RQ1

RQ2

RQ2a

RQ2b

RQ1

What **metanarratives** do people use to express their social and economic uncertainties during crises (COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war) in Facebook discussions?

RQ2

RQ2a

RQ2b

RQ1

What **metanarratives** do people use to express their social and economic uncertainties during crises (COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war) in Facebook discussions?

RQ2

How are **elements of populist discourse** (e.g. conflict between elites and ordinary people) manifested in these metanarratives?

RQ2a

RQ2b

RQ1

What **metanarratives** do people use to express their social and economic uncertainties during crises (COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war) in Facebook discussions?

RQ2

How are **elements of populist discourse** (e.g. conflict between elites and ordinary people) manifested in these metanarratives?

RQ2a

How is **solidarity** during crisis time shaped by the division between elites and ordinary people?

RQ2b

RQ1 What **metanarratives** do people use to express their social and economic uncertainties during crises (COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war) in Facebook discussions?

RQ2 How are **elements of populist discourse** (e.g. conflict between elites and ordinary people) manifested in these metanarratives?

RQ2a How is **solidarity** during crisis time shaped by the division between elites and ordinary people?

RQ2b How does opposing the principles of **expert-based and common sense knowledge** affect the perception of policy measures during crisis times?

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

- Crisis periods stimulate **uncertainty, emotions** and especially the need for social cohesion – **collective social identity** (Hogg, 2023)

- Atmosphere of conflict between groups (us vs. them), **reinforcing populism** (Hameleers, 2019; Hogg & Gaffney, 2023; Schmid et al., 2021)

- Social media: an ideal space for collective identification – reinforcing the **shared feeling of collective victimhood** (Hogg, 2023; Törnberg and Törnberg, 2022)

EXPRESSIVITY, ONLINE IDENTITY AND POLARIZATION

- **Online expressivity** – a discursive way of forming collective online identities – the role of social media performativity (identification, connection, and recognition facilitated by SNS affordances) (Martinsson & Ericson, 2022)

- **Affective polarization** – collective identity formed not around political opinions but rather through aversion to an out-group ("tribal" identity) (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2022)

