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THE NATIONALIST SOCIALIST UNDERGROUND: RISE OF RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM  
& ANTI-IMMIGRATION IN GERMANY

DANIELA ROJAS MEDINA  
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Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Jens-Uwe Guettel  
Associate Professor of History and German  
Thesis Supervisor & Honors Adviser

Matt Golder  
Professor of Political Science  
Faculty Reader

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## ABSTRACT

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, den Anstieg von Einwandererfeindlichkeit und rechtsextremistischer Gewalt in Deutschland zu bewerten. Diese Arbeit konzentriert sich insbesondere auf die rechtsextreme Terrorgruppe Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU). Die Arbeit ist eine NSU-Fallstudie und nimmt diese als Ansatzpunkt um auf die Anfänge von Fremdenfeindlichkeit im wiedervereinigten Deutschland zurückzublicken. Der erste Teil dieser Arbeit beruht auf Zeitungsrecherche mit dem Ziel, die Geschichte der NSU zu erzählen und ihre Verbrechen und den Ablauf der strafrechtlichen Ermittlungen und des Mordprozesses zu rekapitulieren. Der Zweck der Arbeit besteht darin, die Faktoren zu verstehen, die die deutschen Nachrichtendienste dazu veranlasst haben, die Verbrechen der NSU weitgehend zu vernachlässigen. Darüber hinaus wird untersucht, ob es Hinweise auf Voreingenommenheit und fremdenfeindliche Faktoren gibt, die dazu geführt haben könnten, dass die Polizei die Morde an einem griechischen und acht türkischen Einwanderern und zwei versuchte Morde durch Bombenanschläge in überwiegend türkischen und muslimischen Stadtteilen lange Zeit nicht aufklären konnten.

Die Arbeit beschreibt außerdem, wie sich die Einwandererfeindlichkeit unmittelbar nach der Wiedervereinigung entwickelte und versucht zu beantworten, wie sich Einwandererfeindlichkeit manifestierte, durch welche Gruppen in dieser Zeit Rechtsextremisten Gewalt verübt wurde und welche Ähnlichkeiten zwischen früheren Ereignissen und der heutigen Welle Rechtsextremistischer Gewalt bestehen könnten. Das zweite Kapitel der Arbeit beschreibt den Aufstieg der neu-rechten Partei Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) und die kurz- und langfristigen Faktoren, die zu ihrem Wahlerfolg im Jahr 2017 geführt haben. Dieses Kapitel bewertet auch die gesammelten Informationen zu dieser Wahl, um zu bestimmen, welche Personengruppen für die

AfD gestimmt haben. Dies geschieht insbesondere durch die Betrachtung von Faktoren wie Einkommen, Bildung, Beruf, Alter und Geschlecht. Das Ziel der Untersuchung dieser Wahldaten besteht darin, festzustellen, ob zwischen den Personen, die direkt nach der Wiedervereinigung ein Teil von älteren rechtstehenden Bewegung waren, und jenen Menschen, die heutzutage eine weit rechtsstehende Partei in den Bundestag gewählt haben, ein Zusammenhang besteht. Die Arbeit konzeptualisiert anschließend den internationalen Aufstieg der „Neuen Rechten“, indem der Aufstieg der AfD in Deutschland mit dem Aufstieg anderer nationalistischer oder populistischer Parteien in Europa und dem Wahlsieg Donald Trumps in den Vereinigten Staaten verglichen wird.

