

Synne Megaard

Reinforcement or replacement?

A study of far-right political influencers' discourse on globalisation and covid

Master's thesis in Political Science

Supervisor: Pieter de Wilde

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Abstract

The focus of this master's thesis is the discourse on globalisation and covid by far-right political influencers. Globalisation continues to be a salient permeating subject, affecting all corners of the world in an uneven manner. It creates divides and has as such resulted in the division between winners and losers of globalisation. The losers resist the forces of globalisation and are commonly situated at the fringes of the political sphere. The emergence of the covid-19 pandemic created large shockwaves, arguably becoming a force that is noticeable to the same extent that globalisation is. This thesis is interested in reviewing whether covid discursively relates to globalisation by asking the question of whether covid-19 has replaced or reinforced the globalisation cleavage among far-right political influencers. While previous research on political parties, politicians and institutions is extensive, this thesis aims to explore a new contemporary trend of political activists who gather to social media. The social media platform Youtube will be the source for the analysis, and the discourse is expected to be communitarian and populist, advocating closed borders and nationalism. The thesis finds that the globalisation discourse of the far-right political influencers is indeed communitarian and populist, and that covid does reflect it to some degree. Based on the included indicators, covid reinforces globalisation in the discourse, yet an interesting find is that individual freedom becomes increasingly emphasised in the discourse when covid is introduced.

Sammendrag

Fokuset i denne masteroppgaven er å utforske politiske influensere som plasserer seg til det ytre høyre i den politiske sfæren, og deres diskurs rundt temaene globalisering og covid. Globalisering fortsetter å være et gjennomgående sentralt tema som påvirker hele verden på forskjellige måter. Det skaper skiller, og har resultert i et skille mellom det som kan kalles vinnere og tapere av globalisering. Taperne motsetter seg følgene av globalisering, og plasserer seg ofte i ytterkanten av den politiske sfæren. Ankomsten til covid-19 pandemien skapte store sjokkbølger og ble raskt en framtrædende og merkbar kraft i samfunnet, på samme måte som globalisering. Denne oppgaven er interessert i å utforske om covid diskursivt relaterer til globalisering ved å spørre om covid har erstattet eller forsterket globaliseringsskillelinjen blant politiske influensere til det ytre høyre. Tidligere litteratur har forsket mye på politiske parti, politikere og institusjoner, men denne oppgaven ønsker å utforske den moderne trenden med politiske aktivister som tar i bruk sosiale medier. Youtube som plattform vil være kilden til analysen i oppgaven, og oppgaven antar at diskursen vil basere seg på en kommunitær (communitarian) filosofi i tillegg til å være populistisk, for eksempel gjennom forsvar av stengte grenser og nasjonalistiske uttrykk. Oppgaven finner at globaliseringsdiskursen er både kommunitær og populistisk, og at diskursen rundt covid delvis reflekterer dette. Basert på de inkluderte indikatorene forsterker covid globalisering i diskursen, men et interessant funn er at individuell frihet i økende grad blir viktig i det covid blir introdusert.

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Five years in Trondheim are now coming to an end and I look back with fond memories, while also looking forward to where life takes me next.

Synne Megaard
Trondheim, 7 June 2022

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1. Introduction

The discourse on globalisation has most recently been connected to political conflicts on immigration, trade, and international cooperation. Major incidents in the Western hemisphere such as Britain's vote to leave the EU in 2014, Donald Trump's presidential victory in 2016 and the 2015 European refugee crisis have been testimonies of the continued significance of globalisation in politics, as well as evidence of the ideological cleavage it represents. The globalisation cleavage has been characterised as a new type of conflict, "pitting the winners of a liberal world order with open borders and international integration against its losers" (Strijbis, Helmer, & de Wilde, 2020, p. 409). The existence of a globalisation cleavage builds upon the traditional works of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), yet it surpasses the traditional cleavages they identify. Globalisation is a relatively new social conflict, stemming from the impact of modernisation. This has resulted in the idea of a transnational cleavage, which at its core is a reaction to European integration and immigration (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Massive structural changes have taken place, including economic and cultural integration as well as the emergence of post-industrial and post-materialist values (Siddiqui, 2021).

Kriesi et al. (2006) state that the lowering of national boundaries leads to the division of groups that can be known as either winners or losers of globalisation. The last decades have cemented this idea of winners and losers, particularly in Western Europe, but apparent in the Western hemisphere in general. Whereas the winners benefit from the increased competition and will generally support the process of international integration, the losers are expected to defend themselves through protectionist measures and by maintaining national boundaries and independence. This was manifested with the Brexit vote in the UK and the election support for Donald Trump in the US, evident through support for far-right political actors in both countries. Trump managed to combine opposition to immigration and free trade (Strijbis et al., 2020) while the Leave side played on anti-immigration and anti-establishment sentiments (Hobolt, 2016).

In line with the notion of winners and losers of globalisation, Margalit (2019) notes how the displacement of traditional social values has caused a sense of resentment among segments of the population. Globalisation has escalated the sense of a cultural and demographic threat by opening nations to foreign influences. Additionally, a broad concern is that globalisation creates a shift of power to transnational elites (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). The waves of globalisation play on latent cultural and identity conflicts, and as such both activates and magnifies them (Rodrik,

2021). This leads to a state where globalisation is challenged by the rise of both populism and nationalism.

A common claim is that populism is fostered by crises, such as financial crises. Crises generate tensions in society, giving rise to the belief that the ordinary people are made to pay for the mistakes of the political leaders (Mian, Sufi, & Trebbi, 2014). The sudden arrival of the covid-19 pandemic generated a worldwide crisis, and undoubtedly created political, humanitarian, and social chaos. Crises may allow for “shortcuts” for political actors in the fringes (Chapelan, 2021), as they can exploit it for their own good. The impact of the covid-19 pandemic on areas of the economy, healthcare and government policies are substantial. The pandemic has required government officials in countries all over the world to step up and be vocal on decisions regarding the overall population, and additionally cooperate on a transnational level. This has led to an ideal situation for populism to expand, with populists taking advantage of the rapid decisions made by those in power. Moreover, the sudden and momentous impact of covid induced prompt and severe regulations as decided by governments worldwide, arguably making them “democratically deficit” (Varuofakis, 2017 in Bajo-Rubio & Yan, 2019). The decisions had to be made quickly and therefore risked a lack of agreement and accountability from ordinary citizens. Populism feeds upon distrust in the elite, with the crisis of the pandemic making it possible to further emphasise this distrust.

Thus, the arrival of the covid-19 pandemic created a new worldwide challenge, and in a similar fashion to globalisation, it created echoing structural changes. Undoubtedly, covid can be regarded as a political crisis. Hameiri (2021) explores the impact of the pandemic on economic globalisation, considering the repercussions of such an occurrence on the global economy. My thesis instead takes an interest in examining the cultural aspects of globalisation, and further seeks to explore how the pandemic reflects this through discourse. Kriesi et al. (2008) suggest that the traditional economic focus has been downplayed by cultural issues such as immigration and resistance to European integration. The findings may point to a shift in the political landscape, outlining the importance of both globalisation as an existing cleavage and the repercussions of covid as new phenomenon. I suggest that the discourse surrounding covid has led to a process of either replacement or reinforcement of cultural globalisation, evident where covid either replaces or reinforces globalisation in political discourse. To explore whether a process of reinforcement or replacement has taken place, my thesis will review the spoken discourse of far-right political actors to analyse their use of both globalisation and covid. The impact of crises such as covid may allow far right political actors to take advantage of the turmoil that happens in society to promote themselves and their message, as well as mobilise.

Wondreys and Mudde (2022) expect the far right to respond to covid in a way that is in line with their core ideologies of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

1.1 Context

On a cultural level, globalisation leads to a weakening of the ties between national culture and identity, where identity is no longer bound to nation-states (Flew & Iosifids, 2020). This is apparent with the rise of global environmentalism and other transnational movements revolving around race, gender, sexuality, and additionally transnational rights and social justice campaigns (ibid.). Examples of this recent fluidity are the Black Lives Matter protests and the MeToo-movement, which transcends national borders and identities. The losers of globalisation oppose to this weakened link and react by closing a firmer grip around their national institutions and values.

Opposition to globalisation is apparent at both the far left and the far right. Although at odds on several topics, political actors at the fringes share common traits labelling them the losers of globalisation. The main distinction between the left and right on the issue of globalisation is that the far left commonly oppose it on the grounds of economic and political globalisation alone, and less so on cultural globalisation, which is rather the focal point of the far right (Strijbis et al., 2020). Moreover, the far right managed to take advantage of globalisation's cultural shift to challenge the establishment which were commonly mainstream and left-wing, whereas the far left failed to be successful in their redistributive agenda (Siddiqui, 2021). Some scholars maintain that the far right is at its core a reaction to a more liberal international order and the processes of globalisation (Halperin, 2021). The rise in support for far-right politics in Europe and the US more recently show evidence of this.

Far right populism has a huge impact on political behaviours and voter preferences, and has led to an increase in xenophobia and anti-immigration views in public spheres (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Populism is seen as an expression of identity in the discourse of the far right, and a way for political actors to create a divide between “us” and “them”, furthermore fuelling both nationalism and anti-elitism. It is ingrained in the perspective of globalisation that stresses the value of communities, due to its nature of constructing an idea of who we are, who belongs to the in-group and who belongs to the out-group. Far-right populist political actors are therefore central to the discourse surrounding globalisation, particularly on matters concerning cultural globalisation. Populism can be seen as a reaction to cultural change, encouraged by the perceived displacement of values, norms, economic insecurity, and wealth inequality. It is often

the case that it is the nation that bears the consequences of internationally made decisions, thus making populism more attractive as global integration grows (Bajo-Rubio & Yan, 2019).

My thesis assumes that the far-right employ both identity-based rhetoric and the crisis of the pandemic to advocate their stance in globalisation. I will investigate the idea that the far-right's views on globalisation are influenced by their positioning as "losers of globalisation" and that their discourse will defend "border closure, cultural particularism and national sovereignty", thus having a strong communitarian emphasis (Koopmans & Zürn, 2019). In doing this, I aim to present new details of the globalisation cleavage. The element of the pandemic allows for an examination of whether such a crisis is used to promote existing viewpoints or if it can obscure globalisation as a feature of the far-right discourse. This has repercussions for globalisation as a social conflict and transnational cleavage and gives insight into the use of the pandemic as a discursive political topic. The impact of globalisation is immense and as such, it creates both possibilities and disputes for a new societal issue to attach itself to it. My thesis sets off to examine whether covid-19 discursively reflects the discourse on globalisation.

Previous literature suggests a far-right globalisation discourse that is based on xenophobic, nationalist, and ethnocentric sentiments (Siddiqui, 2021). Despite the world being more globalised than ever, more borders and walls emerge in both a literal and figurative sense, to define the nation state from threats that are both alleged and real (Wodak, 2015). My thesis will examine the discourse by four far right political influencers: Ben Shapiro, Mark Dice, Katie Hopkins and Paul Joseph Watson. These four political actors are not politicians elected in government, but rather social media personalities with big followings on various platforms. Whereas previous research has been extensive in covering the far right in terms of politicians and political parties, my thesis focuses on the discourse of the un-elected political actors as an alternative.

The far right has been successful in politicising issues that have been previously neglected, often related to the economic and cultural consequences of globalisation (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). Moreover, modern populist actors have gathered to social media in favour of the mainstream medias, who they argue is infested with elite-supportive politics (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). It therefore becomes interesting to consider how un-elected political actors, or political influencers, discursively deal with a new societal issue, and to examine the frames they utilise to construct their positioning. Political influencers are significant because they are an example of the contemporary trend of reaching out and mobilising through social media as opposed to mainstream media. What is more, studies on social media contend that one of its

uses is identity construction (Bouvier, 2015), making it an ideal choice for studying the discourse on cultural globalisation. After all, the assumption that the losers of globalisation gather to the fringes corresponds with the idea that they seek out social media in the process. Losers of globalisation aim to cement their common understanding of identity, and social media is an ideal platform to do so. Flew and Iosifidis (2020) contend that new communication tools, which social media account for, accelerate the spread of nationalism by allowing people with common values new ways to organise and mobilise.

