

Incongruent? Refugee Influx, Liberalism and Nationalism in Germany

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Abstract:

The last four years have been extremely challenging for Germany in the sense that the influx of millions of refugees has created deep divisions within German society. These divisions, by giving rise to xenophobia and nationalist tendencies, have shaken the foundation liberalism in Germany. This paper explores the impact of the recent influx of migrants and refugee on German society. It also focuses on the rise of Alternative for Germany (AfD), its anti-refugee narrative and the factors behind its growing appeal among German citizens. It does this by, first, exploring the concepts of state, nation, nationalism, identity and their relationship with each other and later on applying these concepts to the German Context. Finally, this paper highlights the ways in which the Alternative for Germany has tried to shape the political discourse around refugees and migrants.

Keywords: Nationalism, Xenophobia, Populism, Refugees, Identity, European Union, Alternative for Germany, AfD

I. Introduction

Europeans have witnessed a number of nationalist waves in the course of a little more than two hundred years of their modern history that began with the French Revolution. During most part of the 20th century, nationalism overshadowed every other idea of belonging to state. Three major leaps such as the unprecedented level of European integration, globalization and the benefits of democratic ideals along with the stunning economic prosperity of Europe proved to be an unprecedented experience for Europeans. It was mainly the impact of these forces which diminished the nationalist tendencies and galvanized Europeans to enjoy the great European experience of the modern era.

Influenced by the transforming impact of these forces, nationalism seemed to have lost its appeal. However, the recent trends show that a considerable section of German society together with nationalist party such as the Alternative for Germany –AfD are finding it hard to adapt themselves to the liberal European Experience anymore.

The influx of refugees and migrants is, undeniably, the most influential factor behind the rise of AfD and the changing discourse around the idea of a liberal Germany. It is also interesting to see how the concepts of nation, nationalism, identity and the responsibilities of a state towards its citizens and those arriving as migrants and refugees are being redefined. The influx of millions of migrants and refugees along with the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of Germany has added more socio-political dimensions to the above-mentioned concepts, which therefore need to be studied carefully and systematically. This paper, therefore, aims to explore that how the influx of millions of refugee has exacerbated political and social divisions among German citizens, which are evident from *xenophobia*, refugee-related violence and from the rise of AfD.

The contribution of this study is two-fold. In a general sense, this paper examines the rise of anti-refugee sentiments, *xenophobia* and the rise of AfD in the backdrop of a Germany whose socio-political makeup is going through a significant change. A more specific contribution of this study is that it also assesses whether the rise of the AfD is a transitory phase, or will it have a long-term and lasting effect on German society and politics.

From the past few years, regional as well as national elections in Germany show clear divisions among Germans, specifically when it comes to the issue of refugees and migrants. The influx of millions of refugee and migrants into Germany and the resultant divisions in German society has not only exposed wide gaps in policy and governance but has also provided an opportunity to the right - wing nationalist party, Alternative for Germany, to expand its political base and mass appeal. In addition to all these, *xenophobia* and refugees-related violence that undermine the liberal ideals of Germany is another issue which German political elite is confronted with today.

Based on its recent past, it can be assumed that the cumulative effect of three factors namely economic prosperity, democracy and liberalism ensured social stability in Germany. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how social stability is going to be affected by the recent influx of refugees as it puts all of the above-mentioned ingredients of social stability to a great test. Ultimately, the overall context of refugee influx and rising nationalism give rise to two very important questions. Firstly, how is the recent influx of refugees contributing to the rise of nationalism in Germany? Secondly, how is the rising nationalism affecting the liberal foundations of the German state?

II. Material and Method

The reason for focusing on Germany and more specifically on the rise of the far-right nationalist – political party- the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is some of the most important developments, which have unfolded since the beginning of the crisis in 2014. The first thing is that, since the beginning of the latest refugee crisis, Germany has received the largest number of refugees who have reached Europe from different directions. Secondly, Germany's response to the refugee crisis has been unique as compared to that of other European states, which certainly provide a comprehensive ground for study. Finally, despite the initial goodwill and openness, the populist – nationalist tendencies seem to be getting stronger by the day, which has resultantly, forced Chancellor Angela Merkel to retract on her stand on refugees.

