UNITED OR DIVIDED BY MUSIC: POPULIST COMMUNICATION AND THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST

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Abstract

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In the aftermath of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) 2024 and in light of Switzerland hosting ESC 2025, controversies and criticism surfaced within the public ESC discourse, particularly from political parties belonging to the right-wing populist spectrum. Taking these developments into consideration, as well as the rising popularity of Eurovision as the world's biggest television live music event and the current political climate in Europe, this research investigates how right-wing populist parties in Switzerland and Hungary frame the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) within their strategic political communication.

Taking a real-life phenomenon as a point of departure, this study situates the ESC not merely as a cultural event but as a symbolic arena of ideological struggle. The research thereby intersects populism, cultural identity, moral panic, and affect in political communication with a specific focus on how right-wing populist actors construct narratives around Eurovision to advance their broader socio-political agendas. The guiding question of this research was the following:

How do right-wing populist parties use the Eurovision Song Contest in their strategic political communication to promote their ideological and cultural narratives?

Responding to those questions, this research locates Eurovision in an interdisciplinary field between media studies, cultural studies, and political sciences, to examine the ESC as a contested site of meaning-making. As the literature review revealed, this study is covering multiple research gaps and is thus exploratory in nature, requiring a well-grounded and transparent methodological approach. Therefore, methodologically, the study applies an abductive and constructivist research design, employing a novel combination of thematic and frame analysis, constructed for this research. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring topics and key themes in the dataset, providing insight into *what*

political actors communicate about the ESC. Then, frame analysis was used to explore *how* these themes are strategically constructed, revealing the underlying narratives and ideological framing. As a final step, a cross-case comparison was employed, comparing the individual findings from the cases of Hungary and Switzerland, which were chosen due to their distinct media and political landscape as well as history within ESC.

The findings reveal that the ESC is framed by right-wing populist parties as a site of cultural and moral decay, representing a threat to traditional values. Drawing on the concept of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" constructing society in antagonistic binaries between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004), the research shows how the ESC becomes a tool for reinforcing this *us-versus-them* logic. However, in Switzerland, the 'enemy' is domestic or rather those following progressive values especially in terms of queer visibility whereas in Hungary it is framed as influence from Western elites.

The study also engages with Moral Panic Theory (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009), demonstrating how Eurovision is framed as a moral threat to the values and identities of Hungarian and Swiss societies. Thereby, the political actors frame queer Eurovision artists as "folk devils" - endangering the moral structures of the respective countries. In addition, the findings can be analyzed through a lens of affect and emotions (Ahmed, 2004, 2014). In the analysis, it surfaces how negative emotions, such as fear, discomfort and disgust, are strategically attached to queer identities and non-normative expressions associated with Eurovision. This intersects with the concept of *biopowe*r and *disciplinary power* (Foucault, 1977; 1978), as the political communication seeks to regulate bodies and identities that deviate from hegemonic moral norms. Particularly in Hungary, affective rhetoric is not only used to mobilize the public, but also to justify concrete policy measures aimed at curtailing queer visibility and cultural plurality. Overall, the Eurovision Song Contest emerges from this research as an ideological battleground where political actors challenge norms, moral boundaries, and identities.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
EBU	European Broadcasting Union
EDU	Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union (Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland)
ESC	Eurovision Song Contest
FA	Frame analysis
FIDESZ	Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Young Democrats)
ISC	Intervision Song Contest
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
MTVA	Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap (Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund)
PC	Political correctness
PSM	Public Service Media
SVP	Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People's Party)
TA	Thematic analysis
WWII	World War II, Second World War

List of Figures

I.

Introduction and Problem Formulation

Loved, laughed at, underestimated, forgotten or hated - despite being the biggest live music event in the world, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) does not resonate with everyone, and some merely remain indifferent. Nevertheless, the Eurovision Song Contest in 2024 reached 163 million viewers across public service media, with votes cast in 156 countries and a record-high youth audience share. On digital platforms, *#Eurovision2024* amassed 6.5 billion TikTok views, reaching 500 million accounts (Eurovision.TV, 2024). The numbers speak louder than words: The Eurovision Song Contest is a mega event, reaching both younger and older audiences across Europe but also across the globe (Eurovision.tv, 2024).

1.1 *"United by Music"* - The Eurovision Song Contest

The Eurovision Song Contest was established in 1956 by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), a cooperation of broadcasters, as a way to unite post-war Europe through music and international cooperation. The contest is an annual international music competition where participating countries submit original songs, which are performed live and voted on by a combination of national juries and public televoting, culminating in a grand final where the country with the highest points is declared the winner (Eurovision.TV, 2025). Technically speaking, the broadcasting channels from the countries are competing with each other, yet the common understanding and perception is that it's a competition between countries.

Since its inception in 1956, the ESC has always served as a platform for artistic expression, intercultural understanding, and cross-national togetherness. The values have been reflected in the annual slogans (implemented in 2002) such as *"Under The Same Sky"* (Istanbul 2009), *"We Are One"* (Malmö 2013), or *"Celebrate Diversity"* (Kyiv 2017). However, in 2024, it was announced that the slogan will not change annually anymore, and the ESC will now always be guided by the slogan

from Liverpool in 2023, *"United by Music"*. The decision in 2024 was made collaboratively with Swedish broadcaster SVT (as the contest took place in Malmö that year) and the ESC Reference Group, the governing body overseeing the contest. According to Martin Österdahl, the Executive Supervisor of the ESC, *"United by Music"* perfectly captures the fundamental principles that the contest stands for: inclusivity, equality, universality, and the celebration of diversity through music. By making this slogan permanent, the ESC ensures a unified message that highlights the power of music, connecting people across borders, regardless of nationality, language, or background (Eurovision.de, 2023).

However, when it was announced that the ESC 2025 would take place in Basel, Switzerland, due to the victory of Swiss artist Nemo in the year before (2024), the Swiss political party EDU[1] organized a referendum aiming at stopping the financing of the contest with public money. If successful, the referendum would have prevented the contest from taking place. In an official press release, the political party expressed the following:

> *"We do not want taxpayer money to be wasted on a political propaganda show that gives a platform to antisemitism and occultism. The ESC should – like most other events – be self-sustaining financially."* (EDU, 2024).

While the referendum was not successful, the statement and ambition to stop the ESC reflects a growing trend where right-wing populist parties are increasingly communicating about the ESC, leveraging the event to promote nationalist, conservative, and exclusionary ideologies.

Similar examples and cases can be found in Germany with the party "*Alternative für Deutschland*" or Hungary with "*Fidesz*" led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has critiqued ESC for promoting LGBTQ rights and has used the event as an opportunity to align national cultural policies with conservative values. Hungary

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[1] The Eidgenössische-Demokratische Union (EDU) Schweiz is a Christian-conservative party promoting traditional family values, Swiss neutrality, and strong support for Israel. It opposes abortion, gender diversity, EU integration, and "Woke" ideology, while calling for lower taxes and energy diversity.

even withdrew from the contest in 2020 in protest against the growing liberalization of the event.

1.2 Broader Trends: Rising Populism

The communications surrounding the song contest mirrors a broader trend of rising populism, particularly evident across Europe, though not confined to it (Brubaker, 2017). Populism refers to a political approach that often divides society into two opposing groups: the *pure people* versus the *corrupt elite* (Mudde, 2004). Right-wing populism specifically is shaped by nationalism, anti-immigration sentiments, and cultural conservatism (Mudde, 2007) as well as portraying the nation as being threatened by immigration, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights (Moffitt, 2016). Rising populism and cultural events such as the ESC are partially intertwined. The ESC responds to and follows cultural changes and those result in cultural backlashes, the deep drivers of populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

As elaborated, the Eurovision Song Contest reflects broader socio-political trends and hence serves as a strong case to analyze such phenomena. Therefore, this study seeks to uncover how right-wing populist actors react to Eurovision in their political communication and which framing strategies are implemented concerning the event. Thereby, this research sheds light on populist rhetoric and how cultural events are being used as battlegrounds for ideological struggles or "cultural battlegrounds". The term shall refer to a space where conflicting ideologies, values, and identities are contested through cultural expressions, media, and public discourse. Thus, the ESC serves as an important case study for exploring the broader phenomenon of right-wing populist communication strategies, bridging the fields of political communication, media studies, and cultural politics.

1.3 Relevance of this study

"*63 million viewers across public service media*" (Eurovision.tv, 2024) - the figures themselves demonstrate the academic and societal significance and value of the study's subject.

While much research has examined populist rhetoric in rather traditional settings such as elections or debates (see Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005; Engesser, Fawzi & Larssion, 2017), research on cultural and entertainment events in that context remains limited. The significance of the contest extends beyond academia to socio-political dimensions, as it has long been recognized for its popularity within the LGBTQ community and among queer artists. Further, as the slogans show, the competition promotes unity, diversity, and togetherness. With right-wing populists using the ESC in their communication in favor of their agenda, the ESC as a 'safe space' is threatened.

Furthermore, Eurovision has evolved into a well-established subject within academia, and scholars have examined the ESC through diverse lenses, including nation branding, gender, politics, and identity construction. While significant attention has been given to its role in public diplomacy, there remains a notable gap in understanding how strategic political communication intersects with cultural narratives in the context of Europe's increasingly populist landscape. This study aims to enrich the existing Eurovision academia by examining it through the lens of identity politics, cultural narratives, and populism, thereby offering a fresh analytical perspective. By addressing this gap, the present study seeks to offer a critical contribution to the interdisciplinary field, enhancing our understanding of how Eurovision operates as a platform for populist narratives and political expression, which is discussed in greater detail in the literature review.

The *international dimension* of the ESC lies in its role as a transnational media event, broadcasted to many countries, that unites diverse nations through music and performances. At the same time, the ESC's *intercultural dimension* unfolds in the way it negotiates and presents different cultural values both on and off-stage. Stage designs, song choices, and performances often reflect cultural diversity among participating countries. Furthermore, off-stage, the contest provides a platform for socio-political narratives, where questions of gender, sexuality, political identity, and cultural norms are also contested and negotiated, reflecting the diversity of the ESC community. Thus, the ESC embodies an intercultural exchange that allows for the exploration and sometimes even the clash of cultural ideals and values in a transnational framework.

1.4 Problem Formulation

Analyzing a media event of this scale in the context of political trends in Europe requires a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach. This involves an iterative process that integrates existing insights from media studies, political science, and communication science with newly gathered data from right-wing populist communication about the ESC.

The Eurovision Song Contest has long been celebrated as a symbol of European unity, diversity, and cultural exchange. However, in recent years, right-wing populist actors have increasingly engaged in the contest, framing it as a battleground in broader ideological struggles. To address this phenomenon and problem area, this research aims to answer the following question:

How do right-wing populist parties use the Eurovision Song Contest in their strategic political communication to promote their ideological and cultural narratives?

To answer this question, this research will analyze the Eurovision related political communication output of right-wing populist political actors or affiliated figures in Switzerland and Hungary with a multi-method analysis. By conducting this as a comparative study, the project aims to explore the strategic political communication, offering an insightful comparison shaped by their contrasting political contexts and their differing historical trajectories within the European political landscape. Consequently, the Methodology chapter will elaborate on the rationale for case selection, providing a comprehensive description of the specific cases analyzed in this study, as well as introducing the multi-method analysis process designed for this research.

II.

Literature Review

As the rationale for this study highlighted, the Eurovision Song Contest is more than a music competition - it is a cultural as well as socio-political phenomenon that intersects with different broader phenomena. As such, this literature review does not belong to a singular academic discipline but rather draws from multiple fields and locates this research within media and cultural studies, international relations, political sciences, media and communication sciences, and sociology. This interdisciplinary approach is necessary to fully understand the ESC's role as a political arena, where ideological conflicts play out on a public stage. The purpose of this review is to map out key academic debates and define key concepts necessary for this research, focusing on the following research areas: Eurovision as a Cultural and Political Space, Cultural Mega-Events and Soft Power, and Populism and Political Communication.

2.1 Eurovision as a Cultural and Political Space

2.1.1 Opening Act: An Introduction to the Eurovision Song Contest

As described in the introduction, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) is an internationally broadcast annual songwriting competition, managed by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). This song contest features performers chosen by EBU member broadcasters representing their countries from Europe and beyond since 1956 (ESC, 2025). By mid-March, participating broadcasters must select a song and artist using various national selection methods, typically choosing from three recurrent formats: a *televised national selection*, an *internal selection*, or a *mixed format*. Once all participating countries have selected an original act for the contest, the performance order for the two Semi-Final shows is decided through the Semi-Final Allocation Draw. After the performance order is set, the ESC begins with its three-night spectacular, two Semi-Final events, and the Grand Final taking place in May. The winning country of the contest is granted the

right to host the next contest; however, no monetary prize is awarded for the victory, and the hosting nation as well as the EBU is responsible for bearing the cost of organizing the event.

2.1.2 From Ballots to Ballads: The Political Undercurrents of Eurovision

With a history spanning over seven decades, Eurovision has become one of the longest-running and most popular television shows globally, uniting Europeans through a simultaneous transnational broadcast (Vuletic, 2018). Throughout the years, the contest has gained increasing attention and became embedded in European pop culture with its characteristic phrases such as 'twelve points go to...' or 'good evening, Europe!', forming shared cultural references among Europeans (Vuletic, 2018).

The origins of the competition date back to 1956, when seven countries (including the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg and Italy) competed in the inaugural song contest event, originally named *Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson Européenne*. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, the International Radio and Television Organization (OIRT) launched the Intervision Song Contest (ISC) in 1965, providing a musical competition for Eastern European states. After EBU rejected OIRT's proposals to jointly organize an international song contest, Intervision was established as an alternative to ESC to foster cultural exchange and promote the musical talents of socialist states from the Eastern bloc (Vuletic, 2018). The last ISC event took place in Sopot in 1980 and since then there has been a discussion about the revival of the song competition. In February 2025, President Vladimir Putin ordered the revival of Intervision, aiming to promote traditional values while "developing international cultural and humanitarian cooperation" (Farrant, 2025). According to claims from the Kremlin, approximately 20 countries, including China, India, and Brazil, are expected to participate in the relaunch of Intervision, which will take place in Moscow in the autumn of 2025.

As Europe was facing changes in the 1990s with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the foundation of the European Union, EBU also witnessed changes that led to the

enlargement of memberships and more nations from the former Eastern Bloc joined Eurovision (Kalman et al., 2019). In 1992 and the following years, newly independent countries joined the song contest, including Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, and Romania. Since its inception, Eurovision has gradually evolved into a three-night spectacle, welcoming new nations to the contest, like Australia in 2015, and drawing audiences not only across Europe but also from other continents.

According to Vuletic (2018), Eurovision provides the platform for "Europe's biggest election" where political battles have been played out, and it is viewed as a "harbinger of developments in international relations" (p. 3). The voting outcomes indicate the sympathies in an international context of diasporic, post-colonial, regional religious, and sexual identities (Vuletic, 2018). These aforementioned sympathies can translate into voting preferences in some countries, creating apparent voting blocs at the song contest. Since the Eastern expansion of the ESC, the issue of 'bloc' or preferential voting has remained a persistent concern, especially regarding the former communist countries (Yair, 2018). This preferential or diaspora voting sparked the interest of the academic sphere and Gatherer (2006) identified the following three voting blocs: the 'Balkan Bloc' (Southeastern Europe), 'Warsaw Pact' (former Eastern Bloc nations), and the 'Viking Empire' (Nordic countries). These symbolic allocations of points have generated complaints and controversy within the Eurovision community and reflect regional rivalries in the continent. In the 2000s, the televoting trends sparked discussion about political voting and its legitimacy. However, Kavanagh (2024) argues that these voting trends reflect factors such as cultural commonalities and shared music markets, rather than politics.

While the EBU officially insists on the apolitical nature of the event, political statements in entries (songs and performances) have only been explicitly or implicitly prohibited in the contest's rules since 2000, a regulation that the EBU has applied inconsistently (Vuletic, 2018). The past years' song contests were not free from political controversies and/or references such as Ukraine's entry in 2005 which was considered an Orange Revolution anthem and originally included lines about Viktor Yushchenko, or Georgia's post Russian-Georgian war entry in 2009 called

'We Don't Wanna Put In', which got disqualified from the competition. Furthermore, audiences can interpret song entries through a political lens based on their contextual knowledge, as seen in the 2016 Bulgarian entry ("If love was a crime, we would be criminals"), which was perceived as a response to Russia's anti-gay laws (Baker, 2019). As demonstrated by previous examples of politically charged entries, the Eurovision Song Contest serves as a "discursive tool in the definitions of Europeanness and political strategies of Europeanisation" (Bolin, 2006, p. 191). Eurovision simultaneously promotes the expression of diversity and unity, a paradox that inherently lends the contest a political dimension, despite the apolitical stand of EBU (Gauja, 2019).

2.1.3 Eurovision and LGBTQ Identity - A Stage for Inclusion

Eurovision has persisted through various geopolitical and socioeconomic transformations, transcending shifting interpretations of 'Europe', the ideological divisions of the Cold War, and the global financial crisis. Today, the contest and its audience navigate an era marked by populism and anti-cosmopolitan sentiment, reflecting the ongoing uncertainties of the contemporary political landscape.

Through its history, Eurovision served as a stage for representation of transnational communities such as the racial and ethnic minorities as well as the queer community. Importantly, these forms of representation often intersect, revealing how multiple axes of identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, are simultaneously negotiated within the contest. As was the case during the Cold War, these communities were deliberately featured in the Eurovision Song Contest entries as a means of conveying a cosmopolitan and tolerant image of the state, especially in instances where the country's international image had been compromised and needed to be reconstructed (Vuletic, 2018). The Russian entry for the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest serves as a compelling example of this phenomenon. Manizha, a feminist, advocate for LGBTQ rights, and a Tajik refugee residing in Moscow, was selected to represent Russia. Through her performance, Russia sought to project an image of itself as a progressive, ethnically diverse, and intersectionally inclusive nation on the international stage (Biasioli, 2023). The incorporation of intersectional identities into national performances thus underscores Eurovision's function as both a cultural platform and a space where

nations express and negotiate values and identities on an international level, an aspect which will be further discussed in the following paragraphs with particular attention to representations of the LGBTQ community.

Throughout turbulent times, Eurovision provided a "safe closet" for the pan-European queer community, and it became a site of pan-European gay, lesbian, and transgender visibility (Singleton et al., 2007; Baker, 2017). As a result, in certain social circles, this large-scale event is informally referred to as the "Gay World Cup" or the "Gay Olympics," highlighting its significance within the LGBTQ community. As these names also suggest, Eurovision provides a "rare occasion for simultaneously celebrating both queerness and national identity" (Rehberg, 2007, p. 60).

Until the late 1990s, the EBU did not formally recognize the contest's strong appeal within the LGBTQ community, and the contest's eventual recognition of sexual and gender diversity emerged in parallel with political advancements in LGBTQ rights across European states (Vuletic, 2018). In 1997, the first openly gay contestant, Páll Óskar from Iceland, participated in the contest. The following year marked a significant milestone for the visibility of sexual minorities when Dana International, a transgender woman from Israel, won the Eurovision Song Contest with her song "Diva." However, critics of the Israeli government have condemned its use of LGBTQ rights advocacy as a means of diverting attention from, and "pinkwashing[2]" its human rights record concerning Israeli Arabs and Palestinians (Vuletic, 2018). In 2007, Serbia's entry, Marija Šerifović, gave Eurovision a canonical lesbian and winning performance alongside previous gay and trans visibilities (Baker, 2017).

In the 2000s, Eurovision emerged as a crucial platform for shaping and challenging narratives surrounding the connection between LGBTQ equality and national or European identities (Baker, 2017). Baker (2017) further elaborates that throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Eurovision became increasingly linked to LGBTQ politics due to its gay and transgender visibility, as well as its transnational fan culture. This

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[2] It is a critical term used to refer to the practice of attempting to benefit from purported support for LGBTQ rights, often as a way to profit or to distract from a separate agenda (Dictionary.com, 2022).

association sparked narratives and discussions within both political and geopolitical contexts. The previously mentioned case of Dana International illustrates how mega-events like the Olympics and Eurovision can provide states with an opportunity to present themselves as liberal and cultivate a positive image of their stance toward the LGBTQ community in international politics (Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020). Therefore, these mega-events have functioned as mechanisms of public diplomacy for post-socialist cities and states seeking to establish themselves as modern, globally connected, and legitimate members of Europe (Müller&Pickles, 2015; Baker, 2017). Russia, Azerbaijan, and Serbia, among others, have been accused of capitalizing on the Eurovision Song Contest to enhance their soft power in international politics.

Amid the increasing tension between Russia and Western European states, the Eurovision Song Contest became a political arena for geopolitical narratives and debates surrounding LGBTQ issues in international relations. One of the most significant controversies in the history of the ESC occurred in 2014 when bearded drag queen performer Conchita Wurst represented Austria and won with the song "Rise Like a Phoenix". Conchita was constructed as a symbolic opponent of Putin's Russia, and the victory was described as "obvious propaganda for homosexuality and moral decay" by Vitaly Milonov, a Russian politician (Golubock, 2014). Even one of Austria's most prominent musicians at the time, Andreas Gabalier, remarked that "it's not easy these days if you're a man who's attracted to women,"[3] expressing disapproval in interviews by claiming that the visibility of homosexuality at Eurovision was a broader issue and implying that success in the contest was largely tied to affiliation with the queer community (Stendel, 2015). In light of the Ukraine crisis (annexation of Crimea), Conchita's victory became politically symbolic, representing the growing tensions between Russia and the West (Vuletic, 2018).

A more recent example is Bambie Thug, a non-binary artist who uses they/them pronouns, whose 2024 Eurovision performance sparked controversy over alleged themes of occultism and satanism. For example, Hermann Kelly, president of the Irish Freedom Party, dismissed the Irish entry as "woke nonsense," while Christian

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[3] As translated from German, the source reads as follows: "*Man hat es in der heutigen Zeit nicht leicht, wenn man als Mann auf Frauen steht*" (Stendel, 2015).

columnist Tony Wilkson described the performance as a "liberal backlash against the institutional church" and called for an end to the normalization of the occult (Wilson, 2024; Fox, 2024). The Irish singer even became the focal point of a religiously motivated political campaign by EDU in Switzerland opposing the country's hosting of Eurovision, a case that will be further explored in the methodology chapter and later analysis.

In today's era of rising populism that challenges social cohesion, events like Eurovision serve as significant political platforms with the potential to highlight societal diversity and promote tolerance (Kalman et al., 2019). The potential of cultural mega-events to enhance soft power and shape cultural narratives will be explored in detail in the following sub-chapter.

2.2 Cultural Mega-Events and Soft Power

Research on Eurovision, including the focus of this study, extends beyond previous Eurovision studies to the broader fields of political science, sociology, and related disciplines. While no prior research has specifically examined how political actors use the ESC in their communication, there is research and there are key theories in the intersection of media, culture, and politics, particularly in how mass events can serve as vehicles for ideological communication and soft power. This sub-chapter of the literature review aims to explore how the ESC functions as a media event and how it can be used in ideological warfare. Firstly, and to do so, it needs to be established what a media event is and how the ESC can be defined as such.

Regarding impact, importance, and uniqueness, media events are not regular TV shows. They disrupt daily routines, present a special occasion in the daily lives of people, resembling a holiday, and make television viewing a festive event (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 1). Such uniqueness and magnitude come with importance and impact: "These broadcasts integrate societies in a collective heartbeat and evoke a renewal of loyalty to the society and its legitimate authority" (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 9). Consequently, media events not only function as cultural celebrations but also as political spectacles, raising questions about the dynamics of hegemony and power within society. These aspects of media events fit the DNA of the ESC: It interrupts routines as it is broadcasted in several countries, unites diverse

audiences in a worldwide collective, festive experience, and serves as a stage for political spectacle (for example, the flag parade). Further, according to Dayan & Katz (1992), contests among conquests and coronations are typical media events.

The introduction to this research highlighted cultural, ideological, and political conflicts within society. These themes can be found in existing literature, particularly from the 1990s; however, these discussions have not been specifically applied to the Eurovision Song Contest or to media events more broadly.

One way to understand the conflictual dynamics surrounding the ESC is through the lens of power, more precisely soft power, as the contest does not just serve as entertainment but also as a platform of power and hegemony (Dayan & Katz, 1992). It might seem inapplicable, reviewing Eurovision through a lens of power, "today however the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras" (Nye, 1990, p. 154). There is plenty of research on how media events such as the ESC play a significant role in international relations, influencing perceptions and fostering connections between nations with a soft power that operates through attraction rather than coercion (see Müller & Pickles, 2015; Grix & Lee., 2013; Baker et al, 2024; Carniel, J., 2019). However, this research paper refocuses the discussion from Eurovision's role in state-led cultural influence to its use by right-wing populist actors primarily in domestic political communication. Hence, how they use the contest's potential for soft power in terms of their agenda, so to speak - is a yet unexplored area of research and presents a research gap.