- The use of antagonistic rhetoric may decrease trust in the expert-based information that is spread by the media and politicians, **further deepening the polarization between citizens and experts** (Hameelers 2022).
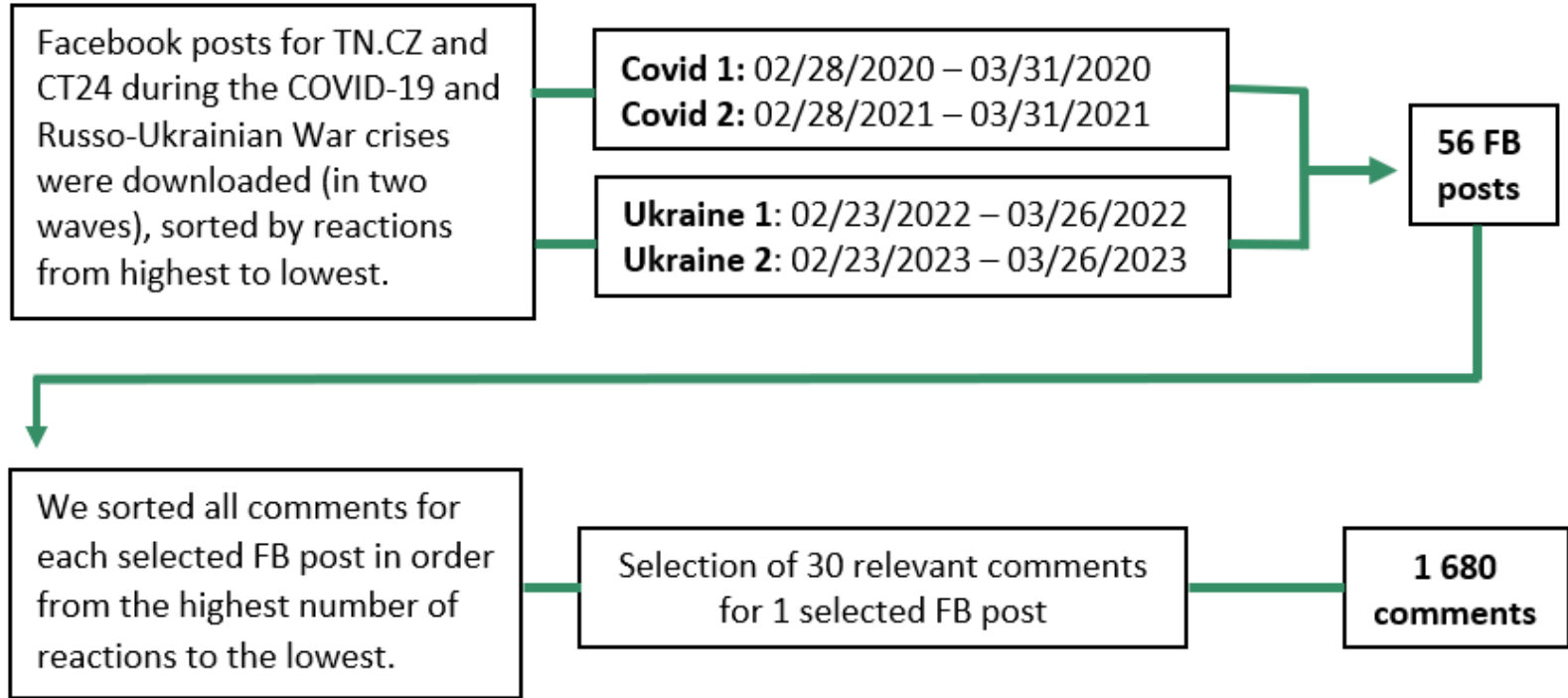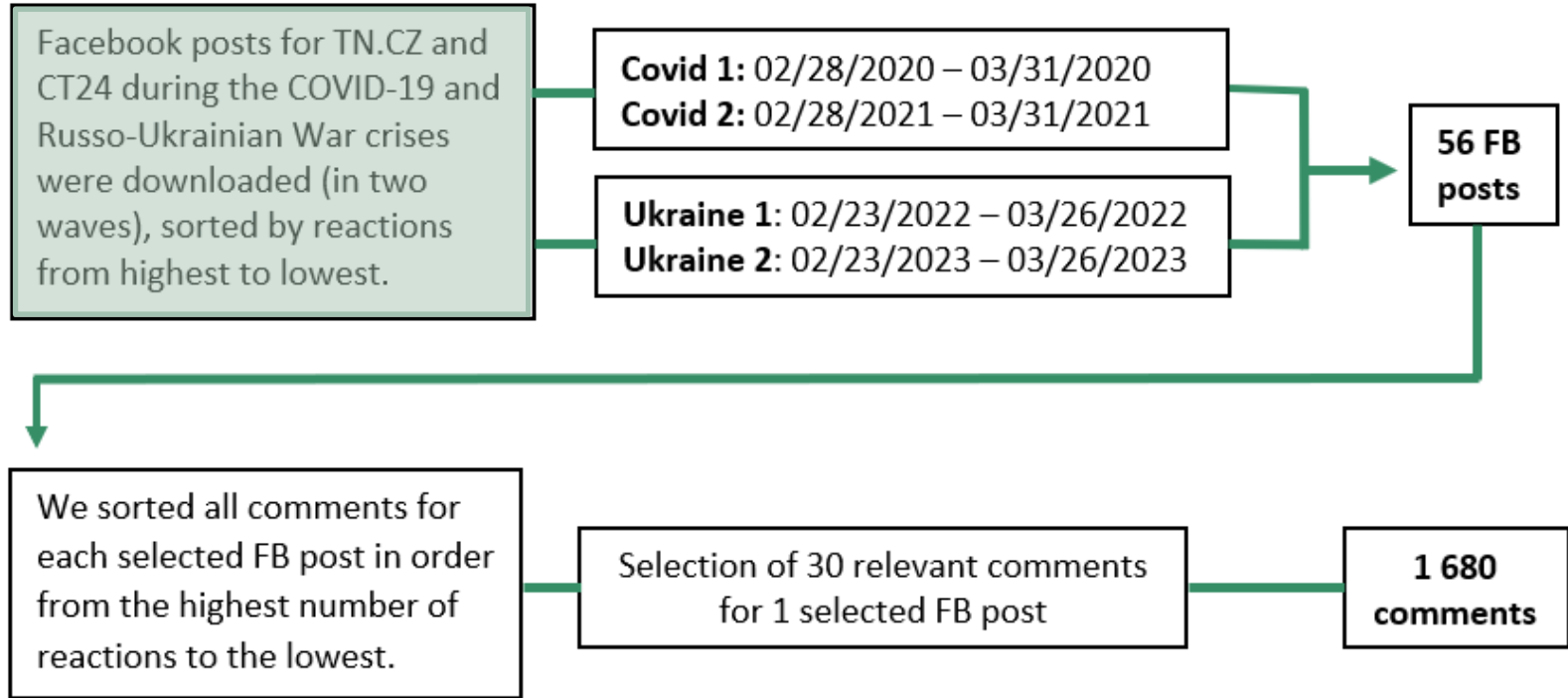
METHODOLOGY

