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Securitizing Immigrants: Applying Securitization Theory in German Politics

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Abstract: This manuscript demonstrates how the use of securitization by the German political party the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has gained them votes in the German federal elections. The securitization focused on the refugee crisis and the effects that the refugees would have on Germany and its citizens. While mainstream German political parties adopted a neutral stance towards the crisis, the AfD separated themselves by adopting a strong anti-immigrant stance. The concept of securitization has not been fully applied to the German political parties. As a proxy for the political party, the paper analyzes the policy platforms and statements regarding immigration, designed to gain popularity and votes. In order to do this, the paper first defines securitization and then analyzes a variety of sources, including the political parties' manifestos, in order to show how they have developed and changed their political agendas and beliefs between the years of 2013-2019. This paper compares voting polls and statistics to examine how the party's use of securitization has garnered them popularity and votes and to find which groups tend to vote for them. The research showed that the party's shift to securitizing the refugee crisis resulted in the increase of votes in the German federal elections. The AfD placed a sizable focus on their campaign towards immigration after the beginning of the crisis in 2015. For the AfD whose whole campaign focused on immigration, it saw a huge boost of votes during the 2017 German Federal election, managing to reach third place in the number of votes it received.

Introduction

During the final years of the Cold War, international relations theorists wanted to broaden and deepen the military-based, state-centric focus of security studies. Traditionalist theorists such as Henry Kissinger and Thomas Schelling argued to keep the conception of security that was created during the Cold War while non-traditionalists argued for the widening and deepening of the terms and concepts that were introduced as a result of global changes. One of the major architects of the non-traditionalist side was the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, a school of academic thought initiated by international relations theorists Barry Buzan and Ole

Wæver. The Copenhagen School focuses on the non-military characteristics of security, the sectors, as they call it, which are comprised of military, societal, political, economic, and environmental. The main text of the Copenhagen School, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Buzan & Wæver 1997), details the main views of the school and gives an in-depth description of each sector. In their work, securitization is introduced as an extreme version of politicization and is defined as the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects (Buzan & Wæver 1997, p. 25.) Securitization is used by state actors to transform subjects into security threats. By doing so, state actors aim to raise the threat levels of such subjects for political gains. In many ways, securitizing issues seem to have become a normal state of affairs.

Methodology

Since my interest lies in European and especially, German politics, this research project analyzes how the process of securitization is utilized by the German political party The Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany) to bring attention and recognition to their main policies. For the party, I analyze the policy platforms and statements regarding immigration, designed to gain popularity and votes. In order to do this, the paper will first define securitization and the applicable sectors and then analyze a variety of sources, including the party's manifestos, in order to show how they have developed and changed their political agendas and beliefs between the years of 2013-2019. I compare voting polls' statistics to determine how the party's use of securitization has garnered them popularity and votes and to find which groups tend to vote for them. While this correlation does not necessarily equal causation, there seems to be a trend between the increase in securitized topics and gains at the polls. I expect to find that the party's successful use of securitization resulted in an increase in votes and public opinion that has helped them secure seats in the Bundestag, State Parliaments, and European Parliament. The results of this research will connect securitization with the politics of Germany and show how the successful use of securitization can turn the beliefs and ideologies of a party into an important political agenda.

Securitization

Before looking at the case of German politics, the concept of securitization and the five factors present in the literature will be analyzed in-depth. Securitization is a term that houses different meanings depending on the field being analyzed. In this case, securitization is being looked at and applied in the field of politics and more specifically, German politics. In essence, securitization securitizes public issues by presenting them as pressing issues that require emergency actions that have to bypass the standard political systems in place. Buzan and Wæver believe that securitization creates 'so-called' existential threats that go above the established rules put in place to deal with those. Such a move is successful when the actor utilizing securitization is able to break free of the procedures that apply under ordinary circumstances. The authors state that there are two thresholds that must be crossed for a securitization act to occur. The first one is a discourse that presents something as an existential

threat to a referent object and convinces the audience to take extreme measures to resolve it and the second one is an existential threat that commands such extreme measures to be taken. The discourse must be successful for the threat to be stopped.

