Original Research Article

Party Politics

Of the people *and* the elite? The strategic framing of Jews, antisemitism, and Israel by the AfD and the FPÖ

Party Politics
2025, Vol. 0(0) 1–11

DOI: 10.1177/13540688251358140
journals.sagepub.com/home/ppq
Sage

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Abstract

Research has examined the co-existence of pro-Jewish discourse and antisemitic incidents within the populist radical right parties (PRR), Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). This paper analyses this phenomenon through the lens of populist discourse, and finds that Jews are accepted into "the people" when they agree with the parties' (mostly anti-Islam and anti-elitist) message. However, Jews are excluded, aligned with "the elite", when they do not. This paper also finds that only the FPÖ demonstrates this same approach towards Israel. The parties thus pursue a dual strategy with regards to Jews and Israel: they use populist discourse as a way to "normalise" their framing of Jews and legitimise exclusion, but the overlap between antisemitic and anti-elitist ideas can make this appear as antisemitic dog-whistling.

Keywords

antisemitism, elite, Facebook, populist radical right

Introduction

Contemporary Western European populist radical right (PRR) parties in Germany and Austria consistently refute accusations of antisemitism, and portray themselves as pro-Israel and against the discrimination of Jewish communities (e.g., Hafez, 2014; Selent and Kortmann, 2023). At the same time, they continue to make comments perceived as antisemitic (Wodak, 2015). The Freedom Party for Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) and Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) largely follow this trend. Both parties claim to defend Jews from Muslim-Arab antisemitism, have had members make high-profile visits to Israel (Shroufi, 2015), and take part in Holocaust remembrance practices (Kahmann, 2017). Both have shifted from biological racism towards framing Islam as a socio-civilisational threat against European society (Brubaker, 2017). Despite this, antisemitism has continued to exist within the AfD and the FPÖ (Danckaert, 2021; Engel and Wodak, 2013; Salzborn, 2018; Wodak, 2015), particularly in relation to comments on Holocaust remembrance and relativisation thereof.

While these contrasting attitudes have been considered separately, this article brings them together and analyses how the parties' attitude to contemporary Jews can be understood as a strategic inclusion/ exclusion along populist lines. Existing research on antisemitism in the PRR has taken what can be considered as a nativist or "civilisational" approach (Brubaker, 2017), focusing on the minimisation of Jewish Holocaust victimhood and overtures to Israel as part of a "Judeo-Christian" front against Islam (Kahn, 2022; Subotic, 2022). This paper finds that Jews are included in "the people" when this is ideologically conducive to the parties, when it can appear to justify Islamophobia and anti-immigration sentiment, and when antisemitism can be used to argue that "the elite" are ignorant and incompetent. The use of religion and class, rather than race, allows the parties to pursue ethnocentric agendas in a more moderate way, similar to the weaponisation of Christian identity (Rosenberg, 2022). The AfD includes Jews more overtly than the FPÖ, perhaps because the AfD has to demonstrate greater ostensible commitment to "anti-"antisemitism, in a context of greater stigmatisation of the far right, due to a more direct link between Nazism and Germany and the

Paper submitted 12 February 2025; accepted for publication 27 June 2025

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prominence of the Austrian "victim myth" (Bischof, 2004). However, both parties exclude Jews from "the people" when they criticise or do not agree with the parties' ideological line, and are then portrayed as part of "the elite." Only the FPÖ takes this approach with Israel, which the AfD is uniformly supportive of in the data under examination.

This article is based on the analysis of 430 AfD Facebook posts and 151 FPÖ Facebook posts, which were collected using keyword searches of "Jew/Jewish", "antisemit-", and "Israel" and published between 2017 and 2022. The article identifies the following dual strategy regarding the PRR's strategic inclusion/ exclusion of Jews. While populism can be used as a way to "moderate" exclusionary discourses in line with a shift away from biological racism (Stockemer and Barisione, 2017), the exclusion of Jews and Israel as part of "the elite" can also be perceived as antisemitic dog-whistling, due to the overlap between antisemitic and anti-elitist attributes.

Who are "the people" and "the elite"?

This article understands the inclusion/ exclusion of Jews by the AfD and the FPÖ through the use of "populist discourse", following the combination of ideological and stylistic elements (Ernst et al., 2019; Krämer, 2014; Stockemer and Barisione, 2017). The ideological core of populism is that of an antagonistic "elite" acting against the interests of a good "people", often in conjunction with a dangerous cultural "Other" (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008), although scholars emphasise different attributes of each group. The "how" of populist communication consists of negativity and crisis construction, itself often imbued with emotionality (Hameleers et al., 2021), and the register of language, notably simple and strong language (Taggart, 2000) and colloquialisms (Moffitt, 2016). This article also draws on visual material as a key affordance of social media platforms (Theocharis et al., 2022).