- **Two crisis periods** (COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war)

- Focus on **public service media** and **mainstream media** / most popular on Facebook in Czechia

- Data downloaded by Facepager (Jünger & Keyling, 2019)

- Qualitative content analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software

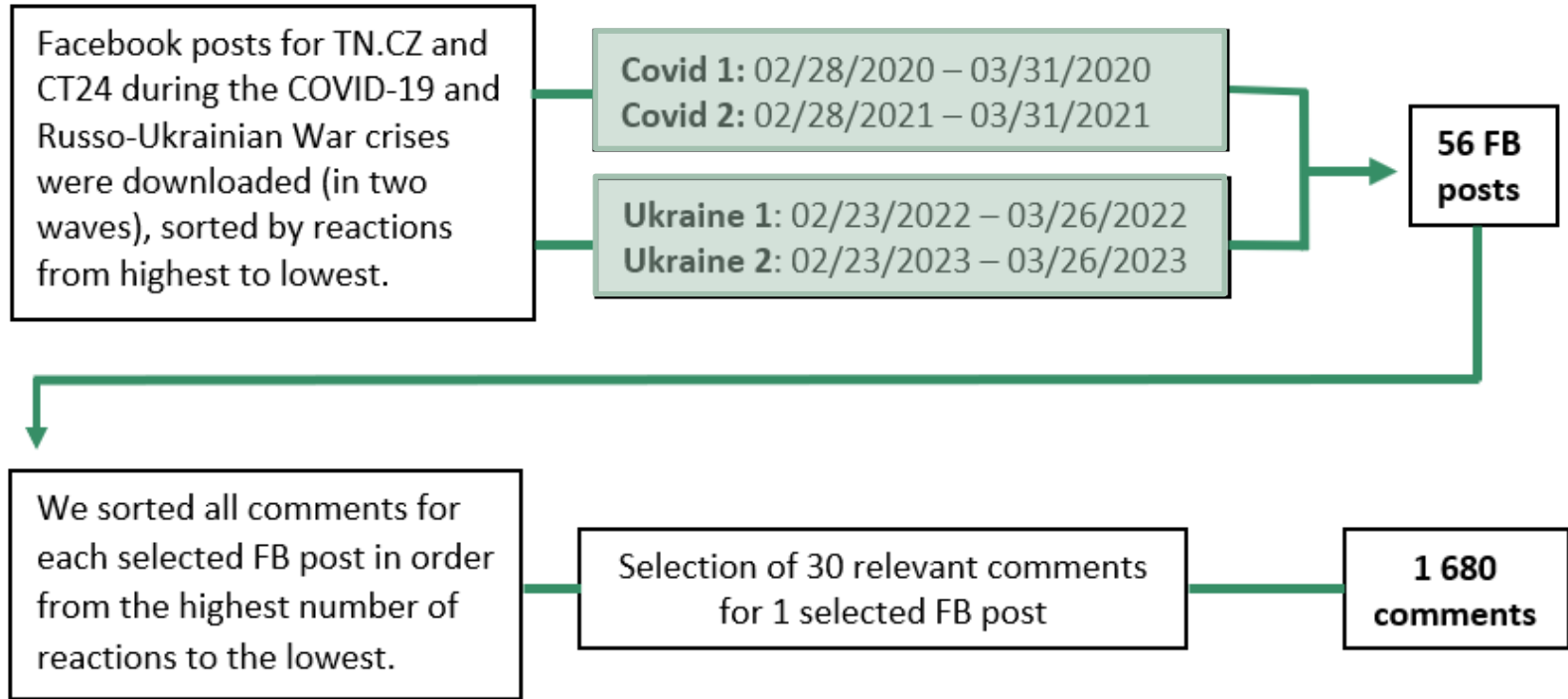- **Open and axial coding** (Grounded theory)