The main four components that are involved in the securitization act are: (1) an actor or entity that can make the securitizing move, (2) an object or idea that can be identified as harmful or dangerous, (3) a referent object that is being threatened by the threat and has to be protected, and (4) an audience which is the target of the act who must be convinced that the object or idea must become a security threat. The securitizing actor must create a discourse that presents an issue as existential to a referent object. The discourse presented to an audience during securitization is one of the most important parts of the process since securitization itself is a speech act. A speech act is not something that can be qualified as real, rather the discourse of securitization is the speech act itself. In the case of German politics, speech acts are usually found in the manifestos published by the parties and speeches done in events such as the parties' annual meetings and during election campaigns.

The language of the discourse must invoke a sense of urgency and survival that warns the audience that if the problem is not solved, it may destroy them in the future. In the case of Germany, the main actors using securitization are smaller fringe parties who are located at opposite ends of the political spectrum unlike the two established mainstream parties, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, whose political beliefs are more centralized.

Another component that may affect how securitization occurs is the sector that the actor believes the threat may affect. Existential threats and audiences vary by sector and the actor must make sure to know in which sector they wish to carry out the process. Buzan and Wæver introduced five different sectors in their book and explained the differences between them by looking at the interactions within them and existential threats to them. The first sector is the military sector which is about forceful coercion relationships where the referent object is normally the state or a similar political entity. The second sector is the political sector which is about governing status and authority relationships. In the political sector, an existential threat targets the sovereignty and ideologies of the state. The third sector is the economic sector which is about finance, production, and trade relationships.

The most important sector for this research is the fourth sector, that being the societal sector, which is about collective identity relationships. In the societal sector, an existential threat will target the collective identity of whichever group that is the referent object in the sector. The societal sector is the main sector in which the Alternative für Deutschland utilizes the securitization process to present immigration as an existential threat to the identity of the German population. The fifth and final sector is the environmental sector which is about the relationships between human activity and the planetary biosphere. In the end, the act will only be triumphant once it manages to convince the audience. Buzan and Wæver believe that the most distinguishing feature of securitization is the specific rhetoric that accompanies it.

The Bundestag and the Party

Before introducing the party, a short explanation of how the federal system of Germany works is necessary. The Bundestag is the parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany. Along with the Bundesrat, the Bundestag is the legislative branch of the German political system. Another important function of the Bundestag is the election of the German Chancellor. The members of the Bundestag are elected every four years. Members are elected by universal suffrage under a system of mixed direct and proportional representation (Bundestag.de, n.d.).

Each citizen has two votes for the Bundestag. The first vote allows the citizen to select a local representative to the Bundestag. Half of the members of the Bundestag are elected directly from electoral districts, with each one electing one member by a first past-the-vote system. The second vote selects a candidate from a party list which determines the relative strength of the party in the Bundestag. At least five-hundred and ninety-eight members are elected this way and parties who gain a minimum of five percent of the second votes or win three constituency votes are given a seat in the Bundestag in proportion with the number of votes they received (Bundestag.de).

Operationalizing a definition for both refugees and immigrants is critical to this paper. An immigrant is a person who decides to leave their country in order to settle in another country (rescue.org). An immigrant usually goes through a process to become a citizen in the new country and always has the option to return to their old country. On the other hand, a refugee is a person who has had to flee their country because of circumstances such as war, violence, or prosecution. These individuals often must abandon their homes and cannot go back until it is safe for them to do so. In order to be considered a refugee, an entity such as an international organization or a government must determine if the person can seek international protection. An asylum seeker is also seeking international protection but has not had the status of refugee granted to them (rescue.org).