Die Schlussfolgerungen aus dieser Forschungsarbeit sind, dass es mehr als genug Beweise dafür gibt zu zeigen, dass Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Rassismus eine wichtige Rolle in der NSU-Untersuchung gespielt haben. Die Beweise liegen darin, wie die Regierungsbehörden die Opfer als Verbrecher behandelten, wie sie der Aufklärung dieser Straftaten wenig Priorität einräumten und Theorien formulierten, für die sie wenig bis gar keine Beweise vorlegten. Darüber hinaus zeigt die Forschung, dass der Neonazismus und die Intoleranz gegenüber Einwandern anfänglich als Protest gegen das kommunistische System in der DDR begannen. Es war eine Ideologie, die Jugendliche im Osten nicht vollständig verstanden, weil es im Osten einen Mangel an Bildung über den Nationalsozialismus gab. Die DDR machte Naziideologie illegal aber erklärte nicht, warum dieses Denken missbilligt wurde. Das verwandelte den Neonazismus in eine attraktive Form der Rebellion. Das System erlaubte indirekt die Bildung dieser nationalistischen Denkweise, die jeden ablehnt, der nicht "deutsch" schaut oder verhält. Die Forschung schlägt auch vor, dass ein Zusammenhang zwischen der älteren Generation rechtsextremistischer Jugendlicher und derjenigen, die im Jahr 2017 für die AfD gestimmt hatten, besteht. Diese beiden Gruppen teilen ähnliche rhetorische Begriffe und Denkansätze und beschuldigten Einwanderer, an dem Mangel

an Wohnraum und an den finanziellen Schwierigkeiten der „einheimischen“ Bevölkerung schuld zu sein. Die Untersuchung zeigt, dass für viele Ostdeutsche, die noch immer mit den Spätfolgen der sozialistischen DDR kämpfen, Einwanderer ein Sündenbock für ihren schlechteren Lebensstandard darstellen. Die Wahl von 2017 zeigt, dass sich diese zwei Gruppen möglicherweise überschneiden. Die Jugendlichen, die in den 1990er Jahren Häuser in Brand setzten, in denen Asylsuchende und Einwanderer lebten, sind jetzt Männer mittleren Alters in ihren 30er und 40er Jahren, genau die Hauptwählerschaft der AfD.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Enver Şimşek was the son of a shepherd who grew up in a small village in Turkey called Salur. He moved to Germany in search for better opportunities and settled in eastern Hesse with his wife Adile. He was the father of two children, Abdulkерim and Semiya, who both grew up in Germany. Şimşek began his life in southern Germany selling flowers at a small stand and over time worked his way up to running his own flower import company. Once a week, he would travel to the Netherlands to attend a flower auction and delivered to flower shops in the town of Schlüchtern and the surrounding areas. At age 38, he was doing very well for himself. He had found success in his work and had become quite wealthy, allowing him to provide well for his family. Although he ran the company, he would at times work at some of his flower stands on the weekends. One Saturday, he decided to fill in at one of his flower stalls in Nuremberg as the employee who operated the stand had gone on holiday. Later in the day, a passerby reported to the police that there was an unattended flower stand along with a white Mercedes Sprinter van with the words “Simsek Flowers” printed on the side. When the police arrived that afternoon on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000, they found Enver Şimşek half-dead in the back of the flower delivery van “among the sunflowers, lilies and chrysanthemums.”<sup>1</sup> He had been shot eight times at close range and had received multiple shots to the face. Şimşek succumbed to his bullet wounds and died two

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<sup>1</sup> Beate Lakotta, “Neo-Nazi Victims Seek Peace with Germany.” March 8, 2013. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/families-of-victims-of-neo-nazi-trio-nsu-look-for-peace-with-germany-a-887314.html>

days later in the hospital. His children were only 13 and 14 years old at the time of the incident. For both Kerim and Semiya, the murder of their father was the worst day of their lives and an event that haunted them for the next eighteen years.