When the uniting agenda of Eurovision (*see* slogans) and the appropriation of such by populist political actors meet, there is a struggle. In simple terms: "United by Music" stands in direct contrast to the narrow, nationalist worldview that populist actors seek to promote (*see Populism and Political Communication*). A similar conflict has been explored in Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" (1993) though it does not directly relate to the ESC yet remains insightful: "The great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington, 1993, p. 22). While Huntington's framework is unrelated to the ESC, his notion of cultural identity as a battleground provides a useful lens through which to analyze

the contest's contested political role. Nonetheless, it needs to be critically reviewed that, Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1993) - referring to the cultural divide between the Western and the Muslim world - has been widely criticized for its oversimplified view and reinforcement of stereotypes (*see Said, 2001*). However, in the case of this research, its relevance to this study lies in its conceptualization of cultural identity as a battleground. Although Huntington applied this framework to global geopolitics, it remains one of the most cited frameworks for cultural conflict and is therefore relevant to this study. This research draws on the broader idea that cultural identity can become a site of conflict and applies it to populist narratives.

As previously discussed, the Eurovision Song Contest can be understood as a platform through which hegemonic power is exercised and ideological narratives are promoted, often becoming a site of cultural contestation. This perspective will serve as a key analytical lens for this present research. With the cultural turn in social theory (Nash, 2001), not only does power become soft (Nye, 1990) and conflict become cultural (Huntington, 1993), but also hegemony not merely a form of economic or structural dominance (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the term takes on a new meaning, considering it shifts away from tactical or strategic uses to how dominant cultural narratives are constructed and maintained within society. As Laclau & Mouffe (1985) argue, "hegemony" becomes essential for understanding the unity within a concrete social formation (p. 7). This shift allows for a clearer understanding of how populist political actors use the ESC as a platform for ideological warfare, where competing narratives of cultural identity and power unfold.

This presented literature on conflict between narratives is mainly from the 1990s[4] and does not specifically focus on the ESC yet was inevitable to understand and accurately locate this research in the broader field. As part of the overall literature review, this chapter also serves to examine existing research in the intersecting fields relevant to this project. While this was mainly theoretical, the next sub-

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[4] This may be due to the end of the Cold War and the cultural turn in social sciences during that period (Nash, 2001).

chapter will provide a detailed review of the literature on populism, examining its defining characteristics and underlying principles.

2.3 Populism and Political Communication

Populism might be the term of the century as it is used in media, academia, and public discourse, highlighting how populist political actors are gaining significance in Europe but also in Northern as well as Southern America (Brubaker, 2017). "Populism is, it seems, a key feature of the contemporary political landscape" (Moffitt & Tomey, 2014, p. 381).

Already in 2004, Cas Mudde defined the "Populist Zeitgeist" (Mudde, 2004), referring to the idea that populism became a dominant political logic in contemporary democracies. According to Taggart (2004), none of those logics are "exclusively populist but are rather different forms of mobilization that have strong populist features" (Taggart, 2004, p. 270). While populism is often associated with right-wing political approaches, it can be found across all political ideas (Mudde, 2004) as it is a current multiclass movement (Laclau, 2005).

2.3.1 Core Concepts

Populism as a concept has often been criticized for its vagueness (Laclau, 2005). The conceptual fluidity has led to debates about whether populism is best understood as a distinct political ideology or as a strategic and communicative tool used across the political spectrum. It has been defined as a political logic (Laclau, 2005) or approach, a rhetorical/political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), or an ideology (Mudde, 2004). The core elements and defining characteristics of populism vary across different studies and conceptual frameworks, making populism hard to accurately define.

However, there is a key feature that most conceptualizations of populism have in common: the dichotomy between "the people" and "the elite". Those opposing groups have an antagonistic relationship (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005; Brubaker, 2017; Taggart, 2004; Hamellers, Bos & Vreese, 2017). One of the most common definitions in academia is that populism is an *"ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the*

pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543).

Mudde (2004) thereby views populism as an *ideology*. However, the ideology is only "thin-centred", because it centers around the simple opposition between "the people" and "the elites", without providing a detailed political program (like grand ideologies would), making it adaptable to various political spectrums. Viewing populism as an ideology of some sort is one approach to the matter. Laclau (2005) on the other hand does not define populism as a (thin-centred) ideology but as a *political logic* that mobilizes and constructs "the people" through hegemonic practices (Laclau, 2005). The logic - hence underlying principle of political action - therefore is a constant construction of political collective identities by articulating grievances and empty signifiers that unite diverse groups, using discourse and rhetoric to create a collective identity (Laclau, 1996). The use of rhetoric is also important for the definition of populism as a *political style*. The approach focuses on the "performative elements of the phenomenon" (Moffitt & Tomey, 2014, p. 387) and emphasizes the representation of societal divisions, particularly the opposition between 'the people' and 'the elite'. The style is characterized by a direct appeal to the masses, often using rhetoric, "bad manners," and the depiction of crisis or threat to create a sense of urgency and mobilize support (Moffitt, 2016).

2.3.2 Constructing 'the people'

While there are different ideas and concepts around, the common ground of such - as mentioned before - is that the "core of populism revolves around the moral distinction between the good people and the culprit elites, who are unable or unwilling to represent the people's will" (Hameleers, Bos & Vreese, 2017, p. 871). According to Mouffe (2018), this antagonism and societal division is inevitable and unresolvable in society, yet populists build on that division, using it to mobilize support by presenting political conflict as a battle between good and evil, or us versus them.

The question then arises: *who exactly constitutes 'the people'?* To begin with, Mudde & Kaltwasser (2013) speak of an inclusive or exclusive nature of populism

surrounding the questions of who counts as part of the people and hence who populists refer to and speak for. Some populists promote an exclusive form, defining 'the people' narrowly based on ethnicity, religion, or nationality, while others adopt an inclusive approach, defining 'the people' broadly as a unified group focused on shared grievances or collective action. The latter aligns with the idea that "populism can exist without nationalism, and indeed can go beyond nationalism—more so, it can also go beyond the nation-state" (Moffitt, 2017, p. 13). A further understanding is that in populist communication, "the people" are living in the heartland - an idea of an idealized community that populists seek to protect or restore:

"The heartland is a construction of an ideal world but unlike utopian conceptions, it is constructed retrospectively from the past—it is in essence a past-derived vision projected onto the present as that which has been lost" (Taggart, 2004, p. 274).

As this romanticized utopia is constructed based on past values and understandings (Taggart, 2004), it can be seen as being under threat by forces such as globalization, immigration, cultural changes, or political correctness. Thus, the people are framed as a unified group that must act to restore the lost past and protect the values and norms that are under attack, aligning with Laclau's (2005) political logic and strategic construction of identity - the people in the heartland - through hegemonic articulation.

2.3.3 Cultural Dimension of Populism

In light of this research on Eurovision, it is inevitable to also shed light on the cultural dimension of populism, which was already touched upon slightly in the definition of the heartland (Taggart, 2004). The cultural dimension of populism is particularly important when examining its rise in response to broader social and political changes. Brubaker (2017) argues that cultural changes, particularly those driven by emancipatory liberal movements since the 1960s, have fueled a "cultural backlash" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) that populists capitalize on. As societal norms shift, populists position themselves as defenders of traditional values and former norms against what they perceive as the excesses of political correctness and hence view it as wrong-doing (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

This literature review on populism and the academic debate surrounding it aims at positioning this research as it focuses on parties from that political spectrum. At the same time, this chapter on populism serves not only as a literature review and exploration of definitions but also as a theoretical lens for the later analysis, particularly because the study interest lies in political communication - and within it centers around style, rhetoric, and communicative strategies. For this theoretical lens, this research draws on core aspects shared across several conceptualizations of populism, as introduced before. This will include the central dichotomy between 'the people' and 'the elite,' the use of us-versus-them rhetoric, and the populist claim to speak on behalf of 'the people.

2.3.4 (Populist) Political Communication & Framing

As discussed above, there is no consensus in academia on the definition of populism, as it can be interpreted as an ideology, a political style, or a form of political logic. However, in each of these conceptualizations, political communication and rhetoric play a crucial role in engaging and appealing to 'the pure people'. Populist political actors, as other political actors do too, communicate and thereby strategically use language, media, and emotional appeals to reinforce their message and connect with their audiences. To investigate how populists use the ESC in their communication and how populism operates in practice, this research must examine the key characteristics of populist communication.

When talking about media events (such as Eurovision) and political communication, 'the media' is a key player in the dynamics of such. A key aspect of modern political communication is its deep connection with the media. Strömback and Esser (2014) describe the mediatization of politics as a long-term process in which the media have become increasingly influential in shaping public opinion. Kriesi (2004) reinforces this perspective, stating that "public opinion is the outcome of the political communication process in the public sphere" (p. 188).

If political communication is defined as the process of shaping public opinion, then populists, too, actively engage in political communication to mobilize and gain voters' support. In the meta-process of the mediatization of politics (Strömback &

Esser, 2004), the phenomenon of rising populism is directly intertwined with mediatization as the media play a pivotal role in the success and visibility of populist movements. Further, Mazzoleni (2014) argues that this is due to the fact that populism capitalizes on media dynamics, leveraging both traditional and digital platforms to amplify its messages.

To enhance the visibility of political messages to a wide audience, framing serves as a key mechanism in populist communication and represents a central focus of this research. One example of existing research is a study on how populists use blame attribution framing in their communication to make their messages noticeable to citizens by using an emotional communication style (Hameleers, Bos & de Vreese, 2017). Populist communicators assign blame to political opponents and institutions, portraying them as "the corrupt elite", while emphasizing the harm the establishment has inflicted on the people's heartland and furthering the moral divide between 'us' and 'them' (Hameleers, Bis & de Vreese, 2018). This communication style plants a sense of threat on "the people", which threat is communicated by using negative emotions of anger and fear (Hameleers et al., 2017). Accordingly, blame attribution is at the core of populist political communication and framing activities, which influence citizens' interpretation of societal issues in significant ways (Hameleers et al., 2017; Iyengar, 1991).

Framing in this context refers to the selection of "*some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described*" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). As mentioned in the previous definition of framing, frames can have four functions in a text: *define problems, diagnose causes*, *make moral judgments*, and *suggest remedies*. While all these framing functions can be present in a text, a frame does not necessarily include all four.

Entman (1993) further notes that the concept of framing consistently provides a framework for explaining the influence and power of a communicated message. Thus, framing serves as a key mechanism in shaping reality by determining which aspects of an issue are emphasized and how they are interpreted, aligning with

populism's inherently antagonistic construction of reality (Hameleers et al., 2018, p. 832). While frames accentuate some aspects of the described reality, they concurrently divert focus from other aspects of reality. Framing has significant implications for political communication and shaping political reality, since it plays a "major role in the exertion of political power, and the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power – registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (Entman, 1993, p. 55).

Ultimately, framing has an important part in populist communication to convey messages targeted to the 'pure people'. As mentioned above, framing is a powerful tool in constructing political reality, particularly in the era of mediatized politics. With the media serving as the primary source of national political information for most people, mass media offer an accessible and easily available approximation of the constantly evolving political landscape (Mccombs & Shaw, 1972). By adopting framing in populist communication and disseminating their messages through mass media, populist actors can shape public opinion on societal issues, a phenomenon that this research will examine in the context of Eurovision.

2.4 Research Gaps

Over the past decades, Eurovision has increasingly attracted scholarly interest, leading to a steady rise in the number of research papers dedicated to the contest. According to Google Scholar, academic interest in Eurovision has grown significantly over the decades, with the number of published papers steadily increasing, particularly in the 2010s when it saw a threefold rise compared to the 2000s. This expanding field of study has drawn numerous scholars who have conducted research on topics such as *nation branding*, *politics*, *urban development*, and *identity*.

Although significant research has been conducted on the political aspects of Eurovision, most studies have primarily focused on its role in *public diplomacy*. A notable example is the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest held in Baku, which outwardly celebrated diversity, despite the concerning human rights situation in Azerbaijan, particularly with regard to its minority groups (Gkuhovic, 2013). Consequently, there is substantial scholarly attention on how the Eurovision Song

Contest is instrumentalized to advance governmental agendas, including public diplomacy and nation branding. Comprehensive research on the relationship between strategic political communication and cultural narratives remains underexplored, particularly in the context of Eurovision and the growing populist movements in Europe. Therefore, this study aims to explore the political dimension of the contest not through the lens of those hosting and organizing Eurovision in a country but through the lens of *populist communication* and enrich the discourse within this interdisciplinary field. The Eurovision Song Contest functions as both a cultural and ideological battleground. Culturally, it serves as a platform for celebrating diversity, unity, and cross-cultural exchange. However, ideologically, it is also contested by right-wing populists who attempt to reshape its inclusive narrative to advance their own exclusionary political agendas. By exploring Eurovision through both cultural and ideological lenses, this study examines how the contest becomes a site for both cultural expression and political manipulation.

As outlined in the literature review, cultural and media studies, along with political science, offer explanations for how cultural and ideological narratives are constructed. However, further research is needed to understand how right-wing political parties use the contest as a platform for conflict within the cultural and political contexts of mega-events like Eurovision.

Ultimately, this research, through its case selection of Hungary and Switzerland, offers perspectives from both Eastern and Western Europe. By doing so, it provides valuable insights into the intersection of political communication, populism, and cultural events such as Eurovision. To address these research gaps, the following methodological chapter will outline the research approach in detail, including the methods used for data collection and analysis.

III.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to explore how certain political actors use the Eurovision Song Contest in their political communication. To be more specific, the explorative approach aims to investigate how political actors in Hungary and Switzerland frame the Eurovision Song Contest in their communication. By adopting a comparative case study approach, the study seeks to identify the dominant frames used by political actors in each country and explore differences as well as similarities.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The approach of how the political communication regarding the ESC is researched shapes the insights and results. Therefore, a research approach that merely counts, categorizes or measures data in terms of frequency, would fail to dive into the deeper meanings and dynamics at play. Hence, to understand how the ESC is framed and communicated, it is essential to adopt a methodological framework that considers meaning-making, social context, and the interplay between media events and communication outputs.

This study, therefore, follows a social constructivist approach as the ontological foundation of this research. This understanding of the nature of reality, also known as *ontology*, matches well with framing processes "as framing serves as a key mechanism in shaping reality" (Hameleers et al., 2018, p. 832). Moreover, in social constructivism as a paradigm, reality is constructed in "processes of social interchange" (Flick, 2014, p. 90), meaning that political communication actively shapes (or is trying to shape) what is perceived as reality rather than just reflecting it. This approach aligns well with the literature on framing, with Scheufele (1999) stating that "within the realm of political communication, framing must be defined and operationalized on the basis of social constructivism" (p. 105). Thus, a (social)

constructivist approach is crucial for understanding how the ESC is framed by certain political actors.

In line with the whole methodological approach, the *epistemological* stance of the researchers is defined by an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism sheds light and importance on *Verstehen*, "understanding", as a method of the human sciences (Schwandt, 2007). Given that framing involves the presentation of certain aspects of a perceived reality (Entman, 1993, p. 52), an interpretive approach allows for analyzing and interpreting these meanings (Della Porta & Keating, 2008) rather than treating them as fixed or given, or merely viewing them at a surface level. Only with this understanding of the meanings and interpretations at play, it can be studied how different actors construct or challenge particular representations of the ESC. Due to the layout of this research with two researchers jointly collaborating and later conducting collaborative analysis of qualitative data (Cornish, Gillespie & Zittoun, 2014), also another epistemological foundation was considered as "the epistemological position of perspectivism provides an intellectual rationale for the collaborative analysis" (Cornish, Gillespie & Zittoun, 2014, p. 80). However, after careful reflection, it became clear that interpretivism aligns more effectively with the framing approach employed in this study. Perspectivism, in this context, can be understood as a more specific lens within the interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing the multiplicity of truths based on different viewpoints and situatedness (Massimi, 2017), yet still concerned with interpreting meaning.

To summarize, this study employs a social constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology to explore how the ESC is framed in political communication.

The *interdisciplinary* approach of this study interest resulted in several concepts, theories, approaches and research being introduced and discussed in the literature review. Nonetheless, this research does not aim to verify or test those theories deductively but instead analyzes the cases of Hungary and Switzerland to explore the broader implications. Hence, a deductive logic of reasoning that is defined by a "procedure of subsumption" (Reichertz, 2014, p. 127), does not fit the

scientific focus of this specific study interest. On the other hand, in the broader fields, there is pre-existing research on populist communication and framing, on power politics in the world of Eurovision as such, meaning that it is not needed to rely only on data. Thus, creating a new theory or finding a general rule or as put by Reichertz (2014): "extending, or generalizing, into an order or rule the combinations of features that are found in the data material" (p. 128) is not the goal of this research. Furthermore, social constructivism and interpretivism challenge the idea of universal generalization by highlighting the socially constructed nature of knowledge and emphasizing the importance of understanding meanings and interpretations.

In light of these presented challenges and considerations, *abductive reasoning* becomes an appealing alternative for the logical reasoning of this research. Abductive reasoning is not only a logic but also "an attitude towards data and towards one's own knowledge: data are to be taken seriously, and the validity of previously developed knowledge is to be queried." (Reichertz, 2014, p.123). Abductive reasoning is, therefore, well-suited for this research as it offers flexibility and openness to the cases and facilitates a dynamic, iterative interaction between (new) data, cases, and theory. Abduction starts with a case or data, something surprising that does not immediately fit existing literature, and is then explored and connected with existing theories. The result then is not to test, but to find a reasonable explanation and to generate an interpretation that makes sense given the data (Schwandt, 2007). Overall, abduction is ideal for the exploratory nature of this research and allows taking "real life" as the point of departure.

3.2 Research Strategy

Overall, the research strategy is, as mentioned before, a comparative case study strategy with a thematic and frame analysis, each comparing political communication about Eurovision in two different countries - Hungary and Switzerland. The research goal is to understand and explore how political actors in each country frame Eurovision, exploring both the content and the cultural context of these frames. Thus, the research strategy is *qualitative*, broadly aiming at describing, comparing and looking for explanations (Flick, 2014).

A qualitative inquiry relies on qualitative, nonnumerical data, while a quantitative inquiry relies on numeric data (Schwandt, 2007). As the case studies focus on the political communication output (words), a qualitative strategy is well-suited and allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings, interpretations, and the social dynamics inherent in the framing of the ESC. This nature of qualitative inquiries is also noted by Blaikie and Priest (2018), as they consider qualitative methods (such as a case study with framing analysis), to be "concerned with producing discursive descriptions and exploring social actors' meanings and interpretations" (pp.200-201). Lastly, a qualitative inquiry is in alignment with the research approach and paradigms as qualitative research seeks to understand subjective experiences, meaning-making and construction of narratives or knowledge.

3.2.1 Comparative Case Study

As per the research approach, strategy and the mentioned goals, a *case study* is a fitting choice for this research. Given the scale of the ESC with many countries participating, narrowing the focus to smaller units of analysis makes it possible to explore how broader phenomena manifest. This approach helps unpack the interplay between media, politics, and identity in a manageable and analytically rich way.

The case study as a method is "best defined as an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar aims to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena" (Gerring, 2004, p. 341). The basis unit of case studies are the cases (Jocher, 1928), which then are "counted and measured, they are compared, their characteristics are studied, their behavior noted" (Jocher, 1928, p. 203). The cases for this study are political actors from two selected countries - Hungary and Switzerland - rather than focusing on the countries themselves. Nonetheless, the cultural, historical and political context of both countries will be taken into consideration.

This case study, within an interpretivist paradigm, focuses on the sense-making of actors, how they perceive and frame events, rather than seeking deterministic explanations (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 32). Further, this aligns with social constructivism as case studies "emphasize symbolic aspects of experience, asking

how and why people act in certain ways, and exploring the meanings they generate" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 33).

As the case study does not come with "hard-and-fast-rules" (Gerring, 2004, p. 346), in this research, the following approach will be used:

- Units of analysis will not be defined as entire countries, but as the framing strategies employed by political actors from Hungary and Switzerland regarding the ESC.
- The case study will focus on meaning-making and the contextual influences shaping political communication.
- The cases will be compared with a comparative approach along a horizontal axis (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017), examining how similar political events or narratives are framed differently across the two cases.
- Multiple sources of data will be used, including political statements, media coverage, and official communications, to reconstruct the framing strategies at play.

Following this presented approach, in the next section the chosen cases of Switzerland and Hungary will be introduced, focusing on their political and media landscape in the context of Eurovision.

3.2.2 The Cases: Introducing Switzerland and Hungary

The case of Switzerland

Switzerland presents an interesting case for a comparative case study due to several reasons: its foundational role in the ESC, the characteristics of its media system and related public service controversies, its status as a symbol of direct democracy, and the recent trends of political polarization.

As previously mentioned, the first ever Eurovision Song Contest took place in 1956 in Lugano, Switzerland, with the Swiss entry winning directly with the song "Refrain" performed by Lys Assia (SRG SSR a, n.d.). Not only was Switzerland the first ever hosting country as well as winner, but also the contest is a Swiss invention as

it was brought forward by Marcel Bezençon, former director-general of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR a, n.d.). Hence, as the birthplace of the ESC and one of its longest-participating nations, Switzerland provides a deep historical context for a case study.

The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, SRG SSR (Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft; French: Société suisse de radiodiffusion et télévision; Italian: Società svizzera di radiotelevisione; Romansh: Societad Svizra da Radio e Televisiùn), serves as Switzerland's founding broadcaster and holds responsibility for all Eurovision-related matters in the country. The abbreviation SRG SSR incorporates all four languages the broadcaster is officially broadcasting in, due to the multilingual country that Switzerland is. Established in 1931 as the umbrella organization for all Swiss radio companies, SRG SSR has since played a central role in the nation's media landscape (SRG SSR b, n.d.). The corporation is founded on the principles of "federalism and diversity" (SRG SSR b, n.d.), as can be seen with SRG maintaining a presence in each of Switzerland's four language regions, thereby ensuring that its broadcasting services are available in all national languages. Therefore, Switzerland and the media system reflect the cultural and language diversity of the ESC.

However, in recent years, there have been controversies and public debates surrounding SRG and its involvement in Eurovision. Schweizer (2020), states that there is even a current rise of media policy activism in recent years with civic media organizations trying to influence and change public service media (PSM) such as SRG. This rising media activism is temporarily overlapping with the "No Billag"[5] referendum from 2018, a national referendum aiming at abolishing public funding as a financial resource for PSM altogether and thereby defunding PSM (Schweizer, 2020). Further, already in 2015, there was a vote against the planned change from the traditional license fee to a household levy, a flat-rate contribution paid by every household regardless of media use (Schweizer, 2020). Both referendums were not successful, with the PSM financial structures consequently staying intact, yet they reflect broader tensions regarding the legitimacy and function of publicly funded

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[5] The "No Billag" initiative in Switzerland got its name from the company, Billag, that collects the tax on behalf of the state (RSF, 2018).

media in Switzerland. As the SRG is in charge of everything Eurovision related, the contest in Switzerland cannot be seen as detached from those public and political debates.

The same happened with the referendum held in 2024 in the city of Basel called "Stop ESC in Basel", with approximately two-thirds of those voting being in favor of hosting and financing Eurovision in Basel (Eurovision.de, 2024). The reasoning behind the referendum being held and brought forward mainly by the Christian and national-conservative political party EDU claims that ESC is a political propaganda platform promoting antisemitism and occultism (EDU, 2024). Hence, the party does not want Basel to host such an event. The EDU only has two parliamentarians in the Swiss "Nationalrat"[6] (EDU, 2023) and is not a popular party. Nevertheless, due to the dynamics of the Swiss democratic system - particularly the possibility of initiating referendums in cooperation with other political actors - the political influence of the EDU should not be underestimated.

While the EDU is primarily a theocratic-conservative party rooted in evangelical Christian values (EDU Grundlagenpapier, 2023), elements of its values align with right-wing-populist rhetorics. The party calls for a restoration of the old national-cultural values (as in "the heartland[7]"), communicating societal developments such as "wokeness," gender diversity, or pandemic-related health regulations as existential threats to a traditional Christian society (EDU Grundlagenpapier, 2023). In doing so, the party makes use of a classic populist rhetorical structure: a dichotomy between a virtuous, "normal" as in referring to Christian, traditional people and various outgroups or elites (e.g., mainstream media, WHO). Further, the Schweizerische Volkspartei *(SVP)* has to be mentioned when talking about populism in Switzerland, known for addressing the Swiss people as a homogenous entity (Laurent, 2017). The party frequently positions itself as the sole true representative of "the people", defending Swiss identity, national autonomy, and traditional values against perceived dangers such as immigration, multiculturalism, EU influence, and political correctness.

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[6] The Swiss National Council with 200 members, representing Swiss residents (The Swiss Parliament, n.d.)
[7] *see Paul Taggart, 2004* as elaborated on in the literature review

It is further interesting to note that with 67 members in the National Council (2 from the EDU) and 7 in the Council of States, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) forms the largest parliamentary group in the Swiss Federal Assembly with a total of 74 members (SVP, n.d.). Thus, the EDU, despite its small size, is therefore part of this largest parliamentary group through its affiliation with the SVP parliamentary group. This affiliation also underpins how the populist party SVP and the EDU align in at least some of their visions and values.

It's not the first time that EDU has voiced its opinion on Eurovision: already in 2007, the EDU had their reasoning surrounding the ESC criticizing the Swiss entry that year. In 2007, DJ Bobo represented Switzerland at the ESC with the song *"Vampires are Alive"*. While initially liked, the song caused controversy. The EDU even submitted a petition with 50,000 signatures, calling the song satanic and harmful to public peace. The party and its supporters also criticized it for potentially endangering vulnerable individuals, such as young people. Despite the backlash, DJ Bobo performed in the semi-final but failed to qualify, finishing at the 20th place out of 28 entries (SRG SSR a, n.d.).

