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Claremont McKenna College

The Trends of Right-Wing Populism in Germany Post-World War II

Submitted to
Professor Katja Favretto, Ph.D.

By
Savannah Green

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Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the trends of right-wing populism in tandem with immigration rates, economic indicators, and social welfare and active labor market initiatives in Germany after World War II. The current right-wing populist party in Germany, the Alternative for Deutschland, has had a sharp increase in support in recent years and currently sits as the third largest party in Germany. Looking at trends from past right-wing populist parties, I identify the important characteristics of the current climate that allow right-wing populist parties to flourish.

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Introduction

The twentieth century brought a clash of superpowers through constant disagreements in policy and power dynamics. Across the world as each country vied for a spot at the top through war and alliances. World War II provided a particularly detrimental time for Germany since it started the war with few countries above it and, ended with strict new legislation from the international community that strived to keep Germany from ever gaining the same level of power again. This legislation intentionally created the division of Germany into four segments that were each controlled by a different superpower. Eventually, France, Britain, and the United States combined their sectors, creating West Germany, and leaving East Germany by itself under Soviet Union control. This division would plague the country's history for decades.¹ From pure Nazism to the internment camps, Germany quickly became an enemy to countless countries across the world. For many Germans, the punishment for the terrible actions of the death camps was understandable. Stories are still being told today about survivors of those atrocities, and those in power have taken specific precautions to prevent a repeat of history.

While World War II was not necessarily a clear battle between the West and the East, it definitely created the beginnings of the rocky narrative that would play out in the Cold War almost immediately after World War II. Unfortunately for Germany, the Cold War split the country into opposing states and set the stage for the long conflict and recovery from this period that the German people would have to endure. Unlike ethnic

¹ "The Cold War Museum," Cold War Museum, accessed December 4, 2019.

conflicts that continue to plague the world today, this struggle came about as an ideological war between the West and the East, and Germany was caught in the middle. While other countries may have had small factions that disagreed with their government's decisions within the Cold War, Germany had a literal wall built between the two states, isolating ideas and preventing healthy debate and conversation. Those who were stuck in the East and felt they belonged in the West attempted to cross the wall and were promptly gunned down by militants in towers. The harshness of these drastic measures has left a deep scar in the German culture still visible today.

Focusing on the implications of this enforced divide, the polarizing actions of the wall drove strong wedges between the German people and allowed for continued implicit division even after the wall was destroyed. While the West embraced globalization and integration into open market policy, the East continued to pull itself closer to the Soviet Bloc and the traditional ways that emphasized nationalism and ethnocentrism. Differing from the internment camps throughout World War II, the wall targeted Germans. Germany may have been an instigator in the beginning of World War II and East Germany a large participant in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, but as I will explain later, the country left these wars defeated and in dire need of substantial rebuilding.

Throughout this paper, I will explain how right-wing populism came to be within Germany and the factors that provide it the platform to excel in the political playing field. I assert that the three main sectors that influence the rise and fall of right-wing populism are: immigration and globalization, economic trends such as unemployment rates, and social welfare and active labor market initiatives. While some of these terms may seem

foreign, I will define each and explain how it has shaped the rhetoric around right-wing populism in Germany, specifically after World War II until present day.

This paper was inspired by the quick rise in support for the current right-wing populist party, the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD). The AfD is by no means the first right-wing populist party to ever exist in Germany, but it is the first to gain the number of seats in the Bundestag that it holds today since WWII, specifically after the Nazi's lost power. It might seem simple to only look at the history of the AfD itself and what may have caused its rise, but I will look deeper into the historical trends of right-wing populism as a movement in Germany and from there, extrapolate to understand the importance of the record breaking performance of the AfD. My aim is to spark some concern in the possibility of a permanent switch to more nationalistic, xenophobic sentiments in Germany by assessing how the AfD has learned from former right-wing populist groups that has led to greater prosperity for the party than ever before. The rest of the world is right to be at least slightly alarmed by this idea, which is why it is important for us to look at likely trends instead of the AfD alone. As I explain throughout the paper, this phenomenon is not a fluke and should not be taken lightly.

While many countries across Europe have been experiencing rises in right-wing populism in recent years, Germany is an interesting case because right-wing populism, at its worst, has had a large impact on the country, its ethnic minorities, and the government's actions to mitigate the public dissidence. We can observe significant variation in its overall impact on the government, especially in times of crisis. Additionally, in 2018 I had the unique opportunity to study abroad in Germany and experience first-hand the effects of the sudden rise in populism in 2017 at the local level.

This paper begins by explaining what right-wing populism is before continuing into a separate chapter about each of the three sectors that are key indicators for right-wing populism, as I identified above. Finally, I will consolidate the argument into a concentrated lens assessing the AfD specifically and thus explain possibilities to look out for in the coming years in German politics using the assessment of previous trends of right-wing populism.

Chapter 1 – What is Right-wing Populism?

Right-wing Populism is a confusing term that provides little context into the movement and ideology behind it. While it has become more prevalent over the last few decades, it has been around for centuries. The term is best explained by separating it into two parts: right-wing and populism, before assessing the term as a whole. Most people are able to understand the fundamentals of right-wing groups from just hearing the term. Populism is much more alluding. As a movement, it allows the working class to seek protection for their culture and way of life through means of curbing globalization and providing security. Looking at both sides of the term will provide a concrete definition to an otherwise confusing political agenda.

Several economists have worked to define the term populism in simple terms. The most common factor they find is that populism does not fit into any clear boxes and instead is more ideological than many other political groups. Populism is most clearly defined by Ernesto Laclau, author of *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, and Populism*, as a political movement. The largest discrepancy between populist movements and established political parties, is that populism targets the working and lower classes that feel underrepresented. The movement itself is centered on gaining more representation but usually does not consist of a uniform power structure that will adequately provide these ends. Laclau describes it as “upholding an anti-status quo ideology” since their demands are often abstract instead of tangible.² Populism is often the political term used when a party does not have a uniform constituent base or a

² Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*(London: NLB, 1979), 151.

consistent set of demands between one movement to the next. Unlike other political parties that perpetuate due to their uniform organization and consistent constituent base, populist parties are often considered more rash since they are created from grassroots movements. They seek to shake the system and be the catalyst for change regardless of which side of the spectrum the party falls on, right or left.³

The other side of the definition is the right-wing aspect of these movements. This half provides more clarification for their demands of and qualms with the current establishment's goals and policies. Right-wing groups are often considered extremist and nationalist. They have been known to use violence and protests to catalyze the insecurities within the population. Many of the extremist groups have been Neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic. This extremist right-wing side preaches communal dependence and preservation, little care for marginalized groups, and a strong emphasis on xenophobia.⁴ Essentially, they are looking to protect the German culture and ethnicity from alteration due to integration of other groups of people. Unfortunately, instead of working to bolster the German culture, they have decided to create a platform around putting other groups down and prevent them from advancing within society, in an effort to preserve German culture.

The right-wing aspect works well with the populist part because both cater to the insecurities of the lower socio-economic classes who have the most to lose from globalization yet are also looking for the most change. The majority of people in this category worry about the decline of economic institutions and therefore will do anything

³ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2018), p.4.

⁴ Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994), p.4.

they can to prevent others from taking their small amount of security from them.⁵

Through the various mediums of propaganda from the leaders of these movements, fear and doubt are exploited and amplified until support is high enough for the party to gain seats within the government and provide the common citizen the opportunity to actually change laws. These parties operate under the guise that the average person knows best and therefore should be catered to by the government. They believe that without these lower-class people in the parliament, the government cannot ever be expected to provide correctly for them.⁶

Diving into the specifics of right-wing populism, Hans-Georg Betz has shown to be a leading analyst in the field specifically in the 1990s. Due to the nature of the right-wing populist groups emerging throughout Europe, and specifically in Germany at the time, the established government structure of Western democracy was formidably challenged by these parties. Instead of resorting to violence and radical, reactionary political actions, they began targeting governmental actions and finding non-traditional extremist ways to gain support.⁷ Since that time period, other analysts cite that while they have not resorted back to the extreme measures in full, they have not completely abandoned them either.⁸ Understanding that they are the type of group that needs to create a scene in order to be noticed and taken seriously, they have little choice but to be the loudest voice in any room. For example, many of their protests involve large

⁵ Hans-Georg Betz and Duane Swank, "Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe," *Socio-Economic Review* 1, no. 2 (January 2003): pp. 215-245, p.219.

⁶ Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism*, 4.

⁷ Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism*, 3.

⁸ Christina Schori Liang, "'Nationalism Ensures Peace': the Foreign and Security Policy of the German Populist Radical Right After (Re)Unification," in *Europe for the Europeans The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 139-175, p.144.

demonstrations where police officers need to separate right-wing populist supporters from opposition to prevent violence. Their fight for power as the underdog allows them to get away with trying new tactics to gain support, but also means that there is never comfort in their status because their platform hinges on several dependent variables.

Hans-George Betz assesses how to mitigate the risks of creating a right-wing populist group based on the types of people who are affiliated with it. He asserts that “systems characterized by comprehensive coverage of citizens within risk categories, a generous social wage and well developed active labour market programmes” are the key to keeping the working class satisfied and able to provide for themselves on a fundamental level.⁹ Making the constituent group that most supports these extremes satisfied with their opportunity within society is the most straightforward approach to curbing right-wing support. By securing the resources for citizens to take care of their families, the government can relax a little. People are tend to be fairly individualistic on a fundamental level and often just want the opportunity to earn a wage and create an enjoyable life for themselves and their families.

Taking this analysis a step further, other analysts such as Christina Schori Liang find examples of this clear need for security. She asserts that the “German populist radical right call for ethnic apartheid in Germany plays well with established popular perceptions that foreigners are an economic threat, depleting the social welfare system and exploiting the German taxpayer.”¹⁰ This analysis targets both the economic opportunities and social welfare the supporters believe they are entitled to. As more

⁹ Betz and Swank, 224.

¹⁰ Liang, 147.

people without jobs or other economic means flood into the country, it is understandable for those already teetering on the poverty line to become protective. Unfortunately, this protectiveness quickly turns into xenophobia. Their fear of losing their security becomes anger toward the people who have the potential to take it away, the government and the immigrants.

These threats to social welfare and economic security have increased since the end of WWII as globalization grew. After the internet and seamless communication were established, this rate increased exponentially. It is now easier to create widespread constituency groups since reaching and catering to them can involve social media and mass communication. The government can only limit portions of their digital platform so other means must be targeted if they want to minimize this threat.

Former right-wing populist groups have been prevalent in Germany for centuries even if there has been a rise since WWII. With the increase in globalization, economic fluctuation, social welfare institutions, and fear of losing everything, groups like this are not only important to create a balance between elites and the working class, but also to give everyone a voice. Democracy promises an equal voice for all citizens. One of the biggest qualms the party has with the current system is the high influx of refugees and immigrants who are receiving special privileges while those who are loyal citizens are barely making ends meet. After the election for the Bundestag in 2017, polls showed that “they perceive a climate of growing lawlessness and criminality in Germany. They feel disadvantages vis-a-vis refugees. 68 percent think that Germany is going in the wrong

direction and feel personally ignored and disadvantaged.”¹¹ As shown throughout history, the most successful groups are often those who have a personal connection to the cause. The more the middle and lower classes feel ignored, the more they will raise their voices.

Today, there is a right-wing populist party called Alternative for Germany (AfD) which is making large strides for their supporters. Learning from the tactics of former right-wing populist groups such as the Republikaner, which gained quick support in the 1980s, they are targeting the fears of those who are willing to mobilize and be unapologetically loud. In the 2017 election, the most important phenomenon was the staggering performance in support of the AfD. The party gained 12.6 percent of the vote which landed it as the third largest party in the country. This obviously sets those representatives up to create substantial change as the largest opponent to Angela Merkel’s coalition between the two largest parties, the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Union.¹² The advantage of having a platform that is not set in stone is that it allows the party better adaptability based on the political, social, and economic climate. In the current climate, the economy is fairly stable but the social welfare institutions and the perceived security of the border are more variable.

