

**THE POLITICS OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN
CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF GERMANY, UK AND AUSTRIA (2000-2020)**

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the thesis titled **THE POLITICS OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GERMANY, UK AND AUSTRIA (2000-2020)** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Shibashis Chatterjee (Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University)**, and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

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This work is the culmination of my interest in connecting theory with trends in European politics which had its beginnings in my days as a master's student. In this thesis I have attempted to understand the one of the challenges of contemporary politics, i.e. right-wing populism from an analytical perspective, connecting both the past and present. It is the fruition of sustained efforts at inculcating my early interests in international relations. Many have guided and helped me in this endeavour and I owe them my gratitude.

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PREFACE

This work is an attempt to understand right-wing populism, one of the defining features of contemporary politics. Rather than finding an overarching explanation to the problem, it seeks to comprehend its intricacies and how it can vary from one context to another. Populism is by no means a new phenomenon; however, it has gradually evolved with the changing times. Though some of its fundamental underpinnings remain intact, the challenges of modernity have forced it to branch out into new territories. Contemporary right-wing populism is but a manifestation of this. This thesis aims to examine the complexities of right-wing populism through the analysis of the historical and socio-political conditions of three separate countries, namely Germany, United Kingdom and Austria. It also looks into the massive impact of external factors such as immigration on the politics of these countries. The aim of this work is to problematize right-wing populism in a particular setting, in order to understand not only its defining commonalities but also its variational aspects.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The political landscape of the 21st century has been overshadowed by an upsurge in right-wing populism. Liberal democracy, hailed as the ‘end of history’,¹ trembled as the rapid proliferation of aggressive nationalism and right-wing populist politics sent shockwaves across Europe and the United States. After the end of the Cold War, western democracies became cocooned in the conviction that liberalism would be able to tide over the challenges of globalization. This certainty transformed into trepidation as many of them fell prey to a restrictive form of nationalism advanced by newly emergent right-wing populist parties. This study aims to examine the rise of right-wing populism in three countries, i.e. Germany, United Kingdom and Austria, in order to understand how it is able to consolidate itself in varying socio-political settings.

The word *populism* is not a novelty in the political lexicon. Populist movements have been evident in various countries and in varying forms. The nature of these movements has often differed from one country to another, such as agrarian populism in Russia or populist dictatorships in Latin America. The rise of right-wing populism in contemporary times, however, can be seen as a challenge to the very essence of liberal democracy. This upsurge indicates a seismic shift in the domestic as well as global political order that had been established in the post-Cold War years.

The definition of populism is fluid and subject to a great deal of contention. Cas Mudde, one of the most noted modern scholars on populism, defines it as;

“ .. an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”²

Populism is also defined as a ‘thin-centered’ ideology since it has few core tenets and borrows heavily from other political concepts.³ While populism can occur on both sides of the political

¹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, *The National Interest*, No. 16, 1989, pp. 3–18.

² Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2004, p. 543.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 544.

spectrum, contemporary populism mainly focuses on the *right*. According to Anton Pelinka, the onslaught of development in Europe paved the way for the rise of a ‘new radical or extreme right’. The new right in Europe is characterized by a lack of coherent structure and definite party organization. The issue of prime importance to the new right-wing populists is the ‘preservation of the status quo’, i.e. a state of democratic and homogeneous existence similar to the era before globalization and Europeanization.⁴ Pelinka opines that this brand of populism has found supporters among the blue-collar working-class section of the population. It is this section which stands to lose from the process of modernization and who believe that the socio-economic system and trends is working against them.⁵ The definition of populism as well as its offshoot right-wing populism is fraught with a degree of discord and complexity even though they may follow a number of parameters. The different approaches to outlining and defining populism have been dealt with in the literature review.

Thesis statement

This study aims to examine the nature of contemporary right-wing populism in Europe, focusing specifically on the case studies of Germany, UK and Austria. These case studies have been chosen keeping in mind their varying experiences with right-wing populism despite similarities in geographic, socio-economic and political features. Germany, a country where right-wing politics was ostracized in the post war years, witnessed the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party as a reaction to the European migrant crisis of 2015-16. The party has been making rapid strides in recent years, capitalizing on ever-increasing levels of anti-immigration sentiment. The UK, too, has traditionally sidelined right-wing parties and groups though these have historically existed on the sidelines of British politics. The noted exception in recent times is the UK Independence Party (UKIP) which played an integral role in the influencing the referendum to leave the European Union in 2016. The UKIP is a classic example of a populist party relying on a charismatic leader, anti-immigration rhetoric and identity politics. Its disintegration post Brexit further confirms its nature as a fundamentally populist party thereby underlining its relevance to this study. Austria presents a different picture from its counterparts in light of the fact that it was one of the first European countries to embrace a right-wing populist party in recent times; the right-wing Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs/Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) become the first of its kind to enter a European

⁴ Anton Pelinka, ‘Right-Wing Populism: Concept and Typology’, in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral, eds., *Right-Wing Populism In Europe: Politics and Discourse*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p.10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

government in 2000. Till recently, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in coalition with the Freedom Party was one of the few right leaning governments in Western Europe.

This research project aims to look into the causes and nature of the rise of right-wing populism in these cases in the hope of gaining a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of right-wing populism itself. It will focus on the socio-economic political backgrounds in each of these countries to identify the factors that create the perception of threat necessary for the growth of right-wing populist politics. Its objective is to analyze if and why there is a variation in the occurrence of right-wing populism since these countries have had differing experiences with it. The crucial role of immigration as an inducing factor for right-wing populism will also be a central theme in this study.

Significance of the Research

The nature of populism has evolved with the onslaught of globalization and advances in modern technology and communication. Destradi and Plagemann, point out that as populists rise to power all over the world, its implications can be felt in the respective governments' decision-making especially in areas pertaining to foreign policy and participation in international institutions.⁶ Populism, thus, exerts influence both at the domestic and international level making it a crucial area of study. Despite an ever-increasing ambit of influence, the basic tenets of populism, be it left-wing or right, have remained largely unchanged. Questions of identity and of the conflict of interests between the 'people' and the 'elite' remain central to populist politics even today. This study is based on the contextual background that contemporary right-wing populism, despite having commonalities in its fundamental underpinnings, is bound to have variational aspects in its causes and trajectory. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to analyse and compare certain crucial facets that contribute to the rise, progression or dissolution of right-wing populism in the three chosen case studies, rather than broadly categorizing it on the basis of a few parameters (such as conflict between 'people' and 'elite'). In doing so it aims to shed light on certain aspects which are often overlooked in contemporary right-wing populist discourse.

⁶ Sandra Destradi and Johannes Plagemann, "Populism and International Relations: (Un)predictability, personalisation, and the reinforcement of existing trends in world politics", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 5, 2019, pp. 711-712.

Research Questions

This research proposes the following questions:

- 1) What are the causes of right-wing populism in each of these cases?
- 2) What role does immigration play in facilitating populist sentiments?
- 3) What are the factors that lead to variation in these instances of right-wing populism?
- 4) What is the role of oppositional forces against the politics of right-wing populism?

These questions are critical to the analysis of right-wing populism and crucial for examining the crux of this research proposition. The *first* question naturally arises in the case of this comparative analysis. Before delving into the intricacies of populism and its variations in each of the countries, the preliminary question relates to the causes of the rise of right-wing populism. In each of the separate cases, there are certain unique conditions that lead to the spread of populist sentiments. The initial question aims to identify these conditions to help attain an understanding of why right-wing populism gains ground in a certain place or time. The *second* relates to immigration and its role in facilitating populism. The last few decades have witnessed the rise in levels of immigration to countries in Western Europe and subsequently this has led to backlash in several of the host countries. The discourse on immigration is an important aspect not only in European politics, but also in the study of right-wing populist politics. The *third* question looks into the variation in the examined cases. Since three separate cases are examined, it is necessary to understand the deviant factors and the contrasting conditions which lead to the growth of populism in each of the cases. It is crucial to analyze the differing nature of right-wing populist sentiments and politics through the comparison of the cases in question and in doing so perceive the evolving nature of populism itself. *Lastly* this study aims to examine the role of oppositional forces against the politics of right-wing populism. Right-wing populism, especially in Europe is often counter-balanced by strong oppositional forces which seek to check the rise of right-wing politics. Thus, any study of right-wing populism in Europe will not be complete without substantial attention to the forces that counter balance the politics of the right.

Review of Literature

An analysis of right-wing populism would naturally have its inception in an examination of the concept of populism itself. In light of the plethora of debates surrounding the resurgence and

the nature of right-wing populism, the core concept of populism and its constituent factors are often glossed over. Right-wing populism is an offshoot of the primary concept of populism which itself can be categorized into many different varieties including left-wing populism, agrarian populism etc to name a few. The difficulty of defining populism and its categorizations is a recurring theme in the literature on populism and shall be dealt with subsequently. To review the literature on populism, certain canonical works have been considered as secondary sources to provide the theoretical and analytical framework of this study.

Themes in Reviewed Literature

Definitional complexity of populism

Certain themes can be identified in reviewing these essential works on populism despite the fact that each has dealt with the nature and the facets of populism in its own way. The first noticeable theme is the complexity in defining populism. The definition of populism is subject to a degree of ambiguity; while Margaret Canovan has treated it as a somewhat fluid concept, others like Ernesto Laclau have criticized this seeming lack of coherence and proposed an alternative based on a complete structural evaluation of populism itself. In contrast to Canovan's ambivalence, Laclau has treated populism as a definite and progressive phenomenon. It must be pointed out that Canovan in her later works views populism as an offshoot of democracy, conforming to Laclau's assertion of it being an always present possibility. Hence, there is a great deal of debate surrounding the actual definition and nature of populism making it fundamentally contested concept.

Canovan in her landmark book entitled *Populism* has attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of the different varieties of populism and their practical applications. At the very outset she has made it clear that populism defies conformation into a single definition. Here she has referred to "the Cinderella complex" outlined by Sir Isaiah Berlin who remarked;

"..there exists a shoe-the word "populism"- for which somewhere there exists a foot. There are all kinds of feet which *nearly* fits, but we must not be trapped by those nearly fitting feet. The prince is always wondering about with the shoe; and somewhere, we feel sure, there awaits a limb called pure populism. This is the nucleus of populism, its essence."⁷

⁷ Margaret Canovan, *Populism*, Junction Books, London, 1981, p.7.

Canovan has made it clear that there is severe overlapping of the different categories of populism and that efforts to compartmentalize a movement into any one of these populist varieties would prove futile because it is seemingly impossible to satisfy all the conditions at once. Her failure to provide a definite means of assessing populist movements proves a disadvantage when one attempts to use her given framework to analyze contemporary populist movements. This lack of clarity has been criticized by Ernesto Laclau in his seminal work *On Populist Reason*.

Laclau begins his influential work by attacking the ambiguity prevalent in the current literature on populism. He specifically targets Canovan's categorization of populism into agrarian and political varieties and questions how the two can differ in actual terms. He claims that Canovan has created a typology from a random amalgamation of movements and created her classifications based simply on their differences. According to Laclau, the lack of 'social determinacy' in Canovan's categorization is responsible for reducing the usefulness of these categories.⁸

Laclau aims to tackle this inherent vagueness in literature on populism by viewing the phenomenon as a 'distinct and always present possibility' and in doing so, overturn its image associated with a seemingly anti-intellectual ideological void.⁹ He views populism as a facet of political culture which can be present in a wide array of movements of varying ideological character. In doing so he deviates from his peers who view populism either as an abnormality or as ideology comparable to the likes of liberalism, socialism etc.

Margaret Canovan, in a later article titled *Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy*, argued that populism is an outgrowth of democracy itself. Here, she has focused particularly on the rise of populism in modern democratic societies and examined how the very innate workings of democracy can give birth to the preconditions necessary for the growth of populist sentiments. In this article, she has initially reiterated the main themes of populism and its workings; the relation between the masses and the elite, the dynamics of the power structures and the ability of populism to appeal to its base. However, she asserts that populism emerges from the structural foundation of democracy itself rather than being an indication of something else altogether. According to Canovan, democracy has two faces; a 'redemptive' face and a 'pragmatic' face and these two faces balance each other. From a redemptive point of view

⁸ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London, 2005, p.7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

democracy is an ideology based on people being the source of legitimate authority, but from a pragmatic angle it is a highly systematized and institutionalized collection of norms and practices. Hence democracy as a system is based on the harmonization of its idealistic and practical aspects. In this light, the author argues that often democracy's redemptive ideal of placing power in the hands of the people is at odds with its pragmatic aspect, i.e. the actual working of democratic processes of governance. Voters in a democracy are likely to assume that their elected government should work towards the protection of their interests. It is only when these interests are not adequately represented that discontent arises, thus creating the breeding ground for populism.¹⁰ Hence it is this tension between the redemptive and pragmatic aspects of democracy that is likely to give rise to populism.

One of the earlier classics in literature on populism is *Populism; Its Meaning and National Characteristics* edited by Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner. It is an attempt to define and explain populism by bringing together the collected works of a number of eminent and scholars in the field. The first part of the book deals with cases of populism in North America, Latin America, Russia, Eastern Europe and Africa while the second part deals with the various facets and characteristics of populism itself.¹¹

Being an amalgamation of the views of various experts, the reader is able to gain a rounded view of the concepts of populism. While Donald McRae has treated populism as an ideology, Peter Wiles has viewed it as a syndrome. Angus Stewart in his chapter *The Social Roots* opines that populism lacks originality in terms of its ideological nature. He claims that there is an *external* aspect of populism and an *internal* one. The external aspect refers to the preconditions necessary for populism to emerge and these can refer to exposure to ideas and outside influences. According to Stewart, populist tendencies emerge in societies which have recently become aware of their situations which are marginal to the real centres of power. Most of these movements arise as a response to the difficulties of modernization and economic development. The author cites the example of Russian populism, where the influence of Western European socialist doctrines played a major role. The *internal* aspect refers to the standpoint of the various social groups in relation to the process of modernization in the country.

¹⁰ Margaret Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy", *Political Studies*, 1999, pp.2-16.

¹¹ Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (eds.), *Populism; Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, The Macmillan Company, London, 1969.

According to Stewart, one of the main distinguishing features of populist movements is the dominance of nationalism and this nationalism invariably equates ‘the nation’ with ‘the people’. Nationalism may acquire a populist character when a number of societal and political prerequisites are met in a particular stage of economic and political development in that society. The author has also referred to the ‘Janus quality’ of populist movements whereby they seek a balance between modernization and the traditional values they seek to preserve.¹² This duality is visible even in modern day instances of populism which are not free from conflicting ideas and interests.

An analysis of these works reveals the complexity of defining populism which evades categorization into a single all-encompassing definition. Noted author on populism Cas Mudde in his book *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, which he co-authored with Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, gave a brief overview of the fundamental concepts of populism from a modern perspective. He refers to populism as a ‘thin-centered’ ideology to highlight its malleability. The idea of populism can be moulded by those who pursue it; left wing populists combine elements of socialism in their brand of populism while right-wing populists may infuse a degree of nationalism in theirs.¹³ Similarly, Canovan too has also claimed that it is pointless to label populism as Left or Right because it can be ‘either or neither’ depending upon a host of factors.¹⁴ In another essay, Mudde has underlined the difficulty of defining populism and has advocated approaching it from an ‘ideational approach.’ In doing so one would view it as a ‘set of ideas’ focusing on the broad antithesis between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’.¹⁵

This tractable nature of populism reinforces the idea of its definitional complexity that constitutes an important theme in the literature on populism. The fact that populism defies strict defining boundaries is reinforced repeatedly in the literature and is a major point of contention.

Typology

The literature on populism has different perspectives on the various types on populism. Here certain differences are noted between the earlier and latter works on populism. While Canovan has provided an overarching framework for the classification of populism, focusing on the

¹² Angus Stewart, ‘The Social Roots’, in Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism; Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, The Macmillan Company, London, 1969, pp. 180-197.

¹³ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017.

¹⁴ Margaret Canovan, n.2, p.294.

¹⁵ Cas Mudde, ‘Populism: An Ideational Approach’, in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 2017, p.3.

constituent base and the political characteristics of populist movements, contemporary scholar Mudde has created a classification based on the direction of mobilization.

Canovan has divided the concept of populism into two broad categories namely *agrarian populism* and *political populism* and has further divided them into numerous sub-categories. Agrarian populism is defined as a sort of ‘rural radicalism’ constituted of a particular socio-economic base, namely peasants and farmers and thriving under particular socio-economic circumstances, most commonly as a reaction to modernization.¹⁶ The different varieties of agrarian populism are farmer’s radicalism, peasant movements and intellectual agrarian socialism. Canovan has provided a detailed account of both populism in the United States and Russia. The former focuses on the evolution of the People’s Party which advocated the rights of farmers, thereby paving the way for one of the first instances of populism in the United States. The latter refers to the *narodnichestvo* movement in Russia where a section of the Russian intelligentsia dedicated themselves to the welfare of Russian peasantry in a movement idealizing a society based on traditional peasant traditions. An interesting point which underlines the varied nature of populism is that while populism in the US grew around the direct participation of farmers, the *narodnichestvo* did not involve any peasant participation, nor was it a people’s movement per se.¹⁷ Despite the fact that the very term *narodnik* translates into “populist”, it was a movement reserved only for a section of intellectuals who were too distanced from the practicalities of reality.

Apart from agrarian populism and its instances, Canovan has dealt with a second variety of populism which leans more heavily upon political characteristics and less on the socio-economic base. She has further categorized them into four subdivisions and provided a detailed discussion of their pros and cons. These types are firstly, *populist dictatorship* revolving around a charismatic leader and appealing to ‘the people’ by bypassing the established elite.¹⁸ Secondly, *populist democracy*, which is classed as a form of radical democracy aiming to achieve the nearest possible form of direct democracy based on the use of initiative and referendum and without the intervention of the political elite.¹⁹ The third variety is *reactionary populism* which is an anti-progressive form of populism which mobilizes popular conservative opinion against the more informed and enlightened liberal elite and their views.²⁰ Finally, there

¹⁶ Margaret Canovan, *n.3*, p.8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.136-137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.225.

is the *politician's populism* which aims to appeal to a large portion of the population skirting the questions of class and ideology and thus creating a vague notion of 'the people'²¹.

The four varieties of populism discussed above help one to gain a clearer perspective of the various facets of populism. However, it becomes difficult to place contemporary instances of populism in any one particular variety since a narrow scheme of understanding under substrata, such as those discussed above, are not sufficient when analyzed in isolation. The cases of populism in Europe, especially those in this study, share characteristics from each of the above four varieties of populism. There are elements of anti-progressive anti-liberal attitudes, appeals to create unity among an idealized notion of 'the people', glorification of a charismatic leader as well as demands for more democratic accountability in each of the cases under consideration, i.e. Germany, Austria and the UK. Hence it is very problematic to attempt to place these cases within the framework of any of the four varieties of populism discussed by Canovan because of their sheer complexity.

It cannot be denied, however, that, the author's detailed examination helps to highlight certain important points which may form an integral part of understanding populism in these particular instances. While the rise of a charismatic leader is a common feature in populist movements and is discussed in any academic discourse on populism, Canovan provides an interesting angle to the cause of the phenomenon. She forwards two views on this matter; firstly, that the rise of a dictator or demagogue can be attributed to the support by the people when they feel there are no other alternatives by which their demands can be fulfilled. Secondly, popular support for dictators stems from a yearning for status and authority among the frightened populace.²² Here the author has cited the views of Alexis de Tocqueville who claimed that 'genuine' political democracies are not susceptible to the rise of charismatic dictators because when people have true access to power, they are less likely to be manipulated by a demagogue. It is only in political systems operating under a 'pretence of democracy' retaining power in the hands of an oligarchy that populist dictators may arise.²³ The explanation of the rise of a populist dictator exposes a potential gap in the case of the application of current instances of populism to Canovan's mode of understanding in this regard. The rise of populist tendencies in liberal democracies cannot be understood along the same lines as the rise of populist dictatorships such as Peronism or Bonapartism. However, even though current populist tendencies preclude

²¹ Ibid., p.261.

²² Ibid., pp.160-161.

²³ Ibid., p.169.

the rise of a populist demagogue, it cannot be denied that the tendency to gravitate towards a charismatic personality remains strong even today. Hence the rise of a populist leader in a liberal democracy is seemingly at odds with Canovan's explanation of the rise of a popular dictator in a pseudo-democratic set-up. Gaps such as these need to be examined because it may seem that an overly simplistic categorization of populism is not enough to gain a clear understanding of contemporary populism in advanced liberal democracies.

The difficulty of applying Canovan's categorization of populism cannot detract from the extent of her contribution to literature on populism and her work is one of the fundamental points of reference on the problem. One of her deeply insightful views relate to the disadvantages of populist democracy. Apart from the danger of the tyranny of majority, she cites the perils of a "Herrenvolle Democracy" where greater political participation, equality and respect is reserved only for the members of the dominant ethnic group constituting the majority and the rights of minority are systematically overlooked.²⁴ One of the main features of contemporary populism involves calls for greater transparency and democratic accountability from the established political elite. While the extension of democratic mechanisms may seem to be a positive development at first glance, Canovan's assertion can lead one to question whether such a development can have positive repercussions for all sections of the population.

Mudde's book briefly goes through the major themes in populism such as the importance of a charismatic leader and the face-off between 'the elite' and 'the people'. However, he also has some interesting additional points to make. He differentiates between the different types of populist movements according to the direction of their mobilization. He classes populist mobilization as three types based on *personalist leadership* operating on top-down mobilization, *social movements* which operate from bottom up or on a *political party* which combines both. He also classifies populists into three types; *outsiders*, *insiders*, *outsider insiders*. While true outsiders having no links to the political establishment are rare, insider-outsiders are the most successful populists since they have strong links to the political elite despite not actually having been one of their ranks. The third type of populists is the insider populists who broke away from their original mainstream affiliations to start anew as populist politicians.²⁵ These classifications provide a simple yet effective way to analyze contemporary instances of populism.

²⁴ Ibid., p.203.

²⁵ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *n.2*.

The typology of populist trends is also applicable to how it has progressed in different ways in the three concerned case studies Germany, the UK and Austria. Berbuir, Lewandowsky and Siri have provided a comprehensive overview of the rise of the AfD in Germany in their article titled ‘The AfD and its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?.’ In this article the authors have traced the transformation of the party from relatively moderate, Eurosceptic beginnings to one embarking on the course of right-wing populism through the espousal of inflammatory, xenophobic rhetoric. They have also outlined how right-wing populism has traditionally failed to find a footing in post-war Germany. This is due to a number of factors such as the political and media culture of ostracizing the right, organisational weaknesses of these parties as well as the federal system that inhibits the success of right-wing parties.²⁶ The rise of the AfD in an environment so ill-suited to actors on the right of the political spectrum reinforces the implications of its success. The lack of reception for the political right is a feature which is common to the UK as well. This facet has been analyzed by Griffin who looks into the historical reasons for the failure of fascism in parliamentary democratic set up of the UK.²⁷ Usherwood has traced the evolution of the UKIP in order to ascertain how it differs from similar such right-wing populist parties. Similar to the AfD, the UKIP was formed by academics sceptical of the European Union. After some initial victories at the European Parliament, the party under charismatic leader Nigel Farage took a populist turn by the turning their focus on opposition to immigration, thereby cementing their position as a repository for protest votes. According to Usherwood, UKIP’s preoccupation with the anti-Europe agenda made it a party of ‘single-issue populism’.²⁸ In the case of Austria, the Freedom Party is an example of a typical right-wing populist party. The FPÖ differs from the other two parties described above in the sense that it initially began as a pro-EU party calling for the accession of Austria to the then European Community. However, the party gradually became opposed to the EU in order to widen its appeal. Reinhard Heinisch has analysed the factors that shape the success of the FPÖ in Austria and these Austria’s insular national identity, unique political system and historical background.²⁹ Hence it is evident that right-wing populism, despite some broad-based similarities has sprung from varying contexts (in this particular study) and

²⁶ Nicole Berbuir, Marcel Lewandowsky and Jasmin Siri, “The AfD and its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?”, *German Politics*, Vol.24, No.2, 2015, pp. 154-178.

²⁷ Roger Griffin, ‘British Fascism: The Ugly Duckling’, in Mike Cronin, ed., *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1996, pp. 141-166.

²⁸ Simon Usherwood, “Shooting the fox? UKIP’s populism in the post-Brexit era”, *West European Politics*, Vol.42, No.6, 2019, pp. 1209-1229.

²⁹ Reinhard Heinisch, “Salvation and villain: the role of Europe in Austrian politics and the rise of the radical right”, *Politique Européenne*, No.14, 2004, pp.165-187.

followed dissimilar trajectories. It is the aim of this study to analyse these variational factors instead of typifying the cases within one broad category.

The different types and classification of populism are crucial to understanding the nature of populism. Further classification of the newer right-wing radical populist parties and Taggart's analysis of 'new populism' will be discussed subsequently.

Operational aspect of populism

The next important theme in the reviewed literature relates to the operational aspect of populism, i.e. its mode of functioning in a particular political system. Here too, scholars have approached it in various ways. On one hand, Laclau has created a structural model explaining the functional side of populism. His model is based on an intricate analysis of the units working together to give rise to populism. On the other hand, authors like Paul Taggart have based their study of the workings of populism on a qualitative rationale. Thus, it is interesting to note the differences in the approach adopted to analyze how and why various factors operate to create populism.

The uniqueness of Laclau's approach to assessing populism lies in his novel perspective of analyzing the issue. Instead of simply categorizing populism and highlighting its various features, he has created an over-arching structure explaining its fundamental mechanisms. At the very outset he has drawn from diverse sources to explain the fundamental differences between a crowd, a public and a group. It becomes abundantly clear that a clear understanding of these groupings can provide one with a clearer insight into populism as a whole. Interestingly, he has claimed that belonging to a crowd lowers the average intelligence of its members. He has quoted Gustave le Bon in this respect;

“ ..by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated he may be a cultivated individual, in a crowd he is a barbarian, i.e. a creature acting by instinct.”³⁰

Distinguishing between *crowds* and *publics*, he asserts that the *crowd* is the most ancient of all social groupings and the *publics*, which emerged at a much later stage of civilization with advancements in transport and communication, ultimately hold the key to the future of societies. Elaborating on the factors and conditions for the formation of *groups*, he claims that in a group, the egoistic impulses of the individual members are subordinated to the higher goal

³⁰ Laclau, *n.2*, p.29.

of the *group* as a whole.³¹ The author's differentiation of these basic levels of human organization provides a micro-level perspective of the phenomenon of populism which ultimately helps the reader to build a clearer understanding of populism as a whole.

Laclau builds his structure by first referring to the basic units which form the unity which is an integral part of any populist movement. The smallest of these units are constituted of 'social demands' which fulfilled or not are basically democratic demands that accumulate to form an 'equivalential chain' of unsatisfied demands. As these demands build up through *equivalential articulation*, they ultimately become 'popular demands' and contribute to the formation of the idea of the 'people' as a whole. The two important preconditions for this whole process to be set into motion is firstly, the formation of an 'antagonistic frontier' which acts as a barrier between the people and power and secondly, the expressions of these demands without which the birth of the *people* will not be possible.³²

The basis of the emergence of populism is formed because of the disconnect between the rising number of unsatisfied demands on one hand and the apathetic power on the other. The evolution of demands from being *democratic demands* to *popular demands* occurs with the amalgamation of different isolated demands through the establishment of an 'equivalential bond' between these demands. When several links come together, they revolve around a popular identity. This popular identity emerges because of certain specific demands and it ultimately becomes representative of a wider totality.³³

The notion of popular identity itself is dependent on a number of *signifiers* such as images or words which represent the equivalential link as a whole. Laclau asserts that the extent of the equivalential chain is inversely proportional to the strength of these signifiers, i.e. the wider the chain is spread, the less these signifiers are connected to their original *particularistic demands*. While analyzing the nature of these signifiers, the distinction between *empty signifiers* and *floating signifiers* must be kept in mind. Empty signifiers refer to the formation of a popular identity once the stable frontier has been consolidated.³⁴ Laclau is of the opinion that an empty signifier, rather than presenting just an *image of pre-given totality*, it is what creates this totality itself.³⁵ On the other hand, *floating signifiers* pose a challenge to and attempt to displace that frontier. With reference to floating signifier, the author mentions the

³¹ Ibid., pp.44-45.

³² Ibid., pp.73-78.

³³ Ibid., pp. 82-86.

³⁴ Ibid., p.94.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

presence of the ‘outsiders’ namely the lumpen proletariat who differ from the actual proletariat and whose demands are often outside the domain of the equivalential chain.³⁶ Hence these outsiders often try to subvert the frontier and they resist integrating with those who constitute the *people*.

Laclau has pointed out why these demands are specifically democratic demands which are different from socialist demands. That is not to presuppose that they belong to a democratic regime per se, rather they indicate an equalitarian dimension because they are formulated by the underdog, thus implying the occurrence of some sort of deprivation or exclusion. Moreover, he focuses on the notion of *ethno-populism* where the ethnic element acts as a determining factor for the elements that can be included in the equivalential chain.³⁷ However, it does not mean that populism can only be of the ethnic variety. The links in the equivalential chain ultimately determine the idea of the people. These links can also constitute a ‘global identity’ but it must be kept in mind that the more diluted the identity, the emptier the signifiers are likely to be.³⁸

Laclau deviates from other scholars of populism by his assertion that populism is a subversive phenomenon capable of overturning the prevalent state of affairs and bringing about a new order from a radical reconstruction of the old one. He sees populism as a force for change and an ever-present possibility which can arise as soon as the necessary structural preconditions are met. His structural explanation of populism provides a new perspective from which one can analyze populist movements and examine them in a logical and empirical way. Laclau has claimed that ‘globalized capitalism’ is responsible for deepening and diversifying identity constructs and thus providing the new historical conditions for the emergence of populism.³⁹ It would be interesting to place his structural narrative in a liberal democratic setting and examine how it fits into his view of populism as an anti-globalization movement.

While Laclau has created a rational framework for analyzing the growth of populism, Cas Mudde has touched upon many of the more modern operational features of contemporary populism. His book also focuses on issues such as the role of social media and female populist leaders, which are important factors in modern politics. It is a common trend among female leaders to portray themselves as ideal mothers or wives to fit into the traditional mould which

³⁶ Ibid., p.153.

³⁷ Ibid., p.196.

³⁸ Ibid., p.198.

³⁹ Ibid., p.231.

appeals to the populist base. The authors make the distinction between traditional cultures which favour female leaders who have inherited their positions and liberal societies which are more conducive to female leaders who are self-made. Furthermore, the rise of populism is analyzed from a demand/ supply perspective. The demand side, created because of increasing corruption and widening gap between the public and the political establishment, lays the groundwork for the rise of populism. The supply side on the other hand, consists of populist leaders magnifying issues which have not been tackled effectively by the political establishment. In today's populist parlance 'immigration crisis' is one of the main issues to mobilize support.

The question of the constituent base

The third notable theme in this reviewed literature is that of the question of the *constituent base*. One of the main themes in populism is the notion of 'the people'. It determines who comprises the base and who is excluded. Taggart has described the people as the 'silent majority' in the populist scheme of things. But who can lay claim to being one of the people, the so-called silent majority? His notion of heartland answers this question by demarcating the boundaries for those who can be considered as one of 'the people'. On the other hand, Laclau has tackled this question by asserting that questions of people and of identity are ultimately determined by the links in the equivalential chain. The foundational aspect of populism ultimately rests on the composition of its constituent base.

Paul Taggart in his book 'Populism' has attempted to deal with the wave of populism sweeping Western Europe since the last part of the twentieth century. At the outset of his book, he has brought together various definitions of populism by different experts to provide the reader with an idea of the features and characteristics of populism. He has dedicated the first part of his book to cases of populism in the United States, Russia, Latin America and Canada. However this review shall focus mainly on his ideas on the nature and characteristics of populism outlined in the second part of his book, which is more relevant for this study.

Taggart brands new populism as a reaction to the established party systems by certain right leaning parties in Western Europe. The increasing support for right-wing parties in the 1980s and 90s was feared by some as the potential rise of fascism and labeled as neo-fascism. New populism mainly deals with issues of nationalism, immigration, taxation and rallies against the perceived corruption in the existing political system. Being chameleonic in character it is also liable to take different forms according to its environment. The author has delineated the

potential voter base as young urban men and the supporters of new populism are unlikely to be long term voters since they are drawn from various ends of the political spectrum. Being anti-institutional in character, one of the weaknesses of populism is that it is liable to disintegrate because of internal factionalism and conflict over leadership.

One of the foundational pillars of populism is its assertion that it speaks exclusively for the people. The author is of the opinion that populism requires devices that can be easily moulded and the idea of 'the people' falls in this category. The people are the target of populism because of 'who they are, who they are not, how they are and how many they are'.⁴⁰ The people are vaunted because of their number and it is claimed by populists that it is the extent of the support of the people that grant them legitimacy. However, the author does not fail to point out the fact that the greater number of people as supporters does not automatically translate into greater variety or plurality.

Taggart has focused on the idea of the 'silent majority', another key aspect in the populist rhetoric. The people are described as the majority who silently get on with their lives as opposed to the minority who are politically active and audible, as if the quality of being silent ascribes the people with a virtue. This silence is only broken under two conditions; firstly, the corruption in politics leading to the perceived wider societal and moral decay and secondly, when 'special interests' are seen to have clouded the political system. These perceived interests vary between populists who belong to the left or the right side of the political spectrum.⁴¹

One of the most important populist concepts examined by Taggart is that of the 'Heartland'. It is an integral part of the populist rhetoric and a device used by populist leaders to evoke a sense of belonging among 'the people' by reinforcing their notions of identity. He defines heartland as;

"The heartland is a territory of the imagination. Its explicit invocation occurs only at times of difficulty, and the process yields a notion that is unfocused and yet very powerful as an evocation of that life and those qualities worth defending, thereby stirring populists into political action. The heartland is that place, embodying the positive aspects of everyday life."⁴²

When dealing with instances of populism, one is most likely to come across rhetoric glorifying the past which is presented to be seemingly socially and politically ideal. In the populist

⁴⁰ Paul Taggart, *Populism*, Viva Books Private Limited, New Delhi, 2002, p.92.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.93.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.95.

discourse, it is this sense of attachment to the past and idealizing its merits and virtues which creates a sense of identity and belonging among the people. Taggart has attempted to use his idea of the 'heartland' to describe this perfect ideal of the past. According to him, the notion of heartland is different from that of an ideal utopian society because while the latter is a construct of the head, the former appeals to the heart. The most important feature of the heartland is its homogeneous character which automatically excludes perceived outsiders. It is indicative of a narrow nationalism which revolves around the notion of an organic homogeneous community which thrives within its own restricted frontiers. The heartland is characteristic of the constricted and inward-looking aspect of populism which shuns plurality and cosmopolitanism.⁴³

Taggart has tackled the issue of populism in a detailed and comprehensive way. He has shed light on the various features and the characteristics of the issue, explaining its various intricacies in a lucid manner. However, it is his idea of the heartland which can be deemed as one of his important contributions to the populist discourse. When dealing with populism or any form of identity politics, one of the recurring themes is that of the ideal past. This ideal past is repeatedly invoked by leaders to appeal to their populist base. Hence the pertinent question may arise as to what actually constitutes this ideal past? Taggart's conception of the heartland is an adroit attempt to answer this question and explain its implications. His work is significant, especially for this study, because it tackles the issue of new populism in Western Europe which can be viewed as a forerunner of modern-day populism in that area.

Emerging trends in contemporary right-wing populism

The final theme in this literature review, also the most relevant to this study is *emerging trends in contemporary right-wing populism* especially relating to the particular concerned case studies. While an extensive review of the works of populism is essential for a fundamental understanding of populism as a whole, attention also has to be paid to more recent works of right-wing populism pertaining to the concerned case studies.

The book 'Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse' edited by Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral is a comprehensive new take on contemporary right-wing populism in Europe.⁴⁴ The first part of the books deals with the basic concepts of right-wing

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral, eds., *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013.

populism and focuses on issues relating to Islamisation and the campaign by right-wing populist parties against Islam in Western Europe. The book also examines the cases of right-wing populism in Western Europe, including Britain, Austria and Germany. The chapter ‘Contemporary Forms of Racist Movements and Mobilization in Britain’ by John Solomos examines the role of radical right-wing organizations and their mode of operation and levels of success in Britain.⁴⁵ During the 1990s and 2000s, ethnic and black minorities were portrayed as ‘enemies from within’ by right-wing factions who perceived them as threats to national politics and culture. These themes of threat perception included references to the ‘silent white majority’ echoing Paul Taggart’s analysis of the modes of mobilization of the new right which has been discussed earlier in this literature review. The article traces the trajectory of right-wing organizations in Britain from the growth of the National Front (NF) in the 1970s, to the rise of the British National Party (BNP) following the collapse of the NF as well as the emergence of the English Defence League in 2009. Solomos provides a very useful and comprehensive overview of the historical background of the growth of these right-wing organizations in Britain which is necessary to understand the basis of their formation and their agendas. Michał Krzyżanowski in his chapter ‘From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: Continuities and Shifts in Recent Discourses and Patterns of Political Communication of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)’ focuses on the changing trends of the FPÖ.⁴⁶ The FPÖ became a rare instance of a right-wing populist party entering the government not once, but twice. Such an occurrence is rare in Western Europe where these parties are generally relegated to the fringes of the political spectrum. The chapter traces the growth of the party under its charismatic leader Jörg Haider and its subsequent performance under H.C Strache. It aims to assert that the FPÖ has undergone a process of ‘modernization’ in the sense that it has aligned its agendas with those of other Western European right-wing parties which resort to ‘Islamophobia’ as a crucial element of their discourse. However, the party has merged these elements within its old features such as its anti-immigration stance.

⁴⁵ John Solomos, ‘Contemporary Forms of Racist Movements and Mobilization in Britain’ in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral, eds., *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, pp. 121-134.

⁴⁶ Michał Krzyżanowski, ‘From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: Continuities and Shifts in Recent Discourses and Patterns of Political Communication of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)’, in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral, eds., *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, pp. 135-148.

‘Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse’ provides a detailed perspective of contemporary right-wing populism in Europe. It fills in many of the gaps of the older books reviewed previously and tackles many new themes and modern challenges. However, its analysis of the cases of right-wing populism in the countries concerned in this research, especially Britain and Austria are somewhat one-dimensional. This research project aims to include further analysis of the role of immigration and its economic costs, as well as technology, some of which have not been sufficiently examined in the book.

The article ‘How Radical Right-Wing Populism Has Shaped Recent Migration Policy in Austria and Germany’ by Alexander Rossel Hayes and Carolyn Marie Dudek provides an interesting comparative analysis between these two countries and deals with the themes of right-wing populism and its relation to immigration in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis.⁴⁷ At the outset, the authors cite the issue of declining fertility rates in both Germany and Austria and assert that the theory of replacement migration is not sufficient to explain their contrasting stance on immigration. The theory of replacement migration suggests that population growth and aging have a role to play in influencing how states form their migration policies. The theory, put forward by the UN Population Division, is based on the notion that immigration could have a positive effect on states with declining fertility rates by boosting their labour forces. Though this theory may be suited to explaining Germany’s liberal immigration policies, it fails to shed light on Austria’s restrictive policies on immigration. The article aims to explain this disparity through the countries’ attempts to come to terms with their historical past. For Germany, the past associated with National Socialism is perceived with a sense of collective guilt. This was reinforced by the fact that symbols and associations with the past were systematically erased in the post-war years and the political system prevented the rise of right-wing parties. This sense of collective guilt characterized by a forced disassociation from Nazi values and attempts to forge a new identity has been termed as *vergangenheitsbewältigung*. On the other hand, Austria’s process of denazification is characterized by *victim myth* whereby post-war narrative was structured to portray Austrians as victims rather than willing participants in the Nazi atrocities and a section of the population even viewed its Nazi past in a positive light. This interesting anomaly between the two countries and their contrasting coping mechanisms with their past has been used as the focal point in explaining their divergent attitudes towards immigration. This article provides crucial insight into the complex inter-

⁴⁷ Alexander Rossell Hayes and Carolyn Marie Dudek, “How Radical Right-Wing Populism Has Shaped Recent Migration Policy in Austria and Germany”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2020, pp.133-150.

relationship between immigration and identity and their impact on the growth of right-wing populism. However, the economic aspect has not been sufficiently analyzed and constitutes a gap in understanding the relation between immigration and right-wing population.

The article ‘The Rise of the Fringe: Right-Wing Populists, Islamists and Politics in the UK’, Juris Pupcenoks and Ryan McCabe have provided a contrasting analysis of two radical organizations, one radical right-wing populist and one radical Islamic.⁴⁸ Opposition to immigration is one of the most crucial defining features of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe and Britain is no exception. This branch of populism, coined as ‘exclusionary populism’, is based on the notion of the incompatibility of Islam in Western civilization. This is usually correlated with demands for the complete assimilation of Muslim communities and even their complete expulsion. On the other hand, UK has also witnessed a strain of conservative Islamism espousing radical Islamic views which are often perceived as threats to liberal democratic values. These include the calls for the establishment of a Muslim caliphate based on sharia law. The Islam4UK is a radical Islamist organization which came to light by protesting against British soldiers returning from Afghanistan. Its leaders came to light through their inflammatory speeches and the party is known for its controversial activities such as holding rallies against troops and calling for the Queen to convert to Islam. The opposite end of the political spectrum witnessed the rise of the English Defence League which emerged in response to an Islam4UK protest rally against British soldiers in 2009. The EDL, which consisted of former members of radical right-wing parties such as the British National Party (BNP), pledged to defend the English working classes against the threats of multiculturalism and the Islamization of Britain. The article has provided a unique perspective on radical politics by highlighting fringe factions from both ends of the political spectrum. It aims to call attention to the fact that while these radical organizations have a negligible role in national politics, they may play an important role in mobilizing popular opinion and impacting politics at large.

These works are important because they highlight certain crucial issues and topics which have not been examined in the older works. The emergence of radical right-wing fringe groups, Islamophobia and questions of immigration and identity are crucial for understanding contemporary right-wing populism in Western Europe. These are vital themes which are pertinent to this research project.

⁴⁸ Juris Pupcenoks and Ryan McCabe, “The Rise of the Fringe: Right Wing Populists, Islamists and Politics in the UK”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2013, pp.171–184.

Gaps in reviewed literature

Reviewing the above literature, the themes and trends can be summed up as;

- 1) The definitional complexity of populism and its contested nature.
- 2) Typology
- 3) The operational aspect of populism, i.e. the various approaches to explain its mechanisms.
- 4) The question of the constituent base and its composition.
- 5) The emerging trends in contemporary right-wing populism

This objective of this research is to examine the causes and nature of right-wing populism in contemporary Europe and in order to do so, the above reviewed literature is crucial. To gain a clear perspective of the inner workings and aspects of right-wing populism, an understanding of the basics of the fundamental tenets of populism is necessary. However certain gaps can be pointed out in the literature with regard to this research.

Firstly, most of the examples of populism are sourced from the early populist movements in Russia or America which were agrarian in their roots, or from Latin America. While Paul Taggart's assessment of new populism in Western Europe is useful, it remains to be seen how the theoretical concepts examined in these works can be applied to contemporary populism in Europe, especially in the case studies. The surveyed literature has focused overwhelmingly on the historical instances of populist movements characterized predominantly by agrarian or dictatorial forms of leadership and mobilization. It remains to be seen whether the nature of populism discussed in the reviewed literature hold true in the instances of western liberal democracies. If not, then what are the main factors of variation? This crucial question needs to be examined in this research project.

Secondly, these works often look at populism from a unidirectional perspective directly correlating cause and effect in each particular instance. Instead, of adopting this approach, this study aims to examine contemporary right-wing populism through a multidimensional approach combining both historical and socio-political analysis. Ascertaining the historical basis for right-wing populist activity facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of right-wing populist politics.

Thirdly, some of the prominent works often overlook the role of oppositional forces to right-wing populism. Determining the crucial part played by forces of opposition, mainstream or

otherwise, is as crucial to the analysis of right-wing populism as its causal effects. This study aims to examine the role of mainstream actors in order to ascertain how they shape the course of right-wing populist politics and its actors.

Finally, the role of immigration is central to discourse on contemporary right-wing populism, especially in western democracies. Most of the existing literature examines the immediate impact of immigration on these particular countries. However, this study looks into the historical context of immigration trends and the degree of exposure to immigration as well as notable reforms. This would enable one to ascertain the level of receptivity to immigration which has a direct relation with the rise of right-wing populism.

The aim of this research is to examine the rise of right-wing populism in the cases of Germany, UK and Austria and to problematize the issue in the context of the reviewed literature. While the literature surveyed above is necessary for constructing the basic framework of analysis required to assess the research questions, it also has a number of gaps. These gaps, discussed above will be identified and analysed in this research project.

Methodology

This study has been carried out using discursive analysis method, making use of both primary and secondary data. The research has focused extensively on the historical and political background of right-wing populism in these three countries, the importance of immigration and the role of oppositional forces in shaping the discourse on right-wing populist politics. Keeping in mind the extensive nature of the research questions, the chapters have been framed addressing them in separate sections. The fundamental premise of the thesis is the fact that these countries, despite their shared characteristics as economically powerful western liberal democracies, have experienced right-wing populism in varying ways. The analytical framework of this work has thus focused on an extensive examination of the historical and political underpinnings that create the conditions for this variation. The methodological tools include analysis of archival documents, official immigration data, party documents and manifestos of both mainstream and right-wing populist parties as well as interviews with experts. Field work has been carried out in the UK, and the following archives have been consulted; **Churchill Archives Centre** (Cambridge), **Wolfson Centre for Archival Research** (Birmingham), **National Archives** (London) and the archives of the **London School of Economics** (London). An extensive collection of archival data and documents has been consulted during the trip and interviews have been carried out with experts in the area of populism.

The chapters in this study are arranged as follows:

- 1) Chapter one: Introduction outlining literature review and thesis structure
- 2) Chapter two: Germany case study
- 3) Chapter three: UK case study
- 4) Chapter four: Austria case study
- 5) Chapter five: Conclusion

CHAPTER 2

GERMANY

Right-wing populist politics in post-war Germany has been conspicuous by its absence. A protracted process of reckoning with painful memories of the war shaped German national identity and politics. Feelings of guilt percolated public life to the extent that nationalist feelings were repressed and right-wing politics sidelined. That is not to say that the latter was absent altogether; xenophobia and the right have been a constant, yet muted fixture in Germany. The turning point came in the form of the 2015-16 migrant crisis when Germany made the decision to admit more than a million refugees fleeing war and persecution. The crisis became a portent of imminent political upheaval as the initial welcoming response swiftly gave way to an upsurge in right-wing populist sentiment. This ultimately manifested in the rise of the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland or Alternative for Germany (AfD) which managed to gain enough public approval to become the third largest party in the Bundestag (German national parliament) in the 2017 federal elections; a feat that had previously been unthinkable for any right-wing populist party in Germany.

This chapter examines the rise of right-wing populism in Germany through the historical lens of identity formation in order to understand why right-wing populist parties (before the rise of the AfD) hardly ever became contenders in national politics. In doing so it aims to analyse the significance of the AfD's ascendance in a political environment that has traditionally been hostile to the political right since the end of the Second World War. It is divided into three sections that align with the research questions of this study; *firstly*, the evolution of right-wing populism in Germany, *secondly*, the pivotal role of immigration and *thirdly*, the part played by oppositional forces in reaction to the right. The first section deals with the the unique historical progression of post-war Germany and its experience of denazification that created a national identity shaped by guilt and firm rejection of the political right. The second section analyses with the liberalisation of Germany's immigration policies along with its accompanying ramifications and the final section examines the role of the mainstream parties in counteracting right-wing populist politics.

Right-wing populism in Germany: Evolution and Current trends

Role of history in shaping post-war national identity and perceptions of the right

A discussion of right-wing populist trends in Germany requires a brief overview of the history of post-war memory in Germany and historical events such as denazification that had a profound impact on shaping German collective memory and identity. The complex nature of post-war German identity can be evinced from the following excerpt; ‘Few Germans today would say that they are “proud to be German”. Since 1945 race and nationality have been taboo subjects. Given the historical context the unwillingness of most Germans to address these issues is unsurprising.’⁴⁹

That is not to deny the fact that German nationalist philosophers had imagined ideas such as ‘Volksseele’ (people’s will) as the foundational pillar for German national identity, even before the emergence of the German state as a political unit. The popular idea of ‘Heimat’ which underlines ‘the bond between the individual and his home community, culture and history’ harks back to the imaginings of nascent nationalist fervour expressed by the early German philosophers.⁵⁰ However, the painful memories of the war and the forcible suppression of any form of nationalism played a profound role in quashing German identity.

After the defeat of Germany in the Second World War, the Allied powers drew up an extensive framework for the regeneration of Germany through the complete elimination of any trace of Nazism or Nazis. The purpose of this policy of ‘denazification’ was to effectively ensure that Germany would not pose a threat to world peace again. Germany itself was divided into four zones and administered by the four major powers, namely Great Britain, the US, Soviet Union and France. The major assumptions that were the basis for this were firstly, the crimes of the Third Reich during the war were the collective responsibility of the German nation as a whole. Secondly, certain inherent traits of Germans such as their proclivity towards anti-liberalism and militarism were the main reasons for the rise of the Third Reich and thirdly, the ‘German problem’ could be dealt with by an effective democratic reorientation of Germany as a whole.⁵¹ The process of denazification referred to the process of identifying, prosecuting and eliminating Nazis from positions of power in those areas of Germany where the United States military

⁴⁹ *Harassment of foreigners in the new Länder: The rebirth of fascism?* (Letter to Sir Christopher Mallaby, HM Ambassador, Bonn) British Embassy, Berlin Office, 5 October 1992 (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 24-06-2023).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Louisa McClintock, “Facing the Awful Truth: Germany Confronts the Past, Again”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 52, No. 6, November/December 2005, p.33.

government exercised control. It was felt that Germans, who had initiated two world wars in the span of three decades, needed to be imbued with the ideals of peace and democracy. The main pillars of denazification, namely re-education, re-orientation and democratisation, were aimed at quashing the militarist tendencies of the Germans. Furthermore, military government also wanted a positive image of the US and its democratic ideals to be maintained in light of the increasing imminence of the Cold War.⁵² It was largely perceived by the American officials that the main drawback of the German national character was its tendency towards obedience. This was expressed in a report by William F. Russell of Columbia University who claimed that “Germans have a sheep psychology. They follow a leader. They do as they are told.” It was this tendency that the Americans hoped to undermine through denazification.⁵³

The process of denazification was carried out by categorizing individuals based on the extent of their participation in the Nazi regime. This was achieved by means of a questionnaire or *Fragebogen* which every German adult was required to complete. This was supposed to be a thorough examination of their career in the Third Reich such as dates of joining the Nazi Party or any such allied organizations, and other such details such as promotion or pay rises. The aim was to identify and remove Nazi sympathizers from top positions so as to ensure the new emerging order is free from their influence. However, this process was flawed in many ways. Offenders were often allowed to appeal and let off after the payment of a negligible fine. After this process, they were seen as ‘denazified’ and could resume not only their citizenship but also their jobs. The questionnaire was also superficially designed, failing to thus comprehensively distinguish between who had actively collaborated and participated in the crimes of the Third Reich and who had been compelled to become members of the Nazi party due to reasons such as basic employment. Since every German had to compulsorily fill up these *Fragebogen*, there was eventually a huge number of forms that had to be screened.⁵⁴ Eventually denazification was abandoned in 1948 in light of changing international scenario and the advent of the Cold War. One crucial aspect of denazification that needs to be mentioned is the process of re-education that was undertaken by the allied powers. It was felt by the military government that the re-education of the youth of the Nazi era was imperative.⁵⁵ This process entailed the mass dismissal of elementary school teachers and school principals and the acceptance of only

⁵² Alexandra F. Levy, “Promoting Democracy and Denazification: American Policymaking and German Public Opinion”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol.26, No.4, 2015, p.615.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.616-617.

⁵⁴ Louisa McClintock, *n.2*, pp.33-34.

⁵⁵ Alexandra F. Levy, *n.3*, p.618.

military government approved curriculum.⁵⁶ Even universities were not exempt from this. Widespread interrogation was carried out into the backgrounds of the students and faculty of Heidelberg university and this extended to interrogations and even arrests.⁵⁷ Several instances such as a report in response to a letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (UK) in 1947 urging investigation into the case of a Professor Karl Gronau of Brunswick reveals how these processes were often fraught with flaws. According to this report Professor Gronau had obtained his position by falsifying his background in his Fragebogen wherein he had stated that he had only been an applicant for Nazi party membership and that application had been rejected. Later, investigation yielded the fact that he had not only been a party member between 1933 to 1938, but he had also been a member of the Korps der Politischen Leiter (Corps of Political Leaders) and the NS Lehrerbund (National Socialist Teachers League), the former of which was responsible for the planning and implementation as well as the supervision of criminal activities carried out by the Nazi Party.⁵⁸

Denazification failed in primary objective of extirpating Nazis from every aspect of public life. According to historian Lutz Niethammer denazification eased the way for the re-entry of ex-Nazis into civil society by allowing them to successfully conceal their backgrounds. This was often achieved by relying on sympathetic local networks who provided good testimonials of character.⁵⁹ Thus the failure of denazification cannot be attributed only to its procedural drawbacks, but also to the persistent public sympathy towards former Nazis.

A particular account which discusses the failure of denazification to weed out Nazi tendencies among industrialists (Wehrwirtschafts-führer) who acted as advisors to the German High Command (Wehrwirtschaftsstab) department dealing with the allocation of raw materials, states;

“Denazification” is an ugly word and a misleading one. It is misleading because it tends to focus our attention almost exclusively on “technical Nazis”, that is those who were members of the Party or its affiliated Organisations, while individuals and groups, although at least as sinister, were overlooked because, for various reasons, they can boast of a “clear”

⁵⁶ Alfred C. Pundt, “Re-Educating the New Germany”, *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol.19, No.7, 1948, p.352.

⁵⁷ Ralph W. Brown III, “Removing “Nasty Nazi Habits”: The CIC and the Denazification of Heidelberg University, 1945–1946”, *The Journal of Intelligence History*, Vol. 4, No.1, 2004, p.28.

⁵⁸ *Denazification- Professor Karl Gronau of Brunswick*, HQ Denazification, Bunde (Germany), 21 February 1947. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 23-06-2023).

⁵⁹ C.M. Clark, “West Germany confronts the nazi past: Some recent debates on the early postwar era, 1945–1960”, *The European legacy*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1999, p. 116.

Fragebogen.”⁶⁰

Other such accounts point to the presence of Nazis in various government departments in the Allied controlled areas of Germany. According to an extract of an American newsletter “The Interpreter”, the Dorpmüller organisation (the German Ministry of Transport and Reichsbahn headed by General Manager Julius Dorpmüller) served as a front for Nazi military powers who were planning to stage a comeback through the rehabilitation of the German transport system.⁶¹ Another report highlighted allegations of the presence of former Nazis in the Food Administration division in the British zone.⁶² Thus, the poorly executed process of denazification failed to weed out Nazi influence from German society and administration. It also meant that the extremist ideology persisted, despite overt attempts to exterminate it.

