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**Information Warfare and the Politics of
Threats:**

**An analysis of Russian Information Warfare on
Germany and its Perception by German politicians**

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Abstract

The master thesis analyses the perception of Information Warfare and Russia among German politicians. By using the Qualitative Content Analysis by Schreier, speeches given in the German Bundestag relating to Information Warfare, and Russia were analyzed from January 2015 until December 2018. Using International Relations (IR) theories and political psychological approaches, a theoretical framework was developed in order to determine factors which have an impact on the perception of politicians. The thesis divides this perception into three categories – friend, partner, and threat. Each category is analyzed in depth resulting in support for two of the four hypotheses. The thesis demonstrates that it is not only the political orientation, but also economic interests which determine if a state and its warfare tactics are perceived as a danger. Moreover, the deductive part of the analysis reveals that Russia's behavior which can be perceived as aggressive, irrational, and power-seeking, also determines whether the regime is perceived as threatening. Information Warfare per se is no issue of concern in the Bundestag. However, information warfare tactics such as disinformation campaigns, the spread of fake news and propaganda, and Russia's meddling in western politics are perceived as a danger to Germany's domestic stability.

Keywords

Information Warfare, disinformation, Russia, threat perception, qualitative content analysis, Germany

Range of thesis: 27.561 words, 68 pages

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that she compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, July 30, 2020



Angela Mehrer

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1 Introduction

“The threat situation has grown, and new threats have emerged. [...] We experience cyber-attacks on German government networks every day, against which we have to defend ourselves. We are facing the situation [...] that we have underestimated the threat posed by Russia, which for the first time used military force again after the Second World War. We have to react to that.”
(Wadephul, 2018, p. 4754)

In times of rapidly advancing technologies and digitalization, new warfare tactics and weapons emerge continuously. Interstate attacks are not limited to conventional tactics, but they encompass new forms, such as attacks through cyberspace and the support of information space.

Information Warfare is not a new concept or war tactic. The Soviet Union, for example, used tactics such as propaganda and offensive disinformation to destabilize their opponents during the Cold War (White, 2016). However, with the invention of the internet and an increasingly interconnected world, Information Warfare as tactic of war implicates new challenges. States employing tactics of Information Warfare interfere in the domestic politics of foreign states through the spread of fake news, misinformation, and propaganda in order to erode public support, spread confusion, and destroy trust in the media and politics in that country (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016). For a long time, the danger posed by foreign influence through propaganda and disinformation was not recognized in international politics.

European states have now identified the risk of new forms of warfare, such as Hybrid and Information Warfare. For instance, in 2017, the Czech Republic founded the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats to fight threats evolving from radicalization and disinformation campaigns. These are perceived as severe internal security threats (MVCR, 2020). On the other hand, Germany, as a leading state in the European Union, has not yet taken any ambitious steps to create new institutions to counter Hybrid or Information Warfare. The country so far has undertaken minor adaptations, for example establishing fact-checking initiatives such as *faktenfinder-tagesschau.de* or *corrective.org* as well as introducing laws against online hate speech and fake news, such as the Network Enforcement Act, which are implemented to fight disinformation (Fried & Polyakova, 2018). Awareness of the issue among politicians and the public as well as media coverage are rising. The main challenge in finding a common approach to counter disinformation is an immensely polarized political opinion with

regards to the urgency of countering information attacks and disinformation campaigns. Some perceive hybrid warfare and especially Information Warfare as a pressing issue, whereas others neglect the importance of finding a common approach to counter disinformation.

A similar polarization or division can be observed among German politicians when it comes to the perception of Russia in Germany. Attitudes against Russia are divided between the so-called *Russlandkritiker* ('Russia-understanders') and *Russlandversther* ('Russia-critics') (Siddi, 2018a; Wood, 2020). Since Information Warfare is usually associated with Russia, it is possible that Information Warfare is not perceived as threatening by Russia-understanders, whereas Russia-critics see Information Warfare as a more urgent issue. Russia's aggressive behavior in the past decade resulted in an increased threat perception among scholars and policymakers alike. Neighboring states and the Baltics in particular seem to perceive Russia as a threat. Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia and Russian involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Germany has been faced with the dilemma to find a peaceful solution as one of the principal negotiators of the conflict and while also acting in the economic interests of German entrepreneurs at the same time. Since Germany does not seem to follow a clear line and oftentimes puts its own economic interests above the security perception of other EU member states, Germany's role as an independent mediator has been questioned due to its ambiguous policy regarding Russia (Seibel, 2015).

Before the start of the conflict, Germany was Russia's primary point of contact in the West (Wood, 2020). The annexation of Crimea and Russia's ongoing support for the separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine has weighed on the relationship between the two states. The poisoning of Sergei Skripal in London in 2018 and Russia's involvement in the American presidential election in 2016 further intensified criticism in Germany towards Russia (Wehner, 2017).

Germany is notably vulnerable against Russian Information Warfare tactics. Awareness about Information Warfare directed against Germany rose after the hacker attack on the *Bundestag* in 2015 and the alleged rape of the German-Russian girl Lisa in 2016 (Pörzgen, 2017). In both incidents, suspicions of Russian involvement have emerged. Following these instances, the West has become increasingly aware of Russian interference in the domestic politics of their countries (Wehner, 2017). However, as long as German federal authorities are not taking Russia and Information Warfare as a severe threat, they will not consider taking offensive actions against the issue or Russia itself. Traditionally, states perceive a new, unknown warfare tactic such as Information Warfare as a threat to its security due to the lack of experience in handling such threats (Friedman & Singer, 2014). At the same time, one would

think that breaking international law in Ukraine and starting a war on European ground would be perceived as a threat and lead to decisive action. Still, academic debate on the subject matter seems to suggest that neither Information Warfare nor Russia are perceived as a threat consistently throughout the German political landscape. The question is if both issues - Information Warfare and Russian aggression - are not real threats to Germany or if one issue mitigates the perception of the other and vice versa. Hence, the underlying research questions of this thesis are:

RQ1: What factors lead to the perception of Information Warfare as a threat?

RQ2: What factors lead to the perception of Russia as a threat?

When answering RQ2, factors which contribute to a country being perceived not as an enemy but as a friend become of interest. Therefore, this aspect is also examined in the present work.

According to these research questions, the main objective of the thesis is to investigate factors which influence individuals' perceptions. The aim is to improve the understanding of the current threat perceptions and enemy images of Russia and Information Warfare among German politicians. Of interest are specific factors underlying the perception and construction of threats, which can explain the causes of divergent perceptions of Russia.

Different people might perceive different issues or states as threatening, while others perceive the same issue as not dangerous at all. How individuals perceive someone, or something, might be connected to their personal experiences, which is why personal relationship towards Russia will be considered. The present study aims to determine a number of factors which might influence people's views and increase or decrease their threat perception. Since research has demonstrated that politicians shape the public opinion of states and policy issues in their country, possible answers might be found in speeches German politicians give regarding the topics Information Warfare and Russia.

Finding an answer to the research questions is relevant on various dimensions. An analysis of the perception of Russia in Germany is up-to-date, considering that the Normandy Contact Group resumed their talks in December 2019 in Paris (Irish et al., 2019). While some politicians argue that Russia threatens security in Europe (Kiesewetter, 2015; Obermeier, 2016), others claim Russia is a key actor in achieving more security (Grund, 2015; Merkel, 2016). In times of insecurity, Germany should position itself clearly and avoid having fluctuating and contracting attitudes towards Russia, even among the leaders of the country. Understanding the relationship between the two states today will help understand future

possibilities with regards to more cooperation and Germany's reliance on being a crisis manager. Further, the awareness of Information Warfare as a threat increases continuously. The concern about Russian disturbance of the German federal elections in 2017 through the spread of fake news and the use of disinformation campaigns illustrates the extent to which many German politicians fear Information Warfare (Müller & Banse, 2017; Pörzgen, 2017).

In addition, the issue of threat perception has not been researched much in the sense that some individuals perceive an issue as threatening, and others do not. Existing literature focuses on the securitization of issues rather than the motives politicians have to construct an issue or a state as a threat or not. The present thesis aims to fill this gap by developing a theoretical approach based on assumptions of respective international relations theories and political psychology approaches.

Having highlighted the scope of this research, this thesis will proceed by giving an overview on Information Warfare and German-Russian relations. First, definitions of essential terms in this thesis are given. Background information on Russian aggression and Information Warfare against Germany helps to comprehend the extent of the issue in Germany. Relevant existing literature is reviewed to build an appropriate theoretical basis for developing hypotheses and evaluating the research questions. Subsequently, the methodology employed in this thesis is presented and discussed. A qualitative content analysis of *Bundestag* speeches is conducted for the time period 2015-2018, which is when most attacks related to Information Warfare and Russia happened against Germany, in order to test the theoretical expectations and answer the research questions. Thus, it is examined whether the framing of Information Warfare tactics and Russia changed from January 2015 until December 2018. In Chapter 5, the findings of the analysis are presented and discussed in light of the hypotheses, followed by the last chapter, which highlights the key points made in this thesis and concludes with potential avenues for further research.

2 Information Warfare and German-Russian Relations

This chapter gives an overview of the current academic literature on Information Warfare, threat perception, and German-Russian relations to highlight possible areas of contribution for this thesis. Before turning to the examination of the relevant previous research, definitions of frequently used terms, such as Information Warfare and threat perception are discussed. Further, some background information on information attacks in Germany as well as the development of German-Russian relations will be given.

2.1 General Definitions

In the area of Information Wars, different definitions of what an Information War (IW) constitutes exist. The European Union defines IW as:

“the offensive and defensive use of information and information systems to deny, exploit, corrupt or destroy an adversary’s information, information-based processes, information systems, and computer-based networks while protecting one’s own.”
(EuroVoc, 2020)

Germany, on the other side, has no official definition of IW. This might be due to the lack of consistency when it comes to the perception of Information Warfare. Other types of warfare and security threats are observed as more pressing. For instance, in the White Book 2016, the focus lies clearly on the early detection of conflicts, hybrid warfare, and cybersecurity (BMVG, 2016). Information Warfare often seems to be perceived as a part of Cyber Warfare in Germany.

Disinformation campaigns in Germany and the West are often automatically linked to Russia or China. However, in this research, it is essential to mention that Russia defines Information Wars differently than the West. Russia officially views IW as an “information-psychological” war (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 5).

“Information War is the confrontation between two or more states in the information space with the purpose of inflicting damage to information systems, processes and resources, critical and other structures, undermining the political, economic and social systems, a massive psychological manipulation of the population to destabilize the state and society, as well as coercion of the state to take for the benefit of the opposing force.”
(Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2020)

Both definitions share the assumption that the information system of another state is attacked in Information Warfare. Manipulation of the public is not mentioned in the definition employed by the EU, while the destabilizing effect which psychological manipulation has on society is central in the Russian definition. For the Kremlin, IW is fought in the “realms of perception” to disorganize and demoralize an opponent (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016). The

overall goal of a state that conducts an Information War is changing the perception of the public and politicians in its favor.

Further, perceptions are of great importance in the realm of politics since they determine what is labeled as a threat and what is not. This is due to the fact that threats are constructed socially “within and among private and public conversations of experts, political leaders, and publics” (Meyer, 2009). In the context of determining whether something is a security issue on the policy level, a consensus has emerged that something is considered a security issue if people perceive an issue as a threat and respond politically. It thus seems to be less important whether they are private individuals or government representatives (Hough, 2013).

When defining threats, a separation is drawn between verbal and physical threats. Verbal threats are usually statements that menace the use of force if the other does not act desirably. These statements signal that the capacity of inflicting harm is available. When expressing non-verbal threats, politicians can use diplomatic measures like the withdrawal of diplomats, the accumulation of military weapons, or moving forces to a critical point like borders, for instance (Stein, 2013). Finally, for the purpose of this thesis, threat perception is defined as “a deep sense of vulnerability that is assumed to be negative, likely to result in loss, and largely out of one’s control” (Gilbert, 2005, p. 742).

2.2 Background: The Threat of Russian Information Warfare in Germany

Politicians and the public in Germany and the EU have long failed to recognize Moscow’s influence through propaganda and disinformation, as well as the danger posed by hacking attacks of Russian origin. Only the hacker attack on the *Bundestag*, the “Lisa case,” and the hacker affair in the American election campaign led to the realization that Moscow is intervening massively in the domestic politics of Western countries. Another case which worsened the relationship between Russia and Western states was the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter. In times of deep estrangement between Russia and the West, as a result of the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Eastern Ukraine, the Kremlin relies on confrontation (Wehner, 2017).

Before 2014, Germany and Russia had strong political, economic, and diplomatic ties, which is why “Germany did not feel threatened by Russia in military terms” (Daehnhardt & Handl, 2018, p. 447). Today, relations suffer from a general distrust among German politicians towards Russia, which makes cooperation difficult. The support of the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union marks a withdrawal from the policy of *Ostpolitik*, which

emphasized the benefits of cooperation with Russia in contrast to confrontation (Forsberg, 2016). At the same time, this policy change led to a new perception of Germany in Russia, which might have put Germany on the “hit list” of Russia’s Information Warfare against the West. Russia uses IW instruments to interfere into German politics and rattle the German society (Pörzgen, 2017).

Information attacks are most successful when the target is caught off guard (Kim, 2016). This is particularly the case if the target is distracted, for example by a crisis. This was the case during the migration crisis in 2015 in Germany. Moscow used this time for a hacker attack on the *Bundestag* and the spread of disinformation. In 2015 and 2016, Russian hackers launched cyberattacks against the *Bundestag* and individual politicians. It took the German counterintelligence agency almost one year to conclude that Russia was most likely responsible for the attack (BBC, 2016).

The event which significantly altered German-Russian relations and can be considered as a “full-on propaganda attack” (Kim, 2016) is the “Lisa Case.” At the beginning of 2016, after false reports from Russian state media about the alleged rape of a 13-year-old German-Russian girl by refugees in Berlin, protests by thousands of German-Russians took place in several German cities. The suspicion that Russia was deliberately using disinformation emerged when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov publicly accused the German authorities of trying to cover up the case. Even after the German judiciary announced that the girl’s rape was made up, Lavrov still supported “our Lisa” on TV and accused the German police of not protecting the girl sufficiently. Since then, misinformation campaigns are perceived as tactics Russia could potentially use to spread mistrust in the German public (Pörzgen, 2017; Wehner, 2017).

The fact that there was no interference in the German elections in 2017 by means of another hacker attack came as a surprise. Most politicians reckoned Russia would try to influence the election results (Müller & Banse, 2017; Schwirtz, 2017). Even though there was no hacker attack, it is still evident that Russia has attempted to influence the outcome of the election. For instance, Merkel’s political proceedings were criticized frequently by Russian media outlets, conspiracy theories were promoted, and RT Deutsch provided populist parties with a platform to spread their opinions and attitudes. However, the entering of the right-wing party AfD as the third largest fraction in the *Bundestag* in 2017 is considered to be a result of German domestic politics, not so much of Russian propaganda and interference (Pörzgen, 2017).

The incident which significantly worsened German-Russian relations was the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in London with a neurotoxin in 2018. Consequently, Germany expelled Russian diplomats, demonstrating that these devious proceedings and the break of international laws are not tolerated (Federal Foreign Office, 2018).

The tactics of Russian intelligence services used in Germany are considered to be the spread of propaganda and disinformation, and meddling in German domestic politics to “influence political and public opinion in Germany” (BMI, 2019, p. 38). Russia does this by spreading fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda through Russian media outlets and social media. The German intelligence service points out that one of the main intentions is to weaken Germany’s position, for instance, on the EU sanctions imposed on Russia. Besides these tactics, Germany sees a severe threat in cyber espionage and sabotage (BBC, 2016). Cyber-espionage would be “a major threat to German security and a constant challenge to counterintelligence” (BMI, 2019, p. 39). Even though the German intelligence agencies underline that the German counter efforts do not target a specific country, the role of Russia is pointed out whilst China, Iran, and Turkey are also mentioned, because these are “currently the main countries engaged in espionage activities focused on Germany” (BMI, 2019, p. 37). Due to the cooled down relations between Russia and Germany, it is assumed that Moscow has increased its espionage activities through cyberspace against Germany.

In April 2017, the new cyber command by the German army – *Bundeswehr* – launched, which constitutes a first step in the direction of countering cyberattacks. After the significant negative impact of the “Lisa Case” on bilateral relations, Germany realized that preparedness and simple countermeasures are competent enough to repel Russian interference in elections (Baumann, 2018). Another measure is directed against the spread of fake news and disinformation is the Network Enforcement Act of 2017, which makes social media sites responsible to remove hate speech, fake news, and illegal material from their platforms (Oltermann, 2018). These measures demonstrate the increasing importance the German government is assigning to the new challenges within cyber and information space.

However, IW tactics do not seem to be very successful in Germany. One factor explaining this is the fact that most Germans still tend to trust mainstream print and TV media more than online platforms and news on social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook (Schwartz, 2017). For instance, RT Deutsch and Sputnik are not as successful in Germany as in other Western states. They mainly reach people of their niche who already believe the

disinformation and propaganda by Russia. Also, RT Deutsch used to struggle to recruit prominent journalists for interviews and TV shows. However, this changed during the 2017 election campaign when the far-right and far-left parties gained more public attention in Germany, and the Russian media started presenting their views in their program more often. Although these media outlets reach an audience outside their old niche now, RT Deutsch and Sputnik are still not very popular (Pörzgen, 2017). However, German politicians are taking the problem of propaganda attacks more seriously, as exemplified by the measures discussed above.

2.3 Literature Review

The following sections deliver an overview of the academic literature on Information Warfare, threat perception, and German-Russian relations in recent years and their added value for this research.

2.3.1 *Russian Information Warfare*

The spread of disinformation is not a new strategy; indeed, the concept can be traced back to Soviet roots, but it has received increasing attention in the last decade due to the current accusations against Russia of spreading disinformation to discredit the West and promote its world views. A large body of research deals with how Russia uses the once Soviet tactic of disinformation today (S. Abrams, 2016; Galeotti, 2016; Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016; White, 2016). According to these researchers, methods of Information Warfare, which are closely connected to hybrid warfare, are not new. The only factor that changed is the multi-dimensional context of IW today. Disinformation and propaganda are not only used in their own state anymore, but states also apply these tactics internationally now, influencing people's perception of their own and foreign states.

Apart from the literature focusing on the change in the use of IW, there is a broad range of research which examines the tactics states such as Russia use in Information Wars and scrutinize the goals these states supposedly follow (Baumann, 2018; Boksa, 2019; Richey, 2018; Wehner, 2017). Today, disinformation is mostly used to discredit the West, mainly the United States and the European Union. Wehner (2017) claims disinformation and propaganda tactics can be seen as part of a war that Russia is waging against Western democracies. In particular, he examines the tactics the Kremlin uses in its Information War. He examines Russian media and their work abroad and the efficiency of troll factories. Russia is investing a substantial amount of resources in its disinformation campaigns. Troll factories are operated,

in which employees spread targeted opinion-making on the Internet in the West. Moscow maintains the international television broadcaster RT and the media network Sputnik, which operate websites and internet portals in more than 30 languages. Both media outlets are known for their systematic distribution of fake news. The procedures are financed through an annual budget of around 340 million euros (Boksa, 2019; Wehner, 2017).

While troll factories have become less relevant today, bots generating semi or fully automated comments and messages are becoming more prevalent. Overall, bots play an increasingly important role in influencing Western states (Hegelich, 2016). It has become clear how important propaganda and disinformation campaigns have become for Moscow, especially after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's covert participation in the war in eastern Ukraine. Through disinformation, the Kremlin aimed to mask its aggression, making Ukraine solely responsible for the conflict, and presenting its combat troops as "humanitarian convoys" (M. R. Gordon, 2014). Researchers stress that Russia's Information War is not only a means to manipulate Western societies but also a tactic to influence its own people (Baumann, 2018). Richey (2018), for example, shows that Russia's disinformation tactics are more sophisticated today and work on different international and domestic levels. He sees Russia's motivation to manipulate the target state in its desire to dominate the perception of its actions. The main goal is that the target group believes Russia's information more than the reports of their government. Overall, Richey repeatedly emphasizes that Russian disinformation and propaganda are used primarily in the context of hybrid warfare, which is why he mainly focuses on Information Wars in Ukraine and Syria. Researching the tactics of IW, some researchers are continually devoting themselves to the so-called "4 Ds" – dismiss/deny, distort, distract, dismay – of disinformation campaigns. The Kremlin uses these tactics, especially in Ukraine and Syria, which is another reason most researchers study these regions in particular but with a focus on the use of the four Ds (Nimmo, 2015; Richey, 2018; White, 2016).

Boksa (2019) explains this phenomenon. According to him, some societies are more vulnerable to Russian IW than others. Usually, states with a weak civil society, media, and political structures are more vulnerable to manipulation from the outside because they have a low resilience against foreign disinformation campaigns. Moreover, ethnolinguistic, regional, and historical realities play a role as well. Societies with more platforms would be more vulnerable to disinformation tactics because different narratives can be applied there easily. Boksa (2019, p. 2) sees Russian Information Warfare as "a system of cascading narratives." However, manipulating the perception of people domestically and internationally is not the

only goal of this strategy. Heickerö (2013) points out that IW is also used in diplomatic talks to pressure other states.

Further, academic literature also touches on policy ideas to counter Russian disinformation campaigns and Russian interference in national affairs (Fried & Polyakova, 2018; Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016; McGeehan, 2018; Nopens, 2014; Richey, 2018). Throughout 2015 and 2016, IW research received considerable attention, which led to the foundation of numerous initiatives and projects to counter IW (Boksa, 2019). The emergence of these initiatives shows at the same time how the notion of Russia's capabilities with regards to disinformation strengthened during this time. Some research focuses on the division of cyber and information threats. Findings show that it is almost impossible to separate cyber-attacks from other elements of Information Warfare since the two are usually intertwined (Libicki, 2017). Not much research has been devoted to the question whether the danger posed by Russia is underestimated or perceived in an exaggerated way (Wehner, 2017). However, the several factors which influence the perception of Russia and the threat of information warfare on behalf of politicians and other stakeholders have so far been neglected in academic research. One important observation was made by Richey (2018), who notes that the danger disinformation poses is not so much due to the creation of false information, but instead that it sows doubts in politics and society and leads to political facts being questioned. Hence, Information Warfare can change people's perceptions of reality.

2.3.2 Threat Perception in Politics and Information Space

Some researchers of IW have mentioned the importance of disinformation campaigns and how these can manipulate people's perceptions of reality. Friedman and Singer (2014) discovered that regimes often perceive new, unknown technologies and those behind them as threatening. The downplaying of threat images has received far less attention than studies of their rise to prominence. However, literature which focuses specifically on threat perception is limited. Usually, researchers focus on threat perception in decision-making or threat perception and certain actors such as terrorists (i.e., Friedland & Merari, 1985).

In security studies, a research gap exists with regards to the relationship between threats and security. Only few researchers so far have attempted to study why specific issues are constructed as threats to national security and others are not. Eriksson and Noreen (2002), contributing to the nascent literature on threat perception, claim that something must be verbalized before being perceived as threatening. If a state is perceived or constructed as a threat, this is an impacting factor that influences the security policy towards that state and

interstate relations. Hence, threat construction affects state interactions and relations (de Buitrago, 2016). Decisions made in this context are usually dominated by emotions rather than logic or rational concerns (C. Gordon & Asher, 2001).

Additionally, it is distinguished between the subject and object of the threat image. How people form threat images is influenced by cognitive factors (Eriksson & Noreen, 2002). Threat perception is essential in decision-making since threats allow making serious decisions way faster and with greater force compared to decision-making processes during “usual” times (Eriksson, 2000; Kingdon, 1995). Desecuritizing an issue, on the other hand, is a tactic used to reduce the amount of attention paid to it and prevent the implementation of extraordinary measures. Overall, threat politics can facilitate or hinder the inclusion of a topic on the political agenda (Eriksson, 2000). Other researchers realize a causal link between societal threats and authoritarianism. They see threats as causes of authoritarian behavior (McCann, 1997; Sales, 1973).

