



# The Rise of Ethno-nationalism in the Globalisation Era: Comparative Analysis of AfD Germany and BJP India

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Date received: 07 March 2024 Revision date: 02 April 2024 Date published: 01 May 2024	As integral components of the global movement, both nationalism and globalisation play significant roles in the rise of ethno-nationalism, particularly influenced by the emergence of social media. Today, nationalist populist figures can easily and extensively disseminate their values through various social media platforms, effectively turning this technology into an echo chamber for ethno-nationalist leaders. Their strategy to spread influence often involves promoting xenophobic propaganda narratives that glorify their supreme goals and identity while alienating minorities perceived as threats. This article critically examines the rise of ethno-nationalism, and the crucial role played by social media, focusing on two political parties: the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. Using qualitative descriptive methods and a case study approach, this research reveals that in both cases, ethno-nationalist leaders utilise Islamophobic populism by alienating Islam and framing Muslims as "the other." Furthermore, social media serves as a critical tool for ethno-nationalist parties to spread their agenda and strengthen connections with their supporters.
Keywords <i>ethno-nationalism;</i> <i>social media;</i> <i>Alternative for Germany;</i> <i>Bharatiya Janata Party</i>	
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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the long debate between nationalism and globalism, nowadays, researchers have argued that the two are not inimical (Sabanadze, 2009). Instead, nationalism and globalisation are considered as an inherent element of the global flows (Middell, 2019). Under globalisation for instance, nationalism is on the rise (Abdulsattar, 2013). The extension of globalisation, social media, has been widely used by nationalist populists' leaders as a tool to spread nationalism message (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020), while at the same time worsen Islamophobic attitudes amongst the people (Oztig, Gurkan and Aydin, 2021). Specifically, the nationalism message by these nationalist populists comes from the conception of ethno-nationalist populism. Not just as a message, but this cultural nationalism becoming their supreme goal as well as identity, making their political agenda more appealing to the dominant ethnic people as their target.

The debate between nationalism and globalisation has been long and arguably opposing, especially post the Cold War when the world is faced with the rapid development of the two contradictory ideologies (Sabanadze, 2009). Nationalism, on one hand, could simply be understood as an established belief system of how people in the world accept that every one of us belongs to a nation and thus, affects the way people think and act (Skey, 2020). Meanwhile, globalization can be understood as a process of integrating the world in various aspects, particularly to enhance transnational exchanges of materials, data, information, and more (Held et al., 2000). In other words, the two become contradictory when nationalism is seen as an exclusive frame to build and protect particular identities, interests and borders, while globalisation tends to eliminate these exclusivities

through global integration efforts in various aspects of life. Consequently, globalisation is often seen as a threat to nationalism (Hoffmann and Ignatieff, 1994; Dreher, Gaston and Martens, 2008) as well as an inherent contradiction (Ariely, 2020).

Given the above context, much of the available literature on the relationship between nationalism and globalisation focuses on how these two terms become contradictory (Zheng, 2004; Yang and Chen, 2021). Other researchers, however, propose that nationalism and globalisation are not completely antagonistic. Sabanadze (2009) argues that the paradox caused by nationalism in the era of globalisation stems from an understanding that nationalism is seen as an inward-looking way of thinking and therefore contradicts the spirit of globalism which tends to promote integration and harmonisation. The solution to this puzzle as argued by Sabanadze (2009) is "to accept the existence of more political, outward looking, and internationalist elements of nationalism" (p. 6). Furthermore, from the perspective of global history, nationalism goes hand in hand with globalisation, where it breaks the argument that nationalism is independent and not related to global connectedness (Ariely, 2020). Thus, it can be argued that nationalism does not contradict the process of globalisation but plays an essential role as an "inherent element of certain political or social projects to manage global flows" (Middell, 2019, p. 154).

Therefore, this study will fill the gap by taking the perspective that see nationalism and globalisation as an integral part. Specifically, this article will critically examine the rise of ethno-nationalism in the globalisation era. This study uses two political parties, which is the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. The AfD is chosen because it represents the trend that happened in the Western countries. Meanwhile, the BJP India represents the Eastern perspective, whose relevance is increasingly strengthened due to the role of new global powers in the region such as China (Aristawidya and Syawfi, 2023). The question that this study attempts to answer is how the social media influencing the rise of ethno-nationalism in the case AfD Germany and BJP India.

