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**Europe's Refugee Crisis:
Right-Wing Populism and Mainstream
Cooptation in Germany and France**

by
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April 25, 2017

Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of International Affairs at the
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**COLIN POWELL SCHOOL FOR CIVIC AND GLOBAL
LEADERSHIP**

Under the guidance of
Professor Rajan Menon
and
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Abstract

In Europe's biggest wave of refugees since World War II, over 1 million people fleeing protracted conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan crossed the Mediterranean on unseaworthy boats in 2015 in a desperate bid to reach the continent. Rather than uniting to deal with the humanitarian situation, the European Union (EU), the world's wealthiest and most integrated bloc, struggled to effectively manage the flow of refugees. Amid rising anti-immigration sentiment and nascent Euroscepticism, EU governments employed unilateral and security-driven responses aimed at limiting the number of refugees that would enter Europe. Europe's Refugee Crisis, as it came to be known, has unsettled the EU like no crisis ever before. This thesis demonstrates that populist right wing parties are responsible for the staunch anti-immigrant sentiment as well as the increasingly restrictive policies on asylum in Europe. By examining France and Germany, the EU's two founding members, this thesis shows that populist right wing parties sowed political discontent by portraying migrants as a threat to jobs and to national identity. These messages achieved widespread acceptance, even mainstream status, in large part because establishment parties validated right wing discourse and demands in a desperate effort to retain their appeal to voters. The result was a marked shift to the right on immigration and asylum policies. That, in turn, has increased the suffering of thousands of people who have sought refuge in Europe. The rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe and the consequent resurgence of nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment also puts at risk the entire EU project: the creation of an integrated continent based on liberal values.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Against the backdrop of unprecedented numbers of people being displaced by conflicts worldwide¹, over 1 million asylum seekers and migrants crossed the Mediterranean on unseaworthy boats in 2015 in a desperate bid to reach European shores.² That same year, over 3 thousand people died or drowned while making the journey. The world witnessed wrenching scenes of hysterical families trying to reach Europe and images of drowning children. Despite repeated calls by human rights groups, the member states of the European Union (EU) did not open safe and legal pathways for refugees to seek asylum.³ This, however, did not deter people, predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq from fleeing protracted conflicts and persecution in their countries. They kept coming, mostly on flimsy boats or on foot through dangerous land routes – often paying smugglers.

Instead of adopting a unified approach that would have shared the responsibility for taking in refugees, European states opted to enforce unilateral actions that contrasted with their declared values and with international treaties on refugees.⁴ States erected fences first with states outside of the EU, but later between EU states, including members of Europe's passport-free area, the Schengen zone. The fences, often manned by armed guards, blocked refugees, diverted their passage or trapped them to open fields. Macedonia built a fence along its border with Greece, blocking a key transit route. Greece built a fence and electronic surveillance system

¹ According to UNHCR a record high of 65.3 million people were displaced due to conflict and persecution in 2015. Available on <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

² Find more data <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

³ See more info: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/16060-deaths-on-the-mediterranean-european-states-should-create-legal-safe>

⁴ Newland et al., 2016

along its border with Turkey. Austria erected a barrier along its border with Slovenia and capped the numbers of people it would admit, as well as how many it would allow to cross into Germany. As tensions rose, on March 18, 2016, the EU heads of state reached consensus on a deal that, in effect, outsourced the problem to Turkey. In exchange for Turkey's stemming the flow of refugees to the EU and agreeing to provide a haven for those refugees repatriated by European states, the EU promised to accelerate visa liberalization for Turkish nationals and pledged more than \$6 billion towards the assistance of Turkey's refugee population. The transactional nature of the deal which focuses solely on migration management, sparked condemnations from rights groups, who also argued that the agreement was in violation of EU law and international human rights law.⁵ The fate of the deal is now uncertain because of tensions between the two sides and political instability in Turkey.

The thousands of refugees who had hoped to reach the United Kingdom through the English Channel encountered rejection. Britain built an even higher wall topped with razor wire around the undersea tunnel—one that was heavily policed. Thousands of people were trapped in the Jungle, as the Calais camp came to be called, among them hundreds of unaccompanied minors. The trash-strewn camp, which was set up on a former landfill site, also came to symbolize the EU governments' unwillingness to cooperate with one another on their humanitarian obligations as well as their lack of empathy for the plight of refugees. After the camp's permanence became a growing source of embarrassment for the French and the British governments, the refugees were relocated to multiple other holding

⁵ Newland, 82

facilities around Paris in October 2016, two years after the Jungle was first set up. The camp was razed.

1.1 Argument

In this thesis, I will argue that the roots of this lack of cooperation lie in domestic politics. The prevailing attitude in Europe toward refugees is that they are economically driven migrants who are unworthy of asylum in Europe or potential terrorists who must be kept out. As I will show, using polls taken over the years and direct quotes from political actors, right-wing political leaders have produced and shaped this lack of empathy towards refugees. Right-wing populist leaders in the EU have politicized the issue of asylum, framing it as a crisis, an existential threat to European Christian identity and an economic burden. They have mobilized people around the idea that migration poses a security threat and therefore warrants containment. They have also monopolized the debate on migration, in large part due to their ability to sell their fear-based messages to publics, but also due to the mainstream's unwillingness to directly confront or challenge such messages. This has led to the shunning of any discussion on the reasons people seek asylum, on the benefits of migration in an aging European workforce, or the assistance of refugees as a humanitarian obligation and a public good. Liberal and left wing parties have shifted to the right on the refugee issue, so as not to be outflanked by the increasingly influential populist anti-immigrant right.

I point out how right wing populist parties were a fringe movement in Europe just twenty years ago; today they have firmly established themselves in the

mainstream in over half a dozen countries.⁶ And where right-wing populists have not gained power, they are enjoying unprecedented popularity. These parties, which are opposed to the basic cooperative and humanitarian principles of the EU, hamper mainstream leaders' ability to allocate funds towards refugee assistance or to put in place even limited resettlement policies. Far right parties do so by challenging ruling governments through the spreading of often unsubstantiated messages that exaggerate the risks and costs of the assistance of refugees. They instead propose security-centered solutions as the only viable option, swaying public support in their direction. The populist messages, which appeal to nationalism, the collective and the personal interests of people, have stoked anxieties by connecting immigration to crime, terrorism and a loss of identity. A security response to migration now shapes asylum and migration policy across much of Europe.

1.2 Organization

This thesis is organized into six parts. The first chapter will define right wing populism through a review of the most prominent literature on the topic and provide an outline of which parties in Europe can be categorized as populist. I will discuss the recent ascent of these parties and address the ways in which a continued rise in their popularity could shape the entire political sphere. The rise of anti-immigrant populism also has humanitarian consequences: thousands of refugees have to contend with a Europe that is increasingly restricting its rules on asylum. I then define the key terms refugee, asylum seeker and migrant and introduce my case studies, Germany and France. The second chapter provides a brief historical survey of the emergence and evolution of the European Union. I mention the 2009 Euro Crisis as a defining

⁶ Malone, 3

moment in the evolution of the European integration project, as it has led to a loss of faith in EU institutions. I then provide a concise history of migration to Europe, tracing its advent to the labor shortages of the post-war reconstruction period. I conclude by demonstrating how populism in Europe emerged in the early 1980s in response to increased migration and to populist actors who began to gain ground running on anti-immigration platforms. The third chapter outlines European states' response to the refugee flows, even before they were declared to be a crisis and show how it largely pandered to the populist agenda of keeping migrants out. I discuss European identity, the construction of Muslims as "the other," as well as some of the laws that have been designed to limit the religious and social freedoms of Europe's Muslim citizens. I argue that populist parties are responsible for the widespread perception that Muslims do not and cannot belong in Europe, which in turn has formed the basis for populism's opposition to admitting Muslim migrants from Syria or Iraq. Finally, I discuss mainstreaming, which is establishment parties' effort to appropriate politically successful populist ideas in an effort to recapture lost votes and to undercut the appeal of populism. The fourth and fifth chapters are the case studies of Germany and France respectively. I discuss each country's confrontation with populism and the uniqueness of each case. I demonstrate how despite variation in the conditions under which populism emerged or is maintained, establishment parties' response to right wing populism has been similar: cooption of ideas that restrict migration and an overall shift to the right. The sixth section offers concluding thoughts on the rise of populism and its likely effects on Europe's future.

1.3 What is right-wing populism?

Hans-Georg Betz suggests that right-wing populist parties are first and foremost right wing in their rejection of individual and social equality and of political projects that seek to achieve it.⁷ Their right wing politics is further manifested in their opposition to social integration of marginalized groups and in their appeal to xenophobia. Jan-Werner Müller defines populism as an exclusionary form of identity politics that is based on a constructed definition of “the people” which excludes minority groups, foreigners and immigrants.⁸ For Cas Mudde, populism lacks an ideology of its own and assimilates ideas from other ideologies so as to capitalize on latent economic and political grievances in society. For Mudde, right wing populist parties in Europe have largely combined with authoritarianism and nativism, considering society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps. They have created a distinct “us” versus “them” approach using religion and culture as the basis for the divide.⁹ Populist authoritarianism emphasizes “law and order” and nativism propagates the idea that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group, presenting foreigners, immigrants and asylum seekers as a threat to the homogeneity and identity of the nation-state. Betz observes that amid the emergence of a more multicultural and diverse society in Europe, right wing populist parties have promoted themselves as the advocates and the guardians of the exclusive European national identity.¹⁰ They appeal to xenophobia and reject the principle of social equality and inclusion based on a civic conception of nationalism.

⁷ Betz, H. (1994). Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe. *The Review of Politics*, 55(4). p, 4

⁸ Müller, 2

⁹ Mudde, 34

¹⁰ Betz, H. (1993) ‘The new politics of resentment: Radical right-wing populist parties in western Europe’, *Comparative Politics*, 25(4), p, 417

Their ideology starts from the assumption of basic inequality where the native population should come first and have priority over jobs and welfare provisions.

For political theorist Ernesto Laclau, populism is the very essence of politics and its emancipatory force.¹¹ Populism is the very logic of the political, and therefore all politics are by definition, populist.¹² For Mudde, populism poses a danger to democracy since it requires pluralism and the recognition of finding terms of living together as free, equal, but also diverse citizens.¹³ For Laclau, populism is a radical form of democracy and the rise of populism reintroduces conflict into politics and mobilizes the excluded sectors of society – ultimately challenging the status quo.

The populist right has focused much of its political fire on Islam, the religion of the majority of the more established migrant populations in Europe, as well that of the recent arrivals from war-ravaged countries. These parties have been able to frame the question of Islam in terms of their level of integration, their belonging and in the context of the larger challenges confronting European identity. Central to right wing populist mobilization is the discussion over whether or not Muslims can or should even be accorded a permanent place in Western society.¹⁴

1.4 What are the populist parties in Europe?

The Front National, the Alternative for Germany, the Dutch Freedom Party, the Danish People's Party, the Sweden Democrats, the True Finns, the Swiss People's Party, and the Norwegian Progressive Party, have all made electoral gains in their

¹¹ Laclau, 2005

¹² Laclau, 47

¹³ Muller, 3

¹⁴ Wodak, R., Khosravinik, M. and Mral, B. (2014). *Right-wing populism in Europe*. 1st ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing. p, 72

electoral polls by almost exclusively focusing on anti-immigration and anti-Islam.¹⁵ Populist right wing parties are also opposed to European cooperation under the EU: they are Eurosceptic. Their recent surge in popularity has put immense pressure on ruling governments on the assistance of refugees, whether sea rescues, allocation of money or permanent re settlement – all of which require cooperation with EU states. Concerned over losing popularity to the surging populist movements, mainstream parties have emulated their positions on migration and adopted their nationalistic rhetoric, in some cases making a significant shift to the right.

1.5 Implications

Europe's handling of the refugee crisis has wide implications beyond the impact on the lives of the thousands of people who remain in legal limbo while living in makeshift camps, are stranded on the streets of major European cities or held in camps in Greece. Since 2011, the war in Syria has created nearly 6 million refugees. An additional 1 million people fled the wars raging in Iraq and Afghanistan. These refugees are entitled to protection under international law, as they face death or persecution if returned home.¹⁶ Meanwhile, millions of refugees remain stranded in squalid camps in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon – developing countries who continue to be the hosts of the vast majority of refugees. In that context, Europe's treatment of refugees, apart from being in direct violation of signed agreement, chiefly the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – sets a very low standard for cooperation and states' humanitarian responsibility towards refugees.

¹⁵ Ibid, 14

¹⁶ See more info: <http://www.cfr.org/global/global-conflictracker/p32137#!/conflict/refugee-crisis-in-the-european-union>

Refugee and human rights groups have criticized the EU for failing to put in place a unified response as well as failing to comply with their own asylum standards and signed human rights treaties. Human Rights Watch characterized the EU's response as "dismal" and lacking in leadership, vision and solidarity.¹⁷ Roberts et al. wrote that Europe's response had a "preoccupation with numbers" that too often ignored the individual treatment of refugees, failing to provide the most basic health and safety standards.¹⁸ The responsibility to care for asylum seekers was largely left to civil society and volunteer organizations. The state abdicated its traditional role. For Newland, many governments pursued "the three Ds" of denial, diversion and deterrence, with only a few others making some efforts to rescue, protect and find ways to share the responsibility.¹⁹ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that a year after the crisis peaked, thousands were still sleeping in tents and open areas in freezing temperatures. Thousands of others were held in crowded detention centers, awaiting responses to their applications. The organization also reported that states were exceedingly slow in fulfilling resettlement pledges, with only 6,259 refugees relocated from Greece by December 2016 – less than 10 percent of pledged numbers under the EU scheme.²⁰

1.6 Definitions

A *migrant* according to the UNHCR describes any person who moves across an international border, to join family members already abroad, in search for work, in

¹⁷ See full Human Rights Watch reports: <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/european-union>

¹⁸ Roberts, B., Murphy, A. and McKee, M. (2016) 'Europe's collective failure to address the refugee crisis', *Public Health Reviews*, 37(1).

¹⁹ Newland et al, 26

²⁰ Find more data: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/news/15792>

the quest for education or for a range of other motivations.²¹ By contrast, a *refugee* flees armed conflict or persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Under international law, he or she requires international protection and cannot be returned home. An *asylum seeker* seeks formal protection and cannot be returned to the country they fled from while their claims are being considered under the principle of *nonrefoulement*, or nonreturn – a concept imbedded in international and constitutional law.²²

1.7 Case Selection

In this thesis, I will focus on the ascent of two populist movements in Germany and in France and trace their impact on the states' migration policy. I will examine these populist movements' positions on migration as well as those of the mainstream political parties to assess the policy shifts that have taken place. *I will examine whether the recent surge in the popularity of right wing populism has the ability to sway leaders to accommodate their proposals.* My project will examine whether the success of these right-leaning parties has the ability to directly weaken efforts to cope effectively with the refugee crisis. If this is indeed the case, then we can expect that their continued popularity is likely to lead to legislation that will further restrict access to asylum in European states and endanger social and religious freedoms of minority groups in Europe.

Germany and France merit special attention because they have been the driving forces behind the formation of the EU and remain essential to its survival and its future. Germany escaped from the Euro Crisis virtually unscathed, maintains a

²¹ See more: <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/44938/migrant-definition>

²² Messina, A. and Lahav, G. (2006). *The Migration Reader: Exploring Politics and Policies*. 1st ed. Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner. p, 9-11.

robust economy and low unemployment rates. Meanwhile France has suffered from years of stagnation and has been dogged for years by a high jobless rate. Germany and France are both home to a sizeable migrant population and populist parties have become powerful in both countries. But populism emerged at different times and under different socio-economic situations in the two countries. The electoral fortunes of French and German populism have also been different. I intend to show through my case selection that while populism may differ in its emergence and success from country to country, what remains similar is the ways in which establishment parties respond to the threat it poses. My findings should therefore help explain the policy shifts on migration that have taken place in other European countries with powerful populist parties, such as Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy. The French and German cases thus provide an opportunity to explore the differences among populist-right parties, the nuances within populist thought and the different ways in which populism manifests itself. These two cases provide the ways in which populism invariably leads to a marked shift to the right in policies on migration, even on the part of mainstream parties—representing the center, right and even the left.