Even with this variability, the principal fear of wanting to preserve the German culture prevails. While in previous years the group that was threatening this delicate ideology may have been different, the group continues to assert that they “want stronger border security and that the influence of Islam is too great in Germany and that German

¹¹ Eric Langenbacher and Jonathan Olsen, “The Left Party and the AfD: Populist Competitors in Eastern Germany,” in *Twilight of the Merkel Era: Power and Politics in Germany After the 2017 Bundestag Election* (Berghahn Books, 2019), pp. 126-139, p.129-30.

¹² Langenbacher and Olsen, 126.

culture and language is being lost.”¹³ The quick turn to xenophobia is the most alarming aspect of the platform, especially in a time filled with international turmoil in developing countries and thousands of refugees seeking asylum. Germany has been a large provider of aid during these times of international crisis, but this could change in the very near future.

Populism is a malleable term that provides little context into the platform and policy it supports, and instead can be categorized better as a movement. It consistently targets the working class and those who are looking for a change in the current establishment as the country becomes a larger global entity and the government focuses outward. Right-wing groups are nationalist and protectionist and while there are varying levels of extremism within the spectrum, their demands do not change much. Right-wing populism thus provides the working class the means to act on their fears of globalization and security by protecting their culture and way of life using whatever means possible. The rapid growth of these groups has sounded alarms in the past and will continue to do so as they gain momentum.

¹³ Langenbacher and Olsen, 130.

Chapter 2 – Immigration and Globalization

Since the end of World War II, immigration in Germany has been a hot topic because of the trend toward globalization worldwide. World War II created a hostile relationship between Germany and many countries throughout the western world as it began the path of paying reparations for the damage done with two different states and two different foreign policy goals. West Germany was more open to the policy goals imposed by the western superpowers and the East German government fervently opposed them, but much of its population did not. By the 1980s, many German nationalists throughout East Germany became fed up with the western superpowers constantly putting Germany down. Additionally, the East German government in particular perceived the constant immigration through globalization as a direct threat to the preservation of their way of life. Globalization is defined as the process in which a country begins to take advantage of economic markets internationally. For Germany, and many other European states, this means lowering barriers to entry through allowing workers and goods to cross borders more easily. This agreement to lean into the European Union was not well received by right-wing populist groups and created an incubator for them to flourish among the masses. As the German government pushed for European integration and further globalization, right-wing populism listened to those who were uneasy about this large change.

The Republikaner was the first strong right-wing populist group that arose in the 1980s and persisted until shortly after the reunification of East and West Germany in 1990. This group thrived specifically in the East but was prevalent in both sides of the state prior to the reunification of Germany. Their platform centered on immigration and

being tired of the world seeing Germany as a lesser force. Following World War II, Germany took in the largest number of immigrants among European countries. While many of these immigrants were ethnic Germans returning after the war, those with a migration background quickly made up close to one-fifth of the population.¹⁴ This rapid influx of people coupled with a constant degradation of Germany for its actions in the war were highly conducive to the creation of right-wing populist groups. Throughout most of Western Europe, emigration from countries across the world occurred for decades after the end of the war. About 5% of the population in Western European states consisted of foreign immigrants by 1980 and steadily increased to 7% by 1999.¹⁵ Germany's role in accepting the largest number of immigrants among European countries provided a perfect opportunity for uneasiness and unwelcoming ideals. The rapid change creates fear which can lead to lashing out and violence against immigrants, who are perceived to be providing this new level of anxiety.

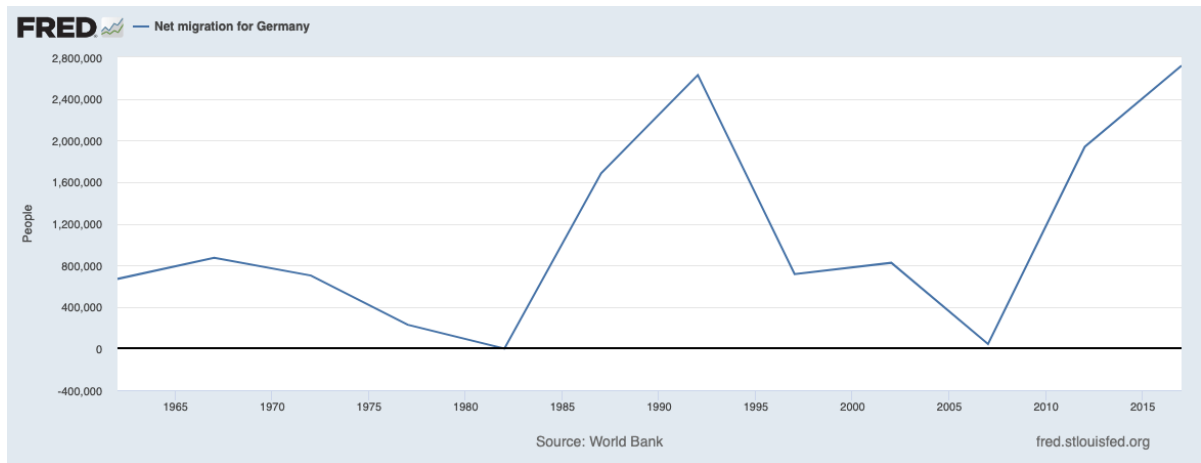
While most returnees that were ethnically German were accepted with open arms, the same cannot be said for those of different backgrounds. The bringing together of two very different sides of government and thinking during reunification created resentment among the German population. The reunification brought up mob-type mentalities specifically within those worried about security and ethnic preservation. There was a stark rise in mob violence incidents with racial and xenophobic motives. Once the rates of immigration began to decrease in the 1990s, the violence against those with migration

¹⁴ "On Integrating Immigrants in Germany," *Population and Development Review* 32, no. 3 (2006): pp. 597-599.

¹⁵ Betz and Swank, 220.

backgrounds also slowed.¹⁶ While the post-war era consisted of continuous, rapid immigration into Germany up until reunification, these rates eventually diminished and those with xenophobic tendencies relaxed slightly in the mid-1990s in parallel. The graph below shows the net migration trends in Germany from 1960 to 2017.¹⁷

Net Migration for Germany from 1962 to 2017



An important characteristic of right-wing populist groups is their strict nationalistic nature. Instead of embracing new workers and outside ideas, they search more within the current community which, in their eyes, solely consists of ethnic Germans that share their same culture. They constantly stress the need for a unified nation using the criteria that only ethnic, non-migratory Germans can participate.¹⁸ The leaders often pull in supporters using the fear that immigrants are seeking to change the German composition and therefore weaken the overall German state. All outside forms of government and political gatherings are labelled as foreign ideas that are meant to break up the German people and infiltrate the government. Additionally, they link these foreign

¹⁶ DOMiD, "Essay: Migration History in Germany," accessed November 1, 2019.

¹⁷ "Net Migration for Germany," FRED, September 20, 2019.

¹⁸ Liang, 166.

ideas with the Allied Powers that defeated Germany in World War II.¹⁹ By feeding off the fear of change and the resentment of German people toward the Allied Powers, the right-wing populist groups grew exponentially as thousands of foreigners entered the country.

One group that is consistently used as a martyr for the party's xenophobic ideals consists of those of Muslim decent. According to Germans, this group includes all those from Muslim countries regardless of their reason for migrating to Germany. Unlike other groups who are simply discriminated against, those in the Muslim population are considered a threat to society. Those who are outspoken in the party "estimate that over 80 per cent of Muslims are fundamentalists who believe in the violent destruction of all non-Muslims."²⁰ Using various terrorist attacks across the world, these groups paint a picture of pure destruction if the Muslim population is allowed to migrate to Germany. While the ruling parties have often tried to curb this threat, they find that only extra integration programs and grouped housing allows for the safety of these immigrants.²¹ The government holds a tough role in allowing people to express their opinions while also protecting all those who reside within the country permanently or temporarily.

Post World War II's trend toward globalization had many unknowns regardless of the later repercussions such as increased immigration and xenophobia. Prior to that, those within the middle and lower classes immediately shudder at the idea of globalization and its high costs and unknown benefits. The majority of the fear that right-wing populist groups feed off of comes from the unknown of the future, and the trend toward

¹⁹ Liang, 147.

²⁰ Liang, 157-8.

²¹ Liang, 157-8.

globalization was unprecedented at the time and provided a lot of anxiety for the general public. During the 1980s and 1990s, these groups received exponential support from those who were not excited to embrace the liberalization of economic restrictions and permeable borders that many mainstream political groups were preaching.²² The mass public provides a safety blanket for itself by vowing to stick up for those within the group when no clear outcome is evident. Any large change is daunting and the movement of the government toward western ideals seemed even less appealing than simple cooperation across borders.

These fears once again link to the resentment of the West for their forced changes to governmental proceedings and constant shame for the atrocities done. One of the party's priorities has been opposition to the European Union. The principal reason is for the suppressive nature of the Maastricht Treaty toward Germany specifically. They feel as though the European Union created precautionary measures that do not allow Germany to reach its full potential while also cutting down Germany's sovereignty.²³ It became easy to get caught up in the tangible goods, such as the burden of switching to the euro, that are apparent now instead of theorizing about the possible intangibles, such as larger free markets, of the future when surrounded by a group of like-minded people such as in these groups.

Before reunification, the West German government implemented a guest worker program to find people to do the work that requires lots of travelling and less stability. Unfortunately, this initiative was quickly taken as another progressive, pan-European

²² Betz and Swank, 223.

²³ Cas Mudde, "Die Republikaner," in *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 31-59, p.48.

idea.²⁴ Even after reunification, the xenophobic tendencies against these workers was very high. Most of these initiatives began before the reunification which do not create a favorable environment for guest workers after 1990. Many of them were deported, had their work permits cut short, and experienced harassment or violent xenophobic acts.²⁵ The complete reversal of rhetoric for the guest workers confirms the increased hostility in East Germany over West Germany.

Some scholars attribute the issues with guest workers to the East German government and their outward hostility toward immigration.²⁶ When the state unified in 1990, it brought the concentrated negative sentiments of East Germany and the guest worker programs of the West into direct contact. Within a few years of reunification, many guest workers were driven away. After successfully forcing the immigrants out, immigration rates slowed and the negative sentiments no longer had a prevalent outlet. During the mid-1990s the support for right-wing parties became much less vocal such as the Republikaner.

As shown in the mid-1990s, right-wing groups feed off of these xenophobic tendencies but also struggle without migrants to exercise them on. After the reunification, these groups were highly followed and supported along with the rise of the anti-immigration sentiments. Once the immigration rates began to reduce, The Republikaner lost support. These rates slowed because the government began to change the legislation surrounding immigration and asylum seeking. Germany found that many asylum seekers

²⁴ Göktürk Deniz, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p.23.

²⁵ Deniz, Gramling, and Kaes, 69.

²⁶ Deniz, Gramling, and Kaes, 69.

were travelling through several safe states before reaching Germany, creating an unequal influx of people. In 1993 they implemented the Asylum Compromise. This legislation outlined that all asylum seekers who passed through other safe states before reaching Germany would no longer be allowed to seek asylum in Germany. This was successful in curbing the influx since Germany is surrounded by safe states.²⁷ After reunification in 1990 and the Asylum Compromise in 1993, the Republikaner began to struggle with support. Their main tactic of using fear was no longer as prevalent of a sentiment as it had been in the 1980s.

The government also began implementing more measures that integrated immigrants into German culture and society. The government debated and eventually implemented dual citizenship to aid in the integration process. This allowed the immigrants to fully accept the society they were entering without having to give up all ties to their home country. Although it was not originally widely accepted by the German population, several methods of grassroots movements popularized the idea throughout the masses. One institution that preached dual citizenship was the church systems. Further, the newspapers emphasized the need for better integration into and understanding of the German culture by immigrants.²⁸ While dual citizenship allowed immigrants to better accept their lives in Germany, it also created a norm that German citizens did not need to be ethnically German which silenced many of the right-wing populist groups for a few

²⁷ DOMiD.

