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Farmers, Framing, and the Far Right: A Content Analysis of Far Right Framing in the Case of the Dutch “Nitrogen Crisis”

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“The word is the most powerful tool you have as a human; it is the tool of magic. But like a sword with two edges, your word can create the most beautiful dream, or your word can destroy everything around you.”

Don Miguel Ruiz

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INTRODUCTION

As fireworks illuminated the sky over Rotterdam's Erasmus bridge on New Year's Eve 2023, a chilling message appeared on the bridge, displaying the words "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." This phrase is commonly referred to as the "Fourteen Words". It is a slogan used by white supremacists and white nationalist groups. It originated from the writings of David Lane, a member of the white supremacist group The Order, who was convicted for his involvement in a series of crimes in the 1980s (Feshami 2020, 3). The phrase has become a rallying cry for those promoting white supremacist ideologies and is often used to express their desire for the preservation of the white race and the exclusion or subjugation of other racial and ethnic groups. This display was a stark reminder of the increasing presence of harmful right-wing ideologies, a trend to which even The Netherlands, a country known for its liberal values, is not immune. Studying the entrenchment of Far Right movements and ideologies in the Netherlands and other democracies has thus become increasingly relevant from an academic, political, and societal perspective.

During times of crises, social and political actors are particularly active in shaping public discourse and mobilising social and political action through framing (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1212). Crises thus provide an opportunity to research these processes. To comprehend the extent, subtlety, and objectives of right-wing groups, as well as to develop effective strategies to challenge and reform them, it is crucial to grasp the symbolic and material harm caused by Far Right discursive strategies and the use of weaponised language. Weaponised language is a systemic process and form of aggressive language, grounded in narratives that shape and manipulate public perception and serve to justify certain actions, often at the expense of minority groups or individuals perceived to be disloyal (Pascale 2019, 900). Weaponised language can be used to facilitate reactionary or dystopic politics which shape public discourse and behaviour and destroy the integrity of public information spaces (Pascale 2019, 900-901). These strategies affect the foundations of a democratic society by targeting people's ability to distinguish truth from fiction. The result of this is communicative and social chaos which can be harmful to society as a whole. Studying and engaging critically with these systems of meaning and interpretation can offer a valuable understanding of how these movements aim to establish and normalize particular types of violence.

Studies of the weaponization of language are not a new phenomenon, despite this there is a dearth of literature on the topic in its current context, as we face a dangerous acceleration and

intensification of framing processes. A critical understanding of weaponised language and crisis framing is essential to reduce the chances of inadvertently perpetuating and recirculating right-wing discursive strategies in media and everyday conversations, normalizing this language and further deepening social divisions. It can also provide valuable insights into alternative ways of framing issues that have the potential to serve as effective forms of resistance. It provides us with a means to decipher and disrupt the growing influence of Far Right movements before they solidify their presence, as well as to dismantle them once they have taken hold.

Against this backdrop, this research locates the Netherlands within a global wave of Far Right movements and analyses the discursive practices of the Far Right in response to the nitrogen crisis, which has sparked controversy in the Netherlands. The Dutch Council of State ruled that the farming sector is a major contributor to environmental nitrogen emissions and pollution, leading to protests from farmers and activists. The discourse surrounding the nitrogen crisis has seen contending crisis frames being put forward by the actors involved. To study this discursive process, this research will use analytical tools from CA to answer the following question: “Which discursive frames did Far Right activists develop in response to the nitrogen ruling of the Dutch Council of State and why?” The framing process is contextually dependent and thus requires context-specific analyses to determine the conditions conducive to the development of frames as well as how the content of these frames is determined. The development of these crisis frames enables the analysis of the Far Right's responsiveness to global issues, the role these issues play in spreading group ideology, recruitment, and activism, and how Far Right activism may develop in response to current events. This research is conducted with three objectives.

The first objective is to identify the discursive narratives used by the Far Right in response to the nitrogen crisis. This will be achieved through a quantitative and qualitative CA of the material produced by Far Right social movement organizations. The analysis will focus on the frames that the Far Right seeks to emphasize or de-emphasize in response to the crisis. The next objective is to investigate why the Far Right utilises these frames in their discourse. This is an understudied aspect of Far Right discourse and understanding this will help shed light on the strategies of the movement. By analysing the frames used by Far Right activists in response to the nitrogen crisis, this study will help uncover the underlying ideologies and motivations of the movement. The final objective is to explore the implications of the results for the study of

Far Right movements. The study will consider how the Far Right is changing its discourse in response to crises and what the implications of this shift are for future research. Overall, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the discursive practices of the Far Right and its responses to environmental and societal challenges. This knowledge can then be used to inform future research and policy decisions.

This dissertation is organised as follows: the first chapter will offer a contextualisation of the nitrogen crisis and the interconnection of environmental policies and protests in the agricultural sector. This chapter will also discuss the centrality of nature and place in Far Right discourse. The following chapter will discuss the theory of crisis framing and how it can be employed to study the discursive strategies of the Far Right. The next chapters will provide insight into the chosen methodology and case studies, followed by the findings of the quantitative CA and a critical qualitative CA. A discussion chapter will discuss the greater implications of the findings for the study of Far Right crisis framing. Finally, the conclusion will outline the main inferences drawn from the research, discuss its limitations, and provide recommendations for further research.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Contextualisation

For two decades, The Netherlands has faced a significant nitrogen issue that has consequences for all layers of society in both the short- and long term. Nitrogen is emitted by several industries and results in the degradation of water-, soil-, and air quality. Dutch biodiversity is steadily decreasing due to soil degradation caused by nitrogen particles that precipitate on the soil (RIVM, n.d.). The Netherlands produced almost 12 million tonnes of nitrous oxide in 2019 (Our World In Data n.d.), This is not in accordance with the European habitat and bird directives that the Netherlands must adhere to. The Dutch Council of State recognized this fact in 2019 and ruled the existing Nitrogen Approach Program (PAS) to be unlawful as it did not comply with European guidelines (Julen 2019).

The foundations of EU environmental policies can be traced back to the 1972 European Council, which took place following the inaugural United Nations (UN) conference on the environment. Since 1973, the European Commission has been issuing multiannual Environment Action Programmes, delineating the objectives of EU environmental policies. In

1987, the Single European Act introduced the 'environment title,' establishing a legal framework for a unified environmental policy. Following this, the EU Nitrates Directive, implemented in 1991, marked a significant step by mandating best management practices in agriculture to combat nitrogen pollution (OECD 2020). The commitment to sustainable development was further reinforced by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993, which elevated the environment to an official policy area, and the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999, which obligated the integration of environmental protection into all sectoral policies. In 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon was implemented, which introduced 'combating climate change' as a specific goal within the EU (EUR-lex 2007). In line with these objectives, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal in 2019, proposing policies aimed at achieving a minimum 55% reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (European Commission n.d.). An example of such initiatives is the Farm to Fork strategy (2020), which aims to establish fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food systems through regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives. Introduced in 2020 amid the initial phase of the COVID-19 crisis, the strategy aims to highlight the importance of sustainable practices for ensuring food resilience during crises. This highlights the interplay between food security and resilience, agricultural practices, and sustainability. This interconnection has historically been a source of dispute.

1.2. Reconciling Agricultural Practices and Environmental Sustainability

The relationship between agricultural practices and environmental sustainability is intricate. Farming occupies a significant role in Dutch history and psyche, tracing back to the end of World War II, during the *Hongerwinter* ["Hunger Winter"] (New York Times 2023). This devastating famine claimed the lives of thousands and left countless others struggling to survive. In the aftermath of the war, the nation rallied together in a post-war effort to revitalize the agricultural sector, and their endeavour proved to be remarkably successful. The value of Dutch agricultural exports soared, ranking second only to that of the United States (U.S.) (The Netherlands and You 2021). Given its relatively small size, The Netherlands is a country where nobody lives far from farmland. There is even a popular Dutch dating show that aims to find romantic partners for farmers, called "*Boer Zoekt Vrouw*" ["Farmer Seeks Wife"]. Because of this central role of farmers in Dutch society, farmers' protests have, historically, had a large scale of public support.

Protests against environmental policies in the agricultural sector date back to the mid-twentieth century. In 1958, the first political "farmer's party" was founded by Hendrik Koekoek, a Dutch

farmer. The party was founded in protest to the “*Landbouwschap*”, an agricultural board set up by the central government and managed by representatives of various disparate agricultural organisations (Vossen 2015, 291). Koekoek and his supporters, nicknamed “the free farmers”, organised demonstrations against the agricultural board due to the taxes it levied (Vossen 2015, 296). Koekoek and his Farmers' Party had gained sufficient name recognition and support through these protests to win three seats in the House of Representatives in 1963 (Vossen 2015, 297). The farmers’ party attracted a wide audience, receiving support from both rural and urban citizens, as well as both Protestants and Catholics (Vossen 2015, 299). The party's appeal lay mainly in the way in which it was able to leverage the dissatisfaction of citizens with the established elite. A similar farmers’ party, the BoerBurgerBeweging [“FarmerCitizenMovement”], was founded in 2019 shortly after the start of the 2019 farmers’ protests. In 2021, this party was elected to parliament with one seat.

The 1990s saw a second wave of farmers’ protests. These protests were caused by growing discontent among farmers about a long period of declining grain prices, as well as discontent with farmers’ trade unions (Strijker and Terluin 2015, 128). This dissatisfaction eventually culminated in a large demonstration at the Malieveld in The Hague, a public field in the centre of the city which is a popular and strategic place for protests. This demonstration and those that followed were marked by thousands of tractors from all over the country gathered at the demonstration sites. These protests only ended when the central government threatened to deploy the army if the farmers occupied the national airport, Schiphol, with their tractors (Strijker and Terluin 2015, 128). Overall, these developments demonstrate the tradition of protesting within the agricultural community.

1.3. The Creation of the “Nitrogen Crisis”

Nitrogen emissions and protests by the agricultural sector against environmental policies are thus not a new phenomenon. However, the “nitrogen crisis” finds its origin in 2019. The Dutch Council of State coined the term ‘*stikstofcrisis*’ or nitrogen crisis in 2019 to recognize the grave harm of excessive nitrous oxide emissions to the environment. The central government proceeded to impose measures in some of the sectors responsible for the emissions, with the agricultural sector taking centre stage. A motion by a Dutch member of parliament, Tjeerd de Groot, to drastically reduce the scale of livestock in the Netherlands in efforts to address the high levels of nitrogen emissions, resulted in the first farmers’ protest on 1 October 2019 at the Malieveld (ICCT 2022). Approximately 2200 farmers arrived in The Hague on tractors,

disrupting traffic throughout the country with the longest recorded traffic jams in Dutch history and loudly honking in their path (ICCT 2022).

On 16 October 2019, demonstrations once again took place in The Hague, Utrecht, and De Bilt (close to the Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu; the Institute for Public Health and Environment). This protest marked the beginning of a more threatening nature to the demonstrations. It was the first farmers' protest to involve personal intimidation of a politician, with one of the vehicles carrying a casket with the name 'Jesse' on it, referring to GroenLinks (green democrats) party leader Jesse Klaver. These personal threats continued with Carola Schouten (Minister of Agriculture), Kasja Ollongren (Minister of Interior), and Tjeerd de Groot receiving death threats from the Farmers Defence Force (FDF) (De Telegraaf 2020).

The FDF was founded in May 2019 following the occupation of a pig farm in Boxtel by animal rights activists, out of a sense of self-protection against animal rights activists and "extremists" (NOS 2020). According to their website, their primary objective is promoting the interests of the agricultural sector (Farmers Defence Force n.d.). FDF represents a more radical faction amongst the farmers' activists, receiving disapproval from more moderate advocates. This is reflected, for example, in statements in which the organisation equates the position of the farmers with the Holocaust (NCTV 2020, 34). The extent of intimidation by the FDF was recognised in a tri-monthly terror threat report by the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), published in May 2020. The report stated that the farmers' protests were generally peaceful, but that the FDF in particular regularly crossed lines and contributed to social polarisation through "oversimplified and threatening expressions against politicians and fellow farmers who think differently" and physical aggression (NCTV 2020, 34). For example, the FDF targeted farmers who let themselves be bought out by the government and stated that "the weak links and the Judases from our ranks must be dealt with" (Farmers Defence Force 2020). The nature of FDF's discourse contributes to social polarisation around the theme of climate.

The farmers' protests regained momentum in July 2021 following research being presented concerning the government's handling of the nitrogen crisis. In contrast to the protests taking place in 2020, the farmers were now willing to engage in dialogue with the government. However, in June 2022 tensions once again rose after the announcement of new nitrogen targets per region. Multiple protests were organised in response to this announcement. Once again, this involved the intimidation of politicians with protestors visiting Minister Christianne van

der Wal at her private residence and awaiting Minister of Agriculture Henk Staghouwer at a work meeting.

The biggest farmers' protest took place in Stroe on 22 June 2022, with approximately 60.000 farmers and sympathisers demonstrating (ICCT 2022). This protest became a platform for discourse on the position of farmers in society and the preservation of the countryside. Farmers blocked highways with their tractors and by dumping farm waste on the roads at various locations throughout the Netherlands. The protests gradually escalated in both intensity and reach, with people and organisations unrelated to the farming sector or government becoming involved and protests growing violent. In June 2022 a Dutch member of parliament expressed his concern of the nitrogen crisis polarising cities and the countryside to the point of a civil war (Telegraaf 2022).



Image 1: Netherlands OUT/ANP/AFP via Getty Images. 2022. "A pile of manure, tires and hay bales on fire on the A50 highway in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, during a farmers' demonstration against the government's nitrogen policy on July 27, 2022."