The thesis attempts to connect the far-right ideology of political influencers to the globalisation cleavage, and further explore the extent that the pandemic reflects this. I suggest the existence of two possible outcomes: 1) that the covid discourse reinforces the globalisation cleavage, or 2) that it rather replaces it. When it comes to the reinforcement of globalisation, this may be apparent if the discussion of immigration and border control is maintained when covid is included in the discourse. Or if the discussion of vaccine mandates is accompanied by apparent references to existing far-right globalisation sentiments. This signals that covid has not changed the globalisation cleavage but rather reinforced it by incorporating and referring to it. The alternative to this proposition is that covid instead replaces the globalisation discourse, where covid dominates and globalisation issues have become absent. For this to be evident, covid is spoken about without reference to issues of globalisation. The discourse may include discussions of vaccinations, masks or other covid references without including any globalisation sentiments, and the inclusion of typical conflicts from the globalisation discourse are not apparent.

My thesis proposes that far-right actors will employ covid to reinforce their existing globalisation discourse. In order for this to be apparent, I expect there to be an element of consolidation between globalisation and covid, where there is a reciprocal relationship between the two. Discourses are commonly introduced to public domain by the recontextualization of existing local or global discourses (Krzyżanowski, 2020). I assume that the far-right will talk about the pandemic by relying on existing conceptualisations of globalisation, thus simultaneously reinforcing their perspectives and stance on globalisation issues. Four main components of globalisation are included, which are “the permeability of borders, the allocation of authority to political institutions, the value of communities and the primacy of individual rights or collective goods” (Zürn & de Wilde, 2016). This theoretical underpinning will be further elaborated below, but in short, they make up the essence of which to identify the far-right’s globalisation sentiments. The range of these issues are broad, reflecting the extensive subject that is globalisation. Moreover, they take into account the identity aspect of

globalisation where populism can be seen as an indication of it. Based on this, I will examine whether covid reflects globalisation in the discourse and as such reinforces it, or rather works to replace globalisation and become a new, dividing critical juncture in its own right.

1.2 Research question

Political influencers from the US and the UK are included in the thesis. Although globalisation more commonly has created a divide between winners and losers in Europe, Strijbis, Helmer, and de Wilde (2020) finds evidence that societal conflicts produced by globalisation exist outside of Europe as well. I will employ discourse analysis to explore what the discourse consists of in these two countries, based on Youtube videos from two far-right political influencers from each country: Watson and Hopkins from the UK, and Dice and Shapiro from the US. Further, I will attempt to explain why it is this way, with regards to the underlining premise that the far-right frame matters of globalisation in a way that cements their role as losers of globalisation, and that the pandemic is used to reinforce this. My research question is as follows: *“Has covid-19 discursively replaced or reinforced the globalisation cleavage among far-right political influencers?”*. The thesis thus sets off to explore the existence and relationship between globalisation and covid-19 in discourse of far-right political influencers. My argument is twofold: First, I argue that far-right political influencers maintain a communitarian, populist stance on matters related to the globalisation cleavage. Second, that covid is used to reinforce these sentiments.

What this thesis can provide, is a distinct focus on the globalisation discourse from the perspective of far-right political influencers. Moreover, by including the element of covid-19, it becomes a contemporary study of the discourse of far-right political influencers and allows for an analysis of the ways they justify their views and the tools they utilise to do it. Covid has come to affect the lives of people across the globe, and it is interesting to explore the significance of the pandemic on today’s political landscape.

2. Theoretical framework

This part presents the theoretical framework for the thesis. First, I review globalisation as a discursive subject, demonstrating the usefulness of it as utilised by the far right. The subsequent section looks at the impact of covid, suggesting a connection between globalisation and covid that fuels the idea that a process of either reinforcement or replacement exists in the discourse. Third, I provide an assessment of globalisation in the literature. This section looks at what previous research has found on globalisation and expands on the notion of winners and losers of globalisation, signifying the importance of globalisation as a process while also bringing attention to how extensive a subject it is. Lastly, I introduce the concept of far-right political influencers, together with discussing the significance of social media activism in today's political landscape.

As the theory will show, the globalisation cleavage has been built over time due to conflict such as immigration, EU, and identity. These topics have been central to the idea of a globalisation cleavage, evident in the theory and discourse on globalisation. Yet, the arrival of the covid-19 pandemic had immense consequences all over the globe, and undoubtedly created divisions politically. It is possible that the force of the pandemic connects to the conflict on globalisation. As initially stated, my thesis explores whether a process of reinforcement or replacement has taken place. The following theoretical framework attempts to unravel the building blocks needed to answer the research question.

2.1 The discourse on globalisation

The discourse on globalisation mirrors the struggle to define globalisation. Friedman and Friedman (2013) argue that it is not about analysing an empirical process, but rather a normative discourse that requires a new understanding. Due to how ambiguous globalisation is, the public discourse that supports or legitimates interpretations of it is of great importance (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). Globalisation brings with it a growing interdependence between states in sections of trade, economy, migration, environmental concerns, and political integration. It increasingly fuels public debates, which are intensified by real or perceived threats of winning or losing due to how the opportunities and threats of globalisation are unevenly distributed (Zürn & de Wilde, 2016). There is an idea of identity construction as a reaction to globalisation, where the argument is that globalisation has created an upsurge in politics of identity. My thesis sees the far-right discourse on globalisation as an attempt to formulate and express a specific type of

identity rhetoric as a reaction to it. Their possible use of the crisis of the pandemic strengthens the claim that it is of importance to the far right to push their agenda and create a sense of identity – and that they will use any means, any societal event, to do so. Thus, the far-right discourse is a reaction to the fluidness of globalisation, and the generating of new, non-territorial political identities.

Siddiqui (2021) reviews place of the right-wing in discussions of globalisation and finds that they are commonly populist, and usually nationalist. He views “the four horsemen of globalisation” to be immigration, financial integration, cultural exchanges, and trade. By seeking to understand why the far right usually adapt an ethnocentric identity policy instead of an economically redistributive agenda, he includes the ideas of identity and culture. My thesis extends this mission, focusing primarily on the identity and culture aspects of globalisation through the discourse of far-right political influencers. Moreover, Siddiqui (2021) identifies characteristics of the far right relevant to explain their stance on globalisation. A central point that he makes is that it is not necessarily the rate of an issue such as immigration that fuels the popularity of the far right, but rather the reception of citizens and the framing of it. This can be applied to other issues of globalisation as well, emphasising the importance of framing a narrative and mobilising on certain issues.

The framework for globalisation can be divided into several sub-topics. These sub-topics are topics where globalisation has an impact on the discourse surrounding it as well as the process itself, either in a positive or negative way. Examples are technology, economy, immigration, international institutions, transnational cooperation, culture, and identity. An understanding of how these topics is typically spoken about must be in place to recognise the relation to covid-19 in the discourse. For that reason, the conceptualisation on globalisation as developed by Zürn and de Wilde (2016) is referred to and will operate as the basis for the analysis. By identifying four conflict dimensions in the globalisation debate, the authors reveal a conceptual framework to analyse the globalisation discourse with. This thesis will be concerned with empirically examining whether some of these ideological foundations are apparent in the discourse of far-right political influencers. My thesis will identify the ways far-right political influencers talk about and frame globalisation as part of their identity-building process, discussing topics such as immigration, culture and economy in a way that legitimises a communitarian stance.

I expect the far-right political influencers to be outspoken regarding both border crossings and cultural concerns. This is in line with far-right actors inclination towards nativism, which emphasises the rejection of people that are not members of the native group

(Mudde, 2007) as well as their position as losers of globalisation stressing the strength of their nation and its values (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020; Siddiqui, 2021). Based on these concepts, it is possible to suggest some key patterns in the discourse. My thesis suggests that the far-right discourse involves certain frames used to support an idea of globalisation as something negative, for instance as a threat to the nation. The discourse that the far-right political influencers employ and the frames they choose to construct their stories with promote their anti-globalisation position and their aim to create a sense of national identity. My thesis particularly explores whether their framing of covid suggests a reinforcement of this stance, or rather replaces it as a new and different discursive topic. In the case of replacement, the issue of covid signals enough political and societal significance to be its own subject, discursively detached from the influence of globalisation.

My thesis adds to existing literature by studying the way the far right make use of various tools to promote their views on globalisation, possibly employing covid as a way to reinforce it. The immediate situation of the pandemic allows for new insight into how the far right make use of discursive frames to support their case, and the extent that the pandemic can be utilised as a component in the political landscape. Wondreys and Mudde (2022) study the far-right response to the pandemic but use political parties as their focal point for analysis. And while Hameiri (2021) examines globalisation in relation to the pandemic, he keeps the economic consequences in mind. My thesis seeks to give insight into the discourse on cultural globalisation from the perspective of far-right political influencers, and the way it connects to the current societal issue that is the pandemic. The rise of social media gives political actors nowadays more freedoms to reach out to audiences and mobilise, and political influencers are good examples of this contemporary trend.

2.2 Connecting the crisis of the pandemic

The crises of Europe in recent years have cemented the idea of a transnational cleavage, a divide between libertarian and universalistic values on the one side and nationalism and particularism on the other (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Previous studies have shown a connection between populism and globalisation, arguing that the growing force of globalisation fuels the rise of populism (Bajo-Rubio & Yan, 2019; Flew & Iosifidis, 2020; Pástor & Veronesi, 2021; Rodrik, 2021; Siddiqui, 2021). Populism refers to the people and justifies its actions by appealing to and identifying with the people; it is rooted in anti-elite feelings; and it considers the people as a monolithic group without internal differences, except some specific categories who are

subject to an exclusion strategy (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). In other words, populism aligns well with the values of the far right and Mudde (2007) characterises the primary ideological aspects of the far right to be populism, nativism, and authoritarianism. It is worthwhile to mention that although my thesis connects the concepts of the far-right to that of populism, I am at the same time conscious of the fact that populism does not always imply far right. In fact, the use of populism as a shorthand for the far right has rather become somewhat problematic (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022).

As some far-right political actors include opposition to the establishment as part of their nationhood scheme, the consequences of globalisation and integration on a global scale across various areas leads to a surge in populism. Moreover, attempts from the far-right to oppose globalisation often result in an identity-building process which stresses the construction of “us” and “them”. The Leave campaign during the Brexit vote strongly emphasised these type of identity markers, creating divides between the UK and the rest of Europe (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Hobolt, 2016). Far-right political actors are thus inclined to utilise populism as part of their anti-globalisation agenda, with both anti-establishment sentiments and nationalist schemes being apparent. As Pástor and Veronesi (2021) notes, populists do tend to oppose globalisation.

With the emergence of covid, populists to the far right have an opportunity to use this new global issue to promote their ideology. As far right political influencers can be deemed losers of globalisation, they commonly mobilise and express themselves in a way that emphasises the contextualist and statist side of the globalisation cleavage. They use this to their advantage, building upon ideological arguments and using contemporary issues to exemplify. The British decision to leave the EU revolved around several issues connected to globalisation, utilised by both the Leave and Remain side (Hobolt, 2016; Vasilopoulou, 2016). The impact of covid resembles that of globalisation, and my thesis reviews the extent that far right political influencers utilise it in their discourse.