²⁸ Jeffrey T Checkel, "The Europeanization of Citizenship?," in *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*, ed. Maria Green Cowles, James Caporaso, and Thomas Risse (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 180-197, p.189.

years.²⁹ The Republikaner lost support and no longer posed a large threat going into the late 1990s due to many of these changes in norms.

Along with the addition of dual citizenship, the government began prioritizing immigrants' rights while also emphasizing better integration programs. In 2005, the Statistical Federal Office created a clear definition of those having a migration background. It labels all those who entered Germany after 1949 or have any immediate connection to another country either themselves or to a parent as having a migratory background.³⁰ This definition was extremely important because it allowed the government to better understand the population they needed to integrate as well as perpetuated the norm of German citizens being more than simply ethnic Germans. After creating this definition, the government could more adequately focus on the asylum seeking and recent immigrant group.

The Grand Coalition was the government that made the first tangible steps toward creating integration policy. In 2006, Angela Merkel held the first Integration Summit in which leaders of the community, religious heads, media, unions, and migrants were invited to participate. The wide spread of participants intentionally allowed people to be a part of the process of creating this inclusive legislation. The most important finding that triggered this summit involved the success rates of children in school. The Programme for Student Assessment found that students with different backgrounds had differing success rates in school and the government took this as a direct cause of poor integration for those students and families with migration backgrounds.³¹ Because of the

²⁹ Checkel, 190.

³⁰ DOMiD.

³¹ DOMiD.

prioritization of the German culture and raising expectations for anyone attempting to stay in Germany, those who originally opposed immigration waited to see the outcomes of these new government programs. Their most pressing concern was the acceptance of asylum seekers as they did not choose to leave their home countries and thus were possibly less likely to assimilate into the German way of life.

The same government also identified the consistent hostility toward those of Muslim decent and chose to tackle that separately. In addition to the Integration Summit they also held an Islam Summit in which Muslim organizations worked with the government to find better ways to accelerate the integration for Muslim people specifically.³² The government wanted to make a visible effort to show the people that they would not simply allow thousands of immigrants into the country without taking care of the German culture. Their way of doing this was through the writing of “a new national integration plan, the creation of a state ministry for integration and the initiation of the German Islam conference.”³³

The new national integration plan of 2005 included the implementation of mandatory courses for those who were not proficient in the German language. Courses of either six hundred or nine hundred hours of language instruction as well as a forty-five minute cultural integration session were highly recommended to those who needed it.³⁴ With the number of people migrating to or seeking asylum in Germany stagnant throughout the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the integration programs were given time to

³² DOMiD.

³³ Christian Joppke et al., “Germany,” in *Immigrant Integration in Federal Countries*(Montreal: MQUP, 2012), pp. 113-134, p.126.

³⁴ Joppke et al., 126.

work out the kinks. This period was also a fairly stable time for the government which gave it the confidence to implement large programs like the national integration plan and calm the skeptics. By this point, the Republikaner's support had mostly splintered off into separate political groups as the government continued to create policies that curbed the anxiety of the masses.

From 2005 until 2013, the stagnation of immigration ended. In 2005, those with a migration background made up close to 19% of the total population. This amount slowly increased to 19.5% by 2011 and began its rapid ascent to 20.5% just two years later.³⁵ Unfortunately for the government, these numbers continued to rise exponentially for several years creating the migration crisis in 2015 and 2016. Along with the rise in migration also came a stark increase in asylum seekers. From 2012 to 2013 Germany experienced a 70% increase in applications totaling to 109,580 applications and 60% more the following year. Most of the applications were from war-ridden countries such as Syria, Serbia, and Kosovo. The largest issue with the mass arrivals was the lack of ample time to prepare. The cities and camps quickly became overcrowded with refugees and all of the work the government put into the integration plan in 2005 was no longer relevant. Additionally, the quick resources and shelters put together during this crisis were not sustainable in the long term and thus created another problem for the government that had so recently found its footing.³⁶ Obviously, the large acceptance of immigrants and asylum seekers quickly awakened the sleeping right-wing populist groups and thus we see the quick rise of the AfD, the most current right-wing populist group.

³⁵ DOMiD.

³⁶ DOMiD.

Today, the same influx of immigrants that occurred in each large outbreak of right-wing populist sentiments is continuing to happen again. The migration crisis that rocked Europe spread right-wing populist groups across the continent. Specifically in Germany, people became increasingly protective of their way of life even if that means denying others a safe place to be. More explicitly, the migration crisis is a large influx of asylum seekers and immigrants specifically from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. The majority of the people brought very little with them as they fled from war-ridden, chaotic countries. In 2016, the close to 200,000 people attempting to migrate or seek asylum in Europe found the Western Balkan route closed. The EU-Turkey agreement also worked to end illegal migration from Turkey into the EU, putting a strain on the Mediterranean route.³⁷

The Mediterranean route created thousands of casualties and hundreds captured as small boats attempted to transport people from North Africa to Europe. Of the number of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean in 2015, 3,771 were either found dead or went missing.³⁸ While the EU-Turkey deal eased the massive flow of migrants entering from Turkey, the strain on the Mediterranean was not only deadly but also added stress to those countries that quickly became more likely to process asylum seekers such as Spain, Cyprus, and Italy. In turn, due to proximity, this placed a larger burden on Germany because the country is just inland of those hotspots. Unlike other countries across Europe that could easily adopt a no-immigration policy, Germany's centralized position in both

³⁷ Demetrios G. Papademetriou, "The Migration Crisis Is Over: Long Live the Migration Crisis," migrationpolicy.org (Migration Policy Institute, June 1, 2017).

³⁸ Kirk Bansak, Jens Hainmueller, and Dominik Hangartner, "How Economic, Humanitarian, and Religious Concerns Shape European Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers," *Science* (American Association for the Advancement of Science, October 14, 2016).

the European Union and physically within the continent forced the government to take action.³⁹ All refugees that were received were taken to camps where they could be processed and either granted asylum or turned away.

The European Union quickly mandated the Dublin Regulation which made the first country people sought asylum in would be the country to make the determination on their status as a refugee for the entirety of the European Union. This criteria stemmed from the need to stop people from claiming asylum in multiple countries after being turned away. Some found this to be harsh as several countries were stricter in their acceptance rate thus making it more desirable to make it to Germany or other more accepting countries before claiming asylum.⁴⁰ The chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, understood the unique position Germany found itself in as being surrounded by safe states and thus began taking in as many asylum seekers as possible. The struggle was immediately felt by the people as they watched their cities fill with unknown people who were fleeing their home countries and needed substantial help. Unlike immigrants who choose to leave their home country, asylum seekers only leave for survival which creates questions as to how much they are willing to integrate into society. Right-wing populism capitalized on this uncertainty and exploited the fears of the public.

Alternative for Germany was founded in 2013 and within a few short years shattered the precedent for right-wing populist groups in terms of support. In 2017, the AfD surpassed the 5% threshold to gain seats in the Bundestag with 13.3% of the

³⁹ Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner.

⁴⁰ J.-P. Brekke and G. Brochmann, "Stuck in Transit: Secondary Migration of Asylum Seekers in Europe, National Differences, and the Dublin Regulation," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28, no. 2 (June 2015): pp. 145-162, p. 146-7.

population vote and has continued to grow since.⁴¹ They currently hold the third largest number of seats at 91 of the 709 seats and because of the coalition between the top two parties, are the largest opponent to the ruling coalition.⁴² We find this rapid awakening of protectionist and xenophobic sentiments parallel to the exponential influx of asylum seekers and immigrants just like in the past. Unfortunately for the ruling party, there seems to be very little they can do to in preventative measures. Groups like the AfD start their movements with whispers through the masses and create a narrative around the fear of the unknown as immigrants flooded into the country. Instead of recognizing the integration programs and temporary measures that are in place, the AfD amplifies the worst case scenario and ties it to the newcomers.

The AfD, much like many right-wing populist groups before it, mostly wants to protect their Christian society especially against those with a Muslim background. Their Christian values are seen as intrinsic to everyday life and they refuse to let anyone from other religions take that away. They also believe in Germany as a Christian state and express the need for state support through encouraging German couples to have more children to protect the German race and culture from outsiders while simultaneously growing the ethnic German population.⁴³ The AfD understands that one of the key ways to protect the German culture is to create a larger constituent base. They continue to

⁴¹ Cas Mudde, "What the Stunning Success of AfD Means for Germany and Europe," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, September 24, 2017).

⁴² "Distribution of Seats in the 19th German Bundestag," German Bundestag, accessed October 20, 2019.

⁴³ Timo Lochocki, "Countering Right-Wing Populism: The AfD and the Strategic Dilemma for Germany's Moderate Parties," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, February 26, 2015, p.3.

preach hostility for those of Muslim background and highlight the key discrepancies between Christianity and Islam.

Although the AfD was not around when globalization first took flight after World War II, the party asserts many of the original ideologies of right-wing populism at the time. It continues to be highly critical and skeptical of the European Union and consistently points out the injustices Germany has been given since leaning into globalization. The party disagrees with a few key arguments, one of which will be discussed here. The first two involve the euro as an economic disadvantage and the general size of the European Union. The third involves sovereignty. This third qualm is most important in terms of immigration because during times like the migration crisis, Germany was forced to take in thousands of refugees and had very little choice in the matter because of its international agreements.⁴⁴ This is a clear example of the government making decisions for the people, and the people dealing with the consequences. While right-wing populism might be drastic at times, their emphasis is always on the individual citizen over the mass of newcomers.

One way that the AfD continues to prosper and focus on the individuals is their tactics for the types of issues they choose -to tackle politically. They often choose to discuss topics that should have been taken care of by the European Union or have disadvantaged Germany through someone else's doing. Instead of looking to face problems head on, they often use the European Union as a scapegoat.⁴⁵ One example is the migration crisis as mentioned above. During the late 1990s and early 2000s as the

⁴⁴ Lochocki, 4.

⁴⁵ Lochocki, 6.

government was creating integration programs and implementing dual citizenship, the right-wing populist groups were nowhere to be found. Only after a large crisis where every country across the European Union struggled to cope, the AfD comes alive and gains support quickly. The fear of outsiders infiltrating their lives moves them to xenophobic acts against immigrants and the denouncement of multiculturalism regardless of the policy changes that were implemented to keep everyone happy.

Looking at the last few years alone, Germany drastically increased its acceptance of asylum seekers every year with the jump from 2015 to 2016 being the highest during the peak of the migration crisis and continued on an upward trend from there. In 2016, Germany accepted 669,482 applications which was a 111.78% increase from 2015. 2017 brought a 44.93% increase from 2016 and 2018 totaled an acceptance of 1,063,837 applications for asylum.⁴⁶ While there were not nearly as many people seeking asylum in the 1980s when the Republikaner became a force to be reckoned with, the AfD is in a much more strategic position today than the Republikaner ever was. This is in direct correlation to the majority of immigrants being asylum seekers instead of economic immigrants.

One of the main differences between the AfD and right-wing populist parties that came before it is their emphasis on immigration policy. Due to the asylum seekers of the migration crisis, right-wing populism has needed to change its priorities to continue to draw from a large audience. The AfD has a wide range of supporters who all share the same fear of change due to the asylum seekers just as former parties like it, but the

⁴⁶ "Germany Refugee Statistics 1990-2019," MacroTrends, accessed November 3, 2019.

rhetoric has changed.⁴⁷ Originally, those migrating to Germany in the 1980s were often seeking economic opportunity instead of safety. This meant they had skills to contribute to the workforce and were willing to take jobs that Germans might not so readily take. With asylum seekers, there is a large social, ethnic, and economic burden associated with every person accepted.

Additionally, it is much harder to implement mandatory integration systems for a large influx of asylum seekers because the government is struggling to give them shelter and safety, let alone teach them German. As the AfD asserts, those who are already citizens of Germany should be the top priority of the government and preserving or bettering their way of life is the most important aspect of a government's job. There might be a moral obligation to help asylum seekers who have nowhere to turn, but if that means sacrificing the lives of Germans, the AfD is not on-board. One of the principal tactics to calm the right-wing populist groups in prior events was the implementation of these integration programs that prioritized German culture just as the AfD is looking for. Unfortunately, the short timeline and continued flow of newcomers has created a challenging situation for the current ruling coalition and now they have to handle the AfD in the national government as well as among the masses.