1.4. Support for the Farmers' Protests

As a result of the increasingly violent nature of the protests, public support for the farmers' protests gradually decreased from 45% in June 2022 to only 39% in July 2022 (I&O Research 2022). The farmers did continue receiving political support from certain parties, such as the Far Right political party Forum voor Democratie ["Forum for Democracy"] (FVD). The party has positioned itself as a champion of the farmers, publicly offering support for the protests: "*FVD staat voor 100% achter onze boeren.*" ["FVD stands with the farmers 100%."] (Twitter @fvdemocratie 2023). This support from the Far Right corner reflects a trend that could be

observed internationally, with various Far Right aligned public figures taking a stance on the protests. Former U.S. President Donald Trump commented on the events, saying that “Farmers in the Netherlands of all places are courageously opposing the climate tyranny of the Dutch government” (CNN 2023). With the farmers’ protests taking place shortly after the Canadian freedom convoy protests by farmers in Canada, the Dutch protests became seen by some as the next iteration of this type of protest. Through this, the issue expanded from solely concerning nitrogen emissions, to being an international discussion around the role of the government and traditional occupations. Both domestically and in the international sphere, support for the farmers thus generally originated from Far Right political and social actors. To understand this connection between Far Right ideologies and the farmers’ protests, it is crucial to first define the Far Right and explore its position and presence in Dutch society.

1.5. The Centrality of Environmental Imaginaries within the Far Right

In recent years, there has been a noticeable surge in the rise of radical and extremist Far Right ideologies, which has resulted in a series of mass-casualty attacks on minority communities in Christchurch (March 2019), El Paso (August 2019), Hanau (February 2020), London (June 2021), Buffalo (May 2022), and Paris (December 2022). These attacks reflect a concerning and escalating global threat posed by Far Right extremist ideologies. In 2020, the UN’s Security Counterterrorism Committee (CTED) published a report recognising the Far Right movement as a significant global threat, supported by a substantial 320% rise in Far Right terrorist attacks from 2015 to 2020 (CTED 2020, 3). This trend is reflected in the recent Global Terrorism Index 2023, confirming that Far Right extremist terrorism accounted for 31% of global fatalities (273 deaths) between 2007 and 2022, (Global Terrorism Index 2023, 3, 30). Contrastingly, religiously motivated terrorism has declined by 95% since 2016 (Ibid).

The Far Right is not a coherent, centralised, or easily defined movement. It is a spectrum encompassing diverse ideologies, united by common ideas surrounding white supremacy and racial imperilment narratives, xenophobia, and a critique of the established elite. Far Right movements and ideologies often employ rhetoric centred around notions of belonging, nationalist geographies, and the importance of preserving a white ethno-state (Miller-Idriss 2020, 29). Individuals on the Far Right of the political scale hold views that challenge the core principles of liberal democracy, such as minority rights and the rule of law. The Far Right spectrum encompasses the radical right, which accepts democratic processes while opposing certain democratic values, and the extreme right, which outright rejects democracy and popular

sovereignty, and is often aligned with fascist ideologies (Mudde 2019, 6). Views associated with the Far Right have emerged as a significant political force due to their anti-systemic nature and critique of established elites.

The increase in terrorist attacks carried out by Far Right extremists is becoming a growing concern not only due to their escalating violence but due to three emerging trends. First, many Far Right attackers draw direct inspiration from their predecessors, seeking to emulate the perceived "success" and celebrity of other lone wolf terrorists (Liang and Cross 2020, 2). This copycat terrorism, which has become the primary modus operandi of Far Right terrorists, creates a transnational "network of inspiration" among disparate lone wolf terrorists (Azani et al. 2020, 9; Liang and Cross 2020, 2). This self-sustaining cycle of inspiration and violence is facilitated by the proliferation of online manifestos and gamified attacks live-streamed to a global audience. These networks of inspiration reflect the transnational potency of Far Right extremist ideologies and are facilitated by a second emerging trend: unregulated and anonymous online communities.

Within these digitised communities, the Far Right is able to disseminate its ideology through propaganda, recruit and radicalise new members, and coach them to evade law enforcement and counterterrorism operations (Gaudette, Scrivens and Venkatesh 2020, 1340; Azani et al. 2020, 9). A study by Sieckelinck and colleagues (2019), underscores the key role of exposure to online propaganda in the radicalisation of extremists. This study interviewed thirty-four former extremists in Denmark and the Netherlands, including those from extreme right and jihadist backgrounds, who confirmed that exposure to online propaganda played a significant catalytic role in their pathways into and out of extremism (Sieckelinck et al. 2019, 663). The internet transcends geographical boundaries, allowing members across the world to congregate in extremist echo-chambers, as part of a "digital brotherhood", exchanging tactical and operational advice and coordinating activities (Gaudette, Scrivens and Venkatesh 2020, 1340; Azani et al. 2020, 9). This trend has resulted in a shift from traditional organisational hierarchies to diffused and decentralised online ecosystems without a form of leadership (Azani et al. 2020, 2-9).

In addition to these already worrying trends, radical factions within the Far Right are attempting to normalise and legitimise racial identity politics and white supremacist discourse within mainstream politics. This process is facilitated by an increase in Far Right political parties with a large public following and elected seats in parliament. These parties manipulate existing

xenophobic fears in society, stemming from mainstream political discussions surrounding topics of immigration and Islamic terror (Azani et al. 2020, 17). According to the insights provided by Bjørge and Ravndal, Far Right radical populist parties adopt a strategic approach, aiming to challenge the current system from within the democratic framework. In the Netherlands, the founder and frontman of the second biggest political party, the Party for Freedom (PVV), Geert Wilders, has publicly referenced racial imperilment narratives warning that “our population will be replaced if we don’t act quickly” (Damhuis 2019). On another occasion, Wilders expressed his fear of an “existential threat to Dutch identity and freedom”, warning that “if we don’t do something right now, the Netherlands will soon be an Islamic country” (Algemeen Dagblad 2016). Wilders is known to consistently make such extreme statements, which over time has desensitised those following Dutch politics to his anti-Islamic and alarmist views. By leveraging the liberties afforded by the liberal-democratic order, radical Far Right parties such as the PVV seek to erode the foundations of the regime (Bjørge and Ravndal 2019, 2).

The connection between Far Right ideologies and the farmers' protests can be observed through the lens of ecofascism, a specific strain within the Far Right spectrum that places a significant emphasis on nature and environmental concerns. Ecofascism, while not a well-established or widely recognised ideology, gained renewed attention after the Christchurch terrorist attacks in 2019. The attacker's manifesto brought ecological concerns to the forefront of mainstream discourse.

The roots of this ideology can be traced back to the early 19th century, with ideas centred around people’s reconnection to nature to forge a distinct national identity (Campion 2021, 6). Popularised by Richard Walther Darré in 1928, the “*blud und boden*” [“blood and soil”] concept in Nazi ideology reinforced the belief in the mystic unity of people and place (Bramwell 1985, 29). This centrality of collectively imagined spaces in Far Right ideologies is often expressed through references to historical events, the concept of a homeland, and a focus on border protection. Adolf Hitler opportunistically utilised eco-fascist concepts, perceiving nature as a perpetual arena of competition and dominance among different racial groups (Campion 2021, 6). Consequently, this ideology evolved into an ecofascist vision where ecological harmony was associated with racial segregation and the assertion of exclusive territorial claims (Campion 2021, 2). However, these symbolic practices should be seen as inseparable from material realities (Pascale 2019, 901). Ecofascism’s potential for violence,

discrimination, and the promotion of privileged claims on territory can form a threat to marginalised communities and immigrants, who might be negatively impacted by exclusionary and xenophobic policies advocated by the Far Right (Diemen 2022, 2).

In the context of the farmers' protests, ecofascist ideals might resonate with certain Far Right groups who oppose industrialisation and urbanisation, seeking to protect traditional agricultural practices and the nation's rural heritage. It is therefore essential to recognise the complexities and potential dangers of ecofascist ideas, particularly when they intersect with social and political movements such as the farmers' protests.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Crises, throughout history, have been recognised as pivotal moments of social and political transformation. Traditionally, crises were closely associated with significant periods of change, marked by increased use of crisis-related concepts and notions. However, in the context of late modernity, the understanding and discourse surrounding crises have undergone a notable shift. Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski (2022) emphasise a departure from the conventional understanding of crises as sudden and transformative moments toward a perception of crises as states of varying permanence. This shift signifies a transition from a focus on abrupt “epochal change” to a recognition of crises as longer or shorter periods of transition, leading either towards a positive or negative outcome, or even an entirely different scenario (Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2022, 808; Koselleck and Richter 2005, 358).

Framing is a practice inherent to crises, determining the way in which crises are constructed and manipulated by different actors. The theory of framing as employed in social movement studies is largely derived from the work of Goffman (1974). For Goffman, frames represent “schemata of interpretation” that allow people “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” events in their immediate environment and the larger world (Goffman 1974, 21). The intended outcome of this process is to present and promote a course of action in response to an identified problem. This is usually underpinned by a master frame, a larger overarching narrative that runs across the frame. By providing events and occurrences with meaning, frames serve to organise experiences and direct action. Entman (1993, 52) highlights that framing involves the intentional selection of certain aspects of reality, which are made more salient in

communication, and the neglect of other aspects. These frames organise discourse by their patterns of selection and their choice of emphasis and exclusion. This dissertation will employ a definition of framing as a discursive practice which introduces or raises the importance of certain ideas while neglecting other aspects of reality, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and act in a particular way (see, *inter alia*, Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004).

Benford and Snow (1992) suggest that, during the framing process, action is directed through collective action frames. These collective action frames are strategically crafted to mobilise potential followers and supporters, garner support, and incapacitate adversaries (Benford and Snow 1988, 198). They are action-oriented systems of meanings and beliefs that serve as motivation and justification for the campaigns and activities of social actors (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Collective action frames are comprised of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational elements. Diagnostic framing offers an interpretation of what is wrong and what caused the problem; prognostic framing presents a course of action to address the issue raised by the diagnosis, and motivational framing (or action framing) seeks to persuade others that the collective action suggested by the prognosis is both possible and necessary (Benford and Snow 1988, 198; Benford and Snow 2000, 611).

Crisis frames can be put forward by various actors within or outside government circles and can include both non-power holders and special interest groups. These actors engage in symbolic manipulation, presenting alternative, yet plausible, explanations of the causes and consequences of crises and the necessary course of action to achieve certain political goals ('t Hart 1993, 38). Crises have frequently been utilised to “pre-legitimise” strategic-political actions by making these actions appear necessary and inevitable through “meta politics” (Krzyżanowski and Ekstrom 2022, 723). The success of contesting frames may undermine the legitimacy of public leaders and their capacity to make authoritative decisions. Far Right groups, particularly those in power across Europe and elsewhere, have effectively employed crisis as a tool to legitimise their ideological positions and policy choices, evident in, for example, the misrepresented refugee crisis (see, *inter alia*, Krzyżanowski 2018a, Krzyżanowski 2018b; Krzyżanowska et al. 2018; Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017; Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2022, 808).

Social and political actors can influence the perception of social issues through various means. They can amplify or distort the issues, or conversely, downplay and disregard their significance and criticality (see, *inter alia*, Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2018b; Krzyżanowski et al. 2018; Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). Taking this into account, crises are not merely a tangible reality but also a discursive construct. Right-wing populists often employ a strategy of constructing and exaggerating crises to instil a sense of urgency and fear among their followers. They may amplify existing issues or fabricate them entirely, aiming to generate panic and uncertainty. This strategy allows them to position themselves as the only solution to these perceived crises, promising to restore order and stability. Conversely, right-wing populists may also downplay or diminish certain crises when acknowledging them would reflect poorly on their leadership or policy positions. The legitimacy of hegemonic political orders is affected during crises when dominant frameworks legitimising the pre-existing socio-political order are broken down ('t Hart 1993, 39). To prevent a loss of legitimacy, political actors may dismiss existing societal issues, label them as exaggerated or "fake news," and undermine the credibility of opposing narratives. This tactic allows them to maintain an image of strength and competence while deflecting criticism and scrutiny.

Alternatively, a crisis can be presented as an undisputed and accepted fact, strategically leveraging the severity of the crisis to legitimize activities or launch offensive campaigns targeted at political opponents. This can be through rhetoric or the implementation of certain policies and regulations. For example, in Poland, the chaos and anxiety surrounding the COVID-19 crisis was used as a distraction to implement restrictive abortion laws. The United Right coalition, fronted by the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS), had tried, and failed to pass restrictive abortion laws since its election in 2015 (Grotsky 2020). By leveraging the severity and restrictions of the COVID-19 crisis, PiS bypassed the democratically elected parliament and appealed to the unelected constitutional court with PiS loyalists to reinterpret the existing law. This resulted in the criminalisation of abortion on 22 October 2020 (BBC 2020). In this scenario, there is an absence of debates regarding the presence or severity of the crisis. This strategy allows for the legitimisation of Far Right ideologically-driven strategic-political actions.

The unique nature of crises also allows for the intertwining of past experiences with future projections, combining the "scope of experience" with the "horizon of expectations" (Koselleck 1979, 91; Koselleck and Tribe 2004; Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2022, 808). Through this, crises are intricately linked to collective memories of the past and serve as a projection of

hopes, fears, desires, and analytical evaluations for the future. The combination of the familiar (known experiences) and the unfamiliar (anticipated expectations) within crisis discourse shapes a powerful narrative that influences perceptions and actions (Koselleck and Tribe 2004, 259; Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2022, 808). Consequently, crises assume a dual nature, simultaneously representing both a reality and a powerful imaginative tool for envisioning alternative futures (see, *inter alia*, Taylor 2004; Wolin 2008; Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2022). In reflecting and shaping societal perceptions, crises have considerable strategic implications for political agendas.

McNeil-Wilson (2020) applies the theory of crisis framing to the discursive practices of the Far Right. The author argues that current analyses of countering extremism have failed to grasp how crises are exploited by the Far Right to attract new members, disseminate ideology, and engage in activism, including violent actions (McNeil-Wilson 2020, 3). McNeil-Wilson found that resilience-building narratives were emphasised as a key strategy employed by Far Right groups to promote community cohesion during the COVID-19 crisis. Conversely, the author discredits the centrality of conspiracy theories in crisis frames put forward by Far Right actors. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering the political context and actions of authorities in understanding the Far Right, emphasises the need for caution in attributing conspiracy theories to Far Right groups without sufficient evidence and the potential need to nuance existing commentary on the subject. This study builds upon the research conducted by McNeil-Wilson by corroborating its results and expanding the scope of research to the Dutch context and that of the nitrogen crisis.