1.8 Two Cases

In Germany a year after Angela Merkel announced an “open border policy” for migrants and accepted more than 1 million asylum applications, her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), was beaten into third place in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The anti-migrant Alternative for Germany party (AfD) garnered about 21 percent of the vote.²³ In response to the rise of the AfD’s

²³ Read: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/04/germanys-far-right-afd-unseats-angela-merkels-party-in-key-regio/>

popularity in the polls and her own sagging approval ratings,²⁴ Merkel began advocating strict anti-Islamist measures, such as banning Muslim women from donning the full veil in public.²⁵

France is home to the prototypical populist right wing party in Europe, the National Front (FN), which commands 25 percent of public support, according to polls.²⁶ In December 2016 its leader Marine Le Pen said she wanted to block free education for illegal immigrants in France, even though such a policy would contravene a central French law that guarantees schooling for all children. Despite having a one of the largest immigrant populations in Europe, France reluctantly agreed to resettle 30,000 after rejecting a permanent quota system, saying, “We won’t take any more”²⁷ socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls said adding, “we cannot welcome to Europe all those who flee dictatorship in Syria.”²⁸

²⁴ See trends and results of German parties: <http://pollytix.eu/pollytix-german-election-trend/>

²⁵ Read full article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/world/europe/merkel-calls-for-ban-on-full-face-veils-in-germany.html>

²⁶ Read: <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/735118/French-election-2017-results-latest-polls-odds-tracker-win>

²⁷ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-idUSKCN0VM0NI>

²⁸ Read: <https://euobserver.com/migration/131175>

Chapter 2: The Birth of Europe

The aftermath of World War II left behind a shattered and impoverished continent with unlikely prospects of recovering or avoiding the recurrence of war with its neighbors.²⁹ But things changed quickly. In 1951, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which brought under joint control the resources necessary for making war, and became the first step in European integration. The initial motivation was to avoid the relapse of war between France and Germany. But less than a decade later, the continent was not only at peace, it was thriving. The motivation for further integration shifted towards creating a stronger and more prosperous union, rather than simply achieving peace. The success of the ECSC prompted leaders to sign more agreements that further developed common economic policies and merged their national markets into a single one in which goods, people, capital and services could move freely. The system established a common external tariff, in addition to removing tariffs on trade among member states.³⁰ Starting in the 1970s, more European states joined what was by then referred to as the European Community (EC). On November 1, 1993, the Maastricht Treaty went into effect, establishing the modern-day European Union.

For Ernst B. Haas, European integration had a self-sustaining dynamic: it created the demand for further integration. Integration had a “positive spill-over

²⁹ Read Hitchcock, 2003; Ther, 2016 and Judt, 2005

³⁰ Find more info: https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/calculation-customs-duties/what-is-common-customs-tariff_en

effect” where integration in one “functional” area spilled over into other areas.³¹ And so the creation of a common market in one sector, coal and steel, led to incentives for the creation of a general common market allowing for free trade in all goods. Integration would soon also widen with more European states joining. In the early 2000s the fast-expanding EU became the world's largest trading bloc.³² It awarded its citizens high standards of living exemplified in its generous welfare system and affordable medical care. The open border policy, which included the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, enabled EU citizens to study, live and work in any EU country.³³ The Union also brought democracy and a shared prosperity to a continent that had been at war since the 16th century. Twelve countries from Central, Eastern Europe, as well as formerly communist countries joined the EU in two waves of accession in 2004 and 2007 leading to today’s Union composed of 28 member states (the UK is due to formally withdraw in 2019).

The Maastricht Treaty resulted in the creation of the Eurozone, in which participants share a common currency, a common central bank and a common monetary policy. In the late 1990s, members signed the Schengen Agreement, which eliminated border controls among participating states.³⁴ The EU is made up of five institutions: the Commission, the Council of ministers, the European Parliament, the Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors.³⁵ Together, the EU is a cooperative

³¹ Schmitter, P.C. (2005) ‘Ernst B. Haas and the Legacy of Neo-Functionalism’ *Journal of European Public Policy* 12/2: 255-272

³² Find more info: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/eu-position-in-world-trade/>

³³ Bradbury, 20

³⁴ The 26 members participating in the Schengen agreement are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland

³⁵ Hitchcock, 447

venture in which states agree to give up aspects of their sovereignty in specific areas in exchange for participation in these institutions. The EU is not static. It is a constantly evolving set of institutions with far-reaching powers, “a web of overlapping institutions designed to allow its members to achieve together certain objective – security, stability, prosperity – that they could not attain alone.”³⁶ The EU passes and enforces laws that affect nearly every aspect of life in Europe: business, trade, farming, health and the environment. It has a parliament, a flag, a common passport and an anthem.³⁷ And yet, it is not a state or a federation. Since its inception integration continued in a largely upward trajectory revealing a steady level of trust among states and a majority citizenry who viewed the EU favorably, valuing the freedoms it afforded them to easily, travel, work and live throughout Europe.

2.1 The Euro Crisis

The year 2009 would prove to be a watershed moment in European history. The 2008 crisis that began on Wall Street when the US real-estate bubble burst, spilled over into Europe dealing a heavy blow to the common European currency, the Euro. Most of the founding EU countries as well as the new members went through deep recessions. Mediterranean countries, Greece, Italy and Spain were disproportionately hit by the crisis. Some post-communist countries also suffered deep slumps. Germany as the wealthiest creditor EU state, took charge of resolving the crisis. Merkel insisted that bailouts be contingent on severe austerity measures, budget cuts and reforms. As a result of these measures, salaries and pensions were slashed, unemployment soared and masses were plunged into poverty. It soon became

³⁶ Hitchcock, 435

³⁷ Ibid

clear that a default of any of the most affected states would spark its exit from the euro and potentially a domino effect of crises across Europe. For Greece as well as some of the other states, membership in the EU not only facilitated the crisis but also tied their hands in their ability to resolve it, as they were subjected to high interest rates on loans and had no ability to use the tools of monetary policy, such as devaluation. Despite showing some signs of recovery, the effects of the crisis still linger with sluggish economic growth and persistently high unemployment rates in some states, paving the way for populist parties to argue against the merits of membership in the EU. It also left behind among citizens a sense of deep distrust in EU institutions and a disdain towards the EU's supranational institutions, above all the Commission and the European Central Bank. Disillusionment with the EU increased as Europeans' initial enthusiasm that membership in the union would bring a higher standard of living, access to better jobs and economic prosperity, was deflated.

It is on the heels of the Euro crisis, that large flows of asylum seekers began arriving on Europe's shores, creating fertile ground for many new or long-dormant populist parties who wanted to bank on general discontent with the EU. They also had a renewed opportunity to further rally people around distrust of foreigners, a central theme for populists, one in some instances, that has been in the works for years.

2.2 Migration in Europe – A brief history

Prior to the end of the World War II, Europe was a significant source of emigration to the rest of the world. It was not until after the war that the continent gradually shifted to becoming a major destination for immigrants. Starting in the

1950s in what became a crucial component of post-war economic reconstruction in Western Europe, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK), recruited large numbers of low-skilled workers. Though labor migration halted in response to the economic crisis of the 1970s, immigration continued in the form of family reunifications. Historical and political changes most notably the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the war in the former Yugoslavia would also lead to increased migration and asylum applications in many countries in Europe. Migration however did not affect all European countries in the same way. Some states, mostly France and the UK, who were former colonial powers, regulated and often facilitated the arrival of immigrants from their former colonies. While other countries in the EU, like Estonia and Slovakia have negligible migrant population.³⁸

Starting in the early 1980s, in response to increased levels of migration, a rise in anti-immigration populist parties alongside official efforts to integrate under the EU, leaders began putting in place policies that would limit migration and asylum. For William Hitchcock, immigration and asylum policies are inherently tied to the process of European integration.³⁹ Leaders recognized that a zone without internal controls requires an effective system for managing external borders, common visa policies and agreed rules on asylum and immigration. Harmonisation however has tended to result in the adoption of the lowest common denominator of national policies.⁴⁰ With some exceptions, the result has been to push policy in a more

³⁸ See full stats [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Immigration_by_citizenship,_2014_\(%C2%B9\)_YB16.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Immigration_by_citizenship,_2014_(%C2%B9)_YB16.png)

³⁹ Hitchcock, 433

⁴⁰ Read more:

https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/gcim/rs/RS4.pdf

restrictive direction. As Europe has worked to free up its internal borders to make travel and trade easier within the EU, it has tried to make its external border more secure. In 1999, EU states put in place the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which provided a common minimum standard for the treatment of all asylum seekers and applications.⁴¹ The focus of the system however was on harmonizing standards and procedures. Member states largely resisted centralizing asylum policy, as it would have involved surrendering control of their external borders, a policy area states have resisted surrendering sovereign responsibility over to the union.⁴² As a result the application of the asylum principles proved uneven across the EU, as they became subject to domestic preferences.⁴³ Attempts to create an effective burden-sharing policy were also met with stiff resistance.

Europe's passport-free zone, the Schengen system, frequently hailed the bloc's most significant achievement, was thus accompanied by the strengthening of the common external border against migrants and refugees.⁴⁴ While external borders remained under the authority of member states, internal borders were removed in order to facilitate the movement of people, to speed the flow of commerce across borders, to reduce costs and to boost economic activity. In response to increased migratory pressures over the years, states have strengthened their control of their external borders to make up for the loss in sovereignty created by the Schengen system.⁴⁵ The internal open borders policy was compensated with an exterior closed

⁴¹ See more on CEAS https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160713/factsheet_the_common_european_asylum_system_en.pdf

⁴² Koremos, Lipson and Snidal 2001, 771

⁴³ Hatton, 10

⁴⁴ More on this: <http://isj.org.uk/fortress-europe-the-war-against-migrants/>

⁴⁵ Gherman 2010, 208

door policy. This approach has been criticized as amounting to the creation of a “Fortress Europe,” a restricted, closed continent inhospitable, even hostile to non-Western immigrants feeling war and economic privation.⁴⁶ This has contributed to the securitized approach to migrants, where the so-called irregular migration of non-EU citizens is viewed as a threat to open borders, the EU state’s welfare system and other benefits that are exclusive to the citizens of the bloc.

In the following chapter, I will explain how migration became a hot-button political issue in Europe and how the public’s anxiety about the inflow of refugees was tapped by right-wing populist parties who, using an anti-Islamic narrative, painted refugees as a threat to people’s core concerns: cultural identity, personal security and economic well-being. I will also address the increasing influence of populist parties in Europe and the extent to which the refugee crisis increased their popular appeal and led to policies that restricted or even denied entry to asylum seekers. It made a unified EU response to a humanitarian crisis impossible, notwithstanding Europe’s commitment to the principle of human rights and the international treaties that underpin it. As for the far-right parties, the refugee crisis proved to be a boon as they developed slogans, narrative and catchwords designed to stir Europeans’ anxieties, which were already substantial given years of successful anti-immigrant campaigning.

⁴⁶ See full Amnesty International report: http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/Reports/EUR_050012014__Fortress_Europe_complete_web_EN.pdf

Chapter 3: Europe's Refugee Crisis

Amidst the lack of a unified EU policy on asylum and simmering popular resentment towards immigrants, large numbers of people from predominantly Muslim countries began landing on Europe's shores, starting in 2011. Fleeing protracted conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of men, women and children began arriving by boats, which were often not seaworthy and even on foot, attempting to enter Europe. Given their Mediterranean coastlines, Greece and Italy received the bulk of arrivals. The EU law governing asylum is the Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility for processing asylum application to the state of first entry.⁴⁷ That state is charged with providing protection to asylum seekers and processing their applications in order to prevent asylum "shopping", where applicants, given Europe's open borders, can move about the EU in search for the best asylum offer.⁴⁸ A major criticism of the Dublin Regulation is the absence of burden sharing provisions to prevent EU border states, such as Greece and Italy, of being saddled with disproportionate responsibility compared to the northern states. The principle of solidarity among EU states, a founding principle, was meant to ensure collective action based on the concept of shared values and responsibilities. All states, especially the wealthier northern ones, were expected to admit their fair share of asylum seekers.

But as thousands continued to pour into mainland Greece and the Greek islands, the northern EU states offered little support. Aid groups who rushed to

⁴⁷ Find more info: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en

⁴⁸ Fratzke, Susan. 2015. *Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System*. Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe.

provide humanitarian assistance to the newly arriving refugees criticized European governments for failing to process people quickly and effectively, and for corralling them in makeshift tent camps or crowded facilities that offered limited access to healthcare and basic sanitary standards. Trust began to erode among states as countries like Germany, France and Sweden, states with large migrant populations and a history of admitting refugees, were only willing to settle relatively limited numbers of people. They also insisted that Greece continue to host the majority of asylum seekers, prompting its Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras to declare that Greece had become a “giant holding pen.”⁴⁹ Refugees were drawn to the more affluent European states, especially Germany and Sweden, either because of family connections or because they believed that these countries would be more hospitable and offer better work opportunities. This logic was not lost on these two states, which balked at having to take in a disproportionate number of migrants or at the principle of allowing asylum seekers to decide where they would settle. In September 2015, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said refugees should not be able to choose where to settle: “We can't allow [them] to freely choose where they want to stay – that's not the case anywhere in the world.”⁵⁰ One of the results of this was that in Greece, asylum seekers were packed into an abandoned former airport terminal in Athens, crammed into an indoor stadium or slept rough in the city's central squares.⁵¹ EU members accused Greece of not registering new arrivals properly and allowing them to travel north.

⁴⁹ See full article <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/greece-now-a-giant-migrant-holding-pen-mntv66tpwm9>

⁵⁰ See full article <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-germany-idUSKCN0RD0GP20150913>

⁵¹ See full article <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-idUSKCN0W51WT>

3.1 Sea Rescues

Though Europe did not lack the economic, social and political capability, it largely failed to put in a place a coherent response to migrant arrivals, long before a crisis arose. A cooperative policy on managing the flows of people would have avoided the chaos that gave rise to the notion of people storming borders and shores by the thousands and of governments lacking the capabilities to deal with them. From a humanitarian perspective, most of the asylum seekers originated from the top ten migrant producing countries⁵² and thus were entitled to protection under international law.⁵³ Instead, Europeans regarded asylum seekers with suspicion, referring to them as imposters, irregulars, illegals and economically-motivate migrants. In the absence of legal and safe channels to access asylum, desperate refugees often paid hefty sums to people smugglers who would then force them onto unseaworthy and overcrowded rubber boats for their journey. These vessels would often capsize during stormy weather or smugglers would deliberately sabotage them, in order to prompt a nearby ship to rescue them. Deaths at sea became frequent, but states were hesitant to respond even in the face of widely publicized human tragedy.

Though drownings at sea became common as early as 2011, no coherent policies were put in place until October 2013, when more than 360 migrants died after their boat sank near the Italian island of Lampedusa, causing international outrage.