FACEBOOK POSTS AND COMMENTS SELECTION PROCESS

Facebook posts for TN.CZ and CT24 during the COVID-19 and Russo-Ukrainian War crises were downloaded (in two waves), sorted by reactions from highest to lowest.

Covid 1: 02/28/2020 – 03/31/2020
Covid 2: 02/28/2021 – 03/31/2021

Ukraine 1: 02/23/2022 – 03/26/2022
Ukraine 2: 02/23/2023 – 03/26/2023

56 FB posts

We sorted all comments for each selected FB post in order from the highest number of reactions to the lowest.

Selection of 30 relevant comments for 1 selected FB post

1 680 comments

FACEBOOK POSTS AND COMMENTS SELECTION PROCESS

Facebook posts for TN.CZ and CT24 during the COVID-19 and Russo-Ukrainian War crises were downloaded (in two waves), sorted by reactions from highest to lowest.

Covid 1: 02/28/2020 – 03/31/2020
Covid 2: 02/28/2021 – 03/31/2021

Ukraine 1: 02/23/2022 – 03/26/2022
Ukraine 2: 02/23/2023 – 03/26/2023

56 FB posts

We sorted all comments for each selected FB post in order from the highest number of reactions to the lowest.

Selection of 30 relevant comments for 1 selected FB post

1 680 comments

FACEBOOK POSTS AND COMMENTS SELECTION PROCESS

Facebook posts for TN.CZ and CT24 during the COVID-19 and Russo-Ukrainian War crises were downloaded (in two waves), sorted by reactions from highest to lowest.

Covid 1: 02/28/2020 – 03/31/2020
Covid 2: 02/28/2021 – 03/31/2021

Ukraine 1: 02/23/2022 – 03/26/2022
Ukraine 2: 02/23/2023 – 03/26/2023

56 FB posts

We sorted all comments for each selected FB post in order from the highest number of reactions to the lowest.

Selection of 30 relevant comments for 1 selected FB post

1 680 comments

FACEBOOK POSTS AND COMMENTS SELECTION PROCESS

Facebook posts for TN.CZ and CT24 during the COVID-19 and Russo-Ukrainian War crises were downloaded (in two waves), sorted by reactions from highest to lowest.

Covid 1: 02/28/2020 – 03/31/2020
Covid 2: 02/28/2021 – 03/31/2021

Ukraine 1: 02/23/2022 – 03/26/2022
Ukraine 2: 02/23/2023 – 03/26/2023

56 FB posts

We sorted all comments for each selected FB post in order from the highest number of reactions to the lowest.

Selection of 30 relevant comments for 1 selected FB post

1 680 comments

FACEBOOK POSTS AND COMMENTS SELECTION PROCESS

Facebook posts for TN.CZ and CT24 during the COVID-19 and Russo-Ukrainian War crises were downloaded (in two waves), sorted by reactions from highest to lowest.

Covid 1: 02/28/2020 – 03/31/2020
Covid 2: 02/28/2021 – 03/31/2021

Ukraine 1: 02/23/2022 – 03/26/2022
Ukraine 2: 02/23/2023 – 03/26/2023

56 FB posts

We sorted all comments for each selected FB post in order from the highest number of reactions to the lowest.