2.1 The Discursive Strategies of the Far Right

This chapter delves into the use of discursive strategies by social actors, highlighting how political groups and movements employ discourse to advance their agendas. By understanding the intricacies of these discursive strategies, we can gain deeper insights into the underlying motives and implications of the Far Right's ideological inclinations in the context of the farmers' protests.

2.1.1. Weaponised Language

Pascale (2019, 898) suggests that Far Right political groups employ a particular *modus operandi* to achieve their objectives, involving a combination of symbolic and material forms of violence. This approach, which is referred to as the weaponisation of language, is central to the tactics and strategies of Far Right political groups. Symbolic violence refers to the use of language, symbols, and other cultural tools to legitimise and reinforce power relations, often in ways that are invisible or normalised (Pascale 2019, 898). Far Right groups may use this form of violence by spreading hate speech, promoting xenophobic or racist ideologies, or engaging in other forms of propaganda that demonise certain groups or individuals. Material violence, on the other hand, involves physical harm or the threat of physical harm. This form of violence may be used to intimidate or silence opponents, for example, by engaging in acts of terrorism, engaging in hate crimes, or engaging in other forms of violent behaviour. Pascale poses that Far Right political groups often employ both symbolic and material forms of violence in a coordinated and strategic manner, using symbolic violence to legitimise and normalise material violence, and using material violence to reinforce the power and influence of their symbolic messages (2019, 898). This approach can be highly effective in advancing the Far Right agenda, as it can help them gain support from like-minded individuals, while also intimidating and silencing their opponents.

Weaponised language is especially dangerous when it is employed through mundane discourse. This is when narratives crafted by Far Right groups enter mainstream discourse. People utilising those frames then become unwitting cogs in the machine of right-wing movements. Mundane discourse can overlap with disinformation when false information is normalised through public discourse (Pascale 2019, 907). Far Right groups use disinformation strategies to promote certain narratives, enabled by computational tools for propaganda based on algorithms, automation, and artificial intelligence, alongside pseudo-science, anti-media rhetoric, misleading information, and distorted statistics (DiResta 2018; Pascale 2019, 904-905).

Mundane discourse also serves to normalise hate and hate groups. Far Right activists aim to shift societal perceptions and boundaries in a process referred to as “mainstreaming” or “normalisation” (see, *inter alia*, Hainsworth 2000, Odmalm and Hepburn 2017; Rydgren and van der Meiden. 2019; Mudde 2019; Wodak 2020; Mondon and Winter 2020; Kallis 2021; Feshami 2021; Krzyżanowski and Ekstrom 2022). These concepts describe a process in which

hegemonic ideas or powers are challenged by introducing radical new ideas as “attainable practical possibilities” and through this, normalise white nationalist sentiments (Feshami 2018, 7-9; Feshami 2021, 56). Weaponised language becomes embedded into mainstream discourse through metaphors, euphemisms, and linguistic frames (Pascale 2019, 910). This process of symbolic violence precedes and accompanies material violence. An example of the way in which the entrenchment of harmful narratives in mundane discourse can precede material violence, is through “othering”. Othering is a linguistic process through which an ‘Us vs. Them’ narrative is created, this results in the devaluation and exclusion of an out-group. The in-group becomes desensitised to the plight of the ‘other’ or the out-group, this desensitisation can then be leveraged to disregard harm done to the out-group, as well as incentivise the infliction of harm (Pascale 2019, 909). By exploiting cultural vulnerabilities and strategically manipulating emotional responses, Far Right groups seek to establish their authority as unaccountable and render the violence they enact as ordinary (Pascale 2019, 900-901). This normalisation is primarily achieved through racial imperilment narratives.

2.1.2. Racial Imperilment Narratives and Affective Identity Production

A primary method through which violence or politics of exclusion are normalised is through racial imperilment narratives which offer a justification for these actions. Racial imperilment narratives produce a scenario in which the imperilment of the white race is imminent, seeking to mobilise white people into acting against the state or minority groups in defence of their race and “their people” (Marcks and Pawelz 2022, 1417). These imaginaries of racial imperilment play into “moral panics”, which are often immigration-related (Cohen 1972, 1; Krzyżanowski 2022, 505). In “Folk Devils and Moral Panics” Cohen (1972) argues that moral panic is enacted as part of strategic, ideological, and political agendas. By posing minority groups, or the state, as an existential threat to the in-group, this discursive strategy enacts moral panic in the in-group, thereby legitimising violence against the out-group in the name of self-defence. This is accompanied by the dehumanisation of the out-group. Through this, resentment is amplified and accelerated, scapegoats are targeted, and injustice is legitimised, all while obscuring the true ends of such campaigns. This type of discursive construct thus precedes and justifies violence and extraordinary measures and contributes to the stigmatisation and discrimination of minority groups in the long term.

Two types of imperilment constructions as used by the Far Right can be distinguished: insecurity, representing a physical threat to individuals, and extinction, an abstract threat to the

racial community as a whole (Marcks and Pawelz 2022, 1418). Insecurity imperilment narratives may, for example, refer to endangerment by allegedly violent migrants, while extinction narratives may refer to threats such as “white genocide”. The Fourteen Words is a well-known example of an extinction imperilment narrative. With the phrase “We must secure the existence of our people and the future of white children” David Lane plays into a sense of urgency to protect the existence of the white race, and a need for action against an unspecified threat (Feshami 2020, 3). Similarly, the white nationalist Great Replacement theory poses that elites aims to facilitate a demographic and cultural replacement of the white race through migration and reductions in white birth rates. The theory dates back to the work of French author Maurice Barrès in the 19th century. Barrès, a nationalist antisemitic advocate of race science, suggested that the “replacement” of white French people by immigrants would result in the death, emptiness, and destruction of France’s soul (Cowden and Yuval-Davis 2022, 111). This threat of cultural and ethnic replacement has become a dominant narrative in online and offline violent extremist groups, unifying various white supremacist ideologies. Through populist Far Right political parties, the theory has also permeated political mainstream discourse in the Netherlands. In May 2022, Flemish politician Filip Dewinter stated his belief in the Great Replacement theory during an interview at the public broadcasting network “Omroep Nederland”, leading to parliamentary discussions about the dangers of these conspiracy theories entering mundane discourse.

Through racial imperilment narratives, Far Right propaganda simultaneously enforces a “myth of victimhood” while promoting cultural and racial superiority (Marcks and Pawelz 2022, 1417). In this way, imperilment narratives are used by Far Right activists to produce affective identity. Affective identification indicates that a person has positive feelings about their membership to a particular social group (Feshami 2020, 7). By emphasising racial imperilment narratives during the affective identity production process, these activists aim to instil a sense of belonging to the Far Right movement and racial community and create a sense of urgency to protect the white race (Azani et al. 2020; Feshami 2020; Feshami 2021).

Affective identity production also plays a role in protest participation. Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez and de Weerd, in 2002, explored the relationship between farmers’ identity and their participation in protests in the Netherlands and Spain. The study found that a sense of collective identity stimulates participation in collective action, and protest participation is more likely among people with a strong collective identity. Identity factors thus had a unique contribution

to the explanation of farmers' protest participation in the Netherlands in the 1990s. The authors noted that farmers felt a sense of belonging to their farming community and a shared understanding of what it means to be a farmer. This was measured through questions about group identification (asking respondents to agree or disagree with the statement "I feel little commitment to other farmers") and participation in farmers' organisations (Klandermans et al. 2002, 242). Other variables such as relative deprivation, feelings of injustice, trust in government, and evaluation of agricultural policy were regarded as less important in explaining protest participation. The study's findings thus suggest that collective identity plays a key role in motivating participation in collective action and social movements.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data collection and analysis for this study are conducted through a mixed-method approach of quantitative- and qualitative CA and the crisis framing methodology put forward by Ryan (1990). Ryan developed a guided process to identify frames that requires the researcher to answer four questions: "What is the key issue in the frame?", "What is the responsibility/solution proposed in the frame, or its diagnosis and prognosis?", "What are the symbols used, especially visual images, metaphors, historical examples, stereotypes, and catchphrases?", and "What are the supporting arguments?" (Ryan 1991, 12). These questions can be used to identify frames within communications, and the actions that the frame suggests as being necessary to take. However, these questions obscure the actor from its analysis. None of the questions address the sender of the message, although this is a critical part of the interpretation of a frame. Whoever creates the frame has a certain motivation to do so and influences it through their beliefs, values, and ideology. It should thus not be obscured from the analysis of crisis framing. By combining this guided process with CA tools, inferences and conclusions can be drawn about not only the message and its intended audience but also the sender of the message.

CA is a method of data collection that allows for the systematic analysis of textual information (Weber 1990, 2). It is a valuable method for social sciences research as it is an unobtrusive research method. It avoids the 'interview effect' or the 'Heisenberg effect'— it prevents participants from distorting answers or altering behaviour when they know they are under

observation, to avoid judgement or embarrassment (Halperin and Heath 2020, 374). Answers are therefore less likely to be formatted to be “socially acceptable” or politically correct, making it a valuable way of investigating an issue among a large number of subjects (Halperin and Heath 2020, 374). CA has found significant utility in exploring social phenomena like prejudice, discrimination, and evolving cultural symbols within communication content (Prasad 2008, 5). For example, Craemer and Martinez (2020) in their CA study highlighted the perpetuation of Haitian stereotypes through Dominican newspapers. The author studied prejudice and bias in media as forms of discrimination against Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic.

Following a set of explicit rules, the outcomes of CA are replicable and objective. The first step of CA involves determining a specific objective or research question, this research will be guided by the following question: “Which discursive frames did Far Right activists develop in response to the nitrogen ruling of the Dutch Council of State and why?” The next step involves the identification of a suitable subject of analysis relevant for the proposed analysis. The source of communication can vary from official documents, cultural documents, or personal documents (Halperin and Heath 2021, 376). This study will focus on the analysis of personal documents, namely messages sent by individuals on the Telegram platform. This data forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions about the content. The next steps involve selecting units of analysis, developing categories or codes, sampling appropriate content, constructing a coding protocol, and conducting the analysis (Prasad 2008, 9). Both the coding protocol and analysis will be conducted using Ryan’s four-step process. The quantitative content analysis phase allows for the analysis of the manifest content of communications, the surface content that is easily observable (Halperin and Heath 2020, 376). This is an objective and systematic research method that allows for the revealing of themes and patterns in the data.

3.1. Quantitative Content Analysis

The quantitative CA phase will involve a thorough coding process guided by a coding protocol to ensure the reliability and consistency of coding. A code is a label that can be used to assign units of meaning to segments of text. These codes can be used to signal the presence of variables and categories in the text and to help identify relevant themes (Halperin and Heath 2020, 380., Charmaz 2014, 4).

After selecting the groups for analysis, messages posted within the timeframe have been exported from Telegram and compiled into separate files divided by group. This dataset was solely text-based and excludes any images and files. Since Group 1 is a group dedicated to discussing developments in the news, without a specific focus on the nitrogen issue, the initial dataset has been filtered based on the selected keywords to ensure the relevancy of the messages to be analysed. This will filter out any messages unrelated to the nitrogen issue. Since Group 2 and Group 3 are dedicated to discussing the nitrogen issue all messages within the timeframe are considered relevant for analysis. Therefore, the entire textual dataset within the selected timeframe (with the exclusion of any images or files) has been used for analysis.

The first step of the coding process is counting the number of messages within the dataset, as well as the number of messages containing frame-consistent references. The total number of messages examined as part of this paper is $n = 2753$, representing the total number of singular messages released by the four channels which specifically referred to the farmers' protests, or the established key terms, between 1 June 2022 and 30 November 2022. Within this dataset, $n = 935$ messages were coded as containing reference to a framing device. These messages were coded in-vivo according to which frame they referred to, utilising Ryan's (1991) four-step process for the identification of frames. This process identifies the key issue in the frame, the responsibility or solution proposed in the frame, the diagnosis or prognosis the frame offers, and the use of symbolism and supporting arguments. The final step of the coding process involves counting the total number of frame-consistent messages in order to calculate the percentage of frame-consistent references per frame. This has been calculated by multiplying the frame-consistent references for the frame by 100 and dividing this number by the total number of messages for this group. This percentage reveals which framing device is utilised most frequently by each group in discussions of the nitrogen crisis and whether these results are consistent across the groups.

From the coding process, an initial set of 16 framing devices were identified. These frames were then re-coded, with overlapping frames absorbed into a singular frame. Frames referring to *anti-elite sentiments* and *government incapability and misguidance* became classed as *anti-establishment*. Frames that diagnose the nitrogen crisis as being a result of *international interdependence*, *EU institutions*, and *migration* were grouped as the *globalisation* frame. Messages *denying the existence of a nitrogen problem* or linking it to other *conspiratorial explanations* were classed together under the *conspiracy* frame. Frames referring to a *threat to*

farmers' identity (due to targeted government policies, being forced out of the occupation and suicide) and the importance of farmers in Dutch society were grouped as farming *identity under threat*. The resilience-building frame stems from frames initiating and supporting *responsive activism* and *political support*. The *limitations of civil liberties* frame did not need to be further adjusted. The resulting six framing devices were the subject of the qualitative CA.

3.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

The quantitative CA is complemented by an in-depth qualitative CA of the latent content to expose meaning, values, norms, and purposes embedded in the text. During this phase words, phrases, and expressions are placed within their broader societal context. There will be an examination of how the nitrogen crisis, and discussions thereof, have been presented by Far Right activists and by the farmers' groups. This will be done through an in-depth analysis of the messages containing one or multiple frame orientations. Phrases and expressions will be placed in their related context, and implicit meanings, values, and norms will be highlighted. From this analysis, inferences will be drawn about the framing devices and their use in the discourse surrounding the nitrogen crisis. Several examples of such messages and their analysis will be included to provide concrete examples of how the frames are presented in the discourse of these groups. All examples will be translated from their original Dutch form to English by the author, who is a native speaker of Dutch.