This chapter discussed the importance of globalization and immigration for the platforms of right-wing populist groups. The Republikaner fed off of globalization more specifically and cemented their voices in the fight against the guest workers. With immigration levels dwindling from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s right-wing populism

⁴⁷ Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013–2017," *Electoral Studies* 60 (2019), p.8.

took a slight hiatus but as shown by the quick rise of the AfD, could be revitalized at a moment's notice. The AfD centers more on immigration issues as a result of increased globalization. With the coupling of leaning into the European Union and the rapid influx of immigrants starting in 2015, the AfD capitalized and is currently the third largest party in the German Parliament.

The next chapters will discuss the economic trends and social welfare programs that, when coupled with the effects of globalization and immigration, are the perfect recipe for the rise in right-wing populist groups.

Chapter 3 – Economic Trends

Several economists might argue that right-wing populism essentially only worries about immigration rates and that economic woes have nothing to do with their trends, but much of the research that dives into individual trends disagrees. While these parties often have more rhetoric surrounding immigration policy, this influx of citizens affects the economy and as immigration and asylum application rates decrease, the burden on the economy lessens, and thus the support for right-wing populism goes down. It is naive not to consider economic shocks when assessing the trends of right-wing populism. While the literature shows that right-wing groups pop up more frequently in regions that have demonstrated more radical ideals in the past, there is a parallel in radicalization in terms of support for right-wing populist groups and economic shocks.⁴⁸ In this chapter I will explain the economic trends that affected right-wing populist support, but the next chapter will also play into this explanation as social welfare programs play a large role in how economic shocks affect the people.

While most of the literature acknowledges that globalization is the key component responsible for the rise in right-wing populism, labor market shocks and other massive economic changes aid in this drive toward radicalization. The increased job insecurity as well as the opening of trade relations are cited as constant examples for increased support.⁴⁹ The majority of these studies do not highlight government intervention in tandem with these shocks although they agree that globalization creates a split society

⁴⁸ Annie Tubadji and Peter Nijkamp, "Cultural Attitudes, Economic Shocks and Political Radicalization," *The Annals of Regional Science* 62, no. 3 (December 2019): pp. 529-562, p.561.

⁴⁹ Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig, "The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior in Western Europe," *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 4 (2018): pp. 936-953, p.939.

that can easily cause unrest. With the rapid changes in economy, groups that are less equipped to handle the shocks become the ‘losers’ of globalization. These ‘losers’ are more likely to revert to a herd-like mentality and support the party that promises them the most and shows them they matter. This trend can be seen through the rapid influx of support for the party and the overall emphasis on preserving German culture. This distress leads to the xenophobic, ethnocentric, radical thinking of right-wing populist parties. According to existing literature, people within this category are more likely to choose the less orthodox ways of thinking that is provided by these parties instead of the inclusive, multicultural nature of more left parties.⁵⁰

Hans-George Betz, a principal analyst in international politics, asserts his assessment on globalization and its various ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Those who are consistently marginalized by the globalization process are “blue collar workers, young people with lower levels of education, and the unemployed.”⁵¹ The majority of these citizens are not living lavish lives in the center of metropolitan cities but instead more likely on the outskirts of town, barely making ends meet. These areas are often populated by a large portion of immigrants because they are the most affordable areas with the small amount they have to their name. As economic shocks come into play, the fear of being taken over by immigrants and losing their livelihoods becomes a very real possibility. Betz explains that their largest complaint with society is that they feel

⁵⁰ Colantone and Stanig, 939.

⁵¹ Hans-George Betz, “The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 25, no. 4 (1993): pp. 413-427, p.423.

completely abandoned. They often find themselves in economic traps that they are unable to escape from unaided due to the institutions that are in place.⁵²

Another economic repercussion from globalization is the growth in economic competition. Many people who align with right-wing populist groups are not only feeling increased fear of immigration rates but also of the ability of their firms and companies to keep up with international competitors. In this case, the international economic competition affects the domestic economic climate and puts marginalized groups even more on edge.⁵³ For this exact reason, right-wing populist groups move toward governmental intervention in the form of social welfare programs for those who are most affected by economic shocks as long as they are not immigrants.⁵⁴ While different analysts have different definitions in terms of who falls into that group specifically, most agree that the worst case scenario is experiencing an economic shock without substantial governmental compensation for ethnic Germans.

One of the main draws to right-wing populism as explained in the first chapter is the shared fear of losing economic opportunities. While economic trends do not necessarily match up with the rise of right-wing populist groups as closely as globalization factors do, they are still a prevalent statistic that right-wing populist groups are dependent on. In a time of complete stability in economic terms, it is extremely difficult for these groups to gain support. As that stability begins to fade, the right-wing populist sentiments come out and the groups grow rapidly. One reason right-wing populist groups have gained support so quickly is because of the volatility in the

⁵² Betz, "The New Politics of Resentment," 423.

⁵³ Betz, "The New Politics of Resentment," 419.

⁵⁴ Colantone and Stanig, 939.

economic climate in Germany as a coupled effect with other crises. Only the government's social welfare programs are strong enough to keep order and like Betz alludes to, welfare programs that aid those who are victims of the change are the easiest way to calm right-wing populist sentiments.

After World War II German economic performance was growing rapidly. In the three decades after the end of the war, the country managed to keep their GDP growth around 5% and unemployment hit an all-time low at 0.6% by 1973. Unfortunately, after 1973 economic performance decreased significantly and by the late 1980s, Germany had almost a 9% unemployment rate.⁵⁵ This increase in unemployment directly correlates to the increase in right-wing populist support throughout Germany and specifically in the East. The Republikaner gained support very rapidly in the 1980s as people were watching and experiencing the spike in unemployment while the nerves of reunification mounted. Much of the research on unemployment focuses on structural aspects of society and how the institutions have changed with the different incentives created by the government.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, these rates did not get much better after reunification and the government was forced to increase its labor market initiatives.

The reunification exacerbated a large crater in East German infrastructure and left many without jobs. Many of the firms in East Germany were completely uncompetitive. The East German infrastructure was no match for its western counterpart and this became

⁵⁵ Jeffrey A Hart, "Germany," in *Rival Capitalists: International Competitiveness in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe*(Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press., 1992), pp. 181-222, p.181.

⁵⁶ Viktor Steiner, "Labour Market Transitions and the Persistence of Unemployment: West Germany 1983 - 1992," EconStor (Mannheim: Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung (ZEW), January 1, 1994), p.1.

extremely apparent when the western economy was struggling to keep the eastern side afloat in the market. Much of the world had advanced to capitalist structure while the East German economy was more traditional as a part of the Soviet Bloc. Instead of converting to capitalist infrastructure, the eastern government continued to stick with traditional export markets and unfortunately many of their trade partners were those in the Soviet Bloc. With the crumble of that faction and the move toward western practices, East Germany was left wildly unprepared to join the western world.⁵⁷

Thus, the western government was forced to implement completely new infrastructure and market structure across East Germany. The government began by implementing programs that privatized the existing firms in East Germany in an effort to create the path to competitiveness in the new capitalist environment. Additionally, the government needed to create self-sustaining practices that included the large industrial sector of the West. The overall goal for the West was to ignite the eastern economy using similar programs that helped western countries excel after World War II.⁵⁸ The West depended on the East as much as the East depended on the West because they now constituted the same country and thus needed both sides to succeed in order for the entire country to grow. The western government's rapid enforcement of social welfare programs on top of restructuring kept the government intact and allowed very little insurgency to rise up.

⁵⁷ Mark I Vail, "German Reunification and the Economic and Social Incorporation of Eastern Germany," in *Recasting Welfare Capitalism: Economic Adjustment in Contemporary France and Germany*(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), pp. 66-81, p.69.

⁵⁸ Vail, "German Reunification," 69.

The Eastern market struggled significantly upon reunification largely due to the conversion to the same currency as the west, the deutsche Mark. This change was implemented by the 1990 Treaty for German Economic, Monetary, and Social Union, which was created in anticipation of reunification and the merging of two starkly different markets. The original currency of the East was the Ostmark which held significantly less value than the deutsche Mark especially when paying for high price items.⁵⁹ The East German people were expecting to be given a 1:1 conversion even with the discrepancy in the value of the different currencies. As of 1989, the conversion was one deutsche Mark to 4.4 Ostmarks so employers and West German firms cautioned against a 1:1 gift to the East. The East's economy was significantly lesser than that of the West and a 1:1 split would exacerbate this.⁶⁰ The government settled on a 1:1 ratio up to 4,000 deutsche Marks and a higher rate past this threshold as a compromise. This rate allowed for the closest possible conversion that set both economies up for success. While this policy would create large repercussions for the entire country in the years to come, it was a key component of accepting East Germany and setting it on a path of convergence with the western market.⁶¹

This currency change forced many East German firms to pay workers at a largely inflated rate which was detrimental to many of their previous markets and labor force. The companies were forced to lay off considerable amounts of workers, contributing to the already rising unemployment rate. Unfortunately, many firms were left unaided as the

⁵⁹ Vail, "German Reunification," 70.

⁶⁰ Irwin L Collier, "On the First Year of German Monetary, Economic and Social Union," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 4 (1991): pp. 179-186, p.183.

⁶¹ Vail, "German Reunification," 70.

western government did not allocate nearly enough money to this project and thus a large portion of the burden was placed on the already suffering eastern firms themselves.⁶² Since the economic stability of the East now directly affected the West, this budgetary miscalculation was hurtful to everyone. In a normal circumstance, the right-wing populist groups would be gaining rapid support and running rampant. Fortunately, after this shortfall by the government, they quickly enacted programs that directly targeted unemployed East German workers. The Republikaner began slowly losing support after these programs were implemented and was obsolete by 1995. This will be addressed more substantially in the next chapter, but without these programs, the unrest of the public would have been extremely high, creating a perfect environment for right-wing populism to grow.

The worst part for the citizens of East Germany was the rapid decay of their livelihoods from one of the top countries in the Soviet Bloc to being essentially ripped down and built back up almost entirely by the western government. During the early 1990s, the unemployment rate of East Germans skyrocketed with some areas in East Germany having close to 25 percent unemployment. Unfortunately, the industrial export market collapsed along with all other markets from the East and never quite recovered to its original output levels. By 1994, the unregistered unemployment rate was at 15 percent with 1.1 million people registered. A large portion of the population was also working part time and thus did not count in the unemployment bracket but were still not making a substantial living.⁶³

⁶² Vail, "German Reunification," 70.

⁶³ Vail, "German Reunification," 72.

The first five years after reunification were very telling for the East German economy and for Germany as a whole. Luckily for the sitting government, the right-wing populist groups were just as jumbled as the infrastructure system which is a large reason the Republikaner slowly dwindled in the 1990s and eventually disappeared from policy. The western government was also transparent with its rhetoric and the German citizens understood that in order to be competitive internationally, restructuring the East German market was crucial. If there is a tangible, economic goal in sight and the government is actively helping those who are normally neglected, populations will rarely rise up in protest. This left the western government room to implement its many social welfare programs that kept anti-government sentiments at bay.

Luckily, the programs enacted by the government in the beginning of the 1990s began to pay off in the second half of the decade. The manufacturing sector in the East began increasing its output with 28 percent growth between 1995 and 1998. Also, per capita output increased significantly. At the beginning of reunification, per capita output was 30 percent of West Germany's and by 1996 had jumped to 56 percent. After this swift increase, the progress began to slow but this positive growth allowed the entire country to breathe a sigh of relief. By the mid-1990s it became apparent that while the government's economic programs were painful at first, they were delivering the benefits they promised in a reasonable amount of time. Real wages and productivity rates also rose with most East German households' incomes reaching at least 75 percent of their western counterparts by 1998. These effects can be directly linked to the restructuring of infrastructure and capital stock throughout East Germany.⁶⁴ Right-wing populism quickly

⁶⁴ Vail, "German Reunification," 79.

lost its gusto as the economic situation of East Germans improved and the public was willing to wait out these policies.

