

**T.C.**  
**ANTALYA BILIM UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

**GLOBAL POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THESIS  
PROGRAM**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POPULIST AND NON-POPULIST APPROACHES  
TO SCIENCE-BASED POLICIES: THE CASES OF CLIMATE CHANGE,  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VACCINE CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2021 PRE-  
ELECTION TERM OF GERMANY**

**Besna DENİZ AĞAR**

**JUNE 2023**

**ANTALYA**



**T.C.  
ANTALYA BILIM UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

**GLOBAL POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THESIS  
PROGRAM**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POPULIST AND NON-POPULIST APPROACHES  
TO SCIENCE-BASED POLICIES: THE CASES OF CLIMATE CHANGE,  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VACCINE CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2021 PRE-  
ELECTION TERM OF GERMANY**

**Besna DENİZ AĞAR**

**JUNE 2023  
ANTALYA**

**T.C.**  
**ANTALYA BILIM UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POPULIST AND NON-POPULIST APPROACHES  
TO SCIENCE-BASED POLICIES: THE CASES OF CLIMATE CHANGE,  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VACCINE CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2021 PRE-  
ELECTION TERM OF GERMANY**

**Besna DENİZ AĞAR**

This thesis was accepted by the jury (with unanimous vote /majority vote) on the date 16/06/2023 in Global Politics and International Relations of the Institute of Post Graduate Education

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işıl Cerem CENKER ÖZEK (Supervisor)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nermin AYDEMİR ÇAVUŞ

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Senem ATVUR

Director of The Institute:

Prof. Dr. İbrahim Sani MERT

Thesis Submission Date:

## DECLARATION

The master thesis of this study named “DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POPULIST AND NON-POPULIST APPROACHES TO SCIENCE-BASED POLICIES: THE CASES OF CLIMATE CHANGE, COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VACCINE CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2021 PRE-ELECTION TERM OF GERMANY”, which I presented, I declare that scientific moral principles were followed in the preparation of this study, in case of benefiting from the works of others, reference is made in accordance with scientific norms, no falsification has been made in the data used, and that any part of this study is not presented as another academic study.

... / ... / 20..

[signature]

Besna DENİZ AĞAR

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ÖZET.....	iii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
PREFACE.....	vii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1. Populism: The Conceptual Discussions.....	7
2.1.1. An Ideational Approach: Cas Mudde.....	7
2.1.2. A Political Strategic Approach: Kurt Weyland.....	9
2.1.3. Socio-Cultural Approach: Pierre Ostiguy.....	10
2.1.4. Synthesis of Three Approaches.....	10
2.2. Science in Populism and Democracy Debate.....	12
2.2.1. Populism and Democracy Relationship .....	12
2.2.2. Science Expertise and Democracy.....	14
2.2.3. Science Expertise and Populism.....	15
2.2.4. Post-Truth Era, Populism and Science Expertise.....	16
2.2.4.1. Digital Media.....	18
2.2.4.2. Conspirational Thinking.....	18
2.2.5. Synthesis of Science Debates in Populism and Democracy.....	19
2.3. The Empirical Cases of Science in Populism: the COVID-19 Pandemic and Climate Change.....	21
2.3.1.Climate Change.....	21

2.3.2. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies.....	23
2.3.3. General Implications Regarding Empirical Studies.....	25
3. CASE STUDY: 2021 PRE-ELECTION TERM IN GERMANY.....	26
3.1. Case Selection.....	26
3.2. Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Chancellor Candidate Olaf Scholz.....	27
3.3. The Rising Populist Right in Germany: The AfD Party.....	28
3.4. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Climate Change Politics in 2021 Pre-Election Term in Germany.....	30
3.4.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies .....	30
3.4.2. Climate Change Policies.....	32
4. METHOD.....	34
4.1. Qualitative Research Methods.....	34
4.2. Qualitative Content Analysis.....	34
4.3. Building Coding Frame.....	36
4.4. Data.....	38
4.5. Reliability.....	38
5. ANALYSIS.....	40
5.1. Category 1: Comparison of Populist and Non-Populist on COVID-19 Pandemic, Vaccine and Climate Change Policies.....	42
5.1.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies: The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla .....	40
5.1.2. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz.....	44
5.1.3. Climate Change Policies: The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla .....	45

5.1.4. Climate Change Policies: Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz.....	47
5.1.5. The Synthesis of the Populist to Non-Populist Comparison on Climate Change and COVID- 19 and Vaccine Policies.....	49
5.2. Category 2: Attitudes Towards Restriction Policies on COVID- 19 Pandemic, Vaccine and Climate Change.....	51
5.2.1. The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla.....	52
5.2.2. Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz.....	54
5.3. Category 3: Evaluation of Economic Interests Based on Climate Change and COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies.....	56
5.3.1. The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla.....	56
5.3.2. Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz.....	58
5.4. Category 4: Attitudes Towards International Institutions.....	60
5.5. Category 5: Attitudes Towards Science Experts and Institutions.....	62
5.6. Category 6: Disinformation.....	64
6. DISCUSSION.....	66
6.1 Generalizability Limitations.....	69
CONCLUSION.....	70
REFERENCES.....	70



## ABSTRACT

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POPULIST AND NON-POPULIST APPROACHES TO SCIENCE-BASED POLICIES: THE CASES OF CLIMATE CHANGE, COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VACCINE CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2021 PRE- ELECTION TERM OF GERMANY

Besna DENİZ AĞAR

Master's Thesis in Global Politics and International Relations

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işıl Cerem Cenker Özek

June 2023; 82 pages

This study explains the differences between populist and non-populist approaches toward science-based debates which have been increasing in recent times such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, vaccine campaigns and climate change. This study compared the populist leaders of the Alternative for Germany Party (Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen) and Olaf Scholz as a non-populist who is the chancellor candidate of the SPD Party. The comparison was made via their tweets focusing on the last 4-months period of Germany's 2021 election period. The most prominent finding of the triangle of populism, science and democracy is that policies based on scientific knowledge and the principle of public representation of democracy are not always comprehensive mutually. Although some studies underline more ideology-based factors, this study explains how populism-based discourses, such as the general will of the people, shaped attitudes toward science-based policies and host ideologies of populism such as right-wing and left-wing only played a reinforcement role. According to the comparison of the tweets of Olaf Scholz and AfD Party leaders; *i*) While populist leaders attacked restrictive policies regarding climate change and the COVID-19 Pandemic, Scholz emphasized that restrictive policies are vital and necessary, *ii*) while populist leaders totally prioritized the economical interests of the citizens against restrictive policies, Olaf Scholz interpreted as constructive the economic consequences of green industry transformation *iii*) While Scholz underlined the great importance of international cooperation, populist leaders mentioned little or didn't support the cooperation of international organizations on climate change and the COVID-19 Pandemic *iv*) While Scholz made no references to scientists, populist leaders openly attacked scientists and scientific institutions *v*) While Scholz did not include any disinformation, Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen who is the leader of the AfD appealed to disinformation in his some tweets.

**KEYWORDS:** Climate change, election campaign, Germany, populism, science, the COVID-19 Pandemic, vaccine campaigns

**COMMITTEE:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işıl Cerem CENKER ÖZEK

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nermin AYDEMİR ÇAVUŞ

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Senem ATVUR

## ÖZET

# BİLİME DAYALI POLİTİKALARDA POPÜLİST VE POPÜLİST OLMAYAN YAKLAŞIMLAR ARASINDAKİ FARKLAR: ALMANYA 2021 SEÇİM DÖNEMİ ÖRNEĞİNDE İKLİM DEĞİŞİKLİĞİ, KOVİD-19 PANDEMİSİ VE AŞI POLİTİKALARI

Besna DENİZ AĞAR

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Küresel Siyaset ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Işıl Cerem Cenker Özek

Haziran 2023; 82 sayfa

Bu çalışma, COVID-19 Pandemisi, aşı kampanyaları ve iklim değişikliği gibi son zamanlarda artan bilim temelli tartışmalara yönelik popülist ve popülist olmayan yaklaşımlar arasındaki farkları açıklamaktadır. Almanya'nın 2021 seçim döneminin son 4 aylık periyodu odak alınarak popülist lider örneğinde Almanya için Alternatif Partisi'nin liderleri ile (Tino Chrupalla ve Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen) ve popülist olmayan lider örneğinde SPD Partisi'nin şansölye adayı Olaf Scholz'un söylemleri detaylı olarak tweet üzerinden karşılaştırılmıştır. Popülizm, bilim ve demokrasi üçgeninin en belirgin bulgusu, bilimsel bilgiye dayalı politikalar ile demokrasinin kamusal temsil ilkesinin her zaman karşılıklı olarak kapsayıcı olmamasıdır. Bazı araştırmalar daha çok ideoloji temelli faktörlerin altını çizse de, bu çalışma popülizm temelli söylemlerin, örneğin halkın genel iradesi gibi, bilim temelli politikalara yönelik tutumları nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve popülizme ev sahipliği yapan sağ ve sol merkezli ideolojilerin yalnızca popülistlerin söylemleri bilim temelli politikalarda pekiştirici bir rol oynadığını gösteriyor. Olaf Scholz ve AfD Parti liderlerinin tweetlerinin karşılaştırmasına göre, *i*) Scholz kısıtlayıcı politikaların hayati önem taşıdığını vurgularken, popülist liderler iklim değişikliği ve COVID-19 Pandemisi ile ilgili kısıtlayıcı politikalara saldırdı, *ii*) popülist liderler kısıtlayıcı politikalara karşı tamamen vatandaşların ekonomik çıkarlarını ön planda tutarken, Olaf Scholz yeşil endüstri dönüşümü olarak adlandırdığı ekonominin sonuçlarını yapıcı çerçevede ele aldı, *iii*) Scholz uluslararası iş birliğine büyük derecede önem verirken, popülist liderler uluslararası kuruluşların iklim değişikliği ve COVID-19 Salgını ile ilgili işbirliğine yok denecek kadar az yer verdi ve desteklemedi, *iv*) Scholz bilim insanlarının herhangi bir atıfta bulunmazken, popülist liderler bilim uzmanlarına ve bilimsel kurumlara açıkça saldırdı, *v*) Scholz herhangi bir dezenformasyona yer vermezken, AfD liderlerinden Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen bazı tweetlerinde dezenformasyona yer verdi.

**ANAHTAR KELİMELER:** Almanya, aşı kampanyaları, bilim, iklim değişikliği, Kovid-19 Pandemisi, popülizm, seçim kampanyası

**JÜRİ:** Doç. Dr. Işıl Cerem CENKER ÖZEK

Doç. Dr. Nermin AYDEMİR ÇAVUŞ

Doç. Dr. Senem ATVUR

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>EU</b>	:European Union
<b>PVV</b>	:Party for Freedom
<b>AfD</b>	:Alternative for Germany
<b>SPD</b>	:Social Democratic Party of Germany
<b>FPÖ</b>	:Freedom Party of Austria
<b>IPCC</b>	:Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>UK</b>	:United Kingdom
<b>USA</b>	:United States of America
<b>WHO</b>	:World Health Organization
<b>CDU</b>	:Christian Democratic Union of Germany
<b>FDP</b>	:Free Democratic Party
<b>PEGIDA</b>	:Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the West
<b>UN</b>	:United Nations
<b>QCA</b>	:Qualitative Content Analysis
<b>WWF</b>	:World Wide Fund for Nature
<b>FFF</b>	:Fridays for Future
<b>STIKO</b>	:Standing Committee on Vaccination

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 4.1.</b> The coding frame of tweets of the AfD Party leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla.....	37
---	----

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 5.1.</b> The proportion of collected tweets by both party leaders during the pre-election term.....	40
<b>Figure 5.2.</b> The proportion of common themed tweets in total tweets.....	41
<b>Figure 5.3.</b> The proportion of tweets about climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic in all tweets.....	42
<b>Figure 5.4.</b> The proportion of tweets by both party leaders about climate change And the COVID-19 pandemic.....	42

## PREFACE

Three years of master's degree process was one of my not only most challenging but also the learning process that I took an important step toward my future goals. In every course, I attended during one year, although the courses were online, I was fully motivated because of my dear department professors who are I. Cerem Cenker Özek, Dicle Korkmaz, Toygar Halistoprak, Didem Çakmaklı İşler, Murat Kasapsaraçoğlu and Tarık Oğuzlu. I couldn't imagine learning that much and shaping my academic process in the most fruitful way before I started this academic process. I'm grateful to my all professors. Also, I would like to thank my dear professors, Nermin Aydemir Çavuş and Aslı Elitsoy. I had a chance to work as an assistant researcher in their TÜBİTAK research project. During one year, I not only improved myself a lot but also shaped my future goals because of this valuable experience. I'm grateful for their endless support.

The thesis writing process is rather challenging and I couldn't imagine that without the support of my one and only Cerem Hocam this process would be that much full of the learning process. During the most trying times, she always enlightened my way and believed me more than I believe in myself. I am grateful for her endless patience, sincere encouragement and full of motivation. I have learned countless things from her. I'm feeling very lucky of being a student of Cerem Hocam. Thank you Cerem Hocam.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family members. I was inspired a lot by my uncle Adnan's mini library during take a decision on my thesis topic. I would like to appreciate my dear uncle Yakup, aunt Keriman, cousins Firat, Gamze and Gaye for their support. I'm grateful to my sister Neslihan and father Arif for their encouragement. I'm grateful to my mother. She is the person who believed in me most during the process. I always feel that she is proud of me. Thank you mother. I would like to thank my dearest friends Büşra and Elif. I can't imagine completing this process without their support. Munise thank you for your sincere motivation. I also thank my friends Can, Eldane, Ömer, Burak, Mert, Recep, Desart, Vera, and Reda for their support. Lastly, I thank myself...

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother Nafiye and the people who lost their lives like her in the 6 February Earthquake. This day will remain as one of the darkest days for our country. Science and science-based non-biased politics are indispensable for human life. I would like to finish my preface with Atatürk's quote;

*"If one day, my words are against science, choose science."*

— Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of populist parties has been recently threatening many European Union countries, such as PVV (Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands, AfD (Alternative for Germany) in Germany, and FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) in Austria. They have increased their seats in the parliaments of their countries in recent years. There are examples of populist parties that have come to power in EU countries such as Hungary, Poland, and Italy. Along with that, populist parties have also seats in the European Parliament. One of the main reasons for the growing populist wave has been the economic decline in these countries. While globalization is effective in developing the economy as a whole, it negatively affects small and local economies and causes rising unemployment in the country. Thus, the rising economic insecurity of citizens causes the rise of populist politics. Besides that, the dominance of international institutions over countries' economic policies triggers the reinforcement of populist leaders based on nationalist discourses (Berman, 2020; Papaioannou, 2018; Colgan and Keohane, 2017; Zakaria, 2016; Deiwiks, 2009). Besides economic concerns, cultural crises such as the refugee crisis in 2015 and terrorist attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also contributed to the strength of populist parties in Europe (Caiani and Graziano, 2019).

Mudde (2004) defines populism as a thin-centered ideology. This ideology sets the morally pure people against the morally corrupt elites. The people are seen as virtuous, and the corrupt elites are seen as illegitimate (Mudde, 2004). Accordingly, the general will of the people rhetoric of populism emerged between the two. Besides Mudde's approach, in Weyland's conception of populism, people need a charismatic leader for their mobilization; hence, the leader is the main component of the discussion of populism. Weyland focuses on what populist leaders 'do' rather than what they say (Weyland, 2017). Lastly, according to Ostiguy (2017), populist leaders focus on the performative side of politics by establishing a close relationship with the public. In this concept, the leader's clothing style, gestures, and folksy language are instruments of this close relationship between the leader and the people (Ostiguy, 2017).

While the dominance of the political institutions is supported by the pragmatic side of democracy, people's sovereignty rhetoric of populism highlights the redemptive side of democracy (Canovan, 1999). When populist leaders attacked political institutions, the issue of representation was at the forefront of their rhetoric. Populists advocate the supremacy of the general will of the people. Therefore, populist leaders undermine policies if they interpret that the institutions ignore the general will of the people principle of democracy. According to Mudde (2017), the representation issue emphasized by populist leaders is fed by the hostility that populists create between the elites and the people. Populists assert that the elites undermine the socioeconomic and representational rights of the people. Based on the antagonism between the elites and the people, populists express not only the socio-economic and representational level issues but also national interests that are adopted by the right-wing ideology (Mudde, 2017). Along with that, populists highlight the anti-elite discourse more in times of crisis because they have the opportunity to present valid arguments to distinguish the people from the elite (Moffit, 2014). In times of crisis, populists tend to accuse political institutions with more concrete arguments. Accordingly, when economic crises escalate, populist leaders are more visible, and populism gains more strength. For example, the Great Recession led populist leaders to come to power in Spain, Greece, and Portugal (Pappas and Kriesi, 2015).

This study focuses on a populist approach toward science-based debates. More specifically, it problematizes the populist and non-populist approaches in science-related policies such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic cases. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started all around the world in 2020, the explanations of science experts about the virus and vaccines have shaped the policies of the pandemic. The environment of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to a greater need for scientific studies and explanations by scientists. Discussions on how the COVID-19 virus spread and how people can take measures against it were among the most discussed headlines. In addition to that, the questions about the reliability of COVID-19 vaccines and the vaccine choice among different alternatives set the political agenda. Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing effects of the climate change issue have been experienced across the world, such as increasing flood disasters, forest fires, and drought in recent years. According to that, the problems that are threatened by climate change and the suggestions of scientists are more important than before. Therefore, political leaders have put the issues of climate change and the proposed policies on the agenda. Unlike pandemic policies, those policies regarding climate change have been covering a longer period of time, concerning many different areas from the economy to health, and demanding more radical changes in the daily life of people. Depending on these current developments regarding science based debates, this study asks how populist leaders differ from non-populist leaders on science-related policies, using the examples of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mede and Schäfer (2020) suggest that, populist leaders attack scientists and scientific institutions as not representing the general will of the people. The policies that are based on the decisions of scientists are interpreted by populists as far from the citizens' daily life practices. Along with that, populist leaders interpret the dominance of scientific experts on political decisions as technocratic rather than democratic. Rather, populists suggest that "truth-speaking sovereignty" and "decision-making sovereignty" should belong to the people's will (Mede and Schäfer, 2020). However, Collins and Evan (2020) suggest that the contribution of scientists to the decision-making process is part of the check and balance systems of democracies (Collins and Evan, 2020). Also, Brown (2009) suggests that science can solve problems as long as it keeps a distance from society and political decisions. However, reaching a consensus only among scientists and making a policy about science-related issues gives rise to criticism of being elitist and secretive by populists (Brown, 2009).

Politicians play the role of mediators between scientists and the public in democratic regimes. Accordingly, the public chooses their representatives to decide on various issues that require technical, and scientific knowledge and expertise in representative democracies. However, the cleavage emerges when the policies do not represent public opinion. Science experts and participatory democracies can be divided into two groups: those who represent common sense and those who defend/protect the idealized model of science (Kitcher, 2001). While common sense emphasizes the local culture and conditions of time and place, science focuses on universal facts (Brown, 2009). Accordingly, politicians either choose the way of making policy about science-related issues between the policies based on technical knowledge and the policies based on the demands of the people or mediate between them. But populist political actors play a role in representing common sense. If science-related policies undermine the socio-

economic status of the people and national interests, populist leaders propose alternative policies or attack proposed policies. Besides undermining scientific knowledge, populist political actors may benefit from scientific knowledge when the scientists share a common view of ideas with them (Boecher et al., 2022).

According to the concept of the post-truth era, issues which require scientific and technical knowledge such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, can be treated as just simple ideas or alternative facts. As a result of this type of skepticism about scientific knowledge, scientists are paradoxically invited to be more open and transparent in their specialized areas. Participation in and communication about scientific expertise have become necessary to discuss the truth (Waisbord, 2018). However, the democratization of science triggers populists' rejection of science and damages scientific institutions (Smart et al, 2019). Especially in social media, the people-centric approach of populism sees experiences, emotions, and common sense as more valid than empirical studies. Along with that, anti-elite rhetoric can easily override established expert knowledge. This binary view of populist politics can prefer alternative facts to empirical evidence in the social media environment (Hameleers, 2020).

In times of crisis, the main purpose of populist policies is to express people's economic and moral concerns rather than to find solutions to problems. Based on the cases of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, while some populist political actors attack scientists, scientific institutions, some populists attack only political elites' decisions and policies under sub-dimensions of populism which are the elites and the people (Eberl et al., 2023). Countries led by populist leaders during the pandemic period ranked first in the number of cases, such as the USA, Brazil, and the UK. For example, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil attacked the Supreme Court and fired two health ministers. The Trump administration wanted to cancel funding for the Disease Control Center. Besides, the scientific evidence presented by the political and academic elites was rejected. In addition to that, Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump spread misinformation about the treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic such as the treatment of hydroxychloroquine and the COVID-19 pandemic being a "plandemic" they asserted (McKee et al, 2020). Along with that, AfD Party members declared that they would not be vaccinated, and they supported lockdown protests in Germany (Lehmann and Zehnter, 2022). Besides, Turkey took serious pandemic measures, but the government administration followed policies that would serve its economic interests rather than considering the pandemic restrictions. For example, shopping malls opened while playgrounds remained closed in the country (Balta and Özel, 2022).

According to the climate change case, the AfD leaders didn't support building wind turbines and they also triggered polarization among the citizens about building wind turbines in the backyards of houses in Germany (Ottens and Weisskircher, 2022). Along with that, populists affect citizens' belief in scientists and scientific institutions regarding the climate change issue in Austria. For example, populist citizens support the idea that climate change is not caused by humans. Also, they prefer to keep their economic interests or limit the restriction policies. In addition to that, regardless of ideology, the anti-elite attitude and lack of representation emphasis of populists were supported by the public in policies related to climate change. As a result, economic concerns were more prioritized than the climate change in populist politics. Besides Austria, the right-wing populist

parties in other countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland prioritized citizens' economic interests rather than decarbonization policies (Huber et al, 2021).

The aim of this study is to analyze how populists differ from non-populists in the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine and climate change policies under the concept of science-related issues. This study is considered a single-country case study as it examines the leaders of the two parties based in one country over a period of time. Climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies have set the agenda of election campaigns in the 2021 elections in Germany. Accordingly, this study focused on the attitudes of the leaders of the two political parties, Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Social Democrats Party of Germany (SPD) towards climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies during Germany's 2021 pre-election period. On the one hand, the populist leaders of the AfD, Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen, and the chancellor candidate, Olaf Scholz from SPD were compared via their tweets between May 25, 2021 and September 26, 2021. Totally, 688 tweets were collected manually from three political party leaders during the 4-month pre-election period. However, 157 tweets were analyzed which were related to climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic based on the research question of the study.

Firstly, based on the three approaches to populism which are socio-cultural, political-strategic and dominantly ideational, a populist to a non-populist comparison was made according to all collected data in focused cases. For example, it was interpreted based on the ideational approach whether the rhetoric of the elites, the people and the general will of the people were implied in the focused cases. Not only the ideational approach but also the socio-cultural and political-strategic approaches were included in the comparison. As a result, all collected data was coded as populist or non-populist in a category based on different populism concepts. After that, in the second stage, a more detailed analysis was carried out. The collected data were categorized based on both the concept and the data-driven, and the analysis was made in five more different categories. The categories revealed the points at which populist leaders differed from non-populists in their policies on COVID-19, vaccines, and climate change. In other words, tweets were interpreted first in terms of populism, then in terms of whether they attacked scientists or scientific studies, restrictive policies, international organizations, the economic consequences of policies, and finally, whether they appealed to disinformation about science-based information. Thus, populist vs non-populist discourses were interpreted not only towards the elites level, but also towards scientists, scientific institutions, and protectionist policies of the focused cases.

For this study, the qualitative content analysis method was used. The qualitative content analysis helped analyze the collected tweets not only in the context of the whole text but also at the level of sentences and words. In addition to that, the categorization process, which is the most important process of qualitative content analysis, helped to outline this study. In total, six different categories of coding frames were built. These categories were listed as follows: the first category compared all data according to populist and non-populist views; the second was a populist to non-populist comparison, followed by attitudes toward scientists. The third category focused on their attitudes toward restrictive and protectionist policies. The subsequent category analyzed their attitudes toward the economic consequences of these policies, and the other one analyzed how their attitudes toward international organizations differed. The last category analyzed

whether populist and non-populist leaders appealed to disinformation about the focused cases.

According to the first category, which is distinguishing populists from non-populists, the most prominent rhetoric that reveals the populists is the “general will of the people” concept. The AfD leaders accused the government and opposition parties, based on the pandemic and climate change policies, of being away from the representation of public opinion of the people. They referred to the sovereignty of the people as a principle of democratic regimes regarding restriction policies for the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Furthermore, Meuthen and Chrupalla accused the opposition parties and the government of being authoritarian about the policies that they proposed. Along with that, populist leaders attacked opposition party leaders and the government in an improper way of political expression. For example, Meuthen and Chrupalla attacked the government, political elites and science experts in sarcastic language. They blamed the government for being dishonest and deceiving the people.

According to the second category, populist leaders attacked the protectionist and restrictive policies proposed by the government and scientists regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change issues. Meuthen and Chrupalla claimed that these policies were authoritarian forms of government policy. For example, they interpreted the lockdown policy during the pandemic period as a policy that violates people's fundamental freedoms as it restricts their freedom of movement. So they supported the lockdown protests. They criticized the precautionary policies in a sarcastic way of expression and they underestimated the importance of climate change policies. The next category compared the economical consequences of restrictive policies and the prioritization of the environment and the health of citizens, where differences between Scholz and AfD leaders were remarkably observed. While Scholz committed that the new industry developed based on climate change and economic development will reinforce each other in a holistic way, Meuthen and Chrupalla stated that the climate-neutral industry makes the elites richer and puts citizens in an economically difficult situation. Moreover, AfD leaders denied the existence of climate change.