In recent years, there has been a tendency that under globalisation, nationalism is on the rise (Abdulsattar, 2013). Commenting on the rise of nationalism, there is some evidence from the work of Mihelj and Jiménez - Martínez (2021) suggesting that the use of digital media plays a critical role in strengthening the nationalism spectrum, by writing "nationalism in its banal, everyday form never disappeared from our mediated communication but was simply updated to fit with the specific affordances of the digital communication environment" (p.332). One of the most significant illustrations is when nationalists intensified the use of new media to build relationships and communication with the public as well as spread nationalist messages specifically by using social media platforms (Engesser et al., 2017). Some of the phenomena that have become important symbols of the rise of nationalism are the rise of Hindu nationalists in India and right-wing nationalist parties in Europe, as well as the election of Trump as president of the United States in 2014. All these phenomena have a strong correlation with the utilisation of social media.

As an extension of globalisation, social media plays a critical role in supporting the rise of nationalism. With this role, oftentimes, political elites or even people in general could use social media as an echo-chamber to spread messages and even as a tool for a political movement (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020). The study from Zhuravskaya, Petrova and Enikolopov in 2020 argues that the use of social media by populists has contributed to some political effects, including at least electoral success as well as a significant rise on the xenophobic movements. These political elites present themselves as allies to people to gain sympathy (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020). Thus, populist leaders who use social media as a political tool experience increasing popularity which has a positive impact on increasing

their votes in the election process. This might have occurred due to increasing public political participation and the intensity of communication between political leaders and the people through social media platforms (Vogelezang, 2021). The major example of this argument is the way Trump massively used his twitter account to amplify his nationalist message, political agendas, as well as represent himself as "the sole legitimate voice of the anti-establishment movement." (Schertzer and Woods, 2021, p. 1166).

Another important consequence of social media utilisation by nationalist populist leaders is that the xenophobic attitude amongst people is getting worse, especially Islamophobic populism. A study by Oztig, Gurkan, and Aydin (2021) suggests that the rise of nationalist populist leaders is surprisingly accompanied by the rise of Islamophobia as well. In the research, some of the right-wing parties he mentioned to represent this argument are the National Front, Alternative for Germany, and The Dutch Freedom Party. The contribution of the study has been to confirm that after 9/11, right-wing parties and national populist leaders built a narration of "Islam as being incompatible with European values and a threat to European societies" (Oztig, Gurkan and Aydin, 2021, p. 447). Furthermore, social media does not just echo and exacerbate xenophobic attitudes, but it also has been widely used by ethno-nationalist populist leaders to spread their nationalist message. Research conducted by Schertzer and Woods (2021) shows how Donald Trump massively uses his Twitter account as a political tool to spread his nationalist message to the public. Ethno-nationalists, such as Trump, are trying to identify who the people are and who are not based on ethnic and cultural parameters. Thus, building narration that 'the other' is an ultimate enemy and threat to 'the people.'

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research utilises descriptive qualitative method. Specifically, this study employs a case study approach by examining one or more cases that are relevant to the research topic (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013). In this study, for instance, the researcher uses the case of two political parties namely Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. The data in this study is collected from existing secondary sources. This type of data is best to help the researcher better understand the phenomenon under investigation using existing information, analysis, or another researcher's findings (Cottrell, 2014). Examples of the data used in this study include journal articles, books, government/non-government data reports. Other secondary sources that also used in this study is social media because they can often represent the voice or perspective of the relevant authorities (Prakoso, 2023). The following are theoretical lenses that are used to investigate the studied phenomena: islamophobic populism and ethno-nationalism.