Literature review for this paper includes a selection of existing secondary data by using well-recognized literature related to nation-state, nationalism, identity, refugees, migration and some of the latest empirical data related to the rise of AfD. The methodology itself was three fold. In the first stage, various concepts such as nation-state, nation, nationalism, culture, identity, liberalism, migration and state responsibility were studied, various dimensions of these concepts and their interconnectedness was carefully explored and in the second stage, these concepts were applied to the Germany and finally, in the third stage data was compared and interpreted and conclusions were drawn.

A vast body of literature suggests that the concept of nationalism is a contested one, which has diverse social, political and psychological dimensions. Resultantly, the complexity of the concept has led scholars to define nationalism in varying ways highlighting its various dimensions. For example, (Taoushiani, 2017) defines nationalism as “an ideology that gives a nation a sense of unity by imposing on them the same set of identities, for instance, linguistic, historical and cultural” (p.8). (Finlayson, 2003) writes “[w]e might say that nationalism is itself a kind of social theory – a kind of theory about how the world works, of what gives us a place in it, how we should think of our relations with other people and of how it should be politically organized” (p.102). In short, although there is a disagreement on how to define nationalism, scholars, however agree that nationalism has proved to survive and stage frequent come backs.

(Delantay & Kumar, 2006) traces the origin of modern nationalism and its links to the nation state. It states that nationalism, which emerged after the French Revolution, was connected to the formation of the nation-state and the emergence of the industrial society in Europe. It further adds that these two developments namely the formation of the modern nation-state and the emergence of industrialization played a very important part in shaping the nationalist movements. This book further adds that although nationalism and nationhood manifested in varying ways, it was still very closely linked to statehood and modernizing tendency towards the homogenization of populations.

(Gellner, 1983) links the birth of nationalism in Europe to the rise of industrialization in Europe. Apart from the nation-state and the birth of industrialism, another important point to consider here is the link between nationalism and the secularization of culture. “The emergence of nationalism is seen as tightly connected to the modern phenomenon of state-formation, and [thus] related to the trend of the secularization of culture.”(Greenfeld, 2006, p.68). (Smith, 1993) also points at the link between nationalism and culture. It states that nationalism is a “collective cultural phenomenon” (p.vi). (McLaren, 2002) presents a similar argument by stating that economics does not have so much influence on attitudes the way people assume. It argues that, contrary to what is generally understood by people, it is the perceived threat to the culture of the people that influence the attitude of the people more than economics. This book further adds that people are more disturbed by the deterioration of the nation in terms of national identity and national sovereignty.

After establishing the link between nationalism and the different aspects of social and political life, the next important question becomes to examine some important effects of nationalism on society. (Delantay & Kumar, 2006) states that nationalism rise from the periphery rather than the center adding that nationalism is anti-statist.(p.2) It further adds that the idea of a nation encapsulates social issues, “such as solidarity and

we-feeling, which are often eroded by the general tendency towards the transnationalization of the state whereby the state disengages itself from the nation.”(p.3). Additionally, (Gellner, 1983) too, by looking at the impact of nationalism on society states that nationalism might result in assimilation or lack of assimilation. Apart from these, a number of important studies on nationalism point at the link between nationalism, the fear of others and *xenophobia*. Research shows that nationalism gives rise to a “fear of others” and consequently xenophobic feelings among the locals. For example, (Berezin, 2009) opines, “*xenophobia* is directly responsible for the resurgence of nationalism in contemporary Europe” (p.274) It further adds that the citizens of host countries take interest in “who is like us and who is not” (p.280)

It further explores the fact that how refugees and migrants from the Middle East and other countries who have Islamic background are viewed in Europe. He states “with the recent influx of immigrants from Islamic countries who have certain needs such as to “build mosques and engage in religious practices, [they] have once more made religion an issue.” (p.281). (Massaro, 2016) argues that apart from the terrorist threats, cultural identity, which is heavily based on language and shared customs and traditions, is another thing which the Europeans seem as threatened. The theoretical context of this study is one of the best-known modernist theories of Nationalism presented by Ernest Gellner. Although, sometimes criticized for being too functionalist, still it is the best theory that captures the true essence and the accurate picture of nationalism as a political force as well as a mass movement that tries to achieve certain aims and objectives.