The Italian government of then-prime minister Enrico Letta established Mare Nostrum, a robust search-and-rescue naval operation. Supported by a budget of \$12

⁵² The top 10 refugee producing countries in order are: Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Central African Republic, Iraq, Eritrea. Find more data: http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean#_ga=1.252992522.209762952.1485913482

⁵³ Read document on the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees signed in 1951, full text: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/StatusOfRefugees.aspx>

million a month, large navy vessels rescued people just outside Libyan waters. The operation, financed entirely by the Italian government, may have saved at least 130,000 lives.⁵⁴ But a year later the Italian government shut down *Mare Nostrum*, citing that it would not be able to shoulder the cost alone, to little objection by EU states. Not only did other EU states refuse to help fund the program, they alleged that it was counterproductive. The UK government argued that sea rescues served as a “pull factor,” encouraging more migrants to attempt the sea crossing⁵⁵ – effectively saying that letting migrants drown would discourage others from making the perilous voyage. Sea rescues also proved contentious in Italy. Maurizio Gasparri, a member of the Senate and of the center-right Forza Italia party claimed that *Mare Nostrum* had become a “taxi service” for migrants.⁵⁶ An opinion poll showed that a third of Italians believed that migrants should be abandoned at sea.⁵⁷

Mare Nostrum was replaced by an EU border control mission named Triton, which rights groups pointed out, would lead to more deaths at sea because it had a smaller budget and lacked a search-and-rescue mandate, charged instead with patrolling and policing the waters. It had fewer ships and a smaller area of operation that remained close to the Italian coast – far from where most of the shipwrecks happen. Still, the refugees kept coming. The year 2014 recorded the highest number of migrants trying to reach Europe, the International Organization on Migration said

⁵⁴ See full article: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/20/italy-ran-an-operation-that-save-thousands-of-migrants-from-drowning-in-the-mediterranean-why-did-it-stop/?utm_term=.fa93b9f98b05

⁵⁵ Townsend, R. (2016). *The European migrant crisis*. 1st ed. Milton Keynes, Bucks.: Lightning Source. p, 1-2

⁵⁶ Read: <https://prospectjournal.org/2015/02/27/mare-europaem-the-european-union-and-irregular-migration/>

⁵⁷ Full article: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/let-them-drown-say-italians-as-migrants-from-libya-flood-in-lz867c8hfdz>

in a report. By September of that year, it also recorded the highest number of fatalities, with 3,279 deaths.⁵⁸ In two separate incidents in September 2014, at least 700 migrants drowned. In the worst incident, 500 migrants were believed to have died after traffickers deliberately rammed and sunk their boat off the coast of Malta, reportedly after an altercation with people on board.⁵⁹ The year 2015 would prove even deadlier: 3,784 refugees died while attempting to cross waters to reach European shores. On 19 April 2015 the deadliest known shipwreck involving migrants occurred: over 900 men, women and children drowned after their boat sank off the coast of Libya. European leaders introduced the term *migrant crisis* after the incident. The shipwreck, which had sent shockwaves around the world, also drew criticism of the decision to scale back rescue operations as it had led to a rise in migrant deaths without reducing their numbers. In response, EU leaders met in an emergency session and proposed doubling the size of the EU search and rescue operation, but the result was an operation that was still smaller and less well funded operation than Mare Nostrum.⁶⁰ Consequently, 5,098 migrants died at sea in 2016—an all time record.⁶¹

Why did the EU fail to put in place legal and safe pathways for people to seek asylum in Europe? And why was the rescue of migrants at sea a politically charged topic? The reasons lie squarely in the anti-immigrant sentiment advanced up by populist right wing parties.

Populist leaders like Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders and Nigel Farage all launched aggressive campaigns denouncing mainstream parties' inadequate responses

⁵⁸ Find more stats: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean>

⁵⁹ Full article: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-boat-idUKKBN0HA1MR20140915>

⁶⁰ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-idUSKBN0NA07020150420>

⁶¹ Find more info: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean>

to the refugee crisis and suggested that these parties would admit large numbers of refugees, to detrimental consequences. They also campaigned against the refugees. In 2015 Le Pen said migrants bring filth, crime, poverty and Islamic terrorism. In response to the picture of Aylan Kurdi, a 3 year-old Syrian Kurdish boy whose lifeless body washed up Turkey's shore after the migrant boat he was on capsized, drowning his mother and brother, Le Pen suggested it was simply a ploy to manipulate European feelings of guilt. France is about to be "submerged" in a "terrifying" wave of migrants who represent only a "burden" she said.⁶²

Echoing a similar message, UKIP leader Nigel Farage said, "actually, most people that are coming from those countries, whether they're coming into Europe or coming to America are basically economic migrants. "And it's mixed in with some of those that you potentially get terrorists. I do think the word refugee gets misused."⁶³ Nigel's UKIP party stunned in 2014 election winning nearly 27 percent of the vote, up from 16 percent in 2009.⁶⁴ The leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, Geert Wilders, went even further calling the flow of refugees an "Islamic invasion."⁶⁵ "Masses of young men in their twenties with beards singing Allahu Akbar across Europe. It's an invasion that threatens our prosperity, our security, our culture and identity," he said. "We have to close our borders for all asylum seekers and all immigrants from Islamic countries."

⁶² Read: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/world/europe/for-marine-le-pen-migration-is-a-ready-made-issue.html>

⁶³ Read: <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/766598/nigel-farage-fox-news-claims-refugees-economic-migrants>

⁶⁴ Find more stats: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-uk-2009.html>

⁶⁵ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-netherlands-idUSKCN0RA0WY20150910>

Citizens picked up on these anti-immigrant messages and thousands took to the streets to protest in major cities in France, Britain, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia demanding an end to the resettlement of refugees.⁶⁶ Though there were sizeable counter protests in support of refugees, they were vastly outnumbered by those calling for closing the borders.

But how do statements and messages advanced by populist leaders that paint migrants as dangerous, and a threat to the economy, jobs and popular culture lead to policy changes? In the next section I will show how these messages not only affect public opinion, but also mainstream leaders who co-opt their ideas in an effort to hold on to their legitimacy and position in power.

3.2 Populism in Europe

Populism was absent from European politics during the first decades of the post World War II period, as it had strong connections with the xenophobia and violence of the war and reminiscent of Nazism and Fascism.⁶⁷ Starting in the late 1980s, however, xenophobia made a comeback. Several populist parties became strong political forces as a nationalist backlash began against the speed and the extent of EU integration, ignited by public fear that national sovereignty would be eroded. It was also a response to a marked rise in immigration.⁶⁸ The Front National (FN) was the first to post an electoral success when it won 9.9 percent of the votes in the 1986 French parliamentary election. In 1990 the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) led by Jörg Haider won 16.6 percent in the parliamentary elections. In Switzerland, the

⁶⁶ Read: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/06/europe/europe-anti-migrant-protests/>

⁶⁷ Mudde 2017, 33-34

⁶⁸ Betz, H. (1993). The Two Faces of Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe. *The Review of Politics*, 55(4).

Automobile Party won 10 seats in Parliament in 1991. In Belgium, the *Vlaam Blok*, a Flemish regionalist party won 12 seats that same year. The Swedish Democrats won 6.8 percent of the vote in 1991 and 25 parliamentary seats. The Danish Progress Party won 9 percent of the vote in 1988 general election, while the Norwegian Progress party became the country's third largest party with 13 percent of the vote in 1989. Though founded in different times, under different circumstances and with different ideologies – all populist parties in Europe devote high salience to immigration policy. They have successfully politicised immigration and have called for limiting and even reversing the number of foreigners in their country.

Electoral studies have focused primarily on the “demand side,” on the ideal breeding ground for populism and emphasized such catalysts as economic crises or increases in migration. Yet the “supply” side, the leaders and parties, have received less attention. In this thesis, I argue that fertile ground is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the rise of populist right wing parties.⁶⁹ I focus on the populist leaders themselves who deftly cultivate economic and social circumstances around them in order to advance their agenda. A fertile ground thus does not automatically lead to populism. Instead, right wing populism is the result of the deliberate work of right wing populist leaders who create and develop a narrative of a majority population that is afraid and whose identity and personal safety is threatened by mass migration.⁷⁰

This narrative, which presents itself as common sense, has been met with widespread

⁶⁹ Mudde, C. (2009). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p, 230

⁷⁰ Fennema, M. (1997). Some conceptual issues and problems in the comparison of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe. *Party Politics*, p, 473-492.

approval. In this thesis, I will carefully describe and analyze this constructed narrative.

Since the 1980s, as a result of the arrival of labor migrants, family unifications and refugees from various parts of the world, European societies have become multicultural.⁷¹ The populist right began to translate this change as a threat to European identity and to its welfare system. For Müller, opposition to migration is due to the fact that populism is by definition an exclusionary form of politics that creates a distinct identity of “the people.”⁷² For a political party or movement to be populist, it must identify a part of the people as the *real* people.⁷³ Excluded are minority groups, immigrants and “illegal migrants.” Populism creates a distinct us versus them. In Europe the people are the majority white “native” Christian citizens of Europe. Minorities, notably migrants and refugees, constitute the other. Not only is the people one homogenous group, “them” are also one monolithic camp. For Cas Mudde, populism in Europe relies on nativism, which demands for states to be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group, the people and non-natives fundamentally threaten the homogeneity of the nation state.⁷⁴ Thus the xenophobic element in European populism derives from a very specific conception of the nation, which relies on a religious, cultural and some instances an ethnic definition of the people.

The political science literature on immigration tells us very little about the origins of xenophobia. Instead, it supposes that this sentiment is almost a natural

⁷¹ Rumelili, Bahar, ed. *Who Are the European? What Is Europe? Identity Challenges of an Evolving Polity*. New York, NY: Open Society Foundations, 2016. Print. p, 231

⁷² Müller, 3

⁷³ Müller, 21-22

⁷⁴ Mudde 2017, 34

outcome produced by immigrants' characteristics, which differ greatly from that of the majority population. Under this conception difference inevitably leads to tensions, fear and a loss of cultural identity among host citizens.⁷⁵ I take on the immigration studies insight, which explains xenophobia as a social and political construction. It has a dialectical relationship between the self and the other, premised on the negative conception of the other. Xenophobia is therefore not a social phenomenon or a consequence of the cultural difference between immigrants and host citizens. Instead, it is the result of a deliberate framing of foreigners and immigrants by political leaders that stresses on an us versus them distinction and agitates fear, a loss of control and identity in the face of the arrival of the other. The intensity or the degree of negative sentiment held by a population depends on the charisma and the ability of these parties and movements to sell their narrative.

3.3 On Identity

Right wing populists have framed the question of migration as a threat to main culture, values and identity, creating social problem and a crisis that must be dealt with on the national policy level. This has allowed these parties to present themselves as defenders of national identities and the larger European identity.⁷⁶ For Slavoj Zizek, immigration is always articulated as a driver of tensions between people who are supposedly different. "What is at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national thing. The 'other' wants to steal our enjoyment by ruining our 'way of

⁷⁵ Carvalho, Joao. *Impact of Extreme Right Parties on Immigration Policy: Comparing Britain, France and Italy*. United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis, 2013. Print. p, 207

⁷⁶ Betz, Hans-Georg, and Susi Meret. "Revisiting Lepanto: The Political Mobilization Against Islam in Contemporary Western Europe." *Patterns of Prejudice* 43.3-4 (2009): 313–334. p, 313.

life'.⁷⁷ Populists' central argument is that their political mobilization against migration is part of a larger fight for the preservation and defense of European identity. Identity on the one hand signifies belonging to a certain place or people. On the other, it requires difference. "We cannot know who we are unless we know who we are not."⁷⁸

The most effective tactic has been the introduction of a zero sum dynamic of both material resources and European identity. This involves the notion that there is an ongoing competition for material prosperity and cultural self-determination between European natives and perceived outsiders, and that what one group gains the other loses. This stance assumes that prosperity and identity are finite resources that the majority group should have privileged access to. Sharing them leads to a disintegration of values and resources and a risk of losing them altogether. National society should be aggressively protected, the flow of migrants must be stopped or reversed and integration must become more rigid and forceful.⁷⁹ Populists also play on fear: fear of losing the self, majority culture and identity. Fear thus plays an important role in homogenizing the in-group and polarizing the relationship towards the out-group.

The European sense of identity and conception of difference emerge most clearly at the continent's borders and in its encounters with those defined as non-European. Given that the physical borders of the EU have changed over the decades incorporating more states, the definition of who is in Europe and who is out has been

⁷⁷ Zizek, S. (1992). *Looking awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture*. Boston: MIT Press p, 101.

⁷⁸ Rumelili, 7

⁷⁹ Wodak et al, p, 60

less clear. What does it mean to be European? For the average European citizen, there are two Europes, one cultural and the other political. Cultural Europe is a broad concept rooted historically and culturally in Christianity. Political Europe refers to the EU as a bureaucratic system, which affords citizens legal rights and responsibilities. The boundaries of cultural and political Europe however increasingly overlap, leading inevitably to tensions between the two concepts. This became visible in the debates about Turkey joining the EU. Those in favor of Turkish membership defined the EU in largely political terms as a post-nationalist and constitutional entity. As long as Turkey implements human rights, democratic rule and market economy there cannot be principled objections against its EU membership. In contrast, many opponents invoked cultural visions of a Europe as a distinct civilization united by Christianity. As a result, a predominantly Muslim country could never qualify for EU membership, no matter how secular its political system.⁸⁰

3.4 Migrants and Islam

Populism's antagonism against migrants has evolved over the years. Who is defined as a foreigner in the first place has evolved as well as have the negative messages associated with migration. In recent years, much of the anti-immigration rhetoric has been directed against Muslims and their religion, Islam, which is presented as a threat to western way of life. Muslims are not, however, the first minority group to be targeted by populists. For Ruth Wodak, some patterns of anti-Semitic prejudices in Europe have been repurposed and applied to other ethnic groups, mostly Muslims but also the Roma. The populist right has also sharpened and

⁸⁰ Find more on this: <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/infobox-arguments-for-and-against-turkeys-eu-membership/#.WM1zYI61tE4>

modified their messages to align with contemporary issues. Today, they have a wide repertoire of anti-Muslim ideas and arguments in the context of an overarching hypernationalist anti-immigration narrative that singles out Islam as the new existential other of European identity.⁸¹ I argue that to the populist right, the other can be contextualized and replaced, and what matters is having and maintaining a group of people who are defined as such.

Islam is the religion of most migrants in Europe. The established migrant population came from Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and North Africa starting in the 1950s, in contrast to the more recent arrivals since 2011 from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. In total, there are now over 13 million Muslims living in the EU.⁸² As the largest and most obvious minority group, Muslims have in recent years been singled out as the other in relation to native European citizens. The populist right treats Muslims in Europe as a singular, undifferentiated group whose members are all the same, denying that they have arrived in different times, come from different countries, under different circumstance and have differing levels attachment to their religion. An anti-Islam that targets all Muslims has become a major part of the rhetoric of most populist leaders, as witness for example by the 2017 main campaign slogan of Dutch leader Geert Wilders, STOP ISLAM.⁸³ He along with others, have successfully introduced the debate of whether Muslim immigrants ought to be admitted to Europe in the first place and whether the Muslim population, painted as

⁸¹ Ibid, 62

⁸² See poll: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/19/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>

⁸³ See Wilders' Twitter page:

https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauth-or

all being religious fanatics, can or should be accorded a permanent place in Western society. The debate, which has created a great deal of animosity and has offended Muslims from all walks of life, has given right wing parties significant publicity that has gained them voters as a large segment of public opinion has identified with their message. This in turn has given the populist right the opportunity to further mobilize people on the issue.

In Italy, Greece and Poland, more than half of respondents in a 2014 poll reported having negative attitudes towards Muslims.⁸⁴ A 2016 poll by the Ipsos Mori research group found that many people in the EU grossly over-estimate the size of the Muslim population in their countries. In France the average over-estimation was 31 percent, whereas the actual figure is 7.5 percent.⁸⁵ Germans, Italians and Belgians likewise overestimated the size of the Muslim population in their country. The same poll found that most citizens also overestimate the growth of Muslim populations. The average estimation in France was that by 2020, 40 percent of the population would be Muslim, when the actual projection is 8.3 percent. Italy, Belgium and Germany also grossly overestimated the growth of the Muslim population and had an inflated view of the proportion of the national population that would be accounted for by Muslims.