### **Islamophobic Populism**

Populism is a global phenomenon that has been studied for a long time (Fabbrizi, 2023). In recent years, however, its impact has become increasingly strong on the international stage (Chryssogelos et al., 2023). This is partly due to the rise of populist leaders in various parts of the world, such as Donald J. Trump in the United States and Narendra Modi in India. These ethnonationalist leaders often adopt aggressive and competitive stances in international relations (Wimmer, 2012). While much of the literature has focused on how populism affects foreign policy (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2017; Destradi, Cadier and Plagemann, 2021), some argue that it should also be studied as a broader phenomenon within international relations (Chryssogelos et al., 2023).

Populism can be understood as a political approach that claims to represent the voice and interest from the ordinary people (Webber, 2023). However, on the opposite, populism tends to

oppose the existence of an open and diverse society, which closely resembles the ideals of democracy (Abts and Rummens, 2007). Major studies showed that to seek public sympathy, many populist leaders use xenophobic propaganda to attract voters (Mouffe, 2005; Kende and Krekó, 2020). Moreover, in a study conducted by Oztig in 2021, he argues that Islamophobic populism is the most popular xenophobic propaganda used by populist leaders, particularly in European countries.

Islamophobic populism is used to alienate Muslims by portraying them as the other (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen, 2016), while simultaneously building a narrative that their culture is incompatible with Western values and using this as a political tool. By leveraging this type of xenophobia, authorities justify policies to discipline Muslims and regulate their culture (Sayyid, 2018). For instance, recently in France, the government banned their athletes competing in the 2024 Olympics from wearing veils to discipline Muslims and subtly force them to conform more closely to the dominant identity. Furthermore, researchers have also noted how Islamophobic populism can be used as an electoral tool for populist leaders to gain popularity and more votes (Williams, 2010). For example, when political parties with close ties to Nazism or fascism use Islamophobic populism approach to attract voters (Hafez, 2014).

### **Ethno-nationalism**

Ethno-nationalism is the belief that a nation's legitimate members are defined by the dominant cultural identity, often determined by shared ancestry, religious beliefs, or racial identity (Brubaker, 1992; Bonikowski, 2017). This form of nationalism prioritizes the culture and symbols of the majority ethnic group (Zubrzycki, 2002) and is often driven by the dominant group's anxiety about perceived threats to their status quo from outsiders (Hutchinson, 2005). Recently, the rise of populist leaders in the West has increasingly employed the core values of ethno-nationalism to attract and increase voter support (Schertzer and Woods, 2021). This is because the combination of populism—a 'thin' ideology—and nationalism—a 'thick' ideology—proves to be particularly powerful (Mudde, 2004, p. 544; Stanley, 2008, p. 95). Populist leaders have used ethno-nationalism to shape the narrative of who belongs to the nation and who does not, leading to increased polarisation, alienation, and the marginalisation of minority cultures (Schertzer and Woods, 2021).

Today, many ethno-nationalist movements have emerged in various parts of the world, with one of the most notable examples being the situation in Palestine. The world has witnessed, condemned, and protested the genocide committed by Netanyahu and his forces against the Palestinians, resulting in the killing of thousands and the displacement of millions from their own land. Netanyahu has employed an ethno-nationalist ideology known as Zionism (Gans, 2008), which grants citizenship rights to all Jews in the state of Israel but not to Palestinians (Eid, 2018)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The AfD's strategy of harnessing xenophobia and ethno-nationalism for political gain**

The AfD is one of the most influential opposition parties in Germany, which was first established to critique the European Union. Some of the issues that AfD brought at the beginning are the critique towards the Euro and the bail-out policy carried out by the European Union to countries that are members of the eurozone (Kim, 2017). Now, this far-right nationalist party is undergoing a major transformation and is being called as the 'most culturally nationalist' party in post-war Germany by denouncing Islam and immigrants (The Economist, 2019). Furthermore, another important value for them is to keep German culture from being lost (Göpffarth, 2017). This is because there is a fear

in the community, especially AfD supporters, that German culture would be replaced by the domination of Islam, hence create a negative impact on cohesion in society (Heineman, 2017).

