The Impact of Right-wing Populist Party on Immigration Policy: the Case of AfD

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Abstract

Refugee crisis, cultural collision, religious strife and terrorist attacks have strengthened right-wing populist campaign in Germany. The Alternative für Deutschland, also called AfD, which has entered the Bundestag for the first time, has rebuked frequently on the ruling coalition over immigration, accusing the government of inefficiencies in tackling the issue of migration that have made people feel more insecure. With the help of social media and political power, AfD began to influence the direction of public opinion and the formulation of German immigration policies. As the biggest opposition party in Bundestag, AfD will have a profound impact on German immigration policy.

Keywords

Right-wing populism parties; Immigration policy; AfD.

1. Introduction

There has been a strong resurgence of xenophobia across the continent as a result of economic downturn and immigration crisis in Europe. Many right-wing populist parties have branded themselves as the party of "all for the people", lashing out at the immigration policies. At the same time the European countries on governing immigration inefficiency caused strong dissatisfaction of the local people. Their demanding of anti-immigration is embraced by the ordinary people, which leads to the increase support of right-wing populist parties. There are a number of populist right-wing parties have obtained important political power in their own country and European parliament and their status have deep influence to public opinion and their own immigration policy. Moreover, multiculturalism has failed in many countries. Under the centrifugal tendency of multiculturalism, those with strong ethnic identity are in sharp contrast to minority immigrants, especially Muslims[1].

In 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would officially accept refugees. In addition to humanitarian aid, another driving factor was to add a large number of workers to the labor market. Germany has one of the lowest birth rates in Europe, and accepting refugees will help ease the problem of aging and maintain the balance of labor market in Germany. However, the sudden influx of refugees in Germany has made the German social system unable to bear it for a while, resulting in many social security problems and frequent violent crimes, which have broken the original stable atmosphere of the German society. Moreover, the German government also needs to spend a huge amount of money and other resources to settle the refugees, and the locals worry that the government will spend too much money in refugee management, which will reduce the German fiscal surplus and shrink the social welfare. Last but not least, the most serious refugee crisis since World War II has

accelerated the rise of right-wing populism, putting mainstream parties in unprecedented trouble in the 2017 Bundestag election. The public is worried that extreme ideology such as racism and xenophobia in Germany will destroy German efforts since World War II.

2. The Current German Immigration Problem Is Becoming Increasingly Acute

Europe continues to suffer economically, and sentiment of anti-immigrant tends to be more pronounced when immigration is relatively large and less pronounced when economic conditions are relatively prosperous[2]. Immigration crisis in Germany broke out immediately after it accepted refugees in 2015. The sudden increase in the number of immigrants added a huge burden to German society, which far exceeded the contribution of immigrants. Coupled with cultural conflicts, the demands of anti-immigrant became increasingly strong.

2.1. The Development Situation and Predicament of German Immigration

After World War II, in order to obtain more resources to fill the needs of the labor market, the ex-federal government of Germany relaxed the restrictions on immigration and made labor agreements with many countries. The immigration of guest labor made the federal republic of Germany became the country with the largest number of immigrants in the European continent at that time. In the 1970s, because of the economic downturn, the government suspended the input of guest workers. However, in the 1990s, the reunification of Federal Republic Germany and Democratic Germany, coupled with the upheaval in eastern Europe, the number of German immigrants and the scale of migration was gradually growing.

However, in 2015, Over 1 million refugees entered Germany, and the out-of-control situation forced Chancellor Merkel to make the decision to restart border control. It is also the first time that EU member states have taken emergency border control measures due to the refugee crisis since the Schengen agreement came into effect. According to the data from the German federal statistics office, the number of foreign nationals in Germany increased year by year from 2011 to 2018, and the scale of immigration gradually increased. In addition to qualified immigrants, there are two main types of illegal immigrants in Germany: one is immigrants from non-war countries who enter Germany as fake refugees; the other is immigrants who stay in Germany despite being rejected by asylum seekers. EU member states are inconsistent in the degree of implementation of the refugee convention, resulting in the failure of the legal framework for the governance of refugees and illegal immigrants. According to the Dublin Regulation, the first country into which a refugee enters is responsible for asylum, but other European Union member states were not completely in accordance with the principle of "Dublin Regulation", allow refugees go to other EU member states to seek asylum so that they can unload their burden, and refugees are heading to the most developed and perfect protection system in Europe---Germany to apply for asylum. The problem of refugees becomes more difficult to control without the constraint of an effective system, and the European public is extremely disappointed with the EU, which exacerbates the prevalence of Euroscepticism.