Coupled with the disorganization of the Republikaner party, right wing populist sentiments were fairly quiet during this restructuring process because of many of the social welfare policies that the government implemented. Although these programs were not perfect, they substantially decreased the amount of people without an income altogether. Many of the programs were specifically aimed at helping people from East Germany who lost their jobs directly due to reunification and restructuring. These programs directly combatted the spike in economic woes during the 1990s and provided at least a small sense of comfort to the public. The social welfare programs and their effects will be further discussed in the next chapter.

The direct approach of the western government allowed for quick success across the country. One of the most influential programs on the wellbeing of the population was the subsidy program that targeted “export-oriented firms” in order to endorse the process of “fixed-capital formation.”⁶⁵ Along with other investments and special provisions to aid in capital accumulation, the West German government also emphasized the need for substantial research and development within each firm especially as their markets changed so drastically.⁶⁶ Without these programs, many of the East German firms that survived likely would not have. The very intentional investment in East German firms and overall wellbeing was key in keeping right-wing sentiments down. Other than a few xenophobic violent acts in 1991, the government successfully kept those on the fringe

⁶⁵ Vail, “German Reunification,” 73.

⁶⁶ Vail, “German Reunification,” 73.

from jumping into right-wing populism as seen in the previous decade.⁶⁷ Large market transitions such as the restructuring of the entirety of the East German infrastructure in just a few short years had large potential to add to the rhetoric of right-wing populist groups, but with the correct approach by the government, these battles were avoided and the convergence between the two economic sides of the country continued as seamlessly as possible into the 21st century.

From the 1990s to the mid-2000s, these programs successfully kept down the nerves and boosted nationalism throughout Germany. For the first time since the Cold War and the separation of the country, Germany was proud of where it was headed. Although the unemployment rates were still relatively high throughout this period, people knew this high rate would not last long. In 2005 the unemployment rate peaked and then quickly began its descent until present day as shown in the graph below.⁶⁸

Total Unemployment Rate in Germany from 1991 to 2019

⁶⁷ Vail, "German Reunification," 76.

⁶⁸ "Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Germany," The World Bank, September 2019.



The restructuring and revitalizing of the labor market was officially bearing fruit after almost 15 years since reunification.⁶⁹ While this is normally too long of a time to wait before becoming restless as a population, the mass of government programs that targeted the exact people who were marginalized by these changes instead created trust and confidence in their government. People are able to overlook a few years of grit if they are given a tangible timeline with programs that are specifically placed and carried out. Public masses often rally with each other through these hard times as long as the government is being transparent and genuine.

The programs that were most specific in terms of revitalizing the labor market were subsidizing the private sector to endorse job creation and restructuring the job-placement services sector. These programs, while setting clear guidelines for

⁶⁹ Mark I Vail, "Modernizing the French and German Labor Markets in an Age of Austerity," In *Recasting Welfare Capitalism: Economic Adjustment in Contemporary France and Germany*(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), pp. 82-114, p.86.

unemployment benefits, mainly attacked the labor market issues from both bottom-up and top-down.⁷⁰ Additionally, from 1998 to 2002 the government increased its funding to these programs. During this time, the relative expenditures of the government increased from 34.6 percent to 43.6 percent. The government saw the need to increase budgetary expenditures for the labor market to speed up the recovery. From 2003 to 2006 expenditures once again drastically increased and climbed to 38.7 billion euros being put directly into the labor market. As they saw the unemployment rate finally start to fall in 2005, they decreased this total amount but continued with targeted policies and began to watch their hard work pay off.⁷¹

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a large complaint of the AfD is the introduction of the euro. Much of the reason this change did not ignite complaints earlier is due to its gradual implementation. There was a three year changeover period that allowed people to gradually begin using euros starting on January 1, 1999. They were still taken as payment until February of 2002 because of a joint agreement between the retail and banking sectors to allow a complete and seamless transition.⁷² Without these strategic actions, the East German market in particular may not have been able to sustain another rapid change in currency. The reason the AfD is opposed to the euro is because they believe Germany was cheated into using this new currency and that they have lost out on economic prosperity because of it.⁷³ The euro is the equivalent of almost two deutsche Marks which requires conversion of all products and adjustment for the people.

⁷⁰ Vail, "Modernizing the French and German Labor Markets," 86.

⁷¹ Vail, "Modernizing the French and German Labor Markets," 107-8.

⁷² "Germany and the Euro," European Commission - European Commission, August 1, 2018.

⁷³ Lochocki, 4.

The government understood that this adoption was a necessary step in integrating Europe which is another large complaint of the AfD. Regardless of their thoughts, the gradual implementation of the euro was the difference between increased economic unrest and containing the fears of the public.

Additionally, the economic crisis in 2008 placed a large burden on Germany's economy and the entire population looked to Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, to fix the problem. While Germany began to finally reap the benefits of all the hard work put into the economy from 1995 to 2005, Europe partially blamed Germany for the economic crisis that started in Greece and spread quickly to the peripheral countries of the EU. Those quick to point fingers saw issues with Germany's continuous wage increases and export performance since it drove prices up across the EU and allowed German companies a competitive edge over other firms. These scholars also label Germany as a large beneficiary of the euro, which is highly contended domestically.⁷⁴

The rescue package put together by the top countries in the EU became a highly contentious topic in Germany. While Angela Merkel tried to negotiate a fair package that both protected the hard work of the German people in recent decades and helped the countries in need, her actions were not well received. The German people regarded Merkel as a more frugal chancellor and argued that the wage rates and high levels of exports are due to the many social welfare programs and budget balancing actions taken prior to this point. With the rescue package, German taxpayers were now obligated to send much of their hard work across borders to countries that did not go through the

⁷⁴ Willi Semmler and Brigitte Young, "The European Sovereign Debt Crisis: Is Germany to Blame?," *German Politics and Society* 29, no. 1 (January 2011): pp. 1-24, p.1.

painstaking process of reunification. Unfortunately for Merkel, the rescue package began the slow decline of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) with a loss of 10% in key districts during the election in 2010.⁷⁵ It is clear that this marked the beginning of the switch from rational politics to right-wing populism.

Fast forwarding to 2013, the AfD gained quick support from the public. From reunification there was a common idea of Eastern Deprivation. This idea came about under the constant understanding that the more recently formed eastern states needed more help and aid than western states. For the first few decades after reunification, the West simply needed to help the East if the entire country wanted to excel to the top. But after waiting for about two decades, this sentiment did not subside as the government might have hoped. The AfD received a significant portion of its support from eastern states that had higher economic unrest. Especially in the later elections such as the one in 2017 when the party actually gained seats in the Bundestag, the high rates of unemployment and low GDP coincided with high support for the AfD.⁷⁶

Many of the voters that began supporting the AfD were from major parties or did not vote in previous recent elections. This switch can be attributed to the “uneven distribution of economic strength, disposable income, and access to the labor market” that are especially prevalent between East and West Germany.⁷⁷ Even after decades of market rehabilitation, the benefits were short term and have created large structural issues

⁷⁵ Semmler and Young, 7-8.

⁷⁶ Matthias Quent and Christoph Richter. “Democracy Under Stress: Right-Wing Success at the German Parliamentary Elections: Socio-Economic and Political-Cultural Influences,” in *Stifled Progress – International Perspectives on Social Work and Social Policy in the Era of Right-Wing Populism*, ed. Kerry Dunn and Jörg Fischer (Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2019), pp. 41-58, p.48.

⁷⁷ Quent and Richter, 49.

throughout Germany that hold the advantage in Western German states. The majority of the voters that switched to the AfD were from economically poor constituent bases. Within these states, there remained large discrepancies in the economic and demographic factors. The unemployment rate averaged 34% and the percentage of individuals qualifying for social welfare programs was 37% higher than the average for all of Germany. Additionally, both disposable income and economic strength averaged 14% and 23% below the rest of the country respectively.⁷⁸

Many political analysts also note that the AfD does not follow this exact structure of economic unrest determining increased right-wing populist sentiments. There are a significant number of states that are also economically stable and have high support for the AfD.⁷⁹ This is important to note because right-wing populist groups are never dependent on only one aspect of the political climate. Economic unrest is only one portion of the draw to right-wing populist groups. In the case of the more well-off supporters, it is understandable that while they are comfortable in their employment and their income, they are tired of constantly having to pick up the slack of the eastern states.

The ability to not only draw from several different socio-economic groups, as well as persuade voters who abstained previously, is how the AfD has been so successful even with certain government programs in place to reduce their growth. Not every state in East Germany is poor and West Germany rich which is exactly what gives the AfD a comparative advantage in terms of economic policy.⁸⁰ Their breadth of supporters from

⁷⁸ Quent and Richter, 50.

⁷⁹ Quent and Richter, 49.

⁸⁰ Quent and Richter, 50.

all economic backgrounds helps explain their rise to becoming the third largest party seemingly overnight.

The rhetoric surrounding right-wing populist groups and economic stability varies significantly depending on the economic climate of the time since these groups have continued to adapt. While some authors believe economic climate is not essential to the platform of right-wing populist groups, I assert that it increases participation and drives more extreme views. One of the few ways the German government was able to stay on top of groups like the AfD for so long was its dedication to social welfare programs that specifically target the groups that were most affected and least cared for. Much of that group was from East Germany which explains the slow decline of the Republikaner and the rapid growth of the AfD decades later. While these groups may not center their platforms on economic policies, they feed off of economic unrest in tandem with increased globalization. While the rises and falls of economic trends are not exactly parallel with those of right-wing populist groups, without social welfare programs to catch the disadvantaged, these trends can boost support for right-wing populist groups.

Chapter 4 – Social Welfare Programs and Active Labor Market Initiatives

Social Welfare programs can be the difference between public support for a government and uncontrollable unrest. The government plays an instrumental role in curbing the anxieties of the general public and these programs provide a safety net for those on the edge of slipping into unemployment. Programs that prioritize those in the population who are likely to suffer from economic changes due to globalization are the best way to prevent widespread panic while working toward economic prosperity. As shown in the previous chapter regarding economic trends, the large ebbs and flows of the economy are extremely variable and instability increased after reunification in 1990. The principal reason right-wing populist groups were not as prevalent during this spike in unemployment and economic unrest is due to the social welfare programs established in Germany and the government's willingness to alter the programs as the attitudes around them changed. This chapter will address this exact proposition while outlining the social welfare programs and active labor market initiatives that were key to curbing right-wing populism for so long and why the AfD was able to break the dry spell for these groups.

Before the 1990s, the government had more hands-off policy in terms of social welfare programs. The economy in each sector of Germany was stable and did not need much in terms of safety nets to catch the unemployed. This being said, there was still social security and unemployment benefit programs for those who did find themselves unemployed. Most scholars agree that systems that create the most comprehensive coverage of citizens who are at risk from falling into the lowest income bracket as well as active labor market programs are the easiest way for a government to prevent right-wing

populism from rising.⁸¹ A government that is involved in the wellbeing of its citizens is more likely to have their support, especially in times of need. In this case, if insecurities do arise, the safety net programs are there to provide aid until the market stabilizes again.

With the reunification, the western government was forced to not only extend its already existing programs to those in East Germany but also modify them to accommodate for the rapid influx of people qualifying. The adjustments strategically targeted East Germans specifically. The government implemented an early-retirement program as well as more active labor market programs. These programs included job creation projects and incentives for firms to retrain those integrating from the East. All the firms involved in the programs were given subsidies from the government to entice them to participate. Additionally, the government created short term work projects that allowed East Germans to temporarily continue earning the same income as they did before reunification. Not only did these policies ignite the markets toward convergence, they also illustrated the dedication the government was willing to put into the eastern market.⁸²

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the government was not completely selfless during the creation of the labor market and social security programs specifically for the East. In order for the entire German market to survive, the western government knew there would need to be a nearly seamless convergence between the markets which included taking care of those suffering from the restructuring process.⁸³ The general understanding was that the western government needed to show full dedication to those

⁸¹ Betz and Swank, 224.