Existing literature has described the PRR's "people" in terms of various qualities: as being virtuous, hard-working, with common sense (Brubaker, 2017), as lacking but deserving sovereignty (Moffitt, 2016), as belonging to the "heartland", a nostalgic conception of a world that has been lost (Taggart, 2000). Considering this, conceptions of "the people" often include a notion of victimhood, articulated as the "underdog" (Canovan, 1984), even if "the people" are not always powerless or lacking in privilege (De Cleen and Ruiz Casado, 2023). "The people" are thus a bounded community which need to be protected against threats. However, research so far has mostly considered "the people" as a static social category, even if it can mean different things to different populists (Canovan, 2005). This article seeks to add nuance here by examining the conditions under which Jews can move between "the people" and "the elite."

In opposition to "the people", "the elite" is commonly designated as corrupt (Aslanidis, 2016), out of touch and self-serving (Brubaker, 2017), antagonistic (Engesser et al., 2017), unresponsive and ignorant of grievances (Betz and Johnson, 2004), remote, and insulated from hardship or suffering (Brubaker, 2017, 2020; De Cleen and Ruiz Casado, 2023; Laclau, 2005). Thus, the conception of "the elite" who are not working to meet the demands of "the people" and are instead focused on their own interests or those of a cultural "Other", lends itself to nativism, exclusion, and racism. "The elite" causes "the people" suffering, or at least is ineffective in alleviating it. This article seeks to demonstrate the conditions in which the PRR's framing of Jews, and Israel, changes and whether this differs between the parties.

Antisemitism and populism

This paper defines antisemitism as a "reservoir" of hostile ideas about Jews, which are then projected onto individual Jews or a collective "Jew" (Fein, 1987; Klug, 2003). The populist distinction between "the people" and "the elite" can open the door to anti-Jewish ideas (Rensmann, 2020a), due to the similarity between antisemitic tropes and traits attributed to "the elite." These overlap in four key ways: first, Jews are perceived to have inordinate power, influence, and control ("the elite" often have political or financial power); second, Jews are seen as greedy (similar to "the elite" being self-serving); third, Jews are considered to be malicious and linked to secret conspiracy (like "elite" antagonism and corruption); fourth, Jews are seen as dishonest and disloyal to their home countries (similar to "elite" disloyalty to "the people").

Since 1945, on the one hand, antisemitism has become inextricably linked to Nazism and acquired a level of stigmatisation (Bergmann and Erb, 1986), leading to philosemitism and overt "anti-"antisemitism. This official rejection has resulted in the view of antisemitism as "tucked away safely in Europe's past" (Fine, 2009: 463), with this belief used as a way to judge the moral standard of others (Traverso, 2016), such as the use of "civilizationism" (Brubaker, 2017), particularly by the PRR, in justifying the "threat" of Islam. If the Muslim-Arab "Other" is antisemitic, then it is incompatible with the supposedly enlightened European society that has overcome antisemitism. This ties to anti-elitism, as if "the elite" is unaware and/or unwilling to combat antisemitism, it is considered to be incompetent, unsuited to being in power, and not aligned with "the people", who are themselves exonerated of antisemitism (Embacher, 2022).

However, antisemitism has also continued *because* of the Holocaust (Heni, 2008). This has been conceptualised as "secondary" antisemitism, namely a minimisation of Jewish victimhood and a rejection of guilt (Schönbach, 1961).

Broader antisemitism and "secondary" antisemitism exist in the context of stigmatisation, and are therefore often communicated implicitly or through so-called "dog-whistling", which would be recognised by an audience familiar with antisemitic codes but ignored by those who are not (Langer, 2022). Examples include the use of code words such as "globalists" and/or the application of antisemitic tropes to Jews without mentioning them directly (Lockwood, 2021; Subotic, 2022).

As the Jewish state, Israel has been considered by some to represent the "collective Jew" (Klug, 2003) and can function as a code word for Jews (Peace, 2009). While this terminology risks a conflation between Jews and Israel, Israel is subject to both antisemitism and philosemitism. Israel has been called all-powerful and controlling (Judaken, 2008) and its actions have been compared to those of the Nazis (Edtmaier, 2022), a discursive strategy known as victim-perpetrator reversal (Wodak, 2015). However, pro-Israel politics and philosemitism can also be based on an understanding of Israel as all-powerful, with Israeli support considered to contribute to the fight against Islam and protect from accusations of antisemitism (Subotic, 2022).