This exaggerated perception of the Muslim population's size and a preoccupation with their fertility rates can be traced back to the discourse advanced by populist leaders. Unlike policies on economy or trade, which are complicated and have little perceptible effect on the lives of regular citizens, migration has direct and

⁸⁴ Find poll: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/12/chapter-4-views-of-roma-muslims-jews/>

⁸⁵ Full poll: <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3817/Perceptions-are-not-reality-what-the-world-gets-wrong.aspx>

obvious effects on the daily lives of citizens. It involves working alongside foreign individuals, sharing public institutions, public parks and neighborhoods with them. It means living alongside Muslims, who are perceived as acting differently, the more so because they speak a different language and adhere to different customs and sometimes even dress differently. Populist leaders pick up on these differences and translate them into a problem, a threat even a crisis that must be acted upon immediately with drastic measures. Rejecting accusations of racism, they reference differences and incompatibility in religion, cultural backgrounds, values and identity. Pointing out the differences between Muslims and majority culture in Europe serve as a justification for the radical right wing's policies of exclusion. These parties and movements emphasize Europe's supposed homogeneity and of the importance of preserving it amidst the threat of what they present as contamination. They paint Muslims as people radically different from Europeans—as backward, lazy and inimical to modernity and democracy. Natives by contrast are pure, innocent and hardworking people who are faced with Muslim migrants who want to “Islamize” and take over Europe by building many more mosques, minarets and halal butcher shops. Their sheer growing presence will be exemplified through the increase of women donning headscarves, speaking another language, practicing a different culture and simply looking “different.” For the populist right, Muslim citizens can never belong to Europe, no matter how many years or generations they have lived there, as their religion disqualifies them.

Populist leaders present themselves as the lone defenders of the authentic Europe that supposedly existed before the advent of Muslim migrants. They claim to

be able to take their nations back to the halcyon era when they were inhabited exclusively by people wedded to a common culture. In addition to propagating this myth, they purport to defend liberal values and secular law.⁸⁶ Stressing the supposed homogeneity of the majority group, many populist parties also take on a distinct authoritarian dimension, arguing that immigrants must either follow local rules or “get out of the country.”⁸⁷ But for the nativist right, Muslim immigrations lack both the ability and the willingness to assimilate because Islam itself is entirely incompatible with the principles of Western civilization.⁸⁸ Muslims are not only incapable and unwilling to assimilate; their very presence poses a threat to western values and culture, which renders efforts to integrate Muslim migrants not only futile but also dangerous.

Populists promote the idea that Islam is not solely a religion but also a totalitarian ideology that is at odds with western liberal way of life. Some have gone so far as to compare Islam to Nazism. Wilders, for instance, called for banning the Quran on the grounds that like Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, it is the source of a fascist ideology that incites death and destruction. And that it wants to kill everything they stand for in a modern western democracy.⁸⁹ Wilders thus charges that he is not racist, rather it is Muslims who are intolerant. Over the years, the nativist right has advanced numerous ideas, demands and policy proposals that would impede and ultimately

⁸⁶ Wodak et al, 73

⁸⁷ Editorial, in Danish: ‘Vaskeægte værdifast’ *Dansk Folkeblad*, no. 4, 2007, 2.
http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/pictures_org/DF4_2007_internet.pdf

⁸⁸ Betz and Meret, 318

⁸⁹ See Wilders’ webpage: <https://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/in-english-mainmenu-98/in-the-press-mainmenu-101/77-in-the-press/1117-enough-is-enough-ban-the-koran>

reverse the integration of Muslims in Western European society. The intent of these initiatives has been to render Muslims and Islam itself invisible.⁹⁰

3.5 Securitization and 9/11

The September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, followed by the 2004 Madrid train bombings added a securitization element to policies on asylum in general, and to Muslim migrants and migration from Muslim countries in particular.⁹¹ The Paris attacks in 2015, Brussels suicide bombings, Nice truck attack and Berlin Christmas markets attack in 2016 perpetrated by Muslims in the name of the Islamic State, have all strengthened support for the right wing populists who were quick to capitalize on the attacks as proof of the need to keep out Muslims refugees and to restrict the freedom of Muslim population in Europe. But though the populist right has been a strong supporter of strict anti-terrorism legislation even before 9/11, the post-9/11 securitization of politics in Europe was broadly supported within the political mainstream and therefore did not require their approval. Right wing populists however seized on the fear of terrorism to make the case that Islam is itself a violent religion and that every Muslim citizen of Europe or asylum seeker is therefore a potential terrorist.⁹² By creating a deep suspicion of Muslims as a group, the populists advanced the idea that as a religion and an ideology, Islam must be eradicated in Europe.

⁹⁰ Betz and Meret, 318

⁹¹ Cesari, J. (2012). Securitization of Islam in Europe. *Die Welt des Islams*, 52(3-4), p, 430.

⁹² Betz and Meret, 319

3.6 Bans on Burqas, Minarets and Headscarves

The anti-Islamic policies espoused by populists are not simply rhetoric or an electoral strategy. They have led to government policies that have targeted the freedoms of Muslims in Europe. The most recent case was March 17, 2017, when the Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that companies could ban staff from wearing Islamic headscarves and other visible religious symbols.⁹³ The case involved a Belgian firm that had dismissed a Muslim receptionist for wearing a headscarf. In its ruling, the ECJ found that company regulations banning political, philosophical or religious signs did not constitute direct discrimination so long as such prohibitions applied to religious garb from all faiths such as Sikh turbans and Jewish skullcaps.⁹⁴ In Germany, the AfD party welcomed the ruling. “The ECJ’s ruling sends out the right signal, especially for Germany,” the party’s Berlin leader Georg Pazderski said. “Of course companies have to be allowed to ban the wearing of headscarves,”⁹⁵ he added.

Restrictions on Muslim women’s headdress have been a subject of intense debate in Europe for a long time. Back in 1989, two Muslim female students in France were suspended from their public middle school for refusing to remove their headscarves, sparking a controversy on freedom of religion, expression and the French principle of secularism. In 2004, France passed a law that banned all religious symbols from official state institutions. Though the law applied to all symbols such as Christian crosses and Jewish skullcaps, it was largely regarded as specifically

⁹³ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/eu-court-headscarf-idUSKBN16L0V9>

⁹⁴ Read: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/world/europe/headscarves-ban-european-court.html>

⁹⁵ Full article: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/mar/14/employers-can-ban-staff-from-wearing-headscarves-european-court-rules>

targeting Muslim women's' headscarves.⁹⁶ The ruling led to many EU countries to follow suit with similar legislation that rights groups have said violate religious freedom.⁹⁷

In 2009, a majority of Swiss citizens voted in favor of a referendum promoted by the far right SVP party to ban the construction of minarets in the country.⁹⁸ The success of the vote was largely due to the campaign that aggressively promoted the idea that the presence of Muslims personified by the minarets of mosques, poses an imminent threat to Swiss national culture and values. This narrative resonated strongly with average citizens, as 57.5 percent voted in favor of the proposal. Campaign posters depicted a Swiss flag with sprouting black, missile-shaped minarets and a woman donning a niqab, a full-face veil that showed only her eyes. Oskar Freysiger, a member of the SVP party and a parliamentarian, said that minarets were a "symbol of a political and aggressive Islam. The minute you have minarets in Europe it means that Islam will have taken over."⁹⁹

In 2010, France and Belgium voted in favor of nationwide restrictions on wearing the burqa in public places. France was the first country to ban the full-face veil in public spaces in April 2011. The penalty for the offense is \$205 and being forced by the court to take a class on French values.¹⁰⁰ Belgium followed suit making it an offense punishable by a \$197 fine or up to seven days in jail.¹⁰¹ The bill was passed almost unanimously in the Belgian parliament, with lawmakers citing security

⁹⁶ Full article: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3619988.stm>

⁹⁷ Full article: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/02/26/france-headscarf-ban-violates-religious-freedom>

⁹⁸ Full article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html>

⁹⁹ Read: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6676271.stm>

¹⁰⁰ Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/17/french-women-trial-wearing-niqab>

¹⁰¹ Read: <https://qz.com/326086/the-places-in-the-world-that-have-a-burqa-ban/>

reasons for the ban, and claiming the veil is a tool of oppression.¹⁰² The European Court of Human Rights upheld the bans in 2014, rejecting arguments that outlawing full-face veils breached religious freedom.¹⁰³

Taken together, these measures demonstrate the far right's success in mobilizing public opinion against Muslim symbols in Europe and the extent of its political clout. They were successful even when they did not do well in election, making their achievement all the more remarkable. It also provides insights into majority opinion on Islam in Europe and the legalization of public restrictions on Islamic spaces and symbols of faith in an otherwise liberal Europe. This shows that these restrictions are no longer peculiar to far right movements and are being endorsed by mainstream ideologies.¹⁰⁴

3.7 “Mainstreaming”

For Aristotle Kallis, extreme ideas against Muslims have a life cycle, from politically and socially marginal to established mainstream recognition.¹⁰⁵ Though the mainstreaming is gradual, it is also powerful and infectious, revealing the vulnerability of average citizens to negative messages. According to Kallis, right wing populism taps into a concealed social demand for policies that suppress minority groups. This demand is very receptive to external confirmation “nudges” that can activate and even further radicalize people. A successful message not only reinforces

¹⁰² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14261921>

¹⁰³ Lægaard, Sune. “Burqa Ban, Freedom of Religion and ‘living together.’” *Human Rights Review* 16.3 (2015): p, 204.

¹⁰⁴ Wodak, Khosravinik and Mral, 2014, 67

¹⁰⁵ Kallis, A. (2013). Breaking the taboos and “mainstreaming” the extreme: the debates on restricting Islamic symbols in Europe. In R. Wodak, M. Khosravinik, & B. Mral (Eds.), *Right-wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse*. (pp. 55-70). London: Bloomsbury Academic. p, 55

similar preexisting stereotypes, it liberates them from the notion that such ideas are taboo and therefore not part of public conversation.¹⁰⁶

Kallis suggests that relying on the electoral support of the populist right alone as a measure of their success obscures how their ideas have succeeded in shaping a new, broader and social common sense that is accepted by a wider population.¹⁰⁷ Looking at the election results of the 2007 French elections for instance, which I will analyze at length in my case study on France, awarded Jean Marie Le Pen 10 percent of the vote in the first round of elections and was hailed as ushering in a decline of the FN party. Yet a significant proportion of voters who abandoned the FN in 2007 were attracted by the anti-immigration rhetoric of Nicolas Sarkozy who successfully mainstreamed FN's ideas, which were previously considered radical. A central aim of this thesis is to highlight how mainstream leaders' alleged desire to address the relevant concerns of the people, or their concern over losing voters produces a win-win scenario for far-right populist parties: either they succeed in the election by winning a large margin ushering them and their ideas into the mainstream, or, mainstream parties will emulate their policies. In either case, their ideas succeed.

For João Carvalho, mainstream parties pick up policy ideas on migration that were advanced by the populist right and gained traction through a political process he terms, "co-option,"¹⁰⁸ the incorporation of policy proposals of challenger groups so as to undercut their appeal and increase the non-populists parties' electoral prospects. Established parties adopt populist proposals in order to enhance their position and

¹⁰⁶ Kallis, 59

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 60

¹⁰⁸ Carvalho, J (2013). *The Impact of Extreme Right Parties on Immigration Policy: Comparing Britain, France and Italy*. United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis. p, 1-2

recapture voters lost to opposition parties. Gianpietro Mazzoleni speaks of the “populist contamination” of mainstream political discourse. His argument is not that all political parties in Europe have essentially become populist parties, but that most parties use populist themes in their political platforms.¹⁰⁹ Carvalho sees co-option as a reflection of right wing parties’ influence in domestic politics. Influence should therefore be understood as the ability to promote a particular outcome rather than electoral support. Co-option is also a strategy employed by mainstream parties to neutralize challengers. Mainstream parties that embrace stricter migration procedures often gain back support lost to populists, but at the expense of the rights of minority migrant populations and of asylum seekers.

There are many examples. In January 2017, a few weeks before their national elections, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the liberal People’s party for Freedom and Democracy (PVV), published an open letter in the Dutch newspapers targeted at immigrants. He said anyone who cannot respect customs should simply leave. Those who “refuse to adapt and criticize our values” should “behave normally, or go away,”¹¹⁰ Rutte said in the full-page newspaper.¹¹¹ He said the Dutch were increasingly uncomfortable with those who abused the freedoms they enjoyed after coming to the Netherlands, who “harass gays, or whistle at women in short skirts, or brand ordinary Dutch people as racists.” He added that the solution was “not to paint everyone with the same brush, or insult or expel whole groups” but to “make it crystal clear what is normal, and what is not normal in our country. We must actively defend

¹⁰⁹ Mazzoleni, G (2008) “Mediatization of Politics”, in: Wolfgang Donsbach (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, p, 57.

¹¹⁰ See full text: <https://www.vvd.nl/nieuws/lees-hier-de-brief-van-mark/>

¹¹¹ Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/23/netherlands-pm-mark-rutte-dutch-citizens-open-letter-pvv>

our values.” Wilders shot back saying that the prime minister is weak and accused him of being a “copy cat” – imitating his policies on national identity and migration. Though establishment parties copying of populist proposals could limit their electoral losses or even make electoral gains, the effects are variable and could lead to favoring the right.¹¹² Copying often also legitimizes the themes of the populist right and increases their influence.

On March 15, 2017, Rutte’s party won with 21 percent of the vote. “It is an evening in which the Netherlands after Brexit, after the American elections said stop to the wrong kind of populism,”¹¹³ said in his victory speech. Wilders’ PVV party won 13 percent and a third more seats than in the last election, becoming the second largest party in the Netherlands. “We were the third largest party of the Netherlands. Now we are the second largest party. Next time we will be number one,” Wilders defiantly said. Though pro-EU leaders hailed Rutte’s victory as a win for mainstream parties, observers note that Rutte only won after accommodating Wilders’ ideas on migration. Ten years ago, Wilders was largely regarded as a raging, fear mongering extremist whose proposals to ban the construction of new mosques in the Netherlands, were ridiculous. Today, not only has he himself succeeded in stepping into the mainstream, his ideas have become the law of the land, embraced by the ruling party.

¹¹² Mudde 2009, p, 241.

¹¹³ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-election-rutte-idUSKBN16M39I?il=0>

Chapter 4: Case Study Germany

Although the emergence of populism in Europe coincides with the arrival of migrants in the postwar period, it was hardly the case that migration, even sudden, *necessarily* produced populism. Instead, populists advance their authoritarian and nativist political agenda by claiming that the presence of migrants could lead to job losses among the citizens of receiving countries as well as a loss of cultural and national identity. Some of the literature on populist parties and movements points to economic crises and high unemployment rates as reasons behind rising support for them. But the economic argument alone fails to explain the rise in Germany of a hostile attitude towards foreigners, especially given that Germany has had over the decades relatively low unemployment rates and a faster growing economy than that of its neighbors.¹¹⁴ It would thus be misleading to reduce populism to migration-driven economic anxieties and ignore the more emotive element of identity politics.

When the Federal Republic of Germany was established in 1949, most Germans sought to break with their Nazi past. Because of the legacy of the Third Reich, nascent right wing populist parties have been stigmatised and linked in the public mind with an ideology that brought death and horror to millions of Europeans.¹¹⁵ Yet certain political attitudes from that period continue to linger and large segments of the German population have proven to be susceptible to various racist appeals.¹¹⁶ Starting in 1964, some 40 right wing parties have formed in

¹¹⁴ Von Dirke, S. (1994). Multikulti: The German Debate on Multiculturalism. *German Studies Review*, 17(3), p, 514.

