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Stuck in a Nativist Spiral: Content, Selection, and Effects of Right-Wing Populists' Communication on Facebook

RAFFAEL HEISS and JÖRG MATTHES

Although social media have become important venues for right-wing populist (RWP) campaigns, the content, selection, and effects of RWP messages on social media remain largely unknown. Using content and panel analysis in two studies, we investigated the potential reciprocal relationship between RWP communication on social media and citizens' anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-elitist attitudes, and feelings of anger and anxiety. In Study 1, we analyzed 13,358 Facebook posts from German and Austrian political parties and their leading candidates. Among our results, RWP actors conveyed anti-immigrant and anti-elitist messages more often than non-RWP actors, and anti-immigrant messages especially induced negative emotional responses among followers of RWP actors. In Study 2, our analysis of data from a two-wave panel study with 559 respondents revealed that anti-immigrant attitudes drove selective exposure to RWP content on Facebook, which consequently fueled anti-immigrant attitudes, and that selective exposure to such content increased individuals' anti-elitist attitudes and anxiety.

Keywords right-wing populism, social media, selective exposure, anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-elitist attitudes, emotions, content analysis, panel study

Today's high-choice media environment provides citizens with ever-increasing opportunities to encounter partisan information (Lelkes, Sood, & Iyengar, 2017; Stroud, 2008, 2010). As important new venues for partisan information, social media platforms allow citizens to follow sources of news and other information according to their personal preferences. Although citizens and alternative media may also disseminate populist messages on social media, right-wing populist (RWP) political actors use their publicity to disseminate such

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messages among massive groups of followers (e.g., Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017; Krämer, 2017). For example, roughly 800,000 Facebook users follow the former leader of the Austrian Freedom Party, Heinz-Christian Strache, whereas only about 315,000 follow Austria's most-circulated newspaper, *Die Kronenzeitung*.

The rise of RWP communication on social media platforms marks a critical development, for it allows RWP actors to disseminate their worldviews and “express a distinctively right-wing populist self” (Krämer, 2017, p. 13). In doing so, their communication can breed political distrust, xenophobic attitudes, and social polarization in general (e.g., Heiss & Matthes, 2017; Müller et al., 2017; Stier, Posch, Bleier, & Strohmaier, 2017). Research in political psychology has shown that individuals with right-wing attitudes are especially inclined to seek exposure to partisan content (Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008), which can catalyze a process in which individuals strengthen their initial predispositions by accumulating evidence to confirm their views (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Thus, once populist supporters have liked RWP channels on social media, they are frequently exposed to RWP messages and may become “trapped in their own ‘populist echo chamber’” (Reinemann, Matthes, & Sheafer, 2016, p. 387).

To date, despite the large body of research on the content (e.g., Engesser et al., 2017) and effects of RWP communication (e.g., Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017), studies on such content have not referred to observational data, while ones on the effects have mostly been based on experimental designs (but see Müller et al., 2017). Although experimental designs are aptly suited to test causal effects, they hardly allow conclusions about how exposure to RWP communication may affect individuals in the real world and in free-choice environments. In response to those oversights, our research presented here contributes to current knowledge about RWP communication on social media by providing more externally valid evidence of the relationship between exposure to RWP content on Facebook and potential attitudinal and emotional outcomes. To make such contributions, we combined evidence concerning the content of RWP communication on Facebook from our first study (i.e., Study 1) with evidence from our second study (i.e., Study 2) concerning how following such content may relate to individuals' attitudes and emotions. For our analysis, we chose Facebook as not only the most widespread social network but also the most extensively used network for RWP communication across Europe in general (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017) and by the Austrian Freedom Party in particular (Schmuck & Hameleers, 2019).

In our two studies, with reference to established conceptualizations of right-wing populism, we first investigated the content of RWP communication on Facebook and how followers of RWP actors have interacted with such content. Later, we examined directional links between selective exposure to RWP content and individuals' attitudes and emotions previously associated with RWP support: anti-elitist attitudes, anti-immigrant attitudes, and feelings of political anger and fear (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2016). We performed our investigations by conducting a comprehensive analysis involving both automated content analysis and panel analysis of data from a two-wave panel study. In Study 1 in particular, we investigated the content of RWP communication on Facebook in Germany and Austria, with special attention to whether RWP actors indeed make more anti-elitist and anti-immigrant references than mainstream political actors and whether they do so across countries. In that same study, we also examined how those characteristics of RWP content relate to followers' emotional responses to political actors' posts. Knowing how frequently RWP actors exploit those characteristics and how their followers directly respond to such cues is critical to theorizing the causal effects of RWP communication. Based on our findings from Study 1, in Study 2 we used panel data to investigate two possible causal pathways between RWP communication on social media and citizens' anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-elitist attitudes, and feelings of anger and anxiety. One pathway referred to research on

selective exposure to partisan content suggesting that these attitudes and emotional states drive citizens to follow RWP actors on Facebook, whereas the other drew from research on information processing suggesting that following RWP actors on Facebook may also strengthen those predispositions by way of repeated exposure.

Theoretical Framework

Content of RWP Communication on Social Media and Followers' Emotional Reactions

Conceptually, right-wing populism is constructed upon the definition of an in-group that has to defend its interests against certain out-groups. Jagers and Walgrave (2007) have defined *empty populism* as occurring when politicians make references to “the people,” so to speak, which is “a standard communication technique to reach out to the constituency” (p. 323). In relation to empty populism, right-wing populism can be defined in terms of vertical and horizontal differentiation. Vertically, right-wing populism propagates antagonism between ordinary people and corrupt, selfish political elites as part of its anti-elitist dimension. Horizontally, as part of its exclusionary dimension, right-wing populism manufactures a constant threat attributed to some isolated out-group among the people whose members do not share characteristics represented and preferred by the defined in-group excluding dimension. In right-wing populism, the in-group is typically defined along national and ethnic characteristics, which is why its horizontal differentiation has also been dubbed the nativist dimension of right-wing populism (Mudde, 2007).

Following that definition of right-wing populism, RWP actors blame political elites for all failure of policy and portray immigrants as a constant threat to the physical and economic well-being as well as the cultural identity of native citizens (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017). In the remainder of this article, we focus on the horizontal and vertical dimensions of right-wing populism—that is, anti-elitism and anti-immigration—for two reasons. On the one hand, although mainstream politicians may use empty populism as a regular campaign strategy, those horizontal and vertical dimensions of right-wing populism are thought to have the most severe consequences for democracy, for they can undermine social and political trust as well as polarize society along ethnic lines. On the other, measuring empty populism is not only conceptually challenging (Krämer, 2017) but also especially complicated in automated content analysis (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011, p. 1275).

The exclusionary nature of right-wing populism can be explained by social identity theory, which suggests that people assess their identities by comparing their in-group to other groups in society (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), particularly when they feel that their in-group status is threatened by another group. As a consequence, the in-group may consider itself to be threatened, which can prompt the discrimination of groups perceived to be threatening (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). RWP actors strategically channel and strengthen specific group-based identities by stimulating antagonism toward political elites and by strategically nurturing perceived threats attributed to immigrants (Schmuck & Matthes, 2015). Accordingly, RWP actors target a specific audience characterized in terms of specific individual dispositions (e.g., Schulz et al., 2017). Based on that conceptualization, we assumed that RWP actors make anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references more frequently in their posts than non-RWP (i.e., mainstream) actors. However, we also assumed that the anti-elitist dimension may not apply exclusively to RWP communication but also characterize other populist

movements, including those led by left-wing populist parties, though such do not currently exist in Austria.