A particularly interesting research area is the interplay between new technologies in cyberspace and threat perceptions. Only few researchers have investigated threat politics and perception in the information age so far (Bendrath et al., 2007; Eriksson, 2001; Gartzke, 2013). Some of them argue that cyberwar is a substantial, pending threat. For instance, Gartzke (2013) points out that the cyberspace can indeed be perceived as a threat when the possible targets believe that an attack is likely to occur and that it will inflict unacceptable harm. Hence, cyberwar can influence politics.

According to Eriksson (2001), the inclusion of IT issues on the political agenda can be traced back to the end of the Cold War. A window of opportunity opened to extend the understanding of security to encompass more issues than just nuclear threats and conventional wars. In addition to other new threats, such as economic, environmental, and social problems, IT threats have now also been securitized. The breakthrough in the information space brought with it doubts and uncertainty. Information Wars can be assigned to the realm of the military. This also explains why the military portrayed IW as a new source of danger. The military has shown how quickly it can adapt to new hazard scenarios. In addition, there was no apparent opposition that would have rejected the securitization of the information space. Overall, developments in IT make it clear that the world is continuously evolving, and fears and perceptions of threats usually accompany this unknown development.

Overall, research which focuses on threat perception in Germany in particular is still scarce. Researchers usually examine threat perception in Germany in the context of the

migration crisis 2015 rather than exploring the perception of IW or Russia. However, some researchers have touched on the issue. For instance, Graf (2020) examines Russia's perception within the German public and how the perception of a threat like Russia led to more support for the creation of a common European army. Yet, he does not take threats like cyber and disinformation into account. The perception of Russia in Germany belongs to another research field. The academic literature on German-Russian relations is assessed in the following part.

2.3.3 German-Russian Relations

Apart from factors which shape the perception of Information Warfare and threat perception in general, the relationships between states are likely shaped by other elements, which have to be taken into consideration in this analysis as well.

Interest in research in the field of German-Russian relations increased notably after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and Germany's participation in the peace negotiations in the course of the Normandy Contact Group. Interest in this area rose even more than in the area of Information Wars. Most researchers focus on the development of German-Russian relations since 2014 and the domestic discourse on finding a common approach on the relationship with Russia among German politicians (Jacobs, 2019; Koszel, 2018; Seibel, 2015; Wood, 2020). Some have concentrated principally on the evolution of the Ostpolitik (Daehnhardt & Handl, 2018; Forsberg, 2016; Jacobs, 2019).

Recently, two main theoretical approaches to Germany's role in the Ukraine conflict have emerged. While the realist school assumes that Germany acts consistent with its economic interests, liberal approaches perceive Germany as a state with a norm-based nature acting as a normative power (Daehnhardt & Handl, 2018).

It is evident to Seibel (2015) that Germany follows an ambiguous policy when it comes to Russia. In his research, he analyzes the emergence of German diplomacy after 2014. On the one hand, Germany supports economic sanctions towards Russia. On the other hand, Germany advocates the Nord Stream 2 project, which counteracts Ukraine's interest. He argues that this ambiguity is based on the fact that, despite the sanctions, Russia remains the most significant energy provider for Germany in terms of gas and oil. However, in other fields, trade with Russia has decreased significantly (Destatis, 2020).

Much of the research, similar to Seibel's (2015) work, revolves around the phenomenon of so-called "Russia-understanders" and "Russia-critics" in Germany (Forsberg, 2016; Seibel, 2015; Siddi, 2018a; Wood, 2020; Zellner, 2017). Researchers agree that because

of Russia's aggressive behavior, the differences of opinion regarding Russia between "Russia-understanders" and "Russia-critics" intensified in the last years. "Russia-understanders" are people who "feel sympathy towards Russian policies," although this is not necessarily related to personal interests (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2018). They can mainly be found among the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party, the AfD, and the Christian Social Union. "Russia-critics," on the other hand, are mostly party members of the Green and the Christian Democratic parties (Siddi, 2018a).

Zellner's essay (2017) gives an initial impression of the perception of Russian-Western relations in Germany. The objective that is shared in the scientific literature is that security in Europe can only be achieved together with Russia rather than acting against Russia. However, the debate about how to deal with Russia is still far from settled.

Recently, Steve Wood (2020) analyzed why 'understanding' for Russian activities exists in Germany and is, in fact, increasing. In his research, he came up with five factors that promote the rising sympathy of individuals and groups towards the Russian government. Besides the fragmentation of the German political system after the elections in 2017 and the historical responsibility of Germany, he considers the current dissatisfaction with national and EU policies, Trump's America first policy, and the process of intra-civilizational alienation as factors (Wood, 2020). Russia exploits these causes and uses them for its own aims. Szabo (2018) and Kundnani (2015) still see business relations as the real determinants of the German-Russian relations, which were neglected by Wood completely. So far, no research has summarized and empirically tested the most promising approaches.

This overview of the existing research has demonstrated that only a handful of empirical studies have so far explored the determinants of threat perception on Information Warfare and Russian aggressive behavior. Further, most research focuses on the public's threat perception rather than politician's perception. The present thesis addresses these shortcomings by providing an analysis which aims to take all these findings into account and further develops the approaches by building a broad theoretical foundation.

3 Theoretical Framework: Perceiving Threats

The theoretical framework developed in this thesis applies to the perception and construction of threats. Threat perception has played a central role among international relations (IR) scholars for a long time, especially regarding "theories of war, deterrence and compellence, alliances, and conflict resolution" (Stein, 2013, p. 364). Not only IR scholars have addressed

threats in the international system. In previous threat perception research, international relations and psychological schools merged, paying attention to the discrepancy between what leaders perceive as a threat and what the evidence illustrates to be threatening (Jervis, 2017; Stein, 2013). Thus, using a psychological perspective on threat perception as an addition to IR theories might be a helpful approach in this research.

In the following sections, IR and psychological theories and their approaches to threat perception will be presented. Subsequently, modifications to the frameworks will be made which allow answering the questions of how and why specific issues and actors are perceived as vital by politicians while others are not. Finally, the guiding hypotheses for the analysis will be derived.

3.1 Threat Perception in International Relations

The sense of threats has long dominated research on war and conflict within international relations. The two dominating schools of thought are realism and liberalism. Both assume that threat perception is a central point of interest in IR. However, they disagree regarding the factors which determine that a state is perceived as a threat. The realist school assumes material factors, like the balance of power, influence the threat perception of states. Thereby, threats are usually put on a level with power, especially with military power. Hence, they are often assumed to be equivalent and are measured utilizing the power a state has (Glaser, 2013).

On the other hand, liberal theorists believe ideational factors like shared democratic values determine the perception of threat. States with a different value system are more likely to be perceived as a threat than liberal states (Rousseau, 2006). The realist school's response to threats in the international system is based on the balance of power. States try to achieve survival in the anarchic international system by either classical balancing or bandwagoning (Mearsheimer, 2010). Liberalism is based on the assumption that threats can be contained through negotiations, agreements, and supranational cooperation between liberal states (Moravcsik, 1997).

Stephen Walt is one of the first scholars who pays attention to the role intention plays as a source of threat. According to him, this means "states that appear aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them" (Walt, 1985, p. 12). He modified the balance of power theory to the concept of the balance of threat in the neorealist school of international relations by separating power from threats. One of his assumptions is that the balance of threats rather than the balance of power has an impact on state behavior. Moreover, threats are perceived as independent from military capabilities. Politicians can perceive ideology as an essential factor

when choosing their international partners. States with a similar ideology are likely viewed as potential friends, while different states might be seen as potential enemies. Because of the unreliability of perceptions and intentions, balancing is more common than bandwagoning. Balancing against a potential threat is safer than relying on the benevolence of a steady state. Hence, Walt focuses mostly on the role perceptions play in the choice of states to join alliances with other states because “intentions, not power, are crucial” (Walt, 1985, p. 13).

The threat perception of decision-makers is influenced not only by the behavior of other states but also by the state’s identity and its leaders. Classical realism claims that people attack each other for gain due to their greedy, insecure, and aggressive characters. Conflicts evolve because of the individual’s lust to possess power and selfishness (Brown, 2009). Like Hans Morgenthau, classical realists affirm that the cause of political conflict is the human nature of diplomats and statesmen (Morgenthau et al., 1985). This classical realist assumption goes in line with Kenneth Waltz’s perception of the individual level in the three categories he developed to categorize theories of causes of war (individuals, states, and the international system). Here only the first image is of interest; it argues that political leaders are often the cause of the outbreak of wars. The perception of individuals guides the political behavior of leaders and, therefore, the behavior of states (Ray, 2001). The world view of individual leaders shapes the policy states follow domestically and internationally (Waltz, 2001). Identity plays an essential role in liberalism as well because liberalists suppose illiberal states behave differently from economic and political liberal states. Within the classical liberal school, threats are seen as a “function of identities rather than power” (Rousseau, 2006, p. 3).

While realists and liberalists discuss relations among states and state leaders’ identity, they assume material foundations determine the world. In the 1990s, social constructivism emerged in the confrontation with the liberal and realist school of thought. Social constructivism moves from states as the central unit of analysis to individuals and especially elites as the main actors (Walt, 1998). Constructivist theories deal with how and whether something is discussed in politics focusing on the meanings of ideas, such as language, signs, social practice, and interpretation in the world. Thus, the world is understood to be static in the short term because meanings change only slowly (Agius, 2013).

Additionally, constructivism directs attention to the nature of the threats themselves. Due to a widened understanding of security, issues like cyber and information threats are taken seriously by the constructivist school, whereas they are not considered as real threats to states by realism and liberalism (Hough, 2013). Wendt (1992) points out that constructivists mostly

develop theories that aim to explain identities and interests. Thus, the perspective of social constructivist approaches, where ideas and perceptions are viewed as central concepts that influence actors' behavior and strategic interests, is applicable in this thesis. According to this perspective, individuals, groups, and other actors construct the meaning of the material and social environment of the past, present, and future through communication (Fierke, 2001). Thereby social constructivists reject the assumption that the meaning of things is something that people find prepared in the world and pass on as objective information. For example, nuclear weapons per se do not have an objective meaning that is perceived by all actors equally. It is the subjective perception that is constructed by the different actors that create different meanings of nuclear weapons and acts as an obstacle to finding common rules for their use. Nuclear weapons can sometimes be a guarantor of peace or can themselves be a problem for peace and security. Actors act based on the importance they attach to objects and other actors (Wendt, 1992). According to Ted Hopf (2002), a leading figure in constructivism, international and domestic identity constructions are determinants of states' interests and security policies.

From an intersubjective perspective, threats are constructed through discourse. The Copenhagen School, a prominent constructivist approach to security, developed this approach by conceptualizing security as an intersubjective construct based on discursive acts of constitutive nature that are applied to the analysis of political rhetoric and communications. Securitization is an element of evaluating a topic above the average level of political business. Topics can be non-politicized, politicized, and securitized. Political leaders usually do not deal with non-politicized issues in general. Politicized topics are on the political agenda, whereas securitized subjects are perceived as urgent that require extraordinary measures to be solved (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Actors who are increasingly perceived as a threatening 'other' are often securitized in particular (Siddi, 2018b). The salient point of this leading constructivist approach is that security lies within the security discourse. When an actor constructs a threat image, he activates the securitization process by presenting the image as an existential threat to the audience in his speeches and statements.

Usually, the referent object is a state, but the Copenhagen School widened the meaning of security, making the securitization of non-military issues possible. The school emphasizes the non-military aspects of security, such as political security, economic security, environmental security, and societal security (Buzan, 1983). Even though the theory focuses on non-military security issues, it still follows a state-centric approach. The securitizing actors are only state representatives like political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups (Buzan et al., 1998). While the approach widened the understanding of

security, the information revolution is not considered in the approach at all (Eriksson & Giacomello, 2006).

Similar to realism and liberalism, constructivism cannot explain the factors that lead to different threat perceptions on the individual level. Therefore, additional theoretical approaches are consulted in the following section.

3.2 Political Psychological Explanations of Threat Perception

The previous section demonstrated the insufficiency of IR explanations. For a suitable theoretical framework, these approaches need to be complemented by psychological assumptions of threat perception.

Since constructivism assumes that actors construct their views of the world, it is evident that the theory already draws from psychology. However, there is still a difference between constructivism and political psychology approaches, since political psychology tends to disregard the context and focuses on individuals within a specific political system only. From a psychological perspective, threats can be constructed even if they are not necessarily existent. The main advantage of political psychological approaches is that it provides helpful insights into the underlying forces of elite decision making and mass politics (Huddy et al., 2013). Some societies put great emphasis on specific issues, due to the importance of the economy and community, or due to the way they are constructed as necessary and presented as such in political debates. Political leaders often construct an issue or a state as a high threat publicly to attain domestic goals (Stein, 2013). Which decisions they make in the end can be influenced by psychological, societal, ideational, political, institutional, and material factors (Kaarbo, 2015). External factors also play a crucial role in constructing an issue or an actor as a security risk. Something perceived as unthreatening before can become a severe threat when a historical event forces political leaders to reconsider their image of the issue or the actor (Siddi, 2018a).

One well-known approach to the study of perceptions is social identity theory. This theory explains how identities are formed. The individual's knowledge forms an individual's identity which assigns them to a specific social group. Hence, individuals construct themselves through identities attributed to them by others. People who are similar to the self belong to the in-group, others are part of the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). The fact that individuals produce stereotypes and exclude others is seen as an inherent pattern which humans developed over time.

In social psychology, the creation of enemy images is attached to prejudices. Constructing prejudices of others is one of the most obvious actions during the process of othering (Gaufman, 2017). When a leader constructs an image of the 'other' as ambiguous, false information will be connected to that image, especially when a hostile image is developed of the 'other' (Jervis, 2017). Social psychology is applicable when studying new technologies and new threats since research in social psychology has shown that fear and anxiety are often produced by the uncertain and the unknown (Johnson, 1994). In her research, Stein (2013) emphasizes that cognitive, motivational, and emotional biases alter threat perceptions of elites and their reactions to these threats. She discusses the impact of emotions on the perception of elites, especially in terms of responding to external threats.

However, political psychologists point out that often neither political psychology approaches nor political scholars can fully explain threat perception and construction (Huddy et al., 2013), and only few scholars put an emphasis on identifying threat perception in the absence of conflicts (Stein, 2013). Nevertheless, psychological approaches offer a change of perspective in the area of threat perception and add value for the individual level analysis.

The following chapter develops a new theoretical approach building on the above presented theories. This new approach allows to develop four hypotheses which will be tested in the analysis.

3.3 A New Theoretical Approach: The Determinants of Threat Perception

This research aims to answer why some phenomena and actors are perceived as a threat by some actors and why they are not by others. Thus, the theoretical framework's focus lies on politicians as individuals and their motivations for constructing issues or states as enemies or friends. It is argued that political leaders hold divergent beliefs about the consequences of information campaigns and the threat posed by a state that uses Information Warfare tactics that lead to different strategy preferences within one government. The presented IR theories and the psychological approach are modified in the following paragraphs, and a new theoretical approach is developed to answer the research questions.

In this section, a concept is presented which examines the factors that shape politicians' threat perceptions. In contrast to constructivism and securitization theory, this approach is not focused on the securitization of an issue. Moreover, the causes motivating actors to construct something or someone as a threat or not are of concern. Hence, the question of why an actor decides to prevent or start a securitizing move is the central question of interest.

If cooperation is vital to politicians, they are constructing a state as a friend rather than as an enemy when the economies of their states are dependent on each other (Walt, 1998). A competing country is more likely to be perceived negatively by politicians since they try to present their own country to the public as more powerful. States with which others compare themselves can be perceived as threatening or not, depending on the political system and international and domestic behavior. The impression politicians have of a phenomenon or a state can change when the issue occurs frequently, or the state changes its behavior. Is the new issue or phenomenon a danger to state security, politicians tend to perceive it as threatening; the same applies to the behavior of a state. However, some politicians may not perceive a phenomenon or a state as threatening even though a new tactic employed by a state or the state itself are perceived by others as a threat to national security or at least as disrupting the existing order. Those politicians might have personal motivations to ignore such threats or perceive them as less threatening

The applied theoretical framework to answer the question why politicians perceive something as a threat or not contains the following assumptions:

First, it is argued that the political orientation of individuals plays an essential role in seeing an issue or an actor as a threat or not. An image proposed by a politician forms a fundamental basis for the construction of a threat. At the same time, there can be politicians proposing the exact opposite image of the same issue or actor. Usually, the political orientation determines if something is perceived as a threat or not depending on the individual's political goals.

Secondly, personal ties with other state actors can determine if an actor perceives another as a threat or perceives them as not threatening at all.

The third and the final assumptions are derived from a realist perspective since they take the economy as a material value into consideration. Economic interests can play a crucial role in threat perception. When something is jeopardizing the economic stability of a state, it might sooner be labeled as a threat. Moreover, constructing something as a threat might weaken the economy of a state, which is why politicians try to prevent threat construction occasionally. In this sense, energy security plays an essential role, as well.

The impact of these factors on politicians' perceptions will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

3.3.1 Political Orientation

Researchers of political psychology have detected that political orientation and political extremism can predict individuals' reactions to societal, political events. Political leaders at both ends of the political spectrum (far-right and far-left) will be more likely to construct new tactics which threaten the national security of their state or an aggressive state itself as a friend rather than as an enemy. The logic here is that politicians at both ends of the political spectrum share a range of similarities (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). For instance, Anti-Americanism and Euroscepticism became a leading tendency on both sides of the political spectrum recently (Tkachenko, 2018).

Moreover, the attacking state offers support to those politicians since the state recognizes the mutual benefit. Notably, Russia supports far-left and far-right movements as part of their propaganda efforts (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016). It is advantageous here that extremist parties tend to believe in conspiracy theories more easily than moderate parties (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). The attacking state spreads disinformation and creates mistrust in the existing order within the population of the target state. In the meantime, far-right and far-left politicians disseminate the disinformation and fake news. In addition, they illustrate information as accurate and believable and construct the Information Warfare tactics another state uses as non-threatening and as reliable (Tkachenko, 2018). Eurosceptic and anti-American parties only use this tactic of pursuing specific aims by using Information Warfare actions against the own country for its own political purposes. In Germany, the far-left *Die Linke* and the far-right AfD fall under these categories. Both of them even hold close contacts with Russia and regularly support a pro-Russian policy (Rettman, 2017).

Moreover, Ben Nimmo (2017) discovered that especially AfD voters tend to spread Russian disinformation from Russian channels like RT and Sputnik, promoting an anti-Western view. Politicians that benefit from disturbances of the system have more substantial incentives to prevent a successful construction of something or someone as a threat. That implies that an individual's political orientation determines his or her tendency to prevent or support the construction of something or someone as a threat.

Hypothesis 1: Far-right or far-left politicians will be less likely to perceive a new tactic or a state that endangers national security as a threat than politicians of the center parties.

This assumption also generates precise predictions about the motives of those who construct an issue or actor as an enemy. Those politicians in a central party will recognize

actions that jeopardize a state's national security, especially when these follow the goal of spreading mistrust against the government of the attacked state. Hence, political leaders who are in power in a state will be more likely to construct the phenomenon or actor as a threat to the nation.

3.3.2 *Personal Ties*

The personality of politicians who are able to influence the political decision-making process or the public plays an essential role in directing state behavior and, thus, the construction of threats (Saunders, 2011). Politicians who have had an active political role in a state for a long time usually enjoy the trust of the population, the media, and politicians who are now holding a leading role in their own party.

Politicians who are in politics for many years and have personal ties to politicians of other countries tend to be reluctant when it comes to condemning the behavior of these states. The underlying logic here is that those politicians know the politicians and the country for many years and feel like they can evaluate the behavior due to their experience better than 'new' politicians. The political preferences of long-standing politicians are defined by experience and trust. They worked on good relations with a country for years and do not want to jeopardize the established relationship. Hence, experienced politicians often do not perceive other states' behavior as uncertain if they have maintained close contacts with these states for years. Therefore, these politicians are less intimidated by the actions of their acquaintances. These long-standing relations are mainly attributed to the Social Democratic Party and especially to the former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. His closeness to the Russian company Gazprom is often condemned by the public and the media. The term *Schroederisation* was established, referring to the corruption of EU politicians (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2018).

In order to avoid a conflict of interest, these politicians present the aggressive behavior of the other state as exaggerated and try to influence the perception of the other politicians to make sure that they do not take the threat seriously, with the aim of preventing a spiral of mistrust and conflicts.

Moreover, personal relationships with politicians from other countries can mean that they are perceived as belonging to the in-group rather than the out-group. Following the psychological approach, it is less likely to construct people of the in-group as threatening. On the other hand, politicians who have little contact with a state tend to perceive it as threatening due to increased uncertainty with regards to the state's actions or interests.

Hypothesis 2: Politicians with strong personal ties to another state will be more likely to perceive a new tactic of a state or the state itself as friendly rather than perceiving it as a threat.

A close personal relationship between politicians, however, is not entirely unproblematic. Familiarity with one another can, on the one hand, simplify problem-solving. On the other hand, personal closeness can limit the scope for political action because friends' actions are defended rather than condemned, which makes it challenging to look at them objectively (Bastian & Götz, 2005).

3.3.3 Economic Interests & Energy Security

Economic interests are another factor which influences how certain actors perceive an issue or a state. Based on the balance of power logic, one state's economic capabilities could indicate that another state will not start a conflict due to material factors. Realist scholars have long argued that states are self-interested actors focusing on their national interests only. The main instruments to keep power are the use of economic and military power (Walt, 1998). The central argument concerning economic interests is that economic losses "would entail a substantial worsening in the lifestyles of the entire population" (Luciani, 1988, p. 152). Politicians, for example, highlight the long-term impacts of sanctions and portray it as 'irreparable damage' the state should prevent to protect jobs and companies (Wagner & Rinke, 2014). Put differently, economic interdependence could lead to less support for economic sanctions on states, for example after breaking international law, since they might fear losing domestic support. Such conditions may lead politicians to be more cautious about condemning other countries' aggressive behavior and representing economic cooperation as more important than the duty of their own state to punish the behavior of the other with sanctions. Possible direct conflicts with the state shall be avoided.

While rejecting sanctions against a state may reveal the limits of normative power, this is not necessarily worse than losing an economic partner. This argument is consistent with research on cost-benefit calculations: The cost-benefit calculation of individuals is usually measured by military and human costs, relative power considerations, domestic and international reputational costs, and normative costs (Silverstone, 2007; Tannenwald, 1999). Political leaders use their individual beliefs to weigh the costs and benefits of preserving a good relationship with a state against the costs and benefits of jeopardizing this relationship by condemning the actions of a state official. Simultaneously individuals give great importance to

the likelihood of success in both scenarios as well. When international conflicts occur, those politicians who are interested in a robust economic relationship with another state emphasize narratives of the state, which picture it as a reliable and worthy partner that is needed for the well-being of the citizens (Siddi, 2018a). To support the economic and human cost arguments, politicians highlight that constructing the tactics of the attacking state or even the attacking state itself as a threat would complicate cooperation in the future significantly. When a foreign state attacks the state or disregards international law, trust must be restored for continuing economic relations. Otherwise, if these break down, this would entail economic losses for both states.

By raising such concerns, economic consequences are constructed as more intimidating compared to the real threat the state poses. Thus, politicians try to influence the perception of actors positively in order to continue economic cooperation.

Hypothesis 3: Politicians with an emphasis on economic interests will be less likely to perceive a new warfare tactic or a state as a threat to national security compared to politicians with an emphasis on an ethical foreign policy.

Moreover, politicians with high economic interests are usually especially worried about energy security – mainly when the concerns are about economic relations with Russia (Siddi, 2018b). Issues of energy dependence are often securitized or desecuritized. The securitization of trade is primarily promoted by the re-emergence of identity-based constructions of another as a threat. Desecuritization is usually carried out by politicians who put economic interests above norms and values. Hence, they try presenting their trade partner as reliable and more as a partner rather than an ‘other’ (Siddi, 2018b).

Hypothesis 4: Politicians who consider energy security to be particularly important tend to perceive a new tactic or a state which threatens their own national security as a friend compared to politicians who consider energy security to be less relevant.