Ernest Gellner avidly presents his understanding and ideas of nationalism in two of his most important works namely *Thought and Change* (1964), and *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). The focus of Ernest Gellner’s theory and his understanding of nationalism is on the cultural and political aspects of transition of human society from agrarian to industrial phase. Thus, Ernest Gellner’s insights become particularly relevant for this study, as this study, by focusing on the Alternative for Germany (AfD), sheds light on the socio- political dimension of refugee crisis in Germany. There is plenty of empirical evidence, which suggests that nationalism is on the rise in Europe. (Postelnicescu, 2017) states: “We are witnessing now, after a long process of integration, a return to instinctive national sentiments. In the face of fear, people want to feel safe; hence, a leader who can promise security and protection is gathering the popular support: we see it in the recent Austrian elections, where the far-right party of Norbert Hofer gained the upper hand and determined the resignation of the Chancellor amid huge debates over the refugee crisis”.

The recent refugee and migrant crisis has given rise to a strong debate in Germany as well. At the center of this debate is the question of security, German identity and its future. Like for every other country, identity and cultural insecurity have become an extremely important discussion point in Germany and this is one of the roots of the rising nationalist tendencies among Germans lies. The popularity of AfD depicts, among some other things, the fact that Germans feel their identity and their security are in a crisis. In Germany, the government of Angela Merkel has been badly hurt by the refugee crisis. A number of German cities have witnessed anti-immigrant protests, which broke out against Angela Merkel’s open-door immigration policy. The AfD has clearly benefitted from such sentiments, which has enabled it to mark major election victories and ultimately raising itself to the third slot.

As (Chazan, 2017) states that, over the past few years, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) has gained a series of successes in Germany's regional elections. It states that, for example, in April 2016, the Alternative for Germany won 24 percent of the vote in the state of Saxony-Anhalt similarly, it states that the previous year, it gave the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) a great surprise by beating it into third place in the rural eastern state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the chancellor's home turf. It further adds that, presently, the AfD has representation in 13 of Germany's 16 regional parliaments. (Mudde, 2017) looks into the election results of 2017. In its analysis, it states that the AfD has now spread its tentacles to almost every part of Germany. It states that in the elections of 2017, the Alternative for Germany, on average, secured 11 % of the votes in West Germany; it received 21.5% of the votes in East Germany, which is nearly double the number of votes it secured in the Western part of the country. It further adds that the results of the recent elections is in line with its results in the regional state elections, in which AfD also gained its largest support in the east.

III. How Important and Severe is the Incongruence?

As stated in the previous section, nationalism is a very puzzling concept such. Accordingly, the study of literature highlights various kinds of nationalisms, which include ethnic, civil, religious and ideological nationalisms. French Philosopher Ernest Renan calls a nation "a large-scale solidarity". In his lecture "What is a nation" delivered in 1882, Ernest Renan stressed the essentiality of glory, a heroic past, great men, of having performed great deeds together, of having common will in the present and the wish to perform still more, as the basic ingredients that make a nation. He calls nation a "daily referendum" seeking a "collective identity" similarly, we can understand the concept of nationalism by looking at the work of Smith. (Smith, 1991) defines nationalism based on three goals, which include national unity, national autonomy and national identity.

What needs deep consideration is the fact that nationalism is not a single whole but a constituent of various psychological, historical, economic, sociological, cultural and political elements, which collectively define the sentiments of a nation, in this case, the sentiments of German citizens. Moreover, as the arrival of huge number of refugees and migrants affect the social, psychological, political, cultural and economic conditions of German society, therefore, this is where we can establish the connection between the influx of refugees and the rise of nationalist tendencies, *xenophobia*, refugees –related violence and the rise of AfD. The arrival of more and more refugees and the growing heterogeneity in terms of language, culture, traditions create new questions and a space for discussion in the society. On the economic level, it opens a new space for competition among the locals and refugees. No doubt, refugees and migrants have a great economic value in terms of low-wage work force. However, for lower-income classes, they create a huge challenge. On the political level too, the German government and society have to think about some serious and politically important questions related to refugees and migrants. These include things like citizenship, integration, rights and responsibilities.

