new domains with German-language names after the break-up of the traffic light coalition (Hock, Bernhard, Eckert & Thust 2025). During the election campaign, Storm-1516 attempted to discredit politicians from the Greens and the CDU/CSU in particular, e.g. through false accusations of child abuse. It also aimed to stir up anti-immigration sentiment and fears of a war. In doing so, *Storm-1516* made use of well-worn tactics: Fake documents and AI-generated videos were used to fabricate eyewitnesses and whistleblowers in order to make the disinformation narrative appear credible. The content was placed on websites created for this purpose and shared by several influencers on social media. The Russian organization *Foundation to Battle Injustice (R-FBI)*, associated with *Storm-1516*, also disseminated similar content.
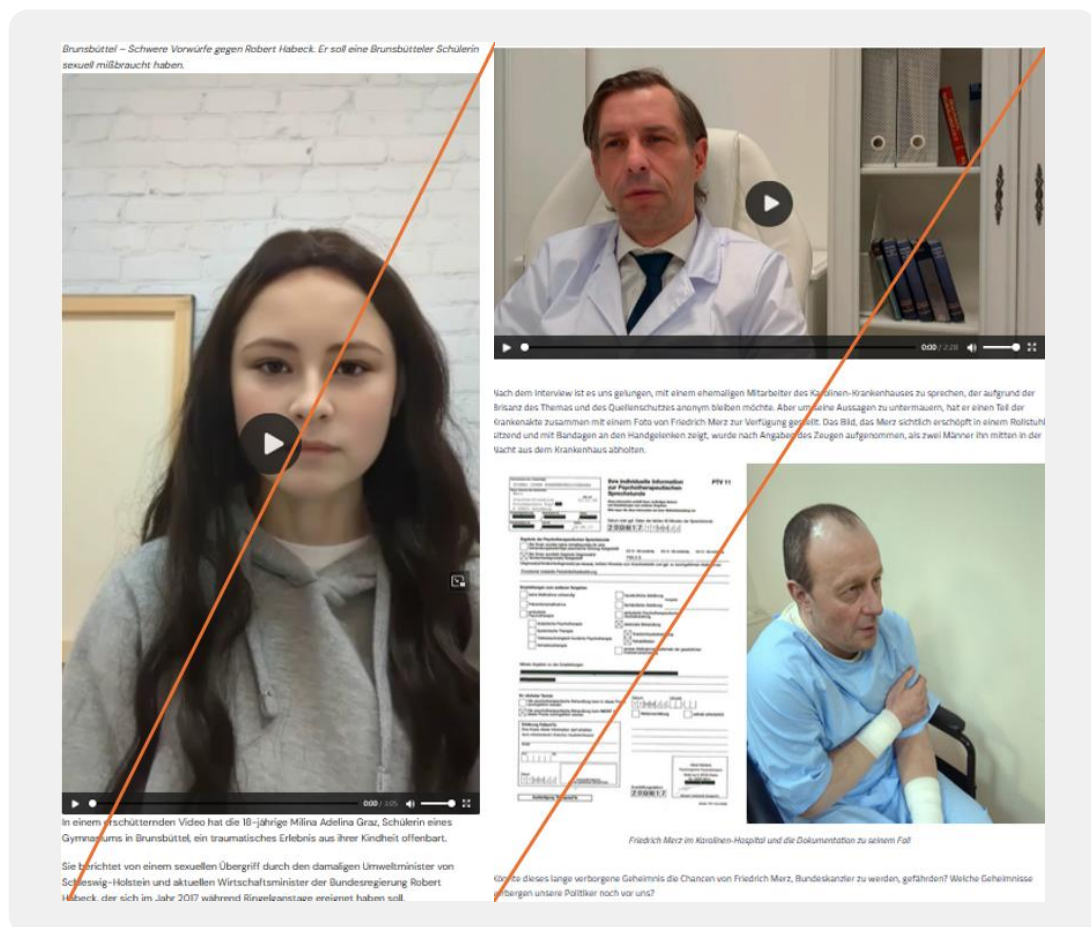

Figure 6: Left: An AI-manipulated video claims to show a young woman who had allegedly been abused by Robert Habeck. Right: A manipulated image, a falsified document and a video with a fictitious eyewitness are intended to prove the disinformation narrative that Friedrich Merz is mentally ill.

According to documentation from CeMAS and Alliance4Europe, German-language content from *Storm-1516* and *R-FBI* reached at least 23 million views on X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Telegram during the election campaign. In at least two cases, AfD accounts also picked up content from *R-FBI* and disseminated it on Facebook, X and Telegram. During the period from July 2024 to February 2025, 3,280 posts linking to *Storm-1516* websites were also documented on X. On Telegram, far-right and conspiracy-ideological channels and groups shared such links 692 times between July 2024 and January 2025 (Smirnova, Schwarz & Nazari 2025).

Videos fuel false claims of electoral fraud

False claims of alleged electoral fraud are a recurring phenomenon in terms of manipulative attempts to influence elections, including the 2025 Bundestag election. From February 17, 2025 onwards, several videos were circulated online alleging election manipulation to the detriment of the AfD in various narrative directions (Smirnova 2025).

For example, it was claimed that postal ballots for the AfD were being destroyed or that AfD candidates were missing from ballot papers. The alleged incidents were investigated and refuted (City of Leipzig 2025; Authority for Home Affairs and Sport 2025). According to media reports, German security circles suspect that the Russian disinformation actor *Storm-1516* was behind the videos (Hoppenstedt 2025). A study by CeMAS confirmed this assessment (Smirnova 2025). This was indicated by the distribution patterns and the use of tactics typical of Storm-1516. Despite the correction, the video in which ballot papers are destroyed continued to circulate on social media. Posts with this false claim received at least 809,000 views on X, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. It was also disseminated after the election to sow doubts about the legitimacy of the election and its results (Frühwirth 2025e). A more in-depth analysis of the widespread false claims of electoral fraud during the 2025 federal election is provided in Chapter "Dissemination of false information about the integrity of the election", page 15.

Summary

The disinformation campaigns documented by CeMAS illustrate Russia's coordinated, illegitimate attempts to influence the German federal elections in 2025. Further studies by other research organizations complement the monitoring results and show the breadth and variation of the problem (Insikt Group 2025; Nazari & Schwarz 2025; Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2025). Misleading content in various forms was intended to systematically manipulate the formation of political opinion among the German population. In terms of content, these posts were directed in particular against democratic politicians and parties and the legitimacy of the election.

The misleading dissemination of pro-Russian perspectives on current politically relevant issues also continued. While the view numbers of the posts should be interpreted more as a rough indication due to the limitations of this metric as well as artificial amplification and thus do not necessarily correspond to the actual reach, this still shows weakness in the protective measures of platform operators.

Where this manipulative content reaches people, a single exposure alone will not necessarily trigger a change in attitude, but should instead be regarded as a risk factor. It is unlikely that many people will be massively influenced by a single misleading post. However, disinformation as a manipulative communication phenomenon is not dependent on a single post, but is designed as a long-term strategy. The core narratives are presented again and again over the years, because repetition increases belief in false claims. Disinformation campaigns repeatedly convey the message in various forms that quality media, political representatives and democratic institutions such as electoral processes are not trustworthy. In the long term, this systematically breeds mistrust of important cornerstones of democratic societies in order to gradually destabilize them. While dealing with the ongoing challenges posed by illegitimate attempts at foreign influence, policymakers should therefore neither trivialize nor catastrophize the problem, but instead address it seriously on the basis of sound and up-to-date knowledge, and take appropriate counter- and protective measures.

The spread of false information concerning election integrity

Julia Smirnova

Contributors: Anna Meyer, Lu Kalkbrenner

False claims concerning election integrity, both in the period immediately before an election day and in the days and weeks that follow, pose a particular risk to the democratic process. It is fundamental for a functioning democracy that all parties and the public recognize election results as legitimate. However, if false information concerning irregularities, fraud, or other manipulation circulates, this can significantly undermine citizens' trust in the electoral system. Such false claims were observed in the context of all European elections in 2023 (EDMO 2023) and the recent presidential elections in the USA. They not only jeopardize the acceptance of the election result but can also put a strain on the social climate and lead to political instability.

False claims concerning the integrity of the election were also spread on all major social media platforms in connection with the 2025 federal election in Germany. CeMAS documented at least 221 German-language posts on X, YouTube, Telegram, Facebook and Instagram that contained false claims about election integrity published in the period between November 6, 2024 (dissolution of the traffic light coalition) and March 2, 2025 (one week after election day). These posts received a total of 10.6 million views according to platform metrics.

Method

Posts on the various platforms were collected retrospectively using a list of German-language keywords related to election integrity. On X, data collection was carried out using the Meltwater analysis tool, and on YouTube and Telegram via APIs. The search on Telegram was carried out in a list of around 3,000 far-right, pro-Russian and conspiracy-ideological channels. On Facebook and Instagram, collection was carried out via the Meta Content Library. The posts that received the most views (more than 5,000 views on X, Telegram, Facebook and Instagram and more than 200 on YouTube) were individually analyzed and manually coded to exclude irrelevant posts and identify overarching narratives.

The selected sample of 221 posts does not include all posts with false claims on election integrity but focuses on the posts with the largest number of views that remained publicly accessible on the platforms after the election. These were individually checked as to their relevance for the German federal election. [3]

---

[3] A detailed description of the methodology can be found at https://osf.io/82vgt/.

Narratives and their reach

The most common false claim in the sample was that the election may be annulled if the AfD won. A total of 93 German-language posts with this claim were identified, achieving a total of 5.3 million views on all platforms analyzed. 54 posts contained broad, unsubstantiated claims that electoral fraud was being carried out in Germany or that the election results were due to electoral fraud. These posts received a total of 1.3 million views.

Number of posts with narratives on election integrity

Narrative	Number of posts
Election could be annulled if the AfD wins	93
Broad unsubstantiated claims about electoral fraud	54
Alleged discrepancies in AfD or BSW results	13
Ballots with AfD votes destroyed in Hamburg	11
Unlocked ballot box as evidence of fraud	11
Difficulties voting abroad as electoral fraud	8
Other	8
Electoral fraud through the use of pencils	7
AfD missing from ballots in Leipzig	6
Mail-in voting is unsecure	5
Polls as a tool for manipulation	5

© CeMAS

Figure 7: Distribution of narratives in the sample.

Number of views by narrative

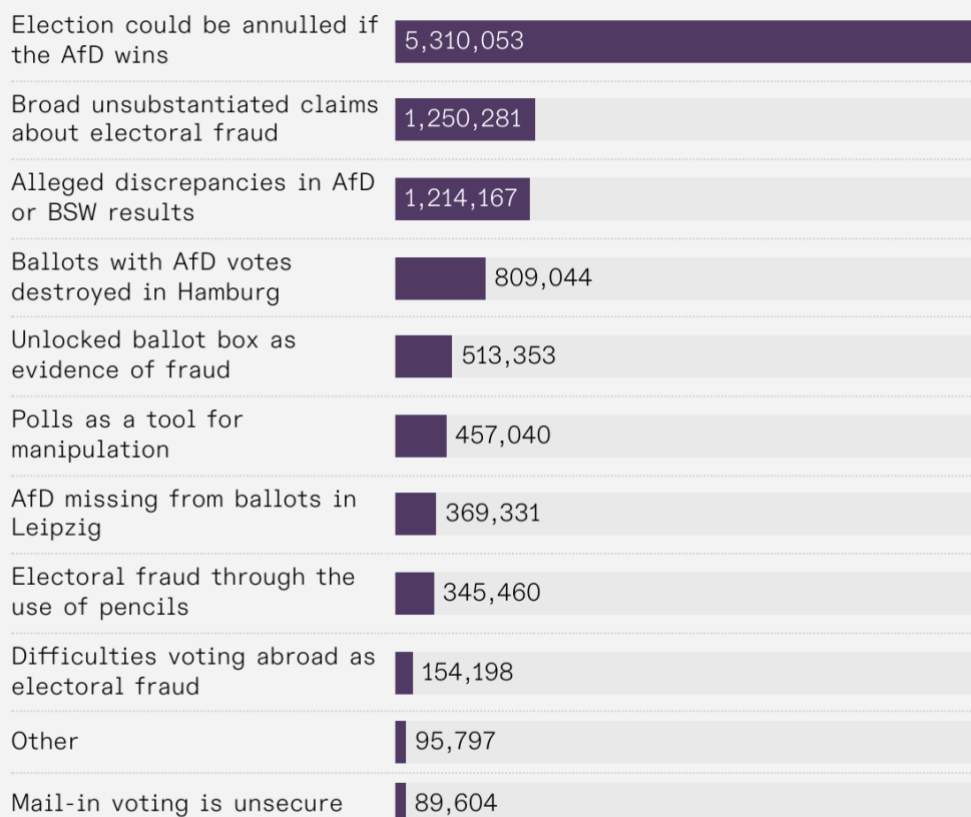| Narrative	Views
Election could be annulled if the AfD wins	5,310,053
Broad unsubstantiated claims about electoral fraud	1,250,281
Alleged discrepancies in AfD or BSW results	1,214,167
Ballots with AfD votes destroyed in Hamburg	809,044
Unlocked ballot box as evidence of fraud	513,353
Polls as a tool for manipulation	457,040
AfD missing from ballots in Leipzig	369,331
Electoral fraud through the use of pencils	345,460
Difficulties voting abroad as electoral fraud	154,198
Other	95,797
Mail-in voting is unsecure	89,604

© CeMAS

Figure 8: Number of views by narrative.

Other narratives focused on election manipulation that allegedly disadvantaged the AfD or the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (*BSW, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht*). These allegations were substantiated in various ways, e.g., through an alleged discrepancy between the provisional election results reported by the Federal Returning Officer and the results on the websites of individual municipalities, or by falsified videos showing ballot papers with votes for the AfD allegedly being destroyed in Hamburg or that the AfD was missing from ballot papers in Leipzig. In addition, unlocked ballot boxes, the publication of pre-election polls, or difficulties in voting abroad were interpreted as evidence of alleged electoral fraud.

Annulment of the election if the AfD won

The claim that the German election could be annulled in the event of an AfD victory was mainly spread in December 2024 and January 2025. Reference was made to the annulled presidential election in Romania, and warnings of foreign interference in Germany were misinterpreted. For example, it was claimed that Federal President

Frank-Walter Steinmeier had threatened in a speech to declare the Bundestag elections null and void if the "wrong" party won. In fact, the Federal President has no power to annul a Bundestag election. In his speech, Steinmeier merely expressed the hope that the election campaign would be conducted using fair and transparent means and pointed towards the danger of foreign interference (Thust 2025).

A statement by former EU Commissioner Thierry Breton made in January 2025 was also misinterpreted. In an interview, Breton commented on the implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) and said that the regulation would be implemented both in the context of the election in Romania and in Germany. This excerpt was misinterpreted: It was claimed that Breton had said the EU was planning to annul the German election, similar to what had occurred in Romania. In reality, the EU has no authority whatsoever to annul elections in member states (Lehn 2025). This false allegation was spread by the Berliner Zeitung on X and by various alternative media such as the *Deutschlandkurier*, *COMPACT magazine*, *Apollo News* and *AUF1*.

Figure 9: Posts with false claims about alleged threats to annul the Bundestag elections in the event of an AfD victory. Left: A tile image used in a Facebook post by the alternative media outlet *Deutschlandkurier* (the image is marked as AI-generated). The text left reads: "Too few votes for the old parties, too many for the AfD: Federal President threatens to annul the new elections!" Text on the right post: A Telegram post from the alternative media outlet *AUF1*. The text in the image reads: „We did it in Romania and we will obviously do it in Germany if necessary." - Thierry Breton, former French EU Commissioner". The text of the post reads: "The former EU Commissioner Thierry Breton threatens to annule the German election: „We did it in Romania and we will obviously do it in Germany if necessary." Specifically, Breton refers in an interview with French TV to "interference" by Elon Musk: "In principle, he has the right to think and say what he wants, even if he does it in a shocking way," Breton said. But what Musk is doing in social media should be regulated. "The law exists".

US Vice President J.D. Vance referred to this misinformation at the Munich Security Conference (Vance 2025) , which was in turn cited by German-language accounts. An English-language version was shared by Elon Musk on X and achieved 21.4 million

views (as of March 17, 2025; the post is not part of the analyzed sample, which only includes German-language posts).

Broad, unsubstantiated claims

This type of posts made blanket claims without evidence that electoral fraud was taking place in Germany. This aimed to explain, among other things, the supposedly inadequate results of the AfD on election night. Even before the election, articles suggested that electoral fraud was being systematically prepared in Germany. The posts in this category did not provide any concrete evidence of suspected manipulation, but assumed that the readers were already of the opinion that organized election fraud is a widespread phenomenon in Germany and represents a plausible explanation for poll or election results.

Figure 10: Example of an X post with a sweeping claim about election fraud published on election night. The post reads: "ELECTORAL FRAUD OF THE HIGHEST ORDER!!! WE HAVE TO TAKE TO THE STREETS, COME HELL OR HIGH WATER!!!"

Alleged discrepancies in the results of the AfD and the *BSW*

After election day, allegations were spread concerning suspected electoral fraud to the detriment of the AfD and the BSW. These were based on alleged discrepancies between the provisional election results reported by the Federal Returning Officer and the figures published on the websites of individual municipalities. The Federal Returning Officer refuted these claims (Bundeswahlleiterin 2025).

A misleading video was distributed by two AfD politicians and one BSW politician, among others (Frühwirth 2025). The misinformation was also picked up in a text by the Russian state broadcaster RT DE, which implied that there had been electoral fraud. Links to the article by RT DE were again disseminated by the German-speaking conspiracy-ideological scene.

Figure 11: A Telegram post by a conspiracy ideology influencer linking to the *RT DE* article suggesting election fraud. The post reads: „Individual errors or systematic electoral fraud? - Apparent discrepancies in vote counting on a massive scale".

Other false allegations

Immediately before the election, several fake videos were distributed falsely claiming that the AfD was missing from ballot papers in Leipzig and that votes for the AfD had been destroyed in Hamburg. The videos were presumably produced as part of a Russian disinformation campaign (see chapter " Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference around the Federal Election", page 10). Other posts in the sample claimed to show unlocked ballot boxes indicating electoral fraud, that crosses made in pencil for the AfD had been erased, that polls had been used for manipulation purposes during the election campaign, or that difficulties in voting abroad were an indication of electoral fraud. In addition, Reichsbürger channels on Telegram spread the conspiracy-ideological claim that the election was illegal because the Federal Republic itself was illegal.