The next section will introduce the Alternative für Deutschland. The Alternative für Deutschland or AfD is a German far-right party that was created in 2013. Over the years, the party has gained notoriety for holding racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic ideological views (Vox, 2019). These can be normally found within populist parties or neo-Nazi parties and are not ideologies that are held by most of the German population (The German Times). The AfD, according to their party program and in contrast to the mainstream Volksparteien, holds views that are nationalistic, anti-immigration, anti-abortion, and climate change skeptic among many others. These views have provided them with a significant following in some East German states but have also earned them a bad reputation in Germany and in Europe overall. While the party is known today as a populist far-right party, it began as a conservative right-wing party whose focus was its dissatisfaction with German federal policies concerning the eurozone crisis. However, its focus shifted following the migrant crisis of 2015 and 2016 and it became more of a

right-wing extremist/populist party. Another important aspect of the AfD which will be introduced now and later expanded on in the article by looking at the party's actions is the party's racism and more specifically its xenophobia, which later expanded to focus strongly on Islamophobia. In an article published by Thomas Klikauer, he explains that the AfD "draws a sharp line between Germanic race and multiculturalism and Islam." He states that the party's racism is often expressed as xenophobic hatred for all foreigners who are not German. According to Klikauer, their hatred is intertwined, and often emphasized, by hatred for modernity (Klikauer 2018 p. 618).

The AfD securitization of migration

This section will offer a chronological outline of the party's securitization processes. Although a party that emerged recently, the AfD has enjoyed a considerable amount of popularity considering how their ideologies and views compare to that of the rest of the German citizens. Even if the party has been associated with extremist ideals and violent stances, it currently holds the third biggest number of seats in the German Bundestag (Bundestag.de). The main event that caused the founding of the AfD was Angela Merkel's reversal of her promise to not financially aid Greece directly during the height of the Euro-crisis in 2011. Hours later, Angela Merkel was in talks with the other European leaders to send a care package to Greece (Lachmann, 2012). The party revealed itself to the public on April 14, 2013, when it held a convention where it chose various leaders and speakers to represent the party, founded by Alexander Gauland, a journalist and lawyer; Bernd Lucke, an economist, and Konrad Adam, also a journalist. Their main goal focused on the abolition of the euro, taking a more radical approach than other similar parties at that moment.

In their founding appeal dubbed the Election Alternative 2013, the AfD called for the dissolution of the euro, stating that Germany is in no need of the euro and that it negatively affects the country. They demand the reintroduction of a national currency or at least the creation of a smaller currency. They called for the amendment of the European treaties in order to allow each state to democratically decide its own currency (Wahlprogramm 2013, p. 1). Among other things, the party laments the lack of control that has been posed by the politicians in Brussels. In their 2013 program, the AfD briefly mentions immigration, calling for skilled and inclusive immigration based on the Canadian model (Wahlprogramm 2013, p. 4). While they believe that a heavily persecuted person should be able to seek asylum in Germany, they state that unordered immigration into the nation's social system should be stopped at all cost (alternative-hamburg.de).

During an interview with the German outlet the *Deutsche Welle* on April 16, 2013, founding member Konrad Adam stated that the euro union has had "extremely unpleasant consequences" for Germany and many southern countries. Regarding their political affiliation, Adam stated that fitting the parties into a left or right spectrum does no longer work. According to him, the AfD is committed to "reduce this sorry state of affairs." However, the party will not

use the current government methods since they believe those are not to be trusted (DW.de April 2013).

Let's review the securitization process and see how it applies to the founding and beginnings of the Alternative für Deutschland. In this instance, the actor of the process is the AfD party which is presenting the euro as the threat. The referent object, in this case, is Germany and the audience are the citizens of Germany. The solutions presented here by the party are not solutions that would seriously be considered by the German government. In fact, the other German parties have criticized the AfD and their platform as populist and nationalist, fearing that they will attract conservative and nationalistic anti-EU individuals. Green Party parliamentary chief Jürgen Trittin stated that the party is "advocating something that is unfounded, dangerous and illusionary" (DW.de April 2013). The AfD presents itself as the alternative solution to the problems which plague the German nation.

