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# Protecting collective worth: pride in European parliament campaigns in Germany, Hungary, and Poland

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**Introduction:** This article examines how pride functions as an emotional resource of protective politics in European Parliament election campaigns in 2019 and 2024. Focusing on Germany, Hungary, and Poland, we analyse how political actors deploy pride-related textual cues in Facebook campaign discourse to affirm collective worth and symbolically defend the worth of the political community in increasingly contested public spheres.

**Methods:** Using a fine-tuned multilingual XLM-RoBERTa model trained on expert-labelled and GPT-generated data, we identify sentence-level pride expressions in Facebook posts published during the ten weeks preceding each election. The classifier achieves accuracy levels above 70% across three languages, enabling large-scale cross-national comparison.

**Results:** The findings reveal substantial contextual variation in both the distribution and audience responsiveness to pride. Pride is not systematically structured by parties' electoral status: both re-elected and newcomer parties may deploy it, although by 2024 its use becomes more selective, with a moderate tendency to concentrate among re-elected actors. The relationship between pride and user engagement is uneven. In Hungary, differences between pride and non-pride posts remain negligible. In Germany, the association is unstable across election cycles. Poland shows the clearest shift, where pride-related posts generate significantly higher engagement in 2024.

**Discussion:** These results indicate that pride is not an inherently mobilising campaign emotion, but a context-dependent communicative resource. Pride can function as a resource of collective worth protection by reaffirming achievement, resilience, and moral standing, yet its effectiveness depends on communicative context and audience responsiveness.

### KEYWORDS

pride, emotional politics, election campaigns, Facebook, European Parliament elections, Germany, Hungary, Poland

## Introduction

This article examines how pride is deployed in political messaging during the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament election campaigns. It asks how pride functions as an emotional resource of protective politics: that is, how political actors use pride to affirm achievements, defend collective honour, and protect the perceived worth of the communities they claim to represent. The study is guided by the following research question:

How does pride function as an emotional resource of collective worth protection in European Parliament election campaigns?

Focusing on Facebook messages by parties and politicians in Germany, Hungary, and Poland, we analyse the distribution of pride-related expressions across parties and election cycles, with particular attention to the distinction between re-elected and newcomer parties. This distinction is important for the protective politics argument: re-elected parties may be better positioned to use pride to defend prior achievements, continuity, and collective legitimacy, whereas newcomers may rely less on pride and more on alternative emotional registers such as anger, frustration, or critique. We also examine whether pride-labelled posts are associated with higher levels of audience engagement than non-pride posts, treating engagement as an indirect indicator of audience responsiveness rather than as evidence of agreement or persuasion.

The three countries provide meaningful variation in political communication contexts. Germany represents a comparatively institutionalised political environment, Hungary an affectively polarised public sphere, and Poland a contested setting combining strong competition with a more balanced emotional repertoire. This comparative design allows us to examine whether pride operates as a general campaign emotion or as a context-dependent resource of collective worth protection.

Methodologically, the study builds on recent advances in natural language processing. Within the framework of the MORES project, we employ a fine-tuned multilingual XLM-RoBERTa model trained on expert-labelled and GPT-generated data to identify pride expressions at the sentence level in Facebook posts published during the 10 weeks preceding each election. This approach enables large-scale, cross-national comparison while maintaining sensitivity to linguistic and contextual variation. The model detects pride-related expressions but does not distinguish between authentic and hubristic pride. Accordingly, hubris is treated as a conceptual extension and interpretive horizon rather than a directly measured category.

The findings suggest that pride is not a uniform campaign emotion. Its distribution is not systematically determined by parties' electoral status: both re-elected and newcomer parties may deploy or refrain from using pride, although pride becomes more structured and selectively used by 2024, with a moderate tendency to concentrate among re-elected parties. The engagement analysis also shows that pride is not inherently engagement-generating. Hungary shows negligible engagement differences between pride and other posts, Germany displays directional instability across election cycles, and Poland provides the clearest case of a significant pride engagement advantage in 2024.

By combining computational text analysis with comparative political communication research, this study contributes to debates on emotional citizenship, moral emotions, and the affective foundations of contemporary European campaigning. It argues that pride can serve as a resource of collective worth protection, but only under specific communicative conditions: where political actors can

credibly link pride to shared achievements, resilience, or moral standing, and where audiences are responsive to such claims.

## Pride in electoral campaigning

Research on campaign communication increasingly highlights the strategic role of emotional framing in digital campaigning, where political actors seek not only to inform voters but also to mobilise supporters, differentiate themselves from competitors, and reinforce political identities through affective communication (Enli, 2017; Kreiss, 2016; Lilleker et al., 2019). Across Europe, political communication is becoming increasingly affect-driven (Bens et al., 2019), with emotions functioning as central instruments through which political actors mobilise supporters, frame conflicts and justify political importance of parties. Social media platforms have become particularly important in this process because they reward emotional engagement and rapid interaction, encouraging parties to rely on messages capable of catching feelings, attracting attention and stimulating participation (Hloušek et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025). Emotional appeals function not merely as expressions of political sentiment but also as strategic branding devices through which parties construct symbolic identities and establish affective connections with voters (Serazio, 2017). Electoral campaigns are especially important arenas in this regard, as they publicly articulate whose achievements deserve recognition and whose emotional claims are considered worthy of attention and protection (Denton Jr et al., 2023). These dynamics are particularly relevant in European Parliament campaigns, which have traditionally been characterised as second-order elections with lower voter engagement (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016), yet European politics has become increasingly salient and emotionally charged as issues such as integration, sovereignty, migration, security, and democracy have moved to the centre of political conflict across member states (Ferrera, 2024). Social media may provide parties with opportunities to increase resonance with voters through symbolic and affective communication. Emotional expressions are therefore strategic communicative tools through which parties signal competence, legitimacy, collective achievement, and politico-moral worth.

Within this broader emotional repertoire, pride occupies a distinctive position. It can bind communities together by affirming shared achievements, resilience, and moral worth, but it can also become excessive or exclusionary, reinforcing perceptions of moral superiority over outgroups and intensifying antagonism (Miceli et al., 2017). Pride therefore does more than celebrate success: it operates as a symbolic assertion of collective worth. Expressions of pride reaffirm—at the level of political interpretation—that a community has acted rightly, achieved collectively valued goals, and deserves recognition and respect. When such self-affirmation becomes detached from concrete achievements or turns against perceived outsiders, however, it may slide toward hubristic discourse that sharpens boundaries of belonging and erodes pluralism.

Pride-based narratives can also simplify the stakes of political conflict. Complex policy debates or structural challenges may be reframed as moralised struggles between those who “do things right” and those who fail to uphold shared values. Such framing transforms political disagreement into moral confrontation and illustrates how moral emotions structure political interpretation. It also reveals how achievements, grievances, and insecurities become publicly ranked within emotional hierarchies of recognition.

Despite important contributions from moral framing research (Domke et al., 2000) and moral foundations theory (Haidt and Kesebir, 2010), important gaps remain in understanding the emotional dynamics of public moralisation (Capelos and Demertzis, 2022; Kiss, 2021; Sullivan, 2021; Szabó, 2024). Existing scholarship has explored the emotional dimensions of socio-political tensions (Demertzis, 2013; Slaby and Von Scheve, 2019), yet comparatively little research has examined how moral emotions circulate in contemporary digital campaign environments. Studies of European Parliament election campaigns are especially limited, despite the growing importance of social media for electoral communication. This study addresses this gap by analysing pride in Facebook campaign communication in Germany, Hungary, and Poland, combining AI-assisted text mining with expert validation within the framework of the MORES project.

Conceptually, pride is a complex moral emotion that emerges when individuals or groups achieve noteworthy accomplishments aligned with socially recognised goals and publicly express or share these achievements (Lewis, 2008). It serves an adaptive social function by facilitating status attainment: the pleasurable reinforcement of past achievements increases motivation and persistence, while the outward expression of pride signals competence and merit to others (Tracy et al., 2010). Importantly, the literature distinguishes between two forms of pride (authentic and hubristic) which correspond to two pathways to status. Authentic pride is associated with prestige-based status grounded in competence, knowledge, and socially valued contributions, whereas hubristic pride aligns with dominance-based status rooted in intimidation, aggression, and essentialist claims of in-group exceptionalism (Shi et al., 2015).

Building on this distinction, pride is closely connected to identity formation because it involves taking credit for valued achievements of oneself or of a group with which one identifies (Lazarus, 1991). In political discourse, expressions of pride can enhance credibility, motivate engagement, and strengthen collective identity among supporters. Although pride can be expressed through both verbal and nonverbal signals (Matsumoto and Hwang, 2012), this study focuses on its textual manifestations in campaign communication. Importantly, pride operates not only at the individual but also at the collective level. Group-based pride emerges when individuals feel emotionally connected to the success of a collective actor such as a nation, political movement, or party (Delvaux et al., 2016), while vicarious pride allows communicators to align themselves with others' achievements to gain symbolic or political capital (Williams and Davies, 2017; Salmela and Sullivan, 2022).