⁸² Vail, "German Reunification," 68.

⁸³ Vail, "German Reunification," 75.

suffering in the East or unrest would quickly turn to outrage and could ruin the entire country. Without this key agenda, the Republikaner would have gained support again and may not have disappeared so quickly.

East German social welfare protection began with the Unification Treaty which agreed to transfer all existing West German political, social, and economic programs to the East at the beginning of reunification. The population falling under these programs increased from 65 million to 81 million people with the addition of East Germans.⁸⁴ This proved to be a hefty test for the infrastructure of the West German welfare state but ultimately the government was willing to continue to alter the system as needed in order to keep the country afloat and unite the people under one government successfully.

After implementing the Unification Treaty, the government increased the eastern social security budget substantially in 1991. While this influx of funds did not fix all of the problems in East Germany overnight, the government was hopeful. Unfortunately, “total public social expenditures ballooned from 23.2 percent of GDP in 1990 to 27.6 percent in 1993, while the federal budget deficit grew from .1 percent of GDP in 1989 to 3.5 percent in 1993.”⁸⁵ With the Republikaner still having a foothold in German politics, the government knew time was of the essence. Specific programs were implemented for East Germans who were unemployed due to the market restructuring process. As mentioned above, the early-retirement programs and active labor market projects targeted East Germans and kept the masses from running to the Republikaner or more far-right groups.⁸⁶ These programs are part of the reason the Republikaner lost its household name

⁸⁴ Vail, “German Reunification,” 76.

⁸⁵ Vail, “German Reunification,” 76.

⁸⁶ Vail, “German Reunification,” 76.

around 1995 and the next prominent right-wing populist group, the AfD, did not emerge until 2013.

The active labor market projects were a collaboration between the government, unions, and employer associations. They created training programs and placement agencies that worked specifically with East Germans. The agencies focused on both short and long-term employment to minimize the number of people without any income. East Germans who were unemployed because of reunification were the top priority and all programs were well financed by government institutions even with the growing budget deficit.⁸⁷ Due to the number of programs, the total amount of social expenditures increased from 24.8 percent to 29.6 percent of GDP during the first five years after reunification. This growth directly combats the various economic shocks, such as increased unemployment rate, because they focus on the wellbeing of each individual.⁸⁸ Although the unemployment rate was high throughout this period, the people saw first-hand the different policies being put in place to help East Germans in particular which provided comfort to the general public and illustrated the government's consideration of the working class as a whole. Thus, it is no surprise that the Republikaner died out by 1995 even with rising unemployment rates.

From 1994 to 1998, the Kohl government introduced more social welfare reforms that focused on "fiscal consolidation" and adapting to the constantly changing societal norms and economic status. Unfortunately, this campaign was too rigid for the country because this consolidation ended up costing the government its power in 1998 and did

⁸⁷ Vail, "German Reunification," 77.

⁸⁸ Vail, "German Reunification," 79.

little in terms of new legislation that helped the general population.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the Schröder administration moved in 1998, learned from the mistakes of the previous government, and expanded social welfare expenditures and payback programs. This government extended social security measures to those who were working less than 15 hours per week while simultaneously putting more funding into reimbursing taxes to those in lower wage brackets. The goal was to universalize more help to lower wage workers through social protection measures.⁹⁰ The programs in place to specifically help workers who were employed but only part time allowed more time for the market to settle and continue convergence toward western levels of output and revenue. They also settled any possible beginnings of anti-government, right-wing populist thoughts by directly focusing on those who were still marginalized in the system by going beyond existing programs.

By now, political elections and all political party platforms centered on social welfare and unemployment. The 1998 election set the precedent for decades to come as the political parties that held the most seats created an era that was known for its social policy reform. With the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) now in power, the rhetoric shifted a little to emphasize individualization and prevent people from exploiting the unemployment benefits system. The era from 1998 to 2009 was key in implementing social welfare programs and finally getting on top of the unemployment rate. This government went back to a more traditional German welfare structure with an emphasis

⁸⁹ Christoph Arndt, "Germany," in *The Electoral Consequences of Third Way Welfare State Reforms: Social Democracy's Transformation and Its Political Costs*(Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 99-126, p.101.

⁹⁰ Vail, "Modernizing the French and German Labor Markets," 108.

on making sure people are not cheating the system. The two-tiered unemployment insurance system allowed people to gain benefits for an unlimited amount of time as long as they fit a certain income criteria. One of the tiers was tax-funded to create accountability and allow those with lower incomes to get help. The other was based on individual contributions in the past which could be paid for by the program for a total of 32 months. They made the programs slightly more universal than the traditional system but the overall principles of receiving unemployment when needed while also imposing accountability for those taking from the system as well.⁹¹ During the Schröder administration's first term, much of the policy was put in place to stabilize the market and shift the burden of financing from the government to the revenue sector which was key to reducing taxpayers' burden and thus began to spread the responsibility more evenly between East and West Germany.

The next era of the Schröder administration emphasized the importance of self-reliance and being able to rely on those around you to help in times of need. The Schröder government did not take away welfare systems but instead restructured them to encourage people to take responsibility and invest in the economy. The government had long instituted the important role of universal banks and their aid in allowing employees across all sectors to take ownership and become shareholders in firms. The universal banks in particular created a push toward a positive relationship between employees and employers through this encouragement of ownership.⁹² Long-term investments are the

⁹¹ Arndt, 104-5.

⁹² Steven Weber and Nicholas J Ziegler, "Corporate Governance in Germany: Toward a New Transnational Politics?," in *Globalization and the European Political Economy*(New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 197-228, p.200.

exact influxes of money that allow firms to further their worker training programs and keep more employees full-time. This push to revamp labor market relations is one of the beginning actions that the Schröder government took to create a more forward-looking policy.

Beginning in 2004 the unemployment system was drastically changed to reflect the new goal of more self-reliance. The government knew that it could not take all of the welfare policies away but instead that they could encourage those who get help from the programs to instead help themselves more. Prior to 2004, the unemployment compensation program covered all those who paid into the social insurance in previous years, those who did not have insurance, and all others. The government split the burden between two bureaucracies and all of the help was need-based. Both prior income and the amount of time unemployed were taken into account when providing benefits. Additionally, the placement agencies as mentioned above were implemented at the local level which provided variation but was more individualized than previous infrastructure and focused more on intermediate areas of the labor market that needed more workers.⁹³ The universalized programs were the ignition to pushing those in lower income brackets to be able to stand on their own and these programs quickly paid off as unemployment rates dropped starting in 2005.

While the welfare programs of the 1990s were not long-term, sustainable policies, they were instrumental in getting East Germany on the path to convergence with West Germany. These programs created large deficits in the government budget that needed to

⁹³ Dirk Jacobi and Katrin Mohr, "Rushing Towards Employability-Centred Activation: the 'Hartz Reforms' in Germany," in *Making It Personal: Individualising Activation Services in the EU*, ed. Rik Van Berkel and Ben Valkenburg (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2007), pp. 217-242, p.219.

be addressed later, but their main purpose was to support East Germany in a time of large transition and they were successful.⁹⁴ The constantly adapting welfare system provided benefits for a wide-array of people and prioritized those marginalized by the system. The largest constituent base of right-wing populist groups was thus fundamentally taken care of and supported. Much of the rhetoric around right-wing populism is the need to shake up the system that is not providing the benefits it is supposed to. In a large transition like reunification, the government very easily could have prioritized GDP growth without being willing to take the backwards steps to rebuild and create lasting prosperity. Additionally, the strategic social welfare programs may have required slightly more recovery in future years, which I address next, but were instrumental in keeping public unrest at a minimum and right-wing populist groups from rising throughout this vulnerable period.

As both sides of the country progressed in total revenues and decreasing unemployment rate, the government became more restrictive in its criteria for receiving benefits. By 2005, West Germany had been subsidizing East Germany for almost 15 years and was ready to create a more well-rounded system of self-reliance. The programs that were in place did not disappear but the government was less eager to point people toward them. Instead, they encouraged people into the intermediary market even if it was not the job they were looking for.⁹⁵ One of Schröder's main platforms from the beginning was the idea of providing agents for active citizenry instead of handing out unemployment aid at no cost.⁹⁶ The tightening of benefits was targeted at those trying to

⁹⁴ Vail, "German Reunification," 68.

⁹⁵ Jacobi and Mohr, 219-20.

⁹⁶ Jacobi and Mohr, 222.

game the system and simply earn unemployment benefits instead of actively looking for a job. This example is one of the main reasons for a rapid switch in social welfare rhetoric from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. Specifically those in the West were becoming tired of supporting those in East Germany so the government compromised by scaling back the programs but refusing to scrap them altogether.

The important distinction in this change in policy is that self-reliance is not the same as individualization. The German population defines these changes as leaning on each other instead of the government and social welfare systems. Not only did this policy ensure that everyone was pulling equal weight among local communities but that neighbors would help each other in times of need, generating a strong social network.⁹⁷ This shift took much of the burden off the government and ultimately off the shoulders of the taxpayers. It also implemented a more local approach to curbing insecurities as the people relied on each other to make it through tough times but still had the government to fall on if necessary. The government found that the majority of the population wanted to actively provide for themselves and those around them. Overall, the government pushed to create both an active and a self-reliant population that collectively cared for the wellbeing of the state and each other.⁹⁸

The alterations to the social welfare system created more localized programs that provided one-on-one support for people who were unemployed. The largest difference between these more-current programs and former ones was the need for more documentation and proof of hardship in order to receive benefits. One large complaint of

⁹⁷ Jacobi and Mohr, 222.

⁹⁸ Jacobi and Mohr, 224.

those consistently paying taxes and funding these programs was about “free-riders.”⁹⁹

With the stabilization of the unemployment rate, the government needed to adapt to the new demands of the people. They came up with the Hartz Acts which are specific guidelines explaining the circumstances under which a person can receive benefits. The Hartz Acts were part of an overarching policy change called Agenda 2010 that was principal in the government’s goal of creating self-reliance as well as making it harder for free loaders as explained above.¹⁰⁰

The Hartz Acts redefined the entitlement structure that originally individualized the labor market and the social welfare system as a more comprehensive, cohesive program. This policy married Unemployment Assistance and the local job-creation agencies by outlining stricter income status and living standards needed to receive the same benefits as before. Social policy like the Hartz Acts allows the local governmental employment agencies to decide on unemployment benefits and force people to actively look for a job. Basically, the social welfare system no longer benefits those under long-term unemployment because it was now assumed the person was not seeking a job at all.¹⁰¹ This policy may have had more push back in the previous years but since unemployment rates declined rapidly starting in 2005, the government did not need to be as lenient in order to ensure general contentment throughout the population. Additionally, it can be assumed that this policy also helped ignite the decline in unemployment rate

⁹⁹ Sigrid Betzelt and Ingo Bode, “German Angst in a Liberalised World of Welfare Capitalism: The Hidden Problem with Post-Conservative Welfare Policies,” in *Social Policy Review 29: Analysis and Debate in Social Policy, 2017*, ed. John Hudson, Catherine Needham, and Elke Heins (Bristol; Chicago: Bristol University Press, 2017), pp. 127-150, p.137.

¹⁰⁰ Betzelt and Bode, 135.

¹⁰¹ Jacobi and Mohr, 226-7.

because it forced people into jobs that were not their first choice but provided them an income regardless. While seemingly harsh, the government truly began to take all taxpayers into account regardless of which income bracket they fell into. It was time that wealthier citizens were not required to support those who choose to be picky about employment.