In addition to being a potential asset to populists in their political strategies, the impact of the covid pandemic share other similarities with globalisation. Bieber (2020) explores the impact of the pandemic on nationalism around the world. This gives insight into how the pandemic risk reinforcing pre-existing nationalist dynamics, which mirrors the effect of globalisation. Moreover, whereas globalisation is often associated with the border crossing of people, covid involves the border crossing of a deadly disease. It subsequently gives the opportunity for opponents of uncontrolled borders to extend their opposition to include more than people, goods, and communication. Elias, Ben, Mansouri, and Paradies (2021) investigate the consequences of the pandemic, arguing that an environment of populism, resurgent

ethnonationalism and retreating internationalism has led to a flare-up of racism. In other words, their study specifically looks into the extent that racism was kindled by covid-19, which can be seen as a reflection of strong forms of nativism.

While there are similarities that make it plausible for covid to be a dividing topic the same way globalisation is, the nature of the pandemic is different than other cases commonly debated by political actors from separate sides. It can therefore be viewed in the same way as a valence case. Valence is often used in the context of voter preferences, where political parties agree on a common goal, and rather disagree on the means to reach this goal (Bergh & Aardal, 2019). In this instance, all sides of the political debate agree that the pandemic need to be fought. As opposed to political issues such as migration and international cooperation where there are often two opposing sides arguing their case, the matter of a valence case is that there is a consensus on an issue being either good or bad (Bergh & Aardal, 2019). No one is arguing that the pandemic is a good thing, and to take a stand on it may therefore involve figuring out how to connect it to existing political conflicts. It is interesting to explore how far right political actors have dealt with this in order to utilise covid in their political scheme. It is likely that disagreements on vaccines, masks, quarantine and other regulations decided by government will be central topics of debate instead of the pandemic itself. Based on this, it is established that covid and globalisation bear both resemblances and distinctions. It therefore becomes an engaging task to examine whether typical arguments apparent used when talking about globalisation will be apparent in discussions on covid.

The two main typologies developed to explore whether covid reflects the globalisation cleavage are replacement and reinforcement. I argue that it is these two processes that will be identified in the discourse of the four far-right political influencers. Whether there exists reinforcement or replacement in the discourse, it has a distinct impact on the globalisation conflict. Reinforcement of the globalisation discourse signals that the pandemic can be utilised to strengthen existing political views. Moreover, it shows that matters of globalisation are still at the forefront of the discourse of the far right, strengthening its significance and its ability to permeate the political landscape. On the other hand, if there occurs a process of replacement, covid seems to be a sufficiently substantial topic for the far right to utilise in their discourse, separate from issues of globalisation. In this case, the usefulness of covid as a discursive subject is ample enough, allowing far-right actors to utilise it without needing any other topics to substantiate their arguments. In the process of replacement, covid is solitarily able to promote the viewpoints of the far-right, indicating that the pandemic is a significant force and a societal conflict with a lot of potential for political actors to make use of.

It is useful to identify these processes in the discourse as it demonstrates the impact of a new societal issue, which is covid, and additionally the existing underlying force that is globalisation. In finding out whether a process of replacement or reinforcement has taken place, it is possible to investigate how a particular political group, in this case political influencers, relate to and utilise both existing and new subjects in their discourse. Using the two typologies of reinforcement and replacement allows me as a researcher to conclude based on the chosen indicators the extent that covid reflects the globalisation cleavage. Yet, as I will reiterate below, the choice of both typologies and the indicators that point to them are greatly impactful and the result of the study will vary based on the choices made.

2.3 Globalisation in the literature

The literature on globalisation is extensive, covering various matters from efforts to theoretically define it to provide and discuss empirical evidence of its existence. Empirical studies on globalisation have gone from proposing decreased interdependence between countries to sharp interest in transborder transactions in areas of trade and finance, and further the idea of social transactions transcending national borders as well as national differences becoming more accentuated when culture, mobility and environment is considered (Zürn, 2003). Globalisation is an uneven process that affects people differently depending on where they are situated in the world (Steger, 2017). One definition is that it is “the name that is often used to designate the power relations, practices and technologies that characterize, and have helped bring into being, the contemporary world” (Schirato & Webb, 2003, p. 1). This definition highlights globalisation as a process and something that can be constructed through verbal expression.

Scholte (2008) writes that globalisation has been a common concept in academic circles much due to its possibility of providing an analytical framework for “understanding continuity and change in contemporary society” (p. 1471). He emphasises that globalisation can be useful to capture the present and on-going growth of connectivity across borders and nations. Piketty and Goldhammer (2020) argue that globalisation has been a long-term process, and could first be noted in the era off slavery and colonialism in 1500 due to its expanding relations among various regions of the world. Since then, it has reached a new period of hyper-capitalism and digital technology (ibid.). Moreover, although globalisation as a concept both overlaps and connects to internationalisation, liberalisation, universalisation, and westernisation, it is far from equivalent to these older notions and ideas (Scholte, 2008). Scholte points to globalisation

as a process that provides increased interconnectedness across borders. This interconnectedness can also be deemed a process of “denationalisation”, as some argue that it leads to a decline of nationally defined borders (Zürn, 2003).

Keohane & Nye (2000) argue that globalisation is a process where globalism is altered, signifying a shift in the networks of interdependence on distances at a multicontinental level (in Dreher, Gaston, & Martens, 2008, p. 105) This substantiates a view of globalisation as a process of denationalisation. Some ways in which globalisation is made visible is through the increased interconnectedness between states “due to trade, internationalised patterns of economic production, migration, environmental degradation and political integration” (Zürn & de Wilde, 2016, p. 282). Dreher et al. (2008) write that this process has led to a movement of goods and services, financial capital, information, and people. They moreover bring attention to the fact that although globalisation has resulted in notable advantages when it comes to culture and governance, giving more awareness to issues such as human rights and gender equality, it has also brought with it new threats to society. Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that the rise of post-materialistic values has created a “cultural backlash”, leading to increased support for authoritarian populism in the West. People fear that the opening of borders, cultures and values will amplify the gaps between rich and poor and moreover that globalisation will create a migration problem, the spreading of diseases, climate change, loss of biodiversity and scarcity and pollution of resources (Dreher et al., 2008).

This represents the main divide between supporters and opponents of globalisation, whereas the latter can be seen to advocate an anti-globalisation stance. Globalisation as a cultural conflict has generated the creation of several concepts, where some use demarcation vs integration (Kriesi et al., 2006), others cosmopolitanism vs communitarianism (Teney, Lacewell, & De Wilde, 2014) and so on. This structural conflict has created the idea that there exists both winners and losers of globalisation. In my thesis, communitarianism is utilised as the concept representing the discourse of the far right on the matter of globalisation, but in its natural state it may imply both left and right-wing positionings. Its perspective is one that criticises liberalism and wants to create balance in society through emphasis on community. Critics of its political philosophy point to its conservative and authoritarian implications, and how it defends existing social structures and moral codes (Heywood, 2004).

Zürn and de Wilde (2016) emphasise the importance of ideology as the normative underpinning of conflict lines in comparative politics. In other words, before the process of globalisation can be seen as the cause of a new political cleavage, an understanding of these normative underpinnings is needed. To utilise globalisation in my thesis, it requires a

conceptualisation of the components of these ideological underpinnings. What Zürn and de Wilde (2016) particularly look at, is the extent to which contributors of the public debate on globalisation draw upon various political philosophies, that moreover establish political ideologies. The authors' conceptualisation includes "the permeability of borders, the allocation of authority to political institutions, the value of communities and the primacy of individual rights or collective goods" (Zürn and de Wilde, 2016, p. 287). The principal conflicts within globalisation arise from the fundamental divergence between universalists and contextualists, where the debate between globalists and statist is found within a contextualist backdrop. Accordingly, the conceptualisation of the four principled conflicts of globalisation is based on components from both the dispute between globalists and statist as well as between universalists and contextualists. This distinction is useful to my thesis because it maps out the content of globalisation as a societal conflict and cleavage. To identify the discourse of the losers of globalisation, an understanding of the underlying ideology pitting the winners and losers against each other is needed. Recognising these positionings is useful to understand what the discourse of far-right political actors represents.

The divide between those who feel left behind, the losers of globalisation, and those who support the forces of this process, the winners, works as a compelling force behind increased support for both the radical left and the radical right (Teney et al., 2014). Those opposing globalisation can be placed both at the left or the right, whereas left-wing communitarians usually emphasise the threat to equality and solidarity within states and the right-wing highlight the threat to national cultural cohesion (de Wilde, Koopmans, Merkel, Strijbis, & Zürn, 2019). My thesis takes an interest in the communitarian view of the far right, and the cultural dimension of globalisation subsequently works as a focal point. Park (2013) argues that most scholars exclude the radical right in their studies on anti-globalisation, leading to an emphasis on left-leaning civil society groups. My thesis aims to include right-wing discourses in the study of anti-globalisation and connect their sentiments to concepts of right-wing identity making. Right-wing communitarianism maintain that community requires respect for authority and established values (Heywood, 2017).

An emphasis on the rise of opposition by the so-called losers of globalisation is voiced by Flew and Iosifidis (2020). They write that the global communication culture created by technology has created a new form of connection across nation lines, and new ways to share interests, identities, and cultures. Flew and Iosifidis (2020) point out the impacts of economic and cultural globalisation as three-folded. First, it creates a pluralisation of cultures and identities. Secondly, this is linked to the deterritorialization of culture (Tomlinson, 2007, in

Flew and Iosofidis, 2020). Third, it entails a weakening of the ties between national culture and identity. As a result, the effects of globalisation have led to a surge in populism and nationalism. Their findings bring attention to how populism and nationalism can function as structures for actors to attempt to protect and distance themselves from the process of globalisation. Moreover, it gives ground to explore the discourse of the far right particularly, as they are known to take advantage of both nationalist remarks and populism (Siddiqui, 2021).

2.4 Far-right political influencers

The political ideology that interchangeably is known as “the far right”, “the radical right” or “right-wing” holds no academic consensus on the correct terms of the broader movement and the subgroups within (Mudde, 2019). Whereas the movements used to be described as “neo-fascist in the 80s, this changed to “the radical right” in the 90s, while “the far right” has become commonly used in recent years (Mudde, 2019). Castelli Gattinara and Pirro (2019) write that “far right” politics goes beyond a focus on either an “extreme” or “radical” political right. Following their definition, my thesis denotes the far right as collective actors, in this instance political influencers, located on the “right” end of the ideological left-right continuum. The far right thus becomes an umbrella term which does not exclude extreme-right and radical-right variants (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). People to the far right repeatedly stress that they do not self-identify with this terminology. It can therefore be somewhat challenging to point out various political activists as far right actors. Yet, it is common for political actors to the right to use identity markers to distance themselves from what they disagree with, for instance deeming the opposite camp as “leftists”. By doing this, they cement their place on the right wing of politics.

The chosen political actors for this thesis are political activists, but I suggest the term political influencers due to how they depend on social media engagement and publicity. Bause (2021) introduces the term political social media influencer, a person who “became well known in social media and, as self-created personal brands, regularly distribute self-produced political content with which they reach and potentially influence a dispersed audience” (p. 296). What these people do is to attempt to condition the public agenda and moreover the public opinion by exercising personal influence through technological means (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). In theory, they are similar to opinion leaders as they have to be extroverted, confident and communicative. But unlike political opinion leaders, political influencers are dependent on social media platforms to get publicity and to exert influence (Bause, 2021). The activists

include in my thesis are Ben Shapiro, Katie Hopkins, Mark Dice and Paul Joseph Watson; internet personalities who are all dependent on social media to express their opinions, relying heavily on getting views, likes and engagement.