On the other hand, liberalists would argue that some politicians are interested in acting responsibly on the international level. Hence, if one state acts aggressively in the neighborhood and attacks a partner state or even the state itself, some politicians neglect economic interests and energy security and put international reputation and norm-based behavior first. Germany in particular is well-known for presenting itself as a normative power that stands for respecting international law, values, and moral principles (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2018).

4 Research Design

This study aims to find out how politicians in Germany perceive Information Warfare tactics, Russia and what the causes of different threat perceptions are. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis of the political discourse on Information Warfare and Russia in the *Bundestag* – the German parliament – will be conducted. The theoretical analysis already offered a conceptual context for further research. This chapter will explain in detail how the research was conducted. First, the case selection is explained. Secondly, the methodology to collect the data is elaborated. Subsequently, Schreier's qualitative content analysis is examined, illustrating the operationalization of the categories derived from the theory and previous literature into applicable coding frames. Finally, the limitations of the present research design are discussed.

4.1 Case Selection

Chapter 2 illustrated that the perception of Russia and new technologies has altered, especially since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, worldwide. However, what are the factors that lead to the perception of Russia or Information Warfare tactics as a threat?

The premise is that Russia and IW are perceived as a threat by German politicians. Germany is a country with considerable influence in Europe and is one of the principal negotiators in the Ukraine conflict. Germany is a reasonable negotiator for the conflict because of its friendly relationship with Russia (Wood, 2020). As Chapter 2.2 shows, the relationship has become increasingly complicated since Russia's violation of international law in Crimea. Germany is known for its preference for finding diplomatic, rather than military, solutions to disputes (Seibel, 2015). However, the revisionist behavior Russia developed in recent years, such as meddling in Western elections, supporting Western right-wing parties, attacking the sovereignty of other states, and modernizing its nuclear weapon systems compels Western states to find new ways to address these challenges (Richey, 2018). Due to Germany's role as a leader within the EU, smaller European Member States expect Germany to initiate a common foreign policy towards Russia. Still, German politicians are divided over the correct approach towards Russia. Considering Germany's pioneering role in Europe, it is no surprise that Russia uses Information Warfare tactics to shake the German system's stability. The annexation of Crimea can be seen as the beginning of new pathways, one where Germany was expected to formulate a clear position on Russia. Turning points for improving IW countermeasures include the hacker attack on the German *Bundestag* in 2015 and the "Lisa case" of 2016. The hacker attack has been described as the worst case of political cyberespionage in Germany to

date (Wehner, 2017). The “Lisa case” stands out because it is a particularly offensive disinformation campaign that has even been publicly supported by the Russian government (Sahin, 2017). These make Germany an interesting case study to examine how German politicians with different party affiliations perceive Information Warfare and Russia and what factors shape their perceptions.

The period of analysis will be from the beginning of 2015 until the end of 2018. Picking this period allows for examination of many notable incidents related to IW and Russia’s aggressive strategies (the hacker attack on the *Bundestag* in 2015, the “Lisa Case” in 2016, Russia’s involvement in the US presidential election in 2016, the poisoning of Skripal in 2018) and allows for the tracking of the change of perception of politicians during this legislation.

The analysis is not limited to the 18th legislation period (22.10.2014 – 24.10.2017) because during that time, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) was not represented in the *Bundestag* yet. However, the analysis of the perception of the AfD is crucial to answering Hypothesis 1. Besides the AfD, the parties investigated are the Christ-Democratic Union (CDU), the Christ-Social Union (CSU), the Social Democrats (SPD), the Green Party (*Die Grünen*), the Left (*Die Linke*), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP).

In the analysis, the ideological position of the MPs will be evaluated. The chosen time frame falls into two legislation periods. However, both were governed by a coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD. The opposition in the 18th legislation period consisted of the Green Party and the Left, while the AfD and the FDP joined the opposition in the 19th legislation. Due to the massive amount of data, 2014 was excluded since discussions about Russia in this year were mostly related to the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict. These topics were still broadly covered in 2015 and the following years. A period of four years promises significant results.

4.2 Data

Plenary protocols were chosen as the primary data source for analyzing the perception of parliamentarians of the German *Bundestag*. The data was gathered using the *Bundestag* website, where all plenary protocols are archived starting from 1949 (<https://www.Bundestag.de/protokolle>). The chosen period of time was 1.01.2015 until 31.12.2018. Using this period, all plenary protocols that included the key terms “*Informationskrieg*” (Information Warfare), “*Hackerangriff*” (hacker attack), “*Desinformation*” (disinformation) or “*Russland*” (Russia) were identified.

To narrow down the results to relevant protocols, some results concerning different topics were sorted out immediately. The protocols were scanned for relevance, sorting out articles that used the keywords in another context. For instance, the search for “*Hackerangriff*” resulted in 20 protocols. Those not related to the hacker attack on the *Bundestag*, and instead were concerned with hacker attacks on German businesses, were sorted out.

“*Desinformation*” had around the same results as “*Hackerangriffe*.” Here, the exclusion of protocols is mainly traceable back to protocols that were already chosen during the first two rounds and plenary sessions on disinformation in connection with domestic policies like financial fraud. On the other hand, the protocols that mentioned Russia were included to figure out if speakers created a connection between the tactics of Information Warfare and Russia or Russia was only mentioned in another context at that meeting. Moreover, some plenary protocols overlap in some search results because when the term ‘hacker attack’ is on the agenda, disinformation is often included as well. This helped further limit the scope of results (see Table 1).

The search for “*Russland*” resulted in the most significant amount of data. However, 25 of the 185 protocols were already included in the data sample after the other keywords’ relevance scan. After excluding the irrelevant protocols, 91 remained for the analysis (see Table 14 in the Appendix). Those protocols in which Russia was mentioned only once in the whole plenary sessions or when the topic on Russia was about Russian environmental policy, archaeology, or Belarus (*Weißrussland*) instead of the Russian Federation, for instance, were considered irrelevant.

Table 1 shows the exact number of logs that the search in the *Bundestag* archive ejected for the respective search terms. The number of protocols after the irrelevant ones have been excluded are shown in bold.

Table 1: Data Selection

Key Word	2015 all protocols/ after relevance scan	2016 all protocols/ after relevance scan	2017 all protocols/ after relevance scan	2018 all protocols/ after relevance scan	Total all protocols/ after relevance scan
Information Warfare	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
Hacker attack	4 / 3	4 / 3	5 / 3	7 / 4	20 / 13
Disinformation	5 / 2	4 / 1	2 / 1	11 / 7	22 / 11
Russia	56 / 27	45 / 22	34 / 14	50 / 27	185 / 91
Total	65 / 32	53 / 26	41 / 18	68 / 38	227 / 114

The plenary protocols vary in scope. Some are 60 pages long, while others have 300 pages. In these protocols, the agenda items with the respective speakers on these topics are listed first. This is followed by the transcripts of the various speeches that took place in this session. Lastly, the relevant appendices follow.

For the analysis, only the speeches in the plenary protocols in which one of the keywords is used at least once are of interest. Interjections during the speeches are included in the evaluation since they promise to reveal politicians' personal perceptions. In the end, 114 protocols were analyzed using the data analysis software MAXQDA. Depending on the length of the protocol, a different number of speeches was analyzed per protocol. A total of 483 speeches proved to be relevant¹.

As a complement and for triangulation purposes, two interviews with experts on German defense politics were conducted. This procedure proves to be advantageous since experts can be asked explicitly about the factors of interest. The interviewer can ask follow-up questions and steer the experts in a particular direction to find answers to the hypotheses. Due to the current circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, only two experts were willing to give interviews. Both of them are representatives of the *Bundestag* in the current legislation period. One interview took place via Skype and the second interview partner filled out the questionnaire in writing. The interview protocols can be found in the Appendix (Figure 5 and 6). While the first interview had to be transcribed in MAXQDA, the second one was already available in a written form. The same analysis procedure, the qualitative content analysis, was chosen for the expert interviews and the speeches.

4.3 Qualitative Content Analysis by Schreier

This study aims to test if the developed factors (economic interests, energy security, political orientation, personal ties), or independent variables, affect the threat perception of politicians, or dependent variable. To identify and operationalize the dominant factors that influence the threat perception of German politicians, speeches by German politicians in the *Bundestag* are examined systematically through the use of qualitative content analysis.

¹ For an overview of the relevant speeches, see Table 17 in the Appendix. The table was created independently from MAXQDA due to the nature of the plenary protocols. Since one plenary protocol consists of several speeches, the pdf documents in MAXQDA could not be assigned to one speech, speaker, or party. Therefore, an Excel sheet was generated that shows the date, party, speaker, his/her perception of Russia, and if the speech was about IW, or the Russian society. Whereas in some of the 114 protocols, only one speech proved to be relevant, in others, up to 16 speeches or even more were included in the analysis. This resulted in a total of 483 speeches concerning Russia and/or IW.

The goal is to ascertain the factors that determine whether politicians perceive Russia, or Information Warfare in particular, as a threat. Moreover, the analysis shall show if IW per se is not taken as a severe threat or if the preexisting relation with Russia undermines the threat IW poses. The speeches should clarify if political leaders are sufficiently informed about IW and its consequences. If not, the lack of information might be a reason for either perceiving IW, and especially Russian information campaigns, as a threat or not. Additionally, the general perception of Russia as a state will be analyzed.

This thesis follows mainly a deductive approach. Inductive approaches aim to develop theories and hypotheses from empirical observations. Hypotheses are generated from theory to test them with the help of the collected data in deductive approaches (Mayring, 2014). In this thesis, the approach is applied by deriving hypotheses from the existing literature and modified theories applicable to this research and testing them utilizing a qualitative content analysis of *Bundestag* speeches.

To test the hypotheses formulated in the previous chapter, the various variables are operationalized. Therefore, theoretical concepts shall be linked to possible empirical indicators. First, those dimensions are identified that make the phenomenon addressed by the research question observable in the first place. Clarification of which factors influence the nature or change of this phenomenon is needed. These categories can be determined from the chosen theoretical framework, the hypotheses, and the relevant secondary literature. The derived categories of analysis, therefore, have theoretical relevance. They are determined by the use of qualitative content analysis (QCA).

QCA “is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame” (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). One significant advantage of QCA is that it allows for drawing “inferences to context, author, recipients,” which is central in this analysis (Schreier, 2012, p. 16). Moreover, QCA is useful for the analysis of big data quantity that requires interpretation. Therefore, the meaning and significance of the relevant text passage are brought into context. Schreier highlights that QCA “is a systematic method, it is flexible and it reduces data” (Schreier, 2012, p. 5). It is systematic because all material is examined and the same sequence of steps is used every time following the coding frame; it is flexible since the coding frame is always tailored to the material. Thus, the coding frame is essential in every QCA. It is a frame of interpretation that consists of categories and subcategories that serve as indicators of the meaning and significance found in the units of coding.

In this study, the categories stand for the different frames used to describe Russia or IW. As already mentioned, this thesis follows mainly a concept-driven (deductive) approach when defining the categories. The categories developed from the theoretical approach are economic interests and energy security, political orientation, and personal ties. However, more categories are developed out of the selected material using a combination of inductive and deductive analysis in the end. According to Schreier (2012, p. 95), categories are defined by “naming the relevant category, a description of what the name means, an example and a decision rule.”

The following tables show an extract of the coding frames used; the rest is attached in the Appendix. Since all the protocols are in German, the quotes were translated by the author of this thesis.

Table 2: Positive Frame for Russia as a Friend

Name	Description	Example	Decision Rule
Economic Interests	Points to the need to cooperate with Russia in economic terms because of economic interdependence	“By the way, de-escalation is also in the interest of our economy” (Gysi, 2015a, p. 10040)	Include text passages that present Russia exclusively as an important economic partner and exclude all statements displaying a ‘balanced’ view
Energy Security	Characterizes Russia as an important partner in terms of energy supply security	“It is clear that every pipeline that supplies us with energy strengthens our energy security. Russia has always been a reliable partner in this regard” (Holm, 2018, p. 3138)	Include text passages that present Russia exclusively as a partner due to energy interests, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Collective Security	Characterizes Russia as a necessary partner to achieve international stability and peace	“Without the United States and Russia, there will be no such process of truces and an end to the war.” (Gehrcke, 2015, p. 74)	Include text passages that exclusively argue that cooperation with Russia to attain peace is necessary, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Historical Ties	Characterizes Germany’s responsibility towards Russia due to the human rights violations of the Nazi regime against the Soviet Union	“We say 70 years after the attack on the Soviet Union: Don’t make Russia our enemy again!” (Dehm, 2016, p. 19141)	Include text passages that underline a friendly partnership with Russia is important due to historical responsibility, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Political Orientation	Perception that a German party is always protecting Russia’s behavior and welcomes a closer relation to Russia	“That [...] means nothing more than that the Left one-to-one adopts the negative Russian narrative, the Russian view of things” (Erler, 2017, p. 23290)	Include text passages that accuse parties of being too close to Russia and exclude all statements displaying a ‘balanced’ view
Personal Ties	Perception that some German politicians have close personal ties to Russian officials	“I had intensive discussions with my Russian colleague. I was in Moscow a few weeks ago and will be going there again this year” (Schmidt, 2016, p. 18578)	Include text passages that associate personal ties exclusively with a gain of friendship, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view

Personal Perception	Portrays Russia as a friend whose actions are defended	“We should finally give the hand of friendship to Russia” (Dehm, 2018, p. 1266)	Include text passages that associate Russia with a friend from a personal point of view, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Victimization	Characterizes Russia as a victim who is threatened by Western states	“The NATO budget is eleven times higher than the Russian military budget” (Neu, 2015, p. 13276)	Include text passages that associate Russia with a friend threatened by the West, excluding all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view

Whereas the first four categories (economic interests, energy security, collective security, and historical ties), displayed in Table 2, argue for a partnership, the following categories (political orientation, personal ties, personal perception, and victimization) argue more for a friendship.

A differentiation between perceiving Russia as a threat or a partner was not made in Table 3, where all the categories display Russia as a threatening state with opposing interests and an alien regime. Just like in the first coding frame, the categories were derived from the hypotheses, the relevant secondary literature, and partly inductively during the coding process.

Table 3: Negative Frame for Russia as a Threat

Name	Description	Example	Decision rule
Economic Independence	Characterizes Russia as a state that is not important for economic cooperation	“Bavarian companies exported almost five times as many goods to the United States in 2013 as to the Russian Federation” (Hahn, 2016, p. 16245)	Include text passages that present Russia exclusively as an irrelevant economic partner to the West, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view.
Energy Security	Characterizes Russia as a state that could threaten Germany’s energy security	“We do need diversification to be less dependent on Russia. This is an important aspect relevant to security policy” (von Marschall, 2015, p. 8905)	Include text passages that present Russia exclusively as a threat to the West due to the West’s energy dependence on Russia, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view.
Political Orientation (enemy)	Points out that some parties characterize Russia as a threat in particular	“A diplomatic offensive against Russia would be responsible. But you’d rather live on in the enemy images from the past millennium” (Lötzsch, 2017, p. 4539)	Include text passages that argue Russia would be an enemy in the eyes of one party, exclude all statements that do not address the opinion that is not related to a party
Personal Perception (enemy)	Characterizes Russia as a threat/enemy that should not be defended from a personal view	“I think that Russia has recently shown that it is using its military for aggressive purposes, and we have to prepare ourselves for that” (Lamers, 2018, p. 671)	Include text passages that associate Russia as a threat from a personal point of view, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view and do not present the personal perception

Irrationality/ Unfairness	Characterizes Russia as a state that uses unfair tactics. This behavior is related to the breach of international contracts and irrationality of Putin resulting in mistrust	“We know that barrel bombs continued to be flown, even though the Russians agreed that this should no longer happen” (Nouripour, 2016, p. 18826)	Include text passages that associate unfair and irrational behavior exclusively with a threat to the West, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view.
Humanitarian Grievances	Characterizes Russia as executor of misery, poverty, inhuman conditions	“This applies to foreign policy, the human rights situation is precarious, and freedom of the press is also severely restricted” (Lazar, 2018, p. 3799)	Include text passages that associate human rights abuses exclusively with a threat to its citizens, exclude statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Power	Characterizes Russia as a strong state seeking power by the modernization of its nuclear arsenal and conventional armament	“Nuclear threats are once again part of Russian rhetoric” (Uhl, 2015, p. 9714)	Include text passages that associate power aspirations of Russia exclusively as a threat to the world, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Normative Power	Points to Germany’s responsibility as a normative power in the world	“We do not put economic interests above international law and the values of freedom that are so important to us” (Motschmann, 2018, p. 883)	Include text passages that exclusively argue norms and values are more important than good relations with Russia, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Aggression/ Instability	Characterizes Russia as an aggressive state which is a threat to peace and stability in the European Order and worldwide	“On the other hand, Russia is again a threat - I deliberately put it that way - a threat to international law and the sovereignty of free states, [...]” (Lorenz, 2015, p. 8098)	Include text passages that associate aggressive behavior exclusively with a threat to security, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Divergent Interests	Points out that Russia follows different goals in conflict zones than Germany and the EU and manipulates peace processes	“Putin wants a failed state. If you are talking about European interests: it is not our interest to have a failed state in our immediate neighborhood” (Trittin, 2018, p. 887)	Include all text passages that associate uncertain behavior exclusively with a threat to security, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Ideology	characterizes authoritarian regimes as alien and a danger to the West	“Russia sees basic personal rights, freedoms and our democratic principles as inferior and dangerous” (Frei, 2017, p. 21342)	Include text passages that associate authoritarianism exclusively with a threat to security, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Weakness	characterizes Russia’s desire to create enemy images as a sign of weakness	“Russia apparently believes that it needs an external and internal enemy. That is - I say very clearly - not a sign of strength, but of weakness” (Wellmann, 2015, p. 8560)	Include text passages that associate Russia’s behavior with weakness, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view

Table 4 shows the frame for Information Warfare as a threat. Here the categories derive from Hypothesis 1 (Extremist Parties) and the discussed theories and secondary literature (Inexperience/Vulnerability, Meddling in Western politics, Instability/Distrust). The other categories (Cyber Crime, Cyber Security, Warfare & Attacks, Russia) evolved during the coding process and proved to be relevant for some politicians in the context of IW.

Table 4: Negative Frame for Information Warfare as a Threat

Name	Description	Example	Decision rule
Extremist Parties	Points out that Russia supports extremist parties and they use IW tactics for their own benefit	“Nor do I find it confidence-inspiring that Putin is financing right-wing populist parties like the Front National through Russian banks all over Europe” (Oppermann, 2016, p. 17986)	Include text passages that extremist parties use IW tactics or are supported by Russia, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Inexperience/ Vulnerability	Characterizes IW tactics as challenging because it is something new Germany has no experience with so far and is very vulnerable to	“Germany is a ‘digitally failed state” (Göring-Eckhardt, 2015, p. 10591)	Include text passages that imply that IW reveals the inexperience and vulnerability of Germany, excluding all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Cyber Crime	Characterizes IW as something mainly used by cybercriminals attacking businesses and private citizens	“You talk about cyberwar fantasies. We call it: reality. You want more regulation and controls. We want more security for our citizens” (Bernstiel, 2018, p. 2417)	Include text passages that associate cyber criminality exclusively with a threat to security, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Instability/ Distrust	Characterizes propaganda and disinformation campaigns as a threat to the information space because these spread distrust and uncertainty in public leading to instability	“This propaganda, this unspeakable propaganda that has caused all evil in people, homophobia, xenophobia, this agitation against Western values, turns many people crazy” (Liebich, 2015, p. 8561)	Include text passages that associate the spread of disinformation exclusively with a threat to security, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Cyber Security	Characterizes IW tactics as threats in the cyberspace through tactics like cyber espionage or attacks on the critical infrastructure used by secret services and criminals to attack the state itself rather than the public	“These are professionally organized criminal structures or even secret services that are equipped with completely different resources anyway. [...] That is the threat we are facing today” (Sitte, 2015, p.13)	Include text passages that associate cyber technologies exclusively with a threat to security, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Warfare & Attacks	Characterizes the use of IW tactics like hybrid warfare, the spread of disinformation, and hacker attacks as a severe threat	“There are also new types of warfare - I am thinking of cyberspace and automated weapon systems - that multiplies the risk of a military, including a nuclear confrontation” (Friesen, 2018, p. 1515)	Include text passages that associate IW exclusively with warfare, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view
Meddling in Western politics	Points out that states interfere in the politics of other states to cause conflicts there and split societies or alliances	“How Russia is trying to use all means to destabilize the EU and drive a wedge into the transatlantic alliance” (Frei, 2017, p. 21342)	Include text passages that argue that states meddle in politics of other states and exclude all statements displaying a ‘balanced’ view
Russia	Argument that the Russian Federation mainly uses IW tactics	“Recently there has been increased Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns in Germany and the EU” (Fabritius, 2016, p. 18847)	Include text passages that argue Russia uses IW tactics, exclude all statements that do not mention Russia

After building the coding frames, the material was divided into units of coding. The unit of analysis “refers to that unit which you have selected for QCA, each unit yielding one text” (Schreier, 2012, p. 130). In this thesis, that would be the speeches. The plenary protocols were not selected as the unit of analysis because they are a collection of multiple speeches with different speakers on the same day. By selecting the speeches, the categories can be assigned to individual parties and speakers, making the analysis easier afterward. The units of coding “are those parts of the units of analysis that you can meaningfully interpret with respect to the categories at hand” (Schreier, 2012, p. 131). They are those units that are assigned to a category in the respective coding frame. In this work, that would be text passages and statements in the speeches relating to the pre-defined categories regarding opinions expressed about IW or Russia.

Based on these coding frames, all 114 protocols were coded using the software MAXQDA. The protocols of 2015 were analyzed first. The established sets of frames were then used for the other samples but further adapted to the new material with two more frames. The frames for “Russia as a friend,” “Russia as a threat,” and “IW as a threat” were applied from the beginning, whereas the frame “Russian society as a friend” and the “frame for the parties” were developed during the analysis. However, most subcategories were adjusted and enhanced during the analysis in all frames. Because of the extent of speeches in one protocol, a protocol could include more than one frame.

As already mentioned, an Excel sheet was created to collect the number of coded speeches from the plenary protocols (see Table 17 in the Appendix). Therefore, the speeches were classified in speeches given by politicians perceiving Russia as a friend, a partner, or a threat. This categorization is further explained in Chapter 5.2. The Excel sheet shows, altogether, that 483 speeches were coded in the analysis. The table has then been included in MAXQDA as well in order to use the assigned variables per speech for the analysis. It was advantageous to create that sheet because it enabled frequency tables to be created based on the party or politician, while the plenary protocols only allowed an examination of the period. The big problem with the plenary protocols is that all speeches of the day are brought together in one pdf document, which is why MAXQDA cannot distinguish between individual speakers. The Excel sheet allowed this downside to be overcome and addressed.

4.4 Discussion of the Method & Limitations

All in all, content analysis is a very multifaceted and, above all, flexible method that has a wide range of analytical tools to answer different questions appropriately and in a targeted manner. The QCA appears to be an appropriate method for this thesis because it allows for the context in which the material was generated and the theoretical background of the research to be accounted for (Mayring, 2014). This enables the identification of factors that underly specific developments and events because politicians' intrinsic motivations can be investigated. The QCA is particularly useful when analyzing speeches and parliamentary debates (Heindl, 2015). Furthermore, the analysis allows for the identification of whether personal perceptions changed over the examined time period. For instance, changing opinions after a hacker attack or when the extent of the "Lisa Case" became known can be analyzed. Conducting a QCA promises to investigate all relevant background information, such as politicians' entire careers that point to an explanation of close ties to Russia.

In comparison, conducting a discourse analysis or quantitative content analysis is not applicable for this research. The first one is unsuitable since this research does not derive from a securitization context and does not focus on how actors use language to create a particular image of something to accomplish a specific purpose. A quantitative research method is improper because it does not explain individual cases following an "effects-of-causes" approach, while this research undertakes a "causes-of-effects" approach. Moreover, the theory evaluation in qualitative research is sensitive to individual observation, whereas quantitative research treats all observations as equally important (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Hence, in this individual approach, where individual cases are weighted differently, a qualitative method is essential. However, content analysis easily allows for the link between quantitative and qualitative research (Heindl, 2015).

