CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Security Studies

Master's Thesis

2025 **Bc. Ondřej Kutman**

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Securitizing Russia: Social Media Discourse and Electoral Support of Pro-Western European Parties since the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine

Master's Thesis

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Year of the defence: 2026

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In Prague on 21st December 2025 Ondřej Kutman

References

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Abstract

This diploma thesis investigates the linkage between the securitization discourse of European pro-Western political parties towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine and their geographical connection to the conflict. The purpose of this analysis is to contribute to the existing research on securitization and the conflict in Ukraine. Through a case-study approach using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, the study first identifies relevant pro-Western political parties in Poland, Germany, and Spain as examples of 'frontline', 'central', and 'distant' actors based on their geographical relationship to the conflict. The research then examines the social media discourse of the identified pro-Western parties and finds that the conflict topic dominated their online communication during periods when international responses to the situation were high. Furthermore, the research finds that pro-Western parties extensively applied securitizing language to portray Putin's Russia as an existential threat to the West. While political parties from countries closer to Ukraine devoted more of their attention to the conflict, the levels of securitization discourse were proportionally similar across pro-Western parties from all case-study countries. Lastly, this research provides a contextual analysis to complement the main findings by showing the election results of the parties that applied securitization.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vztah mezi sekuritizačním diskurzem evropských prozápadních politických stran vůči ruské invazi na Ukrajinu a geografickou vazbou stran na tento konflikt. Cílem analýzy je přispět k existujícímu výzkumu na téma sekuritizace a konfliktu na Ukrajině. Práce pomocí případové studie s využitím kombinace kvalitativních a kvantitativních metod nejprve identifikuje relevantní prozápadní politické strany v Polsku, Německu a Španělsku, které slouží jako příklady 'přední linie', 'centrálních' a 'vzdálených' aktérů na základě jejich geografického vztahu ke konfliktu. Práce následně analyzuje diskurz identifikovaných prozápadních stran na sociálních sítích a zjišťuje, že téma konfliktu dominovalo v rámci online komunikace uvedených stran v časových obdobích, kdy byla mezinárodní reakce na situaci vysoká. Práce dále odhaluje, že prozápadní strany ve vysoké míře užívaly sekuritizační jazyk, aby vyzobrazily Putinovo Rusko jako existenční hrozbu vůči Západu. Ačkoliv politické strany zemí geograficky bližších Ukrajině věnovaly tématu konfliktu celkově více pozornosti, úroveň sekuritizačního diskurzu byla proporčně podobná napříč prozápadními stranami ve všech zemích případové studie. Práce závěrem nabízí kontextuální analýzu pro doplnění hlavních zjištění pomocí demonstrace volebních výsledků stran, které aplikovaly sekuritizaci.

Keywords

Securitization, pro-Western, discourse, parties, Russia, Ukraine

Klíčová slova

Sekuritizace, prozápadní, diskurz, strany, Rusko, Ukrajina

Název práce

Sekuritizace Ruska: Sociálněmediální diskurz a volební podpora prozápadních evropských stran od invaze na Ukrajinu v roce 2022

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Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine came into the lives of Europeans as a massive surprise in most cases, and there is no doubt why – the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine that emerged in February 2022 started something unprecedented and unthinkable by many. The conflict is the first full-scale war on the European continent in the post-World War II era, and given this infamous position, it is no surprise that, at the time of writing this thesis, the ongoing conflict is affecting the everyday lives of European citizens in various ways. Of course, the ones taking the most significant toll are soldiers and civilians present on the battlefield. However, an event of such a magnitude logically has far-reaching implications that, sooner or later, touch every single European country. From increased security risks and changes in energy politics to economic implications, the war has consequences that not every European citizen had to link to the conflict, but has felt in one way or another.

One of the listed implications for Europe is key to this thesis: the increase in security risks. Most European countries are members of the EU and NATO, organizations that call for unity on political and security matters and have identified Russia as a threat to European democracy and the shared Western values (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2021; European Parliament, 2019). Moreover, they did so already before the full-scale invasion. Consequently, with the inception of the so-called 'special military operation', member states of the EU and NATO suddenly saw the biggest rival of these organizations invade a European country, intending to replace its democratically elected government forcefully. Therefore, it is no surprise that this event affected the rhetoric of European politicians. They suddenly became more open in calling out the long-term security risks that Putin's Russia poses and used a more expressive language while doing so.

This thesis focuses on securitization, a process during which certain actors frame an issue as an existential threat to legitimize extraordinary security measures. This theory is typically helpful for researchers when using this tool to demonstrate that a problem can be framed as an existential threat, even when it does not pose the level of threat the actors describe. However, as this thesis shows, it can be applied to situations that clearly pose a danger to actors, such as the war in Ukraine, which poses a threat to European actors. As Vuori (2008, p. 81) explains, securitization can also be used to prioritize a topic on the agenda, deter an objective threat, or legitimize past steps. It is because there are two ways to approach security: either

objectively, in cases where there is a real threat, or subjectively, when there is a perceived threat that might or might not be as serious as actors describe (Buzan et al., 1998). Even though the Russian invasion of Ukraine might not be the most obvious conflict to analyze through the lenses of securitization theory as introduced by the Copenhagen School, this thesis focuses on specific aspects of securitization, namely its linkage to physical distance from the conflict and social media communication. This particular securitization focus promises interesting findings and makes it worthwhile to link the theory with this particular conflict.

The war in Ukraine is bringing unusual instability to Europe, a continent that has, with only minor exceptions, served as an oasis of security and stability in recent decades. Studying the securitization processes by European politicians of this conflict is particularly important given the unusual policies and security measures many European leaders have adopted in response to it. Decisions such as increasing the future minimum limit for defence spending by NATO members to 5 % of each country's GDP, although many members don't even reach the current 2 % threshold, could have the power to change public opinion and political support across the continent. One could claim that it can lead to increased support for anti-systemic parties.

Without judging whether such policies are necessary, this thesis aims to study the securitization processes of the conflict by pro-Western European politicians to see how and to what extent securitization has been applied. A key aspect of this research aim is proximity to the war. This thesis aims to situate the results of securitization research by examining potential links between securitization practices and the distance to the conflict. This topic has been overlooked in prior research. Therefore, the main goal of the thesis is to find out how European pro-Western parties have securitized the Russian invasion of Ukraine in relation to their proximity to the conflict.

The measurement of securitization will focus on social media activity. It is another generally overlooked phenomenon that offers a modern way to research securitization, as political communication on social media is increasingly relevant in today's fast and digital world. Political communication through digital platforms has become crucial in modern political campaigns, and a failure to harness the potential of such a powerful tool can have dire implications for political figures. Furthermore, social media posts on these platforms can serve as a valuable source of data, as the content is extensive and often accompanied by analytical details and insights. The author of this analysis believes that connecting securitization, one of

the most established theories in IR, with a highly relevant and recent conflict, and with a special look through the lenses of physical proximity to the conflict and digital communication, offers an original research that promises to provide interesting findings.

To connect the presented topics and issues, this thesis will examine how pro-Western European political subjects have securitized the Russian invasion of Ukraine through official accounts' communication on the platform 'X' (formerly known as 'Twitter'). The use of the platform promises to provide insights into the securitization rhetoric through metrics. Further, to provide a broader context for securitization processes, we will test whether the intensity of securitization correlates with changes in the electoral support for pro-Western parties.

Hence, this thesis will be divided into five main parts. First, we will review the existing literature on the conflict in Ukraine and introduce studies that connect securitization and the conflict. The theoretical framework will follow, in which the characteristics of the so-called 'Global West' and 'Global East' will be explained through the social identity theory and the concept of identity politics. The aim is to lay a basis to later better identify pro-Western politics in the analytical section of this thesis. The core of the chapter, however, will be an introduction to the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies.

In the next step, we will lay out the methodological framework. In the analytical part of the thesis, pro-Western political parties will be identified first. Subsequently, a case study Discourse Analysis will be conducted on selected cases – Polish, German, and Spanish political parties. These parties will serve as examples of political entities with various geographical connections to the conflict. Data for the analysis will be collected from the platform 'X' to provide a closer look at securitization on social media. After conducting the study, we will discuss the most interesting findings of the analysis.

1. Literature Review

This part of the thesis provides an overview of the foundation on which this study is based. It outlines existing research on the conflict in Ukraine across various fields to show how and to what extent the academic field has focused on it. Furthermore, the existing research on the application of the securitization approach to the conflict will be mapped to ensure justification for this thesis.

1.1 Europe and the conflict in Ukraine

The ongoing war in Ukraine is a heavily studied conflict, and some of the reasons for that are listed in the previous paragraphs. First of all, the scale of the conflict is unprecedented on European soil since the end of World War II. Therefore, it can be studied as a prime example of a modern, large-scale violent conflict that encompasses the latest developments in warfare technology, logistics, intelligence, and informational warfare, among others.

The conflict has been studied across many different fields through various lenses and perspectives. To display this variety, I will briefly mention some. Some of the studies focus on, for example, the relationship between the war and energy. The impact of the war on this field has been studied by multiple scholars, including Inacio et al. (2023), who suggested that fuel prices have increased more dramatically in Europe than in other regions. Ferriani and Gazzani (2023) contributed by explaining how this increase negatively affected European firms with high energy consumption.

The research further encompasses fields such as ecology, technology, or medicine. The ecological implications of the war were studied by Khodorovskyi et al. (2023) and Matsala et al. (2025). Both studies focused on the environmental damage caused in Donbas, a Ukrainian region dominated by heavy industry. The conflict also enabled medical research focused on innovative methods adopted to address the resulting conditions (Klimov and Zavaleta, 2025; Quinn et al., 2023). Some research also focused on the role of forensic medicine in addressing war crimes (Cioffi and Cecannecchia, 2023).

A significant portion of the research on the conflict focuses on warfare technology. Generally, a modern large-scale violent conflict can serve as a source of research into the use of modern warfare technology, and the war in Ukraine is no exception; rather, it is a prime example. Śliwa (2022), Peperkamp (2024), or Albakjaji (2023) describe the importance of modern technology in the conflict for both sides. Some authors go more in-depth, focusing on one specific component of contemporary warfare that proved especially important during this conflict: the use of drones (Dawson and Nadal, 2024; Boșneagu, 2024; Kunertova, 2023).

The strongest aspect of the research regarding the conflict is its focus on political questions. This includes studies of the historical-political background, the conflict's political implications, and political reactions to it. A high volume of studies also seeks to explain the potential causes of the conflict, comparing the roles of the political West and the political East,

and examining various events and actions related to both sides. While some authors claim that the conflict has emerged mainly due to Russia's offense-focused, aggressive foreign policy approach (Götz and Ekman, 2024; Ferraro, 2024; Nitoiu, 2024), other scholars take the opposite stance (Mearsheimer, 2024; Gaido, 2023). They blame the increasing involvement of the West, especially the US, in Eastern Europe, framing it as the primary factor. According to these authors, Russia's decision to invade Ukraine was not primarily a result of offensive objectives. They claim it was a reaction to rising security concerns stemming from NATO's expansion and the West's growing influence.

Sakwa (2024) examines the historical timeline of the relationship between Russia and the West following the fall of the Soviet Union. He claims that the quick deterioration of the relationship after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was mainly driven by the previous perpetuation and radicalisation of the political West, and that the current crisis is a consequence of that. Many authors, however, take a mixed view – they recognize both the Russian political elite's ambitions and the West's increasing influence in the region as key factors (Casier, 2023; Nitoiu, 2024; Polianskii, 2024).

Furthermore, other scholars examined the consequences of the war, discussing Europe's position (Stoilov, 2023), security implications (Riddervold and Rieker, 2024; Cebotari, 2024), and the state of international relations (Cox, 2023; Anghel and Jones, 2024). When it comes to Europe's response to the war, a topic this thesis aims to contribute to, much academic work focuses on support, whether political or public, for one side or the other of the conflict. Hooghe et al. (2024) examined responses to conflict by governments and parties in Europe, with a particular focus on the role of populism. The authors studied political parties' reactions to the conflict across Europe and found that more than 80 % of 269 political parties from 29 European countries support Ukraine. The authors focused on populist parties and movements. They concluded that although populism and Euroscepticism are strong predisposing factors toward an anti-Ukraine position, such parties adopt a moderate pro-Ukraine stance when they participate in government.

Furthermore, the European Commission surveyed public opinion towards the EU's response to the war (European Commission, 2022). The survey, conducted among more than 25,000 responders across the union, found that most EU citizens identify with a pro-Ukrainian stance. They declare support for Ukraine in the conflict and even agree that Ukraine should join the EU when it is ready (p. 18). Panchuk (2024) further found that public support for

Ukraine's EU accession has increased, but, interestingly, decreased in the case of other possible candidates. Some authors chose a more specific path, focusing on public opinion regarding the war in particular European countries (Graf et al., 2024; Mitchell et al., 2025; Kreps et al., 2024). Since the analysis plans to link securitization to election results, we also reviewed the literature on similar topics. We found that few prior works have linked a political subject's particular approach to the war in Ukraine to that subject's election outcome (Musil and Tusor, 2024; Szczerbiak, 2023). However, none of these have examined securitization.

1.2 Conflict in Ukraine and Securitization

Although the conflict in Ukraine has been extensively researched from various perspectives and across multiple fields, as shown in the previous paragraphs, the existing research on the securitization of the conflict remains limited. Generally, existing research focuses on a specific selection of actors. Typical examples include studies that examine a specific European country in detail and analyze how politicians from that country apply securitization discourse (Cingerova et al., 2024; Nedić and Mandić, 2023; Dinçer, 2022). Furthermore, many articles focus on how political elites securitize not directly the conflict itself, but problems indirectly related to the conflict (Štefančík et al., 2023; van Zeben and Alessandrini, 2025). An example of such a problem is the subsequent rise in energy or food prices, a secondary product of the conflict.

Among studies on securitization that focus on a single European country, the work of Cingerova et al. (2024) is particularly interesting. The authors examine the securitization discourse of Slovak left-wing and right-wing populist politicians, focusing on the threats these securitizing actors describe. It is, furthermore, an example of a study that focuses on more specific aspects of securitization than on the conflict as such. Using this approach, Cingerova et al. (2024) discovered that Slovak populist politicians securitize subjects such as NATO, the USA, the EU, and their involvement in the conflict, or Ukrainian president Zelensky, framing them as significant threats.

Another author who focuses on a specific European country is Dinçer (2022), who directs his research towards Finland. This country applied for NATO membership following Russia's invasion and joined the pact in 2023. The author finds that Finnish political elites securitized Putin's regime, framing it as a military threat to Finland and thereby justifying the abandonment of military neutrality and accession to NATO. Nedić and Mandić (2023) studied

the securitization of the conflict during Serbian presidential and parliamentary election campaigns in 2022 and identified three types of securitization of the war. The authors discovered that a first group of politicians applied securitization to frame the war as a threat to stability. In contrast, the second group took the opposite approach, framing it as a threat to Serbia's collective identity as a long-term ally of Russia. The last, third group, applied desecuritization of the conflict and attempted to highlight other political topics, such as ecology.

Furthermore, multiple studies focus on Russia's securitizing approach. Magcamit & Mahon (2024) describe how Russia applies securitization to justify the invasion by framing the existence of an independent Ukraine and its talks with Western organizations as an existential threat. The article further compares an older example of securitization, Bush's War on Terror, with this recent example, thereby offering an interesting perspective on the longevity of the theory's application. Similar work was done by Fusiek (2022), who analyzed Vladimir Putin's speech at a military parade. The author concludes that Putin framed the involvement of the West in Ukraine as a security threat and used it as a primary explanation for the invasion.

It is worth noting that studies on securitization regarding the Ukraine-Russia relationship are not purely restricted to the ongoing conflict. A limited amount of work on the Russian securitization approach towards Ukraine and vice versa was conducted even before the launch of the full-scale invasion in 2022. Arnould (2023) analyzed how the Russian political elite used securitization to frame Ukraine as a threat across sectors, including military, societal, and economic, between 2019 and 2023. Huseynov (2025) examined speeches by Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin, between the inauguration of Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, in 2019 and the outbreak of the full-scale invasion. Thereby, he showcased how Putin gradually intensified the use of securitization in his language against Ukraine.

As mentioned, certain studies examine how the conflict has been securitized indirectly through its negative externalities. Van Zeben and Alessandrini (2025) focus on food security, examining the securitization of European agri-food policy in light of the conflict in Ukraine and highlighting the war's impacts on Ukrainian agricultural land. Štefančík et al. (2023) focus on the securitization of migration as a consequence of the war. The authors studied how opinions were formed in Slovakia towards war refugees who came from Ukraine and received asylum in Slovakia.

Exceptions in the research on the securitization of the conflict in Ukraine include articles by Kurnyshova (2024), Lupovici (2024), and Orenstein (2025), as these authors study securitization of the conflict as a whole. They tried to cover securitization processes involving various, often collective actors, unlike the previously mentioned case-studies that covered one specific country's approach. Orenstein (2025) explains how a securitization agenda has dominated EU policy since the 2022 invasion, and uses this analysis to showcase how securitization theory can be applied to EU policy issues. Lupovici (2024) links securitization to deterrence, identifying intertwined securitizing moves in light of the conflict and highlighting how deterrent threats are embedded within them. He identifies that Russia first securitized the growing influence of the West in the region and then invaded, followed by Ukraine's counter-securitizing moves to seek help from the international community. The next securitization move, according to Lupovici, was Russia's securitization of the potential for NATO's direct participation in the war, as Russia aimed to prevent such a twist. NATO responded by securitizing the threat posed by Russia to alliance members. The last identified securitizing move, as described by Lupovici, was NATO's decision to provide military assistance to Ukraine.

