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Far-right boundary construction towards the "other": Visual communication of Danish People's Party on social media

Sarah Awad[1] | **Nicole Doerr**[2] | **Anita Nissen**[3]

[1]Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

[2]Department of Sociology, Copenhagen University, Copenhagen, Denmark

[3]Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

Correspondence
Sarah Awad, Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark.
Email: awads@hum.aau.dk

Abstract

This paper explores how images are used in online far-right political communication to create distinct groups of "otherness." Focusing on the Danish People's Party, we look at how symbolic boundaries are constructed through images to emphasize an exclusive conception of the nation and its citizens, who need protection from the threatening "others." In order to understand the global rise of the far right, scholars of social movements and digital media have called for new research on how *visual* images serve the mainstreaming of extremist and nationalist beliefs online. We look at images communicated by the Danish People's Party on their Facebook page, exploring how digital images visually communicate the party's slogan of "Safety and trust" (in Danish: "Tryghed og tillid"). With a focus on boundary construction, we present a multimodal visual analysis of 1120 images posted by the party from 2012 to 2020. The data shows how the party constructs an imaginary of *Danishness* through an exclusionary impermeable boundary construction of a trusted in-group's values and traditions in opposition to culturally distinct "others."

KEYWORDS
Danish People's Party, far-right, othering, political visual iconography, social media, visual boundary strategies

Boundary construction is a common mechanism used in far-right political mobilization, involving the construction of a unique and exclusive in-group, promoting conceptions of belonging and solidarity, while simultaneously othering the out-groups that allegedly threaten this cohesion. Sociologists, political scientists, and sociolinguists have studied the symbolic boundary construction toward migrants and ethnic minorities in far-right mobilization, media discourse, and everyday stigmatization (Bakkær-Simonsen, 2018; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wodak & Boukala, 2015; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021). In this paper, we explore how boundary processes are constructed through images and visual communication as parts of multimodal discourse. Our research thereby provides a *visual* contribution to this large body of research on othering in historic and contemporary far-right political discourses. Previous research shows how contemporary European and American far-right parties use visual, digital, and popular communication strategies that both modernize and replace traditional far-right imagery (see e.g., Klein & Muis, 2019). By constructing populist "attraction images" that represent "the party" as an ethnonationalist "people," such parties appeal to larger voter segments, including both moderate voters as well as radical extremists (Doerr, 2021; Schober, 2019, pp. 1–2). Similarly, work on ethnic and national boundary strategies shows how election posters recreate ethnonationalist imaginaries of the nation through provocative visual contents (Özvatan & Forchtner, 2019; Richardson & Wodak, 2009).

Few researchers have studied the *digital* dimension of visual boundary work by far-right parties, especially in a Scandinavian context, where far-right extremist activism has a large community of online users shifting toward visual contents and communication styles (Askanius, 2019, 2020). For a study of visual boundary work, images on online platforms are important to consider, given their everyday relevance and use by citizens, who employ such sites for multiple purposes, including participating in political debates and gathering information, for instance, about migration and citizenship in Denmark (Olesen, 2020). The far right has been particularly apt at utilizing the internet for ideology dissemination and connecting with followers and (potential) voters (Caiani et al., 2012), frequently employing memes and other forms of visuals to attract attention (Askanius, 2020). Such "visual pieces of culture" play an important part in these actors' propaganda and mobilization strategies (Klein, 2020, p. 156) and contribute to far-right mainstreaming (Miller-Idriss, 2018).

By focusing on the case of the Danish People's Party (DF) and their visual communication on Facebook, we explore how far-right nationalist parties construct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in their digital visual communication. Through a critical multimodal analysis, we implement a novel empirical angle to study online visual symbolic boundary constructions, with an interest in exploring processes of othering and stigmatization of minority groups and migrants (see also Richardson & Wodak, 2009). First, we elaborate theoretically on how boundaries are constructed and maintained through visual digital images and how the far right utilizes digital media. We then present the case of DF, the methods and visual data, followed by the visual analysis. Our critical multimodal analysis combines visual content analysis, online engagement data, iconographic analysis, and contextual interpretations. The data analysis shows how DF constructs an in-group imaginary of *Danishness* through an exclusionary boundary construction of the folk, the land, and the common culture and values in opposition to both internal and external "threats." The in-group imagery of Danishness bridges different social groups (e.g., in terms of age, social class, etc.) and connects different topics (such as nature, land, welfare, religion, and history), thus crossing thematic boundaries while simultaneously upholding a nativist impermeable boundary towards the culturally distinct "others," especially migrants and Muslims.

1 | BOUNDARY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH FAR-RIGHT VISUAL DIGITAL IMAGES

Scholars studying ethnic boundary work in public discourse show how people construct *symbolic* boundaries defining who belongs to a particular social group, and who is an outsider (Bakkær-Simonsen, 2018; Lamont & Molnar, 2002;

Wodak & Boukala, 2015). We use the term boundary to refer to the symbolic psychological and social processes of creating a distinction between an in-group and an out-group, which is different from -but could include-geographical and national borders. From a social psychological perspective, people often identify themselves through the belonging to certain social groups and the placement of emotional and value significance to those group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These constructed boundaries vary from being inclusive and flexible to exclusive and impermeable ("bright") boundaries segregating the "others" from "us" (Bakkær-Simonsen, 2018). The latter type is typically constructed by actors propagating nationalist group identities. Previous research shows how far-right parties simultaneously mobilize ethnic and cultural boundaries, while also blurring ideological and social boundaries in order to mobilize a nationalist sense of solidarity among target audiences (Doerr, 2017).

We assume that visual digital images, such as memes, photographs, and visual symbols are used as a medium to enact a "border politics" (Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 258) in which a collective "we" identity is constructed as opposed to perceived enemies such as migrants, Muslims, feminists, and left-wing activists (Askanius, 2019; Klein, 2020). While the non-institutional extreme right draws on *explicitly* racist contents to define its out-group (Bogerts & Fielitz, 2019), populist radical right parties instead make more *implicit* references, as a means to remain legitimate as they either seek or have already obtained mainstream inclusion, entailing a need for moderation (Klein & Muis, 2019).