Denazification was undertaken in different ways in East and West Germany. In the GDR, the process was comparatively harsher and more rapid. Former Nazis would be systematically imprisoned in ‘internment camps’ which few would survive. The underlying view that was prevalent in the GDR was that fascism was the natural result of the certain inherent social and economic conditions, namely those that were contrary to communism. It was felt that the establishment of a communist state would automatically erase the evils of fascism. In such a simplistic scheme, matters of individual or collective guilt were not paid much attention. The major concern was to swiftly complete the process of denazification so that the remaining population could be integrated into society. An interesting element of the East German legacy of dealing with the Nazi past was its commitment to ‘antifascism’ which became one of the ideological pillars of the new state. It initially denoted all those who has resisted the Nazis, but gradually came to represent the GDR’s image of itself as the undisputed heir of such Anti-Nazi resistance. Antifascism became a collective term that encompassed all factions of resistance ranging from communist groups to other elements that had opposed Nazism, with the aim of integrating them into the core foundation of the fledgling communist state. This became its way of dealing with the past.⁶³

⁶⁰ *The Wehrwirtschaftsführer* (Report by Control Commission enclosed in letter to the Undersecretary of State for War, War Office, UK) 17 March, 1947. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 23-06-2023).

⁶¹ *Extract from The Interpreter; by James C. McMullin* (enclosed in letter to British Embassy, Washington D.C.) 26th February, 1946. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 23-06-2023).

⁶² *Alleged Nazis in Food Administration in British Zone* (letter by A.R. Walmsley to German Department), 3rd May, 1946. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 23-06-2023).

⁶³ Peter Monteath, “Narratives of fascism in the GDR: Buchenwald and the “Myth of Antifascism”, *The European Legacy*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1999, pp. 100-101.

The accelerated process of denazification in east Germany included other elements apart from the internment of former Nazis. A process of collectivization of economy and seizure of control of state apparatus characterized the formation of the GDR. Naturally, the government came to be comprised entirely of those who were loyal to the Soviet ideology. Former Nazis, both active and nominal participants and collaborators, were barred from office. Businesses and property owned by these individuals were promptly confiscated. Another important issue was the nature of the ruling communist party of the GDR, or the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) that engaged itself in the creation and consolidation of a surveillance state dedicated to weeding out any dissent. This extensive surveillance was to be carried out by an organization that would be tasked with determining the threats to the party, and it was called Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, commonly referred to as the Stasi. The Stasi eventually developed into a vast network of information collection that permeated into all groups and organisations in the communist state. Collaboration with the Stasi would often be purely in terms of political or personal gain rather than genuine antagonism towards the perceived enemy.⁶⁴ The ordinary citizens participating in this tight network of surveillance, willingly or unwillingly, became cogs in a larger totalitarian framework.

After reunification, one of the major concerns became dealing with the legacy of the Stasi., especially its archives. Many were in favour of opening the files since they wanted accountability for past crimes, or wanted to welcome a new democratic era by overcoming the legacy of mistrust that had been prevalent in East Germany. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, offices of the Stasi were stormed by citizens leading to the damage or destruction of files and data in the archives. Much of the crucial data was also ruined by those who were opposed to the release of such information to the wider public.⁶⁵ The history of Stasi is a significant aspect in the journey for East German closure. Germany, as a whole, has been on the path of accepting its past and the reality of the fact that many of past atrocities committed with the active participation or collaboration of its general population. The citizens of East Germany faced the additional problem of having been subjects of a totalitarian communist regime which made the acceptance of its Nazi past all the more complicated. This was also compounded with the fact such a society forbade any dialogue that would provide even the remotest possibility of assuming responsibility.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Louisa McClintock, *n.3*, pp.34-37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 36-38.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 39.

The impact of the Stasi revelations in the aftermath of reunification had a profound impact on the East German psyche. There seemed to a cloud of suspicion around any individual who would be open to examining the past with a liberal mindset. The general perception was that anything associated with the West was good, while the East became an object of condescension and suspicion. Even instances of East German defiance against Nazism became devalued, especially if these dissidents were believers of socialism. This obviously created a huge gulf between the West and the East. In the aftermath of the war the West wanted to obliterate any memory of the past and the immediate priority in rebuilding Germany became the confrontation with socialism. Thus, the association with the memory of the Nazi past became distorted to the extent that it became barely understood. In the East, however any involvement with the Nazis was completely denied and officially the GDR was seen as the symbol of resistance against Nazism. The Nazis were largely viewed as alien to the GDR population or their predecessors.⁶⁷ This juxtaposition in two opposing ways of coming to terms with the past serves as a reminder of the antagonism between anti-fascism and anti-communism in the post-war years. The fact that communists in the east had been among the most committed anti-fascists became overlooked during the quest to root out communism. Even several former Nazis were able to reintegrate into West Germany simply on account of their being anti-communists.⁶⁸ Apart from the denial of the role of communists in the east as anti-fascists by the west, East Germany also faced the added humiliation of being ‘colonized’ by the former, not just in politics, but also socio-economically.⁶⁹ The gulf created between the East and the West in spite of reunification was only a larger manifestation of the rift between capitalism and communism in the post war years.

The significance of focusing on the post-war national sentiment in Germany is to understand how it shaped its attitudes towards right-wing politics in subsequent decades. However, the sentiment itself is complex and hard to encapsulate. The first fifteen years after the second world war was characterized by feelings of complacent materialism that sought to repress the painful memories of the war. This process of ‘coming to terms with the past’ was examined by two psychiatrists who argued that Germany’s apparent ‘inability to mourn’ arose out of a sense of ‘collective neurosis’ and a lack of understanding of past attachment to Hitler and his

⁶⁷ Peter Marcuse, “Repeating history: Denazification, de-stalinization, and the reworking of the past”, *Socialism and Democracy*, Vol.8, No.2-3, 1992, pp.45-47.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁶⁹ Louisa McClintock, *n.6*, p.42.

ethnocentric ideals.⁷⁰ However, during the 1950s this perception of wilful forgetfulness was challenged by historians like Robert G. Moeller. Moeller claimed that the post war years witnessed a considerable amount of public engagement with the difficult memory of the past; however, it focused on the collective suffering of the Germans and not on the suffering inflicted by the Germans themselves.⁷¹ It is interesting to note the differing viewpoints pertaining to the West German identification of themselves as victims. According to Helmut Dubiel, West Germans claimed victimhood not only with regard to National Socialism but also to bombs, the Red Army and even extended to demands for those deemed guilty at the post war tribunals to be released. In his view, this vehement identification of victimhood and innocence helped to underline their guilt and complicity.⁷² The sense of ignorance regarding Nazi history and atrocities is also revealed in the West German myth that they had been completely oblivious to the reality of the concentration camps and had believed the Nazi propaganda that they were ‘clean camps’ that had been constructed for the rehabilitation of ‘dirty’ elements. The post war silence regarding the Nazi crimes led to assumption of responsibility being underplayed. On one hand, West Germans upheld their sense of victimhood to the extent that they considered themselves at par with the actual victims of National Socialism. On the other hand, the East Germans rejected the past altogether on account of their antifascist credentials.⁷³

The dominant narrative in the post-war years posited ‘collective guilt’ as being a defining element of post-war German psyche. However, this view is often seen to overlook the fine line of distinction between guilt and responsibility; the former being applicable to individuals and their respective actions while the latter is a more far-reaching concept involving both collective and individual connotations. The German concept of ‘Schuld’, denoting both debt and guilt, underlines the complexity of distinguishing between guilt and responsibility. Scholars like Jasper and Arendt have rejected the notion of German collective guilt on the ground that it detracts attention from the actual criminal guilt of a select few.⁷⁴ Arendt has advocated ‘collective political responsibility’ instead of ‘collective guilt.’⁷⁵ Regardless of syntactic intricacies, it is evident that the themes of guilt and responsibility have both played a dominant part in German history after the war. It can also be argued that the political elite being largely

⁷⁰ C.M. Clark, *n.2*, pp. 117-118.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁷² Robert G. Moeller, “What Has “Coming to Terms with the past” Meant in Post-World War II Germany? From History to Memory to the “History of Memory””, *Central European History*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2002, pp. 226-227.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-239.

⁷⁴ Samantha Ashenden, “The persistence of collective guilt”, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 43, No. 1, February 2014, pp.56-58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.63.

responsible for the crimes of the war, some aspect of the German people must have enabled them to do so. These questions relating to national character and levels of complicity have played an enormous role in this respect.⁷⁶

In the context of this brief historical overview, two points are particularly noteworthy in respect of this study. Firstly, the complex sentiments of responsibility and guilt in West Germany after the Second World War and secondly, the East German denial of the past and the subsequent questions of identity in the aftermath of reunification.

Right-wing populism: past and present

The above-mentioned historical background provides a contextual basis for why complex feelings of guilt hindered the growth of the extreme right in Germany. Most parties belonging to the extreme right of the political spectrum have usually failed to exert any widespread appeal apart from some protest voters. Furthermore, given the constant reminder of National Socialism, these parties have always been under the compulsion to mellow down their discourse and dissociate themselves from fascism in any form. Another reason for their failure is the institutional barrier of having to reach a threshold of 5 per cent in order to be represented in the federal parliament.⁷⁷ Also most of the right-wing elements were able to integrate into the two Christian Democrat parties. The CDU was able to accomplish this by becoming a 'single umbrella party' while retaining its neo-conservative leanings.⁷⁸

There are yet other factors that inhibit the growth of right-wing sentiment in a society that is still rife with racist, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment. One of these is the nature of the organisational weaknesses of these right-wing parties themselves. These parties mainly operate on a regional level and barely manage to progress beyond that. Moreover, as per party laws in Germany, certain criteria such as a democratic structure must be maintained. Another attribute applicable in the German context is the fact that the political right faces the stigma of being branded as the successors of National Socialism, which in turn does not bode well for

⁷⁶ Louisa McClintock, *n.7*, p.41.

⁷⁷ Simon Bornschier, 'Why a right-wing populist party emerged in France but not in Germany: cleavages and actors in the formation of a new cultural divide', *European Political Science Review*, Vol.4, No.1, 2012, pp.124-125.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.136-137.

their public image. Often leaders of right-wing parties are negatively treated as anomalous in media and public discourse.⁷⁹

The strong aversion to the right does not automatically translate into the fact that the latter has been altogether absent in the post war German political landscape. However, they have been conspicuous mainly by their failure to succeed at the mainstream level. Since the 1960s, far-right parties like Deutsche Volkunion (DVU) and the Republikaner (REP) and the have consistently failed to make a mark at the national level. The over reliance on immigration and the appropriation of their major issues by mainstream parties have also contributed to their failure. That is not to say that they did not enjoy sporadic instances of success at the regional level; often some of these parties have come close to overcoming the crucial 5 per cent hurdle.⁸⁰ One such party, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) was formed in 1964 and achieved a degree of success combining hyper nationalism and statism, anti-Communism and targeting a range of individuals from conservatives to Neo-Nazis. The extremist background of its members, however, cast doubts on its overt agenda of upholding the democratic ideals of the FRG. The party achieved a degree of success during a period of economic recession and seemed close to clearing the hurdle to entering the national level. However, with the improvement of the economy and consideration by the federal court of banning the party it soon lost its support. After that the centre left came to power, the opposition CDU managed to bring the erstwhile NPD voters back within its fold.⁸¹

In this background, this study will focus mainly on the case of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) or Alternative for Germany as the exemplar for an emergent right-wing party in the last two decades. The sudden ascendance of this party in mainstream German politics is noteworthy, not least because it was able to make a mark in national politics; a feat that has not been accomplished by right-wing parties in post-war Germany. One must briefly look into the background of the party and its gradual transformation in order to assess how such a party was able to succeed in a country where even nationalist, let alone overtly right-wing sentiment has hardly been accepted in the last few decades. The party emerged in the wake of the Eurozone debt crisis of 2008 that was responsible for the economic breakdowns of a number of European

⁷⁹ Nicole Berbuir, Marcel Lewandowsky and Jasmin Siri, “The AfD and its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?”, *German Politics*, Vol.24, No.2, 2015, pp. 158-160.

⁸⁰ Roger Karapin, “Explaining Far-Right Electoral Successes in Germany: The Politicization of Immigration Related Issues”, *German Politics & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (48), Fall 1998, pp. 24-25.

⁸¹ David F. Patton, “The Alternative for Germany’s radicalization in historical-comparative perspective”, *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 25, No.2, 2017, p. 168.

economies. Germany, being a leading member of the EU and a donor country was tasked with putting pressure on the crisis-ridden economies to implement austerity measures. As a result of this financial responsibility, the government in power comprising of the CDU/CSU and the FDP came in for a fair share of criticism from the opposition. It was in this context that the AfD was formed on February 6, 2013 by Bernd Lucke, a professor of macro-economics. It was initially formed as a 'single-issue' party, that was critical of the debt crisis. Its basic agenda was Euroscepticism and it advocated a number of measures such as dissolving the current European monetary system, returning to national currencies and the withdrawal of Germany from the Eurozone. The party thus gained success by highlighting an issue that had been neglected in mainstream politics.⁸²

Although the impact of the debt crisis on Germany proved to be short lived, it was enough to cement the steady rise of the AfD. Here a parallel may be drawn with the UK Independence Party which was also founded on similar grounds of Euroscepticism and based on an intellectual footing. The founding members of the party were of academic, intellectual background with a wide network of connections. On account of its intellectual basis and wide network, the party gained much attention in the wake of the 2013 federal elections. The CDU/CSU won that election and the AfD narrowly failed to enter the Bundestag. However, it was then that the latter increasingly came into focus by capitalizing on the Eurosceptic mood which was gaining headway. The turning point for AfD was the 2015 migrant crisis when Merkel's open-door policy led to her accepting the entry of more than a million refugees. Although her policies were favourably viewed by voters on the centre and centre-left, it was not accepted by many of her own established voter base. The AfD took advantage of this gap by shifting their own political agenda from Euroscepticism to vocal anti-immigration.⁸³ As a result of the leverage gained due to its vocal criticism of Merkel's stance during the crisis, the party went on to perform extremely well in the 2017 federal elections. By gaining a share of 12.6 per cent of votes, it was able to enter the Bundestag for the first time by getting more than double the share of requisite votes to qualify for parliamentary footing.

In discussing the case of the AfD and its relevance as a right-wing party, it is necessary to analyse its ideological basis, gradual transformation as well as its voter base. One of the most significant features of the party's ideological leaning is the radical transformation it undertook

⁸² Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, "The 'Alternative für Deutschland in the Electorate': Between Single-Issue and Right-Wing Populist Party", *German Politics*, Vol.26, No.1, 2017, pp.125-126.

⁸³ Charles Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany': The rise of right-wing populism at the heart of Europe", *Politics*, Vol. 38 No.3, 2018, pp.300-301.

from largely intellectual Euroscepticism to populist anti-immigration. In one of the earlier studies on AfD, Kai Arzheimer examined the categorisation of the party as a right-wing Eurosceptic party. Arzheimer asserted that the AfD did not qualify as a ‘hard’ Eurosceptic party because although it was opposed to many of the economic aspects of the EU, it remained largely committed to the latter.⁸⁴ The party was indeed positioned on the far right of the political spectrum due to its views on nationalism and on traditional family roles and mainstreaming of gender. However, it did not qualify as being ‘radical.’ Furthermore, despite being Eurosceptic, it leaned more towards ‘soft’ Euroscepticism. Interestingly, Arzheimer concluded that the then AfD programme bore strong resemblance to that of the CSU.⁸⁵ According to another study, the AfD was not opposed to immigration in its entirety. Rather, it claimed to welcome individuals who would contribute positively to the economy and not take advantage of the welfare system.⁸⁶

From relatively modest, albeit right-leaning, ideological standpoint in its initial years, the AfD gradually moved towards increasingly populist rhetoric from 2015. This was mainly due to the change in leadership which saw the replacement of Bernt Lucke by Frauke Petry, who was of a much more conservative bent. Petry managed to galvanize opposition to Merkel’s open-door policy during the 2015-16 refugee crisis. Petry was notable for her inflammatory rhetoric such as her call to shoot asylum seekers attempting to cross the border illegally⁸⁷ as well as comparing immigrants to compost.⁸⁸ Her comments were sharply criticized by the opposition at that time. Erstwhile SPD leader Thomas Oppermann remarked that Petry had ‘completely lost her way politically’ and likened her call to shooting asylum seekers to firing orders in the

⁸⁴ Kai Arzheimer, “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 38, No.3, 2015, p.546.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.551.

⁸⁶ Nicole Berbuir, Marcel Lewandowsky and Jasmin Siri, *n.2*, p.167.

⁸⁷ “AfD leader calls for police right to shoot at refugees”, DW. January 30, 2016. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-right-leaning-afd-leader-calls-for-police-right-to-shoot-at-refugees/a-19013137> (Accessed on December 10th, 2023).

⁸⁸ Alexandra Sims, “Leader of Germany's right-wing AfD party 'compares immigrants to compost’”, The Independent. October 6, 2016. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/frauke-petry-leader-germany-rightwing-afd-party-compares-immigrants-compost-a7348531.html> (Accessed on December 10th, 2023).

GDR⁸⁹ Petry's incendiary comments earned her the nickname 'Adolfina.'⁹⁰

The controversial nature of Petry's rhetoric was reflected in the AfD manifesto after 2016. Its agenda began to align more completely with the traditional right-wing populist parties of western Europe. In its 2016 manifesto, it called for tougher measures such as the expansion of the police, the formation of German border patrol and even the reintroduction of military conscription. However, its toughest stance was reserved for the issue of immigration in general and Islam in particular, proposing a series of prohibitive measures such as banning minarets, headscarves in school and calls to prayer. It completely rejected multiculturalism and immigration on a mass scale, even proposing a return to the ethnic conception of citizenship in Germany and rejecting the process of naturalization outright.⁹¹ The 2017 AfD manifesto continued along the lines of narrow nationalism calling for the preservation of German as the 'predominant culture' and making the German language the underlying pillar of German identity. This 'indigenous culture' shaped by Christianity as well as history, is currently under threat from foreign cultural influences. Furthermore, highlighting the supposed incompatibility of Islam with liberal democratic values, it stated:

"Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values."⁹²

The 2017 federal elections also saw Petry stepping down as party leader and being replaced by Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland. The party also became negatively associated with a host of neo-Nazis who were attracted to its agenda. As a result, it has been observed that it only took the AfD a little in excess of 4 years to become a 'beacon for creatures of the far right.'⁹³ New leader Gauland also came out strongly against Merkel in the run up to the 2017 federal elections; "We will hunt Mrs. Merkel and whomever else. And we will take our country and

⁸⁹ "AfD leader calls for police right to shoot at refugees", DW. January 30, 2016. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-right-leaning-afd-leader-calls-for-police-right-to-shoot-at-refugees/a-19013137> (Accessed on December 10th, 2023).

⁹⁰ Brenna Daldorph, "Frauke 'Adolfina' Petry: the anti-immigrant, anti-Islam threat to Merkel", France 24. September 05, 2016. <https://www.france24.com/en/20160905-germany-afd-frauke-petry-right-immigrant-election-merkel> (Accessed on December 12, 2023).

⁹¹ David F. Patton, *n.2*, pp.165-166.

⁹² "Manifesto for Germany; The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany." https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf (Accessed on December 14th, 2023).

⁹³ Charles Lees, *n.2*, p 305.

our people back.”⁹⁴ It was evident that the AfD had become a rallying point for those who opposed Merkel’s refugee crisis stance. Dissatisfaction with mainstream parties also led to a section of voters gravitating towards the AfD.⁹⁵

It is important to note some of the other main features of the AfD’s agenda which makes it conform to the general typology of typical right-wing populist parties. Among these are adherence to traditional familial and gender roles. The AfD has expressed fears about the apparent ‘disappearance’ of the ‘indigenous population’ as well as the traditional ‘normal, medium-sized families.’ Of course, the only way to remedy the apparent declining rates of the ethnic German population is the restriction of immigration. However, the party also called for the establishment of a government ministry, namely the Federal Ministry of Families and Population Development (Bundesministerium für Familie und Bevölkerungsentwicklung) in order to engage in the scientific promotion of population growth. This proposal is indicative of AfD’s typically nativist agenda; the fact immigration needs to be restricted on one hand and the ethnic German population figures boosted on the other. Such measures would ultimately promote a ‘pure’ German nation.⁹⁶ Another aspect of the AfD’s agenda that needs to be mentioned is its stance on gender issues, particularly in relation to Islam. Like other parties on the far-right of the political spectrum, the AfD has overtly espoused commitment to gender equality and the perceived threat to it by Islam, which is considered to be misogynistic.⁹⁷ However, despite overt assertions of support for gender-equality, the core ideology of the party is opposed to feminist ideology. The AfD opposes to certain gender-related issues such as ‘equal pay’, establishment of gender quotas and gender studies. Feminism is viewed as subversive since it threatens traditional gender roles and family setup.⁹⁸

The voter base of the AfD also conforms to similar such right-wing parties in western democracies. Three distinct groups were found to comprise the bulk of the party’s voter base; firstly, the unemployed or partly employed individuals also referred to as the ‘precariat’, secondly, the middle class with high levels of employment and property ownership and thirdly the ‘traditionalists’ or those likely to harbour conservative views pertaining to German culture

⁹⁴ L. Constantin Wurthmann, “Black–Blue or Bahamas? Explaining CDU, CSU, FDP and AfD Voter Attitudes Towards a Common Governmental Coalition Before the 2017 German Federal Election”, *German Politics*, 2022, p.7.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Katrine Fangen & Lisanne Lichtenberg, “Gender and family rhetoric on the German far right”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2021, pp. 79-80.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.77.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.85.

as well as issues such as immigration and Islam. The 2017 federal elections revealed that the voter base of the AfD comprised of mainly the first category, i.e., the precariat. However, there also was the presence of traditionalists and the middle class which points to the fact that the AfD's agenda encompassing both economic issues and the changing face of modern Germany.⁹⁹ According to another study, the average AfD voter in the federal elections was an averagely educated male over the age of 30, with wealth exceeding the German average. Also, women were found to be less likely to vote for AfD. The viewpoint of typical AfD voters with regard to issues such as Europe, immigration, globalisation and family were found to be vastly different from those of other parties. Not surprisingly, the party attracted non-voters as well as those who had previously voted for CDU. Also, it was observed that the possessing a degree would decrease the chances of voting for the party by 11 per cent.¹⁰⁰ The 2021 federal election has reinforced the voting patterns pertaining to the AfD. The AfD suffered major losses in this election, compared to the previous losing nearly one million voters to SPD and FDP.¹⁰¹ However, the voting trends remained constant. The major parties, the SPD, CDU, CSU as well as the Greens were favoured more by women while others including the AfD were favoured by men. The SPD, CDU and CSU drew the highest share of votes from voters aged 70 and above. The AfD failed to draw votes from the youngest and the oldest voters faring well amongst voters aged between 35 and 69.¹⁰² The representation of women in the number of seats held by women in the Bundestag increased compared to 2017, but the AfD remained behind the other major parties in this regard. It had only 13.3% of women compared to the CDU's percentage of 23.5 and the SPD's 41.7.¹⁰³ The AfD also dominated in states which comprised the former GDR or East Germany. In the state of Saxony, AfD came out on top garnering one in four votes, surpassing the CDU which formerly dominated there.¹⁰⁴

Till date, the AfD has remained true to the right-wing ideology, despite often cloaking it under the guise of liberty and democracy. In its official website it states that 'We are liberals and conservatives. We are free citizens of our country. We are convinced Democrats.' Here too, the

⁹⁹ Charles Lees, *n.2*, p 303.

¹⁰⁰ Jasmin Siri, "The Alternative for Germany after the 2017 Election", *German Politics*, Vol.27, No.1, 2018, p.142.

¹⁰¹ Stefanie John, "A brief analysis of the German federal election 2021", Heinrich Böll Stiftung. September 29, 2021. <https://eu.boell.org/en/2021/09/29/brief-analysis-german-federal-election-2021> (Accessed on December 15th, 2023).

¹⁰² "2021 Bundestag Election: greater turnout of young voters", January 2022. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2022/01/PE22_036_14.html (Accessed on December 15th, 2023).

¹⁰³ Stefanie John, *n.2*.

¹⁰⁴ Christoph Hasselbach, "Germany's election results: Facts and figures", DW. September 28, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-election-results-facts-and-figures/a-59343789> (Accessed on December 15th, 2023).

party falls in line with other such populist parties, identifying as liberals and democrats regardless of their restrictive ideological underpinnings. It claims that ‘Germany is not a classic immigration country’ also stating that ‘Africa cannot be saved in Europe’; which underlines the argument that Europe cannot take the responsibility for addressing the gap between the falling population within its own constituent nations and the burgeoning population in African and ‘Arab-Muslim’ countries. The party highlights the massive wealth gap between Africa and Europe and calls for stringent measures to curb migration flows from the former to the latter. It also calls for stopping ‘further immigration into the social systems’, curbing family reunification and dual citizenship. Here too, it reiterates the statement that ‘Islam does not belong to Germany.’¹⁰⁵ Recent trends show that support for the AfD is again on the rise. Voters have expressed dissatisfaction with the governing coalition and approval ratings for the AfD reached 18 per cent putting it at par with the SPD. The main reason behind this is the increasing dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties rather than support for the AfD’s policies per se. However, the anti-immigration rhetoric of the AfD resonated with the majority of respondents.¹⁰⁶

The rise and transformation of the AfD is notable in many respects. It is the only right-wing party to have garnered a considerable degree of success in post-war Germany. It remains to be seen whether it can sustain itself in the coming years or be eventually be relegated to the sidelines as is the case with most such right-wing parties.

Immigration: Historical Trends and Political Impact

Brief historical overview of post-war immigration

Germany, for the longest time, shunned being labelled as a ‘country of immigration’ despite becoming one of the leading immigration destinations after 1945. Since then, it has witnessed several waves of immigration, not only after the Second World War, but also during the early days of the Cold War until the erection of the Berlin Wall. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) underwent a period of massive reconstruction after the war, under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer who paved the way for the eventual transformation of West Germany into an economic powerhouse. The pace of rebuilding was so intense that, during the period between

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.afd.de/> (Accessed on December 20th, 2023).

¹⁰⁶ Sabine Kinkartz, “Germany's far-right AfD sees poll numbers surging”, DW. June 2, 2023. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-far-right-afd-gets-a-boost/a-65803522> (Accessed on December 20th, 2023).

1960 and 1972, approximately 2.3 million temporary workers, called ‘guest workers’ had to be recruited from a number of countries, notably Turkey.¹⁰⁷ Germany’s immigration experience has been shaped by the prolonged debate regarding its refusal to acknowledge itself as an immigration country. Until the latter half of the 1990s, the official government position was that it was most definitely not a country of immigration and this stance reflected its policies that were geared towards hindering permanent immigration. It was after 1998, with the coming to power of a coalition between the SPD and Green party that the country’s immigration policy underwent a massive shift.¹⁰⁸ The evolution of Germany’s attitude towards immigration is a prime focal point of this study and is crucial to understanding the underlying socio-political context of right-wing populism in the country.

Official reports have thus described Germany’s stance on immigration;

“Official government policy is that Germany is not a country of immigration. There is no immigration provision on the statute book, although the constitutional right of ethnic Germans to settle here (Article 116 of the Basic Law) is a considerable source of de facto immigration...Naturalisation laws exist but are strict, and there appears to be reluctance among, for example, the Turkish population in Germany to accept German citizenship even when they would have the right to claim it. The only real source of immigration is by the back door, particularly by exploiting the current state of the asylum laws.”¹⁰⁹

Both the Federal Republic of Germany (also referred to as the ‘Berlin Republic’), and the ‘Bonn Republic’ as it was as it was prior to unification on 3rd October 1990, steadfastly denied acknowledging themselves as countries of immigration. The government adhered to the tag of ‘kein Einwanderungsland’, i.e. not a country of immigration and this has persisted even in the face of criticism. Consistent with this, the term immigrant or Einwanderer has not been adopted in contrast to established immigration countries like Britain or France. Rather, immigrants have always been referred to by a number of expressions that have, if anything, sought to highlight their temporary status and separateness.¹¹⁰ The justification behind the outward rejection of

¹⁰⁷ Joyce Marie Mushaben, “Wir schaffen das! Angela Merkel and the European Refugee Crisis”, *German Politics*, Vol.26, No.4, 2017, pp.516-517.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Green, “Germany: A Changing Country of Immigration”, *German Politics*, Vol.22, No.3, September 2013, pp.333-334.

¹⁰⁹ *Immigration and Asylum in Germany*, British Embassy, Bonn, 4th November, 1992. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 24-06-2023).

¹¹⁰ Dietrich Thränhardt, “Germany: An undeclared immigration country”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol.21, No.16, 1995, p.19.

Germany as a country of immigration was based on the notion that, unlike countries like Australia and the United States, Germany was not seeking immigrants to supplement its population. Even during the phase of recruitment of guest workers, the very nature of the term implied that they were only a temporary redressal mechanism for shortages in labour. It has also been noted by some scholars that the German nation-state owed little to immigration in the process of nation building. However, the paradox was that, despite the overt rejection of being defined as a country of immigration, Germany remained a top destination for immigrants over the decades. The contrast between its official position and the actuality of its migration situation is a crucial aspect of the immigration discourse of the country.¹¹¹

Historically, immigration to Germany has not continued along a linear trajectory in the twentieth century due to a number of factors, foremost being the two World Wars. However, it is to be noted that Germany has traditionally been an emigration country. Migration to the United States from Germany in the nineteenth century was the largest flow of that particular period and even today they constitute one of the largest group of immigrants in the US. Germany's emigration status was reinforced in the wake of the exodus following the Second World War.¹¹² Despite the fact that before 1945, Germany had been defined as an emigration country, the Bonn Republic became the centre point of successive waves of immigration. The earliest immigrants were in fact Germans displaced by the war. After the war, Germans driven out from Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Soviet Union joined the ranks of refugees seeking asylum in West Germany. By 1950, a total of approximately twelve million of these 'expellees' had sought refuge in both the FRG and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as well as Austria, with about eight million in the FRG itself. The refugees or expellees, called 'Vertriebene', on account of their extensive political coordination, quickly came to the attention of the prevalent established political parties. This particular type of immigration dwindled with the commencement of the Cold War and subsequently when the erection of the Berlin wall effectively brought an end to the flow of refugees from GDR. The integration of this category of immigrants was facilitated by the fact that they were Germans, coupled with the provision of ample financial assistance. It is to be noted that as per the Basic Law of west Germany, the defining criteria of being a German was outlined mainly on ethnic and cultural terms. This included many such Vertriebene immigrants who did not hold formally hold German nationality when this legal delineation came into effect from 1931 and automatically included

¹¹¹ Simon Green, *n.2*, p.334.

¹¹² Dietrich Thränhardt, *n.2*, p.21.

individuals who were citizens of the GDR. The existing citizenship law set the tone for the ethnocentric form of German citizenship based on *jus sanguinis* or citizenship by descent. There are a number of important ramifications of this mode of citizenship in the German context. Foremost amongst these was that it upheld Konrad Adenauer's assertion that Germans as a whole were represented only by west Germany. To this end, the FRG made it a point not to distinguish between east and west Germans in its provisions for citizenship. This effectively translated into the fact that East Germans were included within the ambit of the citizenship law of west Germany and automatically handed it down to successive generations all the while holding the separate citizenship of the GDR. These provisions cemented the ethnocultural dimensions of west Germany's citizenship.¹¹³

The next important category of immigrants is that of the 'guest worker' or 'Gastarbeiter' who were labour migrants denied the right to German citizenship unlike the ethnic German war refugees. The sole intention behind denying them the right to citizenship was to prevent them from settling in Germany on a permanent basis. The recruitment of these workers was necessitated by the gaps in the labour market brought about by the swift economic expansion of the post-war years. This was a common practice among the countries of western Europe during the 1950s and 1960s when they were going through an economic boom and Germany was one of the leading countries in this regard. The programme for the recruitment of guestworkers was based on the justification that migrant workers would agree to firstly, work for a lower wage than their native counterparts and secondly, be content to take up jobs that native workers were unwilling to fill. Policy makers were under the impression that these short-term workers would go back to their countries of origin and thereby the former would be relieved of the burden of integrating them into German society. The first attempt to enlist foreign labour was through a treaty signed with Italy in 1955, and the recruitment in the early years advanced at a steady pace. It only reached rapid levels of expansion in the 1960s after the creation of the Berlin Wall stopped any sort of immigration from the east. The number of workers increased from 507,000 in 1961 to 1.3 million in 1966, rising to 2.6 million in 1973 which constituted approximately eleven per cent of the work force of Germany.¹¹⁴ Initially, a number of treaties were signed with countries like Morocco, Spain and Tunisia, but from the

¹¹³ Simon Green, "Immigration, asylum and citizenship in Germany: The impact of unification and the Berlin republic", *West European Politics*, Vol.24, No.4, October 2001, pp.82-86.

¹¹⁴ Gayle K. Berardi, "Germany's immigration and asylum policies: Open or closed borders?", *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1994, p.68.

1970s Turkish workers comprised the largest group of guest workers. But this temporary arrangement could not continue because of the costs of continuously training new employees.¹¹⁵ As a result, these temporary workers ultimately became residents permanently, with a number of repercussions.

In 1973, the government imposed a ban on the recruitment of guest workers in a move called 'Anwerbestopp' but it was not entirely successful. Despite some reduction in the number of foreign workers, the foreign population actually increased on account of migrant workers bringing in their families in the wake of this new law. The increase in the foreign population meant that the government started to look into ways in which the processes of integration could be eased but it kept prioritizing policies encouraging return for these immigrants rather than their integration. The latter included measures such as the reduction in financial support for immigrants and also their families residing in Germany.¹¹⁶ In 1977, a policy framework, referred to as 'Ausländerpolitik' produced a contradictory assessment on how to deal with the issue of these labour migrants. The established parties held differing views regarding the ban during the initial stages of its implementation although they both agreed on the need to prevent the flow of labour migrants. Their reasons for doing so reflected their ideological underpinnings; while the SPD were more concerned about the protection of jobs, the CDU/CSU were anxious about how German identity may be negatively impacted by immigration. The immigration flows continued despite the overt attempt to radically reduce it leading to an alarming increase in the prevalence of xenophobia between 1979-1980. The SPD/FDP coalition which was in power at the time came under pressure from the opposition CDU/CSU then headed by Helmut Kohl. As a result, the government was forced to enact tougher measures against immigration, such as revising asylum laws and restricting dependents.¹¹⁷

Ausländerpolitik continued without major variation for a number of years. During the 1980s, the CDU/CSU witnessed the growth of a faction that opposed the ethnic conception of citizenship and the opposition to immigration. By the end of the 1980s, there was general agreement that the guest worker population had become permanent residents in the country. It is significant that this realization was attained more than three decades after the signing of the treaty of recruitment and 16 years since 'Anwerbestopp'. In examining the political elite's inner

¹¹⁵ Simon Green, *n 2*, pp.86-87.

¹¹⁶ Gayle K. Berardi, *n 2*, pp.68-69.

¹¹⁷ Simon Green, *n 3*, pp.87-88.

conflict regarding the treatment of these guest workers, the negligent treatment of the latter should not be overlooked. As the debate revolving around *Ausländerpolitik* continued for decades, the second and even third generation of these immigrants had been growing up in Germany. Despite having spent a considerable number of years in Germany and also having contributed much to the economy, these immigrants were denied any proper security, that was the norm in other similar countries. And since German citizenship was based on *jus sanguinis*, the children of these immigrants were also denied citizenship.¹¹⁸ The problem of guest workers is a defining feature of the history of immigration in post-war Germany. It illustrates how Germany, in the process of coming to terms with whether it is an immigration country or not, overlooked a section of immigrants who were denied their rightful security regardless of being contributors to the economy.

Immigration to west Germany after reunification was defined by a resurgence in ethnic German diaspora from countries of the former Soviet Union. These individuals, collectively called ‘Aussiedler’, had been persecuted for their ethnicity by the Communists, despite the fact that they had very little connection with Germany which their ancestors had left centuries ago. The ‘Refugees’ and ‘Expellees’ Law of 1953 outlined the right of these ethnic Germans to return to Germany. This provision for return did not pose much of a problem for west Germany when the numbers were insignificant. However, when their numbers rose massively during reunification, the government, headed by Helmut Kohl, moved to impose restrictions on their entry.¹¹⁹ Another crucial point to be noted is the provision laid down in the Basic Law (Article 16) that stipulated the right to asylum; a measure that was considered to make amends for persecuting the Jews during the era of National Socialism. A number of generous benefits were accorded to asylum seekers such as the opportunity to work during the processing of their applications. Over the years increasing influx of asylum seekers was met with opposition from sections of the population as well as the press. There were fears of a rapid increase in the inflow of ‘alien cultures’ referred to as ‘Überfremdung’. In 1981, the press outlined the ‘Heidelberg Manifesto’ which urged for maintaining the purity of the German language and culture as well as putting a stop to immigration.¹²⁰ The pushback against immigration in Germany is definitely not a new phenomenon, it has been a constant fixture accompanying rising levels of immigration.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.91-92.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.90.

As mentioned previously, as per the Basic Law, the Parliamentary Council in west Germany had defined German citizenship in terms of ethnocultural descent in Article 116. It is to be remembered that the provisions of Article 116 included the territory of the GDR as well. Article 116 was in turn based on Germany's original citizenship law of 1913 known as the *Wilhelmine Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz* (RuStAG) which reflected the ethnic nationalist undercurrents of that era. It is this law which lay down the stipulation that German citizenship was to be based on *jus sanguinis* or citizenship by birth or descent.¹²¹ In accordance with the citizenship law of 1913, west Germany adopted the Nationality Act, which was its first important instance of post-war legislation in this area. For a long time, the ethnic basis of citizenship remained unchanged. This was attributed to certain factors, namely its denial of being a country of immigration and the division of the country after the war. The FRG remained reluctant to change the existing nationality laws in light of the emergence of a separate East German national identity, thus expediting the process of integration for the ethnic Germans who entered FRG from the Soviet bloc states. This consolidated the understanding that the German ideal of citizenship based on descent was extremely liberal towards ethnic Germans mainly from the communist bloc countries, while being harsh towards immigrants who are not ethnic Germans.¹²² Also, naturalization was viewed as a privilege that was contingent on a number of factors such as fluency in the German language as well as a number of other factors such as duration of residency, housing and cultural affinity to Germany. It was felt to be directly correlated to the serving of the nation's interests rather than one's own. The adherence of the Federal Republic of Germany to the policy of granting citizenship by descent meant that the former citizens of the GDR were always citizens of West Germany. Thus, the flow of immigrants from East Germany to the west did not impact the prevalent immigration laws since it was not even considered to be immigration.¹²³ The closed nature of German society has been aptly summed thus;

“Germany is a tribal society at heart, with an acute sense of its own insecurity that unification has if anything intensified...While European integration may continue to be a common cause in Bonn, ‘Wir sind ein Volk’ (we are one people) and ‘Deutschland ist unser Vaterland’

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.86.

¹²² Helen Williams, “Changing the National Narrative: Evolution in Citizenship and Integration in Germany, 2000–10”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 49, No.1, 2014. p.56.

¹²³ Gayle K. Berardi, n 3, p.66.

(Germany is our fatherland) is a more popular and more widely understood rallying cry- as the unification process amply illustrated.’¹²⁴

By the end of the twentieth century, however, Germany had begun to struggle with the image that it was not a country of immigration; a debate that had spanned several decades. The reunification of Germany meant that the necessity for maintaining the RuStAG as the foundation of citizenship had been outgrown. It was also becoming increasingly clear that low naturalization rates had contributed to ever increasing rates of the non-German population along with high birth rates and immigration.¹²⁵ During Helmut Schmidt’s time as chancellor, the denial of Germany being a country of immigration became all the more strident and forceful. Long-term residents were devoid of electoral rights. Chancellor Schmidt’s vehement statements regarding immigration are noteworthy; ‘We can’t take any more foreigners; there would be murder and violence.’¹²⁶ Some states or Länder sought to introduce voting rights for foreigners who were permanent residents, but these measures were eventually struck down as unconstitutional. In a statement by the Federal Constitutional Court in 1991, it was made clear that Germany was facing a crisis of democratic legitimacy and the problem of large foreign non-voting segments of population needed to be addressed.¹²⁷

Redefining citizenship

In view of such entrenched opposition, the overhaul of Germany’s citizenship laws took a long time to materialize. During the 1990s, citizenship became a moved to the forefront of political discussions and the mainstream political parties were engaged in a tug of war regarding the transformation of the existing citizenship law. Parties like the SPD and the Greens were in favour of citizenship based on the territorial considerations of jus soli along with the allowance for dual citizenship. The CDU and the CSU on the other hand, insisted on de facto dual citizenship of a limited nature.¹²⁸ It was only after continued discussions in the 1990s, and the coming to power of the SPD/Green coalition government under Gerhard Schröder of the SPD that the progress towards a reform of the citizenship began to gain momentum. On 1st January 2000, the new Nationality Act came into effect. As per the new Act, the naturalization

¹²⁴ *Harassment of foreigners in the new Länder: The rebirth of fascism?* British Embassy, Berlin Office, 5 October, 1992. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 24-06-2023).

¹²⁵ Simon Green, *n* 8, p.95.

¹²⁶ Helen Williams, *n* 2, p.57.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹²⁸ Simon Green, *n* 9, p.97.

procedures of Germany were upgraded and brought more in line with those of other countries of immigration. The prerequisite residence duration needed for naturalisation was decreased from fifteen to eight years and children of permanent resident status foreigners would be deemed German citizens from birth. Children born to resident foreigners in Germany would inherit the foreign nationality of one of their parents via descent, as well as German citizenship, thereby qualifying for dual citizenship. However, this dual citizenship was subject to the condition that these children, upon reaching adulthood, would have to choose between either of these nationalities between the ages of 18 and 23. Despite being subject to these preconditions, the Nationality Act was a step towards the evolution of the German national identity. It was significant because it was acknowledged for the first time that the acquiring of German nationality was connected to German public interest and that greater efforts needed to be made to integrate the guest workers who were now recognized as permanent, and not temporary residents.¹²⁹ The divergent position of the main parties regarding this issue is also crucial in understanding the implications of their evolved perspectives in the following decades.

The Nationality Act was followed by an Immigration Act which aimed to consolidate the changes to Germany's citizenship and immigration policies into one law. Several trends can be noted with the introduction of the Immigration Act; it was for the first time that the CDU/CSU began to recognize the presence of a sizeable foreign population though they were yet to be convinced that Germany was a country of immigration. In the wake of the Act, it was increasingly acknowledged that it was so. With the ascendance of Angela Merkel who took office in 2005, CDU had more or less gravitated away from its earlier stance and politicians of the party began admitting openly that Germany was indeed a country of immigration. Furthermore, the demographic setup of Germany could no longer be ignored; about 21.7 per cent of the foreign population had been born in the country while nearly half had been there for more than 10 years. By 2005, a very large percentage of Germans had a migration background while in the large cities the number was around two in five. In light of this emerging reality, CDU politicians adopted a more technical definition of the term immigration country in reference to Germany. It was asserted that Germany was a country of immigration although not in the traditional sense whereby such countries would be engaged in the active recruitment of immigrants. A pertinent question in this sense would be how Germany denies recruiting immigrants when it did exactly that in the case of the guest workers? The proponents

¹²⁹ Helen Williams, *n* 4, pp.59-60.

of the conservative usage of the term ‘country of immigration’ would assert that these guest workers were deemed to be temporary anyway. Here it must be noted that the Christian Union parties underwent a degree of disagreement regarding the acceptance of Germany as a country of immigration. The CDU criticized the CSU’s reluctance to adopt the label. This trend towards liberalization on the part of the Christian Union parties is noteworthy especially since they have always been more conservative than the other mainstream parties.¹³⁰

The push towards liberalisation is clearly visible in the figures of immigration to Germany in the last three decades. According to figures by Statista (Fig. 2.1), the number of immigrants in Germany has steadily risen between the period of 1991 and 2022, recording the highest in the time frame in 2022. As is visible, the figures in the early part of the 1990s, from 1991 were higher, presumably in light of the fall of the Berlin Wall and breakdown of the Soviet Union. They steadily decreased till 2009 (0.72 million) and this increase continued unabated till reaching a peak in 2015 (2.14 million), the year of the migrant crisis. Despite variations, rate of increase remained consistently high (apart from a downturn during the covid pandemic), reaching the highest rate of growth in 2022 (2.67).¹³¹

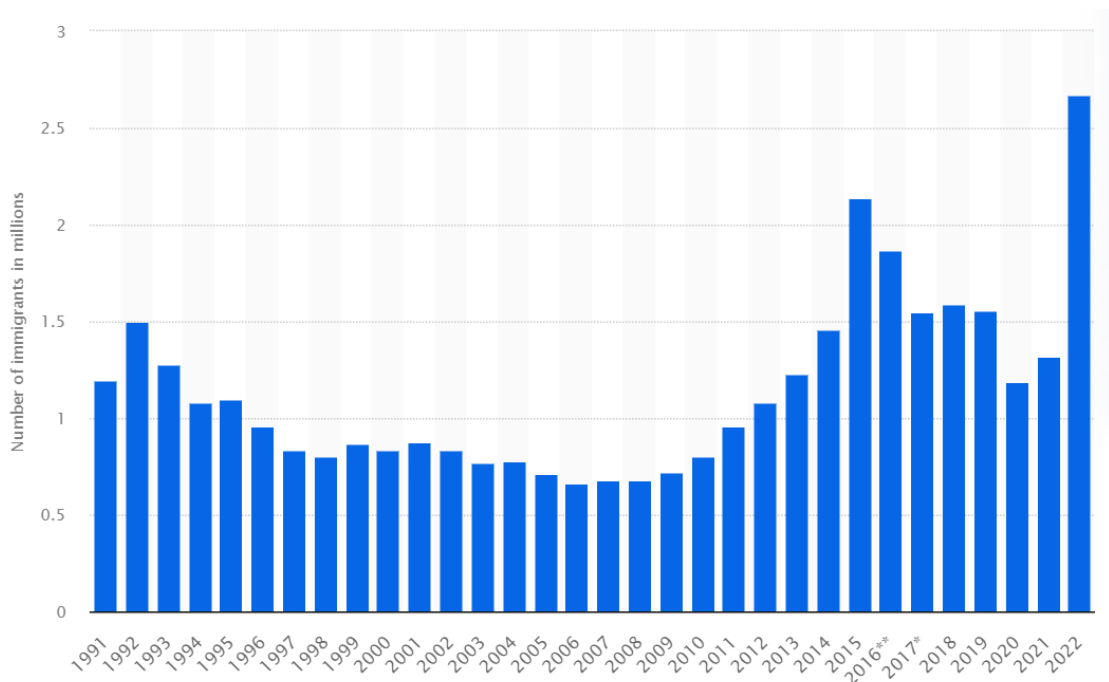


Fig. 2.1: Number of immigrants in Germany (1991-2022) (Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024)

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp.61-62.

¹³¹ Report by Statista Research Department, “Number of immigrants in Germany 1991-2022”, Aug 21, 2023. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/894223/immigrant-numbers-germany/> (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

Official figures indicate that 17.3% of Germany’s population, accounting for 14.2 million people, has an immigration background, having immigrated since 1950. The report published by the Destatis also distinguished between first- and second-generation immigrants, with 5.7% of the population, or 4.7 million people being second generation or direct descendants of immigrants. This translates into the fact that these individuals had been born to parents who had migrated to Germany any time since 1950. Around 23% of the population in Germany had an immigration history in 2021. This left about 72.5% of the population who had no immigration history whatsoever. Another point to be noted is that the percentage of immigrants in the population in Germany, i.e. 17.3% exceeded the EU average which was 10.6%.¹³² The effects of liberalisation are amply clear two decades on, with the increase in immigration figures bringing out significant changes to population figures. Fig. 2.2 below indicates that apart from an overall increase in the immigration figures, there has also been a periodic rise in entries by individuals from war-torn countries.

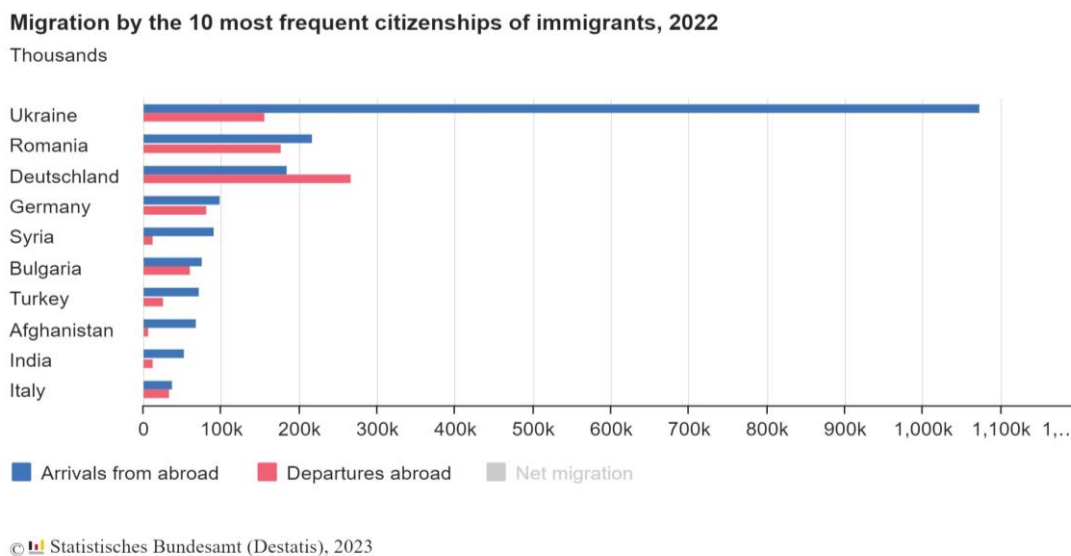
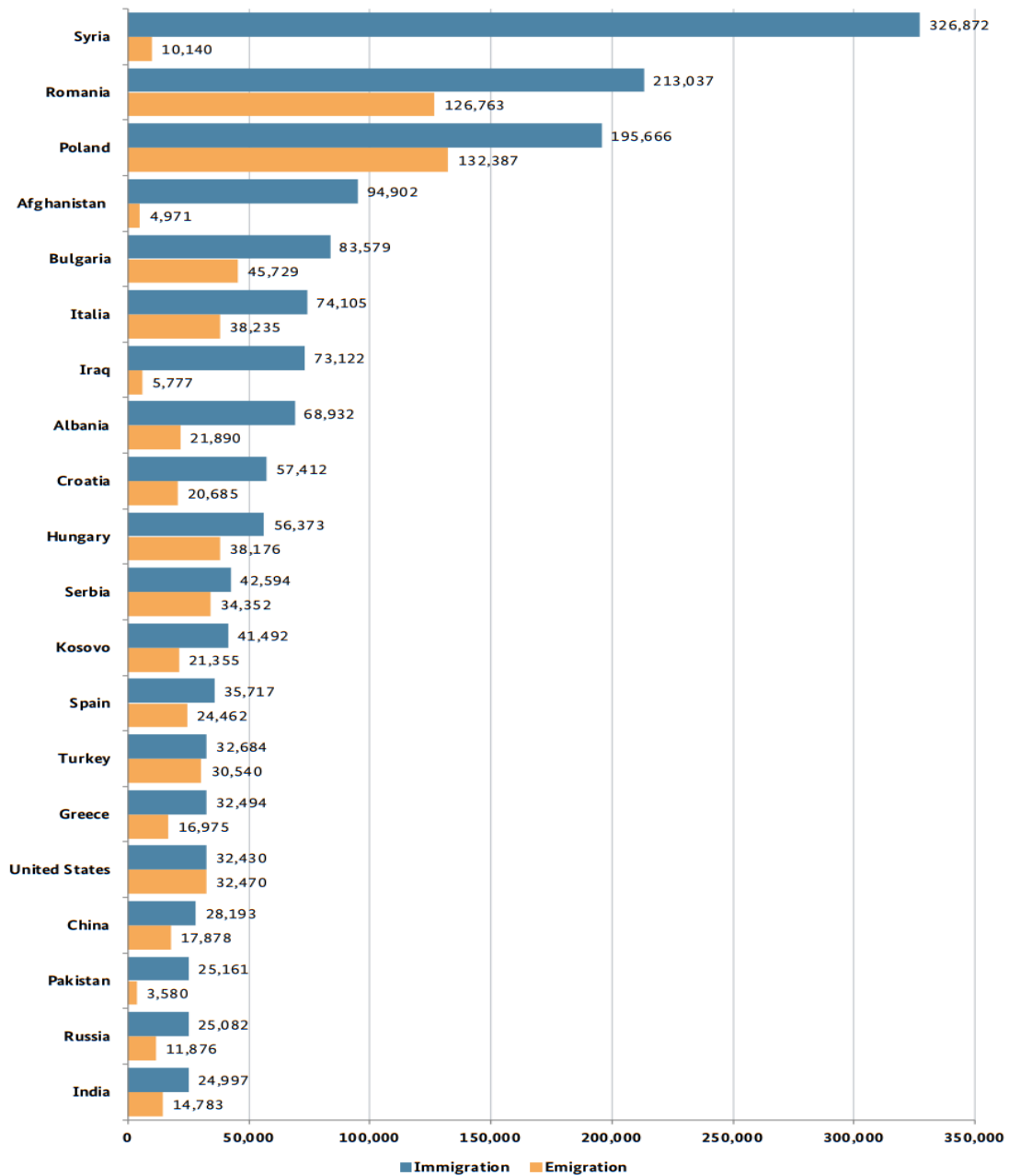


Fig. 2.2: Migration by the 10 most frequent citizenships of immigrants in 2022 (Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024)

As is evident in Fig. 2.2, the arrivals from Ukraine topped the list in 2022, but the entry figures from Syria remained high. An analysis of migration reports reveals a number of interesting trends. According to the Migration Report 2015 by the Federal Office of Migration and

¹³² Press release No. 080, “17.3% of Germany's population has immigrated since 1950”, March 2, 2023. Source: https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2023/03/PE23_080_12.html (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

Refugees, the year 2015 constituted the highest level of immigration by individuals seeking protection. Fig. 2.3 demonstrates the distribution of nationalities seeking protection.