Similarly, Kurnyshova (2024) highlights the complexity of securitization dynamics within the conflict. As the main finding of her critical analysis, she demonstrates the shortcomings of the securitization theory, suggesting a need for further research on the securitization processes of the conflict. Kurnyshova claims that the Copenhagen School's approach is outdated because of its broad application during relatively peaceful post-Cold War times, and sees it as a source of problems for the method amid the re-emergence of the Russia-West geopolitical divide. Therefore, she extends securitization theory and illustrates it in the context of the conflict, laying out three possible forms of securitization: primary self-securitization, counter-securitization, and secondary securitization.

'Primary self-securitization' is pictured as Russia's domestic justification of the invasion by framing the existence of an independent Ukraine as a direct threat to its security. 'Counter-securitization' is, similarly to Lupovici (2024), explained as the response to measures already taken by the primary securitizing actor – Russia, in this case, to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As the author explains, this form of securitization was adopted not only by Ukraine but also by the Euro-Atlantic West to resist Russian military pressure and counter Russia's narrative of itself as a status-quo-supporting power. The last-described form of securitization,

‘secondary securitization,’ is explained as multiple spill-over effects of the conflict, causing insecurity in various spheres, such as energy or food supplies.

This partially explains the need for this analysis and justifies its existence – the second-mentioned type of securitization, ‘counter-securitization’, fits well the characteristics of the discourse analysis this thesis plans to conduct. The responses of pro-Western European political elites to the conflict can be seen as a countering attempt against Russia's measures, which, in Kurnyshova’s framework, was the first securitizing actor in the conflict. The previously mentioned research on the securitization of the conflict focuses strongly on Russia’s securitization of Ukraine (Magcamit & Mahon, 2024; Fusiek, 2022), which fits the ‘primary self-securitization’ box, and on Europe’s securitization of negative externalities of the conflict (van Zeben and Alessandrini, 2025; Štefančík et al., 2023), such as high prices of electricity, fitting the ‘secondary securitization’ box. However, the lack of comprehensive research on the securitization of the conflict itself by a group of European countries creates a research gap. It underscores the significance of conducting this analysis.

Furthermore, the absolute lack of research on the links between geographical proximity to the conflict and the securitization of the conflict provides a substantial justification for this analysis. Even though there is a study on reactions to the conflict based on geographical proximity by Hooghe et al. (2024), neither their study nor other ones focus on securitization and speech acts. The work of Hooghe et al. (2024) examines which side of the conflict European political parties support and links this, apart from other factors, to proximity to the conflict. The authors conclude that political parties in countries that either went through a period of Soviet annexation or are geographically close to the conflict are more likely to support Ukraine. However, as mentioned, this finding did not account for securitization.

Worth mentioning is that the argument of geographical determination regarding relations between the EU and Russia was, to a certain extent, covered in a policy paper called ‘A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations’, published in 2007 by a pan-European think tank, the ‘European Council on Foreign Relations’. The text analyzes the power dynamics between Russia and the EU, claiming that although the EU has a significant economic advantage, it is structurally weaker in its relationship with Russia because of its incoherence in its foreign political approach. The authors continue by presenting five typologies of EU countries based on how they relate to Russia, and even though they do not explicitly use the term ‘geographical

determination', the five lists of countries can be characterized, besides other things, geographically (Popescu and Leonard, 2007).

The first group consisted of the so-called *"Trojan Horses"*, Cyprus and Greece, who, according to the authors, are the closest allies of Russia in the EU and are often willing to defend Russian interests. *"Strategic Partners"* are France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, which have good relations with Russia and sometimes oppose standard EU policies. *"Friendly Pragmatists"* are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia, which have close relations with Russia and prioritize their own business interests over the EU's political goals. *"Frosty Pragmatists"* are the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, which also take business interests into account but publicly speak out against Russia on various issues. The last group is called the *"New Cold Warriors"*, consisting of Lithuania and Poland, who have a notoriously bad diplomatic relationship with Russia and are not afraid to advocate against the EU's negotiations with Russia (Popescu and Leonard, 2007).

Even though not explicitly stated in the policy paper, these groups can be distinguished through the lens of political geography: the first group, *"Trojan Horses"*, comprises the southern periphery of states that have historically been close to Russia and share Orthodox Christianity. *"Strategic Partners"* consist of Western European countries, which are, at the same time, major European powers. *"Friendly Pragmatists"* is the most geographically diverse group, comprising mid-sized countries from Central Europe and South Europe, plus a few others. Most of the countries from this group were part of the Western Bloc during the Cold War. *"Frosty Pragmatists"* consist of Northern Europe and a few others, and *"New Cold Warriors"*, Poland and Lithuania, are the Eastern flank, the former Soviet-dominated zone.

The policy paper is relevant to this thesis as an example of work on EU-Russia relations that accounts for geographical determinants. However, it does not take into account securitization, a key process this thesis engages with. Last but not least, the paper is relatively outdated. It was published in 2007, and since then, the EU-Russia relationship has been developing for nearly 20 years. Clearly, a new study on how European countries react towards Russia based on proximity deserves its own space.

Another research gap this analysis aims to address concerns the link between securitization and social media. The vast majority of studies on securitization focus on a physical speech act, as this is the traditional approach based on the Copenhagen School

framework. However, posts on social media can serve as well-arranged data, especially when comparing the speech acts of multiple securitizing actors. We found only one study on the securitization of the Ukrainian issue on social media: a recent article by Eryiğit et al. (2025). The authors study Volodymyr Zelensky's activity on X (formerly known as Twitter) after Russia's invasion, examining both Zelensky's use of securitization and the broader relationship between securitization and social media. The study serves as a good example of how useful social media can be as a data source for a securitization study.

1.3 Literature review takeaways

The overview of the existing research suggests that, although the conflict in Ukraine has been thoroughly studied through various lenses, research on its securitization reveals certain limitations and gaps that warrant attention. Specifically, the process of securitizing the war in Ukraine has not yet been studied, taking into account the relative distance to the conflict or the electoral results of the securitizing actors. Furthermore, securitization processes on social media have been somewhat overlooked, not only in the case of the Ukrainian war but in general.

This lack of research outlined in the literature review highlights the importance of further research into securitization on social media and the securitization of the war in Ukraine from a European perspective. A study that connects these two topics could yield new and interesting findings. To conclude this chapter, this study aims to fill the research gaps described herein, specifically the securitization of the conflict in Ukraine on social media from a European perspective, while accounting for the relative distance to the conflict. This study could contribute to the existing literature regarding securitization and the war in Ukraine.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this part of the thesis, the theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis will be provided. First, we will explain social identity theory and its political application through the concept of identity politics. Therefore, we aim to lay the most suitable theoretical basis for studying foreign political approaches. By reviewing previous findings and contributions by scholars, the goal is to understand what 'pro-Western' and 'pro-Eastern' politics mean from a European perspective. In the analytical part of the thesis, this will serve as a basis for accurately identifying pro-Western political motives and thereby classifying political parties based on

their geopolitical and ideological aspects and views. Hence, applying this framework is necessary to conduct this research.

In the latter part of this theoretical chapter, the securitization theory of the constructivist Copenhagen School will be introduced to lay a basis for conducting a discourse analysis of securitization processes in the analytical section of the thesis. Combining the framework of social identity theory with securitization allows us to perform the analysis. In the analysis, pro-Western parties in Europe will be identified first, followed by a study of their securitization approach.

2.1 Social Identity and Foreign Politics

The term 'pro-Western identity', which is heavily used in this study, can be well explained by the 'Social Identity' theory, a theory that has a non-negligible impact on recent political research (Huddy & Khatib, 2007, p. 65). This theory, originally introduced in the late 1970s by Tarfer and Turner, claims that our personal identity is powerfully shaped by the social groups we participate in. It rests on the idea that people tend to classify themselves and others into social groups. During this 'social categorization', we link ourselves to others based on factors that create similarities, such as gender, ethnicity, or religion. Thereby, we create an in-group and out-group divisions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Rousseau et al. (2007) further explore this and conclude that social classification is a phenomenon that occurs in any social setting, as such behavior is part of our nature. As individuals identify with a social group, they connect their social identity to that group. Brewer and Brown (1998) offer a similar conclusion, claiming that a self-social identification occurs sooner or later due to objective similarities, and that placing ourselves in a social category automatically creates an 'other' category for individuals with differences. Furthermore, according to the theory's authors, we tend to view our own social group positively, as groups differ in prestige and power (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). As it is in our nature to search for identity, we further look for differences with other social groups, as the act of belonging is linked with distinctiveness. Gibson and Gouws (2000, pp. 279-280) point out that strong identification correlates with a willingness to differentiate between groups.

Applying these findings to the case of geopolitical views suggests that if we have geopolitical preferences, we will also inevitably classify ourselves as a part of a group based on that view. Hence, if we support the European integration process, we might consider

ourselves part of a pro-European group. If we agree with democratic ideas, we may feel closer to countries that practice them and believe they are on the 'right side of things'. As Wendt points out (1999), the social identity theory can be applied to international relations to explain why 'outsiders' are viewed as more threatening than 'insiders'.

An interesting application of Social Identity theory to geopolitics is offered by Fawn, who claims that there is an unbreakable relationship between security and identity, and that a country that seeks security thereby also seeks identity (2006, p. 36). Thereby, security treaties and pacts should also serve as social groups, providing social identity to their members. An organization providing collective security, such as NATO, should give a sense of identity to its members. Since NATO's members can be identified, from a geographical point of view, as part of the North Atlantic and Western regions, the alliance should provide a Western sense of geopolitical belonging.

The political application of social identity theory, furthermore, has notable similarities to the concept of 'Identity Politics'. In political science, this term is generally understood as a political activity grounded in a particular identity that provides a sense of belonging (Bernstein, 2005). The types of such identities vary based on criteria such as ethnicity, race, social background, education, or age, to name a few. This strongly correlates with social categorization, a process that determines how we define our place in society, according to the social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979). As described earlier, the theory states that this process contributes to the creation of one's social identity by perceiving others through social categories that create differences, such as race, religion, or gender, thereby providing a sense of belonging. The identity politics concept overlaps with the theory regarding such categorization, as well as with the emphasis on the in-group and out-group division. This in-group vs. out-group division described by both identity politics and social identity theory enables scholars to explain phenomena such as multiculturalism, actions of the LGBTQ+ community, and even separatist movements and ethnic conflicts (Bernstein, 2005).

Perhaps the best description of the relationship between identity politics and social identity theory is offered by Monroe et al. (2000), who claim that social identity theory can be viewed as a psychological basis for identity politics. However, identity politics lacks the broad content associated with social identity theory. The sense of belonging that identity politics fosters is linked to a rather specific group, typically one that has historically been mistreated, hence being often linked with the Civil Rights movement in the US.

However, from a broader perspective, the concept of identity politics can also be understood as a sense of geopolitical belonging, and in the European case, most notably as pro-Western and pro-Eastern belonging. As Verba and Brody (1970) found in their research, most citizens are well-informed about foreign political topics and developments, which means they are capable of forming a political identity aligned with a particular foreign political approach.

Building on social identity theory and identity politics, various authors describe the relationship between values and foreign political orientation. Rathbun et al. (2016) argue that people's foreign policy preferences are directly shaped by their personal values. Owen (2010) offers a similar conclusion when applying this relationship at the international level, claiming that state intentions are strongly shaped by ideologies rather than material factors. The same argument is advanced in Skidmore's work (1997, p. 181), who claims that qualitative factors are the primary motive for good or bad relationships between countries. Thereby, he provides an alternative to the realist view that explains state behavior in terms of material factors leading to bandwagoning (Waltz, 2010) or balancing (Waltz, 2010; Walt, 2013).

2.2 Global West, Global East

Building on the relationship between social identity and foreign politics, authors further describe and define the characteristics of geopolitical approaches known as 'pro-Western' and 'pro-Eastern' political orientations.

The term 'pro-Western' political orientation is generally defined as a political affiliation with the North Atlantic community and the principles that the states within this community stand for. The word 'West', from a European understanding, therefore, can imply a geopolitical term, but can also describe a set of values and norms. Such norms are predominantly found in countries in the western hemisphere; however, this is not a rule and therefore does not apply absolutely. Thus, some definitions of the 'West' include countries from various geographical regions. From a historical perspective, the shared heritage of Enlightenment thought is an essential formative factor for the West. The same can be said about the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of capitalism (Sakwa, 2024).

From a geographical perspective, authors using the term 'West' typically refer to various states in North America and Western Europe, and often include other states, but definitions vary. In his book 'Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order', political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (2002) famously defined the 'Western World' based on a shared heritage,

culture, and religion. In this category, he placed the USA, Canada, Western, Central, and Northern Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand, but also the Philippines and French Guiana. In his definition, he further described countries with Orthodox-Christian majorities, as well as Latin America, as not directly part of the West, but rather as distinct civilizations intimately related to the West (Huntington, 2002).

Huntington's geographical designation of the West strongly correlates with Will and Ariel Durant's definition, who, across their set of books 'The Story of Civilization', treat the West as Europe west of Russia and its overseas offshoots, such as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and loosely Latin America (Gress, 1998). Contrary to Huntington's or Durants' view, David Gress (1998) focuses the definition of the West purely on the EU and NATO, which automatically excludes countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and others. In all definitions, though, NATO and EU countries, therefore predominantly Europe and North American countries, the USA and Canada, are the core of each of these definitions.

The term 'pro-Eastern' is sometimes substituted for 'pro-Russian', suggesting that the term refers to a single country. The reason why both terms can refer to the same thing is simple. While 'political West' is generally understood in international relations as the North Atlantic community, consisting, as mentioned, mainly of the North American countries and European members of NATO and the EU, 'political East' is understood in European politics as primarily Russia, or as Russia and its sphere. From a more geopolitical perspective, especially when focusing on competitiveness in other fields such as the economy or technology, 'East' could also include China, a major superpower whose relevance in international relations has increased dramatically in recent decades. Furthermore, it could also include the Middle East, the Arab Culture, or India, as can be seen in the work of Edward Said (1979). However, a location bias has been made as Russia has directly been involved in conflicts on European soil, plus shares a history and border with European countries. That leads to a relatively limited European understanding of the East. Europeans often associate the term with Russia alone, or with Russia and the post-Soviet Russian sphere. Various authors describe this dual conception and criticize the limitation of the European understanding (Müller, 2018; Im, 2022).

The understanding of the political East as the post-Soviet area has a historical basis in the Cold War's bipolar division of the world. Unlike the West, this power structure fell steeply with the collapse of the Soviet Union and took years to regain profound geopolitical relevance. Since the annexation of Crimea and the emergence of the war in Donbas, some authors have

been talking about ‘Cold War II’, suggesting that the European power struggle between the West and the East is back (Sakwa, 2024; Mensah & Aning, 2022).

The term ‘political East’ thus refers to an area comprising Russia and post-Soviet countries that remain within Russia’s sphere of influence, such as Belarus, Moldova, and, to a certain extent, the countries of the South Caucasus (Müller, 2018). At the same time, some post-Soviet countries, such as the Baltic states, have become independent of Russia and focused their foreign political orientation towards the West, joining both the EU and NATO.

In conclusion, some definitions of the East encompass an entire range of countries. Nevertheless, the European understanding of the political East is focused predominantly on Russia and its sphere of influence. Since this thesis focuses on the war in Ukraine, a conflict that occurs on European soil, and Russia is one of the leading actors in it, the European conception of the ‘East’ will be taken into account, rather than the global one. Similarly, the definition of the ‘West’ will be considered through the European lens, focusing predominantly on NATO and the EU. Although often limited, this Eurocentric view is the most useful for studying a conflict that occurs on European soil.

2.2.1 Pro-Western, pro-Eastern politics

The definitions of pro-Western and pro-Eastern political orientations typically focus on a few key characteristics and dividing factors between the power blocs, and on what it actually means to affiliate with them. As mentioned, the emergence of the power blocs was shaped by the Cold War and led to a competition between NATO and the USSR. In the case of the West, the political and military alliances from the Cold War have endured and even expanded. Russia, to a certain extent, created alliances that resemble those of the Cold War era. For scholars, the focus on the relationship with international organizations is key when defining pro-Western and pro-Eastern politics. In the case of the West, organizations such as the EU, NATO, the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO provide an economic, military, and political basis for the bloc (Sakwa, 2024; Moise & Wang, 2025). In the East, Russian-led military and economic blocs, the EEU and CSTO, serve as an alternative to Western organizations (Abbasov & Thies, 2023).

Sakwa (2024) attempts to list the components defining today’s Political West, naming the security system represented by NATO as key, as well as security treaties with extra-regional allies such as Japan and South Korea. He mentions Atlanticist ideology as an essential

characteristic, creating the connection between the EU and the US. Furthermore, he admits that this connection makes it difficult for the EU to achieve the strategic autonomy some call for. Despite that, the shared ideology and the importance of the US as a strategic ally ultimately cause the EU to refrain from fully focusing on autonomy within the international order. The stress on North Atlantic international organizations, most notably the EU and NATO, is, furthermore, shared by other authors. Abbasov and Thies (2023) state that, from a European country's perspective, a way to align politically with the West is to pursue membership in the EU and NATO, thereby allowing a country to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community. Moise & Wang (2025) describe the explicit support for European integration through the EU and for NATO as an essential characteristic of pro-Western political orientation.