A clear advantage of this research design is that consulting all speeches in the chosen time period without limiting them to a research sample generates a high validity. Also, the use of a structured category system allows for a secure reconstruction of the analysis by any researcher. This consolidates the research's internal validity on the grounds of high transparency and replicability (Gerring, 2017). Furthermore, the category system could also be adapted in the ongoing analysis and allow for new categories to be included. The inclusion of the expert interviews increased the validity of measurement as well.

However, some limitations to the study remain. First of all, due to capacity reasons, there was only one coder. Even though the coding was applied as objectively and

transparently as possible, inter-coder reliability and, therefore, a higher validity of the coding could have been only reached if a second coder had been used. Secondly, although parliamentarians talk very openly in the *Bundestag*, the analysis of mainly *Bundestag* speeches can only explain part of the factors that shape the perception of these politicians.

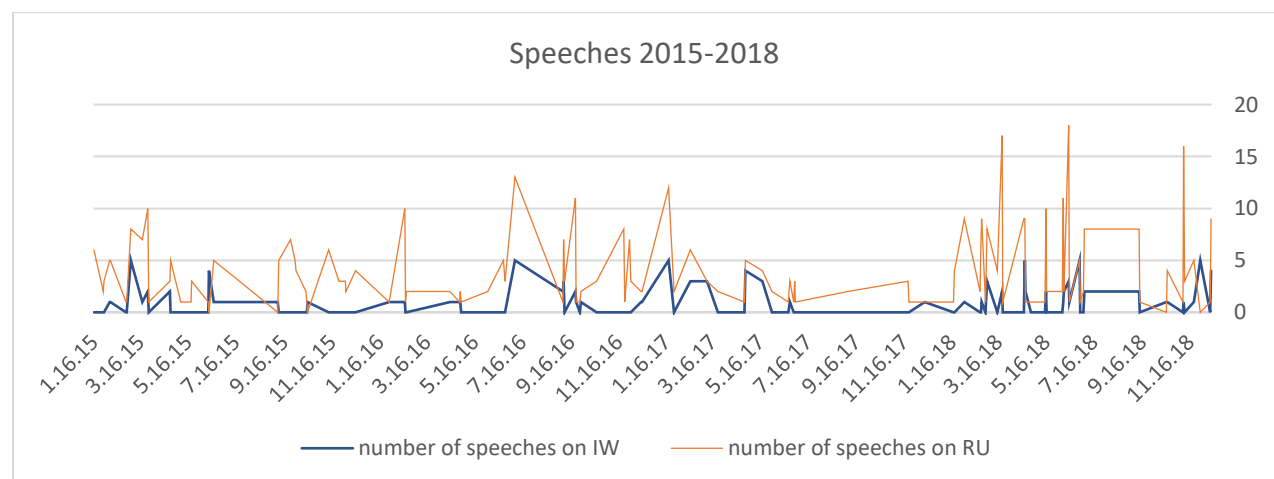
The expert interviews allowed more easy access to their perceptions. Even though this thesis combines two methodological approaches, more expert interviews should have been conducted.

However, with the assessment of speeches from 2015 until the end of 2018, a good start has been made to analyze all parties' perceptions. This effort also included the AfD, which only entered the German *Bundestag* in October 2017. Nevertheless, this procedure should be expanded by applying the frames to other speeches, statements, and interviews politicians have given.

5 Analysis

This section addresses the evaluation of the data obtained from the coded plenary protocols. The findings from the conducted interviews will also be presented. A brief overview of the distribution of the speeches regarding Russia and IW throughout the reference period helps detect the turning points of this study. Subsequently, the factors that lead to the perception of IW as a threat are presented and discussed. Afterward, reasons for perceiving Russia as a friend, a partner, or an enemy are analyzed in depth. The chapter ends with examining the perception of politicians of the Russian society. Finally, as a supplement to the above findings the results from the conducted interviews will be presented.

Figure 1: Temporal Distribution of the Speeches



When considering the frequency of speeches given on Russia and Information Warfare, Figure 1 indicates that the number of speeches regarding IW and Russia fluctuates yearly. However, every time the number of speeches on Russia increases, more speeches on IW are held. Figure 1 shows on June 14th, 2018, the majority of speeches about Russia and IW occurred (Russia: 18; IW: 3). That can be traced back to the start of the FIFA World Cup 2018, where a new debate about the freedom of the press and human rights in the Russian Federation and Europe/Germany's relationship with Russia began. Politicians argued that

“the World Cup can build bridges over the abyss that the Russian leadership has caused to a considerable extent in recent years: Skripal, Syria, Ukraine, Crimea.”
(Kiesewetter, 2018a, p. 3781)

Nevertheless, this is not the only day German politicians held intense debates about Russia or Information Warfare. The peak in March 2015 (Russia: 10; IW: 2) can be explained by the debate on EU's neighborhood policy and association agreements with Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. In this debate, the two speeches mentioning IW tactics focused on the fact that Russia is meddling in Western politics by financing extremist parties. For instance, Karl-Heinz Brunner, a Social Democrat, rebuked the Kremlin for supporting right-wing and left-wing parties tracing this behavior back to the desire to drive a wedge between European states.

“Enemy images are spread through societies. Outrage against individual people is growing. Conspiracy theories against politics are becoming popular.”
(Brunner, 2015, p. 9278)

Brunner sees the danger of progress in Eastern European countries' rapprochement policy, especially in Russia's “verbal armament.”

The increase at the beginning of 2016 is due to a debate about Russia's role in the war in Syria (Russia: 10; IW: 1). The one speech in early 2016 relating to Information Warfare criticized the use of Russia's Information Warfare tactics and illustrated them as a new and dangerous form of Russian behavior. Kathrin Göring-Eckhardt is not only condemning war actions in Syria, but also the spread of disinformation through RT Deutsch, the financing of troll fabrics, and most importantly, the “goading of German-Russians” in Germany (Göring-

Eckhardt, 2016, p. 15139). In her speech, she alludes to the “Lisa case,” which happened just one month earlier.

The number of speeches rose again in July 2016 (RU: 13; IW: 5). This time not only speeches regarding Russia increased. There were also more speeches given on Information Warfare. In fact, more than five speeches on IW were never given in one plenary discussion throughout the whole reference period. The main topic on the agenda in July 2016 was NATO cooperation with Russia. Additionally, some politicians pointed out the need for investment in cyber defense capabilities to deal with hybrid warfare situations in the future (i.e., Annen, 2016; Trittin, 2016).

The third peak in 2016 (RU: 11; IW: 2) and the peak in 2017 (RU: 12; IW: 5) can also be traced back to the war in Syria. Furthermore, concerns about Russia’s interference in Western politics increased just a few months before the elections of a new government in Germany in September 2017.

In contrast to the other years, the frequency of speeches on Russia in 2018 is, in total, higher while the frequency of speeches on IW reduced. Three interesting time points stick out. Besides the meeting in June 2018, more speeches on Russia and IW are given on average on March 21st (RU: 17; IW: 2) and November 8th (RU: 16; IW: 1). The main topic in March was the poisoning of Skripal and his daughter, which happened on March 4th, 2018. In November, speeches related mainly to the INF Treaty after President Trump confirmed the US would withdraw from the treaty because of Russian non-compliance (Borger & Pengelly, 2018).

Overall, the speeches’ temporal distribution shows that the number of speeches on IW rose after the turning points (the hacker attack revealed in May 2015, the “Lisa case” in January 2016, and the poisoning of Skripal in March 2018). The most striking thing is that, particularly in the months leading up to the federal elections in September 2017, speeches were held regularly to highlight the dangers posed by IW tactics. One may claim that this rise was caused by the concern about an interference by Russia in the elections. Even Hans-Georg Maaßen, expressed his fear about Russian interference: “we assume that Russia will be able to launch disinformation campaigns in connection with the federal election” (Müller & Banse, 2017). This concern proved to be justifiable after Moscow interfered in the US presidential elections in 2016 with the use of a troll firm that spread disinformation intending to destroy trust in Hillary Clinton and boost Donald Trump (A. Abrams, 2019). Assuming German politicians were worried Russia could interfere in the same way in Germany, the increase of IW and Russia topics in the twelve months before the elections can therefore be linked to this concern.

The following chapters deal more closely with the perception of IW and Russia from parliamentarians' perspective and the development of their perceptions from 2015 to 2018.

5.1 The Perception of Information Warfare in Germany

Throughout the study, 104 of 483 speeches were related to the topic of Information Warfare. In 74 of these speeches, the parliamentarian was referring to Russia in the same speech. Nevertheless, the proportion of speeches concerning IW is significantly smaller than that for Russia. This is probably because IW is a very specific topic, which for many politicians is a sub-topic of Russia or types of warfare. Hence, it is only natural that politicians spend less time debating Information Warfare than Russia. In both legislation periods, about one-fifth of the speeches were on IW (18th legislation: 22%; 19th legislation: 21%). The politicians, therefore, assign the same importance to the topic over the entire survey period.

Table 5 shows that the CDU is the party that gave the most speeches on IW. However, this is no surprise since it is the party with the most substantial speaking time. The speaking time of the parliamentary groups is divided between them depending on their size.

Table 5: Quantity of Speeches on IW (18th and 19th legislation)

Speeches on IW		
Party	Absolute	%
CDU	43	41,4
CSU	10	9,6
SPD	21	20,2
Greens	17	16,3
Left	6	5,8
AfD	2	1,9
FDP	5	4,8
Total	104	100

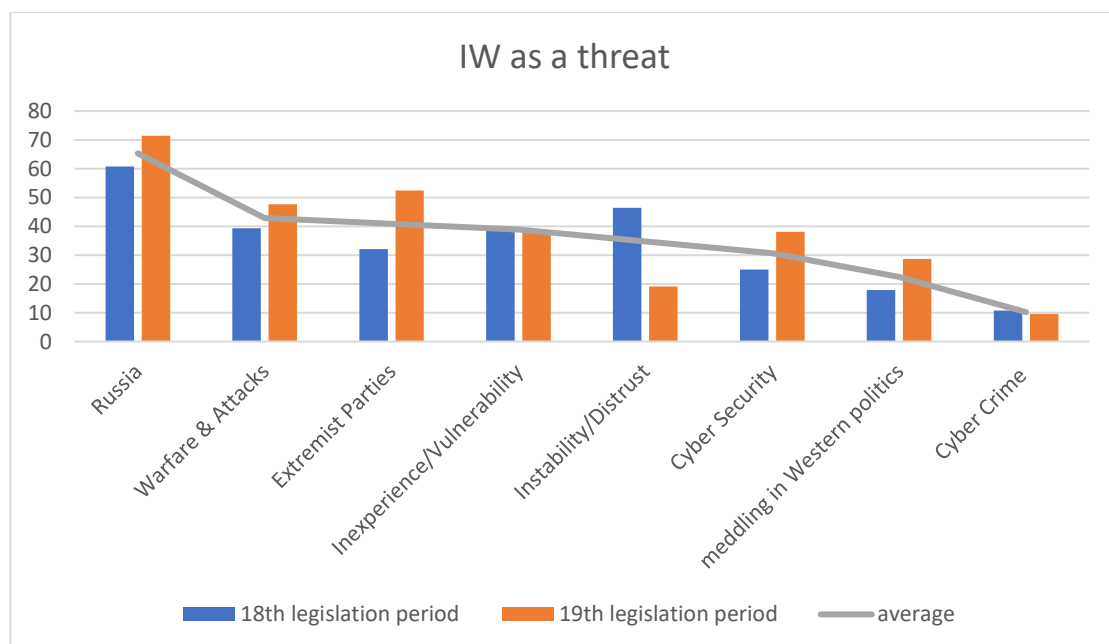
In the 18th parliamentary term, the distribution in a medium debate was as follows: 27 minutes for the CDU/CSU, 17 minutes for the SPD, and eight minutes each for the Left and the Greens. In the 19th legislation, it is 21 minutes for the CDU/CSU, 13 minutes for the SPD, seven minutes each for the AfD and the FDP, six minutes for the Greens, and four minutes for the Left (Deutscher Bundestag, 2020). Hence, it makes sense over half of the speeches are given by the CDU/CSU, which is the fraction with the most considerable speaking time. The SPD is the party with the second-largest speaking time and with the second most speeches on IW. What is striking is that the Greens are spending more time on IW topics while having the

same speaking time as the Left, whose speeches make up only around six percent compared to the Greens with 16 percent. Although the AfD and the FDP only joined the *Bundestag* in October 2017, the FDP has given almost as many speeches as the Left did over the entire survey period. This can be traced back to the FDP's focus on digitalization and cyber topics.

Notably, the AfD did not give much attention to the topic. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which postulated that extreme parties are less likely to frame Russia or IW as a threat than parties of the political center, has some support. Neither the Left nor the AfD presents IW tactics as a threat to Germany. The center parties, on the other side, pay more attention to the issue.

Figure 2 shows the frames identified from 2015 till 2018 for Information Warfare as a threat. The respective definitions of the categories can be found in the coding frame in Chapter 4.3. The frame applied most during the evaluation period is "Russia" (65%), followed by "Warfare & Attacks" (43%), "extremist parties" (41%), and "Inexperience/Vulnerability" (39%) which do not differ significantly in the frequency. The frames "Instability/Distrust" (35%) and "Cyber Security" (31%) are used in one-third of the speeches while "meddling in Western politics" (22%) and "Cyber Crime" (10%) were the two used least. Additionally, the graph shows that the focus on IW was slightly different in the two legislation periods.

Figure 2: Frame of IW as a Threat (2015-2018)



In over half of the speeches given on IW and cyber issues, the topics were associated with Russia. Ignoring the Russia code, in the 18th legislation period, the code applied most was

“Instability/Distrust” (46%), followed by “Warfare & Attacks” (39%), and “Inexperience/Vulnerability” (39%). In the 19th legislation period, the last two categories still played an important role, but “Instability/Distrust” (18th legislation: 46%; 19th legislation: 19%) was replaced by “extremist parties” (18th legislation: 32%; 19th legislation: 52%).

IW tactics are still most often described as a type of warfare or a tactic of an attack on a state, like the use of hybrid warfare or hacker attacks. Especially since 2017, German politicians have worried about other states financing extremist parties that express Euroscepticism and Anti-Americanism. Notably, the AfD is accused of being partly financed by Russia.

“Parties that are up to date and keep pace with the renewal of realities of life are the real guarantors of our democracy and not any shady Russian co-financing.”

(Özdemir, 2018, p. 3920)

The entry of the right-wing party in the *Bundestag* started a debate about extremist parties’ questionable relations to other states and their use of disinformation for their benefit and can, therefore, explain the increase in the use of the “extremist parties” category.

Additionally, the inexperience of Germany with IW tactics and cybersecurity issues concern many politicians. As a CSU politician emphasized,

“we have to take this influence very seriously and be careful not to underestimate it out of naivety.”

(Fabritius, 2016, p. 18847)

Politicians throughout both legislation periods see Germany’s inexperience and vulnerability as a danger to national security and demand higher investments in the cybersecurity sector (Fograscher, 2015). They, thereby, often relate to the hacker attack on the *Bundestag*, cyberwar, and hybrid war (Durz, 2015; Trittin, 2016).

Looking at the “Instability/Distrust” category, it is noticeable that it experienced the most substantial change in attention. This category relates in particular to the spread of propaganda and the resulting distrust in society. It is possible that this category was replaced by “meddling in Western societies” at the end of 2017. From this point on, the politicians no longer generally spoke about propaganda, but directly about Russia’s goals to destroy Western states’ internal realities. Hence the increased concern in the 19th legislation period about Russian interference in the policies of other countries by creating instability among the

respective populations can be explained. Before that, this tactic was only given occasional attention.

“Cyber Security” is another category that gained attention in the 19th legislation period. Using this argument, politicians present IW tactics as a threat related to secret services and governments that use cyberspace for espionage or attacks on the critical infrastructure to destabilize a state. Here, the danger is – in contrast to cybercrime – that secret services are equipped with different resources (Hakverdi, 2015).

“Cybercrime” is the least used code. Cybercrime refers to statements that only relate to crime in cyberspace. Criminals are increasingly using the internet to their advantage. Nevertheless, politicians are paying more attention to cyberspace at the government level.

The 30 speeches about IW tactics that were not related to Russia evolved mainly about Edward Snowden’s disclosures of highly classified information of the NSA in 2013. Metin Hakverdi (2015, p. 10573) expressed his concern about the impact these actions had on societies:

“Edward Snowden’s revelations and millions of data thefts have profoundly disrupted people’s trust in the digital future.”

Other speeches criticized Germany’s lack of experience with cyber issues without making a connection to Russia.

The following chapter shows how politicians perceive Russia and what arguments they use to construct Russia as a friend or an enemy.

5.2 The Perception of Russia in Germany

Throughout the investigation, 164 speeches in which Russia was presented either as a friend or a partner and 287 speeches where Russia was constructed as a threat or an enemy were identified in the parliamentary sessions (see Table 6 and 7).

The perception of Russia can be subdivided into Russia as a friend, partner, or enemy. The speeches in which both code frames (“Russia as a friend” and “Russia as a threat”) were used, the speakers criticized the threatening behavior of Russia. At the same time, the speaker pointed out the importance of cooperation with the state. Hence, these politicians perceive Russia as a partner more than a friend or a threat. Also, some speeches that were only coded with the “friend frame” were labeled as partners if the speaker argued only about economic or energy interests, collective security, or historical reasons. These factors suggest a preferred

partnership relationship, whereas politicians that defend Russia's actions are more likely to argue for friendly relationships.

As Tables 6 and 7 show, most pro-Russian speeches were made by the right-wing and left-wing extremist parties, while the center parties tend to see Russia as an inevitable partner. Most of them classify Russia even as an enemy.

Table 6: Quantity of pro- & anti- Russian Speeches per Party (18th legislation)

Party	Russia as a friend		Russia as a partner		Russia as an enemy	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
CDU	0	0	16	29,6	83	50,6
CSU	1	0,3	4	7,4	23	14
SPD	2	0,6	17	31,5	26	15,9
Greens	0	0	4	7,4	30	18,3
Left	32	91,1	13	24,1	2	1,2
Total	35	100	54	100	164	100

In addition, these tables show that the Left party used to be the only party in the *Bundestag* that perceived Russia as a friend in the 18th legislation period. Only three speeches were held by members of other parties defending Russia's behavior. The parties that perceived Russia most frequently as threatening were CDU, SPD, and the Greens. This applies to both legislation periods.

During the 18th legislation period, Social Democrats portrayed Russia most often as a partner. From October 2017, the AfD took over that role. Portraying Russia as a partner as a Social Democrat usually means condemning Russia's aggressions while also emphasizing the importance of international cooperation to reach peace with Moscow. The AfD, on the other hand, is focused more on the need for economic cooperation due to Germany and Russia's economic interdependence. The analysis shows a clear difference in the argumentation of both parties. Hence, the Left and the AfD are the parties presenting Russia as a friend most often. Therefore, it is no surprise that other parties accuse those parties as being to Russia friendly. Karl-Heinz Brunner (2017, p. 21240) summarized it as follows:

“While the right-wing, usually assisted by the Russian Federation, tries to spread half and fictional truths and arouse fears of gloomy powers, the left-wing always focus on Putin's downplaying as an angel of peace, demonizing NATO wherever possible and summon the Cold War.”

Table 7: Quantity of pro- & anti- Russian Speeches per Party (19th legislation)

Party	Russia as a friend		Russia as a partner		Russia as an enemy	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
CDU	0	0	5	12	50	41
CSU	0	0	0	0	14	11,4
SPD	0	0	9	21,5	25	20
Greens	0	0	0	0	19	15,5
Left	19	58	9	21,5	0	0
AfD	14	42	16	38	1	0,8
FDP	0	0	3	7	14	11,3
Total	33	100	42	100	123	100

It is apparent that members of the CDU perceive Russian activity most often as threatening. However, considering the speaker's time, the Greens appear to be particularly critical towards Russia. It is also interesting that out of the 53 speeches given by the Green Party, only four did not present Russia as a threat. This makes 93 percent of their speeches anti-Russian. In comparison, 83 percent of the CDU speeches and 65 percent of the SPD speeches were anti-Russian. Hence, members of the Greens perceive Russia as most threatening, whereas the other central parties share this perception but are pointing out the need for international cooperation to obtain peace more often.

So far, these findings support previous research that presented the central parties as more Russia critical and the left- and right-wing parties as more Russia friendly. However, the assumption "Russia-understanders" can be found mainly among the Left, AfD, SPD, and the CSU (Siddi, 2018a) appears to be wrong in the case of CSU. Eighty-eight percent of the CSU speeches were anti-Russian, whereas only 12 percent appeared to be pro-Russian. While this is not in line with Siddi, it still supports Hypothesis 1 of this thesis. Far-right and far-left politicians are therefore constructing Russia as a friend or partner, while politicians of center parties perceive Russia mainly as a threat.

In each party, one member stands out as being overly protective of or critical towards Russia. For instance, Roderich Kiesewetter, a CDU politician, gave the most speeches on the examined topics from 2015 until 2018. One factor that might explain that is the fact that he, compared to other politicians, was a member of the *Bundestag* in both legislation periods. Being a former *Bundeswehr* officer and currently chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and deputy member of the Sub-Committee Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation and the defense committee can explain his focus on defense security topics (Roderich

Kiesewetter MdB, 2020). Kiesewetter presents Russia as a threat, not only in the examined *Bundestag* speeches but also in interviews he has given to the media. For instance, with regards to the Ukraine conflict, he said in one interview about Putin: “We think he has a hidden strategy to disturb and weaken the EU to cause it to split” (Orth, 2014). In the *Bundestag* speeches, he mostly criticized Russia’s behavior concerning the INF treaty and nuclear weapons. His main problem with Russia is that “the Russian leadership is currently not interested in a modernization partnership,” which complicates achieving a partnership or even a friendship (Kiesewetter, 2018a, p. 3782). These observations are in line with his background experiences and actions.

In the SPD, the one member who is giving the most considerable attention to Russia and IW topics is Fritz Felgentreu. He is one of the SPD members presenting Russia as a threat and not as a partner. Just as Kiesewetter, he has also been in the *Bundestag* during both legislation periods. He is a member of the Defense Committee and is the spokesperson for his parliamentary group’s security and defense policy. In contrast to Kiesewetter, Felgentreu is more often referring to the need for investment in cybersecurity. For example, he emphasizes that Germany needs a *Bundeswehr* that is better prepared against hacker attacks from cyberspace in the future (Felgentreu, 2018). At the same time, he takes Russia’s power as a severe threat. In 2016 he said:

“if we ask, ‘do we have to take note that Russia can attack the Baltic States?’, We have to answer: Yes, we have.”

(Felgentreu, 2016, p. 18069)

For the Left Alexander Neu, Wolfgang Gehrcke, and Gregor Gysi stand out. Unlike the other two, Wolfgang Gehrcke left the *Bundestag* in 2017. Gehrcke and Neu both present Russia primarily as a victim of the West, whose actions they defend. Gysi, on the other hand, also presents Russia as a friend, but his speeches have more often been classified as “partners.” However, Gehrcke was the one politician who was accused regularly of having inappropriately close ties to Russia.

“Mr. Gehrcke, you want to overcome speechlessness. But what you have said leaves speechless. Because your view of Russia and President Putin is strangely transfigured, you do not perceive realities and may also suppress them.”

(Motschmann, 2017, p. 23293).

That can be traced back to the fact that Gehrcke is one of the radicals in the Left. He is following the goal of changing the system, abolishing capitalism, and nationalizing banks (Wehner, 2014). Looking at Gehrcke's curriculum vitae, it is striking that his experiences with communism go back a long way. He also has close contacts with Russia. For example, he was in the school of the Communist Alternative in Moscow in the late 1970s. Even today, he regularly defends Putin's behavior and frequently demands: "Don't make us enemies of the Russians!" (Gehrcke, 2015b, p. 11652, 2017b, p. 24911).

Alexander Neu is also known as one of the more radical members in the Left. Before the founding of the Left in 2005, he was with the Greens for a long time. As soon as the Left was established, he became a member of the political group for security policy in Berlin. Even if his party colleagues do not place Neu so far to the left, he is usually extremely radical in his speeches (Wehner, 2014).