For the COVID-19 pandemic case, AfD leaders attacked the mandatory testing and the wage cut policies for unvaccinated citizens when they were in quarantine. According to them, like the climate change policies, these policies also served corrupt elites and were discriminatory among citizens. For the following category, Scholz argued that international organizations strengthen solidarity in tackling global problems. Therefore, he believed that Germany should play a leading role in international politics. On the other hand, AfD leaders argued that these organizations do not serve the benefits of the country and citizens. According to the fifth category, when Meuthen and Chrupalla attacked scientists and scientific institutions, they accused them of being dishonest and collaborating with the political elites. They were skeptical about the explanations and suggestions claimed by the institutions and the experts. Lastly, while Scholz did not appeal to any disinformation, Meuthen appealed to it from time to time about the existence of climate change. All in all, populists attacked scientists, restrictive policies, and the negative economic consequences of them, scientific institutions, and international organizations under the “general will of the people” concept of populism. Main findings of the present study shows that populists continue to keep their people sovereignty and the anti-elites rhetoric in science-based debates. Regardless of the vital importance of the

pandemic and climate change issues, populists appealed to attacking restrictive policies of scientific institutions, experts and political elites. Along with that, in order to undermine restrictive policies and their negative economic effects, populists appealed to disseminate disinformation about the pandemic and climate change.

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Following this introduction chapter, the literature review provides an insight into the subject in question and the related developments that have taken place in recent times. After a discussion of different concepts of populism, the parts of science in populism and democracy in literature present a comprehensive review of the science and populism relationship. In order to frame the relationship between the two in detail, besides the relationship between populism and democratic institutions, the relationship between scientific expertise and democracy is fundamentally discussed. This part of the literature gives insight into which vulnerable aspects of science and scientific expertise can be undermined by populist political actors. Thus, the conceptual puzzle is drawn as a triangle of populism, science and democracy principles. Accordingly, the conflicting values between the basic arguments of populism and scientific expertise are highlighted. The following part of the literature explains how populists' discourses about scientific studies were shaped by the effects of the post-truth era. Particularly, it was mentioned about social media, disinformation and conspiracy theories, which are the most important determinants of the post-truth era.

The third chapter explains why and how the qualitative content analysis method was used in this study. According to the analysis chapter, the detailed empirical findings of the approaches of populist and non-populist leaders to science-related issues were presented regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The findings of the populist-to-non-populist comparison give detailed information under six evaluation categories. The thesis ends with discussion and conclusion chapters that indicate the main contributions to previous similar studies as well as how it differs from them, expressed basically.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Populism: The Conceptual Discussions

Populism has been a popular and highly debated concept in literature. Shils (1962), for instance, asserted the roots of populism in the process of modernization as he drew attention to the difference between the rural and the metropolis. He used the concepts of "simplicity, people's sovereignty and dichotomy" when describing populism. Along similar lines, Taggart (2000) suggested that the formation of social classes brought about by modernization provided an opportunity for populist policies. Rather than the process of modernization, Canavan (1999) stressed democracy as constituting the root of populism. According to Canavan, there are two faces of democracy: the redemptive face and the pragmatic face. The redemptive face argues that people are the only force and the source of authority in a democratic state. Alternatively, the pragmatic face emphasizes the political ideas, institutions and procedures of a democratic state. The pragmatic face of democracy emphasizes the principle of "coping peacefully" in economic crises or political conflicts and puts less emphasis on the general will of the people. The pragmatic face is about performance, whereas the redemptive face is about promises, and for Canavan democracy, the contradiction between promise and performance gives an opportunity for the emergence of populist politicians (Canavan, 1999).

In this section, a series of approaches to populism are discussed that incorporate aspects of modernity and democracy in their discussions of populism. Though these conceptual foundations feature in those approaches, they are also different in the extent to which they treat concepts of the people, the elite, the leader, and the popular will. More specifically, these approaches are the ideology-centered approach, the political-strategic approach, and the socio-cultural and politico-cultural approaches.

#### 2.1.1. An Ideational Approach: Cas Mudde

Mudde defines populism as "*a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people*" (Mudde, 2004, p.543). Populism is ideologically against elitism and pluralism. The elitism shapes politics according to moral elites rather than amoral people. In contrast, pluralism supports the heterogeneity of individuals and groups in society. Pluralism doesn't separate society into two polar groups like elitism and populism (Mudde, 2004).

Cas Mudde suggests "populism" is a thin-centered ideology. Thin-centered ideologies don't have a broad sense of ambition. Essentially, populism is not a left- or right-wing ideology in general. Populist leaders combine left or right ideological ideas with populism (Mudde, 2021). Populism doesn't offer deep and strong political solutions to societal problems. Rather, it uses simple language and provides general advice; hence, it sets the societal problems in a narrower framework. According to Mudde, the "morality" concept is central to populism as a thin-centered ideology (Mudde, 2017). This ideology sets the morally pure people against the morally corrupt elites. The people are seen as virtuous, and the corrupt elites are seen as illegitimate and evil (Mudde, 2004).

Mudde divides populism into three core concepts which are “the people”, “the elites” and “the general will”. “The people” concept is the most important component of populism (Mudde, 2017). Populism defines the people as an “imagined community”. Reflecting populist logic, the populist leaders argue to represent the people who are abused and deceived by the elites (Mudde, 2004). According to Mudde, the people can take on three different meanings. These are the people as “sovereign”, as a “socio-economic status” and as a “nation” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

“The people as sovereign” rhetoric emphasizes that the ultimate source of the decision-making mechanism is the pure people. It is believed that the people are not represented by the elites properly. Populist political actors portray themselves as the voice of the people. The people’s rhetoric not only mobilizes the people but also flares them up against defined enemies such as political parties and big organizations. Secondly, “the common people” is conceptualized in terms of the socioeconomic status of “the people” vs “the elites”. Populist politicians touch upon the cultural traditions, economic status, and popular values of the people which are despised by the dominant elite culture. Populist leaders create an image whereby the common people are despised by the elites because of their socioeconomic status. Lastly, “the people as the nation” stresses the nativist culture. The interest of the national community and the culture of ethnicity distinguish the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

The second core concept of populism, according to Mudde, is “the corrupt elites”. The distinction between the people and the elites occurs in a moralistic framework (Mudde, 2017). While the elites are illegitimate, corrupt and evil, the people are pure and virtuous. The elites can be cultural elites, media elites, or political elites. The elites sustain political power for their special interests. Populist politicians assert that political elites and economic elites collaborate to deceive people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). The other reason of the tension between the elites and the people is the economic power of the elites. However, Mudde adds that whether populist politicians have economic power or not is not a key point for defining the elite. Rather, the key point is the moral framework in which the elites are put. The elites are categorically immoral, and this immorality defines the elites. Lastly, populism blames political elites as agents of non-majoritarian segments of society such as minorities or immigrants. Then, this type of agency is also immoral (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

Lastly, the concept of “general will of the people” which defines populism, emerged from the elites versus the people antagonism. Populism prioritizes the different demands of the people. It blames the representative government system for not meeting the participation demands of the people. Besides the government, institutions like the EU are criticized for neglecting the demands of the public. Along with that, the “general will of the people” approach of populism emphasizes the homogeneity of the people; those who don’t belong to the demos are excluded and labeled as enemies (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Populists reject possible diversity and pluralism based on the concept of the people. Plurality requires the “art of compromise”, but populists believe that the compromise is the defeat (Mudde, 2017).

### 2.1.2. A Political Strategic Approach: Kurt Weyland

The political-strategic approach emphasizes what populist leaders ‘do’ rather than what they say. This approach asks how these leaders pursue their power. “The people” is meaningful to the extent that it provides a basis for power. Weyland argues that populists mobilize the people by appealing to notions such as “the will of the people” or “the sovereign people”. The charismatic leader is foundational in Weyland’s discussion of populism, whereas, the people are the slippery ground as they represent heterogeneous interests and uninformed decisions. In other words, in Weyland’s conception of populism, the people need a charismatic leader for their mobilization; hence, the leader is central to his discussion of populism (Weyland, 2017).

The outstanding leader communicates with his supporters directly through TV and mass rallies. Accordingly, the political strategy in populist politics is the establishment of deliberative communication between the personalistic leader and the people. This strategy is the instrument of power. The political leader controls the government and strengthens the authoritative way of ruling through his strong bonds with the people (Weyland, 2017).

Weyland explains the political strategy of the populists in two main categories. These categories are as follows: “the type of political actor” and “the principal power capability”. The first category, “type of political actor”, stresses the use of power based on personalistic leadership. Weyland suggests that personalistic leadership is more goal-oriented than the complicated machinery of states and politics. Since the personalistic leader is more independent, the policy-making process is more decisive, faster, and easier. The centrality of personalistic leadership is at odds with the centrality of political parties in representative democracies. According to Weyland, rather than the discourse, deeds show more concrete solutions. Therefore, populists in general dominate opponents, elites and established political members. In addition to that, the anti-elite rhetoric is a tool, and without this tool, personalistic leadership is less powerful (Weyland, 2017).

The second category for populist political strategy is “principal power capability”. The principal power capability strategy can be numerical. The numbers of people are crucial, such as in the “one vote, one person” approach. Mass rallies represent the power of the personalistic leader. For instance, the rising opinion poll rates indicate the importance of the quantity of support the populists target. Another principal power capability is the “special weight”. More specifically, some sectors are capable of dominating political decisions. Politicians give more special weight to some sectors or issues, especially if a private business claims their demands or the military rattles its sobers. If the demands that are offered by the private business of the military are not met by the government, the consequences may be revealed in costly ways like hunger strikes. Liberal democracies allow negotiating with business and interest groups lobbying in parliament. On the other hand, populism interprets these negotiations as an elitist strategy. Therefore, populist political actors count on mass rallies rather than a different group of people. In other words, rather than group-based strategies, plebiscites, referendums, or elections are often organized to reinforce a populist leader’s position (Weyland, 2017).

### 2.1.3. Socio-Cultural Approach: Pierre Ostiguy

*“Populism is characterized by a particular form of political relationship between political leaders and a social basis, one established and articulated through “low” appeals which resonate and receive positive reception within particular sectors of society for socio-cultural historical reasons. We define populism, in very few words, as the “flaunting of the ‘low’ (Ostiguy, 2017, p.121). Ostiguy defines populism as “a notion of the low” and “a notion of the public flaunting” in politics. According to this definition, populist leaders focus on the performative side of doing politics by establishing close relationships with the public. In this framework, a leader’s clothing style, his gestures, and a folksy language are instruments of the leader-people relationship.*

Firstly; Ostiguy suggests that populist leaders are subjective politicians. Rather than using neutral and formal language in his/her political discourses, he/she aims to provoke an affectual narrative among the people. Populist political actors aim to attack “nefarious” others for the sake of unrepresented people. In other words, performative politics triggers antagonistic ways of political mobilization. The silent majority or repressed truth is brought onto the agenda with an unconventionally aggressive style of politics. For example, populists claim that the people are deceived by the educated classes or the elites. Therefore, the political elites or representatives are not true representatives of the people. Populists believe that rather than suppression, people who are virtuous deserve real representation (Ostiguy, 2017).

Secondly; the populist leader focuses on the socio-cultural identities of the people. The leader and follower linkage is established through sociocultural values. The sociocultural dimension is connected with society’s history, identity dressing, and emotionally acceptable behaviors. Rather than focus on discourses, Ostiguy focuses on accent, levels of language, and gestures. Even though socio-cultural differences are generally country-specific, they are rarely linked with political preferences. However, populism politicizes sociocultural differences in society. Thus, it creates antagonism among the public based on historical and identity differences (Ostiguy, 2017).

Thirdly; according to Ostiguy, the other dimension of the leader-people linkage is politico-cultural. This dimension focuses on the modes of decision-making and the ways of political leadership. Populist leaders are socially more connected to the people. Close, unmediated, improper, transgressive ways of addressing the voters and provoking expressions are strategies that appeal to the people. It is a way of communicating to voters by saying “one of ours” (Ostiguy, 2017). Populists express themselves as local, transgressive, strong, and personalistic in their political leadership. According to that, being close to the people is more important than being formal, bureaucratic and procedural in politics. Even though they defend participatory politics or public mobilization, they violate the separation of powers rule in liberal democracies. Populist leaders depict themselves as if they have unlimited power against nefarious others (Ostiguy, 2017).

### 2.1.4. Synthesis of Three Approaches

The common and different aspects of all three different approaches to populism were used in this study. The common emphasis of the approaches is populist leaders'

rhetoric of people's sovereignty. The populist leader represents himself as a hero for the sake of the "unrepresented people", "silent majority", or "pure people". Political elites are portrayed as responsible for the unrepresented majority. The general framework is drawn as follows: while the people are shown as victims, the elites are blamed for being responsible for the victims. The reason for the tension between the two is that "common sense" is not represented by the political elites. The different parts of the three understandings emphasize "the style of doing politics of populist leaders". While Mudde evaluates populist discourses on the basis of a thin-centered ideology in a morality framework, Weyland evaluates the political actions that are taken by populist politics or the form of government rather than discourses. On the other hand, Ostiguy evaluates the leader's communication style with the people in a socio-cultural and political-cultural framework.

Firstly, this study focused on the moralistic framework which is described in the thin-centered ideology approach of Cas Mudde. According to this study, one of the most obvious indicators of distinguishing the populist leader from the non-populist leader is based on the distinction between political elites regarding a moral framework: corrupt elites and pure people. The moral framework is emphasized not only in political representation but also in cultural, national identity and economic concerns. According to this distinction, the moral sense is also included to provoke the nefarious feelings of the people. For example, the distinction made in a moral sense also causes the discourses that underline the socio-cultural differences between the elites and the people that are underlined by Ostiguy. More specifically, populists refer to historical and identity differences. As a result, using transgressive language against the elites becomes valid in some segments of society depending on the people's economic and educational levels, and it provides an affective narrative to some extent.

Another approach, which is Weyland's "type of political actor", helps to distinguish the populist leader from the non-populist leader. Weyland associates the mobilization strategy of populist leaders based on the factor of political deeds. The populist leader plays the role of a goal-oriented, redeemer and charismatic leader. Accordingly, populist leaders do not see any political power as an obstacle to take fast and easy political decisions in times of political crisis. As a result, this populist attitude wins a vote of confidence from the audience that the leader targets. At this point, a similarity can be established with Ostiguy's political-strategic explanation. Ostiguy suggests that populists express themselves as local, transgressive, strong, and personalistic in their political leadership. Therefore, being close to the people is more important than being formal, bureaucratic and procedural in politics. The type of communication between the people and the leader helps populists be more independent from the bureaucratic sides of politics.

Overall, this study's approach to distinguishing the populist from the non-populist was eclectic, with no emphasis on a single approach to populism. The political aim of the populist leader is to reinforce the general will of the people. According to that, the "pure people vs. corrupt elites" rhetoric based on a moral framework is used as a tool to mobilize the people. Secondly, the way the populist leader communicates with the public and the expression style, as stated by Ostiguy, are taken as evaluation criteria. Besides, the style of taking political action which eliminates institutions and stresses the importance of an

action-oriented or “strong political leader” approach that is underlined by Weyland was taken as another evaluation criteria in this study.

## **2.2. Science in Populism and Democracy Debate**

### **2.2.1. Populism and Democracy Relationship**

The “anti-elite” and “people sovereignty”-focused themes of populism shape the relationship of populist leaders with democratic institutions outside of liberal democratic norms. The main line of discussions about the conflict between democracy and populist politics are emphasized in this section. Particular emphasis is placed on the issue of liberal democratic institutions’ representation, which allows populism to gain strength. Along with that, the ways in which populist leaders try to undermine democratic institutions and reinforce their power at the individual level are explained in this section.

In her influential article, Canovan (1999) underlines democracy’s two different faces, which are the redemptive face and the pragmatic face. According to Canovan, the tension and interdependency between these two faces trigger the emergence of populism. The pragmatic face of democracy is about the procedures of democratic policymaking. Hence, it is mostly about peaceful and legal reconciliation of conflicting interests. According to the procedural definitions of democracy, power should be divided among different organs of the state and the representatives should be accountable to the people. As a result, the checks and balances system in democracies limits the power of individuals. According to the pragmatic face of democracy, free and fair elections, multi-party systems, and pressure groups are tools to cope peacefully with sometimes rather conflictual political issues (Canovan, 1999).

Another face of democracy is the redemptive side. The redemptive face highlights the people-centric side of democratic regimes. After all, the representation of the people is the main priority of democratic regimes. Hence, in democracies, the legitimate authority to rule comes from the people. In a way, the redemptive side of democracy promises salvation to the people at large. Therefore, this side of democracy may have an anti-institutional and rather emotional component (Canovan, 1999).

According to Mudde, populists in general put more emphasis on the redemptive side of democracy. Mudde evaluates populism both as anti-political and uber-political. According to populism; the sovereignty of the people is the main foundation of democracies. Therefore, populism refuses to compromise with the legitimate opposition, and it adopts everything for the “will of the people” approach. In other words, populism denies the limitation of the power of the majority (Mudde, 2021). Moreover, due to increasing education levels and the spread of technological innovations, people nowadays have high cognitive mobilization. Accordingly, they are capable of comprehending politics and processing political information. In other words, the citizens are more sympathetic to the participatory model of democracy (Mudde, 2004).

While modern democracies defend all divisions of representation between representatives and the represented, populism defends unity in the name of the people. Because the unity of the people is needed to overcome the dishonest elites (Singer, 2021). According to Mudde, the populists take advantage of changes that take place on the

demand side of politics. Therefore, they put emphasis on the people's sovereignty rhetoric when they address the people. As it is explained in the previous section, the representation of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people is central to populist politics. Accordingly, populist leaders' preferences for the tools of direct democracy such as plebiscites, referendums, and frequent elections are unsurprising. These mechanisms of direct democracy shorten the distance between the ruler and the ruled, and they strengthen the unmediated relationship between the leader and the masses (Mudde, 2004).

In order to describe the relationship between the representation of the people and the liberal democracy principles, Mounk (2018) underlines the undemocratic nature of national regulatory agencies as well as international organizations for the concept of rising populism. These institutions are mostly supported by liberal democracies. Mounk asserts that the topics requiring expertise are on both the national and international agenda, such as the climate crisis and the global economic crisis. There has been an increase in the need for expert knowledge, and this need causes the experts to have semi-autonomy in influential organizations and institutions without being elected by the citizens. Along with that, this situation strengthens technocracy in law, bureaucracy, international agreements and central banks (Mounk, 2018). In addition to that, emerging technocratic politics undermines democratic institutions, especially in Europe and North America. In this new political order, the demands of the citizens are not heard effectively. Hence, the responsiveness of the political elite didn't meet the expectations of citizens (Kriesi, 2014, Mounk, 2018). Mudde (2021) argues that the people react due to the representation issue of technocratic politics. Therefore, populist leaders take advantage of the representational gap between technocrats and the people (Mudde, 2021).

Kriesi (2014) particularly examines rising populism in Western Europe. Kriesi underlines that the phenomenon of representation in democracy in Western Europe decreased at the party level. He cited the increasing authority of supranational and international organizations as an example of this. Kriesi defines "partyless democracy" as the loss of representation function of democracies. Legally, parties take on the role of mediator between the public and policymaking. However, voting rates and party memberships have decreased recently. Because of the increased multilevel governance system in Western democracies, decision-making authorities at the European level became less transparent and violated the principle of accountability to their citizens. Thus, supranational institutions dismiss the representation of ruling parties and electorates (Kriesi, 2014).

In summary, the rise of populism is considered an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism (Mudde, 2021, Mounk, 2018). Mudde (2021) proposes that democratic institutions should give more weight to the demands of citizens when they adopt the principles of liberal democracy (Mudde, 2021). Along with that, as Canovan (1999) adds, responsive government politics is based on liberal democratic principles that should be organized against populism. In addition, the role of the political leader can increase in times of crisis because people expect fast and solution-oriented policies. The pragmatic side of democracies may render this expectation worthless. Therefore, national and international institutions and party leaders should adopt more action-oriented policies to undermine the power of populism (Canovan, 1999).

### 2.2.2.Science Expertise and Democracy

Politicians need scientists when they make decisions about science-related issues. But politicians' aim is to gain acceptance from the wider community for their science-related decisions. Therefore, the relationship between scientific expertise and politics is based on political interests (Brown, 2005). Since politicians seek re-election and stay in power in democratic regimes, the evidence-based principle of scientific expertise is valid for politicians, especially when it serves their political interests. When political parties need scientific knowledge, they benefit for the purpose of competing with the opposition. More specifically, Boecher et al. (2022) refer to the integration model of research and political practice. According to this model, practitioners, scientists and political actors negotiate the current or pre-existing science-policy-related issues mutually. As a result, mutual discussions shape the political actions of the political actors (Boecher et al., 2022). Keleş et al. (1993) add that science is integrated into the social structure of the community. Science takes its place in the relationship between economic and political actors (Keleş et al., 2009).

Politicians' science-related policies, which are developed to stay in power, are shaped within the framework of the representation of public opinion. The process of public representation in science-related policies depends on whether the policies put forward by scientists get public approval or not (Collins et al., 2020). In other words, the process of public acceptance of scientific knowledge occurs when it becomes a part of the public's daily practice (Habermas, 2010). Accordingly, it is more important how the public observes and handles scientific policies rather than how scientifically objective the scientists are (Brown, 2009). As a result, politicians' efforts to stay in power may lead them to ignore evidence-based principles of science. This problem may lead politicians to make a choice between applying the evidence-based principle of science and the representation of the public principle of democracy. If politicians consider this type of uncertainty politically costly, they may also be unwilling to mediate between the scientific experts and the public (Kitcher, 2001).

Based on the relationship between scientific expertise and politicians, political actors pinpoint the mediatory role of the latter in conveying science-related issues to the public. Namely, in democracies, politicians play the role of a mediator between scientists and the public (Collins et al., 2020). In representative democracies, the public chooses their representatives to govern on various issues, including those that require technical and scientific knowledge and expertise. The general public assumes that scientists conduct their studies for the larger good of the public. Yet a problem of legitimacy occurs at this point, and this problem comes from the simple fact that the public has never had a full understanding of scientific expertise. In times of crisis, such as COVID-19, for instance, the public may not be willing to accept the scientific principle of uncertainty (Kitcher, 2001). Prettner et al.'s study (2021), which focused on the COVID-19 pandemic case in the Netherlands, provides a good example of this case. The Dutch administration addressed the principle of "speaking truth to power" in its press releases. More specifically, political decisions were made only on the basis of expert knowledge. However, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were lots of uncertainty also among the scientific community. Nevertheless, the Dutch government expected the public to comply with its COVID-19 policies even when scientific information remains uncertain. Besides that, secrecy and elitism played a role due to fewer open public

discussions and the legislature's failure to inform the people during the first phase of the pandemic in the Netherlands (Prettner et al, 2021).

At this point, the problem of representation created by the pragmatic face of liberal democracy, as mentioned in the previous section, is observed in policies related to science. The process of scientific representation is an exacting balance between "will" and "reason," and the institutions which mediate it make little contribution to political representation. Therefore, the cleavage emerges between the science experts and participatory democrats as a contradiction between the representation of common sense and the idealized model of science (Kitcher, 2001). In order to overcome the cleavage between science-based policies and the politicians' aim to stay in power, scientific debates that are more open to the public are necessary. In light of the relationship between science expertise and democracy, the following section focuses on the attitudes of populist political actors toward science-related policies.

### **2.2.3. Science Expertise and Populism**

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) underline that populism believes that the political and economic elites work together to preserve their special interests (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). In this section, populism and science debates have similar political consequences as the relationship between populism and democracy. In order to explain the relationship between scientific expertise and populism, Mede and Schäfer (2020) use the term "science-related populism", and they refer to academic elites as agents of science. Populists set "academic elites" against "ordinary people". This dichotomy comes close to an ideational approach to populism, which underscores populists' simplistic division of society between two rival, hostile camps. Populists' dislike of academic elites comes from the latter's academic freedoms and hence their "decision-making sovereignty" (Mede and Schäfer, 2020). Populists interpret the scientific claims of academic elites as power claims. Secrecy and elitism play a role in scientific debates. According to populists, scientists work "behind closed doors and do what is best for them without public sight" (Mede and Schäfer, 2020, p. 482). Populists doubt academic elites' trust-claims and they find them unreliable. For populists, academic elites are disconnected from ordinary people's everyday lives and practices. Hence, populists understand ordinary people better and prioritize their needs and demands (Mede and Schäfer, 2020). Apart from that, Eberl et al. (2023) suggest that science and political populism differ in trust in government and technocratic preferences. Specifically, two different groups of populists categorize the elites differently and refer to ordinary people for different reasons. While political populists undermine the policies of the elected politicians in science-based decisions, science populists generally attack technocracy-based decisions and scientists. However, political populism triggers decreased trust in science and indirectly leads to science populism in the end (Eberl et al., 2023).

Science and common sense differ in terms of the population they focus on. While common sense emphasizes the local culture and conditions of time and place, science is universal and based on evidence. In other words, while science serves universal interests, populism serves local and temporary interests. When populists' claims are challenged by scientific evidence, populists prefer economically less costly policies and/or, foreign policy-wise, more secure stances. They justify these policy options with their claim to represent "the will of the people" (Brown, 2009). Even in cases where scientific

knowledge is required for political decisions, populists claim to know what is best for the people. Populists interpret open scientific debates as unnecessary. Due to populist assertions that they are the only true representatives of the people, they prefer to solve problems according to their own true knowledge (Boecher et al., 2022). They make this claim on the basis that they are the true representatives of the people. For them, the will of the people is the most powerful authority, even for political decisions that require scientific expertise. Populists do not trust scientists because, according to populists, scientists do not serve people's will. As it was described in the previous section, too much reliance on technocracy also causes the rise of populism. Therefore, ascribing too much power to scientific experts causes technocracy. (Mede and Schäfer, 2020; Mounk, 2018, Kriesi, 2014).