We additionally assumed that negative references to immigrants or the political elite may also stimulate RWP followers' negative emotions toward politics (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2016; Wirz, 2018). Although anyone can react to public posts on Facebook, active followers are most likely to see and react to such posts, not only by liking them (i.e., clicking the thumb-up icon) but also by reacting to them emotionally (e.g., clicking the icons of facial expressions). After all, the emotional reactions of social media users are pivotal to understanding their psychological responses (Eberl et al., 2017). According to appraisal theory, specific emotions arise in response to individuals' appraisals of their environments (Lazarus, 1991), and anger, for example, arises when people are unsatisfied with a given situation and identify a blamable source for that situation (Huddy, Feldman, & Cassese, 2007). In that sense, conflictive RWP communication stimulates anger by attributing blame to the political elite and social outgroups (Wirz, 2018). For example, upon encountering a political message that blames political elites or immigrants for a social problem (e.g., cultural backlash, economic deprivation, and increased crime), RWP followers may develop strong feelings of anger, for the message reminds them of a salient association between a problem that they care about and a group of individuals who can be blamed for it (see Huddy et al., 2007; Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011). Thus, we assumed that followers of RWP actors are likely to respond to anti-immigrant and anti-elitist Facebook posts with anger, which we measured as the frequency of angry reactions to each post.

H1: RWP actors are more likely than their mainstream competitors to make (a) anti-immigrant and (b) anti-elitist references in their Facebook posts.

H2: (a) Anti-immigrant and (b) anti-elitist references in Facebook posts incite more angry reactions among followers of RWP actors.

Selection and Effects of RWP Communication on Social Media

Based on the mentioned assumptions, we also assumed that selective exposure to RWP content on Facebook—that is, following RWP actors—relates to citizens' attitudes and emotions for a few good reasons. First, research in political psychology has shown that citizens prefer attitude-consistent versus attitude-challenging political information (Stroud, 2008; Marquart, Matthes, & Rapp, 2016), particularly if they have polarized political attitudes (Stroud, 2010) or strong right-wing ideologies (Iyengar et al., 2008). Consequently, individuals with strong political predispositions for RWP stances may be especially likely to engage with RWP actors on social media (Heiss & Matthes, 2017). Second, research on information processing has produced strong evidence that the partisan content on social media to which followers may selectively expose themselves strengthens their existing attitudes and emotions. On Facebook, for example, once having liked or followed a page, a user may frequently see posts from that page in his or her newsfeed, and exposure to such posts can influence them by requiring them to engage in either explicit or implicit processing (Knoll, Matthes, & Heiss, 2018). In the context of political sympathies, explicit processing occurs when followers process political messages systematically (Chaiken, 1987; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which requires them to reflect upon the messages, remember them, and form attitudes and behaviors in response

to them (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004). Via such systematic processing, individuals may develop personal worldviews based on the information that they receive and, as a result, also develop strong, stable attitudes (Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995).

Of course, social media users are liable to encounter political posts in their newsfeeds even if they do not seek them out (Knoll et al., 2018). In such situations, users may process political posts only implicitly—that is, heuristically or even unconsciously. Although such encounters may not induce strong persuasive effects, they may nevertheless prime and reinforce existing political goals and attitudes. For example, frequent exposure to content combining negative attributes (e.g., corrupt or criminal) with an attitude object (e.g., political elites or immigrants) may subconsciously strengthen existing associations and later be applied to assess that attitude object (Matthes & Schmuck, 2017). If existing associations are frequently activated over a longer period, then they may become increasingly accessible as well as stronger (Higgins, 1996).

Based on those theoretical considerations, we assumed that existing anti-immigrant and anti-elitist attitudes may drive citizens to selectively engage with RWP actors on Facebook by liking and following their pages. Furthermore, because we assumed that RWP actors post more anti-immigrant and anti-elitist content, following them on Facebook may also reinforce existing anti-immigrant and anti-elitist attitudes. Again, however, anti-elitist attitudes may also relate to following left-wing populist actors, although left-wing populist parties do not currently exist in the Austrian case.

H3: (a) Anti-immigrant attitudes and (b) anti-elitist attitudes increase the likelihood of following RWP actors on Facebook.

H4: Following RWP actors on Facebook increases existing (a) anti-immigrant attitudes and (b) anti-elitist attitudes.

Last, we also assumed that negative emotional dispositions increase the likelihood of following RWP actors on Facebook, and vice versa. RWP actors strategically channel citizens' negative emotions and redirect their anger and anxiety toward political elites and immigrants, whom they blame for the allegedly miserable situation of native citizens (Hameleers et al., 2016). In that process, RWP actors not only appeal to and channel citizens' negative emotions but also strategically fuel and disseminate feelings of anger and fear (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Hameleers et al., 2016). For instance, they may use their campaigns to stimulate perceived threats by portraying immigration as an uncontrollable phenomenon (e.g., so-called "mass immigration") and associating it with physical violence, cultural infiltration, and economic deprivation (Schmuck & Matthes, 2015; Stier et al., 2017). At the same time, they increase individuals' anger toward political elites, whom they hold accountable for allegedly failing to represent the interests of native citizens.

Research on the behavioral effects of anger and fear independent of populist communication has shown that anger drives heuristic decision making in accordance with existing attitudes (Valentino et al., 2011). Thus, individuals who experience political anger may be especially susceptible to RWP communication on social media. The role of anxiety, by contrast, may be more complex. Feelings of political anxiety make individuals more receptive to cross-cutting opinions and drive cognitive elaboration (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, & Marcus, 2010). If citizens cognitively engage with political issues, then they may become less susceptible to populist simplification (Heiss & Matthes, 2017). However, individuals who experience feelings of fear pay

greater attention to and have greater interest in negative, threatening messages (Huddy et al., 2007). Moreover, being averse to risk, they support less risky policies, and the exclusion of immigrants and closing of borders may appeal to that tendency among anxious individuals. In response to such contradictory evidence concerning political anxiety, we posed the following research question:

RQ1: How does political anxiety relate to following RWP actors on Facebook?

Furthermore, based on the above reasoning, we formulated two hypotheses:

H5: Political anger increases the likelihood of following RWP actors on Facebook.

H6: Following RWP actors on Facebook increases (a) political anger and (b) political anxiety.

Overview of the Studies

In two studies, we investigated the content of RWP communication on Facebook and how individuals selectively expose themselves to and respond to it. Our primary goal was to pinpoint causal links, if any, between conceptually related predispositions and selective exposure to RWP content on Facebook. To that purpose, Study 1 involved investigating whether RWP actors indeed make more anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references in their communication on Facebook and whether such references stimulate negative emotional reactions among followers.

We sought to answer those questions by referring to the cases of Austria and Germany, whose similar political systems, political cultures, and political party landscapes make them two valuable cases for comparative research. In Austria and Germany, five cross-nationally comparable political parties compete for votes: social democrat parties (i.e., the Social Democratic Party of Austria [SPÖ] and the Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD]), conservative parties (i.e., the Austrian People's Party [ÖVP] and the Christian Democratic Union of Germany [CDU]), green parties (i.e., The Greens in Austria and the German Alliance 90/The Greens in Germany), liberal parties (i.e., the New Austria and Liberal Forum [NEOS] and the Free Democratic Party [FDP] in Germany), and RWP parties (i.e., the Austrian Freedom Party [FPÖ] and the Alternative for Germany [AfD]). Moreover, both countries' electoral systems are based on proportional representation, and members of the national parliaments are elected from a mix of party and candidate lists. In both countries, parties also need to exceed a minimum vote share in order to gain seats in the parliament: 4% in Austria and 5% in Germany.

