Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Anastasia Wittmann

Title: Exploring the Election Fraud Conspiracy Theory: A Qualitative Comparison of Selected U.S. and German QAnon Telegram Channels

Programme/year: International Security Studies / 2023

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Jonathan Collins

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	**10**	10
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	**30**	27
	Methodology, analysis, argument	**40**	37
Total		*80*	74
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	**10**	10
	Style	**5**	5
	Formal requirements	**5**	5
Total		*20*	20
TOTAL		*100*	94

Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies /
Smetanovo nabrezi 6, 110 01 Prague 1, Czech Republic, info@fsv.cuni.cz, tel: +420 222 112 111

www.fsv.cuni.cz

Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis offers an incredible comparative look at the QAnon movement's influence beyond that of the United States, providing a first-of-its-kind qualitative examination of the German movement in relation to its "parent" America. The work is a rare delicacy in terms of master's level research, where it is quite difficult for me to find fault. I would describe the thesis is with the tag 'expert', which encapsulates the different sections (introduction, methodology, terminology, analysis, discussion, and conclusion) to a tee. Not only is this research novel, but it presents an exceedingly interesting look into the German case (which is seldom touched on in academic literature, and when it is, it is often in German). The authors knowledge of German demonstrably helps.

The strengths of the different sections are simple to highlight. From the literature review there is a strong gap recognized in the current works, and the author builds on these components with the methodology. The grounded theory approach is a substantial undertaking, where the author provides a great set of explanatory principles which help determine the variations and commonalities in the two countries content (RQ2). Along with qualitative content analysis, these two techniques pair well. Where the work really shines is the elaborate and comprehensive investigation/analysis into the content of these movements (showcased by the numerous appendices and the data therein). The time and effort are on full display, although this and the discussion section seem a bit short in comparison to what was mentioned previously. The author is also quick to denote any shortcomings or potential alternative explanations that may counteract their three explanatory mechanisms (shared ideology, US content replication vis-à-vis QAnon's hegemonic roots, and content transforms across boundaries), further reinforcing the strength in their argumentation.

In terms of questions, it is difficult to formulate many. What I would ask, however, is if the election fraud theory chosen encapsulates the overarching attention of the group, or is it a simple way to connect the two countries together? Is the German QAnon movement's discourse 'really' dictated by the election fraud theory results predominantly in the US? Is the data skewed to showcase only how Germany's QAnon movement talks about American topics? It seems difficult for me to believe that there is no localised flavour to the discussions happening on the platform, that there is just an obsession with American content. What would happen if you chose a different overarching topic? Would your explanatory mechanisms still apply (especially when talking about US diffusion)? Would Germany's QAnon media rely on American conceptualisations of phenomena happening in Germany, or in Europe? These are questions out of curiosity and interest, rather than outward criticisms.

Minor criteria:

The writing style is very enjoyable, and I can find no faults with the (sometimes exceeding) number of research/citations that are utilized in the study. The format, flow, and structure of the work make for a silky-smooth read.

Assessment of plagiarism: Work is cited appropriately with no obvious issues.

Overall evaluation:

I have given the thesis many praises in the above sections and feel strongly about the works worth for the academic community. I would welcome the defense committee to ask any of the outlined questions presented, out of interest in the author's response and expertise. Nonetheless, it is very much defendable in its current state and think that it would add great value should the author seek to publish it.

Suggested grade: A

Signature:

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