#### **2.2.4. Post-Truth Era, Populism and Science Expertise**

Although there is no agreed definition of the post-truth era, it is defined as an era when the emotional and personal beliefs are found more effective than objective truths in shaping public opinions (Foroughi et al, 2019). In other words, it is the era when objective realities became less popular than emotions and personal beliefs, with the rise of prejudice, belief and inferences above rationality and reason in politics (Yla-Antilla, 2017). Along with that, true or false information is presented through emotions. Emotions are addressed by focusing on the non-rational public. The rational decisions that are given by institutions such as universities and the government are always contested and fact-less beliefs are disseminated more frequently as reality in the post-truth era (Iyengar and Massey, 2019).

Before going into more detail about the post-truth era, the effects of post-modernism on this era should be mentioned. Actually, post-modernism forms the basis of the post-truth era. Post-modernism may partly be responsible for the dichotomy between the elite and the people as well as the heightened tension between them (Alpay, 2017). Postmodernism is skeptical of the acceptance of objective reality. It emphasizes uncertainty and disorder. This situation is different from modernism, whereby politicians prioritize the accuracy of information, and it was important to get the approval of the experts. Different from the modernist era, in the post-modern era, the people have become more important while trust in the elites has decreased (Singer, 2019). The hierarchical distinction made between an academic person and an uneducated person is lost in post-modern society. Moreover, people have started viewing the experts' discussions about the truth with suspicion. Relativity is a major feature of postmodernism (Alpay, 2017). This is related to the fact that people have become more mobilized in the last few decades, and their contact with different others and cultures has increased. Postmodern era gives permission to accept "alternative points of view" because "everyone has their own truth" (Foroughi et al., 2019). Similar to cultural issues, science and facts can also be interpreted differently (Keren and Hawkins, 2015).

In order to support the "everyone has their own truth" argument, post-modern intellectuals suggest that truth can be generated by individuals rather than by employing experts' rationality-based decisions. Therefore, scientists face distrust easily (Hameleers, 2019). In other words, the era of post-truth decreases respect for scientists and experts. Further, it undermines rationality by using people's fears and concerns. Hence, issues such as climate change and the COVID-19 virus, which require scientific and technical

knowledge, are treated as just simple ideas or alternative facts. As a result of this type of skepticism about scientific knowledge, scientists are paradoxically invited to be more open and transparent in their expertise area. Participation in and communication about scientific expertise are necessary to discuss the truth (Waisbord, 2018).

Spector (2020) suggests that in the post-truth era, the assertions spark between the leader and the audience in an implicit way. The leader's power is reinforced by eagerly handing over authority to the people (Spector, 2020). For example, populist leaders divide the people and the elites in an antagonistic way. Accordingly, populism advocates that "the people" and "the elites" have different truths. Populists claim that the truth which is claimed by political elites does not serve a common interest, it rather serves the elites. The elite and the people's interest in the conflict lies in the pre-determined structure of politics. As a result, it is believed that the truth is politically generated and can not be checked and verified (Waisbord, 2018). Democratization of science triggers populists' rejection of science and damages scientific institutions. In a post-truth age, the democratization of scientific knowledge, which means making scientific knowledge comprehensible to people eventually betrays that knowledge (Smart et al., 2019). Populists believe that neither experts nor scientists exist outside of the political sphere and ideology. The common truth that is suggested by experts cannot be neutral in the conflict-centered political sphere (Waisbord, 2018). On this basis, populists use different ways to reject scientific knowledge in order to accommodate the public's common sense. Four of those ways come to the fore in the literature.

The first way is to blame the media. Populist political actors accuse the mainstream media of being dishonest and serving the political elites' special interests. They claim that the media is biased in its scientific explanations and deceives the public. This situation creates distrust towards experts and further hinders communication between experts and the public (Keren and Hawkins, 2015). The second way is to make statements that undermine scientific explanations by giving examples from people's daily lives, because in general, "common sense" explanations increase trust in populist political actors. According to populists, the daily experiences of the people are more valid than scientific evidence (Brown et.al., 2005). The third way is the populists' use of uncertainty related to the scientific research process as a pretext to frame scientific expertise as both uncertain and indeterminate. Accordingly, these scientific properties, in turn, are accused of providing a late response to a crisis situation (Brown et al., 2005; Collins et al., 2019). Populists' criticisms of experts make scientists vulnerable in the eyes of the public. As populists like action-oriented policies, which at times disregard procedures and institutions, they see scientific debates as a waste of time in a crisis situation (Keren and Hawkins, 2015). According to that, populists politicize disagreements among scientists to encourage public distrust of science. Populists benefit from the different scientific claims that are asserted by experts. Hence, distrust in science is reinforced by populists.

Lastly, populists frame scientists and experts as part of the elite, and their anti-elite sentiments create an anti-intellectual stance against the scientists. (Merkly, 2018). Compromising, learning from experience, and being open to criticism are the components of scientific knowledge, and this approach is at odds with the populists' approach to knowledge. For them, knowledge and truths are generated by leaders' interpretations (Keren and Hawkins, 2015). Hence, anti-rationalism, short-term material gain, anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism are common value judgments of the populists. Populists

blame experts as over-rationalist thinkers based on their prioritization of common sense and practical knowledge (Merkley, 2018).

#### **2.2.4.1. Digital Media**

The relationship between the media and populism is crucial to understanding how they transmit their “common sense” rhetoric to the people. Media is used as a tool to directly reach people without any party organizations. Rather than promoting party activists, populist leaders strategically develop their political communication individually (Erdoğan and Erçetin, 2019). The media also benefit from populists’ emotional appeals to draw more audience attention (Manucci, 2019). There is an overlap between the commercialized media and the populists in their emphasis on reflecting people’s common sense. Besides, anti-elite rhetoric is in general the medium for this emphasis (Erdoğan and Erçetin, 2019).

In order to examine the relationship between media and populism in more detail, digital media platforms should be focused on too. The digital media environment gives a lot of opportunities to populist actors. Firstly, digital media has made large masses of people to both produce and consume information. Secondly, the new digital era makes people more participatory in political decision-making. Therefore, populist political actors underline people’s sovereignty in the digital media environment too (Keren and Hawkins, 2015). The social media platforms, in particular, provide more connectivity among individuals. Yet, social media may mislead citizens intentionally. For instance, filter bubbles in social media provide a space where like-minded individuals can view similar news feeds that are shared among like-minded individuals. As a result, people lose their ability to compare alternative news. (Alpay, 2017). Besides that, trolls, bots and related algorithms spread disinformation and misinformation on social media. Disinformation is the dissemination of false information for the purpose of intentionally deceiving or misleading people. Secondly; the misinformation creates confusion about reality unintentionally. In another definition, misinformation is an “honest mistake” (Iyengar and Massey, 2019, Shu et al., 2020). According to that, individuals create their own biased information pool on social media. Expert knowledge and empirical evidence can easily be ignored in this biased pool of knowledge. Two features of populist politics are effective in increasing political disinformation about expert knowledge and mainstream institutions. First, the people-centric approach of populism sees that experiences, emotions, and common sense are more valid than empirical studies. Second, anti-elite rhetoric can easily override established expert knowledge. As a result, the binary view of populist politics based on people-centric and anti-elite rhetoric may prefer alternative facts to empirical evidence (Hameleers, 2020).

#### **2.2.4.2. Conspirational Thinking**

Conspiracy theories generally belong to a group of people who believe that other people have malevolent goals organized against them (van Prooijen, 2018). In addition, conspiracy theories reject widely accepted explanations about the causes of certain events (Shu et al., 2020). Populist thinking is similar to conspirational thinking in these two aspects. Firstly, populists have conspirational thinking in their claims for the existence of a small group of corrupt elites who harm ordinary people, and the people are framed as victims. Populists’ anti-elitist rhetoric and their emphasis on “people-centrism” support

conspirational thinking. (Silva et al, 2017). The populists' framing of both internal and external adversaries as the corrupt elite and their blame of these groups for all the ills of the polity are similar to conspirational thinking, which tends to blame all groups other than itself (Balta et al., 2022). Besides anti-elitism, populist anti-pluralism triggers conspiracy theories. Populists are more likely to use conspiracy theories as a cover to deny the validity of the existence of other opinions that differ from their own. Along with that, environments in which hostility, anger, fear and conflict are more widespread also encourage conspirational thinking. The citizens' anxiety, uncertainty and fear also trigger antagonism in society, which provides a fertile ground for conspirational thinking (van Prooijen, 2018). Taggart (2000) suggests that conspiracy theories are keys to mobilizing dissatisfied citizens (Taggart, 2000).

Global issues such as climate change, pandemics, terrorism, and poverty require science-based solutions. However, populists prefer conspiracy theories rather than evidence-based discussions, which also hinder international collaboration for the solution of these global problems. Populists' anti-scientific claims and denial of evidence-based discussions, in return, trigger people's denial of evidence-based claims and policies based on scientific evidence (van Prooijen, 2018). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainty about the virus and imposed restrictions gave rise to conspiracy theories. Furthermore, citizens' lack of trust in institutions and low education levels are other factors that facilitate conspirational thinking (Balta et al., 2022). Populist leaders' anti-elite sentiment and distrust of experts' discourse enabled conspiracy theories to gain validity at the grassroots level. For example, in the USA, on the one hand, Donald Trump claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic was a Chinese bioweapons strategy. On the other hand, Bernie Sanders claimed that the COVID-19 vaccines were already found, but the experts were hiding them from the people. According to the survey conducted based on these conspiracy theories, almost half of the participants declared that they believed in these conspiracy theories, which were claimed by populist leaders. (Pickup and Stecula, 2021). Along with that, Trump and his administration were the main misinformation and conspiracy sources in the country. According to the findings, one-third of the misinformation stories about the COVID-19 virus stemmed from conspiracy theories, and these were mostly politically motivated. Besides that, Trump accused China of originating the virus in the Wuhan Institute of Virology and claimed that it is a "plandemic". As a result, pandemic management turned into a battle in the country, with "us" vs. "them" in the political sphere in the USA. (The Empirical Studies of Conflict Project at Princeton University, 2021).

### **2.2.5. Synthesis of Science Debates in Populism and Democracy**

This part of the study explains the main drivers of the anti-scientists or anti-science arguments of populist leaders regarding science-related policies. The most prominent finding of the triangle of populism, science, and democracy is that policies based on scientific knowledge and the principle of public representation in a democracy are not always mutually comprehensive. If the ruling system started ignoring the demands of the people, populist political actors would strengthen their influence on the public. Accordingly, the political actors differ on whether they will prefer policies based only on scientific knowledge or policies that will protect their political interests regarding the demands of the people. On the one hand, politicians advocate the supremacy of institutions and objective knowledge based on the pragmatic face of democracy.

Accordingly, the principles of scientific knowledge and the views of scientists can always be stressed. For example, the dominance of scientific knowledge and the views of scientists regarding climate change and the new coronavirus pandemic have caused radical changes in the daily lives of people. On the other hand, the relationship of politicians with scientists on science-related issues is based on the integrity model. In other words, the relationship between the two is based on mutual information exchange and political interest. Politicians can benefit from scientific knowledge to stay in power and from scientific knowledge to get approval from a large part of society as well (Boecher et al., 2022).

On the other hand, politicians may consider the demands of the people more based on the redemptive side of democracy. Because scientific knowledge may not always be easily accepted by people in daily life. This side of democracy may necessitate choosing short-term-oriented policies that take into account the will of the people, rather than long-term policies based on scientific knowledge. For example, the carbon tax creates an economic burden on people, populist political actors reject the policy. According to that, populism strengthens their position on the grounds that the policies conducted on the basis of only scientists do not take the demands of the people into account. In addition, the claim that scientists and political elites serve their political interests creates hostility among the three sides, which are citizens, political elites and scientific experts. This hostility continues as long as the cleavage between scientific knowledge and public opinion grows. Therefore, populist politicians, unlike political elites, may not always play the role of intermediaries between scientists and the public.

Populist political actors may undermine scientific claims by rejecting scientific knowledge or trying to eliminate policies and politicians based on scientific information when that information remains unclear. Along with that, the post-truth era provides an opportunity to open a discussion about scientific knowledge. As a result, populist discourses can easily gain public acceptance. In other words, discussing objective information in a democratic sphere gives each individual the right to claim the truth of his own view. Accordingly, the binary worldview of populist leaders argues that policies based on scientific evidence are policies that serve the political interests of political and economic elites. In addition, the methods used by populist leaders can include disinformation and conspiracy theories. Today, the most important tool for disinformation and the spread of conspiracy theories is the social media platform. Because reaching a faster and larger audience on social media increases the power of populist leaders. As a result, the effect of the post-truth era reinforces populist science-based claims that are accepted easily and quickly.

All in all, more open, public and understandable discussions should take place in the media in order to implement policies based on scientific knowledge that require radical changes in the daily life of the people in response to the anti-science discourses of populists. However, political elites need to conduct policies based on scientific knowledge, provided that they are also policies that take into account the basic demands of the people. The following section includes research that analyzes how populist leaders evaluate the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change policies on the basis of science-related policies.

## 2.3. The Empirical Cases of Science in Populism: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Climate Change

### 2.3.1. Climate Change

Populist political actors undermine solution-oriented policies for the climate change issue in different contexts. Boecher et al. (2022) analyzed the populist approach to the issue of climate change under two different categories, using the example of the populist right-wing party AfD in Germany. Accordingly, the party uses both science-based and populism-based strategies to attack climate change claims. Firstly, for the science-based strategy, AfD Party selectively supports scientific evidence and knowledge rather than denying completely scientific facts regarding the climate change issue. More specifically, the party refers to scientific knowledge as partial when they need to undermine climate change policies. For example, party leaders support scholars who share common ideas with them. In addition to that, AfD Party members benefit from the uncertainties of climate debates. They manipulate the uncertainty of scientific evidence. Secondly, for the populism based strategy, the knowledge that they attribute could include conspiracy theories because they claim that the researchers who disagree with them have special political interests. Along with that, they refer to experiential knowledge when they stress common sense. They attack democratic and scientific institutions. For instance, AfD leaders assert that IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) policies serve the economic interests of the elite. As a result, rather than denying scientific evidence, AfD leaders arbitrarily support scientific evidence based on political interests, under the decontextualization of scientific evidence. Secondly, they emphasize common sense and corrupt elites when they undermine scientific knowledge about the climate change issue (Boecher et al., 2022).

Populist right-wing party the FPÖ (Freedom Party in Austria) didn't support the EU energy and climate change policies due to harming the economic benefits of the countries. Besides that, the party used "the people" discourse due to forcing citizens to pay carbon taxes. FPÖ party rejected the Paris Climate Agreement. Because the policies were interpreted as supranational decision-making on climate change issue (Huber et al., 2021). In the USA example, D. Trump directly addressed to economic consequences of climate change policies. He used clearly the discourse of the elites vs the people antagonism. He criticized the climate change regulation policies due to not serving the benefits of the blue-collar workers of America. Besides, D. Trump attacked the policies due to undermining the growth of the capitalist economy of the USA. He asserted that the strong US economy and its history have no regulation policy regarding climate change. In addition, he believed that the people are betrayed by international policies and political elites. Regarding this, he left the Paris Agreement (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2022).

On the other hand, in France, the RN Party (National Rally) advocates environmental policies. Because the party underlined the importance of localization. The party supported regional consumption and the strengthening of agriculture by emphasizing localism. According to that, localization and environmentalism mutually support each other. But the party didn't give weight enough to combat with climate change issue. The party only used localization and regional interest in a populist frame (Oswald et al., 2021).

In Brazil, Bolsonaro made environmental policies both in populist and in authoritative way. His administration restricted the National Environmental Council (Conama) authority in policy-making and transformed the legislation into serving the Bolsonaro government. Also, the environmental policies were centralized and suppressed any opposition ideas or who has legitimacy in environmental policies against the government policies. The NGOs that make policies for protecting the Amazon forest were attacked by claiming “internationalizing” the Amazon and destroying it (Barbosa and Menezes, 2021).

In another study that used the AfD Party as an example and addressed the construction of wind turbines in Germany, it was found that the party primarily attacked the elites and scientists rather than emphasizing the socio-economic concerns. The party members demanded a local referendum on the construction of wind turbines against the political elites’ decision. Besides that, AfD stressed a nationalistic approach when they attacked the construction of wind turbines. For example, the party claimed that the places requested to build the wind tribunes cause the destruction of national landscapes. Along with that, the AfD Party supported the "not in my backyard" protest regarding the building of wind turbines. Contrary to “not in my backyard” protests, “in my backyard” protests increased the polarization about the building of wind turbines. According to the results of the survey that included supporters of the AfD party, the supporters of the party didn’t support renewable energy and they did not approve the construction of wind turbines (Otteni and Weisskircher, 2022). Based on the findings of the research, populist politics triggered antagonism between supporters and opponents of renewable energy. Primarily, the “anti-elites” rhetoric of populists created anti-environmental public opinion.

Huber’s (2020) research supports both studies mentioned above. The study suggests that populists undermine institutional trust and trigger skepticism regarding climate change issues. Rather than political ideology, institutional distrust and negative attitudes towards science reinforced climate skepticism in public among those who are populists (Huber, 2020). Accordingly, the findings indirectly confirmed the two studies mentioned above. Firstly, Huber (2020) confirmed the anti-elite rhetoric based on populism underlined by Otteni and Weisskircher (2022) and skepticism of scientific-based information underlined by Boecher et al. (2022) regarding the climate change theme. Besides that, Huber (2020), rather than stressing ideology, stressed populism-based strategies to attack climate change politics. Huber analyzed the responses of populist citizens regarding climate skepticism and environmental protection themes. Three questions were asked to analyze the correlation between populism and climate skepticism. First, it was asked whether climate change was anthropogenic. According to the results, populist citizens believe that climate change is not caused by humans. Actually, this question tested the beliefs of populists’ science-based information. The last two questions are more populism-based strategies. The second question tested whether the policies against climate change were going forward on the side of the state. The answers showed that restriction policies were excessive, according to populist citizens. Finally, the last question tested the balance between environmental protection policies and economic welfare. According to that, populist citizens prefer the prioritization of economic interests (Huber, 2020). All in all, regardless of ideology, the anti-elite attitude and skepticism toward scientific evidence and economic concerns triggered a populist anti-environmental mobilization in the public.

Contrary to the findings of previous studies, Küppers (2022) argues that rather than populism, beliefs held by right-wing ideology trigger climate skepticism in the AfD's discourse. Küppers argues that the language of anti-elitism and people-centrism adopted by the populist politics of the AfD plays a subordinate role. She coded the populist discourses not only on the basis of "anti-elitism" discourse but also on the basis of "people centrism" discourse taken together as a basis in AfD Party leaders' articles in the party magazines between the years 2016 and 2020. In other words, the discourses which include both the elites and the people were analyzed as populist. Küppers (2022) didn't conclude that the AfD's speeches both include anti-elitism and people's sovereignty. Therefore, she suggests that nationalist discourses that are adopted by right-wing ideology more dominantly shaped the AfD Party's approach to the climate change issue. Accordingly, the party especially underlined the national interests and economic concerns of the citizens strategically based on right-wing ideology (Küppers, 2022).

### **2.3.2. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies**

The policies of the populist leaders about the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic in three different countries who were in power are described in detail below. For starters, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil practiced anti-establishment policies prominently. Four different health ministers changed in a year. Although one of them had no expertise in the field of health, he was appointed an army general, and he remained on duty for five months. Bolsonaro didn't believe that the virus was a major health problem (Bertholini, 2022). He showed adversarial denial against health experts and he did not put into effect any restriction policies such as lockdowns, masks, and closures (Güllüoğlu, 2021). Bolsonaro suggested herd immunity and miracle drugs such as chloroquine as a solution. According to the stringency indexes of supporters of Bolsonaro and anti-Bolsonaro state governments, great differences were observed regarding the implementation of pandemic measures. Bolsonaro framed the subnational state elites who defend WHO's regulations as an enemy. Besides the restriction policies, the vaccines that China received caused polarization in Brazil. For example, while Sao Paulo's president supported vaccines that came from China, Bolsonaro claimed that he would not give permission to use vaccines imported from China (Bertholini, 2022).

Second, in the USA, Donal Trump's criticisms of long lockdown restrictions triggered an anti-expert attitude among the public. Even though populism usually prefers protective policies such as those that are economic and demographic, populists blamed government measures as over-protectionist in the case of a new coronavirus pandemic (Brubaker, 2021). Besides that, Trump asserted that lockdowns lead the public into depression. He suggested unscientific treatment methods such as hydroxychloroquine, disinfectants, and ultraviolet lights to kill viruses. Along with that, while Joe Biden stressed the importance of wearing masks, the Trump administration rarely used masks, and wearing a mask turned into a political indicator (Roberts, 2022). In addition, Donald Trump blamed the media for being dishonest and magnifying the pandemic situation. He delegitimized the death and case numbers that are given by health institutions (Brubaker, 2021). He used the pandemic measures for his nationalist purposes. For example, he banned family members of green card holders from entering the country. Moreover, Trump called the virus the "Chinese Virus". Besides, Trump didn't support international organizations. He accused the WHO of being under Chinese control (Roberts, 2022). According to the examples of Bolsonaro and Trump, both populist leaders not only

prohibited restriction policies and state-level elites, but also denied scientific facts that were related to the new coronavirus.

Lastly, the Turkish state did not include conspiracy theories or denialism regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The government implemented the pandemic policies of international organizations and took the pandemic crisis seriously. However, correct information was not given about the number of causalities and the number of cases. Double standards were conducted at state-level elites in pandemic measures. For example, the ruling administration did not comply with the pandemic rules at mass openings and political meetings. Besides that, economic concerns were more dominant in the policies of pandemic measures. The government's administration followed policies that would serve the party's political interests rather than considering the danger of the pandemic. For example, shopping malls opened while playgrounds remained closed. As a result, the policies in Turkey during the pandemic period could not balance between promoting life or promoting the market (Balta and Özel, 2022).

Apart from populists in power, Germany's opposition populist party, the AfD, criticized the management of the pandemic as unlawful and undemocratic. The party generally emphasized anti-elitist rhetoric. For example, measures such as lockdowns, the closure of markets, offices, and schools, the necessity of face masks, and travel restrictions were blamed for being authoritarian and violating human rights. Along with that, the vaccine policies were blamed for being slow and unequal for every citizen in the country. The party leaders asserted that vaccination certificates created discrimination in society for those who didn't get vaccinated. Also, mandatory vaccination was denied regarding democratic principles (Lehmann and Zehnter, 2022). The AfD members supported anti-Corona, or in other words, "Querdenken" protests during lockdown. The party adopted the demands of the mobilization and attended the protests. Party members, in particular, opposed all legal restrictions and delegitimized the democratic institutions. As a result, they caused a polarization in Bundestag (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2022). Accordingly, the party especially stressed the deficit of democratic principles in pandemic management under anti-elite and people's sovereignty rhetorics.

According to a survey in Austria about populist citizens' belief in the COVID-19 conspiracy theories, two explanatory factors, regardless of ideology, explained the positive correlation between populism and conspiracy beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the survey tested individuals' trust in political and health institutions. Secondly, it tested attitudes toward science, which were taken into account as evaluation criteria. Firstly, counting on political institutions was an important factor in mitigating the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, populists' negative attitudes towards government and parliament affect individuals' belief in COVID-19 conspiracies and political elites. Secondly, the responses showed that populist citizens have lower trust in science and institutions, which are positively associated with increasing COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs in the public. Accordingly, low trust in institutions and science experts reinforced the belief in conspiracy theories about the new coronavirus pandemic (Eberl et al., 2021).

### **2.3.3. General Implications Regarding Empirical Studies**

Based on empirical studies, populist strategies didn't differ between the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change themes under science-related policies. The sub-dimensions of populism, anti-elitism and the people's sovereignty rhetorics, shaped their policies and approaches toward two issues. The studies generally examine climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic policies of populists through populism-based and science-based strategies. Accordingly, populist politics dominantly criticized the economic and democratic sides of political decisions on climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, populists attacked political and health institutions. Besides that, the green transition and pandemic restrictions directly affected the economy of citizens and countries negatively. Especially climate change policies were attacked by populists for not serving the economic benefit of citizens. Thus, populists prefer to keep citizens' economic welfare rather than adopt solution-oriented and long-term policies. Along with that, populist political actors lead to polarization in science-related problems among the public, such as environmentalists versus non-environmentalists or vaccine supporters versus anti-vaccine citizens. Besides attacking the political elites, populists referred to science experts and science-based information as well. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, populists preferred to be part of conspiracy theories. Accordingly, populists supported the scientists who suggested anti-climate change views or skepticism about the existence of climate change regarding climate change issues.