Source: Federal Statistical Office

Fig. 2.3: Immigration and emigration according to the most common countries of origin and destination in 2015 (Source: Migrationsbericht 2015, Bundesministerium des Innern, 2016)

As is evident, the country accounting for the origin of the greatest number of immigrants (326,900) during this period was Syria, the immigrants mostly being asylum seekers. There was also high immigration from countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. Romania (213,000) and Poland (195,700) accounted for the highest number of arrivals from within Europe. The 2015

report highlights the fact that immigration numbers have increased continuously since 2006 with the year 2015 accounting for the registration of 2.14 million immigrations, both asylum seekers as well as those from other EU countries. This translates to the fact there had been an increase of 46% in comparison to 2014 as well as the largest number of recorded immigrants since 1950.¹³³ The levels of immigration fell during the next four years according to the 2019 Migration Report. It is also noteworthy that the majority of immigrants, namely two-thirds, came from other European countries. 66.4% of immigrants hailed from within Europe, 13.7% from Asia and 4.2% from Africa. In 2019, Romania accounted for being the country of origin for the greatest number of immigrants to Germany, followed by Poland and Bulgaria. In contrast to the previous mentioned report of 2015, migration from Syria fell by a considerable margin. In 2017, Syria came sixth among the top countries of origin for immigrants. From 2018 it no longer figured in the top ten countries and in 2019 the number of immigrants again fell by a huge margin (17.1%). The inflow from other countries like Iran and Iraq decreased as well. Thus, an overview of the major immigrant groups shows that EU nationals accounted for the largest group of immigrants to Germany, with humanitarian immigration falling significantly from its peak in 2015. Another point to be noted is immigration of skilled workers from non-EU countries also registered a noticeable increase; 64,219 individuals of non-EU background, categorized as ‘highly skilled’ received residence for employment permit in Germany.¹³⁴ These figures show a number of interesting trends. Firstly, immigration levels have consistently increased in Germany and this includes special provisions catering to highly skilled workers. Germany has followed a policy of actively courting the latter. Secondly, it has consistently been a top destination for asylum seekers, reflected in the massive inflow from Syria and Ukraine consecutively. Finally, it also should also be noted that despite the backlash in the wake of the 2015 migrant crisis, the majority of immigrants to Germany has been from within Europe itself, i.e. EU nationals. Also, the reaction to the inflow of refugees from Ukraine a few years later was largely viewed as a success.¹³⁵ While Germany has noticeably evolved in

¹³³ Migrationsbericht 2015 (2015 Migration Report), Bundesministerium des Innern, December 14, 2016. Source: <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2015.html?nn=447084> (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

¹³⁴ Migrationsbericht 2019, zentrale Ergebnisse (2019 Migration Report, Key Results), Bundesministerium des Innern, December 2, 2020. Source: https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2019-zentrale-ergebnisse.pdf%3F_blob%3DpublicationFile%26v%3D2#:~:text=Personen%20zogen%20im%20Jahr%202019,und%20Ozeanien%205%2C0%20%25. (Accessed on December 9, 2023).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

terms of overall immigration, the 2015 migrant crisis remains a turning point in how it has steadily come to perceive refugees and asylum seekers.

The process of liberalisation of immigration in Germany is also closely linked to the demographic challenges faced by the country, namely the declining birth rates. In contemporary times, the discourse surrounding demographic crises usually juxtaposes the ageing population of the Global North with the rapidly expanding population of the Global South, the latter being symbolized by the ‘surplus population’ of ‘dehumanized, devalued, poor, indigenous and black people.’ This starkly contrasting picture of demographic variation is upheld by certain political parties in western democracies who seek to make these issues the centre-ground of their political agenda. As a result, these political narratives usually focus on correlating declining or expanding birth rates with the role of women on one hand and reducing the problem of migration to racial and ethnic terms on the other. In this context, Germany is not much different from other western liberal democracies where political parties seek to politicize the issues of immigration and demography for electoral gains. However, there are two reasons why the case of Germany stands out in this regard; the government has become increasingly active in tackling the demographic challenges and this has ranged from welfare cuts and programmes targeting population growth to explicit demographic strategies such as encouraging the increase of birth rates among the German middle classes. More recently, the government has shifted its attention to treating immigration as a ‘demographic issue.’¹³⁶

The population issue has been widely used by anti-immigration factions who warn of the dangers of changes in the composition of the population as one of the ill effects of immigration. Those opposed to higher levels of immigration argue that potential immigrants would also get older thereby proving the futility of higher levels of immigration. It has also been felt that immigrant populations would adapt their habits of reproduction with the native German population. These arguments thus aim to prove the ineffectiveness of immigration as a means of halting demographic change. For the right-wing sections and conservatives, the only solution to the demographic problem would be for the Germans themselves to reach a birth-rate that would sustain itself.¹³⁷ Germany’s declining birth rate has been an issue of concern for many years. A study in 2015 concluded that Germany had overtaken Japan to have the lowest birth rate in the world. Such a drop was feared to bring about a decrease in the percentage of people

¹³⁶ Susanne Schultz, “Demographic futurity: How statistical assumption politics shape immigration policy rationales in Germany”, *Society and Space*, Vol. 37, No.4, 2019, pp.645-646.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.654.

of working age thereby leading to negative economic repercussions.¹³⁸ Coupled with an ageing population, the rate of birth below the rate of replacement of 2.1 children per women prompted fears not only of an economic downturn but also increasing strain upon the social security system.¹³⁹

Recent years have seen a reversal of the trend of declining birth rates and population figures, aided in large part by increased immigration. At the end of 2016, the population reached 82.8 million. This surge was largely attributed to the 2015 refugee crisis. The figures for 2016 indicated that migration numbers for Germany were 750,000 more than those for departure, while for 2015, the difference was 1.1 million. In 2022, population figures reached an all-time high of 84.4 million, recording a growth of 1.3 per cent.¹⁴⁰ The role of migration in expediting this surge is revealed in the numbers estimated by the statistical office. Approximately 1.42 to 1.45 million people migrated to Germany rather than depart it. The war in Ukraine also played a part in pushing up the numbers during this period. In the first half of 2022, the net immigration from Ukraine was 750,000.¹⁴¹ Official figures reveal that forced migration has played a part in aiding population growth in Germany since the end of 2014 but the number of individuals holding German citizenship has registered a decrease. The share of the population of working age has also decreased, although immigration has helped to slow this down.¹⁴² Despite the rising population figures, the number of births continued to fall in comparison to deaths. In 2022, the birth-rate fell by 7% in comparison to 2021, while the number of deaths increased by 4% in comparison to the previous year.¹⁴³ Thus, although the population was boosted by

¹³⁸ “Germany passes Japan to have world's lowest birth rate – study”, BBC, 29 May 2015. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32929962> (Accessed on 15 November, 2023).

¹³⁹ Chase Winter, “Birthrate in Germany highest in 33 years”, DW, 17 October, 2016. Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/birthrate-in-germany-highest-in-33-years/a-36058323> (Accessed on 15 November, 2023).

¹⁴⁰ Press release No. 235, “Germany's population grew by 1.3% in 2022”, 20 June 2023. Source: https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2023/06/PE23_235_12411.html (Accessed on 15 November, 2023).

¹⁴¹ “Ukrainians push German population to record”, DW, 27 September 2022. Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-refugees-push-germanys-population-to-record-high/a-63258430> (Accessed on 15 November, 2023).

¹⁴² Press release No. N 069, “Forced migration has contributed to population growth in Germany since the end of 2014”, 29 November 2022. Source: https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2022/11/PE22_N069_12_13.html (Accessed 17 November, 2023).

¹⁴³ “German population hits all-time high”, 19 January 2023. Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/german-population-hits-all-time-high/a-64446625#:~:text=Germany's%20population%20rose%20to%20an,as%20Destatis%2C%20reported%20on%20Thursday> (Accessed 17 November, 2023).

immigration in recent years, the birth rate has been on the decline. This in many ways reaffirms the arguments of the anti-immigration factions. However, it cannot be denied that high levels of immigration have definitely contributed to lending a degree of stability to the population levels in recent years.

In the context of a looming demographic crisis Germany, like the majority of industrialized nations, has adopted a number of policies to attract highly skilled immigrants to the country.¹⁴⁴ Germany's experience of recruiting guest workers has already been detailed above. From the end of 1990s to the early part of 2000s, it started several programmes to attract highly skilled workers. As mentioned before, the coalition of the SPD and the Green Party were responsible for these reforms which included the revamped German nationality law (2001) and also measures such as the IT Green Card (2000). Spurred by these reforms a commission was formed under Rita Süßmuth which suggested various reforms to ease the immigration of skilled foreign workers. The proposals made by the commission got approval from various economic factions such as unions, employers and organizations such as the Federation of German Industries. But despite strong recommendation from so many sections, these measures were opposed by the CDU and the CSU who argued that increased immigration would prove harmful for German employees. The commission's proposed recommendations of easing the channels of permanent immigration were a definite direction to the affirmation of Germany turning to a typical country of immigration; a fact that had hitherto been denied and debated amongst the public and political elite alike.¹⁴⁵

The liberalisation of the immigration law was supported on economic considerations and was opposed on grounds of integration, the argument for the latter being that the proper integration of already present immigrants came before further liberalization of immigration. Also, it was felt that in loosening immigration purely on the basis of economic considerations should not transform Germany into a country of immigration; a tag it had staunchly avoided for so long. Ultimately, the contentious bill was finally passed in 2004, and the opposition immediately challenged it on procedural grounds. The law finally passed in 2004 with many restrictions added at the insistence of the opposition, i.e. the CDU. Hence it was felt by many that the Immigration Act of 2005 failed in its purpose of liberalizing the entry of skilled and highly skilled migrants into the country. Even previous successes of the government in this area were

¹⁴⁴ Melanie Kolbe, "When Politics Trumps Economics: Contrasting High-Skilled Immigration Policymaking in Germany and Austria", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 55, No.1, 2021, p. 32.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-42.

blighted by intense opposition. The IT Green Card, that was introduced in 2000, aimed to attract IT workers who would have an annual income of more than 51,000 Euros and they would be allowed to stay till five years and with their spouses. This policy was so swiftly implemented that it did not have time to be politicized. But consistent with their anti-immigration stance the CDU launched a campaign called ‘Kinder statt Inder’ that contended that Germany should direct its attention towards the technical training of its youth instead of bringing in IT workers from India.¹⁴⁶

The need to attract highly skilled foreign labour could not be bypassed despite opposition. In recent times the acute need for attracting such professionals has led the government to boost its efforts in this area. An article published by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action has underlined the need for skilled professionals in Germany. According to this, Germany faces shortage in skilled labour in several fields and industries such as those relating to electrical, metal, healthcare, nursing as well as STEM sector (science, technology, mathematics). In 2011, 43% of advertised vacancies were in sectors with skill shortages with the figures rising to 79% by 2018. The two major factors for the shortage in skilled labour are the rapidly ageing workforce as well as demographic transformation. Future forecasts show that by 2034, there is likely to be a 30-45 per cent increase in workers above the age of 67 in the age bracket of workers aged 20-67. On the other hand, the working age population would decrease by a third by 2060, if Germany were to stop immigration. Hence particular emphasis has been placed on the vital role played by migrant skilled labour. The Skilled Immigration Act which came into force in 2020 aims to facilitate the entry of highly skilled professionals from non-EU countries to work in Germany, doing away with priority checks. Also, measures have also been taken to ease the integration of individuals with a migrant background, including refugees, into the labour market.¹⁴⁷ Analysing the history of immigration in Germany, it is evident how it has steadily and gradually emerged as a country of immigration. However, it cannot be denied that it was only during a period of impending demographic crisis that it was forced to seriously consider the liberalization of its immigration and citizenship laws.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.42-44.

¹⁴⁷ “Skilled professionals for Germany”, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Dossier/skilled-professionals.html> (Accessed 10 December, 2023).

Problem of integration of minorities

The recurring debates revolving around Germany being a country of immigration are coterminous with the question of German identity and this in turn is crucial to understanding the problem of integration of immigrant minorities in the country. This is especially relevant because Germany has one of the highest number of migrants among all EU countries. According to EU data, Germany ranks high among EU members with regard to the number of non-nationals resident in the country. As of 1 January 2021, Germany recorded 6,112,299 TCNs (third country nationals) and 4,461,394 individuals who were EU citizens. Germany recorded the largest number of ‘non-nationals’¹⁴⁸ (10.6 million) amongst all EU member states, followed by Spain (5.4 million) and France and Italy (5.2 million) respectively. In fact, the total number of non-nationals in in these four EU states combined accounted for 70.3% of the entire population of non-nationals in the entire EU.¹⁴⁹ With such a huge number of individuals who are not citizens, along with the added population of individuals of migrant background, the task of integration has become all the onerous for Germany.

In the German context, the question of integration became relevant with the recruitment of foreign labour during the years of post-war reconstruction. Societal cohesion was firmly based on the cultural values since the idea of the German nation was essentially based on ethnocultural and linguistic markers. The supreme importance of language can be ascertained from the prevailing notion that the nation existed only where the German language was spoken. These linguistic and cultural preconditions for nationhood are still present today. It was in the context of these strict and exclusive boundaries that the integration of labour migrants can be understood. On one hand they became a part of the working class in a rapidly expanding economy, experiencing a degree of integration in the market for unskilled labour. On the other hand, the degree of integration from a cultural perspective remained low due to the fact that their residence was supposed to be of temporary nature, as well as the fact that they were ethnically excluded from German society. They could not participate politically, being devoid of voting rights. The guest worker was viewed only as a necessary addition to the economic development of the nation, who was expected to return home after the completion of his tenure. It was long before the integration of these migrants was taken seriously. By the time Germany

¹⁴⁸ Non-nationals being defined as ‘people who are not citizens of the country in which they reside. (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Non-nationals>)

¹⁴⁹ “Non-EU citizens make up 5.3% of the EU population”, Eurostat. March 30 2022. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220330-2> (Accessed 10 December, 2023).

had come out of its phase of rapid industrial expansion and had become a post-industrial society in a globalizing world, it witnessed deepening political cleavages and the widening of cultural plurality.¹⁵⁰

The term 'Leitkultur' or 'guiding culture' is of particular relevance in this context. This term came to be used by conservative sections who described it as a 'guiding culture' into which immigrants or foreigners should integrate. Soon it became a recurring fixture in the debates on multiculturalism and Islam in twenty first century Germany.¹⁵¹ According to some scholars, the term *Leitkultur* denoted the superiority of German values and the precedence of adhering to these values over differences of culture or religion. The adage 'Out of many we are one' underlies the idea of Leitkultur, and the idea of integration accompanying it is that individuals should wholly adopt the dominant German values in order to successfully integrate into society. Fischer and Mohrman have used the term 'multicultural integration' in order to denote the German notion of multiculturalism that is strictly secondary to the integration of the individual into German society. This process of integration would entail the display of values such as discipline, hard work and allegiance to principles of not only the German constitution but also Christian secularism.¹⁵² As a discourse, multicultural integration in this context has been viewed as a manifestation of the 'civilizational superiority' of the West in contrast with the inferiority and non-democratic nature of non-Western and Islamic religion and culture. It is basically a reflection of the strong attachment of German society to Christianity and whiteness. In view of the immense importance placed on the national cohesion and community, it is not surprising that the German view of multiculturalism is essentially negative, especially in comparison to countries like the US and the UK. In the German context, multiculturalism is hardly seen as a desired outcome since it undermines national unity. It is accepted only when it is subordinate to German values and culture.¹⁵³

Here, an important point that needs to be emphasized is the CDU's dismissal of multiculturalism and adoption of a conservative understanding of *Leitkultur*. The CDU's perspective on guiding culture arose from the idea that 'Germany belongs to the value community of the Christian West (or Occident/ *Abendland*).' Here the idea of the community

¹⁵⁰ Dietmar Loch, "Immigration, segregation and social cohesion: is the 'German model' fraying at the edges?", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol. 21, No. 6, 2014, pp.677-679.

¹⁵¹ Helen Williams, *n* 5, pp.64-65.

¹⁵² Mia Fischer & K. Mohrman, "Multicultural integration in Germany: Race, religion, and the Mesut Özil controversy", *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 2020, p.2.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

becomes problematic since it has never been particularly liberal in the German context. According to Michael Stolleis, the idea of the national community preceded National Socialism in German history and became a byword for political conservatism. Overtly the CDU's espousal of a guiding culture was meant to toe the middle path between assimilation on one hand and multiculturalism on the other.¹⁵⁴

This is evidenced in a speech by Angela Merkel in 2010 in which she declared multiculturalism to be dead. The speech signalled firstly; an increasing alignment towards the right by the Christian Union parties and secondly, an increasing sense of dissatisfaction in society relating to the perception of fragmentation of society. However, the debate revolving around integration in Germany continued to gravitate towards a middle point which involved concessions made both by the liberals and the conservatives regarding the implications of the term. Conservatives began to accept the fact that not only the immigrants, but also the receiving society would have to make changes in order for integration to be successful. The liberals also conceded that the ideas of integration and nationality should not be so diluted so as to lose all credibility. As a result, the concept of immigration has evolved over the last few decades from previously being understood in terms of outright assimilation to being acknowledged as a symbiotic process involving changes being adopted by both the immigrant as well as society.¹⁵⁵

A landmark change in the discourse on immigration in Germany came about when the CDU/CSU resumed office in 2005 under Angela Merkel. Chancellor Merkel initiated a diversion from the conservative understanding of integration upheld by the party. A new agenda for integration was laid out which led to several integration summits attended members of the immigrant community as well as NGOs. This gradual shift did not progress without its share of shortcomings; these summits were criticized and boycotted by key groups. However, they set the tone for the shift that had been set in motion signalling interactions between the government and the immigrant community, particularly Muslims. These summits ultimately culminated in the formation of the National Integration Plan and the liberal definition of integration endorsed by the government:

“Integration means integration into the social, economic, intellectual, cultural and legal fabric of the host country without giving up one's own cultural identity.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Douglas Klusmeyer, 'A 'guiding culture' for immigrants? Integration and diversity in Germany', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, July 2001, pp.524-525.

¹⁵⁵ Helen Williams, *n* 6, pp.64-66.

¹⁵⁶ Helen Williams, *n* 7, p.68.

The national definition of integration signalled a change in the dominant discourse as well as a fruition of the requests for such that had been raised by the previous liberal SPD/Green coalition. The summits gradually consolidated the understanding that while the main share of integration lay at the level of the local communities, a framework of national cohesion as a prerequisite for integration would have to be implemented at the level of the federal government. This was also accompanied by the understanding that there would be greater representation of minority immigrant communities at the level of local governance and the former would be recognized as ‘policy partners.’¹⁵⁷

Integration in Germany has been a multi-layered process that is still ongoing. The issue of integration in Germany is most commonly associated with that of the Turkish migrant workers. However, there are other layers to the integration process that also includes the experience of the East Germans and the ethnic German migrants or Aussiedler. Some scholars have contrasted the approach of West Germany in tackling the German refugees of the 1950s and the East Germans after reunification. In both cases, the newcomers were ethnic Germans, thus being German nationals, but were set apart from their West German counterparts by their unique historical, cultural and social experiences. In the case of the earlier German migrants after the war, their distinctness contributed negatively to their image as foreigners who were viewed as lazy, unclean and ungrateful by the native population. Doubts were also raised about the validity of their asylum claims. On the other hand, the aftermath of the reunification in the 1990s shattered the initial excitement of finally achieving national homogeneity. This sense of disillusionment brought into sharp focus the painful reality of reunification and the fact that the myth of harmonious national homogeneity was largely an illusion.¹⁵⁸ Despite the negative perceptions, the integration of the ethnic German refugees and expellees in the 1950s can be counted as one of the integration success stories of the FRG. This was attributed largely to the efforts of the political elite in West Germany who eased the way for their inclusion. Led by the CDU/CSU, policies were promoted that would pave the way for the integration of these refugees. In contrast, the approach towards the integration of the East Germans in the 1990s was much different. One notable aspect of the process of reunification was the tendency to exclude East Germans from participating; a possible outcome of the rapidness of reunification which was supported by the East Germans themselves. The legal and political system of West Germany was incorporated in the East and as a result the East Germans had hardly any stake

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.67-69.

¹⁵⁸ Douglas Klusmeyer, *n* 2, p. 527.

in the establishment and implementation of the laws and institutions that would govern them. It was obvious that West Germany remained the arbiter of reunification. As a result, the East Germans could not but help feel that their views and interests were not adequately represented. According to some reports, after the euphoria of reunification had subsided in the mid-1990s, approximately 70 per cent of the easterners felt that they were treated as ‘second-class Germans.’ Hence it is evident that the political reunification of Germany did not mean that a smooth integration process would follow swiftly in its wake. Rather, reunification brought with it its own set of problems in this regard.¹⁵⁹

Another group of newcomers that are pertinent to the integration debate is the *Aussiedler* (resettler) or the ethnic German refugees from the former Soviet Union.¹⁶⁰ The *Aussiedler*, referred to ‘Russian-Germans’ had some attributes which set them apart from other immigrant groups. They possessed a strong sense of German ethnic identity arising from their German forefathers who migrated to Russia in the eighteenth century. There they remained homogeneous as a community, maintaining German as their first language and rarely marrying into the mainstream population. The First World War saw the forced resettlement of the Germans within Russia and with the rise of Stalin, the Russian-Germans were faced with a number of prohibitive measures that stifled their freedom of religion and forcibly collectivized their farms. With the onset of the Second World War, these ethnic Germans suffered further deportation and a complete reduction in their legal status.¹⁶¹

The *Aussiedler* immigrants, by virtue of their German ethnicity, were placed in a much more advantageous position in relation to other immigrant groups. That is not to say, however, that they were spared from all the problems of integration that arise when settling into a new country. Many resettlers struggled linguistically as well as culturally, having been accustomed to not only the Russian language but also values. On one had they had been negatively perceived as Germans back in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, when they arrived in Germany, they were hardly accepted as German by the native population. Thus, the feeling of perpetual otherisation became a crucial aspect of their identity.¹⁶² Despite the difficulties they

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 527-528.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

¹⁶¹ Achim Goerres, Sabrina J. Mayer & Dennis C. Spies, “Immigrant voters against their will: a focus group analysis of identities, political issues and party allegiances among German resettlers during the 2017 bundestag election campaign”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol.46, No.7, 2020, pp.1206-1207.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 1214-1215.

faced, the ethnic German resettlers constitute one of the largest immigrant groups in Germany till today. According to official estimates, Germany has witnessed the entry of more than 4.5 million of these resettlers (including family members) since 1950. The 1990s witnessed the largest influx of Aussiedler immigrants, with 1990 itself registering a total of 397,073. Although their numbers declined thereafter, the introduction of legal measures easing their entry have led to an increase since 2013. In 2016, ethnic German resettlers numbered 6588, with the majority of them coming from former Soviet states, Romania and Poland. Also, since 2014 measures have also been taken to facilitate the entry of such migrants from eastern Ukraine.¹⁶³

The Aussiedler had traditionally been supporters of the CDU, since apart from language, religion was an important part of their identity. The then chancellor Helmut Kohl of the CDU had extended a policy of ‘unrestricted welcome’ to the resettlers since the late 1980s. As a result, the CDU consolidated their voter base amongst the Aussiedler and this trend continued for an extended period of time. As public opinion turned against the continuous inflow of resettlers, the Kohl government was compelled to suspend the unhindered entry of these migrants. In this context of the Aussiedler’s traditional party affiliation to the Christian Democrats, it is extremely important to note their increasing disillusionment with the party in the wake of the 2015-16 migrant crisis. The large section of the resettler community became disillusioned with Angela Merkel’s stance during the refugee crisis and as a result veered towards the AfD. The resettlers, who had traditionally been fiercely patriotic became attracted to the right-wing rhetoric of the AfD which stressed on nationalism and ethnic identity.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the Aussiedler community advanced along their own historical trajectory as far as integration was concerned. However, one crucial point that stands out is their ethnic identity that has been the main driver of not only their historical experience in the erstwhile Soviet Union, but also their integration process and political affiliation Germany.

The other main group of immigrants in Germany, whose integration, or lack of, is of particular relevance is the Turkish guest workers. Their initial settlement in Germany was expedited by the fact that the economic situation in Turkey as well as the active encouragement of emigration

¹⁶³ Annual Policy Report by the German National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN) titled “Migration, Integration, Asylum; Political Developments in Germany 2016”, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2017. Source: https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/EMN/Politikberichte/emn-politikbericht-2016-germany.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7 (Accessed on 10 December, 2023).

¹⁶⁴ Achim Goerres, Sabrina J. Mayer & Dennis C. Spies, *n* 3, pp.1207-1218.

by the Turkish government discouraged them from going back.¹⁶⁵ The Turkish migrants who opted to settle in Germany faced problems of societal and educational exclusion. One of the accusations made against them was that they did not make adequate effort to integrate into mainstream society and settled into “parallel societies” or specific segregated areas. It has been felt that they isolated themselves into these ‘ethnic enclaves’ since these provided for all their specific needs and reduced any obligation to associate with the mainstream. Staying within these closely knit ethnic networks would be more suitable in terms of allowing them to stay connected to informal channels of information regarding job opportunities as well as consuming ‘ethnic goods’, that are related to their culture and home country. However, the other side of the debate claims that discrimination drove these Turkish migrants to segregate themselves in such a way. There is often a tendency among landlords to cave into pressure from prejudiced native tenants and exclude immigrants from areas that are dominated by natives.¹⁶⁶ In the case of Turkish migrants, discrimination remained the chief factor behind their isolation or “ghettoization.” The hostility towards foreigners as well as the prevalent housing policies were major reasons. After reunification, the discrimination by landlords increased even further. This was due to xenophobia on one hand and the fear of racial attacks on the other.¹⁶⁷

Turkish migrants also faced various setbacks in their educational and professional pursuits. According to studies, between 1999 and 2008, the second-generation Turkish youth had surpassed their parents with regard to education, language and training skills. But compared to the German youth, they lagged behind in terms of both language skills and vocational training. They also experienced increasing levels of unemployment during the same time frame. Another point to be noted is that increasing levels of Islamophobia led many Turkish youth to fall prey to Islamic radicalisation.¹⁶⁸ The overarching theme of the discourse relating to the integration of Turkish migrants pertains to their persistent discrimination and otherisation. Deemed ‘un-European’, and unreceptive to the cultural and democratic traditions of Germany, the Turkish migrants have always been compartmentalized due to their religion and culture. Germany’s Immigration and Integration Law (2005) calling for greater efforts to strengthen the integration of minorities was the first major step taken by the government to tackle the problem. Despite

¹⁶⁵ Faruk Şen, “The Historical Situation of Turkish Migrants in Germany”, *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol. 22, Nos. 2&3, July/November 2003, pp.210-211

¹⁶⁶ Verena Dill and Uwe Jirjahn, “Ethnic residential segregation and immigrants’ perceptions of discrimination in West Germany”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 51, No.16, 2014, pp. 3330–3333.

¹⁶⁷ Faruk Şen, *n 2*, p.214.

¹⁶⁸ Dietmar Loch, *n 2*, pp.679-681.

debates surrounding the efficacy of this law in actually fostering integration, it was definitely a step in the right direction. Also, it must be noted that with the liberalisation of naturalisation laws, increasing number of Turkish as well as other immigrant groups began to opt for naturalisation. The peak rate of naturalisation was reached in 1995 when the ‘pink card’ system was introduced by the Turkish government to encourage its nationals in applying for German citizenship. During this time, the naturalisation rates of Turks surpassed that of all other groups.¹⁶⁹

The struggles of the Turkish migrant community in Germany reflect the deeply entrenched xenophobia and discriminatory undertones of German society. The policy advances in the last few decades have benefited the latter generation of Turkish descent individuals who have been able to acquire citizenship and integrate to a better extent than their previous generations. But even then, the narrow scope of the German notion of multiculturalism and the continued presence of overt and subliminal forms of discrimination means that the Turkish as well as other immigrant groups still hinder the process of integration in Germany.

Another aspect of the integration dilemma in Germany that is relevant to this study is the experience of East Germany with regard to this problem. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) differed from Federal Republic of Germany in the sense that it completely distanced itself from the Nazi past by proclaiming itself to be an anti-fascist state. West Germany was looked upon as a fascist power and its immigration policies were viewed as slave labour reminiscent of the Nazi era. Assuming such a high moral stand did not automatically mean that east Germany was devoid of its share of racism. It too recruited ‘contract workers’, although in much smaller numbers from other socialist countries such as Angola, Cuba and Vietnam among others. Interestingly, it was not much different from the guest worker programme of the west because these recruited workers were not granted any rights and were supposed to return home. However, these recruitment policies were presented as beneficial programmes for the home countries of these workers. Within east Germany there hardly existed any contact between the native population and foreigners. The ‘contract workers’ led a separate existence from the locals in terms of both work and housing.¹⁷⁰ This heavily restricted mode of societal interaction eventually translated into xenophobia and violence against foreigners post reunification and even after. According to official reports, the rising number of attacks against

¹⁶⁹ Merih Anil, “Explaining the Naturalisation Practices of Turks in Germany in the Wake of the Citizenship Reform of 1999”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 8, November 2007, pp.1365-1366.

¹⁷⁰ Aleksandra Lewicki, “Race, Islamophobia and the politics of citizenship in post-unification Germany”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 52, No. 5, 2018, p. 501.

foreigners in eastern Germany were mainly carried out by unemployed youth and sections who felt they had been left out in the process of reunification. Among the arrested young hooligans, several were sons of former officials of SED. This right-wing reaction to the collapse of a left-wing dictatorship' was viewed as the outcome of years of isolation from foreigners resulting in the hostile attitude towards the latter. While asylum seekers were the main target of xenophobic violence, even foreign diplomats were often not spared.¹⁷¹

The historical context of the highly restricted way of life in East Germany coupled with the complete denial of history makes it abundantly clear how right-wing populism has found fertile ground in eastern Germany in recent years. Recent research by the Pew Research Centre has analysed the differences in political attitudes between people in the erstwhile west and east Germany. People in the west are more likely to be satisfied with the state of affairs in the country than those in the east. Opinions regarding the success of democracy are more positive in the west with 66% expressing satisfaction compared to 55% in eastern Germany. People in the former west expressed a more optimistic outlook regarding the future compared to their eastern counterparts and attitudes towards the EU were also found to be more positive in the west than in the east. It is also noted that perceptions of the AfD were twice as likely to be favourable in the former east than in the west; while 12% in the former west expressed a favourable opinion about the AfD, the percentage was found to be 24% in the east.¹⁷²

Migrant crisis of 2015-16 and the rise of the AfD

One final aspect that remains to be examined in this discussion that has analysed the history of immigration and problems of integration in Germany is the migrant crisis of 2015-16. The crisis was sparked by the massive influx of refugees and migrants who started flooding into Europe, most of them fleeing war and persecution. The largest share of these migrants was from war-torn Syria, while the rest came from other unstable areas such as Afghanistan, Eritrea and Iraq. Germany's role during this crisis stood apart from other European countries; then Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the doors of the country to more than a million of these migrants. With 1.7 million people applying for asylum in Germany within the time frame of

¹⁷¹ *Xenophobia etc*, British Embassy Berlin Office, 5 November 1991. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 23-06-2023).

¹⁷² John Gramlich, "How the attitudes of West and East Germans compare, 30 years after fall of Berlin Wall", Pew Research Center. October 18, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/10/18/how-the-attitudes-of-west-and-east-germans-compare-30-years-after-fall-of-berlin-wall/> (Accessed on 17th December, 2023).

2015 and 2019, it became the country with the fifth highest population of refugees in the world. While this hugely risky decision nearly tumbled her political career, Merkel was able to brace the nation with her now memorable words “Wir schaffen das” or “we can manage this.”¹⁷³ The refugee crisis is significant, especially in the context of this study for another reason; it became the main driver for right-wing populist forces in the country. The right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD), despite its origins as a strictly anti-Euro party started gaining popularity by adopting a right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric. On the other hand, the far-right PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) started organising rallies against the so-called Islamisation of Germany, calling for a tighter immigration policy.

The political and societal implications of the migrant crisis should be examined to some extent. An important political outcome of the crisis was the changing stance of the CDU under Chancellor Merkel. Merkel’s decision to welcome such a huge number of refugees signalled a massive shift from the traditional anti-immigration stance of the party. The decision caused a rift within the party itself with some conservative factions, especially its sister party the CSU calling for a tightening of the entry of refugees. However, Merkel was able to overcome this dissent and forge a pro-immigration image for the CDU. The AfD on the other hand started to adopt an increasingly xenophobic and racist rhetoric that was staunchly critical of the government’s policies. The party’s increasing radicalisation and shift towards advocacy of cultural exclusivity reached new heights under then leader Frauke Petry.¹⁷⁴ Petry repeatedly made headlines because of her racist remarks, which included calls for shooting refugees trying to enter the country illegally¹⁷⁵ and comparing migrants to compost.¹⁷⁶

The AfD grew by leaps and bounds after the migrant crisis. It became the third largest party in the Bundestag in the general elections of 2017 after having gained 12.7 per cent of votes. Although it performed better in eastern Germany, it also did remarkably well in the west having garnered a higher share of voters than any other right-wing party after the war. It became

¹⁷³ Philip Oltermann, “How Angela Merkel’s great migrant gamble paid off”, *The Guardian*. Aug 30,2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/30/angela-merkel-great-migrant-gamble-paid-off> (Accessed on 17th December, 2023).

¹⁷⁴ Matthias Mader and Harald Schoen, “The European refugee crisis, party competition, and voters’ responses in Germany”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2019, p.71.

¹⁷⁵ Kate Connolly, “Frauke Petry: smiling face of Germany’s resurgent right”, *The Guardian*. Feb 7 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/07/frauke-petry-smiling-face-resurgent-right> (Accessed on 17th December, 2023).

¹⁷⁶ Reuters, “Germany’s AfD leader criticised for comparing migrants to compost”, *The Guardian*. Oct 6 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/06/afd-leader-frauke-petry-criticised-comparing-migrants-compost-germany> (Accessed on 17th December, 2023).

evident that individuals harbouring racist views but who had hitherto refrained from voting for other right-wing parties voted for the AfD since they felt that the mainstream parties were overlooking their concerns. As mentioned earlier, the PEGIDA movement also gained headway during this period. Based primarily in Dresden in eastern Germany, the group organized protest marches ever since it gained momentum in 2015. The group's main agenda included criticising the asylum policies of the government and engaging in anti-Muslim propaganda such as opposition to hijabs and mosques. It also highlighted their dissatisfaction with the perceived discrimination of East Germans resulting from 'West German arrogance.' As is the case with such far-right movements, its participants were mostly less educated males in the lower income bracket. But it must be noted that the movement also gained support from western Germany; a study found that around 22 per cent of its sympathizers came from the west, which was not much far behind from the east where 25.4 per cent supported it. While the PEGIDA still operates in Germany, it also spread to other countries. The incendiary rhetoric of the AfD and PEGIDA led to a rise in violence against the refugees, particularly in 2015 and 2016 when racist violence reached alarming levels. This included the targeting of not only individual refugees but also refugee facilities.¹⁷⁷

Another event that intensified hostility towards migrants and refugees was the Cologne attacks during New Year's Eve of 2015-16 when a series of sexual assaults and thefts were reported in Cologne and also in other cities like Düsseldorf and Hamburg. What was notable about these attacks was the fact that they were carried out mainly by young men of predominantly North African origin. The attacks signalled a discursive shift in not only public opinion, but also media coverage. There began a mass negative and racialized portrayal of particularly male migrants, their sexuality and tendency towards violent crimes. The widespread negative media coverage also led to a decrease in public support for initiatives such as programmes for the resettlement of refugees. It also became evident that the 'Welcome Culture' which had become symbolic of the German public acceptance of refugees during the migrant crisis, was actually restricted to a small yet visible minority, who would not be opposed to the opening of refugee hostels in their own neighbourhoods. Studies have argued that these attacks and their aftermath constituted a 'critical discourse moments', whereby such incidents can alter the course of future public opinion and even the direction of future policies.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Aleksandra Lewicki, *n2*, pp. 509-510.

¹⁷⁸ Iris Wigger, Alexander Yendell and David Herbert, "The end of 'Welcome Culture'? How the Cologne assaults reframed Germany's immigration discourse", *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 37, No.1, 2022, pp. 22-24.

Recent steps taken by the German government show that it has attempted to shift the discourse on immigration integration after the failed attempts of the past. For the integration of the burgeoning migrant population Germany set up two national integration plans. The National Integration Plan of 2007 dealt with educational, employment and cultural aspects pertaining to the integration process while the following National Action Plan on Integration of 2012 focused on the practical application and measurement of the integration policies. Its objectives included various measures to seamlessly facilitate integration such as ensuring greater recognition of foreign degrees, health care support for migrants as well as providing them support. In 2016, the Meseberg Declaration on Integration was adopted which focused on dual strategy of supporting foreigners on one hand but also underlining their duties on the other.¹⁷⁹ The declaration describes the guiding principle of the integration policies as based on ‘supporting and demanding.’ This translates into the fact that while the state would help ease the process of integration, foreigners also need to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring the success of the entire integration process. Among the skills listed as necessary for successful integration are language and ‘value transfer.’ The declaration also warns against misdemeanour and attacks on women, children and other vulnerable sections, citing the quick change in laws after the 2015-16 attacks on women in Cologne.¹⁸⁰

Important legislation in this area includes the German Immigration Act of 2005 which pertains to the entry and stay of foreign nationals in the country and the Immigration Act for Skilled Workers, enforced in 2020 aimed at boosting the immigration of skilled foreign professionals. The Integration Act of 2016 marks the first federal level legislation for integration in Germany. Its chief objective is to promote integration through a system of ‘support and demand’ (Fördern und Fordern) which has been briefly discussed above. Other proactive measures taken by the government to promote integration include the National Action Plan which is implemented through phases. The report on phase 4 stresses on the importance of inclusivity in the integration process. the need to nurture a sense of community among the German population, regardless of whether or not they possess a migration background, and to understand that integration is process involving the society as a whole. To this end, access facilities and

¹⁷⁹ “Governance of migrant integration in Germany”, European Commission. https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-germany_en#integration-programme%20%20 (Accessed on 15th December, 2023).

¹⁸⁰ “Meseberger Erklärung zur Integration”, Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (BPA), May 25, 2016. Source: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/archiv/alt-inhalte/meseberger-erklaerung-zur-integration-396024> (Accessed on 23rd December, 2023).

dialogue would be encouraged, along with ensuring with greater opportunities for all sections, including women. Interestingly the term ‘Einwanderungsgesellschaft’ in reference to Germany points to the fact that it has largely come to terms with its identity as a country of immigration

¹⁸¹ It must also be noted that the report has also highlighted the importance of German history and culture in shaping the national identity.¹⁸²

Questions pertaining to the success of integration in Germany remain open ended. The integration debate is described as being torn between the “overly tolerant and panic-mongers.”

¹⁸³ On one hand, it would be inaccurate to claim that German society is free of xenophobic tendencies. According to a study conducted in 2006, 59.4 per cent of Germans agreed with the statement that there were too many foreigners in Germany, while 35.3 agreed that foreigners should be sent back to their countries of origin in case of a job shortage in Germany.¹⁸⁴ It should come as no surprise that the presence of such dominant xenophobic trends, albeit dormant, should provide fertile ground for the rise of a right-wing populist party like the AfD at the opportune moment. But one must also not turn a blind eye to the progress made by Germany in striving to become a more inclusive society. A testimony to this change is the city of Munich which has transformed from the ‘capital of the movement’ during the Nazi era to being ‘the capital of the welcoming culture towards refugees.’¹⁸⁵

The history of immigration in Germany is dominated by one crucial theme; namely the struggle to come to terms with its immigration status. Despite resolutely denying ever being a country of immigration, its history of accepting immigrants goes long back. It is this dichotomy that sets the tone for its immigration discourse. However, it can be inferred that the liberalization of its ethno-cultural citizenship laws as well as the recent migrant crisis have played an important role in shifting this longstanding discursive ambivalence.

¹⁸¹ *Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration, Bericht Phase IV*, Die Bundesregierung, p.10.
<https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/997532/1875182/0df29c2cd04e842a91b1b33700b467bd/2021-03-09-bkm-kulturkapitel-nap-i-data.pdf?download=1> (Accessed on 23rd December, 2023).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

¹⁸³ Sebastian Hammelehle, “Examining the State of German Identity”, Spiegel International. August 29,2018.
<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/who-are-we-examining-the-state-of-german-identity-a-1225133.html> (Accessed on 21st December, 2023).

¹⁸⁴ Charles Hawley, “When It Comes to Integration, Silence Is Golden”, Spiegel International. October 1, 2008.
<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/opinion-when-it-comes-to-integration-silence-is-golden-a-527694.html> (Accessed on 3rd December, 2023).

¹⁸⁵ Sebastian Hammelehle, n2.

Role of oppositional forces: mainstream and beyond

German history is tainted by the era of National Socialism, but what is often overlooked is the fact that it was also the seat of a thriving antifascist movement that appeared during the closing days of the Second World War. Almost every region of Germany witnessed the rise of ‘antifascist committees’ comprising of Communists, Socialists and other individuals opposed to the fascist ideology who committed themselves to the task of rebuilding the country from the ruins in which the Nazi regime had left it. This ranged from basic tasks such as regaining control over food, electricity, gas or water supplies, establishing law and order to political activities such as engaging in meetings, disseminating anti-fascist literature and expunging Nazi elements from various local levels of government. It has been noted that a significant role was played by the antifas during the period between the establishment of military government and the fall of the National Socialists. However, these grass-roots level forces of the antifascist left were suppressed as soon as the new occupiers assumed power. In latter times, academic discourse has focused on whether the antifas presented ‘missed opportunities’ or ‘suppressed historical alternatives’ in German history.¹⁸⁶ The extreme right has also been countered by far-left extremists called ‘Autonomen’ in the years after reunification. These groups tended to be relatively well organised and they carried out attacks against well-known neo-Nazis. Their activities included targeting vendors selling extreme right-wing publications, burning ‘youth clubs’ affiliated with the latter and even providing ‘Autonomen guards’ to the hostels housing asylum seekers.¹⁸⁷ Apart from the activities of the left, mention must also be made of the demonstrations against the increase in violence against foreigners during this period.¹⁸⁸

This culture of far-left anti-fascist movements serves as a starting point when analysing the role of opposition to the right in Germany.¹⁸⁹ But keeping in tune with the democratic

¹⁸⁶ Gareth Pritchard, “Schwarzenberg 1945: Antifascists and the ‘Third Way’ in German Politics”, *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 35, Vol.4,2005, pp.499-500.

¹⁸⁷ *The far left in Berlin and the New Länder*, British Embassy, Berlin Office, 18th December, 1992. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 24-06-2023).

¹⁸⁸ Demonstrations took place all over Germany in in 1991 protesting against racism and xenophobia. This included a mass rally numbering up to 80,000 in Berlin coinciding with the second anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall and 53rd anniversary of ‘Kristallnacht’. Ministers also strongly protested publicly against the increase in xenophobia and racism.

Xenophobia: Reaction, British Embassy, Berlin Office, 15th November, 1991. (Accessed at National Archives, London, UK on 23-06-2023).

¹⁸⁹ There has always been a push against the incidence of far-right activities in Germany. The government took proactive measures to deal with the attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers following reunification. This included expediting the prosecution of perpetrators and disseminating aggressive information campaigns targeted at the youth to put an end to these attacks.

framework, this analysis will focus on the approaches of the two dominant parties in Germany, namely the centre-right Christian Demokratische Union (CDU) or Christian Democratic Union and the centre-left Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) or the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

Christian Demokratische Union (CDU) or Christian Democratic Union is one of the major parties in Germany, and it has played a crucial role in shaping German politics and history. Christian democratic parties share a number of features; they are predominantly characterized by an overarching commitment to societal cohesion with a firm foundation in supporting traditional structures of family, especially emphasizing ‘conservative social and cultural values.’ It subscribes to social capitalism which recognizes the need for a degree of state intervention within a capitalist economy and ‘transnational reconciliation’, the latter of which is manifested in the development of the European integration in the post war years.¹⁹⁰

The CDU has been likened to a catch-all party because of its widespread appeal across a large spectrum of classes but at times it has also been classified as a ‘Volkspartei’ (people’s party). While the term ‘catch-all party’ represented a broad-based categorisation of a party’s ideological positioning in the quest to appeal to the widest possible base, the concept of Volkspartei goes further to connote a degree of social commitment. The immediate socio-political conditions of post-war Federal Republic eased the emergence and consolidation of the CDU/CSU as a Volkspartei. One of reasons for the success of the party was its dominant religious underpinning that was perfectly suited to the conditions of the time. Subsequently, societal shifts left their mark on the religious aspects governing the lives of individuals and this was impacted a party CDU whose appeal largely religious.¹⁹¹

The emergence of the CDU after the war seen to be a continuity of the traditional Catholic conservative legacy of the Centre Party (Zentrumspartei) of the erstwhile Weimer Republic.¹⁹² This is evident in its voter base. While the Centre Party appealed to mainly a Catholic voter base within a broadly classless framework, the CDU expanded this to include not only Catholics, but also erstwhile nationalist parties, Protestant voters as well as sections of the

The campaign against racism-assessing the present position, Report by the Federal Republic of Germany Embassy, London, 18th December, 1992. (Accessed at National Archives, 24-06-2023).

¹⁹⁰ Ed Turner, Simon Green and William Paterson, “Introduction: Understanding the Transformation of the CDU”, *German Politics*, Vol.22, No.1–2, p.2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹² Eike-Christian Hornig, “The Genetic Origin of the CDU and its Developmental Path to a Catch-All Party”, *German Politics*, Vol.22, No.1–2, 2013, p.85.

moderate liberals. Furthermore, in the initial two decades, the CDU top brass was constituted mainly of individuals closely associated with the Weimer Republic who carried forward their understanding of the party structures and politics of the Centre Party. As a result, the CDU was largely shaped by these considerations in its formative years.¹⁹³ In the GDR, the party, known as the Christian Democratic Union of Germany or CDUD, came to be largely subordinated to the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany or Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) The West and East CDU ultimately joined forces at first all-German CDU conference in 1990.¹⁹⁴

While the origin and transformation of the CDU is pertinent to this study, what is also essential is the way it tackled the emergence of far-right forces in decades after its formation. One study has analysed how the CDU tackled the rise of the right-wing party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) in the period between 1964 and 1969. The NPD was an amalgamation of a number of smaller right-wing parties, even counting some former members of the Nazi Party among its ranks. During the time of this party's brief ascendance in the 1960s, the CDU adopted a multifaceted approach to tackle the NPD. In the initial stages, the leaders of the CDU suggested electoral reform that would accomplish the dual purpose of consolidating the position of the CDU by introducing a first past the post system and also eliminating the presence of 'splinter parties' like the NPD. When these proposed reforms ultimately failed to materialize, the CDU leaders also grew wary of likening the NPD with the Nazi party, fearing that its continuous regional success might be noted by the other western powers. Hence the CDU came up with another interesting defence mechanism, namely to invest in the social sciences to study the emergence of such right-wing forces. The upper echelons of the CDU remained connected to social scientists by means of the party's research and archival foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), which was founded in 1955. Such academic engagement resulted in conferences and research papers probing the emergence of such right-wing parties. The next strategy adopted by the CDU was to treat the far-right as an indicator of public dissatisfaction rather than as something anomalous. With the emergence of public opinion surveys, it became increasingly clear that the NPD voters were predominantly those who were unhappy with the current political system. With this realisation, the CDU began to view NPD voters as a potential base who might be persuaded to change their allegiance in the future by tackling their grievances. The final approach of the CDU, in relation to the NPD has been analysed in the context of student riots that broke out in West Germany from 1967 where

¹⁹³ Ibid., pp.88-89.

¹⁹⁴ CDU official website. <https://www.cdu.de/ueber-uns/geschichte-der-cdu/geschichte> (Accessed on 29th November, 2023).

amongst other reasons, the CDU was accused of being symbolic of the culture of silent conservatism that had characterized the previous generations association with Nazi crimes. In such a climate, the CDU began to ponder over the question of banning the NPD. However, instead of doing so it settled on projecting itself as the only democratic party in the middle ('Mitte') of the political spectrum. Such a strategy involved largely ignoring the NPD and its voters.¹⁹⁵ The CDU proactively took a role in opposing the far-right in the decades after the war; something that is amply evident in the successive measures it took to counter the rise of a party like the NPD. It also did so in the wake of right-wing violence post reunification. A concerted effort was made by the government to tackle such violence and hate crimes. The proposed measures included the establishment of police units and special commissions to tackle xenophobic violence as well as improving the exchange of information between the federal and state police. Amendments were also proposed to the criminal laws pertaining to use of symbols such as swastika, SS or the 'Hitler salute.'¹⁹⁶

The CDU continued as the most dominant party for several years; however, it soon became clear that it faced a crisis of legitimacy. Societal and religious flux posed the greatest challenge to the Christian Democratic parties notably by means growing secularisation and the decline of church attending Catholics who comprised the bulk of its support base. The gradual overhaul of traditional societal and familial structures, the acceptance of homosexuality and unconventional family types as well as the increasing acknowledgment of the emerging role of women in society dealt a blow to the traditional and conservative socio-cultural values espoused by the Christian Democratic parties. With higher levels of immigration, often from Muslim countries, the Christian democratic parties have also had to grapple with a changing electoral landscape and an ideology that seemed to be at odds with it. For instance, by its very definition, it would seem to exclude Muslims. On the other hand, immigrants from Muslim countries, such as the Turkish, were more likely to aligned to the Left despite being overwhelmingly conservative in their views. Apart from social and religious challenges, Christian democracy and its model of a welfare state has also been under threat. An increasingly ageing population is more likely to exert pressure on a social welfare and healthcare system. As the number of workers, who are the foundational pillars for supporting such a system, remain fixed in proportion to the growing number of the elderly, the cost of

¹⁹⁵ Anna Berg, "Electoral Strategy or Historical Legacy? The CDU's Reactions to Far-Right Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1964–1990", *Social Science History*, Vol.4, 2022, pp.537-543.

¹⁹⁶ *Ministers toughen measures against right-wing violence*, Press Release by Federal Republic of Germany, 3rd December, 1992. (Accessed at National Archives, 24-06-2023).

maintaining the traditional systems of social insurance seem to be too high. Furthermore, the traditional Christian Democratic party structure predicated on the male dominated family model came to be challenged by the emergence of new familial patterns.¹⁹⁷ The recognition of the need to accept these new challenges can be gauged from the CDU's 'Dresden Manifesto' that was launched at the second all-German party conference held in Dresden. Describing Germany as a 'foreigner-friendly' country, the manifesto upheld the CDU's commitment to the peaceful existence of Germans as well as foreigners. It also recognised that greater global integration will increase immigration into Germany and thus reaffirmed the CDU's pledge to oppose discrimination and violence against foreigners.¹⁹⁸

The transformation of the CDU, which is crucial to understanding the intricacies of the growth of right-wing populism in contemporary Germany, is thus a multifaceted culmination of a number of social as well as historical transitions. This is most recognisable under Angela Merkel who was viewed as having 'cast off the mildew of decades' by overhauling the party stance towards a number of issues such as immigration and family.¹⁹⁹ As discussed earlier, the CDU began its political career by being a 'catch-all party' operating on pragmatism and broad-based public appeal. Over the years the party leadership continued to operate on the traditional party theme of 'realpolitik' despite attempts made by some reformists like Heiner Geissler and Kurt Biedenkopf to shift party focus to 'soft' issues like multiculturalism or gender. It was in the years following 1998 that the party underwent a seminal shift, whose reasons have been discussed above. This is attributed mainly to Angela Merkel who became the general secretary of the party in 1998 and who steadily rose to become not only the most liberal, but also one of the most recognized leaders of the CDU. In her the party found a leader who was not afraid to stray from convention and attempt to balance principle with pragmatism²⁰⁰

The signal for change came with a crushing defeat in the 1998 federal elections and it was finally acknowledged that the party stance had hitherto been excessively preoccupied with compromise and loyalty. As mentioned earlier, the CDU adhered to traditional familial models based revolving around a male breadwinner. It was Merkel who pushed forward a draft

¹⁹⁷ Ed Turner, Simon Green and William Paterson, *n2*, pp.4-6.

¹⁹⁸ It should be noted that the term *Ausländer* was used to denote immigrants, which highlighted their identity as 'foreigners.'

Dresdner Manifest; Die Zukunft Gemeinsam Gestalten, Die neuen Aufgaben Deutscher Politik, CDU Parteitag, 14-17 December, 1991. (Accessed at National Archives, 23-06-2023).

¹⁹⁹ Clay Clemens, "Modernisation or Disorientation? Policy Change in Merkel's CDU", *German Politics*, Vol.18, No.2, June 2009, p.121.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.122-126.

statement that would encourage the inclusion of single parent, same-sex relationships and other unconventional family forms within the CDU's accepted family parameters. Obviously, such radical measures incited an angry backlash from the conservative factions but the draft was able to come through in December 1999 with the support of progressives. Such a victory was even acknowledged by critics who hailed Merkel for bringing about a 'small cultural revolution by CDU standards.' Merkel next turned her attention to the economy by calling for new reforms that would be better suited to handle the uncertainties of the global markets. These too were attacked as being neoliberal by certain factions of the party.²⁰¹ What is noteworthy here, is not only Merkel's revolutionary role in challenging long standing conservative ideals of the party, but also the staunch opposition she has to overcome within the ranks of the same party for realising such changes.

The next major wave of changes came from the time Merkel became Chancellor in 2005 when the CDU was forced into a 'Grand Coalition' with the SPD after inconclusive federal elections. However, it was clear that the CDU had suffered a massive decline in support, especially among young, urban, female voters as well as eastern and middle-class ones.²⁰² Apart from initiating further liberalizing changes in the party's family policies, the most crucial transformation came in the form of an overhaul of its immigration policies. Under Merkel, the CDU would gradually gravitate towards a more liberal stance towards immigration and the integration of minorities.

Under the chancellorship of Merkel, the government became increasingly active in the promotion of the integration of minorities. Efforts were made to include migrants in the process of dialogue and engagement with the government through measures such as the German Islam Conference and the National Integration Summit. In 2007, the National Integration Plan (NIP) was adopted, whereby participants agreed to adopt measures to improve the process of integration in sectors such as the labour market, education as well as to assist in the acquirement of German language skills.²⁰³ However, the process of facilitating the process of integration has not been without undulations and the CDU itself has had to face various backlash within the ranks of the party. Merkel, despite her pro-immigration image in later years, was not exempt from expressing dissatisfaction with the direction of multiculturalism, famously declaring in 2010 that 'multiculturalism has failed completely.' Despite such negative assertions, the

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp.127-128.

²⁰² Ibid., p.130.

²⁰³ Isabelle Hertner, "Germany as 'a country of integration'? The CDU/CSU's policies and discourses on immigration during Angela Merkel's Chancellorship", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2021, p. 464.

Integration Act was adopted in 2016. This led to further deepening of the rifts in the party; especially with its sister party, the CSU. As is evident, the CDU embodies the centre-right in the German political spectrum, however the centre-right itself is by no means bereft of a number of ideological and geographic divergences. The CDU, being a federal party, has a number of powerful regional branches especially in regions like Thuringia, Mecklenburg-Lower Pomerania amongst others. On the other hand, the even more staunchly conservative CSU operates only in Bavaria.²⁰⁴ Tensions between the CDU and CSU have been persistent over the decades. According to a report on the CDU ‘Deutschlandforum’ dating back to 1992, the right-wingers within the CDU and CSU had been discontent with the way the CDU ‘had gradually been abandoning conservative positions’ and ‘meeting the SPD on the middle ground of German politics.’ As a result, 190 CDU and CSU members (which included 11 Bundestag members) founded the “Christlich-Konservatives Deutschlandforum” which aimed to take the CDU to the right of the spectrum again.²⁰⁵

Both the CDU and the CSU were formed from earlier conservative parties, agreeing to work together with the joint aim of opposing the social democrats on one hand and to prevent conditions that would be conducive to the rise of far-right elements, as had been the case with the Nazis. The CSU, despite being present only in Bavaria, holds power in an industrially and economically advanced region that constitutes the largest contributor to the national budget. Erstwhile CSU chairman Horst Seehofer became a stern critic of Merkel’s open-door refugee policy as Bavaria grappled with the impact of the migrant crisis. On the other hand, the CDU has had to loosen its conservative credentials in order to engage in coalitions because of its broader electoral focus. Thus, under Merkel, the party moved largely to the centre, often having to renounce its aspects of its conservatism on the way.²⁰⁶ The inner contradictions within the party and its allies proves that the path to liberalisation has by no means been without its share of setbacks.