At the time of his murder, the members of the Şimşek family were seen as potential suspects in the investigation. Enver's wife Adile found out about her husband's death that evening when she was sitting in her living room waiting for Enver to come home. Instead, two policemen arrived with weapons telling her that Şimşek had been shot and that they were essentially there to question her. Adile claims that she could tell they could not see her fear and pain and immediately saw her as a suspect.<sup>2</sup> For months following Şimşek's murder, she was aggressively questioned for hours at a time with officers banging their fists on the table and shouting at her, demanding to tell them what she knew. The police would torment Adile with their theories that Enver was involved in the Turkish mafia, consistently telling her lies about her husband's "dark side" and his involvement with drug-dealing, the mafia, gambling, alcoholism, adultery, and so forth.<sup>3</sup> The Şimşek's found these police statements hard to believe but they trusted the authorities to tell the truth. They were thus conflicted and confused, not knowing what or who to believe. The police also tapped the family's phones and questioned friends of the family and relatives asking whether Adil and her brothers would be capable of murdering Enver, even though they had no probable cause for doing this. The Şimşek family was permanently affected by Enver's murder, not only did they lose a husband and father, but they were treated like criminals by the police instead of victims in need of assistance dealing with this trauma. They were investigated and tortured with questions and suspicions, despite the fact that there was no hard evidence to support their theories.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibis.

<sup>3</sup> Ibis.

All the while, the real murderers roamed free around the country killing eight other immigrants and affecting the lives of many more families.

Eleven years after Enver Şimşek's murder, news was released about a right-wing terrorist cell from East Germany calling themselves the Nationalist Socialist Underground (NSU). The group was accused of killing Enver Şimşek, eight other immigrants, a policewoman, and attempting murder by bombing between 2000 and 2007. In 2013, two years after the group's crimes were made known to the public, the state began a five-year trial against the NSU. The Higher Regional Court of Munich recently reached its final verdict on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and sentenced Beate Zschäpe, the only living member of the organization, to life in prison. Four other men were also tried alongside Zschäpe for aiding the group. The NSU murders attracted much attention in the media as "die Dönermorde," an inappropriate term used by the police given the Turkish background of the victims. Despite the media attention, the NSU murders remained unsolved for years. It was not until 2011 when Zschäpe turned herself in that the NSU was tied to all the murders. For twelve years, the NSU was involved in assassination, bank robbery, domestic terrorism, and nobody in the intelligence community seemed to notice. Throughout the investigation, the police adhered to a Turkish mafia theory, insisting the murders were a result of inner conflicts between Turkish gangs. As well as previously mentioned, police officials were convinced the victim's families were the prime suspects. Despite there not being enough evidence to suggest the murders were tied to the mafia, the police did not re-evaluate their investigation and failed to consider far right groups as possible suspects.

The inefficiency and bias shown by the intelligence community in how they handled the NSU investigation highlighted a serious issue of structural racism and intolerance towards immigrants in certain parts of Germany. Local authorities failed to prioritize and take these

murders seriously, allowing the NSU to act with impunity and murder immigrants for years. Furthermore, even though the methods employed by the NSU to express their xenophobia was considered extreme, some of their fundamental beliefs about the presence of foreigners in the country was shared by many Germans. The group was formed during a period when young Germans all over the country were shifting their political views in the direction of anti-immigration and leaning more towards right-wing politics. The NSU investigation and trial serve as evidence that xenophobia and far right sentiment has been a long-standing portion of German political culture that has been largely neglected by the state until this trial.

The NSU trial was in the background of a larger right-wing political movement and the rise of the far-right political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which ran on a xenophobic anti-immigration platform. The issue of immigration has been at the centre of German political debate for several decades. In recent years, however, immigration has become a highly contentious topic and there has been a significant increase in anti-immigration sentiment and far right politics. The short-term cause for this phenomenon is often alluded to the 2015 migrant crisis when the European Union experienced a high increase in immigration from the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Europe. In response to the crisis, Angela Merkel's government adopted an open-door policy and lifted border controls, allowing almost a million refugees to enter the country, mostly from Syria. The sudden rise of immigrants and refugees coming into Germany polarized the nation. While many Germans adopted Willkommenskultur, some rejected the idea of having such a large number of refugees entering the country and disapproved of Merkel's open-door policy. Immigration then became a focal point for the 2017 parliamentary elections, giving rise to right-wing political parties and movements that ran on the platform of anti-immigration and German nationalism. Most notably, the AfD and groups like PEGIDA. As a result of these recent events,