If Study 1 revealed that RWP actors indeed made anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references more frequently than non-RWP actors and their followers on Facebook responded more strongly to such references, then we would have strong reason to assume causal links between citizens' predispositions and their selective exposure to RWP content on Facebook. In that case, in Study 2 we used panel data collected in the context of the 2017 Austrian national election to analyze whether and, if so, then how anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-elitist attitudes, and negative emotional arousal relate to exposure to RWP communication on Facebook.

Study 1

Method

We used the R package RFacebook to extract certain Facebook pages via the Facebook API (Barberá, 2016; Stier et al., 2017). From those pages, we extracted posts from political parties represented in the German and Austrian national parliaments, as well as ones from leading candidates in the respective 2017 national elections—Austria’s on October 15 and Germany’s on September 24—posted from January 1 to December 31, 2017. Interested in making a cross-national comparison, we excluded the German left-wing populist party Die Linke and the recently formed Austrian party Liste Pilz from our analysis, because cross-country equivalents for those parties do not exist. Initially, we extracted 13,390 posts from 21 Facebook pages, including the parties’ official pages and the pages of their leading candidates in the national elections. We included the pages of two candidates for Germany’s Alliance 90/The Greens, which nominated a team of two candidates, and excluded 32 posts that were missing information about angry reactions. Ultimately, our sample thus contained 13,358 posts. Table A1 lists all politicians and parties whose pages we included in our analysis.

To code the textual content of posts, we used a dictionary approach, which involved detecting anti-elitist words in the Facebook posts with reference to a dictionary developed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011). The dictionary includes words such as *elite*, *antidemocratic*, *propaganda*, and *dishonest* (see Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). We identified anti-elitist references in a post if at least one of those words was present. To detect anti-immigrant words, by contrast, we first created two dictionaries: one containing neutral terms related to immigration (e.g., *immigrant*, *refugee*, and *Islam*), the other containing similar words with negative connotations (e.g., *political Islam*, *terrorism*, and *crime*), as shown in Table A2. We identified anti-immigrant references in a post if it contained combinations of words from the two dictionaries—that is, at least one word from the neutral dictionary combined with at least one word from the negative one. We validated our approach by comparing the dictionary-based codes against hand-coded data.¹ Despite successful validation, misclassification was possible—for example, if left-wing parties criticized other parties’ labeling of immigrants as “terrorists” or “criminals” in a political post. Ultimately, anti-elitist references appeared in 5.19% of all posts, whereas anti-immigrant ones appeared in 2.31%.

The number of angry reactions in posts was assessed with a count variable representing the number of users with such reactions in a given post ($M = 61.12$, $SD = 262.08$). We also created a variable for the number of characters in a post as a measure of post length ($M = 291.50$, $SD = 353.09$), a dummy variable for whether a post occurred 6 weeks prior to election day in each country (22.41%), and a variable of time representing the individual weeks of the year, ranging from 1 to 53. Whereas all of those variables were coded at the level of the individual post, meaning that they could have varied across all 13,358 posts, we additionally measured actor-specific variables that could have varied only across the 21 pages of political candidates and parties. We coded a party family variable representing the party families in Austria and Germany: conservative parties, social democrat parties, green parties, liberal parties, and RWP parties. Another variable, page type, assessed whether a page was administered by a candidate or party, while the variable of country assessed whether the political actor was Austrian or German (Table A1).

Results

We ran logistic regressions with random intercepts and regressed the presence of anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references in posts on party family and a dummy variable for country (see Gelman & Hill, 2007). We used a multilevel approach to analyze our data, because individual posts were nested in the pages of candidates or parties. In all models, we controlled for the length of posts, whether the posts appeared during the campaign period, and the type of actor (i.e., candidate vs. party page) who published the posts. To investigate potential country-specific differences, we calculated interaction terms between party family and country (see Table A3). To graphically depict the effects, we plotted predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals (CI) while setting all covariates to their mean values (see Fox & Hong, 2009).

Figure 1 indicates that, in line with H1, both RWP parties—the Freedom Party of Austria and the Alternative for Germany—were more likely to make anti-immigrant references in their Facebook messages than all other parties, for their CIs were far from overlapping with any other party's. At the same time, the conservative Austrian People's Party also made such references significantly more often than most non-populist parties; its difference from the countries' green parties was significant only at $p < .10$. Regarding anti-elitist references, Figure 1 indicates that the Freedom Party of Austria and the Alternative for Germany made such references more often than any other political party examined except the small Austrian liberal party, NEOS.

Next, we examined how anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references affected users' reactions of anger to individual Facebook posts. We analyzed our data by running 10 models, one for each party family and country.² Because we had overdispersed count

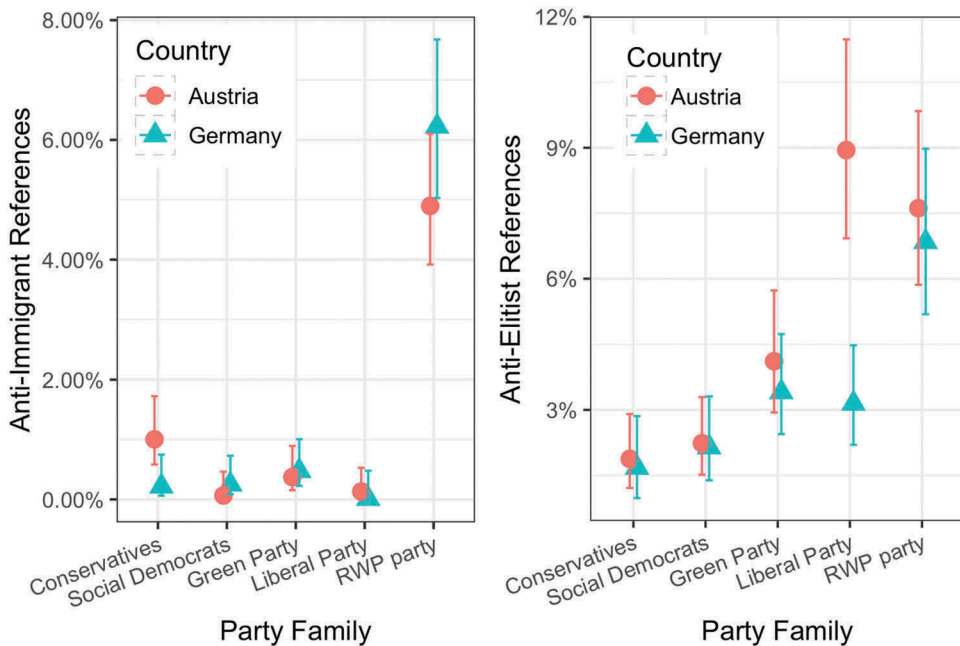


Figure 1. Use of anti-immigrant (left) and anti-elitist (right) references in political parties' and lead candidates' Facebook posts across Austria and Germany. Results are based on the multi-level model in Table A3 (Study 1).

data,³ we used negative binomial regressions to analyze our data (Hilbe, 2011). Again, we allowed the intercept to vary randomly across the Facebook pages and controlled for post length and campaign period. We additionally controlled for the number of non-emotional reactions (i.e., likes, shares, and comments) to account for the fact that some posts—for example, sponsored ones—receive more angry reactions simply because they reach a wider audience. We also controlled for week of publication, for we assumed that the number of followers and thus number of user reactions could increase over time.