In order to understand the impact of refugees on the social, political, psychological and economic plains, it is also important to have a peek into the previous waves of migrants into Germany. Clearly, it is not the first time people from other countries have moved en masse towards Germany. For example, after WWII, almost 12 million people arrived in Germany most of whom were Turks who presently constitute

the largest ethnic group of non-German origin. These Turks, like the recent migrants and refugees, brought their values, religion and culture with them. Resultantly, the inflow of a large number of people of Turkish origin as well as people from other parts of the world to West Germany turned German society increasingly heterogeneous. This influx, similar to that of today, had its own economic, social and political consequences. In order to manage this huge flow of people, the West German government applied and implemented a more civic brand of nationalism allowing space for multiculturalism and inclusiveness predominantly as a state ideology as well as a policy goal to accept and integrate refugees and migrants into its society.

A review of the then German refugee policy shows that, although having some gaps, it has been a tremendous effort to achieve the difficult task of managing and subsequently integrating refugees and migrants into German society. By in large, it were the post-WWII demographic and economic realities, which largely dictated Germany's migration policy. As Germany needed workforce from the outside world in order to promote its economy and to achieve a demographic balance, therefore, this inflow did not transform into a major challenge socially as well as politically. In short, economic interests played a dominant part in determining the policy of the government as well as the behavior of the citizens towards migrants and refugees. (Delantay & Kumar, 2006) writes that modern nationalism, which emerged after the French Revolution, was connected to the nation-state and industrialization. Accordingly, one or very often both of these developments with the centralizing and modernizing tendency towards the homogenization of populations, shaped most of the nationalist movements. However, another important thing, which happened in tandem with industrialization and democratization, was the secularization of culture. As (Greenfeld, 2006) also states that, the two forces, which operated behind the centralization of nationalism in Europe, were the formation of the nation-state and the secularization of culture. (p.70)

These two points open up another area that needs to be discussed here. Nationalism is a new way of how the supporters of AfD view their country. As (Clark, 2015) writes that, there is, of course, a difference between anti-Eurozone nationalism and more ethnic, anti-immigration nationalism. Essentially all contemporary European populist parties embody this first characteristic. Resultantly, the secular space in Germany is constricting and support for minimum multiculturalism, and a more homogenous and refugees-free society is increasing. This leads us to assume that the desire for homogenization in terms of culture is one of the crucial threads, which links the far-right nationalist party (AfD) to its support base. Thus, the role of AfD becomes crucial here as the AfD is trying, or has tried, to establish itself as the representative of such sentiments and to shape popular feelings through its anti-refugee rhetoric. The recent influx of refugees into a Europe, which is going on through a difficult political, social, economic and security conditions, create economic, political and social consequences for the locals. The arrival of millions of refugees and migrants, mostly from cultures and ideological background different from that of the Germans, adds an anti-refugee, anti-liberal and anti-secular ingredient and thus an element of nationalism to the overall discourse.

Another dangerous dimension, which has emerged simultaneous to this recent influx, is the barbaric terrorist attacks against innocent people. These attacks have created a great challenge for the governments, and within common citizens, it has created a sense

of severe insecurity. This provides a ground for the populist, Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant circles as well as creates a citizen consciousness to call for a return to a German state whose identity, politics and economics be defined in terms of its culture, values and ethnicity. This citizen consciousness, which I have mentioned above, shapes public opinion and if such opinions are not accommodated in policy, results in a great political price which no party can afford to pay. As Greenfield (2006) writes that nationalism is the social and political consciousness of modern society. It adds that nationalism shapes our perception, and therefore our experience, of reality and determines what is important to us as individuals and as a community. The recent refugee and migrant crisis and to that, the divided response of Europe, shows that neither the idea of Europe nor the idea of a liberal democracy is perfect enough to deal with the challenges of migration and refugees. Resultantly, those on the nationalist side, claim to have the answer. However, to date, the populists and nationalists have not proved much on the practical side of the matters. Consequently, in making the choice between less liberalism and more nationalism, in other words, the debate of liberalism and openness vs populism and nationalism, has resulted in distraction and discontent as well as a divergence of a vision for the future. Resultantly, the idea of a united Europe and liberal democracy has given way to nationalistic tendencies.