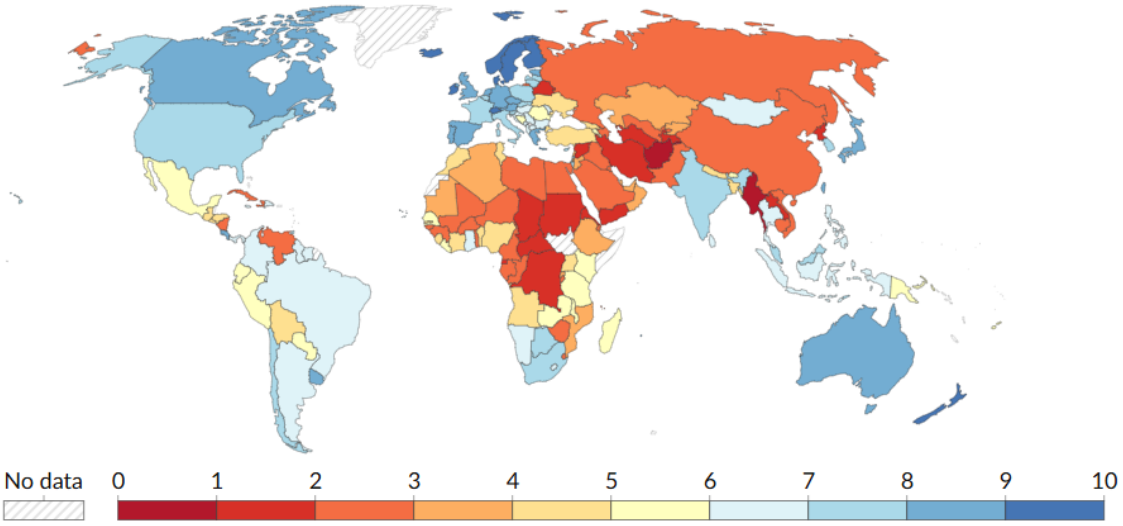
The relationship with liberal democracy is another factor on which scholars hold consensus: it shapes and defines pro-Western and pro-Eastern foreign political orientations. As Abbasov and Thies (2023, p. 3) argue, individuals who hold pro-democracy attitudes have a higher expectancy of agreeing with a pro-Western foreign policy orientation. At the same time, support for pro-democratic values, such as a focus on human rights, serves as the primary individual motive for choosing that orientation (p. 6). The Euro-Atlantic community, which serves as the harbor of Western ideology, therefore tends to oppose authoritarianism and supports integration into Western structures such as NATO and the EU, which they associate with democratic values. Of course, the recent wave of populism and far-right politics in the West could indicate otherwise (Hooghe et al., 2024; Chryssogelos, 2025); however, liberal democracy still appears to be the winning and most supported political approach in the Euro-Atlantic community. Furthermore, instruments that measure democracy across countries suggest that the world's democratic space remains quite limited. They also typically display how democracy is predominantly associated with the Euro-Atlantic community (The Economist, 2024).

Perhaps the most famous instrument to measure democracy levels across the globe, the 'Democracy Index', is annually released by The Economist. This instrument suggests a division between the North Atlantic community and the vast majority of the rest of the world. The index is based on 60 indicators grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of the government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Based on these indicators, the Index rates each country on a scale of 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating greater democracy. The score between 0-4 indicates an authoritarian regime, the score between 4-6 describes hybrid regimes, and, finally, the score between 6-10

suggests a democratic regime, where 6-8 means a ‘flawed democracy’, while 8-10 is listed as a ‘full democracy’ (The Economist, 2024).

The 2024 version of the rating system consists of 202 countries. Interestingly, of the 42 countries that reached the score 7.20 or higher on the scale, 30 were either European or North American, while only 12 were not. That means more than 70 % of democracies with this score are in the North Atlantic region. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of these countries are members of either NATO or the EU.

Figure 1: Democracy Index (2024)



Source: Economic Intelligence Unit

Abbasov and Thies (2023, p. 5) further describe the nature of pro-Western and pro-Eastern political orientations, stating that a clear competition can be observed between two blocs: the first, represented by NATO and the EU, and the second, represented by Russian-led military and economic blocs, the EEU and CSTO. Within this context, Russia primarily focuses on alliances with its Asian neighbors, rather than with the West. The article describes the division between Russia and the West as the main geopolitical competition in Europe. As a result of this competition, a pro-Western orientation of European countries is further characterized by identifying Russia as a geopolitical opponent. As Kubicek (2003) points out, framing Russia as a threat has been a standard practice of Western political elites.

Hooghe et al. (2024) share the same view and add that this perception is typically coupled with support for Ukraine in the ongoing conflict against Russia. They find that most

pro-EU parties are also pro-Ukraine. This suggests that the support for Ukraine is another sign of a pro-Western political orientation. Interestingly, in his study on the securitization of the war in Ukraine, Lupovici (2024) finds that President Zelensky successfully securitized the Russian invasion and framed it as an existential threat to, among others, Western values, to receive Western support. This, therefore, suggests that support for Ukraine is linked to support for Western values. The study of Hooghe et al. (2024) further finds that almost two-thirds of political parties across Europe are in favor of not just the basic steps in support of Ukraine, such as providing material support, but also some seemingly unpopular steps, such as the support of Ukraine's path to the EU or an acceptance of higher energy costs.

2.2.2 Takeaways

The previous part explains pro-Western and pro-Eastern orientations in European politics. It highlights the importance of the relationship with Western organizations, most notably NATO and the EU, and with Russia. In summary, from a European perspective, the pro-Western political orientation can be characterized by the following patterns: support for liberal democracy, an emphasis on cooperation with NATO and the EU, viewing Russia as a threat, and support for Ukraine in the Ukraine-Russia war. On the other hand, a pro-Eastern political orientation, from a European perspective, is characterized by a sympathy for Russia, a strong criticism of NATO and the EU, and support for policies that weaken liberal democracy. This knowledge will later be used when identifying pro-Western political parties in the selected country case studies.

2.3 Securitization Theory

The last part of this theoretical framework involves the Securitization theory. The theory was developed by the constructivist Copenhagen School of thought in the 1990s. Constructivist international relations theory is characterized by viewing political actors' identities and the reasons for their behavior as socially constructed. Unlike grand theories that emphasize the role of material factors, constructivists claim that shared beliefs and practices shape the state of the international system. In their view, historical, cultural, and social aspects replaced the material power and security-based explanations for political behavior. Constructivism rejected the idea that states are the key actors in international relations, and instead highlights the role of non-state actors in foreign policy-making (Kaufman, 2002).

With the rise of constructivism as an international relations theory, the constructivist Copenhagen School of security studies was established, with Buzan and Waever as its leading figures. The name of the school originates from Buzan's and Waever's affiliation with the Danish research institute, the 'Copenhagen Pearce Research Institute'. In the 1990s, Waever developed the most prominent theory of the school, the securitization theory, which changed the discourse of critical security studies. The theory defines security as a speech act. According to the theory, by using the speech act, the so-called securitizing actors can move a topic from the political field to the field of security, regardless of whether an existential threat exists. What matters is that it is presented that way, because, according to constructivists, the concept of a security threat is socially constructed. By framing a topic as a security threat, securitizing actors primarily use securitization to justify extraordinary measures against it (Buzan et al., 1998). However, securitization can also be used to prioritize a topic on the agenda, deter an objective threat, or legitimize past steps (Vuori, 2008).

Buzan et al. (1998) claim that traditionalists equated security with military issues and the use of force, as could be seen by nuclear deterrence during the Cold War. However, the modern understanding of security is moving beyond the military sector, offering a broader, more inclusive understanding of the word 'security'. According to Constructivism, it encompasses other sectors, such as economic, societal, and environmental. The securitization theory suggests that it can be tricky to draw a line between politicization and securitization, arguing that these processes are, to an extent, intertwined, as the nature of existential threats varies greatly across cases.

The theory claims that the transformation of a public issue occurs from a non-politicized issue through politicization and securitization to a securitized issue, which becomes the priority on the political elite's agenda. In practice, the government could first identify an issue it had not previously dealt with; therefore, it was a non-politicized issue. The government then states the issue as part of its agenda, making it a politicized issue, and finally frames it as an existential threat to security. By that, the government adds importance to the topic. The government moves the topic beyond the established rules of politics to justify the use of extraordinary means when tackling it. Importantly, these means are outside of the bounds of typical political procedures (Buzan et al., 1998). Therefore, if an issue is labeled as a 'security issue', it becomes a 'security issue' (Waever, 1995). The theory introduces several concepts it works with, namely the speech act, securitizing actors, referent objects, audiences, and existential threat.

2.3.1 Speech Act

According to the securitization theory, a feature that distinguishes a securitized situation from other situations is the use of a specific rhetorical structure (Buzan et al., 1998). The use of security speech, as described by the theory's authors, is the act of securitization itself. It is because the use of extraordinary means in democracies eventually needs to be explained and justified to maintain public support. Through the speech act, a specific action is prioritized, with the urgency of that action stressed, so the audience is pushed to accept it. Interestingly, the word 'security' does not need to be explicitly used in the securitization speech act; the critical aspect is that security is implied by defining an area of urgency. Therefore, the word can be substituted by other words within the security rhetoric, such as 'defense', indicating that a particular issue should be handled in a different way than a regular issue.

The process of securitization can be successful or unsuccessful, depending on the attributes of the speech act regarding language and society. According to the speech act theory, on which the securitization theory draws, a speech act is successful if two criteria are met. The first requirement for a successful speech act is for the linguistic-grammatical conditions to be met. Secondly, a social position from which the act can be performed must be held. Specifically, there needs to be both a group that authorizes the speech act and a group that recognizes it (Austin, 1975).

Drawing on this, the securitization theory connects these two conditions with the security environment. The use of the grammar of security characterizes the linguistic conditions of the speech act theory. Specifically, a construction of an existential threat in the speech is essential and serves as a key justification for the use of extraordinary means. The speech should also stress an approaching 'point of no return' within the situation and suggest how to prevent reaching this point. Thereby, the speech frames a situation as one that desperately needs resolution (Buzan et al., 1998 p. 25). As mentioned, the second condition of the speech act theory is a social position that is required for performing the act. The securitization theory deals with this condition by naming the actors who participate in the process of securitization.

2.3.2 Securitizing Actor

The initial actor in the securitization process is the 'securitizing actor', that is, the speaker and the subject who instigates securitization through performing the security speech act. This actor declares an issue an existential threat and calls for the use of extraordinary means

to tackle it. The securitizing actor can be an individual or a group, typically political leaders, governments, or lobbyists. Furthermore, there can be multiple securitizing actors that attempt to securitize the same issue, competing for acceptance by the same audience.

The theory describes the securitizing actor as somebody in a position of authority, and this social relationship between the securitizing actor and the audience increases the chances that the audience will accept the securitization narrative. The securitizing actor typically refers to objects that are generally perceived as threatening, which contributes to the efficiency of the security speech act. If the audience accepts the narrative, the securitization process is successful (Buzan et al., 1998).

2.3.3 Referent Object

Another key unit is the referent object. The securitizing actor, as mentioned, declares an issue to pose an existential threat, but he must define against whom this threat is posed. Therefore, if an issue is framed as an existential threat, there must be an object that, according to the securitizing actor, is existentially threatened and has a legitimate claim to survival. That is the referent object, the object for whose security the extraordinary means are said to be used, and an object constructed by the securitizing actor. According to Buzan et al. (1998), it is usually a collectivity that tends to lead to a more successful securitization than if individuals were the referent object.

The referent object also only very rarely overlaps with the securitizing actor. The securitizing actors traditionally point to a state and claim that they are existentially threatened, making them the referent object. This applies especially in the military sector. However, in a modern international relations constellation, nations or civilizations are also typically constructed as a referent object by the securitizing actor. If the referent object is the state, an existential threat is described as an attack on its sovereignty, while if it is a nation, the threat is an attack on its identity (Waever et al., 1995). Even though the mentioned objects are most typically used as a referent object by the securitizing actor, in theory, the actor can choose anything and construct it as a referent object.

2.3.4 Existential Threat

As mentioned, the securitizing actor uses the speech act to describe a situation as requiring extraordinary measures to resolve. To justify the use of emergency measures, the securitizing

actor frames that a particular situation poses an existential threat to the referent object. The securitizing actor claims that the problem needs to be tackled immediately, otherwise other problems will be irrelevant as they will either not exist at all, or not in the same form. As mentioned, an issue only needs to be presented as an existential threat for a successful securitization. Either way, the issue can be removed from the field of regular politics (Buzan et al., 1998).

2.3.5 Audience

The securitization theory holds that, in democracies, a key actor in the securitization process is the audience. This applies because politicians in democratic regimes rely on public support; therefore, they need to provide reasoning for political actions, especially when suggesting the use of extraordinary means. The question of whether the act of securitization is successful depends on whether the audience accepts the speech act. Of course, that is influenced by the characteristics of the speech act itself. Still, the audience is the final actor choosing whether to accept the extraordinary means presented by the securitization actor.

The role of an audience in political decision-making is logically stronger in democracies, as the public has more influence on the political elite's actions. However, even in democracies, there are exceptions to the rule requiring an audience to deliver a message and justify the use of extraordinary means. Buzan et al. (1998) describe how the principle upon which intelligence services operate creates a loophole in the system that requires security-related policies to be publicly announced. Even in democracies, intelligence services are separated from political life, and many security-related decisions are not shared with the public. However, this constellation typically works only for a specific type of threat. In most cases, the use of emergency measures requires justification to an audience, making this actor's role key in determining whether the securitization process is successful.

2.4 Evolution of the Securitization Theory

Constructivism, from which securitization theory originates, gained recognition in the 1990s, owing to the international order that emerged with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War. The end of a half-century-long bipolar international system allowed constructivists to spread their teachings, as the reasons for subjects' behavior in politics seemed more relevant when considering social, cultural, and historical factors, which is precisely what constructivists offered (Kaufman, 2022).

This enabled the creation of the Copenhagen school of thought, as well as other constructivist schools, such as the Paris and Aberystwyth schools. Ole Waever, a prominent scholar of the Copenhagen school, first formulated the theory of securitization, which the Copenhagen school further developed in the 1990s. Naturally, the theory has undergone significant developments ever since. Initially, the scholars studied mainly democratic countries through the lens of the theory. That is because the substantial role of an audience was easy to explain through regimes that rely heavily on public opinion. Buzan et al. (1998) build the case for the theory on examples of the EU or the US, and the first mainstream application of the theory was linked to the actions of the US following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. 'War on terror', the strategy declared by George W. Bush, which promised to fight terrorism in places where it originates, served as a justification for US-led military operations in the Middle East. As scholars demonstrated, the Bush administration, the securitizing actor in this case, successfully framed the regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan as existential security threats to the referent objects, American citizens and global peace. Thereby, they justified the use of unusual military means in front of the audience, the US public. Furthermore, Bush and his administration successfully justified and legitimized the invasion in front of a global audience.

Besides the case of the invasion of Iraq, the early securitization case studies typically focused on European regimes, supporting a belief that the theory applies to democracies with a civil society autonomous from the state (Bilgin, 2011). However, later, the theory was applied to a wide range of conflicts and situations, and, interestingly, even to regimes that are not fully democratic. As some researchers have discovered, even governments in countries without free elections tend to justify the use of extraordinary measures to their domestic populations (Pratt & Rezk, 2019). This allowed an application of the theory on governments in the Middle East, typically focused on the role of religion and ethnicity in security (Pratt & Rezk, 2019; Malmvig, 2014). As mentioned in the literature review part of this thesis, substantial work has been done on how the current Russian regime securitizes political issues to justify its policies.

Further, the theory's focus on a direct speech act later faced criticism, as authors argued that variations in expressions can be used to securitize an issue. That includes images, non-verbal communication, or, as focused on in this thesis, communication in a virtual space through social media. On a similar note, the theory's initial description of the audience faced criticism. Applications of the theory, as early as the case of the Iraqi invasion, showed that the audience can be complex, since military operations require both domestic and international approval. The later development of the theory by the Paris school suggests that securitizing

actors often seek approval not only from the domestic public and transnational groups but also from the local political elite and bureaucracies (Bigo, 2002). Contemporary work also looks at securitization through the lenses of other theories of international relations. A postcolonialist approach points out that securitization mirrors past dynamics between colonizers and colonies, as the former colonizer often acts as a securitizing actor towards the former colony (Nayak & Selbin, 2010). Modern securitization can also be linked to feminism, as the theory examines securitization to reveal power dynamics based on gender or sexuality.

2.5 Modifications of the securitization framework

The criticism of the initially proposed theory led to a broadening of the concept of securitization, offering new, modified frameworks. Vuori (2008) redefines the use of extraordinary means, which the original theory understands as a break from democratic politics. In his framework, emergency means can also be understood as a break from the governing body's usual politics, regardless of whether those politics are democratic. Vuori also redefines the audience, which, in the original theory, is described as the general public. As he points out, the theory offers only a broad definition of the audience due to a Eurocentric bias in the original framework. According to Vuori and his proposed global application of the theory, the definition of an audience should be subject to many conditions. This is described in the case of China, where the political leadership disseminates propaganda to three types of audiences: officials, intellectuals, and the masses. Each audience has a different relationship to the propaganda language (p. 66).

In Vuori's framework, defining the audience depends on the socio-historical situation, as political leaders in different environments need to convince different groups that there is a need for unusual measures. Generally, he describes the audience as whoever has the ability *"to provide the securitizing actor with whatever s/he is seeking to accomplish with the securitization"* (p. 72). This allows for multiple, parallel audiences, as the securitizing actor might seek legitimacy from both the political elite and the general public. With a more nuanced understanding of the audience, the goal of securitization can also be understood more complexly. Besides the original understanding of the process as moving an issue from a field of normal politics to the field of emergency politics, the goal of securitization can be understood as prioritizing an issue on the agenda, deterring a threat, or legitimizing past actions (Vuori, 2008).