The AfD and FPÖ's attitudes to Jews and Israel: Past and present

Antisemitism has historically been a key element in far-right identification (Winock, 2014: 77). However, as noted above, since 1945 overt antisemitism has obtained an element of stigmatisation due to its link to Nazism. Thus, for the far right, antisemitism has to be "present while remaining invisible" (Wieviorka, 2005: 79) and is communicated in more implicit ways (Bergmann and Erb, 1986). The AfD and the FPÖ were selected for analysis because they are considered to be ideologically related (Heinisch and Werner, 2019), have exchanged reciprocal invitations to events since 2014 (Grigat, 2017), and have both largely conformed to the trend in existing literature outlined above: an ostensible reframing as pro-Jewish and pro-Israeli, despite continued instances of members making antisemitic comments. While existing research has broadly compared the two parties' "anti-"antisemitism (Grigat, 2017), a more direct and recent comparison between the parties is lacking.

However, the parties operate in slightly different contexts with regards to stigmatisation of the far right. West Germany was considered as the main perpetrator of the Nazi Holocaust and treated as such by the Allied forces after 1945. It saw several public discussions of responsibility and guilt for Nazism prior to reunification, notably during the student movement of 1968, the screening of the US TV series *Holocaust* in 1979, and the so-called *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s (Axer, 2011).[1] Although these discussions were absent in East Germany, which styled itself as a communist, and therefore anti-fascist, state (Probst, 2006), the Holocaust has arguably played a more central identity-building role following reunification, with more institutionalized memorial days and memorial projects (Fulbrook, 2018; Herf, 1997). Thus, any political party operating in contemporary Germany has to be mindful of this context, and particularly the AfD has to balance isolated provocative comments with conforming to a more "moderate" image and distancing itself from Nazism and antisemitism.

In contrast, the FPÖ, which has already served in three coalition governments, operates in a less stigmatised environment for antisemitism (Wodak, 2011). After 1945, Austrian society widely accepted the "victim myth" (Bischof 2004), that it was Hitler's first victim due to its annexation in 1938. This led to relatively absent discourses of Jewish victimhood and acceptability of the FPÖ's predecessor, the Union of Independents (*Verband der Unabhängigen*), made up of former Nazi Party members. The "victim myth" was challenged in the 1980s, most often attributed to the Waldheim Affair in 1986 (Stögner, 2016), when presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim was found to have been a member of a Nazi Party paramilitary unit (*Sturmabteilung*) which participated in deportations of Jews from Greece. Austrian responsibility was only publicly acknowledged by then Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in 1991 (Art, 2005). Thus, the FPÖ may feel less of a need to engage in pro-Jewish discourse than the AfD, although the party engages in the same strategic approach to a certain extent.

Existing literature on the AfD and antisemitism has focused on the party's attitude to Holocaust remembrance culture in Germany (Kahn, 2022; Salzborn, 2018). The party has largely avoided overt Holocaust denial (which is illegal in Germany) but has made several minimising comments, such as Alexander Gauland's notorious comment in 2018 that the Nazi era was just "bird shit" in German history (Danckaert, 2021: 226). Occasionally, scholars have combined the AfD's approach to remembrance culture with other incidents of antisemitism in the party, such as the example of Wolfgang Gedeon (Grimm and Kahmann, 2017). In 2020, Gedeon was excluded from the AfD after a protracted dispute, emanating from the revelation in 2016 that he had published a book which claimed that the antisemitic fabricated pamphlet, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was real (Pfahl-Traughber, 2016). Research has examined how the AfD's antisemitism manifests on social media, notably its use of antisemitic visiotypes on Facebook to defame political opponents (Hübscher, 2020).

The FPÖ has a longer history of antisemitism. Former party leader Jörg Haider (1986–2000) regularly underplayed the Nazi past by, for example, praising Hitler's labour policies (Wodak, 2015: 61) and addressing a group of former members of the Waffen-SS as "dear friends" (Axer, 2011: 224). He also used "East Coast" as a code for Jews

(Wodak, 2007). Later, in 2005 and in 2010, FPÖ politicians Johann Gudenus and Barbara Rosenkranz respectively advocated for a loosening of the *Verbotsgesetz*, as Rosenkranz argued that challenging the existence of gas chambers should be considered as freedom of expression (Engel and Wodak, 2013; Stögner, 2016).[2] Holocaust minimisation has continued under the party's current leader Herbert Kickl, who compared COVID-19 measures in schools to anti-Jewish exclusion under National Socialism in a 2021 interview (Kleine Zeitung, 2022). On social media, in 2012, then party leader Heinz-Christian Strache shared a Facebook post of an edited caricature with a large, gluttonous figure eating at a table, labelled "the banks", which drew on stereotypical "Jewish" features such as a hooked nose (Stögner, 2016: 496) and had cufflinks with Stars of David on them (Wodak, 2015: 13).