The "Arab Spring" and the Syrian Civil War led to a massive influx of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe. Millions of refugees have the chance to survive and develop in Germany. Once asylum seekers obtain official refugee status, they can get the right of abode and welfare for three years, and even the right of permanent residence. But there are also some immigrants who are considered lazy and do not participate in the work just for the sake of welfare, even criminals. In 2017, the German government processed more refugee applications than the other 27 countries, and the rejected refugee appeal process also caused great pressure on the German government. If Germany boycotted the refugees, there would be a "Domino Effect", leading Southern European countries with serious migration problems to follow German example and possibly stop the refugee registration process altogether. Those seeking

safe haven will find ways to cross the border illegally without formal access to Europe, and Europe will face a dilemma over border controls, the refugee crisis and humanitarian issues.

The ineptitude of government and the looming refugee crisis are prompting the far right to resort to violence. According to the research of Funke Mediengruppe, there were 3,500 attacks on refugees and refugee camps in Germany in 2016 and 2,291 in 2017, with more than 300 injured[3]. The level of economic development in German states is uneven, and the ability to accept refugees varies. Although the current number of refugees has been greatly reduced, the distribution of refugees is still very uneven. Although some cities have received a large number of refugees, they lack the key conditions for integration. Some local states have material defects in integration, such as medical care, housing and language courses. Furthermore, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), part of the German interior ministry, has been scolded by a corruption and malfeasance scandal: from 2013 to 2016, the Bremen branch issued residence permits to more than 1,200 refugees without carefully reviewing their documents. The sloppiness of government in dealing with the refugee crisis has angered both the opposition and the public, and the German public badly needs an explanation.

2.2.   Religious Exclusivity Is on the Rise

Article 4 of Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland provides for the protection of religious freedom and guarantees non-interference in religious activities. Religious freedom can only be limited if it violates the Constitution or hurts the right of a third party. That is, if a woman disguises herself for other reasons, legal action is required to prohibit it, because of the fear that terrorists may use their appearance to carry out terrorist activities. In the debate over whether Islam belongs in Germany, supporters argue that German law protects religious freedom, while opponents argue that Islam is incompatible with Christianity. Calls for Muslims to embrace German values have grown stronger in recent years as Islamist-related terror attacks on the continent of Europe have turned native fears of Muslim immigrants. There were at least 950 attacks on Muslims and Muslim institutions in Germany in 2017, and in all documented cases, the perpetrators were right-wing extremists[4]. But whether Islam belongs in Germany is an absurd debate. Blind exclusion of Muslims will not help solve the current immigration problem. It requires the norms of the legal system and the influence of the media. Besides, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitism still lingers on the German mainland.

3.   The Rise and Characteristics of the AfD

Since reunification in 1990, there have been only five major parties in the German Bundestag election, but in the 2017 Bundestag election, the four-year-old AfD broke the traditional pattern and changed the current situation of German politics. The AfD was founded by German economist Bernd Lucke and journalists Konrad Adam and Alexander Gauland, which is seen as a right-wing populist party that started out as anti-Euro. Although failed to enter Bundestag in the 2013 Bundestag election because it did not win more than 5% of the vote, it has being on the rise, as people have become increasingly vocal in their calls for tighter immigration policies. Presently, the migrant crisis is the most important pawn in party politics.