3.3. Drawing Inferences from the Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis

By triangulating the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative CA, the discussion chapter will compare the way in which the Far Right case study group (G1) has engaged with crisis framing in the context of the nitrogen crisis, compared to the farmers' case study groups (G2 and G3). To facilitate this comparison, we will identify and contrast the specific crisis frames that the Far Right group has chosen to emphasise or de-emphasise, in contrast to the framing patterns observed in the farmers' groups. This analysis will allow us to gain insights into the discursive strategies employed by the Far Right, their underlying motivations, and their objectives in the context of the nitrogen crisis. Further, there will be an examination of the potential convergence in frames between the groups, and what inferences can be drawn from this. Moreover, the discussion will also consider the implications of these findings for the broader landscape of social protest movements in the Netherlands. By exploring the discursive

strategies of both the Far Right and the farmers' groups, we can better comprehend the dynamics of ideological contestation and mobilisation within the context of the nitrogen crisis.

3.4 Telegram

This paper examines frames developed in Telegram groups in the Netherlands in response to the nitrogen crisis. It attempts to comprehend the development of contemporary crisis frames within the Far Right, highlighting the interactive processes that occur between Far Right activists and crises. Media platforms, such as Telegram, have become a platform for framing contests. Contesting frames are presented by different actors, sponsoring their versions of political events and crises (Ryan, Charlotte & Caragee 2001, 45). Through these framing contests, social actors can exercise their power to define what is and what is not relevant to the issue. In this way, they are able to shape public discourse. These framing contests generally favour political and economic elites due to the role of economic and cultural resources. The ability of a frame to control public discourse depends on these resources and the resonance of the frame with political values or cultural tendencies (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson 1992, 177). By placing the theory of framing at the centre of this research, the results can be used to examine how the nitrogen ruling, and discussions thereof, have been presented by Far Right activists.

This dissertation has utilised the messaging application Telegram as a tool for conducting its analysis. The rationale behind selecting Telegram is attributed to its open-source accessibility and user-friendliness, enabling account holders to access the platform without the need for dark web programs. The primary objective of this study is to scrutinise the nature of the discussions held within open-access Telegram groups. Telegram is regarded as a distinctive platform for political discourse owing to its communicative digital aspects, which deviate from those of conventional media channels. Moreover, Telegram is highly secure, ensuring user anonymity, thereby implying that organisations may be more forthcoming and transparent in sharing information.

The Telegram groups to be studied have been selected based on several criteria. First, all groups must be openly accessible. From a privacy perspective, only groups that do not require membership will be studied. Second, the channels need to be responsive to current events and do have an 'activist' component. Third, the channels need to contain messages using keywords. The keywords used for the selection of relevant groups are: 'Boer' ('Farmer') and 'Stikstof'

(‘Nitrogen’). Groups containing at least fifty messages with these keywords are considered relevant. A six-month timeframe, from June 1st to November 30th, 2022, was selected to examine the released posts. This period encompassed the crisis's initial development, with the nitrogen rulings being announced on June 11, and framing responses in their entirety. The analysis will encompass the full dataset deriving from these criteria. This study will analyse and compare messages from one Far Right news channel (Group 1) and two ‘farmers’ groups (Group 2 and Group 3). These farmers’ groups have been created solely to discuss the nitrogen policies among farmers and supporters. There will be an analysis of the messages posted in both types of groups to identify the framing devices being used in each group. Inferences will be drawn from this, analysing how the frames compare or differ from each other and the implications of this.

Initial research involved monitoring the activities of a series of Far Right movement organisations and groups dedicated to discussing the nitrogen crisis on Telegram to scope early findings and identify suitable groups. After examining potential candidates for study, the following organisations were identified as relevant to the study purpose: Group 1: One 4 All Info Kanaal; Group 2: Boeren in Opstand; and Group 3: Official Convoy NL. The initial data gathered examined the reach of each channel, the number of followers of, and posts made by each movement organisation, and the number of posts that were related to the nitrogen crisis.

3.5. Case Study Selection

Group 1 (G1), the ‘One 4 All Info Kanaal’, is a telegram group dedicated to publishing and discussing news, with a clear alignment to the views of the Far Right. This group serves as a representative case study at the national level, providing insight into the evolving Far Right narratives in The Netherlands. This channel was created on 26 June 2021 and at the time of data collection had 760 followers. The total corpus of data within the selected timeframe is $n = 17.634$. with the number of relevant messages containing keywords being $n = 900$. The channel was selected for analysis based on three criteria. First, the large scope of available and relevant data in the selected timeframe ($n = 900$), the group regularly discussed the nitrogen crisis and its developments in the news. Second, the group has an activist component; members of the group regularly discussed topics such as migration policies in response to the news and would encourage each other to partake in promotional activities for the group. And finally, the messages in the channel hold views that are generally considered to be “extreme”, and align with Far Right ideologies. This group strongly adheres to ideological principles and objectives

that align with the Far Right, including the belief in a racially homogeneous nation, an idealisation of national culture and people, and the promotion of values that contradict individualism and universalism. A significant number of messages published in this group refer to the 'Great Replacement' and the preservation of the white race. Members of the group are actively involved in the promotion of xenophobic values within society through their actions and activism. The identified group, therefore, aligns closely with extremist organisations on the Far Right. The AIVD (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, or General Intelligence and Security Agency), uses the term extremist for individuals or groups that are motivated to engage in violent or non-violent activities that undermine the democratic legal order, for ideological reasons (AIVD n.d.).

Group 2 (G2), Boeren in Opstand, is a telegram group created to discuss the nitrogen crisis amongst farmers and supporters. The channel was created during the early development of the nitrogen crisis on 29 October 2020. This could suggest that its members are directly impacted by nitrogen policies and therefore closely monitoring the situation. Further, the group is very active in its messaging with a large scope of available and relevant data in the selected timeframe ($n = 30.358$), the group regularly discussed the nitrogen crisis and its developments in the news. It also has a large number of followers (9.400 at the time of writing). These factors make the group particularly suitable for analysis.

Group 3 (G3), Official Convoy Nederland, is a channel on Telegram centred around discussions of the nitrogen crisis and its impact on farmers. The group was created on 28 January 2022 and had 21.453 followers at the time of writing. Despite the large number of followers of the channel, there was less overall activity within the group. The total number of messages within the selected time frame is $n = 823$.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As a result of the coding process, six key framing devices were found to be used across statements from the three channels under study between 1 June 2022 and 30 November 2022.

Frame 1 (F1): *Anti-Institutional*: The nitrogen crisis as a result of bad governance.

Frame 2 (F2): *Globalisation*: The nitrogen crisis as a result of globalisation and multiculturalism.

Frame 3 (F3): *Conspiracy*: The nitrogen crisis as a made-up crisis.

Frame 4 (F4): *Limitation of Civil Liberties*: The nitrogen crisis as limiting civil liberties.

Frame 5 (F5): *Imperilment Narratives*: The nitrogen crisis as posing a threat to the identity and way of life of farmers.

Frame 6 (F6): *Resilience-building*: The documentation or support of resilience-building measures against the nitrogen policies.

These frames aim to provide a diagnosis of the cause of the nitrogen crisis (F1, F2, and F3), the need for an immediate response (F3 and F4), and ways of responding to the crisis (F6). The selected groups used several crisis frames in their discourse of the nitrogen crisis. These frames were used differently across the case study groups, stressing certain concepts, and framing devices, and excluding others. As an example of these divergences, G1 strongly stressed anti-institutional frames (F1) as a result of the nitrogen crisis, while G2 and G3 were more likely to focus on resilience-building frames (F6).

Table 1 is divided into five sections. The first section lists the results for all three groups together, with the total number of messages analysed being $n = 2753$, the second section lists the results for G1 ($n = 900$), the third for G2 ($n = 1030$), and the fourth for G3 ($n = 823$). Each section is divided by four columns. The first column in each section lists the identified frames; the second column contains the number of messages containing references to these frames; the third column provides the percentage (%) of references to the frame in relation to the total number of messages for this group during the selected timeframe. These percentages are

marked green if it is the most referenced frame in this group and if the percentage is marked red, it is the least referenced frame. Some posts contained multiple F orientations (for instance, certain posts may contain reference to the frames of blaming both globalisation and government incapability) and therefore the total number of references may be higher than the total number of posts.

All groups (n = 2753 messages, aggregated)	References	Percentage of all messages (n = 2753)	Percentage of frame-oriented messages (n = 935)
F1: Anti-Institutional	212	7.70%	22.67%
F2: Globalisation	81	2.94%	8.66%
F3: Conspiracy	113	4.10%	12.09%
F4: Limitation of Civil Liberties	58	2.11%	6.20%
F5: Imperilment Narratives	117	4.25%	12.51%
F6: Resilience-building	354	12.86%	37.86%
Group 1: One 4 All Info Kanaal (n = 900)	References	Percentage of all messages (n = 900)	Percentage of frame-oriented messages (n = 248)
F1: Anti-Institutional	69	7.67%	28.51%
F2: Globalisation	31	3.44%	12.81%
F3: Conspiracy	41	4.56%	16.94%
F4: Limitation of Civil Liberties	20	2,22%	8,06%
F5: Imperilment Narratives	55	6.11%	22.73%
F6: Resilience-building	32	3.56%	13.22%
Group 2: Boeren in Opstand (n = 1030)	References	Percentage of all messages (n = 1030)	Percentage of frame-oriented messages (n = 558)
F1: Anti-Institutional	128	12.43%	23.23%
F2: Globalisation	45	4.37%	8.17%
F3: Conspiracy	71	6.89%	12.89%
F4: Limitation of Civil Liberties	32	3,11%	5.73%
F5: Imperilment Narratives	55	5.34%	9.98%
F6: Resilience-building	227	22.04%	41.20%
Group 3: Official Convoy NL (n = 823)	References	Percentage of all messages (n = 823)	Percentage of frame-oriented messages (n = 129)
F1: Anti-Institutional	15	1.82%	11.72%
F2: Globalisation	5	0.61%	3.90%
F3: Conspiracy	1	0.12%	0.78%
F4: Limitation of Civil Liberties	6	0.73%	4.65%
F5: Imperilment Narratives	7	0.85%	5.47%
F6: Resilience-building	95	11.54%	74.22%

Table 1. Frame-consistent references in G1, G2, and G3 between 1 June 2022 and 30 November 2022.

4.1. Frame 1: Anti-Institutional

The anti-institutional framing device contains several sub-frames varying in their content and beliefs. Two main sub-frames emerge from the dataset: one that rejects the concept of democracy and puts forward the idea of an ‘evil elite’, and one criticising government actions and calling for democratic change to address the perceived mismanagement. This trend reflects the dichotomy between the extreme right, rejecting democratic values, and the radical right, which operates within the frame of democracy.

F1 is the second most referenced frame in the dataset (22.67%). Both G2 (23.23%) and G3 (11.72%) also record F1 as the second most salient frame in their respective datasets. For G1 this frame is the most referenced frame overall (28.51%). G3 displays the least frame-consistent references to F1 compared to the other case study groups. The reason for this contrast between G3 and both G1 and G2, could be that G3 appears to contain fewer personal messages. Its content focuses more on the documentation and promotion of activism than diagnoses for the crisis. Group members may thus be less inclined to share grievances regarding government policies in this group. However, the messages within G3 that did reference this frame, largely had an aggressive undertone, referencing, for example, attacks on politicians. Group members display a significant degree of hostility towards the central government and its representatives.

4.1.1. The “Evil Elite” Conspiracy

Anti-institutional extremists in the Netherlands, have framed the nitrogen crisis as an attempt by the so-called “evil elite” to suppress farmers. The Dutch National Intelligence Agency, the Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD) has identified a growing group within the broader Dutch protest movement, that is turning away from what it calls an “evil elite” (AIVD 2023, 4). For part of this movement, the narrative of an evil elite provides an explanation for all the anxieties and adversity experienced. This has accelerated the ideology’s dominance in popular discourse (AIVD 2023, 21). Within the dataset of this study, 31 messages *directly* referred to the Dutch government as a whole or specific members of parliament as an evil elite putting forward policies with sinister ulterior motives. Far more messages implied an extent of belief in this narrative, referring to politicians as “*landverraders*” or traitors of the country (n = 70) or claiming that they are corrupt, manipulative, and have ill intentions:

“Politiek is een programma allemaal verschillende deuren naar immer hetzelfde slachthuis.” [“Politics is an agenda with different doors always leading to the same slaughterhouse.”] (11 June 2022, G2).

Considering the number of followers, viewers and reactions to important anti-institutional drivers and channels, the AIVD estimates that more than one hundred thousand people believe to a greater or lesser extent in the narrative about an 'evil elite' (AIVD 2023, 31). The following of the evil elite narrative has significant growth potential due to its compatibility with other extremist ideologies and its dissemination through influential figures with broad audiences. For example, Thierry Baudet, frontman of the radical right Forum for Democracy (FVD) party and self-acclaimed conspiracy theorist, has publicly shared his belief in several evil elite conspiracies. He has expressed his belief that the Dutch government has a “party cartel” in which the main ruling parties conspire towards the same goals, and, on another occasion, shared his conviction that the world is controlled by “evil reptilians” (NOS 2022a; NOS 2022b). This widespread exposure normalises the narrative, making it more accepted within certain circles. Part of the movement that believes in the narrative of an evil elite has radicalised from activist to extremist over time and is referred to as the anti-institutional extremist movement by Dutch intelligence agencies (AIVD 2023, 6).