In recent years, Switzerland has continued to participate in Eurovision with notable successes, such as Luca Hänni finishing fourth in 2019, Gjon's Tears finishing third in 2021 and the recent victory of Nemo in 2024.

While societal debates and rising polarization are global phenomena, they pose particular challenges for Switzerland, a country built on direct democracy, which inherently relies on finding a consensus or satisfying voting outcome (Freiburghaus & Mueller, 2023). The polarization in Switzerland mainly surrounds the topic or rather debate of an increasing Europeanization and internationalization of the country. While some political groups look at this matter pragmatically and support (or rather accept) international cooperation and European integration, other political voices oppose globalization and European integration (e.g. the EDU and their critique of the WHO). This question and thus those topics "have opened political space for Eurosceptic, anti-globalist, and right-wing populists, as well as for radical-alternative left parties capitalizing on (and

polarizing along) such issues" (Freiburghaus & Mueller, 2023, p. 781). With the Swiss democratic system, this proves to be a challenge as the growing number of referendums brings more polarizing issues on the national agenda, thus reinforcing societal divides (Freiburghaus & Mueller, 2023). This unique combination of direct democracy, which relies on a consensus-driven system, and rising polarization makes Switzerland an insightful case study.

Overall, the Swiss case was chosen for this research as it uniquely combines a founding role in the contest, a multilingual public service media system, and a direct democratic political structure that increasingly has to cope with polarization.

The case of Hungary

Hungary was chosen as the second case for this comparative case study due to its distinct history in the framework of ESC, media and political landscape, aspects which will be further addressed in the following paragraphs.

As previously noted, the first Eurovision Song Contest took place in Switzerland in 1956, featuring seven participating countries, among which Hungary was not. The year 1956, however, holds significance not only in the history of Eurovision but also in the history of Hungary. During this year, there was a rising tide of unrest, culminating in October with mass demonstrations against the oppressive communist regime of Mátyás Rákosi. What began as a peaceful protest quickly escalated into a full-scale revolution and national struggle for freedom. While initially the revolution succeeded with the formation of a new government, Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, refused to accept Hungary's intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and in response, he ordered thousands of Soviet tanks into the country to suppress the uprising (BBC, n.d.).

Nine years after these historical events, the Eastern Bloc established its own alternative to ESC: the Intervision Song Contest (ISC). The contest was originally hosted in Czechoslovakia from 1965 to 1968, before being relocated to Poland, where it continued between 1977 and 1980 (Vuletic, 2021). The Intervision Song Contest emerged as a result of the liberalization within the Eastern Bloc, specifically the cultural, economic, and political reforms of the 1960s that followed

the wave of de-Stalinization across the region (Vuletic, 2021). Due to 1968's Prague Spring and the end of media censorship as the result of the de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia, USSR decided to discontinue Intervision since they believed that the reforms in Czechoslovakia would undermine the Eastern Bloc as whole (Vuletic, 2018). The decision to relocate and reinstate Intervision in Poland was based on the reasoning that Poland was the most technologically developed country of the Eastern Bloc at that time and the Polish government presented the ISC as an opportunity "to promote the popular culture of communist states and models" (Vuletic, 2018, p.108). Although Hungary was regarded by Western journalists as the "happiest barrack"[8] among the socialist countries and actively participated in the Intervision Song Contest, none of its entries ultimately succeeded in winning the competition. As the Iron Curtain fell and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, it has opened the door for numerous former socialist countries to join the European Broadcasting Union and compete in the Eurovision Song Contest.

Hungary made its Eurovision debut in 1994, and that first appearance remains its most successful to date, as Friderika secured fourth place with her ballad *Kinek Mondjam El Vétkeimet?* ("To Whom Shall I Tell My Sins?") (ESC, n.d.). While Hungary has made it to the Grand Final fourteen times, their last and final 2019 entry struggled to win the audience's affection and ultimately failed to qualify. In November of the same year, EBU revealed the list of countries participating in Eurovision 2020, and Hungary was notably absent. The Hungarian Public Service Media (MTVA) did not inform the public of this decision in advance, and the official reason for the country's withdrawal was never disclosed.

It was widely speculated that Hungary's withdrawal from the competition was influenced by the contest's growing visibility of LGBTQ issues and becoming "too gay", which did not align with the views of the country's far-right government and its increasingly homophobic rhetoric (Walker & Garamvölgyi, 2019). This rhetoric was evident when a member of the Hungarian parliament equated same-sex

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[8] Widely used phrase by Western journalists to describe Hungary in the 1970s and recognized Hungary as the most livable and safest countries of the Soviet system (Gál, 2005).

adoption with pedophilia while a pro-government television commentator described Eurovision as "a homosexual flotilla," claiming that the country's withdrawal from ESC would be beneficial for the Hungarians' mental health (Walker et al., 2019). According to a source from MTVA, the editorial director, Dániel Papp, was reportedly so displeased with the outcome of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest that it was claimed that "they had to throw Xanax into his mouth" when Conchita Wurst won the competition (Sajó, 2019). This claim is further substantiated by the fact that MTVA did not even mention the winner of the contest in their public news program (Sajó, 2019). Orbán's spokesperson, Zoltán Kovács, stated that "Western mainstream media outlets engage in politically driven disinformation campaigns against Hungary" and described their articles as "fake news" (Kovács, 2019). He further argued that the decision was made to focus on Hungary's domestic talent, emphasizing that it was "not about LGBTQ".

However, the past years actions by the Fidesz-led government in Hungary reflect a distinctly different approach towards the queer community. Since the Hungary's withdrawal from the ESC, Hungary has systematically dismantled legal protections for LGBTQ individuals, including, abolishing the legal recognition of transgender individuals, enacting legislation prohibiting the depiction of homosexuality to minors, banning adoption by same-sex couples and legally not recognizing same-sex marriage (Luckhurst, 2025). In March 2025, Hungary passed a law banning Pride marches held by the LGBTQ community. Prime Minister Orbán defended the decision by stating, "We voted to ban gatherings that violate child protection laws," further emphasizing his position with the remark: "We won't let woke ideology endanger our kids." (Orbán, 2025).

As it shows from the Eurovision withdrawal example, public service media is closely linked to the Hungarian government. In Hungary, pro-government investors hold substantial sway over the media landscape, allowing their narratives to reach nearly the entire population (Polyák et al., 2022). Urbán et al. (2023) describes this phenomenon as "media capture" and highlights its prominent elements as the "acquisition of privately-owned media outlets by figures with political connections and the capture of public service media (PSM)" (p. 63). Unlike traditional models, PSM can serve not only as a symbol of credibility and professionalism but also as a

tool for shaping public opinion and driving significant social change by widely spreading disinformation (Urbán et al., 2023). The *OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights* Parliamentary Elections report examined the news broadcasts of the M1 public television channel, among other TV channels, and identified significant bias throughout the 2022 election campaign in Hungary. M1 dedicated 50 percent of politically relevant news coverage to the government and 5 percent to Fidesz, with the reporting predominantly framed in a positive light (OSCE, 2022). While Egységben Magyarországért[9], the opposition's political alliance, received 43% of mainly negative news coverage at M1, frequently featuring unsubstantiated accusations and personal attacks by journalists targeting the opposition's candidate for the prime minister position (OSCE, 2022).

In 2019, a joint press freedom mission to Hungary, led by the International Press Institute, concluded that the country exhibited "a degree of media control unprecedented in a European Union member state" (RSF, 2019). This point is further emphasized by the World Press Freedom Index, which ranks Hungary 67th among 180 countries (RSF, 2024). Since 2010, the Hungarian government has systematically undermined media freedom through a process defined by Griffen (2020) as the "Orbán model," which comprises four key elements: *media capture, manipulation of the media market, the delegitimisation and exclusion of journalists, and the maintenance of an illusion of media freedom*. As an example for media capture, Origo.hu, Hungary's leading online news portal, was sold by Hungarian Telekom (a subsidiary of Deutsche Telekom) at the end of 2015 to a new owner, who was the son of the president of the National Bank (Polyák, 2019). With the new ownership of the news portal, Origo became a pro-government portal and started ignoring corruption scandals in their reporting. András Pethő, the former deputy editor at Origo, reflected on his experience, stating, "It was a really good place to do journalism, but then they started putting pressure on us to ignore certain stories. We didn't comply, and my editor was forced out." (Nolan & Walker, 2018).

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[9] The Hungarian phrase "Egységben Magyarországért" translates into English as "United for Hungary."

Viktor Orbán has described his method of exercising power as "illiberal" (Puddington, 2017), a framework that is prominently evident in the media policies implemented by his government, as previously discussed. Through its media policy and political communication strategies, Fidesz intentionally reinforced the polarization of both the public sphere and Hungarian society. Since 2010, public discourse has become highly polarized, leading to government-friendly and critical media audiences being exposed to opposing and mutually contradictory interpretations of reality (Polyák, 2019).

As a result of these illiberal actions and the Hungarian government's systematic efforts to undermine European values, the European Parliament declared Hungary a "hybrid regime of electoral autocracy," no longer recognizing it as a democracy (EP, 2022). Since the 2010's electoral win of Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary uses populist discourses and sentiment to exploit crises to remain in power and he "transformed the Hungarian constitution from an instrument of democratic governance into a tool of populist rule" (Heinö, 2024, p. 168). The rule of law and the migration crisis were utilized by the government to strengthen their Eurosceptic populist rhetoric and turned the "conflict between 'the people' and 'the elite' more and more identity-based" (Csehi & Zgut, 2021, p. 60). The Hungarian governmental rhetoric is characterized by strong populist and sovereigntist elements with a combatant tone against criticism (Csehi & Zgut, 2021). According to the Authoritarian Populism Index, nowadays, Hungary is ranked first with the highest support for populist parties among the European countries.

In summary, the Hungarian case was selected for this study due to its relatively late entry to ESC, and its illiberal media and political framework which offers a significant point of comparison with Switzerland.

3.2.3 Case Selection Process and Rationale

As mentioned, while introducing each case, Hungary and Switzerland have distinct political, historical and societal backgrounds, which is why they present an interesting case study. Additionally, their characteristics each also underline the value of comparing those cases. Hungary, currently characterized by an increasingly authoritarian political context, stands in contrast to Switzerland, which

is often portrayed as a model of direct democracy and political neutrality, yet experiences rising polarization and populist rhetoric (due to the success of the SVP parliamentarian group). This polarization, although less extreme, reveals similar trends and thus creates an interesting basis for comparison.

Geographically and historically, the two countries also reflect different positions within Europe. Hungary is located in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, whereas Switzerland in the central Western European democratic tradition. Moreover, these countries differ in their relation to Eurovision. While Switzerland is one of the ESC founding nations and participates in the contest until today, even hosts the song contest in 2025, Hungary entered the competition only in 1994 and withdrew from the ESC in 2020 after 26 years of participation. This differing Eurovision relations and the topicality of Switzerland hosting the contest make an interesting ground for a comparative analysis. The selection of these cases was also facilitated by practical considerations. While one researcher is proficient in Hungarian, the other one fluently speaks German and understands French, allowing for direct access to primary materials in local languages. As Jocher (1928, p. 203) argues, "a case is a particular one of a kind or a species, which may be considered a basic unit for study.", both Hungary and Switzerland are selected as context-rich cases that each embody a broader set of political, cultural, and social dynamics relevant to this study. However, examined together, the cases are even more valuable and compelling. The case of Hungary and Switzerland will offer deep insights into the framing activities by certain political actors regarding Eurovision through the comparative approach, while both functioning as "one-of-a-kind" cases.

3.3 Data Collection

As stated previously, the data for this research and the later analysis is qualitative, focusing on textual and narrative sources. In qualitative research there is an absence of fixed sampling rules (Carter & Henderson, 2005) and most sampling guidelines or strategies are focusing on non-textual forms of qualitative data such as interviews. However, the absence of rules does not mean researchers can blindly dive into the data pool (in this case mostly the internet) without a systematic procedure and most definitely not without making the process of sampling

transparent (Carter & Henderson, 2005). Therefore, this study employs a multi-step, flexible sampling strategy that combines elements of snowball sampling and purposive sampling. To be transparent, this approach is developed for this research only and is based on academic literature on data collection and sampling methods and is primarily guided by the research aims and resource constraints in such exploratory research.

The data collection process begins with the selection of Switzerland and Hungary as case studies for this research (*see Case selection process and rationale*). The knowledge about the cases helps to identify key actors, such as the politicians and political parties, and significant starting points for a data search (e.g. identification of key actors or referendums and hence search terms). The next step is an initial scoping of internet resources such as government websites, websites of political parties, newspaper outlets and social media. Given the nature of digital environments, "sampling the web required adaptive and creative solutions" (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005, p. 119). This consideration of online data is especially relevant as populism thrives online, where digital platforms foster direct, emotional, and polarizing communication (Mazzoleni, 2014), making the internet both a data source and a key arena for populist communication. Thus, this process of web-based data collection incorporates a degree of flexibility and adaptability in relation to the selection of the search terms and platform dynamics. Search terms are refined iteratively, and platform-specific filters (e.g., news archive tools) are employed to narrow and target the scope of data collection. This initial scoping step mainly focuses on getting an overview of the availability of data and understanding *what is out there*. The initial scoping step is done by both researchers, whereas the language skills differ, leading to one researcher digging deeper into the Swiss case and the other researcher scoping material on the Hungarian case. Nonetheless, the scoping phase builds the foundation of a more specific data collection - the sampling.

Once the data availability and understanding of the cases is reached, in the next step, a combination of snowball sampling and purposive total sampling is used to collect relevant material. Those are methods of nonprobability samplings. As in qualitative research, nonprobability sampling is a standard method (Lune & Berg,

2018, p. 38) with the benefit of selecting data based on relevance in the light of the research and on accessibility, this will thus also be the case in this research. The sampling process then will be based on the findings of the initial scoping.

As the initial scoping identified key actors (politicians, parties), then a snowball sampling strategy is applied, which is particularly helpful when studying political actors or networks, as it builds upon known sources through referrals (Lune & Berg, 2018, p. 39). In practice, this means that once initial figures were identified, additional actors as well as communication outputs were located through their interactions, such as when one politician referred to another in a statement or shared content across platforms.

While the ESC might not be the most frequently referenced event, this research employs purposive (total) population sampling to ensure comprehensive data collection. In moments of data shortage, the goal is then to collect all available and relevant material. This aligns with purposive sampling principles, where materials are selected based on the researcher's expertise and the source's relevance to the study (Lune & Berg, 2018, p. 39), but aims for gathering all relevant data possible. Lastly, the data is systematically organized (*see appendix*) and categorized according to country (Switzerland or Hungary), political actor or institution, and media format (e.g., speech, tweet, interview, news article). This approach ensures finding comprehensive data, capturing a broad range of perspectives yet focusing on the relevance of this study.

Throughout the process it needs to be noted, that the data sources are not only treated merely as sources of information but as "social products" (Kappinen & Moe, 2011) or even "cultural artefacts" (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). This way of thinking requires the researchers to be aware of the contextual nature of such data as the meaning of the data sources is shaped by interpretation and social reception by society and by the cultural group or person (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010; Karppinen & Moe, 2011). Hence, an understanding of the political, cultural, and institutional dynamics which shape the production and interpretation of the data is fundamental to this research, and will play an important role in the analysis of the data and later comparison of the cases.

3.4 Data Analysis

As previously outlined, this research is carried out through a qualitative methodology, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the topics of the research area. The qualitative data, which is collected from news articles, speeches, interviews, policy documents, and other media sources, generally consists of an extensive body of unstructured text that requires systematic examination (Bryman, 2012). Unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative research remains more flexible, as it lacks a universally established set of procedures for data analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 403). Qualitative analysis can be approached through various methods, each offering different strategies for interpreting and understanding data, such as the narrative analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Each of these methods provides a lens for analyzing qualitative data, allowing researchers to uncover complex insights into human behavior, social phenomena, and cultural contexts. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, this study adopts a multi-method qualitative approach, combining thematic and frame analysis within a comparative case study design.

As outlined in the problem formulation, this research aims to explore how populist political actors engage with the Eurovision Song Contest in their communication. To address the question of *what* is being said about ESC, thematic analysis is employed to identify and interpret the main themes emerging around the contest. As a next step, to answer the question of *how* these messages are strategically constructed and framed, the study applies frame analysis. To implement this data analysis approach, a three-step process was developed, as illustrated in the figure below.
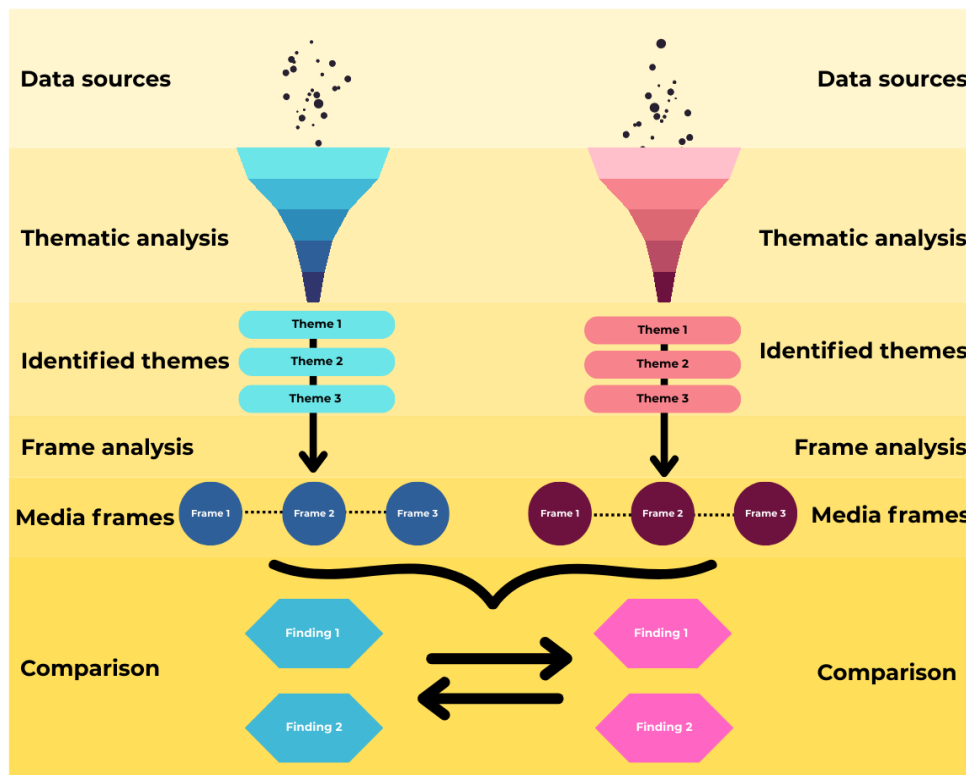
Figure 1 - The multi-method analysis

As a first step, a thematic analysis will be carried out on the collected data to identify recurring themes and patterns across the data. As part of the second step, frame analysis will be applied to understand how these themes are presented and constructed in frames. The final step of the multi-method approach is the cross-case comparison, in which the identified themes and frames are compared in the Hungarian and Swiss data sets. This methodological strategy enables a comprehensive examination of how right-wing populist parties and other possible respective actors in Hungary and Switzerland construct and disseminate their narratives around the Eurovision Song Contest. By combining these methods, this study captures both the content and construction of political communication, therefore providing a nuanced understanding of the role of cultural events like Eurovision in the rhetoric of politics. Each step of this analysis design will be introduced and explained in detail in the following sections.

3.4.1 Step One: Thematic Analysis

The first step of this multi-method approach is the thematic analysis (TA), which is a "method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data." (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). TA is a flexible method that can be applied across various theoretical frameworks and research

paradigms, making it a widely used analysis method in various academic fields (Lester et al., 2020; Clarke & Braun, 2017). This analytical method offers a structured and rigorous approach to generating codes and uncover underlying themes from qualitative data through an iterative process. Codes can be described as "building blocks for themes, patterns of meaning", while themes provide a framework for structuring and reporting the researchers' analytic insights (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

To ensure a transparent approach to thematic data analysis, this research will adopt the seven-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Lester et al. (2020). The analysis framework includes the following phases, shown in the figure below.

1	Preparation	Preparing and organizing the data for analysis.
2	Transcription & Translation	Transcribing and translating (if applicable) the data.
3	Familiarization	Becoming familiar with the data.
4	Memoing	Memoing and capturing the initial reflections and interpretations of the data.
5	Coding	Labeling and organizing data based on the memos and interpretations of the data.
6	Categories & Themes	Moving from codes to categories and categories to themes.
7	Transparency	Making analytic process transparent.

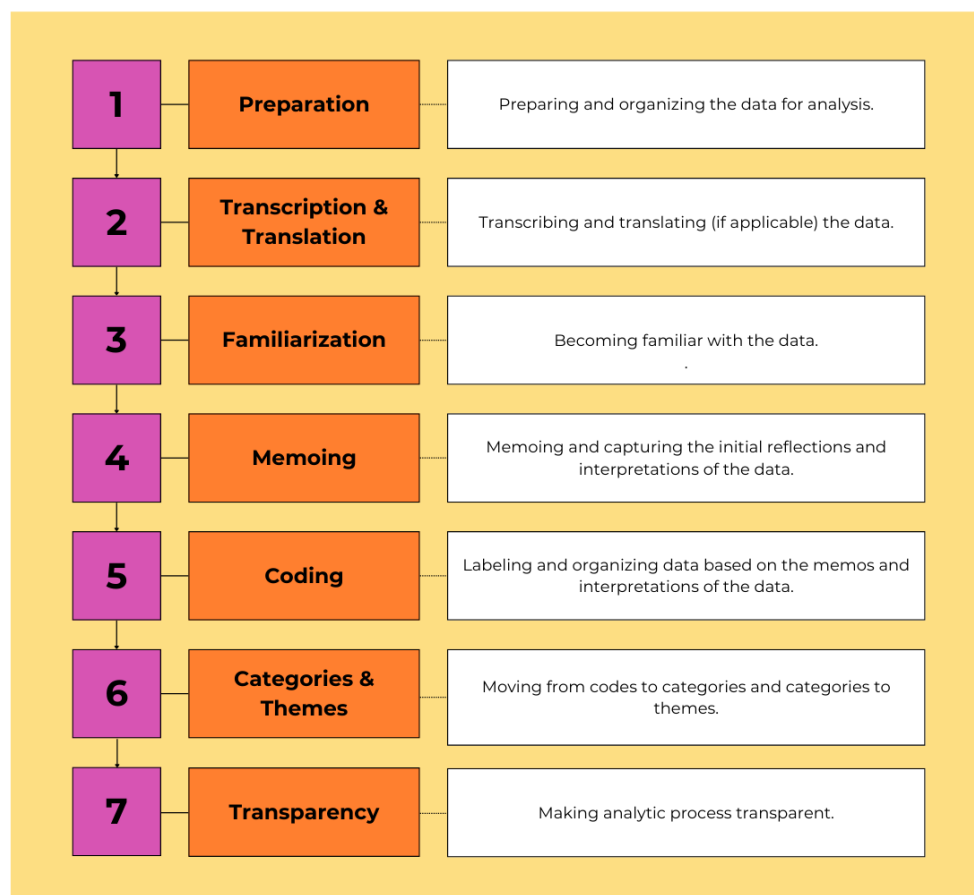*Figure 2 - Seven-phase thematic analysis (based on Lester et al., 2020)*

Following the phases of the framework, first the collected data is organized and transcribed if necessary (in instances of interviews or audiovisual materials such as social media content). Due to the scarce availability of data sources in English, this second phase has to be supplemented with the translation of the German, French and Hungarian text to English, which further helps the familiarization with the data. To ensure full transparency, it needs to be noted that the translation process was supported by generative AI (ChatGPT) to assist the researchers in managing the data. However, as the researchers are proficient in the relevant languages, all translations were carefully reviewed, verified, and, where necessary, corrected to ensure accuracy and consideration of context. For insights into the exact usage of the AI-assisted translation workflow, *see Appendix*.

Following this, through the iterative process of memoing and coding, categories and themes are identified within the data. In this phase of the research, elements that appear frequently or stand out as particularly interesting are marked. Hereby also the cultural context which was studied and identified during the case study research will be considered in order to recognize interesting elements. From these initial markings, similar items are grouped together, gradually refining codes and broader categories that eventually develop into key themes. Importantly, the thematic analysis serves as more than just an initial exploration of the data. It functions as a funnel (*see Figure 1 - The multi-method analysis)* narrowing the broad and diverse data into focused themes and sub-themes. These revealed patterns then form the analytical foundation for the subsequent frame analysis. In this way, TA is not only a descriptive tool, but also a preparatory one for the following frame analysis.

By applying this seven-phase framework proposed by Lester et al. (2020), this research explores recurring narratives and underlying discursive patterns within the political communication of the selected right-wing political parties (*see The Cases: Introducing Switzerland and Hungary*). The insights from the TA will contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which political messages are constructed and communicated within the context of Eurovision, and the findings will serve as a starting point for the frame analysis.