Selection of 30 relevant comments for 1 selected FB post

1 680 comments

Repetitive narratives

I.   The people abandoned by their elites (government)

Repetitive narratives

I. The people abandoned by their elites (government)

II. We have our own problems, we shouldn't interfere in other people's issues

Repetitive narratives

I. The people abandoned by their elites (government)

II. We have our own problems, we shouldn't interfere in other people's issues

III. The government and the media are always lying to us

Repetitive narratives

I. The people abandoned by their elites (government)

II. We have our own problems, we shouldn't interfere in other people's issues

III. The government and the media are always lying to us

IV. The government has given up on us, we'll take care of ourselves

Elements of populist discourse

- The incompetence of politicians

- The elites pursue their interests

- Division between "corrupt elites" and "good citizens"

(Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. https://democracy.fes.de/topics/polarization-democracy)

*Use your brains, people, even if an antidote is invented it will take at least a year to get the vaccine to the ordinary people, **the priority is given to elites and older people**.*
(TN.CZ, first part, COVID)

*It's strange that everybody does everything for free in this country and sends money [donations for Ukraine] **except for politicians who keep their 200,000 CZK salaries** (…).*
(CT24, first part, Ukraine)

Bottom–up solidarity
„We are a capable nation, just led by butter-fingers"

- Independence and autonomy of the people as values

- What about our marginalized (single mothers, retired/homeless people, sick children)?

Bottom–up solidarity
„We are a capable nation, just led by butter-fingers"

- Independence and autonomy of the people as values

- What about our marginalized (single mothers, retired/homeless people, sick children)?

We are in debt ourselves, we have no pensions, no social benefits, and we will support the war that is destroying us. (CT24, second part, war in Ukraine)

Bottom–up solidarity
„We are a capable nation, just led by butter-fingers"

- Independence and autonomy of the people as values

- What about our marginalized (single mothers, retired/homeless people, sick children)?

We are in debt ourselves, we have no pensions, no social benefits, and we will support the war that is destroying us. (CT24, second part, war in Ukraine)

We'll take off our face-masks and put on our helmets 🤸🤦🤦🤦🤦🤦 *At home we'll have to make a fire and probably use air as a car fuel. We'll take care of the Ukrainians, but who'll take care of us?* (TN.CZ, first part, Ukraine)

Lies & manipulations

- Distrust of official information

- Distrust of the media

- They are not solving problems but limiting freedom and establishing totalitarianism (conspiracy narratives)

- Expert-based and common-sense knowledge

Lies & manipulations

- Distrust of official information

- Distrust of the media

- They are not solving problems but limiting freedom and establishing totalitarianism (conspiracy narratives)

- Expert-based and common-sense knowledge

What the media are serving us is just spiel so that the people obey and those on the top just keep feeding their fat bank accounts.
(TN.CZ, second part, COVID)

Lies & manipulations

- Distrust of official information

- Distrust of the media

- They are not solving problems but limiting freedom and establishing totalitarianism (conspiracy narratives)

- Expert-based and common-sense knowledge

What the media are serving us is just spiel so that the people obey and those on the top just keep feeding their fat bank accounts.
(TN.CZ, second part, COVID)

Don't believe that everything the official media are presenting is true. We witnessed ***their lies during the immigration wave*** *[starting in 2015],* ***later in the case of covid, and now in the case of war.*** (CT24, first part, war in Ukraine)