We conceive of visual boundary strategies as forming part of the *symbolic* and discursive dimension of boundary regimes, which recreate ethnonationalist, gendered, and racialized power structures through the stigmatization of outgroups (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021). Discourse here is understood as a multimodal interrelated set of texts, images, and communicative practices within a certain context that constructs our experience in the world (Van Leeuwen, 2015). As images and visual communication form part of this multimodal discourse, we assume that symbolic dynamics of boundary regimes are intertwined in complex ways with concrete material boundary practices located in particular national contexts in which political actors, for example, construct migrants or Muslim subjectivities as "dangerous" or "safety threats" (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021, p. 41). Following Yuval-Davis and co-authors (2019), we assume that public discourse recreates robust, internal boundaries *within* societies, for example, internalized boundaries in people's perception of national belonging, maintained and mobilized through nationalist political actors or the state constructing migrants or minority subjectivities as the nation's (here, Denmark's) *other*.

Since the early 2000s, European far-right communication often involves this visual boundary bridging strategy, blending anti-Islam rhetoric with gendered anti-migration images (for instance by stigmatizing Muslim men as sexual invaders; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021) or with welfare protectionist portrayals (Norocel et al., 2020). In this way, the far right aims to bridge different topics and sub-groups while also creating a strong, negative image of migrants as "threatening Others" of the national we-group narrative (Doerr, 2017). As has been witnessed during the last 2 decades, such context-specific stereotypical images have concrete consequences, as they serve governments to legitimate new laws against migrants perceived as security threats (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021; see also Andreassen & Siim, 2010).

The use of othering in visual boundary strategies in online digital communication facilitates the spreading of extremist images and videos to the mainstream (Askanius, 2019; Miller-Idriss, 2018; Özvatan & Forchtner, 2019; see also Bogerts & Fielitz, 2019; Doerr, 2017). Through provocative visual contents and the use of sarcasm or radical statements often denigrating migrants or ethnic minorities, far-right populist parties instill themselves as authentic spokespeople for the common sense (Caiani et al., 2012; Doerr, 2017; Özvatan & Forchtner, 2019; Wodak & Boukala, 2015).

We will show that DF's visual communication differs in some respects from that of fellow far-right parties; as the party, for instance, hardly draws on references to gender or race, except for its use of the Muslim headscarf as a visual boundary marker to dissociate Muslims from Danish citizens. Another important dimension is the party's emphasis

on welfare protectionism and "deservingness" (Bak Jørgensen & Thomsen, 2016), making it espouse a cultural form of racism, prevalent amongst numerous European far-right actors today.

We investigate the DF's visual politics on social media, exploring the strategies and visual discursive practices by which established and relatively powerful far-right parties construct "boundary ideologies" (Lamont & Mólnar, 2002, p. 188). Such ideologies enable them to distinguish between a collective "we" and the "other," relying on visual images as an open-ended and polysemiotic media to do so (Müller, 2011). We see the party's images as intentional social acts through which the party positions itself and different social groups in society. As those images circulate, they become part of a political dialogue in which they produce and exchange meanings, promoting certain representations of certain groups in society while inhibiting others (Awad, 2020). Our focus in this paper is on the production of meaning by the DF through images, and how those meanings construct certain representations of in and out groups. Our case study discusses an important, yet understudied, aspect, namely the popularization of far-right parties' visual politics through digital media in the Scandinavian context. Focusing on place-specific public debates about migration, our empirical contribution deepens the knowledge on how *visual* representations of migrants—in Denmark—serve political actors (like the DF) to brand their own image.

2 | INTRODUCING AND SITUATING THE DANISH PEOPLE'S PARTY

The *Danish People's Party* (*Dansk Folkeparti*—DF) was founded in 1995. While the party belongs to the overarching far-right scene, due to its adherence to (exclusionary) nationalism, anti-liberalism and authoritarianism, DF's classification can be further narrowed down to "populist radical right," due to its nativist, populist and authoritarian worldview (Mudde, 2007). The term "nativism" is the key term for their ideology. According to Mudde, it refers to "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state" (2007, p. 22). Populism refers to the juxtaposition of "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite," where parties such as DF hold that "the people" should have a greater say in the policy-making process (Ibid.). Finally, authoritarianism relates to the demand for societal hierarchy and order, often expressed through demands for stronger legislative measures against crime.

The party entered the Danish Parliament in 1998, and went from previously being a political pariah to becoming the second largest Danish party at the 2015 national elections obtaining 21.1% of the votes. Yet, at the 2019 elections, the party lost a substantial vote share, only attracting 8.7% votes. Due to its earlier electoral success, DF has become part of the Danish political mainstream, as the mainstream has adopted many of DF's policy stances related to immigration and Islam (Meret & Nissen, 2021). Yet, in its strong visual communication campaigns, which often involve attention-grabbing imagery and clear, simple statements (Klose Jensen, 2016), DF remains the sole Danish party that substantially draws on nationalism in its visuals, also compared to the more migrant-hostile far-right party, the New Right (Nye Borgerlige).

In recent years, DF has increasingly mobilized with the slogan "Safety and trust" ("Tryghed og tillid"), aimed mainly at improving the welfare provisions to (especially elderly) *Danish* citizens and introducing harsher authoritarian measures against (foreign) criminals. The slogan speaks to the general Danish welfare state and discourse, involving generous welfare benefits to "deserving" citizens. Several studies consider the welfare chauvinist statements by Danish parties, where particularly DF utilizes highly exclusionary frames (Bak Jørgensen & Thomsen, 2016; Siim & Meret, 2016). In DF's discursive construction of a boundary politics toward migrants (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021), welfare should only be offered to an ethnically exclusive in-group, where particularly *Muslim* migrants are "othered." Moreover, during the party's existence, DF has emphasized the safety-related need to reintroduce border controls at the Danish borders, in order to both ward off criminals and "illegal" migrants from entering Denmark, but also to protect Danish sovereignty from the perceived EU infringements. While several studies have examined the DF's statements, public speeches, and media discourse, fewer studies explore how the party uses visual digital media in

its boundary construction of Denmark as an ethnically homogeneous *homeland* (Taggart, 2000). Preliminary research of DF's visual communication strategy (Nissen et al., 2021) shows that DF visually depicts migrants and the EU as invaders, left-wing political parties as traitors, and themselves as heroic defenders of both Denmark as a geographical entity and Danes as a homogeneous people. While we know that other nationalist actors often use similar narratives in conjunction with victimhood and bravery frames (Nissen, 2022), we still lack systematic knowledge of how images and visual representations of "the defenders" and "the others" engage audiences online, while embodying the values of the defended object, that is, "the homeland." Thus, our research aims to further understand how the DF's visual politics construct a nativist image of "Danishness."