¹¹⁵ Berbair, N., Lewandowsky, M. and Siri, J. (2014). The AfD and its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?. *German Politics*, 24(2), p, 160

¹¹⁶ Betz, H. and Immerfall, S. (1998). *The new politics of the Right*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press. p, 101

Germany. In 1989, the *Republikaner* Party (REP) entered the Berlin parliament with 7.5 percent of the vote,¹¹⁷ becoming the first right wing populist party to clear the hurdle that required parties to get the 5 percent of the vote at minimum to gain seats in the Bundestag.¹¹⁸ REP, which called for stopping all Muslim migration into Germany, argued that Muslims were opposed to democracy, were militant and murderous against non-Islamic believers. At the time, there were 2.4 million Muslims in Germany, representing 3 percent of the German population.¹¹⁹ Despite the relatively small population, REP leaders promoted the idea that Muslims were working towards establishing an Islamic society in Germany and their presence is a biological, social and cultural threat to Germany.¹²⁰ By the early 1990s REP lost momentum and popularity amid scandals, tactical mistakes and anti-Semitic remarks involving party leaders, which did not resonate well with voters, leading to a sharp decline in their support.¹²¹

4.1 Immigration to Germany

The migration of Muslims in Germany dates back to the 1960s. Faced with labor shortages in the country's post-war rebuilding efforts, Germany began recruiting foreign workers on a large scale. Faced with acute labor shortages and declining birth rates, Germany recruited *Gastarbeiter*, guest workers from southern Europe but also from Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia, three predominantly Muslim countries. Foreign labor became a major resource for the reconstruction of the

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 97

¹¹⁸ Liang, C. (2016). *Europe for the Europeans*. 1st ed. London: Routledge. p, 141-2

¹¹⁹ Kettani, H. (2010). Muslim Population in Europe: 1950 – 2020. *International Journal of Environmental Science and Development*, 1(2). p,155.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p, 146

¹²¹ Kurthen, H., Bergmann, W. and Erb, R. (1997). *Antisemitism and xenophobia in Germany after unification*. New York: Oxford University Press. p, 217

country's infrastructure. But recruitment ended in 1973 in response to the oil crisis and the ensuing economic recession. Though many workers returned home, a significant number chose to stay and benefitted from a family reunification provision in the law that allowed immigrants to be joined by family members, including wives and children. The foreign presence in Germany was thus transformed from temporary single male workers living in allocated housing, to that of foreign families who attend schools, bought homes, opened businesses and used public institutions. Today, Germany is home to 4.7 million Muslims¹²² and has the largest Muslim population in Europe. They make up almost 6 percent of the population.

The German but also in the Austrian discussion on race, integration and migration, has had an emphasis on the alleged biological differences between natives and foreigners. This outlook is rooted in Nazi ideology, which stressed the alleged genetic and racial superiority of the Aryan race. Some populist leaders have advanced similar theories that migrants, Muslims specifically, are inferior beings for reasons rooted in their nature. These parties have portrayed Muslims as not only unwilling to integrate, but incapable of it because of insurmountable cultural and religious differences imbedded in their genes.¹²³ This claim, apart from being scientifically unfounded and reminiscent of a dark period in German history, has been put forward by some populist parties as backed by science, and thus factual, even objective.

4.2 Sarrazin controversy

A controversy in 2010 demonstrated how in Germany the irrational preoccupation with race and racial disparities between people remains prevalent

¹²² The majority, some 3 million are of Turkish decent

¹²³ Tibi, B. (2012). *Islam in global politics*. London: Routledge. p, 112

among politicians and average Germans. Former state finance minister of Berlin and member of the Social Democrat Party (SDP) Thilo Sarrazin released a book in which he argued that Muslims undermine German society, sponge off the state and could swamp the country due to their higher birth rate.¹²⁴ The book warned that Muslim immigrants, who Sarrazin claimed are less intelligent than native Germans, were destroying the country's identity. According to the book, Muslims are unwilling and incapable of integrating into the mainstream because of their genetics. The book entitled *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does away with itself) sold 1.5 million copies and became the most successful non-fictional book in post-war-German history. "I don't need to accept anyone who lives off the state, rejects this country... and is always producing little girls with headscarves. This is true of 70 percent of the Turkish and 90 percent of the Arab population of Berlin," he said in an interview.¹²⁵ Though the book appalled many people, an online poll by the *Koelner Stadt-Anzeiger* daily taken during the ensuing controversy, showed that a third of all respondents supported Sarrazin's claims. A further 43 percent found his words "exaggerated in some cases but believed that he was right about many things." Another survey in *Die Welt* showed that over two-thirds felt criticism of Sarrazin was unjustified.¹²⁶

The chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), of which Sarrazin was a member, initially supported an attempt to expel him but backtracked when it became clear that a large proportion of SPD members sympathized with his arguments. Just a few weeks after announcing that Sarrazin's denigration of Muslims was "completely

¹²⁴ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-sarrazin-newsmaker-idUSTRE6885J720100909>

¹²⁵ *ibid*

¹²⁶ Read: <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE59817S20091009?sp=true>

unhelpful,”¹²⁷ German Chancellor Angela Merkel also backtracked. In a speech to the youth members of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, she declared that Germany's attempt to create a multicultural society had “utterly failed.”¹²⁸ “We lied to ourselves for a while saying that they [foreign workers] won’t stay, and they will disappear again one day. This is not the reality,” she said. “This multicultural approach, saying that we simply live side-by-side and are happy about each other,” she added... has failed, utterly failed.”¹²⁹

4.3 Multiculturalism

Multikulti or multiculturalism is much talked about in Germany and is also a focus of heated debates on the merits and dangers of integrating foreigners into German society. Introduced in the 1980s by Christian officials, the term was seized by populist leaders not as an expression of tolerance, but as evidence of German resignation to the threat posed to their national identity by foreign immigration.¹³⁰ Multiculturalism in this context means the unwillingness of foreigners to ingrate into German society and the failure of officials to devise and to enforce stricter rules that would oblige them to integrate. The definition of integration remains up for debate in Germany as well as in other parts of Europe. Populist parties in Germany have not offered a more concrete definition but have specifically pointed to the exercise of Islamic cultural and religious practices as signs that immigrants are *not* integrated. The AfD says that it ought to involve “more than just learning German.” Populist parties instead envisage multiculturalism’s negation, homogeneity as a utopia of the

¹²⁷ Read: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-05-23/anti-immigrant-and-anti-euro-germanys-thilo-sarrazin-is-not-sorry>

¹²⁸ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-merkel-immigration-idUSTRE69F1K320101016>

¹²⁹ Read: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11559451>

¹³⁰ Tibi, 116

pure nation-state. The essence of internal homogenization is captured in the infamous slogan of German right-wing extremists: Germany for the German's, foreigners out! Not only should the people of our nation rule our states, we should be its exclusive inhabitants.¹³¹ Like mainstream leaders in France, instead of challenging such ideas, German establishment politicians have embraced the extreme right wing definitions of identity and belonging, and adopted policy proposals that have limited the freedoms of minority populations and have kept migrants out.

4.4 Refugee Crisis

In September 2015, at the height of the refugee crisis, and as EU states struggled to agree to a mechanism to distribute 160,000 Syrian refugees from Italy and Greece across the 28 member bloc, Germany announced it would open its doors to asylum seekers and refused to put a ceiling on the number of refugees it would accept. "We can do this," Merkel famously said. "These people must be given a home free of fear and terror," she said.¹³² Over the next several months, Germany received some 1.1 million applications for asylum. Despite some initial enthusiasm from residents and international leaders, by December 2015, Merkel began to face a backlash, not least from her own party coalition. Horst Seehofer, head of the conservative Christian Social Union the CDU's counterpart in Bavaria, a predominantly Catholic province, balked, chiefly because more than half a million Muslim asylum seekers had entered Germany through Bavaria.¹³³ He demanded the

¹³¹ Mudde 2007, 139

¹³² Read: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-germany-poll-idUKKCN0S10PV20151007>

¹³³ Full article: <http://time.com/4097114/angela-merkel-refugees-migrants-position-paper/>

creation of transit zones.¹³⁴ She also faced resistance from the left, the Social Democratic Party's Sigmar Gabriel, her vice chancellor who denounced the creation of such zones as “detention centers.”¹³⁵ The back and forth political wrangling created much uncertainty in Germany and a loss of trust in Merkel’s ability to effectively deal with the situation.

What prompted Merkel at the height of the refugee crisis to make such a decision? Though admirable from a humanitarian perspective, it was certain to have major political implications at home where anti-immigrant sentiment was high among people and among European state leaders who had shown great reluctance to cooperate under the EU on the issue. Observers have noted that Merkel’s motivation has little to do with generosity or humanitarianism. Accepting the educated middle class refugees, like many of the displaced Syrians arriving in Germany, could be an economic self-interest amid rapidly declining birth rates¹³⁶ and acute labor shortages.¹³⁷ But more importantly, Merkel had intended to show leadership, in the context of continuing to maintain the image of Germany as the leading power on the big issues facing the EU, boosting her own position regionally and internationally. She had thus hoped that European leaders would follow her lead by taking in more refugees, which would ultimately help resolve the crisis. Merkel thus had no intention

¹³⁴ Modeled on those in international airports, transit zones are refugee reception and processing centers set up on a country’s border. Their purpose is to conduct preliminary assessments of asylum claims. Those who come from countries that do not qualify for asylum would be deported while those from war torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan would be sent to processing centers in land Germany while their applications can be further inspected.

¹³⁵ <https://euobserver.com/migration/130918>

¹³⁶ In 2015 the fertility rate in Germany was 1.5 children per woman, one of the lowest in the world.

¹³⁷ Germany has a 6.4 percent unemployment rate, one of the lowest in Europe. In 2015, it had 1 million unfilled positions for skilled workers, read: <http://www.politico.eu/article/refugees-wont-plug-german-labor-gap-asylum-employment-skills-gap/>

of solving the entirety of the crisis alone nor did she foresee such strong condemnations from all sides.

According to a best selling political non-fiction book released in April 2017, entitled *Die Getriebenen* (The Driven Ones), Merkel's decision to keep open German borders was neither the result of rational planning nor moral righteousness, but "tactical blundering and communication failures."¹³⁸ The author, Robin Alexander suggests that Merkel had avoided taking a major decision on the refugee crisis since it erupted in 2011, considering it a political minefield for a conservative leader like her. But in September 2015, emboldened by polls that indicated that she had strong public support on her side and refugees as a top concern for Germans, she decided to keep the borders open. This proved to be a near fatal error as by September 2016 Merkel faced 45 percent approval rating, one of her lowest on record.¹³⁹

4.5 Alternative for Germany party

The controversy over migration created a favorable political context for far right populist parties. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which was created in 2013 as a protest movement against bailouts for indebted EU member states like Greece, jumped on the opportunity. The party had only won 4.7 percent of the vote in the September 2013 federal election while campaigning against Merkel's policy on the Euro Crisis, missing the 5 percent threshold for representation in the parliament.¹⁴⁰ By 2015, the party faced few prospects as Germany's economy escaped virtually unscathed from the crisis and other European economies were

¹³⁸ See book review in English: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/06/germany-devours-book-on-angela-merkel-decision-to-open-borders>

¹³⁹ Find poll: <http://www.dw.com/en/nationwide-german-poll-merkels-popularity-dips-to-five-year-low/a-19521704>

¹⁴⁰ More on AfD: <http://www.dw.com/en/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-afd/a-37208199>

recovering, albeit slowly. The AfD decided to take on a new theme, the next big issue facing Europe and made it central to its platform: the refugee crisis. The AfD almost exclusively began campaigning on an anti-immigration nationalist platform that is specifically opposed to Islam. That year the party's co founder Bernd Lucke announced that he would step down out of concern that the party had become increasingly Islamophobic and xenophobic.¹⁴¹ The party nonetheless swept 22 percent of the vote in the 2016 local elections, pushing Merkel's party to third place and defeating it in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Merkel's home state. This caused shockwaves within Merkel's party as well as in other establishment parties. "This isn't pretty for us," said Michael Grosse-Broemer, one of Merkel's top deputies in parliament in Berlin in an interview. AfD co-leader Frauke Petry was quick to pounce, "those who voted for the AfD were sending a message of protest,"¹⁴² she said. "This is a slap in the face for Merkel – not only in Berlin but also in her home state. The voters made a clear statement against Merkel's disastrous immigration policies. This put her in her place," she added.

As the AfD's popularity continued to surge, Petry was emboldened to take on more extremist views. In January 2016 she said that in the face of the recent influx of refugees, the police might have to shoot people crossing the border illegally. "Police must stop refugees entering German soil", she said.¹⁴³ The AfD's website listed asylum and immigration, Islam and identity as the top two out of its five focus

¹⁴¹ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-politics-eurosceptics-idUSKCN0PI25720150708>

¹⁴² Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-idUSKCN1190XG>

¹⁴³ Read: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/german-police-should-shoot-refugees-says-german-party-leader-a6844611.html>

issues.¹⁴⁴ The party has also sought to emulate the FN as an example of a powerful party with a history of successes. According to the AfD's program issued in 2016, "the ideology of multiculturalism is a serious threat to the social peace and the continuity of the national and cultural unity of the state" and "Islam is not part of Germany."¹⁴⁵ The program further describes that Islamic religious practices and procedures are at odds with Germany's liberal and democratic constitution and in contradiction with German laws. The party calls for restrictions on the construction of mosques and minarets as well as the full-face veil in public. The party also demands the complete closure of the EU's external border as well as the sealing of German borders. Failed asylum applicants, the AfD suggests, must be returned or expelled immediately and financial incentive should be put in place in order to encourage them to return to their countries of origin.

Populist parties take advantage of particular historical circumstances, such as economic or refugee crises that can and have facilitated their upsurge.¹⁴⁶ A fact even they contend with. "The migration crisis was the catalyst for our success," Petry told the *Guardian*. The party's leader in the Brandenburg state parliament, Alexander Gauland, went even further calling the refugee influx "a gift from heaven".¹⁴⁷ The party has since been trying to emulate FN ideas and continuing to capitalize on discontent with the management of the refugee crisis.

¹⁴⁴ Find AfD party official website in German: <https://www.alternativefuer.de/>

¹⁴⁵ Read full AfD party platform in German: https://www.alternativefuer.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/01/2016-06-20_afd-kurzfassung_grundsatzprogramm_webversion.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Muller, 75

¹⁴⁷ Full article: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/19/frauke-petry-acceptable-face-of-germany-new-right-interview>

4.6 The Mainstream Parties Move to Coopt

Soon, Merkel began backtracking on her pledge to admit refugees, in large part because the anti-immigration messages of the AfD had gained political traction. “We took on board the concerns of the people, who are worried about the future, and this means we want to reduce, we want to drastically decrease the number of people coming to us,” Merkel told ARD in 2016.¹⁴⁸ “The most important thing in the coming months is repatriation, repatriation and once more, repatriation,” Merkel said.¹⁴⁹ By 2017, Merkel’s co-opting became even more pronounced. She launched a program that offered financial incentives for migrants to voluntarily return home.¹⁵⁰ She also sought to speed up the deportation of failed asylum applications, policy proposals already outlined in the April-May 2016 AfD party platform. In December 2016, she announced to her party that she would support a ban on the burqa, another AfD proposal. An opinion poll conducted in August 2016 showed that 51 percent of respondents support the banning of the full-face veil.¹⁵¹ “In interpersonal communication, which plays a fundamental role here, we show our face,”¹⁵² she said. “And that’s why a full veil is inappropriate in our country. It should be banned wherever legally possible.” “It does not belong in our country,” she said of the burqa, “we don’t want any parallel societies. Our law takes precedence before tribal rules, codes of honor, and Shari’a.”¹⁵³ It later emerged that very few women actually don

¹⁴⁸ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-germany-idUSKBN0TW0SB20151213>

¹⁴⁹ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-refugees-repatriation-idUSKCN1175TI>

¹⁵⁰ Read: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-offer-asylum-seekers-1200-euros-voluntarily-return-home-countries-refugees-crisis-merkel-a7561701.html>

¹⁵¹ More on burqa ban: <http://www.dw.com/en/survey-germans-want-a-burqa-ban/a-19504358>

¹⁵² Full article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/world/europe/merkel-calls-for-ban-on-full-face-veils-in-germany.html>

¹⁵³ See more of speech: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-burqa-burka-ban-veils-angela-merkel-cdu-muslims-speech-refugee-crisis-elections-term-vote-a7458536.html>

the burqa in Germany, her speech thus seemed directly aimed at courting right wing supporters and at neutralizing the AfD.