Despite of its massive movement among its followers, AfD use its online power as a platform to provide a xenophobic attitude. How AfD utilises the digital platforms could be seen from one of the relevant studies from Serrano et al. (2019) which examines social media data from AfD and other political parties in Germany as well, ranging from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram data to shed light on their movement online. In general, Facebook is the most favourable platform that is being used by German political parties (Serrano et al., 2019). Data from table 1 below shows that AfD, compared to other parties, is the most popular political parties regarding its social media statistics (numbers of posts, comments, likes, and shares in four years). This study reveals that AfD is one of the most successful political parties in Germany in terms of online campaigns, which supports this party to gain vote and popularity among people. However, AfD use this privilege not only to communicate their conventions, but also to give space to xenophobic commentary (Maurer et al., 2023).

Table 1. Facebook statistics of political parties in Germany from January 2015 to May 2018  
Source: Serrano et.al. (2019)

	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Likes</b>	<b>Shares</b>
AfD	2.363	994.191	4.168.022	2.891.377
CDU	1.690	272.155	483.924	153. 131
CSU	2.162	406.804	1.897.622	634.153
Die Grünen	1.127	142.473	625.689	411.073
Die Linke	1.367	140.486	903.629	437.920
FDP	2.211	118.277	755.000	192.974
SPD	1.992	247.095	892.198	421.025

A notable example of AfD xenophobic movements could be seen from their political campaign through posters, banners, and social media content as well. The figure 1 below presents how AfD endorse xenophobic movement against Islam, that could be identified as part of Islamophobic populism attitudes, by making video saying that "Islam does not belong to Germany. No to sharia and Islamic parallel society. No financing of mosques. Prohibit public full veil (burqa)" (AfD TV, 2017) Another notable example of their Islamophobic populism movements which portrayed through posters offline and online, reads 'Islamisierung stoppen' (stop Islamisation) and 'Burkas? Wir steh'n auf Bikinis' (Burkas? We prefer Bikinis). This evidence would seem to suggest that AfD is trying to identify Islam and Muslim as 'the other', threats, and enemy to German culture. In addition to that, their biggest target is Muslim women and Muslim men, with the former considered incompatible with German femininity and the latter as potential security threat (Yurdakul, Özvatan and Forchtner, 2019). These examples are relevant with the argument from Oztig, Gurkan and Aydin (2021) who wrote that the rise of national populist's movements goes hand in hand with Islamophobic populism. Other researchers who have looked at this phenomenon points out that that AfD is commercially spreading anti-Islam rhetoric through their political campaign (Yurdakul, Özvatan and Forchtner, 2019).

Figure 1. AfD Youtube Account Portraying Islamophobic Populism  
Source: AfD TV (2017)



Along with the narration that Islam as the outsiders and the enemy for Germany, AfD also use ethno-nationalist rhetoric as their fundamental strategy (Özvatan and Forchtner, 2019). This can be captured from their message on digital media platforms which is abstracted from their manifesto. In their manifesto, AfD conclusively showed their fundamental values. ‘The people’ refers to German ethnic group. Good evidence of this argument could be found from their manifesto, such as; "German as the predominant culture instead of multiculturalism" or "it is the duty of the government and civil society to confidently protect German cultural identity" (Özvatan and Forchtner, 2019, p. 46) and mentioning "young Germans couples" as the one who is responsible for the stability of German population in society by increasing their birth rates against the increasing new born statistics amongst immigrants (Özvatan and Forchtner, 2019, p.41). Another well-known example of their message which showed superiority of German culture can be found from their media content, such as; ‘Neue Deutsche? Machen wir selber’ (New Germans? We make it ourselves) or ‘Wofür mein Vater damals nach Deutschland Kam? Für deutsche Leitkultur’ (What did my father come to Germany for? For German leading culture. Our country. Our values). These obviously present ethno-nationalist attitudes which are in the party’s core values (Özvatan and Forchtner, 2019). AfD tries to identify that ‘the people’, as previously mentioned before, refers to the German ethnic group as the predominant culture, while at the same time alienating ‘the other’ as a threat and outsiders. Taken all these into account, it could be argued that AfD ethno-nationalist populism and Islamophobic populism campaign online is framed as a mission to build the narration of pure Germany.