3 | DATA SET

Inspired by our theoretical interest in visual boundary strategies, we based our data selection and sampling on an evaluation of relevant datasets in the making of "Danishness" in DF's visual online communication. Wanting to consider DF's visual production over time, and targeted to as broad an audience as possible, while also assessing the audience engagement with the images, we focus on DF's Facebook page ("Dansk Folkeparti" https://www.facebook.com/danskfolkeparti). At the moment of writing (June 17, 2021), the page has 104,898 likes and 105,515 followers. Since 2015, the number of followers has risen significantly, going from 35,000 followers that year (Eskildsen, 2015) to 74,000 by September 2016 (Ritzau, 2016). Compared to the other Danish parties, DF has by far the most interactions on its Facebook page (Bahn, 2018), a finding which is similar to the cases of for example, Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Sweden Democrats in their domestic settings (Medina Serrano et al., 2019; The Local Sweden, 2018).

Our data set consists of all images posted on DF's Facebook page from October 2012 to August 2020, totaling 1120 images. The party's image production mainly consists of the combination of image and text (so-called image macros). Most visual DF-posts are photos of party members or appear to be stock photos, which either only show an image or an image plus a short and simple text message regarding a given policy issue. The simplistic appearance means that the visuals become the image's carrying aspect for conveying a message (Klein, 2020). All image data was sorted by date and uploaded to NVivo for the analysis process, which will be elaborated on below.

4 | METHOD: A MULTIMODAL APPROACH TO VISUAL DIGITAL POLITICS

We apply a multimodal approach to studying visual political mobilization, combining theoretical and methodological insights from research on social movements, media, and multimodal visual analysis (Doerr, 2017; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017; Müller et al., 2009). Following Doerr (2017), we define visual analysis by primarily focusing on three aspects of visual boundary practices, which we analyze in DF's digital media communication: (1) the *visual expression* of the party's political program; (2) the *representation* of the nation, citizenship, social groups, and migrants; and (3) the materials' construction of migrants as situated in the broader Danish political context and public discourse on migration.

First, we analyze our image dataset categorizing it through a visual content analysis based on what is represented in the images, and what those representations symbolize. We apply the critical and interdisciplinary methodology of *political visual iconography*, which focuses on the visual aspect of contemporary problems in politics and culture (Müller, 2011). The approach allows for the exploration of the complex esthetic messages and possible inflammatory potential within visual digital images disseminated by political parties toward broader media publics (Müller, 2011). We focus on how DF employs a variety of visual symbols to construct "Danishness" as a category, by drawing a boundary between what is "ours" (e.g., the land, the culture), needing to be protected from the perceived threat of the "other."

Secondly, to assess the images' production and reception context (Müller, 2011), we analyze the digital audiences' (the "Followers") engagement with DF's digital Facebook images. We consider the reception context by looking at the numbers of "Likes," "Comments" and "Shares" as indicators of "attention, engagement, or resonance" (Rieder et al., 2015, p. 4). Studies show that online content appealing to emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and disbelief often leads audiences to react by engaging in online political discussions or by sharing the contents, thereby amplifying the contents due to the algorithms (Matamoros-Fernández, 2017). Facebook expanded the "Reactions" function to six different emotions in Spring 2016 (thumbs-up, love, laugh, wow, sad, and angry). Yet, as our dataset spans from 2012 to 2020, we do not distinguish between the various emotion types, but rather count them all as engagement indicators. Based on our dataset, we can in fact show that in order to reach a broader audience through a "network-enhanced word of mouth" (Nahon et al., 2011, p. 7), over time, DF increasingly posts images, which directly encourage followers to either "like" or "share" the post if they agree with the message.

The third and last step of our visual analysis is an in-depth iconographic analysis and contextualization (Müller, 2011) of three theoretically selected images, which will be situated within the broader Danish public debate on *Danishness* and immigration. Given our interest in the discursive dynamics of boundary practices, we trace the connection between the visual images and DF's political ideas related to the welfare state, deduced from its party manifesto and website. The selected images were among the images that generated the highest user engagement in their respective categories of "Danishness," "the (geographical) border," and "the other."

5 | FINDINGS

5.1 | Visual content analysis

As mentioned earlier, all images were collected in Nvivo software, afterwards the images were coded under different themes based on their visual depictions and symbols and our knowledge of the party's key agitation topics. As we solely focused on the visuals for the coding, we first considered what the visual showed (e.g., a woman with a veil, the Danish or EU flag, the DF logo, a bag of money, a portrait of a person), and then we combined this with our pre-existing contextual knowledge of both the party and its worldview, Denmark, and the Danish political scene, leading us to construct themes uniting these two levels of analysis. In this sense, the themes were informed by DF's party manifestos and literature on far-right politics, while also remaining open to emerging (sub-)categories from coding the collected images. Even though some images could be categorized into various themes, we decided to only code each image once under the visually most prevalent theme. This is of course a rather interpretive and subjective approach, yet, seeing as our main aim was to deduce the (assumed) core symbolic message of the visual, we decided that this would be the most fruitful approach. In terms of the image coding, two of the authors jointly developed the codebook through an interpretive process of constant dialogue regarding the interpretation of symbols and categories, in order to ensure that the deduced codes would be uniform for multiple coders. Our data sampling considers the data reliability challenges and limitations of sampling discussed by Caiani et al. (2012), including the volatility and shifting features of far-right digital networks and communication strategies across time. To address some of these limitations, we chose longitudinal analysis in order to capture the DF's digital media strategy across time. Considering these data characteristics and restrictions, the findings presented below show how the DF uses distinct visual symbols as a tool for demarcating a bright boundary between *Danishness* and *otherness*.

We identified five main visual themes in the data; *the folk*, *the land*, *the culture & values*, *the threat*, and *the party's representation*. A first finding is the visual boundary construction of a "we-group" as represented through the party's visual self-representation, its representation of "the folk," "the land," and "the culture and values," in opposition to the threatening "other" (see Table 1). As already explained, all of those constructions are well-known visual genres of far-right parties on digital media (Askanius, 2019; Bogerts & Fielitz, 2019; Özvatan & Forchtner, 2019).