Since 2016, the AfD has expressed an apparent anti-antisemitic stance, demonstrated by predominant support for Israel (Shroufi, 2024), and apparent support for Jews against Muslim-Arab antisemitism (Grimm and Kahmann, 2017; Kahmann, 2017). Although, this is not a homogenous stance across the party (Selent and Kortmann, 2023): the AfD has previously criticised Israel's migration policy (Rensmann, 2020b). This support has been seen as a means to whitewash the AfD's image, distance it from Germany's Nazi past, and legitimise its Islamophobic policies (Grimm, 2019). A seemingly pro-Jewish stance in the FPÖ has been the topic of less analysis. Strache reportedly told Haider that "if the Jews accept us, then we won't have any problems", demonstrating an ostensible desire to include Jews while implicitly condoning a belief in a "collective Jew" who might have inordinate power to control politics (Hafez, 2014: 488), confirming the problematic nature of philosemitism (Subotic, 2022). Like the AfD, the FPÖ demonstrates supposed support for Jews by offering solidarity with, and support for, Israel. In 2010, FPÖ politicians travelled to Israel with other PRR representatives and signed the so-called Jerusalem Declaration, which referred to fundamentalist Islam as a "global threat" (Kahmann, 2017; Shroufi, 2015). However, during the visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, Strache did not wear a kippah, but instead wore a cap of the Vandalia fraternity group (Böhmer, 2020). Austrian fraternity groups are known for their historical ties to Nazism and antisemitism (Klammer and Goetz, 2017).

Analysing PRR discourse on Facebook

Social media facilitates more direct communication between "the people" and the PRR (Engesser et al., 2017; Gerbaudo, 2018). It also gives political parties the control to share carefully-chosen narratives without journalistic gatekeeping (Ernst et al., 2019; Hübscher, 2020). To collect the data, posts were manually searched using the keywords "Jew-", "antisemit-", and "Israel" to identify relevant posts across 26 Facebook pages for the FPÖ and the AfD.[3,4] These keywords may appear as an example of confirmation bias. Yet, as the parties refute accusations of antisemitism and frame themselves as pro-Jewish, these codewords would not necessarily result in examples of antisemitism. Further, the purpose of this research is not to *quantify* pro- or anti-Jewish sentiment from these parties but rather to analyse how it manifests itself. The resulting dataset contained 430 posts for the AfD and 151 posts for the FPÖ between 2017 and 2022, demonstrating more discussion by the AfD than the FPÖ (see Table 1).

The inclusion of posts referencing Israel is not to imply that Israel should be conflated with Austrian and German Jews, and vice versa, as Jews everywhere should not be made responsible for Israeli policies (Bergmann, 2011). Attitudes towards Jews and Israel would not necessarily be the same. Israel was included in this analysis as pro-Israeli discourse is often used by the PRR to reinforce its anti-antisemitism (Grimm, 2019), but Israel can also be a code for dog-whistling antisemitism (Bergmann and Erb, 1986).

Facebook is easily accessible and, importantly, widely used by the PRR. Both the FPÖ and the AfD display prolific and consistent usage of it (Heiss and Matthes, 2020; Lindenauer, 2022). Unlike Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) is not consistently and widely used by the FPÖ (Seethaler and Melischek, 2019). Similarly, TikTok is not widely used across the parties' politicians and has only been used by the parties for a more limited amount of time: the FPÖ official page's first post dates from December 2020 and that of the AfD's parliamentary group from January 2022. Instagram data is difficult to collect on a large scale due to the requirement of special permissions (Bossetta, 2018: 478) and the difficulty of searching for posts by keyword on specific profiles.

Facebook has important affordances which lend themselves to analysis. First, politicians on Facebook tend to have public pages, while other platforms such as Snapchat encourage a more private network of ties (Bossetta, 2018: 475). Facebook also has strong searchability, as posts can be searched by keyword. However, Facebook data can only be treated as a sample due to uncertainties around data collection. In April 2018, Facebook removed access to its API (Freelon, 2018). Since then, researchers have had to mostly rely on manual data collection, especially when looking at specific Facebook groups (e.g., Fangen, 2020). This is not

Table 1. Number of keyword mentions per party.