In electoral campaigns, pride therefore serves functions that extend beyond simple celebration. It signals competence and perseverance, encourages status-seeking behaviour, and reinforces the perception that political actors and their communities are capable of achieving valued goals (Tracy et al., 2010). By displaying pride, political leaders invite supporters to internalise achievements as shared victories (Tracy and Robins, 2007), thereby strengthening engagement and emotional bonds. At the same time, pride performs a crucial symbolic function in contexts of political conflict. Campaign discourse often unfolds under conditions of competition, criticism, and perceived threat, where expressions of pride help protect the collective honour of the political community by reaffirming its achievements, resilience, and moral worth. In this sense, pride contributes not only to mobilisation but also to the symbolic defence of collective status

and legitimacy, which can be understood as a form of collective worth protection.

These dynamics are further reinforced by the communicative properties of pride. Pride-based messages can increase salience and memorability and may activate positive emotional feedback loops in which social norms, personal evaluations, political preferences, and group identity mutually reinforce one another (Wawrzyński, 2022). Such processes strengthen solidarity among supporters while reducing vulnerability in contexts of perceived hostility or contestation (Sandi and Haller, 2015). Political actors thus frequently rely on pride to construct narratives of collective success and resilience that sustain engagement during election campaigns.

At the same time, political actors often move strategically between emotional registers. Campaign messages may foreground anger-related emotions such as outrage, frustration, or resentment to highlight perceived injustices and mobilise moral indignation (Osnabrügge et al., 2021), before pivoting toward pride by emphasising achievements, resilience, or collective strength. This alternation allows actors to dramatise conflict while offering audiences a positive emotional anchor rooted in collective identity. In right-wing populist discourse, pride often reinforces claims of national dignity while anger targets perceived elites or external actors (Kazlauskaitė and Salmela, 2021), but similar dynamics can be observed across ideological contexts.

However, the same communicative logic that makes pride effective also creates the conditions under which it may shift toward hubris. While authentic pride signals competence and achievement, hubris is characterised by an inflated sense of self-importance and a lack of self-reflection (Sullivan, 2014; Salmela and Sullivan, 2022). In political contexts, hubristic pride emerges when actors portray themselves or their communities as morally or intellectually superior without acknowledging limitations or failures. It has been associated with problematic leadership behaviours, including misjudgement, ethical blind spots, self-centeredness, indispensability of the in-group, grandiose self-celebrations, arrogance and overconfidence (Owen and Davidson, 2009; Catellani and Covelli, 2013; Sullivan and Hollway, 2014; Kazlauskaitė and Salmela, 2021; Magyari et al., 2022; Szabó and Kiss, 2023; Kiss, 2024).

Although the distinction is analytically clear, in practice the boundary between authentic pride and hubris is often blurred as their expressive cues frequently overlap in real-world political communication (Poggi and D'Errico, 2021). In some cases, in between expressions of pride may emerge as a response to perceived humiliation or external criticism, functioning as an attempt to restore collective self-esteem (Salmela and Von Scheve, 2017; Sullivan and Day, 2019; Szabó and Kiss, 2023).

These conceptual ambiguities have important methodological implications. Although the distinction between authentic and hubristic pride is theoretically well established, it remains difficult to operationalise in large-scale computational analysis. Current NLP approaches, including the model used in this study, cannot reliably distinguish between them. The classifier used in this study therefore captures pride-related expressions more broadly, without assigning them to distinct qualitative subtypes.

To address this limitation, the analysis adopts a two-step framework that distinguishes between communicative potential and audience reception. At the textual level, pride expressions are treated as self-affirmatory cues that signal claims of competence, achievement, or moral worth. However, their presence alone does not establish their social or psychological effects. At the reception level, user

engagement—measured through likes, shares, and comments—is used as an indicator of audience responsiveness. While engagement does not provide direct access to internal emotional states, it captures the extent to which messages attract attention and circulate within the digital public sphere. In this framework, engagement is not interpreted as a direct measure of collective worth protection, but as an indirect indicator of uptake: higher engagement suggests that pride-related messages are more salient, compelling, or affectively meaningful in a given context.

## Method

### Research design and country selection

This study adopts a comparative research design to examine how pride functions in political communication across different European contexts. The empirical focus is on Facebook campaign communication during the 10 weeks preceding the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections. This period was selected to capture the broader communicative environment preceding the elections, including early campaign mobilisation and message amplification phases on social media. Our approach prioritises communicative continuity and cross-national comparability over formal campaign boundaries.

This common institutional setting ensures cross-national comparability, while allowing for variation in domestic political dynamics.

The analysis focuses on three countries: Germany, Hungary, and Poland. These cases were selected because they represent contrasting yet interconnected political contexts within the European Union. Germany, as the EU's largest member state in terms of population, economic influence, and political weight, serves as a core reference point for mainstream European political discourse. With a relatively strong position of semi-public media (“öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk”), it stands for a media system in which emotions are to a good extent embedded in the exchange of arguments. Hungary has experienced substantial democratic backsliding, with governing actors frequently employing populist and Eurosceptic rhetoric that intensifies polarisation and challenges liberal institutional norms. Its increasingly centralised and politicised media environment contributes to a highly affective and conflict-oriented public sphere, where emotional communication is often personalised, antagonistic, and strategically polarising. Poland occupies an intermediate and dynamic position. Although its governments have followed illiberal trajectories similar to Hungary's since 2015, the country has also witnessed strong civic mobilisation and sustained political contestation. The Polish media landscape remains comparatively pluralistic and politically competitive, producing a more fragmented emotional public sphere in which pride, grievance, and moral confrontation coexist across competing political camps.

These trajectories are deeply interconnected through European party politics and broader debates about the future of the European Union. German political positions often shape the strategic responses of actors in Poland and Hungary, while political actors in the latter frequently position themselves against “Brussels,” often implicitly framed as German-dominated Europe. These reciprocal dynamics create a shared emotional space in which pride, grievance, sovereignty, and belonging are continuously negotiated across national boundaries.

This comparative design allows us to examine how pride-driven messages operate across different democratic trajectories and political cultures, and how their political meanings vary within the broader European political space.

To explore how pride language operates in electoral communication, we consider three exploratory aspects.

The first concerns the overall distribution of pride expressions across national contexts and election cycles, asking how prominently pride features in campaign communication and how this varies across countries.

The second concerns parties' electoral status. Re-elected parties might be expected to express pride more frequently, as they can draw on prior visibility, continuity, and accumulated political achievements. A high frequency of pride expressions among these parties may also signal an effort to protect and reaffirm their collective worth: by emphasising past success, competence, and resilience, they symbolically defend their legitimacy and status in contexts of political competition and potential challenge. As re-elected parties are often frequent targets of criticism and contestation, pride may further serve to stabilise and protect their collective identity by reaffirming the value and integrity of the political community they represent. Newcomer parties, by contrast, are perhaps less likely to rely on pride in their social media messages, as they lack an established record of achievements to highlight. Instead, their communicative resources may lie in other emotional registers such as anger, frustration, or blaming which allow them to articulate dissatisfaction, mobilise grievances, and position themselves against actors that already held seats in the previous European Parliament and retained representation in the current election cycle. Importantly, European parliamentary continuity should not be equated with political centrality or support for the status quo. Re-elected parties may continue to position themselves in opposition to dominant actors or institutional arrangements, while some newcomer parties may seek legitimacy through claims of competence, responsibility, or collective achievement. Accordingly, the distinction between re-elected and newcomer parties is treated here as an exploratory indicator of political continuity rather than a proxy for ideological orientation or establishment alignment.

Our third exploratory direction examines whether posts containing pride expressions generate higher levels of user engagement, measured through likes, shares, and comments, than other posts. To assess the relationship between pride expressions and audience responsiveness, we compare mean engagement levels between pride-labelled and non-pride posts within each country and election period. In addition to descriptive comparisons of mean engagement, we use Mann–Whitney U tests to assess whether differences between pride-labelled and non-pride posts are statistically significant. We interpret user engagement as an indicator of audience responsiveness to campaign messages, while recognising that interaction does not necessarily imply agreement, persuasion, or endorsement. Pride-based messages may resonate with audiences by activating collective identity and positive emotional identification, thereby encouraging interaction.

### Data and sampling

The empirical analysis is based on Facebook communication by political parties and politicians in Germany, Hungary, and Poland during the 10 weeks preceding the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament

elections. Facebook remains one of the most widely used platforms for political communication in Europe and provides a particularly suitable source for analysing campaign messaging and audience engagement in comparative settings (Bene et al., 2022; Világi and Baboš, 2025). The analysis focuses on the 2019 and 2024 campaigns because these elections reflect a mature phase of platform-centred campaigning in which Facebook had already become a central arena of electoral communication. In Hungary and Poland major transformations in party competition, coalition structures, and political actors reduce the analytical relevance and comparability of earlier EP election cycles.

The dataset originates from the MORES social media database, which contains large-scale collections of political communication data from multiple European countries (available upon request at: <https://openarchive.tk.mta.hu/643/>). For this study, we included all Facebook posts published during the specified campaign periods by political parties that ultimately secured representation in the European Parliament following the elections. This sampling strategy ensures that the analysis focuses on actors with demonstrated electoral relevance while maintaining comparability across countries and election cycles.

Re-elected parties are defined as parties or electoral lists that had already obtained representation in the previous European Parliament election, whereas newcomers are those entering the European Parliament for the first time in the given election cycle. For simplicity, the Facebook posts of individual politicians were merged with those of their affiliated parties, and the analysis is conducted at the party level.