TABLE 1 Visual content analysis: The five main visual themes in DF's Facebook images

	2012*–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020*	Total
The folk—"We"	9 (3.3%)	13 (2.7%)	26 (7.0%)	48 (4.3%)
The folk—Variety	8	6	13	27
The folk—Elders	1	7	13	21
The land	17 (6.2%)	47 (9.9%)	53 (14.2%)	117 (10.4%)
The land—the border	2	23	12	37
The flag	1	14	19	34
Animals and nature	14	9	18	41
The citizenship	0	1	4	5
The culture and values	6 (2.2%)	33 (7.0%)	38 (10.2%)	77 (6.9%)
Religion (Christianity), values, and traditions	5	4	15	24
Welfare state and economy	0	9	11	20
Democracy and law	0	10	6	16
Food	1	9	0	10
History and Danish language	0	1	6	7
The threat	4 (1.5%)	34 (7.2%)	114 (30.5%)	152 (13.6%)
The other (migrants, refugees, criminals, Muslims)	3	23	63	89
Other parties and left-wing	0	5	40	45
EU	1	6	11	18
Representing the party	219 (80.2%)	207 (43.7%)	87 (23.3%)	513 (45.8%)
Faces of the party (mainly politicians' portrait)	159	62	67	288
The party in action	58	140	20	218
The party's logo	2	5	0	7
Excluded	18 (6.6%)	140 (29.5%)	56 (15.0%)	214 (19.1%)
Text-only images	15	125	26	166
Graph—statistics	0	13	22	35
Miscellaneous	3	2	8	13
Total	273 (100%)	474 (100%)	374 (100%)	1121 (100%)

*Data collected from October 16, 2012, until August 1, 2020.

Given our focus on photographs or graphic drawings, we excluded images that had only text or statistics and numeric graphs (201 images) and miscellaneous images not matching the main five categories (13 images). To assess the number of images over time, we present the data longitudinally through 3-year intervals. The 2015–2017 period correlates with the "height" of the refugee crisis, potentially explaining the party's strong focus on geographical "borders" in the period. Similarly, DF became part of the opposition from 2019 onwards, explaining its more frequent use of visuals depicting other (left-wing) parties in the 2018–2020 period.

Table 1 shows that among the five themes, the biggest share of images (45.8%) consists of self-representations of the party. Like other political parties, DF uses its online platform to promote the party's politicians and bring visibility to their work, hence the "party in action" images. The party members' self-portraits also bridge the boundaries between professional politicians and citizens by constructing the DF leaders' images alongside fellow Danes as the "ordinary people," the "everybody" (see more on this below). This is especially evident in images portraying politicians in less formal settings, for example, decorating a Christmas tree or petting an animal.

The second largest category includes images of the "threat" (13.6%). Within this category, images representing the foreign "other," most typically Muslim migrants (89 images), make up the second largest sub-category. This is especially interesting when considering that only 48 images represent the Danish people—the "we" category.

The longitudinal data collection shows that DF's posting of images of threat and otherness has increased over time, particularly in periods where the party was in opposition. The use of threat images gradually increased as the party was losing popularity after 2019, increasingly replacing images of DF politicians and the folk. For example, in the period 2015–2017, threat images represented 7.2% of images, in comparison to 30.5% in 2018–2020. This reliance on threat images are typical strategies especially online, when trying to regain popularity through visual affective content that scapegoats certain minority groups.

The visual content analysis gave us a good overview of how the visual is used in constructing clear exclusionary boundaries. This responds to the focus of our research which is on the production of such meanings through images, rather than their reception or their consequences on mobilization and voting behavior for example, However, we still followed up our visual content analysis with an initial investigation of engagement, looking at how images in those different themes received different attention from followers on the party's social media page. Engagement numbers were calculated based on the mean average of the reactions, comments, and shares respectively (see Table 2). On average, compared to the other four image categories, visuals depicting the foreign, third-country "others" generated the by far highest audience engagement in terms of reactions (mean of 3364.72), and the second highest in terms of comments (697.27) and shares (1059.22). A closer examination of the different codes within the "Migrant Other" category reveals that particularly the codes "Criminal foreigners" and "Muslim migrants" attracted much engagement (see Table 2). Similarly, other boundary-demarcating themes, that is, images of the geographical border and representations of citizenship, also garner high levels of reactions (see Appendix for the engagement figures for each code). Note, however, that Facebook reactions at times include commenting by pro-migrant Facebook users, who join the DF-debate to counter the party's arguments.

As a limitation to the potential meaning and interpretation of our findings, our engagement figures measure the followers' responses to both the image and the text, that is, the complex "text-image" of a particularly engaging post. This restriction inhibits us from tracing the "actual" impact of the image versus the text within a post in terms of fostering emotional audience responses. The context and timing of the given visual is another extenuating factor. It is highly likely that DF-followers engage more strongly with its contents in particular periods, such as during controversial media debates about a particular policy topic or during election periods. Yet, due to space restrictions, such instances are not given special attention in this analysis.

Next, we deepen the findings of the visual content analysis and engagement through an iconographic and contextual analysis of three selected images. To select those three images we first identified the three themes that are most relevant to our theoretical framework, which are "The folk," "The land, culture, and values," and the "threat." These three themes are central to the party's boundary construction between a "we," "what is ours that needs protection," and the "foreign other." To pick which images to choose for analysis from these themes, we looked at engagement data to identify the top 10 images from each of those themes that received the most engagement. Then from those top images, we selected one image from each theme that was most representative of the theme. By this we mean that we selected an image that included many of the most significant and recurrent icons used in this theme, for example, the flag, nature, or the hijab. We present below a visual iconography analysis of the selected three images.

5.2 | Visual iconography of "we" and what is "ours"

As explained above, DF constructs its we-group through the themes of "representing the party," "the land," the "culture and values," and "the folk." The latter theme's images target a broad Danish audience using representations of "ordinary people" together with icons of the flag and of Danish nature. The image in Figure 1 is an example from this theme and was among the images with the highest engagement in 2014.