The narrative's adaptability enables it to incorporate new messages related to current events and phenomena, making it accessible for other (extremist) groups, including those on the Far Right, to adopt and promote. This “issue grouping” appears throughout messages identifying the nitrogen crisis as a form of government oppression. This oppression is explained by some as government failure or mismanagement. Those believing in this diagnosis have retained their faith in democracy but have lost their trust in the current political representatives. This lack of trust in the current government is often emphasised by grouping together previous instances of government mismanagement. These instances are listed together in one message to enforce this frame of government misguidedness and express the belief that Dutch citizens are all victims of the government. This concerns problems such as the corona pandemic, the housing market, and the *toeslagenaffaire*, a childcare benefits scandal:

“Momenteel staat een groot deel van de middenstand op omvallen, de boeren van hun land gejaagd, toeslagen kinderen nog steeds zoek, gezondheidszorg op omvallen, pensioenen verdampt, huizen onbetaalbaar, een ontslagen kabinet wat er nog steeds zit, CO2 puntensysteem in de maak, digitaal EU ID in de maak, Ceta verdrag, enz.”

[“Currently, a large part of the middle class is about to fall, the farmers are chased off their land, subsidy children are still lost, health care is about to fall, pensions are lost in the fog, houses are unaffordable, a cabinet that was fired is still in parliament, a CO2 point system is being made, a digital EU ID is being made, a CETA agreement, etc.”] (13 July 2022, G3).

Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his previous cabinet formations have received a lot of criticism for their involvement in various scandals. Most recently and most notoriously, cabinet Rutte IV, the fourth cabinet formation led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte, received public backlash because of the *toeslagenaffaire* which led to the resignation of the cabinet in January 2021. However, with elections taking place shortly after, the cabinet was reinstated in March 2021. The affair was the result of unjustified suspicions of fraud with allowances and a strict recovery policy from the central government. The case made the press with childcare benefits, but it later turned out that similar problems were involved in the recovery of rent allowance, health care allowance, child-related budgets, and income tax. Although the problem had been ongoing since 2004, it only received public attention in 2017, when it became publicly known as a scandal. Investigations found proof of institutional racism, institutional bias, and violations of the fundamental principles of the rule of law (Huisman 2020, 2).

From 2004 to 2019, it is estimated that the benefits scandal concerned 26,000 parents and 70,000 children (Huisman 2020, 3). Parents had made, often minor, mistakes or had been misinformed by agencies or childcare centres and therefore had to pay back the full allowance they had received. As a result, many duped parents fell into debt, which in some cases amounted to tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of euros. As a result, some of the victims had to deal with large-scale disruption of their lives: they lost their jobs, their houses, some children were placed into foster care, and many parents dealt with psychological problems (Huisman 2020, 3).

The excerpt above emphasises the fact that these children were unjustly taken from their parents in order to underscore the anti-institutional argument being made. The *toeslagenaffaire* can be considered as a key example of government mismanagement. Grouping together this scandal and others with the nitrogen crisis serves two purposes. First, those who have been personally affected by the *toeslagenaffaire* or are sympathetic towards the victims of the scandal, are more likely to relate to the position of the farmers. And second, it reinforces the idea that the government is incapable of acting in the best interest of its citizens. This doubt is exploited by

anti-institutional extremist instigators, who merge genuine concerns and valid critiques of institutions with a narrative suggesting that government actions and failures are all part of a covert preconceived plan (AIVD 2023, 32). According to this plan, the evil elite aim to suppress the population and attain total world control as its hidden objective. Supporters of the anti-institutional extremist ideology find this narrative more plausible than the idea that officials from various institutions, despite good intentions, may take actions or make mistakes that negatively affect citizens' personal lives (AIVD 2023, 32).

It is notable that the above excerpt was originally posted in G3 and shared verbatim within G1. G1 has been established as a Far Right affiliated news group, while G3 proclaims to be a group founded by and for farmers. The fact that this sub-frame and the associated beliefs are shared between farmers and Far Right activists is a concrete example of the convergence in narratives between these groups. It also indicates that Far Right activists are active in farmers' groups such as G3 and share their ideologies in these groups.

The adaptability of the evil elite narrative is facilitated by a shift in the way in which people in the Netherlands engage with protests. The AIVD notes that the rise of social media has made protests on various topics more intermingled (AIVD 2023, 21). Social media allow people to find each other and connect quickly and easily online. Individuals who are opposed to specific policies are then able to connect with people who are protesting other issues. Despite the fact that these people originally opposed different policies, in some cases they are able to connect on their shared grievances and resistance to the government and its institutions. This process was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (AIVD 2023, 21). Different people and groups came into contact with each other via the internet and then came together in physical demonstrations. Although initially the focus of this protest group was on the COVID-19 policies, various topics have become intermingled within their discourse and included in existing messages. These topics often touch on latent concerns people already had about the government and its institutions. These messages spread quickly through social media.

4.1.2. The Netherlands as a Non-Democratic Country

Another sub-frame found in the dataset, associated with views on the extreme radical right, claims that the nitrogen policies are proof that the Netherlands is not a democracy but rather a totalitarian society or dictatorship, and that politics are inherently corrupt. Those believing in this frame are convinced that the government has an ulterior agenda and does not care about

its citizens. Members of parliament are seen as servants of this system. Explanations for the content of this ulterior agenda vary from ideological to conspiratorial and generally take on a negative or aggressive tone. In G2, one framing device utilised a Marxist understanding of the nitrogen crisis:

“Ik heb veel vertrouwen in ons volk, de arbeiders, de boeren, de normale hollanders. Maar we worden bestuurd door een klasse die het merg uit onze botten zuigt, daarom klapt de zorg, klapt de transportsector, klapt de industrie en klappen de boerenbedrijven.” [“I have a lot of faith in our people, the labourers, the farmers, the normal Dutch people. But we are led by a class that sucks the marrow from our bones, that is why the healthcare system is collapsing, the transport sector is collapsing, the industry is collapsing, and the farming companies are collapsing”] (11 June 2022, G2).

The excerpt above demonstrates this sense of oppression by the government, which in this instance is explained through a Marxist reference. The central government is equated to an elitist upper class taking advantage of the “labourers” and the “normal Dutch people”. Resistance against this elitist class is framed as being the solution to the oppression experienced by farmers through the nitrogen policies.

4.1.3. Government Mismanagement

One sub-frame citing government mismanagement claims that the nitrogen policies are targeting the wrong industry. Rather than targeting farmers, those utilising this framing device believe the policies should be focused on reducing emissions by other industries:

“Bij de vuilverbrander Attero worden dagelijks honderden vrachten bende uit binnen en buitenland naar toe gehaald en verbrand of verwerkt maar mag ondanks dat mooi buiten de stikstof regels vallen! Terwijl de boeren moeten verdwijnen word over deze grote echte vervuilers niet omgekeken!” [“At garbage disposal Attero hundreds of shipments of domestic and international trash are burned or disposed daily, but nevertheless it falls outside of the nitrogen rules! While the farmers are made to disappear, these large real emitters are left alone!”] (8 July 2022, G1).

This subframe, which is found exclusively in G1, highlights a viewpoint that criticises the government's approach to nitrogen policies, particularly in targeting farmers while overlooking

other significant emitters such as industrial facilities. While it is fair to criticise the government's focus on the farmers, downplaying the agricultural industry's contribution to nitrogen emissions is factually misleading. Agriculture is a major source of nitrogen pollution in The Netherlands, and any effective policy should address this aspect along with other sectors.

It is worth noting that the subframe's exclusive presence in G1, not among farmers' groups, suggests that the Far Right seeks to emphasise this narrative, possibly with divisive intentions. Far Right discursive strategies often rely on divisive tactics to create a sense of "Us vs. Them" within society. These strategies exploit existing grievances, fears, and frustrations to mobilise their followers and consolidate their support base. Far Right activists often employ identity-based politics, where they present themselves as the defenders of a particular identity or community against perceived threats or injustices. By singling out a particular industry or group (in this case, farmers) and portraying them as unfairly treated or victimised while overlooking the actions of other significant emitters (such as industrial facilities), Far Right activists are likely trying to foster a perception of a united front against a common enemy. In this case, this would imply forming a united front against the government and its policies, while portraying the Far Right community as defenders of the marginalised or unfairly targeted group (farmers). This tactic has been utilised by the radical right-wing FVD Party which has positioned itself as champion of the farmers, seeking to strengthen their support within this constituency and cultivate a sense of loyalty and allegiance. This tactic can help to mobilise their supporters and solidify their ideological base by capitalising on grievances and perceived injustices. This is a form of affective identity production, where a perception of shared identity is created through a common enemy and an existential threat. This sub-frame can thus be exploited to polarise public opinion and exacerbate tensions between different groups or sectors within society. This division helps reinforce their own position and portray their opponents (such as the government or environmental activists) as adversaries.

4.2. Frame 2: Globalisation

A key framing device found in the dataset refers to globalisation as the principal cause of the nitrogen crisis. These messages reference urbanisation, migration, and international institutions as being the key drivers of the nitrogen measures. G1 contains the most pronounced content referencing globalisation, with 12.81% of frame-consistent messages referencing F2. This frame is less salient in G2 and G3 at 8.17% and 3.19% respectively. As such, the globalisation frame appears to resonate more with the members of the Far Right group than with those of the

farmers' groups. This is likely due to the fact that this frame posits urbanisation, migration, or international institutions as forming a threat to farmers and the farming community. The use of such imperilment narratives is an established discursive tool of the Far Right. Further, this frame is closely tied to misinformation and conspiracy theories, herein overlapping with F3, which are commonly used in Far Right populist tactics.

Those using this frame believe that the nitrogen crisis is orchestrated as part of a globalist agenda. Different explanations are offered to reveal the “true” reason for the implementation of the nitrogen policies. The globalisation frame overlaps with F1 and F3 in its anti-institutional sentiments and conspiratorial content. Overall, the growing interdependence of economies and cultures, guided by international institutions, is claimed to be directly responsible for the plight of the farmers. Those believing in this frame vary in their views and tolerance of international cooperation, trade, and migration. For some, the nitrogen policies are the direct result of international cooperation, and the Dutch central government is seen as lacking autonomy in its decision-making. For those believing in this sub-frame, the WEF and/or the WHO are ultimately responsible for the measures imposed upon farmers. They are convinced that the Dutch government is more concerned with the needs of international institutions than with those of its citizens, to the point where this limits the civil liberties of Dutch citizens:

“Dit kabinet heeft ons laatste beetje verkocht aan het WEF met onze vrijheid en lichamelijke Integriteit erbij.” [“This cabinet has sold everything we had to the WEF including our freedom and bodily integrity.”] (26 June 2022, G2).

This quote contains implications that align with the rhetoric often associated with Far Right conspiracy theories. The phrase "sold everything we had" implies a malicious intent by the government, attributing it to the actions of a hidden, malevolent force (in this case, the Dutch parliament and the WEF). By using dramatic and accusatory language the sender aims to evoke emotional reactions and foster distrust and animosity towards the authorities and global institutions.

Another example of this is the sub-frame that poses the nitrogen policies (driven by international institutions) as a cover to expropriate the properties of farmers:

*“DE BOEREN WETEN NU OOK DAT HET STIKSTOF PROBLEEM EEN HOAX IS .
JULLIE WILLEN HET LAND INPIKKEN OM KANSLOZE AFRIKANEN DAAR IN*

HUIZEN TE PLAATSEN .” [“The farmers now know as well that the nitrogen issue is a hoax. You [the government] want to take our land to place hopeless Africans in our houses”] (10 July 2022, G1).

The belief in this frame is that international institutions are driving the nitrogen policies and the resulting “*onteigening*” or expropriation of the properties of farmers. This expropriation is seen by some as being the main goal of the policies and is cited numerous times in both G1 and G2. Different explanations are provided for the underlying reason for this expropriation including urbanisation and migration. In the excerpt above, the nitrogen policies are framed as a conspiracy to expropriate the properties of Dutch citizens in order to house refugees. This discursive strategy is common within Far Right rhetoric and can be interpreted as a combination of both the insecurity- and extinction imperilment narratives. There is a simultaneous suggestion of individual threats (expropriation of someone’s property) and a threat to the community as a whole (“take our land”).

This sub-frame poses that multiculturalism as a practice is a threat to Dutch citizens, to “natives” of the country. This is a “nativist” construct, a Far Right narrative that considers certain internal groups (national, cultural, or religious) to be “foreign”, and stresses a need for efforts to safeguard the country and “native” citizens from the perceived threat posed by this foreign group (Friedman 1967, 408). This sub-frame in itself is also a dog whistle to the Great Replacement theory, suggesting that Dutch native citizens are being replaced with migrants. A dog whistle is the use of coded or suggestive language to convey a subtle message to a particular group without provoking controversy or opposition. Dog whistles utilise language that appears normal to the majority but communicates a specific message to its intended audiences.

Frames attributing migration as the underlying cause of nitrogen policies are designed to ignite moral panics. Drawing on the concept of moral panics as strategic tools used for ideological and political agendas, these frames strategically position minority or immigrant groups as existential threats to the in-group. By fostering fear and anxiety about immigration, these narratives aim to legitimise extreme measures and violence against the out-group in the name of self-defence. The prevalence of misinformation and exaggeration about migration in discussions surrounding this sub-frame, amplifies these moral panics, further fuelling concerns about immigration. This is not a new phenomenon. The "refugee crisis" has been misrepresented in Europe within populist politics and various media platforms, including

traditional and online channels. In numerous countries, the refugee crisis has been exaggerated, resulting in heightened concerns about immigration and the emergence of moral panics fuelled by populist politics and digital communities (Cohen 1972, Krzyżanowski 2020; 504). This discursive construct not only justifies immediate actions but also perpetuates long-term stigmatisation and discrimination against refugees and minority groups. It is evident that these frames exploiting migration to explain nitrogen policies have the potential to sow discord and division within societies, demanding a critical examination of the motivations and consequences behind such narratives.