### **BJP's strategy of spreading Islamophobic populism for Hindutva Nationalism**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a political wing of Hindu nationalists’ movement, has a strong correlation with major Hindu grass-roots organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who support the idea of a Hindu state. It is worth noting that this tie has major consequences on the higher possibility of India becoming a Hindu state (Khan and Lutful, 2021). The reason behind this argument is that the use of Hindutva ideology as the core values of the government by BJP could create critical changes upon the state’s democracy form. Hindutva’s major goal is to bring India as a Hindu state with its own Hindu nationalism. Which this nationalism represents the idea of "majoritarian, dogmatic and cultural nationalism which exclude the participation of Muslim and other religious minority" (Hosen, 2020, p.57). In other words, the application of this ideology in India’s political system by the government means that the authorities try to build the conception of Hinduism and Hindu culture as predominant values and cultures, while at the same time marginalising the minorities, especially Muslims (Chacko, 2019). By doing so, BJP and Modi are using ethno-nationalism populist strategy to help them shape the country and unite the people, primarily to portray the dominant Hindu ethnic group as the solid identity of the state. On the contrary, BJP and Modi

failed to protect the secularism tradition in India's constitution and gave privileges to Hindu ethnic only.

As a controversial figure, Modi has a bad reputation before becoming the Prime Minister due to his Islamophobic populism attitudes. One of his biggest controversies comes from the pogrom of Muslims of Gujarat in 2002. As a chief minister of the state of Gujarat that time, his government did nothing to the pogrom of at least 1000 people, with most of them Muslims (Kamdar, 2020). Despite that, Modi along with BJP have won the election in India for two consecutive periods. Just a year after his election as the Prime Minister of India (2019-2024), the violence in Gujarat echo back in 2020 pogrom when armed Hindu mobs attacked Muslim in Delhi, resulting the killing of around 53 Muslims, 250 people injured, and the displacement of 2000 other people that mostly Muslims (Khan and Chakrabarty, 2021). The patterns are similar; the government, once again, has no immediate action to investigate the program. Considerable studies have pointed out how Modi's authority marginalised Muslims and treated them unequally compared to most Hindus throughout his periods (Harriss, 2015; Kakar, 2021; Khan and Lutful, 2021).

Examples of the implementation of ethno-nationalist populism and Islamophobic populism strategy by BJP and Modi can be captured from considerable number of public policies in India. The prominent evidence for this argument is firstly when the government makes a cow slaughter ban, since for Hindus, cows are a sacred symbol. Consequently, Hindus' hardline movements became more validated. In 2015, a Muslim farmer was killed by Hindus mob for eating beef (The Guardian, 2015). Secondly, the controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill, where the government wrote that they would give Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Christians an India citizenship if they flee to India from persecution in their country. However, this law excluding Islam, creating an inevitable wave of protest from Muslims. Hence, validating BJP's Islamophobic populism.

Moving forward to how the rise of Hindu nationalism is occurring through social media, we first must look deep into Modi's first victory in the 2014 elections. This victory was a symbol of the rise of Hindu nationalism and the dawn of social media in India's political history (Rao, 2018; Jose, 2021). Modi and BJP's massive and consistent use of social media can be captured as part of their genius online public relations strategy (Chhibber and Ostermann, 2014). This can be illustrated briefly throughout the election process, when Modi highly used online media to approach people and spread his nationalist message (Lamensch, 2021). Furthermore, BJP uses social media space as their main rallying point to spread Hindutva ideology, disinformation, and propaganda (Jose, 2021). For instance, the figure 2 below shows how Amit Malviya, BJP IT wing head, spread propaganda message using his twitter account to increase polarisation between Hindus and Muslims (Amit Malviya, 2020). In his tweet, Malviya consciously misrepresented some parts of a video delivered by a journalist, Arfa Khanum, at Aligarh Muslim University. He portrayed Khanum to support the establishment of Islamic society based on Ghazwa-Hind narration, a term used to describe Muslim's effort in trying to build Islamic state in India. However, his propaganda is debunked by a full video of Khanum's speech that is uploaded by one of Indian news platform, The Wire. In her full speech, Khanum spoke against protesters of CAA (The Citizenship Amendment Act) who use religious slogans to just keep focus on secularism issues in India (The Wire, 2020).