Their behavior is too radical for Gregor Gysi. He wants to develop the party into an established political force in Germany, where radical views are hindrances (Wehner, 2014). That could explain why he defends the Kremlin less in his speeches than some other party members. When he talks about Russia in his speeches, he still condemns the violation of international law, but just like his colleagues, he focuses on the fact that Germany and other Western states also broke international law in the past (Gysi, 2015b). Furthermore, he points out the need for de-escalation in the interest of Germany's economy (Gysi, 2015a).

All members of the Left Party have in common that they always defend Russia's aggressive behavior and presenting Russia as a state that acts aggressively because the West – and especially the US – forced Russia into the actions. They argue from a realist perspective, just like John Mearsheimer (2014), who gives the West the blame for the Ukraine conflict. In this view, the expansionist behavior of NATO threatened Russia and pushed the Kremlin into aggressive behavior.

As mentioned above, the Greens are especially critical towards Russia. The one deputy that stands out in this party is Marieluise Beck. This is notable because she was only in the *Bundestag* until 2017. Beck is well-known as a person who is very critical of Putin. Moreover, she was a victim of a cyberattack in 2014 and was targeted again during the hacker attack on the *Bundestag* in 2015. The latest hacker attack on her computers was in January 2017. Nevertheless, these were not the only times Beck was targeted by IW tactics. In 2014, she recognized an increase of vulgar remarks on her Facebook posts, which she traced back to trolls (Steege, 2017). This explains why Beck focused a lot on Information Warfare tactics like hacker attacks, the spread of Russian propaganda in Europe, meddling in western societies, and

the use of trolls and bots. She sees a severe danger in Russia's alliance with nationalists and far-right parties in Europe in terms of foreign policy and by promoting populist parties to stimulate instability in Europe (Beck, 2017).

In the CSU, Bernd Fabritius stands out. He only served in the *Bundestag* during the 18th legislation period, which makes it surprising that he is still the one CSU member who gave the most speeches on the relevant topics. His personal dislike of Russia might have something to do with the fact that his family left Romania after he finished school to escape the communist system (Schwartz, 2014). Additionally, during his time in the *Bundestag* he was a member of the Committee on Affairs of the European Union. Altogether, Fabritius proved in other areas as well that he is less conservative than other CSU members. For instance, in 2017, as the only deputy of his party, he voted for the introduction of same-sex marriage in Germany (Brauns, 2017). In his speeches, he focuses on human rights abuses in Russia and expresses his support for Russian society while condemning the regime (Fabritius, 2016). Fabritius might represent an individual case. To explain why, despite the findings of other researchers, the CSU is determined to be so critical of Russia in this study another parliament member of the CSU is assessed. Against expectation, Florian Hahn, who gave the second most speeches on Russia, supports the earlier finding that CSU politicians see Russia more as a threat than a partner or friend. In all of his speeches, Hahn did not label Russia as a partner, let alone a friend. He especially criticizes Putin's hegemonic ambitions, which he argues necessitates a stronger role for NATO (Hahn, 2018).

The politician giving the most speeches on Russia and IW from the AfD is Armin-Paulus Hampel. He gave five of the speeches. In three of them, Russia was labeled as a friend, and in the other two, as a partner. This shows that he is obviously one of the politicians who fall into the category of "Russia-understanders." He is a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (*Deutscher Bundestag - Armin-Paulus Hampel*, 2020). Regarding the sanctions against Russia, he requests: "let us end the sanctions as soon as possible, for good and the peace of Europe, for the good of our country and also for the good of the great Russian nation" (Hampel, 2018, p. 886) illustrating his goodwill for Russia. However, a background check on him does not reveal any personal ties to Russia.

The FDP is the party that gave the least speeches. Out of the 19 speeches, most were given by Bijan Djir-Sarai. His focus on Russian issues can be attributed to his role as spokesman for his parliamentary group's foreign policy (*Bijan Djir-Sarai MdB*, 2020). While he criticizes Russia's aggressive behavior and armament harshly, he still recalls the importance of cooperation with Russia to obtain security and peace worldwide (Djir-Sarai, 2018).

Overall the insights in the background of the most German politicians allowed the testing of Hypothesis 2. One can say that those politicians who are openly critical of Russia, such as Marieluise Beck, quickly become targets of Russian attacks. Hence, their negative perception of Russia is getting stronger. Other personal ties to Russia, like to Russian society, can lead to more criticism of the Russian regime because those politicians hear about human rights abuses, for instance, from people who personally suffered under the regime. However, Hypothesis 2 claims that those politicians who have close personal ties to their Russian colleagues and or previous connections in Russia during their careers are more Russian friendly than others. This appears to be right in the case of Wolfgang Gehrcke. Nevertheless, one case is not enough to prove the hypothesis. Hence, Hypothesis 2 is refuted.

So far, the analysis has shown that personal experiences shape politicians' perceptions of other states and their warfare tactics. Especially, those politicians who are targeted by a state like Russia or have experienced living in a communist regime themselves are more critical towards such states.

5.2.1 *Russia as a Friend*

This section investigates the factors that lead to the perception of Russia as a friend.

Figure 3: Frame of Russia as a Friend (2015-2018)

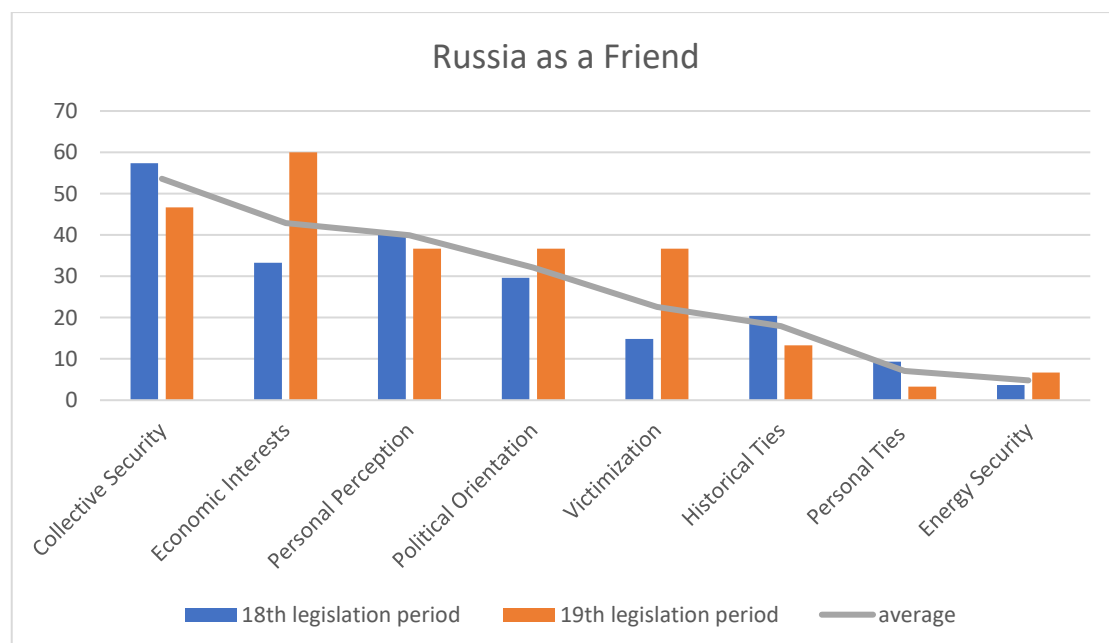


Figure 3 shows the categories identified from 2015 until 2018 divided into the two legislation periods. The line shows the average of both periods. In the 18th legislation period, the codes most often used were “Collective Security” (57%), “Personal Perception” (41%), and

“Economic Interests” (33%). The frequency the codes were used changed significantly in the 19th legislation period. From the end of 2017 on, “Economic Interests” was the code used most frequently (60%). “Collective Security” (47%) was still one of the top three, but “Personal Perception” (37%), “Political Orientation” (37%), and “Victimization” (37%) were used from then on with the same frequency. The “Victimization” (18th legislation: 15%; 19th legislation: 37%) code, in particular, has more than doubled. “Energy Security” (18th legislation: 4%; 19th legislation: 7%) also almost doubled, while “Personal Ties” (18th legislation: 9%; 19th legislation: 3%) decreased by more than the half.

On average, the code “Collective Security” was used most often. In the 18th legislation period, politicians focused on that category, while the politicians in the 19th legislation started concentrating on “Economic Interests.” Collective Security means that politicians argue from a security perspective. In their eyes, a close partnership or friendship with Russia is necessary to reach peace and stop conflicts worldwide. Cooperation with Russia is often not an option but an imperative.

“We are convinced that Russia remains the most important neighbor of the European Union and that security in Europe can only be achieved with Russia, but only with the contribution of Russia.”
(Grund, 2015, p. 9164)

Moreover, this argument is mainly used by center parties and the Left (see Table 8). Collective Security is the one condition that allows most for overcoming boundaries and starting close partnerships to achieve common security goals. Since states are interested in survival, politicians are looking for reasons to put disagreements aside and improve relationships.

Table 8: Code Relations Browser Collective Security X Party

Code System	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	Left	AfD	FDP	SUM
Friend (Russia)\Collective Security	15	3	18	1	25	5	2	69

What stands out the most is that the “Economic Interests” code has risen by almost half in the 19th legislation period. This, and the increase in “Energy Security,” suggests that economic cooperation became more critical for the parliamentarians from the end of 2017. This could be because politicians were slowly calling for an end of the sanctions against Russia after four years or because new parties were entering the *Bundestag* with a strong focus on economic

cooperation. The Code Relations Browser² reveals that the Left and the AfD were clearly the two parties supporting their perception by the use of economic interests arguments. With five speeches each by the SPD and CDU in which this argument was used, they and the other parties are almost not relevant for this argument (see Table 9).

Table 9: Code Relations Browser Economic Interests X Party

Code System	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	Left	AfD	FDP	SUM
Friend (Russia)\Economic Interests	5	1	5	2	17	13	1	44

Since the other parties did not increase their desire to loosen the sanctions, it is legitimate to assume the increase in “Economic Interests” lies within the fact that the AfD joined the *Bundestag* at the end of 2017. The leading argument politicians of the AfD use is that the sanctions would damage the German agriculture sector. However, the CDU also used this argument in 2016 when Hans-Georg von der Marwitz expressed his concern about the implications of the sanctions on the agriculture sector. In 2015, Christian Schmidt, the Minister of Food and Agriculture from 2014 until 2018, confirmed that “the Russian embargo has resulted in a loss of 600 million euros for the German agriculture and food industry” (Schmidt, 2015, p. 9978). Nevertheless, the AfD is the party using the agriculture argument most recurrently. Here the AfD appeals to the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations (OAOEV). The OAOEV “estimates that around 150,000 jobs have been lost due to the Russian sanctions” (Hartwig, 2018, p. 1103). However, the AfD is not the only party quoting the OAOEV; the Left does this as well (Ernst, 2018).

The main difference between the art of argumentation between the Left and the AfD is that the AfD arguments build on the German industry’s economic interests and farmers, whereas the Left argues more from a Russian point of view. They demand an end of the sanctions to improve relations with Russia (Wagenknecht, 2018).

The argumentation line of the Left and the AfD supports Hypothesis 3. Both parties present the economic consequences of the sanctions as stronger than they are. By that, they construct non-cooperation as the real threat for Germany and sweep the actual threat – in this case, Russia – under the carpet by ignoring the reasons that led to imposing sanctions on Russia in the first place. Those politicians try to prevent the construction of Russia as a threat by presenting Russia as a partner or even a friend.

² The Code Relations Browser is a tool by MAXQDA that visualizes the intersection of codes. The tool generates matrices, code by code that displays how often two codes were assigned to the same text segment (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019, pp. 160–161).

The present thesis assumed that politicians with high economic interests usually place a great emphasis on energy security as well. If this is the case, that argument could support the increase in the use of the “Energy Security” argument in the 18th legislation period. In fact, the AfD used this argument, but the SPD did as well. Thereby, the SPD refers to the Nord Stream 2 project (Mützenich, 2018b) and the AfD to Russia as a “reliable partner” in terms of energy security (Holm, 2018, p. 3138). It is no surprise the Social Democrats support the energy security argument since they are well-known for defending the Nord Stream 2 project. They present the import of gas through the Nord Stream 2 pipelines as the “most cost-effective solutions in terms of economic benefits” (Bajczuk & Formuszewicz, 2019). What is striking is that they did not use this argument more often. This might be because the sanctions against Russia were mostly not perceived as threatening to the German economy because the oil and gas sector were areas that were not touched by the sanctions (Filipec, 2019). Compared to the other codes, “Energy Security” was not used significantly enough throughout the investigation. Therefore, no support was found for Hypothesis 4.

Another code that increased significantly is the “Victimization” code. Victimization means that politicians present Russia as a victim of the West, especially the US and NATO. For instance, Inge Höger (2015, p. 9710) argued in the *Bundestag*

“that NATO’s eastward expansion and the current deployment of troops in the Baltic States make a significant contribution to the tense situation in Eastern Europe.”

Table 10: Code Relations Browser Victimization X Party

Code System	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	Left	AfD	FDP	SUM
Friend (Russia)\Victimization	0	0	0	0	17	3	0	20

In this line of thinking, Russia reacts to the West’s aggression and is not the state who started the current tense situation. The frequency of this category more than doubled in the 19th legislation period. On the one hand, this is because the AfD joined the *Bundestag*, and from then on the Left was no longer the only party to use these arguments. However, as already mentioned, the Left continued being the party using this argumentation line the most (see Table 10). On the other hand, the argument was used more often because Russia’s higher investments in the military were defended by the Left in 2018 (more on this in Chapter 5.2.2). Russia would have “neither the military capabilities nor the economic and financial resources to threaten NATO” (Neu, 2018, p. 5118).

“Victimization” and “Personal Perception” are closely connected. However, whereas statements coded with the first category present Russia as a victim that is threatened by Western states, the later one portrays Russia as a friend whose actions need to be defended because other states act in the same way. Some politicians argue that Russia’s actions are condemned more than the behavior of other states, such as the US. Politicians from the Left express: “To say that the Russians are to blame for everything is really stupid” (Gehrcke, 2017a, p. 21854).

Another category that saw an increase in use was “Historical Ties.” Overall, it has not been used that frequently. Statements that relate to Germany’s historical responsibility towards Russia are coded with this title. Using that argument, politicians think Russia should be treated as a partner or friend due to the history between Germany and Russia. Since many Soviet citizens lost their lives in the fight against the Nazis, Germany should establish a friendly relationship with Russia today (Gehrcke, 2017b). Russia also helped free Germany from fascism, which is why Germany owes Russia gratitude (Gehrcke, 2015a). In this case, the decline in the 19th legislation period can be easily explained. Wolfgang Gehrcke, who most often mentioned this historical connection, left the *Bundestag* with the start of the new legislation.

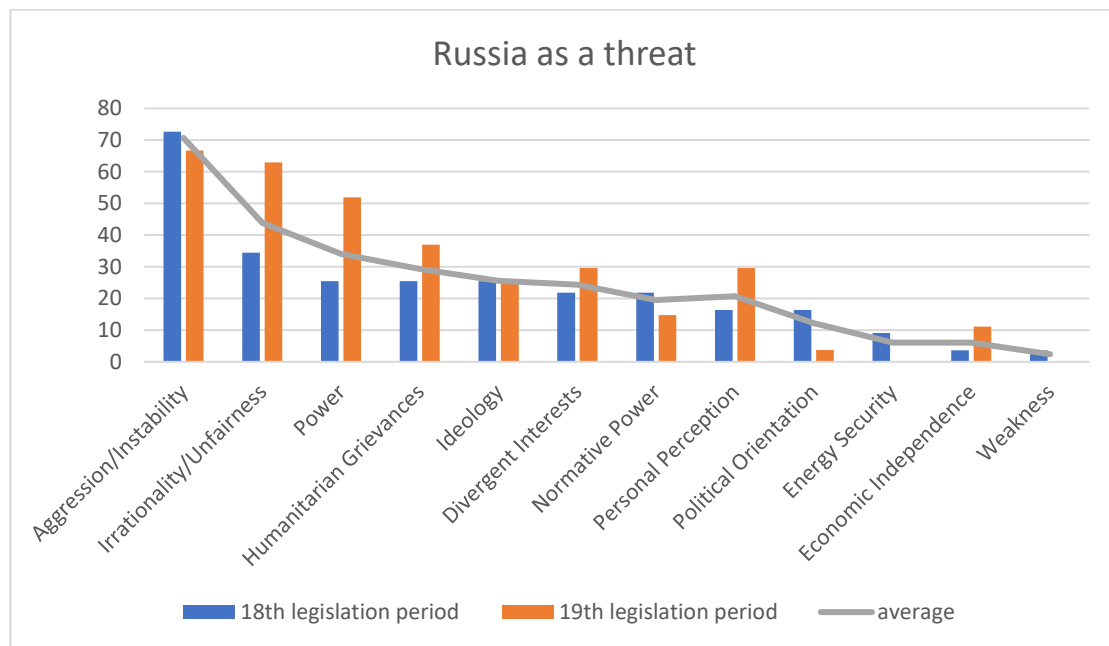
“Personal Ties” and “Political Orientation” are categories that were already discussed in the previous section. They are thus not examined further in this section.

5.2.2 *Russia as a Threat*

Besides the positive frame of Russia as a partner or friend, there is also a negative frame labeling Russia as a threat. Politicians using this frame, more often, usually come up with exact counterarguments to the ones presented in the previous section. While the respective definitions can be found in Chapter 4.3, the analysis results for the “Russia as a threat” frame are demonstrated next.

In the 18th and 19th legislation, the code applied most was “Aggression/Instability” (18th legislation: 73%; 19th legislation: 67%) followed by the similar code “Irrationality/Unfairness” (18th legislation: 35%; 19th legislation: 63%) which almost doubled in the 19th legislation (see Figure 4). While “Power” was third often used in the 19th legislation period (52%), the code was rarely used from 2015 until 2017 (26%). Back in the 18th legislation, politicians used “Ideology,” “Power,” and “Humanitarian Grievances” third most often (26%).

Figure 4: Frame of Russia as a Threat (2015-2018)



All things considered, it should be noted that almost all codes were applied more often in the 18th legislation. Only “Political Orientation” (18th legislation: 16%; 19th legislation: 4%), “Energy Security” (18th legislation: 6%; 19th legislation: 0%), and “Weakness” (18th legislation: 2%; 19th legislation: 0%) were used to a lesser extent. The last two codes were no longer used.

The main difference between “Aggression/Instability” and “Irrationality/Unfairness” is that the first code applies to actual war actions. In contrast, the second refers to unfair and irrational proceedings like the breach of international contracts. One example of “Aggression/Instability” would be:

“there has been an attack on Ukraine with the annexation of Crimea, and there is continuing destabilization of eastern Ukraine. Russian forces are fighting there.”

(Willsch, 2015, p. 8181)

While this text passage is clearly referring to the war in Ukraine and Russia’s presence there that leads to instability in the region, the following example shows that some politicians do not focus on war activities but on irrational behavior that is perceived as unfair by the international community:

“Russia breaks existing European treaties – the Charter of Paris – by invading Crimea and its influence in Eastern Ukraine.”

(Hardt, 2018, p. 7097)

One possible explanation for the increased use of the second category in the 19th legislation period could be that during the 18th legislation, the annexation of Crimea has not been long ago, and the indignation was still high in Germany. Moreover, in the war in Eastern Ukraine, the total number of conflict-related casualties decreased from autumn 2017. There were many civilian casualties, especially at the beginning of the conflict (2015: 2084 deaths). However, the number of civilian deaths fell noticeably for the first time in 2016 (112 deaths) and then again in 2018 (55 deaths) (OHCHR, 2020). Politicians may point out the aggressive approach to conflicts, especially when civilians suffer from it. After the death toll dropped, politicians began to refer more often to the Budapest Memorandum that Russia broke with violating Ukraine’s sovereignty of the borders. Furthermore, there were many discussions in 2018 about the INF treaty and how Russia broke it. That can also explain the increase in the use of the category “Irrationality/Unfairness.”

“Why did the United States resign? They did it because the US has tried over 30 times since 2014 to enter into a strategic conversation with the Russians about receiving the INF, and the Russians have refused the conversation 30 times each time.”

(Kiesewetter, 2018b, p. 8360)

Another incident that was often labeled as irrational or unfair was the poisoning of Skripal. Especially after the attack on him and his daughter, a discussion began about why Russia was in possession of Novichok, although “Russia shouldn’t actually have Novichok” (Erndl, 2018, p. 6501). Novichok is the neurotoxin with which Skripal and his daughter were poisoned (Ax, 2018). Russia must have broken international law that prohibits the use of neurotoxins, and the breach of contracts refers to irrational and unfair behavior.

“Ladies and gentlemen, like you, we are horrified to see the internationally prohibited use of a neurotoxin in the UK. We share the view of the British authorities about Russia as being presumably responsible.”

(Maas, 2018, p. 1796)

The display of these explanations can explain the increase in the “Irrationality/Unfairness” category in the 19th legislation period. At the same time, the “Aggression/Instability” category decreased a little. The use of one category does not rule out the other in the same context. Besides the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, another conflict for which the category “Aggression/Instability” was used frequently is the war in Syria. Russia’s involvement in Syria has been characterized as both aggressive and irrational. Politicians criticized Russia’s alliance with Assad as early as 2015 (Leutert, 2015). CDU politicians often blamed Russia for the migration crisis in Europe that occurred concurrently with the escalation of violence in Syria. Russian bombs would drive people to flee to the borders of Europe (Hardt, 2016; Nick, 2016). Since the war is ongoing, Russia’s involvement and its warmongering behavior are still on the *Bundestag*’s political agenda. Crimea and the war in the Donbas also remain on the agenda. Overall, German politicians continue to criticize Russia for aggressive behavior that led to instability in the past and present.

The code third often used on average is “Power.” This category relates to Russia’s expressions as a power-seeking state by modernizing its nuclear arsenal or investment in conventional weapons. When Russia threatened the use of nuclear weapons against Denmark, many German politicians expressed their alerts and worries. In 2015 Russia’s ambassador to Denmark signaled that participation in NATO’s missile shield would transform Danish ships into “targets for Russia’s nuclear weapons” (Milne, 2015). Politicians find it worrying that threats with nuclear weapons are apparently becoming part of Russian foreign policy again and that Russia, one of the nuclear powers, has recently modernized its sub-strategic nuclear weapons (Nick, 2015). Many politicians express their perception of threats of Russia’s new nuclear weapons. This fear increased mostly in the 19th legislation period. This can be traced back to the fact that the Kremlin presented its new generation of nuclear weapons at this time. Russia developed hypersonic weapons, which can be equipped with either nuclear or conventional warheads, in 2018. Putin called them Russia’s “new kind of strategic weapon” (Troianovski & Sonne, 2018). This demonstration of power increased fear among German politicians. Rolf Mützenich (2018a, p. 1513) expressed his concern:

“Who still doesn’t believe that a nuclear shadow is on the world, just has to look at the pictures from yesterday evening when the Russian President in front of the background of approaching rockets and animations fantasized again about an upcoming nuclear war.”

As a whole, Russia has massively invested in its military since 2000. While Russia used to spent about 3.3 percent of its GDP on armaments and the military in 2000, it increased to 5.5 percent in 2016 and then decreased again into a defense spending of 4.2 percent in 2017 (SIPRI, 2020). Thorsten Frei, a CDU politician, illustrated this development even more dramatically. He claimed that

“Russia used to spend about 2 percent of its economic output on arms and the military in 2000. Today it is 5.3 percent, more than any other country in the world.”

(Frei, 2018, p. 890)

Hence, Putin’s regular depiction of Russia’s nuclear power can explain the increase of this category.