Figure 2 depicts the coefficients of anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references for all models, details regarding which appear in Tables A4 and A5. Points in the figure indicate the coefficient's size, whereas lines indicate the 95% CIs (estimates for intercepts and control variables are omitted). In the case of Austria, we found support for H2, which assumed that anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references prompt angry reactions among RWP followers. In the German case, however, H2 was only partly supported, because the coefficient for anti-elitist attitudes did not achieve statistical significance. We also calculated incidence rate ratios, the results for which suggest that, in Austria, RWP posts with anti-immigrant references received 1.88 times the angry reactions of posts without such references, 95% CI [1.12, 3.40]. Meanwhile, posts with anti-elitist references received 1.87 times the angry reactions of posts without such references, 95% CI [1.23, 2.99]. In Germany, by some contrast, anti-immigrant references stimulated angry reactions among followers of RWP actors by a factor of 1.47, 95% CI [1.12, 1.96]; however, the effect of anti-elitist references did not reach statistical significance. Last, regarding mainstream parties, anti-elitist references among followers of the Austrian Liberal Party increased the expected number of angry reactions by 1.41, 95% CI [1.06, 1.90], and among followers of the German Green Party by a factor of 1.59, 95% CI [1.02, 2.63].

Discussion

The purpose of Study 1 was to investigate whether RWP actors make anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references in their Facebook posts to a similar degree across Austria and

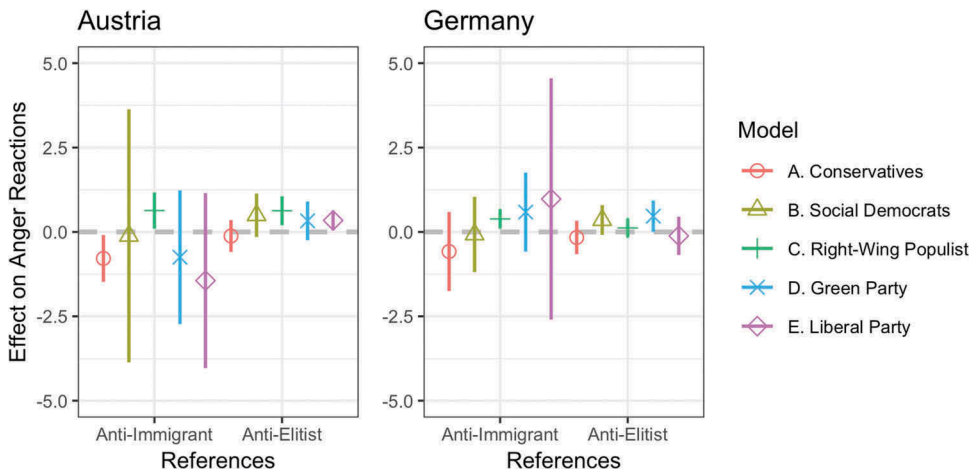


Figure 2. Multi-model coefficient plot depicting the effects of anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references on the number of anger reactions from negative binomial regressions. Models were run separately for each party family and country (see Table A4 and A5, Study 1). Lines indicate 95 percent confidence interval.

Germany and whether such references stimulate negative emotional reactions among those actors' followers. We found that the frequency of posts with such references between the RWP Freedom Party of Austria and RWP Alternative for Germany did not differ. In both countries, those RWP parties made such references significantly more often than their mainstream competitors, except for the small Austrian liberal party NEOS, which also scored high on anti-elitist references. Another notable finding is that the conservative Austrian People's Party made anti-immigrant references slightly more frequently than their non-populist competitors. The reason might be that conservatives in Austria have shifted further to the right under the leadership of Sebastian Kurz and "coopted some of the FPÖ's [Austrian Freedom Party's] ideas on immigration" (Gady, 2017). Last, anti-immigrant references significantly stimulated angry reactions among the Facebook followers of RWP actors in Austria and Germany, whereas anti-elitist ones stimulated such reactions among followers of Austrian RWP actors. Furthermore, anti-elitist references also increased angry reactions among followers of the liberal NEOS party in Austria and Germany's Alliance 90/The Greens. In sum, the results of Study 1 indicated that the anti-immigrant dimension of RWP communication may be its distinguishing factor when it comes to Facebook, whereas its anti-elitist dimension may be adopted by mainstream parties as well and stimulate negative emotional reactions among their followers.

Study 2

Drawing from Study 1's findings about the content of RWP posts on Facebook, Study 2 involved investigating selective exposure to and effects of such content. To assess the impact of RWP communication on social media, we first needed to understand which attitudinal and emotional dispositions drive selective exposure to RWP content and, in turn, how such exposure may affect those dispositions.

Method

We collected two waves of panel data in the context of the Austrian national election 2017 from 559 respondents. Austria represents a highly valuable case for studying the effects of RWP communication, for its Austrian Freedom Party has been ranked among the most successful RWP parties in Europe (McGann & Kitschelt, 2005) and gained a large share of votes in the 2017 elections (25.97%). We defined representative quotas for age, gender, and education among respondents. Because the questionnaire that we distributed chiefly addressed use of social media platforms, we filtered out participants who reported never using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram, as well as respondents more than 65 years old. We issued 14,688 invitations, and although 953 individuals initiated the survey (6.49%), 180 did not complete it, were excluded because of full quotes, or did not meet the defined criteria. Another eight respondents were excluded due to their extremely brief or long response periods, which left a sample of 765 individuals. Approximately 73% of those respondents replied in Wave 2 as well, which left a sample of 559 respondents. By gender, 50.27% of respondents in our final sample were women. By level of education, approximately 19% had college degrees, 27% had diplomas from college-preparatory high schools, and 48% had apprenticeship or vocational school certification; all others had degrees from compulsory school (i.e., the lowest level of school in Austria).⁴ Last, by age, all respondents were from 16 to 65 years old ($M = 44.49$, $SD = 12.61$). Wave 1 of data collection occurred

from August 29 to September 2, 2017, whereas Wave 2 was implemented from October 5 to 12, 2017, a week before the election. Accordingly, respondents were exposed to a month of intensive election campaigning in the period between the waves.

Key measures. To measure our key independent variable, we asked respondents whether they followed the Facebook page of the Austrian Freedom Party or of its leader, Heinz-Christian Strache. We recoded both items into one dummy variable representing citizens who follow at least one of those actors, 18.78%_(t1) versus 17.53%_(t2). We followed the same procedure to assess followers of the Social Democratic Party of Austria, 14.67%_(t1) versus 12.70%_(t2); the Austrian People's Party, 18.78%_(t1) versus 15.21%_(t2); The Greens, 6.08%_(t1) versus 6.62%_(t2); and the liberal party NEOS, 6.26%_(t1) versus 5.01%_(t2). Except for political knowledge and participation, all other variables were measured on a 7-point scale. We measured anti-immigrant attitudes, $M_{(t1)} = 4.65$, $SD_{(t1)} = 2.00$, $\alpha_{(t1)} = .94$ versus $M_{(t2)} = 4.47$, $SD_{(t2)} = 1.96$, $\alpha_{(t2)} = .93$, with 3 items regarding the extent to which respondents agreed that (a) immigrants cost Austria too much money, which should be invested in the Austrian people instead; (b) Austria's borders should be closed to immigrants; and (c) immigrants are the cause of many problems in Austria. By contrast, anti-elitist attitudes, $M_{(t1)} = 5.20$, $SD_{(t1)} = 1.50$, $\alpha_{(t1)} = .87$ versus $M_{(t2)} = 5.19$, $SD_{(t2)} = 1.48$, $\alpha_{(t2)} = .87$, were measured with 3 items asking participants how much they agreed that (a) politicians in Austria's government do not care about what people like me think; (b) politicians in Austria's government talk too much and act too little; and (c) politicians in Austria's government make decisions that harm ordinary people (Hameleers et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2017). Political anger, $M_{(t1)} = 5.12$, $SD_{(t1)} = 1.57$, $\alpha_{(t1)} = .89$ versus $M_{(t2)} = 4.98$, $SD_{(t2)} = 1.57$, $\alpha_{(t2)} = .88$, was also measured with 3 items. We asked participants, "When you think or talk about politics in Austria, how often do you feel ... ?" and stated the emotions of *Verärgerung* ("anger"), *Wut* ("fury"), and *Empörung* ("outrage"). To measure anxiety, $M_{(t1)} = 4.43$, $SD_{(t1)} = 1.76$, $\alpha_{(t1)} = .90$ versus $M_{(t2)} = 4.31$, $SD_{(t2)} = 1.72$, $\alpha_{(t2)} = .91$, we used the same introductory phrase, and respondents rated the degree to which they felt *Furcht* ("fear"), *Sorge* ("worry"), and *Angst* ("anxiety").