3.4.2 Step Two: Frame Analysis

The second step of the introduced multi-method analysis is frame analysis (FA), which is an "analytical approach within the constructivist tradition that addresses not only the construction of meaning, but also the roles of the actors in such processes." (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018, p. 109). Benford (1997) suggests that frames are socially and culturally constructed modes of interpretations, which should be focused on "human interaction, discourse, and the social construction of reality" (p. 420), hence this type of qualitative analysis aligns with the constructivist and interpretivist research approach of this study. There has been a growing interest in using FA to identify media frames in various fields of research, which resulted in a diverse set of applications of this analysis form (David et al., 2011). A qualitative textual approach to frames enables researchers to investigate and interpret texts on a deeper level in order to detect and describe frames used in a media discourse, in the case of this study, surrounding the subject of Eurovision (David et al., 2011).

According to Björnehed & Erikson (2018), frame analysis often consists of two key analytical tasks: uncovering the construction of meaning within a given context (in other words the framing process) and detecting the effects frames have on different actors. To explore how frames are constructed and used by the selected two political parties in the specific cultural context of ESC, this study focuses exclusively on the first analytical task: the *framing process*. To investigate the framing processes of the political messages of the parties, the four functions of frames will be implemented from Entman's (1993) definition: *problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation* and *treatment recommendation*. Thereby, the actual analysis and 'doing' of the researchers involves identifying where the parties and their political actors define a problem, assign blame or responsibility, make moral evaluations of the matter, and suggest or imply solutions for the constructed issue.

FA will be applied to the discovered themes and patterns to understand how they are presented and constructed in the media frames. Entman's (1993) four frame functions will be investigated in the uncovered themes across the two cases, as well as paying attention to the appearance of possible meta frames - or master frames. The concept of master frames originated from social movement theories

and the concept of collective action frames, which are structures of interpretation used by social movements to build a narrative for their action (Snow & Benford, 2000). Master frames thereby are overarching, elastic and flexible interpretive frames providing a more general lens through which various developments are interpreted and connected (Benford, 2013). In this research, master frames are understood as overarching frames that not only structure how particular themes and sub-themes are framed but also connect these themes under a common narrative in light of the political communication.

By examining frames at hand while considering the contexts of the two selected cases, Switzerland and Hungary, the FA can provide a deeper understanding of the underlying meanings of media frames and their strategic functions in the political communication of the political actors, thereby positioning ESC in a broader cultural and socio-political context.

3.4.3 Step Three: Cross-Case Comparison

The final step of the multi-method analysis is to compare significant themes and frames identified in the Hungarian and Swiss data sets. This comparative research design "entails studying two contrasting cases using more or less identical methods." (Bryman, 2012, p.72). According to Hantrais (1995) comparisons provide "an analytical framework for examining (and explaining) social and cultural differences and specificity". By comparing the two cases, the similarities and differences between communication strategies of the right-wing and populist parties can be examined in the ESC dimension. Furthermore, the findings will be considered and interpreted in their cultural, historical and political context to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

3.5 Ensuring Research Quality

To ensure rigor and quality in this qualitative research, a set of research criteria needs to be followed. Even though the importance of research quality is acknowledged in literature, there remains no consensus on how quality should be defined and evaluated in qualitative research (Lester et al., 2020). To ensure the quality of this study, the criteria for qualitative research proposed by Guba and

Lincoln (1985) are applied. The main aspect of their approach to research quality is trustworthiness which consists of four criteria: *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability* (Bryman, 2012).

Credibility is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research, and it ensures that "*research is carried out according to the canons of good practice and submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world*" (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). One way of ensuring the credibility of the study is through various processes of triangulation such as methodological, theoretical, data and investigator triangulation (Stahl & King, 2020). Methodological triangulation was applied in this research through the utilization of two analytical methods, namely thematic and frame analysis. Besides that, theoretical triangulation was implemented by using multiple concepts and theories to interpret data and findings of this research. Additionally, data triangulation was employed by using various types of data sources such as political speeches, news articles and press releases to acquire a comprehensive view on the subject. Lastly, investigator triangulation was adopted, involving two researchers in the coding and interpretation stages to minimize subjective bias.

Transferability parallels external validity in quantitative research, which refers to the extent findings of the research can be applied to other contexts (Bryman, 2012). Transfer is only applicable if a thick description is provided which portrays the specific context of the study (Stahl et al., 2020). The transferability of this research was ensured through providing rich descriptions of the cases of Switzerland and Hungary and presenting the current political, media and cultural landscapes of these countries in order to clarify the specific context of the cases at hand.

The third criterion is *dependability,* which is the equivalent of reliability in quantitative research. According to Bryman (2012), dependability entails "ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process" (p. 392) in an accessible manner, hence the consistency of the research procedures are clear, and the study can be repeated in a new context. Hence, transparency is key to

dependability. This criterion was fulfilled by providing a detailed explanation of the research methods that were used in this study.

The final criteria is *confirmability*, which is equal to objectivity in quantitative research. This criterion concerns with ensuring that the researcher "has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and the findings deriving from it." (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). The confirmability of this research was achieved through investigator triangulation to minimize biases and through collaborative analysis aiming at finding an agreed interpretation of the findings (Cornish, Gillespie & Zittoun, 2014). Moreover, reflexivity was applied to maintain transparency about potential biases, which will be further explored in the next sub-chapter.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical dilemmas and concerns are part of doing research. As part of the ethical considerations, reflexivity was exercised at every stage of this research, and it was applied actively through the research process. According to Guillemin & Gillam (2004), reflexivity is an ongoing "process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated." (p. 274). The application of reflexivity in research involves subjecting every aspect of the study to critical scrutiny and interpretation (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Reflexivity was particularly important since one of the researchers is originally from Hungary, which naturally influenced how the data from the Hungarian case was understood and interpreted. Although, through her background, a deeper understanding was achieved about Hungary's political and media landscape.

To maintain academic rigor, continuous efforts were made to minimize personal bias, especially given the sensitive nature of the political dimension of this study. While the absence of any personal bias is unattainable, transparency about the researcher's background is key and ethically important. Further, to minimize and decrease any personal bias, the research is grounded in data, and the data is looked at only through the consistent methodological approach and the theoretical frameworks important to the data analysis. Thus, by focusing closely on the data

through the lens of TA, FA and the comparative case study, the aim is to ensure a critical, reflective, and rigorous examination of the cases.

As this research included a comparative case study, special care was taken to ensure that the analysis acknowledges the cultural and political contexts of each country, especially given the differing political climates in Hungary and Switzerland. Additionally, caution was taken when drawing conclusion upon the findings to avoid contributing to polarization in light of the fundamental ethical principle of avoiding harm. This consideration will be inherent in the reporting of findings and the possible publication or presentation of research results.

Furthermore, since the data was collected from online sources, careful attention was given to ensure that the speeches, interviews, and news articles were publicly archived and accessible in the public domain, thereby avoiding any issues related to consent or ethical violations, e.g. of interview partners (Bryman, 2012). These forms of written text were considered within their specific social and societal context (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2010; Karppinen & Moe, 2011), highlighting the importance of "macro-ethics", hence considering the broader cultural context, (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005, p. 162) which is an important ethical concern of this research. In the case of this study, considering macro-ethics means acknowledging potential cultural and political tensions as well as power dynamics embedded in the political use of media, events like the Eurovision Song Contest.

IV.

Theory

After discussing existing literature in the fields and outlining the methodological approach of this research, this chapter will explain the theories and therefore theoretical lens that emerge through and guide the analysis. As the research follows an abductive logic, the approach engages in a back-and-forth movement between empirical observations and theoretical concepts. In this sense, these theories emerged after familiarization with the data. These initial encounters with the data such as media reactions to Eurovision performances, critiques of 'wokeness' in public broadcasting, or public debates around gender and queerness raised questions about normativity, public outrage and affect. To explore these dynamics and create an iterative process between data and theory, this chapter builds the theoretical foundation and outlines the main theories. However, theory in this study is not treated as a static lens applied from the beginning, but as a dynamic and evolving framework open to empirical insights. Hence, the analysis also builds on concepts introduced in the literature review and connects to theories that will be introduced in the following sections, if applicable.

4.1 Moral Panic Theory

The Moral Panic Theory was first conceptualized by Stanley Cohen (1972), in his book called *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* and also the term moral panic was first introduced in his work. The theory originally related to youth sub-cultures (see the Teddy Boys[10]), however now it has been applied to various contemporary issues such as sexuality, immigration, and cultural expression. Cohen (2011) describes moral panics as a phenomenon in which "*a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media*

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[10] "*Emerging in London in the 1950s, Teddy boys were a mainly working-class subculture who stood out with their quiffs, long Edwardian jackets and love for rock and roll – but gained a reputation as violent hooligans.*" (London Museum, n.d.)

[…]" (p.1). The term moral panic, much like disaster panic, refers to an "emotionally social phenomena entailing fright and anxiety", illustrating how perceived threats intensify through heightened emotional reactions (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, p.3). This perceived threat emerges from deviants or so-called *folk devils* who are portrayed as the source of moral decline and blamed for threatening a society's culture. Many moral panics revolve around issues of sex and sexuality since people can feel insecure regarding their own sexual identities and that of others and as sexuality is governed by rigid social norms, it becomes a site of moral concern and public debate (Goode et al., 2009).

As the initial definition by Cohen states, mass media plays an important role in defining and shaping social problems. The information about the deviance is processed by the mass media and inevitably received second hand by the public (Cohen, 2011). According to Goode & Ben-Yehuda (2009), media thrives on moral panic episodes since they can constitute as well as generate public concern, thus "engineer" moral panics. During moral panic, media can have an agenda-setting function, in which issues are framed in a way that it amplifies its emotional significance to the public and create sensations which the media can financially benefit from (Goode et al., 2009).

The cause of moral panic can derive from various sources, it can be driven by local actors and anxieties, or it can be deliberately orchestrated for political gain (Garland, 2008). Regarding the political use of moral panics, panics often contain a populist 'us versus them' sentiment. As in populist narratives, during moral panic there is a clear division between the virtuous 'us' and the evil 'them' in the form of folk devils. According to Goode & Ben-Yehuda (2009), moral panics have a populist dimension which manifests in how panic sentiments flow from "the bottom of society's socioeconomic ladder toward its upper reaches." (p. 58).

In this study, the Moral Panic Theory is applied to analyze how the right-wing populist actors in Hungary and Switzerland frame ESC as a (cultural) threat and to examine how ESC is constructed as a symbolic battleground in a broader cultural arena.

4.2 Revisiting populism and framing

As outlined in the literature review, populism provides a structural frame for understanding the logic that underpins such outrage, as defined in the moral panic theory. As discussed, populism can be conceptualized in various ways, however for this research and data insights, it is the core of populism that is relevant: the dichotomy between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004). Thereby, populism as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde, 2004) is fitting as it does not offer a 'one-size-fit-all' worldview but instead attaches itself to other ideologies such as nationalism, cultural or religious conservatism. Further, in this research, populism is seen as a response to progressive societal changes where cultural backlash serves as a catalyst for populist discourse (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In this sense, Eurovision entries and the song contest in general are woven into a wider cultural narrative of decline, loss, and "revolt against change" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Additionally, the concept of framing is closely linked to populism since it serves as a crucial instrument in shaping reality by determining which aspects of an issue are highlighted and how they are interpreted, aligning with populism's inherently antagonistic construction of reality (Hameleers et al., 2018, p. 832). Framing has a significant role in the "exertion of political power" hence it can influence the construction of political reality and the effect of political communication (Entman, 1993, p. 55). In this study, following Entman's (1993) definition of framing will be implemented, especially focusing on the four frame functions, to examine how Eurovision is constructed in the media by the chosen political actors.

4.3 Discipline and biopower

To understand how the cultural norms, narratives and points of friction are maintained and enforced, it is helpful to dive into a theory of power. Michel Foucault's concepts of *discipline*, and *biopower* offer an insightful lens for analyzing how bodies are regulated and disciplined. In "Discipline and Punish" (1976)[11], Foucault describes a shift from spectacular punishment towards subtler

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[11] Originally published in French "Surveiller et punir" in 1975 and 1976 in German.

forms of control: routines, norms, visibility and discipline. Accordingly, the body is "object and target of power" (Foucault, 1976, p, 174[12]) and this is how power is executed.

With the digital age and mediatization of politics (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014), Eurovision stages are transformed into arenas of (moral) surveillance with media coverage everywhere and at all time, for example through social media. Surveillance is a key mechanism for disciplining bodies. Through what Foucault (1976) calls *panopticum*, individuals internalize constant surveillance and hence become regulated. The panopticum itself is an architectural design of a prison but can be transferred into societal context: "Each cell is a small theatre, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized, and constantly visible" (translated from German, Foucault, 1976, p. 257). In the logic of moral surveillance, actors are made visible, evaluated, and potentially sanctioned in the public eye. Commenting, framing, evaluating and using Eurovision in political communication can thus be analyzed through the theoretical lens of disciplinary power.

Another execution or shape of power is what Foucault later (1978) in "The History of Sexuality" terms *biopower*. Biopower is concerned with the human body and especially with sexuality and how it becomes an object of (political) control and regulation. While in past times, sexuality was a matter of private life, society changed and "there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio power'" (Foucault, 1978, p. 140). To be precise, sex and sexuality became something those in power became interested in, for example as in measuring and controlling birth rates and thus biopower is concerned with the broader management of populations. Like this, sexuality becomes a central field, where power is exercised: by producing knowledge about it, categorizing it, and regulating it with a "multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions" (Foucault, 1978, p. 33). Based on this argument, political actors who frame sexuality, gender and also queerness in their political communication thereby participate in the regulation of bodies and identities in the political context of biopower.

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[12] translated from German "Körpers als Gegenstand und Zielscheibe der Macht "

Lastly it is interesting to note in this overview of the theoretical lenses that while this research is concerned with frame analysis, and the Foucauldian approach often consider discourses, the Foucauldian power theory is insightful, nonetheless. It helps explain the effects of these frames and their deeper socio-political implications. This theory will support the frame analysis by adding how power operates through those frames.

4.4 Affect Theory

Public outrage, cultural backlashes and aims of disciplining and regulating are not only cognitive, political or ideological processes but also deeply emotional. These emotions are not just a private matter, but a performative act. It is the *Affect Theory* (Ahmed, 2004; 2014) that encapsulates emotions as a social practice. Hence, emotions are not statically residing within individuals but move, circulate and stick to certain figures (such as lifestyles or people) and thereby forming what is called *affective economies*.

One way in which those affective economies take shape is through the production of normality via the construction of in-groups and out-groups - a dynamic of 'us' versus 'the other' and thereby what is according to norms (in) and what is not (out). Ahmed (2004) argues that "the reproduction of life itself, where life is conflated with a social ideal ('life as we know it') is often represented as threatened by the existence of others: immigrants, queers, other others" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 144) hence the outgroup is contrasting perceived normality of the ingroup. Therefore, by defining e.g. 'queer' as something that disturbs the comfort of "life as we know it", comfort is secured through the projection of discomfort, failure or violation of the norm onto "The Others" (Ahmed, 2004). This is not only ideological but an emotional process, since it is about the feeling of comfort for the perceived in-group: "Normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 147). The doing of what feels comfortable and hence the doing of normativity is not the only cultural aspect of emotions.

Besides discomfort, also the feelings of disgust and hate matter in "The cultural politics of Emotions" (book title by Ahmed, 2004). Hate shapes social structures by

creating a sort of "defence against injury" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 42). Hate is a performative act that claims to protect what is perceived as lovable, comfortable and under threat: "It is a common theme within so-called hate groups to declare themselves as organizations of love on their websites." (Ahmed, 2014, p. 42). Additionally, disgust is also not merely the expression of feeling "grossed out" but a performative act as well. Disgust "sticks" to objects or bodies "in the very moment that objects become attributed with bad feeling, as 'being' sickening" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 88) and binds these objects together. By labeling some objects as disgusting and thereby labeling certain people, behaviors, or ideas as threats to the norm, social order is produced and maintained. This emotional labeling sticks and helps form group identities and boundaries.

Affect theory helps to understand the emotional aspects (e.g. use of certain language) in the political communication surrounding the ESC. In the context of this research, feelings of hate, fear, outrage and even disgust directed towards queer performances at Eurovision or 'woke' agendas of PSM are to be analyzed not simply as expressions of individual opinion. Rather, they are part of the execution of boundaries, identities and social orders. In this sense, affect theory allows reading emotional tones for its performative and regulatory function.

V.

Analysis

5.1 Introduction to the multi-method analysis

The following chapter analyzes political communication in Switzerland and Hungary in relation to the Eurovision Song Contest, focusing on aspects such as participation, hosting, Hungary's withdrawal, and the broader context of Eurovision as a media event. A particular focus of the analysis is on the strategic framings by the right-wing populist parties in the chosen case countries. Following the abductive research logic outlined in the methodology, the analysis moves flexibly between theory and data, combining elements from the theoretical framework outlined before with emerging patterns from the material. Hereby, some theoretical insights are integrated that are not part of the overall theoretical architecture but surfaced in specific sub-themes. This selective use of theory reflects the iterative nature of abductive analysis, where theory and data continuously inform and reshape one another throughout the research process. The analysis is conducted in the following two main steps:

First, overarching *themes* were identified based on recurring topics and present dynamics in the data across diverse communication outputs such as political statements, press releases, social media content and newspaper articles. This aims at condensing the data and thereby serving as an analytical funnel, guiding and informing the subsequent frame analysis.

Second, a *frame analysis* was applied to theme analysis findings, guided by Entman's (1993) model of four frame functions: problem definition, diagnosis of causes, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Frame functions are key to the analysis aiming at analysis of a strategy employed by political actors. Nonetheless, while Entman's framework does structure the analysis, the research remains open to meta frames that emerged inductively from the data.

Given the richness and contextual differences of the two cases, the analysis chapter proceeds case by case, first presenting the thematic and frame analysis for each country and then followed by a cross-case comparison.

5.2 Switzerland - Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of the Swiss data revealed five main themes, some of which include relevant sub-themes. Each theme and the sub-themes will be presented in detail including direct quotes from the collected data. The following overview presents these themes:
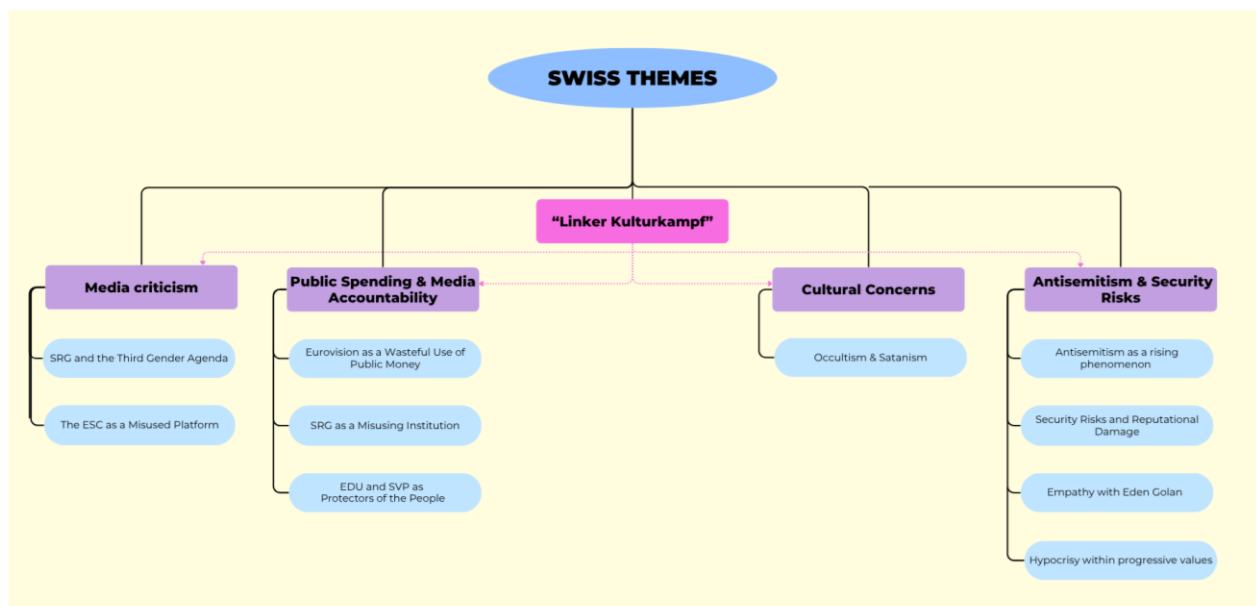
Figure 3 - Emerged themes from the Swiss data

5.2.1 Media Criticism

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the data, in the case of Switzerland, is the voiced criticism of media institutions, particularly towards the Swiss Public Service Media (SRG), as well as the Eurovision Song Contest itself. The criticism connects multiple concerns such as the perceived multiple ideological agendas, waste of public funds and manipulation of the public. This theme of media criticism surfaces in two sub-themes: The SRG involvement with the Third Gender Agenda and the ESC as a misused platform. It is necessary to divide this theme into sub-themes since there is a significant difference, even though they both are about media criticism. In the data, SRG is mentioned as the active,

ideologically motivated actor, while the ESC appears more as a passive platform that is being exploited - either by SRG or broader forces.

SRG and the Third Gender Agenda

"A 'non-binary' singer wins the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) for Switzerland. A joyful message—until one realizes that the ESC is being grossly misused for political statements. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG) has calculated this. It fuels the suspicion that this has been in the works for years to bring the concept of a third gender closer to a mass audience." (05_SWI)

This political statement, by a member of the political party SVP on their official website, showcases how the Swiss Public Service Media is described as strategically orchestrating ideological content, particularly around gender identity. The "non-binary" singer mentioned in the data is Nemo, winner of the Eurovision Song Contest 2024 in Malmö. In their communication, the SVP refers to this identity as "third gender" and calls out SRG on using Eurovision as a stage for furthering their ideological content to its audience:

"The SRG doesn't want a commercial event, but rather to promote its left-wing political messages regarding the 'third gender'." (01_SWI)

According to that political statement from Samuel Balsiger, SVP member and Municipal Council Member for the SVP in the city council of Zürich, the SRG is imagined as engaging in a campaign to normalize the "third gender", using the Eurovision platform as a strategic tool.

The implication of SRG having a long-term strategy connects to the theoretical framework of populist media critique, where institutions are seen as detached from 'the people' and aligned with elite cultural agendas - the core distinction between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004) - which in this case is SRG. This populist anti-elite language, criticism of PSM and protection of 'the pure people' mainly surrounds the topic of public funding of this agenda regarding the "third gender":

"But are all those who recently received their Serafe[13] bill just as thrilled to be financing this LGBTQ++ campaign?" (14_SWI)

SVP member Jean-Luc Addor is hence questioning whether the Swiss citizens would really support their money being spent on a "LGTBQ++ campaign", which is how Addor views the ESC. Also, this social media statement reflects the populist, anti-elite (public service media) sentiment and how the SRG is misusing Eurovision for their agenda. The overall sub-theme is hence about manipulation and betrayal of public trust by the SRG.

The ESC as a Misused Platform

While the aforementioned sub-theme is about the SRG as the active manipulator, this sub-theme sheds light on what the SRG uses to reach their goals: the Eurovision Song Contest. Thereby, ESC is described as a platform that has been infiltrated or corrupted. Again, at the core of this media criticism is the victory of Swiss artist, Nemo at the ESC 2024:

"The ESC has become highly controversial, as it is increasingly used to promote political agendas — following the motto: "Who is the hippest freak in all of Europe?" At the last ESC, the stage was not dedicated to music but served to promote the idea of a third gender entry." (09_SWI)

In this political statement by the SVP youth organization, it becomes also clear that following their opinion, the ESC is not misused only by the SRG but also generally to "promote political agendas", rather than remaining a contest focused solely on music:

"[T]he ESC is a queer political event that unfortunately no longer has anything to do with a purely musical competition." (20_SWI)

"In previous editions, it was observed that the event was used for various political demands." (02_SWI)

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[13] "Serafe bill" refers to the mandatory Swiss public broadcasting fee (Serafe is the official collection agency for SRG's license fee).

These statements imply that there has been some sort of development: The ESC was not always culturally hijacked by certain political agendas, but recent changes have been observed by the SVP. This aligns with what Norris and Inglehart describe as a cultural backlash (2019): a reaction by parts of society who feel that past cultural values have had rapid shifts, in this case the development of the song contest.

The criticism also focuses on the juries, having a vital role especially in the contest's final:

"The so-called music juries from each country hardly focus on the music - they reward woke overall performances, attention for LGBTQ movements, and at times, truly blasphemous acts. Music juries at the ESC are merely a fig leaf. They are not politically neutral." (05_SWI)

Although general criticism of Eurovision and its perceived political components emerges from the data, those accused of misusing the contest for their political demands are to be found within Switzerland (the SRG) - yet it is the Swiss SRG that is expected to take action and prevent the misusage of the ESC:

"What will the SRG do to prevent the event from being misused for political demands directed at Switzerland from within or outside the country?" (02_SWI)

There is a contradiction within the political party: While SVP member Nicholas Kolly wants the SRG to be part of the solution, SVP member Jean-Luc Addor views the SRG as the problem and expresses fundamental mistrust in the institution itself:

"Isn't it time we take a closer look at the public funding (by the SSR) of this kind of ideological operation?" (13_SWI)

While the SVP mentions this political agenda of the ESC, Phillipe Müller (FDP), member of the liberal party, simply calls the event "corrupt" (21_SWI), thereby shifting the critique from ideological content to institutional integrity.