This third force, which is very important, is globalization. Globalization has shaped the dynamics of social, political and economic activities and it will continue to influence important aspects of our economic and political conduct. Therefore, globalization is an important dynamic, which needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with nationalism. This study argues that sub-globalization within Europe, economic inter-connectedness and the internal weaknesses of the AfD are some of the most likely reasons why nationalist parties across Europe as well as the AfD in Germany, despite a substantial rise in its influence and appeal base, could not achieve major election breakthroughs in Europe as well as in Germany. The election of Emmanuel Macron, the recent defeat of Dutch nationalists, and the recent victory of Angela Merkel show that despite the new phase of rising nationalism, there are still some factors at play, which have kept the defeat of mainstream parties like the CDU and SPD at bay. On the one hand, if the influx of millions of refugees as well as the terrorist attacks across Germany have induced anti-refugee sensitivities, things like globalization and the interconnectedness are producing conditions, which have a moderating effect on attitudes towards migrants and refugees in Germany, thus, limiting the ability of the Alternative for Germany to replace the mainstream parties.

IV. The Rise of AfD and the Future of the Liberal State

Jumping across years, we find example after example of events marked by violence that point at decreasing tolerance towards refugees in Germany. With the arrival of millions of people on German soil, we need to think of whether there can be a reason to believe that German society will overcome this challenge without losing social stability. Moreover, it is also important to ask whether the refugee influx, which means the arrival of millions of people with diverse ethnic, religious and cultural background, is killing the bond of Germans with Liberalism. Is it what the French President Charles DE Gaulle once said, "Patriotism is when the love of your own people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than your own comes first" In 1870, the great German leader Otto von Bismarck achieved the goal of German unification through three wars against Denmark, Austria and France. (Bonikowski, 2011) argues that in this

context, Germany conveniently becomes classified as an ethnic nationalist country, because its origins lie in the unification of multiple regions around an ostensibly common ethnicity, language, and culture. (p.184)

On the other hand, after the Second World War, with economic marvels, came the influx of huge number of people from Turkey and other parts of the world, and later on the forces of economic and cultural globalization rationalized adopting a liberal and inclusive approach towards migrants, which turned Germany into a civic nation. The basis of being a German was allegiance to a common set of political and whose underlying principle is equality, human rights, freedom and democracy. The AfD is trying to bring a change in the values a liberal German society does, or will adhere to. It has significantly increased its vote bank. It has also pressurized Chancellor Merkel not to act in a liberal manner as far as the refugees are concerned. (van den Bergh, 1966) therefore, correctly states that the structure of the Welfare state and the intractability of security may promote nationalistic behavior even by the most internationalist of statesmen.

V. Discussion

As (Clark, 2015) states, over the past several years, the political narrative of Europe has been hijacked by populist and nationalist parties, which want to revive racial and ethnic nationalism and to force the governments to adopt strict anti-immigration policies. These nationalist political parties also want to construct an exclusive European identity. The presence of these many parties clearly show the change that has occurred in Europe. One of the common threads among these nationalist parties is anti-immigration and anti-refugee stand. The AfD is trying to make the German people believe that a nationalist government in Berlin or the presence of AfD in the German parliament will be more protective of the interests and more responsive to the will of the German people than a liberal government. The AfD derives its power from the very nationalist sentiments they spread in the society. They want to remind the German people of their heritage, and that the failure of the liberal values which they claim to have brought insecurity and allowed in people who mostly do not belong to their culture and people who do not share the same values as that of the Germans.