To confirm that the four variables of interest (i.e., anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-elitist attitudes, anger, and anxiety) represented distinct factors, we ran a confirmatory factor analysis with data from Wave 1. The fit indices revealed an acceptable overall model fit, $\chi^2(48) = 181.12$, $p < .001$, root mean square error of approximation = .07, comparative fit index = .97, standardized root mean square residual = .03. The correlation coefficients between those variables ranged from $r = .39$ for anti-immigrant attitudes and political anxiety to $r = .63$ for political anger and political anxiety. Measures for the control variables appear in Table A6.

Results

We ran a series of regression models, each including the lagged score of the dependent variable, to assess the relationship between following RWP actors on Facebook and the attitudes as well as emotions of interest. Although the models could not provide any definite causal proof, they reduced problems typical of cross-sectional research, including omitted variable bias, selection bias, and reverse causation, because we compared only individuals with the same dependent variable score at Wave 1 and explained changes in that variable from Wave 1 to Wave 2, which could not affect Wave 1 characteristics. Our results appear in Tables 1 and 2. To increase the robustness of our findings, we controlled

Table 1.

Logistic regressions with attitudinal variables predicting following right-wing populist actors with lagged dependent variables and autoregressive effects (Study 2)

	Following (t1) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Following (t2) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Following (t2) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Following (t2) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Following (t1)	3.49*** (0.38)	3.62*** (0.38)	3.58*** (0.38)	3.70*** (0.39)
Age	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Female	0.37 (0.36)	0.40 (0.36)	0.40 (0.36)	0.45 (0.36)
Medium Education	0.01 (0.42)	−0.04 (0.42)	−0.005 (0.42)	−0.13 (0.42)
High Education	−0.02 (0.51)	−0.04 (0.51)	−0.02 (0.51)	−0.14 (0.51)
Migrant	−1.37** (0.53)	−1.32* (0.51)	−1.27* (0.52)	−1.34** (0.51)
Ideology	0.18 (0.15)	0.26 ⁺ (0.14)	0.22 (0.14)	0.30* (0.14)
Political Interest	0.11 (0.14)	0.09 (0.14)	0.08 (0.14)	0.10 (0.14)
Political Participation	0.12 (0.07)	0.12 ⁺ (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)
Political Knowledge	−0.21* (0.09)	−0.23* (0.09)	−0.22* (0.09)	−0.24** (0.09)
Attention to News	0.19 (0.14)	0.20 (0.14)	0.20 (0.14)	0.23 (0.14)
Facebook Use	0.12 (0.09)	0.14 (0.09)	0.13 (0.09)	0.15 ⁺ (0.09)
Anti-immigrant	0.22* (0.11)			
Anti-Elitist		0.13 (0.11)		
Anger			0.20 (0.12)	
Anxiety				−0.09 (0.10)
Constant	−5.74*** (1.11)	−5.94*** (1.17)	−6.19*** (1.19)	−5.32*** (1.11)
Observations	559	559	559	559
Nagelkerke R ²	.62	.62	.62	.62

Note. ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2.
OLS regressions predicting anti-immigrant and populist attitudes with lagged dependent variables and autoregressive effects (Study 2)

	Anti-immigrant (t2)	Anti-Elitist (t2)	Anger (t2)	Anxiety (t2)
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
^a DV (t1)	0.69*** (0.03)	0.54*** (0.04)	0.65*** (0.03)	0.62*** (0.03)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 ⁺ (0.004)	-0.00 (0.00)
Female	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.14 (0.11)	0.12 (0.11)	0.28* (0.12)
Medium Education	-0.15 (0.12)	0.01 (0.13)	0.11 (0.12)	-0.14 (0.13)
High Education	-0.09 (0.13)	0.08 (0.14)	0.02 (0.14)	-0.28 ⁺ (0.15)
Migrant	-0.12 (0.12)	-0.21 (0.13)	-0.01 (0.13)	0.36* (0.14)
Ideology	0.21*** (0.04)	0.07 ⁺ (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)
Political Interest	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)
Political Participation	-0.005 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.06* (0.03)
Political Knowledge	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Attention to News	0.04 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.05)
Facebook Use	-0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Following RWP	0.33* (0.14)	0.45** (0.15)	0.18 (0.15)	0.39* (0.16)
Constant	0.76* (0.30)	2.33*** (0.34)	0.83* (0.33)	1.23*** (0.35)
Observations	559	559	559	559
Adjusted R ²	0.67	0.35	0.45	0.44

Note. ^aDV = Dependent variable of each model at time 1. ⁺p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

for several variables in our models—demographic traits, ideology, political interest, political knowledge, political participation, attention to news, and Facebook use—that might have explained variance in the variables of interest.

First, we sought to explore the relationship between anti-immigrant attitudes and following RWP actors on Facebook. [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) provide the results of the regression analyses. As shown in [Table 1](#), our results indicated a significant effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on following RWP actors ($b = .22, p < .05$). Furthermore, as shown in [Table 2](#), following such actors exerted a significant effect on anti-immigrant attitudes ($b = .33, p < .05$). Thus, our data provided support for H3a and H4a ([Figure 3](#)).

Second, we tested the relationship between anti-elitist attitudes and following RWP actors on Facebook. As shown in [Table 1](#), no significant effect of such attitudes on following those actors surfaced ($b = .13, p = .26$). Thus, we rejected H3b. However, we did find convincing evidence of a reversed effect; as [Table 2](#) indicates, following RWP positively predicted anti-elitist attitudes ($b = .45, p < .01$). Therefore, our data supported H4b.

Third, we investigated the relationship between political anger and following RWP actors on Facebook. As [Table 1](#) indicates, albeit pointing in the expected direction, political anger did not significantly predict following those actors ($b = .20, p = .11$). In fact, we found a similarly reversed pattern; following RWP actors did not significantly affect political anger ($b = .18, p = .21$). Thus, we rejected H5 and H6a.

Last, we examined the relationship between political anxiety and following RWP actors on Facebook. Although we found no support for a significant effect of following those actors ($b = -.09, p = .35$), we did find evidence that following them significantly increased anxiety ($b = .39, p < .05$). Thus, our data provided support for H6b.