### 3. CASE STUDY: 2021 PRE-ELECTION TERM IN GERMANY

#### 3.1. Case Selection

This study uses the case study method. Case studies allow many different factors to be included in the study for the focused case or multiple cases. Rather than the methodological choice of qualitative work, case studies guide what should be studied. Case studies give the answers to the why and how questions. In addition to that, case studies can be described as the unit of analysis or the concrete result of the study (Stake, 2008). The common, different, or prominent parts of the case are examined in the context of the research. The historical background, political context, and physical conditions of the case play an active role during the selection process (Hyett et al., 2014). The case studies can be identified by three distinct features. First, case studies can be particularistic. If the study focuses on a single event, situation, or project, it gives a detailed description of the focused study. Second, case studies are descriptive. When the focused case study takes many different variables into account, it analyzes the relationship between them. Third, case studies can be heuristic. Therefore, case studies aim to increase the reader's experience with and knowledge of the phenomenon based on the focused research. Along with that, the consequences of the research can give new insights (Corcoran et al., 2004).

This study is considered a single-country case study as it examines the leaders of the two parties within the framework of a country over a period of time. The COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine, and climate change issues were at the top of the global agenda in the 2020 and 2021 years. The need for scientific expertise has increased as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine issues have been the most discussed topics in recent times. Therefore, the claims of scientists about climate change, and especially the new coronavirus pandemic and vaccine in the last two years, have been effective in taking protective or precautionary policies against these issues. However, the protective policies and their positive and negative consequences caused disagreements among the political parties. Besides that, uncertainty and disagreements among scientists led to skepticism about the trustworthiness of science experts. This study compares the approaches of populist and non-populist leaders to the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine and climate change issues, and related political decisions. This period when the parties made their election campaign is focused in this study because political party leaders intensify their discourses the most during elections. Besides, the election periods provide a good opportunity to evaluate how political party leaders will deal with these issues following the new political term.

This study focuses on the attitudes of the leaders of the two political parties, Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Social Democrats Party of Germany (SPD) towards climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies during Germany's 2021 election period. The far-right populist party AfD was established in 2013 and took seats in the Bundestag and the European Parliament in 2017. The most influential factors that are raising the votes of the AfD Party are their anti-immigrant and anti-eurozone policies. Accordingly, under the concept of populism, the AfD Party leaders' approach is interpreted (Aknur, 2020). On the contrary, the chancellor candidate of the center-left wing party that the Social Democrats Party of Germany Olaf Scholz's approach is interpreted regarding climate change and the new coronavirus pandemic issues. After the 2017 elections, Scholz served as finance minister during Angela Merkel's term. Scholz

paved the way for a further increase in social help during the pandemic period. The winner of the 2021 elections, Olaf Scholz, is portrayed as a stronger leader than his opponents, Annalena Baerbock and Armin Laschet. As a result, two party leaders' approaches were compared via their tweets using the qualitative content analysis method.

### **3.2. Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Chancellor Candidate Olaf Scholz**

The Social Democratic Party of Germany was established in 1863. The SPD was one of the first parties that were influenced by Marxism in Germany. Friedrich Ebert was the leader of the SPD and was the first leader of Germany between 1919 and 1925 (Browning, 2004). After Second World War, Kurt Schumacher and following Schumacher's policies *Godesberg Program* put political strategies to follow Marxism as a method rather than as a goal. However, the socio-economic policies of Marxism applied pragmatically. Rather than rejecting capitalism completely, focuses on the reformulation of the capitalist economy. Schumacher suggested that as the method it can be used and other democratic socialism principles can be followed too. Hence, he didn't only focus on the working class. Schumacher's anti-communism and pragmatism policies set the agenda (Schellenger, 1963). According to the 1989 basic program of the party, the SPD placed itself to make alternative policies against neo-capitalist policies proposed by conservative and liberal parties. The party aimed the reduce inequalities in income, secondly, increase full employment and apply Keynesian macroeconomic policy. After this, the party gave authority partially to the government in order to intervene economy. Lastly, the party made policies to compound economic and participatory democracy. Besides that, the party underlined the issues which are ecology, nuclear energy, and migration, should be solved based on non-ideological policies (Braunthal, 1993).

The party currently adopts a center-left ideology. When the party's votes are compared according to the 2013 elections, the vote rates of the party declined in the 2017 federal elections. Accordingly, the party's number of parliament members at Bundestag decreased to less than 20 percent. But similar to the 2008 economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in the 2021 elections. The major factors can be listed as follows: the economically negative impact of the long lockdown process on the citizens and the country led to political shifts. Besides that, the federal government system was another subject of discussion due to insufficient emergency acts and decisions. Lastly, even though the new coronavirus vaccine was discovered in Germany, 30 percent of the population was still not vaccinated in the initial phase of 2021 (Gama, 2022). According to the 2021 election results, while the CDU/CSU coalition lost 8 percent of their votes, the SPD managed to increase its vote from 20 percent to 25 percent after four years. (Dostal, 2021).

Scholz lost the SPD Party leadership to Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans in the 2019 intra-party elections. Along with that, SPD members debated leaving the grand coalition during the Merkel term. According to that, Scholz could have left the SPD when disagreements arose between the SPD and CDU/CSU. But when the COVID-19 virus occurred in 2020, Scholz received full support from the party and the citizens. As Finance Minister, he displayed his experience in political leadership during the pandemic crisis. In fact, he had the attitude that as the finance minister, he heard the demands of the citizens. Therefore, CDU Party members could not make any major criticisms of Scholz.

(Römmele, 2022). By then, the Social Democratic Party of Germany had announced their chancellor candidate, Olaf Scholz, for 2020. The SPD was the first party that announced their candidate for the 2021 elections in Germany. Even though candidates of the Greens and the CDU/CSU were competing for leadership, there was a general impression that Olaf Scholz would win (Helms, 2021). The mistakes of two candidates, Annalena Baerbock from the Greens Party and Armin Laschet from the CDU/CSU, gave Scholz the opportunity to rise in the polls. The media revealed Baerbock's dishonest academic background. Along with that, Armin Laschet's frivolous attitude was caught on camera when he visited the flood disaster area. Furthermore, it was observed that Laschet did not receive sufficient support from Merkel. It was believed that he didn't have sufficient discipline and professionalism as a candidate for chancellor. The fact that both of Scholz's opponents were flawed leader portraits had an impact on boosting Scholz's power (Faas and Klingelhöfer, 2022).

Scholz is a pragmatic politician. He has been called a social liberal for being on the right wing of the SPD. He acted strategically during the election campaign period and did not develop a political idea or a specific project-oriented discourse until the 2021 elections. The campaign of Olaf Scholz was shaped under the theme of "respect", specifically, respect for all citizens. During the pandemic period, he listened to the social and economic security concerns of the citizens. He supported financial aid to the sectors negatively affected by the pandemic as much as possible as a finance minister. However, he supported all pandemic restrictions to end the pandemic. One of the main emphases of the election campaign was social equality. He expressed social help for retirees. Scholz promised to raise the minimum wage significantly. Along with that, he promised to build more housing to manage the problem of high rents. Apart from social equality, he promised to improve the energy security of the country. In the context of energy security, he promised to strengthen the European Union's integration. Scholz underlined that Germany should play an important role in the process of building a stronger European Union (Dostal, 2021).

Scholz started climate club action among the G7 countries. The climate club's main goal was to reduce carbon emissions and set concrete steps for this (Ecologic Institute, 2022). While Scholz was supporting the carbon tax, he promised that, unlike the Greens, he would consider the economic conditions of the citizens. He promised that the carbon tax would not turn into an economic disadvantage for citizens. The coalition of SPD, FDP and Greens adopted massive investments in the environment and public investment. But the FDP demands that taxes not be increased. As a result, Scholz's biggest challenge after the 2021 election can be compensating for the costs of green transformation and the new coronavirus pandemic's negative economic consequences (Dostal, 2021).

### **3.3. The Rising Populist Right in Germany: The AfD Party**

The "Alternative für Deutschland" Party was established in 2013 with the claim that there is an alternative based on the rhetoric that there is no alternative to Angela Merkel's Eurozone policy. Konrad Adam, Alexander Gauland, and Bernd Lucke founded a political action group called "Wahlalternative 2013" (an electoral alternative for the 2013 general election). The AfD Party argued that Germany should not assume the debt

of other European Union states. AfD's anti-Eurozone stance and the necessity of national currency politics were effective in increasing the votes of the party (Arzheimer and Berning, 2018). The AfD Party is Germany's first radical right populist party that has had a place in the Bundestag since 1945. However, it has been decided by the Bundestag that no party be in a coalition with the AfD Party. It has been called a "cordon sanitaire", which is not a written law, on the grounds that the radical policies of the AfD may pose a danger to the liberal democratic principles of the country (Havertz, 2019).

AfD's discourses are shaped within a populist, nativist and authoritarian framework. Members of the AfD Party argue that mainstream parties are implementing policies that do not serve the country's economic welfare, freedom and sovereignty. While immigrants and asylum seekers are marginalized by AfD, the German people are expressed as victims. The party members advocate the preservation of German Christian culture and German homogeneity. While the AfD Party policies express the demands of the majority of the people in Germany and should be dominant in politics, the fundamental rights and freedoms of minorities are ignored (Aknur, 2020). PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) far-right political movement has been instrumental in shaping the content of AfD's intra-party discourse. In addition to that, the demands of the movement during the election periods were effective in strengthening the AfD's rhetoric. PEGIDA's political movement is one of the factors affecting the AfD's intra-party dynamics (Weisskircher et al., 2022). Besides, education levels and age-range factors help give an overall impression of AfD voters. For example, it can be said that less educated and older citizens shape the general demographic profile of AfD supporters (Hansen and Olsen, 2022).

AfD's organizational structure at the top is divided into two. Firstly parliamentary leadership, and secondly the leadership of the overall party (Zons and Halstenbach, 2019). In the 2013 federal elections, the AfD Party took 2 percent of the vote and failed to pass the threshold. However, the party had 7 members in the European Parliament with 7.1 percent of the vote in 2014. The following year, Merkel's open-door policy allowed her to accept asylum seekers who migrated from Syria to Germany. Even if the country the asylum seekers and refugees entered was not Germany first, they had a right to register to enter Germany in the end. Accordingly, the refugee and migrant crisis policy of the country became a critical political debate. Not only because of the anti-Eurozone policy but also because anti-immigrant politics help increase AfD's votes. As a result of the 2017 elections, the party received 12.6 percent of the vote and took its place in the Bundestag with 94 parliament members (Aknur, 2020). The AfD Party entered the Bundestag in 2017 as a third party with the highest vote rate since it was established in 2013 (Arzheimer and Berning, 2018). Along with that, the party increased the number of representatives in the European Parliament to 11 with 10.97 percent of the vote in 2019. The party had representatives in 16 federal states in the 2019 local elections (Aknur, 2020). In particular, the emergence of the Brexit process changed the course of the 2017 elections in Germany. Besides that, the mediating role of social media gave a chance to rise the populists in Germany. As a result, populists easily communicated directly with the public (Arzheimer and Berning, 2018). All in all, the main reasons for the rising votes of the AfD Party can be listed as follows: first, the negative economic effects of the neoliberal capitalist system, second, the representation issue of democracies turning into a crisis, and finally, the changing media culture (Havertz, 2021)

The AfD Party lost 11 seats in the 2021 elections, with a 2.3% difference compared to the 2017 elections. The AfD's 2021 election campaign slogan was "Germany. But normal". The AfD deliberately underlined their opposition to the European Union. Along with that, the party stressed migrant issues less due to pandemic conditions. (Faas and Klingelhöfer, 2022). The anti-EU politics impacted the protection of the party's votes. Besides that, the party's rhetoric against political elites such as the CDU/CSU, the Greens and the SPD was effective. Accordingly, the AfD Party accused the state and political elites of being authoritarian due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (Hansen and Olsen, 2021). They supported the "Querdenken" which were anti-lockdown protests during the first and second phases of the pandemic. They participated in the protests and opposed those who were blocking the protests. Besides that, AfD members created polarization in the Bundestag about the lockdown policies. (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2022). They created skepticism about the COVID-19 vaccine. Alice Weidel, who was a member of the AfD, announced that she will not be vaccinated (Faas and Klingelhöfel, 2022). Specific to the 2021 elections, besides the anti-immigrant, anti-Eurozone and pandemic crisis policies, the AfD Party focused on climate change policies the most. AfD members opposed the approval of this climate package because they interpreted the negative economic effects of the package as inadequate for addressing climate change in a global sense. They supported scientists who were doing scientific studies on climate change, but only those who agreed with their own views. In addition, the party was skeptical of climate change, and international organizations such as the IPCC and UN. The AfD leaders claimed that such organizations were implementing policies that financially served the economic elites (Boecher et al., 2022).

### **3.4. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Climate Change Policies in 2021 Pre-Election Term in Germany**

#### **3.4.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies**

Since the pandemic and vaccine policies were the most discussed headlines in the pre-election agenda of Germany, the COVID-19 pandemic was the biggest crisis that shaped the atmosphere of the election (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2021). Accordingly, many issues, such as the production, distribution, reliability and protection of vaccines took place on the political agenda during the election campaign. Particularly, the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic determined the main themes of the election. Germany was one of the first ones that announced the COVID-19 case among European countries. The German government announced that it would be possible to start some restrictions against the dissemination of the virus in late February 2020. While similar pandemic restrictions started legally in all states in the middle of March, equal and consistent restriction policies were not conducted nationwide. By then, the health minister had increased the bed capacity and the government had provided additional funding to hospitals regarding the "COVID-19 Hospital Relief Act" on March 25, 2020. Even though the testing policy faltered at the beginning of the pandemic, the health minister worked on increasing testing capacity. The government followed the global pandemic restriction policies, such as working from house, social distancing, border checks, closures of schools and restaurants, and using mandatory masks (Desson et al., 2020).

Germany's federal government system was one of the reasons for the political conflict over COVID-19 pandemic policies among the parties. The right-wing populist party AfD was the one that criticized the federal government system most severely. Since the legislation lets state governments act independently, the policies of the federal government have remained advisory. Thus, the strong pandemic restrictions faltered in some states. As a result, central pandemic restriction decisions took almost one year to bind the different states (İstanbul Bilgi University European Union Institute, 2021). Therefore, the Merkel administration enacted the “emergency infection protection law”. For example, many fundamental freedoms were restricted, such as curfews, and the closure of many public places like schools, restaurants, and parks. Merkel made this decision together with the bicameral federal legislature and 16 heads of federal states in a central-decision mechanism. Along with that, scientific committee studies were carried out by the state-sponsored disease control and prevention Robert Koch Institute (Dostal, 2021).

Merkel stated that the pandemic will not end until a vaccine is found. Furthermore, she emphasized that even after the invention of the vaccine, the pandemic would not end until every citizen was vaccinated. Along with that, Dostal (2021) explains that the government didn't prefer a complete curfew and didn't draw a picture that restrictions would be long-term at the beginning of the pandemic. Therefore, when compared to Italy, France and England, German citizens' resistance to the pandemic measures was not very powerful and the adaptation process of citizens was easier. Along with that, the German government provided immediate and sufficient economic support to its citizens. For example, the government provided credit facilities to businesses and compensation for discontinued sales. Also, tax allowance policy was conducted in many industries (Desson et al., 2020). In addition, compensation was paid to workers who could not work due to the closures. However, sectors such as culture, education and entertainment were the ones that suffered the most due to financial losses (Dostal, 2021).

Many opposition parties criticized pandemic restriction policies. While the Free Democrat Party members did not deny the danger of the virus, they opposed the pandemic restriction policies. For instance, they claimed that the fundamental freedoms of the people should not be restricted due to COVID-19. Furthermore, they appealed to the constitutional court during the mandatory curfews. Besides the FDP, the AfD Party clearly attacked the pandemic and vaccine policies suggested by the government. For example, Alice Weidel, who is a member of AfD, declared that she would not be vaccinated. One of the AfD party leaders, Tino Chrupalla, led to skepticism about the vaccine's effectiveness and its protection against the new coronavirus. Also, party members claimed that the pandemic lockdown obligation is an authoritarian policy for unvaccinated citizens because they interpreted that as discrimination and house arrest (İstanbul Bilgi University European Union Institute, 2021). Accordingly, Dostal (2021) suggests that protective policies based on bureaucratic decisions weaken democratic principles if they don't take into account public opinion. For example, the policy of “no vaccination, no job” or discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated citizens. Therefore, politicians should avoid technocratic decisions and adopt liberal democratic values. (Dostal, 2021).

### 3.4.2. Climate Change Policies

Climate change regulations were at the top of the agenda not only in Germany's election period but also in the global agenda in 2021. Before the election, besides the new coronavirus pandemic crisis, the most discussed issue was climate change policies. Since the emission targets of the 2019 Climate Protection Act in Germany were not sufficient as part of the 2030 targets, the new climate change regulations were acknowledged by the two Houses of Parliament in June 2021. More restrictive policies were adopted to reduce carbon emissions. However, the legislation on carbon emissions became one of the main issues during the election period (Angenendt and Kinski, 2022). Along with that, after the flood disaster in July 2021, the negative effects of climate change were more discussed. Accordingly, the citizens were more sensitive to the environment and climate change after the disaster (İstanbul Bilgi University European Union Institute, 2021).

The 2021 climate change regulation adopted in Germany was the most comprehensive regulation in the world. According to the decision taken by the German Constitutional Court, a greenhouse gas emission budget was harmonized according to the IPCC's 1.5 degree Celsius plan. Along with that, it has been decided to make it mandatory for all sectors and citizens to take concrete steps by the end of 2022. Lastly, the Constitutional Court suggested that climate change regulations should be adopted by the Bundestag rather than by the government (Ekaradt, 2022). Thus, all mandatory policies were legalized based on democratic principles. Climate change adaptation policies were conducted regarding vulnerability assessments of sectors, which are based on the results of scientific studies and data. These vulnerability assessments include economic, social, and ecological vulnerabilities, as well as those related to climate change refugees, international trade, tourism and European energy grid areas. Climate change policies were conducted by considering the following areas: water management, coastal risk management, human health, nature and biodiversity, agriculture, planning and development, forestry, the energy sector, industry, soils, tourism, disaster protection, housing, transportation, fishery, education and culture (King, 2022).

Climate change policies differed during the 2021 party leaders' election campaign in Germany. The leader of the CDU/CSU Party, Armin Laschet, aimed to apply emissions trading to all sectors until 2024. Another SPD chancellor candidate, Olaf Scholz, promised that investments in renewable energy would increase further. In particular, he aimed to establish a larger electricity-based production system. The chancellor candidate of the Greens Party, Annalena Baerbock, announced that when new rails, fiber optics, and solar energy panels were built, oil, coal and internal combustion engine production would be terminated. Baerbock promised that they would implement a carbon emission policy in all regulations and that the environmental impact of each plan should be examined. Along with that, she underlined the party's carbon tax policy for all citizens. However, she drew an inadequate framework for how the green tax should be fairly enforceable for all citizens. On the other hand, AfD Party leaders claimed that the Greens would create poverty in the country. Furthermore, they asserted that the policies of the Greens are dictatorial and will lead to a civil war in the country. Besides the AfD, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) opposed state-sponsored climate change regulations while limiting carbon dioxide emissions to protect the environment. Lastly, the Left Party suggested closing all coal plants. Along with that, they proposed making energy public property and nationalizing energy companies (İstanbul Bilgi University European Union

Institute, 2021). All in all, the economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis and the green transformation are challenging issues to resolve in the political sphere. Therefore, Germany's climate change and COVID-19 pandemic political strategy should be based on a balance between open deliberation and technocratic solutions (Dostal, 2021).

## 4. METHOD

### 4.1. Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research focuses on establishing new connections by interpreting collected data (Babbie, 2014). In other words, qualitative research connects with different beliefs and perspectives. According to that, it aims to generate new concepts in research. Furthermore, the rebuilding process of new meaning depends on the researcher's detailed definition, explanation and classification of the data. The qualitative research method makes sense of values and beliefs in the social world. Therefore, the researcher's own interpretation is very important. (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The researcher interprets whatever he or she sees, hears and understands based on his/her knowledge and background. Since the researcher takes an active role during the data collection, it provides more reliable results. Thus, the researcher interacts one-on-one with the research content (Creswell, 2009). Along with that, the researcher can collect the data in many different ways, such as through observation, in-depth interviews and group discussions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

According to the philosophical foundations of qualitative research analysis, the researcher aims to do deep and detailed research (Çelik et al., 2020). Qualitative research focuses on the interpretative approach in an interdisciplinary or holistic way. Therefore, the steps of the analysis process can take a long time. Rather than focus on cause-effect relationships among the cases, qualitative research prefers to interpret and analyze the problems in their natural environment. Along with that, the researcher can develop new methods and approaches according to the changing circumstances. Accordingly, the purpose of the research can be shaped during the research through in-depth interpretation, and an understanding of actors' perspectives. Lastly, qualitative research focuses on emotional and conceptual responses rather than measurable behaviors. Since it is not based on deterministic measurement, the interpretation process is more flexible. In other words, rather than focus on the definition of the cases, subjectivity is more important (Karataş, 2015).

### 4.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

For this study, the qualitative content analysis method was used. Even though qualitative content analysis has some similarities with qualitative and quantitative research, it has distinctive features that differ from them. Qualitative content analysis is an interpretive study of a text or a piece of content by categorizing it systematically (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In qualitative content analysis, meaning is not given obviously. Rather, meaning is built through research based on the experience and knowledge of the researcher. But this process is different from qualitative research. For example, no matter how much the analysis is based on the interpretation of the researcher, the meaning should be systematically standardized. Thus, the analysis of the research could be understood by everyone (Kuckartz, 2019). Accordingly, the reliability process is very important in content analysis. In order to do reliable research, consistency between the coders is the first evaluation criterion in content analysis (Kuckartz, 2019).

Qualitative content analysis both focuses on manifest and latent meaning. The latent meaning, in particular, is interpreted based on the research question. For instance,

it does not address obvious examples like the discrimination of vegetables and fruits in the market (Kuckartz, 2019). Since it is a value-based process, the researcher's subjective interpretations are important (Lindgren et al., 2020). Besides that, like qualitative research, the QCA benefits many research materials, such as diaries, websites, and social networking sites. Qualitative research usually focuses on the study of text or content in every aspect. Therefore, reaching a clear conclusion is a compelling process in qualitative data. On the other hand, qualitative content analysis is more systematic. It interprets content only within the context of the research question. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis minimizes data. Unlike qualitative research, which reproduces the collected data, qualitative content analysis categorizes the data, making it more simple and understandable (Schreier, 2012). Along with that, qualitative content analysis benefits from some quantitative methods. Contrary to qualitative data analysis, the quantitative method complements qualitative content research (Kuckartz, 2019).

As Schreier (2012) explains, there are distinguishable differences between qualitative content and quantitative research. Firstly, QCA establishes neither general nor too specific. In other words, it is not intended to contain only a specific or just a general meaning. While quantitative studies tend toward generalization, qualitative content analysis, based on the research question, contains only related information. Secondly, QCA can be both data-driven and concept-driven. In other words, it can be both inductive and deductive work (Schreier, 2012). However, it should be underlined that whether research is both inductive and deductive or only deductive or inductive, based on the theory or data, the process of categorization should be open, transparent and flexible. Namely, the categorization process should clearly represent the consequences of the analysis (Kuckartz, 2019).

The categorization step is extremely important in qualitative content analysis. The categorization phase highlights the main findings of the research. First of all, categories are determined, then sub-categories are created to shape the coding criteria, and the coding process begins. But above all, the first step is to clarify the research question. The framework of the categorization and data collection process is shaped by this question. The second step is the data collection process. As previously stated, many types of data such as social network sites, interviews and magazines can be used. Thirdly, the categorization and coding process starts (Schreier, 2012). Categories represent the interpretation of the codes. The interpretation of the codes makes sense of the latent meaning of the material. Accordingly, similar codes give the narrative of the categories. In fact, the one code, rather than revealing narratives, gives the meaning of material as condensed under the category. Along with that, the codes cannot reflect the exact meaning of the text. For example, although the statement that the political elites get richer with carbon taxes does not explicitly state the discourse of populism, it is encoded as a populist discourse based on the corrupt elites' implication regarding the populism concept. On the other hand, some codes can be the same as the meaning of the text. For example, the tweet which claimed that scientist and parliament member Lauterbah's statements were deceiving, was coded as an anti-scientist discourse (Lindgren et al., 2020). Besides that, categories also have sub-categories. The sub-categories should complement each other mutually (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). However, the sub-categories are not codes. Rather, sub-categories help to frame the main category in a more specific framework. For example, in comparison of the populist and non-populist categories, the sub-categories

are the corrupt elites, the pure people, and the general will of the people rhetorics. However, the tweets are coded as either populist or non-populist in the end (Lindgren et al., 2020).

### 4.3. Building Coding Frame

The categorization phase primarily develops based on the research question. The problem of this research is how populist leaders differ from non-populist leaders in the examples of the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccines and climate change issues under the concept of science-related policies. According to the research question, if one of the collected materials does not belong to any of the categories, it cannot be used as material. Therefore, 157 of the 688 collected tweets were used as material by two party leaders during the 2021 election campaign in Germany. The categorization process can be interpreted as filtering in a sense. The coding frame is built on three different concepts. Firstly, the data-driven coding frame concept is formed based on collected data. It is constructed through both certain repetitive categories and new emerging categories. Secondly, concept-driven coding frame is based on previous knowledge or the literature. The categories are conducted using previous research. Lastly, both the concept-driven and data-driven coding frames can be used together (Schreier, 2012).

In this study, both concept-driven and data-driven coding frames were used. Accordingly, six different categories were used. The collected 157 tweets were coded at least in one category. The first one is the comparison between populists and non-populists. This category is based on different approaches to the populism concept. Predominantly, Cas Mudde's ideational approach evaluation was taken into account in coding. In the second stage of the categorization, sub-categories are framed as follows: the corrupt elites, the pure people, the general will of the people, and the improper way of political expression. As a result, regarding climate change, vaccines and COVID-19 pandemic policies, 157 collected tweets were coded as populist or non-populist. After making the distinction between populist and non-populist in the first category, the attitudes of populist and non-populist leaders toward science-related policies were analyzed in the following 5 categories.