The evolution of the securitization theory is evident in the case of the war in Ukraine. The robustness of the conflict's implications for Europe suggests that securitization occurred in a complex manner, prompting scholars to develop modified frameworks of the theory further. This leads us to the framework proposed by Kurnyshova (2024), as previously discussed in the literature review section of this thesis. In her analysis, she developed new concepts for securitization: primary self-securitization, counter-securitization, and secondary securitization.

Of these concepts, counter-securitization is the key one for this thesis. Kurnyshova defines it as measures that imply resistance, deterrence, and retaliation, which, in the case of the war in Ukraine, are associated with Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic West in its response to Russia's invasion. Furthermore, in this counter-securitization struggle, the Euro-Atlantic West recognizes Russia as an anti-status-quo power and attempts to delegitimize Russia's efforts to be seen as a victim of NATO's and the EU's policies. We plan to study this type of securitization in the case of the speech act of Ukraine's Western allies, taking into consideration the elements described by Kurnyshova.

Figure 2: Counter-securitization

	Securitiser(s)	Reference objects	Audience(s)	Markers of success
Counter-securitisation	Ukraine and its Western allies	Ukraine's sovereignty and in the entire system of Euro-Atlantic security	Western decision makers	Consensual perception of Russia as a major security threat

Source: Kurnyshova (2024)

3. Methodological Framework

The goal of this research is to explain the relationship between the securitization of the conflict in Ukraine and physical proximity of the securitizing actors. This work aims to fill a gap in the literature by connecting these two topics. For this purpose, we selected three countries to serve as case studies for the analysis: Poland, Germany, and Spain. Across these countries, securitization processes were measured among pro-Western parties.

Based on this research plan, the main research question was formulated in the following way:

How have European pro-Western political parties securitized the Russian invasion of Ukraine in relation to their proximity to the conflict?

To answer this question, a source of speech act needs to be identified first. The political programs and/or public statements of leaders of relevant political parties in the selected countries were selected for this purpose. They will be analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine which are pro-Western. The identified pro-Western political parties, specifically their public communication on social media, will be the subject of the main analysis to measure the securitization speech act. This will be conducted through a discourse analysis, using the mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, a contextual analysis of the political outcomes of the securitizing actors will be provided on the conflict timeline. This could give interesting insights in a possible correlation between securitization and shifts in political support of the securitizing actors. The multi-step approach may appear complicated, however, each of the steps within the process provides research outcomes that serve as a source for the following step of the analysis. Thereby, the multiple steps of the analysis were selected in the described way to provide a detailed, yet logically structured research.

Deriving from the main research question, the following sub-questions were formulated:

SQ1: What relevant political parties from the selected case study countries (Poland, Germany, Spain) can be considered as pro-Western?

SQ2: Are there geographical differences (frontline vs. distant state) in the intensity of securitization regarding the conflict in Ukraine?

SQ3: Does the use of the securitization language correlate with changes in electoral support on the timeline of the conflict?

In connection with these questions, the following hypotheses were formulated as well:

H1: Pro-Western political parties with geographical proximity to the conflict apply a stronger securitization discourse compared to those in more distant countries.

H2: Pro-Western parties that used securitization language gained in elections.

3.1 Case justification

The case study countries, on which the analysis focuses, were chosen to represent various distances from the conflict in the European context. Poland is a frontline country, Germany represents a central country, and Spain is distant from the conflict. The frontline country, Poland, neighbors Ukraine, so the war is ongoing only kilometers away from their shared border. Moreover, Poland intensely experienced the spillover effect of the war in Ukraine, such as the inflow of war refugees. Germany is at a moderate physical distance from the conflict, while, from a European perspective, Spain is far from both Russia and the war.

The narrowing of political parties in these case studies to only pro-Western parties was chosen for two reasons: first, a pro-Western orientation suggests a stronger securitization, as pro-Western parties are expected to view the Russian invasion as a threat. Furthermore, choosing only parties with a shared specific foreign-political view is likely to prevent result biases arising from different geopolitical orientations.

The decision to focus securitization measurement on social media activity, specifically on posts on X (formerly Twitter), was made for several reasons. First, the existing research on securitization has largely overlooked social media communication, which promises to bring a new perspective to the concept. Moreover, social media, especially platform X, provides a robust, coherent data set, making it a practical tool for measuring communication. It also provides secondary quantitative indicators, such as the total number of shares and likes, which could offer interesting insights.

3.2 Data selection and collection

To select pro-Western parties, the political programs of relevant parties in Poland, Germany, and Spain will be analyzed. As some political programs are comprehensive, while others remain brief, it is necessary in some cases to also examine the leaders' public statements to investigate what was not covered in the program. The parties considered ‘relevant’ will be those that entered their respective national parliaments in the last parliamentary elections, plus received at least 5 % of the total votes. This is because of different election systems across countries, resulting in different minimum thresholds required to gain seats. In the case of Poland, we will analyze the 2023 parliamentary election, in the case of Germany, it is the 2025 federal election, and for Spain, it is the 2023 general election. Every single party that fits the outlined criteria will be examined.

The data source for the securitization discourse analysis will be accounts on X of the parties identified as pro-Western. The focus will be on posts from the political parties' official accounts. By focusing on the official accounts of the parties, the analysis will encompass the communications of the most important party members, as these accounts often select and share their communications. To avoid an overflow of data and ensure relevance to the discourse analysis, the posts on the platform will be collected for specific time periods related to the conflict in Ukraine. The goal is to choose periods when social media activity regarding the conflict in Ukraine is expected to be strong. The first selected period spans the days preceding the invasion and ends with the 'Triple Transatlantic Summit' of NATO, the first extraordinary NATO meeting following the invasion. The second selected period consists of time during the second extraordinary summit of NATO, which took place one month after the first one.

For the contextual analysis, the results of the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections will be compared. The European Parliament elections are the best possible elections to study for this research, as all of the case study countries participate in them, which promises relevance for comparison. Moreover, the European Union is a major actor when it comes to the response to the conflict in Ukraine, suggesting that the topic of the war in Ukraine plays a factor in deciding who to vote for. Hence, the focus will be on the election outcomes of the identified pro-Western political parties of Poland, Germany, and Spain. This will be put into context with the outcomes of the securitization analysis.

4. Analysis

4.1 Identifying pro-Western parties

This analysis comprises three interconnected components: identification of securitizing actors, measurement of securitizing processes, and contextual measurement of the securitizing actors' election results. This will be conducted across the three case study countries: Poland, Germany, and Spain. The factors that define a party as pro-Western, as explained in the theoretical framework section of the thesis, are as follows: support for liberal democracy, emphasis on cooperation with NATO and the EU, viewing Russia as a threat, and supporting Ukraine in the Ukraine-Russia war.

However, the first-mentioned factor, support for liberal democracy, is tricky to measure, as all the researched parties participate in free elections, formally respect the

democratic system, etc., making it challenging to identify them as against liberal democracy convincingly. Of course, certain parties, such as the PiS in Poland, are typically accused of adopting policies that undermine the established level of democracy, leading to a phenomenon known as 'democratic backsliding' (Bakke & Sitter, 2022). However, parties in these positions logically do not admit any harmful intentions towards democracy. Therefore, this factor will be removed from the scoring system to identify pro-Western parties, as there is no straightforward method to distinguish them by it. Hence, the scoring system will be applied in the following manner with the following brackets:

Table 1: Scoring system

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y/N/in between	Y/N/in between	Y/N/in between	Y/N/in between

creation: own

Based on the four factors, namely a position towards NATO, a position towards the EU, viewing Russia as a threat, and supporting Ukraine in the conflict, a pro-Western position of parties will be proven or disproven. There will be three possible answers for each factor: yes ('Y'), no ('N'), or 'in between'. The 'in between' bracket will be used for situations when parties either do not clearly focus on the topic, or mention points that do not imply a clear position on the subject, suggesting that their stance is somewhere 'in the middle'. Answer 'no' (N) will mean 0 points, answer 'in between' will mean 0.5 points, and an answer 'yes' (Y) will give a party 1 point. In total, if a party scores 3 points or more across all the brackets, it will be considered 'pro-Western'. Any lower overall score will mean that a party will not be labeled as pro-Western.

4.1.1 Poland

The last parliamentary elections in Poland took place in October 2023. All 460 seats in the Sejm, the lower house of the bicameral parliament, were elected. Five political subjects gained seats while receiving at least 5 % of the total votes, and are therefore considered 'relevant' for this research. The 'United Right', led by the Law and Justice party (PiS), won 194 seats, followed by the 'Civic Coalition' with 157 seats, 'Third Way' with 65 seats, 'The Left' with 26 seats, and 'Confederation Liberty and Independence' with 18 seats (Krajowe Biuro Wyborcze, 2023).

Table 2: Seats in Sejm based on the 2023 Polish parliamentary elections

Party	United Right	Civic Coalition	Third Way	The Left	Confederation Liberty and Interdependence
Seats	194	157	65	26	18

Source: Krajowe Biuro Wyborcze, 2023; creation: own

United Right

The political subject that gained the most seats, the United Right, comprises the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and other smaller parties. An official pre-electoral program of a coalition was not publicly accessible; the program of the leading party, PiS, was analyzed. The program, named 'Safe Future for Poles', consists of 14 key areas. As the name suggests, security is a key area. Across the 300-page-long document, NATO was mentioned 23 times. In nearly all instances, it was mentioned in a positive light. While presenting the policies introduced during PiS's participation in the government, the increases in defence spending as part of the NATO commitments were highlighted (PiS, 2023, p. 93). Moreover, the document highlights the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' role under PiS in *"deepening transatlantic ties, building the Three Seas Initiative, strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence policy"* (p. 100). On the same note, the 2016 decision to establish a forward military presence on NATO's eastern flank was mentioned. As a future goal, the program listed Poland as the foundation of security on NATO's eastern flank (p. 150).

The program, on one hand, assures that Polish membership in the EU is *"a permanent element"* of PiS' policy, highlights PiS' pro-European stance during EU accession times, and rates positively the benefits of the European integration, such as the common market, our subsidies for farmers (PiS, 2023, p. 164-165). On the other hand, the program also calls for institutional reform of the EU. It links the organization to issues such as mass migration from Africa or a lack of national sovereignty (p. 164-165). Thereby, the party is portraying the union as a source of problems. The program directly criticizes calls for federalization within the EU, and the dominance of countries such as Germany and France in decision-making. Overall, the program focuses much more on listing the EU's problems than on its benefits. This suggests that while the PiS does not advocate leaving the EU, it criticizes EU policies. Based on this, the 'pro-EU' cell is assigned a score of 0,5, meaning the party has an 'in between' position.

In presenting past policies introduced during its years in government, PiS also highlighted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took initiatives that led to *"building political support for Ukraine, exerting a real influence on the shape of NATO's security policy towards Russia"* (PiS, 2023, p. 100). Among the initiatives mentioned, the program lists the provision of training for Ukrainian military personnel, a Polish appeal to European countries to provide stronger material support to Ukraine, resulting in donations of the PATRIOT system and Leopard 2A2 tanks (p. 114). The program also promises to develop further actions to enhance *"deterrence on NATO's eastern flank"* (p. 154). Clearly, the party declares support for Ukraine and recognizes Russia as a threat.

Based on the information above, the PiS party was given the following scoring:

Table 3: PiS (United Right) score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	in between	Y	Y
Score	1	0.5	1	1

creation: own

The Law and Justice party (PiS) scores 3.5 on the scoring system, indicating that it is considered for use in this research as a pro-Western party. These results are applied to the 'United Right' coalition.

Civic Coalition

The second most successful political subject in the election was the Civic Coalition. The coalition published a 34-page program covering 21 main topics, including the EU and national defence (Civic Coalition, 2023). Interestingly, the document does not explicitly mention NATO. However, in the 'national defence' section, the program advocates for Poland's participation in the 'European Sky Shield' initiative, a European collective security initiative (p. 30).

The program pledges to actively participate in the EU, receive funds from EU funds, and join the decision-making groups in the EU institutions. However, the program does not specifically touch Russia and Ukraine. The likely reason for the lack of coverage of foreign political issues is the nature of the program document: it focuses on the first 100 days after the

elections, rather than on long-term views and positions. It lists particular policies the coalition promises to adopt if elected and allowed to form a government quickly.

Since the program did not address NATO, Russia, or Ukraine, we examined public statements by the leader of the coalition, Donald Tusk, on these topics. In his first speech in Sejm after being appointed the prime minister following the election, Tusk mentioned: *"Poland is and will be a strong link in NATO and an ally of the USA"* (Stelmach, 2023). Furthermore, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Tusk also claimed that NATO *"remains absolutely crucial"* for Poland's security (Polskie Radio, 2025). In his public statements following the elections, Tusk also said: *"We will loudly and decisively demand the full mobilisation of the free world to help Ukraine in this war... I can no longer listen to politicians who talk about being tired of the situation in Ukraine. They tell President Zelensky that they are tired of the situation. I will demand help for Ukraine from day one"* (The Guardian, 2023).

Apparently, a pro-NATO stance was not among the coalition's top priorities, as domestic issues dominated; however, the coalition's leader clearly favors cooperation within NATO. The same can be said about seeing Russia as a threat and supporting Ukraine.

Table 4: Civic Coalition score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

The Civic Platform scores 4 in the scoring system, hence it is identified as a pro-Western party.

Third Way

The following political subject is the Third Way coalition, consisting of Poland 2050 and the Polish People's Party. This alliance released 12 program points before the 2023 elections (Trzecia Droga, 2023). The program focused primarily on right-wing economic propositions. However, the part on security directly mentions that the coalition stands for a *"full support for Ukraine, which Putin's Russia has attacked"* (p. 4). The program further promises to support Ukraine in any way to ensure that it defends its independence.

On the other hand, the coalition suggested stricter regulation of food imports from Ukraine (p. 4). The military section of the program declares support for the European Sky Shield Initiative (p. 7), which also aims to strengthen the NATO integrated defense system. This, alongside the stance towards the conflict, suggests a pro-NATO stance.

However, the program lacks further assessments of NATO-EU cooperation; we examined the public statements of the alliance's leaders. Szymon Hołownia, the leader of Poland 2050, has publicly expressed during the 25th anniversary of Poland's NATO membership that Poland *"is not only in the NATO pact, but is the Pact,"* suggesting that Poland is not just a NATO member, but a part of the Western identity (Mazur, 2024). Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, the leader of the Polish People's Party, spoke similarly about the EU before the 2023 elections, criticizing the sceptical stance of the then-government of Poland, with PiS as the leading force. He suggested that Poland should become a full member of the EU rather than remain a dissatisfied critic (Winogrodzki, 2023). This strongly supports the claim that the alliance is both pro-EU and pro-NATO.

Table 5: Third Way score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

Hence, the Third Way alliance is also identified as pro-Western, as it scores 4 in the scoring system.

The Left

The political subject with the fourth-best result is The Left, a coalition of left-wing parties. Leading up to the election, the coalition proposed a comprehensive 155-point program on its website. Even though a focus on domestic issues plays once again the strongest role within the program, it also covers security and foreign political topics. The program views cooperation with the EU positively and even suggests expanding the EU's security and defense aspects. This could indicate that the Left does not see NATO as a dominant provider of security for Europe. The latter parts of the program further touch on NATO and propose establishing

European armed forces to complement NATO's defense capabilities (Lewica, 2023). This suggests that the alliance recognizes Poland's place in NATO but seeks to build an alternative to the pact's primary purposes by increasing the EU's role.

Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, the program states that the Left supports the EU's aspiration for Ukraine and other countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. Moreover, support for an energy transformation of these countries is expressed, with an explanation that this *"will help to emancipate the region's countries from Russia"* (Lewica, 2023). The program also promises to provide further training, weapons, military equipment, and aid to Ukraine, and proposes canceling Ukraine's foreign debt. The Left also proposes 'tough policies' towards Russia, such as ending trade with the country in fossil fuels, increasing sanctions, or providing support to persecuted dissidents and opposition figures.

Table 6: The Left score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	in between	Y	Y	Y
Score	0.5	1	1	1

creation: own

With a score of 3.5 in the scoring system, the Left coalition is also considered pro-Western.

Confederation Liberty and Interdependence

The last examined Polish political subject is the Confederation Liberty and Interdependence (KWiN). The program offers strong criticisms of the EU, claiming that Poland *"has been harassed by EU bureaucrats"* (Konfederacja, 2023, p. 30) and argues that multiple legislations of the EU violate the treaties upon which the Union was built. The program portrays Poland as a victim of the EU actions and its *"harmful programs"* (p. 33), which include climate, agriculture, and migration policies. The same criticism, however, is not directed towards NATO. Nevertheless, the program calls for national independence in security matters, suggesting that self-sufficiency in security is more critical than reliance on a collective-defense system provided by NATO. However, the lack of direct criticism of NATO, while devoting a substantial part of the program to security-related issues, suggests that KWiN does not have a

fully anti-NATO or pro-NATO position. This presents a contrasting view to their position on the EU, as KWiN clearly holds a strong eurosceptic stance.

The program touches on Ukraine, but not directly in relation to the war. Ukraine is cited as a source of "unfair competition" in the agricultural sector (Konfederacja, 2023, pp. 59-60). The program also calls for strict border security to oppose immigration from Ukraine and other non-EU countries. Moreover, the program provides no direct endorsement or support for Ukraine. Since the war was not addressed, the public statements of the two KWiN leaders on the topic were searched. Sławomir Mentzen, the co-leader of KWiN, criticized the support provided for Ukraine on multiple occasions and was reluctant to identify Russia as either a clear enemy or an ally (Mikulski, 2024).