Figure 2. Twitter account of Amit Malviya, BJP IT Wing Head,  
spread a propaganda message  
Source: [twitter.com/amitmalviya](https://twitter.com/amitmalviya)



Furthermore, Lamensch (2021) also pointed out that after Modi's election, BJP made a digital move to spread Hindu nationalism through Twitter and even WhatsApp as well as launched 'cyber troops' as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Commenting on the rise of the new media era in the political environment of India, Pal (2015) writes "If you want to listen to Modi, you go to his social media feed—whether you are a citizen, a print reporter or a television channel" (p. 379). This could be seen that social media plays a critical role for Modi and BJP as a communication platform with their voters as well as a tool to spread their nationalist content.

Taking all above into account, there are several possible explanations for the increasing support from people for Modi and BJP as well as their superiority in India under the conception of ethno-nationalists' populism and Islamophobic populism. First, by using ethno-nationalists' populism's conceptions such as Hindutva ideology, Modi and BJP try to appeal to the majority of Hindu ethnic majority in India to move toward an imagined Hindu state. The imagined state which is based on the story of the glorious Hindu civilization in the ancient times (Waikar, 2018). Second, to achieve the ideal Hindu state, however, they should implement Islamophobic populism strategy. This must be done to first, polarise the society and second, marginalizing Muslims and Islam especially when the two have a shared dark history in ancient India times. From Hindutva's perspective, India's past glory was snatched away by Islamic leadership which are "barbaric, wicked, and demonic in opposition to the courageous, righteous, and Godly Hindus" (Waikar, 2018, p. 168).

### **Comparative analysis of the use of ethno-nationalist and Islamophobic populism narratives by AfD and BJP**

Based on the findings above, both the AfD and BJP employ ethno-nationalist populism and Islamophobic strategies to garner public sympathy, particularly among the dominant ethnic communities in Germany and India, utilising digital platforms in this globalised era. Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the powerful interplay between populism, nationalism, and xenophobia in contemporary politics, especially in the context of globalisation.

Firstly, in the case of AfD, they position themselves as the defenders of the pure people of Germany against the perceived threat of Islamic culture, which they depict as the other. This finding



supports previous research suggesting that contemporary populist leaders use ethno-nationalist approaches to create narratives about who belongs to the nation and who does not (Brubaker, 1992; Zubrzycki, 2002; Bonikowski, 2017), leading to increased polarization and the marginalization of ethnic minorities (Schertzer and Woods, 2021). By doing so, AfD indirectly portrays Muslims as incompatible with German identity and nationality. This aligns with previous research indicating that ethno-nationalist populist leaders often frame ethnic minorities as incompatible with the nation's identity (Olzak, 2023) and further alienate them through Islamophobic populist propaganda (Benveniste, Lazaridis, and Puurunen, 2016).

Furthermore, the AfD manifesto explicitly prioritizes German culture over others, demonstrating their attempt to establish the culture of the majority ethnic group as the identity of the nation-state while fostering xenophobic narratives toward Muslims. This approach has successfully increased their popularity. This phenomenon supports existing literature arguing that when a "thin" ideology like populism is combined with a "thick" ideology like ethno-nationalism, the parties employing this strategy tend to gain more power (Mudde, 2004, p.544; Stanley, 2008, p.95). In this context, the strategy used by AfD has significantly boosted its popularity among voters, corroborating research that found that Islamophobic populist narratives used by populist leaders can help gain popularity and attract more voters (Mouffe, 2005; Williams, 2010; Kende and Krekó, 2020).

Secondly, in the case of the BJP, they employ a similar framework to the AfD by portraying the Muslim community as a threat to Hindu identity and its status quo. Through policies and rhetoric that marginalize Muslims, such as the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the BJP fosters the notion that only Hindu values are compatible with the Indian identity. Moreover, the BJP's vision of transforming India into a Hindu state, as the true Indian identity (Khan & Lutful, 2021) strongly represents how they use an ethno-nationalist approach as part of their strategy and ideology (Brubaker, 1992; Zubrzycki, 2002; Bonikowski, 2017). Practically, the BJP portrays its ethno-nationalist strategy through the national promotion of Hindutva ideology, which explicitly prioritizes Hindu cultures and symbols above all others.