Use of the term "electoral fraud" in misleading contexts

After the election, there was a proliferation of posts in which the term "electoral fraud" (Wahlbetrug) was falsely used to accuse CDU chancellor candidate Friedrich Merz of having acted contrary to his own position on the debt brake during the election campaign by reaching an agreement with the SPD on a special investment fund, thereby breaking his election promise. These posts were not included in the sample

as the allegations did not directly relate to election integrity. However, the use of the term "electoral fraud" in the sense of "voter deception" is indeed misleading, as the former refers to deliberate manipulation of the electoral process with the aim of distorting the result. Although politicians must undoubtedly be held accountable for their statements and decisions in a democracy, the frequent misleading repetition of the term "electoral fraud" can help to reinforce the impression that Germany has problems with electoral integrity and sow doubt around the institution of voting.
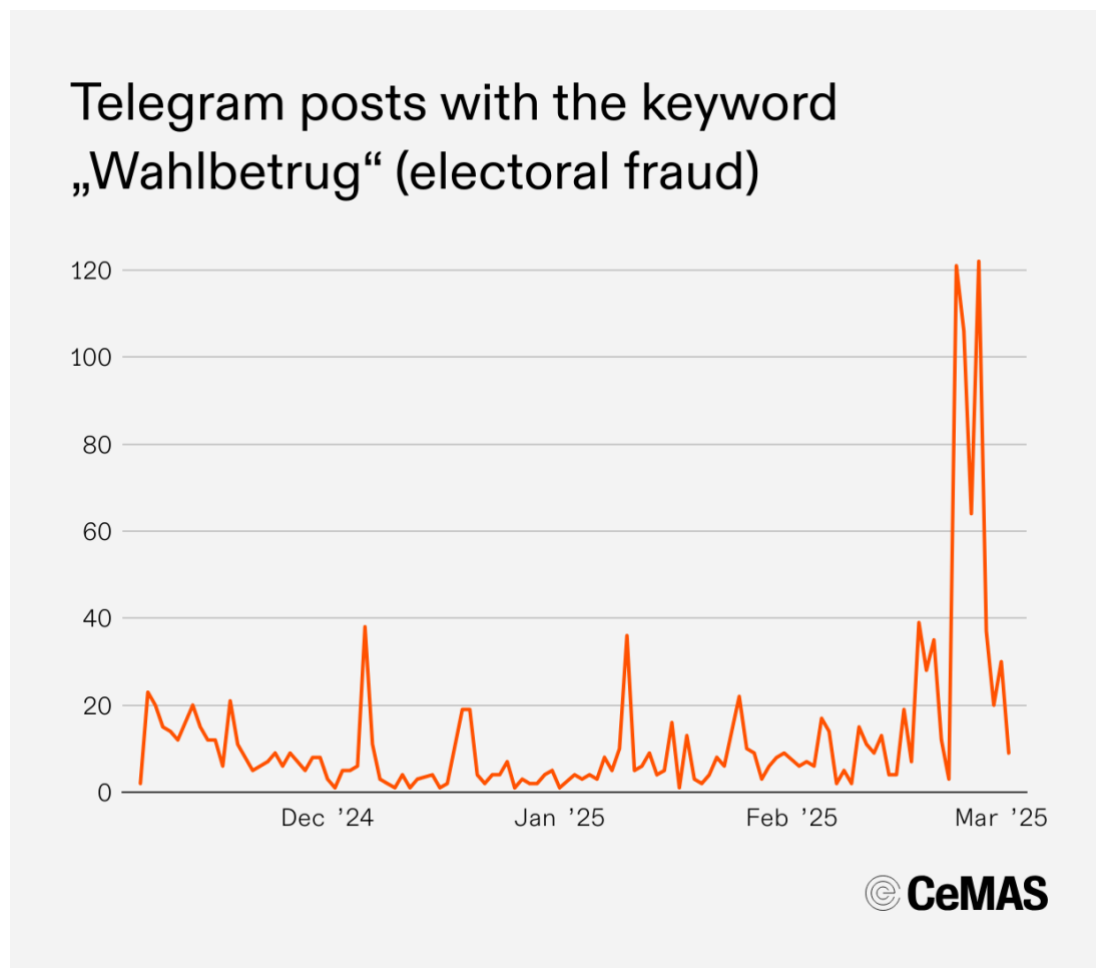

Figure 12: Number of posts with the keyword "Wahlbetrug" (electoral fraud) in German-language far-right and conspiracy ideology Telegram channels in the period from November 6, 2024 to March 2, 2025; see also "Data" at *btw2025.cemas.io*.
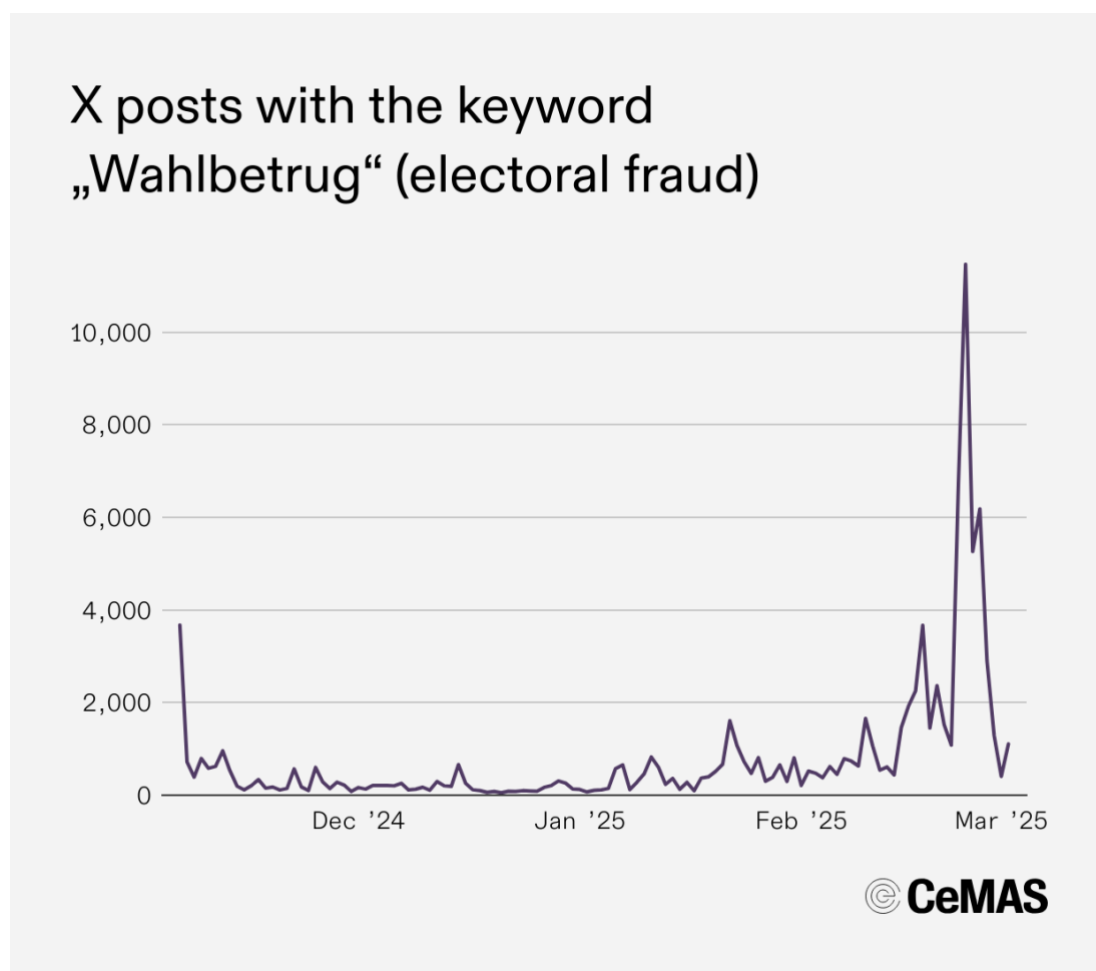
Figure 13: Number of German-language posts on X with the keyword "Wahlbetrug" (election fraud) in the period November 6, 2024 to March 2, 2025.

Summary

Misinformation concerning the integrity of the election was widely disseminated on social media platforms and achieved considerable reach. Posts containing false information were often based on unsubstantiated claims, misinterpreted statements and manipulated content. Misinterpreted warnings of foreign interference became the source of the most common misinformation concerning the integrity of the election. These were shared by a wide variety of actors, including Russian disinformation networks, alternative media outlets and domestic far-right and conspiracy-ideological networks. In several cases, they were also taken up by politicians and journalistic media.

Not all of these false claims were spread intentionally; some of them were rumors and misinterpretations. However, where these claims were spread deliberately, as in the case of pro-Russian campaigns, they aimed to undermine confidence in the entire democratic process. The regular repetition of such claims among certain groups risks weakening trust in democratic processes in the long term.

The AfD on TikTok und X during the election campaign

Miro Dittrich, Joe Düker

Since the takeover of Twitter by billionaire Elon Musk, the platform now known as X has been criticized for giving more space to far-right positions. AfD players also actively used the X platform in the campaign for the 2025 federal election: Many AfD politicians shared several posts a day on the microblogging platform and used it to promote the party's xenophobic positions, among other things.

In the past, the AfD has also repeatedly been credited with a particularly successful social media strategy on TikTok (including by MDR 2024). However, with respect to the AfD accounts on TikTok, it is often not clear whether these are official channels, as AfD associations and parliamentary groups do not always link to their TikTok accounts from their other websites (Dittrich, Düker, Faßbender 2025). The fact that AfD actors do not consistently link to their TikTok profiles from other official AfD internet presences indicates a lack of prioritization or strategy by the AfD regarding its use of TikTok. Where representatives do have accounts, they follow each other only partially and not systematically. In addition, different accounts exist for many AfD state associations, parliamentary groups and politicians, the authenticity of which cannot be clearly determined. Some of these were obviously inauthentic accounts impersonating AfD and mainly posting about cryptocurrency.

In order to analyze the AfD's communication in the 2025 federal election campaign, CeMAS only examined accounts of AfD actors on TikTok and X that were clearly identifiable and attributable as such. The AfD presence on both platforms was compared in order to determine differences in usage and to comment on the party's activity and success on the platforms, which were repeatedly the subject of media coverage and public interest, especially in the months leading up to the 2025 federal election.

Method

The analysis is based on social media posts by the AfD on X and TikTok that were published between the dissolution of the so-called traffic light coalition, consisting of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP, on November 6, 2024 and the federal election on February 23, 2025. The media analysis platforms Meltwater and Exolyt were used to collect the data. First, authentic AfD accounts – including members of the Bundestag, state parliaments, the European Parliament and official state associations and

parliamentary groups[4] – – were individually identified and separated from inactive or fake profiles. This was followed by data cleaning, in which column names,date formats and engagement metric were standardized, duplicates removed, and account handles normalized to enable cross-platform comparisons.

The 20 TikTok videos and 20 X posts with the most views on a weekly basis were used for the qualitative content analysis. A maximum of three posts per account were included in the dataset for qualitative analysis in order to avoid overrepresentation of individual users.

This methodology formed the basis for determining key figures such as posting frequency, engagement and reach, as well as for comparatively analyzing platform-specific communication strategies of the AfD during the election campaign.

Overview of the dataset

---

[4] In contrast to the chapter "The use of AI-generated images by the AfD on X", the data set used here does not include AfD candidates for the Bundestag election but does include members of the European Parliament.

AfD engagement metrics across platforms

Comparison of the AfD's engagement metrics on X and TikTok in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

Metric	X	TikTok	Total
Total number of posts	43,924	5,773	49,697
Unambiguous AfD accounts	228	156	302
Average likes per post	541	3,307	793
Median likes per post	20	156	31
Total number of views	513,132,238	217,320,744	730,452,982
Average views per post	13,050	37,644	14,698
Median views per post	341	1,393	501
Maximum views per post	24,680,621	6,776,529	24,680,621
Total number of comments	1,033,812	1,472,508	2,506,320

Table: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

© CeMAS

Figure 14: Engagement metrics of the AfD on X and TikTok in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025.

Almost 44,000 posts on X and around 5,700 videos on TikTok were collected for the study period from November 6, 2024 (the day the traffic light coalition, i.e. the previous German federal government dissolved) to February 23, 2025 (the day of the federal election). On X, 228 accounts were identified that could be clearly attributed to AfD actors, while 156 accounts were identified on TikTok.

The median number of likes was 20 for X posts and 156 for TikTok videos, while the median of views was 341 for X posts and 1,393 for TikTok videos. Summed together, the X posts from AfD accounts reached over 513 million views and the TikTok videos over 217 million views during the study period. However, a comparison of the platforms' view metrics has limitations, as the measurement basis and criteria are not transparent.

Usage behavior, views and engagement of AfD accounts on TikTok and X

Number of posts on TikTok and X
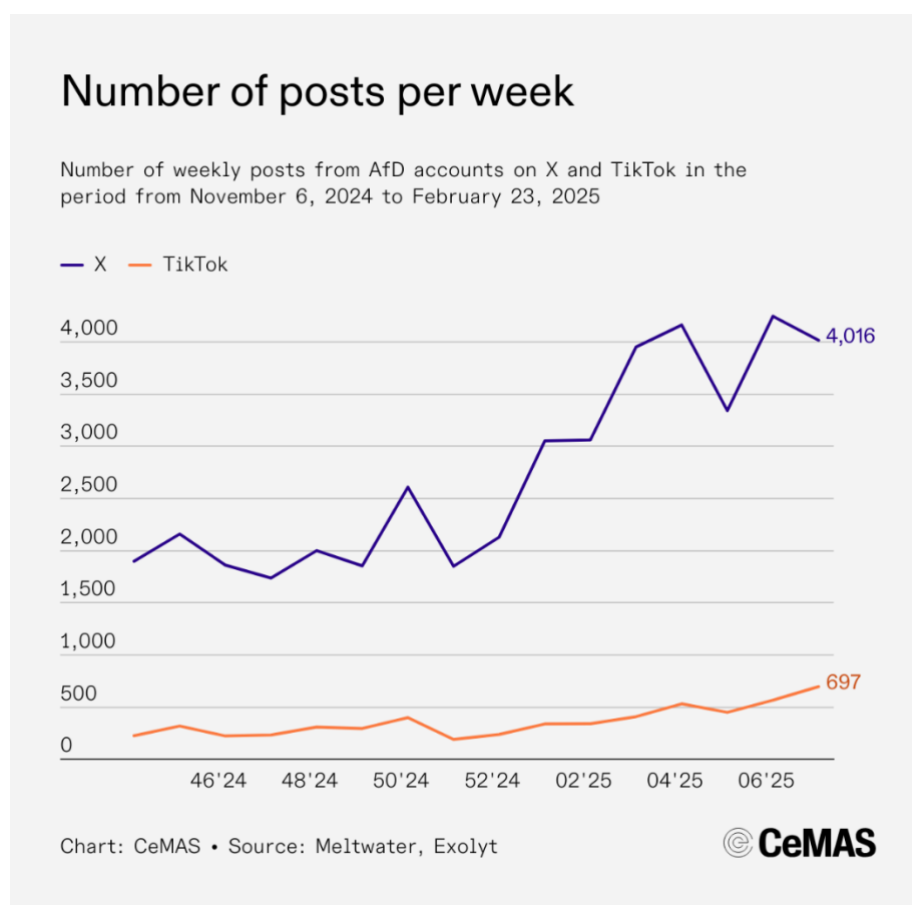
Figure 15: Number of weekly posts from AfD accounts on TikTok and X. The x-axis is given in calendar weeks.

In the study period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025, there was an increase in the communication activities of AfD accounts on both platforms examined. A more significant relative increase was observed on TikTok, from around 220 video posts per week at the beginning of November 2024 to around 700 posts at the end of February 2025. Despite this proportionally stronger growth on TikTok, the absolute frequency of posts on X remained consistently higher. This discrepancy between the platforms can be explained by the different production requirements: While text-based tweets can be created with comparatively few resources, the production of video content for TikTok requires more time and effort.

Reach metrics: Views

Total number of views per week

Total number of weekly views of all AfD posts on X and TikTok in
the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

■ TikTok ■ X

Chart: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

Ⓒ **CeMAS**

Figure 16: Total number of weekly views of TikTok videos and X posts by AfD accounts.

The AfD accounts also achieved a higher total number of views on X than on TikTok. In some weeks of the study period, the AfD accounts on X recorded around 66 million views, while the h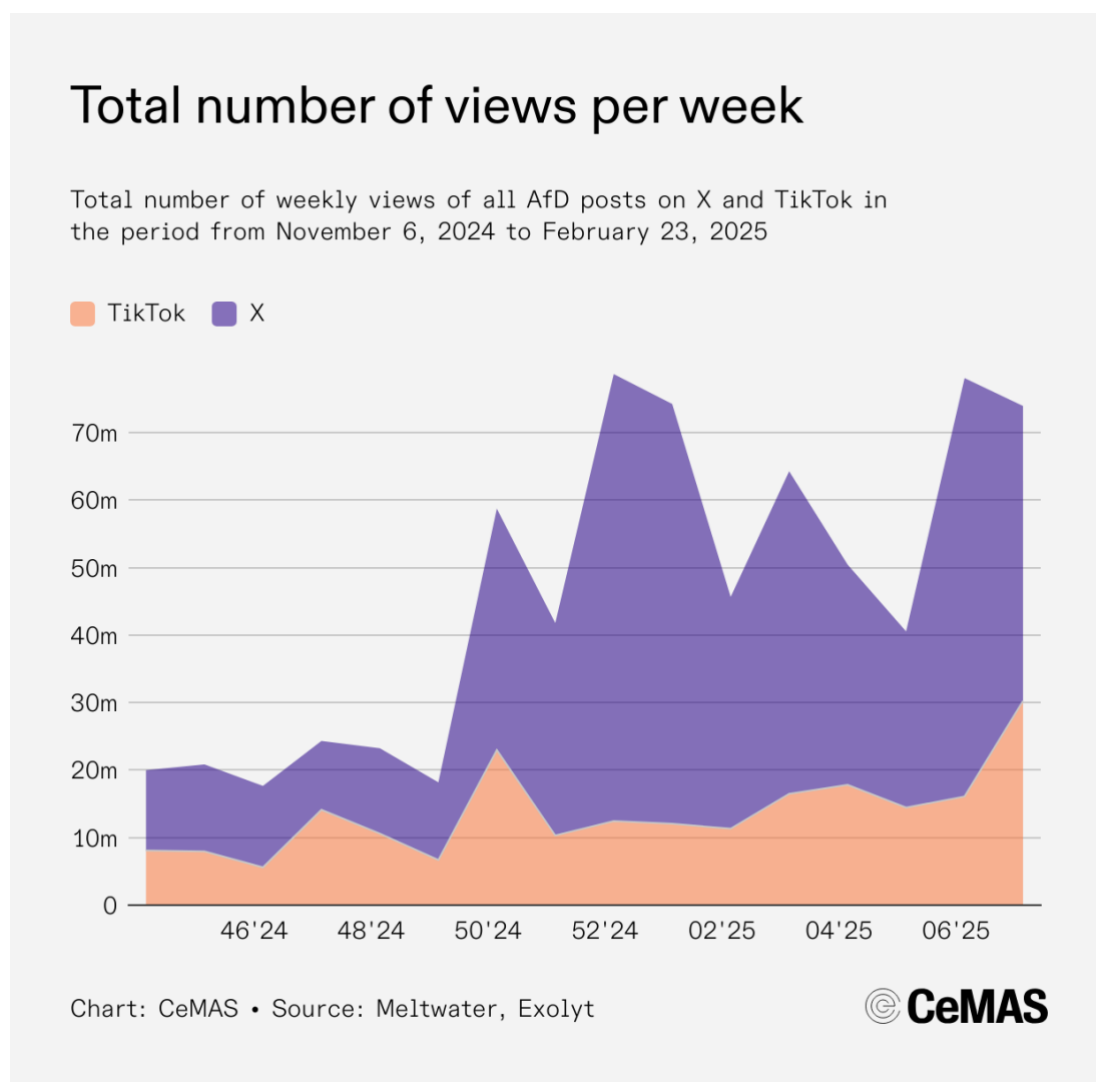ighest value on TikTok was around 30 million views. The number of views increased on both platforms, albeit with greater fluctuations on X, while TikTok recorded steady growth. The high number of views on X can be explained by the fact that AfD accounts published considerably more posts there. However, the total number of views on X does not appear to be very meaningful: Despite the larger number of posts compared to TikTok videos, the total number of likes and comments on both platforms is comparable. Users therefore clearly see more AfD posts on X than on TikTok, but they interact with both types of content to a comparable extent.