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Opinions expressed in the online space can be perceived as **dominant views on a given topic**.
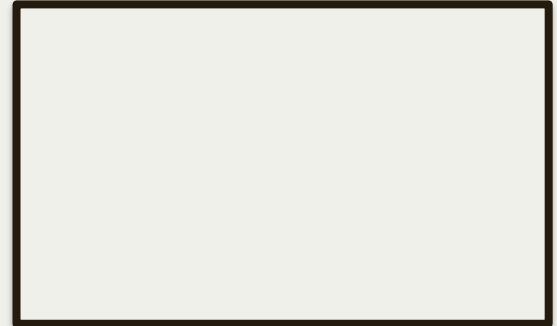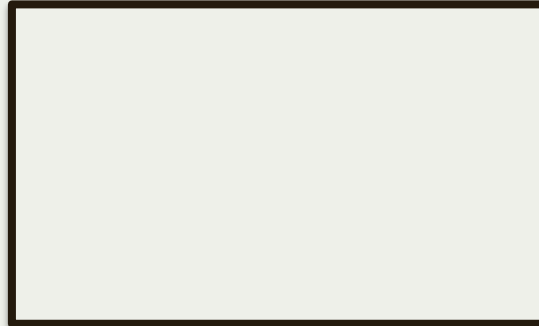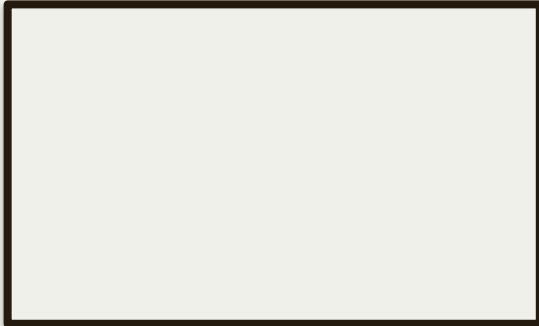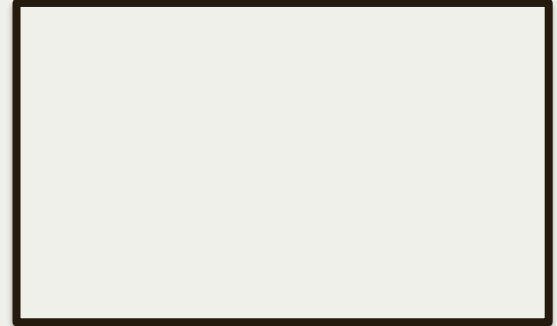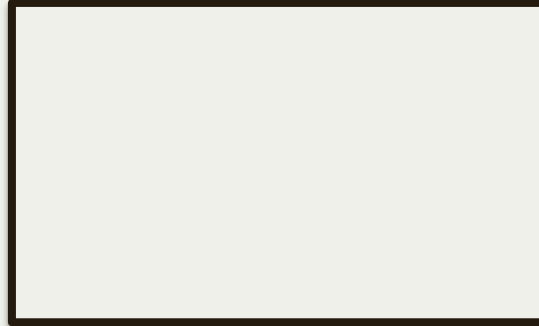
MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Opinions expressed in the online space can be perceived as **dominant views on a given topic**.
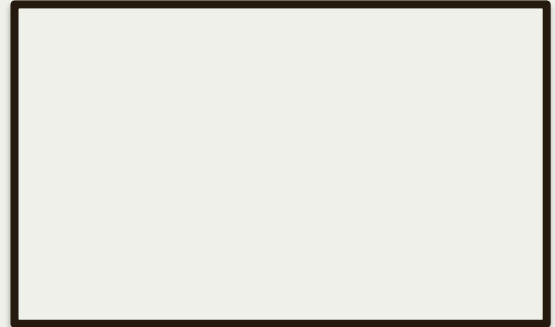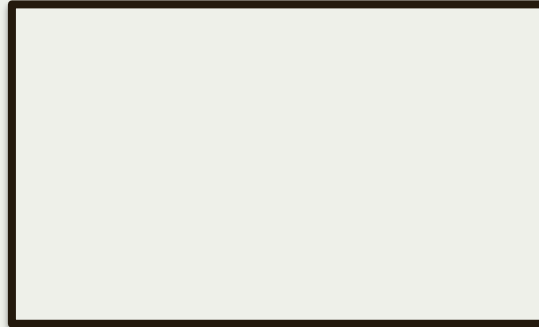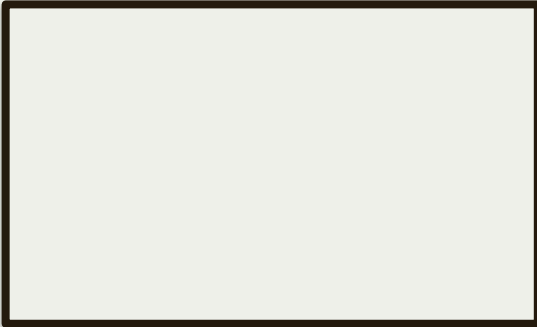
2. The understanding of recurring narratives actualized in times of crisis can help authorities **prevent citizens' uncertainty**.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Opinions expressed in the online space can be perceived as **dominant views on a given topic**.

2. The understanding of recurring narratives actualized in times of crisis can help authorities **prevent citizens' uncertainty**.

3. Online comments reproducing populist rhetoric (incl. the "us vs them" figure) can contribute to **societal polarization**.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Opinions expressed in the online space can be perceived as **dominant views on a given topic**.