The final dataset comprises 24,540 Facebook posts across both election cycles and all three countries, containing a total of 98,136 sentences. Table 1 lists the parties included in the dataset, while

Table 2 provides an overview of the dataset composition by country and election year.

## Operationalisation of pride manifestations

The analysis relies on a sentence-level classification of pride expressions. Each Facebook post was segmented into individual sentences, and a multilingual classifier was applied to each sentence independently. A post was labelled as containing a pride expression if at least one of its constituent sentences was classified as expressing pride. This binary post-level classification (pride vs. non-pride) serves as the basis for all subsequent analyses.

We interpret the presence and accumulation of pride expressions as indicators of the prominence of pride-based messaging in campaign communication. A sustained concentration of such expressions may signal a rhetorical strategy in which political actors repeatedly emphasise success, resilience, and moral worth. While the classifier does not distinguish between authentic and hubristic pride, the frequency of pride expressions provides a systematic measure of self-affirmatory communication.

In operational terms, pride expressions encompass both individual and collective forms of self-attribution. Individual pride highlights the achievements or leadership qualities of specific political actors (e.g., “I was the one who started the reform processes that modernised the country” or “Under my leadership, our party achieved a historic success in the elections”). Collective pride, by contrast, attributes success to a broader community such as the nation, party, or electorate (e.g., “Through the perseverance and diligence of the Hungarian people, we overcame difficult times” or “We are proud that our country is a leader in green energy in Europe”).

TABLE 1 List of sampled parties.

| Country | Year | Parties                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Germany | 2019 | Re-elected parties: Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Die Linke, Alternative für Deutschland, Freie Demokratische Partei, Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative, Freie Wähler, Ökologisch-Demokratische Partei, Familien-Partei Deutschlands, Partei Mensch Umwelt Tierschutz, Piratenpartei Deutschland<br>Newcomer party: Volt deutschland                                                      |
| Germany | 2024 | Re-elected parties: Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Alternative für Deutschland, Die Linke, Freie Demokratische Partei, Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative, Freie Wähler, Ökologisch-Demokratische Partei, Familien-Partei Deutschlands, Partei Mensch Umwelt Tierschutz, Volt Deutschland<br>Newcomer parties: Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht—Vernunft und Gerechtigkeit Partei des Fortschritts |
| Hungary | 2019 | Re-elected parties: Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség, Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, Magyar Szocialista Párt<br>Newcomer parties: Demokratikus Koalíció, Momentum Mozgalom, Párbeszéd Magyarországért Párt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Hungary | 2024 | Re-elected parties: Demokratikus Koalíció, Fidesz—Magyar Polgári Szövetség, Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, Magyar Szocialista Párt, Párbeszéd Magyarországért Párt<br>Newcomer parties: Mi Hazánk Mozgalom, Tisza Párt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Poland  | 2019 | Re-elected parties: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość<br>Newcomer parties: Koalicja Europejska, Wiosna.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Poland  | 2024 | Re-elected parties: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Koalicja Obywatelska, Lewica<br>Newcomer parties: Konfederacja, Trzecia Droga                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

Germany does not apply a formal electoral threshold in European Parliament elections. As a result, even parties with relatively low vote shares can obtain representation which leads to a comparatively large and diverse set of parties entering the European Parliament. In the Polish case, classifications are based on electoral lists rather than party organisations, as coalition structures changed across election cycles. Thus, Lewica is treated as re-elected in 2024 due to the presence of its predecessor parties in the previous EP cycle.

TABLE 2 Total facebook posts and pride-labelled posts by country and election year.

| Country | Year | Total posts | Pride posts | Pride % |
|---------|------|-------------|-------------|---------|
| Germany | 2019 | 2,687       | 568         | 21.14   |
| Germany | 2024 | 1,705       | 481         | 28.21   |
| Hungary | 2019 | 3,845       | 473         | 12.3    |
| Hungary | 2024 | 5,481       | 657         | 12.0    |
| Poland  | 2019 | 5,177       | 1,055       | 20.4    |
| Poland  | 2024 | 5,931       | 1,063       | 17.9    |
| Total   |      | 24,826      | 4,297       | 17.31   |

Importantly, the classifier also captures more exaggerated or self-aggrandising forms of pride that may correspond to what the literature conceptualises as hubristic pride. These include statements emphasising exceptionalism, superiority, or indispensability (e.g., “We see hundreds of wandering tribes disappear in history, yet we, Hungarians, have persevered, proving our superiority” or “Despite the hardships caused by sanctions and war, Hungary remained successful, proving our unmatched resilience”). Although such expressions may differ qualitatively from more moderate forms of pride, they share common linguistic features of self-affirmation and are therefore captured within the same operational category.

## Classifier development and validation

To identify pride expressions, the study builds on recent advances in natural language processing (NLP) and large language models. Within the framework of the MORES project, we developed a customised, fine-tuned XLM-RoBERTa model capable of detecting moral-emotional expressions at the sentence level across multiple languages. The classifier is implemented in the Emotions9 Babel Machine<sup>1</sup>, designed for large-scale cross-linguistic analysis of political communication.

The model was trained on a combination of manually labelled and synthetically generated data. The initial training pipeline was based on a large-scale German emotion dataset (Widmann and Wich, 2023), comprising over 120,000 annotated sentences across nine emotion categories, including pride. Given the relatively low prevalence of pride (approximately 2.8% of labels), we applied a stepwise balancing strategy. Overrepresented categories were undersampled, while underrepresented categories were augmented with synthetic examples generated using OpenAI’s GPT-4-turbo in a 10-shot prompting setting. This resulted in a balanced training corpus with approximately equal representation across emotion categories.

To enable cross-national comparison, we developed a single pooled multilingual model rather than separate language-specific classifiers. The full dataset was translated into the target languages and combined into a unified multilingual corpus, which was used to fine-tune the XLM-RoBERTa model. Additional expert-annotated data produced within the MORES project were integrated

into this corpus to improve cross-linguistic performance. National research teams developed a shared coding scheme and aligned coding decisions to ensure conceptual consistency across German, Hungarian, and Polish political discourse.

Model validation followed an iterative human-in-the-loop approach. Researchers systematically reviewed model outputs, identified misclassifications, and introduced corrections to the training data, which informed subsequent rounds of fine-tuning. Performance was evaluated on held-out test sets using standard metrics. The final pooled model achieved an overall accuracy of 72% (macro F1 = 0.72). For pride specifically, the classifier reached a precision of 0.78, recall of 0.77, and F1-score of 0.78.

The minimum performance benchmark for the MORES project was set at 70% accuracy for pride detection, as this level provides a pragmatic balance between reliability and cross-linguistic specificities in a low-prevalence emotion category. The pooled model exceeds this threshold which indicated reliable performance across all three languages.