Although the AfD accounts appeared less successful on TikTok at the end of the study period, the graph above shows that the total number of views had more than doubled (from under 10 million weekly at the end of December 2024 to over 20 million by the end of February 2025). The increase is due to the fact that they published more TikTok videos, as shown on the previous chart on the number of posts per week (from around

230 videos per week at the end of December 2024 to 697 videos per week by the end of February 2025).

Average views per post per week

Average number of views per post by the AfD on X and TikTok per week in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

— X — TikTok

43,411

10,876

46'24   48'24   50'24   52'24   02'25   04'25   06'25

Chart: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

© CeMAS
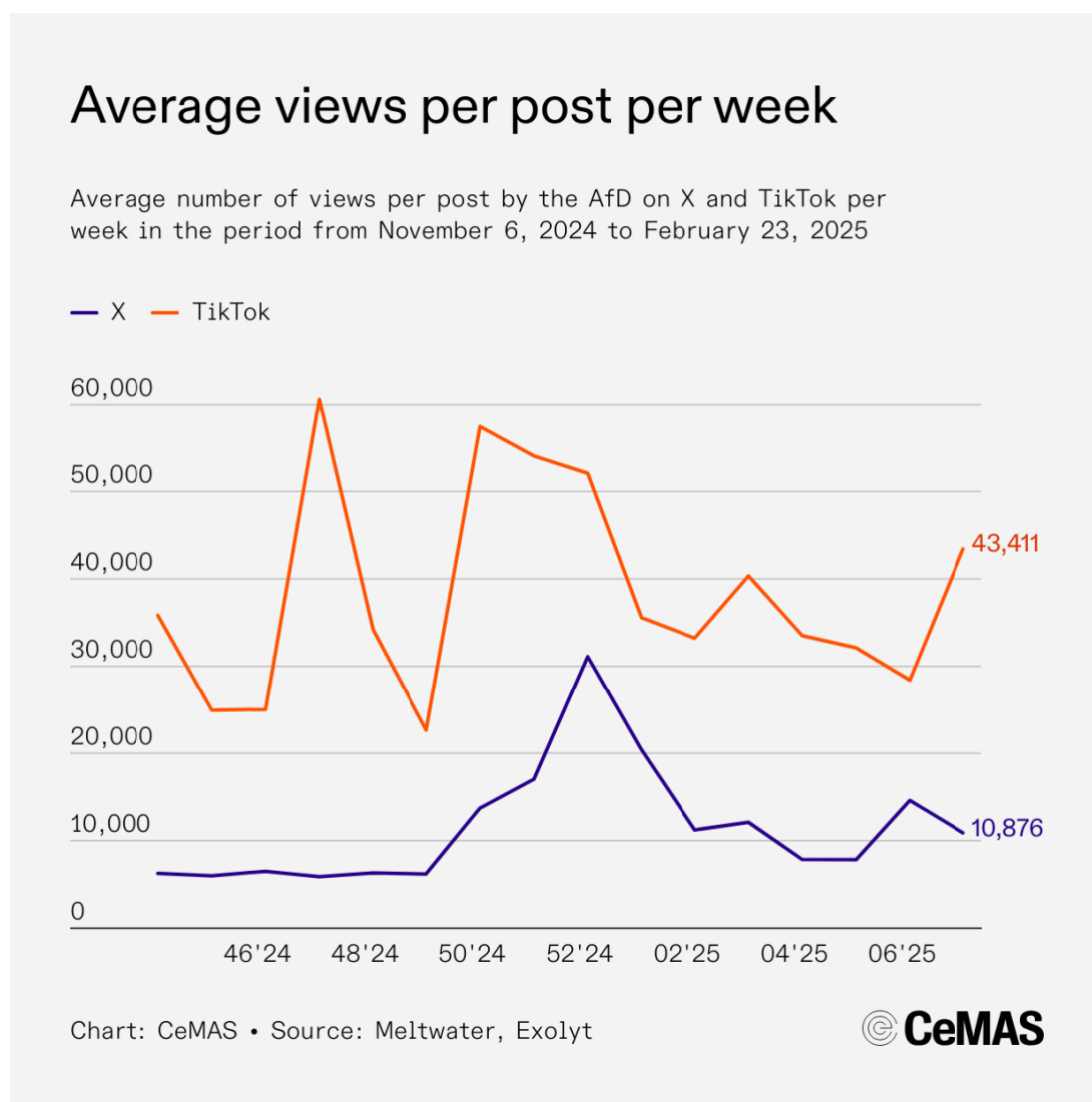
Figure 17: Average weekly views per post of AfD accounts on TikTok and X.

The average views per post vary between the platforms. TikTok videos achieved more views per upload than individual X posts. This makes TikTok videos more worthwhile for the AfD even if they are more complex to produce. Towards the end of the study period, X posts from AfD accounts only generated around 10,000 views per post, but the large number of posts still ensured a high total number of views on X.

Engagement metrics: Likes

Total number of likes per week

Total number of weekly likes for AfD posts on X and TikTok in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

Legend: X, TikTok

2,646,655

2,201,282

Chart: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

© CeMAS

Figure 18: Total number of weekly likes of TikTok videos and X posts by AfD accounts

The total numbers of likes for TikTok videos and X posts by AfD accounts are similar over the study period, although the number of TikTok videos was lower than that of X posts. On both platforms, the number of weekly likes rose from around 700,000 to over 2 million.

Average likes per post per week

Average number of likes per post by the AfD on X and TikTok per
week in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

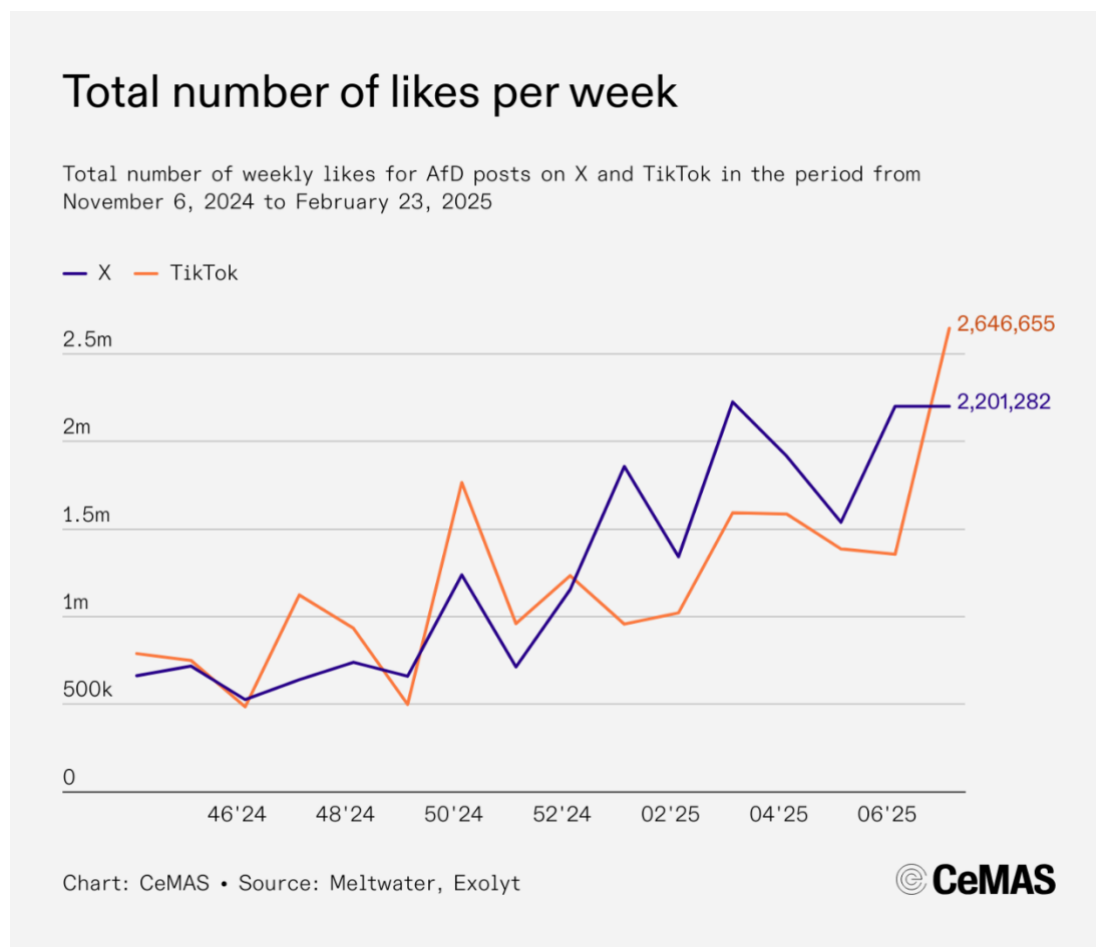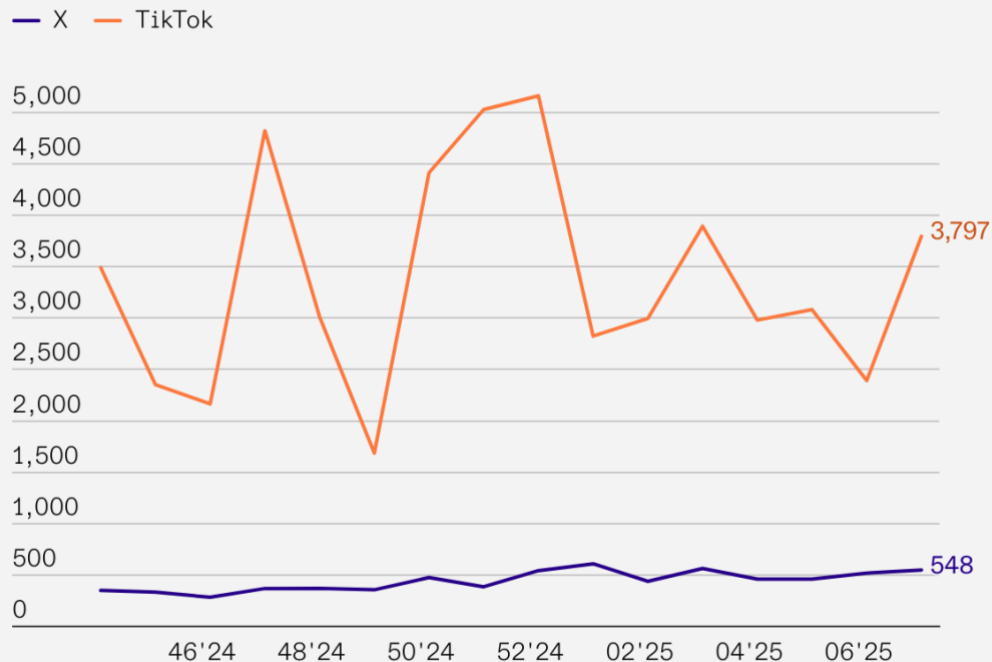— X — TikTok

Chart: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

CeMAS

Figure 19: Average weekly views per post by AfD accounts on TikTok and X.

The average number of likes per post is clearly higher for TikTok videos. Although the
weekly likes per TikTok video fluctuated greatly during the study period, they were
always significantly higher than the likes per X post. The TikTok videos of the AfD
accounts achieved between 1,500 and over 5,000 likes per video. In comparison, the
likes per post on the AfD accounts on X only increased from just under to just over
500 likes per post in the period under review.

Engagement metrics: Comments

Total number of comments per week

Total number of weekly comments received on AfD posts on X and TikTok in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

— X — TikTok

216,788

105,025

46'24 48'24 50'24 52'24 02'25 04'25 06'25

Chart: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

© CeMAS
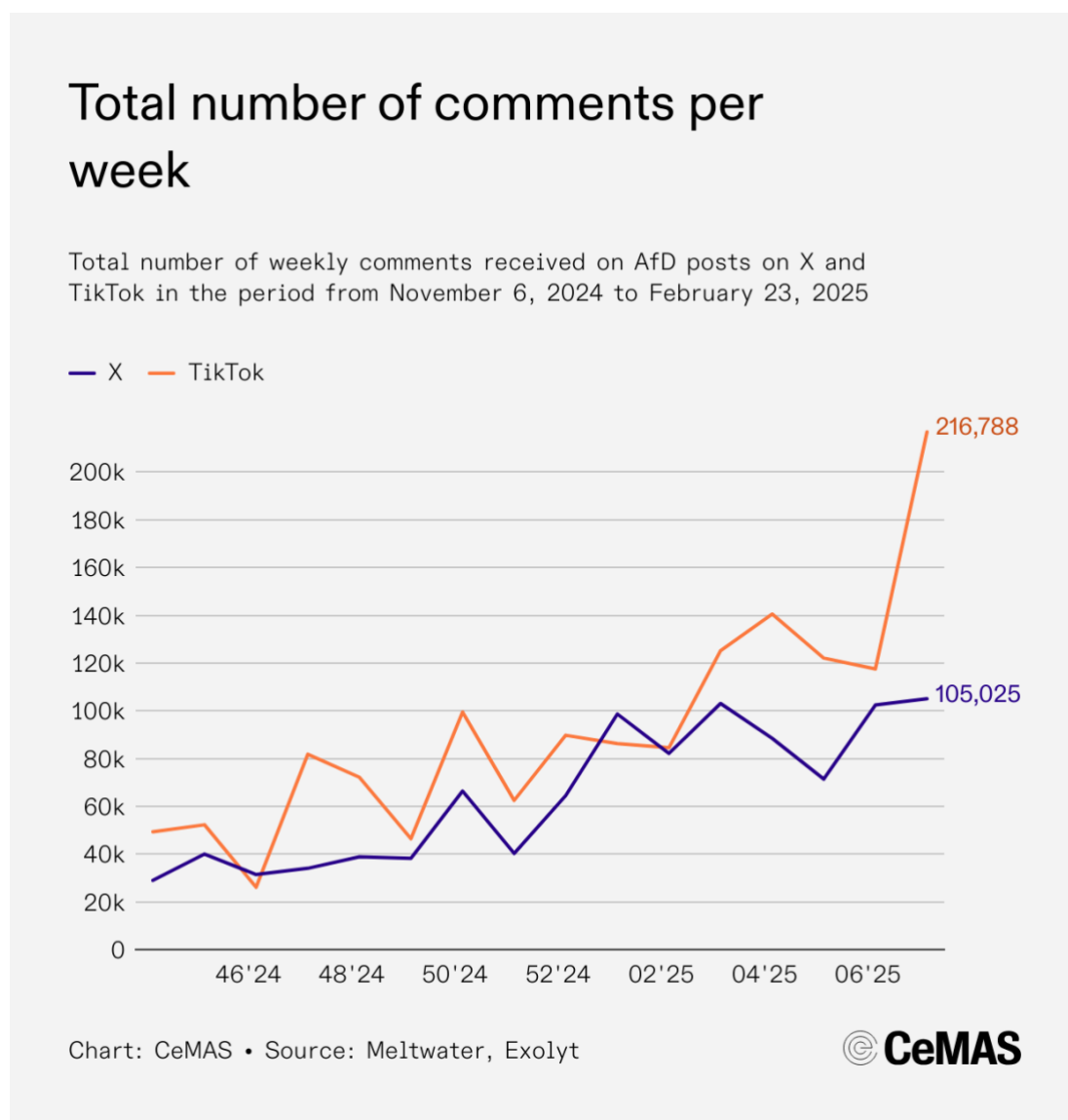
Figure 20: Total number of weekly comments on posts by AfD accounts on TikTok and X.

Despite the significantly lower number of TikTok videos compared to X posts, the TikTok content of the AfD accounts received almost consistently more comments during the study period. Here, too, the trend was upwards on both platforms. At the beginning of the study, weekly comments on X posts numbered around 30,000 and rose to over 100,000 by the end of February 2025. On TikTok, videos from AfD accounts initially received around 50,000 comments, rising to around 216,000 by the end of the study period. The number of comments on X content tripled and even quadrupled on TikTok content.

Most frequent hashtags

Top AfD hashtags during the election

Top ten hashtags by platform in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

Place	X Hashtags	Total	TikTok Hashtags	Total
1	afd	6,471	afd	1,568
2	cdu	1,085	deutschland	687
3	deutschland	732	fyp	482
4	merz	686	politik	332
5	bundestag	651	bundestag	287
6	weidel	607	weidel	229
7	magdeburg	573	cdu	187
8	eu	517	fürdich	178
9	trump	516	viral	172
10	deshalbafd	492	aliceweidel	154

Table: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

© CeMAS

Figure 21: The ten most frequently used hashtags by AfD accounts on TikTok and X.

The two columns above compare the top 10 most frequently used hashtags in content from AfD accounts on TikTok and X. On TikTok, the AfD accounts used hashtags that are typical for the platform, such as "viral", "fürdich" ("for you"), or "fyp" ("For You Page", the TikTok feed of recommended content). In contrast, the X hashtags on AfD accounts often contained thematic references, such as "magdeburg" (a reference to the attack on the Magdeburg Christmas market on December 20, 2024), "eu" or "trump". The hashtag "cdu" appears in both top 10 lists and even achieved second place among the X hashtags. AfD accounts typically used this hashtag in posts in which they criticized or disparaged the CDU.