Table 7: Confederation Liberty and Interdependence score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	in between	N	in between	N
Score	0.5	0	0.5	0

creation: own

KWiN scores 1 in the scoring system, which means it is not considered pro-Western. It is the only relevant Polish political subject with such a position. Four subjects, the United Right, Civic Coalition, Third Way, and The Left, are considered as pro-Western. An average score of 3.2 out of 4 shows that the Polish political representation is strongly pro-Western across the spectrum.

4.1.2 Germany

The last federal parliamentary election in Germany took place in February 2025. All 630 seats in the Bundestag, Germany's federal parliament, were filled. Six political subjects gained seats as a result of the elections. The CDU/CSU coalition won the elections with nearly 30 % of the total votes, gaining 208 seats in the parliament. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) was second with 152 votes, followed by the SPD with 120 seats, the Greens with 85 seats, Die Linke with 64 seats, and the SSW with a single seat. No other party gained seats in the parliament. SSW received 0,15 % of the overall votes (Bundeswahlleiterin, 2025), hence will not be considered relevant for this research.

Table 8: Seats gained in the 2025 German federal elections

Party	CDU/CSU	AfD	SPD	Greens	Die Linke
Seats	208	152	120	85	64

Source: Bundeswahlleiterin, 2025; creation: own

CDU/CSU

CDU/CSU, the coalition with the most seats gained in the elections, published a 4-point program ahead of the polls (CDU/CSU, 2025). The full version of this program consists of 79 pages. The section on security provides clear insight into the party's stance towards NATO and the EU. The program expresses support for increasing the defence-spending target for member states as part of NATO's terms (p. 6). This is explained by describing NATO as a *"security guarantee"* (p. 6). The program further calls for deepening the transatlantic partnership (p. 46) and taking on greater responsibility within NATO (p. 49), ensuring that the coalition clearly stands behind the pact (p. 50).

In terms of the EU, the program promises to change some of the Union's policies, claiming the coalition will *"reverse the trend in EU bureaucracy"* (CDU/CSU, 2025, p. 15), enhance the 'EU AI Act' regulation (p. 27), and improve coordination within the EU (p. 46). On the other hand, the coalition promises to promote EU projects (p. 25), sees the union as a key instrument for implementing policies, and warns of duplicating structures with the EU. Furthermore, the coalition declares support for the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU, as well as for Ukraine and Moldova (p. 53). The program also touches on the topic of Ukraine and Russia, stating that *"the Russian dictator has started a war that challenges us as Europeans and NATO members"* (p. 36). The coalition declares support for Ukraine's future accession to the EU, claiming that *"Ukraine is also defending us"* (p. 45). The program calls out Vladimir Putin's regime for *"despising democracy and human rights,"* and advocates for an increase in the sanctions towards his regime (p. 45).

Table 9: CDU/CSU score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

The CDU/CSU coalition scores 4 on the scoring system, making it a pro-Western political subject for this research.

AfD

The second-strongest party after the elections is the AfD. The party released a 174-page-long program in 2025. In the document, AfD claims that Germany's membership in NATO is part of its security strategy, but stresses that it applies only if Europe develops an independent and effective military alliance (AfD, 2025, p. 87). This suggests an 'in-between' position of the party towards the pact. Further, large part of the program frames the EU as a source of a long list of Germany's problems. Among the listed issues, AfD criticizes the EU for *"centralist ambitions"* (p. 86), suggesting it is attacking Europe's and Germany's nation-state structure. The program even calls Germany and other European countries to leave the Eurozone and return to a national currency (p. 61-62). This suggests that the AfD does not simply call for reform of the EU, but rather for a reversal of the integration process, as dissolving a currency union would be a significant step towards disintegration.

In terms of the Ukraine-Russia situation, AfD rejects the eastward expansion of NATO and the EU, and opposes Ukraine's possible accession to these organizations (AfD, 2025, p. 87). Moreover, the program frames the material support and military training for Ukraine and its soldiers as a key reason for what the party calls an *"inability of German armed forces to defend itself"* (p. 25). The program also calls to remove special financial benefits for Ukrainian war refugees in Germany (p. 25). The program fails to call Russia 'a threat'. Instead, AfD calls for a relationship with Russia on a similar level as a relationship with the USA and China (p. 87).

Table 10: AfD score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	in between	N	N	N
Score	0.5	0	0	0

creation: own

AfD scores 0.5, suggesting the party is far from being pro-Western.

SPD

The next party is the SPD. In the party's pre-electoral program, it describes NATO as a key and irreplaceable instrument for German security (p. 57), and suggests strengthening the European pillar in NATO (SPD, 2025, p. 59). In terms of the EU, the program advocates for the Union's shared values to be upheld and for strengthening the alliances Germany is part of (p. 61). Furthermore, SPD describesthe EU's enlargement policy as a *"driving force for peace, democracy, the rule of law, and prosperity in Europe"* (p. 60).

Regarding the Ukraine-Russia position, the program clearly states that under SPD's leadership, *"Germany stands firmly by the side of invaded Ukraine"* (SPD, 2025, p. 60). It further declares support for Ukraine's accession to the EU. The program also promises to keep supplying Ukraine with humanitarian, military, and other aid *"as long as it will be necessary"* (p. 60). Moreover, the program clearly portrays Russia as a threat, as it calls for an organization of security on the European continent against Russia in the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (p. 57).

Table 11: SPD score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

SPD scores 4 on the scoring system, making it a pro-Western political subject for this research.

Greens

In the Greens' pre-electoral program, the party describes NATO and, especially, the EU in a highly positive light. The document stresses that German security *"is embedded in EU and NATO"* (Die Grünen, 2025, p. 152). According to the program, the EU is *"the most successful peace project since the end of WW2"* (p. 104). Among the listed benefits of membership in the union, the Greens mentions simplifications in many areas, such as working, travelling, and living across borders (p. 104).

Moreover, the program specifically states that the *"foundation of peace, freedom, democracy and human rights"* must be defended *"in a strong Europe and in a strong transatlantic alliance (NATO)"* (Die Grünen, 2025, p. 105). According to the program, the Russian aggression towards Ukraine is an attack on such values. When discussing the attack on Ukraine, the program stresses that the Greens *"stand firmly by their side."* It states that Ukraine deserves support on a *"diplomatic, financial, humanitarian and military level"* (p. 141-142). The party further declares support for Ukraine's possible accession to the EU and NATO (p. 142). When referring to Russia, the program accuses the country of pointing its hybrid attacks towards Germany. It also declares that *"Putin's war of attrition against the civilian population"* must be countered by supporting the reconstruction of Ukraine (p. 142).

Table 12: Greens score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

Hence, Greens join the list of parties considered as pro-Western, as the party scores 4 in the scoring system.

Die Linke

The last examined German party is Die Linke. In the 60-page document, the party devotes one of the main sections of its program to foreign political topics (Die Linke, 2025). In this section, the party takes a highly critical stance towards NATO, calling the pact *"a relic of the Cold War"* that cannot provide a cooperative security policy for Europe and that escalates

situations across the globe (p. 22). More specifically, the program criticizes increases in military investment at the expense of other things and opposes increases in defence spending to 2 % of GDP (p. 21). It also disagrees with the deployment of US intermediate-range missiles in Germany. For the reasons mentioned, the party views NATO as *"superfluous"* and calls for a different security constellation (p. 22). Regarding the EU, the program adopts a more mixed approach, as it criticizes its *"militarization"* and alleged contribution to the escalation of conflicts (p. 21). At the same time, the program does not regard the union as 'superfluous', as in the case of NATO, but suggests a broader EU cooperation to tackle current issues in Europe and abroad (p. 24).

The program also presents a mixed approach towards the war in Ukraine. Even though it directly condemns Russia's attack and states that the party *"stands firmly by the side of the people in Ukraine,"* it opposes the military support provided by the West and the involvement of NATO in the region (p. 21). This suggests an 'in between' position in the scoring box. Regarding Russia, the program claims that Putin's threats show that democracy and security are facing serious challenges. Furthermore, it calls out Russia for *"pursuing its own imperial interests"* (p. 21).

Table 13: Die Linke score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	N	in between	Y	in between
Score	0	0.5	1	0.5

creation: own

Die Linke scores two on the scoring system; hence, it is not considered a pro-Western party for this thesis. Despite that, a majority of relevant German political parties, including the CDU/CSU, SPD, and Greens, are viewed as pro-Western. On the other hand, the AfD and Die Linke did not fit this criterion. With an average score of 2.9 out of 4, German political representation is not as pro-Western as Polish, but still predominantly pro-Western.

4.1.3 Spain

In Spain, the national parliament, the 'Cortes Generales', has two chambers. The lower chamber, the Congress of Deputies, underwent the last elections in July of 2023, electing all

350 seats (Ministerio del Interior, 2023). Fourteen political subjects gained seats. The most successful party was the Spanish People's Party (PP), which gained 137 seats. Second was PSOE, with 121 seats, followed by Vox, with 33 seats, and Sumar, with 31 seats. The remaining parties with seats did not exceed 5 % of the total votes and, therefore, are not considered relevant for this analysis.

Table 14: Seats in Cortes Generales gained in the 2023 Spanish general elections

Party	PP	PSOE	Vox	Sumar
Seats	137	121	33	31

Source: Ministerio del Interior, 2023; creation: own

PP

The People's Party of Spain, in its original 'Partido Popular', which is where the shortcut comes from, was the winner of the elections in terms of seats. Leading up to the election, the PP introduced its 108-page-long program (PP, 2023). The program was no longer available on the party's website; however, its original version remained accessible via an archiving tool. When discussing foreign political topics, the program calls Spain *"a prominent member of the Western community."* It lists the EU and NATO among the main tools through which Spain should play an essential role on the international stage (p. 91). The EU is mentioned multiple times as a tool for dialogue at the global level with regions such as Latin America (p. 96).

Regarding the Russia-Ukraine situation, the program declares full support for the sanctions against Russia, as well as for the *"military, economic, and humanitarian support for the Ukrainian people for as long as necessary."* PP's program also expresses support for Ukraine's possible accession to the EU and NATO (PP, 2023, p. 97). An increase in Russian influence is listed among the challenges Spain faces, suggesting PP views Russia as a threat (p. 96).

Table 15: PP score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

The People's Party of Spain scores 4 in the scoring system, hence it is considered a pro-Western party.

PSOE

The party that gained the second largest number of seats in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament following the 2023 elections is PSOE. This party released a program of more than 260 pages leading up to the election (PSOE, 2023). The program, despite its comprehensiveness, focuses predominantly on domestic political topics, but still touches foreign policy towards the very end of the document. The program declares Latin America to be the focus of Spain's foreign policy (p. 255). Similarly to the PP, PSOE names the EU as a tool to promote diplomatic ties with the Latin American region (p. 256). The program further highlights *"excellent transatlantic relations to contribute to our security"* and points out the relationship between Spain and the USA. Moreover, PSOE promises to work with NATO *"to defend peace and security, the international order, and democratic values"* (p. 256). Various EU policies are described in a positive light, including the Green Deal or talks with Eastern European countries regarding a possible extension (p. 253).

The program also briefly touches on the Russia-Ukraine situation. The document declares that PSOE will *"continue to support Ukraine in its defense of peace, freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity"* in the light of the Russian attack. Furthermore, it expresses support for Ukraine's possible accession to the EU (PSOE, 2023, p. 251). When listing the policies of the government of Pedro Sanchez, with PSOE as the leading force, the program mentions the protection provided to Ukrainian war refugees after the Russian invasion (p. 248).

Table 16: PSOE score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	Y	Y	Y	Y
Score	1	1	1	1

creation: own

PSOE is considered pro-Western, as the party scores 4 in the scoring system.

Vox

In Vox's pre-electoral program, the party adopts a highly critical stance towards the EU. Vox claims that the institutions of the union are *"dissolving the sovereignty of member states"* (Vox, 2023, p. 133). The program criticizes both the institutional constellation of the EU and a range of policies (pp. 133-137). The program does not explicitly state a desire to leave the union, nor does it characterize the organization as an essential tool for achieving its goals. However, the intense focus on criticism of the EU suggests that Vox does hold an anti-EU view. The only mention of NATO in the program concerns Spanish cities that are not part of the Spanish mainland. The party calls for a modification of the treaty so that such cities would be under the same protection as others (p. 92).

The program does not touch NATO in any other way, therefore, a closer look at public statements is necessary. The same applies to Ukraine and Russia. Santiago Abascal, the leader of Vox, talked about NATO in the past in a way that cannot be described as 'clearly pro-NATO', nor as clearly 'anti-NATO'. Abascal commented on Spain's possible rejection of increasing the defense budget to the level NATO requests, claiming that such a decision is against 'national interests' and harms Spanish security (AFP, 2025). This suggests that the party believes in the pact's principles.

On the other hand, Abascal, as well as the program of Vox, call for a Spanish national role in security, without highlighting NATO's role in this area (Vox, 2023), suggesting a 'in between' position. Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, Abascal criticizes the Spanish material support for Ukraine (La Vanguarda, 2024), while also recognizing Ukraine as the victim of the conflict and Russia as the aggressor. Abascal further called for the EU to be independent on

Russian oil (Press Digital, 2025). This suggests that Vox sees Russia as a threat but lacks a clear position on NATO and support for Ukraine.

Table 17: Vox score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	in between	N	Y	in between
Score	0.5	0	1	0.5

creation: own

Vox scores 2 in the scoring system, which means it is not a pro-Western party for the use of this research.

Sumar

The last researched party is Sumar. In its 182-page program before the elections, the party proposes working towards a set of goals at the EU level. This encompasses economic (Sumar, 2023, p. 16), climate (p. 62), security (p. 69), or social (p. 93) topics, suggesting a pro-EU position of the party. The program, furthermore, touches on NATO only once; however, it provides a clear indication of the party's position. The document calls for an autonomous Europe in security matters, advocating a *"progressive shift away from NATO security guarantees"* (p. 139), suggesting an anti-NATO position. The program further stresses a focus on 'citizens' rather than on the 'arms industry' (p. 139-140).

Regarding the Russia-Ukraine situation, the party promises to *"continue our comprehensive solidarity with Ukraine."* The program aims to *"reinforce humanitarian aid to Ukraine and commit to a reconstruction plan"* (Sumar, 2023, p. 141). However, the program does not explicitly support Western military support for Ukraine, suggesting that the party holds an 'in between' position, as military support is the type of support Ukrainian political leadership mainly asks for. The program, furthermore, does not mention Russia or Vladimir Putin. Therefore, public statements by Yolanda Díaz, the leader of Sumar, were examined. Previously, she called the 2022 Russian invasion *"illegitimate"* (Çakırtekin, 2025) and called out Vladimir Putin for *"brutality"* and *"disregard for human rights"* (Europa Press, 2025). Since Sumar's program strongly promotes a focus on human rights and democratic values (Sumar, 2023), this suggests that the party views Russia as a threat.

Table 18: Sumar score

Factor	pro-NATO	pro-EU	Russia as a threat	support for Ukraine
Position	N	Y	Y	in between
Score	0	1	1	0.5

creation: own

The party scores 2.5 in the scoring system; hence, it is not considered a pro-Western party for the purposes of this thesis. This puts Sumar alongside Vox as parties that scored under 3. On the contrary, PP and PSOE scored above 3, meaning half of the Spanish relevant parties are pro-Western, and half are not. Overall, the Spanish parties averaged 3,125.

4.1.4 Conclusion

In this part of the analysis, 9 of 14 parties were identified as pro-Western. That answers the first research subquestion, as the list of identified relevant pro-Western parties in the selected case studies is as follows: United Right, Civic Coalition, Third Way, The Left, CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, PP, and PSOE. Under the criteria of our analysis, all of these parties came out as pro-Western. On the contrary, KWiN, AfD, Die Linke, Sumar, and Vox were identified as political subjects that are not pro-Western.

Interestingly, the strength of pro-Western representation shows a pattern based on the distance from the conflict. The closer to the conflict, the higher share of parties were identified as pro-Western. In Poland, 80 % of the examined parties were identified as pro-Western. In Germany, the number falls to 60 %, and in Spain, it further decreases to 50 %. However, the same distribution does not apply to the average score of the parties in the selected countries. Polish parties achieve an average score of 3.2, making them the most pro-Western political representation under this criterion as well. However, German parties score 2.9 on average, which is lower than the Spanish parties' average of 3,125. The results, nevertheless, suggest that Polish political parties are strongly pro-Western even by European standards.

4.2 Securitization Discourse Analysis

The parties identified as pro-Western are also subject to a discourse analysis that aims to explain how pro-Western political parties securitize the conflict in Ukraine. The researched political subjects were the following: United Right, Civic Coalition, Third Way, and The Left

in Poland; CDU/CSU, SPD, and the Greens in Germany; PP, and PSOE in Spain. Posts on platform X from official parties' accounts were the subject of the analysis. The activity of accounts of these nine political subjects was measured within the two following periods of the same length: 21-27 February and 23-29 March 2022.

The first week covers the days leading up to the invasion, the launch of the attack on 24 February, and a few days afterward. This period covers the international tension preceding the invasion, as well as the international community's initial reaction to the conflict at the first extraordinary NATO summit following the invasion's inception. The second measured week encompasses the period surrounding the second extraordinary NATO summit following the invasion (NATO, 2025). The selection of these periods was made to capture the diplomatic activity related to the conflict. Since some coalitions did not communicate through X during the selected time periods, we focused on accounts of the strongest parties of such alliances in such cases. Hence, instead of the United Right, we researched PiS's posts, and instead of the Third Way, we researched Poland 2050's posts.