One particular study has analysed how the CDU’s discourse on immigration has evolved between the period of 2005 to 2013. This includes a complete overhaul of the way immigrants have been perceived within this time frame. In 2005, immigrants were described as *Ausländer*, a term underlining their status as foreigners, but within a space of four years, they came to be

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.462.

²⁰⁵ CDU: “*Deutschlandforum*”, British Embassy Bonn, 14th December, 1992. (Accessed at National Archives, 23-06-2023)

²⁰⁶ “Migrant crisis strains Germany’s oldest political marriage”, Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/e9112194-7e58-11e5-a1fe-567b37f80b64> (Accessed on 4th January, 2024).

described as ‘people with a migration background (Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund)’. By 2013 and 2017, migrants were defined as ‘people with a migration history (Menschen mit Zuwanderungsgeschichte).’ The party also began to stress more on the need for migrants to integrate better into German society by learning the language and becoming law abiding citizens respectful of German values. A marked recalibration in the economic aspect of immigration can also be noted. In the 2005 manifesto, the party promised to limit immigration to those in the highly educated sector, with the potential to make positive contribution scientifically as well as socially and culturally. By 2017, more or less the same message was repackaged as ‘from all over the world, people come to Germany with their ideas, launch firms and create jobs. We will encourage and support them,’²⁰⁷ Thus, although one might debate how much the actual narrative concerning immigration has transformed within this time period, it is evident that the way in which this narrative has been presented has undergone a noticeable change within this short period.

A crucial aspect of the evolution of the CDU is the change in its attitude towards Islam. The rhetoric of party leaders increasingly began to reflect the reality that Islam is now an integral part of Germany and German culture. In 2015, Merkel stated that ‘it is obvious that today, Islam undoubtedly belongs to Germany.’ However, despite proclamations such as these, more conservative sections of the party continued to voice their opposition to the increasing acceptance of Islam. This is reflected in the statements by Seehofer who stated that ‘Islam does not belong to Germany. Germany is shaped by Christianity.’ However, he made it clear that although Muslims obviously had a place in Germany, it would not automatically mean that the ‘national traditions and habits’ would be displaced.²⁰⁸

The CDU/CSU government programme for the period between 2017-2021 has reveals how much the party has strived to adopt an inclusive stance, particularly towards Islam. On one hand it has acknowledged that integration is a two-way process involving immigrants (referred to as everyone who comes to Germany seeking long-term residency) and the receiving society. Successful integration is necessary to overcome the occurrence of ‘parallel societies.’ This would involve the acquisition of language and vocational skills. Regarding Muslims, it states; ‘We join all peaceful Muslims in rejecting the abuse of Islam for the purposes of hate, violence and terrorism.’ In carefully wording its stance, it distances itself from any form of Islamic radicalism and makes it clear and any individual refusing to integrate or follow laws might

²⁰⁷ Isabelle Hertner, *n.3*, pp. 7-11.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14.

even face being deported.²⁰⁹ Notably, the party also attempted to make amends for the migrant crisis backlash, by stating that it aimed to reduce the flow of asylum seekers by declaring countries like Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco safe countries of origin and also repatriating those denied asylum. Interestingly, it also refers to the importance of ‘Leitkultur’ in defining the German nation.²¹⁰ This pragmatic approach is evident in the outline of its policies in its official website. It states that while the party adheres to the Christian notion of helping people in need, a line needs to be drawn in the case of migration. According to CDU member Carsten Linnemann, Germany cannot ‘take in the whole world’ and relying on Europe is no longer a viable option to control immigration. He also makes it clear that the levels of immigration cannot continue at the current pace and Germany needs to secure its borders and ensure that certain countries are declared as ‘safe’ so as to prevent asylum seekers entering its borders.

After losing power to the SPD in 2021, the CDU under new leader Friedrich Merz has steadily moved away from the Merkel era by recalibrating the party approach to issues such as immigration and Islam. Merkel’s tenure in power, often in a coalition with the SPD, led to assertions that she had ‘social democratized’ the CDU. Under Merz, the party has again shifted towards its original centre-right positioning. The previous statement ‘Islam now belongs to Germany, too’ has been modified to emphasize the precondition that it would only be on the precondition of the acceptance of German values. The rightward shift has also been viewed as an attempt to attract AfD voters, but critics have expressed their scepticism; “Cheating off AfD schoolwork wasn’t particularly smart. Experience shows that voters will ultimately go with the original.”²¹¹ The immediate reaction to the migrant crisis and the ensuing fall in popularity of the CDU meant that the party was compelled to toughen its stance on immigration. The role of the AfD in this regard is dual; on one hand it capitalized politically on the public discontent surrounding the crisis and on the other, it prompted the CDU to adopt a more stringent stance towards immigration and tackling asylum seekers.

The other major party that bears relevance to this study is the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) which had its roots in nineteenth century worker’s movements. The SPD,

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.12-13.

²¹⁰ “For a Germany that is good to live in (Government programme by CDU and CSU 2017-2021)”, CDU official website. Source: <https://archiv.cdu.de/system/tdf/media/dokumente/170816-regierungsprogramm-english-version.pdf?file=1> (Accessed on 27th December, 2023).

²¹¹ William Noah Glucroft, “Germany's CDU redefines stance on Islam in new manifesto”, DW. December 12, 2023. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-cdu-redefines-stance-on-islam-in-new-manifesto/a-67702793> (Accessed on 8th January, 2024).

which emerged from the General German Worker's Association (ADAV) established in 1863, grew in popularity during the days of the German empire from 1871 to 1918. The Weimar Republic, perceived to be Germany's first democratic chapter, was predominantly based on the support of Social Democrats although its inherent weaknesses failed to stop the rise of the National Socialists. The SPD during the Weimar Republic is seen as the party in its traditional form. During this era, the party was proletarian in terms of its support base, with two thirds of its members being semi-skilled or skilled workers although it did have its share of white collar and intellectual members as well. Traditional SPD viewed socialism as a way of life, a fact encapsulated by the term 'Solidargemeinschaft' or 'community of solidarity.'²¹² After the war, the SPD focused on addressing its dwindling voter base by reconstructing its image. It did so, by adopting the Godesberg Program in 1959, whereby it softened its anti-democratic credentials by embracing market economy. From the 1960s, the SPD, in a grand coalition with the CDU steered development in Germany. The range of issues in the SPD's agenda included policies in favour of support for trade unions, suffrage for women and after the party's chairman Willy Brandt became chancellor in 1969, he directed its energy towards the solidifying ties with the socialist states in Eastern Europe.²¹³

The SPD too has undergone a process of transformation from its initial days; one where it tried to adapt to the growing challenges of globalisation. In recent times, a landmark change for the party came in 1998 when Gerhard Schröder became Chancellor in an SPD-Green coalition government. This was a culmination to the drive for change in the 1990s, when modernisers like Schröder saw the benefits of capitalizing on the dominance of the liberal narrative after the end of the Cold War. The aim of this push for modernisation was to veer the party away from the traditional reliance on Keynesianism, which upheld the importance of the state as a regulatory body. What this also meant was that the SPD and the CDU both gravitated to the centre of the political spectrum in terms of convergence of policies. In a paper Schröder jointly issued with Tony Blair in 1998, named *The Third Way/ Neue Mitte*, it was made clear that the main emphasis would be on the development of human capital as per the needs of the

²¹² Peter Lösche, "The Evolution of the SPD: "Community of Solidarity", Godesberg Social Democracy, Irsee SPD", *German Politics & Society*, No. 14, 1988, p.32.

²¹³ Richard A. Fuchs and Rina Goldenberg, "The SPD is Germany's oldest party", DW. <https://www.dw.com/en/the-spd-germanys-oldest-political-party/a-16825489> (Accessed on 9th January, 2024).

‘knowledge-based economy of the future.’ In other words, it symbolized the acceptance of liberalisation by two of the major left-leaning parties in Europe, i.e. Labour and the SPD.²¹⁴

The modernisation of the SPD under Schröder coincides with the overhaul of the major nationality and citizenship laws that were introduced in Germany discussed earlier. It is a foregone conclusion that over the years, the SPD has monopolized the lion’s share of the ‘immigrant vote’ in Germany. Traditionally the guest workers from the southern part of Europe aligned with the centre-left SPD due to their blue-collar background and their connection to work unions. The same can be said about the Turkish guest workers and their support for the SPD. It is due to this background of enduring support from immigrant origin voters that the SPD projected itself as the upholder of immigrant rights.²¹⁵

The SPD has also had to face challenges and dwindling support over periodic phases, and of late the major bone of contention has been the issue of immigration. The SPD has been reluctant to address this due to doubts about how it would fit into the SPD’s identity and agenda. While the moderate left faces the struggle of seamlessly integrating the migration issue within the wider framework of social justice, the SPD with its unfailing commitment of welfare state regimes has found itself at odds with reconciling the two. Apart from ideological and pragmatic considerations, the SPD also faces another challenge in the form of populist right-wing parties. Furthermore, the SPD itself has not been free from racist controversies. Thilo Sarrazin, erstwhile Social Democrat state finance minister for Berlin, shocked the nation with his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does away with itself) where he hypothesized that Muslim immigrants were likely to be genetically inferior than their native German counterparts. Although he faced widespread condemnation, the SPD refused to revoke his party membership though publicly they distanced themselves from his inflammatory views. This stance reveals that the party has had to adapt a pragmatic positioning regarding the migration issue, for fear of a populist backlash. Apart from practical considerations, the SPD has also come up against a revamped CDU under Merkel that has become increasingly accommodating with regard to issues such as immigration and integration. The CDU/CSU were successful in including immigrants within their projected goals for economic innovation and as a result was able to make immigration an electoral issue; something that the SPD failed to do.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Liam Byrne, “How the SPD Lost the Future: The Party’s Crisis as a Loss of Future-imagining” *German Politics*, Vol.30, No.4, 2021, pp.527-529.

²¹⁵ Oliver Schmidtke, “The ‘Party for Immigrants’? Social Democrats’ Struggle with an Inconvenient Electoral Issue”, *German Politics*, 2016, p.1.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

Despite these challenges, the SPD continued to be the party most favoured by immigrants. A study conducted by the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration found that immigrants remained a majorly underrepresented group in terms of their voting potential. It is also interesting to note that one in ten voters in Germany have some sort of immigrant background. The SPD was the party most likely to attract the immigrant vote while the CDU/CSU were less likely to do so. Only 27.6 per cent were likely to vote for the CDU while the figure was 40 per cent in the case of the Social Democrats. However, traditional voting patterns have evolved in recent years. The CDU originally garnered the votes of the ethnic German immigrants from the Soviet Union, however the latter have shifted their allegiance to the right-wing AfD. 70 per cent of immigrants with a Turkish background were found to be supporters of the SPD.²¹⁷ A more recent study concluded that these voting allegiances have broken down with a ‘high degree of mobility across political party lines.’ Apart from ethnic German ‘Aussiedler’ opting for the AfD, it was also found that Turkish origin voters were shifting their loyalties from the SPD to the CDU/CSU. This decline in party loyalty was due to the fact that people were choosing to vote as per issues that affected them rather than for a party with which they had been historically associated.²¹⁸

The SPD remains vocally active against the political right in Germany. In its official website, it has been abundantly clear how much importance it places on mobilising opinion against the right in general and AfD in particular. It professes the need to stand ‘hand in hand for our democracy’ by opposing the forces of the right which are gaining ever increasing traction in Germany. It urges citizens to join forces with the party to counter the proliferation of hatred by participating in organisations for who are discriminated while standing up for values such as respect and tolerance.²¹⁹ The SPD goes as far as to include a ‘fact check’ for the AfD in its website in which it debunks many of the claims made by the latter. It describes the politics of AfD as elitist and unfair and considers it the historical duty of the social democrats to counter such politics which may be threat to democracy and freedom. In order to do so, the SPD

²¹⁷ Richard A. Fuchs, “German immigrants favor SPD”, DW, November 16, 2016. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-immigrants-favor-social-democrats/a-36417388> (Accessed on 10th January, 2024).

²¹⁸ Kay-Alexander Scholz, “German election: Are immigrant voters ignored?”, DW, September 15, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-election-are-immigrant-voters-ignored/a-59187425> (Accessed on 10th January, 2024).

²¹⁹ “Für Eine Solidarische Gesellschaft; Stark Gegen Rechtsextremismus”, SPD official website. <https://www.spd.de/programm/stark-gegen-rechts> (Accessed on 10th January, 2024).

promises to promote good politics which will address problems and it also urges citizens to interact with each other. It also attempts to challenge the populist rhetoric of the AfD whereby the latter claims to stand up for the ‘little people’ and act as the mouthpiece for the ‘silent majority.’ The SPD attacks these claims by asserting that the rather than being the majority, the AfD is in the minority since the greater share of the people want nothing to do with them. Furthermore, rather than supporting the ‘little people’ it works against their interests by opposing economic policies which would benefit these people, such as minimum wage. Finally, the SPD also underlines the AfD’s hatred for minorities, describing it as; ‘anyone who looks wrong believes the wrong thing or loves the wrong person, can become a target’ of the AfD.²²⁰ In light of such a vocal stand against the AfD and right-wing politics, it cannot be denied that the SPD constitutes the major barrier against the right in German mainstream politics.

It is thus abundantly clear that the emergence of the AfD had a profound impact on the power dynamics of German politics in the last decade as is the fact that the migrant crisis had a negative impact on the continued dominance of the CDU. The 2021 federal elections saw the emergence of the SPD as the largest party with 25.7 per cent of votes while the CDU recorded a record low of 24.1 per cent. Despite the dominance of the two major parties in the German political system, it cannot be denied that the emergence of a right-wing challenger party like the AfD upset the traditional balance of power that had existed in German politics since the end of the Second World War.

The rise of the AfD and the resurgence of the right in Germany should not be reduced to the simplistic explanation of it being a reaction to any particular problem. Rather it should be analysed in conjunction with the paradoxes and tensions that have persisted in German society and politics since the end of the Second World War. Each of the sections in this chapter has attempted to elucidate some of these underlying tensions and place them within the framework of the current problem of right-wing populism in Germany. A few noteworthy points are; firstly, the immense role of history in shaping post-war German identity, collective memory and national psyche is often at odds with the persistence of racist and xenophobic tendencies in German society. Secondly; one of the most important undercurrents in the German context is its attempt to come to terms as a country of immigration after steadfastly denying it till it was no longer feasible. Finally, the changing political landscape, especially with regard to the

²²⁰ “Der AfD-Faktencheck”, SPD official website.

https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Argumente/SPD_PV_Faktencheck_AfD.pdf (Accessed on 10th January, 2024).

transformation of the CDU, serves as an indicator of how right-wing populist party like the AfD would be likely to fare. On the other hand, the AfD too has played a significant role in impacting the political fortunes and even positioning of the CDU thereby fulfilling its potential as a right-wing populist challenger party.

CHAPTER 3

UNITED KINGDOM

The relevance of the UK in the discourse of right-wing populism surged spectacularly in the context of the Brexit referendum in 2016, which ultimately led to its withdrawal from the European Union. The UK Independence Party (UKIP), which till then had been a fringe anti-EU party of limited appeal, came to the forefront of British politics and played a decisive role in influencing the outcome of the referendum. Its disintegration soon after was as abrupt as its rise. The ascendance of the UKIP came during a time which signified a crossroads in British politics, where scepticism regarding issues such as immigration and integration of minorities was interspersed with economic pressures and increasing Euroscepticism.²²¹

This chapter aims to examine the rise of the party like the UKIP and analyze why it was able to exert such influence, albeit temporary, in a country where right-wing populist parties have historically been relegated to the sidelines. Consistent with the design of this study, the chapter is divided into three sections as per the research questions. The *first section* analyses the *evolution of right-wing populism* in the UK in order to understand how right-wing groups and parties have typically been shunned from British political mainstream despite their historical presence. The *second section* examines *immigration* to postwar Britain, questions of identity, imperial legacy as well as challenges pertaining to the integration of minorities that shape the discourse on contemporary right-wing populism. The final section deals with the role of oppositional forces to the right, mainly in the form of the two major parties, i.e. Labour and the Conservatives.

²²¹ The first usage of the term Euroscepticism can be traced back to *The Times* newspaper in 1985. This critical approach towards the EU has been characterized as a major element of political discourse in the country as well as theme utilized by populist parties challenging the mainstream establishment. The two major parties also have been unfavourable of the evolving nature of the EU, although they adhere to separate brands of Euroscepticism. It must be pointed out that calls for the preservation of national sovereignty can also be traced back to the post war years. In 1962, Hugh Gaitskell of the Labour Party expressed his concerns over the emergence of ‘the United States of Europe’ which would signal ‘the end of Britain as an independent nation state [...] of a thousand years of history’. Refer to:

Gianfranco Baldini, Edoardo Bressanelli and Stella Gianfreda, “Taking back control? Brexit, sovereignty and populism in Westminster (2015–17)”, *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2020, p.222.

Right-wing populism in the UK: Evolution and Current trends

Role of history in shaping post-war national identity and perceptions of the right

The case of Britain has largely been perceived as an outlier in the discourse relating to fascism; an example where the latter has historically failed to make headway. But interestingly, it has a history of fascism dating back to the first half of the twentieth century and a consistent presence of extreme right factions, despite their limited political success. To understand the nature and the complexity of contemporary right-wing populism in the UK, it is necessary to first briefly examine the extreme right and fascist movements that emerged in Britain in the twentieth century and also the degree of their influence and acceptance.

The usage of the term ‘fascism’ has witnessed a resurgence in recent times; the enduring interest in the term has been encapsulated by Richard Griffin who described it as the ‘most misused, and over-used, word of our times.’²²² Broadly speaking, it is a ‘revolutionary ultra-nationalist ideology, an attempt to create a new type of post-liberal national community-an alternative modernity-by a movement or regime that *aspires* to the total or ‘totalitarian’ transformation of culture and society.’²²³ The core concern of fascism in its traditional sense has been the *palingenesis* or the rebirth of the nation following a period of decline. Griffin has explained the application of this defining attribute to the case of British fascism in its early years which thrived on the critique of the declining fortunes of Britain as an imperial power set within the broader context of pervasive societal decrepitude and the ills of a liberal capitalist order.²²⁴

Griffin has outlined the complex socio-political and economic conditions which are necessary for fascism to thrive. These are; *firstly*, a well-founded nation state with an established national identity. *Secondly*, the corrosion of traditional structures of power by modernization leading to *thirdly*, a situation conducive to the growth of populist nationalism. *Fourthly*, one of the essential prerequisites for the rise of fascism is the sense of pervasive national and cultural degeneration which provides the basis for the emergence of the aspiration for national rebirth. Finally, it is necessary to have a historic basis supporting the myth of the erstwhile greatness of the ‘people’ in order to give credence to the perception of current decay. It has a chance of success only in societies where the conservative traditional power structures are under threat

²²² Nigel Copsey, “Changing course or changing clothes? Reflections on the ideological evolution of the British National Party 1999–2006”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2007, p.63.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.64.

²²⁴ Roger Griffin, ‘British Fascism: The Ugly Duckling’, in Mike Cronin, ed., *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1996, p.143.

by the inroads made by modernization.²²⁵

The period between the two world wars witnessed the rise of fascism in a number of countries, especially in those where the forces of democracy were yet to consolidate themselves. The traditional right in these countries was too weakened by the advent of modernization, thereby indicating a political order that was unstable and conducive to the rise of fascism.²²⁶ In Germany and Italy, the ruling elite often took recourse to aligning with the emergent extremist movements in order to tackle the threat from the left. The defeat of these countries in the First World War along with the concomitant economic repercussions deeply undermined the conservative elite, paving the way for fascism to emergence in full form.²²⁷ In contrast, the case of Britain presented one where fascism consistently failed to make a mark. Griffin has attributed this to a number of factors. The political tradition of Britain leans heavily on constitutionalism and 'gradualism'. Furthermore, it had emerged victorious in the First World War; a fact that had impressed the notion of its status as a Great Power in the minds of its people. The forces of nationalism thus remained dormant while the political order remained stable; the parliamentary system and constitutional monarchy, along with the empire remained unthreatened.²²⁸ The failure of these fascist movements can be attributed to the fact that they failed to find a message with universal appeal, along with the absence of foreign dominion, the relative inexperience of mass immigration and comparatively favourable economic conditions after the First World War. The political situation also played a role in Britain; a strong tradition of democracy dominated by the Conservative Party and its opposition consisting of the reform-oriented Labour Party, as well as the marginalization of revolutionary Communist and other tendencies that were distanced from the predominant political culture. The British landed elite remained content with the fruits of industrial capitalism, as opposed to many of their continental counterparts and the agricultural revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had diminished the peasantry; a group most likely to have been inclined to anti-modern propensities. All these factors led to the radical right being relegated to the periphery of British politics in the 1920s.²²⁹ While this period witnessed the steady strengthening of the right in continental Europe, the fascist movements in Britain remained feeble; leading many

²²⁵ Ibid., pp.145-147.

²²⁶ Ibid., p.151.

²²⁷ David Baker, 'The Extreme Right in the 1920s: Fascism in a Cold Climate, or 'Conservatism with Knobs on'?' in Mike Cronin, ed., *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1996, p.13.

²²⁸ Roger Griffin, *n.4*, p.153.

²²⁹ David Baker, *n.2*, pp.22-23.

experts to conclude that any semblance of a ‘true’ fascist movement emerged in Britain only in the 1930s.²³⁰

While the existing literature suggests that fascism has failed to thrive in Britain for myriad reasons, yet the fact of its presence in British politics for decades indicates that it has persistent appeal to a section of the population. According to Cronin, the assertion that fascism in Britain has not been successful is too naïve and overlooks the potential for the future threat it poses. Despite the frustration of its electoral performances, fascism has survived in Britain for a century in the form of groups such as. There has existed a plethora of groups like the Imperial Fascist League (1928-40) and the League of Empire Loyalists (1948-67) whose presence indicates that fascism in Britain has never been devoid of its share of followers. The latter have persistently sought to bring their political agenda to the forefront.²³¹ Husbands has opined that white working class is particularly susceptible to the rhetoric of the extreme right; an assertion that has garnered increasing attention since the 2000s. Recent research has shed light on how a sizeable section of the British electorate might constitute a potential voter base for a party on the extreme right.²³² Keeping in mind the potential threat of fascism, it is necessary to outline its historical trajectory in Britain from the first half of the twentieth century.

In contrast to mainland Europe where conditions were conducive to the growth of fascism, Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century was characterized more by the absence of widespread anti-modernization forces. The meagre presence of the radical right was confined to a section of the middle and upper classes, who were driven by fears of the impending collapse of the empire along with other concerns such as unrest among the working classes. The ‘Diehards’ constituted the most important section of this radical group, representing the revolt against the trend towards liberalism pervading the politics of that era and their demands included, among others, putting a stop to ‘alien’ immigration.²³³ Fascism in Britain gained impetus after the First World War due to a number of factors. The war revealed the long-term socio-economic repercussions that would burden a declining British empire and this aggravated the radical right sections already present in British society. Ex-soldiers comprised the bulk of adherents for the right and according to an estimate, the higher rungs of the fascist

²³⁰ Ibid., p.14.

²³¹ Mike Cronin, ‘Introduction: ‘Tomorrow We Live’ - The Failure of British Fascism?’, in Mike Cronin, ed., *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1996, pp. 1-3.

²³² Peter John and Helen Margetts, “The Latent Support for the Extreme Right in British Politics”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 3, May 2009, p. 497.

²³³ Mike Cronin, *n.2*, pp.14-15.

establishment of this era were overwhelmingly (60 per cent) constituted of the armed forces of whom 40 per cent had actively served in the war. The post-war period also witnessed the rise of a number of radical right groups or unions that had a middle-class base and were pro-empire.²³⁴ Among these groups, the British Fascists (BF) were also, as their name suggests, explicitly radical in their outlook. The ideology of the BF was deeply opposed to communism, so much so that it was perpetually suspicious of ‘Bolshevik’ tendencies everywhere from trade unions, the Labour party to even the Indian National Congress. The group was authoritarian and adhered to the idea of white supremacy and the British imperialism.²³⁵

Among the various fascist groups of the inter-war period, one stands out for its impact on British politics of that time. The British Union of Fascists, distinctive by their ominous black-shirted presence was founded by Sir Oswald Mosley in 1932. The blackshirts were streetfighters infamous for violence against their opponents who comprised mainly of left-wing sympathizers and Jews. Mosley wanted to overturn the existing political order in pursuit of a traditional fascist state that was rigidly centralized and autocratic.²³⁶ Naturally, the BUF was sympathetic towards Adolf Hitler and supported the policy of appeasement in the run up to the Second World War. However, the outbreak of the war signalled the ostracization of fascists in Britain. Mosley, along with hundreds of other fascists were rounded up and detained because their support for Hitler and Mussolini had led the government to believe that they were capable of subverting Britain’s war efforts.²³⁷

The conditions after the Second World War turned the public even more against fascism which was seen as a foreign ideology. The propaganda during the war had cemented Hitler’s image as a demented individual and mass murderer and many equated Mosley with him. The media were also against Mosley while regular anti-fascist activity disrupted the UM meetings. Mosley’s new movement was not able to gain any support and were effectively stigmatized.²³⁸ The years after the Second World War also brought the issue of immigration to the forefront and it has remained there ever since. Regardless of opposition to fascism anti-immigration sentiment has been present in the UK since the onset of increase of immigration to the country

²³⁴ Ibid., pp.17-18.

²³⁵ Paul Stocker, *English Uprising: Brexit and the Mainstreaming of the Far-Right*, Melville House UK, London, 2017 (Kindle version).

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Anne Poole, ‘Oswald Mosley and the Union Movement: Success or Failure?’, in Mike Cronin, ed., *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition*, Macmillan Press, London, 1996, p.66.

and so has racism. According to Joe Mulhall:

“There is a fundamental difference between anti-fascism and racism. There has always been racism in Britain. The opposition to Nazism and fascism doesn’t mean that many people weren’t simultaneously racist. Being anti-fascist does not necessarily equate to being progressive.”²³⁹

This is a very important point that needs to be noted, especially in the context of Britain. A deep commitment to democracy and opposition to fascism did not negate the prevalence of racism in any way. These attitudes have persisted through the years and can still be perceived in the present day.

The latter half of the 1940s brought the discourse on immigration into prominence. The decades following the Second World War witnessed the most widespread levels of immigration in the country’s history that transformed Britain into the multi-ethnic society it is today. The British Nationality Act of 1948 encouraged the influx of migrants from the Commonwealth countries, initially from the Caribbean and later from India and Pakistan. The sudden entry of these newcomers created massive tensions in British society which till then had been predominantly white. Discrimination against migrants was rampant and many public places were segregated to restrict the entry of blacks. Negative stereotypes especially against blacks were rife and this ultimately resulted in the Notting Hill riots of 1958.²⁴⁰ The working classes who enjoyed the support of unions that advocated class unity, were staunchly opposed to the influx of black immigrants from colonies who were long deemed as an ‘inferior’ race. A point to note is that in the 1955 general elections, the slogan ‘Keep Britain White’ was considered by Winston Churchill as a possible option.²⁴¹

A prominent name associated with staunch anti-immigration propaganda in Britain, and one which has recently enjoyed a resurgence in popularity is that of Enoch Powell. Powell became infamous for his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in 1968 where he vehemently criticized immigration into the country. Powell became synonymous with the speech which was described as the “most incendiary racist speech of modern Britain”²⁴² The theme of his politics revolving mainly

²³⁹ Paul Stocker, *n.4*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Sally Tomlinson, “Enoch Powell, empires, immigrants and education”, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2018, p.4.

²⁴² Prasun Sonwalkar, “Immigration in UK: 50 years on, Enoch Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ speech riles many”, *Hindustan Times*, Apr 13, 2018, Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/immigration-in-uk-50-years-on-enoch-powell-s-rivers-of-blood-speech-riles-many/story-jNYrWuIw3l4EdgpsyAMZgM.html> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

around a closed homogeneous conception of the nation has become a recurring ideal of the far-right parties and leaders in Europe from the UK Independence Party, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany to Geert Wilder in Holland and Marine LePen in France.²⁴³

Powell, an exceptionally gifted scholar and academic, was noted for his speeches attacking immigration and immigrant communities. As early as 1946 Powell had written a paper in which he put forward his arguments against Indian migration into the country on the grounds that these immigrants would not only fail to integrate, but at the same time vitiate British democracy with their politics of sectarianism. In the aftermath of the clashes that arose from the opposition to the British Nationality Act, a number of acts controlling immigration were passed, the first of which was in 1962. It was then Powell actively took up the immigration issue whereby he addressed the working classes and pointed out how their claims to education, housing and healthcare were under threat from the newly arrived migrants. His assertions were of limited credibility; however, this did not prevent him from claiming how the working classes were losing out on places in schools and hospitals to immigrants and how the latter were favoured by employers. In a review published in the Sunday Telegraph, Powell suggested that ‘coloureds’ should be repatriated.²⁴⁴

The political ideology of Enoch Powell, i.e., ‘Powellism’ was based not only on a staunch opposition to immigration, but also adherence to the ideal of national sovereignty and a belief in the greatness and continuation of the Empire. Here, an important distinction must be reiterated; namely that this anti-immigration sentiment was reserved only for those who were not white.²⁴⁵ His ‘rivers of blood’ speech which was delivered to the Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre on 20th April, 1968 gained widespread notoriety, though it had its share of supporters also. It has also been described as the most famous speech by an opposition leader in the post-war years with the exception of Churchill’s ominous ‘iron curtain’ speech in March 1946 warning of the rapid spread of Soviet communism.²⁴⁶

In this speech he warned of the impending calamity that would be facilitated by continued immigration into the country. In his words,

²⁴³ Sally Tomlinson, *n.2*, p.1.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.5.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Nicholas Hillman, “A ‘chorus of execration’? Enoch Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ forty years on”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2008, pp.83-84.

“Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependents, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre”

Interestingly, he made an exception for highly-skilled immigrants who contributed positively to the economy;

“This has nothing to do with the entry of Commonwealth citizens, any more than of aliens, into this country, for the purposes of study or of improving their qualifications, like (for instance) the Commonwealth doctors who, to the advantage of their own countries, have enabled our hospital service to be expanded faster than would otherwise have been possible. These are not, and have never been, immigrants.”²⁴⁷

This delineation of the term ‘immigrant’ largely connotes a completely negative undertone to the term. He justified his speech by asserting that ‘to see, and not to speak, would be a great betrayal.’²⁴⁸ Powell used strongly worded language to drive home the point how immigration would prove disastrous for the country and instead suggested ‘re-emigration’, i.e. making provisions for the return of these immigrants to their country of origin. Warning that even if ‘all immigration ended tomorrow’, the already present immigrant population and their descendants would ‘leave the basic character of the national danger unaffected.’²⁴⁹ The solution to this problem could be ‘the encouragement of re-emigration’;

“Nobody can make an estimate of the numbers which, with generous grants and assistance, would choose either to return to their countries of origin or go to other countries anxious to receive the manpower and skills they represent. Nobody knows, because no such policy has yet been attempted.”²⁵⁰

The outcome of this speech was immediate. Powell was sacked as the Shadow Defense Secretary by Edward Heath, the Conservative Leader of Opposition. This move further increased the notoriety of the speech. Heath described the speech as ‘racialist’ and with the potential to stoke tensions.²⁵¹ Regarding this controversial proposal for ‘re-emigration’, the

²⁴⁷ *Speech by The RT. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, M.P. to the Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre at the Midland Hotel Birmingham, 20th April, 1968.* (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Nicholas Hillman, *n.2*, p.88.

Runnymede Trust looked into the government assistance for repatriation which eventually became a part of the Conservative Party's policy on immigration and race. The report claimed that Powell had misrepresented the numbers of immigrants who had purportedly hoped to return to their home countries. It claimed that Powell's 'recalculation of the original figures is designed to conceal the relatively small proportion who actually expressed a willingness to be repatriated' and that a quarter of the coloured immigrants who had originally been surveyed claimed that Powell's speeches 'had made life more difficult for them.'²⁵²

Needless to say, Powell had his fair share of supporters. He received 120,000 letters in the wake of the speech, mainly in support. He was also backed by the working classes who protested against the criticism of Powell²⁵³ In one such letter to Conservative Member of Parliament Quintin Hogg, a disgruntled Labour voter denounced the dismissal of Enoch Powell from the Shadow Cabinet, asserting that 'far from dismissing him, you should be thankful that you have such a man in Parliament'.²⁵⁴ In another such letter, a lady in her 40s claiming to have 'lived and worked amongst coloured people' supported Powell in his racist sentiments. Attacking Heath for lacking 'decision and drive' she predicted that 'Mr. Powell will go down in history as the man who saved England, if immigration is stopped altogether, in time.'²⁵⁵

Powell's speech had a huge impact on the upcoming elections in 1970 which saw the Conservatives come into power. Although Powell himself downplayed the influence of the speech, it cannot be denied that it had a great role in deciding the electoral outcome in favour of the Tories.

In recent times the political ideology of Enoch Powell has undergone a resurgence of sorts. The phrase 'Enoch was right' in reference to his infamous speech, has become a byword for those opposed to immigration. Nigel Farage, the leading figure behind Brexit, has long been an open admirer of Powell, labelling him as his 'political hero'. It has also emerged that Farage had unsuccessfully asked for the backing of Powell and UKIP had also twice approached him to stand as a candidate for the party, without success.²⁵⁶ It is interesting to note how Powell

²⁵² Report by The Runnymede Trust titled "Repatriation", London, 6th June, 1970. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023).

²⁵³ Paul Stocker, *n.6*.

²⁵⁴ *Letter to Q.Hogg, M.P., by E.Thomas*, 26th April, 1968. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023).

²⁵⁵ *Letter to Mr. Q.Hogg, Mr. T.Heath, Mr. J.Gallagher, Mr. E. Powell by J.H (S.R.N)*, April, 1968. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023).

²⁵⁶ Rowena Mason, "Nigel Farage asked former Conservative MP Enoch Powell to back Ukip", *The Guardian*, 13 December 2014. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/dec/13/nigel-farage-enoch-powell-endorsement-russell-brand> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

rebuffed these requests by UKIP. In response to a letter by Alexander Williams, the chairman of the Nottingham University branch of UKIP, soliciting a message of support²⁵⁷, Powell responded:

“I am sure that there is a movement of public opinion on a large scale against Britain’s membership of the European Union; but this can only be expressed through a party likely to win a majority at a general election.”²⁵⁸

Such is Powell’s enduring popularity that he still sets the standard for politicians on the right. Farage himself has been compared to his hero on several occasions, once being accused of exhibiting ‘shades of Enoch Powell’.²⁵⁹ Former premier Boris Johnson has also been likened to Powell; both have been accused of uttering ‘monstrous lies’ that are capable of ruining the lives of people. They have both utilized their educational credentials to gain credibility in a society preoccupied with class. Johnson even made use of the term ‘piccaninnies’, which was infamously used in Powell’s speech as quoted earlier.²⁶⁰ Despite these comparisons, Enoch Powell’s exceptional educational background and erudition has set him apart from his imitators. While Farage has been dubbed a ‘pound shop Enoch Powell’ (implying a cheapened version).²⁶¹ The question can thus be raised whether it is Powell’s background that has contributed to lending credibility to his obviously racist views, especially in current times? Regardless of the answer, a point of distinction must be noted. Powell’s views in spite of their racist nature cannot be dismissed purely as an electoral ploy to garner public support. Whether the same can be applied to the populist nature of successors’ politics is to be debated. The proof of his enduring relevance could be ascertained when the BBC decided to air the ‘rivers of blood’ in full in a move criticized as “incitement to racial hatred”²⁶² Thus it is obvious that any analysis of right-wing populism in the UK cannot be complete without focusing on the legacy of Enoch Powell.

²⁵⁷ *Letter to Enoch Powell by Alexander Williams, Chairman, Nottingham University UKIP*, 7th November, 1995. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

²⁵⁸ *Letter to A. Williams, Esq. from the Rt. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, MBE*, 13th November, 1995.

(Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

²⁵⁹ Rowena Mason, “Nigel Farage shows shades of Enoch Powell, says Chuka Umunna”, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2016. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/18/nigel-farage-shades-enoch-powell-chuka-umunna> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

²⁶⁰ Nick Cohen, “How did Enoch Powell, a man with no shame, come to haunt our times?”, *The Guardian*, 12 Dec 2020. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/12/how-did-enoch-powell-a-man-with-no-shame-come-to-haunt-our-times> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

²⁶¹ Rowena Mason, *n.2*.

²⁶² “BBC defends Rivers of Blood broadcast”, *BBC*, 12 April 2018. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43745447> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

The immigration debate reached mainstream discourse in the 1960s and since the 1970s, a number of extreme right-wing groups and movements have operated in Britain, often propagating strong anti-immigrant and ethno-nationalist rhetoric. Of these, the most prominent is the British National Party (BNP). It was the successor to the National Front (NF) which was founded in 1967 based on the notion that issues of race and immigration were selectively ignored by the mainstream parties. The BNP was founded by John Tyndall, who had previous links to various neo-Nazi groups and propagated an ethnic conception of nationhood strictly opposed to immigration. Initially the party garnered recognition only at the local level but it began to change the tone of his political rhetoric in the 1990s focusing on an overtly nationalist agenda which was designed to help the party gain leverage in both the national as well as local arenas. Newer leaders such as Nick Griffin characterized this shift from extreme right to a more nationalist political posture.²⁶³ The BNP went on to eventually surpass its extreme right predecessors in terms of electoral success. Between the periods of 1992 to 2005, the share of votes increased from 7000 to 192,000. However, the party was not able to make an impact on a national level; its influence remained predominantly local.²⁶⁴

The core ideology of the BNP bears many striking similarities with the early fascist groups of Britain but it differs slightly in the sense that it has resorted to a 'dual style' of political propaganda to appeal to a wider audience. Its mode of communication has can be divided into 'esoteric appeals' and 'exoteric appeals'; the former targeted at more educated insiders and latter being a simplified and cruder version that is aimed at the wider membership and electorate on a mass level. It thus resorted to a dual modus operandi, i.e. trying to present an image of being moderate to mask its radical ideological underpinnings.²⁶⁵

The chief strategy of the party is based on a nationalist and patriotic appeal to 'Britishness' and in this respect, it aims to share this objective with other mainstream parties. In fact, the campaign slogan 'British jobs for British workers' was common to both the BNP and the Labour Party from 2007.²⁶⁶ In its campaign materials, it mainly stresses on 'Britain' and

²⁶³ John Solomos, 'Contemporary Forms of Racist Movements and Mobilization in Britain' in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral, eds., *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, Bloomsbury Collections, London, 2019, p.126.

²⁶⁴ Matthew J. Goodwin, "Backlash in the 'Hood: Determinants of Support for the British National Party (BNP) at the Local Level", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2008, p.349.

²⁶⁵ John E. Richardson, 'Ploughing the Same Furrow? Continuity and Change on Britain's Extreme-Right Fringe' in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral, eds., *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, Bloomsbury Collections, London, 2019, pp.106-107.

²⁶⁶ John E. Richardson, 'Race and Racial Difference' in Nigel Copsey and Graham Macklin. eds., *The British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge, Oxford, 2011, p.41.

‘British cultural identity’ and promotes populist demands that are unlikely to be opposed by a great number of people. Some of these include demanding the increase in the number of policemen on the streets to the supporting the National Health Service (NHS). These would make it seem as if the BNP is like any other party in the democratic spectrum in the UK, rather than being a far-right fascist one. The overarching theme of the BNP’s narrative is the opposition to immigration and the resident minority communities or the ‘ethnic other’. However, this marked antagonism is seldom explicitly discussed; it is alluded to through a strategy of deliberate ambiguity. The category of ‘non-British’ people is mostly typecast as the major contributing factor to most of the problems of the country such as unemployment and the high rate of crime. Therefore, the BNP has been aptly referred to as ‘not so much a single-issue party as a *single-explanation* party’ due to the fact that its exoteric campaign message is overwhelmingly focused on one particular cause of all problems; i.e. immigrant origin ‘non-British’ people.²⁶⁷

A study of the voter base of the BNP revealed an interesting, yet in some ways unsurprising outcome. The party performed its best in economically declining deindustrializing districts, drawing support from male workers of the skilled manual sector. In these areas, the threats of demographic change, immigration and ethnic minorities were the most acutely felt. The BNP party in particular, has drawn support from the above-mentioned category of working class, i.e., skilled/semi-skilled and less educated, rather than directly from the most deprived areas. In terms of the age of voters, one particular study revealed that the BNP performed well amongst voters between the ages of 45 and 69. It is generally felt that the party appeals to older groups because of their perceived threat from rising levels of immigration that is often manifested in the changing demographic nature of their neighbourhoods. It is because of this reason that the party has often done well in areas of greater ethnic diversity where there is a heightened perception of being swamped by outsiders.²⁶⁸ This pattern of voting largely conforms to the standard applicable for such right-wing populist parties.

A discussion pertaining to right-wing populism in the UK, would be incomplete without mentioning the rise of the English Defence League (EDL) which was founded in 2009 and rose to prominence following the disintegration of the BNP. It emerged mainly as a grassroots organization characterized by the use of anti-Islamist propaganda and street protests. The extent of its extremist inclination can be gauged by the notoriety of its leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon,

²⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.42-43.

²⁶⁸ Matthew J. Goodwin, *n.2*, pp.350-351.

aka Tommy Robinson, a former BNP member, who has been imprisoned numerous times on account of several charges including fraud and violence. While the group has failed in its attempts to be taken seriously on a mainstream level, it is significant on account of its explicit expression of racist and Islamophobic sentiments. It would be simple to overlook a fringe group like the EDL, but it is important to focus on it for a number of reasons; firstly, it is an indicator of the underlying levels of racism prevalent in Britain, secondly its role in the creation of similar new groups such as Infidels and English Volunteer Force who also operate along similar ideological lines. Finally, the fascist nature of the EDL movement has been a topic of contention and its followers have been compared to the Blackshirts of the Oswald Mosley era. The far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik, who gunned down 77 people in Norway in 2011 was said to have been influenced by the EDL.²⁶⁹ Hence, despite its seemingly fringe status in British politics, the EDL is relevant to any discussion on the right-wing elements in the country.

The EDL is comprised of members in the age group of 18-34, many of them being temporary. Leading expert Matthew Goodwin opines that their chief cause of anxiety is the threat posed by the far-reaching societal impact of immigration, rather than other pressing problems like unemployment.²⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that the group has formed sub-divisions in order to in order to come across as more heterogeneous. These subdivisions include ones for youth, for women and even Hindu, Sikh and Jewish members. The uniting factor for such diverse membership is their opposition to Islam.²⁷¹ Analysis of the group's online activity has revealed a marked propensity towards violence and aggression.²⁷² It also advances a particular brand of Islamophobia that represents a shift away from the traditional markers of biology and emphasize more on cultural differences, thereby being categorized as 'cultural racism.' According to Gilroy, this brand of racism is a relic of fascism that survived the end of the Second World War is still present in Europe. It is a manifestation of the inherent conflict arising between the migrant and native workers whereby opposition towards 'a resurgent Islam' is described as religious and cultural.²⁷³

The incendiary nature of the rhetoric is characteristic of EDL's demonstrations. It may be argued that it is simply a fringe group operating on a narrow agenda, namely Islamophobia.

²⁶⁹ Dominic Alessio and Kristen Meredith, "Blackshirts for the twenty-first century? Fascism and the English Defence League", *Social Identities*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2014, pp.104-105.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.107.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.112-113.

²⁷² *Ibid.* p.111.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

However, it remains pertinent to examine it in any context of right-wing populism in the UK. This can be attributed not only to its prominent activity, but also to its points of similarities and dissimilarities with other extreme right groups discussed above. While it is largely similar to previous such groups in terms of voter base, namely disillusioned white males from a lower socio-economic stratum, the EDL stands out for its attempts to present a heterogeneous face in spite of its overt racism. The group remains relevant to any discussion on right-wing movements in contemporary Britain.

Rise and fall of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

The discussion till now, has analysed the trajectory of right-wing populism in Britain from its historical roots to present day incarnation in the form of extreme right fringe groups and parties thriving on constricted agendas; mainly opposition to immigration. One such party, in recent times has managed to go beyond the usual denomination of a right-wing fringe group and actually played a vital role in bringing about one of the most important turning points in recent British history, namely Brexit. The party in question, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is important for this analysis because it fulfils the criteria of a typical right-wing populist party, as will be discussed subsequently. The party was formed in 1993 by Alan Sked, a professor at the London School of Economics. It was created simply as a single-issue party, namely to push for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.²⁷⁴ In one of its earlier pamphlets, it described the aims of the party as preventing 'Great Britain becoming a province of a European superstate.' It upheld the intention of maintaining the 'friendliest relations possible' with European countries, but with the preconditions that 'we simply want to run our own affairs and let them run theirs.'²⁷⁵ In its 1994 manifesto it described itself as 'the only democratic party that defends British sovereignty'²⁷⁶

Its supporters were constituted mainly of disenchanted voters from the Conservative Party as well as others who feared that European integration would outgrow the primary market-based approach. The party had its share of internal splits and discord in its initial years and had to ward off the entry of extreme right elements. Its first break came when it was able to gain representation, albeit limited, in the European Parliament in 1999. However, it still failed to

²⁷⁴ Simon Usherwood, "Shooting the fox? UKIP's populism in the post-Brexit era", *West European Politics*, Vol.42, No.6, 2019, p.1211.

²⁷⁵ *U.K. Independence Party* (Pamphlet). (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

²⁷⁶ *The UK Independence Party, Vote for Independence in 1994* (Manifesto). (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

garner support at the local and national level.²⁷⁷ It faced a number of obstacles including organisational ones as well as being overlooked by the mainstream press. In an article, founder Sked described the success of the party rising from anonymity to garnering 156,000 votes in 24 constituencies. However, he criticised the attitude of the British press who he claimed enthusiastically covered ‘anti-federalist’ movements in Europe while ignoring the ones at home such as UKIP.²⁷⁸

The narrow agenda of the party, classed as ‘hard Eurosceptic’ restricted its performance beyond maintaining a minor presence at the European Parliament.²⁷⁹ The party began to experience greater success only when it broadened its agenda beyond the sole aim of pushing for withdrawal from the EU. Widening its message made it more exclusionary, but it also helped to boost its public profile and election performance. The 2004 European election was a high point for the party which managed to increase its presence through the adoption of ideas considered anti-establishment. From this turning point, it slowly began to evolve its policies which focused increasingly on the issue of immigration. It appealed to the public by pointing out how mainstream parties were reluctant or unable to limit such migration. The broadening of its policies also coincided with the adoption of an increasingly populist turn. The ideology of the party remained incoherent, largely based on opposition to the European Union and immigration. However, with this narrow focus it was able to attract support from individuals of varying political affiliations.²⁸⁰ This ideological ambiguity contributed to its gradual populist transformation.

The UKIP projected the image of a party based on ‘common sense’ upholding the cause of the general population which is ignored by the lackadaisical political and economic ‘elite’. The nature of this narrative illustrates the gradual shift towards a populist position from its initial single-issue based agenda. As per this discourse, the elite-driven political parties of the mainstream have permitted the infiltration of the European Union which is viewed as an organisation of distant, faceless bureaucrats operating from Brussels. One of the underlying reasons for this apathy towards the EU was the perception amongst a section of Britons that

²⁷⁷ Simon Usherwood, *n.2*, p.1211.

²⁷⁸ *In Retrospect* by Dr. Alan Sked, UK Independence News, The National Newsletter of the UK Independence Party, July, 1994. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

²⁷⁹ Karine Tournier-Sol, “From UKIP to the Brexit party: the politicization of European integration and disruptive impact on national and European arenas”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2021, p.381.

²⁸⁰ Simon Usherwood, *n.3*, pp.1211-1213.

the government had ceded a large portion of its decision-making powers to the former. This perception can be viewed as an outcome of a general fear relating to the loss of state autonomy in a globalized world. The feeling of a 'democratic deficit' by voters who felt excluded from policy making by EU institutions contributed to this growing anti-EU sentiment.²⁸¹

As mentioned earlier, much of the UKIP's support came from former Conservative voters. It is noteworthy that Euroscepticism among Conservative voters became more widespread since the early 1990s while the opposite was true for Labour voters who became more in favour of the EU.²⁸² Earlier studies on the UKIP voter base revealed that the party performed well in areas where a large section of the population was aged above 65. These areas also were also more likely to have lower levels of education and a greater number of self-employed persons. Rural and coastal areas of southern England recorded a high degree of support for the party. UKIP was generally found to perform well in areas which were previously the domain of support for the Conservative party.²⁸³ Interestingly, women were also less likely to vote for UKIP than men.²⁸⁴ Studies on the position of voters on the political spectrum of left to right also revealed that UKIP voters identified as 'centre' or 'slightly right of centre', similar to Conservative Party voters.²⁸⁵ Hence the UKIP initially emerged as an alternative for disillusioned Conservatives and voters on the central to centre-right of the political spectrum rather than the left. However, the question can be asked whether this was still the case considering its increasing populist rhetoric in subsequent years which led to the entry of more extreme right elements into the party.

The rise of a party like UKIP is significant in a country like the UK, where such right-wing parties have historically failed to make much headway. Its subsequent collapse is also indicative of its nature as a typical right-wing populist party. However, before analysing the party's main turning point under charismatic leader Nigel Farage it is necessary to keep in mind some important factors that paved the way for its sudden rise. Firstly, it has been argued that UKIP relied on English nationalism or 'politicised Englishness' to advance the cause of sovereignty for the UK. The party's emphasis on the projection of a sense of threat to British,

²⁸¹ Harold Clarke, Paul Whiteley, Walter Borges, David Sanders and Marianne Stewart, "Modelling the dynamics of support for a right-wing populist party: the case of UKIP", *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2016, pp.138-139.

²⁸² Richard Whitaker and Philip Lynch, "Explaining Support for the UK Independence Party at the 2009 European Parliament Elections", *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2011, p.364.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.361.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.370.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.373.

and specifically English identity meant that it appealed to people who were dissatisfied with the cultural aspects of the changes the country was going through.²⁸⁶ The populist nature of the party worked in favour of it projecting itself as an outsider to the political establishment while enabling it to brand the mainstream parties as ‘anti-English’. According to Ford and Goodwin, the feeling of being ‘left behind’ summed up the sentiments of the male, white voters of UKIP who were likely to be of a lower socio-economic standing.²⁸⁷ Appealing to the nationalist instincts of these voters, while at the same time projecting a populist outsider stance helped UKIP to tap into the prevalent dissatisfaction with the mainstream political parties.

Secondly, the rise of UKIP can also be attributed to certain structural changes in the British political system. Historically the Labour party had been opposed to the EU, and had positioned itself against the membership of the European Economic Community during the 1975 referendum to decide whether the UK would remain within that body. The structural changes began in the late 1980s when Labour began to shift its policy from opposition to the EU to a more favourable stance. It was from then that Labour became more inclined towards Europe in comparison to the Conservatives. The issue of Europe, while divisive, had remained on the side-lines as long as Labour had maintained a Eurosceptic stance in tune with its working-class support base. The party shift from that position signalled the beginning of a realignment in British politics. This shift solidified with the rebranding of Labour as ‘New Labour’ under the leadership of Tony Blair who became Prime Minister in 1997. This saw the further alienation of its traditional working class voter base.²⁸⁸

The rise of UKIP and its popularity in the wake of Brexit while apparently sudden, was in fact the outcome of a great number of underlying factors. While on the surface, the issue of immigration is taken to be the primary deciding factor in the referendum, it was in reality the culmination of a structural realignment in British politics, as well as a result of the simmering English nationalism that had been prevalent in the country.

Farage and Brexit

The UKIP reached new heights under the leadership of Nigel Farage and its role during the Brexit referendum ensured that it would reach a degree of prominence which would raise it

²⁸⁶ Richard Hayton, “The UK Independence Party and the Politics of Englishness”, *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 14, No.3, 2016, pp.401-402.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.406.

²⁸⁸ Geoffrey Evans and Jonathan Mellon, “Immigration, Euroscepticism, and the rise and fall of UKIP”, *Party Politics*, Vol. 25, No.1, 2019, pp.77-78.

beyond its fringe status, temporarily at least. Farage, who had been involved with UKIP since its inception, adopted a more proactive role after becoming the party leader in 2006. Being a charismatic personality, he was able to cultivate a media presence and popular support. He was also able to bring about a transformation of the party policies and their presentation and effectively weed out potential challengers. In its 2013 manifesto, UKIP proposed ‘common-sense policies’ and that ‘open door immigration is crippling local services in the UK.’²⁸⁹ On the basis of such simplistic and populist agendas under Farage, the party steadily began to cement its popularity. As a result of this, the party became dependent on his overwhelming stature, much to its own detriment.²⁹⁰ The rise of Farage and transformation of the party narrative reveals how the UKIP has followed a trajectory common to most such populist parties which depend on the charisma of their leaders, often without a solid extensive agenda. According to Rohan Mukherjee, the brand of politics espoused by Farage was based on a great degree of opportunism self-aggrandisement. Keeping in mind the rejection of fascism in British history, the UKIP could hardly promote its agenda by openly identifying with fascist ideals. Farage had associated with Donald Trump and the white supremacy movement in the US and this due to his political ambitions. As a result of this affinity with the extreme-right, his political persona became discredited to some extent in the mainstream.²⁹¹ But his acceptance among a sizeable section of the population indicates the presence of fascist undercurrents.

The process of actually leaving the EU was culminated in early 2020 after much political tribulation which resulted in the resignation of two Prime Ministers among others. The result of the referendum itself came as a surprise to many who felt that the prospect of negative economic repercussions was likely to outweigh any chances of withdrawal. Therefore, the decision to part ways sent shockwaves not only through the country but also the world. The underlying causes of Brexit are many and varied; an extensive analysis of those causes does not fall within the scope of this study. However, it is necessary to look into the broad factors which facilitated the legitimization of the populist rhetoric of UKIP. As discussed earlier, UKIP underwent a transformative process since its inception by which it gradually became a right-wing populist party from its initial position as a purely single-issue party operating on a narrow political agenda. However, in doing so, it raised itself to the mainstream arena, or from ‘second-order to first order’ whereby it was able leave a mark on national politics.²⁹² This a point that

²⁸⁹ *Manifesto 2013*, UKIP. (Accessed at London School of Economics, London on 27-06-2023).

²⁹⁰ Simon Usherwood, *n.4*, pp.1213-1214.

²⁹¹ Interview with Dr. Rohan Mukherjee, London School of Economics. Dated: 27-6-2023.

²⁹² Karine Tournier-Sol, *n.2*, p.381.

separates UKIP from previous right-wing movements and parties in the UK.