Influencers are characterised by their large social following, and they often gain substantial attention for their online posts in the case they go “viral” and attract a lot of online engagement (Sprejer, Margetts, Oliveira, O'Sullivan, & Vidgen, 2021). Social media has become the place for young media users to seek out both information and inspiration about contemporary world politics and affairs (Fischer, Kolo, & Mothes, 2022). Because of this, influencers on social media have a lot of power, and the potential to create enormous ripple effects. The focus on political influencers instead of elected politicians is guided by an interest in the forces of political communication on social media. Particularly in contemporary political communication, which frequently situates itself on the internet. It is an attempt to underline the importance of studying political actors from various spheres, not just traditionally elected politicians.

My thesis contends that there are several forces in play in the transformation of public discourse, and that activists who take to social media in their endeavours can be highly influential and powerful. A crucial explanation to this is the freedom that frequently accompanies speech in social media versus in traditional medias, where the latter is normally checked and controlled by journalists and editors. Social media gives the political influencer the ability to control what they post, allowing them to be their own editor. This leads to political influencers having a lot of power and control, and their content should be continuously checked as a result. Populist political actors, for instance, choose social media instead of the mainstream medias, which they argue only support the elite agenda (Flew & Iosofidis, 2020). Research on the ways political actors influence public opinion is crucial, and because modern political actors have new tools they can utilise, this should be reflected in the field of political science as well.

The mass media is the major site for contests of meaning because participants generally acknowledge its influence (Gamson, 2004). Moreover, mass media is the place where changes in language and political consciousness take place (ibid.). Traditional medias, such as newspapers and tv, is already established to have a lot of power over public opinion. Influence is exerted on both society and culture. Social media is a good example of the globalisation process where communication is made easier across national borders. Modern tools of social media have lowered the cost of both establishing and maintaining connections between political actors (Pond & Lewis, 2019). Yet the internet may represent a certain technological optimism. With the openness of the internet, participation may turn chaotic. Moreover, there are issues of

ensorship, partisanship and the absence of critical discussion (Iosifidis, 2011). With social media particularly, an emerging and alarming spread of misinformation creates problems for the integrity of political information situated there. Filter bubbles and echo chambers are on the rise, subsequently leading to increased exposure to fake news (Rhodes, 2021). With the rise of social media, the medias continue to expand and reach more and more people, becoming a fundamental part of society, consequently leading to a lot of political activity establishing itself there (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). Janssen (2007) emphasises the medias' ability to be an important political arena, where political actors are influenced by the changes happening there. Influencers can take advantage of the mediatization of society to exert influence and mobilise, both on ordinary citizens and elected politicians. It has become a recent internet phenomenon that radical right influencers use social media to spread their messages, deemed by Sprejer et al. (2021) as "highly divisive, disruptive and anti-democratic messages". Moreover, the UN has expressed fear due to the fact that social media is used by the far right to recruit online youth, exploiting on existing anger and fear (The Federal, 2020).



Figure 1: The far-right political influencers included in the thesis. L-R: Katie Hopkins, Paul Joseph Watson, Ben Shapiro and Mark Dice.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological choices for the thesis. First, a clarification of the two possible findings to the research question, namely whether a process of reinforcement or replacement takes place in the discourse. This part accordingly entails a reiteration of the indicators that support the two resolutions as well as my expectations of the findings. Second, this chapter will introduce the method of discourse analysis: the advantages of this type of qualitative approach, but also some of its challenges. Moving on, the choice of cases will be accounted for before the chapter ends with describing the selected data for the analysis and how the videos were chosen.

3.1 Indicators

In line with the political ideology that is communitarianism it is expected that sentiments opposing globalisation will be apparent in the discourse of the far right. Moreover, by identifying the way they engage with the issue of covid, my thesis proposes that the far-right use this to reinforce their communitarian stance. While this thesis is interested in the extent that covid either reinforces or replaces the globalisation cleavage, it would be possible to identify a range of connections between the discourses of the far right that surpass the typology chosen for this thesis. The fluid nature of discourse and the choice of method allows for various interpretations. My thesis looks at the existence of either reinforcement or replacement due to its aim of exploring how far-right political influencers employ various strategies to strengthen their positioning on globalisation. The simplicity of using two categories allows for more attention to be placed on the existing communitarian discourse in addition to its relationship with covid specifically.

As proposed initially, the thesis examines the way the covid discourse reflects the existing globalisation discourse by far-right political influencers. One outcome is that the covid discourse replaces the globalisation discourse. This is evident if themes that are apparent in the far-right discourse on globalisation are lacking in their discourse on covid. For instance, the far-right is expected to be populist in their communication, emphasising identity markers and distancing themselves from “the elite”. This would be part of the conflict within globalisation that stresses the defining of ingroups and outgroups, demonstrating an ideological battle between universalists and contextualists (Zürn and de Wilde, 2016). If the covid discourse by far-right political influencers is found to instead focus on another enemy, for instance China

where covid had its outbreak, this would be an indicator that covid has replaced globalisation. It can be analysed in terms of how covid has led to the setback of common globalisation matters in the discourse, instead creating new enemies or issues to bring attention to. The populist divide between the elite and the ordinary people, or the left and right, could become second place to a new divide, for instance between the West and China.

The other outcome proposed is that covid reinforces the globalisation discourse. Signs of this could be if the recurrent globalisation conflict of allocation of authority, for instance in the case of open or closed borders, are maintained when talking about covid. This continuation implies a reflection of globalisation in the covid discourse, thus reinforcing globalisation. If more similarities can be found between the globalisation and covid discourse, this suggests that the political conflict is preserved. The globalisation cleavage is not altered, but rather strengthened by the same type of arguments, divisions, and enemies. The enemies of the far-right are commonly the left, the liberal and the elite. If these actors are put to blame for covid as well, this reinforces the division already existent in the globalisation cleavage. Based on this, both the issue of who the enemy is, and the issue of borders can be indicators of whether a process of reinforcement or replacement takes place. A third indicator is that of nationalism and patriotism, and the extent that far right political influencers bring attention to and use this in their discourse. This is connected to feelings of identity and emphasising differences to form their own place in society, once again dividing people into ingroups and outgroups. Moreover, it is connected to the primacy of the nation state and arguments voicing the importance of the state in political order. The most apparent way this is evident is by the use of populist sentiments in the discourse.

Based on, and together with, Zürn and de Wilde's (2016) bones of contention, these indicators map out the ways in which to analyse the far-right discourse. It is possible that with the use of other theoretical foundations that the indicators could have been different, and accordingly the results would differ. In sum, the chosen indicators will say something about whether a process of reinforcement or replacement has taken place. It is in many ways difficult to identify these two processes in the discourse of political influencers spanning several months. Naturally, they speak about a lot of topics. Another point is that these specific discourses are not detached from other discourses. Therefore, mentions of topics that can be placed under other labels might be included, as they can encompass several concerns including globalisation and covid.

3.2 Employing discourse analysis

Discourses are semiotic ways to construct aspects of the world and are often identified by various positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). Studying the discourse on globalisation and covid is useful because it can provide an understanding of how societal conflicts are constructed in society. Globalisation is a contested matter and the public discourse that supports or legitimises various interpretations of it is therefore of great importance (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). My thesis aims to recognise some ways that globalisation is constructed and moreover examine how the discourse on covid reflects it. Discourse analysis can be used to identify several frames in the far-right globalisation discourse. In the case for far-right political influencers, it can be employed as a method to examine how their language constructs, maintains, and legitimises a view of globalisation that is based on a communitarian ideology. Moreover, it can be utilised to get insight into whether covid reflects the existing globalisation cleavage.

Huckin (1997) writes that «by focusing on language and other elements of discursive practice, discourse analysis analysts try to illuminate ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct version of reality that favour the interests of those same forces» (p. 79). The research question asks whether covid has replaced or reinforced globalisation. Discourse analysis is beneficial due to its focus on how society is constructed, and a place for various forces to struggle for discursive hegemony. To assess the extent that covid reflects the globalisation cleavage is a way to assess how a recently dominating crisis in society is being constructed, and whether it leans on pre-existing forces such as globalisation. The way far-right political influencers talk about certain issues is a way for them to construct their own reality, and preferably one that is in favour of their worldview. Using discourse analysis becomes a necessary tool for understanding far right positionings on globalisation as well as their use of the crisis that is covid. Additionally, Huckin (1997) states that with discourses, it is important to be aware of the influence of media on public opinion. This underlines the usefulness of connecting a study on political discourse to a media platform such as Youtube. The increasing availability of online discursive spaces allow political influencers to take advantage of social media to spread their message and therefore needs to be continuously checked.

In my thesis, certain frames will be identified. The framing perspective focuses on processes where actors produce frames of meaning to mobilise support for their opinions (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). The idea of identifying frames goes well with the objective of discourse analysis, as it can help identify exertion of power and the frames used to compete for the

domination of a story (Entman, 1993). Framing involves organising the discourse according to a certain view or perspective (Carvalho, 2008). The idea of identifying frames implies an approach that sees reality as a constructed entity. Components of society are dynamic and disputed, and various actors struggle to let their view be the hegemonic one. Carvalho (2008) writes that framing power is about the ability to express opinions and influence others through the media, highlighting once again the significance of the media and its usefulness in the study of discourses.

Because the method of discourse analysis is both interpretive and subjective, it faces several challenges. One of them is selecting the data material. Discourses are not necessarily clear-cut or based on a few sentences alone. They are usually connected in a bigger web, for instance including references to other people, conversations, and topics. It becomes a challenge to gather a comprehensive amount of data that is at the same time manageable from a research perspective, without possibly omitting vital context. The aim of my thesis is to examine discourse centred around globalisation and covid and therefore risks overlooking other significant material from the discourse of far-right political influencers. This connects to another challenge which is the role of the researcher. My socio-cultural background, experiences and theoretical focal points influence the data, from the choice of theoretical framework to political influencers. My interpretations and knowledge as a researcher may affect the data selection, for instance if there are references or words that are unfamiliar. Sometimes words can have double meanings, or political actors may refer to previous events that the researcher fails to comprehend. Undoubtedly, discourse analysis stands in contrast to more quantitative methods. Even so, considering the context of specific utterances and being able to interpret them based on existing literature has its strengths.

3.3 The case of the US and the UK

Two countries are included in the analysis, namely the United States and the United Kingdom. These countries both have prominent and vocal far-right activists and groups, although it is a more recent phenomenon in the UK. There are some advantages of employing these two countries in the analysis. First and foremost, they both have a generally good access to technology and social media particularly. In 2021, the US had over 295 million social media users, equivalent to three quarters of the whole population (Statista Research Department, 2022a). The number for the UK was 60 million, an increase of nine million since 2017 (Statista Research Department, 2022b). This implies that a great deal of the population is influenced by

the content and discourse on social media, something various political actors can take advantage of. Moreover, the two countries are multicultural and developed to the degree that globalisation processes are expected to be visible in many areas. For instance, when it comes to membership in international organisations and high levels of trade and immigration, this occurs in both countries. They are both wealthy countries, meaning that globalisation creates noticeable divides between winners and losers (Strijbis et al., 2020). Consequently, there should exist a discourse on globalisation, seeing as they are affected by it in several ways. A third point that makes the US and the UK good candidates for assessing the far-right discourse on globalisation and covid is the way both countries have little censorship (Bischoff, 2022). In other words, freedom of speech is central, and political actors can express themselves outspokenly.

It is however apparent that using two Western English-speaking countries for the analysis on globalisation has its limits. Literature on globalisation sometimes refers to it as a process of “westernization” (de Wilde et al., 2019), but with the advancement of several non-Western countries, this view on globalisation seems simplified. While globalisation might translate to various views attempting a hegemonic role in the international landscape, the influence of non-Western countries should not be understated. Moreover, whereas modernisation theory keeps a Western bias, holding on to the idea that the rest of the world is helpless in resisting to become increasingly like the West, globalisation theory on the other hand tends to shift away from the focus on the West (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). This being said, while the two countries in this thesis are situated in the Western hemisphere, I still acknowledge the extent that globalisation is about more than only the impact and ideas of the West. In other words, the thesis does not attempt to sustain the view of Western countries as the only conveyors of the processes of globalisation. In the field of economy today, China’s GPD is close to that of the US while Japan holds a higher GPD than the UK (The World Bank, 2020). While globalisation cannot be measured this simplistically, it can give an idea of the development of various countries and thus bring attention to the fact that non-Western countries need to be regarded as well. It is due to the limited scope of the thesis, and the lack of time, resources, and foreign language skills that the thesis is limited to the US and UK alone.