4.7 The EU Turkey Deal

In addition to moving to the right on the refugee question in domestic politics, Merkel also devised a foreign policy response to the political problem she faced on account of the AfD hardline on immigration and asylum. On March 18, 2016, with Germany serving as the moving force, the EU signed a deal with Turkey. In exchange for stemming the flow of migrants and take back Syrian refugees coming from its territory, Turkey would receive financial aid, visa liberation for Turkish nationals entering the EU, and accelerated EU membership talks. Human rights groups slammed the transactional approach to the deal, which focused on swapping favors, on policing and curbing the numbers of arrivals to the EU, rather than ensuring the rights of refugees under international law. “The EU-Turkey deal has been a disaster for the thousands who have been left stranded in a dangerous, desperate and seemingly endless limbo on the Greek islands,” said Gauri van Gulik, Amnesty International’s deputy director for Europe said. “It is disingenuous in the extreme that European leaders are touting the EU-Turkey deal as a success, while closing their eyes to the unbearably high cost to those suffering the consequences,” she added. The deal, however, is now wavering amid tensions between the two sides amplified by a recent row with the Netherlands and Germany who prevented Turkish officials from speaking in rallies. Turkey has also charged that the aid pledges have been too slow to arrive, further casting doubt on the long-term maintenance of the deal.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-europe-erdogan-idUSKBN13K0R6>

4.8 Conclusion

Unlike in France, which I will discuss in the following chapter, where a strong right wing populist party has been a present feature of the political party system since the 1980s, right wing populism is more recent in Germany. The AfD, Germany's most successful populist party to date has had limited success compared to the FN in France. Some scholars have suggested that Germany's Nazi past has made German public less susceptible to xenophobia than the rest of Europe. German people's response to the recent refugee crisis puts this theory into question. The German example also shows that opposition to migration is not based on economic anxiety nor on high unemployment rates, as is commonly suggested. Instead it is the result of mainstream leaders seizing ownership of populist ideas before they become exclusively associated with the populist right wing. The AfD party in a short amount of time was able to put together a political agenda that completely rejects the principle of allowing in Muslim migrants, primarily on the basis that they are different. Merkel most concerned with being re-elected to a fourth term in office, backtracked not only on a policy proposal but a principle she was trying to advance of an open and accepting Germany. This puts into question her commitments to human rights and to her own principles. She opted instead to outdo her own policies and appropriate AfD ideas. Merkel who in 2015 declared that assisting refugees was a humanitarian duty, then moved to advance programs that would drastically reduce their presence, for the sole purpose of alleviating political pressure. This points to the fact that Merkel's move to assist refugees was a political decision, rather than a humanitarian one. The maneuver seems to have worked as Merkel climbed back up in

the polls while the AfD has lost about a third of its support, ahead of the September 2017 elections.¹⁵⁵ It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the AfD and on right wing populism in Germany in the long-term.

¹⁵⁵ An RTL-Wahlrend poll released on April 4 2014 showed Merkel's CDU party would get 36 percent of the vote while the Social Democrats party (CDU) would receive 32 percent. The AfD party polled at 8 percent. Asked who they would vote for as Chancellor, Merkel received 41 percent of the votes against her main rival Martin Shultz of CDU who got 31 percent, see full article in English: <http://www.politico.eu/article/merkels-cdu-back-on-top-in-polls-after-regional-election-win/> German source: <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/stern-rtl-wahlrend--spd-sackt-nach-saarland-wahl-ab---schulz-verliert-an-zustimmung-7398192.html>

Chapter 5: Case Study France

France is home to the most famous radical right wing party in Europe, the Front National (FN). Various scholars consider it the prototype of populist parties because of its archetypal extreme right characteristics as well as its decades-old influence on France's party-system.¹⁵⁶ The FN, under the leadership of Jean Marie Le Pen was created in 1972 initially as a federation of disparate forces of the French far right: Poujadists,¹⁵⁷ neofascists as well as supporters of colonialism and war time collaborationism. In its early years, the party failed to make significant electoral gains mainly because it was torn by internal disagreements and voters dismissed it as far too extremist.¹⁵⁸

The party's main preoccupation has been since its inception, on the defense of French national identity and values against foreign and domestic enemies, immigrants, the elites and the political establishment.¹⁵⁹ Le Pen, a former paratrooper, was infamous for his anti-Semitism and dismissal of the Nazi gas chambers as "a mere detail" of World War II history. In the 1983 local elections, the tide of the FN began to rise. An alliance with a center-right list reached in order to defeat the Socialist party in the small town of Dreux, resulted in clear victory with 55 percent of the vote and three FN candidates placed as councilors.¹⁶⁰ This gave the FN the political legitimacy as well as the visibility it needed. The following year, the FN

¹⁵⁶ Mudde 2007, 41.

¹⁵⁷ Followers of French political figure Pierre Poujade. Poujadism denotes support for his ideals of revolt and protest, hostility to government taxation, defence of the small man, the small business, the small town, see <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/aug/28/guardianobituaries1>

¹⁵⁸ Mayer, N (1998) The French National Front. In Betz, H and Immerfall, S (Eds.) *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press. p, 12.

¹⁵⁹ Mayer, 16

¹⁶⁰ Mayer, 13

emerged as a force to be reckoned with when it won 11.2 percent in the European elections and 10 seats in the European Parliament.

Scholars point to the early 1980s as being marked by pessimism. An economic recession, government imposed austerity measures, mounting social tension over unemployment and growing crime rates translated into declining faith in the Socialist government. They also point to a marked rise in foreign migration. This provided an opportunity for the FN to capitalize on economic discontent as well as on a sudden change in society.¹⁶¹ In the early years, Le Pen voters were mostly residents of large or medium-sized cities, who proved more susceptible to its anti-immigration and law and order messages. The party's strongholds were generally in the most urban and industrialized regions of France. Its most solid support was drawn from small shopkeepers and blue-collar workers. Due to its conservative positions on gender issues and its extremist image, it appealed to more men than women. What appealed most to Le Pen voters, however, was its signature topic, immigration.

5.1 Immigration to France

France's encounter with immigration has been influenced by its colonial legacy as well as its tradition of recruiting foreign workers starting in the early 20th century. The first major wave of Muslim migrants arrived in 1962, at the end of the Algerian War. Some 60,000 *harkis*, or Algerian auxiliaries in the French army, settled in France.¹⁶² Migration of Algerian non-combatants also rose following its independence from France in 1962. Migrants from France's other former colonies in

¹⁶¹ Betz 1994, 52

¹⁶² In addition to the Harkis some 800,000 *piets noirs*, French settlers from Algeria returned to France after the war: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2016/09/25/01016-20160925ARTFIG00156-les-harkis-ces-soldats-oublies-de-la-france-dont-l-integration-a-ete-difficile.php>

North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia as well as sub-Saharan Africa also make up the country's migrant population. Together Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians, *Maghrebins*, or North African Arabs, make up the largest immigrant group in France.¹⁶³

The post war economic growth spurt of the so-called “*trentes glorieuses*” resulted in hundreds of thousands of recruited labor migrants from Europe as well as additional migrant workers from North Africa. The economic crisis of the early 1970s, however, transformed France's relationship to immigration. In 1974, France officially ended its labor migration policy. Immigrants continued to arrive, however through family reunification, applying for asylum and entering illegally. Starting in the early 1980s and propelled by the anti-immigration campaign of the FN, the discourse on immigration began to shift away from labor and towards national identity. *Maghrebins*, given their relatively larger numbers became the focus of the discussion. For Le Pen, North Africans were a particular threat to national cultural because of their fundamental and insurmountable difference: they were Muslims.¹⁶⁴

For the FN, Islam is an alien culture and religion. FN leader Bruno Megret said that North Africans want to stay loyal to their difference and “stay themselves.”¹⁶⁵ The party claimed that Islam is a conquering religion whose expansionist force threatens the Christian identity of the West. This is manifested in the 2010 campaign slogan *Non a l'islamisme*, no to Islamism which featured a map of France draped in the Algerian flag with minarets piercing through it, beside it a

¹⁶³ Today France is home to 4.7 million Muslims, who make up 7.5 percent of the population see poll: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/19/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>

¹⁶⁴ A 2011 poll by Ifop found less than half of Muslim respondents considered themselves practicing see poll: http://www.ifop.com/media/pressdocument/343-1-document_file.pdf

¹⁶⁵ Davies, P. (2001). *The National Front in France*. 1st ed. London: Routledge. p, 144

caricatured woman donning a full-face black veil.¹⁶⁶ For the FN, Islam is incompatible with features of French society and threatens the core value of *laïcité* as laid out in Article 1 of the French constitution, which formally states that France is a secular republic. The religious dimension of North African immigration thus has had a particular significance for the FN, and they have painted Islam as an intrinsically provocative religion as well as a threatening force to France's secularism.¹⁶⁷

Unlike Germany's perception of foreigners, the FN does not specifically address biological or racial differences between the French natives and the foreigners, nor has it specifically laid out racial features as necessary to becoming French. Instead, the FN speaks of "merit," immigrants must earn the right to become French citizens through proving their willingness to assimilate. Assimilation however is not simply having a job and speaking the French language, it entails the shedding of all foreign cultures, religions, languages and traditions. "To be assimilated one needs first of all to respect and share the spiritual, moral and cultural values (of the nation). These need to be strong and dynamic enough to make people want to abandon their own values,"¹⁶⁸ Le Pen said. For Le Pen the presence of foreigners wishing to preserve aspects of their cultural identity is a direct danger to French identity.¹⁶⁹ His corollary is that the inclusion of foreigners into French society leads to multiculturalism, which in turn will result in the erosion and even disappearance of French identity. Le Pen depicted the French natives as victims of this intrusion and

¹⁶⁶ See poster: <http://www.euronews.com/2015/06/12/five-of-the-most-controversial-anti-immigration-posters>

¹⁶⁷ Davies, 147

¹⁶⁸ Chafer, T. and Godin, E. (2005). *The French exception*. 1st ed. New York: Berghahn Books. p, 72

¹⁶⁹ Betz 1994, 131

this threat and portrayed immigrants as oppressors of the French people.¹⁷⁰ The only solution, the FN declared, was to prioritize French citizens and for foreign migrants to return home, an irony given French colonial history. The party's policy proposals included ending social benefits for immigrants, ending intercultural teaching in schools and stopping family unification applications for immigrants. In the "50 concrete measures" against immigration laid out in the 1991 platform, the party called for the repatriation of foreigners to their home countries and the expulsion of undocumented and unemployed migrants. The FN also proposed detaining immigrants while their deportation was pending on the theory that this would discourage new migrants from coming. In addition, the party proposed measures such as a ban on constructing more mosques.¹⁷¹

5.2 Co-option

The FN's messages resonated strongly with the French public. Starting in 1986, Le Pen's party began to surge in the polls. It won 9.7 percent of the vote in the legislative elections and in 1988 garnered 14 percent in the first round of presidential elections, cementing the FN's status as a force to be reckoned with. The party's staunch anti-immigration stance, which became widely popular among French voters, has played a significant role in shaping the country's immigration policy.¹⁷² Mainstream French leaders, in an attempt to counter Le Pen's influence, sought to not only co-opt the FN's policy proposals but its rhetoric too. Even socialist leaders began taking on restrictive policies and tone on migration.

¹⁷⁰ McCarthy, P. (1993). "The State's Will to Survive and the Discontent of its Citizens: A Reading of Domestic French Politics," *SAIS Review* 13 (Fall 1993). p. 53.

¹⁷¹ Betz 1998, 16

¹⁷² Read: <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2007/04/11/french-immigration-policy-history-repeated/>

In the 1990s, center-right Republican Jacques Chirac in an attempt largely regarded by scholars at trying to win back the electorate that he lost to the FN in the election, implemented the Pasqua laws which facilitated the expulsion of immigrants and gave local leaders and mayors a say over who should be sent back – localizing the debate on migration. The Pasqua laws were officially enforced in 1993 and introduced what became known as the government’s “zero immigration” policy, which made it extremely difficult for foreigners to gain legal status in France. The laws required proof of uninterrupted housing and employment to renew residency. It also took away the right of those born on French soil to gain citizenship: children born in France to foreign parents have to wait until age 18 to apply for French nationality. These laws were aimed primarily at stemming the flow of immigration from North Africa.¹⁷³ The Pasqua laws drew strong condemnation from the United Nations who said the laws trapped foreigners in “Kafkaesque limbo.” The report noted that under the Pasqua laws if migrants are married to French nationals or are parents of children born in France, they cannot be expelled, but they also do not qualify for legal residence or work permits. During this period, France's deportation figures increased, sparking protests. The *sans papier*, people without legal documents, mobilized and demonstrated in the streets. The center of the protests was France’s working-class suburbs, built during the postwar period to house workers in the outer cities’ limits. Over the decades, they have become neglected ghettos and even today remain powerful symbols of France’s treatment of its minority groups.

¹⁷³ Find more on Pasqua laws: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/blog/temporary-migrants-or-permanent-immigrants-frances-long-migrant-crisis/>

In 1991, Chirac said that having Spanish, Polish or Portuguese immigrants poses fewer problems than Muslims or blacks. “How do you think a French worker feels when he sees a family, a man who has maybe 3 or 4 wives and some 20 children, make more money than him around 50,000 francs in social services of course, without working,” he said. “If you add to the noise and the smell, it’s no wonder the French worker becomes mad, it is not racist to say this,” he added.¹⁷⁴ The comments drew a strong reaction from the media who quickly likened his tone to that of Le Pen who responded, “Jacques Chirac uses the same discourse as the FN while vilifying the FN and saying it is extremist. This is a contradiction,” he said, “one which he [Chirac] should face, or the voters should take note of.”¹⁷⁵

The FN has had a direct impact through its policy-making capacities, as well an indirect impact on immigration policy in France by influencing the strategic decisions of the mainstream parties, their alliances and their policy proposals. The FN’s early electoral success was due to its ability to harness some first time voters as well as attracting a significant number of people who typically voted for the mainstream right wing.¹⁷⁶ Mainstream parties in an attempt to recapture the lost voters and prevent further loss, have elected to co-opt issues advanced by the populist parties at the same time refusing to officially align themselves with Le Pen, his proposals ideas, or recognize that he is the source. Meanwhile the FN has been successful not only in attracting and holding on to voters but also in influencing the priority of voters who support other political parties – further creating incentives for

¹⁷⁴ See full text in French: <https://lesquen2017.com/2016/05/08/le-vivre-ensemble-est-un-mythe/>

¹⁷⁵ Watch full video in French: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4pun9Cdp6Q>

¹⁷⁶ Guiraudon, V. and Lahav, G. (2006). *Special issue on immigration policy in Europe*. 1st ed. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. p, 72

the mainstream to co-opt their ideas, as refusing would spell their demise. The FN without ever having participated in a government was able to impact the entire political sphere and cause a realignment of the party system in terms of framing the issue of migration and establishing it as an important social, economic and political priority. The FN's influence on the national political agenda has placed issues of migration and national identity at the top of political electoral issues, shaped how it is perceived and dictated how it ought to be dealt with.

5.3 Earthquake

The 2002 French presidential elections produced an “earthquake” in French politics, or so newspaper headlines at the time described it. In the first round, Le Pen's campaign slogan, “Two million unemployed workers equal two million immigrants,” catapulted him past the Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin into second place in a surprise showing. His run-off against the incumbent, Chirac, galvanized the French public and led a massive mobilization of the left, who were in utter panic that Le Pen could become president. Faced with either a right-center candidate or a fascist as they termed Le Pen, left wing voters were forced to cast their vote for Chirac. Hundreds of most notably young people took to the streets “Vote for a crook, not for a fascist” was their rallying cry.¹⁷⁷ Chirac won 82.2 percent of the vote in the second round, while Le Pen won 17.8 percent.