To a considerable extent, the anti-secular and anti-refugee narrative of the AfD is having significant effect on the German voters with terrorist attacks by ISIS and the media coverage being other important dynamics of this influence. To the German citizens, Nationalism, as the one advocated by the AfD, simplifies a number of issues as well as most of the socio- economic and political complexities which Germany is confronted with today. One such issue is the presence of migrants and refugees on German soil. The AfD blames migrants and refugees for a number of issues, which they argue, has destabilized German society. The solution to such issues, which this party presents, is to reach power to design such policies that ultimately create a society, which derives its roots largely from a common history and in most cases shared culture and ideological background. In one short line, it means the homogenization of the society in terms of culture.

Founded in 2013, Germany's AfD has gained representation in ten of the 16 German state parliaments since September 2016. In 2017 elections, they increased their vote share to 12.6 percent, which equals 6 million votes mostly attracting centrist voters.

The rise of AfD and the results of election results of the past two years show that the issues of migrants and refugees have played as a crucial factor in German elections. The Guardian wrote that it was anti-Merkel vote due to her refugee policy. Moreover, a study by the Duisburg Institute of Linguistic and Social Research looks towards the disagreements among the members of the AfD party. It states that out of the 235 candidates on the AfD's list, 98 are extreme right-wingers and 40 of its members are from the moderate wing of the party. This study further adds that 97 of the candidates from the AfD "kept such a low profile it was hard to tell where they stood politically."

VI. Conclusion

The situation that has emerged out this refugee and migrant crisis presents signs of alarm, which we need to worry about. The growing popularity and the election victories of AfD depict the rise of nationalist sentiments and the decline of liberalism in Germany. The ideas of multiculturalism, openness and inclusiveness have taken a back seat while ethnic identity, exclusion, *xenophobia* and the slogan of homogeneity has received more traction among certain sections of the German Society. The impact of the recent influx of refugees on the German society is quite clear. The arrival of millions of migrants and refugees have exacerbated divisions among German people. *Xenophobia*, rise in nationalist feelings and the change in the political landscape of Germany is a practical manifestation of these divisions. Moreover, as an effect of the refugee influx, the discourse around German identity has moved considerably from a civic to a more ethnic one.

In addition, the continuing rise of the far-right nationalist party namely the Alternative for Germany and its substantial gains in German elections depicts resentment against the arrival of refugees and migrants. These developments are also evident of the growing dissatisfaction and wariness on Angela Merkel's refugee policies. Some of the surveys done previously showed that it was mostly the Eastern part of Germany, which was considered the hub of anti-refugee sentiments. However, now it is clear that strong anti-refugee sentiments also exist in other parts of Germany. This is another indicator, which shows how the refugees and migrants are affecting German citizens. In addition to all these, the way European States have responded to the crisis tell us a lot about how these states view this huge influx. The fractured and divided response of the European states towards the refugee crisis is another sign that neither the idea of a socially, politically and economically- integrated Europe nor the idea of a liberal democracy is perfect enough to deal with the challenges of migration and refugees.

Nevertheless, apart from all these, there is still much that gives us hope. A hope that things will return to normal or that the new normal is not going to be as bad and exclusive as the AfD might want it to be. Sub-globalization within Europe, the demographic issues of Germany and its liberal traditions will put the far-right nationalist party (AfD) to a great test. Keeping the French and Dutch elections in mind, one can present an argument that it will not be easy for the nationalist AfD to dislodge the mainstream political parties of Germany. Turmoil, opposing currents and vicissitudes are a commonplace in politics. However, the spirit of liberalism, inclusive democracy and secularism will remain a constant in the distant- future. In Germany, Angela Merkel and other centrist parties are still very strong; therefore, it will be difficult for the AfD to have lasting influence on German voters.

Despite the over-simplification of issues by the AfD, liberalism, inclusiveness, and protection of human rights will serve as the basis of social stability in Germany. For the German citizens and their government, maintaining social stability and promoting tolerance and cohesion is something they should be worried about in the present time. However, it will need more research to uncover how this goal can be achieved in a holistic manner.

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