The second main category interprets the populists' and non-populists' attitudes toward restriction or protective policies for climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines. The codes of the category are as follows: deterrent/denial or supportive/protective codes. This category is framed based on both concept and data-driven reasoning. Sub-categories are based on whether Scholz's, Meuthen's, and Chrupalla's tweets attack or support the government, ministers, scientists, and their restriction policies. For this category, rather than a latent meaning, tweets reveal the codes clearly.

The next category compares the attitudes of the SPD and AfD party leaders' tweets toward the policies of international or transnational organizations. The sub-categories of this category are as follows: the belief in undermining the country's interests, and attacking the organizations, or stressing the importance of the organizations and encouraging the organizations for strong collaboration. Accordingly, the codes of the category are supportive and deterrent.

The fourth category focuses on the relationship between the protective policies that are taken regarding focused science-related issues and economic interests. The three codes of the category are as follows: prioritization of economic interests, integration, and prioritization of protective policies. Protective policies that are taken regarding the issues mostly affect citizens economically. Therefore, the sub-categories are framed according to whether the tweets primarily alluded to the economy of the citizens or protected the environment or health of the citizens. Lastly, tweets are interpreted as if they integrate both sides mutually. The following category analyzes the tweets which include disinformation. According to this category, it is considered whether political party leaders spread any disinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change issues during the election campaign. More specifically, the sub-categories are framed according to whether there is any distortion, decontextualization, manipulated content, or fake content or not. As a result, the tweets are coded as yes or no. The last category focuses on anti-expert attitudes. The sub-categories are framed based on whether the tweets undermine any scientists, experts, scientific institutions or their explanations. The tweets are coded as yes or no in the end.

**Table 4.1.** The coding frame of tweets of the AfD Party leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla

<b>Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen - German</b>	<b>Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen - English</b>	<b>Populist/Non-Populist</b>	<b>Supportive or Deterrent towards climate change, COVID-19-Vaccine restriction policies</b>	<b>Supportive or Deterrent towards collaboration with international organizations</b>	<b>Prioritize financial benefits/integrative/prioritize restriction policies in climate and the COVID-19 pandemic</b>	<b>Attacking experts and scientific institutions: Yes/No</b>	<b>Disinformation: Yes/No</b>
Tweet 1 in German	Tweet 1 in English	Populist	Deterrent		Prioritize financial benefits		
<b>Tino Chrupalla - German</b>	<b>Tino Chrupalla - English</b>	<b>Populist/Non-Populist</b>	<b>Supportive or Deterrent towards climate change, COVID-19-Vaccine restriction policies</b>	<b>Supportive or Deterrent towards collaboration with international organizations</b>	<b>Prioritize financial benefits/integrative/prioritize restriction policies in climate and the COVID-19 pandemic</b>	<b>Attacking experts and scientific institutions: Yes/No</b>	<b>Disinformation: Yes/No</b>
Tweet 1 in German	Tweet 1 in English	Populist	Deterrent				

#### 4.4. Data

The data of the research was collected through the social media platform “Twitter”, which politicians have been using prominently in recent years. Social media platforms have gained such importance for politicians in recent years because they have been able to reach a large audience in a short time. Along with that, politicians feel more flexible when they address the public via Twitter. In other words, political leaders can make their own election campaigns or spread their ideas through unfiltered expression. The Twitter platform offers users the right to use 280 characters. This feature offers politicians the opportunity to reach voters in short notes in situations such as information sharing and campaigning. Twitter is a convenient social media platform for the qualitative and quantitative content analysis of political leaders. Because the election campaigns of the political party leaders can be analyzed at the level of paragraphs, sentences, or words (Gruzd and Roy, 2014). Twitter offers the opportunity to share content in many different ways. For example, the content can be shared in written, audio and visual formats. Besides, "retweet", a feature of Twitter, is used to spread the same post more than once. Another important feature of the platform is the "hashtag". The user has the chance to turn the topic he mentioned in the tweet into a discussion topic in the form of "#the hashtag to be used". For example, if the leader of the political party wants to make the issue of minimum wages a topic of discussion for the followers, the leader can benefit from hashtags to underline the issue (Silsüpür, 2016).

This study compares the approaches of populist and non-populist leaders to the new coronavirus pandemic, vaccine and climate change issues on the basis of political decisions during the 2021 election term in Germany. Therefore, the study focuses on the attitudes of the leaders of the two political parties, which are the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Accordingly, the leaders of the AfD, Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen, and the chancellor candidate of the SPD, Olaf Scholz’s tweets between May 25, 2021 and September 26, 2021 were analyzed. Totally, 688 tweets were collected manually from three political party leaders during the 4-month pre-election period. Based on the research question, only the tweets which were related to the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine were examined. According to that, 106 tweets of Olaf Scholz and 51 tweets of the leaders of the AfD Party were analyzed manually. Furthermore, hashtags in a tweet and re-tweets were included in the analysis. In addition to that, tweets were collected in German. Tweets were translated in English via Google. As a researcher, I have enough German language skills to understand to test the meaning of the translation from German to English.

#### 4.5. Reliability

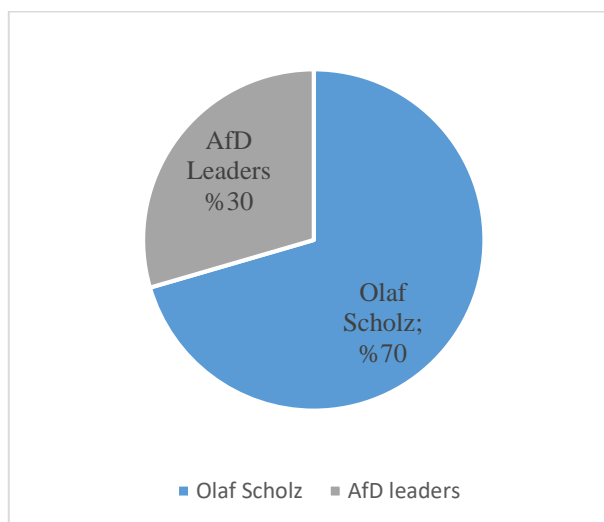
Creswell (2009) defines reliability in qualitative content analysis as follows: the results of the coding researcher should be compatible with the coding made by other researchers (Creswell, 2009). Along with that, Babbie (2014) states that when the collected data is coded again by different researchers at different times, the same codes should be given by the different researchers (Babbie, 2014). In a qualitative content analysis, the step of ensuring reliability is very important, because qualitative content analysis is an interpretive study of a text or a piece of content by categorizing it systematically (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In qualitative content analysis, meaning is not given obviously. Rather, meaning is built through research based on the experience and

knowledge of the researcher (Kuckartz, 2019). Therefore, for the purpose of ensuring compatibility between coders, building a coding frame systematically is very important.

In this study, the researcher who collected and coded the data and the other coder who has conceptual knowledge in the field of populism analyzed the data together. Six categories, which are framed based on the analysis, were included in the test to ensure reliability. The categories are listed as follows: comparison of populists to non-populists, attitudes towards restrictive or protective policies, attitudes towards policies of international institutions, disinformation, anti-expert attitudes, and lastly, a comparison of protective or restrictive policies vs. economic interests. Totally 30 tweets were coded mutually. According to the result of the reliability test, 26 tweets of the coded 30 tweets were consistent between encoders.

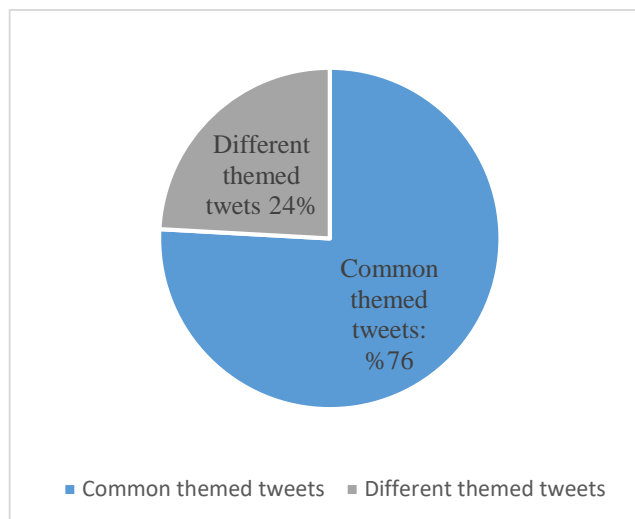
## 5. ANALYSIS

This study focused on the 2021 election term in Germany. The tweets of the chancellor candidates Olaf Scholz from the Social Democrat Party and the far-right populist party leaders Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla were analyzed. Totally, 688 tweets were collected manually between May and September 2021. While Olaf Scholz had 485 tweets between May and September, Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla had 203 tweets. Approximately 70 percent of the analyzed tweets in the 4-month period belong to the SPD's chancellor candidate, Olaf Scholz.



**Figure 5.1.:** The proportion of collected tweets by both party leaders during the pre-election term

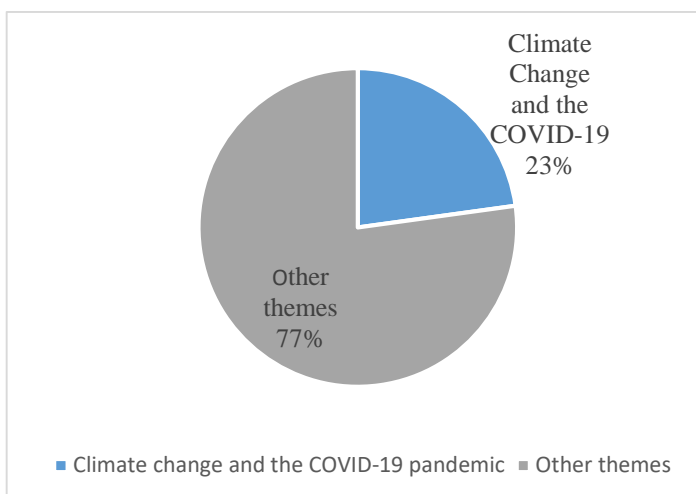
The common themes focused on by the leaders of the two parties can be listed as follows: flood disaster and financial help, EU policies, foreign policy, East Germany politics, economic policies, extremism and terrorism, gender equality and LGBTQ rights, religion, the crisis in Afghanistan, criticism of opposition parties, climate change policies, COVID-19 policies and vaccination. The common themes focused on by the leaders of both parties constitute almost 75 percent of the total tweets. 522 tweets of the total were on common issues focused on by the leaders of both parties. The most focused policies were about climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies, flood disasters and financial policies. While Olaf Scholz had 345 tweets about the above-mentioned themes, AfD Party leaders had 177 tweets.



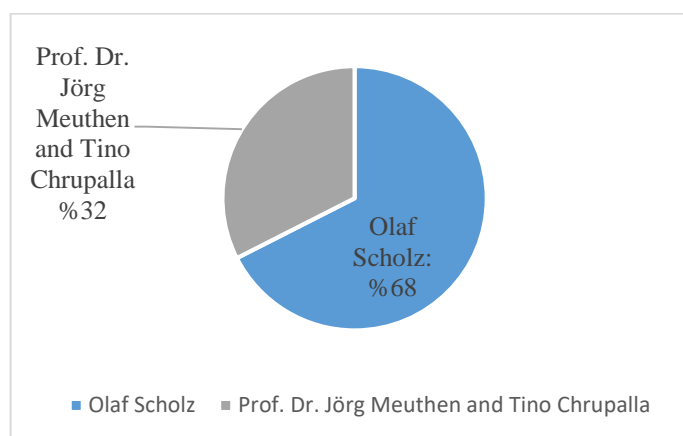
**Figure 5.2.:** The proportion of common themed tweets in total tweets

There were headlines covered by chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz, but not addressed by AfD Party leaders. These headlines can be listed as follows: building of new houses, increasing minimum wages, implementing the progressive tax in the international market, developing social government policies, protecting labor rights, developing digital technologies, and children's rights. On the other hand, tweets from the far-right populist leaders of the AfD Party which are not underlined by Olaf Scholz can be listed as follows: biased media in Germany, and the immigrant issue in Germany and the EU.

The climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies that are focused on this study were mainly discussed in the pre-election term. One-fourth of the total tweets that were mentioned in the pre-election term, were about the focused themes of this study. Furthermore, the chancellor candidate of the Social Democratic Party of Germany and leaders of the AfD Party have relatively the same percentage of their total tweets, which is a quarter of the total tweets of both leaders, about climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies. While Olaf Scholz had 106 tweets about focused themes, AfD Party leaders had 51 tweets in the four-month pre-election period. 157 tweets were analyzed within the framework of the focused themes. The number of the tweets which were related to climate change politics were higher than the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies. While 43 tweets were about the new coronavirus pandemic and vaccine policies, 114 tweets were related to climate change policies. It can be clearly said that climate change policies were mainly formed the political agenda.



**Figure 5.3.:** The proportion of tweets about climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic in all tweets



**Figure 5.4.:** The proportion of tweets by both party leaders about climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic

## 5.1. Category 1: Comparison of Populist and Non-Populist on COVID-19 Pandemic, Vaccine and Climate Change Policies

### 5.1.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies: The AfD Party Leaders: Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen

During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Germany, Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen argued that policies regarding pandemic restrictions and vaccine mandates were undemocratic. Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen blamed mainstream political party members for overriding the fundamental human rights of the people. For example, Meuthen interpreted the obligation of unvaccinated citizens to stay at home as a violation of their freedom of movement. According to AfD leaders, the quarantine policies should serve primarily the general will of the people rather than aim to prevent the spread of the virus. Besides that, Meuthen used improper language in the context of the politico-cultural style of populism stressed by Ostiguy (2017). Meuthen interpreted the quarantine policy as a holiday rather than a precautionary policy of the government.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! The Corona pandemic is finally on the retreat- there can no longer be any talk of a "national emergency". Nevertheless, the Union MPs want the lockdown legislation by 30.9. extend,- apparently you want the vacation undisturbed!" - (29.05.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! According to Green State Minister Lucha, unvaccinated people would ultimately have to "stay at home" if the infection situation "worsened". What an increasingly totalitarian understanding of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of movement for us Germans!" - (27.08.2021)*

Chrupalla underlined the discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated citizens. He attacked the government for forcing the citizens to be vaccinated. Chrupalla accused the government of being irresponsible because it imposes liability on unvaccinated citizens. He evaluated the government's mandatory testing of unvaccinated citizens as an authoritarian management policy. Another important feature of populism is that it gives priority to the demands of the majority (Mudde, 2004). During the vaccination campaigns, Chrupalla claimed that the majority of the public was skeptical about the vaccine. Therefore, he stated that the vaccination obligation policy should take this suspicion of the public into account.

*Tino Chrupalla: "#3G (Regulations on trains) on the train means expensive tests every day for citizens who refuse vaccination. Politics of encirclement and harassment of healthy citizens replace unconstitutional compulsory vaccination. Receipt on 26.9. This autocratic caste of politicians should be deselected! #btw21" - (26.08.2021)*

*Tino Chrupalla: "According to the #INSA study, more than half of the unvaccinated do not want to be vaccinated, 67% of them give a lack of confidence in the vaccines as a reason. The Federal Government must accept this point of view!" - (02.08.2021)*

Another leader of the AfD Party, Meuthen claimed that the bed capacities were deliberately understaffed for the sake of the implementation of mandatory new coronavirus pandemic policies. He claimed that the emergency response policies issued by the government were not correct in the background and that Angela Merkel and her administration were responsible for this policy. Based on these claims, Meuthen evaluated the government's politicians as dishonest, which was described in an immoral framework. Thus, he tried to make the policies implemented by the government illegitimate in the eyes of the public. In addition, populists argue that the policies and explanations proposed by experts about the COVID-19 pandemic, like the policies of the political elite, are not correct (Mede and Schäfer, 2020). Therefore, they attack scientists on the grounds that they do not serve the general will of the people in an immoral framework. For example, the current health minister of the new government and scientist Karl Lauterbach's statements about the COVID-19 pandemic were frequently featured in Germany's mainstream media. Meuthen claimed that Lauterbach's statements were untrue. Along with that, he argued that the mainstream media pursued a biased media policy, as they frequently broadcast Lauterbach's statements. As Keren and Hawkins (2015) emphasized, populist leaders accuse the mainstream media of being dishonest because they adopt the biased editorial policy of the mainstream media in science-related policies (Keren and Hawkins, 2015).

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! Statement d. Federal Audit Office: Many hospitals reported their intensive care bed capacities on purpose too low. But the lockdown policy was based on that! Warning by the RKI as early as January 11th, 2021 had no consequences for Merkel & Spahn. WITHDRAWAL! -- Corona measures are based on intensive lies.” – (12.06.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! Lauterbach's Corona errors have caused enormous damage to our country- he has been allowed to spread his theses 54 times since March 2020, mostly unchallenged, on the 5 major talk shows on ARD & ZDF. His biggest mistakes have now been documented!” – (04.06.2021)*

### **5.1.2. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies: Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz**

Olaf Scholz supported the vaccination obligation. He did not make any positive or negative criticisms of government policies regarding obligatory vaccination policies. He did not evaluate the necessity of vaccination in a negative way. He emphasized that if all citizens are vaccinated, a more hopeful future awaits everyone. There was no skepticism about the vaccine. There was no general will of the people emphasis on vaccine policies. Scholz believed that the vaccine was the most effective method of combating the virus. Therefore, he supported policies aimed at increasing the proportion of vaccinated citizens. Along with that, Scholz approved the controversial policy that unvaccinated citizens should not be paid in quarantine for the following reason: he argued that unvaccinated citizens had a chance to be vaccinated because there were a sufficient number of vaccines. Therefore, he suggested that the pay cut policy would increase vaccination rates. Accordingly, Scholz didn't care about citizens who didn't want to be vaccinated. Rather, he underlined that as there were enough vaccines, any citizen could not be a victim in this condition. On the other hand, AfD leaders claimed that any policy that requires citizens to be vaccinated is undemocratic and victimizes citizens with pay cuts. Regardless of the adequate number of vaccines and the implementation of protective measures, the general will of the people was the main concern of the AfD Party leaders.

*Olaf Scholz: -Retweet- “That's a right decision: Unvaccinated people in quarantine will not receive #continued wages because there has long been enough vaccine. It is important to me that wages will continue to be paid in the event of illness and those who cannot be vaccinated will continue to be compensated. SPD Chancellor candidate Olaf #Scholz welcomes the decision to vaccinate unvaccinated people from November 1st. in quarantine due to to cancel continued payment of wages in the event of a corona infection. He said that on the sidelines of an event in #Cologne. Minister of Health #Spahn had also defended the decision. @ZDFtoday” –(18.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: “Many events will still only be possible for those who have been vaccinated, recovered or tested. But the time will come when everyone who can get vaccinated will have received an offer of vaccination. Then it will no longer be possible to publicly pay for the corona tests.”- (27.07.2021)*

Scholz supported the removal of pandemic restrictions on the condition that vaccination be increased because preventing the spread of the virus was a priority for him. Therefore, he supported quarantine and vaccination policies. He emphasized that if the

rate of vaccinated citizens increases, quarantine will not be necessary. On the contrary, AfD leaders both opposed quarantine measures and mandatory vaccination. They objected to the policies of the government, which sought solutions to combat the pandemic but did not serve the general will of the people.

*Olaf Scholz: "#BILD Live on #Chancellor Night was also about #Corona. This autumn and winter must be different, and the main thing that helps here is vaccination. And it has to stay with face-to-face teaching- it's the better teaching." - (23.08.2021)*

Besides the implementation of protective policies, Scholz emphasized the importance of solidarity in the fight against the pandemic to get better results. Contrary to the hostile rhetorics of AfD leaders among the people, scientists and politicians, Scholz emphasized that cooperation will be effective in the fight against the pandemic. He preferred to use hopeful rhetoric to manage pandemic conditions. Rather than attacking opposition parties or health experts, he favored an integrative policy.

*Olaf Scholz: "The corona pandemic has shown a lot that needs to be improved in this country and it has also shown that it is important for us to show solidarity with one another," says our candidate for chancellor @OlafScholz at #spdcc21. "All of these are issues that are important to us as the SPD." - (14.08.2021).*

### **5.1.3. Climate Change Policies: The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla**

During the 2021 election campaign, carbon dioxide taxes for fuel prices were one of the most criticized issues by AfD leaders. The aim of the carbon tax on fuel prices is to deter people from using fossil fuels. But Meuthen and Chrupalla blamed the government for making policies that did not take people's will into account. They interpreted that tax policy served corrupt elites. AfD leaders believed that the political leaders benefited from the citizens for the sake of climate change policy regulation. Accordingly, populist leaders didn't believe that the carbon tax policy serve to tackle climate change, rather it was only to steal money from people. AfD leaders used an improper and aggressive way of expression to make a criticism about the carbon tax. AfD leaders criticized opposition leaders personally. For example, Meuthen referred to Annalena Baerbock's fake academic background when he judged the climate change policies of the Greens Party. In addition, he used sarcastic language toward opposition party leaders, and he considered the policies suggested by them unimportant.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! Annalena Baerbock- expert for correct CVs, tax-free corona bonus payments and goblins in electric vehicles- wants to burden Germany's drivers with an additional 10 billion euros p.a. for eco-socialist redistribution mania!" - (01.06.2021).*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: Good morning! This is how "green" traffic and clientele policy works: 1,000,000,000 € for typical urban prosperous greens from the pockets of all taxpayers, so that the former can "enrich" their colorful latte macchiato world with subsidized cargo bikes! - (24.08.2021).*

*Tino Chrupalla: "The #gasoline price madness is politically wanted. The economy @MonikaSchnitzer speaks of "steering effect". Means: #CDU and #DieGruenen coldly rip off commuters for their political ideas. For millions, commuting to work is becoming a luxury!"-(09.06.2021).*

AfD leaders attacked climate change policies and the COVID-19 pandemic policies in the same framework. For example, they blamed the policies to fight against science-related issues that were mentioned for being the autocratic ways of the ruling system. Meuthen and Chrupalla blamed the policies of the Greens Party for interfering with the freedom of the people. Rather than prioritizing the climate change issue, populist leaders attacked climate change policies as interfering with people's freedom. More specifically, Meuthen called these policies "paternalism" or "eco-dictatorship".

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! For Baerbock & the eco-socialist "Greens", BANs are an innovation driver. Wrong: Bans are paternalism and patronage! Innovations are best created in FREEDOM. Whoever destroys them also destroys prosperity!"-(14.09.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Özdemir agitates Markus Lanz against our citizens' party and describes his anti-freedom so-called "Greens" as LIBERAL. What a joke: Anyone who chooses "green" will wake up in a climate dictatorship of the purest water!"-(11.09.2021)*

Populist leaders can easily accuse the constitutional court of betraying the people when it comes to a joint decision between the judicial authorities and the government (Mounk, 2018). Meuthen attacked the constitutional court for being a political activist in favor of green policies, and he blamed the constitutional court for being biased. Furthermore, he blamed the constitutional court for undermining the separation of powers principle of democracy. Besides, when populist leaders make skepticism about group-based decisions in government, they refer to referendums. Populists see that the ultimate source of power comes from the people (Weyland, 2017, Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Therefore, Meuthen suggested having a referendum to make decisions about carbon dioxide taxes. He gave an example from Sweden:

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: Good morning! Our clever Swiss neighbors stop a planned left-green CO2 law by referendum- good thing! The beneficial effect of referendums is once again evident on political decisions. We have been demanding this for □□ since the AfD was founded!-(15.06.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! A "climate protection ministry" with the right to veto ALL laws- Baerbock & Co. want an eco-dictatorship for □□ instead of preserving freedom. They are fanatical left-radical pseudo-ecological. Socialists – a case for the protection of the constitution!"- (09.08.2021)*

Mudde (2017) suggests that populism refers to the pure people's rhetoric based on sovereignty, the socio-economic status of the people, and nationalistic statements (Mudde, 2017). Besides the claim of damaging socio-economic interests and the sovereignty of the people's emphasis based on climate change policies mentioned above, the emphasis on the interests of nations was made by Meuthen and Chrupalla. For instance, they blamed the government for damaging Germany's economy due to

renewable energy politics. Germany is a developed country for the production of heavy industry, and Meuthen blamed a climate-neutral industry for damaging Germany's developed economy. He called climate-neutral economy policies "eco-socialist" policies. In addition, AfD leaders painted a catastrophized picture of the policies related to tackling the climate change issue. They asserted that climate-neutral policy, rather than preserving the environment, leads to disaster in the country. Besides criticism of the financial effects, AfD leaders attributed the migration issue to climate change policies. They claimed that the most important issue in the country was not climate change; in fact, the economical welfare and migration issues were more important. Therefore, Meuthen and Chrupalla attacked opposition leaders who ignored the most important issues of the country.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! NOT vs. MISTRESS vs. DESASTER- this is the best way to describe the TV trill between Laschet, Scholz & Baerbock. No concrete statements about the costs of the coming madness & no migration issue, instead climate protection and gender!"-(31.08.2021)*

#### **5.1.4. Climate Change Policies: Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz**

Olaf Scholz prioritized the climate change issue in his political agenda during the election campaign. He believed that the negative effects of the climate change issue were not only observed in Germany but all around the world. Therefore, Scholz acted in international collaboration. In contrast to populist politics, he strategically emphasized regional and institutional collaboration with the EU. While he criticized his political opponents, he didn't use any improper language such as blaming, sarcasm, or a hostile way of expression. Scholz's election campaign slogan was shaped by "respect" for all citizens and society in Germany. The climate change issue was one of the important political strategies on his "respect" political agenda. He interpreted tackling climate change issues as a responsibility for a good future and the next generation.