In total, 1,601 posts from nine accounts were transcribed with a social media-data scraping tool. These posts from the two time periods were then translated into English. During the first period, 21-27 February 2022, the researched accounts published 979 posts, whereas in the second period, 23-29 March 2022, they published 622 posts. From all posts, the most frequently used words were filtered. After removing those that carry a little or no indicative value (e.g., *"the"*, *"to"*, *"of"*, *"and"*, *"we"*, etc.), the following words remained as the most common ones for each time period:

Figure 3: Most frequent words (21-27.02.2022)



creation: own

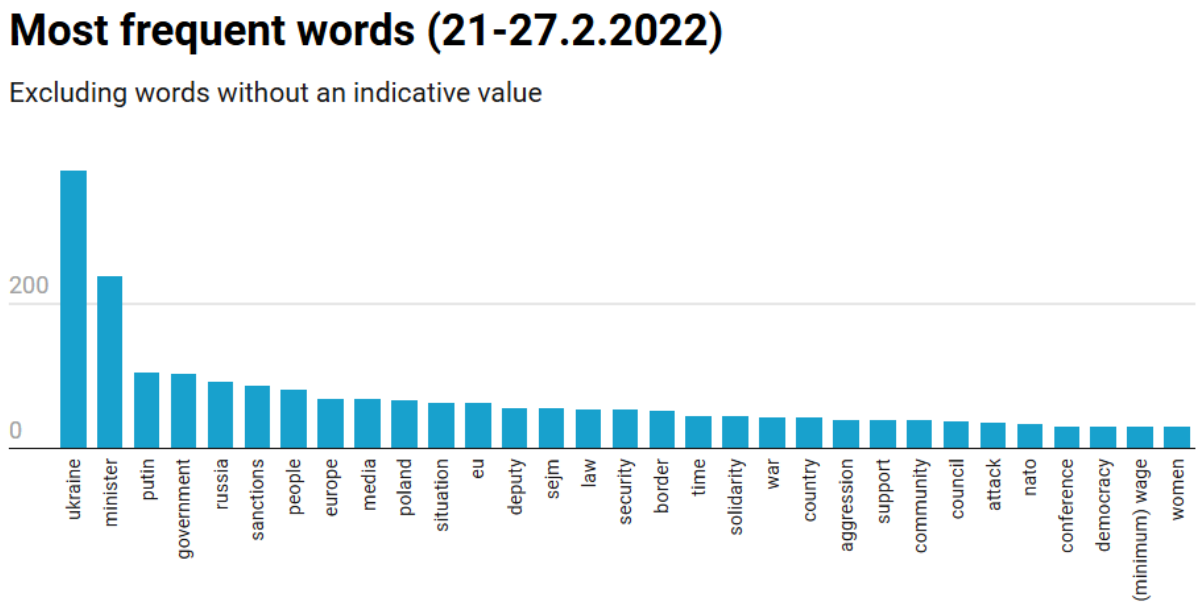
Figure 4: Most frequent words (23-29.03.2022)



creation: own

As the word clouds indicate, the war was the primary topic of communication across the selected social media accounts in both time periods, and the keywords related to the topic strongly overlapped. The most frequently used word in both periods was *"ukraine"*. The word occurred 383 times in the 605 total posts from the first period and 116 times in the 468 posts from the second period. Hence, the primacy of the word was even more visible in the first period. The distribution of keywords was more balanced in the second period, but contained similar words. As can be seen in the word clouds and charts, the majority of the displayed words are clearly related to the conflict.

Figure 5: List of most frequent words (21-27.02.2022)



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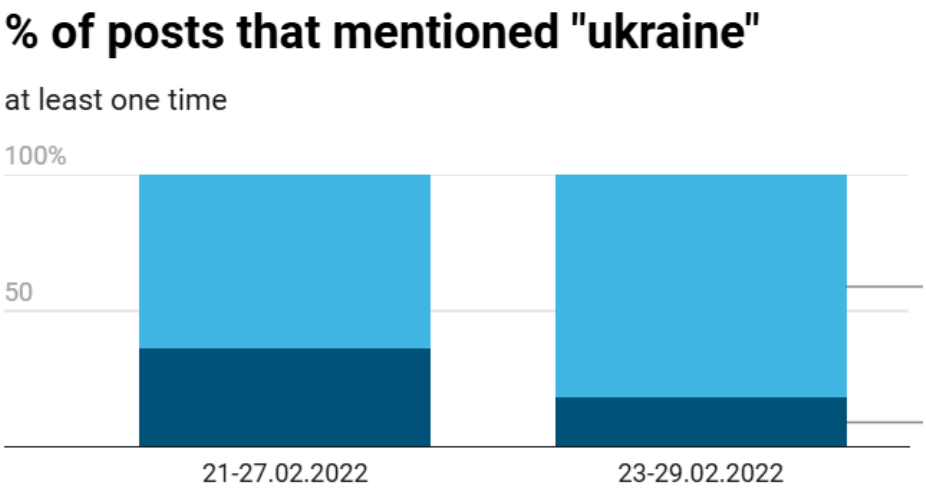
Figure 6: List of most frequent words (23-29.03.2022)



creation: own

Assuming the words could appear multiple times in a single post, we filtered the data and counted the number of posts in which the specific words appeared at least once. In the case of the most occurring word "*ukraine*", it appeared in 219 posts within the 605 posts from the first period, and in 84 posts within the 468 posts from the second period. Hence, 36 % of posts from the first period specifically mentioned Ukraine, while in the second period, this measure declined to 18 %.

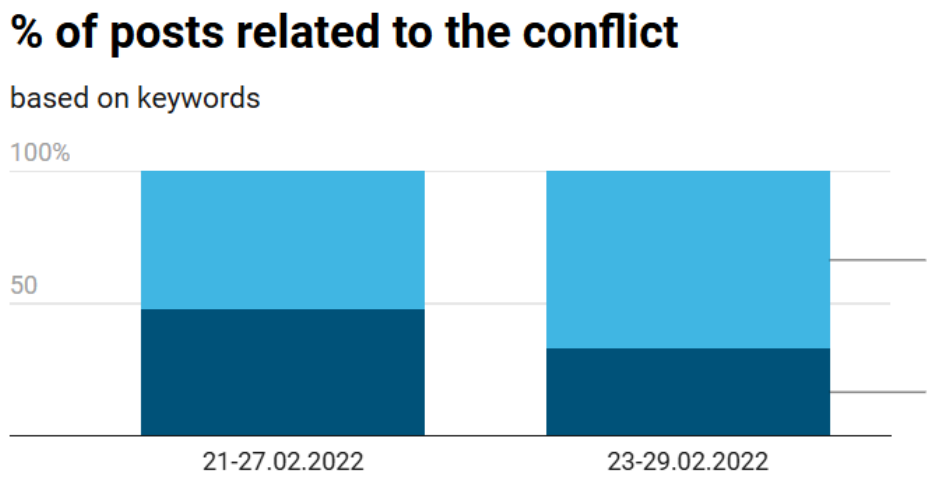
Figure 7: Posts mentioning Ukraine



creation: own

Furthermore, we looked at the occurrence of words assumed to be directly linked to the war: *"ukraine"*, *"putin"*, *"russia"*, *"sanctions"*, *"war"*, *"aggression"*, *"attack"*. We intentionally left out words such as *"nato"*, *"security"*, *"solidarity"*, even though it is logical to assume that most of the posts with these words were linked to the conflict. However, the aim is to identify posts that are almost certainly related to the conflict. At least one of the selected words appeared in 305 posts within the first period and 154 posts within the second period. Based on that, we claim that approximately 50 % of posts in the first period and approximately 33 % of posts in the second period were directly related to the conflict, suggesting a decline in the rate of posts related to the conflict.

Figure 8: Share of posts related to the conflict - Time periods



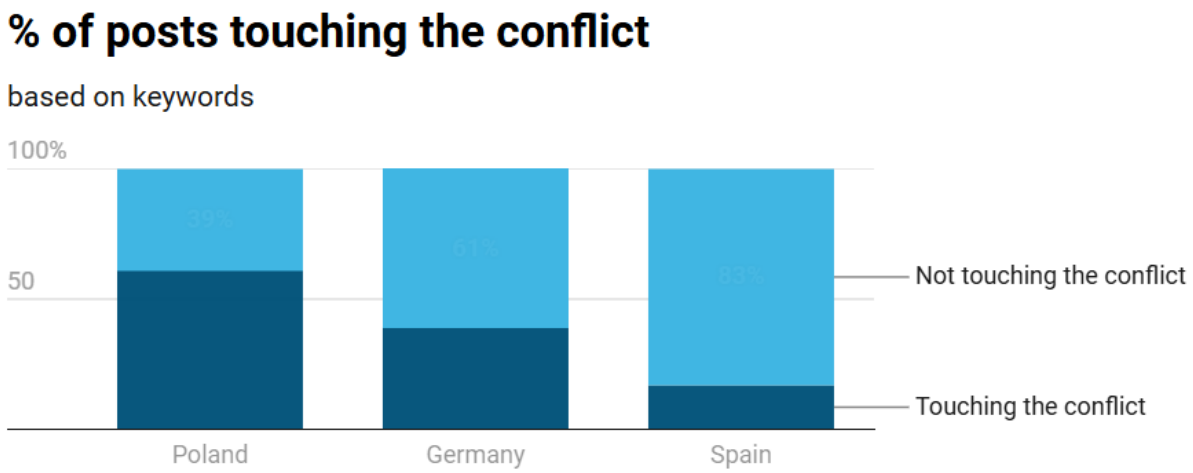
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Despite this change in distribution, both the first- and second-selected periods show a strong occurrence of a language related to the conflict. This suggests that the topic of the war in Ukraine dominated social media communication of pro-Western political parties not just in the first days of the invasion, but even one month later during an extraordinary NATO summit.

In the next step, we wanted to see to what extent parties address the topic of the war, based on the case-study country they are from. Hence, we looked at the posts where the keywords directly related to the conflict (*"ukraine"*, *"putin"*, *"russia"*, *"sanctions"*, *"war"*, *"aggression"*, *"attack"*) occur. At least one of the selected words occurred in 345 out of 596 total posts across both time periods by Polish pro-Western parties, in 60 out of 155 total posts by German pro-Western parties, and in 54 out of 323 total posts by Spanish pro-Western parties.

That means Polish pro-Western parties were most likely to address the war in their communication, with 61 % of posts from the time periods related to the conflict, followed by Germany with 39 % and Spain with 17 %. Hence, the geographical proximity to the conflict played a role in the share of the conflict-related posts. Pro-Western political parties in Poland, the frontline country, touched on the conflict in a significantly higher proportion of their posts than their counterparts in Germany and Spain.

Figure 9: Share of posts related to the conflict - Case studies



creation: own

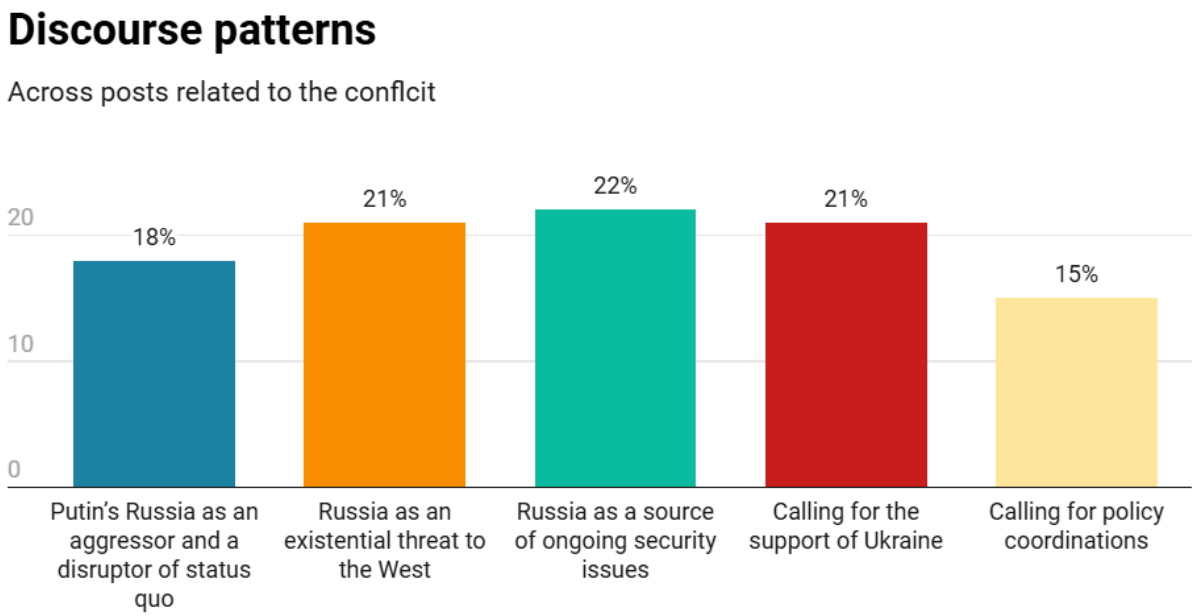
It is essential to acknowledge the limitations, as some keywords may have been used in a different context, or some posts might have touched on the conflict without using any of the selected words. However, we tried to minimize these limitations by carefully choosing the most appropriate words. Moreover, sample work indicates that either overlooking or mistakenly including posts did not occur, or occurred only to a minimal extent. That makes it highly unlikely that the standing of countries is incorrect, as the numbers attributed to them show significant differences.

4.2.1 Discourse patterns

Furthermore, we focused on how this Ukraine conflict-related language contains elements of a securitization discourse. The stress was on explicit references to existential threats or aggressors, and calls for the use of extraordinary measures. In the coding, we identified the following discourse patterns displayed in the language: portraying Putin's Russia as an aggressor and a disruptor of the status quo, portraying Russia as an existential threat to

the West, portraying Russia as a source of ongoing security issues, calling for the support of Ukraine, and calling for policy coordination. By analyzing these patterns, we explain how pro-Western European parties securitize the conflict in Ukraine. Furthermore, these patterns explain differences in approaches across European countries based on their physical proximity to the conflict in Ukraine.

Figure 10: Representation of discourse patterns

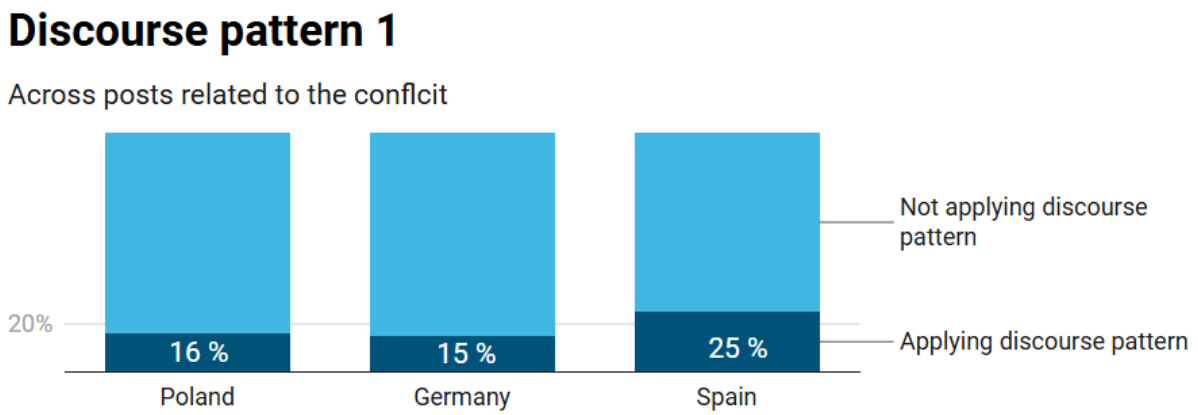


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4.2.1.1 Putin's Russia as an aggressor and a disruptor of the status quo

The first discovered pattern within the language of pro-Western political parties on social media is 'portraying Russia as an aggressor and a disruptor of the status quo'. In the analyzed posts from pro-Western parties, 18 % of the posts related to the war in Ukraine involved portraying Russia as an aggressor and the disruptor of the status quo (see Figure 10). This, however, has varied across the countries researched. In posts related to the war, the identified discourse pattern occurred in 16 % of posts on the Polish accounts, 15 % on the German accounts, and 25 % on the Spanish accounts. This is a surprising outcome, as Spain, the most distant country from the conflict, used this discourse at the highest rate among the countries researched. Germany and Poland, on the other hand, averaged a very similar rate.

Figure 11: Discourse pattern 1



creation: own

The researched accounts extensively used keywords such as *"putin"*, *"russia"*, *"aggression"*, *"attack"*, *"conflict"*, *"war"*, or *"putin's war"*, signalling an aim to associate responsibility for the conflict with Vladimir Putin and his regime in Russia. By not merely using the words *"war"* and *"conflcit"*, but including words such as *"aggression"*, *"aggressor"*, *"attack",* and *"putin's war"* when referring to the military clashes between Russia and Ukraine, the accounts deliberately constructed Putin's Russia as the instigator. In the analyzed posts, Russia was portrayed as the disruptor of the status quo who decided to move away from stability in international relations. Such posts regarding Vladimir Putin and Russia can be seen as a counter-strategy, or as a counter-securitization of Putin's rhetoric blaming the West for disrupting the status quo. Putin was domestically justifying the invasion as a necessary step to stop the spread of the West's influence, most notably the enlargement of the EU and NATO (Person & McFaul, 2022). In the analyzed posts in which the discourse pattern of portraying Putin's Russia as the aggressor was identified, pro-Western parties helped flip the narrative, describing Putin as an actor whose actions were not provoked.