A further sub-frame posits the “Agenda 2030” conspiracy as providing an explanation for grievances experienced by farmers. For example:

“Dit is precies waarom het belangrijk is dat we met z’n allen Agenda 2030 bestrijden. Alle ellende waar we al decennia in zitten, heeft met deze agenda te maken. Overheid en kroon hebben zich uitgeleverd aan de globalistische maffia.” [This is exactly why it is important that we all combat the Agenda 2030 together. All the misery we have experienced over the past decades, is related to this agenda. Government and crown have extradited themselves to the globalist mafia.]” (27 June 2022, BIO).

Several international and domestic institutions have published their agenda for 2030 in accordance with the UN “Agenda 2030” plan which addresses social, economic, and environmental challenges in order to promote sustainable development from 2016 to 2030. Based on various targets laid out in this plan, organisations, including the WEF, have shared their own objectives for sustainable development. Dissatisfaction with any sustainable development policies has subsequently manifested itself in a “Agenda 2030” conspiracy. This theory poses that globalist forces are responsible for enforcing domestic measures that supposedly limit the civil liberties of citizens. References to this agenda are used to respond to various measures and policies that the sender of the message does not agree with. As the above excerpt demonstrates, the sender refers to Agenda 2030 to explain all grievances the group (“we”) has experienced for the past decade. The vague nature of “all the misery we have experienced” allows the reader to interpret this message in various way, based on personal context. This self-interpretation allows the Agenda 2030 conspiracy to be used as an umbrella conspiracy, covering not only grievances experienced by the nitrogen crisis, but also other social issues such as the COVID-19 crisis and migration. This self-interpretation creates a self-

perpetuating cycle for the Agenda 2030 conspiracy in which the message keeps changing in nature and scale as people add their own beliefs to the scope of the perceived agenda.

4.3. Frame 3: Conspiracies

The conspiracy framing device is an overarching umbrella for multiple conspiratorial sub-frames. The conspiracy frame was found to contain a wide variety of different approaches to conspiracy theories or the spread of misinformation, including the suggestion that the climate crisis and nitrogen crisis are man-made crises; the idea that other interests are driving the decision-making surrounding the nitrogen crisis; the promotion of resistance in response to identified conspiracies, and posts that attempt to use the nitrogen crisis to spread misinformation.

There is a significant difference across the groups in the number of references to F3. G1 yields the most references to this frame (16.94%) based on the percentage of frame-consistent references, followed by G2 (12.89%), and G3 (0.78%). The use of conspiracies is common in Far Right rhetoric. This is reflected in the results of this study, with the Far Right aligned group yielding the most references to this framing device compared to the farmers' groups. The salience of this frame within G2, and especially the identified sub-frames with a clear connection to Far Right ideologies, suggests that members of this group are involved in discussions on Far Right topics, as well as the nitrogen crisis. The broader implications of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

The identified conspiratorial sub-frames are:

1. The climate crisis and nitrogen crisis do not exist.
2. The “evil elite” conspiracy.
3. The measures are part of The Great Replacement conspiracy.
4. The measures have been imposed by international institutions.
5. The measures have been imposed to facilitate urbanisation.
6. The measures have been imposed to alleviate the housing crisis.
7. The measures have been imposed as a form of social control.
8. Resistance is needed to address the “real” reason the policies were imposed.

These conspiratorial sub-frames are connected to other identified framing devices in their thematic content. The first sub-frame is a broad, overarching, frame; the evil elite conspiracy.

This sub-frame overlaps with F1; the Great Replacement conspiracy overlaps with several frames as it is an imperilment narrative (F5) citing government actions (F1) as limiting civil liberties (F4), and it is considered by some to be driven by international institutions (F2). The fourth and fifth sub-frames are also sub-frames of F2 as they relate to globalisation. The sixth sub-frame contains anti-institutional sentiments (F1). The following subframe overlaps with two frames, as it concerns perceived limitations of civil liberties (F4) by the government (F1). The final sub-frame is a broad frame suggesting a need for resistance against any of the identified conspiracies.

The first sub-frame denies the existence of a climate crisis and nitrogen crisis altogether. This frame is overarching as these sentiments are found within most other sub-frames. Alternative explanations for the “real” reason behind the implementation of the nitrogen policies include: the existence of an evil elite, the Great Replacement theory, subservience to international institutions, urbanisation, alleviation of the housing crisis through expropriation and conversion of farms into housing, and social control. Some of these sub-frames are used in conjunction to strengthen the core argument: that the nitrogen crisis is a hoax. This sub-frame is the most salient conspiratorial narrative in the dataset across all groups. Those utilising this frame suggest that climate change is being deliberately over-exaggerated by authorities to distract people from more important, underlying issues. Subsequently, the nitrogen policies are seen as being a cover for their conspiracy of choice.

It is suggested by some that the nitrogen policies are part of a government plan to incite starvation and subsequently, depopulation. The nitrogen policies are argued to be a tool to facilitate this depopulation in two ways: through the starvation of citizens and through the “destruction” of farmers. The nitrogen policies are argued to lead to the starvation as farmers are crucial to food security in the Netherlands. Restrictive measures on the farming industry are thus said to threaten the existence of Dutch citizens. This line of argumentation can be connected to two Far Right discursive strategies. First, this message invokes the use of an extinction imperilment narrative, with the aim of convincing readers that farmers are facing an existential threat of extinction, endangered by the central government’s misguided policies. This analogy of an imminent threat is used to mobilise readers to action and legitimise violence under the guise of self-defence. Second, this depopulation narrative appears to be a dog whistle to the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. Suggesting the nitrogen policies will result in the depopulation of Dutch citizens, allows for speculation about the intended outcome of this.

Those familiar with Far Right rhetoric and ideologies will pick up on the suggested underlying reason for this depopulation: the demographic and cultural replacement of the white race. Frames referencing the Great Replacement are often accompanied by misinformation or quasi-factual imaginaries about migration and refugees:

“Die stroom vluchtelingen? Bedoel je de mensen die op uitnodiging hier komen of zij die al bulken van de rijkdom? Allemaal opzet...omvolking heet dat ook wel.” [“That wave of refugees? Do you mean those people that are invited here or those who are already rich? It is all orchestrated... also known as the Great Replacement.”] (12 June 2022, G2).

This excerpt, extracted from G2, references a negative stereotype dominant in Dutch discourse surrounding migration. This stereotype suggests that refugees applying for asylum in the Netherlands are in fact not “real” refugees, but people looking for economic opportunities, also referred to as “economic refugees” or by the Dutch expression “*gelukszoekers*” [“happiness seekers”]. Further, this frame suggests that these refugees were invited by the government, suggesting a dubious plan by the government to ethnically, and culturally, replace native Dutch citizens. These frames aim to sow division between (white) Dutch citizens and ethnic and cultural minorities, as well as refugees. By reinforcing these stereotypes, Far Right activists aim to create an Us vs. Them situation, triggering moral panics and anxieties, and laying the groundwork for violent actions in the name of self-defence. The fact that this quote originates from G2, indicates that members of this farmers’ group are aligned with Far Right rhetoric. However, it is unclear whether such messages are sent by farmers and supporters with Far Right views or by Far Right activists who have infiltrated this group to spread their ideology. Despite this unclear motive, the salience of this-sub frame in G2 does prove that certain members of this group are invested in both Far Right rhetoric and the farmers’ protests.

A further sub-frame that aims to manipulate the moral panics of readers, discusses the expropriation of farming properties. This frame, which has been discussed under F1, claims that the nitrogen policies aim to expropriate the properties of farmers. It is referenced throughout multiple conspiratorial framing devices and identifies different reasons for this expropriation, varying from urbanisation, migration, a communist agenda, and ethnic replacement. This sub-frame enforces an insecurity imperilment narrative aiming to instil moral panic among farmers. By posing the state and its policies as an existential threat to farmers, moral panic is enacted, pre-legitimising violence in response to this threat.

A final salient theme found in the dataset, encourages and documents resilience-building measures in response to the identified conspiracies. For example, members of the group suggest reading material that will help other members of the group “open their eyes” and resist the imposed measures. Especially the book “De Stikstoffuik” [“The Nitrogen Fyke”, a fyke being a type of fishnet], published by journalist Arnout Jaspers in March 2023, was shared a lot in this context. This book, in which Jaspers argues that the Dutch government orchestrated the nitrogen crisis, has quickly gained popularity among those opposing the rulings, while receiving criticism from others for obscuring certain facts and parts of the story. The sharing of reading material to enlighten others to the “truth” about the nitrogen crisis is related to the concept of “red pilling”, originating from the movie *The Matrix*. Those who are “red pillled” are “awake”, they are seen as being enlightened to the truth about reality and the way the world works, especially a truth that is difficult to accept (Azani et al. 2020, 17):

“Wat als de zogenaamde wakkere nou es een x die hele poppekast wat politiek is loslaat en gewoon zijn eigen goddelijke gang gaat?” [“What if the so-called awake would leave the charade that is politics behind and do their own thing?”] (12 June 2022, G2).

Across all groups, various messages with an F3 frame orientation contain references to red pilling. Those who consider themselves to know the truth about the way things are often see it as their duty to red pill others, resulting in the promotion of resilience-building measures in the case study groups. Other examples include calls to protest against government measures, fund-raising activities, and food distribution.

4.4. Frame 4: Limitation of Civil Liberties

This frame draws into question the precise scope and nature of state powers exercised in response to the nitrogen crisis. For those emphasising this frame, state measures are considered disproportionate and misdirected. The limitation of civil liberties refers to the restriction or curtailment of the individual rights and freedoms that are typically protected and guaranteed by law within a given society. Civil liberties encompass fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and due process of law, among others. When civil liberties are limited, it means that individuals may face constraints or barriers in exercising these rights. Such limitations can arise in various forms, including government policies, laws, regulations, or actions taken to protect public safety or societal well-being. Within the dataset some also refer to the curtailment of their “right to freely choose their occupation”. In discussions about

state power and civil liberties, it is important to consider that certain limitations on civil liberties may be deemed necessary under exceptional circumstances, such as during times of emergency or to protect public safety. Such limitations should be justified, proportionate, temporary, and subject to legal scrutiny to prevent potential abuse or erosion of civil liberties in the long run.

This framing device was the least referenced among all groups. However, it should be noted that only messages that explicitly referenced a limitation of civil liberties were coded under this frame, to avoid speculation and coding bias. Messages that, for example, referred to the government as an “evil elite” were not coded under this frame, but rather F1 and F3, although the existence of an evil elite may implicitly suggest a limitation in civil liberties, this would be speculation without the appropriate context by the sender. This frame was referenced most often by G1 (8.06%), which implies that this narrative is primarily used by Far Right activists rather than the farmers and their supporters. The fact that this frame has not been referenced much overall, suggests that it is de-emphasised in the discourse surrounding the nitrogen crisis. This de-emphasis may be attributed to the fact that the implications of the nitrogen crisis on civil liberties might be perceived as secondary concerns by both the public and media in comparison to frames emphasising more immediate and tangible consequences. In times of crisis, there is often a willingness to accept certain limitations on rights and freedoms if it is believed to be necessary for the greater good and urgent resolution of the crisis. This pragmatic approach could downplay discussions about civil liberties in favour of different concerns and narratives.

Within the dataset, this framing device has been used to express discontent with the nature or extent of the nitrogen measures. They believe that the required balance between the limitation of civil liberties and the preservation of individual rights and freedoms is askew. The messages linked to this frame refer to a variety of actions deemed to be limiting civil liberties, including the removal of protest symbols, police response to protests, and a lack of media coverage on certain topics:

“Vrijheid van meningsuiting. Daaronder valt ook het fenomeen vrijheid van het inwinnen van informatie en nieuws. Hoe kan je tenslotte een ‘vrije mening’ opbouwen als niet alle feiten je neutraal worden gepresenteerd?” [“Freedom of speech. That includes the phenomenon freedom of information and news. How can you build a “free opinion” if not all the facts are presented neutrally?”] (15 July 2022, G1).

This message was posted in G1 in the context of a lack of coverage on support for the farmers' protest from Germany. In reality, this is likely not a form of censorship but rather the prioritisation of other topics in mainstream media. Targeting mainstream media for a lack of neutrality is a common tactic of the Far Right. Most famously put by Donald Trump, "fake news" is a way of criticising mainstream media and painting them as being biased. This encourages people to seek their news elsewhere, for example, in these groups. Several messages in the group suggest alternative news sources that they consider to be neutral. Those reading these alternative news sources are then credited as being "awake" (red pill). Within the dataset there were a considerable number of messages using red pilling dog whistles. For example:

"Als mens hoor je je vrijheid te verdedigen, niemand dan jij hebt autoriteit, de rest is goed gedrilde fictie die d.m.v. het zogenoemde geweldsmonopolie door de onderdrukker gehandhaafd wordt...zolang we niet uit deze hypnose komen.... blijf je roepende in de woestijn en vang je idd klappen." ["As a human you are supposed to protect your freedom, no one other than you has authority, the rest is drilled in fiction, enforced by the oppressor through the so-called monopoly of violence... as long as we do not wake up from this hypnosis... you will keep calling into the desert and taking hits"] (11 June 2022, G2).

The message above equates those who comply with the Dutch democratic system as being under hypnosis they need to wake up from. Implying that people need to wake up and realise the real state of affairs, rather than "fiction" is a red pilling dog whistle.

Messages referring to a curtailment of civil liberties often use exaggerated analogies playing into the anxieties of readers. These messages reference an impending loss of freedom and the consequences of this:

"Sta er ook voor de boer! Sta er ook voor jouw kinderen! Sta er ook voor jouw rechten! Sta er voor jouw vrijheid!" ["Be there for the farmer! Be there for your children! Be there for your rights! Be there for your freedom!"] (19 June 2022, G1).