3.1.   The success of the AfD in the Germany election

With the arrival of the refugee wave in Europe in 2015, the opposition to immigration and the prohibition of refugees from entering Germany have gradually become the main slogans of the party. In a series of studies, xenophobia has emerged as the strongest factor in support of right-wing populist parties in Europe.[5] Before the Bundestag election, the AfD had successfully entered several state houses. and finally won 12.6 percent of the vote and 94 seats out of 709 in the German Bundestag elections in 2017.[6] Then Deutschlands Christlich-Demokratische Union(CDU) and Christian Social Union(CSU) formed a coalition with the SPD, and the AfD

became the largest opposition party. The emerging right-wing populist party AfD was the biggest winner in the 2017 German Bundestag elections. After the election, opinion polls show the AfD still in third place, with the SPD, one of the ruling parties, trailing it by only a whisker, and even rising with it.

3.2.   The Strategy of the AfD

When the European Debt Crisis began to cool down, the influx of refugees objectively gave another opportunity of populism resurgence. The AfD then seized upon the fear and dissatisfaction with the refugee issue of German public and attacked the refugee policies of Chancellor Merkel and the ruling coalition. The most obvious difference between the AfD and other mainstream parties is that they follow the populist trend and take advantage of emotions to gain attention and support.

Firstly, different factions have different tasks. The AfD is deeply divided, because its members come from very different political backgrounds, including members from the CDU and the FDP, and have slightly different political views. The AfD, which is roughly divided into "far right" and "moderate" parties, has traditionally taken the approach of having the "far right" lead the way in focusing mainstream parties on issues that are ambiguous and then letting the "moderate" mediate. The strategy of the AfD can acquire attention and support without creating a completely radical image. The "far right" is represented by Gauland and Beatrix von Storch, while the "moderates" are represented by of Alice Weidel and the former President Frauke Petry. But Petry's resignation in April 2017 weakened the moderate wing of the party, leaving the far right vulnerable to chaos without moderates.

Secondly, The AfD has adopted different strategies in different states. In eastern Germany, for example, the AfD argues for protecting the interests of the home state. Weak economic growth, high rate of unemployment and a severe labor outflow have spread xenophobia around eastern Germany. In the more prosperous western of Germany, also known as the old federal state, the AfD has made two claims: "return Germany to purity" and "anti-elitism". The penetration of economic globalization, immigration as a representative of the labor force and the exotic culture promoted by the flow of people and capital have made Germany diversified. These changes have hurt the self-esteem of some Germans, who have always admired their unique culture. The AfD presents itself as a party for ordinary people, and sees mainstream parties and the traditional establishment as a sham, with no regard for the interests of those at the bottom.

Lastly, the AfD has an ambiguous relationship with the extreme right. Leaders of the AfD, which struggled to distance itself from the "Nazism" and "Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes" (Pegida) before formally entering the Bundestag, are now willing to drop their promise. The Pegida campaign also found a medium of growth in the AfD.

3.3.   The Immigration Claims of the AfD

"Anti-immigrant" is the most obvious label of the AfD at the moment. The AfD is staunchly opposed to the government's refugee policy, and wants to take strong measures to repatriate stranded refugees and close the German border to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country and weaken the influence of Islam in Germany. In April 2017, the AfD released a political plan based on the current problems PROGRAMM FÜR DEUTSCHLAND.

First, the AfD believes that Germany is not a typical nation of immigrants. Canada and Australia manage migration taking into account social conditions and employment factors, but Germany does not have any legal framework to govern immigrants, which results in immigrants being able to enter the German social security system but not being able to enter the job market. The refugee policy makes this situation worse and worse. Second, the AfD insists on distinguishing between political refugees, war refugees and illegal immigrants. Refugees are granted asylum only if there is war in their country of origin. Once the war or political persecution is over, refugees' residence permits will be terminated. Germany and other EU members should offer