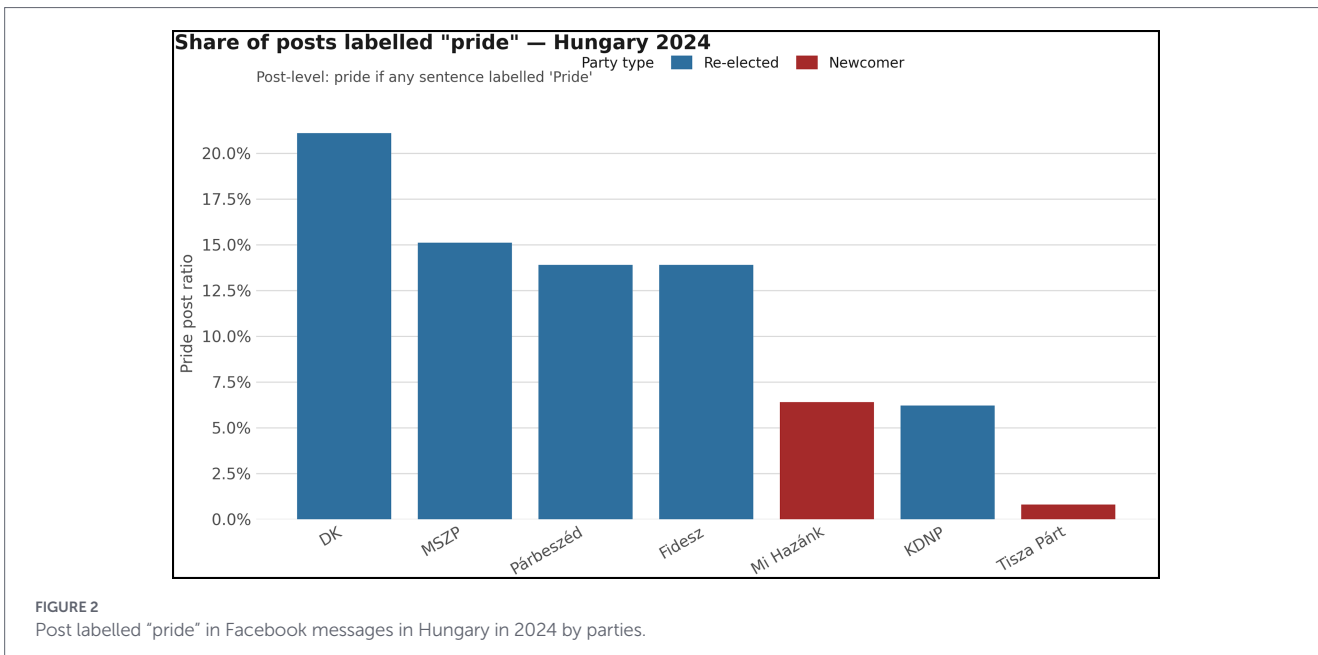
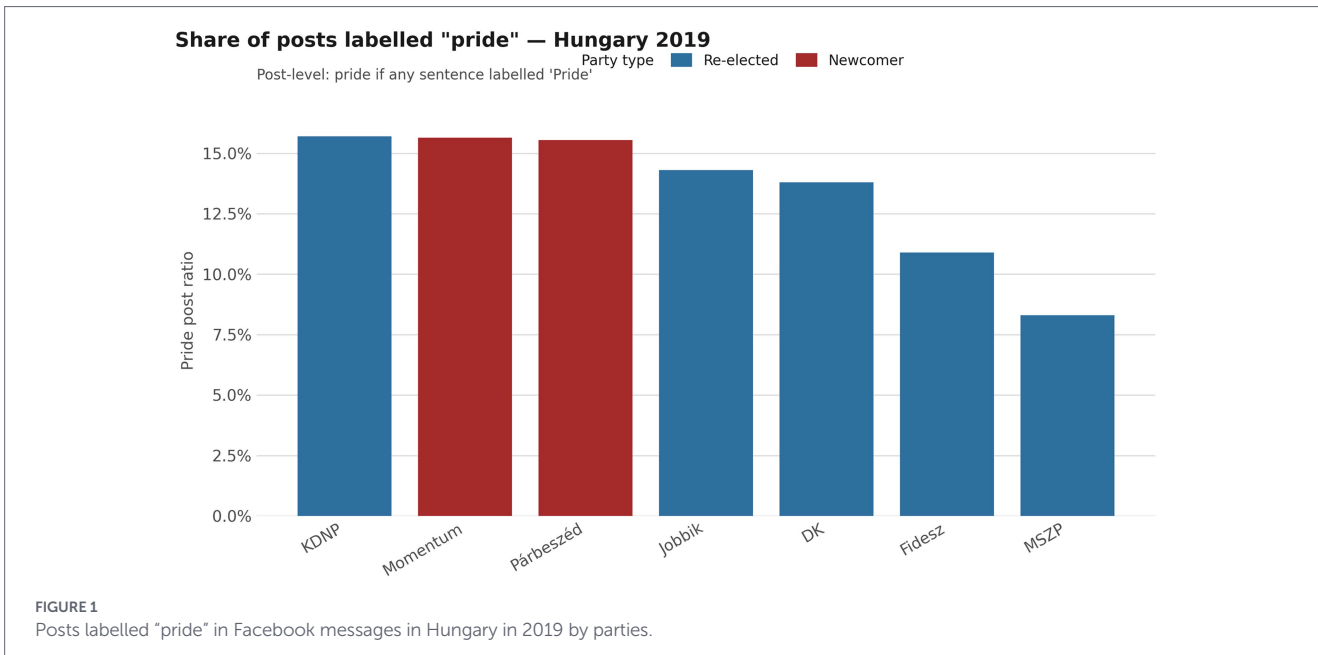
Importantly, the classifier detects the presence of pride-related expressions but does not differentiate between authentic and hubristic pride. As a result, the analysis captures the prevalence of pride as a communicative resource, rather than its qualitative orientation.

## Findings

The distribution of pride expressions in Hungary reveals a clear shift between the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament campaigns, both in overall levels and in how different party types rely on this emotional register. In 2019, pride appears as a broadly available communicative resource across both re-elected and newcomer parties. Actors such as KDNP, Momentum, and Párbeszéd display similarly high levels, with MSZP and DK also occupying the upper-mid range, while Fidesz does not stand out as a particularly intensive user of pride-based messaging. This pattern indicates that pride was not strongly structured by electoral status at this stage: re-elected and newcomer parties employed it in comparable ways, suggesting a flexible rhetorical tool for signalling competence, relevance, and collective worth rather than a resource tied to prior electoral success (see Figure 1).

By 2024, the pattern becomes more differentiated. Higher levels of pride are concentrated among specific re-elected parties, particularly DK, MSZP, and Párbeszéd, where pride appears to be one potential resource of collective worth protection, reinforcing legitimacy and continuity through references to resilience and achievement. Other re-elected actors, including Fidesz and KDNP, remain at comparatively lower levels, pointing to selective rather than uniform adoption within this group (see Figure 2). The contrast with newcomer parties is also more pronounced than in 2019. While Momentum previously ranked among the stronger users of pride, newcomer actors in 2024 generally rely less on this register: Mi Hazánk occupies a moderate position, whereas the Tisza Party displays particularly low levels. This supports the expectation that pride is less readily available to newcomers, whose communicative strategies are more likely to draw on alternative emotional resources such as anger, frustration, or anti-elite appeals. Overall, Hungary moves from a diffuse to a more structured pattern in which pride becomes increasingly associated with selected re-elected actors, especially those seeking to reinforce collective identity and defend perceived political worth.

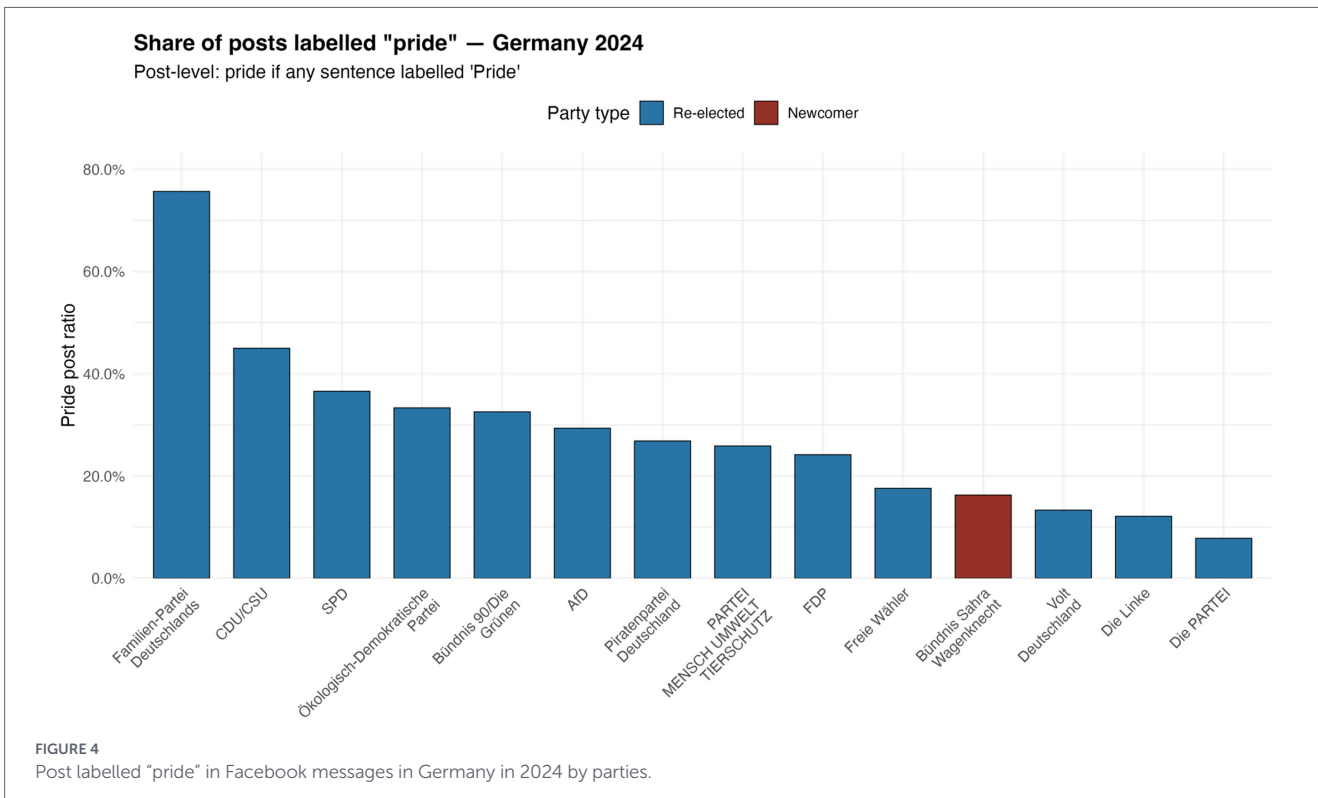
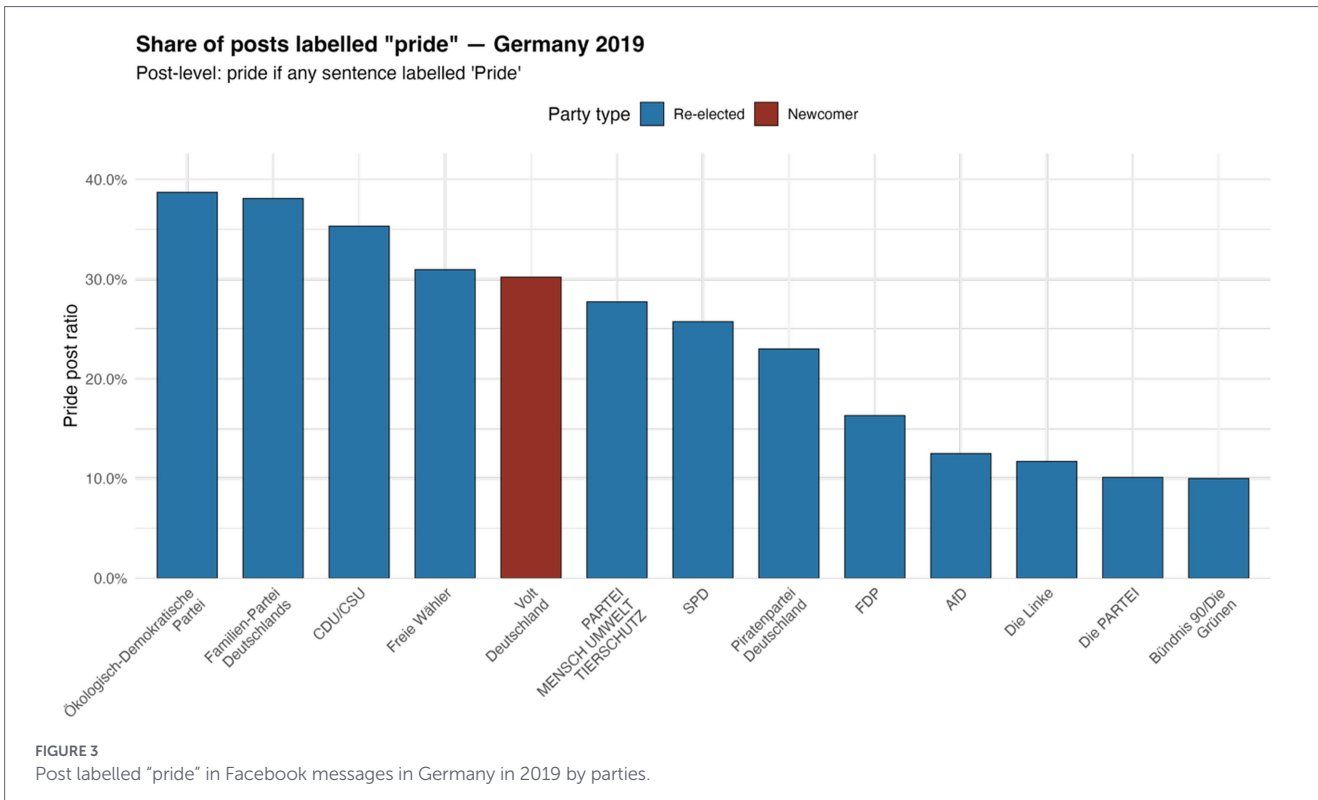
<sup>1</sup> <https://emotions9babel.poltextlab.com/>