The long-term unemployed were forced to lean on those around them or to take the first job offered to them. For anyone who was unemployed and did not accept a job or training offer, their benefits could be cut by 30%. The rhetoric was extremely harsh on those just entering the market since the same choice could cut them from benefits completely for three months. The idea behind these strict policies were to cut free-riders off from unemployment benefits and instead focus on increasing employment for those who are able, especially younger people entering the market.¹⁰² While these stringent policies put a lot of pressure on the unemployed to find a job, it took the weight off the government to fund these people and instead incited a general feeling of responsibility for both individual and communal wellbeing. These reforms were seen as a positive, specifically in the middle class since they were consistently paying the taxes that funded these entities. Now, the government had successfully found a source of income for those unemployed, listened to the worries of the middle class, and set economic indicators like unemployment rate on a downward trend for the first time since reunification.

Strategically, each of the Hartz Acts were aimed at a different section of the economy with all acts having the underlying goal of promoting active market policy. In addition to urging people to take part time jobs instead of always seeking full time

¹⁰² Jacobi and Mohr, 226.

employment, the Second Hartz Act encouraged people to consider becoming self-employed by creating a subsidy for them. The government wanted to continue the creation of new jobs to prevent the unemployment rate from spiking again. Most importantly, this act extended more aid to lower income families that were obviously not trying to free-ride the system and were struggling to move up in the economy.¹⁰³ This wage subsidy allowed those families to take lower-wage jobs and still have enough income to properly take care of children and other relatives. This subsidy not only took care of the families in the bottom income bracket but it also provided workers for the low-wage job sector. Both specificities were key in supporting the lower class and encouraging self-starters to join the market more frequently.

The Hartz IV Act, on the other hand, was more interested in discouraging free-riders and requiring participation within the local job centers. These local governmental employment agencies helped with the entire process of finding a job from job searching and applications, funding for self-employment endeavors, and funding for training. Similar to previous schemes, the government once again recognized the need for specific aid programs for those with more barriers to entry into the labor market. This individualistic approach allowed the government to provide all levels of help from disability services to childcare or debt counseling. People with drug problems or who needed psychological help were not turned away.¹⁰⁴ While the local agencies were on the ground doing the hard work with each individual, the government's oversight policies that kept the hands of the agency workers untied were instrumental. Each agency worker

¹⁰³ Jacobi and Mohr, 229.

¹⁰⁴ Jacobi and Mohr, 226.

could take advantage of the many different subsets of the unemployment program when helping a person find a job.

The Hartz Acts held the right-wing populist groups down through these many subsets of aid. With the drop in the unemployment rate it would have been easy for the government to celebrate and refuse to further the aid programs already in place. These programs would carry the economy through Angela Merkel's first term ending in 2009. Unfortunately, in 2008 the stock market crashed and the world went into recession.

The beginning of the decline into right-wing populism began with the economic crisis in 2008 and the inability of the Merkel administration to quell the anxieties of the people. The social welfare programs put in place from 1995 to 2005 including Agenda 2010 are a key reason for the continuation of prosperity of the German people during the economic crisis. As explained in the previous chapter about economic trends, Agenda 2010 created considerable wage increases and high export rates. Much of Europe was quick to blame these programs as possible reasons for the economic crisis and thus the German government funded much of the rescue package. This decision did not allow the people to finally reap the benefits of their suffering and since their economic climate was not as unstable as other countries', the government began focusing outward. Very few programs were altered or added during this period of time, and the public unrest started to bubble.¹⁰⁵

By 2013, the AfD is an established party and had begun to gain quick support from people who originally backed mainstream parties. The German people wanted more domestic focus specifically since they were now paying for other economies to recover

¹⁰⁵ Semmler and Young, 7-8.

after just suffering through their own restructuring. Unfortunately for the Merkel administration, the migration crisis as mentioned in the immigration chapter was mounting slowly and peaked in 2015 and 2016. Between the outward focus of the government during the economic crisis from 2008 to 2010 followed closely by the migration crisis in 2015, the German public had had enough. By 2015, the AfD was not only growing rapidly but also extremely close to gaining seats in the Bundestag. In 2017 they were finally successful in being the first right-wing populist party to gain seats in the Bundestag since the mid-1980s and held the highest number of seats in right-wing populist history in Germany.

Some scholars argue that the AfD is not concerned at all about social welfare programs. The party does not often talk about the need for social welfare and instead mainly focuses on immigration.¹⁰⁶ While their specific rhetoric of quelling public unrest through governmental policy might suggest that cutting back on these social welfare programs is not beneficial for the country, their main platform also feeds off the insecurities of the masses. Without this unrest, right-wing parties collapse at a rapid pace and it is the lack of recognition of the government to adjust the social welfare programs during the migration crisis that accelerated support for the AfD. Similar to the Schröder government, the AfD likes the idea of people leaning on their communities instead of on the government. When people are confronted with unavoidable events, they often lash out.¹⁰⁷ Entire communities were banding together against the migration crisis and the fear that the government was more concerned about these newcomers than them.

¹⁰⁶ Betzelt and Bode, 130-1.

¹⁰⁷ Betzelt and Bode, 131-2.

Connecting back to the idea of not allowing free-riders, the AfD is extremely critical of anyone benefiting from the system without adding to it. With xenophobic sentiments floating around as more immigrants entered the country, it became very easy to paint any refugee or immigrant as a free-rider. This correlates with the AfD's stance on scaling back social welfare programs because they want to make the rules stricter so it becomes even harder for anyone to take advantage of them. The AfD illustrates these newcomers as benefiting from decades of hard workers and government reform, and asserts that those in the working population should take pride in the hard work of the country as a whole. Often people are unlikely to be accommodating to newcomers when they are seen as lazy, free-riders who do not want to contribute to the German way of life and yet are still covered by social welfare programs. The refugees and immigrants were the targets of these assertions.¹⁰⁸

Social welfare programs, while often are forgotten under economic trends and immigration reform, are a key element to the rise of right-wing populism. As I have shown throughout the chapter, social welfare programs can be a great tool for the government to use in quelling right-wing populist sentiments regardless of economic trends. Without the fervent actions of the government from the beginning of reunification in terms of social welfare programs and caring for those who were likely to slip through the cracks, right-wing populism would have risen much earlier than 2013. The government's constant attention to those in the lower income brackets through active labor market programs, subsidies for self-employment, and specific funding for working families prevented right-wing populism from joining history more consistently in

¹⁰⁸ Betzelt and Bode, 137.

Germany. Only when the government began focusing on other segments of the country during the migration crisis do we see the sudden spike in right-wing populism.

Chapter 5 – The AfD

Now I will focus on the establishment, rise, and adaptation of the AfD in German politics. As I have discussed throughout the last few chapters, right-wing populism feeds off several factors. When the various factors align, groups like the AfD are compelled to take advantage of the opportunity. I assert that right-wing populism is not simply dependent on immigration and globalization like many scholars tend to illustrate. Right-wing populism is a continuously adapting movement that fundamentally thrives on public unrest and dissatisfaction with the government. The AfD has learned and altered its strategies from previous movements but overall is the same as all right-wing populist groups. In this chapter I will bring together all the rhetoric about the AfD thus far in the paper as well as provide deeper information about the AfD that sets it up for continued success.

Thus far we know that the AfD was established in 2013 and provided an outlet for public discontent with economic policy and globalization. The three founders of the AfD were Bernd Lucke, Konrad Adam, and Alexander Gauland. The party was characterized as a diverse group of scholars, economists, and mainstream party politicians that catered to the disappointment of middle class voters. Ideal policy outcomes of each of the three founders differed greatly from more moderate, passive listening to aggressive, extremism which allowed the party to create a wider constituent base. Beyond better economic policy that specifically focused on Germans, they also condemned the open borders of the EU and the lingering presence of Allied forces in Germany. The xenophobia of Islam,

rejection of extensive immigration projects, and widespread fear of multiculturalism set the party up perfectly for the coming years.¹⁰⁹

The party gained 12.6 percent of the vote in the 2017 election for the Bundestag and became the third largest party in national politics. It is the main opposition to the Grand Coalition government that consists of the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Union under Chancellor Angela Merkel.¹¹⁰ Similar to all previous right-wing populist parties, their main concern is the protection of German culture and norms. In terms of immigration, the migration crisis created a quick avenue for the party to insert itself into the political playing field. While economic trends like unemployment were decreasing, Germany was slated to bail out several countries during the 2008 economic crisis and taxpayers were not happy. Finally, social welfare programs had not been substantially adjusted since Angela Merkel took power in 2005, leaving many German people scared for their futures as migration was the main headline across the world. These three sectors of German life created the perfect storm for AfD support and rapid induction into the national government.

On a fundamental level, the AfD's structure is significantly more stable and better defined than that of the Republikaner. After reunification, the Republikaner struggled to define its level of extremism which drove a wedge between those on the more extreme side of the spectrum and those looking to form a more developed political group that encouraged deeper policy than xenophobic acts. The core issues that the AfD chooses to

¹⁰⁹ David F. Patton, "The Alternative for Germany's Radicalization in Historical-Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 25, no. 2 (April 2017): pp. 163-180, p.164-5.

¹¹⁰ Langenbacher and Olsen, 126.

focus on are those that specifically target vulnerable groups and the leaders preach more substantive policy than simply promoting violent acts against immigrants and guest workers like the Republikaner was known for. While the AfD is not impervious to possible internal splintering, the leadership has been more strategic with its wide constituent base than the leaders of the Republikaner were. Many of the local and national leaders are “former CDU politicians and national-conservative intellectuals” which provides people with realistic idols for them to follow as they decide to desert from mainstream parties.¹¹¹ With leaders from differing political backgrounds and an emphasis on the people, the AfD continues to hold substantial power unlike the Republikaner even as the economic and social climates are settling down.

Additionally, from the beginning of its existence, the AfD has fought the notion that it is a right extremist party. If the party had established itself as extremist, the government would not have taken it seriously and their moderate constituents would not have supported it. The important distinction the AfD has to continuously assert is that while some supporters identify as right extremists, the AfD, like former right-wing populist parties, is anti-establishment but still supports democracy. Right extremist groups, on the other hand, condemn both. With only about two to three percent of the population identifying as right extremist, it became pertinent that the AfD be very strategic with its marketing from the beginning.¹¹² One of the AfD’s largest struggles is walking that thin line between extremism and populism. As I will explain throughout this

¹¹¹ Lochocki, 6.

¹¹² Lochocki, 7.

chapter, this continues to be a struggle for the party, but the leaders have gotten better about appeasing both sides simultaneously as shown by the increasing support.

With the height of the migration crisis wreaking havoc across Europe, many AfD supporters were not pleased with the open-arm approach of Chancellor Merkel. East Germans in particular felt left behind. As explained previously, many East Germans were still experiencing high unemployment rates and restrictive social welfare programs, yet immigrants were given aid simply upon arrival. A common sentiment began to echo throughout the country that Chancellor Merkel was more interested in helping international people before her own. This slander fueled the hatred toward the current government as well as toward refugees. Migrants were targeted for their skin color specifically in East Germany because East Germans became tired of feeling like they were constantly being looked down upon by West Germany and the government.¹¹³ The inability of the government to recognize these sentiments is exactly why East and West Germans alike are so unhappy.

Prior to the migration crisis in 2015, the AfD held only about five percent of the vote.¹¹⁴ At the founding in 2013, the main platform that the AfD used to establish itself was the economic crisis. This entailed specific claims against the euro, capitalism, and the western market structure that was extremely globalized.¹¹⁵ Additionally, the party opposed the bailouts of member states within the Eurozone and the understanding that

¹¹³ Thomas Klikauer, "German Neo-Nazis and a New Party," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 30, no. 1/2 (2019): pp. 243-252, p.245.

¹¹⁴ Alexander Häusler, "Forms of Right-Wing Populism: The Example Alternative for Germany (AfD)," in *Stifled Progress – International Perspectives on Social Work and Social Policy in the Era of Right-Wing Populism*, ed. Kerry Dunn and Jörg Fischer (Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2019), pp. 17-31, p.21.

¹¹⁵ Klikauer, 251.

German prosperity needed to be put on hold to help other countries.¹¹⁶ This platform focused mainly on the economic burden Germany carried as being part of the Eurozone but also hinted at the globalization factor in having all economies within the Eurozone linked. While Germany was pulling itself out of reunification and unemployment was high, there was very little support from other countries throughout the Eurozone since it was only created in 1999 and many of the active market programs in Germany were well underway at that point. Now, the AfD saw a large issue with having to bail out countries that did not deal with much of the same rebuilding they did on their own.