Overall, this sub-theme theoretically connects to soft power theory (Nyne, 1990) as elaborated upon in the literature review to describe the previous academic relevance of the ESC. As per Nye (1990), soft power describes the concept of

influencing others not through coercion but through attraction, norms and values. Nye further emphasizes that cultural products and institutions like music, media, and education are key vehicles for this kind of power. However, the findings from the Swiss data set challenge the traditional theory of soft power. While the concept has become foundational in political sciences and international relations, its focus is on state-centric frameworks. In this case, the SRG and not the Swiss nation state is described as the key actor using cultural institutions (the ESC) to exercise soft power and pass their agenda. Furthermore, soft power in this very context is not aimed towards other nation states (as it would be in international relations), but inward at the domestic population. Thus, while the theory seems inapplicable at first glance, the Swiss case reveals a reinterpretation of soft power as a domestically oriented tool, where non-state actors leverage cultural platforms to influence internal public opinion.

In sum, this sub-theme highlights the Eurovision Song Contest as a contested cultural platform that, according to the SVP and other political actors, has shifted from a focus on music to a vehicle for political messaging.

5.2.2 Public Spending & Media Accountability

The second major theme that emerged from the data on Switzerland, along with its related sub-themes, centers on a strong emphasis on the financing of the ESC. This thematic focus was touched upon in the aforementioned theme of media criticism but significantly stood out in the data. Thereby, the Eurovision Song Contest becomes a central object of critique not only for its content, but for the fact that it is publicly funded. Given the broader debates in Switzerland surrounding public service media (PSM) and their legitimacy (see *The Case of Switzerland*), this theme must be understood within its specific cultural and political context. The theme surfaces along with three sub-themes: Eurovision as a wasteful use of public money, SRG as a misusing institution and EDU and SVP as protectors of the people and their money. In general, all sub-themes here are contesting legitimacy - both of the event and of the institutions funding and broadcasting it.

Eurovision as a Wasteful Use of Public Money

Eurovision as an event is highly contested in regard to public funds and usage of taxes. Criticism centers on the use of taxpayers' money and license fees, particularly for costs related to the organization and security for hosting Eurovision. Therefore, the contest is described as a "financial disaster" for the taxpayers:

"[…]dozens of millions in license fees and tax money will be poured in by the state for organization and security – it's a financial disaster" (01_SWI)

The SVP even quantifies the cost of holding the contest - "dozens of millions" - and strongly advocates against it, even with using the tools of direct democracy like referendums and petitions:

"In the city of Zurich, the SVP at least managed to prevent another 20 million francs and dozens of millions in internal personnel costs from being spent on the ESC" (01_SWI)

Here, the SVP and City of Zürich Council Member, Samuel Balsiger, positions itself as an active agent of fiscal responsibility.

What is particularly interesting is that not only the economic-rational side of the argument is used by political actors, but also the ideological one. One recurring pattern is the connection between financial criticism and ideological rejection of the event. Thus, the ESC is called a "*questionable event*" (09_SWI) by the youth organization of the SVP in that context and the EDU titles "*No taxpayers' money for a woke ESC*" (11_SWI). Another EDU Press Release elaborates:

"We do not want taxpayers' money to be wasted on a political propaganda show […]"(12_SWI)

Hence, the sub-theme of Eurovision as a wasteful use of public money expresses a rejection of public service media monetary spendings on the ESC on both economic and moral grounds.

SRG as a Misusing Institution

Beyond the critique of Eurovision as an inappropriate use of public funds, this theme expands to broader distrust in the fiscal policies of the institution responsible for organizing and broadcasting the event - the SRG. In the dataset, the role of the Swiss public broadcaster (SRG) is mentioned frequently.

The SVP criticizes the SRG for its "third gender agenda" and the manipulative action in "promoting" that agenda (*see Media Criticism*) and there are explicit doubts expressed about whether promoting certain values in "*this kind of ideological operation*" (13_SWI) should be part of SRG's mandate as a public service media institution.

While the EDU does not want to spend any "taxpayers' money" on Eurovision, the SVP takes the SRG into explicit responsibility:

"Does the SRG really need so much money for such bizarre events? Is it the SRG's role to explicitly promote woke-left 'queer' activists? These questions will surely resurface during discussions of the SRG initiative '200 francs is enough'." (05_SWI)

This political statement suggests more than just the financial concern, it articulates a normative boundary-setting around what public service media should and should not do. Thereby, the term "bizarre" delegitimizes the Eurovision Song Contest and makes clear that the ESC is not a good investment for public money and hence SRG spendings.

The reference to the "200 francs is enough" initiative indicates that this criticism of Eurovision spending is also tied to ongoing debates about the size and role of SRG more generally. Further, the fiscal policies of SRG in the context of Eurovision are compared to immigration:

"It's like with unchecked immigration: the full cost accounting is deliberately withheld from the public." (01_SWI)

In this statement, the SVP underlines a perceived lack of transparency or accountability and uses an unrelated political topic as a comparison.

This sub-theme highlights how the EDU and SVP believe the SRG to be a fiscally irresponsible and ideologically biased institution, with mismanagement of public money.

EDU and SVP as Protectors of the People

The political actors present in the data set (EDU and SVP) call out the irresponsible spendings of public money by SRG but also mention what can be done about it. Against this "financial disaster" the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Federal Democratic Union (EDU) position themselves as protectors of public interest or as SVP puts it in their political statement:

> *"Fortunately, the SVP is pushing back"* (01_SWI)

According to this statement, this is needed because the SRG is described as having a "*poor understanding of democracy*" (01_SWI), implying the spendings on Eurovision would not be according to what the public wants.

One solution was already mentioned - the SRG initiative "200 francs is enough"[14]. On top of that, there are local initiatives against the contest in the broader context of PSM spendings. For example, in Zürich, where the Young SVP initiative against the financing of the ESC led to Zürich not being chosen as the hosting city[15]:

> *"We do not want such a questionable event taking place on Zurich soil — especially not when taxpayers are expected to foot the bill"* (09_SWI)

Thus, one way of cutting the "wasteful" spendings is to impede the contest being hosted in a respective city. A similar case happened in Basel, after the city was chosen as the hosting city, with the EDU trying to prevent the event from happening:

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[14] The "200 francs, that's enough" initiative to reduce the Swiss radio and TV license fee from 335 to 200 francs per year has been rejected by the National Council's Transport and Telecommunications Committee, citing concerns over a significant loss of broadcasting quality (SRF, 2024).

[15] Zurich was not chosen as the host city for the Eurovision Song Contest 2025 because the SRG cited a lack of planning security due to the impending referendum against the city's approved 20 million Swiss francs credit, initiated by the Young SVP, which had just begun collecting signatures (Watson.ch, 2024)

"On Saturday, October 26, 2024, EDU Switzerland and EDU Basel-Stadt submitted the signatures for the cantonal referendum 'Stop ESC in Basel' to the State Chancellery of Basel-Stadt in the courtyard of Basel City Hall. Within just 42 days, EDU collected over 4,203 signatures — more than twice the required amount. This is a strong signal: The EDU's criticism of public funding for the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) in Basel is enjoying considerable support among the population." (12_SWI)

In this sub-theme, we can again draw on populist theory (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005), which describes how political actors construct a binary between "pure people" and a "corrupt elite." In this sub-theme it surfaces that the SVP and EDU are positioned as aligned with the people as they take action in order to prevent the "taxpayers' money" to be misspent on the "wrong" things or as Samuel Balsiger puts it in his political statement for the SVP website: "*The SRG's wasteful spending must be cut!*" (01_SWI).

However, in January 2025 - after Basel was chosen as the hosting city, political actors Samuel Balsiger (SVP), Roger Bartholdi (SVP), and Yves Peier (SVP) submitted a motion to the city council of Zürich:

"The SVP had threatened a referendum against the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), which was planned to be hosted in Zurich for 20 million Swiss francs. This mere threat led the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG) to not shortlist Zurich, and instead, Basel was chosen. 'We are proud to have prevented the ESC from happening in Zurich.' Nevertheless, hospitality businesses should have the opportunity to profit from the ESC, as it is a purely commercial event. The city should not obstruct this opportunity with bureaucratic hurdles and should approve 'Public Viewings' in an unbureaucratic manner." (08_SWI)

What is particularly interesting is the strategic shift and ambivalence displayed by political actors such as Samuel Balsiger (SVP). While he initially criticized the "left culture war" and the SRG's spendings on the contest (01_SWI), Balsiger and his colleagues later ask for an easy procedure for the hosting city to profit economically from the very same event. This contradiction, rejecting the contest on one hand, while demanding access to its economic benefits on the other,

reveals a deeper strategic importance of the contest within Swiss (local and domestic) politics.

Overall, this theme of Public Spending and Media Accountability is deeply entangled with the first theme on broader Media Criticism. Criticism of the costs surrounding Eurovision consistently overlaps with accusations of misuse and ideological bias by the SRG. The discussion of public funds thus becomes part of a wider pattern of mistrust in institutional roles and hence is strongly connected to the theoretical framework of populism.

5.2.3 "Linker Kulturkampf"

The theme *Linker Kulturkampf* emerged strongly from the dataset and appears to be a rather overarching theme and integral to all other themes. The theme revolves around the perception that left-wing politics are driving a cultural agenda, particularly concerning gender identity, symbolic politics, and societal values - which is connected to both media criticism and public money spending.

However, firstly it needs to be elaborated why in the course of this analysis, the German term "*Linker Kulturkampf*" will be used and not the English translation "left culture war". Firstly, the term originated in the dataset itself among the German data sources (01_SWI). Hence, it is not an analytical label, but one used by the political actors. Secondly, translating it weakens the resonance and meaning of the term - a term that is rather fixed in German media and debates and thus has meaning attached to it. The term „Kulturkampf" has a long history in Germany, originally referring to the 19th-century conflict between the state and the Catholic Church under Bismarck, first Chancellor of the German Empire (BpB, 2015). Nowadays, it is frequently used to defame the ideological agenda of the political opponent, especially from right-wing factors in the context of perceived wokeness and cancel culture of the left. Lastly, using and establishing the term already in the thematic analysis with all its meaning also lays the groundwork for the later frame analysis on how the term and content of it is strategically used in the communication.

Within this theme of a "Kulturkampf", fought by "Linken" (left wing supporters), the Eurovision Song Contest is presented as a central stage, a battleground, where this 'war' plays out. The first theme on media criticism elaborated upon how left-wing actors strategically use the contest to promote their cultural values and particularly the idea of a "third gender". An example is how the contest should be about music - and admiring Nemo's great success, but it is not:

"That should be the focus – not a left-wing culture war." (01_SWI)

However, Nemo is not only celebrated but also heavily criticized and portrayed as a "fighter" in this cultural battle:

"Meanwhile, Nemo proudly waved the flag of political propaganda at this officially apolitical event." (05_SWI)

The statement refers to Nemo carrying both the Swiss flag and the non-binary flag during the flag parade of the ESC 2024 in Malmö, whereby the non-binary flag is called "the flag of political propaganda", reflecting how queer visibility is interpreted not as representation, but as intrusion or indoctrination. To provide context, at the ESC 2025, the EBU reacted to the controversy by Nemo carrying the non-binary flag, as a result, artists are only allowed to display their country's national flag on stage in Basel (Zoronjić, 2025).

Figure 4 - Nemo at the flag parade at ESC 2024 (Source: PinkNews)

Just like Nemo, also the SRG is portrayed as a fighter in this cultural battle. The sub-theme "SRG and the Third Gender Agenda" elaborated upon this in more detail. This theme on *Kulturkampf* in general however is broader and does not only

concern Nemo's recent victory at Eurovision or the questioned agenda of the SRG. The dataset includes statements that criticize debates around gender-neutral language and symbolic changes, portraying these as examples of a misplaced cultural focus.

In a podcast, Marcel Dettling, vice president of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) on the federal level, shares his thoughts on the so-called "gender nonsense" (in German: Gender-Gaga) and portrays Donald Trump's policies as a role model:

> *"Yes, it shows that in Switzerland, we have groups of the population who apparently have no other problems [...]*
>
> *And with Trump: He's putting an end to this nonsense. It's back to: male or female. That's all. So, things are clear again – and not that all laws have to be gender-neutral now. In the canton of Schwyz, the Young SVP is fighting to reset the priorities – on economic strength, earning money, everything that matters – and on self-protection."* (16_SWI)

It needs to be noted that Dettling did not relate his arguments to the Eurovision Song Contest in any sense. Nevertheless, the podcast was recorded only a few days before the ESC 2024 and hence Nemo's participation and Marcel Dettling holds a vice presidency in the SVP - a party that has strongly advocated against the ESC and queer visibility there (*see previous themes on Media Criticism and Public Spending*). Dettling's statement expresses disagreement with gender-neutral policies and political debates regarding gender connected topics. He emphasizes a return to binary gender categories and prioritizes issues like economic strength and self-protection, presenting gender-related concerns as unnecessary.

The disapproval of Nemo at Eurovision and the political context of such disapprovals reflects a desire to return to binary gender categories and traditional priorities, reflecting a broader cultural backlash. In the light of this theme, it is therefore relevant to consider the cultural dimension of populism (Brubaker, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019) which theoretically underlines how such emancipatory movements and moments (such as "Nemo proudly waving the non-binary flag") trigger a cultural backlash. Within this dataset, the disapproval of non-binary identities and their visibility (at Eurovision) reflects this backlash.

Besides this, another theoretical framework helps to grasp this theme: The Foucauldian theory of power. The strong discontent with non-binarity and hence criticism on Nemo as well as Eurovision by political parties in general presents how bodies, identities, and gender categories become subjects of regulation and political contestation (Foucault, 1976 & 1978). In the context of this data, the rejection of non-binary representation can thus be understood as a part of broader mechanisms through which normative boundaries are trying to be enforced.

A few quotes and parts of the data set were used to describe this theme. However, there are other telling statements such as Eurovision being described as a *"woke freak show"* (04_SWI), which were categorized under other themes. In this case criticism on Eurovision. Therefore, it becomes clear that the "Kulturkampf" is inherent in all other themes. The recurring theme and notion reveal how deeply "Linker Kulturkampf" is woven into the overall political communication regarding the Eurovision Song Contest by certain Swiss political actors.

5.2.4 Cultural Concerns Surrounding the Eurovision Song Contest

While diving into the data, the theme of Eurovision being connected to occultism and satanism surfaced, expressed as cultural concerns. This theme revolves around the perception that the Eurovision Song Contest has become a breeding ground for such problematic elements.

Occultism & Satanism

While other themes and sub-themes mentioned Nemo and the "third gender debate" this criticism has an additional target: the singer Bambie Thug who represented Ireland in Eurovision 2024 (hence in the same year as Nemo won):

"In addition, there were, in our view, disturbing messages from other performers – such as the Irish singer Bambie Thug, where the audience was seemingly cursed, and she openly spread her dark, occult message." (17_SWI)

This EDU statement refers to Bambie Thug's performance on the Eurovision stage as well as her overall art. Bambie Thug is a genre-defying, Cork-born artist known for their self-described "Ouija-pop" sound that blends pop, rock, and electronic elements (Eurovision.tv, n.d.). They use their music and performances to challenge gender norms and champion queer identity, as they identify as non-binary.

Figure 5 - Bambie Thug at the Eurovision Grand Final (Source: EBU/Sarah Louise Bennett)

Figure 6 - Bambie Thug wearing an outfit with the colors of the transgender flag at ESC 2024 (Source: EBU/Connie Cumming)

The EDU's local branch in Zürich observes a certain development at Eurovision and uses the same statement to call Bambie Thug a "witch" in that context:

"An event that once proudly claimed to be apolitical has recently degenerated into a bizarre spectacle glorifying woke ideologies — from witches to openly celebrated antisemitism, everything is included." (11_SWI)

This statement illustrates how various elements - from queer expression to religiously charged symbolism - are categorized collectively and marked as "bizarre". Also in this statement, the phrase, "*openly celebrated antisemitism*" is included in this assessment on Bambie Thug. However, this part of the statement will be elaborated upon in the next theme, as antisemitism is a theme that emerged several times during the coding and analysis and hence has to be analyzed in detail and as a theme itself.

Looking at the Swiss political landscape, not just the local EDU branch, but also the national EDU Switzerland, expresses disapproval of recent performances on the Eurovision stage:

> *"In recent years, the ESC has increasingly developed into an event where antisemitic incidents are on the rise and more and more performances celebrate Satanism and occultism. The fact that the organizers tolerate this is incomprehensible to EDU Switzerland."* (03_SWI)

This statement additionally takes the organizers of the event into consideration and held accountable for allowing certain themes, symbols, or acts to be part of the show, implying a broader concern with the institutional or structural approval of the content in question (see theme on *media criticism*).

While these previous statements have been released by different branches of EDU - a party built on religious principles - the SVP generally is relatively reserved in its rhetoric regarding perceived satanism and occultism on the Eurovision stage. However, the SVP in Bern submitted a parliamentary motion shortly after the ESC 2024 in order to avoid Bern hosting the song contest. The motion was later taken back. Yet, the original document contains several narratives, overlapping with the EDU rhetoric:

> *"The nonbinary, antisemitic, satanic artist from Ireland, "Bambie Thug," who calls themselves a "dark witch," cried with rage and contempt upon learning that Israel had qualified for the final; danced during their performance with a demonic figure and was the first to congratulate "Nemo." As a congratulatory gesture, they placed a crown of thorns on the newly crowned ESC winner's head — just as the Romans once brutally whipped and crucified*

Jesus. A crown of torture, with thorns that pierced Jesus' skull, exposing and mocking him: "Behold, a king!" Nemo wore the crown of thorns during the entire victory performance, thereby mocking billions of Christians worldwide. One can only hope this was done out of ignorance, naivety, or in the euphoria of victory. " (20_SWI)

This part of the motion exemplifies the recurring theme with the portrayal of certain performances as morally wrong, especially through the use of religious (Christian) imagery and connected associations with occultism. The strong focus on Bambie Thug's identity, symbolism, and perceived provocation reflects broader concerns about the offense taking place.

Further, the motion can be quoted with the following:

"The Canton of Bern must not tolerate such antisemitic, satanic, and inhumane events. The ESC is an event that blatantly contradicts the fundamental principles of our country — solidarity, rule of law, political neutrality, and religious freedom." (20_SWI)

This statement shows a sort of normative boundary-making regarding "Swissness": The ESC is positioned as fundamentally incompatible with Swiss national values such as solidarity, neutrality, and religious freedom. Drawing on the Cultural Citizenship theory by Stevenson (2003), the discontent with Bambie Thug's performance and the ESC highlights a sense of threats to collective identity and public order and thus defines what is within the symbolic boundaries and what is outside. The findings in this context point to the role of religious nationalism theories that theoretically connect well with cultural citizenship theory, especially in this theme. Religious nationalism refers to a broader cultural-political movement that uses religion to define national identity, moral order, and political legitimacy (Friedland, 2001). While in classical sociology, religion was believed to play a weaker role in politics due to secularization and modernization, a different trend can be observed. Religion is a public and political force is common and in a world of nation-state, religion is used to make claims about who belongs to a nation and who not (Friedland & Moss, 2016). In the statement, "*The ESC is an event that blatantly contradicts the fundamental principles of our country — solidarity, rule*

of law, political neutrality, and religious freedom." (20_SWI), this theoretical link between cultural citizenship and religious nationalism surfaces.

Overall, the performance is repeatedly described using language that emphasizes moral threat and cultural decline, highlighting concerns about values, identity, and social boundaries.

5.2.5 Antisemitism & Security Risks in the Context of Eurovision 2024

While the next theme was mentioned before in the previous theme description and analysis, the theme of *antisemitism as a security risk* clearly surfaces as a major theme in the dataset. Hereby, the theme comes with various sub-themes such as the perceived rise of antisemitism at the ESC and a security risk connected to it. However, since in current and past political discourse the term itself carries a significant historical and emotional weight, the theme will be carefully analyzed and unpacked through a series of sub-themes that illustrate the various ways in which references to antisemitism emerge within the dataset.

Before diving into the theme and emerging sub-themes, it is necessary to provide context. The theme overall has to be understood in the events of Eurovision 2024 in Malmö - the first ESC after heightened tension between Israel and Palestine and the consequential Gaza war.

The ESC in Malmö became controversial due to the participation of Israel, represented by Eden Golan. Prior to the event, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) required Israel to modify the lyrics of its original song "October Rain," which referenced the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023. Furthermore, during the event, tensions were high: Pro-Palestinian protests took place in Malmö, including one gathering of about 5,000 people, while a smaller pro-Israel demonstration also occurred in the city. Security was heightened around Eden Golan, who was escorted by convoy and advised to remain in her hotel between performances. Additionally, several artists expressed their discontent with Israel's participation before and during the events of the Song Contest (The Guardian, 2024).

Antisemitism as a rising phenomenon within Eurovision

The first sub-theme and context in which antisemitism is mentioned refers to some Swiss political actors, such as in this dataset the EDU, observing a certain development, namely that antisemitism at the ESC is increasing:

"In recent years, the ESC has increasingly become an event where antisemitic incidents are on the rise" (11_SWI) or *"Antisemitism, woke propaganda, and Satanism instead of music"* (11_SWI)

This statement names antisemitism as part of a moral and ideological degradation, suggesting a breakdown of the ESC's original purpose - music (outlined in the theme on *media criticism*).

Additionally, the ESC is described as an event that is tolerating or failing to address antisemitism and antisemitic incidents:

"On the side stage, antisemitism was tolerated without reflection, and the Israeli delegation had to move under extremely high security measures at all times." (09_SWI)

The statement by the SVP Bern contains two key accusations. First, it accuses the ESC of *passivity*, of tolerating antisemitism rather than confronting or naming it. Second, it references the high-security measures surrounding the Israeli delegation, showcasing the magnitude and consequences of the antisemitism taking place and the security risk originating from it (see sub-theme *security risk and reputational damage*)

Thus, this sub-theme centers on the perception of a structural transformation within the ESC and a failure to address those changes towards an event perceived as tolerating or even facilitating antisemitism.

Security Risks and Reputational Damage

This sub-themes is closely related to the protest behaviors in Malmö, and thereby focuses specifically on the securitization of the Eurovision Song Contest. The recurring topic here is again the ESC 2024 in Malmö and especially the protests against Israel's participation in the contest and hence the participation of Israeli singer, Eden Golan.

The protesters, who gathered in front of Eden Golan's hotel, are hereby described as "Islamist mob" (17_SWI), which led to the consequence that "*the Israeli delegation had to move under extremely high security measures at all times.*" (09_SWI)

Further, the SVP branch in Bern observed chants labelled by the party as anti-Semitic during those protests:

> "*During the ESC, protesters spread slogans such as 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,' a call by fanatics for the destruction of Israel. Some trampled on Israeli flags, and ESC organizers were accused on banners of 'celebrating genocide'. The Israeli news site Ynetnews reported that protesters shouted, 'Send the Jews back to Poland!' and 'Sinwar, we won't let you die!' Yahya Sinwar is the leader of Hamas in Gaza.*" (20_SWI)

These protests and protesters are not only described as antisemitic but also as actual security risks. For example, in the EDU's argumentation in favor of a referendum to prevent the ESC from taking place in Switzerland, the perceived security risks are directly linked to the events in Malmö:

> "*The days-long protests in Malmö against the Israeli singer Eden Golan by an Islamist mob also raise concerns that hosting the ESC in Switzerland could pose a significant security risk and lead to reputational damage.*" (03_SWI)

While the EDU is concerned about political protests presenting a security risk and the overall event, hence leading to a damaged reputation of the country, the SVP is not voicing these concerns in any statements. The contest is not only seen as a

cultural event, but as a politically charged occasion that could destabilize domestic security.

Empathy with Eden Golan

As mentioned, Eden Golan was the Israeli participant at ESC 2024 and this sub-theme emerged through multiple data points mentioning the singer and describing her experience as being shaped by antisemitism and hostility during the event. Firstly, this includes her overall stay in Malmö, where:

"The singer from Israel, Eden Golan, could not leave her hotel room. She had to be protected by police from anti-Semitic attackers" (20_SWI)

The description emphasizes constant security presence and restricted movement due to perceived threats. Even so, in the Malmö arena, Golan faced reactions as *"her performances were accompanied by whistling and booing"* (20_SWI) but *"Swedish television filtered out the boos so that no one would notice"* (19_SWI). The same author describes Eden Golan as "a heroine who kept singing".

This sub-theme, therefore, focuses on the treatment of a specific individual in both public and mediated spaces of the ESC in the context of perceived antisemitism. Eden Golan becomes a personalized symbol for political tensions and emotions. Empathy with her situation becomes part of an overall calling out of perceived antisemitism at the contest. Here, affect theory offers a useful lens. As noted, "It is a common theme within so-called hate groups to declare themselves as organizations of love on their websites" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 42). Thus, while performers such as Nemo and Bambie Thug are mentioned in a context of critique and discomfort, this sub-theme illustrates how also positive emotions such as empathy, support, concern and compassion can be attached to public figures.