2. The understanding of recurring narratives actualized in times of crisis can help authorities **prevent citizens' uncertainty**.

3. Online comments reproducing populist rhetoric (incl. the "us vs them" figure) can contribute to **societal polarization**.

4. Building a collective identity through defining a common enemy can facilitate the spread of **radical views within homogeneous groups**.
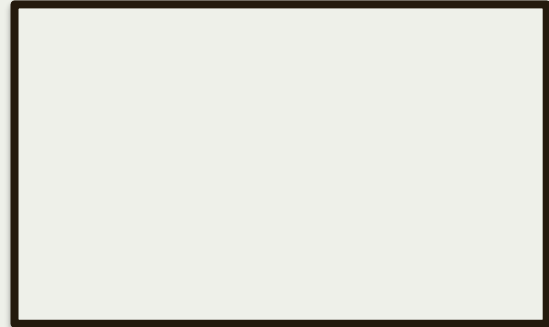
MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Opinions expressed in the online space can be perceived as **dominant views on a given topic**.

2. The understanding of recurring narratives actualized in times of crisis can help authorities **prevent citizens' uncertainty**.

3. Online comments reproducing populist rhetoric (incl. the "us vs them" figure) can contribute to **societal polarization**.

4. Building a collective identity through defining a common enemy can facilitate the spread of **radical views within homogeneous groups**.

5. Shared collective identities are formed **across political attitudes, opinions, and values**. Defining a common enemy is the key strategy.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Opinions expressed in the online space can be perceived as **dominant views on a given topic**.

2. The understanding of recurring narratives actualized in times of crisis can help authorities **prevent citizens' uncertainty**.

3. Online comments reproducing populist rhetoric (incl. the "us vs them" figure) can contribute to **societal polarization**.

4. Building a collective identity through defining a common enemy can facilitate the spread of **radical views within homogeneous groups**.

5. Shared collective identities are formed **across political attitudes, opinions, and values**. Defining a common enemy is the key strategy.

6. The emergence of **collective identities in the environment of mainstream news sites**, not only in the radical or fringe spaces.

Thank you & let's stay in touch!

Martina Novotná
mnovotna@fss.muni.cz

Lenka Vochocová
lenka.vochocova@fsv.cuni.cz

MASARYK UNIVERSITY

SYRI
SYSTEMIC RISK INSTITUTE

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

SOURCES

- Barla, J., & Bjork-James, S. (2021). Introduction: Entanglements of Anti-Feminism and Anti-Environmentalism in the Far-Right. Australian Feminist Studies, 36(110), 377–387. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2022.2062668
- Hameleers, M. (2019). The populism of online communities: constructing the boundary between "Blameless" people and "Culpable" others. Communication, Culture & Critique, 12(1), 147–165. https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz009
- Hogg, M. A. (2023). Walls between groups: Self-uncertainty, social identity, and intergroup leadership. Journal of Social Issues, 79(2), 825–840. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12584
- Hogg, M. A., & Gaffney, A. M. (2023). Social identity dynamics in the face of overwhelming uncertainty. In J. P. Forgas, W. D. Crano, & K. Fiedler (Eds.), *The psychology of insecurity: Seeking certainty where none can be found* (pp. 244–264). Routledge.
- Jünger, J. & Keyling, T. (2019). Facepager. An application for automated data retrieval on the web. Source code and releases available at https://github.com/strohne/Facepager/
- Martinsson, L., & Ericson, M. (2022). 'Fight pandemics with protective masks or gender?' Emerging collective identities and anti-gender movements on Twitter during the COVID-19 crisis in Sweden. Feminist Media Studies, 23(5), 2011–2027. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.2009898 https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003317623-17
- Schmid, F., Treib, O., & Eckardt, F. (2022). The virus of polarization: online debates about Covid-19 in Germany. Political Research Exchange, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736x.2022.2150087
- Törnberg, P., & Törnberg, A. (2022). Inside a White Power echo chamber: Why fringe digital spaces are polarizing politics. New Media & Society, 146144482211229. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221122915

Pictures and motives
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. https://democracy.fes.de/topics/polarization-democracy
- https://www.pexels.com/
- https://storyset.com/