I expect that the far-right political influencers in both the US and the UK will emphasise the same types of issues when it comes to globalisation, having a stance that is in line with their right-wing ideology. This may be apparent with the creation of chauvinistic identity myths and an anti-elitist stance (Wodak, 2015). A finding might be that the UK talk more about globalisation than the US, which can be connected to the fact that they recently were part of the EU and topics related to international cooperation, government regulation and border control

are still very salient. Because the UK has a history of interconnectedness with Europe, I expect to find that some of the globalisation discourse of the far right in the UK is focused on their relationship with the rest of Europe. I assume that this is not the case with the US, who due to their federal nature instead might be more occupied with relations within the US alone, and less interested in outside countries. Aside from this, I expect that the way the discourse on covid-19 relates to the globalisation discourse is similar in both countries – that the far right use this crisis to reinforce their communitarian position. The pandemic works as a useful tool to the far right due to their inclination of being anti-elitist and utilising societal crises to promote their message. I expect that covid-19 has allowed them to advance their agenda by gaining yet another issue where they can spread sensational information, emphasise identity-based rhetoric and position themselves as part of “the ordinary people”.

The thesis then, will analyse the discourse of political influencers from the US and UK and to what extent globalisation matters as well as covid is a part of the discourse. It is interesting to examine if covid does in fact emphasise and reinforce the globalisation cleavage through an anti-globalisation stance, and if the discourse is similar or different in the two cases of the US and UK. In the quest to analyse the discursive relationship between covid-19 and globalisation in the two countries, I expect there to be similar outcomes in the way actors frame globalisation in their covid discourse. This is due to two things: First, it is the discourse of the far right alone that is focal point of the analysis. Consequently, the chosen political activists share similar views on politics and the world regardless of being based in the US or UK. In order for political actors to be positioned to the far right, some fundamental perspectives work as a basis: commonly being populist and nationalist while maintaining nativist and authoritarian ideologies (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022). While the US and UK differ when it comes to the development of state and the overall attitudes to government, I assume that this has little effect on the discourse of the far right in the two countries. The far right usually opposes the government either way due to their populist inclination. Secondly, the two countries share many similarities such as being democratic and noticeably developed Western countries, and accordingly the governments’ handling of the pandemic resemble each other. Some might argue that the placement of the US outside of Europe situates it in an entirely different context than the UK, but the many attempts from the UK to distance itself from Europe, most recently with the Brexit referendum of 2016, gives ground to argue that the two countries exist within a related environment. Due to this, it is likely that the chosen political influencers in both the US and the UK have the same type of arguments.

3.4 Selecting data: the videos

To prevent a selection of sources based on the dependent variable, all videos in the timespan of 10 months were considered. To narrow down the number of videos, the most viewed videos from each political influencer amounting up to 120 minutes of footage is included. The videos are selected from date March 1st, 2020, and out the year. March 2020 was the time when the WHO officially deemed the coronavirus a pandemic (CNN, 2022), cementing it as a topic of debate. An advantage to this type of selection of data is that the most popular videos are the ones being analysed. Popularity in terms of views per video means that these videos are the ones reaching out to the most people, making them more potent and arguably meaningful to this thesis. Yet, a disadvantage is that this data selection fails to necessarily demonstrate the full range of discourses the political influencers produce. Moreover, it may fail to give evidence that my assumptions going into this thesis can be proven. This is nevertheless the type of paradoxes that can arise when working with an abductive approach to research material. The empirical findings nonetheless amount to a conclusion, whether they confirm the predispositions of the thesis, or rather deny it. This leads to another important point, namely the flaws of the qualitative data method. Although it is not the case for every qualitative research paper to have a limited set of data, it is a fact that qualitative data cannot be as generalised or representative as quantitative data. Considering the scope of this thesis, some limitations are in place in terms of data to analyse. The qualitative method of discourse analysis allows for an in-depth case study of what the discourse of far-right political influencers consist of and how they present their arguments. It connects to a broader idea of how values and views are constructed, and how political actors can influence the public sphere based on real life examples.

Videos that were shorter than 1 minute in length were excluded to focus on what was presumed to be more coherent discourses. Videos longer than 45 minutes were also excluded to allow for the inclusion of a greater variation of videos, as opposed to a single video on the same topic. In addition, videos where the political influencer takes the role of an interviewer was eliminated, due to how their talk is not at the forefront of these videos. Instead, videos where the political influencer themselves is at the forefront and a clear communicator of a discourse are of interest. The selection of videos was condensed down to these main criteria: published within the time frame of March 2020 and out that year, had the most views within this time frame, had a duration of 1 to 45 minutes, was not an interview situation or a video where the political influencer was not speaking. Based on this, videos that amounted to approximately 120 minutes of speaking time for each political influencer were included. Due to the variation of the length in the videos that the chosen political influencers published, it was

more even balanced to base the discourse included in the analysis on an approximate of minutes spoken, rather than number of videos. The videos were then all fully transcribed so that indicators could easily be traced through text.

When using specific criteria for the videos, there are naturally some consequences in terms of what type of videos are included. For instance, the criteria of using the videos that are most viewed is based on the fact that these videos reached out to the most people, and thus are more salient. Yet, it says little about the actual content of the videos. It might be the case that these videos have more views because they involve more sensational issues, or that they have what can be deemed a “clickbait”-title. They are not necessarily more relevant to the research question. Due to the limited length of time for this thesis, I chose to base the videos analysed on specific criteria instead of otherwise looking through many more hours of footage from each political influencer. Of importance to this thesis is the spoken discourse of the political influencers, and not only reviewing what their exact words are, but further to connect and interpret their meaning in relation to a greater framework of literature. Discourse analysis allows for this type of interpretation, but it is then imperative for the researcher to be aware and transparent of her own predispositions and prejudice going into the analysis.

4. Empirical analysis

The following chapters will demonstrate the extent and way that matters of globalisation are utilised in the discourse of the far right, and subsequently their use of covid to either reinforce or replace this. In fast-growing modernising countries, there are people who cannot cope with the developments happening both economically and culturally (Minkenberg, 2000). The far right is part of the group deemed the losers of globalisation due to their opposition to the forces globalisation have generated. Increased integration in several areas has caused a reaction in the form of nationalist, nativist, and xenophobic values. Right-wing political actors mobilise these reactions by offering political philosophies that promises a better society (Minkenberg, 2000). The four components of globalisation as formulated by Zürn and de Wilde (2016) are considered, with the thesis arguing that populism aligns with the third component, that of identity politics and making a divide between in-groups and out-groups.

The following section aims to demonstrate the extent that the far right's role as losers of globalisation is apparent in their discourse, and moreover the ways they make use of this position. First, I will identify the issues that the far right is occupied with. Further, I will explore whether covid as part of the discourse either reinforces or replaces globalisation in the discourse, signalling how the far-right discourse either employs covid as a strategy to promote their view on globalisation, or instead implement it independently as a novel issue. This gives new insight into the globalisation conflict, particularly from the standing of far-right political influencers and seeks to examine the extent that the covid discourse reflects a wider globalisation cleavage.

4.1 At the core of the discourse

A few things became apparent in the analysis of the discourses vocalised by far-right political influencers. First and foremost, there were discourses on globalisation matters present from all four political influencers, with varying emphasis on the type of matters they were concerned with. Secondly, and as expected, covid was a topic of conversation for all four. A third point is that the political influencers from the UK spoke considerably more about US political issues than the political influencers from the US did about British issues. Additionally, the US discourse was greatly influenced by the 2020 presidential election taking place.

To begin with, I give examples of the globalisation discourse found from both countries in instances where covid was not present. This illustrates globalisation matters that are of

significance to the far right in the respective countries, separate from the issue of pandemic. By doing so, I connect far right ideology to matters of globalisation to confirm that there is a relation between the two, and further that the relation is shaped by a communitarian perspective. Following this, I will demonstrate the relation and impact between globalisation and covid as it was made apparent in the discourse. This is done by reviewing the discourse that involves covid and examining the extent globalisation is apparent, to argue whether a process of reinforcement or replacement has taken place.

4.1.1 The UK

The discourse of Paul Joseph Watson and Katie Hopkins are included in the thesis to represent that of far-right political influencers in the UK. Apparent in their discourse were references to political matters from both the UK and the US. A possible explanation to this is that the US is a great influence on the rest of the world in many areas, and particularly in terms of internet presence. In the world, the US is third behind only China and India with the highest numbers of internet users as of February 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2022c). It is plausible that political influencers in the UK have a great deal of viewers situated in the US and therefore adjust their content according to what is relevant to them, but this is not possible to say for certain as I do not have insight into country-based viewer statistics for each political influencer. Nevertheless, it was possible to identify several mentions of North American affairs in the UK discourse. One example is the issue of Black Lives Matter (BLM), which originally started in the US. Hopkins sarcastically states that “black people can do nothing wrong” (Hopkins, 2020a), and moreover that BLM-protesters do not know what they want. She uses the words “nonsense” when explaining what the protesters do, arguing that “the protestors only have the purpose of destroying stuff” (Hopkins, 2020b). Watson goes as far as to deem the BLM protests “psychological warfare” and criticises the several ways he thinks it is wrong (Watson, 2020a). This, in addition to support of the Trump administration and opposition to leftist politicians in the US are some of the ways references to the US was apparent in their discourse.

The theory of winners and losers of globalisation argue that the losers are the ones left behind by the effects of globalisation, and they lack optimism for the many things globalisation brings with it, such as more integration in various areas (Teney et al., 2014). A particular emphasis on opposition to integration was voiced regarding the border crossing of people. In one instance, Watson talks about Europe’s open border policies in a sarcastic tone, arguing that it is “so progressive (...), women are afraid of walking the streets unless they are wearing high-tech chastity belts” (Watson, 2020b). He further connects what he calls “Finland’s migrant rape

crisis” to the 2015 refugee flood making its way into Europe. He mockingly makes fun of the Finnish government’s attempt to combat their “rape epidemic”, sarcastically stating that it is enough to just “say no when Abdullah is coming in a dark alleyway thirsting for some cultural enrichment” (Watson, 2020b). What is clear based on this discourse is a framing of immigration as a dangerous threat, along with the suggestion that immigrants are mostly from Islamic countries, and more prone to violent acts such as rape. He uses sarcasm along with criticism of the authorities to underline his argument, for example by stating that the authorities in Finland were too afraid to be labelled racist to publicly identify migrants as criminal suspects.

Another approach to the discourse of border control was made by Hopkins, as she criticised the government’s list of aid to asylum seekers coming into Britain. In her words, “people who have been refused to live here still get somewhere to live, and money” (Hopkins, 2020c). Hopkins talks about the government support as negative, implying that this is something asylum seekers take advantage of. For instance, she says that it is good money in being a pregnant asylum seeker, as that will grant you more money. By focusing on the economic benefits of entering Britain, she connects the economy of Britons to the caretaking of asylum seekers. She specifically states that “this is what we are paying for”, referring to tax money paid by citizens of the UK. In combination with repeating the words “illegal immigrant”, Hopkins manages to frame immigration as a threat to British taxpayer’s money, presenting asylum seekers as money-driven illegal immigrants who receive the goods of Britain undeservedly.