To demonstrate this, we have isolated the following posts from PP, PSOE, and PiS as an example:

PP: 👉 @cucagamarra "We condemn Russia's attack on Ukraine and reiterate our support for the government to take the necessary measures to respond to this aggression". Our solidarity is with the people and government of Ukraine. We must help them with the resources they request.

PSOE: Putin must understand very clearly that no aggression against any NATO country will be tolerated. The free and democratic world must not overlook this. 📺 Margarita Robles on @LaHoraTVE

PiS: Government spokesperson @piotrmuller at the chancellery of the prime minister: “History is unfolding before our eyes. Russian aggression is changing the balance of power in Europe. We have been warning our EU partners about this for many months.”

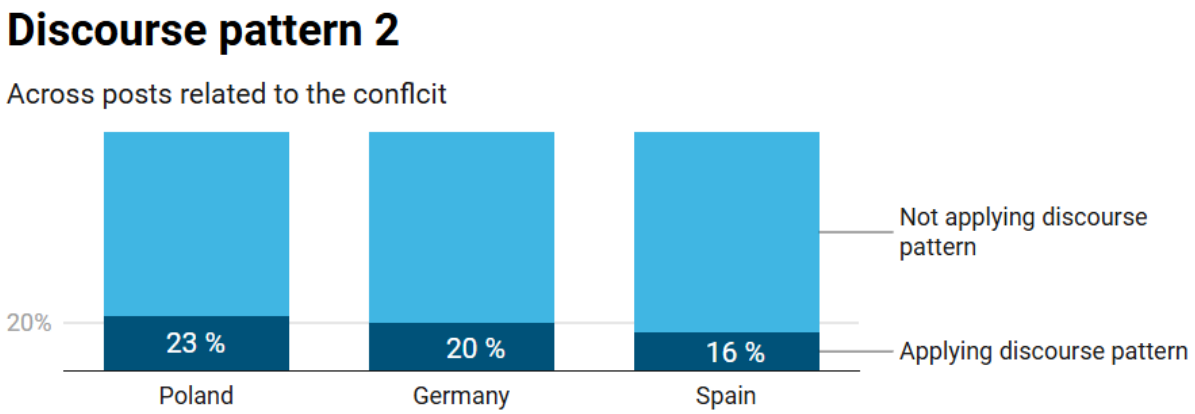
All three posts show a strategy in which Putin’s Russia is displayed as the disruptor of the status quo. In the first post, it was done by referring to the Russian invasion while using words such as *“aggression”* and *“attack”*, and further declaring support towards Ukraine, portraying it as a victim. In the second post, NATO is mentioned, and Russia is warned against disruptingthe status quo by showcasing aggression towards NATO. In the last post, Russia's disruption of the status quo is suggested by the mention of changes in the European balance of power.

Since posts on X were extracted using multiple metrics, we can see how successful this discourse pattern was. The three randomly selected posts averaged 172 likes each. The average number of likes per post across the two researched periods is approximately 88, indicating that the chosen posts were more than twice as successful as the average post across the nine accounts in the time span.

4.2.1.2 Russia as an existential threat to the West

The second discovered pattern is ‘Russia as an existential threat to the West’. In the analyzed posts from pro-Western parties, 21 % of the total of posts related to the war in Ukraine involved portraying Russia as an existential threat to the West (see Figure 10). This pattern was most typical of Polish pro-Western political parties, as 23 % of their posts on the conflict contained this discourse. Furthermore, the discourse portraying Russia as an existential threat to the West was identified in 20 % of posts by German parties and in 16 % of posts by Spanish parties. Hence, for this discourse pattern, the aspect of the proximity to the conflict applies, as a closer distance from the conflict correlates with higher usage of the discourse.

Figure 12: Discourse pattern 2



creation: own

The pro-Western political parties applied a securitization discourse towards the conflict in Ukraine. As explained before, stating an existential threat is key to a securitization process. The researched accounts on X accepted the role of a securitizing actor, as they framed Russia as an existential threat to the referent object, the West, in front of the audience, the general public of the respective country. In this case, the West is not always referred to explicitly as 'the West', but it is the uniting body that connects other words that the accounts use for referent objects. When explaining the type of threat Russia is posing, the pro-Western political parties use an entire scale of words for referent objects. This includes keywords such as *"europe"*, *"eu"*, *"nato"*, "*community"*, *"society",* or *"homeland"*, but also words that are associated with the nature of the West, such as *"democracy"*, *"law",* and *"values"*.

Moreover, the use of referent objects is extremely broad in some cases, including words such as *"citizens"*, *"state"*, and even *"future"*. In such cases, the existential element of the described threat is plain, as describing something as a threat to the *"future"*, for example, carries the existentiality with it by definition. If something threatens the state or the future, it automatically becomes an existential threat. The existential dimension of the described threat is also highlighted by the use of expressive, emotionally resonant language. By extensively using words such as *"serious"*, *"everything"*, *"most"*, *"threat"*, *"strong"*, *"entire"*, *"necessary",* or *"crisis"*, the researched accounts further emphasized the situation as extraordinary and requiring unusual action.

The following examples from PL 2050 and CDU/CSU showcase how pro-Western parties used language to securitize Russia and to portray it as an existential threat to the West.

PL 2050: "Ukrainians are also fighting for our cause. This is a war that Putin declared against the entire West, of which #Ukraine was starting to be a part not institutionally, but culturally and civilizationally" @ZalewskiPawel @onetpl #Ukraine

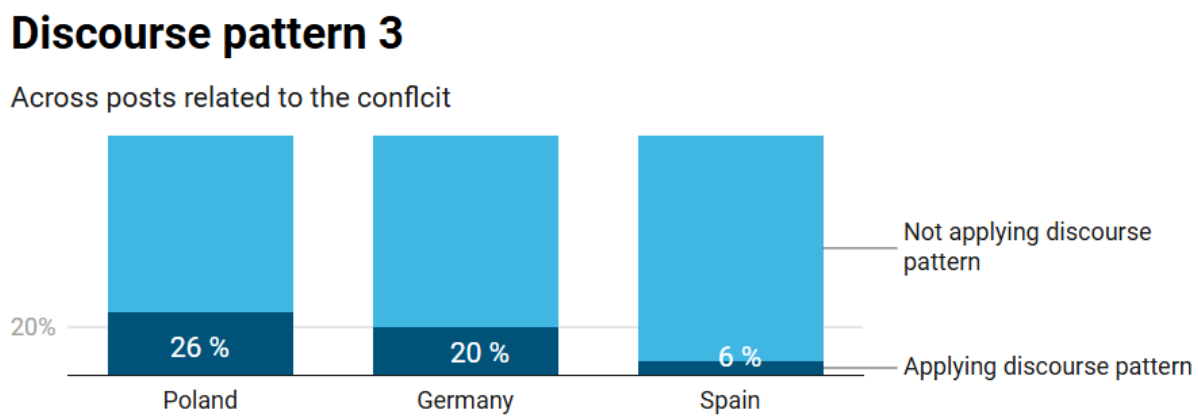
CDU/CSU: "There is war in Europe," said our parliamentary group leader @_FriedrichMerz today on ZDF's @morgenmagazin. Russia's attacks are not only directed at #Ukraine: "It is a war against democracy, against our freedom," said Merz.

In both examples, the accounts are trying to portray the invasion as an attack not just on Ukraine, but also on the West. In the first post, the *"West"* is explicitly mentioned, whereas in the second, it is not. However, the West is represented here by *"democracy"* and *"freedom"*, as the post claims that these institutions were attacked. The posts also name Putin and Russia as the sources of the existential threat. Furthermore, the two posts averaged 115.5 likes per post, exceeding the average across posts for both time periods, which is 88.

4.2.1.3 Russia as a source of ongoing security issues

The following identified pattern is 'Russia as a source of ongoing security issue', which covers domestic security issues that the researched countries are directly facing at the current time. This includes immigration, border security, food security, energy security, or cyber security. In the analyzed posts from pro-Western parties, 22 % of the total of posts related to the war in Ukraine involved portraying Russia as a source of the listed issues (see Figure 10). In posts related to the war, the identified discourse pattern occurred in 26 % of posts on Polish accounts, 20 % on German accounts, and 6 % on Spanish accounts. This distribution strongly correlates with distance to the conflict, as countries closer to it are more likely to experience local issues related to the conflict, such as migration waves or increased food prices.

Figure 13: Discourse pattern 3



creation: own

The researchers attributed the domestic security issues their countries were facing to Russia and presented them to the local audience. In the case of Poland, the occurrence of keywords such as *"refugees"* and *"border security"* was higher than in German and Spanish accounts. This finding is not surprising, as Poland shares a border with Ukraine and with Russia's ally Belarus, making it a buffer zone of migration related to the conflict. Apart from the inflow of a high number of war refugees from Ukraine, Poland is also facing an inflow of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa through the shared border with Belarus (Kazharski, 2023). Moreover, the disruptions in agricultural trade flows from Ukraine logically affected Ukraine's neighbors more strongly than distant countries. The surprisingly high occurrence of the discourse in posts from German parties, compared to Spanish parties, can be explained by Germany's strong dependence on Russian oil at the beginning of the war. Hence, the posts from German accounts on this matter often touch the Nord Stream pipeline system that transports gas from Russia to Germany.

These examples from PiS and the Greens showcase how the researched accounts blamed Russia for the domestic security issues their countries faced.

PiS: Prime Minister @MorawieckiM in #Brussels: W. #Putin treats the war and refugee mechanism as part of energy blackmail. We knew this beforehand, which is why the #Government took appropriate steps earlier, and we will be able to be independent of Russian raw materials this year.

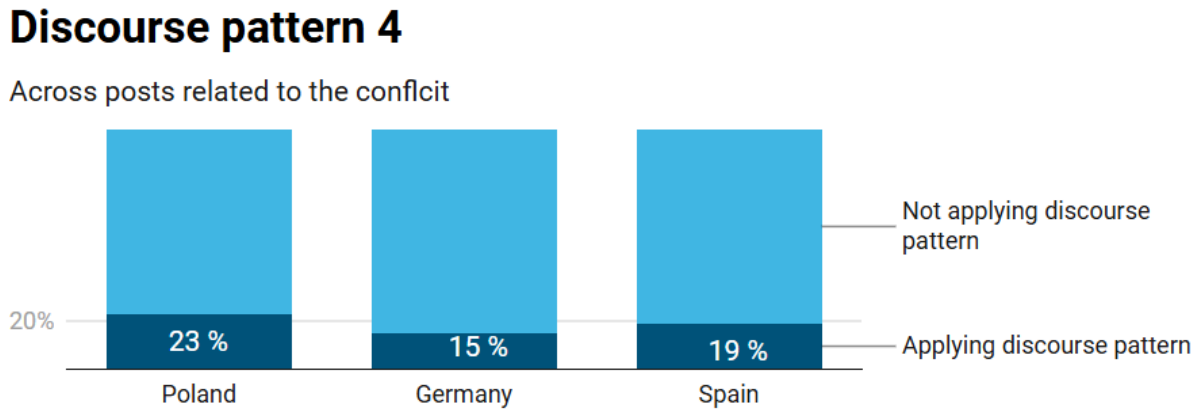
Greens: @nouripour emphasizes that it is right that Economics Minister Robert Habeck and the German government stopped the approval process for #NordStream2 today. Because the massive escalation of the #Russia crisis threatens the end of the peace order in Europe.

The first post names Vladimir Putin as the cause of the energy security crisis after the launch of the invasion, and even uses the term *"energy blackmail"*. Thereby, it describes the situation as an outcome of Russia's strategy. Similarly, the second post suggests that Russia is a source of the energy crisis and advocates reducing dependence on Russian gas. These two posts averaged 165,5 likes, hence they also exceed the average number of 88 likes per post across the collected data.

4.2.1.4 Calling for the support of Ukraine

The fourth identified pattern is 'calling for the support of Ukraine'. This pattern was identified in 21 % of posts related to the war in Ukraine (see Figure 10). In Poland, 23 % of posts related to the conflict contained this discourse pattern, followed by Spain at 19 % and Germany at 15 %. Hence, a similar portion of posts related to the conflict called for support for Ukraine across all three case-study countries. Interestingly, accounts from the most distant country, Spain, devoted a higher proportion of their posts to this discourse pattern than accounts from Germany.

Figure 14: Discourse pattern 4



creation: own

The calls for the support of Ukraine presented one form of the use of extraordinary means within the securitization discourse. By providing support through material and military donations and assistance, as well as through the acceptance of war refugees, the pro-Western European political parties went to extraordinary lengths. Naturally, providing humanitarian, material, and military support, and accepting war refugees does not necessarily equal extraordinary measures. However, what makes this support extraordinary is the volume at

which it was provided, as the financial means to help Ukraine were unprecedented. The same can be said about the number of war refugees accepted by European countries in the first months of the conflict (Fabbrini, 2024).

The use of these extraordinary means was justified by portraying Russia as the cause of the situation in Ukraine and as the cause of security issues in Europe. Thereby, pro-Western political parties declared Russia to be an existential threat. The discourse pattern of calling for support for Ukraine was practised on X through the use of keywords such as *"solidarity"*, *"support", "help", "provide", "assistance", "humanitarian", "stand with Ukraine"*, etc.

To better explain the discourse pattern, here are two examples of posts by PSOE and PiS related to it.

PSOE: We stand in solidarity with the affected people and will assist Ukraine from the European Union with financial aid, investments, and medical supplies. I have informed the leader of the opposition and will appear before Congress to report on the situation. 🗣️ @sanchezcastejon

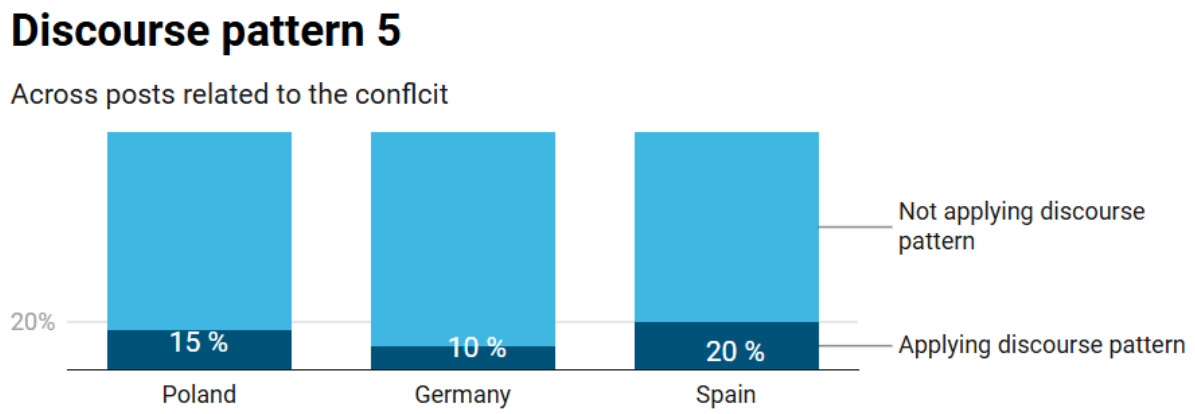
PiS: Prime Minister @MorawieckiM in #Warsaw: The war in Ukraine is not over yet, and it may still be very brutal. It is our duty to help those who are most disadvantaged.

The first post lists specific forms of help towards Ukraine, including financial and medical aid. The second post does not mention concrete means to help, but calls the required help as *"our duty"*. The post suggests that a policy should be a moral obligation, further highlighting the unusual and extraordinary nature of the political approach. The two posts averaged 144,5 likes, which means they again surpassed the average of 88 likes per post across the collected data.

4.2.1.5 Calling for policy coordinations

The last identified discourse pattern is 'calling for policy coordinations'. This pattern was identified in 15 % of the retrieved data related to the conflict (see Figure 10). Specifically, 15 % of these posts by Polish accounts, 10 % by German accounts, and 20 % by Spanish accounts are categorized under this pattern. Interestingly, neither here does the pattern follow the assumed order based on the proximity to the conflict. Spain, the most distant country, had the highest share of posts with this discourse pattern among posts related to the conflict.

Figure 15: Discourse pattern 5



creation: own

As with support for Ukraine, this pattern suggests the use of extraordinary means by pro-Western political parties in their securitization discourse. Again, calling for a united approach is not remarkable in itself. Still, the unprecedented level of policy coordination and decision-making at both the domestic and international levels (Fabbrini, 2024) suggests that this discourse serves as an extraordinary means. The call for policy coordinations in relation to the conflict in Ukraine was practised on platform X through the use of keywords such as *"cooperation", "coordination", "together", "united", "community", "partners"*, etc.

We randomly selected the following posts that fit this pattern.

SPD: "#Russia should not underestimate the European Union's resolve on this issue. Vladimir #Putin crossed a line yesterday. There will be a decisive, coordinated response from the Europeans and the Americans... @larsklingbeil

PSOE: EU This #EUCO has been about unity in: ▻ Condemning Putin's war. ▻ Solidarity. ▻ Economic sanctions against the Putin regime. Because if we are united in this, we must also be united in the economic responses to the war. 🗣️ @sanchezcastejon

Both posts call for a unified response at the European level through the EU, while the first also mentions the US. The first post comes from the first period and was published shortly after the invasion began. The second one comes from the second period, which explains why, unlike the first post, it mentions concrete steps in the proposed united approach. In contrast, the first post mainly stresses the need for a coordinated response, but does not imply what kind of response. The two posts averaged 111 likes, which means they also surpass the average of

88 likes per post across the collected data, just like the other samples we used for different patterns.