subsidies to encourage those who must leave. If refugees return home and contribute to their original countries, that meets the criteria of world peace and win-win. Third, in order to prevent an increasing influx of refugees into Germany, asylum centers should be set up in safe areas outside Germany, which will operate under UN and EU mandates and urge asylum seekers in Germany or other EU member states to return to these centers. Those who apply for asylum for financial reasons can be encouraged to leave voluntarily through one-off assistance. In addition, they blame the German government for failing to comply with federal repatriation laws or delaying processing of migrants. The AfD does not bar Germany from accepting migrants outright. It welcomes highly skilled migrants, and legal immigration helps replenish labor pool in Germany. Fourth, crime rates have risen since mass migration into Europe, but under the cover of religious and language barriers, immigration-related crime is hard to crack down on. The current system of justice is unlikely to end criminals' residency entirely, and the AfD wants a legal mechanism to make it more efficient to revoke criminals' residency rights in Germany. Fifth, the AfD believes that the government and civil society have a responsibility to confidently protect indigenous culture as mainstream culture of Germany, and that multiculturalism is a blind look at history. The AfD requires immigrants of all ages to learn to speak and write German, and to respect German law and social institutions. Permanent residency requires successful integration, and any immigrant who refuses to integrate will lose his right of abode. The AfD wants to ban burqas and veils from all public Spaces because they create barriers to cultural integration by creating barriers to the environment. Sixth, the AfD supports freedom of religion, but freedom of religion must be within legal and value system of Germany. The AfD wants to stem the trend of Muslim religious radicalization in Germany and ban state funding of mosques from the Islamic world[7].

4. The Impact of the Afd on German Immigration Policy

The main political functions of German largest opposition party are to make speeches, control the budget, supervision and organize investigations. The AfD could use these political functions to influence German immigration policy in the Bundestag. In addition, the AfD is adept at using social media to stir up hatred and influence public opinion.

4.1. The Impact on Policy Making

Upmostly, the AfD influences the government's immigration policy by making statements in the Bundestag. Bundestag debates are allocated by the caucus in proportion to the number of seats, so the more seats, the longer the speech, and the greater the impact. The AfD gained control of the Budget Committee, the biggest opposition party's most effective weapon against the ruling party. Its appeal will be guaranteed priority for the government's response, the public will focus on the inquiry topic and the response of government, and the speech will gain stronger social attention. Since entering parliament, the afd has repeatedly called for the organization to investigate merkel's refugee policies and has used its control of the budget committee to take on the coalition on immigration.

4.2. The Impact on Public Opinion

Outside the Bundestag, social media became the main platform for the AfD. On account of its ability to use social media to stir up public sentiment, the AfD has been more effective than other political parties in closing the gap with voters, and the public can have a clearer and more timely understanding of the party's dynamics. The AfD is adept at creating its own channels of communication, using social media for real-time communication, and has developed a systematical communication strategy across the country,it has more than 300,000 followers on Facebook, far more than the CDU and the SPD, and through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, it can create panic and project an image for country and people. The AfD

castigated lax immigration policies and government inaction in response to the worst migrant violence in Germany.

Some members of the AfD have also caused controversy by frequently making extreme and xenophobic comments on social media. Beatrix von Storch has repeatedly used inflammatory language to satirize and insult Muslim immigrants on social media platforms like Twitter. A year after the "sexual assault" in Cologne, police in cologne blessing for people in many languages. Von Storch tweeted: "Is country crazy? How can the official website of the NRW police publish tweets in Arabic? Is that enough to appease the brutal, Muslim world, the gang of adulterous men?" The remark caused great controversy and Beatrix von Storch's Twitter account was temporarily shut down. On January 1, 2018, Germany formally implemented the law of Internet enforcement to regulate illegal content such as hate speech and fake news on the Internet, which to some extent warned the party to be cautious about free speech, but still could not change the way that party members have been using the strategy of "playing the touch ball" to test the public's response.

4.3. The Impact on the Ruling Coalition

As the AfD has succeeded in winning over a large number of voters with its immigration message, other parties have said Germany needs a tough immigration policy while accusing it of deluding the public. Interior minister Seehofer issued a call for "Islam does not belong to Germany" shortly after taking office, and in July 2018 proposed his Masterplan Migration. He needs to reduce the influence of the AfD in Bavaria. One of the most controversial items of the document was the refusal of refugees registered in another EU country to enter Germany. Chancellor Merkel and other CDU members said the plan would not work at all, because it was in violation of the Dublin Regulation.