Hypocrisy within progressive values

The last sub-theme emerged only in two data points yet has an interesting connotation in the overall theme analysis and especially in the theme Linker Kulturkampf. Namely, the perceived hypocrisy by other artists, such as Nemo:

"Other contestants, who otherwise promote tolerance and diversity, subtly or overtly signaled to her during the show that she was not welcome. " (20_SWI)

This suggests a perceived inconsistency between their public advocacy and their conduct during the event. This statement references to several artists at the ESC 2024 with whom Nemo frequently interacted, many of them publicly expressed their disapproval of Israel's participation, such as during press conferences (Savage, 2024).

Besides this broad statement by the SVP, another data point mentions Nemo directly:

"To avoid any misunderstandings: I don't expect political statements from Nemo. But when they speak of 'peace' and 'dignity' they are entering the political arena. Then they cannot stay silent when an Israeli is treated as though she's not a human being." (19_SWI)

Thus, this sub-theme presents an issue of moral inconsistency. Artists who publicly represent values such as dignity, peace, and diversity are described as hypocritical when they remain silent in moments of perceived mistreatment.

To conclude with this theme, it overall explores how antisemitism is perceived and discussed in the context of Eurovision 2024, focusing on claims of rising antisemitic incidents, protest behavior, the treatment of Israeli artist Eden Golan, and perceived hypocrisy among other participants.

While theoretical connections (e.g. to concepts such as moral panic or affect) were already visible in some themes, the thematic analysis remained primarily descriptive and closely grounded in the data. In the next step, the frame analysis, building on the thematic coding, the analytical step will focus on how certain themes/narratives are constructed, strategically employed, and emotionally charged.

5.3 Switzerland - Frame analysis

While the thematic analysis condensed the data, reporting *what* has been said and categorizing it for better understanding with the help of themes and sub-themes, the following frame analysis delves deeper into the framing mechanisms uncovered in the themes. The guiding question here is not *what* has been said but *how*. The frame analysis will use the insights from the aforementioned themes and sub-themes and focus on strategic framing and frames. Thereby, the four frame functions as described by Entman (1993) will serve as the foundational guide for the analytical framework for the frame analysis.

5.3.1 Media Criticism & Public Spending

When analyzing the framing strategy in the Swiss dataset, it appears that the criticism on media, directed towards both the Swiss broadcaster SRG and the ESC, as well as the theme of Public Spending & Media Accountability are framed similarly. Both express high discontent with the Public Service Media and frame it as an immoral misuse of taxpayers', hence 'the peoples' money.

Looking at the frame functions, the parallelism becomes even clearer: regarding the *problem definition*, the ESC is framed as a problematic event which highlights a larger issue of institutional manipulation and improper use of taxpayer funds by the SRG. This issue is framed expressing an even larger concern, namely that the SRG is having a "poor understanding of democracy" (01_SWI) and hence the actions are framed as undemocratic. The responsibility for this issue, the *cause diagnosis*, is placed on the Swiss PSM (SRG) and secondly also on the Eurovision Song Contest as an event. In that sense, the SRG is blamed for its ideological agenda and the ESC itself is framed as the platform that has been hijacked for those political causes. The *moral judgement* thereby is surfacing clearly: both the SRG and the ESC are immoral in many senses due to the promotion of their agenda with the irresponsible usage of taxpayers' money. However, both political actors (EDU and SVP), have a *treatment suggestion* for this perceived issue. Both the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Federal Democratic Union (EDU) position themselves as defenders of public interest ('the people'), with figurative language such as "fortunately the SVP is pushing back" (01_SWI).

What is interesting in these frames surrounding the contest is the way it closely ties the ESC to a general critique on an "immoral" PSM, while simultaneously evoking strong emotions through strategic framing. The use of language reveals the emotional component in this narrative. Firstly, the German original statements are rather insightful as they offer a deeper understanding of the meanings attached to them. It is relevant to note, that in the original political statement in German, it says "Ein «non-binärer» Sänger gewinnt für die Schweiz den Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)" (05_SWI). While for non-German-speaker this statement might seem neutral, there are a few insights. In German language, the quotation marks around "non-binär", often signal skepticism, irony, or disapproval. It implies that the author of the political statement does not accept the concept of non-binarity or at least questions its relevance. Further, the use of the word "Sänger", the grammatically masculine form in German, disrespects Nemo's identity and implies a refusal to linguistically accommodate non-binary identities.

Secondly, the ESC is described with a certain terminology within these themes of media criticism and media accountability at large. Spendings on ESC are called "wasteful" (01_SWI), the ESC is described as a "woke freak show" (04_SWI), "grossly misused" (05_SWI), "bizzare" (05_SWI), "questionable" (09_SWI), "bizarre spectacle" (11_SWI), "political propaganda show" (12_SWI), "ideological operation" (13_SWI), "LGTBQ++ campaign" (14_SWI). This language used in political communication surrounding ESC reveals much about how it is framed as problematic. This framing positions the ESC as a fundamentally corrupt and ideologically driven event, associated with wokeness (in a negative sense) and resource misuse. Further, the phrase "hippest freak in all of Europe" is telling: It blends mockery, non-normativity and discomfort (Ahmed, 2004) with expressions of identities at the contest. By using the term "freak", the youth party of the SVP discredits the artists and criticizes expressions of identity at play. Thus, overall, this narrative of taxpayer-money-misuse and corruption suggests moral decay. Further, words like "freak show", "grossly misused" and "bizarre" evoke alienation as well as disgust and implies that the ESC and hence the SRG have been distorted from "what is normal". Repeatedly labeling it as ideologically driven reinforces the idea of a larger conspiracy to impose progressive values.

In theoretical terms, the political actors are attaching emotions of disgust and discomfort onto the event (Ahmed, 2004). In this framing, non-normative identities (like Nemo's non-binary identity) become marked as "other," disrupting the comfort zone of normativity breaking with the "ease and easiness" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 147), of those zones. With this language usage, the ESC becomes an *affective site* where political emotions are negotiated, and disgust or discomfort serves to bind together discontent expressed by political actors regarding PSM fiscal policies. In this process, a binary between the normative (heterosexual, traditional) and the non-normative (queer, progressive) is enforced, framing queer visibility as inherently discomforting (Ahmed, 2014).

The binary also connects with populism theory (as elaborated upon in the thematic analysis), but a certain theoretical notion surfaces: *populism and its connection to conspiracy theories*. The agenda of the SRG and the hijacking of the contest are not only described as immoral or "wasteful" but even framed as conspiratorial. Hereby, populist rhetoric and conspiracy theories interconnect in that data set. To begin with, "a conspiracy theory is a belief that two or more actors have coordinated in secret to achieve an outcome and that their conspiracy is of public interest but not public knowledge" (Douglas & Sutton, 2023, p. 282). When political statements mention the agenda (promote the idea of a third gender) by claiming that the government misuses public money and cultural events without the public's agreement, that is a conspiracy frame. A similar rhetoric strategy in this frame is the comparison to immigration, with the SVP bringing up that the spendings on Eurovision appear similar to it, as in both cases "*the full cost accounting is deliberately withheld from the public.*" (01_SWI). This narrative reinforces the idea of elite secrecy and financial irresponsibility, appealing to public distrust and reinforcing populist-conspirational sentiments.

This finding matches a yet underdeveloped academic field (Bergmann & Butter, 2020), namely the connection between populism and conspiracy theories, as those are more likely to flourish among populist instead of moderate political movements (van Prooijen, 2018) due to a central notion of anti-elitism which is similar to populism. With a look at the current information age, Hameleers (2021)

argues that the fusion of populist and conspiratorial rhetoric is effective in the post-factual era, because it triggers emotions by pointing out supposed enemies.

As per this studies interest in strategic political communication it has to be noted, that both the SVP and the EDU have previously advocated against the Swiss PSM such as with supporting the *No Billag* referendum in 2018, which sought to eliminate the broadcasting license fee. Hence, by targeting the ESC, these parties can tap into their existing mobilization against PSM and reinforce their ideological narratives.

All in all, the frame analysis on the findings from the thematic analysis shows how political rhetoric portrays the ESC and SRG as corrupt, ideologically driven, and morally decayed, linking queer visibility to discomfort and populist conspiracy theories.

5.3.2 Linker Kulturkampf

Before diving into the framing of this particular theme, it needs to be noted that the theme of a left initiated culture war is not only a prominent theme in the data set but also seems to structure and frame the overall political communication by certain Swiss political actors regarding the ESC. Hence, this frame is built on a recurring theme and thereby can be viewed as some sort of *meta (or master) frame* - a frame that is wider in scope and encompasses and organizes other specific frames (Benford, 2013)[16]. Moreover, this meta-frame can be still understood in the framework of the four framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation.

The problem concerning the *Linker Kulturkampf* is framed as an ideologically hijacked ESC, as emblematic of a larger societal problem - the ideological agenda of the left wing (e.g. the third gender promotion). Responsible for this perceived problem are the "left-wing actors", identity politics, and what is labeled as "gender nonsense" (*see* 16_SWI). The problem definition and cause diagnosis are joined by a strong moral judgment suggesting that the increasing visibility of non-binary

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[16] Master Frames originated in the field of social movement research in the context of collective action frames.

and queer identities signal a moral and social decline, Hence, traditional values are portrayed as being under attack. Through the critique of progressive values, an implied remedy emerges, namely the re-establishment of normative boundaries:

"In the canton of Schwyz, the Young SVP is fighting to reset the priorities – on economic strength, earning money, everything that matters – and on self-protection." (16_SWI)

This meta frame is present in all other frames such as the criticism of media, the discontent with the ESC and so on. As aforementioned, the ESC was e.g. called "ideological operation". With a look at the thematic analysis, where also the criticism on Nemo surfaced, the meta frame renders individual topics like Nemo's non-binary flag or ESC's alleged politicization, not as isolated controversies, but as symptoms of a larger, ideological struggle led by "the left". This meta frame, which includes all frame functions, can be seen as a highly strategic frame not only because it is inherent in the overall dataset but also because it draws sharp symbolic boundaries between "the people" and "the elite" (Mudde, 2004; Brubaker, 2017).

What is interesting to note in this frame is that most connecting statements to the frame and theme are about non-binary identities (the so-called "third gender") and queer visibilities (e.g. the "LGTBQ++ campaign" in 14_SWI). This framing strategy of focusing particularly on those identities exemplifies how bodies, in this case those that deviate from heteronormative standards, are subject to control and regulation (1978) by political authorities in power - biopower. In this specific context, political actors use a form of moral surveillance and thereby disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977), where non-normative identities are observed, called out and framed as disruptions to the comfort zone (Ahmed, 2004). This dynamic shows that power also works through cultural norms that pressure people to fit in. When someone doesn't conform, like by expressing a non-binary identity or waving a non-binary flag at a music event, they are framed as problematic by some actors. Thus, those exclusionary ideologies reinforce these norms by defining what is considered acceptable within a national or cultural identity.

In sum, the meta frame "Linker Kulturkampf", centers on the notion of a "left-initiated culture war" and links various issues, such as media criticism and the ESC, to a broader ideological struggle mostly connected to gender identities.

5.3.3 Moral Panic & Antisemitism

In terms of framing, the themes of cultural concerns and perceived antisemitism are closely connected, especially regarding the political communication surrounding the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest. The thematic analysis has already offered valuable insights into the controversies and key events of that year and their resonance within the Swiss political landscape.

At the core of this combined frame and hence the defined problem is the perception that Eurovision 2024 represented a dual threat: A cultural security risk due to certain performances and an actual security risk because of "antisemitic" protests. Those risks are not framed as isolated incidents, but as symptomatic of a broader ideological decline. Taking a closer look at the framing of ESC as a risk, this frame closely aligns with two intersecting theoretical logics: moral panic theory and securitization theory.

Firstly, framing the contest as "risk" to national security, seen in phrases like "security risk and damage to the […] reputation" (11_SWI), echoes the theoretical framework of the securitization theory (Waever, 1995). In this theory of international relations, phenomena and events are elevated to existential threats through performative speech acts, thus justifying extraordinary measures. Thus, the EDU mentioning hosting the ESC is a risk to security, reflects a clear securitizing move. The extraordinary measures are therefore the non-hosting of the contest, which differentiates from the original securitization theory that refers to large-scale political or even military measures (Waever, 1995).

Secondly, while the securitization theory is concerned with the framing of actual threats, the overall narrative simultaneously intersects with moral panic theory. The ESC is framed as the creator of a moral panic, shifting from entertainment to a moral threat and thereby introducing frightness (Gode & Ben-Yehud, 2009). In this framing, the causal interpretation and thus the naming and blaming of the

deviants (central to moral panic theory as per Gode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009) - 'the folk devils' - is a key element. Bambie Thug ("the witch"), Nemo and the protesters become folk devils representing moral decline and religious provocation. Their behavior, such as protesting or performing, becomes the example of what is unacceptable behavior, as folk devils are the "visible reminders of what should not be" (Cohen, 2011, p.2). This frame also intersects with the disciplinary power and biopower (Foucault, 1978; 1979) as elaborated on earlier, with gender identities being at the core of the framing.

In the framing process of those causes of the moral panic, the folk devils are dehumanized. While the protesters are framed as an "Islamist mob" (03_SWI), Nemo's and Bambie Thug's identities are ignored by referring to them grammatically as male and female while both of the artists identify as nonbinary. In this presented moral decline caused by such individuals and groups, the ESC is framed as a catalyst for threats and antisemitism. What strikes as particularly interesting here is that while some are framed as immoral, Eden Golan serves as an affective site for sympathy and empathy. Golan's portrayal evokes protective sentiments, depicting her as a victim of hostility and injustice by those folk devils. A binary narrative surfaces: good versus bad, threatened versus threatening. This differential framing underscores how empathy and moral condemnation coexist within the same political communication, reflecting the strategic use of affect to mobilize public sentiment in opposing directions.

The moral evaluation of this frame becomes evident as political actors frame the ESC in opposition to Swiss values, portraying it as morally deviant. Strong adjectives such as "incomprehensible" (11_SWI) or "disturbing" (17_SWI) underline the aforementioned narrative. Additionally, this framing conveys a sense of moral chaos, characterized by the portrayal of multiple immoral acts occurring simultaneously, captured in statements such as "from witches to openly celebrating antisemitism" (11_SW).

Lastly, the treatment options to the problem do not differ much from the other frames, the recommendation is to safeguard public order - a notion of cultural protectionism. By calling out the folk devils, SVP and EDU position themselves as

those battling "what should not be". This framing not only reaffirms their commitment to preserving cultural norms but also legitimizes their political stance as a necessary response to perceived threats.

To conclude, the Eurovision Song Contest 2024 is framed as a dual threat (cultural and security-related) reflecting a moral panic, where political actors portray certain performers and protesters as folk devils embodying moral decline. This framing clearly draws from both moral panic theory, where cultural transgression triggers public anxiety, and securitization theory, where political speech constructs existential threats to legitimize extraordinary responses. This theoretical linkage, especially to moral panic theory becomes even more striking as mass media appear important for the creation of moral panic (Cohen, 2011), and the ESC as a media event (see Dayan & Katz, 1992) reaches big audiences.

Finally, it needs to be put in context that the SVP and the EDU have been particularly vocal about the ESC, especially regarding the controversies surrounding Eurovision 2024 and the upcoming hosting of the event in Switzerland in 2025. As described in the case description, this heightened communication can be attributed to their broader media criticism of the Public Service Media. Furthermore, the proximity factor plays a crucial role as the ESC 2025 is in Basel, the perceived threats, risks and issues become more immediate and proximate, prompting increased political attention.

5.4 Unique characteristics of the Hungarian data

Before diving into the findings of the analysis on the Hungarian data, the specific state of the Hungarian media landscape has to be taken into consideration. As touched upon in the introduction to the Hungarian case (*see The case of Hungary*), the government systematically undermined media freedom over the past several years and PSM is closely affiliated with the ruling party. Fidesz has reshaped much of the media landscape by turning existing outlets, including Public Service Media broadcasters, into instruments of pro-government propaganda, while also establishing new platforms such as *Mandiner.hu* and *PestiSrácok.hu* (Bajomi-Lázár, n.d.). Since Hungary's withdrawal from Eurovision, party members of Fidesz haven't commented on the song contest directly. However, journalists from the aforementioned government-affiliated media outlets expressed their views on the contest, following the political ideology of the government in their statements. Due to its unique characteristics of the Hungarian media landscape, articles from government-affiliated outlets were analyzed as part of Fidesz's broader communication strategy in the context of Eurovision.

5.5 Hungary - Thematic analysis

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of the Hungarian dataset, focusing on how media and/or political actors aligned with the ruling Fidesz party construct meaning around ESC. The identified themes are examined in the context of the complex media and political landscape of Hungary, as well as in consideration to its past history in Eurovision. Through the thematic analysis of the data, four main themes were discovered, namely: *media criticism, culture war, moral threats* and *antisemitism (see figure below).* The emerged themes will be analyzed through the theoretical lenses of this research, while also paying attention to the specific contexts of the Hungarian case.
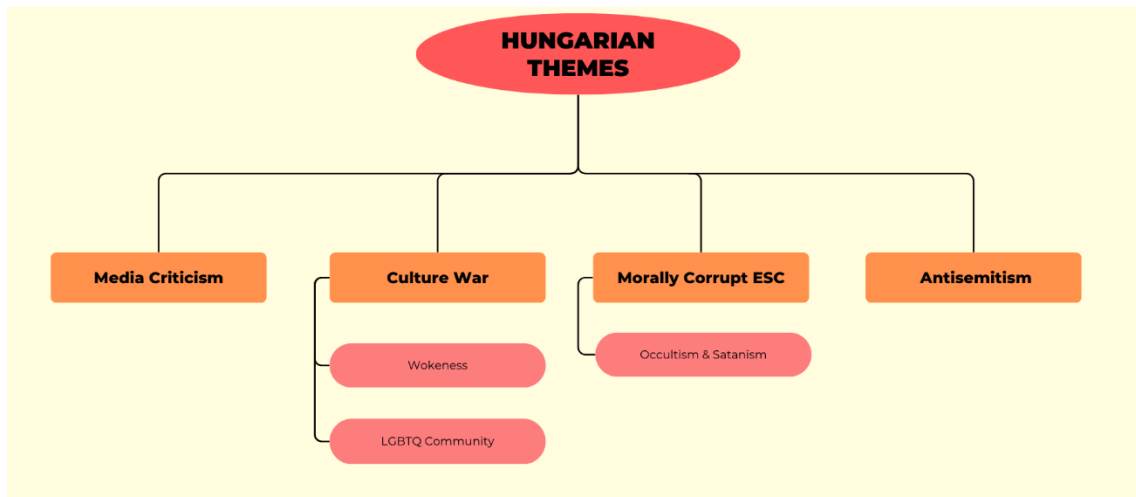
Figure 5 - Emerged themes from the Hungarian data

5.5.1 Media criticism

One of the themes that emerged through the iterative analysis process can be described as *media criticism*. In the Hungarian dataset, media criticism is directed towards the "left-liberal propaganda press" (01_HUN), which, according to Fidesz and its associated media outlets, are spreading fake news about the reasons for Hungary's withdrawal from Eurovision. As described in the introduction of the Hungarian case, the official reason for the withdrawal was never disclosed to the public, and the possible reasons for withdrawal were leaked through anonymous sources who were working at the time for the Hungarian PSM. These information leaks sparked speculations in both independent Hungarian and international media, theorizing that Hungary's withdrawal was due to the growing queer visibility at Eurovision.

The Guardian's article draw attention to Hungary's decision to leave ESC and was even shared on X by Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian member of the European Parliament[17], to which Orbán's spokesperson, Zoltán Kovács, responded this way (*shown in the picture below*):

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[17] Group leader of the Liberals and Democrats at the European Parliament from 2009 until 2019 (guyverhofstadt.eu, n.d.)

Figure 6 - Zoltán Kovács's reaction to the Guardian article (Source: X)

In his response, Kovács calls the "liberal press organs" reporting on the subject "sensational" and declares it as fake news.

In the upcoming days, the PSM broadcaster, M1 News, reported on the aftermath of Hungary's pull-out from ESC, showcasing similar sentiments towards the liberal media outlets. The media attention on Hungary's decision was described as "media hysteria" (02_HUN). In the news reporting, the Guardian article has been discredited by M1 since it was written jointly by a Hungarian and a British journalist, specifically pointing out that Garamvölgyi, one of the authors, is a former journalist at the opposition-linked Népszava (02_HUN). As a result, the article was not viewed as a legitimate foreign opinion, but as a politically influenced piece. The article was translated into Hungarian and published on domestic Hungarian news portals, which was depicted as a well-established method to discredit the public broadcasting:

"'Call the other propagandist, so your own propaganda doesn't get exposed — that's how Western media logic works,' said Zoltán Kiszelly on M1. The political analyst called this method an old trick used by the Guardian and parts of the Hungarian media to discredit Hungarian public broadcasting." *(02_HUN)*

Zoltán Kiszelly, a pro-government political analyst, further stated that the "left-liberal propaganda mess" (01_HUN) exposed itself by proving that "it is in fact the liberal online media that tracks the sexual orientation of performers in certain productions" (02_HUN). Additionally, in the broadcast of M1 it was stated that this was a "full-frontal attack on public media" (03_HUN) and portrayed the liberal media as amplifiers of fake news:

> " [...] the 'limping dog media' does everything it can to divert attention from the scandalous lies being spread against public broadcasting." (02_HUN)

Moreover, not only the Guardian articles was discredited by the PSM, but also the Hungarian portals reporting on the subject:

> "It is telling — and characteristic of Hungary's media dynamics — that the same press circles now attacking public media over Eurovision were previously extremely critical of the event when it was still being broadcast on public television. They previously wrote of 'horrors, sadomasochistic pirates, and corniness.' Now, outrage is sparked because none of it will be aired." (03_HUN)

In the M1 news, several media portals such as 444.hu, Hvg.hu, index.hu and 24.hu were highlighted as previous critics of the ESC, thus discrediting their negative views on Hungary's pull-out from Eurovision. These statements from PSM hence aim to undermine the credibility of these media outputs, which fall under the *delegitimization and exclusion of the journalist* element of *Orbán model* by Griffen (2020). Griffen's model illustrates how media freedom was systematically dismantled in Hungary, and it involves four elements which contributed to the establishment of the current Hungarian media landscape. By underlining the Hungarian co-author of the Guardian article and the prior negative opinion pieces on ESC of the Hungarian liberal news portals, the government-affiliated PSM undermines the credibility of these media outlets and reduces their perceived legitimacy among the public.

In addition, the PSM reporting establishes a clear division between the PSM and the liberal (Hungarian and Western) media. This division evokes an antagonistic relationship between these two groups, in which PSM is described as a victim of a "frontal-attack", while the liberal media is labelled as the "sensational", deceptive aggressor on the Hungarian public media. The *us versus them* sentiment has a significant part in the populist rhetoric, which creates a social and moral division between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004). In this case, the liberal Western and Hungarian media is portrayed as the members of the 'corrupt elite', while the Public Service Media embodies the will of the 'people'. This *us versus them* sentiment is a recurring populist communication strategy in the Hungarian dataset, which overarches on various themes.

5.5.2 Culture War

The second theme explored in this section is the notion of *culture war*. As discussed in the previous theme, the populist rhetoric of *us versus them* resurfaces across multiple themes and narratives, and this theme is no exception. This theme revolves around the narrative that the liberal West ('corrupt elite') imposes its gender ideologies, societal values, and "wokeness" onto Hungarian society ('pure people'). Thus, Hungary is portrayed as the protector of traditional values, while the liberal Western Europe is depicted as an external, elitist force threatening to diminish the country's cultural sovereignty. The ESC provides a platform for the battle of these ideologies and identities on stage, and where West's wokeness, gender, and LGBTQ propaganda is presented on TV screens. The theme of *culture war* will be explained through its sub-themes of *wokeness* and the *LGBTQ community*.

Wokeness

One of the sub-themes focuses on Eurovision being the instrument for woke propaganda by the Western elite. Reflecting on Hungary's withdrawal from ESC and the media attention around it, Zoltán Kiszelly expressed his following thoughts about the topic in his blog post:

> *"The ~~declining~~ progressive West's soft dictatorship operates with refined linguistic and symbolic codes to filter out the ones who think differently.*

Currently, political correctness is in fashion, so anyone who doesn't use its vocabulary or doesn't think and behave accordingly immediately becomes suspicious." (01_HUN)

He describes the West of Europe as a "soft dictatorship" which operates with political correctness (PC), implying in his post that Hungary's withdrawal from the ESC only became suspicious to Western countries since it doesn't follow the "fashion" of political correctness and its terminology. Additionally, PC is described as a practice or principle that is trending in Western societies and presents PC with derogatory undertones. Furthermore, he claims that PC serves an important role at the Eurovision Song Contest as well:

"In a democracy, there are no black cars, but instead, there is public shaming, smear campaigns, Facebook bans, or job dismissals. Political correctness is put on a pedestal — and this is what happens at the Eurovision Song Contest as well, where in the past 4–5 years, it's not talent but the degree to which one conforms to the trends of political correctness that really matters. This new direction began with the victory of the 'bearded lady', Conchita Wurst, in 2014. Since then, the situation has only gotten worse." (01_HUN)

Kiszelly argues that Eurovision has shifted away from being a competition based on musical talent, claiming that since the victory of Conchita Wurst in 2014, it has increasingly centered around political correctness, leading to what he perceives as a steady decline in its artistic and cultural value. He highlights the influence of cancel culture concerning PC and suggests that failure of abiding to its norms could lead to "public shamings, smear campaigns, Facebook bans, or job dismissals" (01_HUN). The phenomenon of political correctness presents a societal shift in norms, which is viewed as "wrong-doing" and populist figures, such as Kiszelly, might perceive it as a threat or even as a violation to their established societal norms and values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). As this example illustrates, cultural shifts, such as changes in the use of language driven by PC, can fuel "cultural backlash" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), leading to resistance against departing from traditional norms.