Additional analyses. We also analyzed how the investigated variables related to following mainstream political actors on Facebook. As a result, we found support for the notion that anti-immigrant attitudes significantly predict following the Austrian People's Party or its leader, Sebastian Kurz ($b = .23, p < .05$), if not both, but not vice versa. No other significant relationships were observed for followers of that party nor for following actors in the Social Democratic Party of Austria. Regarding followers of The Greens, anti-immigrant attitudes were a nearly significant negative predictor of following that

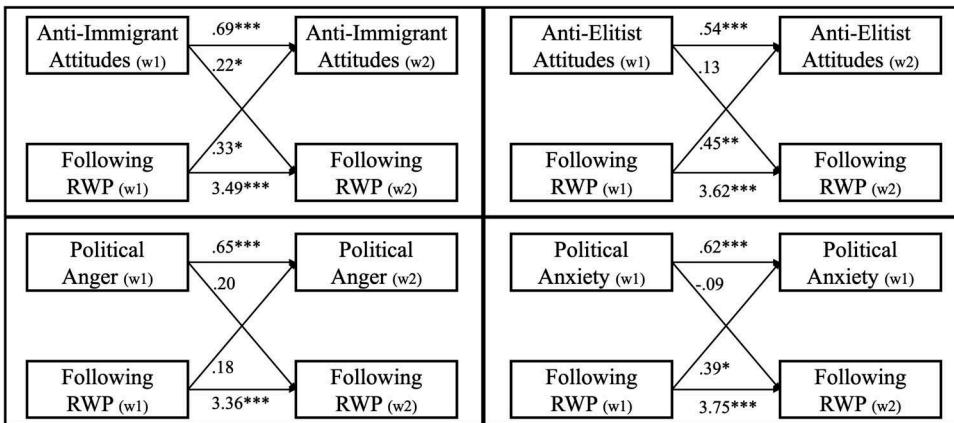


Figure 3. Cross-lagged relationships between individuals' predispositions and whether they are following of the right-wing populist Austrian Freedom Party and/or its leader on Facebook. Effects correspond to [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) (Study 2).

party's actors ($b = -.29, p = .05$), and anti-elitist attitudes were more clearly a significant negative predictor ($b = -.32, p < .05$). Political anger was a highly significant negative predictor of following actors in The Greens ($b = -.63, p < .001$) and negatively related to following them ($b = -.37, p < .05$), which in turn had an almost significant negative effect on anti-immigrant attitudes ($b = -.37, p = .09$). By contrast, no significant effect on anti-elitist attitudes, political anger, or political anxiety emerged. For the liberal party NEOS, anti-elitist attitudes exerted a nearly significant negative effect on following its actors ($b = -.31, p = .06$), whereas anti-immigrant attitudes demonstrated no significant effect. In sum, political anger ($b = -.41, p < .05$) and political anxiety ($b = -.44, p < .01$) were significant negative drivers of following NEOS, which in turn did not affect anti-immigrant or anti-elitist attitudes, political anger, or political anxiety.

Discussion

Building upon the findings of Study 1, in Study 2 we conducted a panel analysis to discern directional paths between individuals' attitudes and emotions and their behavior of following certain political actors on Facebook. The results indicate that only anti-immigrant attitudes drove citizens to follow RWP actors on Facebook, and, in turn, following such actors significantly fueled anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-elitist attitudes, and political anxiety. Despite evidence from Study 1 of a relationship between following RWP and anger, we found no significant effects in our panel analysis models. One possible reason for the small effects observed in that analysis was the brief period between Waves 1 and 2; however, because the effects pointed in the expected directions and given the more robust evidence from Study 1, more research over longer periods is needed to assess the relationships between anger and exposure to RWP content on Facebook.

General Discussion

Taken together, the findings of our two studies indicate the importance of mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment in RWP communication on social media. In Study 1, anti-immigrant references emerged as the most distinguishing factor of RWP communication on Facebook. RWP actors in both Austria and Germany made such references more often than any of their competitors, and such references were also likelier to stimulate angry reactions among their followers. In Study 2, anti-immigrant attitudes were both significant antecedents and outcomes of following RWP actors on Facebook. That finding aligns with our theoretical consideration that individuals who follow such actors on Facebook may primarily seek anti-immigrant content, which is the unique selling point of right-wing populism and distinguishes RWP parties from their mainstream competitors. Thus, individuals with strong anti-immigrant attitudes may selectively seek out RWP content on social media (Stroud, 2008), and such selective exposure may increase their initial attitudes as they engage in attitude-congruent information processing that reconfirms those same attitudes (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

Although initial anti-elitist attitudes seem to be less important to proactively engaging with RWP actors on Facebook, they were strengthened by following those actors. Thus, though anti-elitist attitudes may not necessarily drive selective exposure of RWP content, once Facebook users have liked the pages of RWP actors, those RWP campaigns may nurture anti-elitist sentiments. After all, RWP actors strategically portray an antagonistic relationship between allegedly corrupt political elites and allegedly virtuous

ordinary people. That trend also surfaced in Study 1, which demonstrated that the Austrian Freedom Party has made anti-elitist references more frequently than other parties, with the exception of the liberal NEOS party. Nevertheless, we found no support for the notion that followers of NEOS increased their anti-elitist attitudes. One reason might be that NEOS appeals to highly educated, politically efficacious, progressive individuals who may also consider themselves to belong to some elite group and may thus resist developing anti-elitist attitudes.

In Study 1, we found evidence that following RWP actors on Facebook relates to feelings of anger. Anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references in posts were frequently made by RWP actors and increased the number of angry reactions among Austrian followers, although only anti-immigrant references increased such reactions among their German counterparts. However, even though the coefficients pointed in the expected directions, the relationships between anger and exposure to RWP content were not significant in our panel analysis. From a methodological perspective, the weak effects for anger could have related to the brief period between Waves 1 and 2; at the same time, they could also relate to the fact that the Austrian Freedom Party, busy working to establish itself in the government during the examined election period, focused more on presenting a positive self-image than inciting followers' anger toward potential coalition partners.⁵ The role of exposure-induced anger thus needs to be further examined, especially over longer periods and across different contexts (e.g., countries and electoral vs. non-electoral periods).

We also found convincing evidence that anxiety did not predict following RWP actors on Facebook. In fact, individuals with high levels of anxiety may actively seek political information that lowers their anxiety (Huddy et al., 2007; MacKuen et al., 2010). RWP actors, however, seek to increase perceptions of specific threats (e.g., cultural infiltration and terrorism due to mass immigration) among individuals and strategically disseminate messages that elicit such issue-specific anxiety (Schmuck & Matthes, 2015). Accordingly, we found that exposure to RWP messages on Facebook increased political anxiety. However, individuals who were anxious already might have had little reason to selectively expose themselves to content which would reinforce their anxiety.

In another analysis, we probed the relationship between the investigated predispositions and the act of following mainstream political actors. As a result, we found some robust support for the idea that negative emotions decrease the likelihood of following the left-wing The Greens and the liberal NEOS. Although anti-immigrant attitudes negatively predicted following actors in The Greens, they also increased the likelihood of following the Austrian People's Party or its leader, Sebastian Kurz, if not both. Those results align with the finding from Study 1 that though Austrian conservatives made anti-immigrant references significantly less often than actors from the Austrian Freedom Party, they also made such references slightly more often than their mainstream competitors. That result confirms international observations that Kurz heavily framed his political campaign around tougher immigration policies and, in doing so, combined RWP elements with rationalism and respectability, which allowed him to retain a base of traditionally conservative voters (Gady, 2017). It may also explain why we found no effects of following Austrian People's Party actors on anti-immigrant attitudes or negative emotions.

Even though we found some evidence suggesting that the investigated predispositions encourage people to follow mainstream party actors, we did not find any effects on their followers' attitudes or emotions. Two dynamics might explain that finding. On the one hand, followers of populist actors may heavily rely on social media for their political

information (Engesser et al., 2017) and may selectively expose themselves more strongly to attitude-congruent information (Hameleers et al., 2017; Stroud, 2010). On the other, followers of RWP actors may also be more susceptible to campaign effects. For example, scholars have shown that RWP supporters tend to have a lower educational background and that followers of RWP actors on social media may be less cognitively oriented in their social media use (Heiss & Matthes, 2017). That second reason also aligns with our finding that political knowledge negatively affected the act of following RWP actors on Facebook (Table 1). Low levels of cognitive processing and knowledge may thus increase the susceptibility of the followers of RWP actors to populist messages (Schmuck & Matthes, 2015).