By referencing this impending loss of freedom, the sender aims to enact the anxieties and moral panics of the reader. The suggestion is that if the reader does not act quickly, they will not only lose their freedom, but their children will also face consequences. This narrative falls under the

category of an insecurity imperilment narrative, as it involves an abstract threat to the individual and the community as a whole. Without specifying a specific cause for this loss of freedom, it is up to the reader to fill in the gaps. This open-endedness allows this frame to be interpreted as regarding a multitude of policies and actions. It also allows this frame to be adapted in response to the developments of the crisis. The implementation of a new law, or the curtailment of a protest, may all be cited as being a threat to freedom and civil liberties. This narrative also frames farmers and other citizens as being responsible for fighting against the perceived suppression. This call for mobilisation is a key aspect and objective of imperilment narratives. Accordingly, taking part in protests is framed as being heroic and for the good of the whole country, referring to protestors as "*beschermers van waakzaamheid en de dienstbare sector*" ["protectors of vigilance and the labour sector"] (10 June 2022, G2). In this quote, the reference to the protestors as "protectors of vigilance" may imply that farmers, in their resistance against state actions, are protecting the rights of Dutch citizens.

4.5. Frame 5: Imperilment Narratives: Farming Identity under Threat

This frame references the potential threats faced by farmers and their entire way of life. This frame is utilised throughout the dataset, at times overlapping with several other identified frames. A significant contrast can be noted in the salience of F5 among the different groups. G1 contains far more references to this frame (22.73%) than G2 (9.98%) and G3 (5.47%). While references to this frame raise some valid concerns regarding the challenges faced by farmers, and the potential social, economic, and psychological consequences of their situation, it is crucial to critically evaluate its source and consider potential biases. Assessing the accuracy and validity of the claims requires a more comprehensive examination of the broader context, diverse perspectives within the farming community, and reliable data.

Within this context, two distinct types of threats emerge: metaphorical and physical. Metaphorical threats allude to the potential loss of the farming occupation itself, painting a bleak picture of the consequences arising from the implementation of nitrogen regulations. These messages capture the fears that farmers harbour, as they perceive their livelihoods gradually slipping away due to these rulings. Conversely, another set of messages paints a far more distressing and immediate scenario—one that highlights a physical threat to farmers.

One narrative put forward that suggests a more abstract threat is that of a risk to food security in the Netherlands. This frame emphasises the centrality of Dutch farmers to the domestic food supply, claiming that there will be “no food without farmers”.

“Hiermee maak je misschien toch een groot deel van de bevolking wakker pas als de voedselbron wordt stilgelegd dan raak je de juiste punten en beseft men dat voedsel niet uit de fabriek komt.” [“Maybe you will wake up a big part of the community when the food source is stopped, then you will hit the right nerves and people will realise food does not come from a factory”]. (5 July 2022, G2).

This frame suggests that if the restrictions placed upon farmers are not rescinded, the whole of society will suffer, as they would be without food. This frame attempts to expand the scope of the issue beyond just farmers, to the entire society. By framing this as an issue for every citizen, the sender aims to mobilise support from a wider constituency. Further, this frame attempts to legitimise the farmers’ protests by implying that the farmers are protesting not just for their own sake, but for the good of the whole country.



Image 2: a group of protestors holding a banner depicting an upside-down Dutch flag and the slogan “no farmers no food” (Batiche 2022, TIME).

In some instances, messages referencing physical threats utilise historical analogies to express the progression they foresee for the nitrogen crisis and the farmers:

“We zijn straks de indianen van Amerika of de Aboriginal van Australië. Dronken, werkeloos, moedeloos op een bankje in het park. Verjaagd van je eigen land. We moeten omkijken naar elkaar. Zijn best wel veel boeren die aan zelfmoord denken.” [“We will

soon be the Indians of America or the Aborigines of Australia. Drunk, jobless, without hope on a bench in the park. Chased from your own land. We must look out for each other. There are quite a lot of farmers thinking about suicide”]. (12 June 2022, G2).

This excerpt suggests that the central government is illegally disowning farmers' properties, resulting in dire consequences such as substance abuse or even driving some farmers to consider suicide. The use of a historical analogy, comparing the plight of farmers to the displacement and marginalisation experienced by indigenous peoples, is a rhetorical strategy to evoke an emotional response. While historical comparisons can sometimes be useful for illustrating parallels or raising awareness, they must be employed carefully and with a nuanced understanding of the specific contexts involved. Without a clear examination of the complexities and differences between the situations faced by indigenous communities and contemporary farmers, such comparisons can oversimplify and distort the realities.

By drawing a comparison between the farmers and indigenous communities, it is suggested that farmers are native citizens with a privileged claim to “their” land. This requires protection against a perceived external threat, in this case, the state and its policies. Drawing on the concept of ecofascism, this idea of an inherent connection to the land is a key discursive strategy to foster affective identity production. Facilitated by a historical analogy, the above excerpt aims to highlight the centrality of this collectively imagined “homeland”.

The depiction of a bleak future for farmers, including being "drunk, jobless, without hope" and contemplating suicide, should also be critically evaluated. While it is true that some farmers may face significant challenges and hardships due to various factors, including agricultural policies, economic pressures, or environmental concerns, it is crucial to examine the overall diversity of experiences within the farming community. Generalising the experiences of all farmers based on extreme outcomes can be misleading and fail to represent the complexity of the situation.

By emphasising the severity of the challenges farmers are confronting and implying an impending imperilment, this message aims to mobilise group members to act under the guise of self-defence. Similar to the Fourteen Words (“we must secure the existence of our people”), this message stresses that “we must look out for each other” to protect ourselves from the perceived existential threat. There is a strong emotional appeal here: the necessity asserted in “must” and the implied outcome of a failure to do so; joblessness or even suicide. These

imaginaries of imperilment insist on a sense of urgency steeped in anxiety and fear over the insecure nature of a future for the farmers and their children. These moral panics are strategically enacted to pose the state as an existential threat to the in-group and pre-legitimise further actions.

The call to “look out for each other” implies the need for solidarity and support within the farming community. It emphasises the importance of fostering a sense of unity and collective action in the face of the challenges they are confronting. The use of “we” encourages the reader to see themselves as part of this defence, which offers a feeling of belonging to something bigger than the self. This is a subtle invitation to inclusion.

4.6. Frame 6: Resilience-building

The groups documented and shared a wide range of community-oriented activities during the specified period. As can be observed in Table 1, the resilience-building frame (F6) yields the most references across the different groups (n = 354), with 37.86% of all references being to this frame. Resilience-building frames were salient in the discourse of G2 (41.20%) and G3 (74.22%). The messages in this group contained a large number of pro-social messages in which resilience-building was recognised, encouraged, or supported. Contrastingly, these frames were emphasised much less by G1, where only 13.22% of frame-oriented messages reference resilience-building activities. In this context, resilience can be described as the capacity of individuals to confront and handle adversity, drawing upon their personal or social strengths to adjust and manage challenges and stressful or traumatic situations effectively (McNeil-Wilson 2019, 19).

Across all groups, messages referencing F6 documented and supported the activities of members in providing an active response to the nitrogen rulings and encouraging members of the groups to partake in forms of resistance in several ways. Activism is used as a means of addressing the challenges faced by farmers due to the rulings, as well as preventing any hardships endured by vulnerable communities as a result of the protests. Instances of resilience observed in the dataset encompass various activities, including assistance to vulnerable groups, advocating for the rights of local businesses and farmers, sharing information and advice regarding the new policies, and exchanging sustainable best-practices such as tree-planting.

These messages exist on a spectrum from those that support forms of peaceful activism and those that call for, and document, more radical activities. On the more radical side of the spectrum, messages may reference disruptive forms of protests such as holding demonstrations at food distribution centres:

“Gisteren zijn de boeren begonnen met het blokkeren van distributiecentrums van meerdere grote supermarkten. Binnen een dag is het effect duidelijk zichtbaar in de supermarkten.” [Yesterday, the farmers started blocking the distribution centres of multiple big supermarkets. Within a day the effects will be visible in supermarkets”]. (5 July 2022, G3)

On several occasions demonstrations took place at food distribution centres throughout the Netherlands, obstructing food supplies from being sent to grocery stores. The group’s members were encouraged to take part in these demonstrations and to organise similar protests at other locations. This tactic is aimed at disrupting an activity central to one’s day-to-day life: grocery shopping and buying food. The protestors want to make sure that others feel the gravity of the situation and how restrictions on food distribution may impact daily life. In this instance, the farmers pose that the restrictions placed upon them will result in a blow to the country’s food supply and resilience. Similar to the effects of blocking distribution centres.

Other forms of activism discussed and encouraged in the groups are hanging up posters inside stores, encouraging people to buy their groceries locally from farmers, and hanging the Dutch flag upside down:

“Ik kreeg woensdag ook de vraag van mijn manager waarom ik op het werk kwam met een vlag omgekeerd. Nou heel simpel: ik sta achter de boeren, jij toch ook?” [Wednesday my manager asked me why I arrived at work with a reversed Dutch flag. Well, the answer is simple: I support the farmers, you do too, right?”] (27 June 2022, G2).

This reversed flag has become the symbol of the farmers’ protests. Members of the group are encouraged to hang these flags along highways and in front of their homes as a sign of protest against the rulings.



Image 3: Dutch flags being held upside down as a sign of protest against the nitrogen rulings and in support of the farmers. (ANP Nico Garstman).

A further theme found within the dataset, is the documentation or encouragement of radical or aggressive forms of activism, often targeted at politicians involved in the public debate surrounding the nitrogen crisis. For example, several politicians were handed letters of resignation by farmers, suggesting they resign from their positions, and some messages even reference attacks:

“Hooibaal door de voorruit van Kaag mieteren.” [“Throw a bale of hay through the front window of [Sigrid] Kaag’s home”]. (27 June 2022, G2).

The personal intimidation of politicians has been an issue throughout the farmers’ protests. On various other occasions, members of the groups under study boycotted companies involved in the removal of reversed flags or towing of tractors used during demonstrations. They encouraged other members to leave bad reviews for the companies on Google and to avoid doing business with them. In at least two recorded instances these allegations proved to be false, with the wrong companies being targeted.

Messages of this, more aggressive, nature, were especially salient in G1 and G2, while G3 did not contain any references to aggressive forms of protest. Despite the serious and dangerous nature of these more radical forms of protesting, it should be noted that these messages were less salient in the dataset than messages encouraging peaceful demonstrations. In G3, messages referencing resilience-building and forms of protest generally took on a more neutral form. Despite the salience of messages containing a resilience-building frame orientation in G3

(74.22%), the group appears to have fewer individual expressions of support being shared in the group. Many messages supporting the activism of farmers were sent repeatedly or forwarded from different groups, lacking a personal nature, and verging more on spam.

Contrastingly, the content of resilience-building messages shared in G2 suggests that its members are personally invested in the nitrogen rulings and its developments, more than in G1 and G3. The messages in this group contained considerably more references to F6 (41,20%) than any other frame, with the second most referenced frame being F1 at only 23.23%. A frame that is unique to G2 in the dataset is the encouragement of group members to engage in activities to protect vulnerable groups:

“Denk aan de ouderen en de minima onder ons. Zorg dat zij ook kunnen beschikken over hun boodschappen. Er dreigen tekorten en dan moeten we deze groep helpen. Doe vast wat extra boodschappen voor hun zodat ze niet zonder komen eten komen te zitten.” [“Think about the elderly and those with lower incomes among us. Ensure that they can also have access to groceries. There is a risk of shortages [of food] and we have to help this group in that case. Go ahead and purchase some extra groceries for them so that they will not end up without food”]. (4 July 2022).

As the excerpt above demonstrates, members of the groups encouraged each other to buy groceries for the elderly to prevent them from being without food as a result of the farmers’ protests. This care for vulnerable groups could be attributed to the more personal nature of the group, which resembles that of a community. Messages utilising this framing device aim to foster affective identity among group members and with society. This encourages people to take part in demonstrations and aims to paint the farmers in a positive light among members of society. This frame reflects the statements published by the Farmers Defence Force on their website, where they claim to help vulnerable communities in case of storm damage, by sending Christmas packages to nursing homes, and by visiting children’s hospital wards. According to McNeil-Wilson (2019), Far Right groups displayed this tendency during the COVID-19 crisis, where they focussed on emphasising their role as providers of assistance to families, local communities, and nations (19). These actions served as propaganda to emphasise the Far Right’s portrayal of itself as a responsible caregiver in contrast to an indifferent state, aiming to gain support by addressing the gaps left by the state during crises (McNeil-Wilson 2019, 25). Resilience-building frames are thus a key discursive tool used by both farmers’ groups and Far Right groups activists to promote a positive image within the community.

Efforts to foster unity between members of the group and the wider community are reinforced by the use of local languages and dialects in messages documenting and encouraging forms of activism. Speaking in dialect is a way of connecting to those with a shared culture and history, those that, quite literally, understand you. Within the dataset, one framing device being used, saw the use of the Frisian language as a way of reinforcing affective identity, a sense of connection between the Farmers and the community, exemplified by the following slogan:

“GJIN BOEREN, GJIN ITEN” [“NO FARMERS, NO FOOD”].

This slogan was used throughout all case study groups. Frisian is a local language that is spoken primarily in the province Friesland, where approximately 3000 dairy farms are located (Boeren Business 2017). Similarly, local dialects are most commonly spoken in the countryside of the Netherlands, where farms are located. Using these local dialects and languages is thus a strategic discursive tool in the process of affective identity production.

5. DISCUSSION

Having detailed the six frames that were found in the dataset, some key points arise about how the Far Right case study group (G1) has responded to the nitrogen crisis, in contrast to the farmers’ case study groups (G2 and G3). By contrasting the crisis frames emphasised by the Far Right compared to the farmers’ groups, inferences can be drawn about the Far Right’s discursive strategies and objectives, as well as social protest groups in the Netherlands.

The findings suggest that:

1. Anti-institutional framing devices are key to Far Right discursive strategies.
2. Imperilment narratives aimed at enacting moral panics received more emphasis than pro-social resilience-building frames.
3. The role of conspiratorial content in crisis framing by Far Right activists should not be underestimated.