Between March 31 and May 12, 2013, the party found affiliates in all 16th German states. During the first election that the party participated in, the 2013 German federal election that occurred on September 22, the AfD managed to win 1.9% of the first votes and 4.7% of the second votes. However, it did not reach the 5% vote requirement to enter the parliament. The party was able to amass around 2 million votes and it got its strongest support from the states of Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia, states located in the eastern region of Germany which previously belonged to East Germany (Bundeswahlleiter.de). Throughout its career, the eastern states of Germany will prove themselves to be the strongest supporters of the AfD, and we will take a more in-depth look at the reasons why this may be the case.

In January of 2014, the AfD hosted a party conference. While the party's beginning was disappointing, it seems that their focus on the euro crisis was not too successful. Nevertheless, the party found an audience to which they can promote their beliefs and message. During the conference, the party shifted its focus to match the growing anti-EU sentiment which was growing. Members warned citizens of a loss of cultural identity. The party argued that the EU had lost its ways of democracy and solidarity and opposed the idea of a centralized European State, favoring more sovereign states in the EU. Member Beatrix von Storch stated that "democracy only functions at a national level." During the conference, founder Lucke stated that the AfD was an outsider to the political landscape and was in a battle against the other political parties and their alliances who he believed too hard on pleasing everyone (DW.de January 2014).

With this conference, we can see that the party has shifted the focus of what they securitize from the economic sector to the societal sector. This sector is primarily focused on the collective identity of a group or community. Societal insecurity exists when the communities define a new development or change as a threat to their survival as a community (Buzan & Wæver 1997, p. 119). At the party conference, the AfD securitized one of the most common issues that is described in Buzan and Wæver's book. They call it vertical competition and explain the issue as a threat which "will cause people to stop seeing themselves as x because there is an integration

project that pulls them toward either wider or narrower identities (Buzan & Wæver 1997, p. 121).” This shift proved to be successful because during the 2014 European Parliament election in Germany, which was held on May 25, the party was able to gain 7.1% of the national vote (around 2 million votes), placing it as the fifth most popular party among German voters (Europarl.europa.eu). Thanks to the votes, the party won seven seats in the European Parliament, marking the first victory for the AfD.

During a party conference on July 4, 2015, Frauke Petry was elected as de facto party speaker, succeeding Bernd Lucke. A member of the national-conservative faction of the AfD, Petry’s leadership signaled a shift in focus to immigration and the perceived cultural intrusion of Islam. Previous principal speaker Bernd Lucke believed that Petry’s leadership turned the party into a far-right Pegida Party (sueddeutsche.net 2015). ‘Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident’ or Pegida, is a German-nationalist, anti-Islam political movement. The movement made up of various far-right parties and disenchanted German citizens seemed to have developed out of the frustrations that German citizens were feeling with regards to the migration laws and the increasing population of Muslim citizens as a result of the migrant crisis (Spiegel.de 2014). The movement was heavily criticized by Chancellor Angela Merkel who urged those attending the demonstrations to not follow the leaders and creators of the rallies, saying that they “too often have prejudice, coldness, and even hatred in their hearts” (The Guardian 2014). However, while the party did have its detractors, a poll done by the German news website Der Spiegel found that around 34 percent of German citizens agreed with the statement that the movement was making with regards to their belief that Germany was increasingly becoming Islamicized (Spiegel.de 2014). The joining of the movement by the AfD was one of the earliest signs of the party’s focus on Islam when it came to their anti-immigration rhetoric.

Another example of this rhetoric occurred at a party congress between April 30 and May 1, 2016, the AfD adopted a strong platform against Islam and its symbols, using the slogan “Islam is not part of Germany.” By this time, the party had already planted itself as anti-immigration following the migrant wave that began in 2015. The party called for the ban of Islamic symbols such as burkas, minarets, and the call to prayer (independent.co.uk 2016).