He developed political strategies to ensure mutual benefit between the new climate-neutral industry and the financial welfare of the citizens. He underlined that citizens can adapt harmoniously to an industry with a lower CO2 footprint. Scholz deliberately proposed the acceleration of renewable energies such as wind turbines, the use of electricity in industries. While AfD leaders criticized the new climate-neutral economy for damaging citizens' economical welfare and daily life practices, Scholz used hopeful rhetoric for the integration of citizens into the new climate-neutral economy. However, populist leaders claimed that a new climate-neutral economy serves political elites, not the people's will. On the other hand, Scholz proposed that for the safety, health and good future of all citizens, climate change policies are necessary. It can be seen that the leaders of both AfD and SPD underlined the economical consequences of climate change policies, but from contrasting perspectives. While AfD leaders focused only on bad economic consequences and damaging Germany's developed industry by ignoring the effects of climate change, Scholz focused on building a supportive and collaborative way of changing the new climate-neutral industry by taking the worse vital consequences of climate change into account.

*Olaf Scholz: "Have every reason to be optimistic. The #upturn is here. We will continue our determined budgetary policy in 2022. We invest in social cohesion, in a strong public community and in a climate-friendly economy." (02.09.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: “The course for the future of the German steel industry and for many #jobs are now being set! The demand for climate-neutral steel production is growing, companies must act now and need reliable framework conditions. #Steel #climate neutral”-(16.06.2021)*

In Germany, there was a flood disaster in the state of North-Rhine-Westphalia in which 183 people lost their lives. While populist leaders underlined the failures of state management and financial help, Scholz stressed that not only financial help but also the disaster experienced in Germany was one of the effects of the climate change issue. When Scholz mentioned the flood disaster, he also underlined the climate change issue. According to Scholz, the climate change issue is not only a theory but also experienced in reality in this flood disaster. Besides that, Scholz accepted that climate change is a consequence of human-actions. He emphasized that, as humans, we are responsible for the bad consequences of climate change and we are responsible for tackling the issue. On the other hand, Meuthen asserted that those claiming that the flood disaster occurred as the reason for climate change are deceiving the people. It can be obviously said that Meuthen blamed Scholz to deceive people according to the tweet examples that are shown below:

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! The village of Schuld, which was destroyed by the flood, was flooded by the Ahr as early as 1790 and 1910. So anyone who thinks they can prevent this with "climate protection" is deceiving the citizens who are at risk of flooding- □□ will NOT become a "climate island".”-(27.07.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: “The consequences of climate change are reflected in droughts and storms. This is one of the reasons why support is not just a matter for the affected regions. We must do more together- federal, EU and all regions- to stop #climatechange”. (15.07.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz- Retweet- “The #flooddaster is a result of man-made climate change. We have to fight him, says @OlafScholz. As we rebuild, we must also make provisions to ensure homes, factories, and infrastructure are prepared for events like these. #Assembly Help.” (28.07.2021)*

Scholz criticized the climate change policies of the Greens Party for not protecting citizens' economical interests. He claimed that climate change policies and the citizens' economic welfare should be in harmony. When it came to making criticism of opposition parties' climate change policies, AfD Party leaders and Olaf Scholz differed in that AfD Party leaders blamed political opponents in a transgressive way of expression, while Scholz reasonably had criticism of policies proposed by political opponents. For example, Chrupalla insulted the carbon-free vehicles that were funded by the government for the employees of cargo. These tweets are examples of the comparison of the expression styles of populist and non-populist political leaders:

*Olaf Scholz: And the greens? They might have a lot of ideas. But they are not over and they simply ignore the reality of life for most citizens- as we can see from their plans for CO2 pricing. #futurecamp -(20.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: We need a careful, moderate approach to carbon pricing. Changing prices overnight is at the expense of society. And that can't be the solution we want.-(22.06.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen "Good morning! When "green" candidates hang up AfD members and want to put the JU in a Soviet re-education camp and allude to RAF methods to combat the "climate crisis", then it should be clear: the "green" have a problem with violence."-(13.08.2021)*

*Tino Chrupalla: "Green transport policy: €1 billion subsidy for €1 million cargo bikes. Craftsmen and small business owners should offer services to the Bionade bourgeoisie on bicycles. Next, rickshaws instead of taxis? Raised, clueless and unelectable!"(22.08.2021)*

Another important political discussion during the election term was the sharing of carbon dioxide heating costs between tenants and the owner of the house in a building. The aim of this policy is to deter people from using fossil fuels in heating systems. Scholz supported the sharing of heating costs between landlords and tenants in half. However, rather than accepting equal cost sharing, CDU/CSU political leaders gave more weight to tenants' paying CO2 costs. This policy was criticized severely by Scholz. Because he claimed that reducing carbon dioxide production in heating systems could not be loaded only on tenants, landlords also had responsibility for the prices. When he attacked CDU/CSU members, he used a kind of populist language. He blamed CDU/CSU political members for lobbying with landlords. But it cannot be said that these tweets were coded as completely populist. Scholz didn't divide the tenants and the CDU/CSU political leaders in an antagonistic way. He suggested that both tenants and landlords have equal responsibility. Scholz didn't attack politicians personally or attack them for personal features of politicians. Along with that, Scholz didn't point to the general will of the people rhetoric of populist-style politics.

*Olaf Scholz: "The tenants should shoulder the costs themselves. This is neither fair nor politically sensible. That's crazy. If the landlord can simply pass on the higher costs, he has no reason to modernize. #CO2 Price"-(02.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "Heat and freeze less? The #CO2Price is actually supposed to lead to investments in more environmentally friendly technologies- i.e. in a more modern heating system. But only the landlord can do that."-(02.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "The CDU and CSU prevent the landlords from having to bear at least half of these higher costs. At the request of the real estate lobby, which makes large donations to the Union. #CO2Price."-(02.06.2021)*

### **5.1.5. The Synthesis of Populist to Non-Populist Comparison in Climate Change and COVID- 19 and Vaccine Policies**

The number of tweets related to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine policies was 42 during the election campaign. 24 of the 42 tweets belonged to Olaf Scholz, while the rest belonged to Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla. Besides that, the total number of tweets about climate change policies was 115. While Scholz had 84 tweets about the issue, AfD leaders had 31 tweets. The most distinctive feature that distinguishes

a populist leader from a non-populist leader is the “general will of the people” concept of populism. According to populists, the ultimate source of power comes from the people. The representation of common sense is the fundamental responsibility of political leaders (Taggart, 2000). Populists stress the importance of the unrepresented people. According to that, populism attacks liberal democratic principles for undermining the participatory demands of the people. In comparison with Olaf Scholz, Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla, the populist style of politics is clearly distinguishable. AfD leaders accused the government and opposition parties of undermining the principle of the people's representation based on the pandemic and climate change policies.

As Canovan (1999) suggests, the tension between the pragmatic and redemptive sides of democracy triggers populism to gain strength (Canovan, 1999). While the pragmatic side of democracy expects the public to comply with the recommendations of scientific experts and institutions on pandemics and climate change policies, the redemptive side of democracy advocates that the demands of the people should be taken into account by the decisions of the institutions. Based on this explanation, the AfD Party leaders claimed that the government had a representation issue regarding pandemic and climate change policies. Rather than making solution-oriented policies about the focused issues, AfD leaders undermined the policies which were suggested by opposition parties' leaders and government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the public demanded that the restrictions and quarantines end as soon as possible and that the economic recovery process be started (Otteni and Weisskircher, 2022). Accordingly, populist leaders of the AfD severely criticized the pandemic restrictions and vaccine mandates. But Scholz prioritized ending this pandemic with restrictions and vaccines. Scholz proposed solution-oriented policies that support the scientific evidence on climate change and new coronavirus pandemic policies. He didn't express his concern to represent the majority of the public in its pandemic and climate change policies because Scholz didn't make politics under the theme of the general will of the people rhetoric.

Based on the politico-cultural style of populists underlined by Ostiguy (2017), populist leaders attacked opposition party leaders and the government in an improper way of expressing themselves. Meuthen and Chrupalla attacked the government and science experts in a hostile language. For the sake of protecting citizens' sovereignty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change policies, the political elites were criticized by Meuthen and Chrupalla in sarcastic language. They blamed the government for being dishonest and deceiving the people.

When Scholz prioritized the protective policies in the COVID-19 pandemic, Meuthen and Chrupalla accused the protective policies of not protecting citizens' fundamental rights. Rather than focus on the elimination of the virus, the negative consequences of protective policies were criticized by populist leaders. Meuthen and Chrupalla attacked any restriction policy related to the prevention of virus. Along with that, the media was blamed for being biased, and the government was blamed for being dishonest. On the other hand, Scholz used hopeful rhetoric to end the pandemic on the condition of vaccinating all citizens. Scholz interpreted the mandatory vaccination as necessary for a good future. He supported the testing policy for the purpose of keeping all citizens healthy and stopping the dissemination of the virus. Contrary to Scholz, any mandatory testing was criticized by the AfD leaders for damaging the citizens

economically. Also, AfD leaders attacked the discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated citizens policies for being undemocratic

Besides the new coronavirus pandemic, the AfD leaders accused members of the opposition party, the Greens and the government of being authoritarian about the climate change policies that they proposed. In addition to that, Meuthen and Chrupalla claimed that the constitutional courts acted politically biased under the green policies. They blamed the judiciary for undermining democratic principles. Besides that, Meuthen and Chrupalla accused the political elites of being corrupt for forcing citizens to pay carbon taxes, particularly in climate change policies. For example, Meuthen and Chrupalla asserted that the carbon tax endangered the people economically when political elites made climate-neutral policies. Lastly, AfD leaders argued that opposition parties endangered the country's financial interests as opposition party leaders and the government put more emphasis on green policies than the country's primary problems, such as immigration and the economy. It can be clearly seen that both populist leaders often put emphasis on the general will of the people rhetoric on climate change.

On the other hand, Scholz interpreted that climate change policies were future-oriented policies. Therefore, it was a responsibility to combat climate change in a national and international sense. In addition to that, the most discussed topic, carbon dioxide tax, was one of the main policy regulations of Scholz. He aimed to implement this policy to combat the climate change issue. In the case of the carbon price for heating systems in houses that used carbon-based fuel, in contrast to the Greens and CDU/CSU parties, he strategically put emphasis on the public to alleviate the costs of the carbon price. Besides that, when he suggested new climate-neutral policies, he used unifying and hopeful language rather than hostile. Scholz didn't mention common sense or the general will of the people rhetoric when he addressed his policies to the public. Along with that, when Scholz criticized the opposition party leaders, he didn't use any aggressive ways of expression or personal attacks.

## **5.2. Category 2: Attitudes Towards Restriction Policies on COVID-19 Pandemic, Vaccine and Climate Change**

During the 2021 election campaign in Germany, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change policies were the most discussed headlines. The effects of climate change have begun to be observed concretely. International organizations put more emphasis on the issue due to increasing forest fires, flood disasters, earthquakes and global temperatures. Furthermore, there have been some scientists who claim that more pandemics, such as the new coronavirus pandemic, can occur because of climate change. Another most-discussed headline was the COVID-19 pandemic in the pre-election term in Germany. At the beginning of 2020, the whole world stayed at home due to the new coronavirus pandemic. All the people of the world acted according to the statements of scientific experts and political leaders. During the 2021 election period in Germany, the COVID-19 vaccine studies gained momentum. Increasing the number of vaccinated citizens in election campaigns was one of the most important political debates. In both cases, the statements of scientists and political leaders shaped the 2021 election campaign in Germany. In order to combat climate change and the pandemic, many restrictions had been implemented by science experts and the government, such as curfews and working conditions. In this section, the attitudes of the leaders of the far-right populist AfD Party,

Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla, and SPD's chancellor candidate, Olaf Scholz, towards the pandemic and climate change protective policies were analyzed.

### 5.2.1. The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla

Almost half of the total tweets about the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change of the AfD leaders during the election campaign were related to the restrictions or protective policies. AfD leaders discouraged or denied the restriction policies. The government announced that having a COVID-19 vaccine certificate is mandatory at the entrance to open public spaces. Citizens who were not vaccinated were forced to have a COVID-19 test. Yet, testing in Germany was paid. Chrupalla opposed both mandatory vaccination and the testing of citizens. He claimed that the government placed an extra economic burden on the citizens. He accused the government of being irresponsible while he was trying to protect the citizens economically. Furthermore, Meuthen accused the imposition of quarantine on unvaccinated citizens of being a policy of discrimination between citizens. He called this policy as "totalitarian".

*Tino Chrupalla: "Today I have myself in @morningmagazine commented on the #Corona summit: It is irresponsible that citizens should pay for mandatory tests. Federal and state governments must not force citizens to vaccinate through burdens! -(11.08.2021)*

Contrary to the government's policies to increase the proportion of citizens who were vaccinated, Chrupalla was skeptical about the reliability of the COVID-19 vaccine. While vaccination was seen as the most powerful solution to end the pandemic, the AfD leaders tried to undermine vaccination policies by declaring that they would not be vaccinated at all. In addition to that, Chrupalla claimed that the majority of the public did not want to be vaccinated. He saw the obligation of vaccination as a policy that did not serve the will of the majority of the people. Furthermore, Chrupalla and Meuthen completely opposed the vaccination of children in debates about vaccination for children. Chrupalla accused the government of putting pressure on the public to get children vaccinated. As a result, they believed that the COVID-19 vaccine did not serve the public's health and they did not see it as reliable.

*Tino Chrupalla: "According to the #INSA study, more than half of the unvaccinated do not want to be vaccinated, 67% of them give a lack of confidence in the vaccines as a reason. The Federal Government must accept this point of view!"-(02.08.2021)*

*Tino Chrupalla: "#STIKO does not give any general vaccination recommendations for minors. Health ministers want to override independent experts today. #AfD rejects vaccination pressure on children and young people because the benefits do not justify the risks".-(02.08.2021)*

Meuthen accused the quarantine policies during the pandemic of hindering the freedoms of the people and being the policies of an authoritarian government rather than being policies aimed at protecting the public from the dissemination of the virus. He underestimated the precautionary policies that were taken against the dissemination of the virus. Along with that, Meuthen supported the pandemic restrictions lifted in Denmark. Accordingly, he suggested that restrictions should be lifted in Germany too. Meuthen accused Angela Merkel of enforcing the restriction policies for too long. For

example, he evaluated the closing of borders as an "anti-tourist" policy, not as a part of pandemic measures. Besides that, Meuthen and Chrupalla framed the government's precautionary policies in a hostile picture, as policies that did not serve Germany and its citizens.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! A tourism association has accused SPD-Schwesig & its state government of having drawn an "anti-tourist protective wall" around Meck-Pomm. That's exactly how it is: Despite an incidence of under 15 (!) in some cases, vacationing there remains prohibited!"-(25.05.2021)*

AfD leaders opposed the climate change regulations by expressing similar arguments as in the pandemic case. Accordingly, Meuthen and Chrupalla used skeptical language about the existence of climate change. They preferred to criticize the new climate change regulations in a cynical manner. They denied not only protective measures against climate change but also the existence of climate change. With the concept of the anti-elite rhetoric of populism, Chrupalla attacked the carbon-free vehicle policy to enrich a particular group of people. In fact, in order to reduce carbon emissions in transportation, the government provided financial support to the employees who used bicycles. Chrupalla accused this policy of serving the "bionade bourgeoisie". He claimed that carbon-free regulation serves the interests of a particular group rather than being evaluated within the environmental policy. Chrupalla tried to undermine this policy with a cynical tone.

*Tino Chrupalla: "Green transport policy: €1 billion subsidy for €1 million cargo bikes. Craftsmen and small business owners should offer services to the Bionade bourgeoisie on bicycles. Next, rickshaws instead of taxis? Raised, clueless and unelectable."-(22.08.2021)*

According to the climate change regulations, the government aimed to reduce the amount of carbon used in transportation and heating. Based on this, carbon tax policy was made mandatory. AfD leaders attacked the carbon tax policy as "eco-dictatorship", similar to their stance against pandemic restriction policies. They evaluated environmental policies in an undemocratic framework. Meuthen and Chrupalla believed that the fundamental freedoms of citizens should not be curtailed by environmental policies. Moreover, based on the example of Sweden, Meuthen recommended that the carbon tax policy could be decided by referendum.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! For Baerbock & the eco-socialist "Greens", BANs are an innovation driver. Wrong: Bans are paternalism and patronage! Innovations are best created in FREEDOM. Whoever destroys them also destroys prosperity!"-(14.09.2021)*

The carbon-free energies were promoted by the government in order to reduce carbon-emitted energies for transportation and heating purposes in Germany. Accordingly, the construction of wind turbines in Germany took an important place on the political agenda under the theme of the new climate-neutral energy policies. AfD leaders were particularly critical of renewable energy policies. Meuthen and Chrupalla accused wind turbines of harming nature. They claimed that wind turbines were destroying the national landscape. Therefore, they targeted Scholz for promoting wind turbines. Meuthen interpreted the construction of wind turbines as not ecological. He

stated that supporters of wind turbines could not spoil the beauty of the landscape and could not destroy the national lands by using the discourse of protecting nature through wind turbines. According to this example, AfD leaders' politics focused on a hostile attitude toward the government and politicized any solutions suggested by the government.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! SPD environment minister believes that wind energy is "increasingly becoming part of our cultural landscape". This unspeakable disfigurement of nature will certainly NOT! In addition, it is unparalleled nonsense in terms of energy policy as well as ecologically. Our beautiful landscape is being destroyed by such people."-(23.07.2021)*

### **5.2.2. Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz**

The climate change issue was one of the top headlines of the election campaign of Olaf Scholz. He mostly emphasized the importance of climate change. He underlined that climate change was not only an issue for Germany but something that threatened all the countries around the world. As a chancellor candidate, Scholz believed that Germany should be a leading country in the international sphere in the case of the management of climate change policies. Mainly, he promoted a carbon-free industry in his election campaign. Scholz created a large budget plan for a new climate-neutral industry. His plan was to build an industry based on electricity and various forms of renewable energy. He promoted climate-neutral energy in production, heating and transportation systems. Along with that, he stressed making climate-neutral industries based on innovations and strategies stronger. On the other hand, AfD leaders asserted that electricity based on industry undermines Germany's powerful industry, and they suggested that electricity capacity was not enough for the mass use of energy. Furthermore, Scholz interpreted climate change issues from a broad perspective. For example, he emphasized that the climate change issue did not only threaten nature but also threatened the health of people.

*Olaf Scholz: "Climate protection is health protection. But what exactly does that mean? What are the effects of the climate crisis on our health? Talk about @SvenjaSchulze68, Matthias Miersch and Heike Baehrens and I with Eckart von Hirschhausen! Now. Live."-(21.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz- Retweet-: "With an additional 8 billion euros, we are sending a clear signal: Germany should become a pioneer in #climate protection, said @OlafScholz on the #Immediate Program 2022 climate decided by the Federal Cabinet today. Protection. Finance."-(11.08.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "Renewable energies must be massively expanded: roll up your sleeves, get your hands on an excavator, lay power lines. Because for a CO2-neutral industry, companies have to use electricity from renewable energies instead of coal, gas or oil."-(22.08.2021)*

Scholz criticized the opposition party leaders for not putting enough effort into climate-neutral policies. Armin Laschet was one of the chancellor candidates who supported a climate-neutral economy. However, Scholz criticized Laschet's policies for not giving enough priority to the climate change issue. In the case of building wind

turbines, Scholz criticized the opposition parties for taking decisions slowly. Along with that, he criticized the political decisions of the Greens Party for not being in harmony between the financial costs of the green policies and the adoption of the citizens' policies. He suggested that adopting citizens to climate-neutral policies adequately was very important. Therefore, he didn't support radical changes in climate change policies. According to that, Scholz strategically proposed political decisions regarding both the financial condition of citizens and the environmental policies.

*Olaf Scholz: "The numbers of @BWEeV show that where the Union and the Greens are in government, the federal states are lagging behind when it comes to building new wind turbines. This means that anyone who resolutely pushes ahead with the expansion and wants to make our power supply climate-neutral must do so in the fall."-(27.07.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "And I like to repeat it again: A higher carbon price alone is not the solution. It does not create a single new power line, not a single new system for electrolysis and not a single hydrogen network!"-(22.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "Armin Laschet, on the other hand, voted against expanding our electricity generation targets. But this is absolutely necessary if we want to make the industry climate-neutral. This is the only way Germany can remain an industrial country and make progress in #climate protection. #AskSelf."-(15.08.2021)*

The COVID-19 vaccination started in Germany in December 2020, and vaccination campaigns gained momentum during the peak period of the election campaign. Scholz supported protective policies, and he emphasized that the most powerful solutions to stop the pandemic are vaccination and restriction policies. When the number of vaccines was enough for everyone, Scholz supported mandatory vaccination. He underlined that the pandemic would end, provided that the majority were vaccinated. Along with that, Scholz supported the quarantine policy for unvaccinated citizens. Furthermore, he supported the policy of not paying the salaries of unvaccinated citizens during quarantine at home. While AfD leaders evaluated this policy as an authoritarian and discriminatory one, Scholz emphasized that everyone could benefit from the vaccine as there was enough of it available. As a result, Scholz took a very determined stance on the vaccination campaign. He considered vaccination necessary for the end of the restriction policies. He frequently promoted the COVID-19 vaccine campaign during the pre-election period so that children could receive face-to-face education, workplaces could reopen, and, in other words, everyone could return to normalcy.

*Olaf Scholz: "That's a right decision: Unvaccinated people in quarantine will not receive #continued wages because there has long been enough vaccine. It is important to me that wages will continue to be paid in the event of illness and those who cannot be vaccinated will continue to be compensated. SPD Chancellor candidate Olaf #Scholz welcomes the decision to vaccinate unvaccinated people from November 1st. in quarantine due to to cancel continued payment of wages in the event of a corona infection. He said that on the sidelines of an event in #Cologne. Minister of Health #Spahn had also defended the decision. @ZDFtoday." -(02.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "We need to get the vaccination out to the people now and convince as many citizens as possible to get vaccinated. Lifelike offers are part of this."(01.08.2021)*

All in all, the leaders of both parties approached climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic restriction policies from opposite sides. While Scholz's top priority was to tackle these problems and propose new solution-oriented policies, the AfD leaders opposed the proposed policies under the theme of the general will of the people. While AfD leaders were skeptical about the reliability of the vaccine and the existence of climate change, Scholz underlined that protective policies were vital for the purpose of a better future. Scholz put more emphasis on precautionary policies against the climate change issue than the COVID-19 pandemic during the pre-election term. He interpreted the climate change issue as an extremely important threat. Therefore, he aimed to expand the use of various types of renewable energy in many different places, such as production, transportation and heating systems. Accordingly, he aimed to popularize industrial technologies based on electricity. He underlined that Germany would strengthen its strong industry with the new era of climate-neutral energy solutions. Although the leaders of both parties mostly focused on the restriction policies of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change policies during the election campaigns, it is clearly seen that they evaluated the policies within completely opposite frameworks.

### **5.3. Category 3: Evaluation of Economic Interests Based on Climate Change and COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Policies**

The approach in which the populist and non-populist differed most clearly in climate change and COVID-19 policies was observed in the relationship of these policies with economic interests. Based on scientific evidence, restrictive policies were implemented by international organizations and the government for the COVID-19 Pandemic and climate change issues. Populist leaders prefer less costly policies for the people because they see the experience and will of the people as more valid, even when scientific evidence is needed (Brown, 2009). Along with that, whether scientific knowledge is objective or not in science-related policies, as long as it is experienced in daily life, it is accepted by the public (Habermas, 2010). Therefore, political actors may not always support policies that accept the correctness of scientific results. Along with that, populism can be skeptical about scientific studies such as vaccines and climate change by referring to the daily life experiences of the people (Foroughi et al., 2019). Also, populist leaders accuse decision-making political actors of not representing the public in policies related to science (Mede and Schäfer, 2020).

#### **5.3.1. The AfD Party Leaders: Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla**

In the example of the 2021 election in Germany, AfD leaders denied protective policies if there were obvious obstacles to people's fundamental freedoms and daily life practices. The mandatory carbon tax policy and the transition to a climate-neutral industry caused new living habits to be gained based on new climate change regulations. AfD leaders undermined the government's protective policies as these changes put the people in an economically difficult situation. In addition to that, Meuthen and Chrupalla accused the political elites or science experts of creating policies that served their own economic interests. For example, Chrupalla argued that carbon tax policy covered the costs of non-sensical laws enforced by the political elite. In other words, he argued that the carbon tax

was the policy of the elites as a result of their mismanagement. Besides that, he underlined the negative economic consequences of the increase in fuel prices rather than the aim of reducing carbon emissions through the carbon tax on fuel. Along with that, Meuthen claimed that carbon taxes that were taken from the public only made the political elites richer. Same with Chrupalla, Meuthen also attributed the reason for high energy prices to wrong political management rather than the aim of reducing carbon emissions. Meuthen and Chrupalla interpreted the carbon-dioxide tax policy under the theme of the pure people and corrupt elites, which Mudde (2004) describes as an immoral framework.

Furthermore, Meuthen asserted that the CDU, CSU and the Greens Party were responsible for the rising oil prices. Due to the rapid increase in oil prices, Meuthen expressed the cost of transportation as an issue for citizens. AfD leaders demanded that fuel prices be lowered so that citizens did not suffer more. In addition to attacking the Greens and the CDU/CSU Parties for rising oil prices, they accused Olaf Scholz of being apart from the public due to his unawareness of current gas prices. In other words, Meuthen and Chrupalla alluded that Scholz was far from the challenges of the daily lives of people.