TABLE 2 Median of Engagement levels for each category

Theme		Oct 2012–Dec 2014				Jan 2015–Dec 2017				Jan 2018–Aug 2020				Total		
		N	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares
The folk—"We"	Median	9	170.00	11.00	11.00	13	921.00	240.00	107.00	26	834.00	193.50	146.50	48	656.00	96.00	88.00
	Mean		230.33	14.33	29.56		1842.54	216.31	289.15		1129.15	231.65	332.85		1153.83	186.75	264.15
	SD		242.43	13.02	37.97		2131.13	180.30	435.88		902.99	209.88	682.16		1377.73	196.00	556.42
The land	Median	11	642.00	46.00	76.00	43	1417.00	84.00	304.00	55	1245.00	210.00	206.00	109	1133.00	107.00	214.00
	Mean		720.73	48.82	285.18		2108.65	178.26	425.74		1775.85	402.24	411.64		1800.66	278.21	404.44
	SD		464.26	35.41	484.11		2280.77	320.88	435.03		1740.79	611.17	643.14		1927.42	494.06	551.15
The culture & values	Median	2	-	-	-	29	1184.00	102.00	211.55	31	1299.00	197.00	168.00	62	1290.50	150.50	163.50
	Mean		-	-	-		1690.48	179.52	165.00		1752.48	673.06	2597.87		1722.77	423.29	1401.02
	SD		-	-	-		1457.10	143.80	197.12		1795.81	1065.58	12,891.79		1607.60	794.735	9122.01
The threat																	
The migrant other	Median	3	-	-	-	23	3495.00	289.00	255.00	62	2720.50	422.00	564.00	88	2778.00	401.00	484.00
	Mean		-	-	-		3610.17	336.22	475.70		3336.92	848.35	1319.11		3364.72	697.27	1059.22
	SD		-	-	-		2948.89	262.75	491.74		2759.20	2183.78	2557.95		2797.49	1850.01	2194.54
Muslims	Median	1	-	-	-	17	2905.00	278.00	252.00	37	3087.00	459.00	565.00	55	3087.00	431.00	461.00
	Mean		-	-	-		3343.00	330.24	388.00		3531.89	1101.27	1495.30		3510.69	860.18	1133.69
	SD		-	-	-		2998.90	291.57	442.76		2568.16	2802.16	3093.27		2673.93	2321.27	2590.51
Immigrants and Asylum seekers	Median	0	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	9	1746.00	385.00	477.00	13	1958.00	391.00	594.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		1910.11	382.56	595.33		2846.23	403.46	657.92
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		702.97	81.29	357.04		2351.38	91.914	455.69

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Theme		Oct 2012–Dec 2014				Jan 2015–Dec 2017				Jan 2018–Aug 2020				Total			
		N	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares
Criminal Foreigners	Median	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	16	2668.00	416.00	566.50	20	2384.50	350.50	522.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		3688.63	525.50	1318.81		3300.30	440.25	1115.25
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		3663.39	381.82	1784.87		3431.02	383.15	1648.92
Other parties & left-wing	Median	0	-	-	-	5	928.00	106.00	200.00	40	1188.00	554.50	214.50	45	1134.00	496.00	213.00
	Mean		-	-	-		781.00	257.00	178.40		1613.98	1295.95	362.05		1521.42	1180.51	341.64
	SD		-	-	-		421.95	315.93	64.524		1333.44	2337.83	389.12		1289.29	2227.67	371.47
EU	Median	1	-	-	-	6	1138.50	84.50	351.00	11	1385.00	493.00	331.36	18	1275.00	173.00	324.00
	Mean		-	-	-		1503.83	226.00	467.50		1694.00	590.09	361.00		1579.50	437.17	367.89
	SD		-	-	-		1061.41	368.03	334.49		886.56	619.87	235.11		917.81	553.96	268.41

Note: The table shows the Facebook engagement for the various themes across the three periods. The engagement numbers were manually retrieved on September 13–15, 2021. The code "Criminals" has not been included in the table, as it only consisted of one image, explaining why the sum of the "Other" is only 88. Where *n* =>5, the images are not included in the table.

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation

FIGURE 1 Posted on September 13, 2014 (805 likes, 46 comments, 281 shares)

Figure 1 shows two silhouettes covered by a piece of fabric in the colors of the Danish flag (*Dannebrog*) in front of a sunset ocean view. In the figure, the Danish flag serves to cover two children, who in this composition could symbolize Denmark's future. Moreover, the bold text slogan associates the flag and the children positively with the statement "safety and trust in Denmark." We see the image as a professionally made political advertisement (Müller, 2011). While *Dannebrog* is a widespread popular symbol of Danish everyday life, positively associated with celebratory events and national pride (Kjersgaard Nielsen, 2018), the DF uses the flag extensively in its political mobilization to emphasize its ambition to protect the country, its culture, and people (see also Nissen et al., 2021). The idyllic background of an ocean and meadow also draws upon the far-right historical focus on nature and the environment (see Forchtner, 2019), an issue also highlighted by DF in their communication, albeit most often in relation to animal rights.

From an iconographic perspective, the picture resembles a well-known popular art painting by the Danish painter Jørgen V. Sonne, painted in 1848 ("Landlig scene" ["Rural Scene"]). In Sonne's romantic and historic painting, two women overlook a sunset ocean scene, one holding a small child in her hand, the other wearing a dress in the colors of the Danish flag. DF's photograph repeats several of the visual symbols and gestures in Sonne's original painting, among them the gaze over the ocean, children, and the green nature. Yet, while Sonne portrays two adults with their small children, the figures in the DF visual are only children. The composition with the boy's tallness in comparison to the shorter girl, and their young age, and his embrace of the smaller girl with his arm covered by the Dannebrog together symbolize the protection of Denmark's future.

At first sight, the portrayal in Figure 1 does not seem to draw clear boundaries, nor does it use spectacular or offensive messages targeting migrants. However, in terms of visual and symbolic elements, Figure 1 combines multiple symbols of Danish art history and popular culture, which all rally for a defense of present-day Danish material borders and symbolic boundaries. First, note that according to contemporary art historians, Sonne's original historic painting reflects an idea of Denmark supporting "national virtues," where the painting "might well have been an effective poster for drafting soldiers, depicting the Denmark—the people and the nation—that needed to be protected and defended" (Nørgaard Larsen, 2021). Indeed, soon after the painting was completed, Denmark would be traumatically defeated, not just by war, but also by the economic and technological changes of industrialization opening Denmark to "outside influences," which increased urban progress as well as loss of meaning for rural areas and populations (Nørgaard Larsen, 2021).

It is important, we assume, that the DF's photograph's iconography has anonymized children at its center. Shot as a photograph in the traditional genre of romantic paintings, the boy and the girl symbolize the future of Danish nationalism. Moreover, Anna Schober (2021) shows how contemporary representations of children in the context of debates on migration and citizenship come to symbolize an abstract self-reflection or "we-understanding" of the

adult audience viewers for whom these pictures have in fact been created. Accordingly, we assume that the DF visual, rather than representing particular children, would come to represent the abstract idea of Denmark's future that needs protection, as well as serving as a projection for a positive "we" understanding of Denmark and Danishness today.