“Humanitarian Grievances” arguments often come up in connection with Russia’s belligerent behavior. The German politicians refer not only to human rights violations in the parts of Russia in war zones, but also to the humanitarian situation in the country itself. Freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Russia are particularly criticized. This category was also slightly more often used in the 19th legislation period. However, this can be traced back – as already mentioned – to the human rights discussions that came up with the start of the FIFA World Cup in Russia in 2018. Otherwise, human rights violations were addressed and condemned relatively consistently. It is, however, surprising that the party using this code most often is the CSU (see Table 11). Even though the CDU/CSU parliamentary group has the most considerable speaking time in both legislation periods, Tables 6 and 7 have shown that the CSU always had a smaller share on speeches about Russia than the Greens. It could have been expected that the Greens, a party that stands for peace and human rights (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2020), relate more often to humanitarian issues. However, the CDU and the CSU attach great importance to norms and values (CDU/CSU, 2020), which explains why they perceive humanitarian grievances as particularly frightening.

Table 11: Code Relations Browser Humanitarian Grievances X Party

Code System	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	Left	AfD	FDP	SUM
Enemy/Threat (Russia)\Humanitarian Grievances	9	10	5	8	2	0	1	35

An argument that was used with the same degree of frequency throughout the investigation is “Ideology.” This code is used for statements in which politicians express their worries about Russia’s authoritarian regime type. Some politicians perceive the intentions, rather than the power, of another state as threatening. This is in line with the views of Walt’s balance of threat theory. Politicians recognize that:

“the narratives on the Russian side and the European side, on the western side, have diverged considerably in the past 25 years.”
(Schmid, 2018)

Only parties that perceive authoritarian regimes as threatening use this code. Hence, it is no surprise that neither the AfD nor the Left used this code at all (see Table 12).

Table 12: Code Relations Browser Ideology X Party

Code System	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	Left	AfD	FDP	SUM
Enemy/Threat (Russia)\Ideology	15	1	5	7	0	0	1	29

Another code that increased in its frequency is “divergent interests.” This code applies to statements that illustrate Russia as a threat because the state follows different, or even opposed, interests in international politics. Because of this, Russia can potentially manipulate peace processes and thus impedes peace in some regions. For instance, about Ukraine, Jürgen Trittin (2018, p. 887) said:

“Putin wants a failed state [...]. It is not our interest to have a failed state in our immediate neighborhood.”

The use of “Personal Perception” almost doubled in frequency (18th legislation period: 16%; 19th legislation period: 30%). Text passages in which politicians argued that Russia should not be defended because it behaves like an enemy were coded with this category. The parties expressing the most negative personal perception of Russia – concerning speaking time – are the CDU and the Greens (see Table 13). They can be perceived as the exact opposite of the Left and the AfD, who act more as “Russia-understanders.” For instance, Katja Leikert (2015, p. 9714) illustrated her personal perception of Russia by criticizing “Russia-understanders”:

“with a view of Russia’s undisguised threats using nuclear funds, I can understand the Putin-understanders less. Anyone who ignores all provisions of international law has not arrived in the 21st century.”

Especially in the 19th legislation period, politicians started expressing their personal perception more often. For instance, Karl Lamers (2018, p. 671) stated:

“I think that Russia has recently shown that it is using its military for aggressive purposes, and we have to prepare ourselves for that.”

Table 13: Code Relations Browser Personal Perception X Party

Code System	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	Left	AfD	FDP	SUM
Enemy/Threat (Russia)\Personal Perception (enemy)	9	1	2	5	0	0	2	19

“Normative Power” stands for Germany’s illustration as a state that puts normative values above economic interests. Therefore, it can be seen as the opposed category to “Economic Interests.” Politicians using this argumentation line “do not put economic interests above international law and the values of freedom that are important [to them]” (Motschmann, 2018, p. 883).

“Economic Independence” on the other side applies to statements in which politicians, in particular, say that economic cooperation with Russia is not necessary because Germany and the West are economically independent of Russia or should be in the future. Politicians do that by presenting other states, like the US as more critical for the German economy. For instance, by arguing that “Bavarian companies exported almost five times as many goods to the United States in 2013 as to the Russian Federation” (Hahn, 2016, p. 16245).

The same applies to “Energy Security.” These statements relate to the perception that Germany should be independent of Russian gas and do not need it in the future.

“Weakness” turned out to be the least significant argument used. Only two text passages were assigned to this category during the analysis. The politicians who are arguing that Russia is a threat because it is a weak state claim that Russia is creating enemies on its own, which would not be a sign of strength but of weakness (Wellmann, 2015).

Overall, the analysis of the negative frame has shown that politicians argue differently when they portray Russia as an enemy. If one looks at time period of analysis, it is also noticeable that the politicians of the current legislative period classify Russia more often as threatening than their predecessors.

5.3 The Perception of Russia's Society

Besides the frames "IW as a threat," "Russia as a threat," and "Russia as a friend," one more frame was developed that deserves analysis. The frame "Russia's society as a friend" was developed during the coding and is an inductive category.

This category was only used in 17 speeches. The majority of the politicians arguing in favor of the Russian society perceived the Russian regime and Putin as a threat. Politicians presenting the Russian society as good usually point out that the Kremlin is acting aggressively while the society does not support its government's proceedings. Therefore, its society should be supported and protected from Russian officials. These politicians support their perception of Russian society through their own experiences. Personal or professional visits to Russia have shown them that Russia is a friendly country (Kaster, 2016) and that Russia's civil society deserves support.

"Some time ago, I was in Moscow myself and exchanged ideas with civil society representatives about their problems at the Sakharov center there. It's one thing to learn about a country's human rights situation from a distance in reports and briefings. It is a completely different matter to speak to those affected locally and to experience the despair that is now spreading among the people there."
(Fabritius, 2016, p. 18846)

Even though no support was found for the assumption that personal ties create an atmosphere of friendship regarding a state, this analysis found evidence for the creation of feelings of friendship with societies that improve through personal visits and connections. Those parliamentarians that visit Russia regularly and meet with civil society agents more often portray the Russian state as a threat due to its aggressive behavior and human rights abuses abroad and domestically. Among them, it is common sense that Russian society deserves support since their own government fails to do so.

In the following section, two interviews with politicians currently sitting in the *Bundestag* are analyzed using the same category system. Based on these interviews, the previous findings can be supported.

5.4 Russia Experts' Perception of Information Warfare and Russia

Out of the two interviews conducted, the first interviewee was a member of the SPD parliamentary group and the second one of the AfD. Both interviews were coded utilizing the developed coding frames for the speeches. However, both interviews revealed new factors that lead to the perception of an issue or a state as a threat or not. Hence, new codes were used complementary.

The interviews were split into three parts (Part 1: Information Warfare; Part 2: Information Warfare & Russia; Part 3: Russia). This layout was chosen so that the interviewees would share their perception of IW first without making a connection to Russia. The second part was created to find answers to why Information Warfare is usually associated with Russia. The last part should reveal other reasons – independent of IW tactics – that lead to Russia's perception as a threat, partner, or a friend.

When analyzing the two interviews, it first emerges that the interviewees attribute importance to different tactics of Information War. While the SPD politician sees the interference of foreign states in the domestic politics of western countries as the main threat and is not sure whether one should “call it warfare or [...] just a way of meddling, interfering in West European affairs” (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 22nd, 2020), the AfD politician speaks of psychological wars that have always been waged and are mainly dangerous because they spread disinformation and propaganda (Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 29th, 2020).

Both politicians expressed concern about the spread of propaganda, fake news, and disinformation regarding Information Warfare. While the AfD is attributing the fault of successful propaganda to German media and politics, Russia would only be using a cleavage for its own advantage that is already existing in the German society.

“Media, especially public channels, practically gave up their role as the fourth power and, therefore, lost public trust. Fake News and disinformation fill this gap.”

(Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 29th, 2020)

The SPD politician also recognizes that mistrust. Russia's success in the spread of disinformation would not lie in Russia's skills but rather in German society's weakness. German politicians have to focus on the underlying reasons the society has to put more trust in authoritarian regimes than in German mainstream media. Both agree that the primary goal

should be increasing societal resilience to treat the roots of the problem and not only the symptoms.

As already mentioned, the meddling of foreign powers in domestic politics is also of concern. So is the support for extremist parties all over Europe, which was unsurprisingly mentioned by the SPD politician only. He traces this back to 2011 and 2012 when Putin changed his personal strategy resulting in a more authoritarian Russian state. This ideological shift would make Russia more attractive for radical groups in Europe.

“That’s what we have seen with financial and political support for right-wing parties all over Europe. Le Pen in France, Salvini in Italy and also AfD here in Germany. So, this has also become part of a Russian strategy to point European democracies as weak, as rotted, [and] as declining”
(Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 22nd, 2020)

Only the SPD politician expressed concern about Germany’s inexperience regarding Information Warfare. However, he claimed that Germany is not suffering from a lack of experience. The problem, in his opinion, is that no efficient measures of containment have been developed yet and Germany is still figuring out the best responses to hybrid warfare. However, the two politicians agree that the perception of IW as a threat is stronger in the Baltic States and that this must be acknowledged. They trace their perception of the threat to Baltic States back to their experience with cyber-attacks.

The second Interviewee might have been biased about the topic of the present study because he did not mention other countries that use IW tactics. This might be because he answered the questions via email and, therefore, knew that Russia was the main topic. In contrast, Interviewee one, who answered the questions via Skype and did not receive the questions in advance, pointed out that IW arises in Russia, China, and Iran. Further, he underlined the need for EU and NATO cooperation to counter such threats. The AfD, on the other side, favored NATO cooperation over the EU.

Regarding the relation to Russia and ignoring the aspect of Russia’s use of Information Warfare, the interviews support the findings of this study. The SPD politician was more critical towards Russia and condemned Russia’s aggressions more consistently. At the same time, he pointed out the importance of cooperation with Russia regarding economic and, in particular, international stability issues. He held Putin responsible for the non-existing cooperation between the EU and Russia and assumed real cooperation with Russia would be unrealistic as

long as Putin is president. While he wants to have Russia as a partner, he still perceived Russia in many areas as a threat.

“So, [Russia] can be a partner. For the time being, it’s not so much a partner. In many aspects [Russia] is an adversary, and in other cases, it’s a necessary partner.”

(Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 22nd, 2020)

The points that speak for a partnership are historical responsibility, collective security, economic and energy interests.

The AfD politician, on the other hand, defended Russia’s actions. After the end of the Cold War, Europe failed to integrate Russia in a security architecture, which led to a picture of Russia as a “bad guy.” So, Interviewee two is using the same arguments as his colleagues in the *Bundestag*, accrediting some of the faults to the West. However, Interviewee one also demanded some concession from the West regarding Russia. To solve the Ukraine conflict, the West would have to admit some mistakes and change its perception of Russia.

One argument that was used by Interviewee one, and for which only little support was found during the analysis of the *Bundestag* speeches, is “weakness.” Like his colleagues, the SPD politician saw Russia’s weakness as the real challenge Germany and Europe would be facing. This weakness should not be underestimated.

The categories newly discovered in the interviews were “awareness,” “geographical proximity,” and “concession.” Awareness relates to Information Warfare. It is a kind of counterargument to “Inexperience/Vulnerability.” Interviewee one argued that:

“cyber-attacks are much more closely followed now and so I think awareness is much bigger than five years ago. Technical measures have been implemented. So, I guess we are better prepared now.”

“Geographical Proximity” related to labeling Russia as a partner and was used by the SPD politician only. From his standpoint, the fact that Russia is a neighbor to the EU makes avoidance of Russia impossible. Germany has to deal with Russia and cannot ignore the behavior of the Kremlin.

The category “concession” is the only new one that was used by both interviewees. Both agree that Germany and NATO have to admit that the West made mistakes when building a new European security architecture without Russia. The EU and the West, in general, have to

come up with new ideas to improve relations with Russia, which is, of course, the overall goal of the politicians.

Overall, the two interviews complemented the previous findings of this study. Support was found for Hypothesis 1 since the AfD politician expressed less concern about tactics of Information Warfare, arguing that conventional warfare should not be neglected. Additionally, he condemned Russia's aggressive behavior in the same way his colleagues in the *Bundestag* did. He argued that Russia acted out of frustration, and German politicians and the German government should take this into account when judging Russia.

The SPD politician, on the other side, expressed worries about IW tactics and perceived Russia more as a threat. Even though he would prefer a partnership, he does not think a trustworthy partnership would be possible as long as Putin continues following his strict principles. Hence, the far-right party's politician perceives Russia and the new warfare tactic as less threatening than the center party's politician.

Just as with the speeches, the interviews do not support Hypothesis 2. While no personal connection to Russia has been found in the background check of the AfD politician, the SPD politician said he does have close connections to Russia because he is fluent in Russian. However, this personal connection led to a closer understanding of Russian society as friends. Again, this is in line with the findings of the speeches. German politicians who have close connections to Russian society perceive them as friends while they portray the Kremlin more often as a threat.

Both politicians emphasized economic interests. However, the SPD politician excluded closer economic cooperation as long as Russia does not change its authoritarian course. On the other hand, the AfD politician put the economic advantages of the Russian sales market for Germany above ethics and demanded the end of the sanctions. These observations support Hypothesis 3. This is because the politician who privileged an ethical foreign policy over economic interests (SPD) turned out to be perceiving Russia as more threatening than the politician who had an emphasis on economic interests and constructs Russia more as a partner who is no danger (AfD).

Hypothesis 4, which is closely connected to Hypothesis 3, is refuted. The SPD politician emphasized his support for Nord Stream 2 and still perceived Russia as a threat rather than a partner. However, he sees cooperation in the energy field as a chance for a successful partnership in the future. The AfD politician underlined Russia's importance as a trade partner regarding energy imports but did not expand this statement further.

6 Conclusion

This thesis studied the perception German politicians have of first, Information Warfare and second, Russia. Based on the academic literature and the findings presented above, this thesis's outcomes are discussed in the following section. Subsequently, the main results of the thesis will be summed up. Lastly, an examination of the limitations of this study helps to give recommendations for further research.

The Qualitative Content Analysis of *Bundestag* speeches examined the perception of IW and Russia among German politicians. Different incidents, such as the hacker attack on the *Bundestag* in 2015, the "Lisa Case" in 2016, the Russian interference in the US election in 2016, and the poisoning of Skripal 2018, were chosen as focusing events since these incidents connected Russian aggression with the use of IW tactics aiming to sabotage the West and Germany. Throughout the investigation, it was possible to identify different narratives of Russia among German politicians by analyzing how they presented and framed Russian actions and IW tactics in their speeches.

In general, there are some differences concerning the urgency of and focus on the two topics. However, this is no surprise since IW is just a subtopic in defense politics, whereas Russia is of interest in many contexts. According to the findings of this study, Information Warfare is not one of the main topics German politicians are concerned about. Quantitatively, out of the 483 speeches related to Information Warfare and/or Russia only 104 were related to disinformation campaigns, the spread of fake news, other information warfare tactics, or cyber issues. Conformingly, the interviewees supported these findings when they stated that IW would be a topic of concern but is not affecting their everyday political life. They see Germany's vulnerability in its public distrust towards the media, which contributes to a failure of those most responsible for undermining disinformation tactics. One of the reasons why German politicians do not perceive Information Warfare as a threat, in general, might be that there is no common understanding of Information Warfare in Germany. The background research showed that German intelligence services focus mainly on cyber-attacks. They put great emphasis on cyber espionage and sabotage, ignoring the psychological dimension of Information Warfare. In the German debate, Information Warfare is often assigned to a form of cyberwar, which means that the actual tools of Information Warfare (media manipulation, distribution of fake news and propaganda) fade into the background.

However, the analysis of the *Bundestag* speeches allowed the discovery of support for Hypothesis 1, which stated that far-right and far-left parties would not present new warfare tactics as a threat, whereas center parties perceive Information Warfare as a danger to national security. The AfD and the Left barely spend speaking time on IW topics while the center parties, which proved to be more Russia critical in the analysis, do. Additionally, most speeches on IW tactics were also about Russia and no other countries. That supports the claim that Information Warfare is often automatically associated with Russia.

The findings furthermore suggest that politicians are mostly concerned about the use of information and cyber tools for warfare and attacks, such as the hacker attack on the *Bundestag* in 2015 or Russia's hybrid warfare in Ukraine. The politicians additionally expressed concern about the use of disinformation campaigns by extremist parties and the support of right-wing just as much as left-wing parties by foreign powers like Russia. In the 19th legislation period, the concern about foreign powers meddling in German domestic politics increased. The awareness of German parliamentarians concerning manipulative IW tools is rising, but the main focus is still on cyber tools.

Germany's inexperience in cyberspace, and therefore its vulnerability towards cyber and information attacks, is of great concern. Political psychology approaches offer explanations for this. The unknown causes anxiety and fear, which leads to the perception of new technologies as threats (Friedman & Singer, 2014).

Overall, the literature and the analysis of the speeches concerning Information Warfare suggest that German politicians are aware of Germany's inexperience in the field of cyber threats and its inability in countering disinformation campaigns effectively. The main problem, however, might be that Germany, in contrast to Russia, neglects the psychological dimension of Information Wars. They thus underestimate the real implications disinformation campaigns and fake news can have on Western societies. As a significant player in the European Union, Germany should take these new threats more seriously and work not only on a cyber defense strategy but include the information aspect and psychological dimension into their strategic considerations as well.

Regarding the perception of Russia among German politicians, the analysis reveals that a large proportion of them perceives Russia as threatening.

First of all, the analysis showed that it is plausible to divide the perception of Russia into three categories – Russia as a friend, as a partner, and as an enemy or threat. The flexible nature of QCA allowed categorizing the speeches between the three even though only two

respective coding frames (“Russia as a friend”, “Russia as a partner”) were created in the initial analytical scheme. Through the use of arguments out of both frames, or the use of the more partner-centric categories of the “Russia as a friend” frame (“Economic Interests,” “Energy Security,” “Collective Security,” “Historical Ties”), politicians presented Russia neither as a friend nor an enemy but as a partner that is needed. Mostly, politicians of the SPD (18th legislation period) and the AfD (19th legislation period) present Russia as a partner. This finding is in line with the findings of Marco Siddi (2018), who divided German politicians into “Russia-understanders” and “Russia-critics.” According to him, the SPD is more a sympathizer of Russia than a critic.

Furthermore, the analysis confirmed Hypothesis 1, which stated that the far-left and far-right parties (The Left and AfD) clearly support Russia frequently by presenting it as a reliable partner and friend and by defending its aggressive behaviors and breach of contracts and international law. The “Russia-critics,” on the other hand, are the CDU and the Greens. This thesis would put only one party into a different category: the CSU. Notably, this outlier reveals the advantages of QCA as a method. Background checks allowed for these findings regarding the CSU, however they might be biased due to Bernd Fabritius’ more progressive and liberal positions within the CSU.

Conducting background checks was also important for testing Hypothesis 2. For example, whether personal ties determine the perception of Russia as a friend could only be answered through this method. The background check was decisive especially in the case of Wolfgang Gehrcke. Still, no proof was found for the second hypothesis since only one politician stood out as presenting Russia as a friend continuously. The examination of the personal ties of more politicians that proved to be “Russia-understanders” could potentially find more evidence for this hypothesis. Therefore, more research is needed, which would have overstretched the scope of this thesis.

Even though Hypothesis 3 was rejected, the analysis showed that politicians with personal ties to Russia’s civil society instead perceive the regime as a threat while they perceive part of the society, with which they share universal norms and values, as friends. Hence, personal ties can indeed determine if a politician perceives someone as a friend or a threat. The hypothesis was restricted to only personal ties with other state representatives. Further research should investigate the role civil society plays in threat perception.

Hypothesis 3 and 4 were tested by the use of the “Russia as a friend” and the “Russia as an enemy” frames. The first frame verified Hypothesis 3 and the analysis showed that those politicians who presented Russia as a friend most frequently used the economic interest

argument. However, Russia is presented as a friend or partner because of the desire for security, which is easier accessed through cooperation. Besides the expectation that energy security would play an essential role in the threat perception of politicians, less proof was found for Hypothesis 4. Politicians barely used Germany's energy security to argue for Russia as a friend.

The factors that mostly led to the perception of Russia as a friend or partner were the desire for collective security and economic interests. What proved to be particularly interesting is that Russia's actions were more than twice as often defended by politicians in the 19th legislation period compared to the previous one. This rise can empirically be traced back to the AfD entering the *Bundestag*. Once again, proof was found for Hypothesis 1, confirming that right-wing parties present a state that endangers national security as friends instead of threats.

The investigation of the factors that influence the perception of politicians regarding another state as a threat revealed that Russia's aggressive behavior internationally, its irrational behavior (like the breach of contracts or the poisoning of Skripal and his daughter), and the demonstrative way of presenting its military power with the threat of violence determine a politician's threat perception more decisively. As social constructivists point out, actors always act based on the importance they attach to objects and other actors (Wendt, 1992). Considering the amount of time politicians spend on IW and Russia's urge for power, the analysis shows that only minimal importance is attached to IW in Germany while nuclear weapons and an increase in military investments are still perceived as outstanding threats and hence, as more of a danger.

To summarize and answer the research questions, the factors that lead mainly to the perception of IW tactics as a threat are: the perception of IW as a form of warfare or severe attack; the fact that Russia supports extremist parties for their own purpose in order to destabilize a country domestically; and finally, the inexperience and thus the resulting vulnerability of Germany. These three factors proved to determine the perception German politicians have of IW tactics through both investigated legislation periods.

The factors that lead to the perception of Russia as a threat include Russia's aggressive behavior, which leads to instability within Russia itself and worldwide, the irrationality and unfairness of Russia's proceedings, and Russia's pursuit of power through the modernization of its weapon systems and its investments in nuclear weapons.

Generally, this thesis's research has shown that German politicians mostly condemn Russia's aggressive and irrational behavior. However, most of them clearly attribute these negative perceptions to the regime. Because of this, the ones condemning Russia defend the

civil society more frequently. Although German politicians tend to perceive Russia carefully, they are aware of the importance Russia plays in Europe and worldwide. In the end, cooperation and partnership are desirable. Still, friendship or even a partnership with Russia is only feasible if Russia's foreign policies change substantially.

Concerning Information Warfare, German politicians do not perceive it as an urgent issue since the government and media do not do so either. Here, more research is needed regarding media coverage of the warfare tactic. The German government should also formulate a definition to make it easier for politicians to refer to the issue in debates. A debate about Russia's understanding of IW and its impacts on Germany could be a promising strategy. Further research should analyze how much Germany lags behind in countering information warfare and scrutinize the challenges Germany might face due to its inexperience in the field of information warfare.

The theoretical part of this thesis showed that no single theoretical school is able to explain the different aspects of threat perception. More research is needed to reveal how personal motivations can influence the threat perception of individuals.

Overall, the qualitative assessment of parliamentary speeches has proven to be an effective tool to systematically analyze structural differences in the threat perception of Russia and Information Warfare among German politicians. In this process, valuable empirical findings have been collected which can be used to confirm existing theoretical concepts on threat perceptions. The use of expert interviews appeared to be an excellent complement to the research of existing speeches, as they allowed for a deeper understanding of the individual positions of the interviewees. Still, further research on the subject is needed. Especially the role civil society plays and how civil society actors are able to influence politicians' perception in particular have been identified as potential starting points for academic work.