A number of factors contributed to the make UKIP a party of the 'first-order'. Firstly, the role of Farage needs to be reiterated in raising the profile of UKIP to a national level. Under his leadership, the party strengthened its populist, anti-elite narrative that challenged the existing establishment. Secondly, the changing landscape of British politics at the time proved propitious for UKIP. Both the major parties had been making a collective shift to the centre of the political spectrum. This was applicable not only to David Cameron of the Conservative Party but also to New Labour under his predecessor Tony Blair. As a result of this decided centrist shift by the two mainstream parties, a section of the electorate felt alienated; a fact that was capitalized by UKIP and boosted its popularity after 2010. These factors allowed the UKIP to reach a position whereby it was able to majorly influence national politics and ultimately the referendum. In fact, the growing profile of UKIP was perceived to be such a threat that the referendum pledge itself, made by David Cameron in 2013, was seen as a strategic manoeuvre to 'shoot the UKIP fox' i.e., to eliminate the threat it posed altogether by depriving the party of its *raison d'etre*. However, it is also important to note that the Conservative Party too had become subject to anti-EU sentiment with 26.5% of its members identifying as 'hard Eurosceptics'.²⁹³ It is thus evident that a combination of factors catapulted UKIP to mainstream British politics. While a large part of its success is attributed to Farage, it cannot be denied that the prevalent political atmosphere of anti-immigration sentiment and Euroscepticism facilitated the acceptance of its overtly populist rhetoric

According to Harsh V. Pant, one of the underlying reasons for the rise of parties such as UKIP was the fact that the mainstream parties had been out of touch with the problems which the common people were concerned about, thus lending credibility to the oft cited populist assertion that the 'elites' were out of touch with the common people. The populist parties could enter the fray as a result of the two major parties having skirted issues that had caused a degree of uneasiness amongst a section of the population. Working class voters who were previously Labour voters became attracted to the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties like UKIP since they felt that their concerns were being completely overlooked by Labour. Here the evolving stance of Labour in the last few years is also of relevance; while the party had become too left of centre under Corbyn, it has recently seen a more centrist push by current leader Keir Starmer. Most societies are bound to have elements on either side of the political spectrum, and this

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.381-382.

includes fascist tendencies. However, it is only because of Britain's strong democratic credentials that these conflicting views have had a platform for expression in the first place. There has always been a space for debate between opposing ideologies and political affiliations.²⁹⁴

Brexit: A brief overview

Brexit has been considered a landmark event not only in contemporary British history, but also as an indicator of the resurgence of nationalist feeling sweeping over western liberal democracies. The case of the UK is peculiar because of the complex nature of its national identity as well the considerable presence of anti-EU feeling over the years. This anti-EU sentiment or Euroscepticism, which apart from its obvious impact on Brexit, was also majorly accountable for the success that UKIP experienced. In recent years claims for sovereignty have been deeply linked with the issue of immigration. The 'Leave' side campaigning in the referendum for Brexit made use of the slogan 'Take back control'. This can be interpreted in a number of ways, one of which is a 'claim for national sovereignty'.²⁹⁵ It can also be viewed as a desire to regain complete authority over the burning issue of immigration, which too falls within the domain of sovereignty.

While the issue of Euroscepticism and immigration is a crucial to understanding Brexit, it is also important to point out the evolving nature of the idea of nationalism in Britain, as well as its increasing appropriation by populist narratives. The British have long been considered 'reluctant nationalists' mainly because their preoccupation with governing the empire overrode any compulsion of asserting a national identity or any threat to it by foreign influence. However, this view came to be challenged by a surge of nationalism in recent years which ultimately had a massive impact on the decision to withdraw from the EU. The referendum was seen as the victory of nationalism in an increasingly interconnected globalized world and as a marker of 'the collapse of the Anglo-British globalist worldview'. Britain has always prided itself on its exceptionalism and its democracy based on parliamentary sovereignty. Its national identity has been deeply entwined with these historic and political institutions. This pride has also been coupled with a sense of the relative inferiority of the European systems to the British

²⁹⁴ Interview with Professor Harsh V. Pant (King's College London). Dated: 16-03-2023.

²⁹⁵ Gianfranco Baldini, Edoardo Bressanelli and Stella Gianfreda, *n.2*, p.223.

ones.²⁹⁶

Attributing Brexit to a desire to uphold the tradition of parliamentary sovereignty would not, however, be wholly accurate. While the outcome was a manifestation of the discontent of people who perceived themselves to be neglected by the self-serving ‘elites’, it also bespoke their demand to be more involved in democratic processes which they felt were no longer serving their interests and in which they were not adequately represented. This form of national populism cannot be applied wholesale to the case of the UK. For instance, Scottish nationalism has different ethnic underpinnings. The Scottish National Party (SNP) has campaigned not only for independence from the UK but also to be a member of the EU. Scottish nationalism is supported by a large number of Scots who are driven by feelings of anti-English and anti-Conservative Party sentiment. Opponents of Scottish independence are often branded ‘traitors’ who are ‘not true Scots’ leading some to argue that the cause of Scottish nationalism is not as ‘benign’ as it is presented to be.²⁹⁷ It is significant to note that Scotland largely voted to remain in the EU in the referendum. The outcome has thus led to a general feeling of being ignored by the British government and calls for more direct forms of representation. SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon claimed that only independence would allow Scotland to extricate itself from the economic doldrums which the UK economy has encountered in the aftermath of Brexit. She claimed that the fact that the UK could not offer Scotland the economic security it had promised at the time of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 was “glaringly obvious”.²⁹⁸ Established British political traditions, which have long been a source of pride, have thus been challenged by new forms of civic and ethnic nationalism.²⁹⁹

UKIP during and after referendum

UKIP’s stance on immigration and on leaving the EU was so powerful that it began to dominate the political discourse relating to these issues. The party outlined the framework of the Brexit debate and its anti-immigration arguments began to be adopted by other mainstream parties. This marked assertion was visible during the campaign for Brexit which came to be dominated

²⁹⁶ Emma Bell, “Post-Brexit nationalism: challenging the British political tradition?”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2021, pp.351-352.

²⁹⁷ Jill Stephenson and Will Reid, “Scottish nationalism is no more benign than its English equivalent”, *The Guardian*, 18 February, 2020. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/18/scottish-nationalism-is-no-more-benign-than-its-english-equivalent> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

²⁹⁸ Severin Carrell, “Independence will rid Scotland of UK economic chaos, says Nicola Sturgeon”, *The Guardian*, 17 October, 2022. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/17/independence-will-rid-scotland-of-uk-economic-chaos-says-nicola-sturgeon> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

²⁹⁹ Emma Bell, *n.2*, p.352.

by populist rhetoric. UKIP's organisation, i.e. *Leave.EU*. campaigned for exiting the EU along with the official group *Vote Leave* headed by Boris Johnson which made use of many of UKIP's arguments. However, it should be pointed out that despite this, the Vote Leave group always made sure to differentiate itself from UKIP. Interestingly, it operated on tactics of inclusion as well as exclusion, whereby it utilized many ideas popularized by UKIP but at the same time ensured downplaying any semblance of commonality with UKIP and its overt toxicity. This was done with the intention of reaching out to moderate voters who might otherwise be put off by any association with UKIP. Despite this disassociation by the mainstream parties, the importance of UKIP to the referendum cannot be undermined in any way. Its influence has been described more in terms of shaping the EU debate rather than purely in terms of garnering votes. While the majority the Leave votes can be attributed to Conservative voters, UKIP can be largely credited with bringing the issue of EU to the forefront and making use of the general dissatisfaction of a section of the electorate with the mainstream parties. Analysis of the Brexit voters have revealed similarities with that of typical UKIP voter; mostly older white males above the age of 55 with lower educational qualifications.³⁰⁰ Hence it should be noted that despite the mainstream political disassociation from UKIP and Farage's populist rhetoric, the latter found resonance with the majority of the voters, particularly the demographic section mentioned above. While UKIP's arguments gained leverage only when adopted by the mainstream campaign, it cannot be denied that the essence remained very much the same.

Pitcher has pointed out the racist undertones of the Brexit vote as well as Farage's Leave campaign. UKIP's slogan that called upon people to "break free of the EU and take back control of our borders" was a clear manifestation of racism targeted specifically at non-white immigrant groups. The migrant crisis of 2015 contributed to stoking up further anti-immigration hysteria. The media and tabloids made ample use of the imagery depicting non-white immigrants who were portrayed as a legitimate threat to Britain's territorial integrity. Case in point was the UKIP's 'Breaking Point' poster depicting hordes of non-white asylum seekers and emblazoned with the heading 'The EU has failed us all.' The inflammatory poster received an immediate backlash, and was even reported to the police with some claiming that it was a deliberate attempt to foment racial hatred.³⁰¹ According to Pitcher, the Brexit vote illustrates not only a deep antipathy towards immigration but also the inherent class divisions

³⁰⁰ Karine Tournier-Sol, *n.3*, pp.382-383.

³⁰¹ Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason, "Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police", *The Guardian*, 16 Jun 2016. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

of British society. As mentioned previously, UKIP's rhetoric made use of the familiar populist trope of the ordinary people vs the elites. However, in this case, the former are categorized as "white working class" and the latter as the "liberal elite". They both have certain characteristics that set them apart. The white working classes are more likely to be socially conservative, inhabitants of small towns who are less likely to adhere to norms of political correctness. The opposite is the case for the urban, metropolitan dwelling liberal elite who seek to impose strict political correctness. While the former is more likely to identify as 'English' or 'British' while the latter as 'European and cosmopolitan'. As a manifestation of the skewed power balance between the two groups, the numerically superior working classes remain devoid of power that is monopolized by the liberal elite who comprise the minority. Farage blamed immigration for the deprivation of the white working class arguing that it has effectively been transformed into an 'underclass.' Immigration has been viewed as the chief culprit, since before its advent the country was at its ideal state of having a homogeneous population as a 'white nation'. Hence, this juxtaposition between the grasping liberal elite and the deprived working classes is basically an attempt to present how immigration has been responsible for the majority of the problems the country is facing. The liberal elite are presented as supporters of immigration and multiculturalism and thus responsible for the decline of the nation.³⁰²

The outcome of Brexit vindicated UKIP's enormous impact on having shaped the debate on Europe as well as its original purpose which had long been overlooked in mainstream politics. But this victory was short lived, since the outcome proved to be its undoing. The party became a casualty of the enormous changes that swept the country's political and economic scene as a result of the referendum. In a way, it helped to contribute to its own degeneration. The outcome affected the fortunes of UKIP in a number of ways; firstly, the party was completely deprived of its main political purpose. It received another blow with Farage's resignation only a few days after the referendum thus leaving the party without the leader with whose image it had become more or less coterminous. After his departure the party went through factionalism and contention over leadership thereby reverting back to the erratic nature of its earlier days before Farage acted as the 'glue' holding together it together. Secondly, the outcome of the referendum completely transformed the political environment of the country. The Conservative party witnessed a major leadership transition with David Cameron stepping down and being replaced by Theresa May. Moreover, a large number of UKIP voters switched allegiance to the

³⁰² Ben Pitcher, "Racism and Brexit: notes towards an antiracist populism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 14, 2019, pp. 2491-2493.

Conservatives, which was aided by the Tories' appropriation of major UKIP agendas. The dire contraction of UKIP's voter base was visible in the 2017 general election where it gathered 1.8% of the total votes; a massive decline from its highpoint in the 2015 election which saw it gathering 12.6% of votes. It also lost half of its members after the results. Thus, it was more or less consigned to the side-lines once more.³⁰³

The whole scenario of the political right in contemporary UK has been summed up by Raffaello Pantucci, who opines that while the extreme right remains a fringe element, what is more distressing is the fact that the mainstream itself has shifted further to the right. An increase in the influence of the right does not, however, necessarily mean that the former has gained more credibility or popularity. The UKIP's rhetoric was strongly xenophobic with racist elements but that is not to say that all UKIP followers are racist. According to Pantucci, what is problematic is the fact that the mainstream parties have brought many extremist ideas into their rhetoric.³⁰⁴ Hence, the UKIP was effective more in the way it was able to change the narrative of the mainstream rather than the actual outreach it had as a party by itself.

Immigration: Historical Trends and Political Impact

Brief historical overview of post-war immigration

Central to the whole discourse on right-wing populist trends is the issue of immigration. The question of immigration is deeply connected to the rapidly changing demography of the UK, which has experienced widescale transformation in the past few decades. Official data reveals how diverse the population of UK has become in the span of a few decades. According to the 2011 census, 13.4% of people in England and Wales were born outside the UK, with 1.2% born in India. India is the top country of birth outside the UK; while 456,000 of UK residents were born in India in 2001, the number increased to 694,000 or 1.2 of the population in 2011. Pakistan occupied third place, constituting 1.0% of non-UK born residents in 2011.³⁰⁵ This composition became even more diversified by the time the 2021 census was conducted. In 2021, the total population of England and Wales was recorded at 59.6 million with 81.7% recorded as white. Among the latter, 74.4% were white British and the next largest ethnic group was 'Indian' accounting for 3.1% of the population. Interestingly, the category of white British

³⁰³ Karine Tournier-Sol, *n.4*, pp.383-385.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Raffaello Pantucci (Nanyang Technological University). Dated: 24-2-22.

³⁰⁵ "People born outside the UK", GOV.UK, 17 December 2018. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/people-born-outside-the-uk/latest/> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

underwent noticeable decline between 2011 and 2021 from 80.5% to 74.4% while the percentage of white ‘other’ ethnic group increased from 4.4% to 6.2%. Among the non-white ethnic groups, Indians constituted the largest category, as mentioned before, accounting for 5.5 million people. The Pakistani ethnic group also witnessed an increase, growing to 1.6 million or 2.7% of the population. Around 2.4 million (4.0%) people were from the black ethnic group, identifying as either black African (2.5%) or black Caribbean (1.0%).³⁰⁶

Fig. 3.1 shows the unprecedented rise in levels of the foreign-born population in England and Wales population till the period of 2011. Even discounting the spectacular rise in levels in the succeeding years, this graph is an accurate indicator of how the demography of UK has transformed in the last few decades.

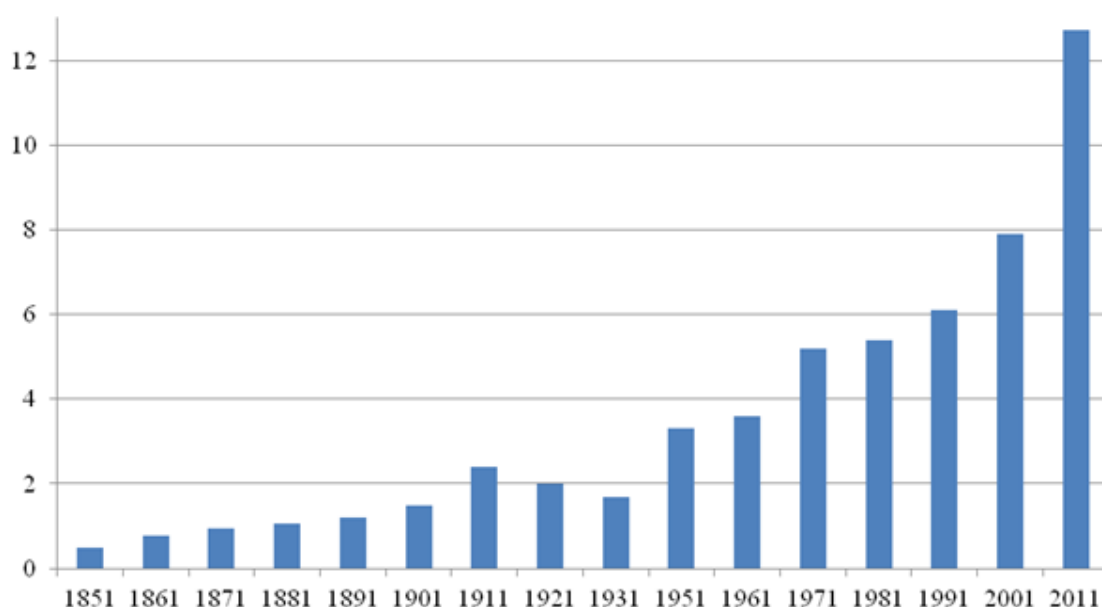


Fig. 3.1: Percentage of foreign-born population of England and Wales (1851-2011) (Source: Migration Watch UK, 2014)

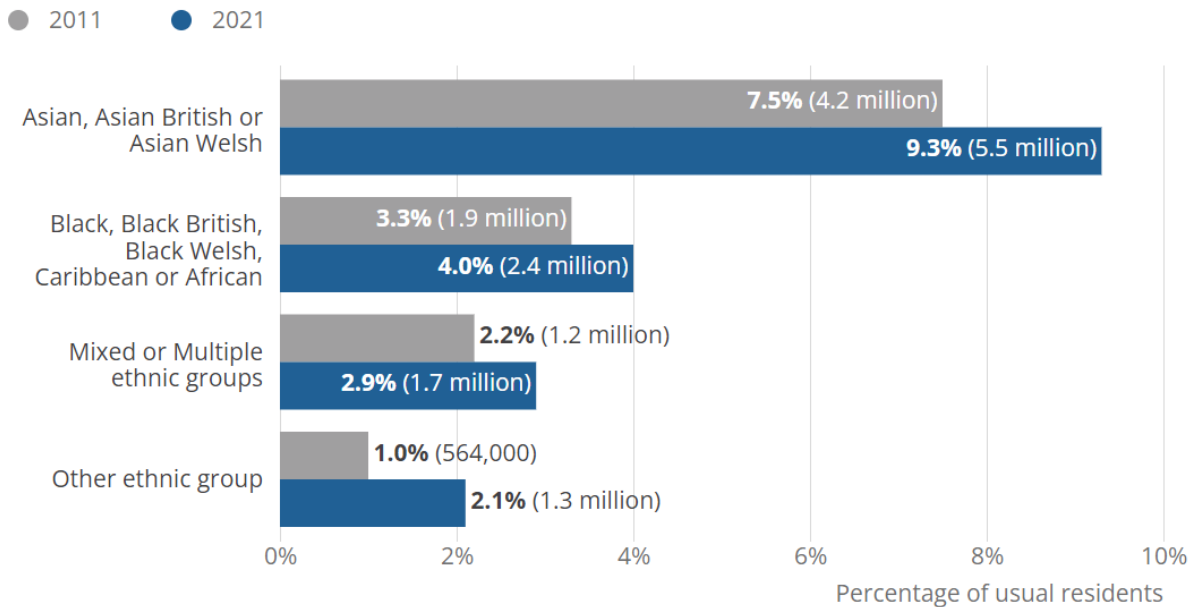
According to Migration Watch UK, the foreign-born population increased by 1.1 million between 1991-2001, with the highest rise occurring after 1997. The period between 2001 and 2011 witnessed the numbers rising to 3 million, the highest ever increase in foreign-born population in British history.³⁰⁷ Fig. 3.2 below demonstrates the rapidly increasing

³⁰⁶ “Population of England and Wales”, GOV.UK, 22 December 2022. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest/#by-ethnicity-over-time> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

³⁰⁷ “A summary history of immigration to Britain”, Migration Watch UK, 12 May, 2014. <https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/48> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

demographic diversity in the UK in the space of a decade (2011-2021).³⁰⁸

Ethnic group distribution (high-level categories), 2011 and 2021, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Fig. 3.2: Ethnic group distribution in England and Wales (2011 and 2021) (Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021)

It is not difficult to see how issues of immigration and integration have come to constitute the major driving forces in British politics in such a rapidly changing demographic scenario.

The term ‘immigrant’ has come to be associated with negative connotations in the UK, so much so that officially it has been replaced by the term ‘ethnic minority.’³⁰⁹ Though immigration has steadily attained a degree of supreme importance in contemporary British politics and policy making, it is to be kept in mind that the issue has been steadily gaining momentum since the end of the Second World War. Historically, the idea of nationality in the UK is somewhat nebulous; it originally denoted a British subject owing allegiance to the Crown. However, as per the 1948 British Nationality Act the notion of a British subject automatically became linked

³⁰⁸ “Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021”, Census 2021, 29 November, 2022. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021> (Accessed on 9th March, 2024).

³⁰⁹ Kristin Couper, “Immigration, nationality and citizenship in the UK”, *New Political Science*, Vol. 8, No.1-2, 1989, pp. 91-92.

with citizenship of a Commonwealth country and the status of both inhabitants of the UK and the wider Commonwealth became coterminous. As a result, individuals belonging to Britain and its colonies became 'British subjects', automatically becoming entitled to the full set of political and civil rights it entailed. A direct outcome of this Act was the massive influx of coloured immigration from Commonwealth countries such as India, Pakistan and Jamaica to Britain, who enjoyed the status of being British subjects thus exempting them from any form of immigration restrictions. However, the unrestricted entry of coloured immigrants from the colonies, regardless of their status as 'British subjects', drew public ire and calls for its restriction.³¹⁰

The next significant changes to British nationality occurred during the 1960s. In response to the widespread public dissatisfaction with immigration from the Commonwealth countries, the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act stipulated that the only individuals who would be allowed to enter the UK without immigration controls would be those who were either born in the UK, holding a British passport, or those with a parent or grand-parent resident there. Meanwhile, Enoch Powell started a powerful anti-immigration campaign; one which would become the prototype for subsequent right-wing populist rhetoric. Although he was dismissed for his inflammatory remarks, the sentiment behind his speech continued to be manifested in the tightening of nationality laws, particularly the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act passed by the Labour Party that aimed to restrict the flow of British Asians expelled from Uganda under Idi Amin's regime. Considered a 'milestone in racist legislation', the Act not only restricted the flow of expellees from Uganda, but also enforced the concept of 'patriality' that created a strict demarcation between 'Old Commonwealth' citizens, namely 'white' migrants from countries like Australia and New Zealand, and New Commonwealth, indicating coloured migrants from other colonies. Needless to say, the latter category bore the brunt of discrimination while no restrictions were placed on the former.³¹¹ In a speech at a public meeting in 1969, Conservative leader of opposition Edward Heath outlined several proposals for the toughening of immigration laws for Commonwealth citizens entering the UK. Despite asserting that the 'deep-seated instincts' of the majority of the British population are 'generous and decent, and not, as some would have us believe, mean spirited and racist', he underlined the necessity of restricting flow of Commonwealth immigrants. As per his proposals, Commonwealth immigrants would be denied the right to settle permanently in the country, once admitted. Their

³¹⁰ Ibid., pp.92-93.

³¹¹ Christopher Kyriakides and Satnam Virdee, "Migrant labour, racism and the British National Health Service", *Ethnicity & Health*, Vol.8, No.4, 2003, pp. 291-292.

residence would be on a strictly temporary basis, subject to yearly renewal and completely based on precondition of ‘a specific job in a specific place-for a specific time.’³¹² The severely restrictive nature of the proposals reveals their racist undertones, despite the denial of being ‘racialist’ as well as the staunch anti-immigration stance of the Conservative Party.

The 1971 Immigration Act further consolidated this discriminatory demarcation, by tightening the requirements for ‘patrials’ who were now named as ‘Citizens of the UK and Colonial Territories.’ This Act succeeded in further reducing immigration by allowing only the entry of dependents of migrants who had reached the UK prior to the enactment of this legislation.³¹³ The British Nationality Act of 1981, defined British citizenship as one born in the UK, or with one parent British or settled there. What is evident from these successive waves of nationality and immigration legislation is the fact that several factors were at play in their framing. Apart from the obvious anti-immigration public sentiment, the racial undercurrents of being a former imperial power as well as the varied history of emigration shaped the discourse on nationality and citizenship to a large extent.³¹⁴

Figures reveal how immigration to the UK has increased over the last few decades despite the restrictive policies of the earlier years. According to one estimate, annual immigration between the period of 1991 and 2020 had increased by 117% with the estimate per year rising from 329,000 to 715,000. Annual emigration also recorded an increase between 1991 and 2008 and in 2020 the total emigration was 403,000. The levels of immigration have surpassed emigration with net migration³¹⁵ increasing from an annual average of 37,000 in the time frame 1991-1995 to 266,000 between 2015-2019. Figures also reveal how the balance of emigration and immigration has been overturned. Till 1930s, the UK had net emigration of approximately 80,000 a year, but from 1931-1961 this flow was reversed with the average net immigration standing at 19,000 a year. Although net emigration increased from 1961-1981 yet their levels were lower than previously. After 1991 annual net migration began to increase at an unprecedented pace with levels exceeding 100,000 a year. Levels of immigration dropped during the pandemic between 2020 and 2021 before rising to a record high in 2022. The period

³¹² *The Rt.Hon. Edward Heath, M.B.E., M.P. (Bexley), Leader of Opposition, Speaking at a Public Meeting, at Walsall Town Hall, on Saturday 25th, January 1969*, Conservative Central Office (News Service). (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023).

³¹³ Christopher Kyriakides and Satnam Virdee, *n.2*, pp.291-292.

³¹⁴ Kristin Couper, *n.2*, p.96.

³¹⁵ Net migration being defined as the difference between immigration and emigration. Refer below.

leading up to 2022 has been described as ‘unique’ with two separate migration flows arising from the Ukraine crisis and Hong Kong.³¹⁶

The patterns of immigration after Brexit are telling in the sense that the composition of immigrants has undergone a change. There has been an overall increase in net migration to the UK mainly due to the increase in entry of non-EU citizens. The latter has steadily risen in the past decade with non-EU net migration reaching 184,000 in 2019, falling briefly during the pandemic and rising again to 768,000 by the end of June 2023. Around 968,000 non-EU arrivals were ‘long-term’, which was nearly 2.5 times more than the 2019 numbers. In this category, students and their dependents accounted for the largest increase, with 316,000 (42%) of the total increase in grants of visa. Another important group included refugees from Ukraine and Hong Kong whose entry was attributed to the opening of two ‘visa routes’ in 2021-22. 2022 witnessed the handing out of approximately 54,000 grants of Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas (BNO) visas and 211,000 to those falling under the Ukraine Family and Sponsorship schemes. Finally, there has also been an increase in the numbers of skilled workers, which witnessed an increase of 24% or 180,000 since 2019. In this category, grants to those working in the health and care segment has been the highest. As a result of the government’s active encouragement, the number of nurses in the healthcare sector also witnessed an increase by more than 30,000 between July 2019 to July 2022.³¹⁷ Finally, the net migration of EU citizens has fallen sharply. EU citizens accounted for anywhere between 59% and 77% of the net migration in the year 2015. But net migration from the EU started to fall after the referendum and it became negative after 2021 when the post Brexit immigration system came into effect which greatly reduced the scope for entry of EU citizens. According to some estimates, the net migration of EU citizens in the year 2023 (till June end) was - 86,000.³¹⁸ It is pertinent to ask how one of the prime aims of Brexit, i.e. reduction of immigration, came to be completely overturned in such a manner in the years following the referendum. While there has been a fall in the entry of EU citizens, it has been more than supplemented by incoming non-EU immigrants which makes one wonder whether this is what

³¹⁶ Research Briefing by Georgina Sturge titled “Migration statistics”, House of Commons Library, 31 May 2023. Source: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06077/SN06077.pdf> (Accessed on 5th May, 2024).

³¹⁷ Briefing by the Migration Observatory (University of Oxford) titled “Why has non-EU migration to the UK risen?”, 21 Nov 2022. Source: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/why-has-non-eu-migration-to-the-uk-risen/> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

³¹⁸ Briefing by the Migration Observatory (University of Oxford) titled “Net migration to the UK”, 22 Jan 2024. Source: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/long-term-international-migration-flows-to-and-from-the-uk/> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

the populists were aiming for while campaigning to leave the EU.

The two mainstream parties had differing views on immigration and this divergence is reflected even in later years in the context of the anti-immigration Brexit debate. The Conservative Party has always been strict regarding immigration, having historically been responsible for some of the most stringent anti-immigration laws. Reports published by the official Conservative Party Research Department in 1968 underline the commitment of the party to tightening immigration laws. The 1966 manifesto promised to introduce a ‘conditional entry system’ which would stem the flow of Commonwealth immigrants and also reduce the number of dependents entering the country. The other important proposal included facilitating the return of these immigrants to their countries of origin, emphasising on the need to resort to ‘Action not words’ in this respect.³¹⁹

The Labour Party, on the other hand has been more lenient regarding immigration and comparatively more sympathetic to ethnic minorities. For instance, a summary of the proceedings of a Labour Party ‘Race Working Group’ in 1989 outlined the party’s immigration policy as well as race policy as based on universal human rights and civil liberties, which would ensure conditions of equality and freedom for all in Britain. It criticised some of the prevalent notions on the immigration debate as;

“..immigration=black=bad. This means that immigration and nationality policies which largely affect white people are very open and positive-these people are not “immigrants”. It also means that, because all immigrants are black, all black people are immigrants-thus, British-born blacks become ‘second generation immigrants.’”³²⁰

The Labour Party has been at the forefront of debates relating to race and diversity as well as immigration. For all its shortcomings, it has been much more inclusive in its approach towards Britain’s sizeable ethnic minority communities and have played a vital role in shaping the integration debate in the country.

In recent times, the immigration debate reached its climax during the Brexit referendum. The decision to leave the EU was predicated upon a number of factors, among which questions of national identity and the volatile relationship with the EU played a part. The sense of prevalent

³¹⁹ Report by the Conservative Research Department titled, “Immigrants and Race Relations”, 10th June, 1968. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

³²⁰ *Race Working Group*, February 1989. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

disillusionment was clearly evident in the outcome; surveys indicated that the majority of 'Leave', approximately 73 %, voters felt that the country had become 'a lot worse' in the last 10 years.³²¹ While the role of immigration in inducing Brexit has a separate and vast field of literature, it would make sense to understand, at least on a macro-level how it impacted the outcome of the referendum; more so because the issue of immigration became the focal point of the populist 'Leave' campaign.

Studies have shown how the increasing levels of anti-immigration public sentiment in the run up to the 2016 referendum tipped the scales in favour of Nigel Farage and the right. This negative perception of immigration from the EU can be traced back to the 2004 enlargement of the EU which facilitated the accession of a number of Central and Eastern European states, prompting fears of economic and cultural threat. The unprecedented salience of the immigration issue continued till 2016, and public concern pertaining to the issue reached new levels during the 2015 European refugee crisis.³²² A number of central questions are pertinent to the Brexit debate such as the composition of the voter base who voted Leave. Academic discourse focused on whether the Leave voters were mainly 'white' and whether they were resident in areas subject to high rates of ethnic and demographic transformation. Conflicting narratives also centred around the economy/ identity debate. Several studies focused on how the impact of economic marginalisation had an adverse impact on those considered to be 'losers' of increasing globalisation and European integration. On the other hand, it was also starkly evident that Leave voters were overwhelmingly concerned with questions of identity. They were less likely to possess strong feelings of European identity, while those with deeper feelings of European identity were less likely to vote in favour of Leave. Furthermore, individuals who supported UKIP and were readers of Eurosceptic newspaper were more likely to be Leave voters.³²³

The underlying explanations behind these voting patterns are complex and are rooted in the problematic question of British identity. The concept of British identity has historically been associated mainly with the Empire other political and cultural unifiers such as the British parliament or the monarchy. The 'political patriotism' it engendered was found to be tenuous. On the other hand, the ethnic nationalism involving allegiance to English, Scottish or Welsh

³²¹ Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo, "Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit", *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 19, No.3, 2017, p.451.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid., pp.457-459.

identity was found to be much stronger.³²⁴ The comparatively weaker sense of British identity began to decline once the glory of the erstwhile ‘noble’ association with the Empire began to lose importance and credibility.³²⁵ In such a context it would seem difficult to fathom the strongly ingrained sense of ‘British exceptionalism’ which is at play with regard to its relation with Europe. It is this sense of exceptionalism that played a part in the tumultuous relationship with the EU, culminating in Brexit. Historically, the focal point for Britain had been the Empire, and then the Commonwealth. When Britain joined the European Community in 1973, it became evident that it would mean not only the weakening of many of its ties with the Commonwealth, but also the consolidation of its institutional attachment to Europe.³²⁶ The sense of British exceptionalism had become so deeply ingrained in the country’s psyche that it was an established fact that while ‘Britain was in Europe, but not of it.’ When Britain emerged as a victorious power in the Second World War, it did so greatly depleted and with the looming reality that the US and the Soviet Union were the main victors. However, this did nothing to dampen British hubris and this sense of exceptionalism continued long after its days as the topmost global power were over.³²⁷ It steadily became evident that it was not the most important European power anymore. This realisation could not have come without its share of resentment and the Brexit was one of the outcomes of that.

This complexity and ambiguity underlying British identity is crucial for understanding the problems of immigration and integration that lie at the heart of the populism debate. Right-wing populist groups cite the perceived lack of integration of minority communities as the reason behind the failure of multiculturalism. To examine the veracity and nature of these claims, one needs to understand how immigration has transformed British society after the war and how the experiment with multiculturalism has played out in this context.

The study of immigration in the UK is based on a number of considerations which must be kept in mind. The different ethnic minority groups are marked by a number of variations as per socio-economic parameters. While some ethnic groups such as British Indians and Chinese are high performing and marked by upward social mobility, the same cannot be said for all. Another point which must be kept in mind is that the UK has experienced several waves of migration.

³²⁴ Eva-Maria Asari, Daphne Halikiopoulou and Steven Mock, “British National Identity and the Dilemmas of Multiculturalism”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 14, No.1, 2008, p.9.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

³²⁶ Andrew J. Crozier, “British exceptionalism: pride and prejudice and Brexit”, *International Economics and Economic Policy*, 2020, pp. 635-636.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.638.

It is these flows along with the advent of globalisation and the spread of higher education that has shaped the composition and nature of ethnic minorities. Finally, the long history of immigration means that generations of immigrants have been shaped by their respective experiences of life in the UK as well different policies. The emergence of these second or third generations of immigrants raises the question as to how they differ from the first generation or the mainstream.³²⁸

The centrality of immigration to the populism debate would entail several debates which encompass questions of integration of minorities and the success of multiculturalism. The ideas of multiculturalism and nationalism are often perceived as contradictory in liberal discourse; however, a stable sense of national identity is often necessary for the success of multiculturalism in a particular society. National identity here, in the words of Anthony Smith is “the maintenance and continuous reproduction of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations and the identification of individuals with that heritage and those values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions.” It is accepted that a sense of national cohesion would require a particular unifier that members can view as an inherent part of their identity. This can be political in nature such as harking back to a ‘golden age’ or it may be cultural signifiers such as a common religion or language. The degree of success of multiculturalism is often contingent on the extent to which these unifying signifier(s) are inclusive themselves.³²⁹ In view of this prerequisite, it is evident that the weak nature of British identity would pose problems for the multiculturalism project. While Germany has an ‘ethno-cultural and differentialist conception of nationality’, the case of Britain is marked by ambiguity and conflicting claims of civic and ethnic identity allegiances.³³⁰

The earlier generations of coloured immigrants from the ‘New Commonwealth’ had endured unhindered racism. A study carried out in 1968 in five towns in the UK revealed the levels of prejudice prevalent then. The respondents, 42% of whom were Labour and 36% Conservatives, were asked questions on a number of issues pertaining to immigration and minorities. It was found that one third of Labour Party members would be in favour of the dismissal of a coloured worker while half of the Conservative members were so. Also, 68% claimed to live within ‘half an hour’s walking distance of a coloured person’, and 42% of this group were in favour of a

³²⁸ Lucinda Platt and Alita Nandi, “Ethnic diversity in the UK: new opportunities and changing constraints”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 5, 2020, pp. 842-843.

³²⁹ Eva-Maria Asari, Daphne Halikiopoulou and Steven Mock, n.2, pp.2-4.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

coloured worker being dismissed. Furthermore, on being asked to assign a social class to the coloured people, the above-mentioned group responded as such; only 5% thought that coloured immigrants to be middle class, 3% felt they were 'skilled working class', while 25% thought them to be 'semi-skilled' and 67% felt they were 'unskilled.' Hence the general trend was towards assigning a lower social standing to coloured immigrants.³³¹ Another report surveyed the stereotypes about coloured immigrants and found that 38% of respondents found 'coloured people' to be 'dirty and troublesome' while 45% disagreed. The former were also perceived to be lazy by 35% of respondents while 50% disagreed. On the basis of such results, the survey stated that while coloured people were unpopular, they were 'not as unpopular as politicians.'³³² These surveys are but small indicators of the prejudice and hostility faced by coloured immigrants in the earlier decades.

One of the earliest attempts to draw up an anti-racist policy outline was by the New Labour government in 1997. This was also accompanied by the Runnymede Trust report in 2000 which proposed a more inclusive and multicultural Britain. Another report claimed that certain sections of ethnic minorities were leading 'parallel lives.' These reports and the ensuing debate as well as the policies enacted by the government cast grave aspersions on the success of multiculturalism, so much so that it was felt that multiculturalism was retreating in Britain. The 'Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act' was introduced by the government which aimed to reclaim the loss of 'social cohesion' in Britain arising from the shortcomings of immigration and integration in Britain. However, this would entail the introduction a number of measures which would further complicate the process of integration for immigrants. The new requirements for being granted citizenship included the passing a citizenship test and attending a ceremony to underline one's loyalty to the state. The idea was that such affirmations and tests would lead to the greater proliferation of 'British values.' However, it actually had the opposite effect. It was felt by some quarters that the new requirements were racist and anti-Muslim in nature. But it should be mentioned that the situation was not uniformly bleak. A number of studies indicated that while ethnic minorities of both initial and subsequent generations retain both a sense of both their ethnic and national identities. The sense of national identity among individuals with immigrant origin was found to be at par with those of their white peers. The

³³¹ A survey by Research Services titled "Race Prejudice: A comparison of the Five Towns with the National Sample", February, 1968. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023)

³³² *Mood of England, July/September, 1968*. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 19-06-2023).

chances of harbouring a strong sense of national identity in the case of immigrants is often found to be directly correlated with higher levels of socio-economic status or advantages.³³³

The process of integration which is often felt to be the sole preserve and responsibility of immigrants themselves, often overlooks the fact that it is a two-way process. The perception of the native population towards immigrants always plays a central role in the success or failure of the integration process. This public perception of immigration in the case of the UK is ambiguous; on one hand there has been an increasing acceptance of the fact that Britain has become a diverse and multicultural society. On the other, there is a persistent sense of antipathy towards immigration and immigrants per se; a fact that was amply utilized by the right during the Brexit referendum. This anti-immigration sentiment is dependent on a number of factors such as class composition, generational differences and internalized attitudes and perceptions of immigration figures. It would be relevant to look into these factors in this particular context.

The notion of ‘pictures in our heads’, refers to the ‘cognitive representations and attitudes’ that play a part in shaping public opinion. Often very few are well-informed about the issue of immigration with major information sources such as media, personal experiences or even official data failing to capture the nuances of the issue.³³⁴ The perception of immigrants in Britain follows certain trends; it was generally found that the attitudes were more positive towards immigrants who were highly-skilled, or in other words contribute significantly to the economy.³³⁵ There is also the matter of a gulf between actual statistical figures of immigration and public perceptions of these figures. It has also generally been found that the public overestimate the size of immigration numbers, which may in turn further shape their perceptions.³³⁶ By and large findings have revealed that the general tendency was towards a preference for lower immigration; majority of respondents (69 per cent) felt that there should be a reduction in immigration, with only 6 per cent favouring an increase.³³⁷ The politics of class has been unabashedly played by the right to fuel their anti-immigration debate. Grayson has delineated the creation of a ‘racist electorate’ where voters rife with xenophobic sentiment are ever quick to dismiss the logic of experts and other such actors. Any party arguing in favour

³³³ David Bartram, “Does the UK ‘citizenship process’ lead immigrants to reject British identity? A panel data analysis”, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 21, No.2, p.379.

³³⁴ Scott Blinder, “Imagined Immigration: The Impact of Different Meanings of ‘Immigrants’ in Public Opinion and Policy Debates in Britain”, *Political Studies*, Vol 63, 2015, p.81.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.83.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.84.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.91.

of immigration is branded as an ‘out of touch metropolitan elite’ who are beneficiaries of the existing immigration policies.³³⁸

The perception of immigrants is shaped by myriad factors and thus there is no simplified explanation of prevalent anti-immigration attitudes. However, the pertinent question may be raised as to whether there has been a steady generational change in the perception of immigrants among the British mainstream population? Of course, the increasing presence of minority communities in public life has come about steadily; the period from the 1990s witnessed a rise in prominence of individuals from ethnic communities in various sectors such as sports and media. Hence the generations whose developmental years took place in this era were used to a much broader spectrum in terms of visibility of immigrants and ethnic minorities. This is certainly not the case for the older generations when the percentage of immigrants in the population was much lower. According to the ‘contact hypothesis’, the exposure to greater diversity is likely to produce attitudes which are more positive towards immigration. In the case of the UK, studies have analyzed how younger generations who have spent their formative years in a climate of increased diversity are likely to have their views on immigration shaped by the transforming norms that accompany the change in population demographics. The sense of threat amongst this section in relation to immigrants is likely to be much lower.³³⁹ In contrast, in the case of the older generations, who were socialized after the advent to mass scale post-war immigration, attitude towards immigration is likely to be negative due to the lack of contact with immigrants and the general low visibility of immigrants in all walks of public life.³⁴⁰

One final point pertinent to this discussion is the welfare angle to immigration. This is relevant since right-wing populist rhetoric, especially in the context of Brexit, has stoked up discontent regarding immigration by playing up how immigrants in general and asylum seekers in particular have been taking advantage of Britain’s supposedly generous welfare system. The argument of the Vote Leave campaign focused largely on justifying how leaving the EU would mean ‘taking back control’ over not only the country’s borders but also national institutions such as the NHS.³⁴¹ The problem of ‘welfare chauvinism’ has become increasingly prevalent

³³⁸ Phoebe Moore and Kirsten Forkert, “Class and panic in British immigration”, *Capital & Class*, Vol. 38, No.3, 2014, p.500.

³³⁹ Lauren McLaren, Anja Neundorf and Ian Paterson, “Diversity and Perceptions of Immigration: How the Past Influences the Present”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 69, No.3, 2021, pp.729-731.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.741.

³⁴¹ Matthew Donoghue and Mikko Kuisma, “Taking back control of the welfare state: Brexit, rational-imaginaries and welfare chauvinism”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1,2022, p.182.

in the rhetoric of the right in western liberal democracies. While welfare states are meant to provide a security net and means to provide for basic needs, it also thrives on a degree of exclusivity as to who can avail of its benefits. Right-wing populism takes advantage of this demarcation by politicizing how outsiders are channeling the benefits of the system while the main beneficiaries, i.e., the native population are excluded.³⁴² Here it should be mentioned that the UK is ‘typical liberal welfare state’ in contrast to ‘conservative’ ones like Germany. The UK reserves the right to exclude certain immigrants from housing or income benefits, but healthcare is universal.³⁴³

The question may be raised as to whether the UK’s prolonged experience with the integration of minorities has resulted in the success of multiculturalism? Some like Pant assert that multiculturalism in the UK has, by and large, been a success. The UK remains ahead of its counterparts in mainland Europe in terms of integration of minority communities as well as in terms of the visibility and representation of the latter in top positions of the government.³⁴⁴ Others like Mawdsley feel that there is no clear-cut answer to the multiculturalism debate, particularly because ethnic minorities still remain disadvantaged to a large extent. Also, the debate between integration and assimilation remains unresolved. Certain cultural practices of minorities may be deemed to be at odds with British values, so dealing with these becomes all the more problematic.³⁴⁵ Mukherjee asserts that the question of integration in the UK is deeply connected to the changing nature of British identity which is constantly being made and remade by both immigrants as well as the British themselves. In this state of flux, the immigrants themselves become British over generations. Thus, while integration has not been an ‘unmitigated success’, the process is less blighted by ‘othering’ as it is in other countries.³⁴⁶ Hence, the question of whether multiculturalism has been a success remains open-ended and open to interpretation. But it cannot be denied that the UK has made more positive strides in the area of minority integration than many other western liberal democratic countries.

³⁴² Mike Slaven, Sara Casella Colombeau and Elisabeth Badenhoop, “What Drives the Immigration-Welfare Policy Link? Comparing Germany, France and the United Kingdom”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 54, No.5, 2021, p.858.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.861.

³⁴⁴ Interview with Professor Harsh V. Pant (King’s College London). Dated: 16-03-2023.

³⁴⁵ Interview with Professor Emma Mawdsley (Cambridge University). Dated: 19-06-23.

³⁴⁶ Interview with Dr. Rohan Mukherjee (London School of Economics). Dated: 27-6-2023.

Role of oppositional forces: mainstream and beyond

The fortunes of the any right-wing populist party aspiring to gain power is linked to the politics of the centre-right Conservative Party. After the election of Boris Johnson in 2019 as Prime Minister and party leader, the Conservatives witnessed a decided shift to the right in terms of their policies. According to Allen, the Conservatives are clearly positioned on the right in view of their preference for lower taxes and smaller government.³⁴⁷ Previously in 2005, the election of David Cameron as the leader of the Conservative Party was viewed as an indicator of the modernization that the party was finally going through. Since 1997 there had been a great deal of criticism of the absence of progress that had led to the party lagging behind a modernized Labour Party. There has also been contention regarding the ideological position of the Tories and it was suggested that the party should shed its ‘ideological baggage’ if there was to be any hope of them winning elections. A section of commentators raised the question whether the Conservatives were really as right-wing as their reputation suggested while others claimed that the party must ‘shift back to the centre ground of British politics’.³⁴⁸ The period between 1997-2005 witnessed an interesting trend of policy convergence between the two main parties. The Labour Party, under Tony Blair had been undergoing a repositioning towards the centre of the spectrum. Interestingly, at the same time, the Conservatives were leaning away from the traditional party position under Thatcher in the 1980s which was very much rightist. Thus, both the parties were inching towards the centre during this period with Labour moving to the right and the Conservatives moving to the left of their position in the previous decades. This is also indicative of the competitive nature of a two-party system whereby a party can adopt any ‘non-centrist’ position of its opponent to position itself in a way as to increase its vote share.³⁴⁹ Thus, it is evident that while the Conservatives are positioned on the centre-right of the spectrum, the extent to which they shift to the right or to the centre of the median depends on the prevalent political environment and the stance adopted by its competitors. This fact assumes further significance in the context of Brexit, as will be discussed below.

The Conservatives have long suffered from an image problem whereby they were seen as ‘socially exclusive’. The party was perceived as being close to the rich and to big businesses

³⁴⁷ Thomas O Falk, “How a change in leadership could affect UK’s Conservative Party”, *AlJazeera*, 20 Jul 2022. Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/20/how-a-change-in-leadership-could-affect-uks-conservative-party> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

³⁴⁸ Thomas Quinn, “The Conservative Party and the “Centre Ground” of British Politics”, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol. 18, No. 2, May 2008, pp.179-180.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.182-184.

and distant from the interests of the poor and the working classes. A section of voters also feared that the party would ‘privatize’ the public services upon which a large number of ordinary people were dependent.³⁵⁰ In contrast, the Labour Party garnered much more public sympathy because of its image of being associated with the public services. The Conservative Party’s unsympathetic and conservative image that was perceived to be hostile to marginalized sections such as the poor, gays and ethnic minorities consolidated their negative image as a ‘nasty’ party. This perception of negativity contributed to its categorization as “too right wing”. Conservative leaders also made matters worse by resorting to authoritarian language when dealing with issues such as immigration. An example of such is the speech made by former Conservative leader William Hague who referred to Britain becoming a ‘foreign land’.³⁵¹ Here it must be pointed out that Hague’s assertion of Britain being likened to a ‘foreign land’ calls to mind Nigel Farage’s almost similar assertion during a UKIP conference in 2014.³⁵² Considering that UKIP eventually came to be nearly a textbook example of a right-wing populist party, this similarity is of much significance.

While the party’s stance on issues such as immigration has gained public support over the years, the party has previously been subject to much scepticism due to its perceived affinity with the wealthy. It has also been seen as somewhat old fashioned, ascribing to traditional values seen as idealizing a ‘mythical Golden Age, somewhere in the 1950s’.³⁵³ Here too, the similarity with the modus operandi of populist parties should be noted. It was David Cameron who contributed much to the rebranding of the party and its modernization. He tried to revamp its image to make it more inclusive and this included choosing candidates beyond the established social strata of professional white married men.³⁵⁴ This process of modernisation was to bear fruit in the coming years.

In the first two decades after the Second World War, both the Labour and the Conservatives were aligned on immigration. But from the 1960s onwards, immigration became the preserve of the Tories on one hand while becoming increasingly polarizing for Labour on the other. The Conservatives’ overtly harsh anti-immigration rhetoric cost them a large section of the educated

³⁵⁰ Ibid.p.190.

³⁵¹ Ibid.pp.190-192.

³⁵² Andrew Sparrow, “Nigel Farage: parts of Britain are 'like a foreign land'”, *The Guardian*, 28 Feb 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/feb/28/nigel-farage-ukip-immigration-speech> (Accessed on February 15, 2024).

³⁵³ Thomas Quinn, *n.2*, p.194.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.195-196.

middle-class voter base. Cameron attempted to rebrand the party and thus focus less on the issue of immigration and the EU. However, this left a wide political void that was liable to be filled up by a populist party that could adeptly make use of the prevalent anti-EU and anti-immigration sentiment in the country. This is exactly what UKIP did under Nigel Farage; use the immigration and EU issues to capture dissatisfied Conservative voters who felt out of tune with the party's modernization drive under Cameron.³⁵⁵ When the Conservatives comprised the opposition between 1997 and 2010 it had become Eurosceptic and made use of the 2004 enlargement of the EU to attack the Labour government on immigration and asylum. The enlargement had led to a sizeable increase in the number of foreign workers. On coming back to power in 2010, the party attempted to bring about a reduction in immigration through policies that promised to reduce net immigration 'from the hundreds to the tens of thousands.'³⁵⁶ This period witnessed the party resorting to varied measures to reduce net migration, most of which were unsuccessful. In fact, the numbers actually increased up to approximately 330000 in the year till March 2015. The Conservative Party's failed attempts to deal with immigration led to the rise of a populist contender, i.e. UKIP, who promised to solve these problems without any consideration of possible repercussions. The latter began to spread the message that the UK's problems would be solved by leaving the EU and by introducing a 'points-based' immigration like Australia which favours skilled migrants. Immigration came to displace all other problems as the one which people were most concerned about. In such a situation, the general confidence in UKIP in dealing with matters of immigration began to surpass the Conservatives. According to reports of the British Election Survey, by March 2015 70 per cent of voters wanted a reduction in immigration while 60 per cent held the Tories responsible for the existing levels of immigration.³⁵⁷ It was such a scenario that the Conservatives agreed to carry out the referendum. In its 2015 manifesto for the general elections, it promised the British people 'a straight in-out referendum' on EU membership.³⁵⁸

The overarching emphasis laid on the topic of immigration in the run up to the referendum can be understood as an exemplification of politicization of an issue that is often liable to overlook the actual reality. A large number of people came to be instigated by such fears of an impending

³⁵⁵ Tim Bale, "Policy, office, votes – and integrity. The British Conservative Party, Brexit, and immigration", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2022, p.3.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³⁵⁸ The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015.

<https://www.theresavilliers.co.uk/sites/www.theresavilliers.co.uk/files/conservativemanifesto2015.pdf>
(Accessed on February 15, 2024).

increase in foreigners. Many critics pointed out that EU immigrants were positive contributors, therefore the fears of their apparent ‘threat’ were politically constructed rather than being based on actual demographic or economic facts. Moreover, the term ‘immigrant’ itself was misplaced in reference to these individuals since they were legally exercising their right to free movement being citizens of the EU. However, such rational explanations often fail to convince voters, especially in highly charged situations which the Brexit referendum turned out to be. According to Geddes and Scholten, the role of public opinion in relation to immigration cannot be understood by neglecting ‘the ways in which public opinion is shaped by elite discourses and practice on immigration as well as the ways in which immigration is represented in public debate and the media’.³⁵⁹The campaign for Brexit also exposed the inner rifts of the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party was divided on the issue of Brexit and had backers on both sides. While 185 MPs declared their support for the Remain side, 138 came out in favour of Leave. Here it must be reiterated that the Leave side comprised of the official *Vote Leave* group, that was dominated mainly by Conservatives on one hand and UKIP’s Leave.EU on the other. The campaign brought to light the inner fault lines in the party and this did not exclude attacks on each other. It was felt by the architects of the Leave side that immigration could turn out to be a deciding factor in outcome of the referendum, however it would have to be dealt with carefully; ‘immigration was such a big deal we don’t have to make a big deal of it.’ In other words, emphasizing too heavily on immigration would run the risk of Leave supporting Conservatives like Boris Johnson being equated with UKIP leader Farage, which would ultimately harm the prospects of the former. As a result, the Leave side comprising predominantly of Tories benefited greatly from the anti-immigration hysteria spread by UKIP, while at the same time adroitly distancing themselves from it. During this time, the European migrant crisis (2015-2016) seemed to vindicate the anti-immigration propaganda by the Leave side. Scenes of hordes of desperate migrants fleeing war and persecution, making their way across the continent seemed to consolidate fears that the UK would be their next natural destination. This would not bode well for ordinary citizens in the UK who were supposedly having to already compete with Eastern Europeans in the job market and in the access of education for children, housing and healthcare services. It was generally felt that the EU is the root of many of these problems and that the top political brass in the UK did not have the

³⁵⁹ Tim Bale, *n.3*, pp.5-6.

‘faintest clue’ how to deal with these pressing problems.³⁶⁰

Just as it seemed as though the relentless campaign had caused the Leave side to gain a great deal of leverage, a bulletin on net migration was published by the Office of National Statistics. It revealed that immigration levels had actually risen to unprecedented levels and a part of it was due to the influx of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants from the EU. Needless to say, this information was used by both Farage and Johnson to their advantage. The *Stronger In* campaign (officially the Remain group), many of whom were also Conservatives, were prevented from indulging in the racist narrative of the Leave side. They focused mainly on the economic costs of Brexit and tried to avoid ‘blue on blue’ attacks, namely infighting within the divided Conservative Party.³⁶¹ However, it soon became clear that the campaigning of the Leave side which had made great use of UKIP’s incendiary anti-immigration message, had become attractive for a large section of the population.

The Brexit referendum can be described as being responsible for transforming the nature of populism in the UK. The referendum and its aftermath witnessed populist politics being adopted into mainstream political dialogue in a way that was previously unseen. Right-wing parties like the BNP had remained more or less on the margins of British politics; the sudden rise of UKIP paved the way for the popularization of a particular brand of populist rhetoric that was eventually used by the Conservative Party to advance its own agenda. The Leave side dominated by the Tories presented themselves as more representative of the common people and in order to do so, they resorted to the use of nativist and often xenophobic language that would ultimately be normalized within mainstream political discourse. The leading figures of the Leave side which included the prominent strategist Dominic Cummings resorted to the proliferation of politics based on ‘post truth’ reality that had previously been the domain of right-wing and populist politics. This ‘post-truth’ reality is often based on the outright rejection of conventional notions of reasoning and knowledge. In what can be described as having startling echoes of the extreme right ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century, Cummings referred to the notion of post truth politics creating the gateway for ‘superior logic.’ According to him, only an extreme empirical mode of study based on mathematics and the collection of data were required to comprehend the socio-political world and completely he dismisses ‘artificial’ and subjective studies such as Politics and Economics that are apparently the creation of ‘elitist academics.’ Apparently, the reliance on strictly empirical mathematics

³⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.6-8.