In addition to images representing the "we" group, such as that in Figure 1, a second theme of images in the data set addresses *material* symbols of "what is ours" through images of the land and its geographical borders. Figure 2 is an example of a highly engaging image juxtaposing geographical borders with anti-migrant discourse. Like in Figure 1, the visual in Figure 2 uses the Danish flag overlaid onto a geographic map of Denmark as a way to construct a boundary between "us" and "them," specified in the text "we should help our own before migrants—Share, if you agree!" Unlike Figure 1, which draws on photography, Figure 2 juxtaposes the Danish in-group with migrants through the use of icon symbols. In the text, the welfare state is indirectly positioned as at risk from the economic threats coming from "welfare migrants," which may harm those who deserve the welfare benefits the most; the autochthonous Danes. This meaning is a recurrent one, especially in the images depicting elderly citizens in the "Folk" category (see Table 1). Here, several photographs create a visual boundary between an elderly person (textually represented as worthy to be protected and prioritized by Denmark's welfare state) vis a vis a refugee or migrant (represented as undeserving groups in terms of government welfare support).

Contextualizing Figure 2 as part of our data set, the image of a flag forms part of a political iconography by DF, where the party visually marks "ownership" of the land by constructing a nationalist "we-identity," incorporating several layers of symbols, from direct representations of Danes and the party, to material symbols of boundaries, such as nature and border lines, and to abstract symbols of culture, values, and social structures. The Danish flag is frequently utilized in this category (34 images). Interrelated visual symbols around the flag feature several "we" symbols simultaneously, including images of the land, culture, and social structure. Those visual depictions unfold DF's different "social imaginaries"; the party's imagination and representation of the society's ideal constitution and functioning, as well as its own identity construction (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017).

FIGURE 2 Posted on September 3, 2019 (4800 reactions, 743 comments, 4200 shares)

The in-group boundary is established through the identification of the physical land borders (e.g., Figure 2) and the practices and values that establish cultural distinction (e.g., theme category of "culture and values"). Those practices identify the country as having the continuity from one generation to the next and going from specific habits and traditions (such as food and Christmas traditions) to the broad social and economic structures, most notably the welfare state. According to DF, trust is a key aspect in relation to those values, as it not only keeps the society solidaristic, but also assures a safety net for the most deserving. As the party states in its manifesto, "In the Danish People's Party, we are proud of Denmark; we love our country and we feel a historic obligation to protect our country, its people and the Danish cultural heritage. This sense of obligation implies the need for a strong national defense, and secure and safe national borders. Only in a free Denmark can the country develop according to the will of the people" (DPP, 1997).

In sum, visuals categorized under "the folk," "the land," and "the culture and values" construct a homogenous and exclusionary conceptualization of Danishness. The text statements surrounding these images mark boundaries by pointing out how this entity (Denmark and the future of Danishness) can only be kept safe through a clear geographical border (e.g., Figure 2), and an embodied symbolic boundary (e.g., Figure 1). The national border control line is transformed to an internalized boundary separating the "us" and "them." This aligns with the party's wish to defend Denmark as a geographical entity and its frequent calls for a more permanent border control (see also Nissen et al., 2021). It also explains the DF's visual communication focus on the "threat," as discussed below.

5.3 | Visual iconography of "the threat" and the "other"

This section focuses on the visual iconography of the *Other* as constructed and presented by DF, illustrated by a typical DF "threat" image (Figure 3), which was among the images obtaining most engagement in the period 2017–2020.

The photograph is a visual representation of Denmark's Others based on an anonymized stock photograph of several non-western looking female figures, one wearing a female head cover, set in a lively urban street scene.

FIGURE 3 Posted on April 24, 2019 (4400 reactions, 1000 comments, 491 shares)

The bold text is placed top center and consists of a rallying, anti-refugee slogan ("Refugees shall not integrate into Denmark! They must go home!"). The image represents the Islamic head cover and the non-caucasian features as symbols of other-ness and as representations of the refugee group. This is set in contrast to western way of dressing and the dominant Caucasian blond features symbolizing Danishness (Bakkær-Simonsen, 2018).

In this photograph, the meaning of the female headscarf is ambivalent and open for multiple iconographic interpretations. In terms of visual symbolic boundary construction, DF's general representation of "the other" almost exclusively relies on photographs representing female figures. Historically, in Western European media debates about Islam, citizenship, and gender, the headscarf commonly symbolized diversity in the context of post-war immigration into European society (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 2). More recently though, in increasingly polemic, polarizing, and racializing debates about citizenship, culture, and national belonging in majority white secular European societies, the headcover has come to symbolize otherness or backwardness and submission. Like Figure 3, Western European far-right parties increasingly use the headcover as anti-Islam symbolism, as opposed to a simplified construction of white European women as the "we-group," symbolizing Westernness, liberal democracy, and progress (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 2). In this sense, the threat is thought to eventually destroy the Western societies' democratic values. Together with most Europeans' more favorable stance towards LGBTQ and women's rights, the far right draws on Europe's Christian heritage, values, and culture (see e.g., Betz & Meret, 2009), as means to demonstrate the "backwardness" of Islam (see e.g., Mondon & Winter, 2018 on "Liberal Islamophobia"). In this way, the anti-Islam position remains a form of racial Othering (Narkowicz, 2018), as Muslims are essentialized and considered a homogeneous group, perceived as civilisational inferior and "backward" to the "West."

Moreover, the focus on Muslim women complements the construction of Muslim men and male refugees as a "threat" to ethno-nationalist narratives of belonging and ideals of heterosexual masculinity by European far-right parties (Miller-Idriss, 2018; Norocel et al., 2020). As a gendered symbol of threat, the head cover works as a symbolic identifier, which constructs all of these groups together as one threatening "other." Drawing a bright boundary between "us" and "them" (Bakkær-Simonsen, 2018), diverse ethnic minorities, non-white Danish citizens, and Muslims are associated with "refugees" and asked to "leave" Denmark.