Aiming to avoid a repeat of 2002, Nicholas Sarkozy, the candidate of the center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP),¹⁷⁸ took on anti-immigration and

¹⁷⁷ Read full article: <http://www.economist.com/node/1127414>

¹⁷⁸ The UMP was formed in 2002 as a merger of several center-right parties under the leadership of Jacques Chirac in order to unite against Le Pen in the 2002 presidential elections. The party was renamed *Les Republicains*, the Republicans in 2015.

identity politics as a main topic in his 2007 presidential campaign. Political observers quickly noted that his policy proposals on immigration control and integration had significantly diverged from the party's traditional stand on these issues. Sarkozy set ambitious quotas for the deportation of illegal residents (25,000 a year) and passed laws to restrict family reunification under the guise of *immigration choisie*, chosen migration based on skilled labor rather than immigration determined by family reunification. "If people don't like being in France they only have to leave. We've had more than enough of always having the feeling that we must apologize for being French. We cannot change our laws our habits or our customs because they don't please a tiny minority," he said in an interview.¹⁷⁹ Sarkozy was blasted in the media after the interview for "stealing" Le Pen's campaign slogan that year, *Aimez la ou quittez la*, "France love it or leave it."¹⁸⁰ In another example of appropriation of the theme of national identity from the FN, Sarkozy added "National Identity" to the name of the Ministry of Immigration and Integration. Defending himself against accusations that he was adopting Le Pen's positions to woo voters from the far right, Sarkozy defiantly said, "If Le Pen says 'the sun is yellow' should I say it's blue?" he asked, arguing that he was just using "common sense" in the immigration debate.¹⁸¹

His strategy seemed to work. The 2007 elections ended with a massive shift of FN voters toward Sarkozy in the first round, leaving Le Pen with only 10 percent of the vote, disqualifying him from the second round.¹⁸² Surveys conducted at the time demonstrated that between 21 and 38 percent of Le Pen's 2002 electorate voted for

¹⁷⁹ Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/apr/24/france.thefarright>

¹⁸⁰ Read: <https://correspondent.afp.com/if-you-find-my-dead-body>

¹⁸¹ Read: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/27/world/europe/sarkozy-turns-france-to-talk-of-immigration.html>

¹⁸² Read: <http://www.electionresources.org/fr/president.php?election=2007>

Sarkozy in the first round of the 2007 elections.¹⁸³ Two-thirds of Le Pen voters voted for Sarkozy in the second round.¹⁸⁴ Sarkozy defeated his Socialist rival Ségolène Royal in the second round, by winning 53 percent of the vote.¹⁸⁵

French observers speak of a profound *Lepenisation*¹⁸⁶ of France and French society, whereby Le Pen's ideas have become so deeply ingrained in political and social life that they have become permanent. This is a remarkable feat in a country with a strong liberal and left-wing tradition. And thus if 2007 proved to be a setback for the FN as a party, it amounted to a clear victory of Le Pen's ideas. Sarkozy had legitimized, mainstreamed and implemented Le Pen's rhetoric and the very principle of limiting migration at the expense of the social and human rights of the migrant population in France. The year 2007 would prove to be only a minor setback for the FN. As Le Pen repeatedly said, in the long run it might even bring more supporters who always prefer "the original to the copy."¹⁸⁷

5.4 Marine Le Pen

In 2011 in a major shakeup, Marine Le Pen, Jean Marie's youngest daughter took over leadership of the FN after winning an internal vote. "Politically, barring a few subtleties, she holds the same opinions as me,"¹⁸⁸ Le Pen the father said of his daughter after her formal inauguration. Marine Le Pen nonetheless sought to distance herself from her father and his anti-Semitism, while staying true to the party's base

¹⁸³ Evans, J and Ivaldi, G (2007). 'L'extreme droite a la derive: Recomposition a droite', Revue Politique et Parlementaire, vol. 109, no. 1044, 113 22 (119)

¹⁸⁴ Shields, J. (2010) 'Support for Le Pen in France: two elections in trompe l'œil', Politics, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, 61 9 (63). p, 65

¹⁸⁵ More on 2007 French presidential elections:
<http://www.electionresources.org/fr/president.php?election=2007>

¹⁸⁶ <http://lmsi.net/La-lepenisation-des-esprits>

¹⁸⁷ Mayer, 22

¹⁸⁸ Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/16/marine-le-pen-front-national-leader>

and anti-immigrant policy plank as a central feature of the platform. Since taking over she has significantly broadened the party's appeal by expelling extremists. In 2015 in a very public feud she ejected her father from the party after hailing notorious French wartime collaborationist Philippe Petain in an interview.¹⁸⁹ Since taking over at the helm, Le Pen has sought ways to modulate her father's tone with her own style.

In 2010, Le Pen compared Muslims praying in the streets to Nazi occupation of France. "I'm sorry, but for those who really like to talk about the second world war, if we're talking about occupation, we could talk about that (street prayers), because that is clearly an occupation of the territory," she said at an FN rally in Lyons. "There are no tanks, there are no soldiers, but it is an occupation anyhow, and it weighs on people."¹⁹⁰ Rather than condemn her remarks, Sarkozy called for a national debate on Islam and secularism. Following the debate, interior minister Claude Guéant promised a countrywide ban on street prayer "within months", saying the "street is for driving in, not praying".¹⁹¹ Guéant said in *Le Figaro* newspaper "Praying in the street is not dignified for religious practice and violates the principles of secularism and it hurts the sensitivities of many of our fellow citizens." Muslim groups argued that worshippers are forced to pray in the street on Fridays in the absence of large enough mosques. Building more is difficult, they argued, as according to French law, mosques and other religious houses of worship must be funded privately given the restrictions against using public money for religious

¹⁸⁹ Read: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-08/marine-le-pen-says-she-ll-oppose-her-father-after-vichy-comments>

¹⁹⁰ Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/22/marine-le-pen-faces-court-on-charge-of-inciting-racial-hatred>

¹⁹¹ Read: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/8766169/Praying-in-Paris-streets-outlawed.html>

purposes.¹⁹² In 2011, the ban on public prayer was imposed in Paris, forcing worshippers to use nearby abandoned buildings.

Le Pen has been particularly successful in the campaigns she has launched on what she calls the “special demands” of the Muslim community. In 2014, Le Pen successfully campaigned to remove “non pork” meal options in school canteens. “We will accept no religious requirements in the school lunch menus,” she declared in an interview. “There is no reason for religion to enter into the public sphere.”¹⁹³ She said that such provisions are aimed at “shattering secularism” and “creating special rules that would allow Muslims to behave differently.”¹⁹⁴ Le Pen has thus positioning herself as a defender of French secularism against Muslim migrants who want to impose their values on France. Public opinion has been squarely on her side. In 2014, 53 percent believed that Muslims were accorded “too many rights.”¹⁹⁵

In the runoff round of the 2012 presidential elections, Le Pen started yet another controversy by saying that all meat in Paris was halal – killed by cutting the animal's throat and letting its blood drain out. She used this as proof that the government was bowing down to “Islamic radicals.” “This situation is deception and the government has been fully aware of it for months,” Le Pen said. “All the abattoirs of the Paris region have succumbed to the rules of a minority. We have reason to be

¹⁹² Public funding of places of religious worship is banned under a 1905 law separating church and state.

¹⁹³ Read more: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/10746273/Frances-Le-Pen-ban-non-pork-meals-in-schools.html>

¹⁹⁴ Find full interview with Marine Le Pen with video: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2015/01/qa-marine-le-pen-france-islam-2015113123524709520.html>

¹⁹⁵ TNS Sofres pinion poll in French: <http://www.tns-sofres.com/publications/barometre-2014-dimage-du-front-national>

disgusted.”¹⁹⁶ It later emerged that the vast majority of the meat in France was not slaughtered in conformity with halal practices. Few believed that the uproar had anything to do with how animals were slaughtered or who eats them, it was clear that the real purpose of the meat controversy was to stoke anxieties about the erosion of French national identity. In the 2012 election, Le Pen secured 13.6 percent of the vote in the first round of elections and 17.9 percent in the second, beating her father’s best ever score.¹⁹⁷ Socialist Party leader Francois Hollande was elected president.

5.5 Refugee Crisis

As migration continued to be a hot-button political issue in France’s politics, the refugee crisis created by the Syrian government’s crackdown on the 2011 uprising, proved a welcome boost for Le Pen’s popularity and her agenda. France was not a major destination for asylum seekers, largely because of its well-known high unemployment rate, its excessive red tape and its unwelcoming attitude towards refugees. Asylum seekers instead preferred to try to head to Germany, Sweden and Britain. Officials however said that 80,000 people had applied for asylum in France since 2011, a record number. France also came under pressure to contribute to resettling some of the refugees who had arrived in Italy and Greece, adding pressure on Hollande’s government. After initially rejecting a quota system for resettling refugees across the EU, in 2015 France agreed to resettle 30,000 Syrians from Italy and Greece over a two-year period, a limited number given France’s size and its existing migrant population.

¹⁹⁶ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-lepen-idUSTRE81I06920120219>

¹⁹⁷ Find more info on 2012 presidential election:
<http://www.electionresources.org/fr/president.php?election=2012>

Germany had also requested that France take in some who had reached Germany. “We won’t take any more, Prime Minister Manuel Valls said in response in 2016. “France never said ‘come to France,’”¹⁹⁸ he added in a reference to Germany’s open door policy. But it was France’s treatment of asylum seekers in the camp in Calais that symbolized France’s failure to effectively deal with the refugees on its territory. Hundreds who had hoped to reach Britain through the French town of Calais in northern France, some wishing to join relatives already there, others planning to seek work believing that jobs are more available than in France, were trapped on a former landfill site, as the UK refused to accept them, citing the Dublin Regulation rules. France, arguing that the refugees did not want to remain in the country, refused to assist them. Though the estimates have varied greatly, a refugee agency said over 8,000 people among them 1,300 unaccompanied children for months lived in the squalid and over-crowded Calais camp, “the Jungle” as it came to be known. Charity organizations provided meals for the camp’s residents, as the French government hesitated to offer assistance, worrying it would lure more migrants. In October 2016 after a two-year standoff between France and the UK, authorities relocated most of the people to other holding facilities around Paris. The camp was destroyed multiple times as former residents kept returning, believing it was a better option than the over crowded housing facilities they were offered. In March 2017 the mayor of Calais banned the distribution of food to migrants as part of a campaign to prevent the establishment of a new camp, drawing more condemnations from charity groups.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-idUSKCN0VM0NI>

¹⁹⁹ Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/02/calais-mayor-bans-distribution-of-food-to-migrants>

5.6 Le Pen on the Crisis

Le Pen's position on all asylum seekers — “illegals” as the FN calls them — “strain our public accounts” at the expense of “our own,” she told party activists in Marseille.²⁰⁰ “Migrants are now wandering in our neighborhoods, around the train stations or in the slums, causing for France immense security and public hygiene problems,” she told the audience. The majority of asylum seekers are in fact economically motivated migrants, she added. “I think that the political refugees are an ultra-minority. To prove this I only need to show the images that I see on television. I have seen the images of the illegal immigrants coming, arriving in Germany from Hungary and other place. And of course, 99% of these images are of men,” she said, “I think that the men who flee their country and leave their family there, are not doing it to flee persecution. This is obviously done for economic reasons.”²⁰¹ Families are in the “ultra-minority,” Le Pen said. In violation of international law, which guarantees protections to people fleeing war and conflict, she said asylum should only be granted to those being persecuted by their own government because of something they did or said.²⁰²

During the EU led initiative to redistribute 160,000 migrants who had arrived to Greece and Italy Le Pen said: “We're told to accept 160,000 illegal immigrants this year, but next year it will be 700,000 and the following it will be 1.2m,” she said during a party meeting in Marseille.²⁰³ She also accused Germany of seeking to

²⁰⁰ Read: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/world/europe/for-marine-le-pen-migration-is-a-ready-made-issue.html>

²⁰¹ Read: <http://europe.newsweek.com/national-fronts-marine-le-pen-says-majority-refugees-are-economic-migrants-332659?rx=us>

²⁰² Read: <http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/718083/Marine-Le-Pen-EU-refugee-economic-migrant-Syria>

²⁰³ Read: <https://www.ft.com/content/62131206-5473-11e5-8642-453585f2cfd>

recruit low-wage migrant “slaves” to replace its aging workforce.²⁰⁴ An Odoxa poll published in *Le Parisien* in September 2015 found that 55 percent of French citizens were opposed to emulating Germany’s decision to soften asylum rules for Syrian refugees. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said migrants came for economic reasons.²⁰⁵ In another poll in 2014, 55 percent of respondents said there were too many immigrants in France.²⁰⁶

Le Pen had been parlaying the French public’s fear of Islam for years before the Paris attack killed 129 people in 2015; but that event made her message far more appealing. Pointing to the discovery of a Syrian passport near the remains of one of the suicide bombers at the national soccer stadium, Le Pen seized the opportunity immediately. “France and the French,” she warned a day after the attacks, “are no longer safe.” She demanded a crackdown on “Islamists” in the country. She proposed, “to expel foreigners who preach hatred on our soil.” A poll conducted days after found that 94 percent of French people were in favor of this proposal.²⁰⁷ Hollande tried to modulate the proposal with plans to strip French citizenship only from dual-nationality citizens²⁰⁸ who are convicted of terrorism²⁰⁹ as part of amendments aimed at fighting terrorism, but it back fired. His party accused him of betraying the values of the left and the French Republic. The parliament also rejected the proposal –

²⁰⁴ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-france-idUSKCN0R70WC20150907>

²⁰⁵ More on survey, in French: <http://www.leparisien.fr/politique/sondage-pour-62-des-francais-les-migrants-sont-des-immigres-comme-les-autres-05-09-2015-5065393.php>

²⁰⁶ Find poll in French: <http://www.tns-sofres.com/publications/barometre-2014-dimage-du-front-national>

²⁰⁷ Find poll in French: <http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/sondage-elabe-bfmtv-94percent-des-francais-pour-la-decheance-de-nationalite-des-terroristes-931488.html>

²⁰⁸ As opposed to those who only hold French citizenship. Members of the Socialist party accused him of creating a new distinction between citizens: those who are bi-national versus those with French citizenship only.

²⁰⁹ Under current law, only dual-national citizens who have been naturalized and acquired French citizenship less than 10 years before a convicted crime can be stripped of their French nationality, not those who are born French.

forcing him to abandon the plan.²¹⁰ The refugee crisis clearly worked to Le Pen's advantage. Whereas in 2009 the FN won 6.3 percent of the vote, in the 2014 elections it gained nearly 25 percent.²¹¹ The 2017 presidential elections ushered in renewed success for Le Pen. She won 21.7% of the vote in the first round propelling her into the second round. She came into second place, beating her Republican and Socialist adversaries to third and fifth place respectively.