	AfD	FPÖ
Jew/Jewish	693	46
Antisem	814	93
Israel	477	158

always reliable when searching on a large scale (across several profiles) as Facebook's advanced search function does not always display all the posts containing the keyword that has been searched for.

Jewish communities as part of "the people"

Both the AfD and FPÖ amalgamate Muslims, Arabs, immigrants, and radical Islamists into a generalised Muslim-Arab "Other" who is allegedly predominantly responsible for antisemitism in Austria and Germany. This becomes an anti-elite argument when the AfD and the FPÖ portray mainstream political parties as ignorant of this problem and therefore ineffective at dealing with it.

The AfD is critical of the CDU/CSU/SPD coalition government under then Chancellor Angela Merkel from 2017 to 2021, but also of the so-called "traffic light" coalition government that followed. The party argues that the government and other major political parties are ignorant of, and "out of touch" with, the reality of Muslim-Arab antisemitism, thereby including Jews in the party's conceptualisation of "the people" let down by elites. In January 2018, the AfD's parliamentary group *(AfD im Bundestag)* posted on Facebook that "as long as the established parties (*Altparteien*) do not want to recognise the danger of Islamic antisemitism, this danger will not diminish," in a construction of crisis. *Altparteien* is a derogatory term used by the AfD, and other far-right political actors in Germany, to refer to mainstream parties with an established parliamentary tradition. A 2019 post by AfD politician Jörn König criticised the government commissioner for Jewish life in Germany and against antisemitism, Felix Klein, for not "open[ing] his eyes and notic[ing]" that antisemitism came from Muslim immigrants. The accompanying image to the post showed König speaking into a microphone with the words, "the government is turning a blind eye to the real perpetrators!" (see Image 1), with the implication that he is not and is standing up for Jews.

The AfD portrays the members of the later SPD/Greens/FDP coalition government in a similar way. In September 2021, AfD politician Martin Sichert posted an image (see Image 2) of three candidates in the German federal election: Armin Laschet (CDU), Olaf Scholz (SPD), and Annalena Baerbock (Greens). Each candidate had a label stating "silence" over their mouth. Sichert criticised the three for allegedly "remaining silent and looking away" while "Muslims beat Jews in the middle of the street." Again, the AfD attributes the negative traits of ignorance and incompetence to candidates from the *Altparteien*, including Jews in "the people" as let down by them.

The FPÖ is softer in its blame-shifting of antisemitism onto "the elite", perhaps because it operates in a context of lesser stigmatisation of the far right and therefore does not have to justify its "anti-"antisemitism over other parties as

Image 1. AfD politician Jörn König's 2019 post: "increasing antisemitism: the government is turning a blind eye to the real perpetrators!".

Image 2. AfD politician Martin Sichert's 2021 post: "only 4 days after a planned attack on a synagogue. Muslims beat Jews in the middle of the street. The chancellor candidates on this: silence, silence, silence. They have something to say about everything, but here: remaining silent and looking away."

consistently. The FPÖ uses the same narrative that the ÖVP/Greens government (elected in 2019) is ignorant and unaware of the "reality" of immigration and antisemitism. In August 2020, following an attack on the leader of Graz's Jewish community Elie Rosen, FPÖ politician Mario Kunasek posted that "the Syrian (31) who attacked Elie Rosen… is now being investigated for association with

terrorism… meanwhile the ÖVP and the Greens continue to see no problems with radical asylum seekers." This caption is followed by a face palm emoji, a stylistic choice to demonstrate Kunasek's informality and colloquialism, and his alleged understanding of immigrant antisemitism. FPÖ politician Stefan Hermann also commented in August 2020: "domestic politics can no longer keep the old blinders on, the hatred of Jews, particularly imported from #Muslim countries, must finally be handled with all severity!" Like the AfD, the FPÖ nominates itself and Jews as the ingroup, and the political elite and Muslim-Arab immigrants as the outgroup. The elite is attributed negative qualities of ignorance and incompetence, as they "continue" to ignore the issue, framed as an ongoing trait, while the FPÖ portrays itself as aware of the problem and as providing solutions.

Jews as part of "the elite"

Thus, the AfD and the FPÖ include Jews in their ingroup when Jewish victimhood is conducive to the parties' narrative about Muslim-Arab antisemitism and a political elite that is ignorant of the issue. However, to differing extents, the AfD and FPÖ also include Jews in "the elite" and exclude them when they criticise the parties or do not agree with the narrative that contemporary antisemitism comes from the Muslim-Arab "Other." This is much more the case with the AfD than the FPÖ, perhaps because, again, the AfD has to make a more sustained effort to prove it is not antisemitic in a context of greater far-right stigmatisation.