Contextualizing this image as one example of depicting the "other," we understand it as reflecting a typical visualization of "threat" by DF, drawing on the symbol of the veil. Our dataset shows that visual representations of Muslims and migrants as Denmark's "other" were represented in 89 out of the 152 photos featuring the theme "threat," as in posing an attack on the perceived Danish homogeneity and autonomy. It is relevant to note that out of those 89 "threat" photos, 63 were posted in the last 3 years of analysis (2018–2020). This increase suggests a heightened relevance of emphasizing threat images in a period where the DF lost popularity after it had previously mobilized on the refugee crisis and needed new support.

Figure 3 forms part of a broader image category depicting the "threatening other" in our dataset. Images in this category visually communicate three recurrent messages in relation to the "other." First, the party communicates the magnitude of the problem by employing visual icons showing the massive numbers of migrants and asylum seekers. Second, the party emphasizes the burden of the "other" group by posting images showing for example, wage dumping and child support paid to "welfare migrants," often depicted visually in comparison to Danish pensioners. And finally, the party pinpoints the "way out" of this "problem" through images of migrants and their suitcases and arrows "sending them home."

In summary, in DF and other European far-right visuals, the headscarf has become a condensed symbol of "othering." What is interesting from an iconographic perspective is the banality of nationalism (Billig, 1995) as constructed in this text-image. Without the inflammatory text, the image is a typical stock photograph representing everyday life in a global city. This choice of a banal, everyday urban street scene suggests that Denmark's diversity, its cosmopolitan and globalist urban centers, including the presence of ethnic and cultural diversity, is perceived as a threat for DF.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The central contribution of this paper is the theoretically informed empirical investigation of visual and symbolic boundaries constructed by far-right parties mobilizing online engagement through digital visual images. This paper has analyzed how the Danish People's Party construct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion focusing on the party's official digital visual communication online. This inquiry was informed by a theoretical interest in exploring processes of othering and stigmatization of minority groups, and how images are used in digital communication processes to propagate and normalize nationalist representations about a threatening "other." Drawing on an original data set of over a thousand Facebook posts collected over the period 2012–2020, we analyzed the DF's use of visuals in constructing Danishness and drawing clear distinctiveness of the group from the "others." Our longitudinal analysis combined qualitative visual methods of multimodal analysis with a quasi-quantitative assessment of the audience engagement and an in-depth iconographic interpretation.

The visual content analysis showed how DF constructs in-group representations of Danishness through images of the folk, the land, and the common culture and values. These in-group images are set in opposition to images of "otherness" that are presented as a threat to in-group ideals. The in-group imagery of Danishness bridges different social groups (e.g., in terms of age, social class, etc.) and connects different topics (such as nature, land, welfare, religion, and history), thus crossing thematic boundaries while simultaneously upholding a exclusionary impermeable boundary towards the culturally distinct "others," especially migrants and Muslims. The collected engagement data further showed that images of otherness (such as images of migrants and Muslims) triggered on average the most reactions and second-most sharing on social media, which could explain the attractiveness of such "othering" images for political actors to use for driving attention and mobilizing followers.

Focusing on the visual construction of symbolic boundaries through online communication strategies, we showed how the DF constructs Danishness based on ethnonationalist visions of belonging and "we-images" portraying Denmark and the Danes as needing protection through maintaining geographical borders and exclusionary boundaries toward "the other."

DF's Facebook page includes politically designed popular images celebrating the history of Denmark, the Danish people, and the land itself, which is threatened by several "others," including the EU (Muslim) immigrants, and Danish left-wing politicians. In this sense, the party's depictions largely align with other European populist radical right parties, which also highlight the same threats (Mudde, 2007), albeit with a more limited focus on the national flag. By drawing on the nostalgic past of a land under threat, DF mobilizes visual esthetic boundaries of banal nationalism in a subtler way than fellow European far-right parties using more offensive and openly nativist images to describe the future of their countries (e.g., Özvatan & Forchtner, 2019). The political portrayal of DF politicians, likewise, establish a contrast as they show the politicians' warm and friendly character towards the "we" group in opposition to the firm protective defender character when it comes to the "other." Addressing safety and security and the welfare state, politicians' solidarity and insider compassion is represented visually in reference to the parties' policies as prioritizing elderly care and advocating for animal rights and protection.

On DF's Facebook page, Denmark's threatening "other" is most commonly represented through the headscarf and the use of female racialized bodies of women from diverse backgrounds, who come to symbolize undeserving and "backwards" populations. The symbolic boundary of the headscarf draws the line between those who can be integrated and those who do not deserve to be included as they do not belong to the nation. Our data shows how the continuous repetition of the icon and photo image of the female headscarf online increases throughout the period of analysis gaining wide visibility in terms of growing engagement numbers. Thus, for sociologists of boundary work, our contribution shows how visual boundary symbols such as the headscarf are powerful enough to catalyze and mobilize affective reactions among target groups and audiences of far-right political parties. Where the simple use of the icon of headscarf symbolizes otherness (Ahmed, 2003; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014), our data shows how images of threat and otherness with clear and straightforward anti-immigration slogans are posted and shared repeatedly, gaining more and more affective value.

The analysis of DF's visuals confirms general trends in research on far-right communication emphasizing the unique "we-group" that has a distinct history and culture, which needs protection from the "other." Yet, there are also unique context-specific trends in the image data that differ from previous research on the European far right. The use of welfare protectionist slogans combined with nationalist symbolism is rather unique for the Scandinavian setting (Askanius, 2019). Mobilizing on this topic since its creation, DF developed the "safety and trust" slogan in the mid-2010s, creating a storyline around those to be protected (the autochthonous Danes) and those presenting a threat (the external "others").

As in other European countries today, this discursive portrayal has become mainstream in Denmark, indicating a normalization of the exclusionary imagery. This aligns with Müller's (2011) assertion about the need to pay attention to how individuals and groups use and make sense of the visual and how in turn the visuals shape cultural belief systems at a given time. The images analyzed in this paper form part of the everyday production and exchange of meanings in which certain symbols become instant markers of belonging and othering. As those images circulate in the public space, they come to influence what it means to be Danish and who is included and excluded in this identification, together with the permeability level of the group boundary.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