The two examples mentioned above show clear references to the conflict regarding the integrity of borders, with particular emphasis on the border crossing of people. Immigration is a salient issue for right-wing political actors (Teney et al., 2014), and it is by no surprise that this was apparent in the discourse of the chosen political influencers. In another video criticising previous US president Barack Obama, Watson expresses his opinion that the Obama administration was at fault for the refugee crisis due to their support to jihadi leaders, which then again lead to the strengthening of ISIS (Watson, 2020c). He links this to what he deems increased terrorism in the West, mentioning that more than a thousand people have been murdered by asylum seekers and refugees. By referring to the perceived dangers of immigration, both Watson and Hopkins manage to frame this issue of globalisation as a problem rather than something desirable. Thus, they connect globalisation to risk rather than opportunity, in line with the statist side of the divide on the matter.

The existence of patriotism and identity politics is also an apparent part of the discourse. Positioned within the communitarian political ideology camp, statistes emphasise the nation state

and are therefore often associated with nationalism and patriotism (Bauman, 1995). Nationalism implies how nations are socially constructed entities and expressing it involves drawing a limit between “us” and “them” thus authorising treating various groups differently (Boréus, 2013). Nativism is the expression of a strong form of nationalism and promotes the idea that nations should consist of members of the native group only, and that unfamiliar elements are threats to the nation (Mudde, 2007). This particularly affects immigrants and their ability to become part of the communities they go to. When Watson and Hopkins frame immigration as a threat, and immigrants themselves as rapists, illegal and exploitive, they further promote a view that they are part of an out-group and do not belong. This type of communication is a feature of populism, as out-group rhetoric is commonly used by the right against immigrants (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). Of significance is the finding of what Watson and Hopkins portray as what they deem to be their main enemies: immigrants, the government, the media – all of whom they link and frame as part of a leftist agenda.

4.1.2 The US

The Republican versus Democrat divide is a prominent topic in the US, permeating most discussions on US politics. USA is a two-party system with strong, conflicting values, beliefs, and ideas for implementation. The videos in this analysis were selected in the year of 2020, which is an election year for the US. Naturally, the election is heated topic, and this became apparent in the discourse excerpts from Ben Shapiro and Mark Dice. One way this became evident was with the continuous criticism of the left, where both Shapiro and Dice blamed “leftist media” or “the democrats” for most of the things that are wrong in the US. Dice suggests that “democrats are continuously lying” (Dice, 2020a), while Shapiro puts forward sentiments such as “democrats threaten the integrity of the republic” (Shapiro, 2020a) and “the democratic party is the party of radicalism” (Shapiro, 2020a). Additionally, they commonly suggest that the media is left-wing, liberal and mainstream. This demonstrates their view that the left and the media are their key enemies.

As mentioned initially, the far right is positioned as losers of globalisation, and are thus expected to support a contextualist point of view as opposed to a universalist one. This divide is concerned with identity politics and weighing individual rights and collective needs. Shapiro and Dice view the left, the democrats, and the media as a common enemy. Recurring topics that they refer to in order to illustrate their discontent towards these constituents are issues of racism and discrimination, particularly issues that are transnational. In doing so, they refer to politics

of identity. Whereas more liberal standings support the contemporary reconstruction of identity, family and race, political actors such as Shapiro and Dice oppose this in favour of more rigidly established principles. They moreover blame the opposing side and continuously frame their discourse in a way that suggest that “leftists” are the ones to be held accountable.

A compelling example of the debate between contextualists and universalists is on the issue of freedom. On the one hand, contextualists stress the collective freedom to self-determination, while on the other hand, universalists support people’s freedom from oppression (Zürn & de Wilde, 2016). In one video, Shapiro talks about an actor named Ellen Page who chose to transition from female to male, changing their name to Elliot. Shapiro strongly criticises the medias’ way of presenting the story, arguing that “the media have created a bizarre standard whereby if a person declares themselves a member of the opposite gender, the entire world must immediately stop calling them the name everybody knew them as” (Shapiro, 2020b). He moreover states that while he is indifferent to what gender the actor chooses to be, he himself will continue to call “him” a “her”, saying “since it is a free country, I am free to point out that Ellen Page is in fact a woman”. This provides an instance where the transnational issue of LGBTQ+ rights is utilised by a political influencer to promote a view that is in line with a communitarian political ideology. In his discourse, Shapiro frames the idea of changing genders as something ridiculous, subsequently delegitimising it, and those who do it, in the process. It becomes an example of an instance where freedom to express yourself however you like surpasses freedom from oppression, further connecting Shapiro and his political views to a communitarian, conservative perspective on matters of globalisation.

The media is repeatedly framed using words such as “leftist”, “mainstream”, “unethical” and “biased” in the words of Dice and Shapiro. It becomes apparent in their discourse that they strongly distance themselves from it. Along with nationalism, populism is another strategy commonly utilised by political actors at the fringes. Discontent with globalisation manifests among other things with the cultural backlash of rising intolerance and xenophobia, which are ingredients for the rise of populism (Bajo-Rubio & Yan, 2019). The framing of the media as working for the political elites who Dice and Shapiro disagree with, the Democrats, shows how they utilise populist communication strategies in their discourse. They treat the media as an outcast, questioning their integrity and ability to stay impartial on politics. News channels such as CNN and MSNBC are mentioned several times as examples of leftist media propaganda. This discourse stresses the conflict between the people and the corrupt elite and medias, as Dice and Shapiro portray it. Pointing out his support for Trump over Biden was of particular interest to Dice, as he additionally mentions how “liberal media” was unfairly biased against Trump.

A latter important part of the discourse of Dice particularly, is the inclusion of black African Americans as part of the out-group. He comments on how black people in America want their own national anthem, further stating that “They want to build their own country on our soil” (Dice, 2020b). Moreover, he states in another video that “The left is blaming white people for all the problems in the black community” (Dice, 2020c). This illustrates the inclusion of race as a divider in US politics, and the reference to “black people” as “the other”. Dice mocks the “wokeness” of today’s society when it comes to racism, consequently normalising ridicule at the expense of suppressed groups in society. In one video, he specifically mocks what he deems the recent “hysteria” of racism that he thinks has resurfaced by well-known brands, parodying issues that people in the black community and Americans in general have been highlighting in later years (Dice, 2020i).

4.2 Covid in the discourse

This section reviews the discourse on covid and the extent that covid and globalisation co-exist, to argue whether a process of replacement or reinforcement is apparent in the discourse. The case of the far-right discourse in the UK comes first, followed by that in the US. For this section, the discourse of each political influencer is addressed separately, and some similarities and differences are pointed out along the way. The three indicators are: the issue of borders, evidence of populism, and mentions of who the enemy is. They will be regarded respectively, together with some partial conclusions.

4.2.1 Katie Hopkins

Hopkins spoke a lot about covid in the videos analysed. She linked the pandemic to several issues, such as the incompetence of the government, the science behind covid regulations and the vaccines, fearmongering, protests, values, media’s coverage of it and the freedoms of individuals. Most prominently featured in her videos is her opposition to the government and the media, in line with the far-right ideology that is to commonly utilise populist communication. Her discourse on covid extends her pre-existing opposition, which was apparent in her globalisation discourse. The matter is to what extent, and if it is recurring theme throughout her discourse. As for the first indicator, the issue of borders became less evident in her discourse on covid. Whereas the mention of immigration was strongly observable in her globalisation discourse, there were in fact no mentions of it in connection to covid. This erasure

of the issue of borders, which was so salient in her globalisation discourse, suggests that in this case, covid has replaced globalisation.

For the second indicator, evidence of populism, there were continuous references to nationalism and identity politics in Hopkins' discourse. Identity sentiments were mostly apparent in the form of populist remarks, promoting the will of the ordinary people against the elite. Hopkins repeatedly stresses "they" versus "us" when discussing the government's handling of the pandemic, portraying their regulations as forceful and power hungry. Moreover, she is able to link various transnational movements such as the BLM movement and the abortion rights movement, to covid. The general approach by the far right towards these movements is conservative. An instance where Hopkins does this is when she in a video connects the abortion rights slogan "my body, my choice" to her choice of not taking the covid-19 vaccine. Additionally, when discussing the vaccine, she demonstrates opposition to the government by arguing that the vaccine is something the government wants to inject people with, strongly promoting anti-establishment sentiments and a divide between "us" and "them". Moreover, she questions the legitimacy of the vaccine, referring to it as a "government injectable" (Hopkins, 2020d).

When she links vaccine choice to the issue of abortion, Hopkins builds upon an existing discourse of individual freedom and transnational rights. She does not point out that she promotes abortion rights, but rather what she thinks is the irony behind a group of people advocating the motto of "my body, my choice" and only applying it to abortion and not vaccines (Hopkins, 2020d). This surprisingly links her discourse to a more liberal take on globalisation, as it does not embody a communitarian perspective and can therefore represent a process of replacement. Further, Hopkins frames the vaccine as something unsafe, something the government wants to experiment with. This extends her oppositional view of the government as incompetent, not only on issues regarding immigration but also on issues regarding covid. This points towards a process of reinforcement due to her continuation of populist sentiments, now including covid. There is a fight for "the ordinary people" existent in Hopkins' discourse, where she fights for a specific type of collective identity.

Hopkins comments on what she regards as the irony of the protesters of the BLM movement being able to gather in the thousands, while lockdown regulations and other government safety precautions are supposed to be at play. She asks, "If you worry about corona deaths, why do you protest in the thousands?" as a way to criminalise the protesters (Hopkins, 2020e). Noted above is the discontent Hopkins expresses about BLM protest and their values, and her discourse further illustrates how she includes covid as another argument in her dissent.

Where speaking up against BLM was part of her identity politics before, she now equally manages to connect it to covid, with new arguments disparaging the movement and their actions. Included in these sentiments is a continued framing of the government as the ones at fault. Consequently, the third indicator of who the enemy is continues to be the government. Hopkins mentions an instance where an old lady is being arrested by the police for holding up a sign, whereas BLM protesters are allowed to protest openly without consequences. Her strategy seems to be to continuously blame the government for most things related to covid, exemplifying her claims by bringing up stories where ordinary people have faced the consequences while those in control are unable to face reality. This is a direct continuation of her globalisation discourse, where the government was pointed out as a main rival to the values she promoted. This can be seen in connection to her populist remarks where she fuels a division between various groups, such as the ordinary people versus the politicians in government.

Not only does Hopkins criticise the government for the vaccine and their apparent support for the BLM protestors. She also mentions lockdowns, framing it as a power opportunity for politicians. In one video, she faces her viewers and says that “the government takes control over you, they take away your freedom” (Hopkins, 2020f). This can both represent a populist bias and a libertarian emphasis on freedom. Hopkins thinks the media are complicit as well, stating that “the media managed to manipulate death, so that people live in fear” (Hopkins, 2020g). It becomes evident that she refers to the same type of enemies in her covid discourse as before, signalling that the enemy is still the same after the arrival of covid. The indicators of populism and who the enemy is are thus visible in Hopkins’ discourse, whereas the issue of borders is noticeably missing. While this can be ascribed to the selection of videos or other methodological choices, it nevertheless suggests based on the included data that covid has replaced the issue of borders in Hopkins’ discourse.

4.2.2 Paul Joseph Watson

Contrary to Hopkins, Watson does mention the first indicator, the issue of borders, in his covid discourse. He asks the question of how pubs in England can be closed while thousands of people from foreign countries continue to land in the UK every week, with zero health screenings (Watson, 2020d). Additionally, he specifically mentions “boat migrants” as a problem, suggesting that something needs to be done with immigrant problem. In other words, Watson manages to use covid to promote his claims that immigration into the UK needs to be limited. It is nevertheless no doubt who he blames, stating several times that it is “left-wing government” who are to be held responsible. He criticises that it seems like “the mass

movement of people” is more important to the government than stopping the pandemic, arguing that it is open borders that have spread the most cases (Watson, 2020e). Watson connects the issue of borders to covid to advance his arguments, making it possible to argue that the first indicator is evident in his discourse, representing a reinforcement of globalisation.