Attila Farkas, author for a pro-government Hungarian news portal called mandiner.hu, underlines similar notions regarding the ESC:

"The Eurovision Song Contest is one of the most perfectly awful shows: it combines cringe-worthy talentlessness with the most heavy-handed, bottom-of-the-barrel woke propaganda, all dressed up in the gaudiest trappings of parvenu bourgeois tastelessness." (06_HUN)

Similarly to Kiszelly, he highlights the lack of talent among the artists at the competition and views the contest as a platform of "woke propaganda". He even calls Eurovision "bourgeois", which further establishes the ESC as part of the liberal Western elite. To conclude his opinion piece, Farkas described the contest as "politically harmful too" (06_HUN), implying that ESC is an instrument to normalize progressive and woke ideologies of the Western elite.

Overall, in this theme political figures argue that political correctness overtook the song contest, undermining artistic talent and view Eurovision as an ideologically driven event. Both political figures perceive ESC as a "politically harmful" (06_HUN) by imposing "woke propaganda" (06_HUN) on the viewers.

LGBTQ Community

The second sub-theme explores a similar notion to the previous sub-theme, but shifts focus specifically to the portrayal of Eurovision as a vehicle for LGBTQ "propaganda." The acronym of LGBTQ includes understandings of diverse gender and sexualities (Council of Europe, n.d.), with gender identity emerging as a center of attention in the Hungarian dataset.

Returning to the blog post by Zoltán Kiszelly, he expresses support for Hungary's withdrawal from ESC, claiming that victory at Eurovision is only possible for individuals who identify with the queer community or identify with liberal values such as environmentalism:

"And I also think it's a good decision not to take part in a contest where only the "bearded ladies" or the bards of Greta Thunberg's doomsday religion can win anyway." (01_HUN)

"[…]emotions between a man and a woman, wouldn't even stand a chance today unless the lyrics referenced at least three of the 32 different gender identities. […] The pinnacle of political correctness is the 'third-gender restroom' "(01_HUN)

Kiszelly views queerness and climate activism as ideological extremes, reinforcing his view on Eurovision not being an event for artistic celebration, but as a politically charged platform aligned with progressive Western values. He further emphasizes that traditional representations of binary gender roles and heterosexual love are no longer valued at ESC. On a similar note, Attila Farkas draw a comparison between the 2024 Olympics Games opening ceremony and the Eurovision Song Contest, underlining the emphasis on identity politics in the performances - such as racial and queer representation:

"It was the usual, standard, widespread, boring Eurovision Song Contest cultural crap, done without much thought. Trans, queer, dwarf, people of color, etc. — all the usual inclusive-accepting slogans […]." (04_HUN)

Farkas views the visibility of marginalized groups at these mega events as a form of tokenism or as empty symbolism and perceives these events as ideologically driven rather than meaningful or artistic.

Across the theme of culture war, Kiszelly and Farkas's critiques of Eurovision reflect a perceived loss of cultural control. Eurovision is seen as a politically charged event, which has become the place of "woke propaganda". Their resentment towards post-materialistic values such as multiculturalism, environmental protection, and LGBTQ rights aligns with the cultural backlash theory by Norris & Inglehart (2019). The spread of these progressive values triggered a cultural backlash since it imposes a threat to their traditional values and norms, as their values are viewed as 'politically incorrect' (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). This imposed threat of progressive

values can create moral panics among the individuals of a society, which the next theme will uncover in further detail.

5.5.3 Morally Corrupt ESC

As outlined in the previous theme, the perceived threat of progressive values and interests can generate moral panics within a society, which is a social reaction triggered by specific phenomena, anxieties or people (Cohen, 2011). The theme of *morally corrupt ESC* examines the perception that Eurovision is the source of moral decline. From the *culture war* theme, two predominant moral threats have already surfaced in the form of wokeness and LGBTQ "propaganda", which are further reinforced as a site of moral concern by Farkas:

"But they could have put anything on stage — as long as there's woke and LGBTQ, the Eastern press will write the same thing anyway, because it's another proof of the decaying West's rot, and this kind of stuff is like bread and butter to them." (04_HUN)

He highlights the contest's ideological function and sees the visibility of liberal values as the "proof of the decaying West's rot" (04_HUN). In his view, these representations are not cultural expressions, but rather a confirmation of Western societies' moral decline. Another author, working under the writer's pseudonym 'Paranoid Android', expressed a similar concern regarding the identity-based representation in the entertainment industry as well as at Eurovision:

"But today, almost every Black person (and Black character) in the entertainment industry is where they are — even if they're talented — because they're Black. And it's the same with all the non-binary people. It's incredibly embarrassing, for every talented and normal person out there.

Nothing humiliates untalented people in any given field more than the current trend, where they're treated like divine miracles because of a few psychiatric conditions." (05_HUN)

In this statement, the author portrays non-binary identities as not a valid form of identity expression and even refers to this gender identity as "psychiatric conditions" (05_HUN). By contrasting non-binary people with "talented and normal" people, the author reinforces the heteronormative worldview, where deviation from binary gender and traditional values could be conveyed as a moral threat. In a podcast episode, Ádám Varga and Emília Vince voice similar sentiments concerning the representation of diverse gender identities on stage, specifically referring to Barbie Thug's 2024 performance at Eurovision:

> "**Varga**: But it all started with the Irish satanic, transgender dance group. If you watch the performance, you see all these strange people with horns, dressed up like demons — or demons disguised as people. Or the other way around. Something like that. And I think they were trans too. And even being a trans demon isn't enough anymore to win.
>
> **Vince:** Honestly, I'm just glad we jumped off that ship. I mean, maybe not in time, but still. What even is this? What on Earth is going on?" (11_HUN)

Varga describes the performance as "satanic" and suggests that the performers' appearance and gender expressions are morally corrupt, even saying that they might be "demons disguised as people" (11_HUN). They view Bambie Thug's religiously charged artistic and queer expression as a moral threat to the traditional, Christian values of Hungary's society.

Satanism, wokeness and LGBTQ identities are perceived as moral threats by the Fidesz-affiliated political media actors, and they are blamed for threatening Hungary's national sovereignty. According to the Moral Panic Theory by Cohen (2011), these perceived moral threats emerge from 'folk devils' who are portrayed as the source of moral decline, in the context of Eurovision, folk devils are performers (such as Nemo, Conchita Wurst and Bambie Thug) who represent progressive, liberal values on an international stage. Furthermore, this construction of moral threats closely aligns with Taggart's concept of the "heartland", which is a utopian conception of a culturally unified, sovereign nation. From the populist rhetoric, the West's liberal values act as a symbolic threat to the imagined heartland, resulting

in moral concern. Therefore, ESC becomes not only a stage for a song contest, but also a site where the values of the heartland are attacked by liberalism. To explore in more depth the construction of the moral panic by Hungarian political actors, these moral threats will be examined in the frame analysis.

Before delving into the final Hungarian theme of this analysis, it is important to briefly consider Fidesz's broader stance on the perceived moral threats stemming from the West. As noted in the case introduction and sub-chapter 5.4, since Hungary's withdrawal from the ESC, members of the ruling party have largely avoided referencing Eurovision directly in their political communication. However, their legislative actions (such as the anti-LGBTQ law, and the recent ban on Pride) along with their communication concerning queer politics, provides an insight on their stance on queer and specifically gender visibility at Eurovision.

Following the chronological order of the data, two years after Hungary's withdrawal from ESC, the topic of gender and sexual identities was addressed by PSM broadcaster in the following way:

> *"In several Western European countries, identity-based lifestyles are being promoted, while the traditional family model is being pushed into the background. According to experts, one reason for this is that child protection laws in Western Europe are on shaky ground. Brussels would also force Hungary to allow gender changes for children. Hungarians may be the first in Europe to vote on aggressive LGBTQ propaganda targeting children — details are coming up." (09_HUN)*

In this segment from M1, the state broadcaster suggests that identity-based lifestyles and gender expressions are a threat to children and traditional family values, and it claims that such visibility stems from weak child protection laws in Western Europe. The broadcaster portrays queer visibility as a form of "propaganda", reinforcing the moral panic narrative and positioning Hungary as a defender ('pure people') against the liberal, morally corrupt influence of Brussels ('corrupt elite'). This rhetoric demonstrates Hungary's increasingly Eurosceptic standpoint, in which the protection of national sovereignty and cultural purity ('heartland') is contrasted with the perceived moral decay of the West. Hungary's role as a bastion of traditional values is further reinforced by the political director of the prime minister, Balázs Orbán's statement from May 2024 concerning the upcoming celebration of Pride Month:

Figure 7 - Balázs Orbán's social media post
(Source: X)

In terms of recent developments in the Hungarian government's efforts to protect its values against "gender" and "LGBTQ propaganda" (13_HUN; 09_HUN), a significant milestone was reached when, in March 2025, a law was passed prohibiting Pride marches. When asked about the reasoning behind this decision in an interview, Máté Kocsis, leader of the Fidesz parliamentary group, responded the following:

"Perhaps the organizers themselves are aware that what they do year after year on Andrássy Avenue irritates the majority of society. Abnormality provokes normality. So we await proposals on this. The government is planning several constitutional amendments — for example, enshrining the idea that a man is a man, a woman is a woman, and that children's right to healthy development could override other fundamental rights. Would this be the justification for a ban? Child protection is paramount under all circumstances." (07_HUN)

Kocsis portrays Pride as not a celebration of the LGBTQ community and its achievements on legal rights, but as a provocation against the moral norms of the "majority of society" (07_HUN). In the name of child protection, he suggests that the binary gender definitions should be established in the constitutional amendments to provide "the right to healthy development" (07_HUN) for children. This discontent with the queer community shows how bodies and identities become objects of political control, with biopower (Foucault, 1978) exercised through regulatory actions such as the ban on Pride. Furthermore, the statement of "Abnormality provokes normality" (07_HUN), illustrates biopower by showing how the state enforces what they call "normal" identities and controls bodies through constitutional laws and moral justifications like child protection to regulate what it defines as "abnormal". As demonstrated in the previous statements from political figures, the LGBTQ community is perceived as a threat to the heteronormative structures and traditional family values.

To summarize, by examining the broader political communication of the Hungarian ruling party, moral threats to traditional values were identified as satanism, woke and LGBTQ propaganda. Due to the continuous mentions of these subjects in public discourse, Fidesz sustains moral panic and polarizes Hungarian society with its Eurosceptic populist rhetoric. Ultimately, the public discourse around LGBTQ rights becomes a symbolic battleground where national sovereignty and moral values are contested.

5.5.4 Antisemitism in context of 2024 Eurovision

The final theme which will be explored regarding the perceived antisemitism at previous year's Eurovision Song Contest. Even though this theme appears less frequently than the previously discussed themes of the Hungarian data, it is still relevant to be examined to understand how Eurovision has been constructed recently by the Fidesz-affiliated media actors. As noted in the Swiss thematic analysis, Eurovision 2024 became a site of political controversy due to the participation of Israel during the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict. During the live shows in Malmö, the singer representing Israel, Eden Golan got booed on stage by some of the audience members to which Ádám Varga commented on, in his podcast:

"And then there's the fact that the Israeli contestant got booed. That's wild. The world has turned upside down. It used to be: "We're not anti-Israel, we're not anti-Semitic, we just support the Palestinians." But this? This is no longer subtle — this is open anti-Semitism.

She was booed on stage like she was personally guilty of something — just for being Israeli. That's collective guilt. Might as well have pinned a yellow star on her so everyone could see. It's a recurring pattern in history." (11_HUN)

Varga interprets the audience's reaction to the performance as "open anti-Semitisim", drawing parallels between the public shaming of Golan and historical instances of collective punishment as well as Jewish discrimination of the WWII. His comments evoke a strong historical analogy, mentioning the yellow star, the symbol of the Holocaust. Varga portrays the incident as part of a broader and recurring pattern of anti-Jewish sentiment in Europe and draws another connection to the Holocaust by comparing the following incident to Schindler's List:

"Then there's the Finnish contestant. He got attacked online because a backstage video leaked of him dancing a silly TikTok dance with the Israeli performer. People told him to be ashamed — just for dancing with a Jew. This is like Schindler's List — you touch a Jewish person and get three days in solitary. It's ridiculous." (11_HUN)

He draws a connection between online shaming and the logic of antisemitism in the Holocaust-era. This incident regarding the public shaming of the Finnish contestant is viewed as the proof for the rising antisemitic sentiment in Europe, which further reinforces the idea of the declining West.

As previously mentioned, the thematic analysis served as an analytical funnel, condensing the data and revealing the prominent themes within the dataset. In the following section, frame analysis will be applied to explore in greater depth how these themes are strategically constructed and utilized in Fidesz's political communication.

5.6 Hungary - Frame analysis

Through the implementation of the thematic analysis on the Hungarian dataset, the findings of the data were narrowed down to four themes, and it revealed the main key topics around Eurovision in Fidesz's narrative. To discover how these themes are framed in their political narrative, the four functions of framing by Entman (1993) was applied to the established four themes, which will be explained in further details in the following segment of this study.

5.6.1 Liberal media framing PSM

As noted in the analysis of the theme *media criticism*, the liberal media is portrayed as the source for spreading fake news regarding Hungary's withdrawal from ESC. Regarding the *problem definition*, liberal media, both in Hungary and Western Europe, are framed as the distributors of fake news about Hungary and as the initiators of a "full-frontal attack on public media" (03_HUN).

As for the *cause diagnosis*, his notion is framed as part of the broader attempt by liberal media to promote their ideological agenda and force it onto Hungarian society. This ideological agenda is referred to as the "left-liberal propaganda mess" (01_HUN), which is perceived to enforce a "sensational, liberal storyline" (14_HUN) regarding Hungary's decision to leave the ESC. The liberal media is addressed as the "limping dog media" (02_HUN) which caused a "media hysteria" (02_HUN) by spreading their "scandalous lies" (02_HUN) and speculations about the topic. The aforementioned quotes from the dataset illustrate the Hungarian government's populist and sovereigntist rhetoric with a combatant tone against criticism (Csehi & Zgut, 2021). By using words with strong undertones such as 'hysteria', 'limping dog' and 'full-frontal attack', they evoke strong affective and emotional response in the readers.

The *moral judgment* in this frame emerges through the portrayal of liberal journalists as untrustworthy, ideologically biased actors who engage in sensationalism and misinformation. These journalists are depicted not as neutral actors in media but as active participants in a cultural and political campaign against Hungary's public service media. They are framed as intentionally aiming to

discredit the legitimacy of state institutions, in this case the Hungarian Public Service Media. By highlighting their alleged bias and alignment with "left-liberal propaganda" (01_HUN), pro-government voices construct liberal media as morally corrupt whose critiques are not credible. This frame aim is to discredit external as well as internal criticism in the country and reinforce the perception that Hungary's PSM is under attack from external forces such as Western liberal media.

By delegitimizing critical voices in the media and undermining the credibility of these media sources, the government-aligned media is portrayed as the trustworthy media source in the Hungarian media landscape. The *treatment suggestion* surfaces in the form of delegitimization of liberal media actors by questioning their objectivity, highlighting their alleged biases and suggesting the public to reject their narratives as foreign-influenced forces or disconnected from Hungarian values. Moreover, this frame portrays PSM as the trustworthy media source, who defends the national sovereignty by shielding the Hungarian public from ideological influences.

5.6.2 Eurovision as "cultural crap"

The two themes of *culture war* and *morally corrupt ESC* of the Hungarian data will be analyzed together, as there is a significant overlap in both the blame attribution and the framing of ESC in these themes. As discussed in the thematic analysis, these themes revolve around the topic of ESC being a platform for woke and LGBTQ propaganda for the Western European countries. Concerning the *problem definition* of this frame, ESC is framed as a "cultural crap" (04_HUN), a stage for ideological propaganda for the West. Furthermore, ESC is also framed as a culturally invasive event where ideologies play a bigger role in winning than meritocracy and talent. According to this frame, Eurovision is characterized by its woke and gender ideology, queer visibility and the gradual erosion of traditional values and moral norms.

The *cause diagnosis* in this frame identifies the liberal West as the primary actor responsible for the perceived cultural decline at ESC. The Western European countries are framed as the forceful exporters of their woke and LGBTQ propaganda through the publicity of Eurovision. In this narrative, Western

countries are constructed as *folk devils* (Cohen, 2011), whose actions are seen as morally corrupt. This framing is especially amplified concerning entries coming from the queer community representing progressive, liberal values such as Nemo and Bambie Thug, who through this framing become the symbol of the West's ideological "propaganda". By constructing the West as the morally wrong folk devil in contrast with Hungary being the defender of the traditional values, this narrative reinforces the populist *us versus. them* binary rhetoric. This populist dichotomy between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004) is enhanced with the usage of emotionally charged language such as "declining West" (01_HUN), "cultural crap" (04_HUN), "aggressive LGBTQ propaganda" (09_HUN), "idiotic Brussels politicians" (10_HUN). The utilization of emotionally charged rhetoric produces two antagonistic groups in which Hungary is associated with virtue and purity, while the Western European countries are associated with moral decline and threat to the Hungarian society. Therefore, this language use simplifies complex issues into easily digestible moral conflicts. Furthermore, the continuous use of emotionally charged language over the years demonstrates and reinforces the notion that Fidesz intentionally sustains the polarization of the public discourse in the Hungarian society (Polyák, 2019), as well as "engineers" moral panic in Hungary through the media.

The *moral judgement* in this frame is that the Hungarian traditional values and national sovereignty is being under attack. The queer visibility, specifically non-binary identities on the ESC stage are linked to the perceived moral decline of the West, which is posing a threat to children as well as to the Hungarian traditional family model. As in the previous frame function, the use of emotion-filled language plays an important part in evoking strong feelings such as fear, disgust or anger, triggering moral panic as a response to the perceived threat (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Terms like "global attack on national idea" (10_HUN), "woke propaganda" (06_HUN), "decaying West's rot" (04_HUN) all contribute to the enhanced urgency and justify political responses to the perceived threat. By sticking negative emotions to particular bodies or ideologies, they are constructed as threats in the eyes of the public (Ahmed, 2014). To further illustrate the impact of emotionally charged language and framing, the following statement by Zoltán Kiszelly will be analyzed within the historical and cultural context of Hungary:

"In a democracy, there are no black cars, but instead, there is public shaming, smear campaigns, Facebook bans, or job dismissals. Political correctness is put on a pedestal — and this is what happens at the Eurovision Song Contest as well, where in the past 4–5 years, it's not talent but the degree to which one conforms to the trends of political correctness that really matters." (01_HUN)

By referencing "black cars", Kiszelly draws a parallel between Hungary's communist past and the cancel culture of today's society. In Hungary, black cars carry political and historical connotations, since they were widely used by the ÁVH (State Protection Authority), the secret political police of the communist regime, and they became the symbol of fear and authority. From the perspective of Affect Theory (Ahmed, 2004), the reference to black cars taps into the collective Hungarian memory, in which the feeling of fear and anxiety are utilized to frame cancel culture as a new form of ideological enforcement. This emotional resonance constructs cancel culture not merely as a social phenomenon but as a continuation of historical trauma, tied to repression and authoritarian control.

Furthermore, the journalist of Pesti Srácok sticks negative emotions to non-binary and Black people concerning their visibility in the entertainment industry, including ESC (*see 05_HUN*). In the author's statement, Black and non-binary people are constructed undeserving of their platforms and used for mere tokenism, thus discrediting their achievements in the industry and portraying it as only identity-based partiality. This connects with Stevenson's (2003) notion of "cultural citizenship", which emphasizes the right to cultural representation and inclusion in the life of a society. The journalist's narrative denies these individuals' full cultural citizenship by undermining their legitimacy as contributors to public culture, and it frames their visibility as a threat to traditional norms. Additionally, it also depicts 'normality' under threat and displaced in today's world which connects to Foucault's concept of biopower (1978). According to his concept, the human body and especially sexuality can become objects of power. In this case, non-binary identities are referred to as "psychiatric conditions" (05_HUN) thus delegitimizing non-normative identities and reinforcing the binary gender view. This way non-

binary people are framed as unhealthy, illegitimate members of the society, thereby establishing who present a threat to the social norms of Hungary. This reaction can be seen as part of cultural backlash against the progressive cultural shift in society and at ESC, reflecting a desire to reassert control over the perceived normalcy and familiar traditional norms (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

The *treatment suggestion* emerges in the form of "child protection [..] under all circumstances" (07_HUN), and the preservation of Hungarian traditional values and norms. Fidesz-affiliated figures approve of Hungary's decision to leave ESC, framing the event as morally corrupt. This sentiment is demonstrated in statements such as "*Honestly, I'm glad we're out of this circus*" (11_HUN) and "*I also think it's a good decision not to take part in a contest where only the 'bearded ladies' or the bards of Greta Thunberg's doomsday religion can win anyway.*" (01_HUN). ESC is framed as the embodiment of liberal, progressive values and ideologies, hence Hungary's withdrawal from the contest is framed as necessary for the survival of national sovereignty and traditional values.

5.6.3 Eurovision enabling open antisemitism

The final frame analysis will be carried out on the theme of antisemitism at ESC. As explained in the thematic analysis, this theme revolves around the perceived open antisemitism at the ESC 2024 by the pro-government media sources. Regarding the *problem definition*, Eurovision is framed as a platform where antisemitism can be exercised against Israeli entries. The hostile reception of Eden Golan, the Israeli contestant, exemplifies the issue of antisemitism on the international stage of Eurovision.

The *cause diagnosis* in this frame identifies the morally declining West as the enabler of antisemitic sentiment at the contest. This perception reinforces an already established narrative in Fidesz-affiliated media, in which Western institutions are framed as ideologically corrupt and hostile to fundamental values. Ádám Varga, in his podcast underlines this view by suggesting that the professional jury's evaluation of Eden Golan's performance was based on political biases and not on artistic values:

"And then, the professional jury gave her zero points. Zero. Why? Because of where she's from? Or because she didn't perform well? But she did perform well — the audience even placed her fifth! So what's the reason for the zero? It's insane." (11_HUN)

He claims that Golan was denied points by the jury because of her Israeli nationality, despite public voting placing her in fifth position on the leaderboard. His statement highlights this perceived difference between public and jury opinion or judgment on the performance, reinforcing the idea that ESC, and especially the juries, are ideologically and politically driven rather than basing it on merit and talent.

The *moral judgement* of this frame is that ESC is not only politically biased, but also scandalous and harmful, by promoting collective guilt and a recurring pattern of anti-Jewish sentiment in Europe. Similarly, to the previous frame, there is a parallel drawn between the public shaming of Eden Golan and the historical instances of Jewish persecution, in this case the parallel is drawn to Holocaust. By mentioning the emotionally charged symbols such as the "yellow star" and "Schindler's List" (11_HUN), Varga taps into the collective Hungarian memory as well as European memory, in which the feeling of fear and outrage are utilized to invoke national empathy toward Israel. Drawing on the Affect Theory (Ahmed, 2004), by mentioning these affective symbols, the author seeks to show empathy for Israel, therefore constructing solidarity through invoking emotions with the use of affective language.

The *treatment suggestion* function is not explicitly stated in the Hungarian dataset. However, since ESC is perceived as a politically and morally harmful event, it is implied that Hungary should keep distancing itself from ESC and framing the withdrawal from Eurovision as justified decision.

5.7 Cross-case comparison

After having carried out the thematic analysis and understood the strategic framing at play for each case, key strategic framing patterns within each context emerged from the data analysis. By examining these frames, the socio-political climates of the respective countries provided context to understand how media criticism, cultural debates, populist rhetoric, and language choices are strategically utilized.

In the following sections, the individual case analyses will be systematically compared through their identified frames, highlighting both similarities and differences.

5.7.1 Contextual differences

Before the comparison of the frames, it is important to highlight the contextual differences between the cases of Hungary and Switzerland, particularly in terms of their historical relationship with the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), as well as their geopolitical and temporal contexts.

Regarding their history with Eurovision, while Switzerland, located in Central Europe, is one of the founding members of ESC and still participates in the contest today, Hungary, situated in Eastern Europe, joined after the fall of the Iron Curtain and withdrew from the competition in 2020. Even though the examined political figures in both countries criticize ESC due to its perceived role in the promotion of woke and gender ideologies, only Hungary has withdrawn from the Song Contest. Switzerland is not only still a participant but also became the host country for ESC 2025 by winning the competition in 2024. In the case of Switzerland, ESC provides a stage for political discussions, such as the criticism towards SRG (public service media) and its misuse of taxpayers' money, however the withdrawal from the Song Contest is never mentioned as a solution.

In terms of the characteristics of the collected data, differences emerged in both the type and volume of accessible material. While the Swiss dataset consists of various types of data such as official press releases, political statements and social

media posts, the Hungarian dataset was more limited in scope to the Swiss dataset and mainly composed of newspaper articles from government affiliated media outlets (*see sub-chapter 5.4*) and social media posts from politicians from the ruling political party Fidesz. As a final note, each case was introduced in depth in the methodology chapter (*see sub-chapter 3.2.2*) with attention to their respective political and media landscapes, as well as their historical also in context within the Eurovision Song Contest.