4.3 Electoral support

Finally, in the final step of the analysis, we will examine the election results of pro-Western political parties that invoked the securitization discourse. The goal of this contextual analysis is to assess whether there were changes in the electoral support for these securitizing actors. Thereby, we aim to determine whether electoral outcomes correlate with electoral results to provide a broader context for the securitization analysis. The results of the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections will be studied and compared to see how the support for the selected parties changed after the conflict broke out. As mentioned in the methodological framework, the European Parliament elections appear to be the best elections to study, as nearly all of the researched political subjects participated in them at the same time. The only exceptions are the Polish parties Poland 2050 and The Left, both founded after the 2019 elections. Furthermore, the EU is one of the leading actors in responding to the situation in Ukraine, suggesting that the conflict resonates during the European Parliament elections.

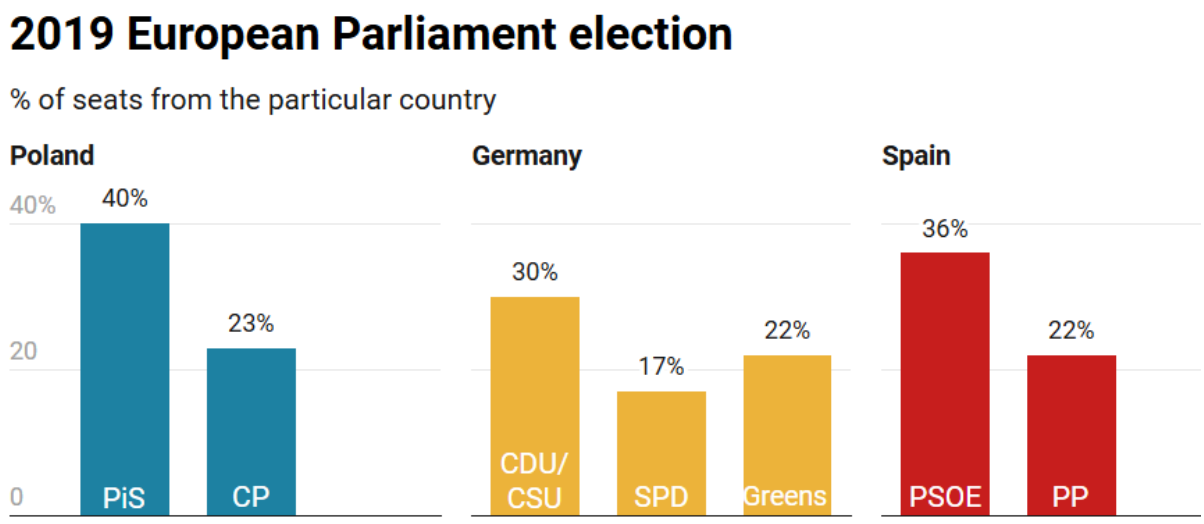
4.3.1 2019 European Parliament elections

The last European Parliament elections before the full-scale Russian invasion took place in May 2019. All parties we identified as securitizing actors participated in them, except for Poland 2050 and PL 2050. Hence, two parties from Poland, three parties from Germany, and two parties from Spain were studied. In Poland, the pro-Western parties we identified as securitizing actors ran in coalitions. Because of that, we focused on the number of seats each party gained in the elections.

In Poland, 52 seats were distributed following the elections. PiS ran in the 'United Right' coalition, which gained 27 seats, while PiS alone won 21 of those seats. The Civic Platform (CP), the main party of the Civic Coalition, ran in a broad coalition that gained 22 seats, out of which 12 were distributed among the Civic Platform candidates (Krajowe Biuro Wyborcze, 2019). As mentioned, the parties PL 2050 and The Left did not exist at the time of the elections, hence they will be excluded from this part of the analysis. In Germany, 96 seats were distributed in the elections. CDU/CSU gained 29 of them, followed by the Greens with 21 seats and SPD with 16 seats (Bundeswahlleiterin, 2019). In Spain, 59 seats were distributed in the elections, with PSOE winning 21, followed by PP with 13 (Ministerio del Interior, 2019).

Percentage-wise, the distribution of the seats, in the context of each country, was as follows:

Figure 16: Distribution of seats in the 2019 European Parliament election



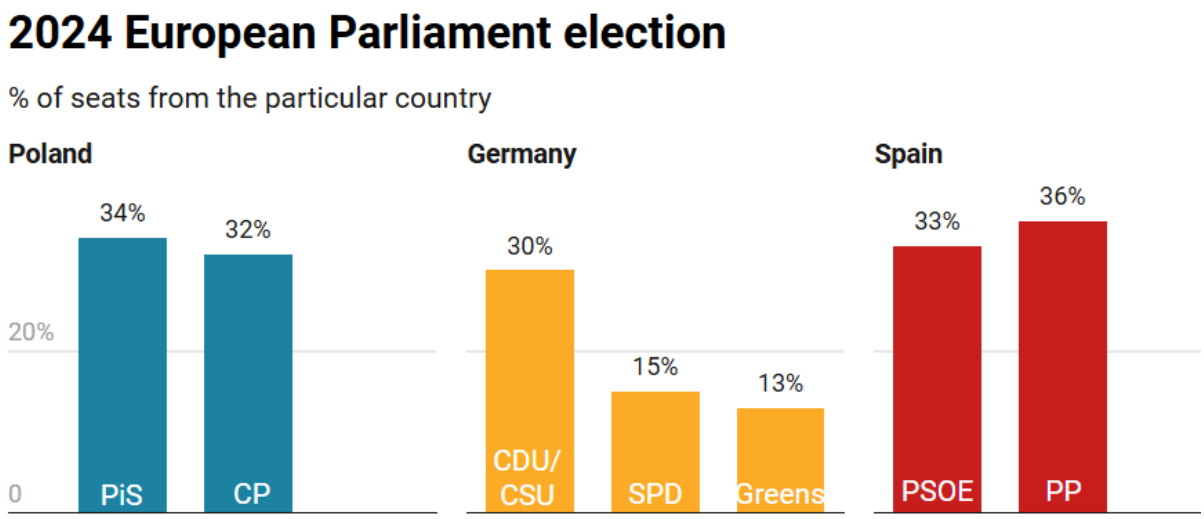
creation: own

4.3.2 2024 European Parliament elections

The first European Parliament elections after the breakout of the full-scale war in Ukraine took place in June 2024. In Poland, 53 seats were distributed as a result of the elections. PiS ran again as a part of the 'United Right' coalition. The coalition won 20 seats, of which PiS candidates held 18. The CP also ran in a coalition, and the party alone won 17 seats (Krajowe Biuro Wyborcze, 2024). In Germany, the CDU/CSU won the election and secured 29 of 96 seats. SPD received 14 seats, and the Greens received 12 seats (Bundeswahlleiterin, 2024). In Spain, PP won the election with 22 of 61 seats, followed by PSOE with 20 (Ministerio del Interior, 2024).

With respect to the total number of seats elected in each of the selected countries, the distribution was as follows:

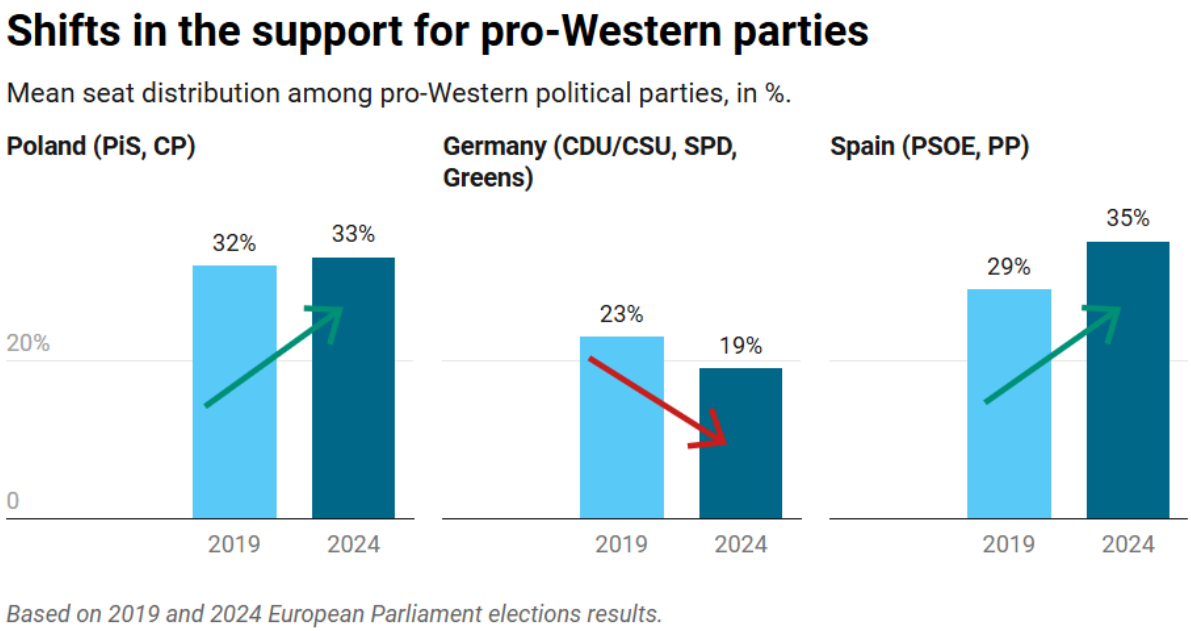
Figure 17: Distribution of seats in the 2024 European Parliament election



creation: own

Now that we know the seat distributions in both elections, we can examine the shifts in each country. For that reason, we calculated the average percentage share of seats held by pro-Western parties in each of the three countries. Figure 18 shows how the mean has changed between 2019 and 2024.

Figure 18: Shifts in the support for pro-Western parties



creation: own

In two of the three case-study countries, the support for pro-Western parties has increased. In the 2024 European Parliament election, Polish and Spanish pro-Western parties gained more seats than in 2019, while support for German pro-Western parties decreased. In Poland, the growing tendency of the researched pro-Western parties is even more remarkable since two other pro-Western parties, PL 2050 and The Left, emerged in the meantime between the two elections.

5. Discussion

The analytical part of the thesis first identified relevant pro-Western political subjects across the three case-study countries. In total, 9 of the 14 studied subjects were identified as pro-Western, suggesting that the majority of relevant political subjects in Europe are pro-Western. Also, the rate of pro-Western positions among the studied parties was higher in countries closer to the conflict.

From the identified pro-Western parties, posts on the platform X were extracted across two time periods. From the extracted posts, we searched for the most occurring words and discovered that a large portion of them were directly related to the conflict. This suggests that the topic of the war in Ukraine dominated the communication of these parties on X in both time periods. Furthermore, the selected parties extensively used language to counter-securitize the conflict during the first days of the invasion and again one month later at an extraordinary NATO summit. The parties became securitizing actors and named Putin's Russia as an existential threat to the referent object, the West, in front of the audience, the general public of the respective countries. Thereby, these parties aimed to legitimize the use of extraordinary means, in this case, extensive material support for Ukraine and an unprecedented amount of coordinated policies related to the conflict.

As expected, we discovered that the researched parties devoted a higher portion of their content on X to the topic of the war in Ukraine, the closer they were to the conflict. However, drawing on the identified securitization discourse patterns, we also found that pro-Western parties across all case-study countries applied these patterns in a similar portion of the discourse related to the conflict. Of the five identified discourse patterns, the majority did not correlate with relative distance to the conflict in frequency. This means that parties from countries closer to the conflict were more likely to address the conflict in their discourse, but when they did, they did not apply stronger securitization. Hence, Polish pro-Western parties published more

posts that involved a securitization discourse pattern than German and Spanish parties, but only because they generally published more posts related to the conflict.

This is a surprising finding, as we expected parties from countries closer to the conflict to apply stronger securitization. A possible explanation for this research outcome is that Putin's Russia is, following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, already a fully securitized object across European pro-Western political parties. This would explain why Polish parties devote more attention to the conflict, but at the same time, they exhibit similar levels of securitization discourse. If pro-Western parties across Europe already see Putin's Russia as an existential threat, a disruptor of the status quo, and a danger to European security, it makes Putin's Russia a fully securitized object by such securitizing actors. Another possible explanation is that an uneven level of securitization varies with distance to the conflict, but is visible only beyond the binary scale of securitization measurement. This means that different pro-Western parties may securitize Russia in a proportionally similar number of posts. However, the intensity of the securitizing language may still vary depending on its emotionality.

To demonstrate how the researched accounts apply securitization discourse patterns, we also presented sample posts from them. Since the posts were also extracted and transcribed with metrics attached, we looked at how successful they were compared to the average post. The randomly selected examples in each of the five identified discourse patterns averaged significantly more likes than the average post in the extracted data. This suggests that pro-Western parties successfully securitized the conflict in front of the audience, the general public in the respective countries.

The last part of the analysis, devoted to shifts in electoral support for the researched parties, shows that support increased in two of the three case study countries. In Poland and Spain, pro-Western parties achieved better results in the 2024 European Parliament election than in 2019. Therefore, the electoral gains partially correlate with the application of securitization language to the conflict, as pro-Western parties experienced electoral gains in the majority of the researched countries. At the same time, we acknowledge that this finding needs to be treated carefully, as the correlation was not observed across all three of the researched countries. Furthermore, linking election results to a particular political approach is tricky by definition, as many factors typically influence election results.

6. Potential limitations

As the research outcomes are presented, it is also essential to acknowledge the limitations of the research design. First and foremost, conducting a case study research inherently simplifies the analysis. The selection of Poland, Germany, and Spain as case study countries was chosen to make the analysis feasible. Researching all European countries that fit in the categories 'frontline', 'central', and 'distant' towards the conflict, would thus be extremely comprehensive. But choosing case studies, of course, presents a significant simplification. With a case study, we strive to replicate the same results as if the analysis was not limited to the small number of cases. However, it is not guaranteed that the sample's informative value will accurately translate into the full-scale picture.

Secondly, the methodology across all three analytical parts was carefully selected, but is also inherently subjective. The method for the first analytical part, which compares relevant political parties to determine which are pro-Western, was chosen after a thorough review of the existing literature on the characteristics of a pro-Western foreign political approach. However, the programs of these parties, which served as the input data for this part of the analysis, might have more closely reflected how they wanted to present themselves to the electorate than what they actually believed. Nevertheless, it was chosen as the best standardized data source for this part of the analysis.

The third part of the analysis, devoted to shifts in electoral results for the securitizing actors, poses the most significant limitations. First, not all of the relevant parties identified as pro-Western existed in 2019, and thus some were not subjects to this part of the analysis. Furthermore, as mentioned, this part of the analysis suggests a correlation between the use of a securitization discourse and electoral gains. However, this relationship was not observed across all the countries studied, and, more importantly, there is a wide range of factors that influence electoral results. Hence, this part of the analysis states whether a correlation exists, but does not imply any causality. For these reasons, the final analytical part is treated purely as a contextual analysis that complements the main body of analysis.

All of these potential limitations need to be acknowledged and taken into account when interpreting the research outcomes. At the same time, these potential limitations also offer space for further, more defined research that could help fill the gaps in this study. Particularly, this could be the case of linking securitization discourses with the election results of the

securitizing actors. A single research project devoted entirely to this linkage could yield interesting findings. Moreover, the securitization patterns, which were identified in this analysis, could serve as a source for future research. This could shed more light on why the researched accounts, according to the findings of this study, securitized the conflict at a similar proportional level.

Conclusion

In this research, we tested the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School on the case of the war in Ukraine. We examined differences in the use of securitizing moves across European countries by physical proximity to the conflict. Thus, we studied and compared the discourse of pro-Western political parties from Poland, Germany, and Spain. Our central assumption was that parties from countries closer to the conflict apply a stronger securitization discourse to Putin's Russia.

To test this hypothesis, we analyzed the programs of relevant political parties in the selected case-study countries and identified which ones can be considered pro-Western. To answer the first research sub-question, this list comprises the Polish political parties and coalitions PiS, Civic Coalition, Third Way, and The Left, as well as CDU/CSU, SPD, and the Greens from Germany, and PSOE and PP from Spain. We extracted the social media communication of these parties on X from periods when the frequency of conflict-related discourse was expected to be high.

We discovered that the topic of the conflict dominated the communication of pro-Western parties, and that these parties extensively applied securitizing language to counter-securitize the conflict and to portray Putin's Russia as an existential threat to the referent object, the West. They do so from a position of securitizing actors, in front of the audience, the general public of the respective country. The key finding, however, and an answer to the second research sub-question, is that the closer the pro-Western parties are to the conflict, the more attention they devote to it, but interestingly, they exhibit similar proportional levels of securitization discourse across all case-study countries. Last but not least, we found that the use of securitization discourse towards Putin's Russia partially correlates with gains in electoral support, but does not reveal a strong pattern.

Summary

This diploma thesis has studied the discourse of European pro-Western political parties regarding the conflict in Ukraine. The main finding of the research is that although parties from countries closer to Ukraine are more likely to address the conflict in their discourse, they apply a proportionally similar level of securitization discourse as parties from distant countries.

Tato diplomová práce zkoumala diskurz evropských prozápadních politických stran ve vztahu ke konfliktu na Ukrajině. Hlavním zjištěním výzkumu je, že politické strany států, které jsou blíže Ukrajině, se věnují konfliktu ve svém diskurzu častěji, avšak aplikují sekuritizační diskurz poměrově v podobném měřítku jako vzdálenější státy.

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