5.7 Conclusion

Marine Le Pen, and her father before her have succeeded in pulling the political center of gravity in France to the right, forcing center-right as well as Socialist party leaders to adopt stricter anti-immigration laws on migration and restricting the religious and social freedoms of the Muslim community. Le Pen has succeeded in reformulating her father's principles into coherent political strategies, which have gained strong support among the French public. Far from her father's often-nonsensical racist rants, she offers solutions to on-going grievances. A talented public speaker with a great deal of charisma, Le Pen has managed to present herself and her party as a legitimate alternative to mainstream parties. In 2011, 38 percent of respondents believed that the FN was a mainstream party representing right wing patriotism and traditional values. In 2016, the number rose to 46 percent.²¹² By appealing to nationalism, she has managed to hold on to her father's blue-collar male supporters, and by defending secularism she has succeeded in gaining the support of

²¹⁰ Full article: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/30/francois-hollande-drops-plan-to-revoke-citizenship-of-dual-national-terrorists>

²¹¹ Find full elections results: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-fr-2014.html>

²¹² See 2014 TNS Sofres Poll in French: <http://www.tns-sofres.com/publications/barometre-2014-dimage-du-front-national>
2016 poll: <http://www.tns-sofres.com/publications/barometre-2016-dimage-du-front-national>

more women and youth. She has also succeeded in convincing the majority of French people that her analysis of French problems and her criticism of the French mainstream are accurate. In 2014, 56 percent believed that Marine le Pen grasps day-to-day French problems. The policies implemented during the latest refugee crisis, have thus been a symptom as well as a result of the constant shifting to the right in public opinion and in the leadership. The growing acceptability and popularity of the FN points to the life cycle of ideas, from fringe to mainstream, it also shows that the appropriation of ideas fails to undermine right wing populist parties, especially on the long-term. It has the opposite effect. It legitimizes right wing ideas and turns them into laws, it gives them mainstream acceptability, shedding them of their fringe source and legalizes them. It also further incentivizes populist leaders into coming up with more radical ideas to pitch to the public.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

There are no easy or inexpensive solutions to mass migration. By 2015, Turkey which hosts the largest refugee population in the world, had spent \$7.6 billion providing for the basic needs of some 2.2 million refugees on its territory²¹³ and Germany said it had spent 20 billion euros (\$21 billion) in 2016 on assistance to refugees.²¹⁴ Indeed the Syrian conflict alone has displaced nearly 6 million people out of a total 65.3 million refugees worldwide.²¹⁵ The resulting burden has strained the states that are hosting them as well as the human rights groups mandated with assisting them. What the refugee crisis in Europe has shown is that no country, certainly not Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Greece or Italy, who are currently hosting the majority of Syrian refugees, can or are willing to cope with the flows alone. The refugee challenge is enormous. No country or bloc can have a no-limit policy on refugees, as states have finite resources and capabilities to accept refugees. But no country can, or indeed should, block people fleeing war or persecution from reaching safety. This creates a distinct conundrum especially for liberal mainstream leaders. If they liberalize their policies on migration and allow more refugees to come in, they empower the populist right's agenda and undermine their own position. If they restrict their asylum laws, they undermine their legal and moral obligations and endorse populist proposals. Meanwhile thousands of refugees continue to make their way towards Europe by sea, using riskier routes and flimsier ships as smugglers

²¹³ Read: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-turkey-idUKKCN0R10N520150918>

²¹⁴ Read: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-refugees-spend-20-billion-euros-2016-angela-merkel-crisis-budgets-middle-east-north-africa-a7623466.html>

²¹⁵ Read: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

attempt to bypass authorities. According to the IOM, almost 33,715 people reached European shores in 2017 alone, while 795 have drowned or gone missing.²¹⁶

In this thesis, I have discussed the ways in which the refugee crisis has contributed to the rise of populist right wing parties in Europe. These parties have succeeded in putting the flows of people seeking safety in Europe high on the political agenda by framing it as a negative and destructive force, by linking it to people's most immediate concerns: their financial security, their employment prospects and their very identity. These high-voltage messages have persuaded public opinion and influenced people who do not even vote for far-right parties. These parties have also been able to significantly influence the political sphere by pressuring governments to implement restrictive policies on migration and asylum.

I have shown that right wing populism necessitates an "other" that is constructed through a discourse that plays to public fears about safety and identity. Refugees are not one homogenous group or entity, neither are Europeans. Yet populism posits a neatly defined "us," a hard working, good and moral group, versus "them," an alien, suspect and dangerous interloper. During the refugee crisis, "us" was the native Christian population of Europe under threat, "them" was the economically driven illegal migrants and potential terrorists. Populist parties called for the exclusion of refugees by shutting their national borders, rejecting asylum applications and limiting refugees' access to public services.

By turning the flow of migrants into an enormous crisis for Europe, they have established that it is vital for every citizen to have a firm opinion on the matter. Indeed the fact that migration in the long run is a net profit for states, that the

²¹⁶ As of 15 April 2017, find more stats: <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>

assistance of refugees is a duty under international signed agreements, that it is well within Europe's economic and political means to effectively deal with the situation and that Europe's aging population could benefit from young workers, or that it is a moral obligation – all of these considerations have been conspicuously absent from the discussion on the merits of migration or the assistance of refugees. Instead, irrational fear has dominated the discourse on migration. In this respect right wing populist parties have had enormous influence. In most countries in Europe these parties have gone from fringe movements twenty years ago, to ruling governments in Switzerland, Poland and in Hungary. In Austria, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, populist parties are in the top three largest parties.

I have shown that right wing populist parties have been mobilizing opposition to migration long before the onset of the crisis and their influence has proved to be greater than their electorate success suggests. Indeed over the years they have managed to curb the religious and social freedoms of Europe's minority Muslim population by helping to put in place legislation that has banned religious attire, the building of new mosques and minarets, and prayer in the street.

The achievements of populist right wing parties and movements should thus be understood both by considering their electoral power as well as in the triumph of their ideas, as manifested by the mainstream parties decisions to appropriate their proposals in order not to lose political ground. I have shown for instance how 2 years after announcing Germany would welcome refugees with open arms, Chancellor Angela Merkel put in place financial incentives for their voluntary return – a policy proposal that had previously been advanced by the Alternative for Germany party

(AfD). Her gambit worked as the upstart party and its electoral prospects are now in decline. Despite the AfD's limited electoral power, it has succeeded in forcing Merkel's Social Democratic Party to move to the right on refugee policy and even to borrow some of their discourse. Likewise in France, the Front National (FN) has mounted successful campaigns that have resulted in center-right and Socialist leaders imposing bans on headscarves and limitations on family unification applications for migrants. The French example is useful because it provides an insight into the potential long-term effects of mainstream parties' borrowing tactic: it backfires. It also leads to increased popularity and acceptability of the populist leaders and their ideas. The FN, considered a radical fringe party in the 1970s, is now a top contender in the local as well as presidential elections and a major mover and shaker of ideas. It remains to be seen whether a similar result will unfold in Germany.

Though establishment leaders have been concerned with their own ability to control and influence public opinion on migration, they have failed to provide coherent policies during their election campaigns and they have hesitated to act decisively with the matter effectively during times of crises. This has forced them to play catch up during the refugee crisis, having to reverse policies already in place or employ ad hoc crisis-management maneuvers meant to undo political damage. Populist parties have thus successfully laid bare the inherent weakness of establishment parties: that of lacking their own concrete positions on migration and lacking a principled dedication to the cause of human rights. They are, after all, strategic actors willing to compromise on their positions and even to completely back track from them when faced with the prospect of losing public support and, in

consequence, votes. Their concern with the rise of populism and fear about losing their political base has shunted to the sidelines their values-based concern for the plight of refugees. This is particularly true of the socialist and social democratic parties. As a result, mainstream leaders' behavior has often been reactionary, strategic and self-interested rather than principled. This, of course, has had many unfortunate consequences for minority rights and the rights of asylum seekers.

The increased restrictions have had tangible negative effects on the lives and futures of thousands of people. Fewer than 14,500 refugees have been relocated from the overcrowded camps in Greece and Italy under the two-year plan that was supposed to resettle 160,000 people.²¹⁷ Elsewhere in Europe, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban has housed all asylum seekers in shipping containers and prohibited them from leaving the premises while their applications are evaluated. Germany has been deporting failed asylum seekers from Afghanistan back to their country—notable given that Afghanistan is the world's second largest refugee producing country.²¹⁸ Austria passed a bill that would deny accommodation and food assistance to failed asylum applicants.²¹⁹ For the thousands throughout Europe who are still waiting for final word on their asylum applications, they find themselves in legal limbo and living in makeshift housing or on the street. There have been other dismaying signs of the unwelcoming, even hostile attitudes toward refugees. Three men died in the Greek island of Moria in January 2017. Pictures later emerged of their flimsy makeshift tent camp covered in heavy snow, prompting the Greek

²¹⁷ Read: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-austria-migrants-asylum-seekers-homes-attacks-firebombings-doubles-accomodation-a7661831.html>

²¹⁸ Find more stats: <http://www.unhcr.ie/about-unhcr/facts-and-figures-about-refugees>

²¹⁹ Read: <http://www.dw.com/en/austria-plans-tougher-measures-against-refused-asylum-seekers/a-37750857>

government to move the refugees to warmer shelters.²²⁰ Many have also been suffering from daily attacks. German authorities reported 3,533 attacks on refugees across Germany in 2015, which left 560 people injured, among them 43 children.²²¹

European officials have been slow to condemn these attacks, paving the way for xenophobic populist leaders to continue to shape public perceptions of refugees as economically driven opportunists with little to contribute to society, as potential security threats and foreign predators on a mission to destabilize Europe. This conception has done a profound injustice to the lives and futures of refugees whose fates depend on the resolution of complicated conflicts back home and on decisions about their asylum applications that are completely outside of their control.

I have shown how the radical ideas advanced by the populist right have been so powerful that they have altered the entire political atmosphere. Their conceptions have become an inextricable part of European political discourse. Supporting the assistance of migrants for instance, has become a political position in and of itself that implies opposition to populist parties. Meanwhile the opposition to immigration has become the dominant, mainstream sentiment. Establishment leaders focused on re-elections have seized populists' proposals in an effort to neutralize their opponents, but in the process they have legitimized these ideas and in some cases legitimized their radical challengers. Ideas that were once considered fringe have now become acceptable and have become cemented into policies. But it does not end there.

Populist leaders are then prompted by political self-preservation to come up with new

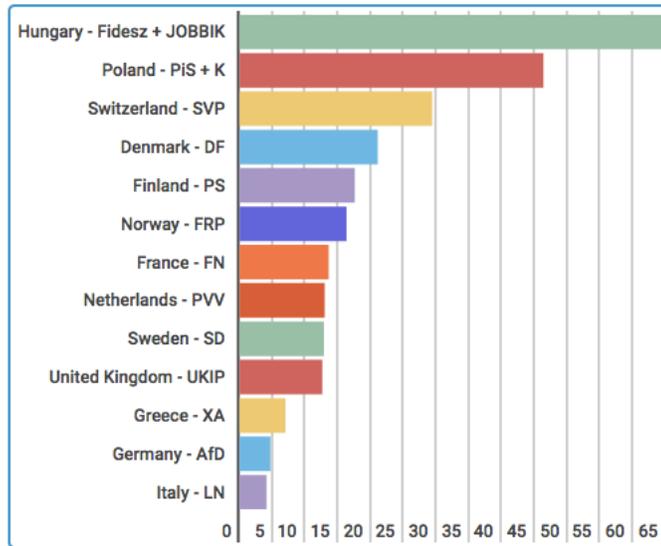
²²⁰ Read: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-idUSKBN15E1GW>

²²¹ Find more details on report: <http://www.dw.com/en/more-than-3500-attacks-on-refugees-in-germany-in-2016-report/a-37719365>

proposals, potentially more radical ones in an effort to remain relevant, putting into motion a new life cycle of ideas all over again.

The refugee crisis has transformed Europe. It has sparked the increasing influence of right wing populist parties that has not only shaped refugee policy, but also undermined cooperation in the world's most integrated bloc. There is striking evidence of this. In 2016, the majority of British citizens voted in favor of a referendum advanced by populist leaders to leave the EU and put a limit on migration. The departure of the UK, apart from incurring economic costs on the EU has also buoyed populist and Euroskeptic leaders in France, the Netherlands, Italy, Austria and Sweden to call for holding similar referendums on their own EU memberships – threatening the survival of a bloc that took decades to forge.

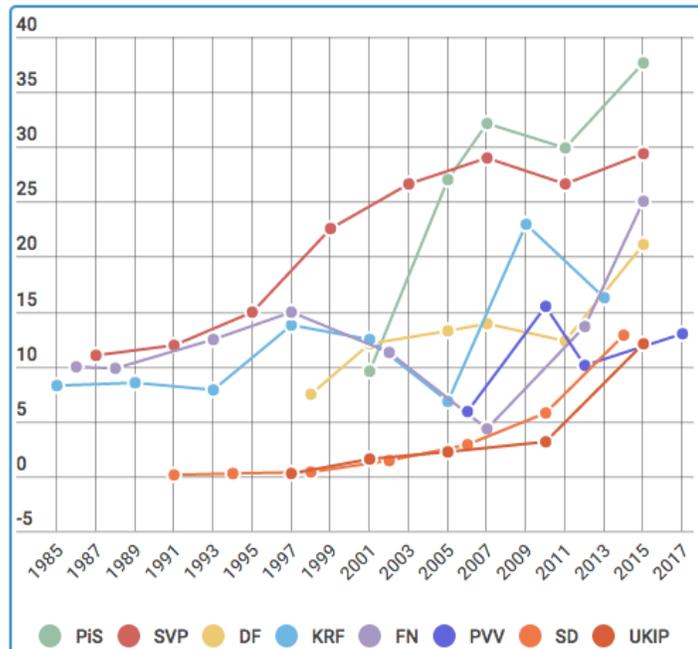
Electoral success of right wing populist parties in Europe in 2012-2017 presidential elections



In percent source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/countries.html>

Fidesz (ruling government): Hungarian civil union; JOBBIK: Movement for a better Hungary; PiS (ruling government): Law and Justice party; K: Kukiz'15; SVP (largest party): Swiss People's Party; DF: Danish People's Party; PS: True Finns; FRP: Progress Party; FN: Front National; PVV: Party for Freedom; SD: Swedish democrats; UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party; XA: Golden Dawn; AfD: Alternative for Germany; LN: Northern League.

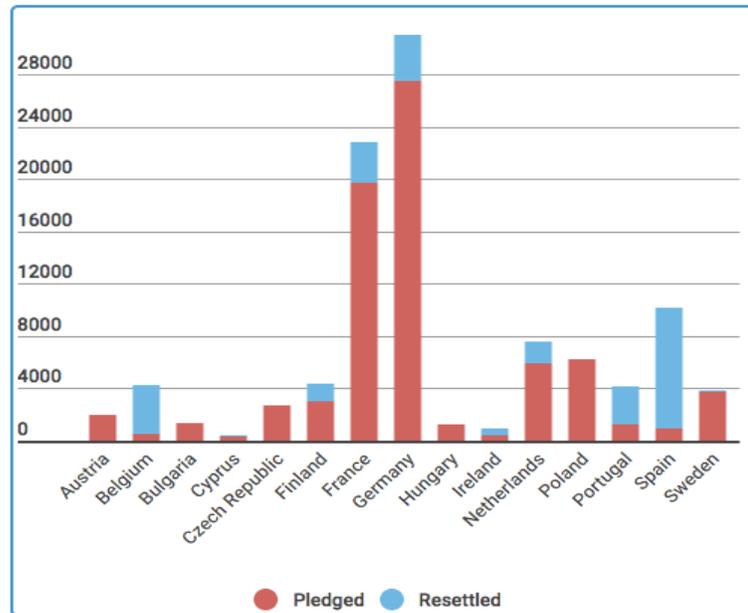
Right wing populist parties electoral results since 1985



Results are in percent

PiS: Law and Justice Party (Poland); SVP: Swiss People's Party (Switzerland); DF: Danish People's Party (Denmark); KRF: Progress Party (Norway); FN: Front National (France); PVV: Party for Freedom (Netherlands); SD: Swedish Democrats (Sweden); UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party (UK)

Breakdown of total number of refugees settled under the EU *

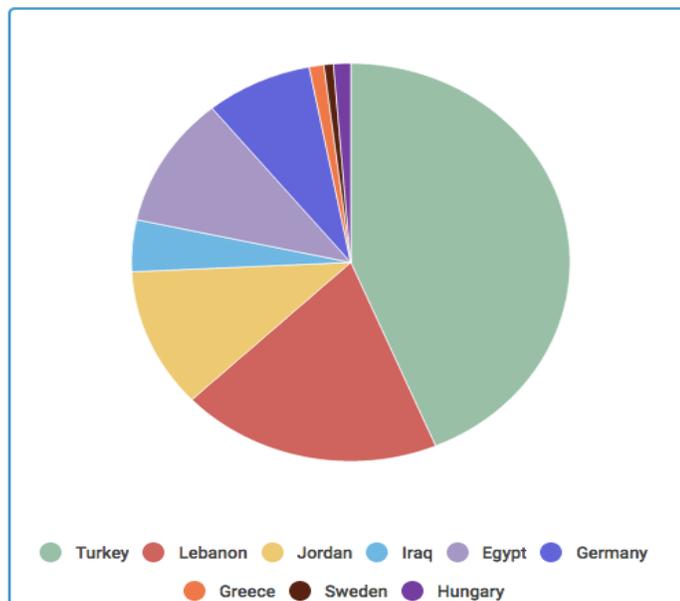


source: UNHCR

As of 06 April 2017

*In September 2015, the EU agreed on a two-year plan to relocate asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU Member States.

Distribution of Syrian refugees



Source: UNHCR 2016 statistics

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