AfD accounts on TikTok and X

Accounts used by the AfD on X and TikTok during the election

Distribution of accounts used by the AfD on X and TikTok in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

Only TikTok 18

Only X 111

Total: 302

Both Platforms 173

© CeMAS
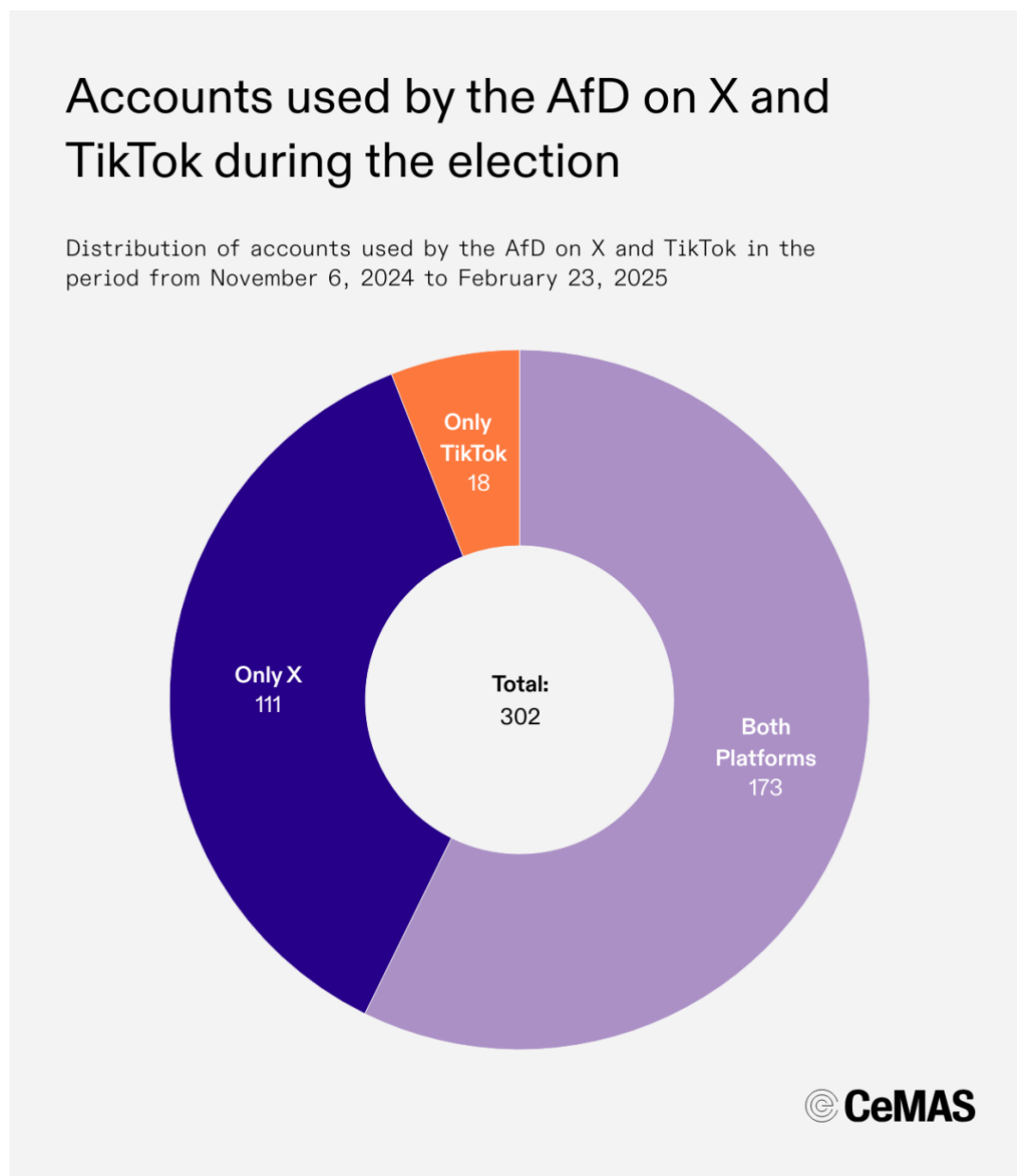
Figure 22: Distribution of accounts used by AfD actors on TikTok and X.

The analysis included 284 accounts on X and 191 accounts on TikTok. 173 AfD actors had accounts on both platforms. X still appeared to be the more established platform for AfD actors. 111 of them only had an X account and no TikTok account, while only 18 AfD actors had a TikTok account but no X account.

119 AfD actors posted more frequently on X, while 42 published TikTok videos more often. On average, AfD accounts created 175 X posts and 31 TikTok videos in the period under investigation. In contrast, eight AfD accounts published no content on either TikTok or X, while 35 accounts recorded no activity on TikTok and 26 no activity on X.

Engagement with AfD posts on TikTok and X

Post engagement was also examined for AfD actors who were active on both TikTok and X. Engagement (or "interaction") is defined here as the sum of likes, shares and comments. The average engagement per video on TikTok was 2,089, which is about four times higher than the average engagement of 515 per X post.

AfD engagement success during the election

Efficiency of the AfD's use of X and TikTok in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

Metric	X	TikTok
Posts per account	175	31
Views per post	9,408	19,428
Engagement per post	515	2,089
Engagement per view (%)	6	9

*Only accounts present on both X and TikTok were used for the analysis
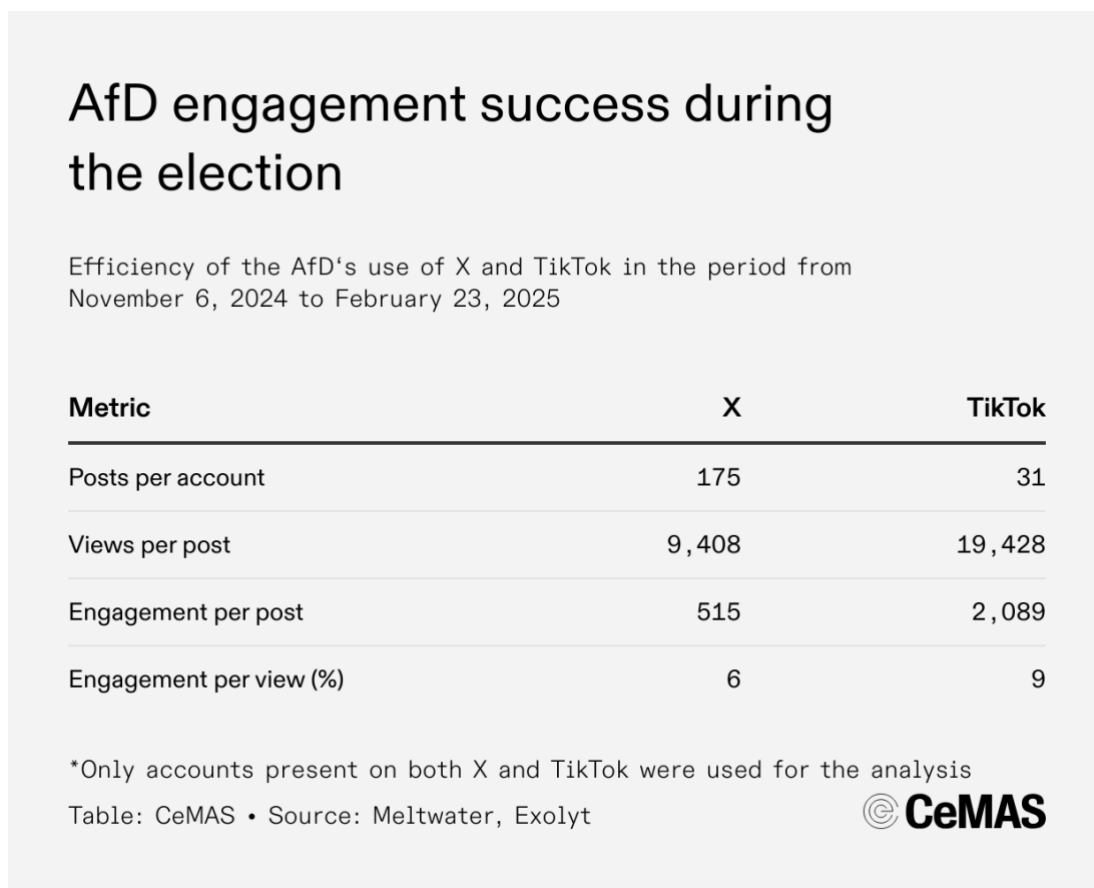Table: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

CeMAS

Figure 23: Engagement metrics of AfD accounts on TikTok and X.

In addition, TikTok videos averaged twice as many views per post as X posts, with around 19,400 compared to around 9,400. TikTok also had a higher engagement rate: 9.3 percent of views led to interactions, while this was only the case for 5.8 percent of views on X.

The chart in figure 24 also only compares the accounts of AfD actors who were active on both platforms. A comparison of the ten TikTok accounts and ten X accounts with the most views per post highlights the presence of AfD co-chairwoman Alice Weidel, who takes first place on both platforms. The two other AfD accounts in the top ten with the highest average views per post on both TikTok and X belonged to the AfD federal parliamentary group and to Ulrich Siegmund, a member of the state parliament of Saxony-Anhalt. Alice Weidel achieved the highest number of views per post on her

X account (around 540,000). However, TikTok bested X in terms of the ratio of views: The ten TikTok accounts with the most views received almost twice as many views per post as the ten most popular X accounts.

Average views per post by platform

Average number of views per post for the most successful AfD accounts on X and TikTok per week in the period from November 6, 2024 to February 23, 2025

■ X　■ TikTok

Account	Views
Alice Weidel	541,364 (X)
Alice Weidel	379,636 (TikTok)
Bundestag Fraktion	368,545 (TikTok)
Ulrich Siegmund	271,352 (TikTok)
Maximilian Krah	231,766 (TikTok)
Mary Khan-Hohloch	227,531 (TikTok)
Björn Höcke	131,942 (X)
Dennis Hohloch	122,916 (TikTok)
Jonas Dünzel	120,039 (TikTok)
Roger Beckamp	109,994 (TikTok)
Tino Chrupalla	103,326 (X)
Beatrix von Storch	85,752 (X)
Miguel Klauß	77,907 (TikTok)
Sebastian Münzenmaier	70,054 (TikTok)
Bernd Baumann	68,797 (X)
Vanessa Behrendt	36,291 (X)
Hamburg LV	29,995 (X)
Ulrich Siegmund	27,012 (X)
Thüringen LV	26,999 (X)
Bundestag Fraktion	26,310 (X)

*Only accounts present on both X and TikTok were used for the analysis
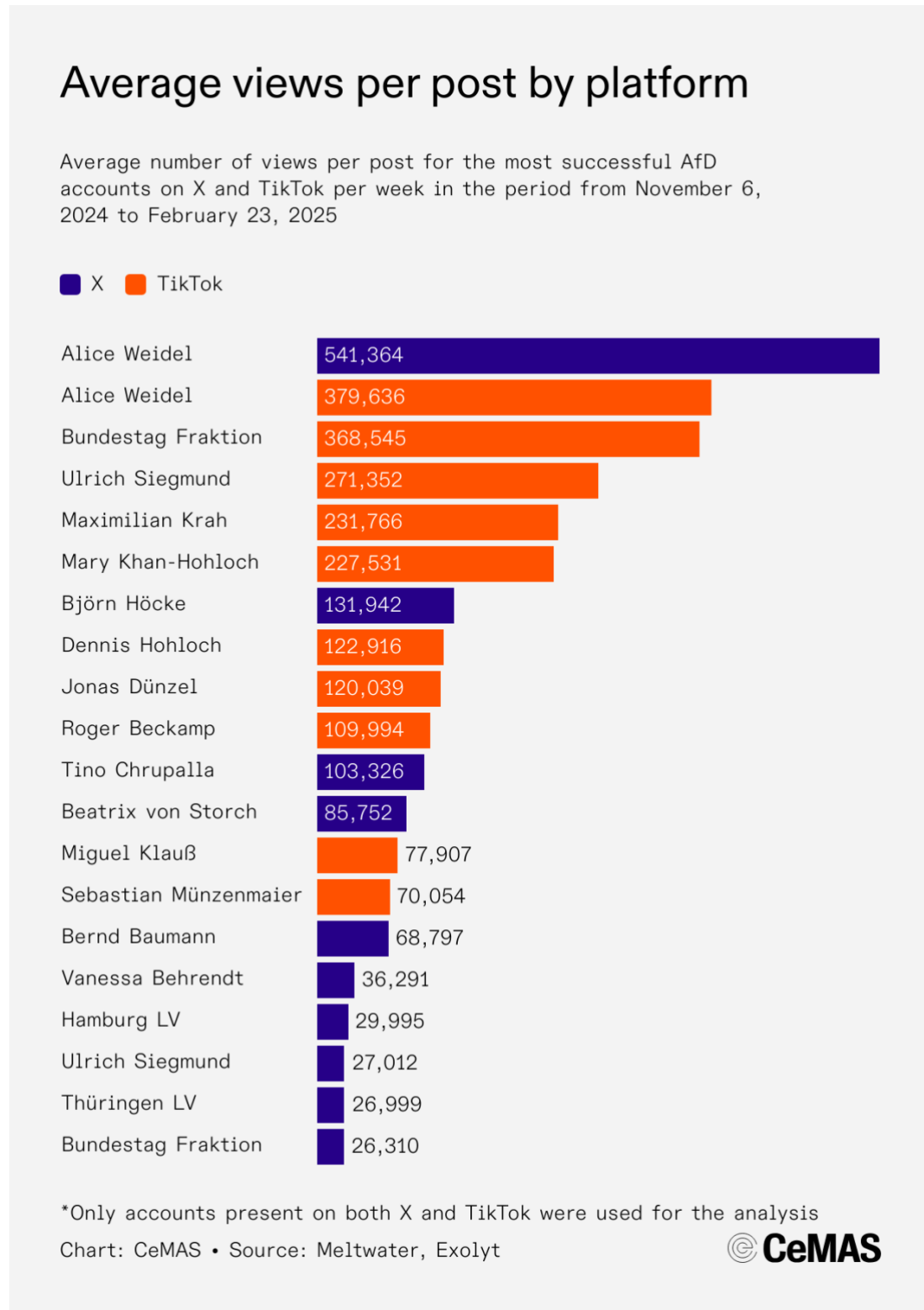Chart: CeMAS • Source: Meltwater, Exolyt

© CeMAS

Figure 24: The ten AfD accounts on TikTok and X with the highest average number of views per post.

Of the accounts active on both platforms, only 16 were more successful in terms of their engagement success [5] on X, while 104 accounts had a higher success rate on TikTok. Despite a significantly lower publication frequency, TikTok generated almost the same total engagement per account as X.

More posts on X, but more interactions on TikTok videos

The AfD accounts we examined showed significantly higher activity on X during the study period, presumably due to the lower effort involved in creating X posts. Nevertheless, the AfD also actively used TikTok, with about 5,800 videos from around 160 identified accounts.

Remarkably, the AfD accounts on TikTok achieved significantly more views and interactions per post. Although the production of TikTok videos is more complex, they evidently also generate more likes and comments per video. While X posts are particularly worthwhile for AfD accounts due to their large volume, TikTok videos are effective in smaller numbers.

The AfD topics on TikTok and X during the election

During the election campaign, AfD accounts on TikTok and X focused primarily on posts that spoke out against migration and asylum policy. In X posts and TikTok videos, AfD politicians called for existing asylum laws to be tightened, German borders to be closed, or illegal or criminal migrants to be deported.

When attacking political rivals, the AfD accounts focused primarily on the CDU and the Greens. Among the Greens, foreign minister Annalena Baerbock and chancellor candidate Robert Habeck were especially targeted by AfD accounts, while among the CDU, the main target was chancellor candidate Friedrich Merz.

The disparagement of both parties was often linked, e.g. when AfD politicians claimed that a vote for the CDU was tantamount to supporting Green politics. The CDU was also accused of copying AfD positions during the election campaign but not wanting to implement them after the election. AfD politicians repeatedly emphasized that a "policy change" was only possible with a vote for the AfD.

AfD politicians also attacked the established parties' firewall against the AfD. They claimed that after the dissolution of the traffic light coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and FDP, there would be majorities for anti-immigration policies if the CDU and FDP would just work together with the AfD. The AfD attacked the CDU/CSU for

[5] In our analysis, we measured "success" using the "Platform_Preference_Index", which is based on the normalized success quotient. This takes into account: 1. Normalized engagement (relative to the highest engagement on the respective platform); and 2. The number of videos/posts. An account is "more successful" on a platform if it achieves a higher normalized engagement per post. This means that the platform is more efficient for this account - it achieves more impact (engagement) with less effort (videos/posts).

its adherence to the firewall particularly in the context of attacks by suspected terrorists with a migration background. Since the attack in Aschaffenburg on January 22, 2025, in which the perpetrator – presumably a 28-year-old Afghan who lived in asylum accommodation and had been ordered to leave the country – attacked a group of children in a park with a knife, AfD politicians have also used the term "firewall death victims" to blame the CDU and others for such attacks. According to the AfD, the firewall policy of the CDU/CSU and FDP is primarily to blame because it prevents the tightening of asylum and migration policy. The attacks in Magdeburg (December 20, 2024), Aschaffenburg (January 22, 2025), and Munich (February 13, 2025) were generally used by AfD accounts on TikTok and X to spread anti-immigration positions.

AfD politicians also used the issue of German support for Ukraine in the Russian war of aggression to attack the established parties. The AfD positioned itself on the issue as a supposed "party of peace" and criticized the former traffic light coalition and the CDU as "warmongers". In this context, AfD politicians also explicitly stoked fears of a third World War and accused the other parties of negligence and escalation.

AfD politicians also celebrated US President Donald Trump's election victory and his administration's policies, such as the plan to dissolve the US Agency for International Development (USAID). AfD accounts also expressed delight at the support from Trump confidante and multi-billionaire Elon Musk. This connection also resulted in a live interview on Musk's platform X with Alice Weidel which was viewed millions of times. Videos of Musk's live broadcast at the AfD election campaign kick-off in Halle at the end of January 2025 were also advertised by AfD accounts on TikTok and X (Rathje, Tiedemann 2025a).

AfD politicians also repeatedly addressed the issue of freedom of expression during the election campaign. They repeatedly invoked alleged censorship of their content by the German media and politicians, especially with respect to criticism of Weidel and Musk's live interview. AfD politicians also celebrated the speech by US Vice President J.D. Vance at the Munich Security Conference in mid-February 2025 in which he criticized European measures against disinformation as threats to freedom of expression.

In addition to these themes, which were continuously addressed by AfD politicians on TikTok and X, there were other issues that were only brought into focus for one or two weeks. These include the dissolution of the previous German federal government of the traffic light coalition, Donald Trump's election victory in the USA, and the Bundestag votes on CDU motions to tighten migration policy on January 29 and 31, 2025. AfD politicians presented the latter as a success for their positions. In the weeks immediately before the election, AfD politicians also began increasingly campaigning for election observation. Some politicians referred in this context to the far-right association *Ein Prozent* (eng. *One Percent*; see Rathje 2025).