Germany has seen a considerable return of anti-immigration sentiment, right wing violence has increased significantly, and hostility towards immigrants has become a normal aspect of modern political culture.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the case of the National Socialist Underground and use it as a starting point to assess the history of anti-immigration sentiment and right-wing violence in Germany. The first chapter of this thesis will focus on telling the story of how the NSU came to be, their crimes, investigation and trial. It will then provide an analysis of the consequences of the group's actions and place it in the context of the rise of the far right in Germany today. The goal is to determine what biases and xenophobic factors led the intelligence community to largely neglect the murders of a Greek and eight Turkish immigrants. In addition, it will assess how anti-immigration sentiment developed in the period immediately following reunification. The chapter will attempt to answer how anti-immigration sentiment was manifested, by what groups, what cases of right-wing violence took place during this period and what similarities can be drawn between earlier occurrences and today's wave of right-wing violence.

The second chapter aims to assess the short- and long-term factors that led to the rise of the AfD in 2017. It will first discuss Thilo Sarrazin's book, "Germany abolishes itself" and its role in shifting political debate towards anti-immigration. It will then evaluate the electoral data to determine what groups of people voted for the AfD and why. Specifically, by looking at factors such as income, education, occupation, age, and gender. The objective of assessing this electoral data is also to determine whether there is a correlation between the people who were part of the initial far right movement after reunification, such as the NSU, and those in the new movement who voted a right-wing party into parliament. This thesis will then contextualize the rise of right-wing politics and nationalism in the international stage by comparing the rise of the AfD in

Germany to the rise of other nationalist and populist parties in Europe and the rise of the Trump administration in the United States.

## Chapter 2

### The Nationalist Socialist Underground & Neo-Nazism

The Nationalist Socialist Underground (NSU) was a neo-Nazi extremist terrorist group formed in the late 1980s in a town called Jena, in the former East German state of Thuringia. The group was composed of two men, Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, and a woman named Beate Zschäpe, who was charged with all the crimes of the NSU as the only living member of the organization. Zschäpe met Mundlos as a teenager at an after-school youth club, and later met Böhnhardt when she was 19 years old. The two men were already involved in the far-right scene in the 1980s. Zschäpe, who was originally a punk in a more left leaning group called the Ticks, joined the movement later after Mundlos and Böhnhardt convinced her to switch sides.<sup>4</sup>

The members of the NSU at first did not show any typical characteristics of far-right extremists or serial killers. Böhnhardt, who was more committed to the right-wing front, was the son of an engineer and a teacher. Mundlos also came from a relatively well-educated family; his father was an IT professor at the Jena University of Applied Sciences. Although Mundlos' grandfather did collect Nazi artefacts. Zschäpe did not have anything that stood out in her childhood either, besides a distant relationship with her mother and having never met her father,

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, "The neo-Nazi murder trial revealing Germany's darkest secrets." The Guardian. 15 December 2016.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/15/neo-nazi-murders-revealing-germanys-darkest-secrets>

who was of East European origin.<sup>5</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the three members of the NSU became much more involved in the far-right movement. They began by first attending extreme right concerts, fighting left leaning punks, dressing up in SS uniforms, and playing a board game that consisted of sending Jews to concentration camps.<sup>6</sup>

According to an article published by Eric Brothers regarding the Neo Nazi scene in East Berlin, Neo-Nazism developed as a form of youthful rebellion against the GDR.<sup>7</sup> Brothers argues that these so called “skinheads” did not lean towards the extreme right because they had a strong conviction to the Nazi ideology or genuinely wanted to bring Hitler’s Reich back. Rather, it was a way to protest against the repression of the East German regime and its communist political and social culture.<sup>8</sup> Youths became a part of the movement and began to paint swastikas on walls, which was the most forbidden symbol in the GDR, simply because it was illegal and very much frowned upon. The ideological aspect of the movement came later on, in order to “give the skinheads a political framework in which to work.”<sup>9</sup>

One of the factors that perhaps helped this rebellious movement grow and made it so problematic was that there was no denazification and educational programs in the East that explained to young people exactly why Nazism was bad. The regime simply told them Nazis were evil and made Nazi symbols and culture illegal without giving them a reason or a logical explanation, which made the movement the more attractive for young people. Brothers’ reasoning for this failure to implement educational programs was that there were undeniable parallels

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<sup>5</sup> Ibis.