Throughout the years, the party’s anti-immigration rhetoric seemed to focus almost exclusively on the migration of Middle Eastern refugees, more specifically those of the Islamic faith. The current leader of the AfD in the Bundestag, Alice Weidel, stated, while she was a lead candidate for the party, that the party wanted to achieve “negative immigration” and that they believed that Germany was being “Islamified” (Arthur, 2017). In one interview with the magazine The Atlantic, Alexander Gauland, cofounder of the AfD, explained the party’s reason for why they don’t believe that Islam is part of Germany. Gauland believes that the values based on Sharia Law are not compatible with Germany’s Basic Law. Furthermore, he gave various reasons as to why Germany and Islam are not compatible stating that “Islam does not know the parity of men and women,” “Islamic states are not democratic states with democratic values,” and Islam would

make many changes to German society which people would not like very much (Friedman, 2017).

The party's anti-Islam stance was seen in their comments surrounding the Jihadist attacks between 2015 and 2016. Attacks such as those occurring in Paris in November 2015, the Brussels Bombing attack of March 2016 which resulted in the death of 32 people, and the Berlin Attack of December 2016 which resulted in the death of 12 people saw mass casualties attributed to extremist actors claiming Islamic affiliations (Nesser, 2016). The AfD took advantage of these terrorist events to attack Merkel's immigrant policies. AfD leader Frauke Petra stated that the environment for these attacks resulted from the negligence and mismanagement of the refugee policies by Angela Merkel. Furthermore, Marcus Pretzell, a candidate from the AfD sent a tweet stating that the deaths in the Berlin attack were "Merkel's Death" (Delcker, 2016).

These views were once again reiterated in the party's 2017 manifesto. While their small 2013 manifesto mostly focused on their stance against the euro and their policies regarding the EU, this manifesto expanded into anti-migrant beliefs. In it, chapters 7 and 9 are dedicated to their views on culture, identity, Islam, and immigration. Chapter 7 focuses on German culture and identity. The party believes that "the link between education, culture, and identity is of paramount importance for the development of society" (Grundsatzprogramm, 2017, p. 45). On the topic of multiculturalism, the manifesto states that it is a "serious threat to social peace and the survival of the nation-state as a cultural unit," and that the government and civil society have a duty to protect German cultural identity as the predominant identity (Grundsatzprogramm 2017, p. 46). The majority of chapter 7 is specifically focused on the views that the AfD has on Islam. In section 7.6, the AfD claims that Islam does not belong in Germany since the ever-increasing population of Muslims is "a danger to our state, our society, and our values" (Grundsatzprogramm, 2017, p. 48). In their eyes, Islam does not respect the legal system, and is incompatible with their culture, identity, and the Christian religion. The word threat is used again when referring to Mosques. A big issue that makes Islam a threat in the eyes of the AfD is their use of Mosques, Sharia laws, and Islamic radicalization to expand their "power base" (Grundsatzprogramm, 2017, p. 48-49) that can result in turning Muslims into terrorists or violent Salafists. Overall, with the migrant wave in effect, we saw that the AfD particularly targets the Muslim population in Germany and singles them out when speaking about their beliefs on Islam. In the manifesto, the word Islam is used more times, thirty-seven to be exact, than any other word related to immigration such as refugee (14 times) and immigrant (23 times).

Chapter 9 of the AfD manifesto focuses on mass immigration in Europe. The AfD believes that a distinction between refugees and irregular immigrants should be made. To the AfD, refugees should be granted shelter, though refugees' residence permits should be time-limited (Grundsatzprogramm, 2017, p. 58). The party demands strict controls at German borders in order to prevent an uncontrolled influx of immigrants and states that international agreements such as the Geneva Convention of 1951 should be adapted to present-day conditions so that the German Asylum Laws won't be misused anymore as a vehicle for mass immigration. On the

topic of integration, the party believes that the concept of a multi-culturally society has failed (Grundsatzprogramm, 2017, p. 61-62).