³⁶¹ Ibid., pp.11-12.

based on data gathering, were supposed to legitimize an ideal post-truth reality. Suffice to say, the Leave side relied heavily on the dismissal of experts and economists and a complete nullification of their views. Here the role of right-wing sympathising media outlets should also be mentioned for their contribution in spreading the harmful politics of ‘post-truth.’³⁶²

The political atmosphere in the UK after the referendum was one which was torn by hostility. After the resignation of Cameron, Theresa May attempted and failed to bring a consensus between the differing factions within the party who were on opposite ends of the campaign. She was ultimately forced to step down and was replaced by the populist Boris Johnson who joined forces with other right-wing oriented members of the party. The Conservatives also resorted to attacks on Corbyn to drive forth their agenda. Pamphlets of the party declared that a vote for any other party other than the Conservatives would mean getting Jeremy Corbyn as Prime Minister, who they claimed had been ‘propped up by parties like the Scottish Nationalists.’³⁶³ A pamphlet for Priti Patel standing for the party from the Witham Constituency in the run up to the 2019 general elections put forward a clear choice for prospective voters; that they either vote for Boris Johnson and get a completed Brexit with the accompanying benefits such as improved police force and NHS or they simply vote for a Labour government led by Corbyn.³⁶⁴ The negative implications of the latter are effectively left to the voter’s imagination by leaving them unsaid.

In response to the increasing dominance of nationalist oriented politics in the Conservative Party, the opposition Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn attempted to join forces to counter it. Through a grassroots movement named *Momentum*, associated with the Labour Party, Corbyn was able to gain some attention with his proposal for a socialist alternative. At a time of increasing uncertainty over the ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ nature of the Brexit withdrawal, the Labour Party put forward a campaign that called for not only a soft Brexit, but also social measures for a post-Brexit scenario. It is noteworthy that *Momentum* was able to mobilize support from the younger generation which was an indicator of the discord that had emerged between the older and younger generations and their respective outlook.³⁶⁵

³⁶² Owen Worth, “The great moving Boris show: Brexit and the mainstreaming of the far right in Britain”, *Globalizations*, 2022, p.6.

³⁶³ Conservative Party Manifesto. (Accessed at London School of Economics, London on 27-06-2023).

³⁶⁴ Priti Patel, *A strong voice for the Witham Constituency*, Conservative Party Manifesto. (Accessed at London School of Economics, London on 27-06-2023).

³⁶⁵ Owen Worth, *n.2*, p.7.

The gradual inclination of British politics towards a more right-leaning and nationalist course of action was exposed by the Brexit referendum. It is interesting to note how politics and general public perception came to be dominated by anti-immigration sentiment and xenophobia. Right-wing parties who had previously championed these issues were side-lined in earlier years and it is this fact which makes the success of UKIP and the eventual overtly populist turn of the Conservative party all the more noteworthy.

The premiership of Boris Johnson from 2019 left no further doubts of the predominance of populist nationalism in British politics. Dismissing 17 ministers from May's government, he appointed a number of individuals who were notably right leaning. Also, the fact that he garnered support from various quarters of the right-wing spectrum ranging from fringe groups to noted far-right leaders such as Tommy Robinson was another indicator of the populist turn in British politics after Brexit. Johnson adopted an aggressive stance in order to push through with the problematic issue of Brexit and this included expelling a number of MPs. The removal of dissenting factions would automatically make the party more homogenous. The drastic change in Johnson's brand of politics from his previous stint as the London Mayor was noted by many. Despite always having been prone to populist gestures, he had previously supported multiculturalism and the idea of freedom of movement. The rapid departure from a relatively liberal to an increasingly closed right-wing form of politics illustrated a degree of reliance on opportunism that fuelled his rise.³⁶⁶ This helped him to widen the Conservative support base by gaining working class support which was previously not achieved by the party in recent times. Resorting to the politics of opportunity that was based on both economic and political ambiguity helped Johnson to widen the Conservative Party support base to gain support from areas in which previously the BNP and then UKIP had performed well. Areas such as the towns in north of England which had borne the brunt of Thatcher's neoliberal policies and subsequent deindustrialisation had switched their allegiance from socialism to a constricted form of nationalism propagated by these right-wing populist parties. Johnson's reliance on nativist and exclusivist politics also leaned towards English nationalism thereby alienating other sections of the Union, namely the Scottish, Irish and the Welsh who have witnessed a resurgence of separatism.³⁶⁷

The referendum and its aftermath have brought into focus the inner contradictions of the Conservative Party. *Firstly*, While the referendum witnessed members of the party of either

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p.8.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.9-10.

side of the campaign, the aftermath divided the party along the lines of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Brexiteers. The latter were ready to withdraw with some of the EU market regulations intact, while former favoured complete absence of these market restraints. Johnson’s premiership indicated the victory of the ‘hard’ Brexit faction. But inner party discord aside, the party has overall adhered to the assertion of a neoliberal standpoint in a post- Brexit situation. *Secondly*, the party has resorted to using two forms of nationalism to achieve its ends; a) parliamentary nationalism and b) ethnic nationalism. Parliamentary nationalism is an exclusivist political strategy based on the inherent assumption that the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and its underlying traditions surpass those found in Europe, leading to the implicit idea of the latter being somewhat inferior. It has led to a number of systematic contradictions equating British interests with primarily English interests, and has incurred the displeasure of the other constituent nations of the union. Both May and Johnson side-lined politicians from Scotland during the Brexit negotiations despite playing up the significance of the union. Apart from upholding an English brand of nationalism, the Conservative Party’s adherence to parliamentary nationalism has ultimately widened the gap between decision making and the common people; precisely the opposite of what they asserted during the referendum.³⁶⁸

Apart from parliamentary nationalism, the Conservative Party has also resorted to appealing to nativist sentiment. Overtly, the party has distanced itself from the inflammatory brand of ethnic nationalism associated with the likes of Enoch Powell. The party has appointed members of ethnic minorities to top posts; examples include members of Indian origin like Rishi Sunak, who was previously the Chancellor of Exchequer before being appointed as the Prime Minister and Priti Patel who held the post of Home Secretary in the Boris Johnson government. However, the party has persistently resorted to the politics of nativism especially with regard to its immigration policy. There is a fine line of difference between ethnic nationalism and nativism; the former aims at the establishment of a nation of homogeneous ethnicity and the latter seeks to maintain a particular balance of ethnicities. In this case, the Conservative Party has foregone any excessive preoccupation with ethnicity and focused on upholding the interests of the ‘natives’, i.e., British citizens over those of other nations. This has had wide reaching implications for its economic policies, especially regarding issues such as the access to labour markets and welfare benefits. The party has consistently maintained that companies should prioritize native British people while recruiting from abroad and that the former should also get priority in access to welfare services such as medical treatment. Such a series of measures

³⁶⁸ Emma Bell, *n.3.*, pp.353-355.

were designed to create a ‘hostile environment’ for migrants whereby their immigration status would be checked at every point from accessing housing to medical and educational facilities. Although the Conservative Party has outwardly eschewed ethnic nationalism, its hostile stance towards migrants indicates a growing trend toward nativist politics. It has presented migrants as being at odds with British liberal values and being devoid of liberal qualities and values such as self-help and responsibility. Therefore, the party has succeeded in stigmatizing migrants through measures designed to deter them at every step. Only by focusing on the cultural aspect, rather than the racial and the ethnic has the party been able to separate its brand of exclusivist nationalism from the brand exercised by extreme-right groups. In doing so, it has been able to preserve its liberal democratic credentials.³⁶⁹

It can be ascertained that as with other such centre-right parties in Europe, the Conservative Party has undergone successive phases of recalibration in tune with the changing political environment. But its turn towards a notably populist direction under Johnson is surprising in the sense that such marked a departure from its previous centrist push. It is an instance of a right-wing populist party such as UKIP exerting indirect influence over a mainstream party to change its policies.

The other major mainstream oppositional force that needs to be examined is the Labour Party and the various ideological complications that have risen in the course of its evolution. The Labour Party holds the distinction of having enjoyed the support of the ethnic minority communities in the UK since its early days.³⁷⁰ However, many have questioned its adherence to its ideological roots in the face of electoral prospects. It has been accused of favouring ‘traditionalism’ over socialism. Such an idea of traditionalism meant accepting the conventional notions of Britishness and British culture. Labour was founded in 1900 by a section of trade unions and reform-oriented socialists with the goal of representing labour and improving their working conditions but it was never revolutionary by nature. After becoming the major opposition to the Conservatives in 1918, it began to think beyond simple representation and work towards maximising support across all classes in order to fulfil the ambition of holding national office. The steady evolution of the party reveals how it has generally struck a balance between trying to maintain its universal image on one hand while catering to the pressures of electoral interest on the other. This has often led to inner contention

³⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.356-358.

³⁷⁰ Steven Fielding and Andrew Geddes, “The British Labour Party and ‘ethnic entryism’: Participation, integration and the Party context”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1998, p.59.

between the those on either side of ‘principle’ or ‘pragmatism.’ This is particularly evident in its approach to black immigration from the commonwealth after the war. The members, on the side of ‘principle’, opposed discriminatory legislation such as the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) on the grounds that a colour-based system of immigration would be contrary to principles of social justice and equality. Other members, no doubt ‘pragmatists’ viewed this type of legislation as a necessary evil so as to keep their voter base intact and not alienate racist sections who comprised part of it.³⁷¹

Despite its shortcomings, the Labour Party has historically been proactive in taking a stance against far-right groups as well as in the inclusion of ethnic minority groups within its ranks. An instance of the former is a statement released by the party in 1978 in response to the far-right group, the National Front. The statement underlined the commitment of the ‘Labour movement’ to counter the spread of racial hatred and divisive racist propaganda. To do so it set out an extensive framework of proposals which included amending the Race Relations Act to deal with the problem of marches and the general incitement of racial hatred by the National Front. It also advised Labour candidates not to share any public platforms, be it on radio or television, with members of the National Front.³⁷² The Labour Party has also been active in the area of engaging ethnic minorities. This is illustrated in its ‘Gulab’ endeavour targeting the Asian community, with ‘Gulab’ referring to the Labour Party logo of a rose. The aims and objectives included providing a platform for Asian communities within the Labour Party and disseminating Labour ideals more widely among the former. It also sought to promote more Asian representation at the local level of the Labour government, within the wider common goal of establishing a Labour government.³⁷³ The party has also worked towards establishing ‘race working groups’ under the aegis of its ‘race equality programme’ which sought to promote ‘understanding and respect for the cultures and religions of all racial groups’ and encouraging their participation in processes of decision-making.³⁷⁴

The coming to power of the rejuvenated Labour Party (‘New Labour’) in 1997 symbolized a new chapter in British politics with the promise of ‘anti-racist politics.’ Till then, a series of

³⁷¹ Ibid., pp.61-63.

³⁷² *Statement by the National Executive Committee, Response to the National Front*, The Labour Party, September 1978. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

³⁷³ *Asians for Labour Victory*, 18th May, 1987. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

³⁷⁴ *Race Working Group: Minutes of the Meeting Held on 8th March in the House of Commons*, Labour Party, 8th March, 1989. (Accessed at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge on 20-06-2023).

Conservative governments from 1979 had effectively eroded minority voices by emphasizing on the importance of preserving the 'British way of life' from perceived internal attacks. It was felt that Labour would transform the discourse of race politics for the better.³⁷⁵ Subsequently, New Labour came to be lauded for its achievements in the area of race relations. Detractors have pointed out the underlying modes of discrimination towards asylum seekers which have led to the normalisation of racism towards them. Squire argues that Labour's stance towards migration operated through a conception that was 'monocultural.' This points to the fact that the party's professed brand of multiculturalism, rather than being anti-racist like it claimed, was actually geared towards the homogenisation of diversity through processes such as 'assimilation through segregation.'³⁷⁶ The early part of New Labour's first term in government witnessed a celebration of diversity. Multiculturalism was upheld and series of policies were implemented to uphold the new idea of 'Cool Britannia'. The party was keen to promote its vision of modernising the country and encouraging cultural diversity.³⁷⁷ It directed its focus towards local communities where it attempted to infuse its model of multiculturalism on a micro level. Such a strategy included advancing the ideas of 'learning democratic mores' and 'learning to be civilized.'³⁷⁸ Despite this promising start it eventually fell back on an approach inclined towards assimilation. Hence Labour's conception of a nation shifted to an assimilative idea based on a 'cohesive' nation rather than an integrative one of 'communities of communities', the latter being multicultural and the former monocultural.³⁷⁹

It cannot be denied that New Labour attempted to live up to its promise of promoting diversity. In 1998, a new Race Relations Forum was announced which would include a number of advisors from professionals and politicians from ethnic minorities. Organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) were recognized by the party in order to open up avenues of consultation with the Muslim community. However, such tactics often backfired; the MCB publicly denounced the war in Afghanistan in 2001 only a few days after sending a delegation to Downing Street. This prompted critics to point out that Blair was faced with the problem of how 'to balance the bombing of Muslims abroad with wooing them at home.'³⁸⁰ It is evident that while New Labour set a new precedent in its promotion of multiculturalism and diversity,

³⁷⁵ Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Khan, Kalbir Shukra and John Solomos, "The Return of Assimilationism: Race, Multiculturalism and New Labour", *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2002.

³⁷⁶ Vicki Squire, "'Integration with diversity in modern Britain': New Labour on nationality, immigration and asylum", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol.10, No.1, 2005, pp.51-52.

³⁷⁷ Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Khan, Kalbir Shukra and John Solomos, *n.2*.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ Vicki Squire, *n.2*, p.56.

³⁸⁰ Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Khan, Kalbir Shukra and John Solomos, *n.4*.

policies to aid these agendas often came with their own inner contradictions.

Another area of ambivalence during New Labour's term in office was its approach towards immigration, particularly its policy of 'managed migration.' Managed migration attempted to strike a balance between an adherence to the traditional idea of a nation-state on one hand and a globalized neoliberal economic model of growth on the other. The difficulties of such a trade-off became apparent in its response towards tackling refugees and migrant labourers.³⁸¹ Managed migration attempted to categorize migrants into 'good' or 'bad' in terms of whether they are 'wanted' or 'unwanted' respectively. Such a system made it clear that labour migration would be welcomed while other groups such as asylum seekers would be dealt with stringently.³⁸² Such terms generally implied that being uncompromising with 'unwanted' migrants was meant to compensate in some way for maintaining those migrants who were prized by employers. The government also greatly encouraged international students who contributed much to the Higher Education sector.³⁸³ This system was geared to facilitate the entry of highly skilled migrants through work-permit systems and also low-skilled workers through measures such as various employment schemes. Managed migration continued without much opposition during the initial phase of Labour's time in office. Since the media focused on political migrants exclusively, economic migrants were overlooked. Only with the imminent enlargement of the EU in 2004 did economic migration begin to get increasing attention from the public as well as other quarters.³⁸⁴ Squire has opined that this demarcation of migration into welcome and unwelcome varieties was a marker for the inclusion or exclusion of migrants in relation to the nation. As a result, New Labour ultimately followed a monoculturalist version of diversity based on the acceptance of those considered to be suitable for assimilation and segregating those who are not deemed to be assimilable.³⁸⁵

In the context of New Labour's promotion of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, it is also necessary to analyse its conception of nationalism. The idea of nationalism has usually been the preserve of the right and has historically been associated with movements seeking to overthrow the existing order. The Left has been critical in its approach towards nationalism and has considered it an impediment to fostering international peace. Harold Laski proposed a

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Gareth Mulvey, "Immigration Under New Labour: Policy and Effects", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 9, 2011, p.1478.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.1483-1485.

³⁸⁵ Vicki Squire, *n.3*, pp.60-61.

‘world community’ of nations based on the renunciation of national sovereignty. New Labour subscribed to a brand of post-nationalism which would embrace globalization and deepening ties with Europe. The question of national identity assumed prominence in the wake of the terrorist attacks in London in 2005. Erstwhile Prime Minister Gordon Brown justified a civic form of nationalism that would be suited to a multicultural nation. However, this automatically excluded a section of the white population who were opposed to multiculturalism. As a result, the party ended up alienating those who fell behind the tide of neoliberal economic progress. What New Labour did was to effectively ensure that identity became removed from the idea of class, making it localized. The gap left by Labour in addressing the growing nationalist claims was exploited by parties like the BNP and later by the likes of UKIP to strengthen their arguments against immigration. While in its later phases, New Labour attempted to toughen its stance on immigration, it came to be viewed as ‘soft’ on the issue.³⁸⁶

In recent times, Labour has been proposing policies that would engage and empower local communities to deal with issues that directly affect them. It has also maintained its pro-EU and pro-immigration standpoint. In its 2015 manifesto for the general elections, the party underlined the importance it places on EU and the fact that it considers the economic aspect of EU membership to be ‘overwhelming.’ Also, it did not promise a direct referendum on membership, instead proposing to ‘legislate for a lock’ to prevent the any undue transfer of power to the EU from the UK without attaining consent by means of a referendum. It made it clear that its main aim was to tackle the economic issues facing Britain, not to take it out of the EU.³⁸⁷ In the aftermath of the referendum it continued to strongly uphold its pro-immigration stance;

“In trade negotiations our priorities favour growth, jobs and prosperity. We make no apologies for putting these aims before bogus immigration targets.’³⁸⁸

Former leader Jeremy Corbyn proposed measures such as the renationalisation of railways. Wresting power back from the hands of foreign forces of capital can be viewed as a form of economic nationalism. Moreover, apart from attempting to foster an alternate model of nationalism, Labour also has to ensure that it does not fall under the sway of ethnic nationalism like the Tories. It has to ensure that opposition to foreign economic forces does not

³⁸⁶ Emma Bell, *n.4.*, pp.361-362.

³⁸⁷ *Britain can be better, The Labour Party Manifesto 2015.*

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/03265/LabourPartyManifes_3265486a.pdf (Accessed on 4th March, 2024).

³⁸⁸ *For the Many, Not the Few, The Labour Party Manifesto 2017.* (Accessed on 4th March, 2024).

automatically translate into ill feeling towards migrant workers. The party has accepted that immigration needs controlled while at the same time opposing discrimination against immigrants.³⁸⁹ Hence Labour has to strike a fine balance in advancing its version of nationalism so that it does not transform into a narrow brand of ethnic nationalism which would run contrary to its ideological underpinnings. It should be noted that Corbyn was suspended from the party in 2020 over his dismissive reaction to claims of anti-Semitism in the party. It is evident that in recent years, Labour has faced a great many contradictions in its approach towards tackling nationalism. While distancing itself from a narrow brand of ethnic nationalism, it has also had to ensure that it does not develop any discriminatory tendencies which would counter its egalitarian principles.

Labour's performance during Brexit has been characterized by the same ambiguity that has been visible in earlier phases. This has been also been reflected in the ambivalence of the leadership under Jeremy Corbyn during that time. Labour had been in a position of strategic advantage at the time of the referendum, which it could have used as a leverage to advance the cause for Remain. The majority of its members supported Remain, with only very few MPs declaring any intention of voting to leave the EU. However, it was not able to take advantage of these favourable conditions due a number of reasons. Firstly, its leader Corbyn had only unenthusiastically agreed to the party's Remain stance; this was mainly due to the fact that he had been a long-established critic of the EU based on his prominent left-wing ideological position. This led to a perception in the among many pro-Remain voters that Corbyn had failed to do enough to make the case for Remain. Secondly, the Labour voters themselves remained undecided on the issue of Brexit with a third of them being opposed to the EU. The task of bringing together the pro-Remain voters and convincing those against the EU to switch to the side of Remain proved to be a mammoth task for Corbyn who himself was ambivalent on the matter. Due to the varying voter profiles and the deep divisions in their stance, conditions became all the unfavourable for the party to bring the Eurosceptic voters under its wing. The low turnout of Labour voters went against the party. Figures revealed that compared to the high turnout for Conservative, Liberal Democrat and UKIP voters in the referendum (83% for Conservatives, 80% for Liberal Democrats and 86% for UKIP, only 73% of those had voted for Labour in the previous election in 2015 voted in the referendum. The low turnout illustrates another problem faced by Labour mainly being the fact that despite enjoying the support of minority ethnic communities as well as those of a lower socio-economic stratum, turnout

³⁸⁹ Emma Bell, *n.5.*, pp.361-362.

amongst these categories of voters is generally low. Due to these conflicting reasons, Labour found itself in the position of having to devise an electoral strategy that would straddle the interests of the ‘have nots’ and the ‘haves’, the latter being its base of cosmopolitan middle-class pro-EU voters.³⁹⁰

It is interesting to note the role played by Brexit in exposing the contradictions of that can arise from the interplay of two systems; the intricacies of representative democracy on one hand and an apparatus of direct democracy such as referendum on the other. The implementation of a mechanism of direct democracy such as a referendum brought to light the divergent nature of public opinion regarding the withdrawal, thereby contributing to the erosion of the two-party system. It is a fact that the machinations of a first-past-the-post electoral system in a democracy serves as a hindrance to the rise of new parties. But the increasing prevalence of ‘catch-all’ mainstream parties who aim to encompass diverse interests in order to widen their base was challenged by the referendum. Brexit forced these parties to unequivocally accept a definite stance in relation to a divisive issue.³⁹¹ It is evident that the referendum highlighted not only the inner contradictions of the two main parties, but of the political system itself.

The inner ambiguities of the Labour Party became visible during the referendum and this had much to do with the stand taken by Corbyn. He adopted a dual stance which served, no less to obfuscate the very nature of intentions. He made it clear that it was not the EU, but the Conservatives which posed the main threat to the welfare of the country. He advocated maintaining a critical perspective towards the EU without necessarily withdrawing from it altogether. He therefore tried to strike a balance between both sides of the Brexit argument, summed up in his ‘Remain and Reform’ position. The ambiguity of his position led many to question whether he was actually in favour of remaining at all. Labour faced a great deal of criticism over this chaotic approach to Brexit with many senior former figures even urging Corbyn to rectify it.³⁹² It was also felt by some that Labour had adopted a pragmatic position after the referendum, favouring a ‘soft’ Brexit. Such a strategy would basically depend on the Conservatives failing in their purpose of carrying through with Brexit, while Labour would maintain a minimal level of engagement with the matter.³⁹³ Labour continued to keep the possibility of a second referendum open, declaring in one of its 2019 election manifestos that

³⁹⁰ Emmanuelle Avril, “Labour and the Interplay of Brexit and Electoral Politics”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2021, pp. 336-337.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.338.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.339-340.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.345.

it supports the option of a ‘public vote’ in the event that it cannot bring about changes to the Conservatives’ ‘bad deals’ on Brexit.³⁹⁴ In personalized messages to voters, it presented the Conservatives as part of ‘the far right, spearheaded by Johnson, Farage and Trump alliance’ which would not only diminish what influence UK has in the world but also offer the dire alternatives of ‘a privatised NHS’ and ‘chlorinated chicken.’ In contrast a Labour government would offer ‘hope and opportunity for everyone.’³⁹⁵

Corbyn’s position as Labour leader is significant within the context of this study due to the stark contrast between his leadership and that of Farage. Corbyn symbolized a traditional left-wing perspective with a background of campaigning against issues such as Britain’s involvement in the Middle East war. As mentioned earlier, he was instrumental in launching the grassroots civil society movement called *Momentum* that was formed as separate entity from the Labour Party. It gained popularity for presenting ‘common-sense’ arguments against the government’s policies, it was also responsible for highlighting the increasing role of social media as opposed to the historical dominance of the traditional media. The powerful British media have always exercised immense influence over the politics of the country and were also responsible for a great number of personal attacks on Corbyn. Despite resting on foundations of left-wing radicalism, the Momentum movement under Corbyn attempted to create a new brand of neo-liberal political engagement upholding ‘humanitarianism, pacifism and internationalism rather than merely an inward-looking form of left nationalism.’³⁹⁶

The contrast in the political discourse of Corbyn and Farage is also noteworthy as an indicator of the schism between the politics of the left and the populist politics of the right. While they both have resorted to adopting some form of populist tactics in order to gain acceptance among the common man, there remained several differentiating factors between the two, as well as some points in common. One study has analysed these differences by evaluating their respective approaches to three crucial populist signifiers, namely ‘the people’, ‘elite antagonism’ and the adoption of ‘cultural and economic’ class themes. In the case of the signifier ‘the people’, both leaders attempted to encompass a large section of the population though in different ways. Farage used the signifier ‘the people’ but left its meaning ‘open’ in order to include within its scope a wide range of voices disillusioned with the political elite.

³⁹⁴ *Labour will bring our country together*, Labour Party manifesto. (Accessed at London School of Economics, London on 27-06-2023).

³⁹⁵ Labour Party pamphlet. (Accessed at London School of Economics, London on 27-06-2023).

³⁹⁶ Owen Worth, “The new left, Jeremy Corbyn and the war of position: a new coherence or further fragmentation?”, *Globalizations*, Vol. 16, No.4, 2019, pp.494-497.

Farage resorted to the politics of nationalism and the typical populist ploy of dismissing experts. On the other hand, Corbyn's interpretation of 'the people' was more inclusive. It attempted to articulate the interests of a wide section of the population ranging from the working classes to minority communities and unite them to challenge the country's 'unjust and unfair society.' To do so, some aspects of his politics overlapped with the populist rhetoric used by the right, namely the clash between the people and the elite.³⁹⁷ The second signifier, i.e. 'elite antagonism' reveals some commonalities in the political discourse of both Farage and Corbyn. Farage strongly presented the political elites as being opposed to the interests of 'the people.' The political parties are seen as working for the vested interests of the corporate elites. Similar to the rhetoric of UKIP, Corbyn accused the Conservatives of joining forces with the capitalist elite at the cost of the common man.³⁹⁸ In terms of the final signifier i.e. 'cultural and economic class', Farage approached it in a way as to widen his support base by means of adopting a deliberately ambiguous posture. He attempted to include both the middle classes as well as the lower income groups such as the working classes. On the other hand, Corbyn adopted an approach more based on the criteria of economic class. Corbyn's discourse was based on a class-based interpretation of issues and he made repeated references to the need to reach out to disadvantaged communities. Therefore, Corbyn's rhetoric mainly emphasized on economic class by underlining the gap between the privileged and the deprived.³⁹⁹ From this comparison it is evident that both the leaders used some form of populist rhetoric to articulate discontent with the governing elite. But on closer analysis, it is evident that while Corbyn mainly stuck to his left leaning ideological sympathies, Farage used the populist tactic of remaining ambiguous in terms of ideology as well as the targeted base through the open-ended use of signifiers such as 'the people.'

Corbyn's contribution in presenting a left-wing alternative movement to the prevalent politics of the right is important in the analysis of oppositional forces to right-wing populism in the UK. He has been representative of the opposition to the forces of the right that became manifested not only prior to the referendum but continued after it. Being a traditional left-winger meant that his brand of politics signalled a departure from the likes of former leaders like Tony Blair who had made the party increasingly centrist in order to revive its image. But it seems that Corbyn, despite his success with the Momentum movement, seemed destined to

³⁹⁷ Callum Tindall, "Populism, culture and class: articulation and performance in contemporary British populism", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2022, pp.130-131.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.132-133.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

failure in the climate of right leaning politics in the UK that was evident not only by the popularity of Farage, but also of Boris Johnson who seemed to articulate a similar brand of populist politics as Farage.

The case of UK presents an instance of a right-wing populist party breaking through the invisible barrier impeding the rise of such parties in a stable two-party democratic set up. It is an ideal prototype of a right-wing populist party thriving in a given period of time, under a charismatic leader and subsequently disintegrating when deprived of the narrow agenda that made it successful in the first place. Britain differs from many other countries in mainland Europe in the sense that it has had a vast experience of dealing with immigration and integration of minorities. Coupled with this is the reality of its imperial history that has equipped it to deal with problems of immigration within a mature democratic framework. That is not to say that it does not have its share of deep-rooted problems, but a right-wing populist parties would always face a formidable challenge in rising above fringe status in the British political system.

CHAPTER 4

AUSTRIA

On February 4, 2000 Austria and the world witnessed the swearing in of the FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs/ Freedom Party of Austria) as a coalition partner, the first right-wing party to enter government in a European country since the Second World War. Europe and the western world had previously watched in consternation as the FPÖ, under maverick leader Jörg Haider won second place in parliament in the Austrian national elections in 1999. The early days in government witnessed retaliation from several countries in the EU. 14 member countries of the EU downgraded their relations with Austria to a strictly bureaucratic level while the European Commission made it clear that any violation of its values by Austria would lead to the latter's expulsion from the EU.⁴⁰⁰ The wider international reaction was no less acerbic. Despite faring poorly in its first stint in power, the FPÖ came back once again as a partner in 2017, riding on the back of wave of anti-immigration sentiment occasioned by the 2015-16 refugee crisis.

This chapter analyses the political fortunes of the FPÖ in the last two decades. Similar to the other two case studies, this chapter is also divided into three main sections. The *first* section deals with the *evolution of right-wing populism* in Austria, the historical sense of denial pertaining to its role in the war as well as the unique nature of the Austrian political system all of which are responsible for the high degree of tolerance for right-wing populist politics in Austria. The *second* section analyses the *role of immigration* in the rise of right-wing populism in a country with a high-degree of anti-immigration sentiment. The *final* section examines the part played by *oppositional forces* in mainstream Austrian politics which, rather than opposing, often end up collaborating with the FPÖ. This chapter charts the rise of the right-wing populist FPÖ in the backdrop of the wider context of the debates revolving around post-war Austrian history, national identity as well as newer challenges such as immigration and integration.

⁴⁰⁰ Anton Pelinka, "The Haider Phenomenon in Austria: Examining the FPÖ in European Context", *The Journal of the International Institute*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, Fall 2001. Source: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0009.102/--haider-phenomenon-in-austria-examining-the-fpo-in-european?rgn=main;view=fulltext> (Accessed on November 10, 2023).

Right-wing populism in Austria: Evolution and Current trends

Role of history in shaping post-war national identity and perceptions of the right

Austria is viewed as a prototype of a European political system in which right-wing populism has attained a degree of success and acceptance. To study the emergence and success of right-wing populism in Austria, it is necessary to look into a multitude of factors which also includes its postwar history and the complex underpinnings of its national identity. Austria in the last few decades has been a 'transition society', a term which defines its unique position as a neutral country distanced from both the liberal capitalist bloc on one hand and the communist one on the other, even at the height of the Cold War. This self-imposed isolation and tailored domestic market economy, referred to as 'Austro-corporatism' led Austrians to consider their socio-economic system to be advanced and superior to its neighbours. This sense of contentment is aptly summarized in the adage that Austrians considered themselves as 'living on an island of the blessed' where 'the clocks were ticking at a different pace.'⁴⁰¹

The contextual background of the success of right-wing populism in Austria is based firmly on its postwar legacy and sense of national identity. Like Germany, Austria had to undergo a process of denazification, but it progressed along radically different trajectory. The inception point for this discussion lies in the fact that Austria portrayed itself as 'Hitler's first victim,' thereby largely absolving itself of responsibility for the atrocities of National Socialism. This was the unchallenged narrative in Austria regarding its role in the Second World War. This 'victim thesis' originated in the Moscow Declaration of 1943, where the Allies underlined Austria's supposed victim status by declaring it to be 'the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression.' This ultimately became the cornerstone for Austrian identity in the postwar years, an identity based on the selective expunging of wartime memory.⁴⁰²

This fatalistic self-identification as victims was untrue historically since many facts pointed to the reality that the Austrians were anything but. For instance, a large number of Austrians were in favour of Anschluss or annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938. Furthermore, shortly after this annexation took place, Austrian Nazis succeeded in stripping 190,000 Jews of their rights, thereby exhibiting an expediency that outstripped even their German Nazi counterparts. Apart from the glaring fact that Hitler himself was Austrian, the Austrian obsession with racial purity

⁴⁰¹ Reinhard Heinisch, "Right-Wing Populism in Austria: *A Case for Comparison*", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, no. 3, May/June 2008, p.40.

⁴⁰² Judith Beniston, "Hitler's First Victim"? — Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria", *Austrian Studies*, Vol. 11, 2003 pp. 2-3.

served as an example even for the Germans. These facts point to a reality that is very much different from image was portrayed by the Second Republic. However, such wilful and deliberate misrepresentation had a number of negative outcomes. It portrayed all Austrians as victims and undermined the crucial points of distinction separating actual victims and perpetrators and collaborators. The crimes perpetrated by Austrians became blotted out and the fascist mindset continued to be perpetuated under a veil of victimhood.⁴⁰³ This revised version of history also had the effect of misrepresenting the general Austrian public perception of the National Socialist regime. It systematically underestimated the sudden financial enrichment of Austria under the Third Reich, at the cost of ‘Aryanization’ or the removal of Jews. The war itself was not felt keenly in several parts of Austria, rather the hardships for the general population were felt more after the war. For them, the Nazi regime was hardly as terrifying as it had been for others and it was not viewed as a ‘foreign regime’ per se.⁴⁰⁴

Historically, the ethnic basis of Austrian society has been rooted in Germanic and Slavic heritage. However, the influences shaping Austrian society are many, and there are a number of cultural and linguistic differences along with prevalent dichotomies such as the conflict between Catholic and secular forces and as well as between rural/ urban clash between tradition and modernity. The construction of an Austrian identity came about gradually.⁴⁰⁵ Austria had historically been a part of the larger Habsburg empire, one of the largest multi-ethnic empires in Europe. However, even up till 1867, large sections of the empire suffered from a lack of belonging or identity thus leading to the consolidation of parochial regional identities.⁴⁰⁶ Austrian history reveals that there have been several aborted attempts at nation-building and Austrian identity has been indelibly linked with a German one. The long rule of the Habsburg monarchy ended after the First World War and it was accepted that the territorially small country, i.e. Austria that had emerged from the dissolution of the multi-ethnic empire could not be sustained on its own. The solution to this dilemma was believed to lie in the union with Germany. This aspiration ultimately failed to materialize since the victors of the First World War forbade any such attempt. With Austria’s annexation into Germany in 1938, the Austrian identity and population came to be subsumed within a larger German framework. This

⁴⁰³ Werner Wintersteiner, “Angel of Oblivion. Literature and memory politics in Austria”, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2019, pp.386-387.

⁴⁰⁴ John Bunzl, “Austrian identity and antisemitism”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1987, p.4.

⁴⁰⁵ Reinhard Heinisch, ‘Austria: The Structure and Agency of Austrian Populism’ in Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, eds., *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, p.73.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.72.

unification was willingly accepted by the Austrian population who welcomed the German troops with open arms. Ironically, the process of building a national identity succeeded after the Second World War, under the guise of the 'victim doctrine' which brought together the Austrian population. This unlikely identity creation was firmly based on underlining Austria's distinction from Germany. Interestingly, while previously the subsumption with the German identity and nation had been the driving aspiration of the Austrian political elite, the defining principle of post-war Austria became the uncoupling from Germany and German identity. The notion of a unified Austrian nation came into being by shifting the blame of National Socialism to Germany and self-proclaiming itself as a victim of Hitler's aggression. For the Austrian nation and Austrian identity to come into its own, Germany had to be presented as the 'significant other.'⁴⁰⁷

To understand this complicated relationship with Germany, it would be pertinent to understand the roots of this connection. The original historical discourse, which now overlooked, presents the notion of a 'single German(ic) nation', thereby dissolving any lines of demarcation between Austria and Germany. This version of Austrian history, whereby it is viewed as a subsection of a larger pan-German identity has now been discredited. Regardless of the forcible over-writing of history, the enthused acceptance of the Nazi regime by the Austrian public is testament to the fact that originally Austrian and German identity were viewed as one and the same. The idea of Austria comprising a part of the German people (Volk) was the dominant 'interpretative paradigm' in the inter-war years.⁴⁰⁸

It is interesting to note the complete reversal of the Austrian attitude towards Germans, in the immediate aftermath of the war and beyond. Some scholars have suggested that this excessively rapid transformation was a way of 'overcompensating' for supporting Nazism. According to Matthias Pape, this overt hatred was not an accurate representation of public sympathies, rather it reflected the Germanophobe attitude of the elites.⁴⁰⁹ The postwar representation of Germany as the 'other' by perpetuating the myth of Austrian innocence became symbolic of Austria's decision to distance itself from any sort of accountability for the

⁴⁰⁷ Martin Tschiggerl, "Significant otherness nation-building and identity in postwar Austria", *Nations and Nationalism* (Journal of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism). December 30, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/nana.12677> (Accessed on November 10, 2023).

⁴⁰⁸ Christian Karner, 'The 'Habsburg Dilemma' Today: Competing Discourses of National Identity in Contemporary Austria', *National Identities*, Vol. 7, No. 4, December 2005, pp. 411- 412.

⁴⁰⁹ Robert Knight, "National Construction Work and Hierarchies of Empathy in Postwar Austria", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 49, No.3, 2014, p.497.

war. The postwar Austrian identity based on ‘amnesia’ and selective historical representation contrasted starkly with Germany’s attempts to come to terms with its past. Scholars have also raised the question whether the suppression of any links with German identity is a calculated move to further repress memories relating to Austria’s involvement in the Holocaust and the horrors of the war. Furthermore, this ‘hegemonic reimagining’ of Austria’s singularity may also be an attempt to avoid the divisive forces that had emerged in the interwar years. Peter Thaler opines that the postwar emphasis on Austria’s distinctiveness was set against the backdrop of rapid economic development and the consolidation of the education system that aimed to strengthen the restrictions on the ‘Germanist discourse.’ These measures had their desired outcome; a series of polls conducted between 1956 and 1987 revealed that there was a steady increase in the percentage of Austrians identifying themselves as ‘a separate people’ rather than as ethnic Germans. This was a massive affirmation of the success of the postwar re-education programmes.⁴¹⁰

Keeping in mind the nature of Austria’s ambivalent relationship with its past, it is not difficult to see why denazification was a failure there. The entire process of denazification in Austria was accomplished in a number of phases. The initial phase was dominated by the overt rejection of National Socialist ideals. This was accomplished by emphasizing the distinction between Austrian and German attributes in order to portray the former as being distanced from German ‘militarism.’⁴¹¹ A number of laws were passed such as the Prohibition Statute (1945) and the National Socialist Law (1947) which not only outlined the process of denazification, but also the complete termination of the Nazi Party. There was a crackdown on former members, who had to face varying degrees of punishment for their participation in Nazi organisations. These individuals were categorized as ranging from ‘incriminated’ to ‘less incriminated’ as per their degree of involvement and the outcome could be anything from the imprisonment to the confiscation of property and banning of employment. Former members of the National Socialist Party were also stripped of voting rights.⁴¹²

These measures proved inadequate; due to the fact that not only was there a general lack of accountability, but also an unwillingness to face the wronged Jewish community. Of the huge number who had been systematically killed in the concentration camps, only a negligible number returned. Their ability to return was further impeded by not only memories of the

⁴¹⁰ Christian Karner, *n2*, p. 417.

⁴¹¹ Siegfried Göllner, “The politics of denazification: parliamentary debates in Austria, 1945–57”, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2018, p.79.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p.77.

horrors of the war, but also the reluctance of the new Austrian republic to invite them back. Surprisingly, returning Jews were denied any opportunities for reemployment. This deliberate omission can be attributed to the fact that the presence of Jews would be a glaring reminder of the memories of war and this would have been detrimental to the exclusivist reinterpretation of history in postwar Austria.⁴¹³ It is noteworthy that even in this initial phase, the gradual facilitation of the return of former Nazis to public life was evident. While it was generally accepted that guilty individuals should be severely punished, Mitläufer or ordinary followers of the Nazi party who had not been proactively involved, were granted less severe punishment. The ÖVP, as early as in 1945 proactively promoted a policy of ‘forgive and forget’ and also amnesty for former Nazis who had not been involved in war crimes.⁴¹⁴ With such limited scope, it is not difficult to gauge why denazification was a failure in Austria.

The second phase of denazification was characterised by a growing resentment against the National Socialist Law that had been reformed by the Allies to prolong and magnify the punishment for Nazis. The law was viewed as a forcible imposition on Austria, thus easing the way for the reinstatement of erstwhile members of the National Socialist Party. This period also witnessed a steady shift in attention away from anti-fascism to anti-communism in keeping up with the increasing dominance of the Cold War. The main point of focus during this phase became the ‘unjust suffering’ of the ‘victims’ of denazification and the major political parties such as the Socialist Party and the ÖVP began to distance themselves from denazification. The redirecting of focus to the tribulations of former Nazis eventually paved the way for their re-entry into public life.⁴¹⁵

The third phase of denazification involved the transition from the ostracization of former National Socialists to their eventual reintroduction to post war society. While the decision may seem questionable, historians have attributed it to the evolving dynamics of the Cold War. On one hand, it was felt that the success of parliamentary democracy depended on the eventual inclusion of former National Socialists in the political system. On the other hand, by pragmatically considering the economic consequences it was felt that there was a necessity to reintegrate many individuals who had been removed from their specialist jobs due to their Nazi credentials. It thus followed logically that the huge number of former National Socialists had to be reintroduced into society out of nothing but sheer necessity. However, this had effect of

⁴¹³ John Bunzl, *n.2*, p.6.

⁴¹⁴ Siegfried Göllner, *n.2*, pp.79-80.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.80-81.

trivializing their participation in the horrors of the war and contributing to the lack of accountability of Austria regarding their involvement in the same. Due to the nature of excusing the former National Socialists by underlining their ‘unjust’ treatment, their victim narrative became all the more entrenched.⁴¹⁶ The process of reintegration of former Nazis reached such proportions that parties started competing amongst themselves to recruit these former Nazis. Opinion polls revealed alarming trends amongst the Austrian public; not only was there a prevalent tendency to shift the blame to Germany by refusing to accept any share of the blame, levels of antisemitic tendencies continued to be high. The Austrian public harboured a deeply entrenched proclivity to overlook antisemitic activities, including statements made by top ranking politicians. Various surveys revealed that there was high degree of tolerance towards public proclamations of antisemitism by politicians amongst the Austrian public, in comparison to their German, French or American counterparts.⁴¹⁷

From a discursive point of view, it is pertinent to ask how the whole process of denazification was undermined. Initially it was discredited as being detrimental to the postwar democratic process to the extent that it was equated with oppression of the Nazi regime. However, in keeping with the climate of the Cold War, it was later discredited and viewed under the same suspicious lens as communism. Denazification came to be viewed as an attempt to transform Austrian society into a communist one, along the same lines as what the Soviet Union had accomplished in the erstwhile East Germany. With the gradual entrenchment of this narrative, it was accepted that the repealing of the denazification laws absolutely essential. The ÖVP viewed the termination of denazification as ‘the end of a spiral of inhumanity, of an automatism of persecution that would have happened with every change of regime.’⁴¹⁸ Thus, it can be inferred that the process of denazification was more or less doomed from its inception, and one of the major reasons for this was the firm belief of Austrians that it was they who were the wronged party.

The complicated politics of memory is a crucial part of understanding the relative success of right-wing politics in the country. Coming to terms with the past has not progressed along a linear trajectory. A landmark in Austrian memory politics was the 1986 Waldheim Affair involving Kurt Waldheim, a former Secretary-General of the United Nations and former President of Austria. The controversy arose when it came to light that Waldheim had

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

⁴¹⁷ John Bunzl, *n.3*, p.6.

⁴¹⁸ Siegfried Göllner, *n.5*, pp.85-86.

deliberately misrepresented himself as being an ordinary soldier in the German army during the war, who had like other Austrians, simply carried out their basic duties. However, it came to light that he had, in fact, been a high-ranking officer who had been involved in the mass deportation of Jews in Thessaloniki, Greece. This deliberate repression of the truth by such a high-profile public figure came to be representative of Austria's selective and exclusivist memory politics. Despite the lack of direct evidence pertaining to whether he participated in war crimes, the wilful prevarication on his part as well as the refusal to resign as President even in the aftermath of the ensuing scandal became indicative of the culture of overlooking and disparaging wartime wrongs. After the Waldheim scandal, and the accompanying international repercussions, it became more commonplace to not only reassess the past but also to conduct more thorough background checks of individuals. Other measures such as education of younger generations to build a culture of analysis and criticism of Austria's role in the war and the returning of assets of victims of the Holocaust became a part of the evolution Austria's relationship with its past.⁴¹⁹ In recent years, much has been done to create a 'culture of remembrance' in Austria in place of the historical tendency towards outright denial. This includes setting up memorials and conducting research into the Nazi past and in general, bringing conversations regarding Austria's Nazi past into the mainstream.⁴²⁰

What remains to be noted is that Austria is a country with a high degree of pride in national identity. According to a survey examining the level of national pride in Western Europe, Austria fared much higher than Germany. In this survey respondents were asked whether they were 'very' or 'somewhat' proud of their nationality. 43% of Austrians claimed to be 'very proud' while 43% were 'somewhat proud.' Germans were among those who were the least likely to be 'very' proud of their nationality with only 32% responding as such and 46% as 'somewhat' proud.⁴²¹ The difference in perceptions of pride in national identity is an indicator of how post-war denazification and identity formations occurred in the two countries.

⁴¹⁹ Werner Wintersteiner, "Angel of Oblivion. Literature and memory politics in Austria", *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2019, p.388.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.398.

⁴²¹ Pew Research Center, "Nationalism, immigration and minorities", May 29, 2018. Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/nationalism-immigration-and-minorities/> (Accessed on November 28, 2023).

Right-wing populism: past and present

An analysis of right-wing populism in Austria would naturally focus on the Freedom Party (FPÖ) which became a hallmark of a successful right-wing party in a western democratic set up. The aims and guiding principles of the party are in tune with its right-leaning ideology, as expressed in its official website. It places a great degree of importance on Austrian national identity, 'Heimat' and the need to preserve the way of life and culture of Austria. It also makes it clear that Austria is not a country of immigration, although integrated immigrants who accept Austrian and European values can acquire residence and citizenship. However, it is to be understood that the guiding principles of the country would be based on Christian and European values. Furthermore, true to its right-wing populist ideals, the party guidelines express dedication to the traditional family values embodied in the heterosexual family as the 'natural nucleus that holds a functioning society together.'⁴²² The party thus fits into the template of a typical right-wing populist party in a western liberal democratic setting. It adheres to the traditional societal norms and upholds the need to preserve the dominance of the majority culture. It can thus be asked how it successfully attained a position as a coalition partner in government when most other such right-wing populist parties failed to do so? The answer to this question lies in the unique socio-political and historical context of Austria and the evolution of the party which resulted in its unprecedented success.

The postwar political constellation in Austria was such that only three parties were allowed to contest elections; the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), the Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ). The first elections in 1945 saw the erstwhile National Socialist Party members being excluded, which was noteworthy since the former constituted a fourth of the entire population of Austria. Things began to change drastically in the next elections held in 1949, not least because the major parties began to covet the ex-Nazi voter base. Furthermore, the former Nazis who had not been absorbed into the two main parties, formed a new one called Verband der Unabhängigen (VdU) or the Union of Independents. It is this party that reorganised itself and formed the (FPÖ) in 1956. The party was invited to form coalition with the SPÖ in 1983, and despite its extreme right roots, the FPÖ top brass remained relatively liberal.⁴²³ Right-wing populism in Austria mainly revolves around the political and electoral fortunes of the FPÖ, which reached new heights under its most charismatic leader Jörg Haider. But before delving into the FPÖ's rise and Haider's leadership, it is also pertinent

⁴²² FPÖ official website. (<http://fpoe.at/>) (Accessed on November 28, 2023)

⁴²³ John Bunzl, "National populism in Austria", *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1 & 2, 1992, p.32.

to make sense of Austria's unique political and economic system.

As mentioned above, Austro-corporatism is a crucial element of Austria's economic and political system. However, the other crucial constituent of this framework is the dominance of the two main parties; SPÖ and the ÖVP and their respective networks. The Proporz system plays a vital role in this interconnected institutional set up. It is a process by which the two main parties share not only political leverage amongst themselves, but also over the lion's share of the country's institutions and elements of public life such as the bureaucracy and labour bodies. This ensures the complete hegemony of these two parties, with its power extending to most aspects of the economic and political framework of the country. The Proporz system also operates on a system of patronage associated with the two main parties and their extensive membership. It is to be noted that it is this system that was challenged by the FPÖ and which allowed it to project itself as a party for the 'common man.' Another feature of this institutional setup, is the system of Grand Coalitions which refers to the coalitions between the two main parties which have been a feature of Austrian politics since 1945. Such a system not only results in a transparency deficit but also haphazard solutions to complex problems and issues. According to Heinisch, this system is characterised by the two parties being involved in closed door negotiations and the passage of legislation in the form of 'package deals.'⁴²⁴ The economic system too, is defined by an extremely high level of centralisation defined by the term 'Social Partnership' in which a few associations representative of business and labour interests dominate the entire decision-making process. The unusually high degree of centralising tendency is indicated by the prevalence of 'Personalunion', i.e. a system whereby individuals dominating these institutional frameworks also occupy powerful political positions.⁴²⁵ It is not difficult to see how such a closed system, that is intrinsically geared towards centralisation, would be susceptible to populist politics.

Austria underwent several phases of shifts in its value paradigms. While it maintained the pre-war ideological status quo in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the 1960s and 1970s began to witness a degree of repositioning in this regard. During this period, there was a gradual deconstruction of the previous ideological order. The 1970s saw economic prosperity brought about by the reforms of the SPÖ government under Chancellor Bruno Kreisky. This led to the rise of an increasingly conscious and politically relevant middle class with a more individualistic mindset. The tone was thus set for the period of 'affective dealignment' which

⁴²⁴ Reinhard Heinisch, *n.2*, pp.68-69.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.69.

took place between the end of the 1970s to mid-1980s. This period was characterised by the increasing disillusionment with the hitherto existing political trends. The increasing detachment from established political norms continued in the 1980s and 90s as growing number of political and corruption scandals came to light. The public grew increasingly alienated from the elites as an atmosphere of distrust and resentful protest gained ground.⁴²⁶ The rise of Jörg Haider coincides with this period of shift and realignment of the traditional politics and norms. The exceedingly centralised political and economic system and the growing public discontent with the exclusivist political system provided fertile ground for the emergence of a charismatic populist leader.

It has already been mentioned that the FPÖ, despite its extreme right beginnings and credentials, had been dominated by a relatively liberal leadership. Jörg Haider initiated the pushback against the liberal top rung of the FPÖ. Born in a family of Nazi background, Haider perpetuated the extreme right political tradition in which he had been socialised. He came to power in Carinthia, a province with a history of antagonism with Slovenes, who populated the region and outside it as well, in neighbouring Slovakia. Carinthia was a hotbed of guerilla conflicts and large-scale deportations during the war. Austrian Slovenes were routinely killed by Austrian Nazis in order to preserve the German ethnic purity of the region. A sense of German nationalism persisted in this region of historical ethnic dissension; the Slavic minority population is discriminated against for being a part of the resistance against Nazis.⁴²⁷ Haider's political ideology was based on upholding German nationalism, as is evident in his statement regarding Carinthia in 1984; 'this land will remain free as long as it remains German.' While not much attention was paid to such partisan statements in initial years, his subsequent political success directed the spotlight to his incendiary political rhetoric.⁴²⁸ Haider became the party secretary of the FPÖ in 1977 and at the age of 29 he attained the seat at the federal parliament, subsequently becoming the head of the party (FPÖ) in Carinthia in 1983.⁴²⁹

Haider's affiliation to extreme right political ideology can be discerned in various instances throughout his career. His politically shrewd persona, however, was such as to set him apart from the traditional Nazis. While adhering to a strong sense of German nationalism, Haider presented himself as a saviour of Austria. He presented himself as a 'modern-day Robin Hood'

⁴²⁶ Ibid.,70.

⁴²⁷ Paul Hockenos, Jörg Haider: Austria's Far Right Wunderkind, *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1995 (Fall), p.76.

⁴²⁸ John Bunzl, n.2, pp.32-33.

⁴²⁹ Paul Hockenos, n.2, p.76.

who would not shy away from advocating ‘the best interests of the people and ordinary citizens.’⁴³⁰ However, at a basic level he exhibited all the traits of a typical populist leader, by attaching himself to any cause that might attract public endorsement. For instance, despite being a supporter of the European Community when not many politicians were, he quickly became a staunch opponent, labelling the body as ‘Brussels mafia.’ Later he changed his stance again by supporting Austria’s EU entry. He succeeded in reaching out to even Socialist Party strongholds by the adept usage of populist politics that targeted the corrupt elite and their alleged incompetence. His larger-than-life flamboyant personality played an important part in his staggering political success. Dubbed as ‘Carinthia’s favourite son’, he received ringing endorsement from his supporters who claimed that ‘Our Jörg dares to say what the others don’t.’⁴³¹

The ascendance of Haider also coincided with a time in history that bore witness to the collapse of the Soviet Union and also German reunification. These events had important implications for the FPÖ; the influx of migrants from eastern Europe to Austria facilitated the growth of anti-immigration sentiments and xenophobia. The FPÖ was quick to use this for their own political leverage by painting the migrants as the new enemy, to replace the old Communist ones. True to this classic populist trope, Haider also depicted migrants as criminals and economic opportunists who had arrived in Austria purely for material benefit. Multiculturalism became a byword for exclusivity and segregation, as is the norm in right-wing populist narratives. However, most disconcerting was Haider’s frequent endorsement of the Nazi regime. He reached out to former Nazi and SS members glorifying their actions and even praised ‘the orderly labour policies of the Third Reich.’ His ringing endorsement of the Nazi Party is reflected in his assertion that the FPÖ could never be considered as a successor of the former, because had it been so, it would have enjoyed a thumping majority.⁴³² Haider’s popularity, even in spite of such inflammatory comments speaks volumes of how deeply entrenched fascist tendencies were entrenched in a large section of the Austrian population.

The FPÖ can be described as having evolved through three phases under Haider. In the first phase between 1986 to the end of that decade, the party capitalised on its distinctness from the established mainstream parties, i.e. ÖVP and the SPÖ. The main theme of the party revolved

⁴³⁰ Patrick Moreau, “The state of the right: Austria”, March, 2011. Source: <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/the-state-of-the-right-austria/> (Accessed December 2, 2023).

⁴³¹ Paul Hockenos, *n.3*, pp.75-76.

⁴³² John Bunzl, *n.3*, pp.33-35.

around disillusionment with the prevalent status quo as well as the mis-spending of public funds. The party entered its second phase in the 90s when it adopted a more radical stance by intensifying its opposition to the political system. The party moved more to the right by hardening its stance and bringing issues like immigration to the forefront. From the mid-1990s, i.e. during its third phase, the party began to detach itself from its previous affinity to upholding German nationalism, and instead focused on the threat to national values by immigration and the forces of globalization. In fact, the party explicitly stated in its 1997 programme that it was committed to upholding Christian values and opposing ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and ‘aggressive capitalism’ amongst other issues.⁴³³

The turning point for the FPÖ, by which it became an exemplar for such right-wing populist parties was when it entered the government as a partner in 1999. The FPÖ had overtaken the ÖVP, albeit by a small margin in the race to the second place, while the SPÖ came out on top. After several attempts to negotiate an SPÖ-ÖVP coalition, it became evident that the former would be unable to meet those terms. ÖVP leader Wolfgang Schüssel and Haider thereafter declared that they had agreed to join forces. It was very obvious that the two parties had been engaged in underhand negotiations beforehand, leading Schüssel to be accused of duplicitous tactics by the SPÖ. However, this reaction was nothing next to the widespread condemnation that greeted the news of the coalition. Thousands of protesters gathered in Vienna, while the international media foretold gloom for the future of democracy in Austria as well as Europe. Most importantly, the country’s EU partners warned of impending diplomatic sanctions in the event of the FPÖ entering the government. However, even such extensive backlash failed to prevent the ÖVP-FPÖ from coming to power. The sanctions were not entirely without effect; the forces rallying against Haider were further galvanized and he was ultimately forced to resign from the chairmanship of the party in May 2000. But despite being ousted from party leadership, Haider still retained control over it and found a way to exploit the situation into exploit the situation along populist lines.⁴³⁴

The new government, upon coming to power, wasted no time in removing many individuals with SPÖ leanings from top public posts replacing them mostly with supporters of the ÖVP. As a result, the influence of the latter in public sector increased further. Unsurprisingly, there

⁴³³ Franz Fallend, “Are right-wing populism and government participation incompatible? The case of the freedom party of Austria”, *Representation*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2004, pp. 120-121.