Limitations

Some limitations in our research warrant attention. First, our panel analysis was conducted in the context of the Austrian national election. Even though election periods are ripe for studying media and campaign effects (Iyengar & Simon, 2000), they are not representative of citizens' daily information environment, for they typically entail the increased spending of political parties on advertising and political posts on social media. Second, a dictionary approach can hardly allow assessing the context in which words appear or capture the conceptual complexity of RWP communication (Van Attefeldt & Peng, 2018). Thus, our findings should be replicated by using manually coded data (e.g., Ernst et al., 2017). At the same time, we were able to analyze a comprehensive data set and highlight the similarity of RWP communication across two countries. Third, following similar approaches (Stroud, 2008, 2010), we used self-reported measures of selective exposure to RWP communication on Facebook; however, such reports rely on individuals' memories and may be over- or underestimated (Heiss & Matthes, 2017; Naab, Karnowski, & Schlütz, 2019; Scharkow, 2019). Furthermore, such measures may be confounded; for instance, individuals who follow RWP actors on Facebook may also selectively expose themselves more intensely to the information of other RWP campaigns. Recently, researchers have experimented with simulating real-world situations of media exposure (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2018), and in the future, scholars should seek to implement such procedures in their survey-based research. On a related point, it should be noted that right-wing populism represents a complex worldview that goes beyond the notion of evaluative attitudes. Thus, our measures might have captured only limited aspects of RWP communication. Moreover, other aspects not measured in our content analysis (e.g., empty populism and emotionalization) may have affected the outcomes that we measured as well as other dimensions of populist attitudes (see Wirz et al., 2018). Last, we scrutinized only two cases in our content analysis and only one case in our panel analysis. However, to elucidate RWP communication in Europe and beyond, more multi-country studies are needed (e.g., Ernst et al., 2017), especially ones that compensate for those limitations by, for example, involving cross-national surveys in non-electoral periods and the use of new computerized means to track individuals' following behavior on social media. Despite those limitations, our research has provided a first comprehensive picture of the content, selection, and potential effects of RWP communication on social media.

Conclusions

Altogether, our research has confirmed the unique role of anti-immigrant stances in RWP social media communication and even provided convincing evidence of an anti-immigrant or nativist

spiral in such communication. Our findings indicate that RWP actors across Austria and Germany have used anti-immigrant references more frequently than any other actors in their respective country and that only followers of RWP actors reacted to such references with increased emotionality. In our panel analysis, citizens with stronger anti-immigrant attitudes were more likely to selectively expose themselves to RWP content on Facebook, and exposure to such content reinforced their initial anti-immigrant attitudes. While citizens primarily selected RWP content on Facebook based on anti-immigrant sentiments, exposure to RWP communication on Facebook also stimulated their anti-elitist attitudes and political anxiety. Those findings corroborate the results of recent research on the content that RWP actors post on Facebook, which heavily relies on anti-elitism (Ernst et al., 2017) and the stimulation of perceived threats (Stier et al., 2017). In all, our findings thus suggest that amid the increasing importance of social media, RWP actors may indeed use social media channels to propagate their political worldview and bolster electoral support for it.

Supplemental material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher's website at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1661890>.

Notes

1. We asked an independent coder to categorize a subsample and assess the presence of anti-immigrant references for each post. The subsample contained 60 randomly selected posts; however, to ensure some variance among the posts, it included a third of anti-immigrant references based on the automated analysis. The coder received only information that the references were to be coded when immigrants or religious minorities were linked to either criminal (e.g., sexual assault and violence) or extremist (e.g., terrorism and Islamism) activities and thus presented in a negative light. No other information was provided. The dictionary creator also coded the same subsample. Krippendorff's alpha for the two human coders was .83. Next, we calculated measures of consistency between the independent human coder and the dictionary-based codes. Krippendorff's alpha between the independent human coder and the automated codes was also .83. Last, we calculated precision (76%) and recall (81%), which indicated sufficient consistency between the automated and independent human-detected codes (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013).

2. We ran separate models to avoid running one overly complex model, which would needed to be a hierarchical negative binomial model with multiple cross-level interactions. Dividing the sample into subsamples allowed us to pinpoint the effects for individual parties within countries, while plotting the CIs (Figure 2) provided additional information on potential differences across parties and countries.

3. The observed variance was higher than expected. In our case, the standard deviation of the dependent count variable of angry reactions was considerably larger than the mean. In such cases, negative binomial regressions are suggested (Hilbe, 2011).

4. College degrees are less common in Austria than in other countries (e.g. the United States). Although 27% of respondents dropped out and did not respond in Wave 2, our numbers remained fairly representative. Our original quotas, defined according to information provided by Statistics Austria, required 18% of respondents to have college-preparatory high-school diplomas, 13% to have college degrees, 44% to have apprenticeship or vocational school certification, and 25% to have attended compulsory school only.

5. The Austrian Freedom Party also joined a coalition with the Austrian People's Party after a successful campaign, and Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of the Austrian Freedom Party, became vice-chancellor of Austria.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Table A1

Facebook profiles from political candidates and parties represented in the sample with number of posts in parentheses (Study 1)

Party Family	Actor (ID)	Country	Profile type	Posts
Conservative Party	Sebastian Kurz	AUT	Candidate	708
	ÖVP	AUT	Party	773
	Angela Merkel	GER	Candidate	268
	CDU	GER	Party	629
Social Democrats	Christian Kern	AUT	Candidate	751
	SPÖ	AUT	Party	805
	Martin Schulz	GER	Candidate	453
	SPD	GER	Party	628
Green Party	Ulrike Lunacek	AUT	Candidate	533
	The Greens	AUT	Party	655
	Cem Özdemir	GER	Candidate	430
	Katrin Göring-Eckardt	GER	Candidate	397
	Alliance 90/The Greens	GER	Party	532
Liberal Party	Matthias Strolz	AUT	Candidate	731
	NEOS	AUT	Party	667
	Christian Lindner	GER	Candidate	699
	FDP	GER	Party	756
Right-Wing Populist	H.C. Srache	AUT	Candidate	830
	FPÖ	AUT	Party	759
	Alice Weidel	GER	Candidate	569
	AfD	AfD	Party	785

Note. ÖVP = Austrian People's Party, CDU = Christian Democratic Union of Germany, SPÖ = Social Democratic Party of Austria, SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany, NEOS = The New Austria, FDP = Free Democratic Party (Germany), FPÖ = Austrian Freedom Party, AfD = Alternative for Germany.

Table A2

Dictionaries used to identify anti-immigrant references in Facebook posts (Study 1)

Neutral Dictionary	“Asyl”, “Integration”, “Flüchtling”, “flüchtling”, “Flucht”, “flucht”, “einwander”, “Einwander”, “Zuwander”, “zuwander”, “Immigrant”, “Immigrat”, “Migrat”, “migrat”, “Migrant”, “Islam”, “islam”, “Muslim”, “muslim”, “Mohammed”, “Koran”, “Minarett”
Negative Disctionary	“politischen Islam”, “politische Islam”, “politischer Islam”, “Islamist”, “islamist”, “Terror”, “terror”, “Extremis”, “extremis”, “Radikal”, “radikal”, “fundamentalis”, “Masseneinwand”, “Massenzuwand”, “Asylante”, “Asylant_”, “Völkerwander”, “Anschlag”, “Anschläge”, “Kriminell”, “kriminell”, “Täter”, “täter”, “Gewalt”, “gewalt”, “Verbrech”, “verbrech”, “Straf”, “straf”

Note. Anti-immigrant references were coded when at least one word of the neutral dictionary and at least one word of the negative appeared combined in one Facebook post.