Summary

During the election campaign, AfD accounts on TikTok and X focused on issues including migration and asylum policy, the mainstream parties' firewall against the AfD, German support for Ukraine in the Russian war of aggression, freedom of speech, and attacks against the CDU and the Greens.

Despite an unclear overarching strategy among AfD accounts on TikTok, measured by the lack of links to other official presences, especially accounts of state associations and parliamentary groups, some AfD politicians were successful on the video platform.

Overall, both the X and the TikTok platforms appeared to be attractive to the AfD for campaign communication, albeit for different reasons: On X, the AfD and its supporters also succeeded in penetrating international spheres, as shown in a further analysis as part of CeMAS's Bundestag election monitoring 2025, which examined the interactions between AfD accounts and accounts of party supporters and the owner of the platform, Elon Musk (Rathje, Tiedemann 2025a; Rathje, Tiedemann 2025b). TikTok, on the other hand, is particularly popular with children and youth. The use of the platform thus offers the AfD the opportunity to address and tap into younger target groups.

The analysis identified Alice Weidel as the most successful AfD representative on both platforms, but especially on X: Here, her account had more than four times as many followers as the second largest account analyzed.

During the investigation period, the AfD accounts published significantly more X posts than TikTok videos. As a result, the views per post and likes per post were distributed differently across the platforms: Although the total numbers of likes (and comments) were almost the same for X posts and TikTok videos, individual posts from AfD accounts on TikTok achieved significantly more views and likes than individual posts on X. In this respect, the comparatively more costly production of videos for TikTok seems worthwhile for the AfD and its election communication.

The AfD is often said to be adept and successful on social networks. This chapter helps to illustrate the AfD's presence on two much-discussed platforms with empirical evidence on the reach and engagement achieved by the party on the respective platforms. The analysis indicates that both TikTok and X are worthwhile for the AfD. On X, the AfD accounts seemed to focus primarily on quantity, while the AfD accounts on TikTok achieved a comparably high level of interaction despite the lower number of videos.

The far-right and conspiracy-ideological scene on Telegram: Discussions during the election campaign

Simone Rafael, David Faßbender

On the website www.btw2025.cemas.io, CeMAS published an analysis of particularly relevant posts and discussions from the conspiracy ideology and far-right milieus on Telegram every week from January 13 to February 28, 2025. CeMAS analyzed the discourse and narratives of around 3,000 Telegram channels and 2,000 groups[6]. Telegram is one of the central platforms for networking and communication in this milieu; however, the relevance of X has increased significantly following its acquisition by Elon Musk and the associated change in platform policy. Telegram was therefore no longer singularly the most important networking medium during the 2025 German election. Nevertheless, by analyzing the posts shared on Telegram, it is possible to generate insights into which topics were relevant within this milieu in the weeks before and after the election. CeMAS also analyzed which links to YouTube, X and TikTok accounts and content were shared on Telegram.

The election campaign period as it happened

Calender Week 3, 13.01. – 19.01.2025:

Conspiracy-ideological, pro-Russian and AfD-affiliated Telegram channels spread the false claim that the Bundestag election could be annulled if the AfD won, making reference to the election annulment in Romania (Voinea 2025). Donald Trump and his inauguration are at the center of the discussion, and the US President's victory is seen as a blueprint. Alternative media claim that the incumbent German federal government is using state funds to encourage a civil society aligned with the government.

Calender Week 4, 20.01. – 26.01.2025

Far-right and pro-Russian Telegram channels blame the established parties for the knife attack in Aschaffenburg, in which an allegedly mentally ill asylum seeker fatally injured a child and a man. The far-right milieu addresses a breach in the AfD firewall after CDU chancellor candidate Merz announced that he wanted to push through a

---

[6] A German description of the data set can be found at https://btw2025.cemas.io/daten#beschreibung-des-datensatzes

stricter migration policy with votes from the AfD. Russian state media channels and pro-Russian channels discredit demonstrations against far-right extremism.
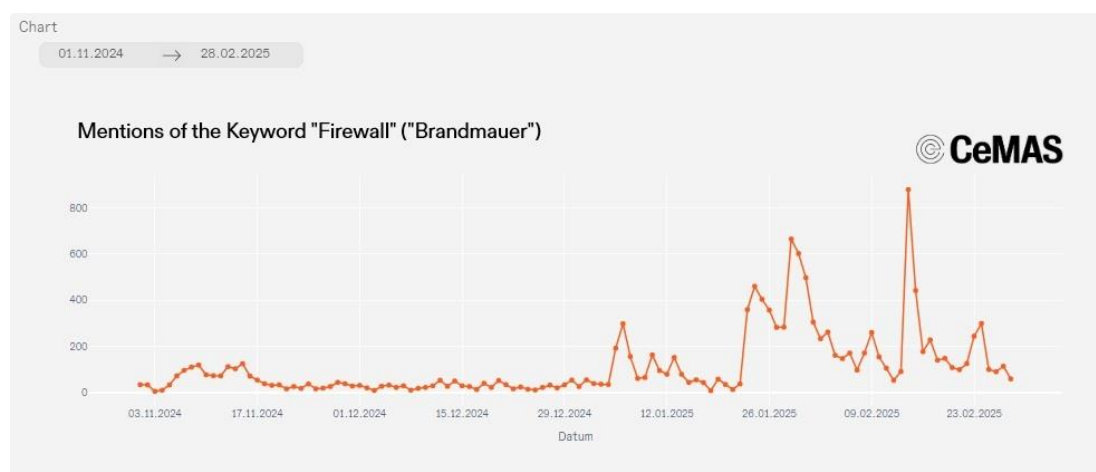

Figure 25: On https://btw2025.cemas.io/daten, readers can find various keyword graphs such as this one on the topic of the "Brandmauer" (firewall). It is clear to see how discussion of the topic increased over time (Nov 6, 2024 to Feb 28, 2025). For a description of the peaks in the graph, see https://btw2025.cemas.io/daten#erwaehnung-brandmauer-keyword-analyse.

Calender Week 5, 27.01. – 02.02.2025

The far-right milieu describes the "fall of the firewall" in the Bundestag as a "historic moment" after Merz's "five-point plan on migration policy" is adopted with votes from the AfD and FDP. Far-right Telegram channels continue trying to portray migration as a threat to German citizens. Pro-Russian channels share propaganda material from Russian "pranksters" Vovan and Lexus concerning CDU politician Johann Wadephul, whose party they portray as "warmongers". The two pranked Wadephul by pretending to be the head of the Ukrainian presidential office Andrij Jermak.

Calender Week 6, 03.02. – 09.02.2025

In the context of the TV debate between chancellor candidates Olaf Scholz and Friedrich Merz, Telegram channels of Russian state media and pro-Russian channels express the criticism that there are no longer any differences between the mainstream parties and that any disputes are faked (e.g. on *RT DE*).

In addition, the revelation of an alleged conspiracy "by intelligence services" against the AfD by *AUF 1* is shared frequently: Intelligence services portrayed the "Saxon Separatists" as a terrorist group, allegedly with the aim of harming the AfD. Contrary to the claim that it was merely an unarmed group of young men, the investigating authorities did in fact seize weapons during searches. Three of the eight members of the group arrested following a raid in November 2024 were AfD members.

Calender Week 7, 10.02. – 16.02.2025

Far-right Telegram channels debate the Islamist attack on a trade union demonstration in Munich and blame the migration policy of the governing parties. Pro-Russian

Telegram channels praise Alice Weidel's call for sanctions against Russia to be lifted. They report positively on the meetings between Weidel and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and with US Vice President J.D. Vance. The AfD's lead candidate is portrayed as a stateswoman whose reputation in world politics is supposedly growing. The speech by J.D. Vance at the Munich Security Conference, which criticized alleged censorship in the EU, is widely discussed with approval by far-right milieus on Telegram.
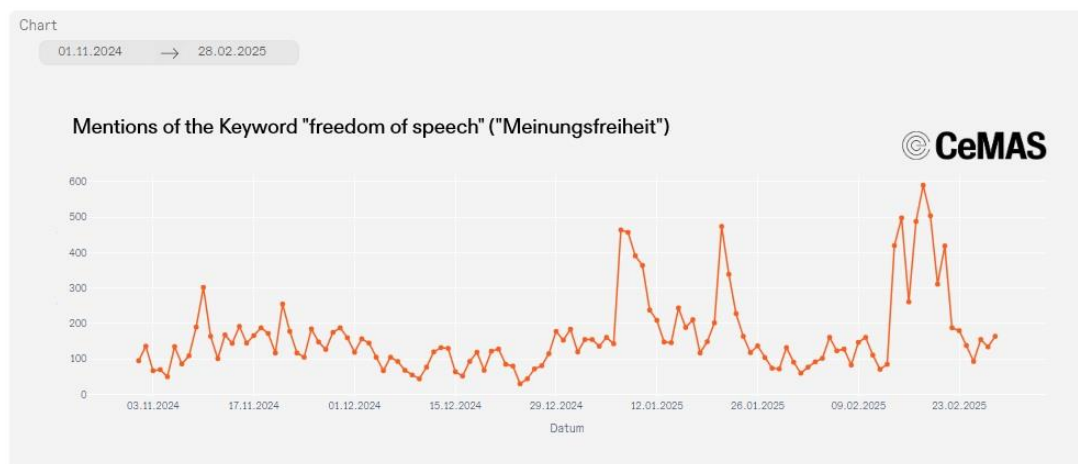

Figure 26: On https://btw2025.cemas.io/daten , readers can find various keyword graphs such as this one on the topic of "Meinungsfreiheit" (freedom of expression). The mentions of the topic increased over time (Nov 6, 2024 to Feb 28, 2025), especially after the intervention of J.D. Vance. For a description of the peaks in the graph, see https://btw2025.cemas.io/daten#erwaehnung-brandmauer-keyword-analyse (in German).

Calender Week 8, 17.02. – 23.02.2025

Criticism of Europe's alleged "censorship policy" remains popular in far-right Telegram channels, including in the context of a video from the American CBS television program "60 Minutes" concerning the prosecution of hate speech in Germany. Statements by Elon Musk are particularly widespread in these networks; the most shared X links included his statement "Time to liberate Germany" and his reposting of content from AfD lead candidate Alice Weidel and Thuringian AfD politician Björn Höcke. These posts ranked among the ten most shared X links during the week under review. Pro-Russian channels spread false information about a "green financial policy" that allegedly neglects Germany in order to help Ukraine.

Calender Week 9, 24.02. – 02.03.2025

After the election, the far-right and conspiracy ideology milieus focus primarily on Friedrich Merz's campaign promises. They criticize his refusal to close borders immediately and are outraged by the concession that a reform of the debt brake is necessary to support Ukraine. This is presented as alleged electoral fraud. The pro-Russian scene is particularly interested in the disagreement between Donald Trump

and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a press conference in the White House.

The scene's preferred information sources

Where did the far right and conspiracy ideology groups and channels get their information from in the period from November 6, 2024 (dissolution of the traffic light coalition) to February 23, 2025 (the federal election)? A domain analysis[7] in the data set provides insight: Which media were shared most often in the Telegram channels and groups examined? CeMAS has analyzed both the scene's own <u>alternative media as well as well established journalistic media</u>[8].

Alternative media whose domains where shared the most

Data retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

	Media	Number of groups and channels	Number of mentions
1	Apollo News	793	24.434
2	Nius	756	12.968
3	AUF1	753	13.063
4	tkp	751	16.304
5	Report24	697	17.054
6	Reitschuster	638	11.145
7	Uncutnews	632	16.757
8	Junge Freiheit	632	13.313
9	Tichys Einblick	630	11.309
10	Epoch Times	562	16.871
11	Kla.tv	558	16.494
12	Legitim.ch	532	3.830
13	Alexander Wallasch	518	3.629
14	Anti-Spiegel	479	6.397
15	Nachdenkseiten	447	3.137
16	Multipolar-Magazin	427	3.587
17	Achse des Guten	426	2.576
18	Exxpress	422	8.632
19	apolut	421	3.816
20	Ansage	393	7.326

© CeMAS

Figure 27: Most-shared alternative media

---

[7] A description of the domain analysis method can be found at <u>https://osf.io/82vgt/files/osfstorage</u>.

[8] We define alternative media as internet outlets that describe themselves as media sources but pay little attention to journalistic standards such as truthfulness, accuracy, factuality, source verification, independence, objectivity and fairness.

Journalistic media whose domains where shared the most

Data retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

	Media	Number of Groups and Channels	Number of mentions
1	BILD	1.008	43.814
2	Die Welt	868	17.127
3	Berliner Zeitung	813	12.501
4	Tagesschau	761	7.818
5	Focus	695	7.380
6	N-TV	681	14.700
7	t-online	670	8.909
8	Spiegel	661	6.772
9	Die Zeit	569	4.849
10	Frankfurter Rundschau	542	3.272
11	ZDF	540	2.872
12	Merkur	517	3.439
13	FAZ	512	2.530
14	MDR	508	2.459
15	stern	491	2.296
16	MSN	485	7.601
17	NZZ	482	5.991
18	Süddeutsche Zeitung	479	2.513
19	Daily Mail	477	3.573
20	Tagesspiegel	444	2.755

© CeMAS

Figure 28: Most-shared journalistic media

Both types of media were shared by the far right and conspiracy Telegram channels. Content from established journalistic media was shared taken up in particular when the information or arguments offered confirmed the world view of the far-right scene. Journalistic outlets whose domains were most frequently shared on Telegram are known for addressing topics relevant for the far-right and conspiracy scene, such as Die Welt with an Elon Musk guest article (Musk 2024), BILD with a now depublished article claiming that protests against the far-right were allegedly financially supported by the state (Eckhard 2025) BILD with a now depublished article claiming that protests against the far-right were allegedly financially supported by the state (Kopietz 2024; Kopietz 2025; Latour, Sonneborn 2024).). Long-time BILD editor-in-chief Julian Reichelt is now editor-in-chief of *Nius*, which belongs to the *Vius* publishing group. Also at *Vius* was Max Mannhart, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Apollo News*. *AUF1* is an outlet from Austria that has a large part of its target group in Germany due to its open support for the AfD. The TV channel is one of the most important and widest-reaching media outlets of the far-right and conspiracy ideology

scene and has repeatedly spread false information about the COVID-19 pandemic or migration (see Siggelkow 2025). The fourth place also comes from Austria: *tkp*, the "blog for science and politics", is dedicated to topics such as climate change denial and anti-vaccination.

Alternative media: The most discussed topics

Most-shared posts from alternative media

Data retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

Media	Title	Date	Topic	Number of channels and groups
AUF1	Intelligence services plot discovered! Here's how the deep state wants to take down the AfD	9. Februar 2025	The arrest of the far-right terrorist group „Saxon Separatists" including three AfD members would be only a ploy to damage the AfD	293
Apollo News	The Kramer Complex. Inside the Office for the Protection of the Constitution: How the intelligence services became a political tool	9. Dezember 2024	Allegations against the head of the Thuringian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Stephan Kramer	196
AUF1	Alice Weidel: Playtime is over! Policy change and mass deportations now.	28. Januar 2025	AfD lead candidate Alice Weidel accuses all other parties of playing „party political games" in the wake of the Aschaffenburg attack and announces that an AfD government would withdraw from the WHO and ensure reconciliation over COVID-19	174
AUF1	End of "traffic light"-coalition planned at Bilderberger?	8. November 2024	Heiko Schönung (corona denier group „Ärzte für Aufklärung") allegedly „predicted" that all the elections in important NATO states would be held earlier and would be synchronized, as a „state of emergency" would start in 2025	162
AUF1	Alice Weidel: We have to save Germany!	29. November 2024	Stefan Magnet, Editor-in-Chief of AUF1, interviews Alice Weidel, AfD	149

© CeMAS

Figure 29: Most-shared posts from alternative media on Telegram.

Also popular on Telegram were articles on alleged harm from vaccines and addressing measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Articles that lacked reference to the Bundestag elections were discarded for this evaluation.

The dominance of *AUF1* as an election campaign medium for Alice Weidel is clear, as four of the top 5 posts shared are from *AUF1* and are in favor of the AfD. Also recognizable, as expected, is the interest of these actors in conspiracy narratives: For example, posts about the alleged intelligence services plot against the AfD, Weidel's stories about powers attacking the AfD from the "deep state", and a post containing a Bilderberg conspiracy narrative were shared.

Journalistic media: The most-discussed topics

Most shared posts from journalistic media

Date retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

Media	Title	Date	Topic	Number of channels and groups
Berliner Zeitung	Baerbock blabs: Billions for Ukraine after the election	17. Februar 2025	Report on an EU support package for Ukraine. According to foreign minister Baerbock, it would be in the range of 700 billion euros.	243
Cicero	Bundestag passes drastic CO2 price increase	6. Februar 2025	The Bundestag passed a cap and trade (ETS-2) reform „in the wake of the migration agreement", according to the author.	178
BILD	With taxpayer money against the CDU: Who is behind the mass protests	14. Februar 2025	After Friedrich Merz passed the „five-point plan for migration" with votes for the AfD, there were protests against the breach of the firewall. The article suggested that they were paid by the state. The article has since been deleted (March 11, 2025).	133
stern	Holocaust denial: 87-year-old Nazi grandma given 10 month sentence	12. November 2015	The notorious Holocaust denier Ursula Haverback received a prison sentence for a repeat offence of incitement to hatred.	128
Berliner Zeitung	Musk proves Germany's double standard: Freedom of expression yes, but only for the correct opinions	30. Dezember 2024	Comment on the fact that Tesla CEO and US government advisor Elon Musk praised the AfD in a guest article in Die Welt.	127

© CeMAS

Figure 30: Most-shared posts from journalistic media on Telegram.

Far right and conspiracy ideology groups increasingly shared articles about fears spread in the scene (high volumes of aid for Ukraine, price increases, taxpayer funds for supposedly left-wing NGOs), but the censorship narrative is also resonating (e.g., conviction for incitement to hatred, the freedom of speech debate after Musk's article in Welt am Sonntag). A 2022 article from stern magazine about Holocaust denier Ursula Haverbeck, who died on November 20, 2024, was shared in the far-right milieu after Haverbeck's 96th birthday on November 8. The article described Haverbeck's last incitement to hatred conviction for Holocaust denial, although Haverbeck had not yet started her sentence. After the speech by J.D. Vance, in which he accused Europe of restricting freedom of expression, Haverbeck was once again a topic of discussion in the milieu. The claim was now that if Germany had freedom of speech, she would have never been convicted. In the journalistic media, the operators of the channels

and groups primarily look for daily news or opinion pieces that represent their world view, even though they are published in media that they otherwise oppose.[9]

The sharing of links to X accounts

Most shared X accounts

Data retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

	X account	Number of channels and groups mentioning the account	Total number of mentions
1	elonmusk	592	5.813
2	real_rabbit	538	8.018
3	bitteltv	471	6.518
4	FreieMedienTV	467	6.293
5	SHomburg	386	1.747
6	EvaHermanEx_ARD	369	2.236
7	ShadowofEzra	367	5.187
8	OliverJanich	367	2.570
9	tomdabassmann	364	2.819
10	PhantomSchweiz	326	3.313

© CeMAS

Figure 31: Most-shared X accounts on Telegram.