A different trajectory emerges in Germany, where the shift between 2019 and 2024 concerns both the intensity and the internal structuring of pride. In 2019, pride already exhibits a relatively hierarchical distribution, with several re-elected parties as ÖDP, Familien-Partei, and CDU/CSU, occupying the upper end, followed by Freie Wähler and other re-elected actors in the mid-to-high range (see Figure 3). This suggests a closer alignment between pride and re-elected parties than observed in Hungary. However, the position of Volt demonstrates that newcomer actors are not excluded from this repertoire, as it reaches levels comparable to higher-ranking parties despite lacking an established track record.

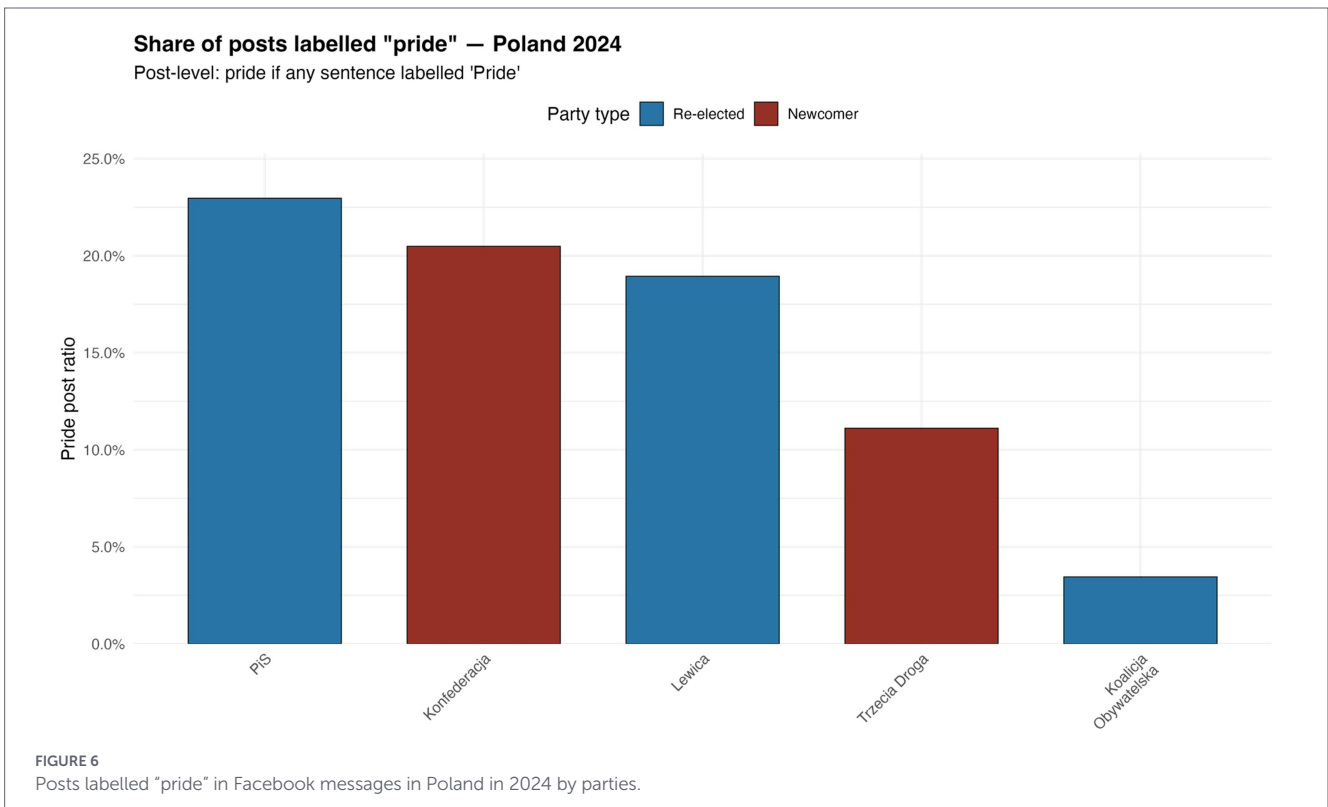
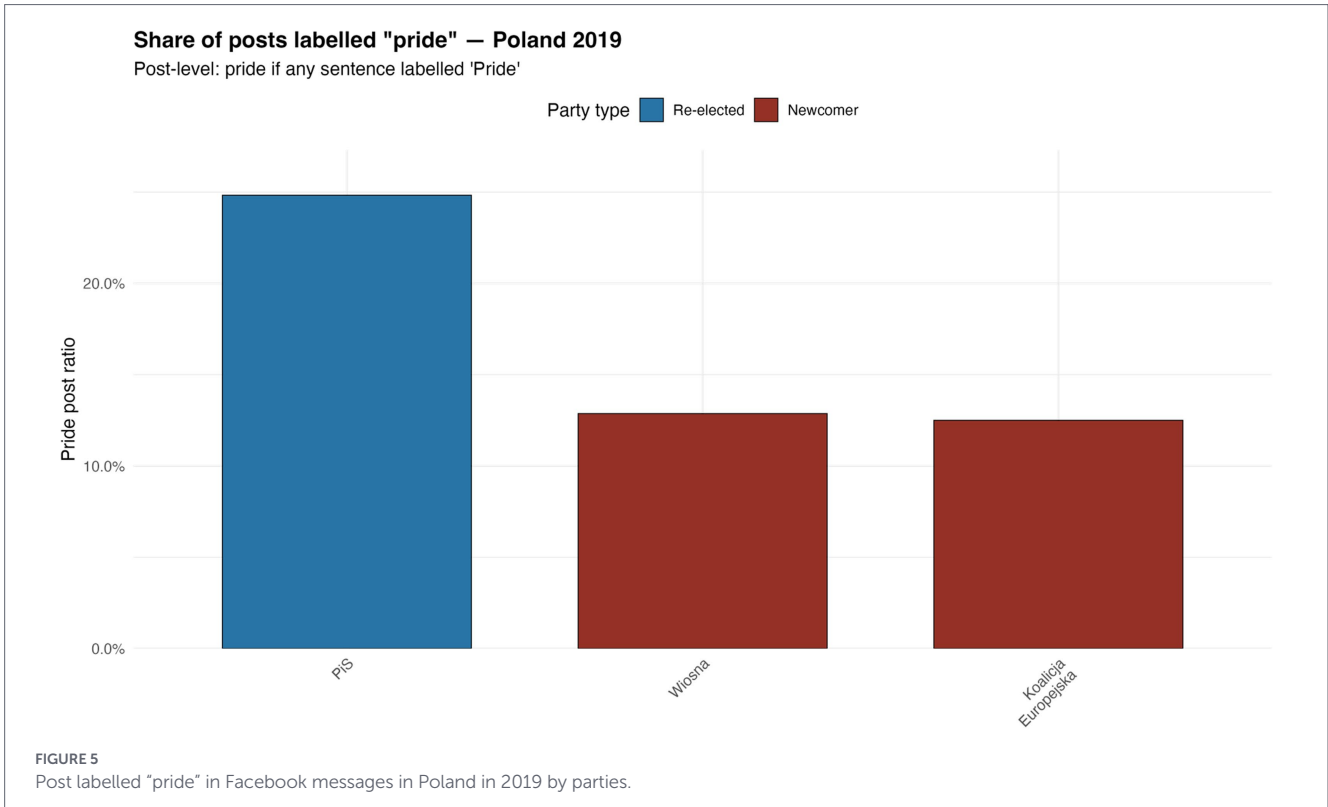
By 2024, pride becomes more pronounced overall and more clearly concentrated among certain re-elected actors (see Figure 4). Parties such as Familien-Partei, CDU/CSU, and SPD occupy the upper end of the distribution, indicating a more