Watson make obvious references to who he deems as “globalists” and “technocrats”, arguing that they are the one issuing the corona regulations and rules. He points out that “the technocrats made the laws on face masks, social distancing and lockdowns. Yet they don’t have to abide by these laws” (Watson, 2020f). In his discourse, Watson bluntly states that globalist technocrats do not care about “the little guy”, and that politicians do not follow the rules they have made themselves. He combines populist sentiments with identity markers for “us” versus “them”, while moreover framing covid regulations as “stupid”. By uttering phrases such as “imagine being such a mindless npc [non-player character, people who do not think for themselves] that you beg to be injected just to see some shit band” (Watson, 2020f), Watson suggests that those doing what the government expects of them do not to possess a free will, referring to the issue of individual freedom. He specifically states that covid regulations is a way of stripping fundamental freedoms from the people, in this way emphasising the individual in the debate of collective needs and the common goods of society. Contextualists emphasise collective self-determination and the importance of majority rule (Zürn & de Wilde, 2016) and apparent in the discourse of Watson is that he does not think covid regulations offer these pillars. This leaning towards individuality suggests a process where communitarian viewpoints have been replaced by a more libertarian positioning, indicating a process of replacement.

The importance of stressing identity is realised by vocal opposition to the elite, the government, and politicians in general, a lot like the opposition voiced by Hopkins. There is constant references and criticism towards the wealthy and powerful, with particular examples integrating covid. Watson mentions how the rich have only gotten richer because of covid; that globalists and technocrats do not follow their own covid regulations; and that politicians do not care. The second indicator of populism is therefore very much apparent in his discourse. Along the same lines as Hopkins, Watson similarly criticises the BLM rally for breaking covid rules. This is a continuation of his dismay for the protests. He questions how it is illegal to get close to one’s own parents yet protesting in the streets seem to be okay. Of the situation in the US, he says:

In the US the same healthcare workers who berated stay at home protesters for violating social distancing were out on the streets applauding far left protesters for congregating in huge crowds, not caring about the social distancing (Watson, 2020g).

Watson identifies BLM protesters as “far left” and moreover draws attention to healthcare workers, who he blames for being inconsistent in their covid rules. He additionally criticises the media for applauding the protesters, placing them on the same side of the left-right spectrum. It becomes apparent that Watson holds the left, in the form of protesters, politicians, and the media to be accountable, and he uses several tactics to distance himself from the left and is explicit about how he thinks they are at fault. In the same way as Hopkins, Watson refers to the same opponents as before. In reference to the last indicator, it continues to be the left and their politics as well as the media that is framed as the big enemy. The only difference now is that there is a new problem to affiliate them with, namely the pandemic.

A notable point is that Watson mentions how the Chinese government should have reacted quicker to the coronavirus. He says that “there are several evidence they could have slowed it down” (Watson, 2020e). This suggests them as possible enemies, as he partly lays the blame on them for the situation of the pandemic. Despite this, he connects these sentiments to a criticism of the government who think it is more important to fight the racism caused the virus than the actual virus itself, and the media who has decided that it is racist to call it “the China virus” (Watson, 2020e). His discourse referencing China should therefore be seen in relation to his main points, but he nevertheless reprimands the Chinese government. Concluding whether the issue of who the enemy is indicates a process of replacement or reinforcement is therefore somewhat unclear, yet because the same enemies are mentioned in the covid discourse, it is possible to argue that a process of reinforcement has taken place. Although Watson mentions a new enemy, it does not overshadow the previous enemies which continues to be the government, the media and the left. Taking all three indicators into account, Watson’s discourse suggests a process of reinforcement where covid reflects his globalisation sentiments. A communitarian viewpoint continues to be promoted in most of his discourse, now with the use of covid as well.

4.2.3 Ben Shapiro

Ben Shapiro was the political influencer who spoke least about covid in the videos analysed. Evident in all of his discourse is his strong disregard of the left, the democrats in the US, in line with the far-right ideology. The divide between the left and right in the US is in many ways a

divide between conservative, traditional values on the one hand and liberal, modern values on the other. Consequently, it becomes relevant to connect the two sides to the debates on globalisation, as their different positionings correspond to the divide between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism on several issues. However, the left-right divide in the US nor in its classic sense in general do not capture the fault lines around globalisation completely (Koopmans & Zürn, 2019). It is possible for the left and the right to differ in opinion on issues where cosmopolitans and communitarians stand strong, and the cosmopolitan and communitarian ideology are not identical opposites of each other.

There were no mentions of migration nor the closing of borders in Shapiro's discourse on covid. The first indicator was not present, suggesting that the issue of borders was replaced in the discourse. As for the second indicator, one way patriotism was seemingly apparent was with his criticism of the BLM protests as part of his criticism towards the left. The BLM protests are, by the opposition, viewed as anti-nationalist and some would even call them traitors for the ways they choose to protest— by for instance “taking a knee” in football matches. Shapiro did not explicitly mention this part of the protests, but rather focused on his dismay of BLM protests that end in looting. The second indicator of populism was therefore pronounced through the undermining of the BLM protests and the framing of them as unpatriotic. Shapiro cements his identity sentiments by denouncing BLM protestors, framing their movement as one of looting and rioting (Shapiro, 2020a). As for the third indicator, Shapiro's overall attitude as presented in his discourse suggests that he continues to condemn the same type of enemies in his covid discourse, and as such that covid fails to bridge the left-right gap but successfully maintains his globalisation discourse.

The most apparent example of who the enemy is, is part of the criticism of the government and their abuse of power. Shapiro says that “[covid] is the biggest government power grab” (Shapiro, 2020a). Moreover, he extends his opposition to the left by criticising them for their attitudes towards covid regulations. He says that the left-wing react because people cannot be mandated to wear masks and argues that their belief is that people are not left-wing enough (Shapiro, 2020c). The left, which to Shapiro are mainly the Democrats, are also complicit in a “culture war” in the words of Shapiro. He argues that they cheer on rioting and looting instead of condemning it, whilst also frowning upon going to church in the pandemic (Shapiro, 2020a). This represents a right-wing communitarian perspective of tradition and conservatism. Part of the globalisation conflict is the criticism of the opposition, the enemies. In Shapiro's discourse on covid, there are no signs of a reconciliation between the left and the right. Despite covid being a seemingly common threat across party lines and ideologies, Shapiro

continues to find faults with the left and their attitudes and opinions towards covid. He uses covid as yet another issue to criticise the left with, and additionally argues that they “activate media, social media and friends in academia to get their way” (Shapiro, 2020a), thus viewing these as complicit. It continues to be the same enemies in the covid discourse that were mentioned in the globalisation discourse, indicating a process of reinforcement.

4.2.4 Mark Dice

Mark Dice speaks about covid mostly in reference to his discontent with liberal media and the left, but touches upon matters of nationalism and populist sentiments as well. There were however no indicators concerning the issue of borders apparent in Dice’s discourse, but similar to Shapiro, this was lacking in his overall globalisation discourse as well. Regarding nationalism, Dice continues to vilify black Americans in his discourse, now using covid as a part of it. He jokes how black Americans say they are unable to pay rent because covid has made them unemployed but argues that this is just an act as “they still have to get their new Air Jordans [sneakers]” (Dice, 2020d). As such, it is possible to argue that Dice’s discourse on covid deals with issues of white nationalism and reinforces his globalisation discourse. As mentioned previously, lack of support of the BLM protests may be a signal of nationalism and patriotism by the far-right. His blatant discrimination of black Americans is a way to frame them as an outgroup in society.

Dice continues to talk about the media’s censorship, blaming “big tech companies” in the US for censoring the news on coronavirus. He says that even Instagram is in on it, flagging information as false even though it comes from the US Centre for Disease and Control Prevention (Dice, 2020e). It becomes apparent that “liberal media” is a recurring enemy to Dice, which was possible to identify in his general globalisation discourse as well. With the arrival of covid, Dice continues to criticise liberal media’s views on Donald Trump and now includes covid as a part of the discourse, arguing that “The liberal media is upset that Trump started his rallies, gathering without masks” (Dice, 2020f). This suggests a continuation of his existing globalisation discourse, further supported by remarks on how the government allows for BLM protests yet denies Republicans to have their rallies.

Dice openly supports Trump and his government, visible throughout most of his discourse. An important component to his support is his continuous ridicule and criticism of the opposing side, then presidential candidate Biden. Covid has become a way for Dice to advance these sentiments. He refers to the first vice president debate in the US, where the Biden administration refused to participate unless candidates were separated with protective plexi-

glass shields. He mocks this decision and argues that “medical experts not on the liberal media payroll say these shields were entirely symbolic and a joke” (Dice, 2020g). Dice frames the leftist administration and media as inferior by suggesting their decisions are symbolic more than actually thought through. Undeniably, the left continues to be the enemy to Dice after the arrival of the pandemic as well, easily detectable in his covid discourse, particularly shown in the way he sets the Trump and Biden administration against each other. He continues to argue that media companies such as CNN are leftist, and he continues to point out what he deems their hypocrisy. In one video, Dice states that CNN reporters failed to wearing masks to a political convention while still criticising the lack of social distancing there (Dice, 2020h).

Based on his discourse, Dice fails to mention anything in regard to the integrity of borders. He maintains a nationalist, populist ideology that now includes covid as well. Additionally, the enemy continues to be the left and the media. Reinforcement of the globalisation cleavage is therefore evident based on two of the three indicators, while the first indicator is absent.

5. A discussion of the findings

The findings show that globalisation matters were visible in the discourse of the far right in many different ways. For the UK, the conflict regarding integrity of borders was a particularly prominent topic of debate and something both Hopkins and Watson had strong opinions on. They expressed strong nationalist scepticism towards migration and the government that regulates it, this in line with far-right populists' inclination toward nationalist, ethnocentric sentiments on globalisation and anti-establishment (Siddiqui, 2021). For the US, the left-right divide seemed to be the most evident topic, touching upon issues of identity and integrity. There was an emphasis on the importance of democracy, whereas Shapiro and Dice argue that “the Democrats” are a threat to the integrity of the US. As such, they hold a contextualist view rather than universalist view of moral concerns.

In general, it was evident that the four political influencers did lean towards a communitarian position, in instances where they spoke of globalisation. Communitarianism stresses that people are shaped by their communities, and right-wing communitarianism requires the community to respect authority and established values (Heywood, 2017). Communitarianism is a combination of statist and contextualist arguments that feature in public debates on globalisation (Zürn & de Wilde, 2016). Shapiro referred to conservative principles in his criticism of the media's handling of actor Elliot Page's transition, while Dice emphasised the division of communities in his comments on racism in the US. Watson and Hopkins particularly emphasised identity and opposition to open borders. As such, at the core of their globalisation discourse was an underlying communitarian perspective. As globalisation leads to transnational movements such as MeToo and BLM, political actors that oppose globalisation voice their conservative and traditional values in opposition.

A significant point to mention is that although the discourse identified emphasises communitarianism as the base, it is not completely communitarian in nature. In other words, on the issues mentioned as focal points for the debate on globalisation, the far-right political influencers in this thesis lean towards the communitarian side – but they are not necessarily communitarian. They rather draw upon arguments of statist and contextualists as opposed to globalists and universalists in debates on globalisation, but they do not fulfil the ideology of communitarianism completely by sharing all traits of a communitarian perspective. Due to the chosen theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, it is nevertheless cosmopolitanism and communitarianism that are used as the two main concepts that divide opinions on matters of globalisation. It is expected that both shortcuts and simplifications are evident when political

entrepreneurs aim to turn philosophical arguments into public claims (Koopmans & Zürn, 2019).