Elon Musk, owner of the X platform and supporter of the AfD in the German election, ranked first among the shared links to X accounts in the data set. The following accounts were largely conspiracy-ideological alternative media or X channels. In this evaluation, Alice Weidel only ranked in 12th place, despite the support of Elon Musk.

Two tweets from Elon Musk are among the ten most shared tweets:

---

[9] See also keyword analysis for mentions of "Lügenpresse" (lying press): https://btw2025.cemas.io/daten#herabwuerdigung-demokratischer-institutionen-keyword-analyse (in German).

- ○ „Only the AfD can save Germany" (Dezember 20, 2024)

- ○ „Did you know that USAID, using YOUR tax dollars, funded bioweapon research, including COVID-19, that killed millions of people?" (February 2, 2025,

Other tweets in the top ten revolved around alleged harm from vaccines and the alleged Secret Service plot against the AfD.

Most-shared YouTube channels

Most-shared YouTube channels

Data retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

	Name of YouTube channel	Number of channels and groups mentioning the YouTube channel	Total number of mentions
1	COMPACT TV	491	3.340
2	Deutschlandkurier	458	4.587
3	Die Welt Nachrichtensender	431	2.765
4	Augen Auf Medien Analyse	380	2.276
5	Marc Friedrich	370	1.304
6	AfD-Fraktion Bundestag	360	1.686
7	NuoFlix	347	1.578
8	Kontrafunk	344	1.334
9	Aktien mit Kopf	340	2.835
10	Nius	331	1.957

© CeMAS

Figure 32: Most-shared YouTube accounts on Telegram.

The most-shared links to YouTube during the study period included multiple alternative media channels, a journalistic media outlet, and the YouTube outlet of the AfD parliamentary group as well as right-wing libertarian and conspiracy ideology channels, all of which (also) publish videos with current news and election references.

In terms of content, many of the most shared videos were not related to the election, but to health tips, vaccinations, and conspiracy narratives (including secret CIA wars,

climate change denial or Brigitte Macron). However, the top 30 shared videos included an election campaign event by Alice Weidel published on her own YouTube channel, a post by *Junge Freiheit* on an alleged left-wing "payment card mafia" that procures cash for migrants, an *Apollo News* video called "Inside Verfassungsschutz" (Inside the Office for the Protection of the Constitution), and the speech by US Vice President J.D. Vance at the Munich Security Conference, which the *Deutschlandkurier* aired and translated in full, as well as a video from *Kontrafunk*, which shows and translates the X conversation between Alice Weidel and Elon Musk on YouTube.

Most-shared TikTok accounts

Most-shared TikTok channels

Data retrieval from German-speaking conspiracy ideology and far-right Telegram channels and groups, study period Nov 6, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

	Name of TikTok channel	Number of channels and groups mentioning the TikTok channel	Total number of mentions
1	bitteltv	442	5.527
2	danielarbogast0	146	1.786
3	deutschlanderblueht	108	381
4	kartoffellkoenig	97	126
5	muenchenstehtauf	93	455
6	klardenkentv	86	382
7	zauberwald13	84	178
8	new.mexico80	80	145
9	sichertdeutschland	78	100
10	dr.christinabaum	73	189

© CeMAS

Figure 33: Most-shared TikTok accounts on Telegram

The analysis of the most-shared TikTok accounts indicated that TikTok was linked less often in the far-right and conspiracy ideology scene on Telegram than X or YouTube. The groups on TikTok were primarily interested in conspiracy ideology and/or AfD-affiliated actors that they also know from other platforms and who for the most part do

not create their own content on TikTok but rather repurpose landscape-format YouTube videos on that platform. However, two AfD politicians appeared in the top ten, both of whom create their own TikTok content with some success: the AfD parliamentary group's health policy spokesperson Martin Sichert and AfD member of parliament Christina Baum. As explained in the chapter "The AfD on TikTok and X in the election campaign" (page 24), the AfD evidently does reach people on the short-form video platform. However, the AfD's target groups react very differently to Telegram and TikTok. AfD politicians such as Maximilian Krah, who is successful with younger people on TikTok, are hardly present on Telegram.

Much of TikTok's most-shared content on Telegram was not election-related but instead served to spread conspiracy narratives such as chemtrails or dubious promises related to health or finances. However, election-related content in the top 20 most shared TikTok videos were exclusively videos positioned against the CDU or glorifying Alice Weidel.

Summary

During the Bundestag election campaign, in the period between November 6, 2024 and February 23, 2025, German-language conspiracy-ideological and far-right channels and groups on Telegram were dominated by criticism and disparagement of the German federal government and the NGOs and institutions perceived as being linked to it, combined with fears of inflation, migration and an alleged "deep state" in which actors other than the elected politicians were in charge. The AfD was supported and presented in a largely positive light. The CDU, on the other hand, was met with mistrust: It is seen as a competitor that would use AfD issues in the election campaign but not implement them later. The conspiracy-ideological narrative of a supposed state conspiracy against the AfD took up a lot of space in the debates and demonstrates the scene's mistrust of the state.

Pro-Russian channels focused on discrediting all democratic parties in Germany, but especially the Greens and the CDU. They praised the AfD and – to a lesser extent – the BSW (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht). Discrediting Ukraine was also intensively pursued, particularly with respect to fears of inflation and migration.

American influence was also noticeable before the election: The scene's discourse on minority rights protection and measures against hate speech online as supposed censorship skyrocketed after US Vice President J.D. Vance raised the topic at the Munich Security Conference. The American "free speech" approach, which makes freedom of speech almost absolute, was also well-received in the far-right scene on Telegram. The influence of Elon Musk, who explicitly supported the AfD and Alice Weidel in the German election campaign, can be seen on Telegram in his frequently shared X quotes, which found further cross-media resonance there.

The use of AI-generated images by the AfD on X

Jan Rathje, Leonard Tiedemann, Joe Düker

With the release of Open-AI's ChatGPT in November 2022, AI tools became accessible to the general public for the first time. This also made the Bundestag election the first nationwide election in Germany in which AI-generated content could be systematically used.[10] This analysis employs a case study to examine how the AfD used AI-generated images on X during the critical phase of the Bundestag election campaign.

State of research

The use of AI-generated content by the AfD and its far-right allies in elections was recently analyzed in two studies on the 2024 state elections in Thuringia, Saxony and partially in Brandenburg on Telegram (Donner et al. 2004) and X (Fielitz et al. 2024), and a study on the 2025 federal election on the platforms Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and X (Hiller et al. 2025). A comparative overview of the use of AI-generated images by a wider range of parties during the federal election can also be found in the monitoring project CampAIgnTracker.

The authors came to the conclusion that the AfD used AI-generated images in many cases as symbolic and background images for the communication of core topics, such as the demonization and criminalization of migrants or presenting the party's political visions with respect to deportations and traditional family images.

Real events can also be recreated by generative AI (Fielitz et al. 2024; Hiller et al. 2025). In addition, photorealistic representations of people and situations offer the potential for abuse (Donner et al. 2004). AI-generated content was also not labeled as such in the majority of cases (Fielitz et al. 2024; Hiller et al. 2025).

In comparison to these studies, this analysis is limited to AfD accounts on X. However, it extends the analysis period to the critical phase of the Bundestag election campaign up to the election day.

---

[10] Although image generators such as OpenAI's DALL-E were already present at the beginning of 2021 (OpenAI 2021), the first use of AI-generated content by AfD accounts can only be dated back to August 2022 (Hiller et al. 2025) and March 2023 (Haupt 2025).

Brief description of sample and method

An actor-based approach was chosen for the analysis. From 315 AfD accounts [11] on X, 7,710 original posts with image content were identified using the social listening tool Meltwater (without reposts, quoting posts or replies) for the analysis period from December 16, 2024 to February 23, 2025. A data set with 7,268 image files was then created from the posts using the 4CAT tool (Peeters et al. 2025) aus den Posts ein Datensatz mit 7.268 Bilddateien erstellt.[12] Further filtering of the files was carried out using the AI recognition model of the Sightengine platform, which reduced the sample to 4,001 files.[13] As a review of the filtering revealed that not all AI-generated content could be correctly identified as such, 84 files that had been classified as potentially AI-generated by the recognition model were added to the sample for a final review by three researchers. Finally, 474 images with AI-generated elements were identified in the manual coding process.

The filtered sample of images was then divided into several blocks which were assigned to three researchers and analyzed with MAXQDA software using a predefined codebook. The analysis dimensions included the labeling of AI-generated images as such, their graphic style, their relation to the federal election, and the narratives disseminated in the images.

Overview of the narratives

Within the sample, 29 narratives were identified, of which 27 were subsequently grouped as attack narratives, glorification narratives, victim narratives, or others.

---

[11] The accounts included the publicly searchable profiles of members of the federal and state parliaments (237), candidates for the Bundestag who were not members of the federal or state parliaments (46), accounts of the state associations (16), and accounts of the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag and state parliaments (15), as well as the account of the federal party (1). In contrast to the chapter on the AfD's use of X and TikTok, accounts belonging to members of the European Parliament were not analyzed here, but the accounts of candidates for the Bundestag elections were. This explains the difference in accounts between the two analyses.

[12] A detailed description of the method can be found at the following address: https://osf.io/82vgt/files/osfstorage.

[13] A sample of 1,092 images was not pre-filtered but manually coded before classification by Sightengine in order to serve as a test set for checking the quality of the classification model.

Overview of coded narratives in images with AI-generated elements from AfD accounts on X

Narrative type	Code	Description
Attack narratives		
Against migrants and refugees		
ANTI-MIGR	ANDERE_MIGR	General content against migration, migrants and refugees, without explicit reference to violence, deportations or "remigration"
	GEWALT_MIGR	Portrayal of migrants and refugees as violent, for example through knife attacks or sexualized violence
	SOZIAL_MIGR	Linking the topics of migration and social welfare benefits
	RE_MIGR	Demands for "remigration" or deportation
Against the "old parties" and their politicians		
ANTI-ALTP	ANTI-GRUEN	Attacks against Alliance 90/The Greens and its current top politicians, including as part of the traffic light coalition
	ANTI-SPD	Attacks against the SPD and its current top politicians, including as part of the traffic light coalition
	ANTI-FDP	Attacks against the FDP and its current top politicians, including as part of the traffic light coalition
	ANTI-CDU-CSU	Attacks against the CDU/CSU, their current top politicians and Angela Merkel
	BRANDM	Attacks against the "firewall" policy of democratic parties towards the AfD
	ANTI-LINKE	Attacks against Die Linke and its current leading politicians
	ANDERE_ALTP	Other attacks against democratic "old parties" in general terms
Against other political enemy narratives		
ANTI-ANDERE-POL	ANTI-KLIMA	Attacks against climate protection measures and activists as well as support for fossil fuels or nuclear power
	ANTI-LINKS	Negative references to political opponents/enemies labeled as "leftists" without direct party reference (e.g. Antifa, demonstrators against right-wing extremism)
	ANTI-MEDIEN	Attacks on public and private media with accusations of lying, or distorting or concealing information
	SEXISMUS	Devaluation of women through sexualized depictions
	ANTI-LGBTQ-GENDER	Negative portrayal of measures to protect sexual minorities and the LGBTQ community
	ANTI-EU	Rejection of the EU and its institutions

CeMAS

Overview of coded narratives in images with AI-generated elements from AfD accounts on X

Narrative type	Code	Description
Glorification		
Glorification of light-skinned Germans	KOERPER_DE	Idealized representation of Germans as light-skinned and without a non-Nordic migration history
Glorification of German traditions	TRADITIONEN_DE	Glorification of German traditions and myths, e.g. by emphasizing the nuclear family, alcohol consumption or Christian festivals
Fight for freedom against censorship	FREIHEITSK	Glorification of a German fight for freedom against censorship or external influences
The AfD is a very successful party	ERFOLG_AfD	Glorification of the AfD's presumed success, e.g. by depicting large crowds of supporters with flags
Only the AfD can save Germany	RETTER_AFD	Presentation of the AfD as the only force that could save Germany from ruin
Victim narratives		
Germany as a victim	DE_OPFER	Portrayal of Germany as a victim
Restricted, threatened freedom of expression	MEINUNG_OPFER	Portrayal of freedom of expression as restricted or threatened
Economy at risk	WIRTSCHAFT_OPFER	Portrayal of the German economy as a victim, for example of the policies of the traffic light coalition
Individuals as victims of politics and violence	PERS_OPFER	Portrayal of individual victims of politics and acts of violence, especially of acts of violence within the analysis period (in contrast to the nation as a whole as victim)
AfD as a victim	AFD_OPFER	Portrayal of the AfD as a victim, e.g. of unequal treatment
Other narratives		
Demands for peace	FRIEDEN	Demands for peace
Pro-Russian content	PRO-RUSSLAND	Promotion of pro-Russian positions
Other narratives	ANDERE	Other narratives, narratives unrelated to federal politics or federal elections and unclear narratives

© CeMAS

Figure 34: Overview of coded narratives in images with AI-generated elements from AfD accounts on X

Analysis: Use of AI

The analysis showed that of the 7,268 images shared by AfD accounts on X within the analysis period, 6.5 percent (474) contained AI-generated content. Of these, only a quarter (25.1 percent, 119) explicitly labeled the use of generative AI as such.

In most images, AI-generated elements only represented part of the image content, serving as a basis or supplement as part of a montage. Other elements of the images were text elements, logos or cropped photos.

In addition, two styles of AI-generated content can be distinguished. Most of the images (71.7 percent, 340) were created in a photorealistic style (see Figures 35 and 36). A non-photorealistic, artistic style (see Fig. 36) was identified in 28.3 percent (134) of the images.

Figures 35 and 36. Left: Example of image related to the election with labeled AI-generated elements in a pseudo-realistic style with texts and logo. The text says: "Open words from Merz: Nothing will change. 'Possibly the Social Democrats, possibly the Greens.'" Right: Example of artistic style. The text says: "Remigration ist the answer to Munich". "Remigration" is a term the German far-right invented for deportation of migrants.

Within the sample analyzed, 355 (74.9 percent) of the AI-generated images contained a reference to the Bundestag elections, e.g. in the form of election appeals and depictions of the leading candidates and/or thematizations of federal parties or federal politics. The remainder (25.1 percent) had no clear reference to the federal election, spread unclear narratives, or focused on state politics, such as the state parliamentary elections in Hamburg.

Sharing of posts with AI-generated images

After filtering 7,268 posts with images from 315 AfD accounts on X, 474 posts were identified that contained AI-generated elements. These had been shared by a total of 114 accounts. The histogram below shows the distribution of these posts across the

114 accounts that shared them. The majority of accounts (91, 80 percent) shared between one and five posts containing AI-generated elements. Only a few accounts shared a large number of posts with AI-generated content, with ten accounts still represented in the interval of five to nine posts, and the number decreases continuously from then on. There are a few accounts in the highest intervals: one account with 24 posts, one with 31 posts and one with 41 posts.

Distribution of account posts with AI-generated images

Number of accounts with N* number of AI-generated images shared

Accounts

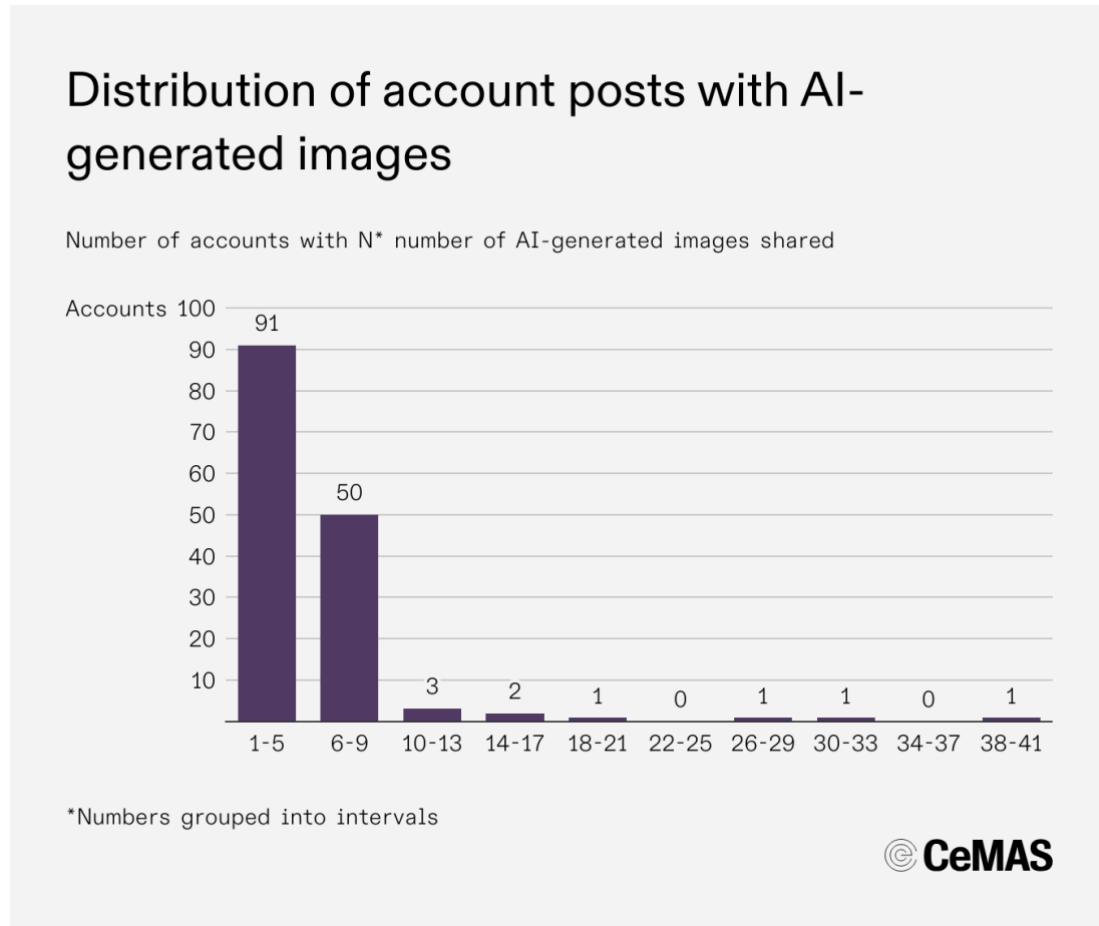| 1-5	6-9	10-13	14-17	18-21	22-25	26-29	30-33	34-37	38-41
91	50	3	2	1	0	1	1	0	1

*Numbers grouped into intervals

© CeMAS

Figure 37: Histogram – distribution of account posts with AI-generated images.