With the media attention the AfD was able to garner, Bernd Lucke, who was the elected Member of Parliament for the AfD in 2015, took advantage of the economic issues that the Merkel administration consistently overlooked. In a successful effort to connect with the people, Lucke explained his dissatisfaction with the euro and allowed the conversation to be voiced nationally. The rise in prices from the adoption of the euro was bad enough without the fact that East Germany was still adjusting to the deutsche Mark. By this point, East Germany became tired of being forced to adapt to western ways without feeling represented within the government.¹¹⁷ People across Germany felt the inability of the government to produce stability and it only got worse in 2015. The AfD capitalized.

Adaptability became a crucial element of the AfD's strategy. Essentially, the AfD became the party that listened to any possible qualm someone could have about the current establishment. At the beginning of 2015, the AfD still focused mainly on the

¹¹⁶ Seongcheol Kim, "The Populism of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): an Extended Essex School Perspective," *Nature News* (Nature Publishing Group, October 24, 2017), p.4.

¹¹⁷ Klinkauer, 245.

Eurozone as a key enemy of Germans. Within a few months this platform almost completely shifted to center on the migration crisis itself as that gained more attention throughout the world. By the end of the migration crisis, the AfD now contained a widespread group of supporters with complaints about economic, social, and globalization policies. In 2015, “the chairman of the AfD of Brandenburg Alexander Gauland described the refugee crisis as a ‘gift’ for his party” because of the rapid uneasiness it created throughout the country. The crisis allowed the party to attract those from both anti-immigration and German-nationalist sentiment groups, once again broadening its constituent base.¹¹⁸

Even though the AfD has gone through its fair share of changes in leadership, it has persisted and thrived. With the new leaders and changing policy climate, the party has moved to being a more “racist, nationalistic, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic party” due to its need to assert its dominance in the conversation about immigration. Björn Höcke, a prominent party leader today, provides the more right-wing rhetoric throughout the party, continuing to keep the small right extremist percentage of the population as supporters.¹¹⁹ A dissenter of the party, Franziska Schreiber, explains party leaders’ logic in keeping Höcke as a prominent, vocal member while still portraying more moderate sentiments for those uncomfortable with that rhetoric as a tactic to cater to as many people as possible. Due to the anti-Nazi and anti-hate-speech laws, the party works hard to stay on the politically correct side of the debate or incur large fees and lose credibility within the

¹¹⁸ Häusler, 21.

¹¹⁹ Klikauer, 244.

state.¹²⁰ One of the worst moves the party could make would be to fully embrace the right extreme view of Höcke.

Between the constant changes to the main platform of the AfD and the wide-array of leaders that have successfully led the party, the AfD has very little in its nature that stays consistent over long periods of time. Scholars have identified this lack of consistency and thus assert that the entire party platform is a facade. The party produces little to no tangible programs or policies in terms of solving the issues its constituents have with the current state of the country. Unlike other parties, the AfD tries to avoid unsavory names such as neo-Nazi by never actually attempting to implement new policy. Instead, the party simply listens to the people and fights the current policies that are in place that are causing the public unrest. The party takes arguments from differing political attitudes and pieces them together to create a pseudo-cohesive platform that caters to the people.¹²¹ This strategy allows the party to continue to garner support from people with different ideologies similar to its somewhat polarizing leadership.

As alluded to in the aforementioned paragraph, the AfD has allowed for right extreme ideas since the beginning of its existence. The regional leaders seem to fall further to the right than Bernd Lucke. With Lucke being more economically liberal than his fellow members, party splintering was looming. The differing opinions of the caucus members for certain districts versus Members of Parliament is part of the reason for the widespread support yet can become an issue in terms of consistent policy. As the regional leaders begin to exert their policy goals as more conservative or right extreme, Lucke has

¹²⁰ Klinkauer, 248.

¹²¹ Klinkauer, 248-9.

been put in a sticky spot to either accommodate their ideas or assert authoritarian control within the party.¹²²

Splintering has also begun among the regional leaders as well. The underlying themes of the policies are the same but the policy implications differ from one region to the next. For example, Gauland, the AfD caucus chair in Brandenburg, shares the same ideals of ethnic closure and the importance of protecting ethnic Germans as Höcke, caucus chair in Thuringia. But, Gauland interpreted this to include ethnic Russian-Germans who have begun to reintegrate into society after the Cold War, but Höcke does not agree. This miscommunication led to advocacy for a partial opening of borders in Berlin to Russian-Germans and LGBTQIA members and a dismissal of these same groups in Höcke's region. These fundamental issues cause an inconsistency across the country that does not favor the AfD. Scholars have identified this breakdown of the party as opportunistic to the issues in front of them but definitely not cohesive.¹²³ With incomplete policies like these at the regional level it is no surprise Lucke was inclined to authoritatively decide the outcome of the party. Unfortunately for him, he was not reelected as a Member of Parliament in 2019, signaling a possible diversion toward right extremism for the party.

Luckily, the AfD is not the only right-wing populist party in Europe that has broken into the political playing field and is trying to continue its success. As shown by other groups in Europe, right-wing populist groups that fall close to extremism are very careful to keep their rhetoric from representing fascism or Nazism. In defiance, the AfD

¹²² Patton, 172.

¹²³ Kim, 8.

has begun using Nazi expressions more frequently. They are attempting to conjure up more ethno-nationalist sentiments by striking a deeper chord within the German population.¹²⁴ While in previous years it has been more careful with its language and defiance of the establishment, the leaders have become more comfortable in their constituent base and are once again looking to shake up the conversation. Unfortunately, if they are to be taken seriously in the long run, it is unlikely that this strategy will be the one that carries the party forward. While scholars recognize this possible self-destructing plan, only time will tell whether it is as detrimental as predicted.

Throughout this chapter I have shown that the AfD has garnered a large following and should not be taken lightly. While it has shifted significantly over the few years that it has been prominent, its quick rise to fame has not resulted in a quick descent. It holds a significant constituent base and continues to gain supporters. As it begins to consolidate its leadership platform, it will form a more reliable, more attractive party. Its right extremist sentiments are something to be careful of but as long as they are kept at lower levels, these ideas are not likely to take the party down anytime soon. If the party continues to follow its current steady trajectory, it will fall under the “same category as successful right-wing populist parties such as the Front National in France or the United Kingdom Independence Party.”¹²⁵ Even with its Nazi level language, the strategic play on nostalgia for a time when Germany was at the top of the world is likely to carry it into the foreseeable future.

¹²⁴ Samuel Salzborn, “German Right-Wing Extremism and Right-Wing Populism: Conceptual Foundations,” in *Stifled Progress – International Perspectives on Social Work and Social Policy in the Era of Right-Wing Populism*, ed. Kerry Dunn and Jörg Fischer (Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2019), pp. 33-40, p.38.

¹²⁵ Lochocki, 8.

Due to the reactive nature of the AfD, the fate of the party is hardly up to the leaders themselves. How the Grand Coalition government as well as other popular mainstream parties handle the conversation on immigration, European globalization, and economic consequences for Germany is everything for the AfD. If the current government continues to shy away from the hard topics and neglect to put out tangible legislation that takes the public's complaints into account, the AfD will continue to gain supporters and rise within the Bundestag. Open border policies and other liberal initiatives on the integration of Germany into the EU directly combat the German nationalistic approach of the AfD.¹²⁶ The party leaders are experts at skewing the images of the other parties and until the other parties take seriously the real concerns that are exacerbated by the AfD, voters will continue to flock toward right-wing populism and the AfD will continue to unapologetically shake up the existing establishment.

It is almost impossible to predict where the AfD is headed in the near future due to the many factors that it depends on to exist. Between immigration and globalization policy, economic trends, and social welfare and active labor market initiatives, the AfD has capitalized on public unrest and will continue to keep leaders from other mainstream parties on the edge of their seats. Even though these sectors have begun to calm down across the EU, the AfD still persists. I argue that the AfD is not going to crumble anytime soon and that leaders of other parties should start to pick the portions of its platform that are tolerable and work on partnerships. The pure recognition of the complaints of the people could be the difference in a short versus long future for the AfD and right-wing populism in Germany as a whole.

¹²⁶ Lochocki, 8.

Conclusion

As indicated at the end of the last chapter and implicitly throughout the paper, the phenomenon of the rise in right-wing populism is worth paying attention to because it is unlikely the AfD will disappear in the near future and it now holds enough power to contribute to legislation and policy in the government. Much of Europe is experiencing similar uprisings that directly challenge the establishment and are gaining support quickly. While the AfD might be the most recent right-wing populist party in Germany, it is not the first and not likely to be the last. The versatility of the leadership within the AfD and the adaptability of right-wing populist groups in general will be extremely helpful in the long term for these parties.

Throughout this paper, I outline the full history of right-wing populist groups in Germany from the end of World War II when Germany finally began to gain footing again and advocate for itself. One of the key characteristics of right-wing populism is its ability to make the public's concerns into a movement. I find that there are three prominent sectors of German life that affect support for right-wing populism. Immigration and globalization are agreed upon by almost all scholars because with constant change comes more uneasiness, especially for those in the lower classes. Economic trends are seen in parallel with immigration rates as right-wing populist groups frame an increase in unemployment as a direct cause of migrants taking German jobs. Finally, social welfare programs and active labor market initiatives are really the glue between economic trends and immigration policy because without strong programs protecting the lower classes, unrest grows and right-wing populist groups flourish.

With this analysis, I assessed the AfD and extrapolated to explain its induction into the Bundestag and possible future in German rhetoric. The most important point is that for groups like the AfD with constantly changing platforms and leadership styles, the future is even more variable than other mainstream parties. The Republikaner was a strong party that also grew overnight on the back of public unrest. Unfortunately, the government's dedication to social welfare programs was successful in driving much of the uneasiness down at the time and allowed the sitting government to see its policies lower unemployment and create integration programs for immigrants. In the Republikaner's case, while economic unrest was still high, social welfare programs were targeted at those most affected and immigration rates began to slow, thus decreasing the overall stress on the people.

Today, the status of the three sectors is once again in disarray for the AfD to capitalize on. For example, migration rates across the world from poorer countries has increased significantly in recent years. As global warming starts to make the countries at the equator more inhabitable, resources will become scarce and people will resort to war to solve their problems. Conflict zones drive people to seek refuge in more democratic states and until the European Union figures out a better way to deal with the hundreds of thousands of migrants, right-wing populism is going to spread across Europe in particular. Countries will begin to tighten their borders, thus putting a larger strain on those that choose to keep their borders open like Angela Merkel did during the peak of the migration crisis in 2015 and 2016. Further research can be done to dig into the deeper meanings behind migration patterns and how that is going to affect democratic, open-

border states in comparison to right-wing populism not only in Germany but across the world.

In this moment, we are presented with a similar climate to when the Republikaner gained support, but the AfD has managed to go far beyond what the Republikaner ever accomplished. From the literature we see that the AfD has built up a solid constituent base and will continue to feed off of any missteps that the mainstream parties take, but I find it unlikely that the government will ever be run by the AfD as the top party. The party is still establishing itself and many people throughout Germany are waiting to see what they do next, but the reactive nature of the party will set it back from ever holding the position of Chancellor. In addition, we find in both the Republikaner and the AfD that the leadership thrives on chaos but that is not sustainable. People like the idea of more radical groups that are looking to challenge the establishment when they feel the establishment is not providing enough for them. In the event that the AfD becomes the most powerful party in the Bundestag, not only will Germany become much more isolationist and possibly sever long-existing ties with other key countries, the party will also have to produce tangible legislation that helps the country through another massive change as they pull away from globalization. Only time will tell how the world will react to the growing crisis of right-wing populism, but the longer world leaders wait, the more time right-wing populist groups have to stir up uneasiness among the masses and grow their reputations beyond whispers.

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