Although communitarianism is about putting communities first, and in other words the group before the individual (Bauman, 1995), the discourse of the political influencers on covid could at times be seen as the opposite. Their discourse shifted when covid was introduced. In terms of covid regulations, all of them promoted the individual's choice of wearing masks, taking vaccines, and following regulations. This is more in line with the cosmopolitan principle of the freedom of the individual (Koopmans & Zürn, 2019), and moreover clear examples of libertarian philosophy. Libertarianism strongly emphasises liberal freedoms over authority and tradition and seeks to maximise individual freedom (Heywood, 2017). Based on this, it is possible to argue that the covid discourse has led to a replacement of the globalisation discourse, due to how it has shifted the positioning of far-right political actors from communitarianism towards libertarianism.

However, it became apparent in other instances that the way the political influencers expressed themselves still represented a strong focus on community. They framed their words in a manner that distinguished between various groups in society, with the "left" involving politicians, media, and others with conflicting values as the villains. In the far-right utopian society, these types of morals are non-existent. In other words, they still highlighted the nation while promoting individual freedom, arguing that the nation should have other morals, other lawmakers, and other influences than what exists today. They stress individual freedom because they are dissatisfied with the current people in power, and the current wave of globalisation that involves liberal values and fluid processes. They did not necessarily stress humanity as a whole but rather highlighted some groups of people before others. The focus on border integration by the means of immigration was pointed out as a big flaw of today's society, put into motion by the left. This was specially mentioned by Hopkins and Watson in their globalisation discourse, yet surprisingly left out of the covid discourse by all political influencers except Watson.

The permeating emphasis on identity by the far-right political influencers represents an attempt to create meaningful identities in a fluctuating world. By continuously stressing a divide between various groups, they uphold a divide of communities. The far-right promote a community with a particular set of values. With their use of populist communication, it becomes evident who they blame and who they praise. As Koopmans & Zürn (2019) write, a growing divide between the elite and the masses is expected in countries affected by globalisation. All four political influencers stressed identity one way or another, both in their globalisation discourse and moreover in their covid discourse. This supports the claim of populists stressing

identity in their political communication, and the fact that it continued to be apparent in the discourse on covid signals that globalisation does indeed highlight the issue of identity, and that it continues to be important. This therefore suggests a reinforcement of globalisation, where covid is used to highlight and promote existing identity markers. One explanation as to why identity continues to be a salient issue in the discourse is the idea that the more a country becomes exposed to a particular dimension of globalisation, the more issues related to it will generate controversy (de Wilde, 2019).

Social media has a big role in spreading nationalist views. An advantage of social media is the easy spreading of conspiracies and post-truths, thus allowing it to bypass the mainstream media which more commonly take a liberal-cosmopolitan stance (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). An identity-building process of far-right communities is their feeling of having their eyes wide open to the hidden truths of the world (Chapelan, 2021). Youtube was employed as a social platform due to the thesis' emphasis on political influencers. The findings show that a discourse involving identity was clearly evident in their discourse, and while my thesis cannot argue that the choice of platform specifically fuelled this, it nevertheless does not lessen this claim.

The choice of Youtube for the sources likely affected the results. One finding turned out to be that the indicator of integrity of borders was not evident in the discourse of all four political influencers, most notably excluded entirely from the discourse of Shapiro and Dice. Possible explanations for this will be discussed below, yet the selection of material from Youtube could have an effect as well, identifying an improvement that future research could consider. Youtube videos are a specific type of source and while users enjoy a great deal of freedom in what they post, the videos posted on the platform are censored by the owners. Moreover, videos on Youtube allow people to talk in an unstructured manner where they do not necessarily need to build a clear argumentation. This does not always go well with research where discourses are central. Future research could therefore consider making alterations to the methodological choices of the thesis. For videos, sites such as Rumble.com have a more coherent image of promoting far-right actors and can possibly include videos with a clearer argumentation and stronger message.

While there are some advantages to studying two countries as mentioned above, an ideal selection would be to look at more countries, ideally more diverse ones, to get a thorough understanding of the globalisation discourse that exists in the world today. This would probably also lead to more distinctive differences and usages in the relationship between the discourse on covid and globalisation. I therefore suggest that to increase the validity of the findings, future studies should include several countries, not only the US and the UK. A hypothetical study

including all countries, or all highly developed rich countries, has a high likelihood of getting more diverse answers to the research question. It is plausible that internal conflicts in various countries will have an effect on the extent to which political actors speak on matters of globalisation. Moreover, countries that are less developed have felt the consequences of covid in a different way than highly developed countries.

5.1 Reinforcement or replacement?

I claimed initially that the discourse of the far-right political influencers would be both communitarian and populist, yet the empirical analysis gave evidence of a discourse that also stressed liberal viewpoints, especially when covid was introduced. It moreover became apparent when analysing the spoken discourse of the political influencers that the three chosen indicators did not fully grasp the many sides of the debate. As noted throughout the empirical analysis, the inclusion of an indicator did not straightforwardly represent a process of reinforcement. In the case of Hopkins, although her discourse had clear evidence of populist remarks, working as a continuation of a communitarian stance on globalisation due to its emphasis on identity, her discourse on covid also involved a turn towards the importance of individual freedom. This does not, as I initially argued, represent reinforcement of communitarian viewpoints. Based on this, it is possible to argue that the chosen indicators were not sufficient to comprehend the discourse completely. It was nevertheless possible to gather some conclusions. The table below maps whether the indicators were present or not in the political influencers’ discourse on covid.

	Issue of borders	Evidence of populist remarks	Mentions of the enemy
Katie Hopkins	No	Yes	Yes
Paul J. Watson	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ben Shapiro	No	Yes	Yes
Mark Dice	No	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Did the discourse on covid include the three indicators?

Despite its shortcomings, the use of the indicators did manage to produce some findings. On the basis of the specific indicators alone, it is possible to argue whether a process of reinforcement or replacement was existent. Yet as I mentioned above, this does not fully represent the whole discourse.

Based on the three indicators of borders, populism and enemies, covid was found to reinforce the globalisation cleavage in two out of three in the discourse of Hopkins. The integrity of borders was surprisingly lacking in her covid discourse despite being an obvious feature of her globalisation discourse, suggesting that in this instance, covid replaced this specific globalisation conflict. The findings on the two other indicators show that her enemies are the same, namely the government and the media, and also her use of a populist communication style to emphasise British nationalism. Covid did not successfully eclipse these features of her discourse, meaning that globalisation to a good extent continued to be reflected in her covid discourse.

The integrity of borders was a significant issue for Watson as well, and he continued to include it in his covid discourse indicating that it remained important. By implementing this in his covid discourse, Watson's discourse signals a reinforcement of this particular globalisation issue. Watson uses populist sentiments and identity markers, condemning the government, the technocrats and the elite in general. Moreover, the same type of enemies appears in his covid discourse, which were present in his globalisation discourse. In sum, none of his focal points related to the globalisation cleavage is missing in his covid discourse, suggesting that in the case of Watson, the data points to a process where globalisation is reinforced by covid. A point to make is that Watson instead of replacing globalisation in his discourse rather adds on to it, as he argues that the Chinese government are partly to blame for the rapid spread of the pandemic. Because this does not come at the cost of his existing views on globalisation, and as he continues to be vocal about the same type of enemies in his covid discourse, this can be seen as an add-on more than replacement.

In the case of Shapiro and Dice, the integrity of borders was not apparent in their general globalisation discourse nor in their covid discourse. It therefore becomes challenging to argue whether this indicator represents a reinforcement or replacement of the globalisation cleavage. One solution is to argue that the absence of it implies that covid did in fact replace globalisation on this specific indicator. This was the case for Hopkins, who spoke a lot about border control in her globalisation discourse but excluded it in her covid discourse. Yet, the case for Shapiro and Dice was that they did not mention the issue of borders at all. This may imply several facts. For instance, it could be ascribed to the theoretical framework of the thesis. Based on the chosen theoretical underpinning, I expected to find the three indicators referring to borders, populism, and descriptions of who the enemy is. Yet as shown in the empirical analysis, this framework fell somewhat short, and the mention of borders was not present for all political influencers. Therefore, the chosen theory might have been too narrow, not fully grasping the full concept of

globalisation in practice. Another reason could be inadequate choice and selection of data. Due to the scope of the thesis as well as the immense data material to gather from, several criteria were put in place when gathering the data for the analysis. The criteria may have led to weaknesses in the data set, as they excluded a lot of material. Related to this, it is possible that the choice of method using Youtube videos was unsuitable, and that another platform would have been more beneficial.

Evidence of nationalist and/or patriotic remarks was evident in the discourse, but some country-specific context was needed to get the full scope of it. For instance, when Dice and Shapiro opposed the BLM protests, it was useful to keep in mind the general discourse of the BLM movement in the US. Many of the BLM movement's actions is frowned upon as unpatriotic, and right-wing groups often oppose the movement based on nationalist arguments. Their opposition therefore specifically represents patriotism and nationalism, and the use of covid to argue against the protests is an apparent example of using covid to promote existing viewpoints. Nationalism can be deemed an identity marker that stresses divisions in society, commonly used in populist communication. Moreover, Shapiro and Dice continued to confront the same type of enemies. In sum, their discourse reinforced their sentiments on matters of globalisation on two of the indicators.

6. Conclusion

The research question asked whether covid-19 discursively has replaced or reinforced the globalisation cleavage among far-right political influencers. To answer this, I suggested that the far-right discourse maintains a communitarian perspective on globalisation matters, and further that covid-19 is reflected in it by reinforcing existing globalisation sentiments. The alternative to the latter was that covid instead replaced globalisation in the discourse. On the basis of the empirical analysis and the following discussion, a process of reinforcement is largely evident. The indicators mainly point to a process where the discourse on globalisation continues to be reflected even when covid is introduced. Yet, there were several examples of a libertarian positioning in the covid discourse, signifying a shift. While the far-right discourse was largely communitarian when it came to globalisation alone, the introduction of covid led to a weakening of this. Thus, it is possible to draw two conclusions. First, that covid-19 did not fully reinforce the globalisation cleavage among the four far-right political influencers due to the inclusion of libertarian sentiments seemingly replacing communitarian sentiments in the covid discourse. Second, that based on the indicators alone, covid did mostly reinforce the globalisation cleavage, but ideally more indicators should have been considered. As mentioned previously, this could be attributed to several things such as the chosen theoretical framework as well as the methodological choices.

My assumption going into this thesis was that covid-19 would reinforce existing globalisation sentiments and cement far right political influencers as “losers of globalisation”. Matters of globalisation continued to be evident and reinforced in several ways, yet the great emphasis placed on individual freedom suggests the ideology behind globalisation is indeed affected by covid. It is possible that discussions on covid, especially regarding individual freedom, represent a new divide. Existing globalisation sentiments were mostly maintained, and a process of reinforcement was mainly noticeable, yet the importance of individual freedom that became evident does not represent a communitarian philosophy. Covid was employed to strengthen existing views to an extent yet managed to create new ones as well. Is it possible that both reinforcement and replacement are insufficient in explaining the relation between covid and globalisation? Maybe the term “adaption” could better encapsulate the processes happening?

Future research should pick up on the finding that covid seems to have altered the positioning of far-right political influencers. Where they previously would be expected to keep a fully communitarian perspective on matters of globalisation, the regulations that covid has

brought with it suggests a new turn. This could have consequences for individual freedom, meaning that its emphasis could be transferred to other topics as well. For instance, does the emphasis on individual freedom translate to heated topics such as abortion in the US, meaning that the far-right will adjust their beliefs on the matter? The current situation in the US does not suggest it, yet it would be interesting to further examine the extent that covid has affected the significance and range of individual freedom to the far-right. Moreover, future studies could explore whether the far-right emphasis on individual freedom reduces over time as regulations connected to covid cease to exist.

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