The average number of posts was 4.15, indicating that the average number of posts with AI-generated images per account was low compared to the total volume of posts. The median was 2, which means that half of the accounts had published a maximum of two such posts. Both figures make it clear that the majority of accounts only shared a small amount of AI-generated content. The majority of the content was distributed by a small number of accounts.

The top ten AfD accounts that shared the most images with AI-generated elements included two organizational accounts, four accounts belonging to members of the Bundestag, three accounts belonging to members of state parliaments and one account of a Bundestag candidate (see Figure 38).

Most of the top ten accounts did not label AI-generated images as such. The central account of the federal party (AfD) labeled AI use in only 4.9 percent of all identified

cases, which was far below the average flagging rate of 25.1 percent for the entire sample. Only three accounts labeled the majority of the AI images they shared.
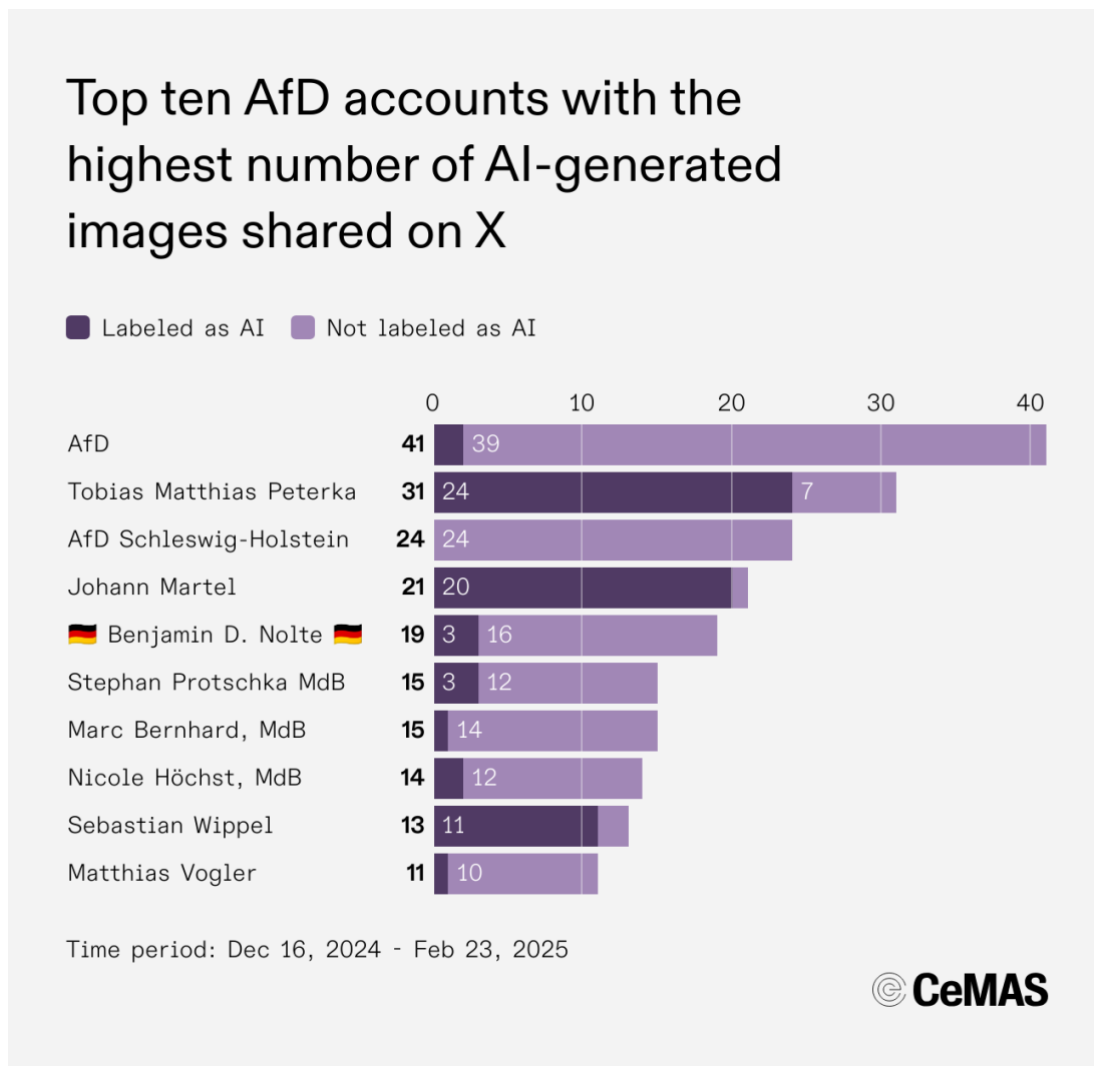

Figure 38: Top 10 AfD accounts with the highest number of shared AI-generated images on X.

Use of narratives in AI-generated images

Within the sample, 29 specific narratives were identified. A total of 811 codes were assigned, as the AI-generated images could contain several narratives. Over the entire analysis period, KOERPER_DE (90), ANTI-CDU-CSU (69), DE_OPFER (63), ANTI-GRUEN (43) and ANDERE_MIGR (37) were among the five most widespread specific narratives (see Fig. 39).
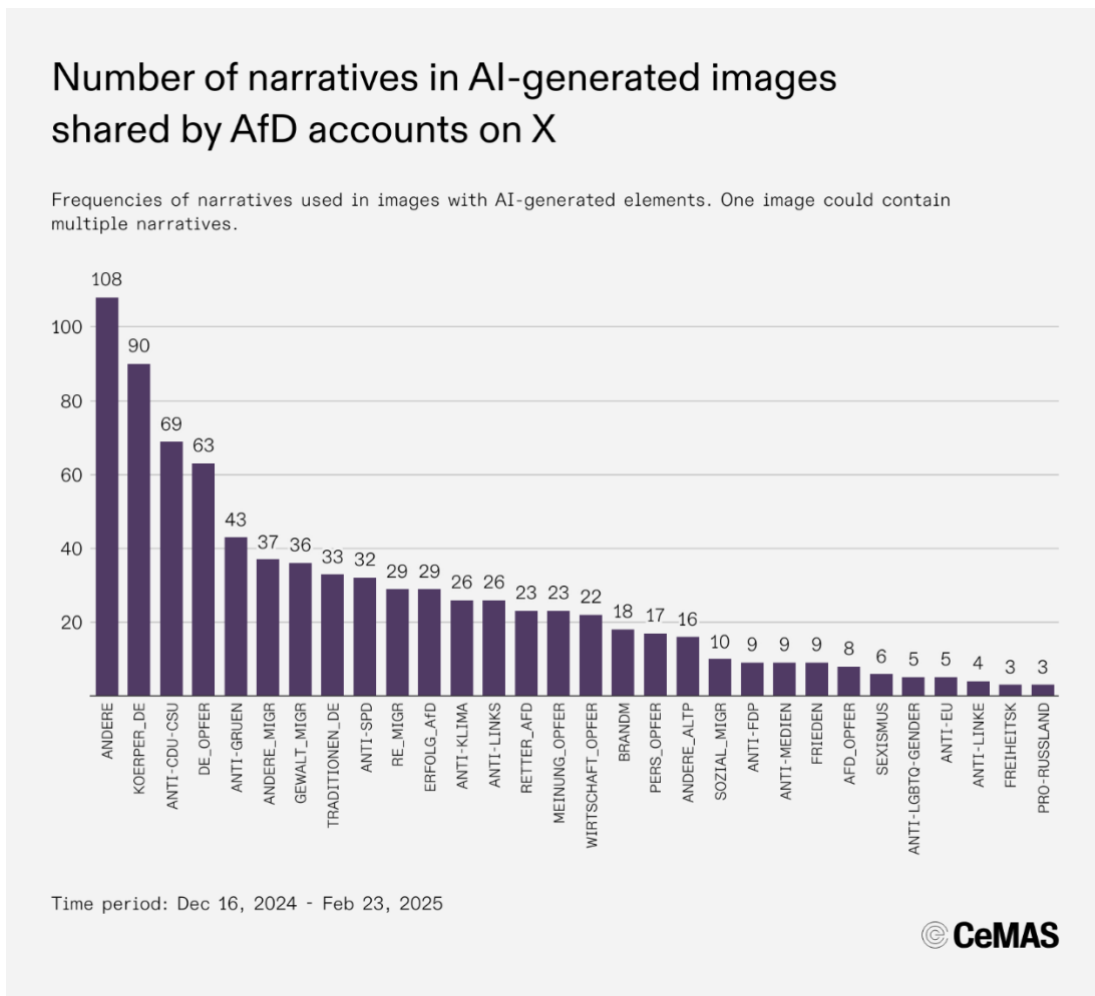
Figure 38: Top 10 AfD accounts with the highest number of shared AI-generated images on X.

Grouped by type (see Figure 40), AfD accounts disseminated attack narratives in just under half of all cases (47 percent, 380) when using images with AI-generated content during the analysis period, glorification narratives in just over a fifth of cases (22 percent, 178), victim narratives in 16 percent of cases (133), and other narratives in 15 percent of cases (120).
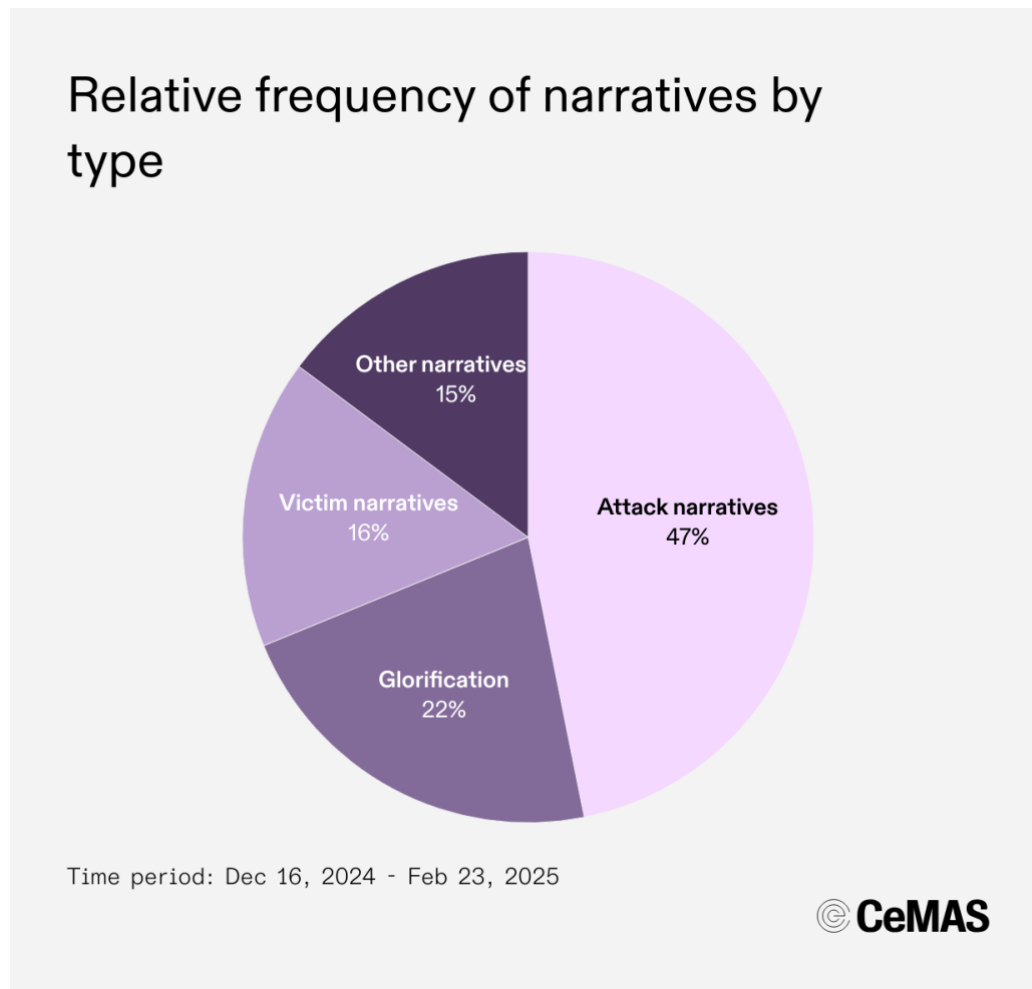
Relative frequency of narratives by type

Other narratives
15%

Victim narratives
16%

Attack narratives
47%

Glorification
22%

Time period: Dec 16, 2024 - Feb 23, 2025

© CeMAS

Figure 40: Relative frequency of narratives by type.

A sub-grouping of the narratives based on overarching themes under the "attack narratives" shows that half of the attack narratives used were directed against established parties (ANTI-ALTP 191) at the federal level (CDU/CSU, SPD, The Greens, FDP and Die Linke), 30 percent against migrants and refugees (ANTI-MIGR 112), and 20 percent against other political enemy narratives (ANTI-ANDERE-POL 77).

But how successful is such content? In order to investigate the resonance of posts with AI-generated image content, the median values of views and engagement[14] of posts with and without AI-generated image content were compared. While posts with AI-generated image content were viewed 439 times on average, this figure is 855 for posts from the same accounts with non-AI-generated image content. The engagement value for content with AI-generated images, at 150, is also noticeably below the median value of 175 for posts with non-AI-generated images. The median values indicate that posts with AI-generated image content received less attention and resonance in our data set.

---

[14] The engagement statistics describe the total number of likes, reposts and replies that a post on X has collected.

Summary

At 6.5 percent of individual image posts, generative AI was only used to a limited extent by the AfD on X during the election campaign. This tends to confirm the result of another study on the use of AI-generated content by the AfD and its front runners during the 2024 state elections, where the value was 5 percent (Donner et al. 2024).

Parallels to the study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) on AI use by the AfD and its supporters for another period of the German federal election campaign (Hiller et al. 2025) can be seen in the distribution of narrative types. When AI was used for visual elements, it was mainly used for attack narratives. However, there are also differences between the studies.

For example, the data set analyzed here contained significantly more attack narratives against established parties than against migrants. It is possible that in the critical phase of the election campaign, attacking political opponents was considered more strategically relevant. In many cases, the two narratives were linked, for example when the CDU was held responsible for the negatively portrayed consequences of Angela Merkel's migration policy.

Narratives directed against migrants were specifically linked to acts of violence by migrants, such as the attack in Magdeburg on December 20, 2024, or the attack in Aschaffenburg on January 22, 2025. This was associated with a collective characterization of migrants as potential perpetrators of violence, which was also reflected in the portrayal of individual migrants and groups as threatening.[15].

In this context, victim narratives were also frequently used - for example, of Germany as a collective victim of violent acts by migrants, or an individual person as a victim.

With regard to the AfD's labeling the use of AI, it was found that the majority of posts using AI were not labeled as such. This is in line with the findings of other studies (Fielitz et al. 2024; Hiller et al. 2025). The federal party's X account stands out in this respect. It continues to use AI-generated elements for image posts on the platform without identifying them as such.

However, posts with AI-generated image elements do not generally provoke a higher response on X. The advantages of using AI-generated image content may therefore be the ease of use and cost efficiency in creating target group-specific content (Kruschinski et al. 2025), rather than generating additional engagement.

AI-generated content is thus suitable for further accelerating political communication, as current events can be very quickly provided with an illustrated political message.

---

[15] However, this was not specific to the use of generative AI but reflected the general discourse on migration and violence during the election campaign, in which the topics of migration and security were very much negotiated together.

The X platform offers particular advantages here, as it has integrated a powerful AI tool called Grok, which can be used to create image elements and to generate images of politicians.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

The heightened security situation caused by anti-democratic actors at home and abroad was also evident in the 2025 German federal election. It was targeted by various domestic and foreign authoritarian forces that aimed to discredit democratic institutions and engage in political agitation using xenophobic rhetoric. Such content has been accessed millions of times in digital space.

Russian disinformation actors attempted to spread divisive, anti-immigration and anti-Ukrainian content before the election and to discredit democratic parties, as well as to support the AfD and, to a lesser extent, the BSW. Immediately prior to election day, CeMAS documented attempts by suspected Russian actors to spread disinformation concerning alleged electoral fraud. False claims about the integrity of the election were also spread by domestic actors on social media platforms, where they were viewed millions of times by users. Even if a single exposure to such posts does not necessarily lead to a change in voting decisions or political reorientation, the unhindered mass and sustained dissemination of dehumanizing rhetoric and disinformation exerts additional pressure on democracies and contributes to the normalization of anti-democratic views.

For the first time, generative AI tools were available to the general public in Germany during a federal election. The AfD used AI-generated images in its election campaign to attack established parties and migrants, glorify itself, and portray Germany as a victim of migrant violence. Even though AI-generated images accounted for only a small proportion (approx. 6.5 percent) of all images shared by AfD accounts on X, three quarters of them were not explicitly labeled as such.

The AfD actively used X and TikTok during the election campaign, where its content received hundreds of millions of views. AfD accounts instrumentalized topics such as migration, support for Ukraine in the Russian war of aggression, and freedom of expression to mobilize supporters in the election campaign.

Far-right actors once again achieved high reach on social media platforms. In 2024, they used Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok to organize offline anti-LGBTQ demonstrations, during which violence was used repeatedly. Terrorist sub-communities can still exist almost undisturbed on platforms such as Telegram. At the same time, the platforms themselves rarely react to threats such as Russian disinformation in a consequent manner, and actors can often use structures for a long time without being suspended. The digital space must not be a legal vacuum in which hate and disinformation can be spread unhindered. In the EU, large online platforms

are obliged by the Digital Services Act (DSA) to reduce systemic risks, particularly in connection with elections. The DSA should be implemented consistently, even considering expected resistance from the USA. Researchers and civil society should be given access to the data provided for in the DSA to be able to independently investigate digital risks and the influence of social media on political processes.

CeMAS also recommends the following actions to curb foreign attempts at influence as well as the further strengthening of far-right extremism:

Understanding disinformation as a long-term risk: Policy recommendations

Disinformation and hate campaigns do not end on election day. The new federal government should recognize these challenges as permanent and complex risks to democracy and develop suitable policy strategies. The increasingly aggressive rhetoric from Russia makes it clear that hybrid threats will not simply disappear but are an integral part of the new security situation.

It is crucial to understand the complexity and long-term nature of disinformation and foreign attempts to exert influence in order to assess the potential for damage in terms of security policy. Given the importance of foreign influence in the context of hybrid threats, the rapid development of policy responses should be prioritized. Specific containment measures are fully dependent on the provision of financial resources in order to obtain and consolidate the necessary structures, resources and powers to implement such measures.