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Appendix

Table 14: Data Selection “Russia”

	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Number of protocols	56	45	34	50	185
Already included	4	4	4	13	25
irrelevant	25	19	16	10	69
Relevant protocols	27	22	14	27	90

Table 15: Coding Frame for Russian Society as a Friend

Name	Russian society as a friend
Description	characterizes that the Russian society rather than the regime is perceived as a friend
Example	“The Russian people are our friends. We are particularly close to those who fight for an open society despite the extreme conditions. Criticism of the Kremlin does not mean criticism of Russia” (Beck, 2016, p. 18846)
Decision Rule	Include text passages that exclusively argue that cooperation with the Russian society is good and important, exclude all statements that display a ‘balanced’ view

Table 16: Coding Frame for the Parties

Name	Description	Example	Decision Rule
CDU	Characterizes every relevant statement given by a CDU member	“Russia is and remains our largest eastern partner” (Wellmann, 2015, p. 8560)	Include all text passages that are coded and given by a member of the CDU, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party
CSU	Characterizes every relevant statement given by a CSU member	“To date, Russia has not eliminated fears that they will develop land-based cruise missiles with nuclear missiles with a range of over 500 kilometers” (Ullrich, 2018, p. 6882)	Include text passages that are coded and given by a CSU member, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party
SPD	Characterizes every relevant statement given by an SPD member	“Cooperation with the USA and sustainable security for Europe does not exist without and certainly not against Russia” (Thönnies, 2017, p. 21857)	Include all text passages that are coded and given by a member of the SPD, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party

Left	Characterizes every relevant statement given by a Left member	“It is one of the European interests to have a good relationship with Russia again instead of an ever-escalating confrontation” (Wagenknecht, 2016, p. 15135)	Include all text passages that are coded and given by a member of the Left party, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party
Greens	Characterizes every relevant statement given by a Greens member	“Russia must disclose its missile program and destroy missiles with a range of more than 500 kilometers” (Keul, 2018, p. 8416)	Include all text passages that are coded and given by a Greens member, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party
AfD	Characterizes every relevant statement given by an AfD member	“It is clear, however, that every pipeline that supplies us with energy strengthens our energy security. Russia has always been a reliable partner in this regard” (Holm, 2018, p. 3138)	Include all text passages that are coded and given by a member of the AfD, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party
FDP	Characterizes every relevant statement given by an FDP member	“[...] because Russia already has appropriate medium-range missiles with mobile launchers, while the United States still has to develop them” (Lechte, 2018, p. 8415)	Include all text passages that are coded and given by a member of the FDP, exclude all statements that are not coded and/or given by another party

Table 17: Speeches 2015-2018

Date	Party	Perception of Russia	MP	IW	Russian society
16.01.15	Greens	threat	Thönnies	no	no
16.01.15	SPD	threat	Roth	no	no
16.01.15	Greens	threat	M. Beck	no	no
16.01.15	Greens	threat	Höhn	no	no
16.01.15	CDU	threat	Gruns	no	no
16.01.15	Leftist	friend	Gehrcke	no	no
28.01.15	Leftist	friend	Hänsel	no	no
28.01.15	SPD	partner	Roth	no	no
29.01.15	SPD	threat	Gabriel	no	no
29.01.15	CDU	threat	Lämmel	no	no
29.01.15	Greens	partner	V. Beck	no	yes
05.02.15	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
05.02.15	CDU	threat	Lorenz	no	no
05.02.15	SPD	threat	Hellmich	no	no
05.02.15	Leftist	friend	Gehrcke	no	no
05.02.15	SPD	threat	Annen	yes	no
06.02.15	CDU	threat	Willsch	no	no
06.02.15	CDU	threat	Liebing	no	no
06.02.15	CDU	threat	Jung	no	no
06.02.15	CDU	partner	Pfeiffer	no	no
06.02.15	SPD	threat	Brunner	yes	no
26.02.15	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
27.02.15	SPD	friend	Gabriel	no	no
04.03.15	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	no	no
04.03.15	Leftist	friend	Liebich	yes	no

04.03.15	CDU	threat	Uhl	yes	yes
04.03.15	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	yes	yes
04.03.15	CDU	threat	Wellmann	no	no
04.03.15	Greens	threat	M. Beck	yes	no
04.03.15	Greens	threat	Trittin	yes	no
04.03.15	SPD	threat	Steinmeier	no	no
19.03.15	Leftist	friend	Wagenknecht	no	no
19.03.15	CDU	threat	von Marschall	no	no
19.03.15	SPD	partner	Spinrath	yes	no
19.03.15	SPD	partner	Oppermann	no	no
19.03.15	CDU	threat	Merkel	no	no
19.03.15	Greens	threat	Göring-Eckhardt	no	no
19.03.15	SPD	partner	Becker	no	no
26.03.15	CDU	threat	Vaatz	no	no
26.03.15	SPD	friend	Steinmeier	no	no
26.03.15	CDU	threat	Steffel	no	no
26.03.15	CSU	threat	Obermeier	no	no
26.03.15	Greens	threat	M. Beck	no	no
26.03.15	CDU	threat	Lindholz	no	no
26.03.15	CDU	NA	Kiesewetter	yes	no
26.03.15	CDU	partner	Jung	no	no
26.03.15	CDU	partner	Grund	no	no
26.03.15	CDU	threat	C. Müller	no	no
26.03.15	SPD	partner	Brunner	yes	no
27.03.15	Greens	partner	Ostendorff	no	no
23.04.15	Greens	threat	M. Beck	yes	no
23.04.15	CDU	threat	Klimke	no	no
23.04.15	CSU	threat	Fabritius	yes	no
24.04.15	CDU	threat	Uhl	no	no
24.04.15	CDU	threat	Nick	no	no
24.04.15	CDU	threat	Leikert	no	no
24.04.15	Leftist	friend	Höger	no	no
24.04.15	SPD	threat	Hellmich	no	no
07.05.15	CDU	partner	Möring	no	no
20.05.15	CSU	partner	C. Schmidt	no	no
21.05.15	SPD	partner	Oppermann	no	no
21.05.15	CDU	threat	Merkel	no	no
21.05.15	Leftist	partner	Gysi	no	no
11.06.15	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
12.06.15	CSU	NA	Durz	yes	no
12.06.15	Greens	NA	Keul	yes	no
12.06.15	Greens	NA	Göring-Eckhardt	yes	no

12.06.15	SPD	NA	Hakverdi	yes	no
18.06.15	SPD	threat	Oppermann	no	no
18.06.15	CDU	threat	Kauder	no	no
18.06.15	CSU	threat	Hasselfeldt	no	no
18.06.15	Leftist	friend	Gysi	no	no
18.06.15	SPD	threat	Arnold	no	no
08.09.15	SPD	NA	Fograscher	yes	no
09.09.15	Leftist	partner	Neu	no	no
09.09.15	CDU	partner	Merkel	no	no
09.09.15	Leftist	threat	Leutert	no	no
09.09.15	Leftist	partner	Gysi	no	no
09.09.15	Leftist	friend	Gehrcke	no	no
24.09.15	CSU	threat	Wöhr	no	no
24.09.15	SPD	partner	Oppermann	no	no
24.09.15	CDU	partner	Motschmann	no	no
24.09.15	CDU	partner	Kiesewetter	no	no
24.09.15	CDU	threat	Kauder	no	no
24.09.15	Leftist	partner	Gehrcke	no	no
24.09.15	Greens	threat	Brantner	no	no
30.09.15	Leftist	partner	Ulrich	no	no
30.09.15	Greens	threat	Nouripour	no	no
30.09.15	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
30.09.15	CSU	threat	Karl	no	no
30.09.15	CDU	threat	Frei	no	no
01.10.15	CSU	threat	Fabritius	no	no
01.10.15	CDU	threat	Brand	no	no
01.10.15	CDU	threat	Uhl	no	no
01.10.15	Leftist	friend	Hunko	no	no
14.10.15	SPD	partner	Steinmeier	no	no
14.10.15	Leftist	partner	Bartsch	no	no
15.10.15	CDU	partner	Merkel	no	no
16.10.15	SPD	NA	Rawert	yes	no
12.11.15	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
12.11.15	CDU	threat	Lamers	no	no
12.11.15	Leftist	friend	Kunert	no	no
12.11.15	CDU	partner	Klimke	no	no
12.11.15	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
12.11.15	CDU	threat	Bergner	no	no
25.11.15	CSU	threat	Hahn	no	no
25.11.15	Leftist	friend	Buchholz	no	no
25.11.15	SPD	partner	Arnold	no	no
03.12.15	CDU	threat	Steinbach	no	no

03.12.15	SPD	threat	M. Roth	no	no
03.12.15	CSU	threat	Fabritius	no	no
04.12.15	Greens	threat	Janecek	no	no
04.12.15	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
16.12.15	SPD	threat	Oppermann	no	no
16.12.15	CDU	threat	Merkel	no	no
16.12.15	Leftist	friend	Lenkert	no	no
16.12.15	Leftist	friend	Hunko	no	no
28.01.16	Leftist	partner	Ulrich	no	no
28.01.16	CDU	NA	Pfeiffer	yes	no
28.01.16	SPD	NA	Gabriel	no	no
17.02.16	Leftist	friend	Wagenknecht	no	no
17.02.16	Greens	threat	Göring-Eckhardt	yes	no
17.02.16	CDU	threat	Kauder	no	no
17.02.16	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
17.02.16	Greens	threat	Nouripour	no	no
17.02.16	SPD	threat	Annen	no	no
17.02.16	CDU	threat	Nick	no	no
17.02.16	Leftist	partner	Dağdelen	no	no
17.02.16	CDU	threat	Wadephul	no	no
17.02.16	SPD	threat	Schwabe	no	no
18.02.16	CDU	threat	Heider	no	no
19.02.16	CSU	partner	S. Mayer	no	no
19.02.16	CDU	threat	Frei	no	no
15.04.16	SPD	threat	Steinbrück	no	no
15.04.16	CSU	threat	Hahn	yes	no
27.04.16	Greens	threat	Göring-Eckhardt	yes	no
28.04.16	CSU	threat	Obermeier	yes	no
28.04.16	Leftist	friend	Lötzsch	no	no
29.04.16	CDU	partner	Bergner	no	no
02.06.16	Greens	partner	V. Beck	no	yes
02.06.16	CDU	partner	von der Marwitz	no	no
22.06.16	SPD	threat	Thönnies	no	no
22.06.16	SPD	partner	Steinmeier	no	no
22.06.16	CDU	threat	Motschmann	no	no
22.06.16	CDU	partner	Kaster	no	yes
22.06.16	Leftist	friend	Gysi	no	no
24.06.16	CDU	threat	Möring	no	no
24.06.16	CDU	threat	Fuchs	no	no
24.06.16	SPD	threat	Annen	no	no
07.07.16	Leftist	friend	Wagenknecht	no	no
07.07.16	Greens	threat	Trittin	yes	no

07.07.16	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
07.07.16	SPD	partner	Oppermann	yes	no
07.07.16	CDU	partner	Merkel	yes	no
07.07.16	CDU	threat	Lorenz	yes	no
07.07.16	CDU	threat	Kauder	no	no
07.07.16	Greens	threat	Hofreiter	no	no
07.07.16	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
07.07.16	CSU	threat	Hahn	yes	no
07.07.16	CDU	threat	Gädechens	no	no
07.07.16	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	no	no
07.07.16	SPD	threat	Annen	yes	no
06.09.16	CDU	threat	Schäuble	yes	no
06.09.16	CDU	NA	Gröhler	yes	no
07.09.16	CDU	threat	Röttgen	no	no
07.09.16	CDU	threat	Lamers	yes	no
07.09.16	CSU	threat	Karl	no	no
07.09.16	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
07.09.16	CDU	threat	Gädechens	yes	no
07.09.16	CSU	threat	Friedrich	no	no
07.09.16	Leftist	friend	Buchholz	yes	no
08.09.16	Leftist	friend	Claus	no	no
08.09.16	CSU	friend	Schmidt	no	no
08.09.16	SPD	partner	Jurk	no	no
22.09.16	CDU	threat	Weiss	no	no
22.09.16	CDU	threat	Wadephul	no	no
22.09.16	CDU	threat	Steinbach	no	no
22.09.16	SPD	threat	Schwabe	no	no
22.09.16	Greens	threat	Nouripour	no	no
22.09.16	Greens	threat	M. Beck	no	yes
22.09.16	Leftist	friend	Liebich	no	no
22.09.16	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
22.09.16	Leftist	friend	Hänsel	no	no
22.09.16	CSU	partner	Fabritius	yes	yes
22.09.16	CDU	threat	Bergner	yes	no
23.09.16	CSU	threat	S. Mayer	yes	no
28.09.16	SPD	partner	Gabriel	no	no
29.09.16	CDU	threat	Motschmann	yes	no
29.09.16	Leftist	friend	Dehm	no	no
19.10.16	CDU	threat	Wadephul	no	no
19.10.16	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
19.10.16	SPD	partner	Mützenich	no	no
23.11.16	CDU	threat	Wange	no	no

23.11.16	SPD	threat	Schwabe	no	no
23.11.16	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
23.11.16	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
23.11.16	Greens	threat	Hofreiter	no	no
23.11.16	CSU	threat	G. Müller	no	no
23.11.16	Leftist	friend	Buchholz	no	no
23.11.16	SPD	threat	Barnett	no	no
24.11.16	Leftist	partner	Claus	no	no
30.11.16	CDU	threat	Röttgen	no	no
30.11.16	Greens	threat	Nouripour	no	no
30.11.16	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
30.11.16	Leftist	friend	Hänsel	no	no
30.11.16	Greens	threat	Göring-Eckhardt	no	no
30.11.16	CDU	threat	Frei	no	no
30.11.16	SPD	partner	Annen	no	no
02.12.16	Greens	threat	T. Lindner	no	no
02.12.16	CSU	threat	Obermeier	no	no
02.12.16	Leftist	partner	Neu	no	no
15.12.16	CDU	threat	Hochbaum	no	no
15.12.16	Leftist	partner	Hunko	no	no
15.12.16	CSU	NA	Hoffmann	yes	no
16.12.16	CSU	threat	Fabritius	no	no
16.12.16	CDU	threat	Lengsfeld	yes	no
19.01.17	Greens	partner	Trittin	no	no
19.01.17	SPD	threat	Thönnnes	no	no
19.01.17	CDU	threat	Schäfer	yes	no
19.01.17	CDU	threat	Otte	yes	no
19.01.17	Leftist	friend	Nord	no	no
19.01.17	CDU	partner	Motschmann	no	no
19.01.17	Greens	threat	T. Lindner	no	no
19.01.17	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	yes	no
19.01.17	Leftist	partner	Gehrcke	no	no
19.01.17	CDU	threat	Frei	yes	no
19.01.17	CSU	partner	Fabritius	no	no
19.01.17	SPD	threat	Brunner	yes	no
26.01.17	CDU	partner	Knörig	no	no
26.01.17	CDU	threat	Frei	no	no
16.02.17	SPD	partner	Thönnnes	no	no
16.02.17	Greens	threat	M. Beck	yes	no
16.02.17	Leftist	friend	Gehrcke	no	no
16.02.17	Leftist	NA	Binder	yes	no
16.02.17	CDU	threat	Bergner	yes	yes

16.02.17	SPD	partner	Felgentreu	no	no
16.02.17	CSU	threat	Fabritius	no	no
09.03.17	CDU	NA	Binninger	yes	no
09.03.17	SPD	NA	Reichenbach	yes	no
09.03.17	CSU	threat	Friedrich	no	no
09.03.17	Greens	NA	Özdemir	yes	no
09.03.17	Greens	threat	T. Lindner	no	no
09.03.17	CDU	threat	Kirchbaum	no	no
23.03.17	Leftist	friend	Hunko	no	no
23.03.17	Greens	threat	Brugger	no	no
26.04.17	SPD	threat	Roth	no	no
27.04.17	SPD	NA	Reichenbach	yes	no
27.04.17	CDU	partner	Nick	no	no
27.04.17	CDU	threat	Motschmann	yes	yes
27.04.17	Greens	threat	M. Beck	yes	no
27.04.17	CDU	NA	Jarzombek	yes	no
27.04.17	SPD	threat	Erler	no	yes
27.04.17	Greens	threat	Baerbock	no	no
19.05.17	CDU	threat	Uhl	yes	no
19.05.17	CDU	threat	Motschmann	yes	no
19.05.17	Greens	threat	M. Beck	yes	no
19.05.17	CDU	threat	Bergner	no	no
31.05.17	Greens	threat	Koenigs	no	no
31.05.17	CSU	threat	Fabritius	no	no
21.06.17	CSU	threat	Uhl	no	no
23.06.17	CDU	threat	Wanderwitz	yes	no
23.06.17	Leftist	threat	Petzold	no	no
23.06.17	CSU	threat	Freudenstein	no	no
28.06.17	CSU	threat	Bergner	no	no
29.06.17	CDU	threat	Jüttner	no	no
29.06.17	Leftist	friend	Gehrcke	no	no
29.06.17	CDU	threat	Beyer	no	no
30.06.17	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
05.09.17	Leftist	partner	Wagenknecht	no	no
05.09.17	CDU	threat	Wadephul	no	no
21.11.17	CSU	threat	Durz	no	no
21.11.17	Leftist	partner	Dagdelen	no	no
21.11.17	AfD	partner	Chrupalla	no	no
22.11.17	SPD	threat	Juratovic	no	no
12.12.17	Leftist	partner	Hunko	no	no
12.12.17	Leftist	NA	Domscheit-Berg	yes	no
18.01.18	AfD	partner	Gminder	no	no

19.01.18	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
19.01.18	CDU	threat	Lamers	no	no
19.01.18	CSU	threat	Hahn	no	no
19.01.18	Leftist	friend	Dehm	no	no
01.02.18	CSU	threat	Ulrich	no	no
01.02.18	Greens	threat	Trittin	no	no
01.02.18	SPD	partner	Schmid	no	no
01.02.18	CDU	threat	Motschmann	no	no
01.02.18	FDP	partner	Lamsdorff	no	no
01.02.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
01.02.18	Leftist	friend	Hunko	no	no
01.02.18	AfD	friend	Hampel	no	no
01.02.18	CDU	partner	Frei	yes	no
21.02.18	AfD	partner	Huber	no	no
21.02.18	CDU	threat	Böhmer	no	no
22.02.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
22.02.18	CDU	threat	Kauder	no	no
22.02.18	AfD	partner	Hartwig	no	no
22.02.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
22.02.18	Greens	threat	Brugger	no	no
22.02.18	CDU	threat	Assad	no	no
22.02.18	SPD	threat	Annen	no	no
23.02.18	CSU	threat	Ulrich	no	no
23.02.18	Greens	threat	Trittin	no	no
23.02.18	CDU	threat	Steffel	no	no
23.02.18	FDP	threat	Müller	no	no
23.02.18	CDU	threat	Frei	yes	no
23.02.18	AfD	partner	Droese	no	no
23.02.18	Leftist	friend	Dehm	no	no
23.02.18	Leftist	friend	Buchholz	no	no
23.02.18	Greens	threat	Brantner	no	no
28.02.18	AfD	partner	Kotre	no	no
02.03.18	CDU	threat	Wadephul	yes	no
02.03.18	SPD	threat	Mützenich	no	no
02.03.18	AfD	friend	Lucassen	no	no
02.03.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	yes	no
02.03.18	Leftist	partner	Hänsel	no	no
02.03.18	AfD	friend	Hampel	no	no
02.03.18	AfD	threat	Friesen	yes	no
02.03.18	FDP	threat	Müller	no	no
15.03.18	SPD	threat	Schmid	no	no
15.03.18	CSU	threat	Radwan	no	no

15.03.18	CDU	threat	Motschmann	no	no
15.03.18	SPD	threat	Maas	no	no
21.03.18	CDU	threat	Wadephul	no	no
21.03.18	CDU	threat	von der Leyen	yes	no
21.03.18	CDU	threat	Merkel	no	no
21.03.18	SPD	threat	Maas	no	no
21.03.18	FDP	threat	Lambsdorff	no	no
21.03.18	Greens	threat	Keul	no	no
21.03.18	Leftist	friend	Hänsel	no	no
21.03.18	AfD	friend	Hampel	no	no
21.03.18	CSU	threat	Hahn	no	no
21.03.18	AfD	friend	H. Müller	no	no
21.03.18	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	yes	no
21.03.18	FDP	partner	Djir-Sarai	no	no
21.03.18	SPD	threat	C. Petry	no	no
21.03.18	AfD	friend	Bystron	no	no
21.03.18	Greens	threat	Brugger	no	no
21.03.18	CSU	threat	Brandl	no	no
21.03.18	CDU	threat	Brand	no	no
22.03.18	SPD	threat	Scholz	no	no
18.04.18	Leftist	friend	Wagenknecht	no	no
18.04.18	SPD	partner	Schmid	no	no
18.04.18	CDU	partner	Röttgen	no	no
18.04.18	Leftist	friend	Pflüger	no	no
18.04.18	Greens	threat	Nouripour	no	no
18.04.18	SPD	partner	Maas	no	no
18.04.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
18.04.18	AfD	friend	Gauland	no	no
18.04.18	FDP	partner	Djir-Sarai	no	no
19.04.18	Greens	NA	von Notz	yes	no
19.04.18	CDU	threat	von der Leyen	yes	no
19.04.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
19.04.18	SPD	threat	Maas	no	no
19.04.18	CDU	NA	Lindholz	yes	no
19.04.18	Greens	threat	Keul	no	no
19.04.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
19.04.18	Leftist	NA	Hahn	yes	no
19.04.18	Leftist	friend	Gysi	no	no
19.04.18	CDU	threat	Frei	no	no
19.04.18	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	no	no
19.04.18	CSU	threat	Erndl	no	no
19.04.18	CDU	NA	Bernstiel	yes	no

20.04.18	CDU	threat	Motschmann	yes	no
20.04.18	Greens	NA	Stumpp	yes	no
27.04.18	AfD	friend	Schlund	no	no
15.05.18	AfD	partner	Huber	no	no
16.05.18	Leftist	friend	Wagenknecht	no	no
16.05.18	SPD	partner	Post	no	no
16.05.18	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
16.05.18	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
16.05.18	CDU	partner	Merkel	yes	no
16.05.18	SPD	threat	Maas	yes	no
16.05.18	Greens	threat	Keul	no	no
16.05.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
16.05.18	AfD	friend	Gauland	no	no
16.05.18	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	no	no
16.05.18	FDP	NA	Djir-Sarai	no	yes
17.05.18	AfD	partner	Holm	no	no
17.05.18	Leftist	partner	Ernst	no	no
06.06.18	AfD	partner	H. Müller	no	no
06.06.18	Leftist	partner	De Masi	no	no
07.06.18	FDP	threat	Lechte	yes	no
07.06.18	CDU	partner	Kiesewetter	no	no
07.06.18	AfD	partner	Huber	no	no
07.06.18	AfD	friend	Hartwig	no	no
07.06.18	AfD	friend	H. Müller	no	no
07.06.18	CDU	threat	Frei	no	no
07.06.18	FDP	threat	Djir-Sarai	no	no
07.06.18	Leftist	friend	Dehm	no	no
07.06.18	Leftist	friend	Dagdelen	no	no
07.06.18	AfD	partner	Bystron	no	no
07.06.18	Greens	threat	Brugger	no	no
08.06.18	SPD	threat	M. Özdemir	yes	no
08.06.18	SPD	threat	Schneider	yes	no
14.06.18	CDU	threat	Steffel	no	yes
14.06.18	SPD	threat	Schwabe	no	no
14.06.18	FDP	threat	Sauter	no	no
14.06.18	Greens	threat	Sarrazin	no	no
14.06.18	SPD	partner	Oppermann	yes	yes
14.06.18	SPD	partner	Mützenich	no	no
14.06.18	Greens	threat	Lazar	no	no
14.06.18	AfD	friend	König	no	no
14.06.18	AfD	friend	Komnig	no	no
14.06.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	yes	yes

14.06.18	FDP	threat	Jensen	no	yes
14.06.18	AfD	friend	Hartwig	no	no
14.06.18	Leftist	partner	Hahn	no	no
14.06.18	CDU	threat	Gienger	no	no
14.06.18	Leftist	friend	De Masi	no	no
14.06.18	FDP	threat	Dassler	no	yes
14.06.18	CSU	threat	Brehm	no	no
14.06.18	CDU	threat	Brand	yes	no
15.06.18	SPD	threat	C. Özdemir	yes	no
28.06.18	CSU	threat	Ullrich	yes	no
28.06.18	CDU	threat	Motschmann	yes	no
28.06.18	CDU	threat	Merkel	no	no
28.06.18	FDP	threat	Hacker	yes	no
28.06.18	CDU	threat	Connemann	yes	no
28.06.18	Leftist	NA	Achelwilm	yes	no
29.06.18	SPD	threat	Post	no	no
03.07.18	Leftist	friend	Lötzsch	no	no
03.07.18	SPD	partner	Jurk	no	yes
04.07.18	CDU	threat	Wadephul	yes	no
04.07.18	Greens	threat	Stumpp	yes	no
04.07.18	SPD	threat	Schwabe	no	no
04.07.18	Greens	threat	Nouripour	no	no
04.07.18	SPD	threat	Maas	no	no
04.07.18	CDU	threat	Lamers	no	no
04.07.18	Greens	threat	Hofreiter	no	no
04.07.18	CSU	threat	Brandl	no	no
12.09.18	CDU	threat	Wadephul	no	no
12.09.18	Greens	threat	T. Lindner	no	no
12.09.18	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
12.09.18	SPD	threat	Maas	no	no
12.09.18	CDU	threat	Kirchbaum	no	no
12.09.18	SPD	threat	Hellmich	no	no
12.09.18	Leftist	partner	Gysi	no	no
12.09.18	SPD	NA	Felgentreu	yes	no
13.09.18	Leftist	partner	Ernst	no	no
17.10.18	CDU	NA	Merkel	yes	no
18.10.18	CDU	threat	Schäfer	yes	no
18.10.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
18.10.18	Greens	threat	Keul	no	no
18.10.18	CSU	threat	Erndl	no	no
07.11.18	CDU	threat	Altmaier	no	no
08.11.18	CSU	threat	Ullrich	no	no