⁴³⁴ Kurt Richard Luther, “The self-destruction of a right-wing populist party? The Austrian parliamentary election of 2002”, *West European Politics*, Vol.26, No.2 (April 2003), pp.136–137.

was a tightening of immigration policies with new measures such as citizenship classes for newer immigrants. But on the other hand, the government took steps to address some of Austria's wrongs during the war. This included setting up a fund for wartime slave labourers and the restitution of property to Jews whose assets had been stolen by the Nazis. But even as all these new measures were underway, the FPÖ began to implode internally.⁴³⁵ It faced the classic problem of transforming itself from a reactionary right-wing populist party to actually one tasked with the responsibility to converting its promises into action.

One of the major problems the FPÖ faced after assuming power is the fact that they faced electoral decline, a fact that was compounded by infighting within the party and disagreements over policies. The party also failed to attract high quality candidates to stand for them. On the other hand, Haider grew increasingly frustrated with the public confidence in the senior FPÖ leaders who were viewed as the respectable face of the party. A struggle ensued between Haider and the party leader Susanne Riess-Passer which culminated in the latter rejecting Haider's proposal to resume control over the leadership of the party. Reiss Passer was duly re-elected as the party leader with overwhelming support from the party.⁴³⁶ The fragmentation and infighting ultimately led to further decline in electoral fortunes for the FPÖ; in the subsequent elections in 2002 its vote share was reduced to less than half of its previous performance. Finally in April 2005, Haider along with several prominent party members left the FPÖ and established a new party; the Alliance for the future of Austria (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich or BZÖ). This coup completed the FPÖ fragmentation at all levels. Interestingly, the ÖVP continued with BZÖ as a coalition partner and Haider at the helm of the latter. However, the BZÖ grew increasingly devoid of a following despite remaining in the government. On the other hand, the FPÖ elected Heinz-Christian Strache as the leader of the party and the party went on to compete with BZÖ in the elections. In the 2006 general elections, the FPÖ under Strache attained 11 per cent of the vote and surpassed the BZÖ which got only 4.1 per cent. By that time Haider had relinquished control over the BZÖ and this was reflected in the decline of its electoral performance.⁴³⁷ The whole situation for the populist right in Austria turned out to be chaotic and the pressures of operating in a government proved to be its undoing.

Heinisch has summarized the FPÖ's shortcomings as a populist party, namely its 'weak institutions, excessive personalization and permanent mobilization.' The excessive tendency to

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p.138.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., pp.139-140.

⁴³⁷ Reinhard Heinisch, *n.3*, pp.81-82.

lean towards personalization meant that it lacked actual policy making. The disintegration of the party in such a short time revealed that there is a wide gulf separating a party in opposition and the public expectations of a party in government. The excessive dependence on the cult of Haider and his opportunistic brand of politics as well as the lack of concrete ideology meant that the party fell prey to inevitable factionalism.⁴³⁸

While the FPÖ adheres to many of the established patterns of a typical right-wing populist party, it is also necessary to see whether its voter base aligns with the same. After Haider assumed leadership of the party in 1986, it was able to stake a claim in the voter base of the traditional mainstream parties. In 1999, the party ranked as the most popular among the blue-collar workers, and second in popularity among professional and self-employed voters. While the former group were traditionally voters of the SPÖ, the latter constituted a core group of the ÖVP. Furthermore, the FPÖ was able to make substantial inroads into young voters, it failed to do so amongst female as well as highly educated voters. As per the norm of traditional right-wing populist parties, the FPÖ underwent a change in the profile of its voter base in tune with the increasing radicalization of its rhetoric. Till the early part of the 1990s, the FPÖ voters did not differ drastically from those of the other two mainstream parties. Because of this, it had been categorized it as an ‘anti-statist party’ rather than a radical right one. It was evident that the voters of the FPÖ were disillusioned with the prevalence of corruption and patronage that shaped the existent political system. The FPÖ was viewed as the outlier; a party that would expose scandals and the privileges of the system from outside. The success of the FPÖ has been attributed to the peculiar nature of the Austrian system that encourages the fusion of the political and economic elites. The series of ‘grand coalitions’ between the two major parties induced disaffection amongst its voters who were disenchanted with the dynamics of the system. As mentioned earlier, all major decisions pertaining to the socio-economic policy making were undertaken in a process known as ‘social partnership’ that involved active collaboration of the leaders of the major interest groups. This elitist system was attacked by the FPÖ which challenged this elitist structure by reaching out to both working class and middle-class voters. After the 2002 elections, the voter base underwent a change; the party grew out of favour with the blue collar and young voters. The internal crises of the party led to many voters switching their allegiance to the ÖVP.⁴³⁹ Over the years, the FPÖ moved to the right of the spectrum in terms of voter base. Comparing surveys conducted in 1985 and 2000 it was found

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p.82.

⁴³⁹ Franz Fallend, *n.2*, pp.116-119.

that while 30% of FPÖ respondents felt that the party was ‘rather right’ or ‘very right’, while in 37 % classed the FPÖ as ‘right’ and 33 % as ‘very right.’⁴⁴⁰ It is clear that the FPÖ followed a path of increased radicalisation similar to typical right-wing populist parties, a fact that is also reflected in the changing composition of its voter base.

After the pressures of operating as a coalition partner in government and the subsequent splintering of the FPÖ, the right in Austria went through a period of doldrums. The BZÖ suffered huge losses after the death of Haider so much so that it lost all representation at the level of the regional parliament.⁴⁴¹ The elections of 2013 however, proved to be interesting for the right. The two parties, i.e. the FPÖ and the BZÖ followed separate paths of campaigning with the former focusing on its anti-immigration rhetoric while the latter shifted its emphasis on economic matters. The results of the election were revealing. The two main parties recorded record low percentages of votes with the SPÖ winning 26.8 per cent and the ÖVP 24.0 per cent, both of which were a decline from earlier performances. Interestingly, the two right-wing splinter groups recorded contrasting outcomes. While the FPÖ continued on the road to recovery after the 2002 debacle by increasing its share of votes to 20.5 per cent, the BZÖ lost all of its seats.⁴⁴² The government ultimately saw yet another grand coalition, but the results were telling. They showed that the right, despite being splintered and fragmented was steadily making a comeback in the form of a rejuvenated FPÖ.

The next important phase for the FPÖ came in 2017 when it became a coalition partner with the ÖVP in the government once again. The ÖVP, with Sebastian Kurz at its helm, had gone through a number of leaders in the preceding 4 years. The 31-year-old Kurz, previously the foreign minister had cultivated a tough image prioritising law and order and cracking down on immigration. He had previously been involved in pressing for routes of immigration from the Mediterranean and the Balkan during his stint as foreign minister.⁴⁴³ The FPÖ on the other hand, had been in a state of political isolation despite faring well in opinion polls. From 2005 onwards, it had been focused on a campaign of anti-immigration and Islamophobia making use of election campaign slogans like ‘Islam is not at home here.’⁴⁴⁴ It must also be remembered

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p.121.

⁴⁴¹ Martin Dolezal and Eva Zeglovits, “Almost an Earthquake: The Austrian Parliamentary Election of 2013”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2014, p.645.

⁴⁴² Ibid., pp.648-649.

⁴⁴³ Farid Hafez, “In Austria, the problem is not the far-right party”, Aljazeera. October 15, 2017. Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/10/15/in-austria-the-problem-is-not-the-far-right-party> (Accessed on 29th December, 2023).

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

that the 2015 refugee crisis had played an important role in mobilising public opinion towards the anti-immigration FPÖ agenda. The country recorded nearly 90,000 refugees and the issues of asylum and integration became the most pressing issue in Austrian political discourse.⁴⁴⁵ This proved to be a blessing for the political fortunes of the FPÖ.

The ÖVP under Kurz underwent a shift to the right, by calling for greater national autonomy; a departure from its earlier position of championing European integration.⁴⁴⁶ However, what Kurz became mostly noted for was his tough opposition to immigration taking pains to completely overhaul the ÖVP image to make it the ‘New People’s Party.’⁴⁴⁷ He even reached out to voters on the right by claiming that ÖVP would be able to materialise the tough anti-immigration agenda espoused by the FPÖ. By doing so, he attempted to cultivate a populist and relatable image that would appeal to not only the right-wing but also to other potential voters anywhere on the political spectrum.⁴⁴⁸

The 2017 elections culminated with Kurz becoming the chancellor and one of the youngest elected heads of government and FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache stepping into the position of vice-chancellor. Both leaders had assured their commitment to a pro-European outlook.⁴⁴⁹ Shifting stances aside, what is noteworthy is that this right-wing coalition elicited none of the outcry which the one in 2000 had done. The scale of protest was much lesser than what had been witnessed in 2000, and the criticism from EU partners had also been negligible. Despite the fact that Kurz had projected a pro-European image for the coalition, he gradually hardened his stance. Also, due to the fact that Kurz had coopted many aspects of the FPÖ agenda by being vocal against immigration and asylum seekers. As a result, the FPÖ too came to be recognised as a natural ally of the ÖVP. The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition was harmonious compared to the previous pairings of the ÖVP and the SPÖ. Kurz overlooked many of the incidences of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia by the FPÖ by referring to them as stray incidents. Such wilful ignorance on the part of Kurz towards such extremist activity bore echoes of the Nazi era. Other alarming incidents included the instance of when the Austrian intelligence agency,

⁴⁴⁵ Philip Rathgeb, “Makers against takers: the socio-economic ideology and policy of the Austrian Freedom Party”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2021, p.650.

⁴⁴⁶ Reinhard Heinisch, Annika Werner and Fabian Habersack, “Reclaiming national sovereignty: the case of the conservatives and the far right in Austria”, *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2020, p.164.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.651.

⁴⁴⁸ Farid Hafez, *n.2*.

⁴⁴⁹ “New Austrian cabinet shows shift to the right”, *DW*, 16th December, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/austrias-conservatives-and-right-wing-populists-agree-on-coalition-government/a-41818503> (Accessed on 29th November, 2023).

tasked with dealing with right-wing extremist activity, itself came under a police raid ordered by FPÖ minister Herbert Kickl. As a result, Kurz adopted a master strategy of distancing himself from the unsavoury activities of the FPÖ as per his convenience, thus preserving his own image. The ÖVP-FPÖ government under Kurz came to be symbolized by a hardened anti-immigration and foreigner stance. A number of restrictive measures were taken by Kickl which included closing mosques, reducing wages of jobs for asylum seekers and promoting German classes for foreigners. Several other steps were also taken which included curbing support for immigrant such as introducing cuts for immigrant families lacking German or English skills and banning headscarves for female children in elementary schools.⁴⁵⁰

The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition did not last long, collapsing embarrassingly in 2019 after a scandal dubbed as 'Ibizagate.' Two German media outlets, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel* unearthed a video which would auger one of the most high-profile scandals in contemporary Austrian history. Filmed at a luxury resort at the Spanish island of Ibiza, it showed FPÖ leader and vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache convincing a woman, purportedly the niece of a Russian oligarch, to buy the country's most circulated tabloid, *Kronen Zeitung*. Strache was heard offering public contracts in lieu of campaign support. Strache dismissed the incriminating video as a 'honey trap stage-managed by intelligence agencies' and indirectly hinted at links to the SPÖ. The incident discredited the anti-corruption rhetoric of the FPÖ by exposing how eager Strache was in adopting corrupt means.⁴⁵¹

As an outcome of the Ibiza scandal, Kurz was removed from power after the passage of a vote of no confidence and a caretaker government was appointed by President Alexander van der Bellen. This was the first time in the history of post-war Austria that a Chancellor had been removed by a vote of no-confidence. Soon after campaigns were started for a snap election. Although it was quite certain that Kurz would come out on top, questions were raised regarding the involvement of the ÖVP to the Ibiza scandal.⁴⁵² As expected, the ÖVP emerged victorious, attaining 37.5 per cent of the vote, performing better than predictions by pre-election polls. The SPÖ saw a fall in the popularity, despite coming second with 21.2 per cent. The FPÖ got only 16.2 per cent of votes, even less than the predicted percentage of 20 per cent.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Lena Maria Huber and Carolina Plescia, "A tale of firsts: the 2019 Austrian snap election", *West European Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2020, pp.1350-1351.

⁴⁵¹ Philip Oltermann, "Austria's 'Ibiza scandal': what happened and why does it matter?", *The Guardian*. May 20, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/austria-ibiza-scandal-sting-operation-what-happened-why-does-it-matter> (Accessed on 29th November, 2023).

⁴⁵² Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Lena Maria Huber and Carolina Plescia, *n.2*, p.1354.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.1357.

The period between 2017-19 can definitely be counted as one of the most tumultuous periods in contemporary Austrian politics. The coming to power of the FPÖ and the stridently right-leaning ÖVP led by Kurz in 2017 indicated how much right-wing politics had come to be normalised in the mainstream. The slew of scandals and upheavals also did little to upend the dominance of the ÖVP in 2019. Here it must be mentioned that Kürz was ultimately forced to resign in 2021 after yet another corruption scandal. He came under scrutiny after claims were made that he has misused government money to bring about favourable coverage in a tabloid and a series of raids were made at places linked to the ÖVP.⁴⁵⁴ From these outcomes, one might pertinently point out that only reaching corruption scandals proved to be useful in ousting right-wing governments from power; otherwise, the majority of the public remained in tune with their populist and exclusivist agenda.

Immigration: Historical Trends and Political Impact

Brief historical overview of post-war immigration

The migrant crisis of 2015 brought the issue of immigration in Austria in sharp relief. Like Germany, Austria too has a complicated history with the acceptance of its status as a country of immigration. Similar to the former, it was a predominantly a country of emigration till the latter half of the twentieth century when it became the opposite, i.e. a country of immigration. However, this particular status remains contested and a degree of reluctance to accept this reality is still prevalent. The migrant crisis simply highlighted the reality for what is; namely the fact that Austria has been a ‘migration society’ long before any such crisis took place. Austria witnessed successive waves of migration after the Second World War and subsequently during upheavals in the former Soviet bloc countries such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. According to estimates, Austria saw 4.5 million migrants travel through its borders of which 1.3 million remained. A large percentage of the population come from a background of migration while in Vienna, the capital, this figure is even higher (40 per cent). The largest group of immigrants from outside the EU are those from former Yugoslavia comprising of nearly 500,000 while the Turks come in second place with 250,000. Ethnic Germans also constitute a large section of the foreigner population, many of whom were expelled from other countries after the war. Due to their ethnicity, they are often exempted from debates on immigration and integration and are viewed much favourably than other immigrant groups. The

⁴⁵⁴ Sebastian Kurz, “Austrian leader resigns amid corruption inquiry”, BBC. 9 October 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58856796> (Accessed on 17th December, 2023).

large share of immigrants in Austria is revealed in figures from 2016, when it was estimated that approximately 15 per cent of the population were of non-Austrian citizenship with the percentage cited as double in Vienna. This phenomenon has been interestingly summed up by an Austrian news magazine as; “Austria has become what it never wanted to be; one of the leading countries of immigration in the world.”⁴⁵⁵ The jump in international net migration can be observed from the figures in the period between 2012 to 2022 which saw a rise from 43,797 to 136,979.⁴⁵⁶

Official data on immigration reveals the profound impact it has had on the constitution of the Austrian population. According to an official press release (2022), individuals with migration background constitute more than a quarter of the total population of Austria. According to figures by Statistics Austria, 25.4% of the population, i.e. approximately 2.24 million people with migration background resided in Austria in 2021, which was an increase of 24% from the figure (430,000) recorded in 2015. According to Statistics Austria Director General Tobias Thomas;

“Austria’s population is growing solely through immigration; without it, the population would fall back to the level of the 1950s in the long term, according to the population forecast.”⁴⁵⁷

Here it should be mentioned that German nationals constituted the largest number of foreign nationals living in Austria, accounting for 217,000 of 1,587,000 foreigners as of 1 January 2022. The next largest groups were Romanian (138,000), Serbian (122,000) and Turkish (118,000). It should also be mentioned that these figures have been impacted by the consecutive crises in Syria and Ukraine. There were approximately 68000 Syrians during this period, while the number of Ukrainians increased exponentially from 13,000 to 53,000 between the period of the beginning to 2022 to April of the same year.⁴⁵⁸

The figures of the immigrant population in Vienna also reveal how these numbers have increased. Vienna experienced a sustained increase in population since 1961, transforming

⁴⁵⁵ Dirk Rupnow, ‘The History and Memory of Migration in Post-War Austria: Current Trends and Future Challenges’ in Günter Bischof and Dirk Rupnow, eds., *Migration in Austria*, University of New Orleans Press, 2017, pp.39-40.

⁴⁵⁶ “International Migration”, Statistics Austria, 1 June 2023. <https://www.statistik.at/en/statistics/population-and-society/population/migration-and-naturalisation/international-migration> (Accessed on 3rd January, 2023)

⁴⁵⁷ Statistical Yearbook Migration & Integration 2022 (Press release: 12.859-157/22), “More than a quarter of the total Austrian population has a migration background”, 2022. Source:

<https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/announcement/2023/08/20220725MigrationIntegration2022EN.pdf> (Accessed on 3rd January, 2024).

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

from an ‘ageing city’ to a ‘young metropolis’ mainly due to foreign immigration. The most recent figures from 2023 show that foreign nationals accounted for 34.2 per cent of Vienna’s population, 44.4 per cent are of foreign origin while 39.3 per cent were foreign born. Individuals of foreign origin constitute a very large portion of the Viennese population; 2023 figures reveal that out of the total Viennese population, 1,102,57 were Austrian origin, while 879, 526 were of foreign origin.⁴⁵⁹

Another important facet of the immigration debate in Austria is its demographic problem; it too has been forced to grapple with population decline. The demographic trend in Austria can be divided into three phases. The first phase between 1952 and 1974 is characterised by a high degree of population growth. Birth rates grew exponentially due to the post-war economic growth and is often referred to as ‘Golden age of marrying and childbearing.’ Immigration also increased at the same time as the government was forced to recruit labour from outside to offset gaps in labour market. The second phase from 1974 to 1988 witnessed a decline in both in birth rates and immigration levels. This was due to a push towards encouraging education by the government which resulted in the rise in numbers of working women as well as measures such as legalising abortion and increasing prevalence of contraceptives. The third phase from 1988 saw increased population growth however the nature of this growth differed from the previous phase. During this period, while the population grew by 19% between 1988-2022, only 23% of this growth was constituted by natural change. Rapidly ageing population coupled with low fertility, along with their accompanying consequences such as increasing burden on healthcare and pensions have become some of the problems that loom over Austria due to the prevalent demographic challenges. The fertility rates are below the rate of reproduction (1.48 in 2021) and the average age of Austrians has risen from 36 years in 1970 to 43.2 years in 2022. The size in age groups is also likely to undergo changes with the proportion of the population aged above 65 likely to increase to 27% from 19%.⁴⁶⁰

Due to these changes, immigration has assumed even greater importance and the question of whether it can be a means to counter these impending challenges has become an issue of

⁴⁵⁹ “Vienna’s population 2023 - facts and figures on migration and integration”, City of Vienna. <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/social/integration/facts-figures/population-migration.html> (Accessed on 4th January, 2024).

⁴⁶⁰ Report by MIGWELL titled “International Migration Patterns in and between Hungary and Austria”, January 2023, Source: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/fileadmin/Institute/ISR/pdf/Forschung/MIGWELL_WP2_D.2.1_Final.pdf (Accessed on 4th January, 2024).

contention. This is more so because of the positive rates of birth and fertility amongst the foreign-born population. In 2015, the birth balance⁴⁶¹ stood at +1300, with 84,400 births and 83,100 deaths. However, while foreigners had an excess of births (+13,300), Austrian citizens recorded a surplus of deaths (-12,000). During the same period, the differences in fertility rates are also telling; while native Austrian women had 1.38 children on average, foreign-born women had 1.92, with women from Turkey recording 2.44. Fertility rates fell among naturalised women. For mothers born in Austria, the average at which the first child was born was 29.5 while the age was two years younger for foreign-born mothers, with women from Turkey becoming first time mothers at the age of 24.5.⁴⁶² With the looming problem of an ageing population burdening health services, the positive birth and fertility rates among the foreign-born population of Austria have become increasingly significant in the immigration debate.

These rapid changes meant that immigration was bound to have an impact on Austrian politics sooner or later. Austrians have been recorded to be the least favourable towards immigration. According to the 2023 Democracy Perception Index by the NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's Alliance of Democracies group, European respondents, more than their non-European counterparts, consider the reduction of immigration by the government as an issue of topmost priority. Austria ranked first among the countries where it was felt that immigration should be reduced with 34 per cent, followed by Germany (31%) and the Netherlands (30%).⁴⁶³

A number of cleavages and trends must be taken into account while analysing the impact of immigration on Austrian politics; firstly, the divide between the industrial working class represented by the SPÖ and the enterprise and farming section represented by the ÖVP and the FPÖ. The second cleavage to be noted is drawn along lines of religious affiliation with the ÖVP being the marker for Catholicism and the SPÖ and the FPÖ for secularism and agnosticism. The voter base of the ÖVP was drawn mainly from the rural section of society and who also tended to be deeply religious, while that of the SPÖ were mainly urban and inclined to be

⁴⁶¹ Birth balance: the difference between live births and deaths

⁴⁶² Report by Austrian Academy of Sciences, Commission for Migration and Integration Research, "Migration and Integration, Zahlen.Daten.Indikatoren 2016", Vienna, 2016. Source: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/fileadmin/kommissionen/KMI/Dokumente/Migration_und_Integration_Zahlen_Daten_Indikatoren/migrationintegration-2016.pdf (Accessed on 5th January, 2024).

⁴⁶³ Timo Kirez, "Austria is the most anti-immigration country in the world: Survey", Anadolu Agency. May 10, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/austria-is-the-most-anti-immigration-country-in-the-world-survey/2893984> (Accessed on 4th January, 2024).

secular. Another important fault line in Austrian politics is that between German and Austrian nationalism, with the FPÖ standing for the former and the SPÖ and the ÖVP for the latter. The topic of immigration did not figure much in the nationalism debate till the 1990s, with the major object of contention being the commitment to a separate and distinct Austrian national identity on one hand and an ethnic-based affiliation with the German nation on the other. It is the FPÖ which upheld its support for the latter. The whole basis of Austrian politics became centred around these divisions and this was precipitated by the reality that a growing number of Austrians had ceased to identify with their ethnic German identity since the end of the Second World War. Furthermore, for several decades after the war, the political system became characterized by stability through the dominance of the two major parties, or a grand coalition between them. From the 1980s, the political landscape began to change with the emergence of new parties such as the Greens and the FPÖ. The rise of these challenger parties, along with the advent of the forces of globalisation brought the issue of immigration to the forefront.⁴⁶⁴ The unique configuration of the Austrian political system, with its cleavages and conflicting identity debates coupled with the emergence of globalisation led to immigration gaining ever increasing prominence in Austrian party politics. It is in this backdrop that the historical background of immigration to Austria needs to be examined.

Austria undertook a ‘guest worker’ recruitment scheme to help with the process of nation-building much like its neighbour Germany. These workers were mainly recruited from Turkey and Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 70s, and at one point they constituted 4.1 per cent of a population of 7.6 million.⁴⁶⁵ This recruitment process was mainly undertaken to recompense the loss of skilled labour due to Austria’s lower wages. Here it must be mentioned that Austrian citizenship was not as rigid as its German counterpart. Foreigners were able to attain citizenship after a period of residence of 10 years. Between the period of 1991 and 2002, 238,300 foreigners were granted citizenship, a process that was accelerated by immigration policies that actively promoted citizenship. Formerly, ethnic Germans from the erstwhile Soviet bloc constituted the largest number of foreigners being naturalised. Later on, individuals from Turkey and the erstwhile Yugoslavia, namely those who had been previously ‘guest workers’ comprised the largest share of new citizens. The next largest group granted citizenship was again individuals from the countries of the former Soviet Union who arrived in Austria after

⁴⁶⁴ Leila Hadj Abdou and Didier Ruedin, “The Austrian People’s Party: an anti-immigrant right party?”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2022, pp.386-388.

⁴⁶⁵ Dirk Rupnow, *n.2*, p. 41.

the collapse of the former. It is important to note that between 1997 and 2002, the naturalisation rate from 2.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent.⁴⁶⁶

It is pertinent to briefly examine the difference in citizenship laws between the Germany and Austria in this context. The German Citizenship Law of 1913 set the basis for an ethnic mode of citizenship that was to continue for nearly nine decades. While the law hindered the naturalisation of the long-term resident immigrant population, it facilitated citizenship for the ethnic German diaspora. Successive attempts to make the process of naturalization more lenient were rejected. The National Socialist government tightened the ethno-racial mode of citizenship to bar Jews and Poles. German citizenship and top positions were reserved only for individuals of ‘pure German blood’ as stipulated by the Reich Citizenship Law of 1935. On the other hand, during the period between 1840 and 1914, the Austro-Hungarian citizenship was already seen as multinational, on account of the multi-ethnic nature of the empire. After the First World War a citizenship law was passed which granted citizenship to individuals residing within the territory of an Austria that was diminished in size after the dissolution of the empire. With the conclusion of the Second World War, both Austria and Germany reverted to the modes of citizenship that had existed prior to the war. The nationality law established in Austria by the passing of the Austrian Citizenship Act of 1949 was not ethnonational in nature like that of Germany.⁴⁶⁷

The government website pertaining to migration delineates the official policy of acquisition of citizenship. Austria abides with *jus sanguinis* and children of Austrian parents (one or both) automatically gain citizenship. However, children of parents of different nationality are entitled to dual citizenship and the Austrian law does not compel them to choose between the two.⁴⁶⁸ Here too, Austria is more liberal than Germany in the sense that the latter, even after the liberalisation of citizenship norms, obliges children with dual citizenship, born to foreign nationals to choose between either of the two nationalities at a certain age. In cases of ‘citizenship by award’ or cases of naturalisation, certain preconditions are required to be met. These include continuous residence for 10 years including 5 with a residence permit, possessing the required language skills, income as well as a clean criminal record amongst

⁴⁶⁶ Gudrun Biffl, “Immigration and Integration Issues in Austria and Slovakia”, Austrian Institute of Economic Research, 2004, Source: https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2009-11/doc1_10833_229697095.pdf (Accessed on 5th January, 2024).

⁴⁶⁷ Thomas Janoski, “The difference that empire makes: institutions and politics of citizenship in Germany and Austria”, *Citizenship Studies*, Vol.13, No. 4, August 2009, pp.393-394.

⁴⁶⁸ Citizenship <https://www.migration.gv.at/en/living-and-working-in-austria/integration-and-citizenship/citizenship/> (Accessed on 6th January, 2024).

others. Requirements also include inculcating a ‘positive attitude towards the Republic of Austria and warranty that there is no danger for the public peace, order and security.’⁴⁶⁹

It is not surprising that despite many similarities with neighbouring Germany, the process of naturalisation ran along a completely different course in Austria. In this respect, Austria has many similarities with the US, in the sense that even many politicians keenly uphold their immigrant backgrounds. The same is not the case in the Bundestag since historically there were very few immigrant origin politicians in German parliament. While, a sizeable section of immigrant origin politicians is able to influence migration policies in Austria, the same is not the case in Germany. These exclusivist tendencies have been evident even after the dissolution of these empires.⁴⁷⁰ The active encouragement of granting citizenship on one hand and the discouragement of the same in another provides a relevant backdrop for their respective experiences with populist tendencies.

It is pertinent to ask why the trends of citizenship are so dissimilar in two countries that share so many commonalities in traits. It is natural that a country like France, shaped as it is by the French Revolution, would be more inclusive in its approach towards the granting of citizenship to immigrants, the foremost prerequisite being the adoption of French language and culture. In contrast, the highly closed societal system that was prevalent in Germany shunned not only foreigners but also German speakers who were not a part of the immediate community. This was naturally reflected in the ethnic mode of citizenship prevalent there until very recently. One would expect Austria share a likeness with Germany in this respect, both being Germanic countries but it is not so. Experts have attributed this surprising dissimilarity to a history of colonialism. Freeman opines that nations which actively pursued colonialism exerted their will on others but were in the process were left transformed themselves. The process of colonialism progressed along certain steps; at first the colonizers would make use of the colonized for purposes of administration and as this dependence gradually increased more rights would be conceded to the latter. Parallely, the natives who were colonized were educated and trained by the colonizers and it would so happen that the elite class of the former would receive their education in universities of the rulers’ motherland. Thus, through this process what initially started out as a process of perpetuation of ‘elite self-interest’ would gradually solidify into permanent intransigent social institutions. It is accepted that this history of colonisation leads

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Thomas Janoski, *n.2*, pp.381-382.

to higher rates of naturalisation in erstwhile colonizer countries.⁴⁷¹ Due to this factor, Austria with its colonial history has a more lenient process of naturalization than Germany.

As mentioned before, the empire was characterized by ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity until its demise after the First World War. However, its legacy continued to live on in the collective memory of the nation. This memory is often characterized by nostalgia and a sense of glorification of the past. The empire is seen as something to be celebrated and indeed it is, however what is often overlooked is its hegemonic and oppressive nature. Studies on Austrian national identity by scholars such as Ruth Wodak reveal that the Habsburg monarchy is viewed positively as an amalgamation of different ethnicities, religions and cultures and an early example of multiculturalism. Furthermore, what is generally felt is that the Austrian empire was more benevolent than its counterparts such as the British, French or Spanish empires on account of the fact that it did not have colonies like the latter. The Habsburg Empire was viewed as 'soft' and 'motherly' as opposed to the Prussian empire characterized by masculinity. This supposed 'soft' nature was mainly due to the fact that it sought to play a civilizing role amongst those it considered to be 'uncivilized.' This was reflected in the widespread use of German as the official and administrative language and the suppression of cultures that were considered to be inferior to the German dominated Austro-Hungarian empire that supposedly symbolized all that was modern and progressive.⁴⁷²

A study by Janoski has focused on the diversity of the various institutions of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Austrian Empire was multicultural in the respect that many ethnic groups had a role to play in the various levels of administration such as the military and the bureaucracy. Many ethnic groups were integrated into the military which also served as a means of social mobility. An indicator of the diverse nature of the army is revealed in the figures which show that Jews comprised 3.9 per cent of the army while constituting 4.5 per cent of the general population. This diversity was maintained even when the first Austrian Republic was formed in 1918 out of the German parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire and there were sizeable sections of ethnic groups such as Croats and the Slovenes who settled in various parts of the new republic. In fact, no fewer than six ethnic groups were given official recognition. This proclivity towards inclusivity took a blow with the rise of National Socialism. Hitler went as far as to contemptuously refer to the Austrian empire as a 'fruit salad of peoples.' As the wave

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., pp.383-384.

⁴⁷² Brigitte Hipfl and Daniela Gronold, "Asylum seekers as Austria's other: the reemergence of Austria's colonial past in a state-of exception", *Social Identities*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2011, pp. 29-31.

of anti-Semitism progressed, Jews were removed from the army and became the victims of mass atrocities. After the Second World War, questions were raised as to whether Austria would go adopt a new identity that retained the positive vestiges of the empire such as multiculturalism without the accompanying authoritarianism. It was lamented by former premier Bruno Kreisky that the demise of the empire had led to the decline of a 'supranational cultural community.'⁴⁷³ However, it should be mentioned that till date, official recognition has been accorded to six ethnic groups in Austria, the Slovenes, Croats, the Czechs and Slovaks, the Hungarians and the Roma⁴⁷⁴

Despite its shortcomings, the Austrian empire did have a degree of inclusivity. However, the same cannot be said for the Germans who had been historically antagonistic towards other ethnic groups. For instance, the Germans followed a policy of discrimination against the Poles who were viewed as traitors and enemies. Despite the fact that troops from African colonies were utilized in the German military, there are no records of them making any claims for German citizenship. Germany's colonial experience also started much later than that of its European counterparts and was of much shorter duration. It was only after its reunification in 1870 and subsequently under Bismarck that Germany started its colonial journey. Germany established a number of African colonies which included regions in the present-day nations of Namibia, Cameroon, Tanzania, Togo and Burundi. However, these endeavours did not last long enough to stretch beyond the period of military occupation. While German colonial law did not explicitly prevent the naturalisation of natives, it hardly ever came to materialize. Furthermore, as per its cultural policy, German was not taught to African natives for matters of security. Thus, it is evident that Germany's experience of colonisation was neither long enough nor impactful enough to have left a mark on its citizenship or naturalisation policies. This lack of deep-rooted association with alien ethnic groups is a recurring element in German history. While Jews had also historically occupied administrative and military positions in Germany they were widely discriminated against and of course, the participation of Jews promptly ended when Nazis came into power⁴⁷⁵ The historical German intolerance towards non-German ethnic groups stands in stark contrast to the relative inclusivity of the erstwhile Austrian empire. This historical dichotomy underlines the stark contrast in the two countries with regard to issues of citizenship, national identity and memory.

⁴⁷³ Thomas Janoski, *n.3*, pp.389-391.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.387.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.388-392.

Till now, the discussion has highlighted the historical background of immigration trends in Austria. Austria shares many similarities with Germany among which is a difficulty to embrace its identity as country of immigration. Austria's history as a colonial power set it apart from Germany in terms of how it deals with immigrants and citizenship laws. Furthermore, it should also be noted that collective memory in both the countries, with regard to history and identity differ significantly. An analysis of immigration and populist trends in Austria should be undertaken with these points in mind.

What sets Austria apart in a discussion of immigration policy and the populist right is the fact that it is one of the exceptional cases where a populist right-wing party has occupied power in government. As mentioned earlier, the election of the FPÖ to become a partner in government is one of the turning points not only in Austrian politics but also for all other such similar parties in western liberal democracies. Hence it is crucial to understand how it performed in government by analysing how the FPÖ (from 2000) and its breakaway splinter group BZÖ (from 2005) operated once in power.

The bulk of the leverage that resides with contemporary right-wing populist parties is their role in highlighting the issue of immigration and exerting influence in the shaping of immigration policy. It must be noted that most of these parties do so outside the ambit of government participation, i.e. as oppositional forces. The FPÖ was no exception in this regard. It capitalized on an anti-immigration agenda based on initiatives that claimed to exclusively uphold the interests of Austria and successfully influenced government policies on issues such as citizenship, rights of migrants and labour migration. While several scholars have cited the performance of the FPÖ to argue the case for the influence of populist right-wing parties on government policy, others are more sceptical. Noted populism expert Cas Mudde has questioned the actual impact of these parties by asserting that claims of their influence lack 'empirical and theoretical' credibility. According to Mudde, the trend towards the restriction of immigration is an indicator of policy alignment by EU countries and not an outcome of influence by right-wing parties. Similarly, Bale has argued that the tightening of immigration policies has traditionally been the preserve of the centre-right parties much before the radical right made a mark. Other experts have backed the argument that right-wing populist parties have limited impact because they are by nature an oppositional force and therefore bound to fail if they are elected to power. This due to the fact that they are forced to tone down their radical tendencies and in cases of coalitions, the coalition partners often take the credit for successes and divert any negativity or backlash to their right-wing partners. As a result, the

very qualities of the right-wing populist parties that made them popular, i.e. inexperience, personality-driven nature and identity as outsiders prove to be their undoing.⁴⁷⁶ These are some of the challenges that faced the FPÖ and the BZÖ when they were in power between 2000-2006.

A study by Duncan has extensively examined the immigration policy of the FPÖ/BZÖ governments during their tenure from 2000 to 2006 to ascertain their actual impact in this regard. As discussed earlier, the FPÖ and the breakaway BZÖ were coalition partners with the ÖVP in two successive cabinets headed by chancellor and ÖVP leader Wolfgang Schüssel. During their tenure, both the FPÖ and later the BZÖ shared the common attribute that both were anxious to lay claim to recognition for changes in immigration policies be it with regard to citizenship or asylum. The ÖVP had already been leaning to the right under the leadership of Schüssel and the adoption of restrictive immigration policies could not be claimed as the outcome of FPÖ influence alone. An examination of the 1999 manifestos of both the FPÖ and the ÖVP reveals that while the former advocated a zero-immigration stance, the latter conceded the need for labour migration despite favouring an overall tightening of immigration. Both parties called for greater integration of immigrants, advocating for adoption of language skills, European values pertaining to human rights and the ‘Austrian way of life.’⁴⁷⁷

Duncan has also expounded the standpoints of the parties pertaining to the issues of immigration control, integration and asylum. In the case of migration control, it is not surprising that both the Schüssel governments discouraged the expansion of immigration. During this period, the granting of resident permits was reduced even further and only highly skilled and qualified professionals were encouraged. On the other hand, there was a marked reduction of interest in labour migration and the ÖVP-FPÖ government took steps to stem the free movement of labour migrants from the states which newly acceded to the EU in 2004. The most noteworthy outcome of these arrangements is the fact that there was an increase in the use of temporary workers. The discrepancy is evident here; while on one hand steps were taken to curb labour migration, on the other the use of these seasonal workers was encouraged. The ÖVP-FPÖ government encouraged the employments of seasonal workers in all economic sectors and the subsequent ÖVP-BZÖ government expanded this further.⁴⁷⁸ In both the

⁴⁷⁶ Fraser Duncan, “Immigration and integration policy and the Austrian radical right in office: the FPÖ/BZÖ, 2000–2006”, *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2010, pp.339-340.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.342-344.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.344-346.

governments with FPÖ and BZÖ as partners, the increasing use of temporary workers continued unabated.

Problem of integration of minorities

Integration, in the Austrian context, has been defined as;

“..a process involving all sections of society, whose success depends on all people living in Austria. The receipt of Austrian citizenship is intended to mark the final point of a comprehensive integration process.”⁴⁷⁹

At the outset, it should be highlighted that it has officially been recognised that the end result of successful integration in the Austrian context, is the acquisition of Austrian citizenship. In this regard, the Austrian approach has become more positive despite its ethnic roots. The process of integration and finally obtaining citizenship as per the due process of law has been recognised. In recent times, the government has enacted further measures to ease the way for integration. The Integration Act of 2017 has attempted to outline a framework aiming to ensure ‘social cohesion and social peace.’ In 2019, it was further amended to make sure that immigrants are able to pick up German faster so that they are able to speedily integrate into Austrian society. Here again, it must be noted that mastering the German language is of supreme importance in this regard and the primary means of ensuring successful integration. Learning the language is followed by acknowledging and respecting ‘Austrian and European systems of laws and values underlying the rule of law.’ Other measures to be noted include the passage of the ‘Anti- Face covering Act’ prohibiting the full covering of the face in public as well as banning the distribution of publications by groups deemed to be ‘problematic.’⁴⁸⁰ But it should also be acknowledged that the government also contributes to the costs of undergoing the integration process; subject to certain preconditions it reimburses 50 per cent of the requisite costs.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ 68th Federal Act enacting an *Integration Act (IntG, Integrationsgesetz)* and an *Anti-FaceCovering Act (AGesVG, Anti-Gesichtsverhüllungsgesetz)*, and amending the *Settlement and Residence Act (NAG, Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz)*, Federal Law Gazette I, 8 June 2017, No 68. Source: https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Integrationsgesetz/20171006_IntG_Gesetze_text_Uebersetzung_final.pdf (Accessed on 6th January, 2024).

⁴⁸⁰ *Integration Act*, Federal Chancellery, Republic of Austria. <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/integration/integration-act.html#:~:text=Since%20June%202017%2C%20the%20Integration,social%20cohesion%20and%20social%20peace> (Accessed on 6th January, 2024).

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

Despite efforts at expediting the integration process, official figures reveal that immigrants are lagging behind in many respects, especially education and employment. Among these are obvious setbacks such as the level of German proficiency which is crucial in ensuring success. According to a survey carried out in 2008, 90% of German-speaking children attending a kindergarten were likely to have the required level of language competence while 58% of children born to non-German speaking foreign parents needed additional support. This discrepancy is also evident in the case of employment, which is another crucial indicator of integration. In 2015, the employment rate was 74% among people without a migration background, while it was 64% for those with a background of migration. Furthermore, the rates of employment among women of the former category were less.⁴⁸² These trends have remained the same in recent years. According to 2020 data, immigrants of employable age, especially those of non-EU background, were less likely to be employed than their Austrian national counterparts and were likely to have a higher rate of unemployment. This situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the unemployment rates among non-EU nationals rose by nearly three percentage points, and nearly 23 per cent more young individuals of the former category were reported to have left school prematurely in comparison to their Austrian peers. This category of immigrants also witnessed a rise in poverty and social deprivation since the start of the pandemic with 44 per cent being exposed to this, as compared to only 13 per cent of Austrian nationals.⁴⁸³

The approach towards integration by the political parties is indicative of their leanings. Both the FPÖ and the BZÖ advocated a tougher stance on integration. Although the position of long-term foreign immigrants was improved with the easing of conditions for their stay, the government adhered to the slogan of ‘Integration before new immigration’. The FPÖ was vocal in its scepticism of Muslim immigrants and their willingness to integrate. Moreover, there was an increased focus on the criminal and security problems that are associated with immigration. A string of prohibitive measures was taken which included the Foreigners Act of 2005 which did away with the protection granted to non-EU nationals born and raised in Austria, against deportation. Thus, the populist right parties did try to solidify the processes of integration of immigrants. This was clearly evident in the expansion of the Integration Agreement which outlined a contract between the immigrant and the Austrian state that underlined the obligation

⁴⁸² Report by Austrian Academy of Sciences, Commission for Migration and Integration Research, *n.2*.

⁴⁸³ Prisca Ebner, “Austria – Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021”, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Vienna, 2022.

of the former to integrate.⁴⁸⁴ Alongside integration, steps were also taken to toughen citizenship. The second Schüssel government amended the Citizenship Act in 2005 and the changes ensured not only a reduction in the rates of naturalization but also in the high rates of early naturalisation. Furthermore, the preconditions for naturalisation and citizenship were aimed to exclude individuals with a criminal record and those who had been beneficiaries of welfare payments any time within the last 3 years. Citizenship tests, language tests and increasing charges for undergoing naturalisation also accompanied these increasingly stringent measures.⁴⁸⁵ In light of these changes, Duncan questioned whether the radical right had any actual far-reaching impact in the areas of immigration, integration and citizenship mentioned above. The policies pertaining to immigration continued as per the prevalent trend towards restrictionism, even bringing back echoes of the old guest worker model in light of the continued use of seasonal workers. Integration of immigrants became more rigidly enforced and citizenship became more geared towards exclusion. In light of this, Duncan asserts that the populist right, in the form of the FPÖ and later the BZÖ failed to bring about any novel or radical departure from the government policy trends pertaining to immigration, integration or citizenship which had been already been in vogue till then.⁴⁸⁶ However, the question also may be raised whether the stringency of government policies had resulted from pressure from the populist right oppositional forces in the first place?

Public perception regarding the interaction with immigrants also needs to be noted. It was found that greater interaction leads to a better perception of living with together with immigrants. It was found that Austrian-born population who had less contact with immigrants were less likely to perceive living with migrants positively as compared to those who were more in contact with immigrants. Only 29% of Austrian born individuals with less contact with foreigners described living together as “very good” or “rather good”, while a 46% of Austria born with more contact with immigrants did so. On the other hand, immigrants too recorded favourable experiences; around 55% of respondents born in countries like Turkey or Serbia who had daily contact with Austrian born perceived living together as “very good” or “rather good”.⁴⁸⁷ These figures show that integration of immigrants is dependent on a healthy degree

⁴⁸⁴ Markus Rheindorf and Ruth Wodak, “Borders, Fences, and Limits—Protecting Austria from Refugees: Metadiscursive Negotiation of Meaning in the Current Refugee Crisis”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, Vol. 16, Nos. 1–2, 2018, p.18.

⁴⁸⁵ Fraser Duncan, *n.2*, pp. 346-348.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.349.

⁴⁸⁷ Statistical Yearbook Migration & Integration 2022, *n.2*.

of interaction with the native population and the right-wing thrives on the support of those whose contact with the immigrant population is limited.

Migrant crisis of 2015-16 and the return of the ÖVP-FPÖ partnership

The next important landmark in the analysis of the populist right in Austria is the European migrant crisis of 2015-16 and the subsequent coming to power of the FPÖ in 2017 as a coalition partner of the ÖVP. The European migrant crisis was one of the most challenging humanitarian challenges faced by Europe in recent times. The crisis was marked by the untold loss of lives of these refugees and migrants fleeing war and persecution. Austria, along with Germany became one of the safe havens sought by these desperate masses. However, it also witnessed its share of the tragedies befalling these migrants trying to desperately reach it. In August 2015, the bodies of 71 migrants and refugees were discovered by Austrian authorities in a refrigeration truck near the border between Austria and Hungary. This came a month before the death of Aylan Kurdi, a young boy whose body was washed up on a beach in Turkey having drowned in the perilous journey by sea to reach Greece. These tragedies brought the attention of the world to the plight of these migrants risking their lives to reach Europe, often falling prey to ruthless people smugglers. In September 2015, 1000 refugees disregarded the Hungarian government's refusal to provide transport to reach the Austrian and German borders. The response from Austria was welcoming; volunteers from organisations such as the Austrian Red Cross undertook to welcome these migrants by handing out essentials like food, water, blankets and clothes, holding placards saying 'welcome.' These efforts by Austria and Germany received recognition from the UNHCR which acknowledged the efforts of these groups and also the respective governments in deciding to keep their borders open. However, very soon after Hungary closed its borders and completed erecting a fence along the border with Serbia, prompting the temporary reinstatement of border controls all over Europe for the first time in two decades.⁴⁸⁸

It is necessary to understand the context of the political situation that preceded the refugee crisis. The SPÖ-ÖVP grand coalitions that came after the period of the populist right FPÖ and BZÖ in government (2000-2006) was characterised by the continuation of strict measures pertaining to immigration and integration. The National Plan of Integration passed in 2010

⁴⁸⁸ William Spindler, "2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis", UNHCR. December 8, 2015. Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/in/news/stories/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis#:~:text=Tragedy%20propelled%20the%20issue%20to,been%20lost%20during%20the%20journey>. (Accessed on 7th January, 2024).

outlined the scheme for the integration of migrants, and was followed by the setting up of a State Secretariat and a Ministry for Integration since 2011 and 2014 respectively. More emphasis was placed on tackling illegal immigration and ‘bogus asylum seekers.’ From 2013, the topic of refugees achieved ever increasing salience and this was naturally accompanied by the increasingly strident FPÖ rhetoric which continued its typical nativist, anti-immigration agenda. It is in this context that the refugee crisis played a huge role in impacting the political fortunes of the right in Austria. Initially there had been public sympathy for the asylum seekers but it was also accompanied by calls for stricter border controls and tackling human smugglers. Civil society was proactive in demonstrating its support for refugees, but public opinion became gradually polarised regarding the migrant issue. As the FPÖ grew in popularity, the then Foreign Minister Kurz proposed closing the Balkan route in October 2015⁴⁸⁹ a route which had become increasingly volatile with media coverage of aggressive state handling of refugees.⁴⁹⁰ As an increasing number of migrants struggled to reach Austria, politicians there began calling out for tougher measures to stem the flow. To do so, the security aspect was upheld with emphasis being placed on the threatening nature of ‘foreign masculinity’ that was supposedly at odds with the western liberal norms. As expected, the FPÖ rallied against the way in which the crisis was being tackled. FPÖ leader Heinz Christian Strache began calling for the closure of borders to prevent the imminent ‘Islamisation of Austrian society’. In trying to galvanize Austrian public opinion against the migrants and refugees, the populist right forces made use of rhetoric that stereotyped Muslims as dangerous, prone to violence and terrorist activity and disrespectful of the rights of women.⁴⁹¹

As politicians began to intensify their opposition to the tackling of the refugee crisis, Austria went as far as to construct a barrier along its border with Slovenia, echoing Hungary’s policy which had drawn so much ire. However, the construction of border barriers did not suffice; Kurz began calling for the absolute control of the EU’s external borders, stressing on the fact that ensuring the impermeability of borders was an absolute necessity for safeguarding Austrian society. A number of restrictive measures were taken in response to the ever-increasing discontent. Austria began limiting the number of asylum applications and an ‘emergency decree’ was proposed by the government which would enable it to rescind the right to asylum

⁴⁸⁹ Markus Rheindorf and Ruth Wodak, *n.2*, pp.18-20.

⁴⁹⁰ Paul Scheibelhofer, “‘It won’t work without ugly pictures’: images of othered masculinities and the legitimisation of restrictive refugee-politics in Austria”, *NORMA, International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2017, p.99.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

for incoming refugees in future if there was any perception of threat to ‘maintenance of public order and the protection of public security.’⁴⁹² The refugee impact and the populist politics that flourished in its wake culminated in the 2017 Austrian elections when the ÖVP under Kurz came into power once more with the FPÖ as a coalition partner. The staunch anti-immigrant stance of the ÖVP and Kurz was reflected in its electoral campaign which was described by The New York Times as ‘ripped from the anti-immigrant populist playbook.’⁴⁹³ It was more or less an affirmation that Austria was by no means averse to having a populist right-wing government in power.

The outcome of the 2017 elections and the stark contrast in its reception in comparison to the FPÖ’s landmark electoral victory in government in 2000 is also noteworthy. As European governments recoiled in outrage and Israel went as far as withdrawing its ambassador, similar calls were made to other governments to take such stringent measures. The 2017 elections symbolized the resurgence of the Austrian right after its last precarious spell and subsequent collapse. The FPÖ finally cemented its status as a potential political ally and the lack of international condemnation meant that the party had finally shed its pariah image. It also indicated that the populist trend in Europe was still very much alive. The victory of the populist right was described as having emerged from the ‘volatile interface between unemployment, migration and a society which, in some eyes, has seen itself as the frontline defence of Christendom against Islam since at least the time of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683.’⁴⁹⁴ The outcome was also notable in the sense that it signalled the rise of Sebastian Kurz, who became the face of a new brand of pragmatic right-wing populist politics. Despite having engaged in a coalition with the FPÖ, Kurz was also known for criticising the FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache more than once. However, he was adept at absorbing some of the basic underlying tenets of the FPÖ’s primary agenda which included toughening immigration stance and this worked in his favour.⁴⁹⁵

His strategy summed up by Anton Pelinka is as follows:

⁴⁹² Ibid., pp.100-101.

⁴⁹³ Leila Hadj Abdou and Didier Ruedin, *n.2*, p.386.

⁴⁹⁴ “The Guardian view on the Austrian elections: an old threat in a new guise”, The Guardian. October 16, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/16/the-guardian-view-on-the-austrian-elections-an-old-threat-in-a-new-guise> (Accessed on 8th January, 2024).

⁴⁹⁵ Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Lena Maria Huber & Carolina Plesecia, “A tale of firsts: the 2019 Austrian snap election”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2020, p. 1351.

“His formula has consisted of stealing talking points from the FPÖ and presenting them in more moderate garments and with better manners”⁴⁹⁶

Austria is somewhat an anomaly in the sense that it presents one of the few cases of a right-wing populist party actually occupying a position of power as a government coalition partner. One might surmise that similarities with its neighbour Germany with regard to immigration and populist trends would be a foregone conclusion, closer analysis reveals that it is not so. Austria’s unique history and identity impacts how it deals with issues such as immigration and citizenship and it also reflects in how it reacts to the populist right. Despite this, it cannot be denied that immigration has played a crucial role in shaping the politics of contemporary right-wing politics in Austria; in this sense the latter is not so different from its western liberal counterparts after all.

Role of oppositional forces: mainstream and beyond

The presence of oppositional forces to right-wing populist parties is often a marker for their success or failure. The case of Austria is no exception. It presents a unique case in which the populist right has enjoyed an unusual degree of acceptance as well the opportunity to participate in the government more than once. According to Reinhold Gärtner, Austrian politics has always been characterized by a centre-right majority. This is attributed to the fact that Austrians harbour ‘great respect for authorities.’⁴⁹⁷ However, what also needs to be examined at the outset is the nature of the political system and the extent to which it can encumber or expedite the rise of these parties.

It is necessary to briefly reinforce the nature of the Austrian party system which is characteristically static. This system denoted as the ‘consensus model’ has ‘little movement, little improvement, little innovation’ and is therefore categorized as a ‘very conservative government model.’ One of the main distinguishing features that sets the Austrian system apart is the fact that it often veers towards an arrangement based on parties from across the political spectrum jointly holding the power if governance. However, the support for such ‘grand coalitions’ have been on the decline. It has been increasingly felt that such a rigidly bureaucratic

⁴⁹⁶ Philip Oltermann, “Sebastian Kurz’s audacious gamble to lead Austria pays off”, The Guardian. October 15, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/15/sebastian-kurz-could-31-year-olds-audacious-bid-to-lead-austria-pay-off> (Accessed on 8th January, 2024).

⁴⁹⁷ “Populists poised to shift Austria toward right”, France 24, October 14, 2017. <https://www.france24.com/en/20171012-austria-kurz-right-election-ovp-nationalist-fpo-freedom-coalition-government-populism> (Accessed on 8th January, 2024).

and archaic system was ill equipped to meet the evolving needs of the populace.⁴⁹⁸ This disillusionment at its stagnant nature has provided a fertile ground for the rise of right-wing populism in the last two decades.

Historically, the case of Austria presents a template for how parties on the far right of the political spectrum have been met with a general degree of tolerance. As discussed earlier, the process of denazification after the Second World War led to the exclusion of former Nazi party members from nearly all sectors of public life, including participating in and establishing new political parties. However, this process failed to achieve its desired outcome and Nazi sympathies remained very much alive in Austrian society. The Verband der Unabhängigen (VdU) or the Union of Independents and its successor the FPÖ were the predominant platforms for the far right during this period. In the initial years after denazification, former Nazis did face some opprobrium which included harbouring extremist tendencies and sympathies with Nazi and German nationalism. The media as well as the political opponents went out of their way to portray the far right as being enemies of Austria and of democracy in general. Because of this overt criticism, the far right despite having a foothold in the political arena and enjoying support from sympathetic elites, had to reposition themselves within the framework of democratic politics.⁴⁹⁹ In other words, they had to tone down their extremist inclinations, at least explicitly, and attempt to present a respectable façade in order to be accepted within the democratic framework. It is here that the concept of the democratic centre or ‘Mitte’ becomes relevant.

The concept of ‘centre’ has manifold facets ranging from the political to the sociological. While, it denoted the political position situated between the ‘Left’ of the political spectrum and the ‘Right’ it also symbolizes ‘lament over cultural decline’ in a Germanic context. After the Second World War, the centre was depicted as a bastion of stability, order and tradition which had been threatened by the advent of liberal democracy and modern society. Modernity along with its by-products such as the collapse of traditional authoritarian structures, the liberation of women as well as the excessive reliance on materialism became the signifiers of this cultural decline. While this aspect of a perceived societal transformation and its accompanying power is a crucial element in understanding the rise of the right, what also needs to be taken into

⁴⁹⁸ Michelle Hale Williams, “Tipping the Balance Scale? Rightward Momentum, Party Agency and Austrian Party Politics”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2013, pp.68-69.