The strategic and changeable nature of this is evident in the FPÖ and AfD's approval and inclusion of Austrian and German Jewish figures who agree with the party line. In 2018, FPÖ politicians Christian Hafenecker and Markus Abwerzger shared posts in which Arik Brauer, an Austrian Jewish painter and survivor of the Nazi regime, stated that immigration was a cause of antisemitism. Brauer's opinion is condoned as true because he aligns with the FPÖ. Similarly, when Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council for Jews in Germany (ZdJ), responded to antisemitic attacks by immigrants in 2018 by stating that "whoever wants to live here has to stick to our values", a post on the AfD official page claimed that the ZdJ was "in line with the AfD."

However, Austrian Jews are excluded when they do not align with the FPÖ. A May 2022 post by FPÖ politician Marlene Svazek criticised former president of the Viennese Jewish community, Ariel Muzicant, for comparing FPÖ leader Kickl to Nazi propaganda minister Josef Goebbels. Svazek accused Muzicant of relativising the Holocaust and implicitly minimised his right to victimhood: "it is those who always demand the highest level of sensitivity who then express themselves inappropriately and strangely." While Elie Rosen, victim of an attack by a Syrian perpetrator, is granted his victimhood and inclusion in "the people" because he is the victim of the right kind of perpetrator, Muzicant is not. The antagonism attributed to Muzicant is similar to that given to "the elite", as is the implication that he, along with generalised Jews ("those"), has a certain power to demand sensitivity and then uses this maliciously, which overlaps with antisemitic tropes of Jews abusing their victimhood position to manipulate society (Rosenfeld, 2001). The FPÖ has a long tradition of attacking Muzicant, mostly under former party leader Jörg Haider (Wodak, 2007).

Similarly, the ZdJ has repeatedly stated that the AfD is "no party for Jews" (ZdJ, 2018). In response, the AfD portrays the ZdJ as aligned with "the elite", and as hypocritical, ignorant, and out of touch. This is often done through the mouthpiece of the Jews in the AfD group *(Juden in der AfD*, JAfD*)* which excludes Schuster and former ZdJ president Knobloch even as German Jews. In October 2019, AfD co-leader Alice Weidel shared a post by JAfD leader Vera Kosova in which Kosova claimed that Schuster and Knobloch wanted "to belong to the political elite." In contrast, Kosova wrote that "we Jews in Germany want security, peace, and future prospects." Another JAfD post from January 2019 claimed that Knobloch had "NOTHING AT ALL in common with Judaism in Germany!" using capital letters to heighten the emotionality of the post. Schuster and Knobloch are portrayed as an out of touch "elite", but this statement also overlaps with the antisemitic and anti-elite trope of disloyalty, as they do not have an awareness of what "Jews in Germany" want, despite representing them.

The AfD also attributes the "elite" attribute of incompetence and ignorance of Muslim-Arab antisemitism to Schuster, as the party does to the *Altparteien*, nominating him as part of the outgroup. In November 2021, AfD deputy leader Beatrix von Storch wrote on Facebook that Schuster had called AfD politicians' statements "a catalyst for antisemitism" and argued that this "crude thesis" was incorrect. This was accompanied by a link to a post on Von Storch's website, titled "Schuster is ignoring growing Muslim antisemitism." This again overlaps with antisemitic tropes of dishonesty, disloyalty, and maliciousness, as Schuster is allegedly actively not helping German Jews due to his alignment with "the elite."

The parties' approaches to Israel

The AfD and FPÖ take a strategic approach to Austrian and German Jews: including them when they are seen to agree with the party line but excluding them when they do not, and this anti-elitism can overlap with antisemitic tropes. A secondary aim of this paper is now to analyse how the parties treat Israel. While not intending to conflate Israel with Austrian and German Jews, the use of pro-Israeli

discourse is often considered as part of the parties' "anti-"antisemitism strategy (Grimm, 2019).

Despite previous findings that the AfD has been critical of Israel on social media (Rensmann, 2020b), the dataset used for this paper found that the AfD was uniformly supportive of Israel. The AfD considers Israel to be a victim of the Muslim-Arab "Other" in the same way as Jews in Germany. In May 2021, AfD deputy leader Beatrix von Storch criticised then foreign affairs' minister Heiko Maas for marking the end of Ramadan, "while the Muslim mob lets its hatred for Israel run wild on German streets." Israel is thus included in the AfD's ingroup against "the elite" due to Maas not adequately addressing the behaviour of the "Muslim mob."