08.11.18	FDP	threat	Strack-Zimmermann	no	no
08.11.18	SPD	threat	Schulz	no	no
08.11.18	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
08.11.18	SPD	partner	Maas	no	no
08.11.18	CDU	threat	Löbel	no	no
08.11.18	CDU	partner	Koob	no	no
08.11.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
08.11.18	Greens	threat	Keul	no	no
08.11.18	AfD	partner	Jampel	no	no
08.11.18	SPD	partner	Hitschler	no	no
08.11.18	AfD	partner	Hartwig	yes	no
08.11.18	Leftist	friend	Hänsel	no	no
08.11.18	AfD	partner	Hampel	no	no
08.11.18	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	no	no
08.11.18	FDP	threat	Djir-Sarai	no	no
09.11.18	CDU	threat	Otte	no	no
09.11.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
09.11.18	Leftist	partner	De Masi	no	no
21.11.18	CDU	threat	Otte	yes	no
21.11.18	Leftist	friend	Lötzsch	no	no
21.11.18	CDU	threat	Hardt	no	no
21.11.18	Leftist	friend	Gysi	no	no
21.11.18	FDP	threat	Djir-Sarai	no	no
29.11.18	FDP	NA	J. Schulz	yes	no
29.11.18	Greens	NA	Rößner	yes	no
29.11.18	CDU	NA	Oster	yes	no
29.11.18	CSU	NA	Hoffmann	yes	no
29.11.18	SPD	NA	Esken	yes	no
12.12.18	AfD	partner	Frömming	no	no
13.12.18	CSU	threat	C. Schmidt	no	no
13.12.18	Leftist	friend	Neu	no	no
13.12.18	FDP	threat	Lechte	yes	no
13.12.18	FDP	threat	Köhler	yes	no
13.12.18	CDU	threat	Kiesewetter	no	no
13.12.18	Greens	threat	Keul	yes	no
13.12.18	AfD	partner	Hampel	no	no
13.12.18	SPD	threat	Felgentreu	yes	no
13.12.18	CDU	threat	Brand	no	no

Figure 5: Interview Protocol Interview 1

- 1 I: As I just said I'm gonna start on the topic of Information Warfare. During my research I found out
- 2 that many observers argue that information warfare replaces
- 3 conventional warfare more and more and that tactics of information wars are also used during
- 4 peacetime.
- 5 How would you assess these developments?
- 6 R: I agree. So, we haven't had any war in Europe for many decades now. Except for wars like in
- 7 Yugoslavia, Kosovo, and Ukraine but if you look at the core of Europe - western Europe - Germany
- 8 has not experienced a war in the last seventy years which is of course great.
- 9 But low level warfare or non-military warfare has increased over the last years and it's true
- 10 that Russia has become more adapt at this kind of warfare and now the question is should you call
- 11 it warfare or is it just a way of meddling, interfering in West European affairs.
- 12 So I do not like to sort of wipe out the border line between real war and what is non military
- 13 movement or interference but there is a strategy behind that and since military tools are not used
- 14 it's much more difficult to define and much more difficult to discover and also much more difficult to
- 15 deter and to defend against.
- 16 I: So would you say Germany is experienced enough to counter such information wars or is there
- 17 still a lack of experience in Germany?
- 18 R: Well we have had some experience including the Bundestag which was attacked several times.
- 19 Of course, there are European partners closer to Russia, such as the Baltic states which have
- 20 even more experience with this kind of information warfare.
- 21 It is not a lack of experience but its a lack of well-established measures of containment and so we
- 22 are still trying to figure out which are the best responses to this kind of hybrid aggressions
- 23 I: Would you say there are more pressing or more urgent crises right now or should information
- 24 warfare be seen as one of the threats that should be tackled?
- 25 R: Well it's a new kind of threat and it is a very broad issue because it does not arise only from
- 26 Russia but also from Iran, China and other places all around the world.
- 27 That's why it's urgent to find a sort of common response on that. At least on the EU level.
- 28 So, but I would say that traditional defence policy focuses mainly on military tools so whenever you
- 29 discuss about risks coming out of risks coming out of Russia you start by mentioning new
- 30 weapons, new weaponsystems, new nuclear weapon systems being developed in Russia.
- 31 You talk about army units brought to the western border of Russia, you talk about low level military
- 32 warfare areas like in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova.
- 33 And there is also a process going on of turning our attention to this IT based or technology based
- 34 interference
- 35 I: Would you say that Germany is well prepared for countering these new threats, especially in the
- 36 IT field?
- 37 R: Well, I would say we are improving our response. There has been done a lot on the level of
- 38 NATO. So, Cyber security has become a major pillar of NATO strategy and also the EU has started
- 39 to counter false narratives by putting things straight when it comes to information coming out of
- 40 Russia or other fake news outlets and this is very important to correct wrong information and also to
- 41 name and shame those who are responsible for spreading it
- 42 I: Germany is more focusing on international cooperation with NATO and the EU in countering
- 43 information warfare and cyber threats. Are there also some national countermeasures or do you
- 44 think its also important to do something on the national level?
- 45 R: Well of course its important to protect our national insitutions for example the Bundestag by
- 46 technical means and also by national legislation. So what we started to do is to introduce
- 47 legislation on fake news on the responsibility of social media providers for spreading fake news.
- 48 This is an ongoing process because we are still learning how to deal with that and how to hold this
- 49 big social media companies, mostly based in the US, responsible for spreading fake news.

- 21 And once again you should try to do it on a national level but you need international cooperation on that.
- 22 I: Okay. As I told I'm specifically interested in the role Russia plays in information wars. How do you feel about Russia and disinformation campaigns in particular? Are these current issues that concern you as a politician in your every day life?
- 23 R: Well, everyday life maybe not. But of course its of great concern to us. And I still remember the case of this alleged rape of the girl Lisa. This also
- 24 concerned us on a very local level. There were more demonstrations going on in many cities. Also in Baden-Württemberg. I recall the mayor of Lahr, where you find a strong population of Russian origin, telling me about demonstration in front of his mayor office and his surprise of seeing this happening right before his eyes and there was no real reason for this kind of demonstration. There was no local cause to be brought to the streets and it was all made up ... it was completely made up ... and it was all spread through Russian based media outlets and so you see that there is a part of our population in Germany as well that relies more on Russia Today or Sputnik then on the mainstream media and they tend to see or to live in a sort of parrallel universe and to see what's going on in the world or in Germany through very different eyes and this is really, for us policy makers, a great challenge because that is one more example of a very fragmental society where you have not a uniform public discourse going on - very fragmented society and also very fragmented publics in society.
- 25 And yes it is of concern for us and the question is why do citizens living in Germany, either of Russian origin or not, trust more this Russia based media than ARD, ZDF or public broadcasting or big newspapers published in Germany.
- 26 This is a very interesting phenomenon that people feel not represented by what is going on public television and in their local papers or international papers but rather by what is said or shown on Russia Today or Sputnik or for the Turkish population on TRT or other turkish outlets. This is very strange and I believe that Russia updated its skills in information warfare but it also takes advantage of opportunities offered by weakness or weaknesses in our own society.
- 27 It's less a question of Russia's strength or technological skills or technological edge, but rather a question of what is going on in our societies.
- 28 Why are they? Why do they tend to believe more in an authoritarian president like Putin than Ms. Merkel or whatever, Mr. Macron. This is a very intriguing question for us as German politicians.
- 29 I: So you already talked about that usually when you talk about information war its connected to Russia but you also said its connected to China and Iran and other countries. But why do you think that is? That its usually you hear information warfare and the word that pops into your head is Russia.
- 30 R: Because Russia probably is much more effective in spreading fake news than other countries in the world.
- 31 R: But China is very far away from us. There is not so much tension or sympathy with China within Western societies and this is even less the case for Iran because the Iranian regime is a very brutal regime which has a very bad reputation but Russia is a different story because Russia has always been a part of Europe, of European history, of European culture.
- 32 There has always been all kinds of conflict between Russia and Germany and Russia and European countries and of course there is also a very special German story. So you have a high degree or a huge number of very personal context between Germans and Russians. Partly between Eastern Germany and the Soviet Union and nowadays Russia, but also in the West. So and of course there is the historical responsibility when it comes to the second World War, Holocaust, being perpetrated in part of the former Soviet Union. So there is a bundle of motives for German people to be interested in Russia and to get in touch with Russia.
- 33 And Russia has changed its strategy towards Europe in 2011 and 2012. It was a fundamental shift in Putin's strategy giving up on any idea of democracy in Russia and rather turning more authoritarian. And then the idea of defining Europe and European liberal values as a threat to the Russian soiety and to the unity of the Russian nation or whatever. So there has also been an ideological shift in the Russian government and this offers new possibilities for Russia to reach out

to radical groups, right-wing and left-wing radicals in the European countries. That's what we have seen with financial and political support for right wing parties all over Europe. Le Pen in France and Salvini in Italy and also AfD here in Germany.

So, this has also become part of a Russian strategy to point European democracies as weak, as rotted, as declining whatever. But for me this is just a sign of weakness because in fact Russia is a weak state, Putin in his twenty years in office has not managed to reform the structure of the Russian economy and develop a modern Russian state. It is still a very much personalized system of governance lying on oligarchs, on oil and gas, and any idea of modernizing Russia in economic terms and societal terms and institutional terms has more or less been given up in favor of just preserving power.

I: Okay. So you already talked about the attack on the German Bundestag. Do you think the attack of 2015 was well processed? Or is it still a topic?

R: Well yes it is still a topic. Security measures have been stepped up in the Bundestag. There are much more keen to observe some rules when it comes to confidential information being discussed in committee meetings for example. And there are also more and more technical requirements when it comes to bringing your Iphone to Russia for example. Some recommendations have been published on these issues. But still, if you are a knowledgeable hacker you may find a way to enter the Bundestag system but I guess that it will be discovered much sooner and I know from our federal secret service - Bundesnachrichtendienst - that cyber attacks are much more closely followed now and so I think awareness is much bigger than 5 years ago. Technical measures have been implemented. So, I guess we are better prepared now.

I: So, lets jump to the next topic and put information warfare aside for a bit and just deal with the perception of Russia. Besides information wars are there any other dangers going out from Russia?

R: Well, Russia is not really a danger I believe. The real challenge for Russia but also for us as potential partners of Russia is the weakness of Russia in economic, in social terms. It is a country that which has always been difficult to govern due to its huge territory and (unintelligible) population but in the 90s a sort of democratic system was introduced. It was not perfect, far from that, but still there was a part of political competition possible but political competition is more or less been rooted out and it has been once again become very much personalized. So it all depends on Putin and nobody knows what will come after Putin. And although formally Putin is a very strong president. In fact he is just a sort of muddling through president. If you look at his record of the last 20 years there was no achievement except for bringing back Russia on the international stage by intervening in Syria by annexing Crimea and all this stuff. But if you look at the economy, the society, there has been some superficial modernization going on. So Moscow looks like Paris at least in the city centre and now you have much more cycling lines and all this stuff. But in fact Russia is still dependent on gas and oil for much of its exports and much of its state budget. It has not really created a strong private sector and the famous 'Mittelstand', small and medium sized companies, are more or less crowded out of the economy. Society and the arts is much more under pressure than 10 years before. So renovation, creativity can still be found in Russia but there is less and less space for this kind of open debates and also controversial debates on which way Russia should go. And I believe that this is a pity for Russia and it's very difficult to change that from the outside. So I believe that Putin has managed to sort of find a level of prosperity - of relative prosperity - which avoids any huge social terrain. But there is no real progress in sight for many of the Russian citizens. They just rely on some handouts from the state. So that you will not die from hunger but what are the perspectives for the young generation in Russia? And is anybody who is now on Putin's side

79 here in Germany, is anybody ready to live in Russia? This sort of destination
80 for young people who want to build up their own lives, you know, they would
81 rather go to the US, maybe even to China, but not to Russia. This would be a
82 very crazy idea. So, in fact, Russia is not really attractive. Russia is only
83 attractive as a tool to or as an instrument to gain influence within western
84 societies. So Russia tries to use political forces in the West to gain some
85 influence and radical, especially right-wing radicals in the West, try to use
86 Russia to attack liberalism, democracy and to fight for an authoritarian state.
87 That is not because they love Russia, but they love Russia because its
88 authoritarian and not because it's Russia.

89 I: So you said that Russia has a very weak economy. But how important are
90 economic relations with Russia for Germany?

91 R: They are in part very important when it comes to energy supplies. Of course,
92 Russian gas is important and the Russian market, because of its severe size is
93 important or can be important and there are some middle class consumers
94 especially in urban areas. These people buy german cars and consumer goods but
95 still Russia's GDP is equivalent to Spain's GDP. And when it comes to exports
96 Germany exports much more goods and services to Poland and other central and
97 east European member states of the EU than to Russia. So it's a sort of sleeping
98 giant. There is a huge potential and for decades Germans and Europeans have been
99 waiting for Russia to exploit this potential but expect for very few years there
100 was no real possibility to do that. So, there is always this dream of combining
101 Russia's natural resources with Europe's technology and manufactural power which
102 is in theory a good idea but for the time being Russia does not really offer
103 this opportunities. Too much corruption is going on, it's not transparent, we
104 have no private companies as partners. But I certainly believe that the economic
105 cooperation can also be a good instrument for bringing Russia and Europe closer
106 together. So I would not give up on the idea of cooperating more with Russia on
107 economic issues this is still a very good idea.

108 I: Can you tell me a bit more about the role of energy security between Germany
109 and Russia?

110 R: Well, for energy security or for the security of energy supplies Russia plays
111 still a very important role, not only for Germany but for the whole of the EU.
112 There is great dependency, but in both ways and if you look at the numbers you
113 will see that Russia is more depending - not more dependent - on export revenue
114 from oil and gas than we depend on Russia or the import of oil and gas. So I
115 believe that this sort of interdependence is not a bad thing. Could be
116 maintained - this is why I am also in favor of North Stream II - because it
117 gives us also some leverage on Russia and I believe that this is still a very
118 smart political tactic. But at the same time we should also diversify Europe
119 sources of energy by, first of all, granting to renewables but also by opening
120 up other sources for oil and gas from other parts of the world. But so, economic
121 cooperation can be a good thing and even in times where political relations
122 between Russia and the West are in dire straits we should try to have some
123 leverage, to have some openings. And energy and economic cooperation is still
124 one of the main instruments for this kind of cooperation, for improving
125 relations.

126 I: So, you say Russia should be treated as a partner rather than an enemy. What
127 are typical counter arguments that you hear in the Bundestag regarding this
128 position?

129 R: Well, the problem is that Russia in many aspects has become an adversary by
130 attacking liberalism, by attacking the European Union or the cohesion of the

131 European Union by spreading fake news. But at the same time it is there in
132 geographical terms it's still a part of Europe. It's a neighbour in a way - not
133 a direct neighbour to Germany but a neighbour to the European Union. So you
134 cannot avoid dealing with Russia in whatever kind, but you have to deal with
135 Russia. You cannot trust to lean back and say this is far away. You know, this
136 is not like Vietnam or I don't know Angola. It's really part of our European
137 continent and our political and economic life. So, it can be a partner. For the
138 time being it's not so much a partner. In many aspects it's an adversary and in
139 other cases it's a necessary partner. So when it comes to solving international
140 crises like in Syria, Libya, Iran, even climate change. All these issues need
141 some involvement, engagement from Russia. And although Russia has acted in very
142 negative ways in many areas it's still, at least formally, adhered to
143 multilateral agreement. If you look at the JCPOA, the Paris climate agreement
144 and all this stuff you still have a Russia that is at least not attacking these
145 kind of multilateral agreements. So, you cannot go around Russia on the
146 international stage. You need to find ways of dealing with Russia. Many
147 international formats as well.

148 I: So, would you say that your personal perception of Russia changed over the
149 last years? You were talking about the Lisa case. Did this have an impact on
150 your personal perception?

151 R: Well, I learned Russian when I was a young student in school and so I was
152 always very close to Russia, it's people and its culture. But I also, I would
153 say, I always had a very sovereign assessment of what is going on in Russia. I
154 do not have this romantic idea of Germans and Russians being like minded spirits
155 and whatever. So, I'm (unintelligible) on that. But what has changed is my
156 awareness of the assertiveness and sometimes aggressiveness of Russian official
157 policy. Since I've become a member of the Bundestag I've had even more direct
158 contacts with Russian officials and I'm always amazed by the kind of
159 selfassertiveness they show and the way they trust, spread fake news and tell
160 their narratives. It's all about narratives. It has become very difficult to
161 have an open and frank discussion with Russians on controversial issues because
162 they always come back to their narratives and their grievances. It's very sad.

163 I: What would you say? What would have to change that the image of Russia as a
164 partner or even an enemy could change to an image as a friend?

165 R: Well it depends of course on the behavior of the Russian government and it
166 needs some progress to be made on very important conflicts like Ukraine. But it
167 also needs some changes in the Western attitude towards Russia. We have to admit
168 that there have been made some mistakes in the last 10 to 15 years. We also need
169 some new ideas coming from the European Union or from the West in general. So, I
170 believe for example that we should talk more about disarmament initiatives, we
171 should talk more about the possibility for operation between the Eurasian
172 economic union and the European Union when it comes to how to agree on standards
173 for example this is very low level. We should do more to improve direct contacts
174 between civil societies and we should not stop at the point we've reached now
175 which is a sort of deadlock between the West and Russia to find some common
176 ground on certain issues. Maybe also on some international issues like Libya, or
177 Iran. But we should also avoid any trap, any idea of this romantic life in our
178 relationship with Russia because the nature of the Russian regime is
179 authoritarian and is not tended towards the future. It's more about refirming
180 the present and, in a way what Putin is doing, is just managing stagnation.
181 There is no engagement with the future, no idea for the future of Russia. And I
182 believe this cannot be the last word coming out of Russia but of course we have
183 to take things as they are and so we will have to live with Putin and his
184 government for the next year. It's also useless to attack it and do it only in a

185 confrontational manner but as I said we should be very stubborn about the nature
186 of what's going on in Russia. This is more oppression, less space for economic
187 reform, less space for an open public discourse. In the end, this will be
188 self-defining for Russia.

189 I: That's great you just answered my last questions. So, we've reached the end
190 of the interview. Thank you very much.

Figure 6: Interview Protocol Interview 2

Questionnaire Expert interview on the master's thesis
"Information Warfare and the Politics of Threats"
at the University of Konstanz and Charles University Prague

Part 1: Information Warfare

Q1: Some researchers assume that information wars are increasingly replacing conventional warfare. Moreover, the tactics are also used in peacetime. How do you assess these developments?

I do not share the finding of a replacement. Wars have always been fought in different domains. This always included psychological warfare, which provides for disinformation and propaganda. However, it is true that technical advances no longer only cause conflicts on land, water, and in the air, but also in the digital space. Also, the secure second-strike capability in disputes between major powers means that "total wars" have not occurred in the past 70 years, and other means have been used.

Q2: Do you think tactics like disinformation campaigns should be seen as a severe threat?

Yes, just like in conventional threat situations, national states have to defend themselves against such dangers. The biggest challenge is to be able to defend against a war below the traditional military force threshold. Hybrid warfare poses a challenge for the national state regarding international law challenges and, additionally, attribution problems complicate an effective defense.

Q3: Which threats or challenges are currently more pressing than information wars and should be tackled sooner?

It is about being prepared for all kinds of threats. Therefore, I warn against losing conventional national and Alliance defense out of sight.

Q4: To what extent should Germany better prepare for possible propaganda attacks or disinformation campaigns?

In particular, we have to restore our resilience against potential enemies. Disinformation and propaganda only have a chance when they meet breaches in unstable structural societies. Obviously, we have to provide actual resources, such as equipping our intelligence services with adequate material, personnel, and judicially.

Moreover, we need close organizational coordination of the different security agencies under the leadership of the Federal Chancellery, approximately through the strengthening of the Federal Security Council.

However, if we're not increasing our resilience, we would only treat the symptoms and not the roots.

Media, especially public channels, practically gave up their role as the fourth power and, therefore, lost the trust of the public. Fake News and disinformation fill this gap.

Part 2: Information Warfare & Russia

Q5: What do you think, why is Russia often automatically associated with information warfare and disinformation campaigns?

The evidence suggests, on the one hand, that the Russian Federation is actually using such methods to protect its interests, also against Germany. In addition, since the end of the Cold War,

there has been a failure to integrate Russia into a European security architecture, thereby building up an antagonism. So there is an attempt to brand the opponent as a "bad guy."

Q6: Do you think the hacker attack on the German Bundestag in 2015 was well processed, and Germany will be protected from such threats in the future?

I do not have full insight into the work of the BKA and intelligence services. In my opinion, security agencies are taking the threat seriously. At the same time, I have to notice that our intelligence services are only able to operate limitedly due to self-imposed restrictions. One example would be the latest judgment regarding the operation principle of the BND.

Q7: Do you think the concern about Russia meddling in German domestic politics is justified?

I would be less alerted if the actual causes of our vulnerability would be removed. Only through the societies' mistrust in media and politics, disinformation and propaganda become relevant problems. The defenses of a healthy body are better protection against viruses than any medication.

Part 3: Russia

Q8: Are there any dangers from Russia at the moment? If yes, which?

Russia is challenging us. The annexation of Crimea questions the global post-war order regarding mutual-guaranteed borders. In Syria and Libya, Putin makes us aware of our own lack of concepts. Still, I don't see an immediate threat to Germany. However, our NATO allies in the Baltics see it differently. We have to respect that.

Q9: What are the main reasons for seeing Russia as a partner rather than an enemy?

Especially Germany's geopolitical position is a reason for that. We simply do not have an interest in having Russia as an enemy. In the end, it is about including Russia's security interests in our own strategy. Would this have happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation would have been more integrated into a European security architecture, the relations would be notable better today.

Of course, this does not mean to approve Russia's aggressive behavior in Crimea or Eastern Ukraine. The key is a rational realpolitik instead of a naive and moral led approach.

Q10: How important are economic relations with Russia for Germany?

Currently, the trade policy relevance with EU-nations or the USA is not comparable. Still, the Russian Federation is an important trade partner, for instance, regarding energy imports.

The Russian market, with more than 140 million consumers and the industry, is a potential promising sales market for German products, especially in the engineering and technology sectors.

For this reason alone, an end to the sanctions would be in our interest.

Q11: What are the typical counter-arguments that you hear in the Bundestag regarding your personal position on Russia?

One is already outlawed on the left side of the parliament if one acts in the sense of a reason-based realpolitik in the German interest. The arguments are rarely factual and often moral. Because we emphasize the need for a balance with the Russian Federation, we are "Putin understanders." And

because the AfD parliamentary group wants to provide military capabilities for credible deterrence at the same time, the Left labels us as warmongers.

Q12: Did your perception of Russia change over the last years?

The Chechnya wars, the conflict in Ukraine, and lastly, the annexation of Crimea and the support of the rebel groups in Eastern Ukraine showed the kind of instruments the Russian leadership uses if they feel like their security interests would be threatened. This has to be assessed in our own strategies.

In the Middle East and North Africa, Russia also demonstrates that despite economic weakness, it remains a geopolitical power that cannot be ignored.

It also takes revenge that the deep Russian feeling of humiliation after the collapse of the Soviet Union was not observed. I, just as NATO, was not so clearly aware of these developments in the early 2000s.