*Tino Chrupalla: "Intervention spiral: Politicians want to use nonsensical measures to solve the problems they have caused themselves with nonsensical laws. #fuel price brake is window dressing. The #CO2 tax must go, then fuel will become cheaper by itself."-(07.09.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: " Good morning! This is how "green" traffic and clientele policy works: 1,000,000,000 € for typical urban prosperous greens from the pockets of all taxpayers, so that the former can "enrich" their colorful latte macchiato world with subsidized cargo bikes!"-(24.08.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! "SPD "chancellor candidate" (current value of his "chancellor party" according to INSA: 15.5%), who has the current Doesn't know fuel prices: What an oath of disclosure to remote citizens! The prices can be seen on every corner, you can't NOT know them!"-(22.06.2021)*

AfD leaders interpreted the mandatory policy of having COVID-19 tests in open public spaces as an authoritarian management practice. They harshly criticized the public's payment for COVID-19 tests. They interpreted it as a policy that put pressure on citizens rather than underlining that mandatory testing policy would protect citizens from the virus. Moreover, they claimed that healthy citizens suffered economically. In addition to the pandemic measures, they interpreted the necessity of carbon taxes as a totalitarian form of government. Meuthen and Chrupalla claimed that the policies that forced the citizens to pay a carbon tax were undemocratic.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: Good morning! The "Greens" are again showing their totalitarian face with their tax-Stasi portal: the citizen should become a tax-extorted subject of the expensive "green" mania to save the world- such a disgusting Stasi portal should not be missing!-(02.09.2021)*

Lastly, Meuthen and Chrupalla underlined the nationalist statements under the theme of climate change policies, which was one of the most prominent expressions of

the far-right populist discourse. During the election campaign, AfD leaders criticized the opposition parties' policies against climate change as being more important than Germany's economic and immigration issues. They accused the leaders of the mainstream political parties of not serving the interests of the country. They emphasized that the policies should serve economic interests first. They emphasized that AfD Party saw the problems of migration and economic reasons more important than the problem of climate change. AfD leaders claimed that climate change policies damaged Germany's strong economy and that companies were economically threatened by the new climate-neutral policies.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! NOT vs. MISTRESS vs. DESASTER - this is the best way to describe the TV trill between Laschet, Scholz & Baerbock. No concrete statements about the costs of the coming madness & no migration issue, instead climate protection and gender!" –(31.08.2021)*

### **5.3.2. Chancellor Candidate of the SPD: Olaf Scholz**

Olaf Scholz emphasized that he would support businesses damaged by the pandemic lockdown. He underlined that especially music, art, culture and gastronomy were the sectors most negatively affected by the pandemic. According to that, he stated that financial aid was provided to the damaged workplaces and would continue to be provided. He didn't point out the negative economic impact of measures such as the obligation of COVID-19 testing price or the quarantine of unvaccinated citizens after an adequate stock of vaccines. Rather, Scholz focused more on how protective policies would end the pandemic in the long run. Apart from that, as AfD leaders do, Scholz gave more space to policies related to climate change, as the effect of new policies for climate change on the economy causes a more radical change in the long term than the COVID-19 pandemic measures. Unlike Meuthen and Chrupalla, Scholz primarily acknowledged the existence of climate change. Secondly, he emphasized that the negative effects of climate change would affect everyone and everything, from the economy to health, at the national level and internationally in the long term. Scholz promised that the structure of the climate-neutral economy would be arranged in a way that benefits everyone. When Scholz underlined the negative effects of climate change, he said a new climate-neutral economy will make Germany's developed economy stronger. In other words, he emphasized that new climate-neutral industry and economic policies will mutually reinforce each other. Contrary to the AfD leaders' belief in the catastrophized economic interests of the country due to the policies of climate change, Scholz used constructive language. Lastly, Scholz strongly expressed that he would fight the climate change issue in order to slow it down and minimize its negative effects. Scholz promised that he would make a big transformation in the German industry. Accordingly, he aimed to create the new climate-neutral industry in a way that would move the economy forward, such as by creating more good jobs and increasing production. The most important transformation underlined by Scholz is increasing the use of renewable energy in the long run. For instance, he aimed to greatly increase the capacity of electricity and to benefit more from wind energy in Germany.

*Olaf Scholz- Retweet-:"We have to manage the ecological transformation," says @OlafScholz. "In my view, it is associated with the second industrial revolution. It is also about the future of work, about ensuring that there are good jobs in the future."- (05.09.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: Our economy has been fueled by coal and oil for 250 years- this era will now come to an end within 25 years. She has to. And that's why we have to set the course for our economy again now. #TDI21- (11.06.2021)*

Scholz emphasized that policies related to climate change should not threaten citizens economically. He sometimes accused the Greens Party's green policies of being radical. Accordingly, he implied that the green policies of the Greens Party would put the people in an economically difficult situation. Rather, he emphasized that green policies should be both environmentally friendly and prioritize the economic conditions of the people. Scholz believed that green policies should be beneficial for everyone with detailed consideration and implementation. For example, he promised that electricity would be cheaper for the purpose of increasing the use of electricity. Along with that, he emphasized the gradual and more reasonable implementation of the carbon tax policy, unlike the Greens. Furthermore, he promised that the targeted green transformation in the steel industry would both protect the environment and the jobs of steel industry workers. As the AfD underlined, carbon taxes and renewable energy policies would affect people economically. But unlike AfD leaders, Scholz assured that climate-neutral policies could also serve the economic interests of the people.

*Olaf Scholz: "And the greens? They might have a lot of ideas. But they are not over and they simply ignore the reality of life for most citizens- as we can see from their plans for CO2 pricing. #futurecamp"- (20.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "We need a careful, moderate approach to carbon pricing. Changing prices overnight is at the expense of society. And that can't be the solution we want."- (16.06.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "The employees of the steel industry must be able to rely on the fact that climate-neutral production also takes them with them, that good jobs are obtained and expanded. For me it is clear: industrial policy and the interests of employees must always be considered together!"- (16.06.2021)*

Another important issue discussed during the election period was the sharing of carbon dioxide taxes between tenants and landlords. In Germany, a carbon dioxide tax is imposed on citizens who use fossil fuels in their homes for heating. The purpose of this tax is to encourage citizens to switch to renewable energy. But only tenants pay these taxes, not landlords. Accordingly, Scholz emphasized that the carbon dioxide tax should be shared between landlords and tenants. Scholz supported the implementation of the carbon dioxide tax as part of the climate change policy. However, he emphasized that landlords should also pay the tax so that this tax does not burden only tenants. On the other hand, the CDU/CSU Party members suggested that only tenants should pay the tax. Scholz accused the CDU/CSU Party members of being biased in this policy. He offered to compromise so that it would not significantly threaten the tenants economically. It can

be concluded that Scholz prioritized both the economic interests of citizens and climate-neutral policies in the case of the carbon tax paid by tenants and landlords.

*Olaf Scholz: "That's why we had agreed in the coalition: The rising CO2 price will be divided fifty-fifty among tenants and landlords. @OlafScholz: "The CDU/CSU parliamentary group has completely sided with the landlords and canceled the negotiated compromise."-(08.07.2021)*

The SPD's chancellor candidate, Olaf Scholz, and the AfD leaders underlined that the economic consequences of climate change policies were extremely important. However, the AfD leaders denied the existence of climate change and stressed that all proposed policies would be an economic burden to the public and serve the political elite. On the other hand, Scholz guaranteed that the new industry based on renewable energy would create a structure that was not only environmentally friendly but also would consider the economic interests of the people. He underlined that the most important strategy to combat the negative effects of climate change would be a carbon-free industry. As a result, Scholz promised that there would be an integral industry structure for a better economy with a climate-neutral industry. He used hopeful language. However, he criticized the Green Party's policies for ignoring the economic interests of the citizens. According to Scholz, the protection of economic interests in the climate-neutral industry was a top priority. On the other hand, populist leaders, considering the short term, argued that the policies taken against climate change did not serve the economic interests of the people, and they ignored the negative effects of climate change in the long term. Contrary to the AfD leaders, Scholz aimed to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and protect the economic well-being of the people in the long term with a well-planned climate-neutral industry.

#### **5.4. Category 4: Attitudes Towards International Institutions**

International organizations and transnational institutions such as the WHO (World Health Organization), the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), and the EU (European Union) are the most important decision centers that bind states in their policies on climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The liberal democracies, in particular, reinforce international and transnational organizations. In other words, international and transnational institutions strengthen their dominance throughout the existence of liberal democracies. On the other hand, populist leaders undermine transnational and international institutions. The most important reason for this is that the policies of international institutions create a representation problem at the national level. Accordingly, these institutions are accused by populists of failing to protect interests at the national level. Therefore, the policies of international institutions trigger populists to strengthen their discourse on the general will of the people (Mounk, 2018). Kriesi (2014) highlights that European-level decision-makers undermine the principle of public accountability in their policies. He emphasizes that transnational institutions have lost the principle of representing parties and citizens (Kriesi, 2014).

Expert knowledge is needed for policies that require scientific knowledge. Non-elected scientists have semi-autonomy in such international institutions. Populists criticize the decision-making position of scientists as a technocratic administration, in policies such as climate change, pandemics, or economic crises (Mounk, 2018).

Therefore, populism strengthens the rhetoric of "the general will of the people" due to the policies of international institutions. Accordingly, when we look at the tweets of Olaf Scholz and the leaders of the AfD Party, Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla, about international organizations during the pre-election period, the number of tweets of the SPD chancellor candidate about international organizations is significantly higher than the number of tweets of the AfD leaders. AfD leaders referred to international organizations in only 2 tweets, while Scholz referred to them in 26 tweets.

Regarding climate change policies, AfD leaders attacked the policies of the EU, which include restrictions on automobile production and increasing fuel prices. They described the new policy as a "crazy climate tariff". Meuthen and Chrupalla asserted that this policy damaged the interests of international trade. They argued that the EU's climate change restrictions did not serve their economic interests. Apart from that, they did not mention cooperation with international organizations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic precautionary policies. AfD leaders did not mention the policies of international organizations that have taken against climate change issues. As a result, in the political agenda of the AfD election campaign, protective policies of international collaboration against climate change and the COVID-19 virus did not have an important place.

On the other hand, Scholz would like to see Germany as the country that should strengthen international institutions for climate-neutral industry policies. For example, he believed that Germany should play a leading role in climate change policies within the EU. In his election campaign, he aimed to make renewable energy more widespread in the EU. He believed that as a result of international cooperation, there would be a more sustainable world. Scholz highlighted the problem of the climate change issue in international meetings such as the Progressive Governance Summit, G20, and G7. He considered it one of the most important issues on the global agenda. For example, he announced at the G7 meeting that he would cooperate under the name "Climate Club" for climate change policies. Scholz emphasized that the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement within the "climate club" should be accelerated. Scholz is one of the initiators of the climate club collaboration. Furthermore, Scholz supported mobilization communities such as WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) and FFF (Fridays for Future). He supported the demands of these communities during the pre-election period. In addition to that, he highlighted the climate change issues in the context of the UN's 2030 goals and supported cooperation with the young population. He declared that he will legislate the goals of the IPCC at the national level for a climate-neutral industry. He planned substantial budgets for the climate-neutral industry.

*Olaf Scholz: "Good news, for which I have worked very hard. We need common, international minimum standards for climate policy measures in order to promote #climate protection internationally. With the #climateclub we create a reliable international framework."-(21.08.2021)*

*Olaf Scholz: "We must give the Paris climate protection agreement a boost. That's why we discussed the international #climateclub in the cabinet today. So that countries cooperate more and more transparently and are not afraid that #climate protection will lead to competitive disadvantages for them."-(25.08.2021)*

Apart from that, for the COVID-19 pandemic policies, he emphasized the importance of acting in collaboration with the EU. He stated that joint decisions taken with the EU helped achieve stronger and more effective results. In particular, he focused on the word "solidarity" with EU countries for their pandemic measures policies. It is seen that Scholz emphasized the necessity of international cooperation not only for climate change but also for the end of the pandemic.

### **5.5. Category 5: Attitudes Towards Science Experts and Institutions**

The principle of scientific studies is to present universal and objective results. According to evidence-based scientific information, political actors benefit from scientific knowledge and make policies regarding it in science-related political decisions. Sharing scientific experiments and results might take a long time. In addition to that, there may be disagreements among scientists during scientific discussions. On the other hand, populist leaders advocate short-term-oriented policies due to the fact that scientific studies take a long time to conclude (Collins et al., 2020). Populists interpret disagreements among scientists as scientists' dishonesty. In particular, populist political actors claim that scientists carry out their work in secrecy and are far from the daily life experiences of the public (Kitcher, 2001).

Furthermore, the populism that underlines the general will of the people in any conflict between the public and scientists causes scientists to express their decisions as decision-making sovereignty (Mede and Schäfer, 2020). While populist leaders propose policies that are compatible with local culture and the conditions of the time, scientists prefer to be universal and objective (Brown, 2009). During times of crisis, citizens cannot adopt scientific knowledge quickly and easily (Prettner et al., 2021). In order to support citizens, populist leaders interpret the experiences and beliefs of the people as more dominant than objective realities. Therefore, in times of crisis, populists defend the experience-based information which is accepted by the majority of people rather than evidence-based information. Along with that, the idea that everyone can have their own truth, underlined by the post-truth era or the acceptance of relativity, may cause populist leaders to easily disprove the claims of political elites and scientists (Foroughi et al., 2019).

Four tweets by AfD leaders that directly targeted scientists and scientific institutions within the framework of climate change and the pandemic during the pre-election were analyzed. For example, Meuthen accused scientists and the new-term health minister, Karl Lauterbach, of lying and harming the citizens. He denied the statements about the new coronavirus asserted by Lauterbach. Meuthen claimed that the public was intimidated by fake news. Furthermore, he repeatedly accused the mainstream TV channel that featured Lauterbach's statements of being biased because he accused the mainstream media of not giving space to scientists who were against Lauterbach's claims. Meuthen claimed that the information shared by the mainstream media was not correct. He accused not only Lauterbach but also the government of sharing false information about the new coronavirus. Accordingly, Meuthen and Chrupalla claimed that the pandemic policies implemented regarding suggestions from biased scientists and media deceived the public.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! Lauterbach's Corona errors have caused enormous damage to our country- he has been allowed to spread his theses 54 times since March 2020, mostly unchallenged, on the 5 major talk shows on ARD & ZDF. His biggest mistakes have now been documented!” – (04.06.2021)*

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! The spread of corona fake news has been frightening the public for many months- at least THAT is what Merkel, Söder, Lauterbach & Co. have mastered, also thanks to ARD & ZDF. This kind of corona scaremongering must finally come to an end! –(12.08.2021)*

According to another tweet example, Meuthen targeted minister of health Jens Spahn and chancellor Angela Merkel. He again drew attention to the cooperation between scientific institutions and political elites. He expressed this cooperation in a negative way. He claimed that the decisions taken between scientists and politicians within the scope of pandemic restrictions were deceiving the public through disinformation. The minister of health, Spahn, deemed the quarantine policy necessary due to the limited bed capacities in hospitals. However, Meuthen claimed that this information was not correct, and he claimed that for the sake of implementing stronger pandemic restrictions, this information was deliberately delivered by Spahn. Meuthen ignored the statements claimed by the minister of health.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! statement d. Federal Audit Office: Many hospitals reported their intensive care bed capacities on purpose. Too low. But the lockdown policy was based on that! Warning by the RKI as early as January 11th, 2021 had no consequences for Merkel & Spahn. WITHDRAWAL! -- Corona measures are based on intensive lies.” – (12.06.2021)*

AfD leaders had skepticism about the safety of the vaccine. Chrupalla stated that the vaccine was insufficient against the newly formed COVID-19 variants. As a result, he opposed the policy that made the vaccine mandatory. Meuthen and Chrupalla harshly criticized the political leaders in government, especially when vaccinating children was on the agenda. Contrary to the joint vaccine promotion by the government and scientists in Germany, AfD leaders sought to undermine the reliability of the vaccine. Even though STIKO (the Standing Committee on Vaccination) approved vaccines for children, the AfD leaders had skepticism about this statement.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: “Good morning! With pressure on STIKO to recommend the corona vaccine for children despite the lack of long-term data, Söder & Schäuble have taken a very dangerous detour. There must be NO DIRECT OR INDIRECT VACCINATION FOR CHILDREN!”- (31.07.2021)*

Apart from the new coronavirus pandemic, AfD leaders took a tougher stance on climate change policies. AfD leaders denied the alleged information on climate change and questioned the existence of climate change. Meuthen and Chrupalla emphasized that the policies taken against climate change did not serve the fundamental rights of citizens, as in the case of the pandemic. Besides the rhetoric of the general will of the people, they also tended to deny scientific findings. The information given by scientists was either accepted or completely denied. For example, they accused politicians and scientists who claimed that the flood disaster that occurred in July 2021 was caused by climate change

of being dishonest and deceiving the public. AfD leaders accused politicians and scientists who implemented policies linked to climate change of deceiving the public.

*Good morning! The village of Schuld, which was destroyed by the flood, was flooded by the Ahr as early as 1790 and 1910. So anyone who thinks they can prevent this with "climate protection" is deceiving the citizens who are at risk of flooding- □□ will NOT become a "climate island". -(27.07.2021)*

On the other hand, the chancellor candidate of SPD, Olaf Scholz, did not make any positive or negative references to scientists or institutions. He did not tweet anything positive or negative about scientists and scientific organizations. He did not defend scientists and scientific institutions against populists in his election campaign. In other words, he expressed his solution-oriented policies for the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change issues rather than attacking individuals and institutions. Scholz's determinant and bellicose attitude in his policies regarding climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic drew attention. Scholz did not mention the reliability of the COVID-19 vaccine, either positively or negatively. Rather, he underlined that the only solution to ending the pandemic was vaccination. Scholz did not have any doubt about the existence of climate change. He interpreted climate change as a priority problem at the global and country levels. Therefore, he supported all environmental policies. He stated that he would fight against the new coronavirus pandemic and climate change at every opportunity.

## **5.6. Category 6: Disinformation**

The democratization of scientific knowledge makes it difficult to accept evidence-based scientific knowledge. The most prominent feature of the post-truth era is relativity, which takes its place in scientific discussions. The understanding that everyone has their own truth creates an environment for the acceptance of more than one reality in debates on the results of evidence-based studies (Smart et al., 2019). According to that, people's daily life experiences have gained more validity than scientific knowledge in the post-truth era. Besides that, disinformation and misinformation play a major role in the credibility of alternative information vs. scientific knowledge through social media platforms. Disinformation is the dissemination of false information for the purpose of intentionally deceiving or misleading people. Secondly, misinformation causes confusion about reality unintentionally. In another definition, misinformation is an "honest mistake" (Iyengar and Massey, 2019, Shu et al., 2020). The fact that a binary view of populism creates an atmosphere of hostility between the elites and the people accelerates the generation and spread of disinformation (Hameleers, 2020). Populist leaders can easily spread disinformation about a decision they interpret as a threat to the general will of the people in science-related policies. During the election campaign period, AfD leader Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen's 3 tweets, in which he spread disinformation about climate change, were analyzed. Meuthen basically denied the existence of climate change in his tweets, which included disinformation.

*Prof Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! According to Prof. Pielke from the University of Chicago, the increase in extreme weather damage is NOT due to climate change, but to 3 other factors; in addition, far fewer people die than in the past as a result of extreme weather. Climate crisis?" - (09.09.2021)*

Firstly, Meuthen denied the existence of climate change. Referring to a scientist, he confirmed his belief that climate change was not real. He discussed climate change only in the context of extreme weather in this tweet. He dismissed the climate change issue by referring to inaccurate information that claimed that fewer people died from extreme weather.

*Prof Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! Climatologist Prof. Mike Hulme refuses to declare a "climate emergency" as the "Greens" keep doing. With such a "climate emergency" our fundamental rights should be suspended and permanent left-green dictatorship enabled! --Emergency laws undermine fundamental rights--there is no climate emergency."-(28.06.2021)*

Meuthen denied that the climate change issue was an emergency. He referred to another scientist in this example. Meuthen was attributed to one of the best-known scientists in the field of climate change. Although Prof. Dr. Mike Hulme didn't approve the declaration of a climate emergency according to current conditions, Hulme is a scientist who supports policies that tackle climate change. In fact, Meuthen defended the correct statement of Hulme. Yet, he used rhetoric that completely ignored Hulme's previous statements. In other words, although Hulme supported fighting against climate change, Meuthen did not share any information that would refer to Hulme's previous statements. Meuthen rejected the climate emergency by referring to Hulme and deliberately picked the information that supported his point of view.

*Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen: "Good morning! The village of Schuld, which was destroyed by the flood, was flooded by the Ahr as early as 1790 and 1910. So anyone who thinks they can prevent this with "climate protection" is deceiving the citizens who are at risk of flooding- □□ will NOT become a "climate island".-(27.07.2021)*

Many people, especially Olaf Scholz, claimed that the flood disaster in Germany in July 2021 was due to the effects of climate change. Natural disasters such as forest fires and floods, which increased in many parts of the world, were also believed to be due to climate change. Meuthen referred to past flood disasters in Germany, and he opposed those who claimed that the 2021 flood disaster was due to climate change. He claimed that the flood disaster which occurred in July 2021 was not extraordinary. Meuthen opposed those who associated the flood with climate change, referring to the time span of two previous floods in the same region. In addition, Meuthen undermined the climate change regulation policies of the government or opposition party leaders, as analyzed in previous sections. Meuthen's rhetoric, which contained hostility, allowed him to create disinformation. He reinforced climate change denial among the public by attributing information that refuted climate change issue and their effects. On the other hand, Olaf Scholz's tweets during the pre-election campaigns didn't include disinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study analyzed how populist and non-populist political actors differ in their approach to climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine issues and policies under the theme of science-related issues. According to the 2021 election period in Germany, the problems mentioned above were discussed the most. While the tweets of AfD leaders who are Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla were analyzed for their populist approach, the tweets of chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz were analyzed for their non-populist concept. According to the findings of the study, populist leaders Chrupalla and Meuthen were skeptical about the existence of the climate change issue and the reliability of the new coronavirus vaccine. Along with that, the general will of the people was the most prominent rhetoric in attacking protective policies regarding the new coronavirus pandemic and the climate change issue. Contrary to AfD Party leaders, Olaf Scholz neither denied the existence of climate change nor protective policies for the new coronavirus pandemic. In contrast, he promised that these problems would be tackled with solution-oriented policies in the best way for a better future. He had a positive attitude toward the policies implemented by the government, scientific institutions, and international organizations. His primary headlines of the election campaign, under the slogan of “respect”, were fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic and especially climate change for a better, safer and sustainable future.

The far-right populist leaders Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen interpreted the protective policies that were decided for climate change and the COVID-19 issues in a similar framework. Accordingly, two important outputs should be mentioned in both cases. They argued that the policies conducted by the government were not serving the general will of the people. Rather, they claimed that the policies conducted by the government to tackle these issues served the benefit of political elites. For example, they argued that mandating carbon taxes or covid testing made a certain group of people richer. Also, they claimed that the people were economically damaged due to pandemic and climate change based policies rather than considering the life-threatening emphasis of the two global issues. Secondly, Chrupalla and Meuthen were skeptical of the existence of climate change issues and the reliability of the COVID-19 vaccine. While they did not deny the existence of the new coronavirus, they framed a skeptical view of the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine. Along with that, AfD members not only argued that the vaccine against the new variants was insufficient but also declared that they would not be vaccinated. Furthermore, they blamed the STIKO institute for vaccinating the children without reliable scientific knowledge. Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, the AfD Party leaders have taken a tougher stance on climate change policies. They denied the existence of climate change issues. In addition, they did not consider climate change issue as an emergency. Accordingly, they considered all protectionist policies regarding climate change issues to be policies focused on political interests that only served a certain group of people. In other words, populists not only had a skeptical stance on climate change and the vaccine, they also labeled the conducted protective policies and serving the political interests of the elites as undemocratic.

Contrary to the findings of this study, Küppers (2022) suggests that it is insufficient to evaluate only the anti-elites’ rhetoric or only the people’s rhetoric as populism on its own. She interpreted the discourses in which the elites and the people were expressed together. According to the discourses of AfD leaders between 2016 and

2020 under the concept of the climate change issue, Küppers suggested that the leaders expressed nationalist discourses underlined by far-right ideology rather than populism (Küppers, 2022). However, based on the data in this study, which includes the tweets of AfD leaders in four-month, they emphasized the general will of the people rhetoric the most. According to Mudde (2017), the general will of the people concept arises from the building of antagonism between the elites' and the people's rhetorics (Mudde, 2017). When AfD leaders criticized the high oil prices, the mandatory carbon tax, or the mandatory testing policy, they attacked the corrupt elites. Along with that, they claimed that people could not be forced to pay carbon tax or have mandatory COVID-19 tests. According to that, they attacked the mandatory policies of restrictions under the "general will of the people" rhetoric of populism. As a result, in this study, the interpretation of populist discourse is not only framed by the elites or the people but also includes the general will of the people concept.

Ideology-based discourses are important factors in strengthening the discourses of populists. However, the main discourses of populists are shaped not within the framework of ideology-based factors but rather based on sub-dimensions of populism (Mudde, 2021). However, the host ideologies of populism played a partial role in the policies of climate change. For example, while right-wing populists assert that economic interests are more important than climate change policies regarding the nationalist approach, the left-wing populist approach supports climate change policies. But left-wing populists criticize international political institutions because they drag economically disadvantaged people into crisis (Huber et al., 2021). According to the findings of my study, the claim that right-wing populists' restrictive policies on climate change and pandemic issues do not serve Germany's economic interests can be interpreted in nationalist discourses. However, attacking restrictive policies under the concept of corrupt elites was interpreted as populist. Besides corrupt elite rhetoric, the political elites were blamed as they were far from the daily life practices of the people. As a result, far-right, ideology-based rhetoric only helped reinforce the populist rhetoric of AfD leaders.