In contrast, the FPÖ demonstrates a strategically ambivalent attitude towards Israel, framing it as part of "the elite" when the party does not agree with Israeli policies. The majority of the FPÖ's posts mentioning Israel in this dataset refer to Israel's COVID-19 policy, and the FPÖ argued that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu influenced the Austrian government's restrictions to combat COVID-19, attributing Netanyahu with "elite" antagonism towards "the people", but also antisemitic and anti-elitist tropes of power, control, and maliciousness. This appears to have originated from then Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's statement that Netanyahu helped him realise the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Bild, 2020). Thus, with the FPÖ's opposition to Austria's COVID-19 restrictions, the party argued that Israel and Netanyahu were the "role model[s]" for Kurz's COVID-19 policy. An August 2021 post on the FPÖ's official Facebook page asked, "in Israel, even small children are now being tested regularly. Will that soon be the case for us too?" The symbol of children and its emotionality emphasises the negative view of Israel's approach to COVID-19, and constructs crisis, while the rhetorical question can be seen as a dog-whistling strategy, allowing more indirect criticism of Israel.

Although the AfD portrays Jews as part of "the elite" in an anti-elitist and potentially antisemitic way, the FPÖ more overtly refers to antisemitic tropes by portraying Jews as *controlling* "the elite", and not just as part of it. An image shared by FPÖ politician Michael Schnedlitz in February 2021 (see Image 3) portrayed Kurz as the puppet of a dark hand, the owner of which appeared to wear a business suit. Although the hand is not attributed to Netanyahu in the image, the caption leaves little doubt, stating that "Kurz is just a puppet of Israel and only follows Netanyahu's whispers." Netanyahu is not only controlling the political elite, but is portrayed as part of a business "elite", drawing on the antisemitic tropes of greed and power, linked to Jews' alleged overrepresentation in business. Schnedlitz's description of Netanyahu's "whisperings" also relates to the antisemitic trope of secrecy and conspiracy.

Image 3. FPÖ politician Michael Schnedlitz's 2021 post: "no to the Corona vaccination pass: Kurz is just a puppet!".

However, as Israel began to remove restrictions in early 2022, the FPÖ twisted the narrative. In February 2022, FPÖ politician Dagmar Belakowitsch wrote a post applying Netanyahu's alleged influence to then Chancellor Karl Nehammer (2021–2025), "Israel, your great role model when it comes to COVID-19 measures, has abolished the Green Pass [document with proof of vaccination against COVID-19] […] then immediately copy this for Austria!" This demonstrates the FPÖ's ambivalence towards Israel itself, as the party changes its portrayal of Israel's alleged control over Austrian government policy depending on whether it agrees with these policies.

Discussion and conclusion

The AfD and the FPÖ thus display strategic inclusion and exclusion of Jews into their ingroup, which appears to be determined by whether the Jews in question are seen to agree with the party line. When Jews are victims of Muslim-Arab antisemitism and, by extension, victims of the incumbent government's alleged incompetence and ignorance in dealing with the problem, they are included in the parties' conception of "the people." This helps the AfD and the FPÖ justify their anti-government, anti-migration, and Islamophobic sentiments, while also allowing them to portray themselves as "anti-"antisemitic.

However, this is less of a priority for the FPÖ than it is for the AfD, as the FPÖ mentions Jews less often and more overtly drew on antisemitic tropes regarding Israel. This is arguably because the "normalisation" achieved by speaking positively about Jews, Israel, and antisemitism, and therefore distancing the party from the Nazi past, would be less of a priority for the FPÖ. The FPÖ operates in a context of lesser far-right stigmatisation due to greater historical

avoidance of the Nazi past in Austria (Wodak, 2011), and has thus had consistent electoral success in a way the AfD has not.

The data analysed in this paper confirms findings from existing literature that the AfD is predominantly supportive of Israel (Kahmann, 2017), including it in "the people" in a similar way to Jews in Germany as a shared victim of Islam and the government. However, the FPÖ is more strategically ambivalent in its approach, drawing on anti-elitist and antisemitic tropes of power, control, maliciousness, and secrecy to portray Israel as being part of, and controlling, "the elite" when it does not align with the FPÖ's ideological stance. The strategic and flexible nature of this is clear in that this control is deemed acceptable when the FPÖ wanted the government to follow Israel's approach. Regardless of their differences, both the AfD and the FPÖ demonstrate a conflation of Jews and Israel to a problematic extent. The AfD frames Israel as victims of Muslim-Arab antisemitism in a similar way to Jews, and the FPÖ attributes antisemitic traits to Israel.