With the shifting focus to identity and culture, the AfD received the highest amount of support since its inception. Those numbers would be surpassed in the 2017 German federal election. By looking at the data provided by *Politico* on the German citizen's intent to vote we can see that the AfD found its highest support on September 29, 2014, a few months after the European Parliament election in 2014 with nine percent of the citizen's votes (Politico.eu). The party's percentage slowly trickled down to its lowest point around the end of July 2015 with three percent of the votes. However, right after the beginning of the migrant crisis of September 2015, when the party focused its views on immigration, we saw an increase to 14 percent in Summer 2016. Unfortunately for them, voter support began to once again dwindle at the beginning of 2017 until the German federal election of 2017, when it peaked with 17 percent in September. During this time the party even tied with the SPD, one of Germany's most popular and biggest parties (Politico.eu).

The German federal election of 2017 provided the biggest results for the AfD since they won 5.3 constituency votes (11.5% of the votes) which won them three seats and 5.9 million party votes (12.6% of the votes) which won them 91 seats. Winning 12.6% of the total votes allowed the party to join the German Bundestag and with a total of 94 seats, the party became the third biggest party in the Bundestag. Once again, the party received its biggest support from the states of Saxony, Thuringia, and Brandenburg, former East Germany states that have been the biggest supporters for the AfD both in this election and in the previous election (bundeswahlleiter.de). The East German states are known for being post-communist states and the poorer states of Germany. A study on Islam in Germany found that 66 percent of eastern Germany respondents answered that they saw Islam as a threat, 11 percent more than western Germany, with the land of Saxony scoring the highest percentage at 77 percent (bertelsmann-stiftung.de 2015)

Another study done on the support populations of the AfD found that a big percentage of the supporters of the AfD were people who did not have a graduate education or an Abitur (Juho, 2018, p. 6) (fig. 1) and earned less than 1250 euros a month (Juho, 2018, p. 6) (fig. 2). While another study found that a big percentage of the supporters came from East Germany and were either unemployed (Roth & Wolff 2017 Unemployment Graph) or working in blue-collar professions (Roth & Wolff 2017 Income Graph).

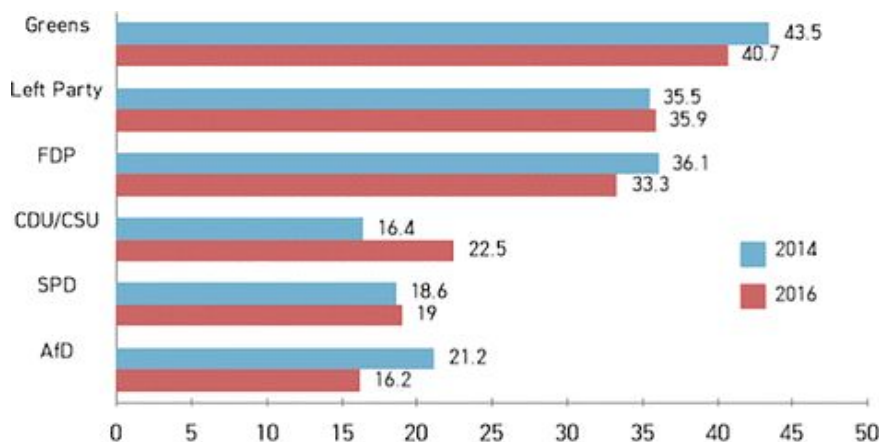


Figure 1 (Arbitur Pass Rate of parties' supporters)