5. German Current Immigration Policy Is Towards Austerity

In the Bundestag, the AfD will continue to criticize the current immigration policy and influence the formulation of immigration policy, while outside the Bundestag, it will continue to influence public opinion and incite people to oppose immigration through social media and demonstrations. Based on the current immigration situation and the aggressive offensive of the AfD, German immigration policy will continue to develop in the direction of austerity. The coalition government will step up enforcement efforts to raise barriers to entry for immigrants and deport illegal immigrants, as well as efforts to integrate immigrants into German life and abide by the country's legal system.

5.1. Strictly Address the Issue of Refugee Admittance and Tightening Border Controls

In January 2018, the German coalition party and the SPD started negotiations on forming a government, and they agreed that the annual number of refugees accepted by Germany should be limited. The opposition criticizes generosity in accepting refugees and the government's weakness in deportations have made the problem worse, threatening to undermine the dignity of the law. More than 100 migrants try to prevent local police from deporting a Togolese man in Elwangen in May 2018. On the issue, "The intimacy between asylum seekers is growing and German law is becoming powerless." Alice Weidel said. Chancellor Merkel is determined not to take a unilateral approach to immigration. On June 29, 2018, EU member states reached an agreement to establish " control centers" on a voluntary basis to house refugees. Germany also signed an immigration agreement with Spain in August 2018 to repatriate asylum seekers who already registered in Spain back to Spain, which is also the first bilateral agreement on immigration between Germany and other EU member states. In addition, the coalition wants to

once again declare Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Georgia safe nation, making it easier to deport illegal immigrants.

5.2. Greater Efforts Are Being Made to Integrate Immigrants Into Germany and Cut Benefits

Turkish immigrants are German largest immigrant group, but Turkish immigrants tend to cluster with their own ethnic group. To facilitate the smooth integration of immigrants into Germany, two barriers need to be broken: language barrier and residential isolation barrier. The German government still spares no effort to encourage immigrants to learn German and offers various German courses. German language helps to eliminate the prejudice of native people against immigrants and helps immigrants to integrate into Germany as soon as possible. Another important reason for immigrants being difficult in integrating into Germany is ethnic residential segregation. Germany is a country with a relatively high degree of homogeneity in terms of race, language, religion and other aspects. Ethnic minorities live in a certain region and are isolated from German local society, resulting in two parallel worlds in the same field.

To reduce the influx of refugees, Germany lowered the expectations of immigrants by offering in-kind benefits rather than cash benefits at the original reception centers. In addition to the war refugees from the Middle East, Germany has received large numbers of migrants from within the European Union, mostly from Romania, Bulgaria and Poland. In 2016, Chancellor Merkel said publicly that there is no asocial welfare union in Europe and Germany does not welcome migrants who receive social benefits for nothing.

6. Conclusion

Based on the current German immigration issues, the German immigration policy will be tighten continuoslly. The issue of immigration has become increasingly important in German political life, even driving the changing trend of German political pattern and encouraging the spread of populism. Although many analysts said there was a protest vote, the voters turned to the AfD because they disliked Chancellor Merkel's immigration policies. Both the ruling coalition and the other participating parties must take a dispassionate approach to the rise of the AfD and its discussion of immigration or it would be easier for the AfD to present itself as a political victim and gain popular sympathy. The rise of right-wing populism and extreme right is more about expressing fear and dissatisfaction over terrorist attacks and the damage to their own interests. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier warned: "Fear of the future is normal, but it should not become suspicion of democracy." The immigration issue can never be solved by one country alone. Germany needs to cooperate with all parties, speed up consultation with all parties, establish a legal framework for the governance of immigration issues and strictly implement it, and build a new immigration management system of the EU. Only in this way can Germany and EU mitigate the current immigration crisis.

Acknowledgements

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