As has been argued in existing literature, the weaponisation of religious identity allows the parties to move away from framing exclusion in racial or ethnocentric terms (Rosenberg, 2022), and this paper argues that the parties use populism to moderate discourse (Stockemer and Barisione, 2017). Populist discourse can be considered as a tool in the far right's shift away from biological racism, as excluding Jews on the basis of being part of the "elite" rather than race can be more easily justified by the PRR. This, combined with the parties' strategic inclusion and exclusion, implies that it is up to Jews whether they want to be part of the ingroup or not. Furthermore, framing the exclusion of Jews as anti-elitist helps the PRR to argue that it has distanced itself from Nazism, which excluded Jews in predominantly racial or ethnic terms. Despite this, as we have seen, the negative traits of "the elite" attributed to Jews can overlap with common antisemitic tropes and can therefore be seen as antisemitic dog-whistling. The pursual of this dual strategy allows the AfD and FPÖ to appeal to a more moderate audience, who would not accept antisemitism, and a more radical one, who would understand the implicit use of antisemitic codes.

Both the AfD and the FPÖ use Jewish victimhood to suit their ideological messaging. This also works in the opposite direction, and Jews are challenged in their victimhood, and even in their Jewish identity, when they are not considered to align with the parties or criticise them, drawing on anti-elitist and antisemitic tropes of dishonesty and disloyalty. The FPÖ included Elie Rosen in "the people" (the underdog) because he was subject to the "right kind" of antisemitism (Muslim-Arab antisemitism), unlike Ariel Muzicant, who felt victimised by the "wrong kind" (white, PRR antisemitism) and was therefore excluded. This reinforces a problematic division between "good" and "bad" antisemitism (Younes, 2022). The AfD targets the German Jewish community representatives Josef Schuster and Charlotte Knobloch. The party responded to criticism from Schuster and Knobloch by aligning them with "the elite" as ignorant of the "reality" of antisemitism and not effectively protecting the Jewish community. These "elite" traits overlap with antisemitic ones of disloyalty in that the JAfD claims Schuster and Knobloch are not German Jews, similar to the argument that "the elite" does not loyally serve the interests of "the people." This encourages a division into the "good" Jew, aligned with the AfD, and the "bad" Jew, critical of the AfD, disguised behind ostensible concern for German Jews, but in reality a way to divide and further oppress a minority community (Topolski, 2018).

Therefore, both the AfD and, to a lesser extent the FPÖ, have tried to portray themselves as campaigning against antisemitism and as "anti-"antisemitic. Existing literature has, rightfully, argued that these efforts are inauthentic because members of both parties continue to make antisemitic comments and use Jewish inclusion to stoke Islamophobia, anti-government, and anti-immigration sentiments. This article has offered an analysis of the parties' discussion of Jews, Israel, and antisemitism through a dual strategy. The parties use a populist lens to strategically include and exclude Jews based on their ideological alignment with the parties, allowing them to distance themselves from exclusion based on race, but these anti-elitist tropes can overlap with antisemitic tropes, making their application to Jews problematic and demonstrating a lack of genuine concern for Jewish (and Israeli) life. This subject will remain relevant for further research, especially considering the significant escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict in 2023 and the impact of this on the parties: in 2024, the AfD criticised German weapons exports to Israel and the FPÖ called Israeli self-defence measures excessive. Representatives from neither party appear to have attended a March 2025 antisemitism conference in Israel, unlike PRR politicians from France, Hungary, and the Netherlands, perhaps indicating a new division of "good" far-right antisemitism and "bad" far-right antisemitism, based on alignment with Israel.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Isabelle Hertner, Manès Weisskircher, and Omran Shroufi for giving feedback on previous versions of this paper.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The

author received funding for their PhD research from the London Arts & Humanities Doctoral Training Partnership (LAHP) from 2021 to 2024.

Ethical statement

Ethical approval

The data used in this article was freely and publicly available online. Ethical clearance was received for this research in October 2022 by King's College London under Minimal Risk Registration Number MRSP-22/23-34294.

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Notes

1. The *Historikerstreit* was a dispute between academics in West Germany regarding the uniqueness of the Holocaust, with the argument that Nazi Germany could be compared to the Soviet Union.
2. The *Verbotsgesetz* is an Austrian federal law dating from 1947 which dissolved the Nazi Party and its affiliated branches, and forbade the denial of Nazi crimes against humanity.
3. The pages included the official party page, and a selection of the most highly ranking members (members of parliament were prioritised) as well as the most popular in terms of followers on social media.
4. This data collection was part of the author's PhD data collection, with the timeframe ranging from 2017 (to coincide with elections in Austria and Germany) to February 2023, when data collection had to be concluded as researcher access to X (formerly Twitter) was drastically reduced.

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