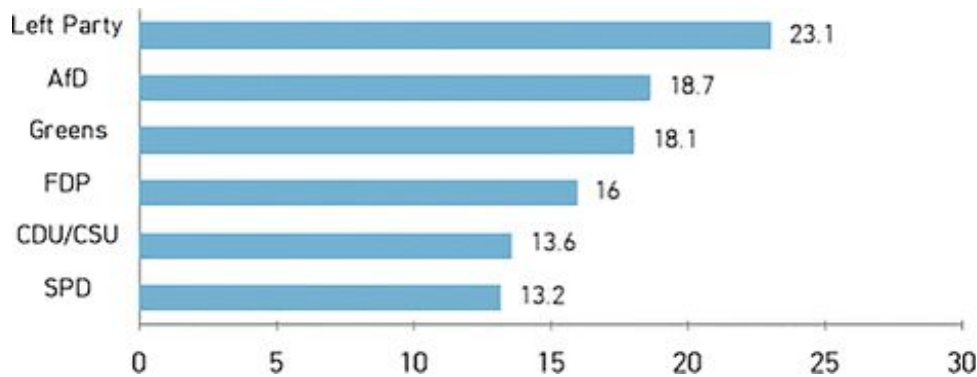


Figure 2: Proportion of parties' supporters with a monthly income of 1250 euros or less

However, it was not only the blue-collar workers that found themselves giving their support to the AfD. In a 2018 article, author Charles Lees writes about a study that shows the percentage of electoral support that the party received by social milieu. Lees explains that the electoral support of the party was concentrated in three distinct social groups: The Precariat, the respectable middle class, and the traditionalists. The Precariat was described as part-time/temporary employed or unemployed individuals, the respectable middle class was described as full-time employed, often in the private sector, with a high number of house ownership, and finally, the traditionalists was explained as putting higher value in Germany's cultural legacy, resent rapid social change, and have concerns about Islam and high levels of immigration. Lees explains that while the Precariat was the most likely group to vote for the AfD in the 2017 election, the presence of the middle class and traditionalist supports the view that the AfD's political message "resonated strongly with voters who felt cultural discomfort with modern Germany as well as with voters who felt real economic distress" (Lees, 2018, p, 303).

With regards to the European Parliament election of 2019, the AfD managed to win around four million votes for the European Parliament election. The results of this election were much better than the 2014 election and the party managed to gain double the votes and four extra seats for the European Parliament. The AfD was also one of the only parties, along with the Greens party, another German party that can be found on the opposite political spectrum to the AfD, to see an increase in the seats gained.

A study by Simon Franzmann, Heiko Giebler, and Thomas Poguntke (2019) focused on the electoral strategies used in the 2017 election. The writers make a distinction between two different issues, the valence issues which mainstream parties favor and the socio-cultural positional issues which are being used by the AfD. By using a unique survey with both valence and socio-cultural issues plus an analysis of Twitter accounts, the study found that the contemporary polarization of the German electorate is due to socio-cultural issues, especially on the issue of migration. Furthermore, the authors specify that polarization may be caused by the antagonism between the AfD and the Greens. While the more mainstream parties such as the SPD and CSU focused on valence issues, the Greens and the AfD can mobilize by focusing on socio-cultural issues (Franzmann, 2019). This study shows that the securitization of immigration done by the AfD was done strategically and has resulted in an increase of votes.

Conclusion

The use of securitizing migration by the AfD has been a quite successful one for the party. The AfD strategically separated themselves from all of the other Bundestag parties with their shift from their anti-Euro stance to anti-immigration. Becoming Germany's right-wing party gained them a following and a demographic which they can rely on for votes. They increasingly spoke of the dangers and evils of immigration and of the refugees who abuse the system. Furthermore, their strategy on appealing to people's identity and fear of losing that identity is a clear way to securitize an issue in the societal sector on which both parties operate on. Looking into the future, it does not seem that the AfD is losing any steam. The upcoming 2021 German federal election will provide another opportunity for a case study to see if the continuing securitization of the party has been continually successful.

About the Author

Aaron Uranga is enrolled in a European and Mediterranean Studies master's degree program at New York University. He earned his bachelor's degree from Florida International University where he double-majored in International Relations and Political Science, while also obtaining a German Language and Culture certificate. Aaron's senior research focused on the German political parties, the AfD and the Greens, and how they use the theory of securitization to secure votes for the German elections. Going forward, he would like to expand his research into studying nationalism in Germany and to see how German parties, with a heavy concentration on the AfD party, gain voters for their respective elections. His academic and professional interests include European politics with a focus on Germany, the rise of nationalism, voter behavior, and political sociology.

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