⁴⁹⁹ Matthias Falter, “Reclaiming the political centre after National Socialism: the discursive repositioning of the far right in Austrian (party) politics, 1949–60”, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2018, pp.92-93.

account is how the latter have tried to move towards the centre in order to gain credibility. This holds true in the Austrian case as well.

The above-mentioned right-wing parties in Austria, i.e., the VdU and subsequently the FPÖ, both made a strategic move the centre, and in order to do so, they often presented a completely refurbished image. This image overhaul consisted of disassociating from their discredited historical origins and presenting an image of dedication only to the present and future. It also meant the overt affirmation of renouncing ideological affiliations. The FPÖ, for instance, projected itself as a party which was inclined neither to the left nor to the right. It might also be pertinent to point out that their first chairman Anton Reinthaller had belonged to the top brass of the Nazis in Austria and had even faced prosecution by authorities during the course of denazification. This projection as a completely new party, devoid of the ignominy of association with Nazism, was an attempt to start with a clean slate.⁵⁰⁰ To do so, these right-wing parties resorted to diversionary tactics which consisted of turning the tables on their political opponents accusing them in turn of being undemocratic or fascist. The prosecution of Nazis was denigrated as being undemocratic and synonymous with Nazism itself. This strategic restyling as being victims of political propaganda meant resorting to unjustified parallels such as comparing the history of anti-Semitism in Austria to the political censure of the FPÖ. As per this line of reasoning, the condemnation of both parties was not only groundless but also ensued from the fact that the accusers were themselves the guilty parties. Needless to say, this widespread attack on ‘others’ encompassed not only the political establishment but also society at large and was linked to the notion of ‘cultural decline.’ Former FPÖ leader Max Stendebach, lamented the increasing trend towards a totalitarian state based on bureaucratization which had led to the decline of the not only the individual, but also the ‘(ethnic) people, nation and culture.’⁵⁰¹ The initial push towards the political centre by the FPÖ is representative of a wider yearning for credibility and acceptance by the political establishment. However, it has now transformed into a populist ploy; the clear demarcation of the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ is the culmination of this process of ‘othering’. While earlier it signified an attempt to be integrated into the political system, it now symbolizes a desire to be set apart from the same.

Whether the FPÖ was actually successful in its attempt to position itself at the centre is another question, given its turn towards radicalisation under Haider. One may draw the conclusion that once the post-war striving for acceptance was met to a certain degree, it was able to gradually

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p.96-97.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p.99.

return to its radical roots. The importance of the political centre, especially in the Austrian context is crucial for understanding the success of the right-wing populist parties there. On this note, it is also necessary mention the ÖVP, which despite being positioned in the centre, has often forayed to the right in terms of not only its political standpoint but also its alliances with the FPÖ.

The Austrian political spectrum is characterized by a consensus model where power sharing between the two major parties in the form of ‘grand coalitions’ underlines a system that thrives greatly on stability. As mentioned before, policy making in Austria is based on ‘social partnership’ whereby the elites of the government, in consultation with representatives of the business and worker community engage in policy making. Policies are formed only when these three groups reach a consensus. Social partnership is deeply entwined and dependent on the major parties, either the SPÖ or the ÖVP which wield an undue amount of influence on the whole process. As a result of this unique arrangement, power-sharing has become the mainstay of Austrian politics.⁵⁰²

In the context of such a scheme of power sharing, the ÖVP is notable in the sense that it has strayed from the established trend of grand coalitions more than once by entering into coalitions with the FPÖ. However, the ÖVP itself has struggled with coming to terms with the competing right-wing ideological factions within its own ranks. From the 1980s, it attempted to diversify from its traditional Catholic voter base by emphasizing neoliberal economic policies. However, this failed since the core voter base, despite becoming less religious, still remained attached to traditional Christian values such as upholding established family values. In the 1990s the ÖVP returned to its former conservative roots, albeit with a novel twist. While it still held on to the norms of traditional familial values and morality, it added an element of individualism to the former as well. Despite the repeated efforts to reinvent itself, the party suffered from deep rooted ideological divisions, a fact that worked in favour of the FPÖ. The FPÖ succeeded in attracting a motley group of voters; ranging from ÖVP voters who were disillusioned with the party’s inability to meaningfully pursue its market-liberal policies to disenchanted working class SPÖ voters who were drawn in by the FPÖ’s populist common man image. As the ÖVP continued to grapple with its identity crisis, the FPÖ steadily sought to establish itself as the main centre-right party in Austria.⁵⁰³ The 1999 elections were a turning point for the ÖVP, since it exposed their vulnerable position. The fact that they came a distant third in the elections,

⁵⁰² Michelle Hale Williams, *n.2*, pp.69-70.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.75-76.

further facilitated their decision to enter into an alliance with the FPÖ as a way to regain a degree of their lost power. It also highlighted the growing rift between the SPÖ and the ÖVP which played a role in lessening the attraction of grand coalitions.⁵⁰⁴

The 1999 general elections and the subsequent formation of an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition is notable not only for bringing the FPÖ into the mainstream, but also for the concerted disapproval by various actors both domestic and international. Fallend and Heinisch have studied the reaction of these oppositional forces to the shock victory of the FPÖ in 1999 and analyzed the outcome of efforts to diminish its influence. According to them, the FPÖ was utterly disregarded by its competitors prior to 1999 and deemed unfit to govern due to its Eurosceptic and populist tendencies.⁵⁰⁵ The party was viewed as being situated beyond the ‘constitutional arch’, thus implying that it was often perceived as unworthy of serious consideration by its political rivals. Indeed, despite a centralising push by the FPÖ from the mid-1990s, not too many within the ÖVP favoured an alliance with the FPÖ. The situation began to change in light of the continued decline in the electoral performance of the ÖVP, and an alliance with the FPÖ seemed less and less unlikely. The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2000 was largely premised on the fact that the latter was eager to tone down its rhetoric for a chance to be a partner in government. In fact, as time progressed the coalition came to be seen somewhat favourably; in 2002, 42% of respondents in an opinion poll felt that ‘the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition had done “quite a good job”.’ However, the fact cannot be overlooked that the image of the FPÖ took a blow due to poor professionalism, losses at regional levels and internal discord. This increased during the second cabinet when the FPÖ splintered to give rise to the BZÖ.⁵⁰⁶ A possible way to interpret the ÖVP’s gamble in entering into a partnership with the FPÖ is to infer that the former tried to blunt the influence of the FPÖ by making it more moderate and thus ultimately removing it as a threat.

The other mainstream Austrian parties kept their distance from the FPÖ, following a path of ‘principled non-cooperation or *Ausgrenzung*.’ The SPÖ especially was rigid in adhering to this policy even at the cost of reduced coalition options. Following the widespread condemnation of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2000 which included sanctions by EU-14, the SPÖ was accused by the former of supporting ‘foreign interference’ and ‘committing acts of national disloyalty.’ However, the SPÖ was unsuccessful in garnering new voters during this period and in the 2002 elections, the ÖVP monopolised a greater share of dissatisfied FPÖ voters. The SPÖ’s stringent

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p.78.

⁵⁰⁵ Franz Fallend and Reinhard Heinisch, “Collaboration as successful strategy against right-wing populism? The case of the centre-right coalition in Austria, 2000–2007”, *Democratization*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2016, p.324.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.327-329.

policy of ostracization was somewhat loosened after the election of the second ÖVP-FPÖ coalition. In Carinthia in 2004, the SPÖ was even persuaded to join forces with Haider's FPÖ. The 'breach of the quarantine' continued with many regional SPÖ organisations openly questioning the earlier repudiation. Thus, it can be seen that the weak response of the mainstream parties towards the FPÖ underlined a lack of willingness to adopt extreme measures needed to tackle possible threats to democracy. Harsh measures such as banning the FPÖ or creating obstacles to its public funding were not undertaken. Noted scholar Chantal Mouffe opined that branding FPÖ politicians as Nazis or ostracising the party would be ineffective since it would reinforce its populist credentials of being 'victims' of the political establishment. According to Fallend and Heinisch, the weakening of the FPÖ and the breakaway BZÖ was due to their shortcomings in actual governance and the inability to materialise the promises that had heightened public support in their favour. The ineptitude of the right did more to discredit them rather than any actual attempt at excluding them by mainstream oppositional forces. Moreover, the resurgence of the FPÖ in the coming years reinforced the fact that 'populism supplies a broad demand in the Austrian electorate.'⁵⁰⁷

Apart from reaction by the mainstream parties, the response by other internal actors such as civil society organisations, the media and courts also need to be noted. In Austria, the response of the media, both national and international to the rise of the FPÖ can be described as being lukewarm. The international media did focus on Haider and his party's extremist agenda with a degree of consternation; *The Economist* summed up the result of the Austrian election with the ominous heading "Fascism Resurgent?". However, these reactions did nothing but to fuel to FPÖ's 'anti-internationalist' stance. On the other hand, the national media was by no means overtly vocal against the rise of the FPÖ. Austria's public broadcaster, the ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk) was subject to a degree of interference by the mainstream parties. It was critical in its coverage of the FPÖ's 1999 campaign and subsequently covered the two coalition parties in power extensively leading the latter to actually pass a law in 2001 that replaced the top brass of the ORF with their own sympathisers. However, a massive backlash which included a petition signed by 70,000 Austrians in 2006 led to a reduction in the interference. Apart from the ORF, highly regarded papers such as *Die Presse* and *Der Standard* made no secret of the fact that they were in favour of a coalition between the mainstream parties, ÖVP and SPÖ and clearly did not favour the FPÖ. The only medium that was unequivocally in favour of the populist right was the tabloid media. The tabloids, as is usually

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.329-330.

the norm, were themselves populist in style, and were prone to the dissemination of views that were not only anti-Semitic, but also hostile to immigration, globalisation as well as European integration. More often than not, the populist right could rely on this media for negative propaganda against certain groups that were viewed as harmful to Austrian interests.⁵⁰⁸ Thus, the role of the media is somewhat ambivalent in the Austrian case. Their reactions to the rise of the FPÖ in 1999 cannot be deemed as overtly hostile. Despite the fact that the leading papers expressed their dislike for the FPÖ, the rampant interference in the coverage of the ORF as well as the pro-right propaganda of the tabloid media meant that the reaction was not as unanimously antagonistic as could have been expected.

The reaction of a few other actors also needs to be considered. The constitutional courts have a potential to limit parliamentary action, although in Austria, party politics has the last word. In earlier years, legislation passed by the mainstream parties, the SPÖ and ÖVP were able to bypass judicial review since the bills passed with the requisite majority were deemed to be constitutional laws. However, this was not possible during the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition because it did not possess the required two-thirds majority. Furthermore, the SPÖ, which had a large presence in the parliament was able to seek recourse at the Constitutional Court in order to challenge legislation passed by the coalition. This outcome of this strategy bore mixed results; while the Court repealed some laws, others were approved.⁵⁰⁹

Aside from domestic actors, the responses at the international level to the rise of the FPÖ also need to be taken into consideration. The repressive policies of the ÖVP-FPÖ pertaining to immigration and asylum were often criticized by civil society organisations such as Amnesty International. However, it is the reaction by foreign governments that need to be kept in mind. In neighbouring Germany, the response by both the mainstream political parties and media was unanimously negative; German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of the SPD warned against the ominous possibility of the ‘Haiderization of Europe.’ The US which was particularly cautious of far-right tendencies in Austria noted the rise of the FPÖ. Despite initially recalling its ambassador on pretext of ‘consultations’, it finally settled on treading a path of pragmatism. The harshest reaction to the FPÖ came from the Israeli government. Between the period of February 2000 to July 2001, not only did it refuse to send an ambassador to Vienna, but it also made it clear that the FPÖ in government would have a negative impact on the bilateral relations between the two countries. Austria’s 14 EU partners announced a number of sanctions

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.331-332.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 333-334.

against Austria. These stipulated measures which included steps such a refusal on the part of the EU-14 countries to engage on certain levels with any Austrian government of which the FPÖ is a part and reception of Austrian ambassadors at only a technical level. Finally, a committee of experts formed to review the Austrian government and the FPÖ designated the latter as a ‘right-wing populist party with extremist expressions.’ This was a warning to the Austrian government to reign in the FPÖ and indeed the ÖVP did much to downplay some of the more radical demands of the FPÖ.⁵¹⁰

Despite doubts regarding the actual efficacy of these sanctions, it was a reminder that the international community was not oblivious to the worrying ascendance of a right-wing populist party like the FPÖ to the very upper echelons of the government. The Austrian government tried to downplay the damage done to its bilateral relations, but the effect of these sanctions persisted for quite some time in that many countries avoided engaging with it on a deep level.⁵¹¹

Fallend and Heinisch’s analysis presents the subliminal acceptance of right-wing populism in the Austrian socio-political system. After the initial outrage at FPÖ’s rise had subsided, its participation in government became more matter of fact. Coupled with the interference of the government in media and also in processes of legislation to suit its agenda, the relative tolerance of the right makes more sense. The socio-political ecosystem in the Austrian context points heavily to the fact that there is a high degree of tolerance to right-wing parties, or a lack of marked aversion to such parties. This is further illustrated by the 2017 election, when the FPÖ once again came into power as a coalition partner of the ÖVP. While its former stint in power evoked opposing responses, regardless of their ultimate efficacy, the ascendance of the FPÖ for a second time was met with a lack of outrage or opposition. From this it can be inferred that within the period of 20 years, the presence of the FPÖ had become more or less normalised in Austrian mainstream politics.

Although the FPÖ is generally seen as the major example of a right-wing wing populist party in Austria, one must not lose sight of the fact that the centre-right ÖVP is the fulcrum in the political spectrum that often determines the degree of the success of a party like the FPÖ. Abdou and Ruedin have analysed whether the ÖVP is a an ‘anti-immigrant right party.’ As highlighted earlier, the ÖVP was forced to transform itself due to a combination of factors in a changing political landscape such as the emergence of challenger parties and falling electoral

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 334-336.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p.337.

support. These were responsible for the ÖVP turning its focus to the immigration issue. The increasing prominence of immigration, as per Eurobarometer, started from 2007, reaching a peak during the migration crisis of 2015 when it became the most important issue of public concern. A classic scheme adopted by parties to attract voters is to establish ‘ownership’ over a particular any particular issue, particularly a prominent one. While the FPÖ had been the ‘issue owner’ of immigration, the ÖVP had steadily making strides since 2000 to increase its share of ownership over immigration. These included adopting a national integration strategy for immigrants in 2010 as well as setting up state secretary for the same purpose.⁵¹² This period is also marked by the increasing prominence of the Sebastian Kurz who became responsible for steering the party towards a stauncher anti-immigration direction.

So profound was his impact that the advent of Kurz for the ÖVP had been compared to that of Jörg Haider for the FPÖ in the initial years. The party was quick to revamp its image to make Kurz its public face. It is unsurprising that due to such excessive reliance as well as public popularity, Kurz was able to cement his position and acquire power without much opposition. This meant a basic restructuring of the party itself. The ÖVP moved away from its original decentralised core to a centralised mode of operation which also meant the sidelining of pro-immigrant interest groups. Interestingly, the party also loosened its religious underpinnings which is evident in it rebranding itself as ‘neo-conservative.’ This meant decreasing emphasis on traditional Christian values and the Catholic church. All these changes proved to be fruitful; the ÖVP was able to increase its vote share by 7.5 per cent in the 2017 elections and this was also largely owing to the role of Kurz.⁵¹³ The role of Kurz and the ÖVP during the 2015 migrant crisis is also turning point in the party’s rightward trajectory. Although the ÖVP was a junior partner in the coalition at that time, it successfully established its ownership over the immigration issue. Kurz successfully pressed for limiting the number of asylum applications and Austria became the first country in the EU to do so. This assertiveness was reflected in the 2017 and 2019 election manifestos where it claimed credit for the reduction of the flow of migration to the country.⁵¹⁴

An examination of the election manifestos of the ÖVP reveals a growing trend towards a more restrictive positioning. The election manifestos of 2017 and 2019 made the anti-immigrant stance of the party amply clear, however it was also pragmatic enough to tone down its rhetoric

⁵¹² Leila Hadj Abdou and Didier Ruedin, *n.3*, pp.388-390.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.390-392.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.396.

in order to attract new voters. The 2013 manifesto was more moderate in comparison, much like other Western European centre parties. Prior to 2013, the party upheld its credentials as a centre party by eschewing radical positions of both ends of the political spectrum be it the left or right.⁵¹⁵ Also, after 2013, the party focused more on the integration of immigrants consistent with the establishment of the state secretary for immigration headed by Kurz. The question of purported misuse of welfare payments by immigrants also came into prominence with the 2017 manifesto pressing for welfare benefits being available to EU citizens only after residence of 5 years. The party firmly advocated for the acquisition of German language skills by immigrants, since knowledge of German was upheld as imperative for integration by the party. It was made clear that the chief prerequisites for successful integration be the adoption of Austrian values and those of liberal democracy.⁵¹⁶

The gradual progression of the ÖVP from the centre-right to further right in the political spectrum has thus been induced by a number of factors, not least of which is the rise of a challenger party like the FPÖ. This transition reached its peak under Kurz who made sure to utilize the issue of immigration which enabled the party to secure previously dwindling votes on one hand and diminish the FPÖ stronghold over immigration on the other. The role of ÖVP is crucial to understanding the impact of oppositional forces to right-wing populism in Austria because it has played an important part in legitimising the FPÖ and bringing it in the mainstream. The two ÖVP-FPÖ coalitions and the contrast in responses to both shows the increasing acceptance of the right in Austrian politics.

In recent years, after the exit of Kurz, the ÖVP moved back to its centre-right positioning. According to the Government programme 2020-2024, it emphasizes the importance of integration through learning the German language and adopting the European values, with clear warnings of repercussions in case of breaking the law.⁵¹⁷ The migration strategy also remains restrictive; with clear lines of demarcation drawn between migration and asylum. Measures to expedite labour migration and to restrict the flow of asylum seekers through the strengthening of Europe's external borders and commitment to agreements with other 'safe countries' remain the main focus points. Regarding integration, the party aims to further integration measures through the German courses as well as value courses, as well as to expand control over Islamic

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., pp.394-395.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p.395-396.

⁵¹⁷ "Aus Verantwortung für Österreich; Regierungsprogramm 2020–2024". Source: https://www.dievolkspartei.at/Download/Regierungsprogramm_Kurzfassung.pdf (Accessed on 14th January, 2024).

centres. The aims also explicitly state the aim of expanding the existing ban on headscarves till the age of 14.⁵¹⁸ In 2020, the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition approved a ban on headscarves in primary school as part of a plan for ‘integration.’⁵¹⁹ The ÖVP programme clearly indicates a rigid approach towards integration more along the lines of assimilation of minority communities rather than actual integration based on a more inclusive approach. This tendency towards assimilation is based on the predominant majority culture subordinating the other minority cultures.

Finally, some light also needs to be shed on the role of the left as an oppositional force. As mentioned previously, the SPÖ was adamant in its rejection of any alliance with the FPÖ initially, despite loosening this resolution to some extent later on. However, as consistent with other parties of the left, it has been liberal in its approach towards naturalisation and immigration. In 1985, Chancellor Bruno Kreisky of the SPÖ headed the coalition that was instrumental in passing the Citizenship Act that granted citizenship to children of Austrian and foreign parentage. During this period, the SPÖ took other measures to liberalise citizenship to some extent for foreigners.⁵²⁰ However, the SPÖ was not always able to act of its own accord in matters relating to immigration, citizenship and the like. The rise of the FPÖ in the 1990s meant that these issues came under increasing public scrutiny. The limiting influence of the right is noticeable in the case of the enactment of the 1998 citizenship law. While an earlier citizenship law, enacted by Chancellor Vranitsky of the SPÖ in 1994 was progressive in the sense that it removed certain sexist barriers in citizenship laws by allowing Austrian mothers, with foreign husbands to pass on their citizenship to their children. But the subsequent law enacted in 1998, under Chancellor Viktor Klima, also of the SPÖ introduced restrictions on citizenship and naturalisation requirements. Thus, the right has exerted immense influence on these matters in Austrian politics. It is also to be noted that the that the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition came into power soon after in 2000.⁵²¹

The SPÖ adheres to ideals that are inclusive and liberal. Its aims include the creation of an environment which would include the participation of all sections of society. It is vocal in its opposition to discrimination and advocates the increased participation of citizens in civil

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Philip Oltermann, “Austria approves headscarf ban in primary schools”, May 16, 2019. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/16/austria-approves-headscarf-ban-in-primary-schools> (Accessed on January 19, 2024).

⁵²⁰ Thomas Janoski, *n.4*, p.397.

⁵²¹ Ibid.p.399.

society. It reiterates the belief that religion and personal beliefs fall strictly within the private domain of the individual.⁵²² It thus departs from parties like the FPÖ which uphold the dominance of national identity and espouse a rigid and authoritarian form of governance. But with regard to the SPÖ as an oppositional force to the right in Austria, one might comment that their performance has been to some extent equivocal. It is true that it has acted as a relatively liberal influence, with regard to matters like immigration and naturalization, during the times it has headed the government. But it must also be kept in mind that it has not been able to free itself completely from the constricting influence of the right, often having to cave in under their pressure.

The study is a microcosm of the impact of the right on Austrian politics in the last few decades. Austria is exceptional in the sense that it is the first country in the post-war western liberal democratic framework to witness a right-wing populist party in power. Much of this can be owed to Austria's unique history, national identity as well as its own process of dealing with its role in the Second World War. The sense of denial contributed to a high degree of tolerance for right-wing politics. This is also accompanied by rapid demographic diversification and high rates of naturalisation. It is at the juxtaposition of these competing trends that the rise of the right needs to be examined. The FPÖ fits the template of a challenger right-wing populist party aspiring to upend the rigid post-war consensus that characterised the political and economic system of Austria. However, its periodic episodes of ascendance are matched by inevitable loss of power, which leads one to conclude that despite its unusual acceptance in the mainstream, it has not been able to break the mould of a right-wing populist party failing to live up to its promises.

⁵²² "Parteiprogramm und Statut", SPÖ official website. <https://www.spoe.at/downloads/> (Accessed on 20th January, 2024).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The salient points pertaining to the case studies are as follows:

Germany

Germany illustrates the dilemmas faced by a country struggling with the challenges of liberalization on one hand and the ever-present ominous reality of its past on the other. Collating the facts and trends discussed previously, it is necessary to sift the major underlying aspects that are crucial to this study as a whole;

Firstly, the dominant leitmotif in the German case is the complicated relationship with its past which has in turn has played the single most decisive role in shaping its post-war national identity. Germany's defeat in the Second World War paved the way not only for the national humiliation of being dissected by the victors but also laying the groundwork for an identity shaped by guilt. From then on, the political and economic destinies of East and West Germany were to be so divergent that even reunification failed to undo the entrenched polarity that had set in over the decades. The process of denazification in the west constituted the earliest attempt to exterminate Nazi sympathies and stamp out the possibility of a German resurgence. Needless to say, it was unsuccessful and if anything, it illustrated how deeply such sympathies were embedded in every aspect of German life. But despite its failure, denazification entailed extensive re-education and restructuring that signalled the inception of the culture of reckoning and guilt in the west. It is for this reason that it is pertinent to this study, mainly to understand how west German political psyche was conditioned out of its pre-war nationalist and militarist underpinning to be reduced to one forever burdened with conflicting notions of guilt and victimhood. In contrast, east Germany underwent no such process of reckoning and dismissed Nazism as the outcome of capitalism. The fledgling socialist state built itself on the premise of being inherently anti-fascist, as if all traces of fascism would automatically be obliterated by socialism. Reunification did not make things better for the east; rather it only heightened feelings of east German insecurity by subsuming its entire socio-political and economic system into the western liberal, democratic and capitalist framework. As a result, the eastern part of Germany till date is a fertile ground for right-wing populism.

Secondly, another point central to the question of right-wing populism in Germany is how the latter has been suppressed in various ways since the end of the war. Right-wing populist parties have traditionally been ostracized or forced to tone down their rhetoric. Also, the threshold for entering the federal parliament was so rigid that they could hardly make an impact beyond a few localized, sporadic victories. It is in this context that the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is so portentous. Its entry into parliament in 2017 was not just simply a victory for the political right, it signalled a breach of the invisible barrier that had prevented the ascendance of right in Germany for more than half a century. The role of the European migrant's crisis (2015-16) in catapulting a fringe Eurosceptic party to one of national (even international) importance is of immense significance. It raises questions how right-wing sentiment has persisted in Germany despite decades of being repressed.

Thirdly, the reason why immigration has played such a decisive role in the rise of right-wing populism in Germany has a lot to do with how it has historically been perceived in Germany. Germany has traditionally never accepted the official label of being a 'country of immigration' despite being the centre point of successive waves of immigration, especially after the Second World War. The most prominent of these immigrant groups has been ethnic Germans expelled from different parts of Europe after the war ('Vertriebene'), and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union ('Aussiedler') as well the Turkish guest workers who were recruited to help with rebuilding the economy after the war. The ethno-national conception of German citizenship meant that the ethnic German migrants were automatically granted citizenship and the Turkish guest workers remained exactly that; 'guests' denied of citizenship even after decades of residence. It is only recently, with the enactment of the Nationality Act (2000) that these strict laws have somewhat been loosened. This period also coincided with the continued rise of immigration to Germany as well as a rapidly ageing population. The harsh demographic reality of an ageing workforce no doubt played a role in the liberalisation of naturalisation laws and the government also took recourse to various measures such as easing the entry of highly-skilled migrants. The question of immigration is also inextricably linked to the integration of minorities. The closed ethno-linguistic nature of German society meant that the ethnic German migrants, often courted by mainstream political parties, were able to integrate relatively easily, while the Turkish guest workers remained economically backward and prone to segregation. On the other hand, eastern Germans remained hostile to immigrants; an enduring testament to the lack of contact with foreigners in the erstwhile GDR. As is evident, these conflicting trends pertaining to immigration needed only one catalyst to set off a chain reaction and that came in

the form of the migrant crisis. Angela Merkel's decision to let in more than a million refugees during the crisis forcibly brought these underlying tensions to the forefront and exposed the struggles of a closed conservative society coming to terms with its new diverse identity.

Finally, the role of oppositional forces to right-wing populism in Germany centres on the role of its dominant party, the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Historically the party has catered to a predominantly Catholic voter base and has upheld traditional Christian family values. But even during its initial years, it adopted a firm stand against fledgling right-wing parties and proactively undertook various measures stem their growth. In this respect, it remains the only centre-right party among the three examined case studies to have taken an active oppositional role to the right. The CDU began to face a crisis of legitimacy with the waning of the traditional family and religious values that constituted a major part of its appeal. As a result, it was forced to undergo a process of modernisation, which gained momentum under Angela Merkel. Under Merkel, the CDU moved away from its traditional conservative position and adopted a more inclusive approach towards the integration of minorities. As a result of this shift, it created a void that was exploited by a party like the AfD who could successfully reach out to voters disenchanted by Merkel's policies. Apart from the CDU, the other mainstream party that has been analysed as an opposing force is the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). The SPD has been the party most favoured by immigrants and was responsible for pushing through the citizenship reforms. It is still openly opposed to and vocal against the AfD, even taking the responsibility of educating the public against the former on its official website.

United Kingdom

The case of Britain is anomalous in the sense that right-wing populist parties, till date, have failed to penetrate the tough integument of the two-party dominated political system, despite having maintained a continuous presence throughout the last century. This is due to a number of factors ranging from its unique historical circumstances to the intransigent nature of its liberal democratic political framework. The salient points to be noted are;

Firstly, the fact that fascism has historically failed to make headway in Britain is amply demonstrated by the reality of two world wars. While nations in continental Europe began to fall under the fascist sway, Britain remained secure under the aegis of its vast empire and the conviction that it was the undisputed leader in the world. The strength of its economy and the perception of the superiority of its democratic traditions provided a stark contrast to the tenuous

political and economic circumstances of its continental counterparts. This sense of superiority persists even today, and has fuelled the thriving Eurosceptic tradition in British politics. Steadily, as pride in its imperial legacy began to be discredited, what remained was a national identity rooted in civic nationalism and democratic tradition as well as an obstinate refusal to accept a diminished role in the world. There are some of the underlying factors responsible for not only major political decisions such as the withdrawal from the EU, but also why right-wing populist parties have consistently failed to make a mark in British politics.

Secondly, the persistence of fascist and right-wing populist groups in the UK is as constant as their inability to enter the mainstream. These groups and parties have flared up at various points in the twentieth century, be it the infamous British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, the British National Party (BNP) from the 1960s onwards to even the English Defense League (EDL) in more recent times. These groups have, in varying degrees, thrived on propagating nativist politics and stringent opposition to immigration. Parties like the BNP have even attempted to evolve in order to widen their support base, but to little avail. The rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) is remarkable in the landscape of contemporary British politics because it holds the distinction of majorly influencing the EU referendum, a feat unusual for a right-wing party in the UK in terms of sheer impact. Like the AfD in Germany, UKIP was formed as a Eurosceptic party by academicians, and like the AfD it steadily grew out of its moderate beginnings to adopt a more radicalized, populist standpoint. However, what sets these parties apart is the fact that while the AfD achieved the seemingly insurmountable task of entering the German federal parliament by stoking up anti-immigration sentiment, the UKIP ultimately faded into obscurity even after shaping the very foundation of Brexit. It is this point of divergence that sets Britain apart from many of its European counterparts where right-wing populist politics is concerned.

Thirdly, the Brexit referendum is the focal point of the analysis of right-wing populism in the UK in the time frame of this study. The referendum brought to the fore the inner conflicts of British national identity in a globalized world as well as the tensions pertaining to immigration and the integration of minorities in a country experiencing rapid demographic transformation. The UKIP was able to perfectly capitalize on this prevailing discontent and under Farage it began to tread the path of xenophobic and racist right-wing politics under the guise of protecting British identity and interests from the perceived threat of immigration. The UKIP shared an identical voter base to parties like the BNP; comprising of older, less educated white males who are seen to be the 'left-behind' underclass bereft of the fruits of globalization.

However, it was able to dominate politics in a way that a fringe party like the BNP was not. Though mainstream parties often resorted to denouncing Farage and distancing themselves from the UKIP's inflammatory politics, the latter set the tone for a brand of right-wing, intolerant populism that dominated British politics at that particular time.

Fourthly, the role of immigration in the rise of right-wing populist tendencies in the UK is premised on the fact that contrary to countries like Germany, the UK has had a long history of immigration and exposure to the wider world due to its imperial past. There have been successive waves of immigration to the UK as well as government legislation to facilitate or restrict these flows. Many of the earlier restrictive legislation was downright racist, reflecting the societal undercurrents of the time. This hostility has persisted through the rapid acceleration of immigration from the turn of the twenty-first century. This negativity is also linked in part to the scepticism relating to the perceived failure to integrate minority communities. The complex nature of British identity, with the subliminal pull of ethnic nationalist tendencies (i.e. English, Scottish or Welsh) meant that minorities face difficulties in subscribing to a definite identity. This contradiction has been weaponized by right-wing populist groups in their agenda of 'othering' immigrant communities not only in terms of identity but also access to government welfare and jobs.

Fifthly, analyzing the role of the mainstream parties as oppositional forces reveals a few interesting trends. The centre-right Conservative party has traditionally been socially exclusive and inclined to the elite strata of society. It has also been historically opposed to immigration and its early leaders like Enoch Powell propagated racist and xenophobic politics which are idealized current right-wing populist leaders. On the other hand, the Labour Party has been the preserve of the working classes and has been more inclusive in its approach towards ethnic minority groups. In the context of Brexit, the major point to be noted is that the Conservative Party ended up co-opting several aspects of the UKIP's political agenda, while at the same time maintaining a distance from the latter. As a result, it ultimately deprived the UKIP of its political raison d'etre. The Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn on the other hand failed to play the impactful role it could have due to inner party ideological contradictions and dissent.

Finally, one of the most noteworthy points is the complete disintegration of UKIP after the referendum, thus making it a textbook example of a typical right-wing populist party. However, what differentiates it from other fringe parties of limited appeal is the decisive role it played in the UK breaking away from the EU. Furthermore, it set the precedent for an aggressive brand

of right-wing politics that made its way into the mainstream leading to the acceptance and normalization of hate politics and xenophobia.

Austria

Austria differs from the other two case studies in the sense that it has a curious amalgamation of an imperial past and a unique political and economic system that shapes attitudes towards right-wing populism. It also provides the earliest example of a right-wing party assuming power in government in post-war Europe, thereby setting the standard for the impending wave of right-wing populism in Europe a decade later. The following points are thus to be noted;

Firstly, the question of Austrian national identity and the relationship with its past is central to the discourse on right-wing populism. At the outset, it should be kept in mind that Austria, despite its diminished size today, was once the seat of the vast multi-ethnic Habsburg empire. Thus, it has its own peculiarities and divergences which set it apart from its much larger neighbour Germany. Unlike Germany, which underwent a process of reckoning with its past, Austria chose the path of deliberate denial by presenting itself as a victim of Nazi aggression. Such brazen revisionism completely overlooked its complicity in the war and the wilful acceptance of Nazism by the Austrian public. Furthermore, the process of denazification failed in Austria to the extent that Nazi perpetrators themselves came to be viewed as the wronged party leading to their eventual re-absorption in public life. Another aspect of Austrian national identity is the conflicting loyalty to its German ethno-linguistic roots on one hand and Austrian heritage on the other. While historically, both were perceived as one Germanic whole, the former came to be increasingly discredited as Austria disassociated itself from its past after the end of the war. Hence, what can be seen is a constant attempt to invalidate the unsavoury aspects of its past leading to a general proclivity to shirk accountability. This, coupled with the high degree of pride in its national identity and imperial past has contributed to an implicit sense of nonchalance and acceptability of right-wing tendencies as opposed the fervour of collective guilt in Germany.

Secondly, the singularities unique to the Austrian political system is, to some extent, responsible for the tolerance for right-wing politics. This system is characterized by the undisputed dominance of its two main parties, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) who often engage in a system of power sharing or 'grand coalitions'. This closed system of power sharing, known as Proporz, leads to a situation where these parties assert dominance and control over the political, bureaucratic and economic

configuration of the country. This centralising tendency also makes its presence felt in the economic sector where the upper echelons of business and labour interests engage with the political elites to shape policy and decision making. Thus, a constricted, hierarchical system, which was initially formed to accelerate the reconstruction of the country's economy after the war, gradually came to be the major determinant in the country's destiny. It is no wonder that the nature of the political and economic establishment, by its very nature elite-dominated would prove to be a fertile breeding ground for right-wing populist sentiment.

Thirdly, the Freedom Party of Austria or the FPÖ is a crucial component of right-wing populist discourse in western Europe simply because of the fact that it came to power as a partner in a ruling government coalition, a feat that was previously unthinkable in post-war Europe. Hence it is the only case in this comparative study where a right-wing party has not only assumed power in government, but did so *twice* within the examined timeframe. Its initial claim to fame in the 1980s-90s under charismatic leader Jörg Haider was largely based on its assertion of being an outsider to the political establishment. In its second stint in 2017, it was able to garner popularity on the basis of the discontent surrounding the European migrant crisis. In the former phase, its assumption of power was met with widespread condemnation, which was surprisingly absent the second time. From this it can be ascertained that right-wing populism not only has a sizeable demand and supply base in Austria, but it was also become normalized to a great extent in the last two decades.

Fourthly, Austria too denied being a country of immigration despite experiencing persistently high levels since the end of the Second World War. Its population is diverse with around one fourth being individuals of migration background. Citizenship and naturalization are relatively more liberal in some respects than that of its neighbour Germany. This surprising divergence has been attributed to its colonial past and interaction with foreign peoples, unlike Germany where imperialism did not leave its mark. Despite this, anti-immigration sentiment remains high and laws pertaining to integration of minorities are stringent.

Finally, oppositional forces to populism remain relatively weak in Austria. Traditionally, the country has been dominated by the centre-right ÖVP. It must also be remembered that it is the ÖVP which has undergone successive shifts to the right and entered into coalitions with the FPÖ. Under Sebastian Kurz, the party took such a radical and rightward turn that it ended up co-opting the rhetoric of the FPÖ. The more liberal SPÖ adhered to a policy of not cooperating with the FPÖ, but fails to be a strong oppositional role. Hence it is to be noted that the forces

of opposition to the right in Austria remain restricted to a superficial level and sympathy for the right is entrenched in both the public and the elites.

Keeping in mind the salient points pertaining to each case, the **research questions** of this study need to be addressed:

1. What are the causes of right-wing populism in each of these cases?

The first obvious question that needs to be analysed is the underlying causes of right-wing populism in each of these cases. The answer can be addressed in a two-fold manner; overt/surface level cause and implicit/underlying cause(s). In terms of the former, it is simple enough to pinpoint the one sole factor that set into motion the surge of right-wing populism in these countries, particularly in the period between 2015-17; the European migrant crisis. The crisis symbolized a breach in the relative insularity underlying post-war European stability and the inability of the authorities to deal with the massive influx of non-white, mostly Muslim migrants. It brought to the fore tensions that had been simmering in European society and politics since the advent of globalization and can be viewed as the major propelling factor behind the rise in right-wing populist politics at that point of time.

If one is to examine the internal determining factors in this context, it would be interesting to note that the underlying scenario is more complex than what appears on a surface level. Germany's historical progression unfolded in such a way that not only was it left divided, but it was also left with a guilt-laden national identity that shaped its politics since the end of the war. Of the examined cases, it is the only one where right-wing parties were actively sidelined and shunned from the mainstream in entirety. It is also a country with a comparatively weaker sense of national identity and pride, one where any semblance of nationalist fervour has been quashed as a reminder of its role and subsequent defeat in the Second World War. The threat of an impending demographic crisis prompted not only the liberalization of its immigration and citizenship laws, but also in part the transformation of its dominant party, the CDU. As a result, it may be ascertained that the challenges of globalization and increased demographic diversification proved difficult for a country that was until recently closed and ethno-national by orientation. Immigrants in general and non-German immigrants in particular have always been the 'other', not part of the greater Germanic whole characterized by ethnicity and language. This otherization has been more acute in eastern Germany, a fact that has been capitalized by right-wing populist forces to further their divisive agenda. Beneath its exterior of economic prosperity, Germany still has unreconciled tensions pertaining to its past, the gulf

between the east and western regions as well as persistence of xenophobic tendencies that are at odds with the its changing population landscape. The rise of a right-wing party like the AfD in a country which has doggedly ostracized the political right can be seen as the inevitable manifestation of tensions underlying a society in a state of flux.

Britain, on the other hand, has been shaped by its imperial past and a stable parliamentary democracy that has stood firm for centuries and through two world wars. For the longest time, this national pride in its identity and political institutions impeded the advance of right-wing parties beyond the fringes of British politics. However, in recent times certain strains are to be noted. Immigration has become the foremost topic of contention in British politics. Although Britain has a more diverse history of immigration in comparison to its European neighbours, rapid demographic change has brewed discontent pertaining to not only the influx of immigrants, but also the perceived failure to integrate minorities. British identity, already weak due to the pull of its separate ethnic constituents, found a footing in the previously nascent Euroscepticism that was rapidly gaining ground. UKIP used this to their advantage in two ways; *firstly*, by manipulating the sensitive issue of immigration to push forward a populist brand of racist, divisive politics and *secondly*, to use the British Eurosceptic predisposition to achieve its original agenda of breaking away from the EU. Hence, behind the surge in right-wing populism in Britian we see a degree of identity threat perception of a former imperial power still struggling to come to terms with its new role in the world as well as the massive demographic changes has been undergoing in the past few decades.

Finally, the case of Austria also presents a number of interesting trends and features. Like, Britain, it is also a former imperial power and this has contributed to a high degree of pride in not only its national identity, history but also its unique political system. Austria is a case where there is a peculiar level of tolerance for right-wing parties, inducting a right-wing party in government as a partner twice. This high degree of acceptance can be attributed to a number of factors. *Firstly*, the post-war denial of its role during the war and complete failure of denazification meant a tendency towards a lack of accountability. *Secondly*, the closed, hierarchal and elite-driven nature of its political and economic system meant the existence of gaps which lead to the rise of right-wing challenger parties. The latter factor led can be seen as a contributing factor to the rise of right-wing parties while the former can be seen as responsible for normalizing it. Hence, the entire historical and political set-up is such that situations are relatively more conducive to the rise of right-wing populism on a whole.

The internal factors show that there are certain innate differences between the three countries in terms of the rise of right-wing populism. While it may be tempting to reduce the causes of right-wing ascendance to a common denominator, there are a plethora of factors unique to each country that play a crucial role in this regard.

2. What role does immigration play in facilitating the rise of right-wing populism?

The role of immigration is central to the discourse on right-wing populism in Europe, so much so that it can be counted as the single most influential factor in inducing it. In each of these cases, the concerned right-wing populist parties have used the issue of immigration to chart their upward trajectory. And as mentioned before, the European migrant crisis also played a fundamental role in this regard. Immigration can be viewed as the ‘empty signifier’, as per Laclau’s theory, which constitutes the *image of pre-given totality* around which all unfulfilled demands converge. In a way it becomes symbolic of, and an outlet for the tensions underlying a political system at a given point of time. The usage of immigration, not only as an issue in itself, but also as a front for other unresolved ones is crucial for the propagation and acceptance of right-wing populism as a whole in this context. Having outlined that, it is also necessary to understand the various facets of each of the three countries’ experiences of dealing with immigration.

In the case of Germany, the issue of immigration largely symbolizes the focal point of rapid societal and political pressures arising from modernization. The excessive preponderance of German ethnic insularity meant exclusive and discriminatory citizenship laws. On the other hand, emphasis on German cultural superiority symbolized by ‘Leitkultur’ (guiding culture) meant upholding certain specific standards that needed to be met by immigrants (especially non-ethnic German ones) in order to become ‘civilized’ or integrated. Hence, we see a system that is parochial and exclusionary by nature. The major blow to this ethno-linguistic form of nationhood came in the form of demographic challenges and globalization. The subsequent liberalization of naturalization and citizenship laws put Germany well on the road to accepting its status as a country of immigration. The dominant CDU, which at one time had been strictly opposed to immigration, overhauled itself to keep up with the times promoting both immigration and integration of minorities. However, these changes occurred predominantly within the last two decades. The short timespan meant that these sweeping changes were met with a degree of resistance, especially in east Germany, which had its own share of problems pertaining to xenophobia and crisis of identity. All these underlying pressures were set off by

the advent of the migrant crisis, which helped to overturn the final impediments that had been keeping in check the forces of the political right in post-war Germany. Hence the absolutely integral role of immigration in the rise of the right in Germany is amply evident.

Britain, due to its role as an imperial power, experienced the influx of immigrants on a much wider scale than a country like Germany. The floodgates of immigration from the Commonwealth were opened after the Second World War, but this tide was quickly stemmed by subsequent restrictive legislation in the wake of widespread public discontent. Moreover, actors on the political right, be it fascist groups or fringe right-wing parties, made use of immigration to further their agenda over the years. So how did the immigration issue bring UKIP into the mainstream while other such parties failed? *Firstly*, it is to be noted that the UK has experienced a surge in immigration as well as in the percentage of foreign-born population in the last two decades particularly. Official data reveals that the percentage of ethnic minority groups as well as white non-British have increased exponentially every decade. Furthermore, the perceived lack of integration of some of these communities became a major problem as well. As several metropolitan cities (including London) witnessed huge demographic change, underlying antipathy to immigration only became magnified. *Secondly*, the advent of New Labour and its policy of ‘managed migration’ increased immigration levels from the end of the 1990s. The EU expansion of 2004 only added to the numbers. Hence, anti-immigration sentiment peaked during this particular time frame and the UKIP was able to successfully channel this to achieve their agenda. It should be borne in mind that despite starting off as a Eurosceptic party, the UKIP achieved success only by making use of anti-immigration rhetoric. Thus, in the case of Britain particularly, immigration became an ‘empty signifier’ indicating not only the issue in itself, but also other problems relating to identity and economy.

The case of Austria bears some similarities with both Britain and Germany but has its unique points as well. Like Britain it has an imperial past and this has translated into relatively higher naturalization rates in comparison to Germany. Its similarities with Germany with regard to the issue of immigration range from its denial to acknowledge its status as a country of immigration, to accepting similar waves of immigrants such as ethnic Germans and Turkish guest workers. But its approach towards immigrants has been somewhat different to Germany despite the fact that both started out with strict ethnonational citizenship laws. Immigration remains a sensitive point in Austria. It has also experienced demographic diversification and studies have found that Austrians have the highest level of anti-immigration sentiment in Europe. It is to be noted that the FPÖ was able to rise under Haider initially by making use of

anti-immigration rhetoric and during its last victory in 2017, both the FPÖ and its partner the ÖVP made use of the migrant crisis to consolidate their position. The sweeping changes in the area of immigration in Germany and the UK in the last two decades are not as profound in Austria, although immigration levels and demographic change have both been constant. However, the inherent closed nature of Austrian political system coupled with high levels of inherent anti-immigration sentiment contribute to the growth and acceptance of right-wing populism there.

3. What is the role of oppositional forces against the politics of right-wing populism?

Oppositional forces to the political right play a central role in determining the extent to which right-wing populist forces are able to consolidate themselves in a political setting. In the three case studies concerned, it is the centre-right parties that act as the pivotal fulcrum deciding the success or failure of right-wing populist parties.

It may appear paradoxical that Germany, infamous for its war history, has also given birth to thriving anti-fascist movements. In fact, of the three case studies, it is the only one where active measures have been taken to stunt and suppress right-wing forces, with even citizens often resorting to mass protests against the right. The centre-right CDU, the dominant party in post-war Germany, has traditionally taken up the mantle of opposing right-wing politics. This included adoption of measures ranging from politically sidelining right-wing parties to even engaging in academic research to tackle them. However, at the same time the CDU has been staunchly opposed to immigration and has upheld its conservative Christian credentials. The centre-left SPD on the other hand has been the traditional bastion of immigrant voters. Also, it is the SPD that was majorly responsible for pushing through the reforms in citizenship in the face of stiff opposition by the CDU. With the gradual loosening of the religious and family-oriented ties underpinning the CDU, it faced a crisis of legitimacy which forced it to undergo a process of modernization. Under Merkel's leadership Germany gradually transformed into an economic powerhouse from its previous status as the 'sick man of Europe'. The CDU also became more proactive in the areas of integration of minorities. As a result, this push towards modernization was bound to leave a section of disillusioned, conservative, right-leaning voters who would be more susceptible to the rhetoric of a party like the AfD. Thus, the proactive oppositional played by the CDU in a way contributed to the rise of the AfD. On the other hand, the SPD is openly vocal against the AfD; in its website it even attempts to educate voters against

political disinformation propagated by the AfD. Forces of the political right have always been kept in check in Germany to some extent.

The British political system is unique in the sense that it has steadfastly refused to let any right-wing party penetrate mainstream politics. While most of the major points have been discussed above, one factor that needs to be elaborated, i.e. the role of its two main parties Conservatives and Labour. One of the important reasons why right-wing parties have been sidelined is because the centre-right Conservatives have typically propagated a brand of exclusivist and anti-immigration politics, earning them the moniker of ‘nasty party’. From the end of the 1990s we see successive changes in the political configuration; *firstly*, the push to the ‘centre’ by Labour and Conservatives, both adopting a stance more moderate than their previous positioning on the left or right. This potentially left a dissatisfied pool of voters from both parties who would be liable to vote for the UKIP. *Secondly*, the referendum exposed another peculiar repositioning; Labour, under its staunchly left leader Corbyn (who had originally been opposed to the EU) failed to play a decisive role in countering both the UKIP and Brexit. The Conservatives moved back to the right to the extent that they coopted the major agendas of UKIP. This ultimately led to the disbandment of UKIP once Brexit had been achieved. Thus, ironically the Conservatives played a greater oppositional role than Labour in terms of countering the right-wing populist UKIP.

In case of Austria, the centre-right ÖVP played a crucial role in determining the fortunes of the right-wing populist FPÖ. While the former had never been overtly right-wing, a decline in political fortunes in the late 1990s meant that it became more open to collaborating with the FPÖ, something it had not envisaged previously. Simultaneously, the FPÖ had also been moving to the centre and toning down its rhetoric in order to enter the mainstream. The first ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 1999 was made possible by the ÖVP’s decision to unite with the FPÖ make it a coalition partner. By the second ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2017, the ÖVP under Sebastian Kurz had made a decided shift to the right and established ‘ownership’ over the immigration issue. Like the Conservatives in the UK, the rightward shift by the centre-right ÖVP worked in ultimately sidelining its partner FPÖ. Oppositional forces to the political right remain relatively weak in Austria, especially in comparison to the other two cases. The centre-left SPÖ despite its refusal to collaborate with the FPÖ has also failed to play a strong oppositional role.

In all three cases, the main oppositional push came from the mainstream establishment itself. In Germany, despite there being a degree of antipathy towards the political right both in mainstream politics and public life, the repositioning of the CDU largely paved the way for the rise of AfD. In the case of UK and Austria, the centre-right parties played a crucial role in either delegitimizing (as in UK) or sidelining (as in Austria) right-wing populist parties.

4. What are the factors that lead to variation in these instances of right-wing populism?

In examining the three case studies concerned, it is evident that myriad factors are at play when it comes to the problem of right-wing populism. Viewing them from a monolithic perspective would be unduly reductive and deny the amalgamation of historical, political and economic factors that facilitate the rise of right-wing populist politics. The basis for its variation, on the other hand, also depends on how successful it has been in terms of consolidating itself.

In the case of Germany, there is a definite pushback towards right-wing populism. Long years of conditioning have created an overt rejection of the political right. But this has not been able to eliminate the underlying xenophobia and persistent right-wing sentiment altogether. As a result, the flare up of the AfD is nothing but an indicator of these unresolved strains in a rapidly transitioning society. Simultaneously, it must be kept in mind that the anti-fascist sentiment has also not been exterminated and often makes its presence felt in the form of mass protests against the AfD and the right. The AfD, despite enjoying the support of discontented voters in opinion polls, is viewed as a serious threat to democracy. The extreme-right and parties like the AfD are still not viewed favourably by mainstream German political establishment. In the UK, too, right-wing populist parties have not been able to overcome the rigours of the biparty parliamentary democracy; UKIP despite its massive role in the Brexit referendum, ultimately disintegrated when it was deprived of its driving agenda. In no way was it even considered a major political contender at the national level. At best, its role remained confined to shaping the national debate on Brexit which, though significant, did not enhance its potential to make inroads into national politics per se. The case of Austria is different altogether due to the high level of tolerance for the political right in a constricted, conservative and hierarchical political and economic system. The political space and general inclination are such that it would always be more receptive to right-wing populist politics.

A few variational factors can thus be noted; *firstly*, in the case of Germany we see the surge of the right even in spite of repression and decades of conditioning. *Secondly*, in the case of

Britain, the unprecedented rise of UKIP and subsequent fall is testament to the fact that such parties will always either be sidelined or be subsumed within the democratic system. *Thirdly*, in the case of Austria, there is neither the conditioning, or the political/ public pushback against the political right making it the most prone to right-wing populism. Thus, the actual variation lies in not only the inherent contributing factors to the rise of right-wing populism in each case, but also how the respective political systems have **addressed** the problem. These **addressal mechanisms** are three separate types; **systematic pushback** (Germany), **eventual absorption/rejection** (UK) and **normalized acceptance** (Austria).

The different types of addressal mechanisms also speak volumes about the variation in the types of democratic political systems in each particular country. UK has a mature democracy committed to liberal democratic principles which, despite its shortcomings, allows voices on either end of the spectrum to be heard. A party like the UKIP rose by its own volition and ultimately followed the path to disintegration in the natural course of events. In the end its agenda became at one with its mainstream contender (the Conservatives) leading to its **temporary absorption and ultimate rejection** by mainstream national politics. In Germany, the democratic tradition, though strong, is relatively new and some aspects are enforced (such as concepts of guilt and identity). Hence, we see a **historic pushback** of right-wing populist parties, as opposed to their inherent dismissal in the British political system. The AfD is simply the product of various unresolved strains breaking through the barrier of this enforced repression. Finally in the Austrian case, the unique, changing democratic system characterized by a near perpetual system of ‘grand coalitions’ left a gap for the rise of right-wing populist FPÖ and its **gradual normalization** through its two stints in power.

As the above cases illustrate, the threat of right-wing populism is a challenge that any democracy is inclined to face at a given point of time. In some ways it can be viewed as a coping mechanism for unresolved tensions that are struggling to find an outlet in a particular political system. The impending possibility of right-wing populism is what makes it all the more relevant in political discourse. It should be kept in mind, however, that the nature and progression of right-wing populist politics is dependent on several variables that differ in separate contexts. That is not to deny the existence of commonalities; as examined in this study, immigration has become a common catalytic factor for the rise of right-wing populism in most western democratic countries. But it is the nature of the underlying variables that determines the reception of these external factors and their role in the advance of right-wing populist politics. Right-wing populism is thus subject to the interplay of both explicit and implicit

causalities unique to each separate political system. The major point of contention is whether the system concerned will allow these right-wing populist tendencies to translate into political authority or simply allow them to follow the natural course of disintegration.

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3. Interview with Mr. Raffaello Pantucci, Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Dated: 24-02-2022.
4. Interview with Professor Emma Mawdsley, Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies, Newnham College, Cambridge University. Dated: 19-06-2023.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Britain is usually seen as a case where right-wing parties have generally failed to make much headway in mainstream politics. However, there have been instances of the rise of right-wing populist parties like UKIP which have exerted influence at a certain point of time.

(a) Why are these parties never able to enter the mainstream?

(b) What is it about the British political system that prevents these parties from making a lasting mark in mainstream national politics?

2. Right-wing parties like BNP have been traditionally side-lined. On the other hand, a party like the UKIP, that started out as a single-issue party, gradually gained more popularity by adopting anti-immigration rhetoric. How would you explain this dichotomy?

3. Do you think the increase in immigration in the last few decades has genuinely led to a case of identity threat? Or is the anti-immigration rhetoric used by right-wing parties just an indication of prevalent racism in society?

4. How does the UK differ from mainland Europe in terms of the acceptance of these right-wing populist parties? (citing example of success of AfD in Germany and FPÖ in Austria in contrast to disintegration of UKIP post Brexit)

5. The lack of integration of minority communities has often been cited as an issue of concern by the right.

(a) Do you think the UK has been able to perform well in terms of the integration of minorities?

(b) Do you think multiculturalism has been a success?

(c) Do you think the UK fares much better than countries like Germany in the case of integration of minorities?

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

The following persons were interviewed during the course of this study.

1. Dr. Rohan Mukherjee, Assistant Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science. (Date of interview: 27-06-2023)
2. Prof. Harsh V. Pant, Professor of International Relations with King's India Institute at King's College London. (Date of interview: 16-03-2023)
3. Mr. Raffaello Pantucci, Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. (Date of interview: 24-02-2022)
4. Prof. Emma Mawdsley, Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies, Newnham College, Cambridge University. (Date of interview: 19-06-2023)