intensive use of pride as a communicative resource linked to narratives of competence and continuity. At the same time, variation within the re-elected group remains substantial: actors like Die Linke and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen appear at the lower end, highlighting that pride is strategically deployed rather than structurally determined. Newcomer parties remain present but less dominant in this register. Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht reaches a moderate level, yet does not match the highest values observed among re-elected actors, reinforcing the idea that pride is more readily mobilised where claims to past achievements can be credibly articulated. Compared to Hungary, Germany displays a comparatively clearer, though still uneven, association between pride messages and re-elected parties, particularly by 2024, although the boundary between party types remains permeable.



In Poland, the distribution of pride expressions is notably more stable across the two election cycles, with limited signs of structural change (see Figures 5, 6). In 2019, pride levels are moderate and relatively evenly distributed between re-elected and newcomer parties. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość and the European Coalition display comparable levels, while the newcomer Wiosna occupies a

similar range. This balanced configuration indicates that pride is not strongly tied to electoral status and functions instead as a general communicative resource for signalling competence and collective belonging. The absence of extreme values further suggests that pride plays a secondary role within a broader emotional repertoire.



The 2024 campaign largely reproduces this pattern with slightly increased differentiation. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość remains among the higher users of pride, consistent with an interpretation centred on continuity and collective worth reinforcement. Newcomer actors such as Konfederacja reach similar levels, indicating that pride can also serve as a projective resource for asserting relevance and positioning. Other

parties, including Lewica and Trzecia Droga, cluster in the mid-range, while Koalicja Obywatelska appears somewhat lower. Variation within the re-elected group again points to selective use rather than uniform adoption. Across both cycles, neither re-elected nor newcomer parties consistently dominate, and pride remains a shared but non-dominant element of campaign communication.

From a comparative perspective, the three cases reveal distinct configurations. Hungary shows the most pronounced shift toward a status-sensitive distribution, with pride increasingly concentrated among selected re-elected actors by 2024. Germany displays a stronger and more consistent association between pride and re-elected parties, particularly in the later campaign, though with notable internal variation. Poland, by contrast, stands out for its continuity and balance, where pride remains moderately used and only weakly structured by electoral status. These cross-national differences are accompanied by a broader temporal shift. The comparison between the 2019 and 2024 campaigns suggests not a uniform change in the overall prevalence of pride, but a transformation in how it is used. Pride becomes more structured and selectively deployed, with a moderate tendency to concentrate among re-elected parties, for whom it serves to emphasise continuity, achievement, and collective worth. Newcomer parties, in turn, rely less on pride in 2024 than in 2019, indicating that this emotional register is less readily available without an established record and is often replaced by alternative affective strategies.

The patterns show that pride is not a fixed attribute of either re-elected or newcomer parties, but a context-dependent resource shaped by strategic positioning and the capacity to articulate credible claims to collective worth.

To assess the relationship between pride expressions of political parties and user engagement, we aggregated total user interactions across all parties and politicians in each country and compared engagement levels between pride-labelled posts and other posts during the 2019 and 2024 campaign periods. Here, the comparative pattern is particularly clear.

The relationship between pride expressions and user engagement reveals a complex and uneven pattern across countries and election cycles, offering limited support for the assumption that pride systematically enhances audience responsiveness. While engagement is interpreted here as an indicator of audience attention and interaction—without implying agreement or persuasion—the results suggest that the effects of pride are neither uniform nor stable over time.

In Hungary, focusing on EP-represented parties, the differences between pride-labelled and other posts remain consistently small across both campaigns. In 2019, pride posts generated somewhat higher average engagement (mean 1428.0 vs. 1253.2), but this advantage did not reach statistical significance. By 2024, the pattern reversed slightly, with non-pride-labelled posts receiving marginally higher engagement (1758.9 vs. 1720.4), yet again without statistical significance. These findings indicate that, in the Hungarian context, pride does not function as a reliable driver of audience responsiveness. Rather than producing consistent engagement advantages, pride appears to operate as one among several communicative options, without a clearly measurable impact on interaction levels.

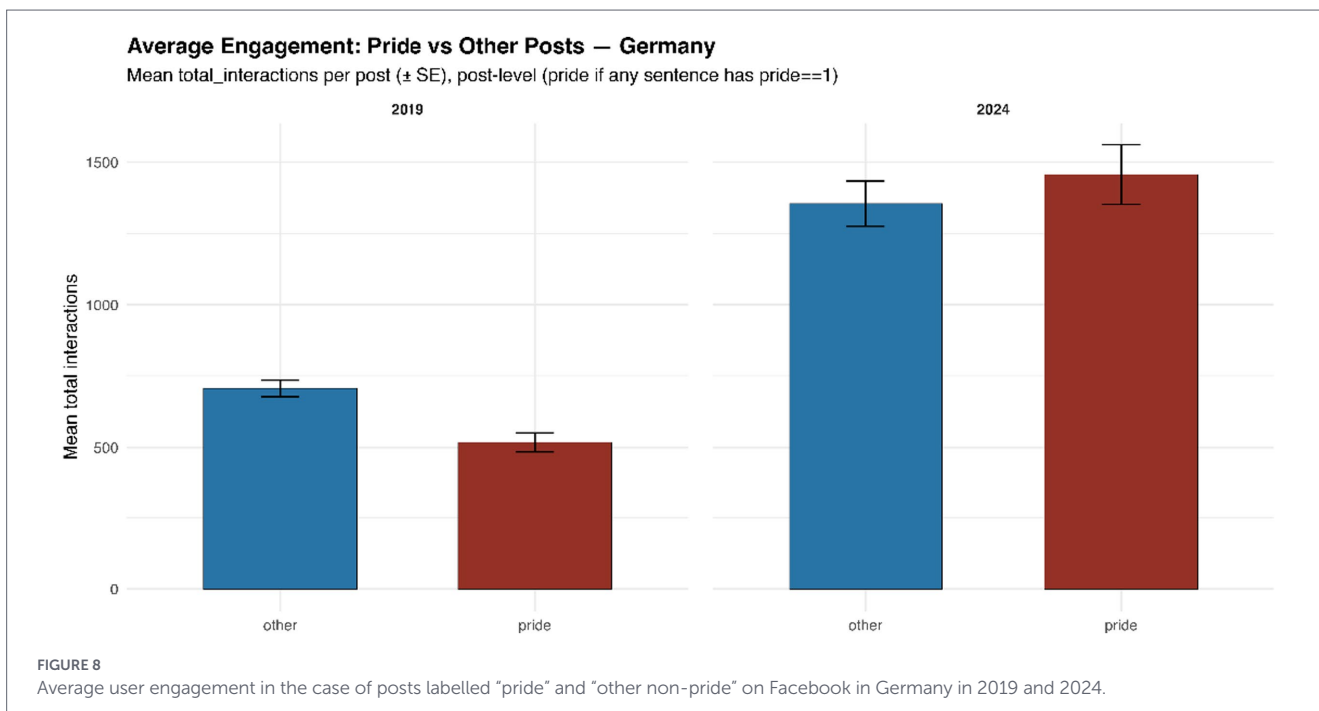
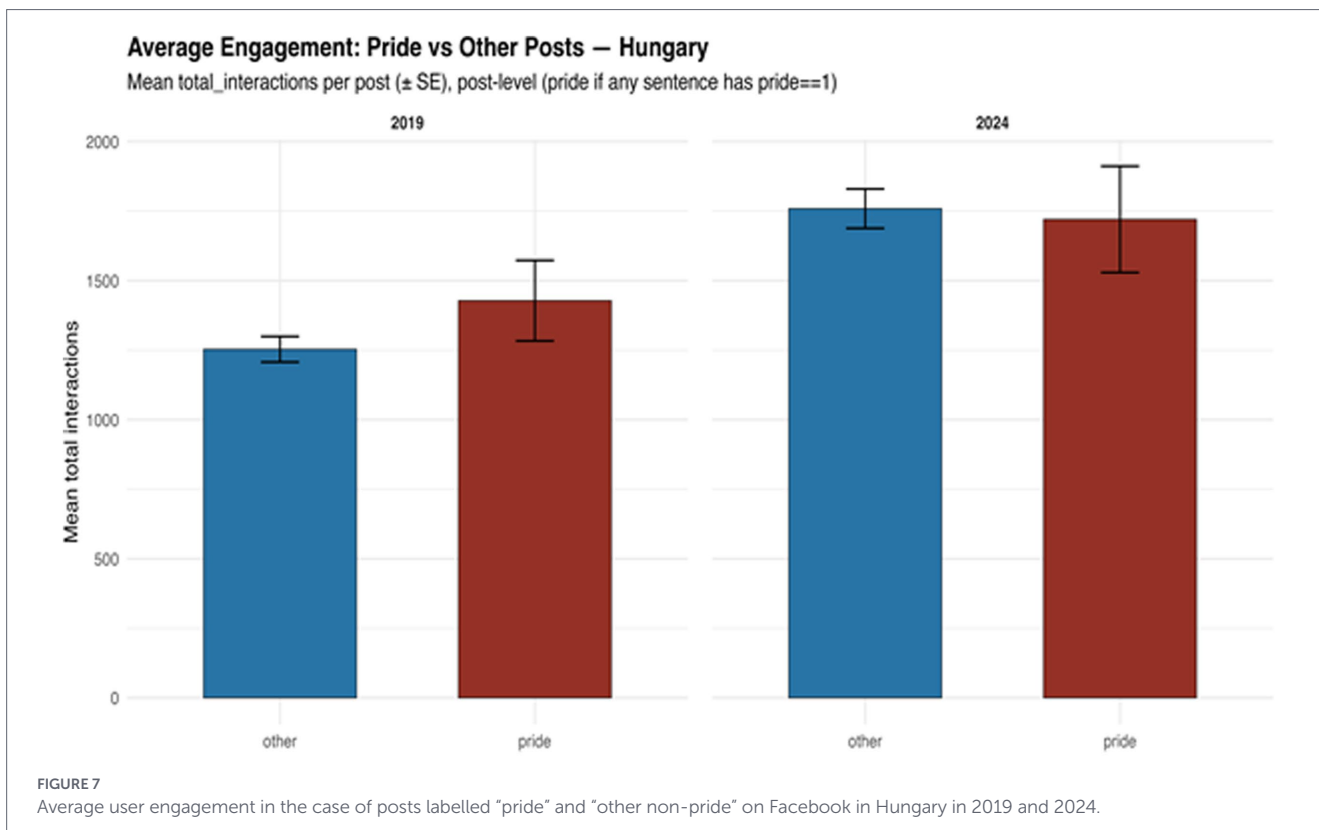
Germany presents a more dynamic but equally inconclusive pattern. In 2019, posts with pride expressions were associated with significantly lower engagement than others (mean 535.4 vs. 723.1,  $p = 0.036$ ), suggesting that overt self-affirmatory messaging may have been less effective in attracting audience interaction in that campaign context. By 2024, however, this relationship reversed: pride posts generated higher average engagement (1533.4 vs. 1488.0), although the difference was not statistically significant. This shift points to a