ORCID

Sarah Awad https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5909-8562

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APPENDIX: ENGAGEMENT FIGURES FOR EACH CODE

		Oct 2012–Dec 2014				Jan 2015–Dec 2017				Jan 2018–Aug 2020				Total		
Theme/Code		*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares
The folk—"We"																	
Variety	Median	8	177.00	14.50	14.00	6	1230.50	163.50	206.00	13	515.00	62.00	137.00	27	405.00	54.00	63.00
	Mean		240.63	15.88	31.88		2254.50	198.00	454.83		803.38	186.08	173.62		959.11	138.30	194.11
	SD		257.06	13.01	39.90		2796.71	200.01	613.85		586.41	227.93	190.08		1496.28	195.69	336.99
Elders	Median	1	-	-	-	7	921.00	240.00	107.00	13	1099.00	240.00	164.00	21	921.00	240.00	108.00
	Mean		-	-	-		1489.43	232.00	147.14		1454.92	277.23	492.08		1404.19	249.05	354.19
	SD		-	-	-		1500.08	176.22	122.41		1060.61	187.92	937.23		1197.13	184.86	751.52
The land																	
The border	Median	2	-	-	-	21	1499.00	90.00	395.00	12	3065.50	390.00	787.00	35	2087.00	142.00	431.00
	Mean		-	-	-		1971.95	214.71	447.67		3513.75	787.67	1040.58		2469.63	402.89	675.09
	SD		-	-	-		1759.72	427.16	483.09		2955.26	954.14	1130.94		2292.10	694.64	818.68
The flag	Median	1	-	-	-	14	1446.00	90.50	267.00	19	1170.00	111.00	160.00	34	1207.50	105.00	167.50
	Mean		-	-	-		2734.93	170.64	432.64		1225.32	327.63	185.58		1816.26	254.76	282.50
	SD		-	-	-		3250.31	201.35	402.47		524.89	559.76	158.17		2225.31	440.72	307.38
Animals	Median	7	599.00	26.00	76.00	4	-	-	-	14	1043.50	152.00	257.50	25	868.00	78.00	163.00
	Mean		582.86	43.29	156.29		-	-	-		1229.64	181.07	314.93		954.00	119.68	240.44
	SD		299.13	43.07	176.83		-	-	-		630.93	123.83	277.77		586.04	117.39	240.45
Nature	Median	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	7	804.00	64.00	112.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		1239.29	146.57	333.14
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		937.97	180.32	436.07
Citizenship	Median	0	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	5	2961.00	362.00	485.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		2674.20	643.20	456.60
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		566.75	485.83	246.23

Theme/Code		Oct 2012–Dec 2014				Jan 2015–Dec 2017				Jan 2018–Aug 2020				Total		
		N	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares
Infrastructure	Median	0				1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	3	323.00	103.00	42.00
	Mean						-	-	-		-	-	-		728.67	109.33	75.00
	SD						-	-	-		-	-	-		807.89	79.69	81.66
Culture + values																	
Religion	Median	0	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	6	670.00	85.50	32.00	8	670.00	84.00	32.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		738.33	160.67	44.83		784.50	137.50	40.13
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		318.22	199.16	41.30		392.37	174.07	36.64
Values + tradit.	Median	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	6	1829.50	136.00	61.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		2017.17	185.00	98.00
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		1221.33	129.59	122.60
Welfare state	Median	0	-	-	-	9	833.00	130.00	208.00	11	1614.00	358.00	268.00	20	1241.50	186.00	240.00
	Mean		-	-	-		1090.56	153.33	261.44		2593.00	952.64	6921.00		1916.90	592.95	3924.20
	SD		-	-	-		905.21	96.34	185.37		2727.38	1407.16	21,599.48		2201.85	1101.14	16,034.80
Democr. and law	Median	0	-	-	-	9	2096.00	264.00	171.00	6	2093.00	572.00	262.00	15	2096.00	338.00	188.00
	Mean		-	-	-		2454.33	254.67	215.22		1861.67	997.00	496.83		2217.27	551.60	327.87
	SD		-	-	-		2011.03	197.77	142.68		740.76	1056.09	469.86		1611.61	749.92	332.97
Food	Median	1	-	-	-	6	1388.50	91.50	107.00	0	-	-	-	7	1321.00	88.00	107.00
	Mean		-	-	-		1454.50	111.67	228.33		-	-	-		1374.71	105.14	211.00
	SD		-	-	-		839.51	74.37	312.87		-	-	-		794.91	70.05	289.27
History	Median	0	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	5	758.00	138.00	94.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		961.00	133.00	148.40
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		399.52	89.24	104.26
Language	Median	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-		-	-	-

Theme/Code		Oct 2012–Dec 2014				Jan 2015–Dec 2017				Jan 2018–Aug 2020				Total		
		N	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares	*N*	No. of reactions	No. of comments	No. of shares
The threat																	
Muslim migrants	Median	1	-	-	-	17	2905.00	278.00	252.00	37	3087.00	459.00	565.00	55	3087.00	431.00	461.00
	Mean		-	-	-		3343.00	330.24	388.00		3531.89	1101.27	1495.30		3510.69	860.18	1133.69
	SD		-	-	-		2998.90	291.57	442.76		2568.16	2802.16	3093.27		2673.93	2321.27	2590.51
Immigrants and asylum seekers	Median	0	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	9	1746.00	385.00	477.00	13	1958.00	391.00	594.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		1910.11	382.56	595.33		2846.23	403.46	657.92
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		702.97	81.29	357.04		2351.38	91.91	455.69
Criminal foreign	Median	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	16	2668.00	416.00	566.50	20	2384.50	350.50	522.00
	Mean		-	-	-		-	-	-		3688.63	525.50	1318.81		3300.30	440.25	1115.25
	SD		-	-	-		-	-	-		3663.39	381.82	1784.87		3431.02	383.15	1648.92
Other parties + LW	Median	0	-	-	-	5	928.00	106.00	200.00	40	1188.00	554.50	214.50	45	1134.00	496.00	213.00
	Mean		-	-	-		781.00	257.00	178.40		1613.98	1295.95	362.05		1521.42	1180.51	341.64
	SD		-	-	-		421.95	315.93	64.52		1333.44	2337.83	389.12		1289.29	2227.67	371.47
EU	Median	1	-	-	-	6	1138.50	84.50	351.00	11	1385.00	493.00	361.00	18	1275.00	173.00	324.00
	Mean		-	-	-		1503.83	226.00	467.50		1694.00	590.09	331.36		1579.50	437.17	367.89
	SD		-	-	-		1061.41	368.03	334.49		886.56	619.87	235.11		917.81	553.96	268.41

Note: The table shows the Facebook engagement for the various codes and themes across the three periods. The engagement numbers were manually retrieved on September 13–15, 2021. Where *n* = >5, the images are not included in the table.

Abbreviation: SD, Standard Deviation.