Furthermore, the BJP also employs xenophobic propaganda toward Muslims by creating anxiety among Hindus about how this minority group might endanger their identity. As a result, this strategy has attracted dominant ethnic communities, leading them to support the BJP with more votes. This aligns with previous research that found populist leaders use xenophobic narratives, in this case, Islamophobia, as an electoral tool to seek sympathy and gain votes (Mouffe, 2005; Williams, 2010; Kende and Krekó, 2020). The BJP explicitly demonstrates its ethno-nationalist and Islamophobic populism through its power to produce policies that limit the existence of Muslims and further alienate them. This also corroborates previous findings that argue authorities justify their policies to discipline Muslims and regulate their culture as part of their xenophobic propaganda (Sayyid, 2018).

Another important theme emerging from this research is the strategic use of social media by both the AfD and BJP to amplify their ethno-nationalist and Islamophobic narratives in the globalised era. The AfD, for example, extensively employs platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to promote their narratives. On their YouTube channel, the AfD produces online campaigns that fuel xenophobia towards Muslims, depicting them as a threat to German identity and as endangering ancestral roots and traits. Additionally, the AfD disseminates its ethno-nationalist ideology, such as the concept of "pure German," across their social media platforms. By targeting dominant ethnic communities, the party has successfully used these platforms to attract more followers and gain broader support, making them more popular than other parties in Germany. This finding aligns with previous research, which argues that political elites in the globalised era use social media as echo

chambers for their political agendas (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020; Schertzer and Woods, 2021) and to increase their electability (Zhuravskaya, Petrova, and Enikolopov, 2020).

In the case of the BJP, Modi and his party have extensively utilised social media to reach the public and spread their ethno-nationalist message, particularly the Hindutva ideology and Islamophobic propaganda, while manipulating public opinion. The BJP implements its agenda through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, even employing cyber troops to control and shape public sentiment. However, the BJP's approach differs from that of the AfD. As India's ruling and dominant party, the BJP focuses on maximising social media as an echo chamber for its political agenda, manipulating public opinion, and gaining more popularity (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020; Schertzer and Woods, 2021). Moreover, concerning their Islamophobic populism, the BJP, as the ruling party, has the power and legitimacy to marginalise and alienate Muslims through unjust laws, public policies, and political agreements. This aligns with previous studies that argue populist authorities justify policies to discipline Muslims and regulate their culture by using xenophobia as a rationale (Sayyid, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Social media plays a critical role in the rise of nationalism in the era of globalisation. It acts as an echo-chamber of nationalism messages from nationalism populist leaders. In the case study that is brought in this research, which is the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), ethno-nationalism is a form of nationalism that is increasing rapidly and has resulted in major political changes in Germany and India. In both cases, the rise of the ethno-nationalist's movement was accompanied by the rise of Islamophobic populism attitudes and mediated by the role of digital media. Although in these cases both are massively using ethno-symbolic and anti-Islam rhetoric, there were also significant differences emerging between the two. First, in the BJP case, as a ruling party, they explicitly use Hindutva ideology to create Hindu state through their public policies as well as portray Hindu culture as the identity of the state. On the contrary, AfD can only voice the ethno-nationalist spirit through their slogans, posters, and manifestos. Secondly, while Islamophobic populism strategy by AfD is the result of the extension of 9/11, the xenophobic movement towards Islam and Muslims that is denounced by BJP rooted from a dark past between Hindu and Islam. Additionally, this study has a major limitation. Due to the language barrier, gathering first-hand evidence from BJP and AfD's social media accounts which mostly use Hindi and Germany language, is quite hard. Lastly, in future research, more in-depth and comprehensive research is needed to understand the intertwined relationship between ethno-nationalist populism and Islamophobic populism since research in this topic is still very limited.

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