Long-term capacities to detect and combat foreign information manipulation in the form of a central agency or a central office should be developed in a timely manner to enable efficient monitoring and investigation. Increased cooperation should be promoted between this new agency and the various security authorities, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the one hand, and civil society and academia on the other, to detect foreign attempts at influence in real-time and to react quickly and in a coordinated manner in the event of a crisis.

Another important lever: Existing sanctions should be implemented quickly and consequently. In the past, examples such as the Russian propaganda broadcaster *RT DE*, which set up alternative domains and thus remained accessible despite sanctions, showed how foreign authoritarian actors were able to circumvent sanctions and bans. It should also be examined to what extent draining the sources of funding for foreign propaganda outlets can be applied as part of a sanctions package.

CeMAS recommends the development of a national strategy for dealing with hybrid threats. Networking and confidential exchange with civil society and allied governments is recommended. Illegitimate attempts to exert influence must be

understood as a constant, dynamic threat to democratic societies, even outside of election periods. The speed of policy action should be adapted to that of the disinformation actors to meet rapidly evolving challenges.

National programs to strengthen resilience within the German population should also be promoted on a long-term basis to facilitate the shift from a culture of fear to one of competence: At present, there is greater uncertainty among the population due to Russia's hybrid attacks. Stoking fear is in itself a goal of propaganda campaigns. The population must therefore acquire skills to deal with the new security situation. Wars in particular are always a gateway for authoritarian ambitions and can have a radicalizing effect if they are instrumentalized for propaganda purposes. It is important to achieve a resilient population, especially with respect to challenges in the state's fight against disinformation. Sensible approaches should not only aim to strengthen media literacy but also train people to recognize and deal with ideological manipulation. It is essential that this work is made possible not just in the digital space, but also in analog form at the regional and local levels.

Far-right agitation as a threat to democracy: Policy recommendations

Democracy is not just under pressure from outside but is also under attack from within. The growing self-confidence of far-right actors is reflected in their increasing willingness to use violence, as shown by the figures on far-right violence and criminality. Far-right extremism has not lose its threat potential after the Bundestag elections. In order to assess the potential for damage from the perspective of security policy, it is crucial to understand far-right attempts to exert influence as a long-term threat to our democratic coexistence.

Far-right actors try time and again to attack the state. Democratic institutions such as public broadcasting and our constitutional courts should be protected from far-right influence. It is crucial that this protection of democracy is prioritized across party lines and not misinterpreted as tactical party politics.

The key relevance of digital networking for far-right actors is demonstrated not just by the still highly active far-right scene on Telegram, but also the return of many far-right accounts on X after the takeover of the platform by Elon Musk. Loose digital network and group structures extending as far as far-right terrorism are increasingly the starting point for radicalization and criminal planning. Security authorities and the judiciary must adapt their work to these changed radicalization pathways. Structures and legal possibilities should be created to allow for efficient prosecution adapted to current developments. Investigating authorities must place increased focus on digital spaces.

Germany has a large number of civil society democratic initiatives and psychosocial services that carry out key work on the ground. Particularly in these conflict-ridden times, it is crucial to expand these projects and safeguard measures for their continued financing. This applies in particular to projects in federal states where far-right actors have a particularly strong presence. If such initiatives and projects fall away, the situation will deteriorate further, as anti-democrats often exploit the resulting gaps.

During the election campaign, it became clear that the AfD is already trying to appeal to significantly younger target groups through the successful use of platforms such as TikTok. These appeals correlate with a worrying development in the analog sector: Since 2024, an increasing number of violent and far-right youth groups have formed. This development requires an urgent political response. This also includes the creation and safeguarding of local democratic youth opportunities and a political signal to young people that their concerns are being heard and addressed. These measures should be taken promptly to stop the normalization of right-wing extremist ideas and the establishment of further groups, and to prevent the next generation of neo-Nazi groups from gaining ground.

It is also necessary at this moment to support those who are democratically active with practical protective measures. The multiple crises at present are a burden for the public. Mental health and resilience are protective factors for a strong democracy, for trust in democratic institutions, and against radicalization, and their development should be promoted as a resource. Psychosocial support for citizens is thus also central to democracy.

It is also important to dry up far-right funding sources where possible. Far-right (donation) financing is constantly evolving – which is why these activities need to be continuously monitored. New platforms and financial service providers are being established in order to avoid existing sanctions. Ongoing monitoring of far-right financing makes it possible to react to new developments at an early stage. Financial service providers must be informed as to whether their services are being used for right-wing extremist purposes. Systematically training people and defining responsibilities, for example, helps to ensure that banks can take proactive action rather than waiting for public pressure in order to react.

Bibliography

For the chapter: Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference around the Federal Election

Behörde für Inneres und Sport (2025, February 20). Bundestagswahl 2025: Landeswahlleiter warnt vor Fake-Video in den sozialen Medien – „Seien Sie wachsam". https://www.hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/behoerden/behoerde-fuer-inneres-und-sport/presseservice/pressemeldungen/bundestagswahl-2025-fake-video-1024112

Frühwirth, L. (2025a, January 20). Russische Desinformation vor der Bundestagswahl: Doppelgänger-Kampagne macht Stimmung gegen Parteien. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/update-doppelgaenger

Frühwirth, L. (2025b, January 28). Koordiniert und verifiziert: Pro-russische Kampagne veröffentlicht Hunderte Beiträge auf X. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/koordiniert-und-verifiziert

Frühwirth, L. (2025c, February 4). Doppelgänger gegen Merz: Desinformationskampagne verstärkt Stimmungsmache auf X. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/doppelgaenger-gegen-merz

Frühwirth, L. (2025d, February 21). Doppelgänger verbreitet KI-Video gegen Sanktionen. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/doppelgaenger-ki-video-sanktionen

Frühwirth, L. (2025e, February 28). Nach der Wahl: Falschbehauptungen zu angeblichem Wahlbetrug wandern durch soziale Medien. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/falschbehauptungen-wahlbetrug

Hock, A., Bernhard, M., Eckert, T. & Thust, S. (2025, January 23). Russische Desinformation: Einflussoperation enttarnt: Russland greift in deutschen Wahlkampf ein. CORRECTIV. https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/russische-desinformation/2025/01/23/angriff-aus-russland-auf-bundestagswahl-deepfake-ki

Hoppenstedt, M. (2025, February 21). Polizei ermittelt: Russische Trollgruppe verbreitet offenbar Fakevideos zur Briefwahl. SPIEGEL. https://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/bundestagswahl-russische-troll-gruppe-verbreitet-offenbar-fake-videos-zur-briefwahl-a-325b8c89-8dae-4adc-ada9-f8d9ab6dd9f2

Insikt Group (2025, February 13). Stimmen aus Moskau: Russian Influence Operations Target German Elections. Recorded Future. https://www.recordedfuture.com/research/stimmen-aus-moskau-russian-influence-operations-target-german-elections

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2025, February 13). Coordinated disinformation network uses AI, media impersonation to target German election. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/coordinated-disinformation-network-uses-ai-media-impersonation-to-target-german-election/

Nazari, S. & Schwarz, K. (2025, January 27). Sky's the Limit – Russian Influence Operation Doppelgänger Expands to Bluesky. https://alliance4europe.eu/doppelganger-bluesky

Reset.Tech (2024, July 18). Doppelganger Revamped: Network of Verified Accounts Spreads Multilingual Propaganda on X. Reset.Tech. https://www.reset.tech/resources/reset-tech-research-note-doppelganger-revamped-network-of-verified-accounts-spreads-multilingual-propaganda-on-x.pdf

Smirnova, J. (2025, February 21). Videos mit Falschbehauptungen über Wahlbetrug – Hinweise auf einen russischen Akteur. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/videos-mit-gefaelschten-wahlunterlagen

Smirnova, J., Schwarz, K. & Nazari, S. (2025, February 13). Wie Desinformationskampagnen rund um die Propaganda-Organisation Foundation to Battle Injustice versuchen, die Bundestagswahl zu beeinflussen. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/russische-kampagnen-rund-um-foundation-to-battle-injustice

Stadt Leipzig (2025, February 18). Videos mit gefälschtem Stimmzettel im Umlauf. https://www.leipzig.de/presse/medieninformationen/medieninformation/videos-mit-gefaelschtem-stimmzettel-im-umlauf

For the chapter: The spread of false information concerning election integrity

Bundeswahlleiterin (2025). Erkennen und Bekämpfen von Desinformation. Fakten zur vorläufigen Ergebnisdarstellung. https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/bundestagswahlen/2025/fakten-desinformation.html#35f7a3f4-df1d-4446-a98e-bd4179d381bf

EDMO (2023). Disinformation narratives during the 2023 elections in Europe. https://edmo.eu/publications/disinformation-narratives-during-the-2023-elections-in-europe/

Frühwirth, Lea (2025, February 28). Nach der Wahl: Falschbehauptungen zu angeblichem Wahlbetrug wandern durch soziale Medien. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring.https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/falschbehauptungen-wahlbetrug

Lehn, Johanna (2025, January 29). Ex-EU-Kommissar Breton falsch interpretiert – EU kann Bundestagswahl nicht annullieren. AFP. https://faktencheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.36WE7WV

Thust, Sarah (2025, January 20). Frank-Walter Steinmeier drohte nicht, die Bundestagswahl zu annullieren, wenn die falsche Partei gewinnt. Correctiv. https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/2025/01/20/frank-walter-steinmeier-drohte-nicht-die-bundestagswahl-zu-annullieren-wenn-die-falsche-partei-gewinnt/

Vance, J. D. (2025, February 14). Die Münchener Rede des US-Vizepräsidenten im Wortlaut. Handelsblatt. https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/j-d-vance-die-muenchener-rede-des-us-vizepraesidenten-im-wortlaut/100107881.html

For the chapter: The AfD on TikTok and X during the election

Dittrich, M., Düker, J., Faßbender, D. (2025, February 21). Strategische Inkohärenz? Zur Präsenz der AfD auf TikTok. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/strategische-inkohaerenz-zur-praesenz-der-afd-auf-tiktok

Frühwirth, L. (2025a, January 20). Russische Desinformation vor der Bundestagswahl: *Doppelgänger*-Kampagne macht Stimmung gegen Parteien. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/update-doppelgaenger

MDR Aktuell (2024, December 14). Analyse: AfD dominiert weiter auf TikTok. https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/wahlen/bundestagswahl/btw-spitzenkandidaten-social-media-tiktok-reichweite-likes-100.html

Rathje, J. (2025, January 30): Extrem rechter Verein Ein Prozent: Aufruf zur Wahlbeobachtung, Kampagne gegen Die Linke. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/der-extrem-rechte-verein-ein-prozent-und-die-bundestagswahl

Rathje, J., Tiedemann, L. (2025a, January 22). Elon Musk und die extreme Rechte in Deutschland auf X (I): Interaktionen mit der AfD. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/elon-musk-und-die-extreme-rechte-1

Rathje, J., Tiedemann, L. (2025b, February 12). Elon Musk und die extreme Rechte in Deutschland auf X (II): Interaktionen mit dem Vorfeld der AfD. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/elon-musk-und-die-extreme-rechte-II

For the chapter: The far-right and conspiracy-ideological scene on Telegram: Issues in the election

Eckard, J. (2025, February 14): Mit Steuergeldern gegen die CDU – Wer steckt hinter den Massen-Demos? Bild. Publiziert unter https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/mit-steuergeldern-gegen-die-cdu-wer-steckt-hinter-den-massen-demos-67a1d74308bc756e749d6056, inzwischen auf Bild.de gelöscht; Archiv-Link https://archive.is/4Wmqt

Kopietz, A. (2024, December 5). Marel Luthe verklagt die Regierung: Die Bürger wurden über das Corona-Virus getäuscht. Berliner Zeitung. https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/marcel-luthe-verklagt-die-regierung-die-buerger-wurden-ueber-das-corona-virus-getaeuscht-li.2278379

Kopietz, A. (2025, February 10). Corona-Impfzwang: Berliner Feuerwehr droht Schadenersatz in Millionenhöhe. Berliner Zeitung. https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/corona-impfzwang-berliner-feuerwehr-droht-schadenersatz-in-millionenhoehe-li.2294020

Latour, C., Sonneborn, M. (2024, November 18). Paxlovid-Skandal: Sonneborn errechnet 417 Jahre Haft für Karl Lauterbach. Berliner Zeitung. https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/wirtschaft-verantwortung/paxlovid-skandal-sonneborn-errechnet-417-jahre-haft-fuer-karl-lauterbach-li.2273309

Musk, E. (2024, December 28). Warum Elon Musk auf die AfD setzt – und warum er dabei irrt. Die Welt. https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article254982012/Warum-Elon-Musk-auf-die-AfD-setzt-und-warum-er-dabei-irrt.html

Siggelkow, P. (2025, February 27). Bundestagswahl: Eine große Bühne für die AfD in Österreich. Tageschau.de. https://www.tagesschau.de/faktenfinder/kontext/bundestagswahl-aufeins-afd-100.html

Voinea, M (2025, January 23): Wahlbeeinflussung durch koordinierte Social-Media-Kampagnen: Ein praktischer Leitfaden für die Zukunft. CeMAS Bundestagswahl 2025 Monitoring. https://btw2025.cemas.io/artikel/wahlbeeinflussung-durch-ueber-soziale-medien-rumaenien

For the chapter: The use of AI-generated images by the AfD on X

Donner, C., Böswald, L.-M., Fielitz, M., Sick, H., Marcks, H., Gsenger, R., Heft, A. & Brodersen, W. (2024). Attention Is All They Need: Eine Analyse der Nutzung generativer KI in rechtsalternativen Netzwerken. Machine Against the Rage, 2(3). https://machine-vs-rage.net/attention-is-all-they-need/

Fielitz, M., Sick, H., Schmidt, M. & Donner, C. (2024). Social-Media-Partei AfD? Digitale Landtagswahlkämpfe im Vergleich (OBS-Arbeitspapier Nr. 73). https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/02_Wissenschaftsportal/03_Publikationen/AP73_LTW_AfD_WEB.pdf

Haupt, F. (March 11, 2025). AfD mit KI-Fotos: Abgeordnete der Partei rechtfertigen täuschende Bilder. FAZ. https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/afd-mit-ki-fotos-abgeordnete-der-partei-rechtfertigen-taeuschende-bilder-18788651.html

Hiller, A., Maristany de las Casas & Pablo. (2025). Generative AI and the German Far Right: Narratives, Tactics and Digital Strategies. https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/The-use-of-generative-AI-by-the-German-Far-Right.pdf

Kruschinski, S., Jost, P., Fecher, H. & Scherer, T. (2025). Künstliche Intelligenz in politischen Kampagnen: Akzeptanz, Wahrnehmung und Wirkung (OBS-Arbeitspapier Nr. 75). https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/02_Wissenschaftsportal/03_Publikationen/AP75_KI_Kampagnen.pdf

OpenAI. (2021, January 5). DALL·E: Creating images from text. https://openai.com/index/dall-e/

Peeters, S., Hagen, S. & Wahl, D. (2025). 4CAT Capture and Analysis Toolkit [Computer software]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14888687

About CeMAS

The non-profit Center for Monitoring, Analysis, and Strategy (CeMAS) consolidates years of interdisciplinary expertise on the topics of conspiracy ideologies, disinformation, antisemitism, and far-right extremism. CeMAS addresses current developments in the above-mentioned fields through systematic monitoring of central digital platforms and modern study designs in order to derive innovative analyses and recommendations for action. Furthermore, CeMAS advises decision makers from civil society, media and politics.

The aim of CeMAS is to enable society to actively counter conspiracy ideologies, disinformation, anti-Semitism and far-right extremism in the context of current problems and future crises.

Support the work of CeMAS!

We are delighted if you would like to help us and support our work. CeMAS is a non-profit gGmbH. Your donation helps us to strengthen democratic society with innovative analyses and strategies for decisive action.

https://cemas.io/en/donation

About the authors and contributors

Gregor Bauer

Gregor Bauer is a linguist and works at CeMAS as chief operating officer and deputy managing director.

Miro Dittrich

Miro Dittrich is a political scientist and researches far-right extremism, terrorism and content moderation as a senior researcher at CeMAS.

Joe Düker

Joe Düker is a researcher at CeMAS and conducts research on far-right phenomena on the Internet.

David Faßbender

David Faßbender is a student assistant in the field of data science and develops tools for the automated collection and analysis of social media content and behavioral data at CeMAS.

Lea Frühwirth

Lea Frühwirth is a psychologist and senior researcher on disinformation, propaganda and conspiracy narratives at CeMAS.

Corinne Heuer

Corinne Heuer is communications Manager at CeMAS and works on the topics of political communication and policy as well as anti-Semitism in the digital space.

Josef Holnburger

Josef Holnburger is a political data scientist and managing director of CeMAS.

Pia Lamberty

Dr. Pia Lamberty is a psychologist and, as lead psychological analyst at CeMAS, is responsible for the areas of policy, research and consulting in the context of the anti-democratic instrumentalization of crises and disasters.

Janina Mainzer

Janina Mainzer is studying interdisciplinary antisemitism research and works at CeMAS as a student assistant in the field of communication and social media content creation.

Anna Meyer

Anna Meyer is a political scientist specializing in IT and is investigating the spread of disinformation on the Internet as a student assistant at CeMAS.

Lu Kalkbrenner

Lu Kalkbrenner is a software engineer at CeMAS and works on scraping and analysis tools.

Jan Kaßel

Jan Kaßel is a software engineer. At CeMAS, he designs and develops systems that make the data and content of his colleagues at CeMAS accessible to the public.

Martin Müller

Martin Müller is a computer scientist. As a backend developer at CeMAS, he develops digital tools that make the interplay between technology and society tangible and enable analyses in the context of conspiracy ideology, far-right and anti-Semitic content on the internet.

Simone Rafael

Simone Rafael is a journalist and communications manager at CeMAS and writes about threats to democracy on the internet and digital far-right extremism.

Jan Rathje

Jan Rathje is a political scientist and senior researcher at CeMAS on the topics of the online far-right, conspiracy ideologies, anti-semitism and sovereignism..

Julia Smirnova

Julia Smirnova is a senior researcher at CeMAS with a focus on foreign influence and the spread of disinformation online.

Leonard Tiedemann

Leonard Tiedemann is a student of social and economic data science with a focus on computational social science, data-based analysis of the dynamics of digital discourse and German far-right on social media.

CeMAS, the non-profit Center for Monitoring, Analysis, and Strategy brings together years of interdisciplinary expertise focusing on conspiracy ideologies, disinformation, antisemitism, and right-wing extremism. CeMAS addresses current developments in these fields through modern study design and systematic monitoring of key digital platforms to conduct innovative analysis and form recommendations for policy action. CeMAS advises decision-makers from civil society, media and politics.