These three inferences allow for the examination of the greater implications of the frames emphasised in the context of the nitrogen crisis and the challenges posed by the Far Right movement.

Firstly, from the analysis of crisis frames presented by the different case study groups, it becomes apparent that the Far Right has consistently prioritised the use of anti-institutional framing devices. These narratives are strategically targeting people that feel insufficiently heard by the government, are disappointed in the government's response to certain events, or have lost confidence in the government's approach to various problems. Far Right activists opportunistically draw upon these sentiments to broaden their reach to different constituencies and normalise their message through mundane discourse. Populist Far Right groups in the Netherlands have effectively employed this frame as a tool to legitimise their ideological positions and policy choices, evident in the FVD's use of anti-institutional narratives when publicly discussing the nitrogen crisis. By sowing seeds of doubt and mistrust, and framing institutions as corrupt, self-serving, or incompetent, they seek to rally public support and sympathy for their cause. The objective here is to create a fertile ground for their ideologies to take root and flourish, ultimately aiming to replace the current system with their own vision of society.

Herein, the strategic emphasis on anti-institutional framing reveals the Far Right's goal of challenging and dismantling the existing political order, using this frame as a potent tool for undermining legitimacy in established institutions, such as governments, media, and law enforcement. Those using this narrative call for the overthrowing or replacement of the government, aiming to create social divisions and mobilise support against a common enemy (the state). By avoiding discussions surrounding the desired end situation of this scenario, proponents of the evil elite conspiracy can unite against a common enemy (the state). Their narratives directly criticise the government and its policies through frames such as F2 (Globalisation), and F4 (Liberty), and indirectly through frames such as F3 (Conspiracies), F5 (Imperilment), and F6 (Resilience). The ability of this frame to include various messages in one frame contributes to this salience. The anti-institutional narrative is self-perpetuating as each instance of government mismanagement will lead to more doubts about the sincerity of government actions and can be argued to be a part of the plan of the evil elite. The narrative is responsive to societal developments and can be adapted accordingly, as demonstrated by the nitrogen crisis.

Secondly, another striking aspect of the Far Right's discursive strategy lies in the high salience of imperilment narratives within their crisis frames. Imperilment narratives are constructed to induce fear, anxiety, and moral panic within the broader society. By exaggerating threats and

dangers, the Far Right attempts to mobilise people into taking drastic action, often aligning with their extremist agendas. These imperilment narratives seek to enact a sense of urgency, fostering an environment conducive to social chaos and political disruption. This calculated approach highlights their focus on anti-social activities rather than pro-social resilience-building initiatives.

In contrast, the farmers' groups, through their emphasis on resilience-building narratives, showcase a different set of priorities. The farmers' groups aim to promote positive and proactive approaches to dealing with crises, focusing on building community strength and solidarity. This divergence in discursive strategies underscores the profound differences between the objectives of the Far Right and those of the farmers' groups. Farmers' groups utilise resilience narratives to emphasise their role in providing support and strengthening communities in contrast to the perceived incompetence of the Dutch government. In this way, resilience can be harnessed with anti-social objectives. This may have a double-effect in which pro-social activities are used as propaganda to manipulate public perception. By emphasising the role of these groups as caretakers of the community, they aim to create a caring and responsible image that helps to legitimise other anti-social actions. For example, painting the state as being uncaring and lacking in its provisions, may serve to sow divisions in society and affect political legitimacy and social stability.

Thirdly, the crisis frames presented by the Far Right group reveal another discursive tactic that should not be underestimated: the use of conspiratorial content. A significant number of messages in the dataset referred to conspiracies as an explanation for the crisis. This frame was particularly salient in the discourse of G1, the Far Right case study group. This implies that Far Right activists have actively employed conspiracy theories in their crisis framing to propagate their ideologies, often attempting to normalise, and spread extremist ideas through seemingly mundane discourse. These conspiracies manipulate the collective imagination to justify radical solutions to the crises, such as the use of anti-institutional rhetoric and discriminatory policies.

Conspiracy frames were also present in the discourse of the farmers' groups. The content of these conspiracies is directly linked to Far Right rhetoric, such as the Great Replacement theory. This exemplifies how Far Right weaponised language, grounded in narratives promoting the preservation of the white race and exclusion of other racial and ethnic groups, is permeating the discourse surrounding the nitrogen crisis. This insidious spread of conspiratorial content underscores the Far Right's efforts to infiltrate mundane discourse and

ideologies. By packaging their extremist beliefs within seemingly harmless narratives, the Far Right aims to widen its reach and influence, making it imperative to remain vigilant against the normalisation of harmful ideologies.

The emphasis of these three narratives reveals the following about the Far Right's objectives:

Firstly, Far Right activists attempt to normalise and spread Far Right ideologies by infiltrating farmers' groups and linking the nitrogen crisis to Far Right rhetoric, such as by drawing a connection between the restrictions and the Great Replacement theory. By weaponising language in this way, Far Right ideologies enter mundane discourse. This has serious implications for minority rights. When extremist ideologies become a part of everyday discussions, they risk becoming normalised within society. The acceptance of Far Right rhetoric as a legitimate viewpoint can lead to the normalisation of discriminatory attitudes and actions against minority groups. This may embolden individuals who hold extremist beliefs to act upon them, posing a direct threat to the safety and security of minority communities. It can also lead to the perpetuation of systemic oppression and discrimination, creating an exclusionary environment for minority groups. This may discourage minority individuals from actively participating in these spaces, further marginalising them from decision-making processes and exacerbating existing inequalities. Eventually, this leads to the erosion of social cohesion within society.

Secondly, Far Right activists exploit existing grievances, fears, and frustrations with the government to mobilise their followers and consolidate their support base. By framing themselves as defenders of a particular identity or community (in this case, farmers) against perceived threats or injustices, they aim to foster loyalty and allegiance among their supporters. This process strengthens the emotional connection between Far Right activists and their followers, fostering affective identity, and a sense of unity and solidarity against perceived adversaries. This has the potential to polarise public opinion and exacerbate tensions between different groups or sectors within society. This division helps reinforce the Far Right's position and portrays their opponents, such as the government or environmental activists, as adversaries. This is facilitated by the use of imperilment narratives and the narrative of an "evil elite". Far Right activists often employ such identity-based politics to create a perception of shared identity through a common enemy. This strategy can contribute to social and political instability by polarizing different groups and hindering constructive dialogue, potentially leading to further societal tensions.

Thirdly, Far Right groups aim to facilitate political change by posing Far Right groups as better alternatives to the current hegemonic powers. These Right groups use propaganda to construct a narrative that portrays themselves as champions of resilience, community-building, and defenders of traditional values. By promoting positive images of their activities, they aim to garner support from segments of the population dissatisfied with the status quo. These carefully crafted perceptions may divert attention from the extremist and divisive aspects of their ideologies, thereby enticing individuals who might otherwise be wary of their beliefs. Simultaneously, these frames emphasise the incapability of the state to provide sufficient social support. Criticising the actions of the state and highlighting its shortcomings is a common tactic used by Far Right groups to erode public trust in democratic institutions. By painting the government as corrupt, inefficient, or uncaring, they seek to weaken the legitimacy of the existing political order. The success of such frames may result in a decline in trust in democratic institutions and affect the overall stability and effectiveness of governance, leading to a potential democratic decline.

By contrasting the results of this study with the study by McNeil-Wilson (2019) on crisis frames emphasised during the COVID-19 crisis, we can determine if and how crisis framing by Far Right groups changes based on the socio-political context.

Frames emphasized during the COVID-19 crisis	Frames emphasized during the nitrogen crisis
Resilience-building	Anti-institutional
Globalisation	Imperilment
Anti-institutional	Conspiracy
Migration	Globalisation
Limitation of Civil Liberties	Resilience-building
Conspiracy	Limitation of Civil Liberties

Figure 2: Comparison between the crisis frames emphasized by Far Right groups during the COVID-19 crisis (McNeil-Wilson 2019) and those emphasized during the nitrogen crisis, in order of significance.

This study found resilience-building narratives to have a minimal role in Far Right crisis framing. This is a departure from the results put forward by McNeil-Wilson, who found Far Right groups to use resilience-building frames as a cornerstone for their activities during the

COVID-19 crisis. As such, we should be careful to underestimate attempts by the Far Right to create divisions in society through discursive strategies aimed at undermining social stability and unity. The results of this study suggest that contentious activities by Far Right activists are intensified during crises, not mitigated through resilience-building. Further, anti-institutional narratives were found to be used more often by Far Right actors in the context of the nitrogen crisis, than during the COVID-19 crisis. Another notable distinction between the two studies is the role of conspiratorial content. During the COVID-19 crisis, Far Right actors did not emphasise conspiracy frames and would, in fact, promote narratives that suggested the government was not taking the crisis seriously enough. This is in stark contrast to the results of this study, where framing devices accusing the government of not taking climate change or nitrogen emissions seriously enough, were absent. This difference underscores the fact that Far Right groups alter their discursive strategies in response to crises. The dynamic nature of their narratives allows Far Right activists to introduce crisis frames tailor-made to specific crises and likely, to specific cultural and national contexts. The changing use of crisis framing by Far Right actors reinforces the need for context-specific analyses of crises, to effectively counter undermining narratives put forward by the Far Right.

CONCLUSION

This study utilised tools from crisis framing and content analysis to study the way in which Far Right discourse has developed to account for the nitrogen crisis. The research examined Telegram statements released by three case study groups across a six-month period from 1 June 2022 to 30 November 2022 during a tumultuous period of farmers' protests in the Netherlands. By expanding the scope of existing literature on the discursive practices of the Far Right to the Dutch context, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the discursive practices of the Far Right and their responses to environmental and societal challenges. The findings from this study shed light on how Far Right groups operate and how the discursive strategies they employ are adapted during crises. This is crucial for policymakers, academics, and citizens to address the challenges posed by extremist ideologies and foster a more inclusive and resilient society.

The conclusions reached in this study reflect the use of six frames within the overall discourse surrounding the nitrogen crisis: 1) anti-institutional, 2) globalist, 3) conspiratorial, 4) limitations of civil liberty, 5) imperilment narratives, and 6) resilience-building frames.

From these six frames, three frames were found to be emphasised by Far Right groups: anti-institutional frames, imperilment narratives, and conspiracy theories. The emphasis of these frames reveals that the Far Right movement employs specific discursive strategies to influence public perception and mobilise support during crises. Firstly, they heavily rely on anti-institutional framing devices, targeting individuals disillusioned with the government and seeking to undermine the legitimacy of established institutions. Secondly, the Far Right emphasises imperilment narratives, inducing fear and moral panic to promote their extremist agendas, while downplaying pro-social resilience-building frames. Thirdly, the study highlights the significant use of conspiratorial content by the Far Right, manipulating collective imagination to justify radical solutions and spread extremist ideas. These strategies reflect the Far Right's goal of challenging and dismantling the existing political order, making it crucial to recognise and address these discursive tactics to safeguard social stability and unity. A comparison between the findings of this study and the research by McNeil-Wilson (2019) reveals a divergence in the emphasis of certain framing devices during crises, primarily in the use of resilience-building frames and conspiratorial frames. Far Right groups demonstrate adaptability in their discursive strategies based on the socio-political context in which they operate. This underscores the need for context-specific analyses of crises to effectively counter their undermining narratives.

The farmers' groups under study were found to emphasise resilience-building frames and anti-institutional frames in their discourse. The groups primarily promoted and documented resilience-building activities to promote affective identity production within the group. This finding is in line with previous research conducted by Klandermans et al. (2002), which found that affective identity has historically played a key role in mobilising support for farmers' protests. Further, the groups emphasized pro-social activities aimed at strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities and promoting a positive image of the group in society. Simultaneously, these activities were used to underscore the perceived incapability of the government to provide these services. These results can be used as a departure point to draw inferences about how social protest movements engage with crisis framing in the Netherlands.

This study contributes to the understanding of Far Right discursive practices and their responses to societal challenges. The insights gleaned from crisis framing strategies in the context of the nitrogen crisis shed light on the strategic tactics of the Far Right, underscoring their efforts at undermining democracy and social cohesion. Addressing these serious implications requires a multi-faceted approach, including awareness-raising and media literacy campaigns regarding extremist content, support and protection for marginalised communities, fostering dialogue between diverse communities, and strengthening regulations and oversight to prevent the spread of hate speech in digital communities. The value of this study lies in its impartial assessment of the motivations and tactics of the Far Right, providing a foundation for proactive measures to address the challenges posed by their discursive strategies.

A limitation that should be considered for this study is the limited scope of case studies and the time frame analysed. As this scope is too limited to draw generalised conclusions, further research should be conducted using longitudinal studies to track the evolution of crisis framing strategies employed by the Far Right over time. This can reveal how crisis narratives shift in response to changing societal dynamics and events. Expanding the scope of research to focus on more Far Right groups in the Netherlands and beyond may also aid in the anticipation and countering of future crisis frames. Further, it should be considered that Far Right groups often operate in covert digital communities where they are able to discuss issues freely without observation. Although Telegram allows users to anonymously engage in group chats, it remains an open-source platform. Far Right groups with anti-social intentions may prefer to discuss their views and actions in closed groups or platforms. The group under study in this research may thus be moderating its discourse to accommodate for potential observation. Expanding the scope of research to different platforms may eliminate this factor.

At the time of writing, the nitrogen crisis remains an ongoing and evolving issue. The government has taken a significant step by initiating dialogue with stakeholders from the agricultural industry, aiming to establish an Agricultural Agreement that would provide a clear perspective for the future of farmers. Unfortunately, these negotiations suffered a setback and collapsed in June 2023, as the farmers' representative organization, Landbouw en Tuin Organisatie [“Agriculture and Garden Organisation”] (LTO), withdrew from the talks (LTO n.d.). Amidst the ongoing crisis, protests by farmers' groups, notably led by the radical FDF, continue to take place. Given the persistence of these protests, it remains paramount to closely monitor the development of crisis framing in the context of the nitrogen crisis.

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