change in the direction of the relationship, but not to a robust or stable effect. The German case therefore illustrates the temporal instability of pride as an engagement strategy: its effectiveness appears sensitive to broader changes in communication styles, audience expectations, or the evolving emotional tone of political discourse.

Poland displays the most pronounced transformation across the two election cycles. In 2019, non-pride posts outperformed pride-related posts in terms of engagement (mean 1637.5 vs. 1425.1), although this difference was not statistically significant. By 2024, the pattern reversed in a substantively and statistically meaningful way: pride posts generated significantly higher engagement (1635.0 vs. 1449.8,  $p < 0.001$ ). This represents the only case in the analysis where pride is associated with a clear and robust engagement advantage. The shift suggests that the responsiveness to pride-based communication can change substantially within a relatively short time frame, potentially reflecting transformations in the political landscape or the entry of actors whose communication style relies heavily on pride and successfully mobilises audience interaction.

From a comparative perspective, these findings do not support the existence of a generalisable or convergent pattern in the engagement effects of pride. The results highlight persistent cross-national variation. Hungary is characterized by consistently negligible differences between posts with or without pride manifestations, Germany by directional instability without statistically reliable effects, and Poland by a context-specific and actor-driven shift toward a significant engagement advantage for pride-laden social media messages in 2024. Evidence also suggests that pride is not an inherently engagement-generating emotional formula. Its effectiveness depends on the broader communicative environment, the configuration of political actors, and the strategic deployment of emotional narratives within specific campaign contexts. Rather than functioning as a universally mobilising resource, pride operates as a contingent and context-dependent element of campaign communication, whose audience effects are shaped by the interaction between emotional content and the political dynamics of each election cycle. At the same time, the findings are consistent with linking pride to collective worth: where pride-based narratives resonate more strongly (such as in Poland in 2024) they may reflect moments in which political actors successfully activate shared perceptions of achievement, resilience, and moral standing. In other contexts, however, where such narratives fail to produce measurable engagement advantages, the protective function of pride appears either less salient or less effectively translated into audience responsiveness (see [Figures 7–9](#)).

Additional exploratory analyses separating likes, comments, and shares suggest that the relationship between posts containing expressions of pride and audience engagement varies across countries and interaction types. Rather than generating a uniform engagement advantage, pride-laden communication appears to stimulate different forms of responsiveness depending on the broader communicative and political context. In Germany, posts expressing pride generally generated lower or only slightly comparable levels of engagement relative to non-pride posts, particularly in 2019, suggesting a more restrained reception of overtly pride-laden communication. In Hungary, pride-related posts produced higher levels of likes and shares in 2019, while by 2024



engagement patterns became more uneven, with some posts attracting exceptionally high levels of interaction. Poland displayed the clearest positive association between pride-laden communication and audience responsiveness, especially in 2024, where posts expressing pride generated higher levels of likes and comments than non-pride communication. The distinction between likes, comments, and shares also indicates that different forms of engagement capture different communicative dynamics.

Likes may reflect low-cost symbolic approval or visibility, comments may indicate discussion or emotional activation, while shares point to the active circulation of campaign messages. The findings therefore reinforce the argument that engagement metrics should not be interpreted as direct indicators of persuasion or endorsement, but rather as indicators of visibility, uptake, and communicative resonance within digital campaign environments (see Table 3).

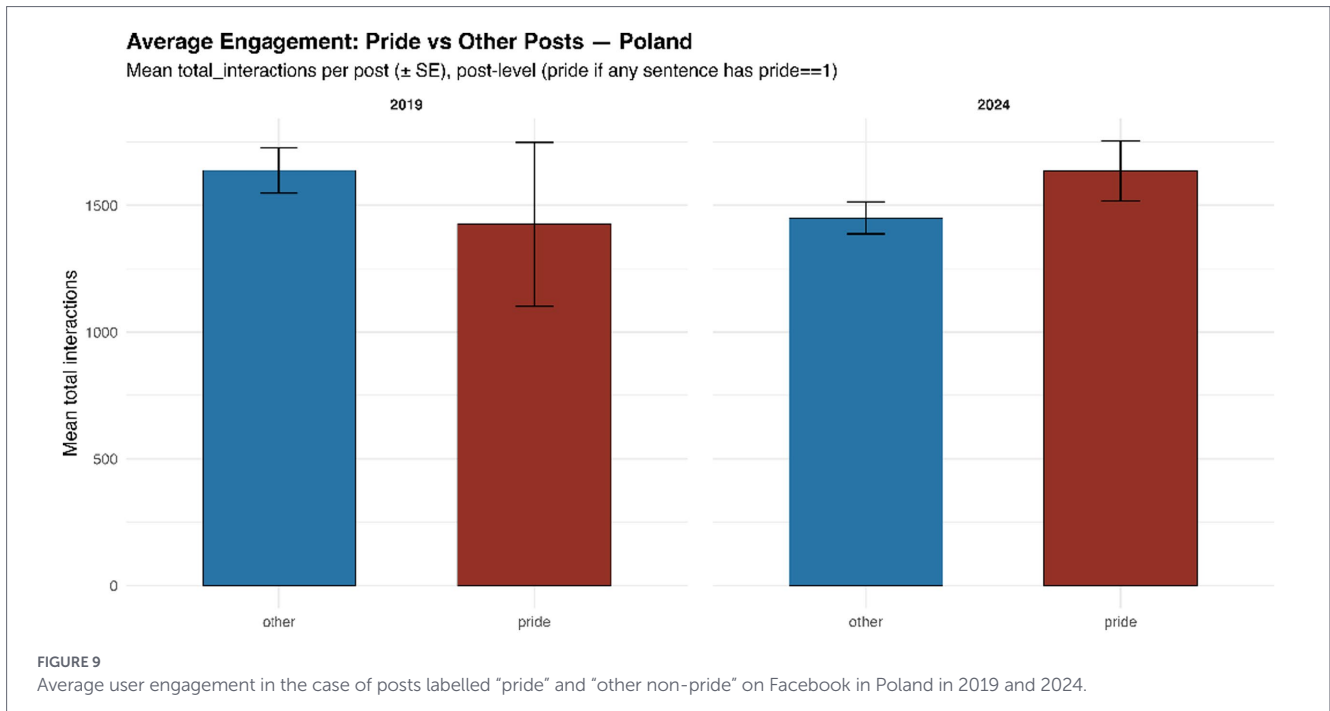


TABLE 3 Average likes, comments, and shares per post for pride and non-pride facebook messages.

| Country | Year | Pride     | Likes | Comments | Shares |
|---------|------|-----------|-------|----------|--------|
| Germany | 2019 | Non-pride | 406.9 | 96.3     | 119.2  |
| Germany | 2019 | Pride     | 300.8 | 86.8     | 73.1   |
| Germany | 2024 | Non-pride | 887.6 | 234.9    | 175.4  |
| Germany | 2024 | Pride     | 870.7 | 259.8    | 168.0  |
| Hungary | 2019 | Non-pride | 723.3 | 78.4     | 228.6  |
| Hungary | 2019 | Pride     | 867.3 | 76.3     | 268.7  |
| Poland  | 2024 | Non-pride | 674.5 | 213.9    | 74.3   |
| Poland  | 2024 | Pride     | 751.7 | 222.6    | 70.5   |

## Discussion and conclusion

This study examined how pride is employed in political messaging during the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament election campaigns in Germany, Hungary, and Poland. Conceptually, pride functions as a powerful moral emotion in political communication. It can strengthen credibility, reinforce collective identity, and sustain political engagement.