Table A3
Logistic regression with random intercepts predicting anti-immigrant and anti-elitist references (Study 1)

	Anti-Immigrant References		Anti-Elitist References	
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Germany (vs. Austria)	0.16 (0.15)	0.25 (0.16)	-0.36* (0.15)	-0.12 (0.21)
Conservative (vs. RWP)	-2.20*** (0.27)	-1.62*** (0.30)	-1.48*** (0.25)	-1.46*** (0.27)
Social Democrats (vs. RWP)	-3.65*** (0.48)	-4.37*** (1.01)	-1.26*** (0.23)	-1.28*** (0.25)
Greens (vs. RWP)	-2.63*** (0.30)	-2.62*** (0.47)	-0.68** (0.21)	-0.65** (0.23)
Liberals (vs. RWP)	-4.42*** (0.70)	-3.66*** (0.72)	-0.26 (0.21)	0.18 (0.20)
Germany*Conservative		-1.79* (0.70)		0.00 (0.41)
Germany*Social Democrats		1.09 (1.15)		0.07 (0.37)
Germany*Greens		-0.005 (0.61)		-0.08 (0.33)
Germany*Liberal		-2.70 (2.03)		-0.99** (0.31)
Control Variables				
Post Length ^a	0.52*** (0.04)	0.53*** (0.04)	0.46*** (0.03)	0.46*** (0.03)
Campaign Period	-0.11 (0.19)	-0.09 (0.19)	-0.17 (0.11)	-0.17 (0.11)
Candidate page (vs. Party)	0.27* (0.13)	0.28* (0.13)	0.19 (0.14)	0.17 (0.11)
Constant	-3.01*** (0.14)	-3.08*** (0.14)	-2.45*** (0.17)	-2.54*** (0.16)
Observations	13,358	13,358	13,358	13,358
Variance (Intercept)	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.02
Log Likelihood	-980.23	-974.23	-2,411.10	-2,405.94
Tjur's D	0.18	0.18	0.08	0.08

Note. Note that the party labels (e.g., conservative) represent party families across both countries. ^aVariable is standardized (z-scores) for convergence reasons.
⁺*p* < .10; * *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001

Table A4
Negative binomial regression predicting number of anger reactions in Facebook for party families in Austria (Study 1)

	Anger Reactions (count)				
	ÖVP Model	Greens Model	NEOS Model	FPÖ Model	SPÖ Model
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Anti-Immigrant Ref.	-0.78* (0.35)	-0.75 (1.01)	-1.44 (1.32)	0.63* (0.27)	-0.12 (1.91)
Anti-Elitist Ref.	-0.12 (0.24)	0.33 (0.29)	0.34* (0.15)	0.63** (0.22)	0.50 (0.33)
Control Variables					
Total Reactions ^a	0.77*** (0.04)	0.79*** (0.06)	1.05*** (0.04)	0.81*** (0.06)	0.53*** (0.05)
Time (weeks)	0.01** (0.002)	0.01* (0.01)	-0.005 (0.003)	0.01 ⁺ (0.004)	0.07*** (0.004)
Post Length ^a	-0.04 (0.03)	0.14* (0.06)	0.08 ⁺ (0.05)	0.13* (0.06)	0.23*** (0.05)
Campaign	0.96*** (0.08)	-1.41*** (0.16)	0.14 (0.11)	-1.51*** (0.17)	-0.99*** (0.12)
Candidate ^b	1.14*** (0.07)	-1.83*** (0.14)	0.50*** (0.09)	0.64*** (0.13)	0.03 (0.11)
Constant	1.00*** (0.08)	1.60*** (0.18)	1.12*** (0.11)	3.82*** (0.14)	-0.02 (0.16)
Observations	1,481	1,188	1,398	1,589	1,556
Log Likelihood	-4,472.88	-2,095.19	-3,245.96	-6,317.56	-4,513.40
theta	0.82*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.02)	0.44*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.01)	0.29*** (0.01)

Note. ^aVariables are standardized (z-score). ^bDummy variable which represents each parties' lead candidate vs. the party profile (e.g., Sebastian Kurz vs. ÖVP party profile in model 1). ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table A5
Negative binomial regression predicting number of anger reactions in Facebook for party families in Germany (Study 1)

	Anger Reactions (count)			
	CDU Model	Greens Model	FDP Model	SPD Model
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Anti-Immigrant Ref.	-0.58 (0.60)	0.59 (0.60)	0.98 (1.82)	-0.07 (0.57)
Anti-Elitist Ref.	-0.16 (0.25)	0.47* (0.24)	-0.12 (0.29)	0.35 (0.22)
Control Variables				
Total Reactions ^a	0.72*** (0.04)	0.98*** (0.04)	1.11*** (0.05)	1.15*** (0.04)
Time (weeks)	0.02*** (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	0.01** (0.004)	0.02*** (0.003)
Post Length ^a	-0.09* (0.03)	-0.12** (0.05)	0.49*** (0.05)	-0.11** (0.04)
Campaign	0.04 (0.08)	-0.65*** (0.12)	-0.53*** (0.13)	-0.64*** (0.09)
Candidate ^b	1.29*** (0.08)	-0.24* (0.10)	0.41*** (0.10)	0.28*** (0.08)
Candidate 2 ^b		-0.44*** (0.11)		
Constant	2.40*** (0.08)	2.62*** (0.10)	1.67*** (0.12)	2.05*** (0.08)
Observations	897	1,359	1,455	1,081
Log Likelihood	-3,921.10	-4,457.22	-3,994.26	-4,173.48
theta	1.07*** (0.05)	0.43*** (0.02)	0.31*** (0.01)	0.81*** (0.03)

Note. ^aVariables are standardized (z-score). ^bDummy variables which represents each parties' lead candidate vs. the party profile (e.g., Angela Merkel vs. CDU party profile in model 1). Note that the German Greens were represented by two lead candidates (see Table A2). ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table A6

Overview of measures for control variables used in Study 2 (Wave 1)

Political participation <i>0 = no participation,</i> <i>12 = participated in all activities</i>	12 items asking participants whether or not they have engaged in (1) liking or sharing a political post, <i>M</i> = 1.91 (2) commenting a political post on SNS, (3) signing an online petition, (4) participating in a demonstration, (5) attending a political rally, (6) working in a political organization, (7) writing a longer political comment online, (8) contacting a politician or journalist online, (9) creating a political group on SNS, (10) reminding others of upcoming political event, (11) use campaign material (e.g., buttons), and (12) signing an offline petition. Positive responses were summed up, resulting in an additive index reaching from 0 to 12. <i>SD</i> = 2.35
Knowledge <i>0 = all incorrect,</i> <i>8 = all correct</i>	Knowledge was measured with four correct and four incorrect statements on issue positions of the four major parties. Participants evaluated the statements (true, false, or don't know). Correct responses were summed up, resulting in an additive index reaching from 0 to 8. <i>M</i> = 4.03 <i>SD</i> = 2.25
Political interest <i>1 = not interested,</i> <i>7 = very interested</i>	We measured political interest with two items asking how much respondents were interested in (a) politics and (b) the current election. ρ = .91 <i>M</i> = 4.90 <i>SD</i> = 1.81 <i>M</i> = 4.06 <i>SD</i> = 1.32
Ideology <i>1 = left,</i> <i>7 = right</i>	Single item with higher values indicating right.
Attention to news <i>1 = never,</i> <i>7 = very often</i>	Single item asking participants how often they use news media to get information on the election. <i>M</i> = 4.50 <i>SD</i> = 1.76
Facebook use <i>1 = never,</i> <i>7 = very often</i>	Frequency of Facebook use. <i>M</i> = 3.86 <i>SD</i> = 2.05
Migration background <i>No migration is the reference category</i>	A dummy variable which assessed whether participants or one of their parents were born in a foreign country (18.25% had a migration background). 18.25%