With these contextual differences in mind, the following section compares the main frames surrounding Eurovision and findings across the two cases of Hungary and Switzerland.

5.7.2 Media Criticism

Both cases involved media criticism, framing the ESC in general as a negative phenomenon for society. However, the Public Service Media is framed differently in their political communication: The Swiss case centers on national media accountability, specifically targeting the Public Service Media (SRG) and framing it as a morally corrupt and internally problematic establishment. In contrast, the Hungarian data criticizes liberal Western media and frames it as an external threat, emphasizing cultural protectionism against perceived Westernization. Hence, the Hungarian framing is wider in scope, also considering global influences. The difference in the framing of PSM is due to the contrasting media and political landscape in the case studies' countries. In the Hungarian case, PSM is closely tied to the ruling Fidesz party and given Hungary's withdrawal from the ESC, media criticism is directed towards other mediums such as liberal foreign news platforms and domestic liberal media actors.

The same applies therefore to the strategic framing of the Eurovision Song Contest. While in Switzerland the SVP and the EDU mention the contest in the context of general PSM criticism, namely the ideological driven content of such, in Hungary, the ESC symbolizes Western influence. Consequently, the cause diagnosis diverges: in Switzerland, the blame lies with the left and the SRG and their agenda, while in Hungary, it is attributed to Western elites and liberal agendas. Thus, the

Swiss media is framed as internally corrupted, while Hungarian media is seen as corrupted from the outside by Western ideologies.

However, in both cases, regardless of their actions, the criticized media outlets and particularly the Eurovision Song Contest itself are labelled as "propaganda" (*see 12_SWI, 01_HUN*). This indicates that in both countries, these media entities are perceived not just as biased but as deliberately manipulating public opinion, like propaganda, to advance particular political or cultural narratives.

Although both cases associate the ESC with moral decline and describe it as not being about music anymore, they differ in the perception of the artistic value. In the statements from Swiss political parties, there was acknowledgement of Nemo as a talented artist, while Hungary dismisses the entire event as a talentless show.

5.7.3 Culture War, Identity Politics, and Queer Visibility

The cultural war as an overarching frame is evident in both analyzed cases. Therefore, in both contexts, there is a conflict between traditional - "rightful" - value and progressive changes. In both cases, figures like Nemo and also Bambie Thug are presented as "fighters" of this cultural war. They are thereby not only seen as artists and performers, but as symbols and representatives of those left war initiators. In this way, their visibility and public performance are framed as acts of provocation or confrontation. Furthermore, in both cases the threatened traditional norms are tightly connected to religion and specifically to Christianity. For example, in Switzerland the outrage was particularly directed at the interactions between Bambie Thug and Nemo at the ESC 2024, where Nemo was crowned by Bambie Thug with a crown of thorns, symbolically invoking Christian imagery. This act was interpreted as mocking billions of Christians worldwide (20_SWI). Meanwhile, in Hungary, Bambie Thug and their dancers are depicted as "demons disguised as people" (11_HUN). In this use of language, the demonization of queer visibility surfaced. Hence, despite small contextual differences, both cases present Bambie Thug and Nemo as contesting Christian values. In both narratives, the cultural war is thereby linked to religious nationalism, illustrating how religion can be utilized to define boundaries of national inclusion and exclusion (Friedland & Moss, 2016).

Although moral decline and threatened Christian values are inherent to both data sets, the cause diagnosis - the framing of those who are to blame - differs. In Hungary, the narrative is within a broader nationalist narrative. The cultural threats are seen as symbols of foreign cultural imperialism, primarily associated with Western influence, the EU, and Brussels. The blame is directed clearly: Progressive values are not domestic evolutions, but rather foreign impositions that threaten the national cultural identity. On the other hand, in the Swiss case a domestic ideological crisis appears rather than an externally driven attack. Considering the political context in a broader sense, this framing aligns with the fact that Switzerland is not an EU-member state.

There was not only a difference between the political parties in the blame attribution for the perceived moral decline, but also in the way in which the language was used in their political communication. While in the case of Hungary, emotionally charged language is utilized as part of the populist war rhetoric, by using terms like "full-frontal attack" (03_HUN) and "global attack on national idea" (10_HUN). In the case of Switzerland, there is a relatively lighter tone in their rhetoric, highlighting emotions such as disgust and discomfort. The war rhetoric is quite prominent in the Hungarian government's communication, in which they emphasize the need to unite people to fight a crisis (Sata, 2023). In the context of Eurovision, the government affiliated media utilizes a similar language by incorporating words such as "full-frontal attack" (03_HUN), "to force" (09_HUN) and "aggressive LGBTQ propaganda" (09_HUN), emphasizing the urgency of the perceived crisis. Even though Switzerland also uses terms such as "left-wing culture war" (01_SWI), the rhetoric of the Swiss data revolves around the sense of discomfort and disapproval regarding queer visibility at ESC. In the Swiss political actors' communication, they express their disapproval by claiming that ESC is a "woke freak show" (04_SWI) and "bizarre spectacle" (11_SWI).

Overall, in both cases, queer visibility is framed within the broader cultural war narrative. In this narrative the ESC is not only portrayed as the place where this cultural war plays out on stage but also constructed as the symbol of overall moral decline. Political figures from both Hungary and Switzerland emphasize the

importance of protecting Christian values against the perceived threat of "woke ideologies" (11_SWI). However, the two cases diverge in their cause diagnosis and rhetorical strategies. On one hand, in the Hungarian case the threat is framed as an external moral invasion to Hungarian society, conveyed through a militarized and emotionally charged rhetoric. On the other hand, in the Swiss case the threat is identified stemming from internal societal changes, expressed through a more restrained and disapproving tone.

5.7.4 Populism

As noted in the previous frame comparison, in both cases there is a perceived threat identified in the form of moral decline, however the blame is attributed towards different actors. Through blame attribution, in each case two opposing groups are established, creating the dichotomy between *us versus them* (Mudde, 2004). The *us versus them* rhetoric is the key feature in populism, which is very clearly implemented in both of their political communication styles. As previously discussed, a key difference in their populist rhetoric lies in how each constructs the figure of the 'corrupt elite'. In the case of Hungary, the 'us' or in other words 'the pure people' represent the Hungarian society with traditional and nationalist values, whereas 'them' or the 'corrupt elite' comprises the external forces of the Western countries and Brussels as the embodiment of the EU with their liberal, progressive values. In contrast, the 'us' consists of the ordinary taxpayers and conservative citizens in Switzerland, while 'them' is represented by the public service broadcaster (SRG), leftist elites, and the tax-wasting establishment. Hence, in Hungary the attribution of blame is concerning external actors and establishments, while in Switzerland the blame is directed towards internal forces. Through the utilization of a populist political style, the political figures in both cases try to appeal to masses, and with their emotionally charged rhetoric and depiction of threat they insert a sense of urgency to mobilize support (Moffitt, 2016). The combination of blame attribution, framing and emotionally charged communication style are prominent characteristics of populist political communication (Hameleers et al., 2017), which can be clearly recognized in both the Hungarian and Swiss data.

Even though the political actors from the two countries attribute blame to different players in politics and society, in both contexts the populist rhetoric frames progressive, cultural changes as a threat to the established moral order, aligning with the concept of cultural backlash described by Brubaker (2017) and Norris & Inglehart (2019). Populist parties such as Fidesz in Hungary and EDU in Switzerland capitalize on cultural backlash as a result of the societal norm shifts and position themselves as the defenders of traditional, Christian values and heteronormative norms.

Despite the differences in their blame attribution, both narratives draw on the cultural backlash phenomenon, leveraging on public anxiety about changing social norms to create a clear divide between 'the people' and 'the elite'.

5.7.5 Moral Panic

As outlined in the previous frame comparisons, in both cases a populist rhetoric is utilized, however they target different actors with their communication strategies. These targeted figures are portrayed as the source of moral decline, and they are depicted as *folk devils* (Goode et al., 2009). As a threat to the society's culture, these folk devils in Hungary and Switzerland evoke fright and anxiety in people due to perceived threat to their values and norms. Moral panics (Cohen, 1972) along with the aforementioned cultural backlash (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) have a significant role in populist narratives, as they help construct a sense of moral crisis by amplifying perceived threats to traditional values, thereby justifying reinforcing and *us vs. them* dichotomy central to the populist rhetoric. In the Hungarian case, moral panic is continuously sustained throughout the years by framing the West (by extension the Eurovision) as a vehicle for promoting woke and gender ideology. In contrast, the Swiss case showcases a relatively recent emergence of moral panic within the context of Eurovision 2024, focusing on defending Christian values in response to what is interpreted as satanic expressions on stage. This recent emergence of moral panic concerning ESC in Switzerland could be due to Switzerland's role as the host of ESC 2025, since it has sparked public debate around the event's financial burden and potential security risks as a reaction to the ESC in 2024.

Despite the difference in their construction of folk devils, both portray the ESC as a strategic tool for ideological imposition. The perceived threats in both cases focus on issues of gender and sexuality, which frequently serve as focal points of moral concern and public debate. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) argue, such issues often function as triggers for moral panics. The two examined cases of Hungary and Switzerland demonstrate how matters of sexuality become the site of moral concern, through which broader cultural and political insecurities are contested.

5.7.6 Antisemitism

The recent political developments in Israel, and particularly its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have raised questions regarding its participation in ESC (EBU, 2025).
The Israeli participation in ESC 2024 and in the recently held ESC 2025 has sparked controversy, prompting protests in host cities prior to the Song Contest. This heightened tension at the Eurovision arena was perceived by Swiss and Hungarian political figures as proof of the rising antisemitic sentiment at ESC. Both cases frame ESC as a platform where antisemitic incidents are tolerated, however they differ in their scope and emphasis.

In the Hungarian case, the recent incidents at ESC are interpreted as evidence for broader, escalating antisemitic and anti-Jewish sentiment across Europe. This perspective positions Hungary as the defender of the traditional Judeo-Christian values against a hostile, secular, and morally corrupt West. The narrative thus plays into a broader populist logic of *us versus them*.

In comparison, the Swiss narrative implements a more limited perspective, focusing primarily on the presence of antisemitic expressions within ESC itself. Moreover, the Swiss narrative centers on the potential security risks posed by these heightened tensions in light of Switzerland's role as host of ESC 2025. Here, antisemitism is framed not as a structural European-wide issue, but as a practical risk for domestic public safety. Nonetheless, this framing still plays into an *us vs. them* logic: 'us', the responsible taxpayers and concerned citizens, versus 'them', the organizers, cultural elites, and outsiders who risk security by tolerating antisemitic sentiments.

5.7.7 Summary

The cross-case comparison of Hungary and Switzerland uncovers how Eurovision is framed through populist narratives. Both cases portray ESC as a vehicle for ideological imposition, especially concerning gender, sexuality and liberal values, which are framed as moral threats to traditional, Christian norms. Despite the differences in rhetorical strategies, blame attribution and context, both cases demonstrate how populist and moral panic narratives mobilize cultural and moral concerns, therefore positioning ESC as a battleground for broader ideological struggles. The summary of the cross-case comparison is presented below in the form of a figure:

Aspect	HUNGARY	SWITZERLAND
ESC Participation	Withdrew from ESC after 2020	Founding member, still participating, host in 2025
Media Criticism	Criticism of liberal Western media (external), focus on cultural protection	Criticism of SRG (public broadcaster, internal), misuse of taxpayer money
Cultural Conflict	ESC as a symbol of Western values, threat of foreign influence	ESC as a stage for domestic cultural debates, criticism of "woke" content
Queer Visibility	Demonization, seen as attack on Christian values, emotionally charged language	Visibility seen as provocation, but less aggressive language, focus on discomfort
Populist Rhetoric	"Us" (Hungarian people) vs. "Them" (Western/liberal elites, EU)	"Us" (taxpayers, conservatives) vs. "Them" (SRG, left-wing elites, establishment)
Moral Panic	Persistent panic over Western "gender ideology", ESC as a threat	More recent panic triggered by ESC 2025, focus on costs, safety, and values
Antisemitism Framing	ESC as evidence of growing antisemitism in Europe	Focus on antisemitic incidents in the ESC context and related security risks
Blame Attribution	External actors (EU, West, Brussels)	Internal actors (SRG, the left, "tax money wasters")
Rhetoric	Militarized, emotional, mobilizing	More restrained, expression of disgust and disapproval

Figure 8 - Summary of the cross-case comparison

VI.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how right-wing populist parties from Switzerland and Hungary frame the Eurovision Song Contest in their strategic political communication, with particular focus on populism, cultural narratives and identity politics.

Unlike other research on the ESC, the research revealed insights into the main strategic political communication regarding the Eurovision Song Contest by right-wing populist political parties in both Hungary and Switzerland. It surfaced from the analysis that those political actors in both countries use Eurovision as a platform to promote their standpoints such as anti-queer sentiments, media critique or even anti-Western narratives as in the case of Hungary.

Hence, rather than treating Eurovision merely as a musical competition, a song contest, these actors construct it as a threat to national-traditional identity, morality, and security. As the cross-case comparison revealed, the strategic framing is thereby often similar, such as the perceived threat to national values, discontent with queer visibility at the ESC and overall perceived moral decline at the contest due to blamed artists such as Nemo or Bambie Thug. While these findings are often similar, Hungary's framing emphasized queer visibility as a moral decay linked to Western liberalism and Western media, Switzerland's discourse focused more on national security and domestic media wrongdoings in terms of the promotion of a left-wing cultural agenda. The findings showcase how right-wing parties use Eurovision to clearly separate 'the people' from 'the elite'. In Hungary, 'the elite' was constructed as Western liberal actors and the EU; in Switzerland, it included mainly the public broadcaster SRG. These differences highlight how the same event can be framed according to each country's political goals and anxieties.

The strategic framing analyzed within the research comes with broader implications. The active *politicization of the ESC* in favor of the political actors' agenda shows how cultural events can be leveraged to advance political agendas and profit from the massive platform in terms of audience outreach and media attention that the ESC provides. Furthermore, such political communication has an *impact on minority communities,* who view the contest as a 'safe space'. The framed association of Eurovision with moral decline and threats to 'cherished' values often targets LGBTQ communities, potentially exacerbating societal divisions and marginalization. From a *transnational perspective*, the similar utilization of the Eurovision stage by populist parties in different countries, Switzerland and Hungary, points to a cross-border pattern in populist communication and illustrates how international events can be used for national political narratives.

During the analysis, one particularly surprising finding was the extent to which religious, specifically Christian, identities are perceived as threatened and mocked by queer artistic expression at the ESC. Especially in the Swiss case, this finding reveals an undercurrent of religious nationalism. The Eurovision Song Contest was not only portrayed as a site of cultural and moral decline but was at times framed through a lens of religious morality, with references to satanism and occultism. In the Hungarian context, the Christian sentiment was also a recurrent theme but was more closely linked to queerness and LGBTQ visibility at the ESC. Here, the event was depicted as incompatible with "traditional Christian values," positioning LGBTQ rights as a symbol of Western moral decay. The difference between the Swiss and Hungarian cases highlight the transnational flexibility of populist communication: depending on the national context, similar events can be infused with distinctly different symbolic and emotional meanings. Furthermore, a notable aspect within the religious context of both cases was the presence of strong accusations of antisemitism by certain ESC artists and fans in 2024. In both contexts, antisemitism becomes a rhetorical resource used to delegitimize 'the other side', strongly linked to the overall present *us versus them* sentiment.

6.1 Contribution to the academic field

As described in the introduction of the discussion chapter, this section will explore how the findings of this research contribute to different academic fields and expand existing theoretical frameworks.

As discussed in more detail, there is a well-established Eurovision academia, with significant attention given to topics such as nation branding, gender and politics. By focusing on the intersection of identity politics, cultural narratives and populism, this study contributions to existing research gaps within this interdisciplinary field by introducing a novel academic perspective on Eurovision. Through the exploration of this specific research area, this study deepens the understanding of how Eurovision serves as a stage for ideological battles and as an instrument for strategic political communication.

Throughout the analysis of the datasets, it became evident that populistic rhetoric is an overarching narrative across both the Hungarian and Swiss case. By focusing on how populist actors use cultural arenas (in this case ESC) for ideological contestation, this research extends the scope of analysis beyond voting behavior and populist rhetoric during elections, therefore contributing to the field of populism studies in the context of cultural events. This research showcases how right-wing political actors from different countries use an international cultural event as ideological battlegrounds to reinforce these *us vs. them* dichotomies in their respective countries. Hence, this study reveals how populist communication constructs these two opposing groups through media narratives surrounding the ESC. Additionally, by examining the intersection of moral panic theory with populist rhetoric and queer visibility in the context of an international cultural event like Eurovision, this study addresses a largely underexplored dimension of the field.

It was revealed through the findings that Eurovision is framed as a morally corrupt, harmful event which imposes a moral threat to the Hungarian and Swiss society. This perceived threat which ESC represents triggers a moral panic around gender, sexuality and religious identity in the aforementioned societies. Political figures from the case countries emphasized only the perceived threats to their own

societies, without referencing the need to defend the moral order of other nations. This suggests nationalistic political perspective and implies that the framings in the context of ESC, may serve to mobilize and expand their domestic voter base for political gain. Furthermore, this research shows that folk devils are not only constructed and amplified by tabloid and other media platforms but is also strategically employed by political actors to advance their ideological agendas and reinforce cultural sovereignty, as seen in both Hungary and Switzerland. Additionally, in the Swiss case, ESC is framed as an actual, potential security risk, linking the moral panic theory with securitization theory. Therefore, this study brings a political dimension into the theory by showing how moral panics operate transnationally through media narratives linked to cultural events and how they are sustained through political discourse over time.

When it comes to emotionally charged language, it was discovered through the analysis that negative emotions are attached to queer performers and consequently to Eurovision as well. As previously mentioned, ESC is framed as morally corrupt which demonstrates how affect becomes a type of governance, by sticking negative emotions to queer artists and essentially portraying them as threats to moral norms and values.

6.2 Future research recommendations

As outlined in the introduction of this study, scholarly interest in Eurovision has gradually grown, establishing it as a rich academic field with diverse focus areas. While considerable attention has been given to topics such as public diplomacy, nation branding, and belonging, less emphasis has been put on how ESC is instrumentalized in strategic political communication. With its focus on the intersection between political communication, populism and cultural narratives, this research addressed the gap in academia, contributing to this interdisciplinary field. Nevertheless, due to the exploratory nature of this research, the complexity of the subject, and limitations, new questions have arisen during the analysis, paving the way for future research.

6.2.1 The Spectrum of Political Parties

With a look on the study interest, this study focused exclusively on how right-wing populist parties use Eurovision in their political communication to promote their cultural and ideological narratives. By expanding this research to other political parties across the ideological spectrum, such as liberal and left parties, a more comprehensive understanding could be provided of ESC's role in political discourse. Understanding how other political actors portray ESC and potentially construct it in supportive framings would uncover how cultural events are instrumentalized for political legitimation and agenda-setting from all political backgrounds. Furthermore, it could showcase how cultural events are not only a site for criticism, but also potentially be used for positive political discourse, such as promoting inclusivity and national pride which would potentially align with the ESC motto "United by Music".

6.2.2 Geographical Extension

While this research concentrated on two selected countries, notably Hungary and Switzerland as case studies, findings may not be generalizable to other countries participating in ESC. By applying this research framework to other ESC participant countries (e.g. Nordic countries), it could be explored how Eurovision is framed in other European countries and examined whether similar framings emerge around the song contest. In addition, future research could extend this analysis by investigating how non-European countries (e.g. Armenia, Israel) or relatively new participating countries (e.g. Australia, Azerbaijan) frame Eurovision. This approach could provide valuable insights into how ESC becomes a transnational stage for political meaning-making across diverse cultural and political contexts, and enrich the comparative focus of this study.

6.2.3 Societal Reception

The study focused solely on the construction of populist messages ("sender" perspective), around the ESC. As the foundational communication model of Shannon & Weaver (1949), the basic model of communication science, illustrates, communication is a linear process involving actors, the sender and the receiver. To gain a better understanding of the effects of populist framings, it is essential to

discover how the populist messages are received and interpreted by the public. Furthermore, this study only focused one of the functions of framing, namely on the *framing process.* To gain a better understanding of the social impact of the examined frames in this research, the other framing function needs to be studied: the *frame effect* (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018). By examining how audiences respond to populist messages, this approach could offer a new layer of understanding to media studies, especially on societal reception. Therefore, mixed-method studies involving audience analysis, surveys, or focus groups could deepen our understanding of the societal impact of political communication surrounding Eurovision.

6.2.4 Beyond Eurovision

In its scope and interest, this research was limited to the exploration of a single cultural event (Eurovision). Eurovision is an internationally broadcasted mega-event, reaching a broad audience across the globe. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how political actors utilize international cultural events for ideological purposes, other mega-events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup need to be examined. Mega-events, such as Eurovision, can serve as cultural battlegrounds where values and norms are contested, providing an interesting case for future research regarding framing, moral panics and populist narratives.

These suggestions for future research show how many aspects there are to political communication around cultural mega-events like Eurovision. While this study focused on a specific angle, how right-wing populist actors in Hungary and Switzerland use Eurovision to promote their narratives, it also opened up the forementioned questions and research ideas.

6.3 Summary

Reflecting on the "Clash of Civilizations" by Huntington (1993), the findings of this study echo his claim that "the great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (p. 22). While not fully following his deterministic view of civilizational conflict, in both cases of Hungary and Switzerland, the main divide between the opposing groups is partially *cultural,*

suggesting that political tensions are originating from differing values, identities and ideologies. In both cases, the tension was primarily ideological, which manifested in the way ESC was framed in their political communication. In conclusion, this discussion has highlighted how Eurovision serves as a stage for broader ideological battles, where populist rhetoric, moral panic, and affective communication strategies intersect. By analyzing the Hungarian and Swiss cases, the study illustrates how cultural events, such as Eurovision, are utilized to reinforce political narratives and social anxieties by political actors to further their political agenda. These findings not only deepen the understanding of populist strategic communication and their use of framing, but also open pathways for further research into the politicization of cultural events.

VII.

Conclusion

By focusing on the Eurovision Song Contest amid Europe's populist surge, this research aimed at uncovering how international cultural events are politicized within national contexts. Through an interdisciplinary approach involving existing literature from media studies, political and communication science, this research set out to examine *how right-wing populist parties use the ESC in their strategic political communication to promote their ideological and cultural narratives*. To explore how political parties utilize the Eurovision Song Contest within their different political, media, and cultural contexts, this study carried out a comparative analysis of Fidesz in Hungary and the EDU and SVP in Switzerland.

Following a multi-method qualitative approach, this research combined thematic and frame analysis within a comparative case study design. The cross-case comparative analysis revealed both similarities and differences in the populist framing of ESC by the aforementioned political parties. In both the Hungarian and the Swiss case, ESC is portrayed as an embodiment of moral decline and a threat to traditional, Christian values and norms, due to ESC providing a platform for queer visibility and representation of progressive values. Political actors in both countries utilize populist rhetoric in their communication concerning ESC, invoking emotions such as fear and disgust. Through their populist communication style enhanced by the emotionally charged language and the *us versus them* rhetoric, ESC is depicted as a vehicle for woke and gender ideologies imposing threat to the cultural purity and established moral order in both countries' societies. Moreover, the examined political parties in both cases strategically exploit cultural backlash as a result of the societal norm shifts and positions themselves as the defenders of traditional, Christian values, and simultaneously fostering a clear divide between 'the people' and 'the elite'.

In the Hungarian case, the narrative centers around the perceived threat being an external moral invasion to Hungarian society. The ESC is presented as a cultural platform controlled by the morally decaying West that seeks to force it woke and gender "propaganda" on Hungary. The framing involves prominent Eurosceptic and anti-establishment sentiments, which further highlights Fidesz's populist and nationalistic narrative about cultural sovereignty. In contrast, Swiss political actors construct the threat more internally, attributing the blame to the public service broadcaster (SRG), leftist elites, and the tax-wasting establishment. While the Swiss framing shares similar moral concerns, a less militarized language is utilized and it's more focused on their domestic cultural identity and security concerns, particularly in light of Switzerland hosting ESC 2025. Although the two cases differ in their rhetorical approaches, attribution of blame, and contextual settings, both reveal how populist and moral panic narratives leverage cultural and moral anxieties, framing ESC as a symbolic arena for broader ideological conflicts.

All in all, this study has shown that the Eurovision Song Contest is not merely a musical spectacle, but also a cultural stage where broader ideological battles are fought. Political actors both in Hungary and Switzerland turned ESC into a symbol of moral decay in their populist rhetorics, enhancing the moral panic concerning queer representation. By examining the political, cultural and historical dimensions of the uncovered frames, this research provides a deeper understanding of how culture, politics, and identity intersect in contemporary Europe. As populist movements continue to shape political landscapes across Europe, it remains essential to understand the symbolic power of cultural events and highlights the need for further research into the intersection of culture, media, and political communication. In times when being *"United by Music"* becomes a contested slogan, Eurovision no longer simply opens with *"Good evening, Europe"*, it opens a stage where Europe's cultural and ideological trends play out in real time.

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