Yet pride is also normatively ambivalent: it may shift toward hubristic forms of communication characterised by overconfidence, moral superiority, and the symbolic elevation of the in-group over perceived opponents. Using the analytical framework developed within the MORES project, this study analysed pride expressions in Facebook communication through an AI-assisted approach based on a fine-tuned multilingual XLM-RoBERTa model trained on expert-labelled and GPT-generated data. The classifier achieved accuracy levels above 70% across German, Hungarian, and Polish texts, enabling systematic cross-national comparison of pride expressions in campaign discourse.

The findings reveal substantial variation in both the distribution and audience responsiveness of pride-based communication. Pride is not systematically structured by parties' electoral status: both

re-elected and newcomer parties may deploy or avoid pride, although by 2024 its use becomes more selective, with a moderate tendency to concentrate among re-elected actors. The engagement analysis also shows that pride is not an inherently engagement-generating emotion. In Hungary, differences between pride-labelled and non-pride posts remain negligible across both cycles. In Germany, the relationship is unstable: pride underperforms in 2019 but shows no robust disadvantage in 2024. Poland displays the clearest shift, with pride-related posts generating significantly higher engagement in 2024. These patterns suggest that pride functions as a context-dependent communicative resource rather than as a uniform campaign emotion.

Overall, the findings indicate that pride in electoral discourse does more than simply celebrate success. Pride can be understood as an emotion through which individuals enhance their ego-identity by taking credit for valued achievements of a group with which they identify (Salmela and Sullivan, 2022). Such pride is grounded in shared values, group ethos, and identification processes that connect individual self-worth to collective accomplishments (Kitayama et al., 1995). In this sense, pride symbolically elevates the social self by linking personal identity to collectively valued

outcomes, helping individuals maintain commitment to social and altruistic behaviour even in difficult circumstances (Hart and Matsuba, 2007).

Extending this perspective, pride in political communication can be interpreted as a resource for collective worth protection. When political actors invoke pride, they do not merely highlight achievements; they reaffirm the worth, dignity, and moral standing of the political community (Nussbaum, 2013). By taking credit, directly or vicariously, for collective accomplishments, communicators contribute to stabilising group identity, especially in contexts where this identity is perceived as threatened, criticised, or contested. Pride thus functions as an affective resource that protects the collective self against experiences of humiliation, marginalisation, or status loss by reasserting the group's value in morally meaningful terms (Ober, 2012).

This protective function, however, is normatively bounded. Pride remains democratically productive insofar as it is anchored in shared values, concrete achievements, and recognisable claims to collective dignity. When the defence of collective worth shifts toward generalised claims of superiority detached from specific accomplishments, pride may turn into hubris. The boundary between legitimate collective worth protection and exclusionary moral hierarchy therefore lies in whether pride affirms value or asserts superiority. In this light, pride-based communication can be seen as a form of symbolic protection through which political actors defend the dignity and legitimacy of the political community. By emphasising collective achievements and resilience, campaign messages reaffirm the moral worth of the in-group and validate the emotional claims of its members. When intensified, however, such discourse may also reinforce exclusionary narratives that elevate the in-group above perceived outsiders and sharpen boundaries of belonging.

The comparative perspective adopted in this study highlights how the political functions of pride vary across democratic contexts. Hungary shows the pronounced shift toward a status-sensitive distribution of pride, with selected re-elected actors relying on pride to reinforce collective identity and perceived political worth. Germany displays a comparatively clearer, though still uneven, association between pride and re-elected parties, especially by 2024. Poland stands out for its relative continuity and balance, while also providing the clearest case in which pride-related communication generated a significant engagement advantage in 2024. These differences illustrate both the diffusion of emotionalised campaigning across Europe and the contextual limits of its effects. Pride may be available as a resource of protective politics across cases, but its prominence and audience uptake depend on national political contexts, party configurations, and campaign dynamics.

The study is not without limitations, which also point toward promising avenues for future research. First, the automated classifier detects pride expressions but cannot reliably distinguish between qualitatively different forms of pride, such as authentic and hubristic variants. As these forms often share similar linguistic markers in political discourse, the boundary between legitimate self-affirmation and exclusionary moral superiority remains difficult to operationalise in large-scale computational analysis. Future research should therefore investigate this distinction using complementary approaches. Qualitative and multimodal methods could help capture how tone, irony, visual performance,

gestures, or humour signal shifts from competence-based pride to dominance-oriented, potentially hubristic expressions.

Second, the observed variation may also reflect differences in party ideology, as conservative and progressive actors may rely on pride in distinct ways and for different political purposes. However, examining the relationship between ideological orientation and the strategic use of pride falls beyond the scope of the present study and remains an important direction for future research.

Third, the analysis focuses exclusively on Facebook communication, while contemporary campaigning increasingly unfolds across a multi-platform environment in which emotional expression is shaped by platform-specific affordances. Pride-related communication on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube may rely less on textual cues and more on imagery, performance, and audiovisual storytelling. Future research should therefore adopt cross-platform and multimodal designs to examine how pride circulates, transforms, and acquires meaning across different digital environments.

Fourth, engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments indicate audience responsiveness but do not provide direct evidence of persuasion, agreement, or internal emotional states. Engagement cannot be interpreted as a direct measure of collective worth protection or psychological outcomes such as restored dignity, reduced insecurity, or strengthened identification. Rather, in this study engagement is conceptualised both as an indicator of audience uptake and as a mechanism contributing to the visibility and circulation of campaign messages within social media environments. Higher engagement may increase the prominence and reach of political messages through platform dynamics that reward interaction and visibility, regardless of whether engagement reflects support, criticism, or conflict. The analysis therefore focuses on engagement as a communicative outcome shaped by platform logics, including both organic and strategically amplified interaction, as well as potential automated or coordinated activity. The findings show that pride-related messages are associated with higher engagement only in specific contexts, most clearly in Poland in 2024. This suggests that audience responsiveness to pride is conditional rather than general. Future research should combine computational approaches with experimental and survey-based designs to examine how audiences interpret pride-based messages, whether they experience them as affirming, exclusionary, or both, and how such interpretations relate to attitudes, emotions, and behavioural intentions.

Finally, while this study captures patterns of emotional communication during election campaigns, it remains limited in its ability to account for longer-term dynamics. Pride may function differently inside and outside campaign periods. A promising direction is to adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how pride-based communication evolves over time, particularly in moments of crisis when collective worth is most at stake. Such investigations would make it possible to assess more directly when pride manifestations successfully contribute to collective worth protection, and when it shifts toward exclusionary or hubristic forms.

## Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repositories and accession

number(s) can be found below: MORES—Morális érzelmek a politikában: Hogyan egyesítenek, és hogyan osztanak meg Vezető pártok és politikusok Facebook oldalai Németországban, Franciaországban, Lengyelországban és Magyarországon 2009 és 2024 között Farkas, Eszter és Boda, Zsolt és Szabó, Gabriella és Ring, Orsolya és Beichelt, Timm és Lipiński, Artur és Hubé, Nicolas (2025) MORES—Morális érzelmek a politikában: Hogyan egyesítenek, és hogyan osztanak meg Vezető pártok és politikusok Facebook oldalai Németországban, Franciaországban, Lengyelországban és Magyarországon 2009 és 2024 között. [Kutatási gyűjtemény] DOI: [10.17203/KDK643\(https://openarchive.tk.mta.hu/643/\)](https://openarchive.tk.mta.hu/643/).

## Author contributions

GS: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. OR: Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Software, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AL: Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. TB: Formal analysis, Investigation, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## Generative AI statement

The author(s) declared that Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript. Prior to submission, the authors used AI for grammar and linguistic checks and corrections. OpenAI GPT-4-turbo was used to generate synthetic examples for data augmentation during the development of the multilingual emotion classifier. All generated content was manually reviewed, validated, and integrated into the training pipeline by the authors.

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## Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2026.1828880/full#supplementary-material>

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