According to that, Mede and Schäfer (2020) argue that the opposition attitude of populists to scientists stems from the anti-elite attitude. The populist approach claims that the policies put forward by scientists don't respect the daily life practices of the people. Populists accuse the work of scientists of not being transparent to the public. Therefore, they accuse scientists of having a secretive and elitist attitude (Mede and Schäfer, 2020). According to the findings of my research, the anti-elites' attitude is effective in explaining the hostile attitude of AfD leaders towards scientists regarding policies regarding climate change and COVID-19 pandemic issues. For example, Meuthen and Chrupalla claimed that scientists maliciously acted together with the political elites. In addition, they argued that the scientists who were frequently featured in the mainstream media were on the side of the government. The AfD leaders accused the statements of scientists in the mainstream media of being dishonest and deceiving the people.

In this study, Meuthen and Chrupalla explicitly targeted scientists such as Karl Lauterbach and Jens Spahn. When they attacked the protective or restrictive policies, they undermined the science experts both implicitly and explicitly. The scientists and their scientific findings were undermined by anti-elite rhetoric. However, the tweets that undermined the protective policies for the new coronavirus pandemic and climate change issues are much more than the tweets that scientists directly undermined. In addition to

that, populists attacked political elites under the concept of scientific knowledge-based policies more than scientists regarding policies to combat the pandemic and climate change issues. According to the findings of another study that support my findings, the political decision to build more wind turbines in Germany was attacked by AfD leaders for harming national landscapes. They claimed that the elites aimed to destroy the national landscape of the country. Although this is a nationalist-based argument, it accuses the political elites. Moreover, AfD leaders demanded a referendum in federal states on whether wind turbines should be built or not (Otteni and Weisskircher, 2022). In order to delegitimize the political decisions of the elites, AfD leaders suggested a referendum and stressed the general will of the people's rhetoric.

Meuthen and Chrupalla framed similar alternative, non-scientific claims on both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change issues. According to the COVID-19 pandemic case, they did not deny the existence of the COVID-19 virus, but they underestimated the danger of the virus. Accordingly, they undermined the restriction policies of the government and scientists. Besides that, AfD leaders explicitly refused to be vaccinated, and they undermined the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine. Meuthen and Chrupalla took an explicitly anti-scientific stance on vaccine-related policies. For the climate change case, they don't believe in the existence of climate change issues; rather, they believe in alternative claims that support climate change skepticism. Accordingly, Meuthen tends to spread disinformation about climate change. He supported alternative claims about the issue. In particular, in the post-truth era where everyone is free to express their own truth, Meuthen did not hesitate to claim that climate change is not real in spite of scientific evidence. Besides that, policies related to science-related issues can yield results in the long run. For example, the negative effects of climate change issues continue to increase over a long period of time, not in a single day. Therefore, policies based on climate change issues focus on a long process, not a short-term one. However, AfD leaders preferred policies that focused on short-term and were less costly. For instance, rather than supporting renewable energies for industry, populists prefer energies that give the most effective manufacturing power, such as nuclear energy and fossil fuels.

On the other hand, Olaf Scholz committed to protecting the economic interests of citizens based on center-left ideology when the economic consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic and restrictive climate change policies were discussed. He promised that a new industry that would be transformed as a result of climate change and would equitably take care of the needs of all citizens. In other words, he didn't only emphasize the importance of the transformation process of the industry but also put forward new policies for citizens to adapt to this transformation process in the best way possible. Unlike the AfD Party leaders, Scholz expressed the transformation process of a new climate-neutral industry in hopeful rhetoric. Along with that, Scholz emphasized the negative effects of climate change, which threaten everyone, from health to the economy. Therefore, he emphasized that acting in solidarity is a necessity for a sustainable future, and he supported international cooperation. Contrary to AfD Party leaders, chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz didn't need to attribute scientific studies, findings, or evidence. Therefore, he didn't attend to skepticism about vaccines or climate change debates. According to the concept of populism, the general will of the people rhetoric was not addressed by Olaf Scholz. However, Scholz accused the CDU/CSU members of supporting lobbying with the landlords when the discussion of the carbon tax payment increased between the

tenants and the landlords. He had a kind of populist attitude. However, it can not be claimed that it is completely populist, as it offers a reconciliatory policy between tenants and landlords and does not emphasize the “general will of the people” rhetoric of populism.

### **5.1. Generalizability Limitations**

This study covered the last 4 months of Germany's 2021 election campaign period. During their election campaigns, the tweets of the chancellor candidate of SPD and the leaders of the far-right populist party AfD were analyzed comparatively under the themes of the COVID-19 Pandemic, vaccines and climate change policies. Even though populist-to-non-populist comparisons yield remarkable results, the generalizability of the study is limited. First, a more detailed analysis can be made in later studies by considering not only the election campaign process of populist leaders but also a longer time period. Along with that, the comparison between populist leaders can be analyzed using the populist party example not only from Germany but also from populist parties in different countries. Secondly, populist leaders, whether in opposition or in incumbents may give different results in approaching their science-based policies. For example, the populist leaders in power, Orban in Hungary and Erdoğan in Turkey attached great importance to vaccines and quarantine measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, the comparison of right-wing populists and left-wing populists may also help obtain more detailed findings for future studies.

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to analyze the differences between populist and non-populist approaches to science-based issues, namely climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the qualitative content analysis of the tweets of Olaf Scholz and populist leaders Tino Chrupalla and Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen during the 2021 election campaign period, populist and non-populist approaches completely have opposite points of view regarding the focus themes. According to the results of the coding, even though the life-threatening issues were the new coronavirus and climate change, populists suggested deterrent policies against the protective policies of the government. Secondly, AfD leaders didn't support protective policies due to them damaging the economic interests of the citizens. Rather, they adopted the short-term economic interests of the citizens. Thirdly, they explicitly attacked the claims of the scientists and scientific institutions, accusing them of being dishonest and deceiving the people. In addition, Meuthen appealed to disinformation in some of his tweets about climate change issues. Lastly, Meuthen and Chrupalla criticized the restrictive policies of transnational and international organizations such as the EU and the IPCC for harming the countries' economic interests.

According to the conceptual discussion of populism, this study addressed mainly the ideational approach. Along with that, socio-cultural and political-strategic approaches were eclectically included during the process of analyzing the populist discourse. The qualitative content analysis was used to interpret the latent meaning and manifest meaning of the whole text, sentence, and words of the tweets. Building the coding frame of the tweets helped yield the main findings about the data. The ideational approach suggests that the general will of the people concept emerged due to antagonism between the people and the elites' discourse. In this study, based on the "science-related populism" term suggested by Mede and Schäfer (2020), it was expected that populists would evaluate the government's policies based on scientific information and science experts under the concept of the anti-elite discourses. Accordingly, when Meuthen and Chrupalla attacked political elites and scientists, they attacked them under the concept of anti-elites.

All in all, both the policies of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change issues were attacked under the same rhetoric of populism by AfD leaders. Firstly, they accused the protective policies of being undemocratic in regard to the demands of the majority of the citizens. Along with that, they accused the policies of causing discrimination between citizens. Meuthen and Chrupalla demanded the freedom of the people against the restrictive policies rather than protecting the environment and the health of the citizens. As a result, the AfD leaders attacked the restrictive policies under the "general will of the people" rhetoric. They attributed it to the redemptive side of democracy, which Canovan underlined. Accordingly, populist leaders adopted the people-centric side of democracy and science-related issues. Secondly, AfD leaders attacked scientists and the political elite as deceiving the people and stealing money from the citizens. Thirdly, they underestimated and humiliated the life-threatening issues and the importance of protective policies. Lastly, AfD leaders had skepticism about the reliability of vaccines and the existence of the climate change issue.

This study explains the differences between the populist and non-populist approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccines and climate change under the themes

of science-based policies. This study can expand on its findings by making more detailed analyses of the samples of more countries and populist leaders for further research.

## REFERENCES

### Books

- Alpay, Y. (2017). *Yalanın Siyaseti*. (7.Baskı). Destek Yayınları.
- Babbie, E. (2014). *The Basics of Social Research* (6th ed.). Wadsworth, Cengage Learning
- Brown, M. B. (2009). *Science in Democracy: Expertise, Institutions, and Representation*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Browning, C. R., and Matthäus J. (2004). *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*. Comprehensive History of the Holocaust. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Habermas, J. (2010). *İdeoloji Olarak Teknik ve Bilim*. (4.Baskı). Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
- Kitcher, P. (2001). *Science, Truth, and Democracy*. Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Science. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mudde C. And Kaltwasser R. C. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Prooijen, van J.W. (2019). Populism as Political Mentality Underlying Conspiracy Theories. *In Belief Systems and the Perception of Reality*. (1st ed, 79–96). New York: Taylor and Francis, Series: Current issues in social psychology: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315114903-6>.
- Ritchie, J., and Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative Research Practice—A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Kaltwasser, R. and Cristóbal, P.....Ostiguy, P. (Eds). (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. First edition. Oxford Handbooks. Oxford, United Kingdom ; New York: Oxford University Press.

- Keleş, R., Hamamcı, C. and Çoban A. (2009). *Environment Politics*. (6th ed, pp. 83-86). İmge Publications.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. (pp. 119–149). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Taggart, P. A. (2000). *Populism Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press.

### **Electronic Books**

- Brown, M. B., Lentsch, J. and Weingart, P. (2005). Representation, Expertise, and the German Parliament: A Comparison of Three Advisory Institutions. In *Democratization of Expertise?* (24:81–100). *Sociology of the Sciences Yearbook*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, [https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3754-6\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3754-6_5)
- Collins, H., Evans, R., Durant, D. and Weinel, M. (2020). *Experts and the Will of the People: Society, Populism and Science*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26983-8>.
- Imlay A. and Matthew W. (Eds). (2020). *Reactionary Populism and the Historical Erosion of Democracy in America. An Interview with Nancy Maclean. Volume 29 Populism*, (pp.121-129). <https://doi.org/10.13023/DISCLOSURE.29>.
- Keren, M. and Hawkins, R. (Eds). (2015). *Speaking Power to Truth: Digital Discourse and the Public Intellectual*. Athabasca University Press. <https://doi.org/10.15215/aupress/9781771990332.01>.
- Kuckartz, U. (2019). *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Systematic Approach*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15636-7\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15636-7_8).
- Kriesi, H. and Pappas, T.S. (Eds). (2015). *Populism and Crisis: A Fuzzy Relationship. European populism in the shadow of the great recession*. (pp. 303-325). Colchester : ECPR Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929917738703>.

Rennó, L. and Ringe, N. (Eds). (2022). *Populists and the Pandemic: How Populists Around the World Responded to COVID-19*. (1st ed). London: Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003197614>.

Schellenger, H.K. (1966). The German Social Democratic Party After World War II: The Conservatism of Power. *The Western Political Quarterly*. 251-265.

Smart, P., Holmes, S., Lettice, F., Pitts, H. F., Zwiendelaar, J.B., Schwartz, G., and Evans, S. (2019). Open Science and Open Innovation in a Socio-Political Context: Knowledge Production for Societal Impact in an Age of Post-Truth Populism. *Open Science and Open Innovation in a Socio-Political Context*. (49(3), 279–97). R&D Management, <https://doi.org/10.1111/radm.12377>.

### **Journals**

Aknur, M. (2020). The Rise of Radical Right in Germany: Alternative for Germany, Populism and Democracy. *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, 13, 415-446. <https://doi.org/10.37093/ijsi.837682>.

Algan, Y., Guriev S., Papaioannou E., and Passari, E. (2017). The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2, 309–400. <https://doi.org/10.1353/eca.2017.0015>.

Angenendt, M. and Kinski, L. (2022). Germany: Political Developments and Data in 2021: The End of the Merkel Era. *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook*, 61(1), 171–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12366>.

Arzheimer, K. and Berning, C. (2019). How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013–2017. *Electoral Studies*, 60, 2-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.004>.

Arzheimer, K. (2015). The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany? *West European Politics*, 38(3), 535–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1004230>.

Balta, E., Kaltwasser, R. and Yagci, A. H. (2022). Populist Attitudes and Conspiratorial Thinking. *Party Politics*, 28(4), 625–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688211003304>.

- Berman, S. (2021). The Causes of Populism in the West. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1), 71–88. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102503>.
- Boecher, M., Zeigermann U., Berker, L.E. and Jabra, D. (2022). Climate Policy Expertise in Times of Populism – Knowledge Strategies of the AfD Regarding Germany’s Climate Package. *Environmental Politics*, 31(5), 820–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2022.2090537>.
- Braunthal G. (1993). The 1989 Basic Program of the German Social Democratic Party. *Northeastern Political Science Association Palgrave Macmillan Journals*, 25(3), 375-399. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3234970>.
- Brubaker, R. (2021). Paradoxes of Populism during the Pandemic. *Thesis Eleven*, 164(1), 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513620970804>.
- Caiani, M. and Graziano, P. (2019). Understanding Varieties of Populism in Times of Crises. *West European Politics*, 42(6), 1141–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1598062>.
- Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy. *Political Studies*, 47(1), 2–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00184>.
- Castanho, S., Bruno, F. V. and Littvay, L. (2017). The Elite Is Up to Something: Exploring the Relation Between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 423–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12270>.
- Collins, H., and Evans, R. (2019). Populism and Science. *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science*, 56(4), 200–218. <https://doi.org/10.5840/eps201956476>.
- Corcoran, P., Walker, K. E. and Wals, A. E. J. (2004). Case Studies, Make-your-case Studies, and Case Stories: A Critique of Case-study Methodology in Sustainability in Higher Education. *Environmental Education Research*, 10(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350462032000173670>.
- Çelik, H., Baykal, N. B. ve Memur, H. N. K. (2020). Nitel Veri Analizi ve Temel İlkeleri. *Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 8(1), 379-406.
- DOI: 10.14689/issn.2148-2624.1.8c.1s.16m

- Desson, Z., Lambertz, L., Peters, J. W., Falkenbach, M. and Kauer, L. (2020). Europe's Covid-19 Outliers: German, Austrian and Swiss Policy Responses during the Early Stages of the 2020 Pandemic. *Health Policy and Technology*, 9(4), 405–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hlpt.2020.09.003>.
- Dostal, J. (2021). Germany's Federal Election of 2021: Multi-Crisis Politics and the Consolidation of the Six-Party System. *The Political Quarterly*, 92(4), 662-672. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.13080>.
- Eberl, J.M., Huber, R. A. and Greussing, E. (2021). From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why Populists Believe in COVID-19 Conspiracies. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 31(1), 272–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1924730>.
- Eberl, J.M., Huber, R.A., Mede, N. and Greussing, E. (2023). Populist Attitudes towards Politics and Science: How Do They Differ? *Political Research Exchange*, 5, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2159847>.
- Ekardt, F. (2022). Freedom, Human Rights, Paris Agreement, and Climate Change: The German Landmark Ruling on Climate Litigation. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 64(2), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.2022.2021791>.
- Erdoğan, E. ve Erçetin, T. (2019). Popülist Liderlerinin Başarısına Medya Sistemleri Perspektifinden Bir Bakış: Birleşik Krallık, Hollanda ve Türkiye Karşılaştırması. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Kültürel Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 6(1), 38-74.
- Faas, T. and Klingelhöfer, T. (2022). German Politics at the Traffic Light: New Beginnings in the Election of 2021. *West European Politics*, 45(7), 1506–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2045783>.
- Foroughi, H., Gabriel, Y. And Fotaki, M. (2019). Leadership in a Post-Truth Era: A New Narrative Disorder? *Leadership-Sage Journals*, 15(2), 135–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715019835369>.
- Gama, C. F. P. S. (February 7, 2022). End of The Merkel Era: Germany After COVID-19. *Boletim De Conjuntura*, 9(26), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.5998542>.

- Graneheim, U. H., and Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today*, 24(2), 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001>
- Gruzd, A., and Roy J. (2014). Investigating Political Polarization on Twitter: A Canadian Perspective: Investigating Political Polarization on Twitter. *Policy & Internet*, 6(1), 28–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI354>.
- Hameleers, M., and Minihold, S. (2020). Constructing Discourses on (Un)Truthfulness: Attributions of Reality, Misinformation, and Disinformation by Politicians in a Comparative Social Media Setting. *Communication Research*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220982762>.
- Hameleers, M. (2020). Populist Disinformation: Exploring Intersections between Online Populism and Disinformation in the US and the Netherlands. *Politics and Governance*, 8(1), 146–57. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i1.2478>.
- Hansen, M.A. and Olsen J. (2022). A Tale of Two Electorates?: The 2021 Federal Election and the AfD Voter in East and West. *German Politics and Society*, 40(2), 110–33. <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2022.400206>.
- Havertz, R. (2019). Right-Wing Populism and Neoliberalism in Germany: The AfD's Embrace of Ordoliberalism. *New Political Economy*, 24(3), 385–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2018.1484715>.
- Heinze, A. S. and Weisskircher, M. (2022). How Political Parties Respond to Pariah Street Protest: The Case of Anti-Corona Mobilisation in Germany. *German Politics*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2042518>.
- Helms, L. (2021). Chancellor Wanted! The 2021 German Chancellor Candidates in Context. *Austrian Journal of Political Science*, 50(2), 15-21 <https://doi.org/10.15203/OZP.3810.VOL50ISS2>.
- Hsieh, H. F. and Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 1277-1288. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

- Huber, R. A. (2020). The Role of Populist Attitudes in Explaining Climate Change Skepticism and Support for Environmental Protection. *Environmental Politics*, 29(6), 959–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1708186>.
- Huber, R. A., Maltby, T., Szulecki, K. and Četković, S. (2021). Is Populism a Challenge to European Energy and Climate Policy? Empirical Evidence across Varieties of Populism. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7), 998-1017. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1918214>.
- Hyett, N., Kenny, A. and Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or Method? A Critical Review of Qualitative Case Study Reports. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 9(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.23606>.
- Iyengar, S., and Massey, D. S. (2019). Scientific Communication in a Post-Truth Society. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(16), 7656–61. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1805868115>.
- Karataş, Z. (2015). Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemi, *Manevi Temelli Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(1), 62-80.
- King, J. P. (2022). Sixteen Ways to Adapt: A Comparison of State-Level Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in the Federal States of Germany. *Regional Environmental Change*, 22(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-021-01870-3>.
- Kriesi, H. (2014). The Populist Challenge. *West European Politics*, 37(2), 361–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.887879>.
- Küppers, A. (2022). Climate-Soviets,’ ‘Alarmism,’ and ‘Eco-Dictatorship’: The Framing of Climate Change Scepticism by the Populist Radical Right Alternative for Germany. *German Politics*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2056596>.
- Lehmann, P. and Zehnter, L. (2022). The Self-Proclaimed Defender of Freedom: The AfD and the Pandemic. *Government and Opposition*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.5>.
- Lindgren, B. M., Lundman, B., and Graneheim, U. H. (2020). Abstraction and interpretation during the qualitative content analysis process. *International journal of nursing studies*, 108, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2020.103632>

- McKee, M., Gugushvili, A., Koltai, J. and Stuckler, D. (2020). Are Populist Leaders Creating the Conditions for the Spread of COVID-19? Comment on "A Scoping Review of Populist Radical Right Parties' Influence on Welfare Policy and Its Implications for Population Health in Europe. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2020.124>.
- Mede, N.G., and Schäfer, M.S., (2020). Science-Related Populism: Conceptualizing Populist Demands toward Science. *Public Understanding of Science*, 29(5), 473–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662520924259>.
- Mede, N.G., Schäfer, M.S., Metag, J. and Klinger, K. (2022). Who Supports Science-Related Populism? A Nationally Representative Survey on the Prevalence and Explanatory Factors of Populist Attitudes toward Science in Switzerland. *PLOS ONE*, 17(8). 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0271204>.
- Mede, N.G., Schäfer, M.S., Ziegler, R.Z. and Weißkopf, M. (2021). The 'Replication Crisis' in the Public Eye: Germans' Awareness and Perceptions of the (Ir)Reproducibility of Scientific Research. *Public Understanding of Science*, 30(1), 91–102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662520954370>.
- Menezes, R.G., Barbosa, R. (2021). Environmental Governance Under Bolsonaro: Dismantling Institutions, Curtailing Participation, Delegitimising Opposition. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 15, 229-247. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-021-00491-8>.
- Merkley, E. (2020). Anti-intellectualism, Populism, and Motivated Resistance to Expert Consensus. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 84 (1), 24–48. doi:10.1093/poq/nfz053.
- Moffitt, Benjamin. (2015). How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism. *Government and Opposition*, 50(2), 189–217. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2014.13>.
- Mounk, Y. (2018). The Undemocratic Dilemma. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(2), 98–112. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0030>.
- Mudde, C. (2021). Populism in Europe: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism (Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019). *Government and Opposition*, 56(4), 577–97. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.15>.

- Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*. 39(4), 541–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>.
- Nordensvard, J., Ketola, M. (2022). Populism As an Act of Storytelling: Analyzing the Climate Change Narratives of Donald Trump and Greta Thunberg as Populist Truth-Tellers. *Environmental Politics*, 31(5), 861-882. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1996818>.
- Otteni, C. and Weisskircher, M. (2022). Global Warming and Polarization. Wind Turbines and the Electoral Success of the Greens and the Populist Radical Right. *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(4), 1102–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12487>.
- Oswald, M.T., Fromm, M., and Broda, E. (2021). Strategic Clustering in Right-Wing Populism? “Green Policies” in Germany and France. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 15, 185-205. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-021-00485-6>
- Prettner, R., Molder, H., Hajer, M.A. and Vliegthart, R. (2021). Staging Expertise in Times of COVID-19: An Analysis of the Science-Policy-Society Interface in the Dutch “Intelligent Lockdown.” *Frontiers in Communication*, 6, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.668862>.
- Römmele, A. (2022). Parliamentary Elections in Germany. *BLUE*, 2(1), 124-128. <https://doi.org/10.3917/blue.002.0127>
- Shu, K., Bhattacharjee, A., Alatawi, F., Nazer, T.H., Ding, K., Karami, M., and Liu, H. (2020). Combating Disinformation in a Social Media Age. *WIREs Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery*, 10(6), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/widm.1385>.
- Silsüpür, Ö. (2021). Halkla İlişkiler ve Medya: Araç ve Yöntemler Üzerine Bir Çalışma. *Türkiye Mesleki ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 5, 66-78. <https://doi.org/10.46236/jvosst.875955>.
- Singer, B. C. J. (2021). Populism and the separation of power and knowledge. *Thesis Eleven*, 164(1), 120–143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513620983685>
- Singer, J. B. (2019). Populist Postmodernism: When Cultural Critique of an Enlightenment Occupation Goes Viral. *Media and Communication*, 7(4), 133–37. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2268>.

- Spector, B. (2020). Post-Truth Claims and the Wishing Away of Brute Facts. *Leadership*, 16,(1), 9–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715019885771>.
- Stecula, D.A., and Pickup, M. (2021). How Populism and Conservative Media Fuel Conspiracy Beliefs about COVID-19 and What It Means for COVID-19 Behaviors. *Research and Politics*, 8(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168021993979>.
- Waisbord, S. (2018). The Elective Affinity between Post-Truth Communication and Populist Politics. *Communication Research and Practice*, 4(1), 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2018.1428928>.
- Weisskircher, M., Hutter, S. and Borbáth, E. (2022). Protest and Electoral Breakthrough: Challenger Party-Movement Interactions in Germany. *German Politics*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2044473>.
- Ylä-Anttila, T. (2018). Populist Knowledge: ‘Post-Truth’ Repertoires of Contesting Epistemic Authorities. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 5(4), 356–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2017.1414620>.
- Zons, G., Halstenbach, A. (2019). The AFD as a Leaderless Populist Right-Wing Party. How the Leadership-Structure Dilemma Left an Imprint on the Party’s Leadership. *Political Science Review*, 7(1), 41-60. doi: 10.2478/ppsr-2019-0003

### **Newspaper Articles**

- Zakaria, F. (Dec-2016). Populism on the March: Why the West Is in Trouble. *Foreign Affairs*, 95(6), 9-15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43948376>
- Colgan J. D, and Keohane R. (2017 May). The Liberal Order Is Rigged. *Foreign Affairs*, 36-44. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-04-17/liberal-order-rigged>

### **Press Releases**

- Ecologic Institute (2022 February). What Role for a Climate Club under the German G7 Presidency.
- İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Avrupa Birliği Enstitüsü (2021, 19 Eylül). Almanya Seçime Doğru. [https://eu.bilgi.edu.tr/media/files/Germany\\_Brief\\_\\_19.pdf](https://eu.bilgi.edu.tr/media/files/Germany_Brief__19.pdf)

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2017, 23 November). Federal Republic Of Germany Elections To The Federal Parliament. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/3355105/federal-republic-of-germany-elections-to-the-federal-parliament/4153997/> on 25 Jan 2023. CID: 20.500.12592/dpkk9f.

The Empirical Studies of Conflict Project at Princeton University ( 2021, March 25). Localized Misinformation in a Global Pandemic: Report on COVID-19 Narratives around the World (The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists).

### **Thesis**

Güllüoğlu, T. H. (2021). *How to Weather the Storm: A Comparative Case Study on Populist Trajectories to COVID-19 Pandemic*, Department of International Relations, (Unpublished Master Thesis), Bilkent University, Ankara. <http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/handle/11693/76493>