<sup>6</sup> Ibis.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Brothers, “Issues Surrounding the Development of the Neo-Nazi Scene in East Berlin,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the new Europe* Vol 33, No. 2. (2000): 45.

<sup>8</sup> Ibis.

<sup>9</sup> Ibis.

between the GDR and the Nazi regime that they did not want young people to see.<sup>10</sup> Notably, the fact that these were both highly repressive dictatorships with a secret police force that ensured compliance and loyalty to the system by spying and instilling fear in citizens.

Although Neo-Nazism first began as a rebellious movement, it eventually adopted the Nazi ideology, perhaps because the young people that led it did not fully understand the consequences of this ideology. It was then that the movement developed into more than just painting swastikas on walls to anger a communist leadership. It had turned into a movement that was racially and ethnically intolerant, hateful of immigrants, and one that used violence to express that ideology. The movement became very popular in the GDR and a relatively normal aspect of the youth scene that was largely ignored. Youthful rebellion in the form of neo-Nazism should have posed a bigger concern for parents, educators, and authorities in the former GDR. However, this inclination towards right-wing extremism was not taken very seriously and was merely perceived as a passing phase. This was certainly the case for Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe's parents, who did not make much of their children's behaviour as they said that getting involved with the extreme right as a young adult was fairly common in East Germany.<sup>11</sup>

Neo-Nazism became more prominent during the 1990s once Germany became unified. During this period, there were several incidents of far-right crime that shocked the nation. Neo-Nazis in eastern Germany were channelling their xenophobia, towards guest workers and asylum seekers who began to migrate from the West to the East after the fall of the wall. As a result, these groups wanted to influence policy and take a stand towards anti-immigration law through violence. On October 1st, 1991, The New York times reported that a total of 80 attacks on foreigners by

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<sup>10</sup> Ibis.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, op, cit.

German youth had taken place that year, four times the number of attacks in the previous year.<sup>12</sup> The attacks were said to be a response to the growing number of immigrants from Vietnam, Mozambique, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, who according to these groups were taking jobs, apartments and government subsidies from native Germans. By the fall of 1991, 150,000 refugees had arrived in Germany, a third more than most European countries were receiving at the time.<sup>13</sup>

One of the main attacks towards immigrants was a series of riots in Hoyerswerda, Saxony from the 15th to the 23rd of September 1991. During these riots, groups of far-right youth surrounded two apartment complexes where foreign workers lived. The police were able to arrest 83 of the people causing the violence but were unable to contain it altogether.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, the 230 African and Vietnamese immigrants living in the apartments were retrieved from the buildings and taken to safety at an army base, while the residents of Hoyerswerda cheered proclaiming their town “foreigner-free.”<sup>15</sup> On September 28th, 15 young people were arrested in Herford after they demolished cars and threw gasoline bombs in front of a home for asylum seekers.<sup>16</sup> On September 29th, groups of neo-Nazis surrounded refugee homes in Leipzig and authorities had to extract 240 Romanians from their houses for protection. On the same day, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1991, a local election was held in the north-western city of Bremen, in which the Social Democrats, a party known for advocating liberal immigration policy at the time, went from having 51% of the vote

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Kinzer, “A Wave of Attacks on Foreigners Stirs Shock in Germany.” *The New York Times*. October 1, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/01/world/a-wave-of-attacks-on-foreigners-stirs-shock-in-germany.html>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibis*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibis*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibis*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibis*.

share in 1987 to only 39% in 1991.<sup>17</sup> In addition, a local far right party called the German People's Union received more than 6% of the votes in this election, almost twice as much as they did in the 1987 election. Moreover, a poll taken in September 1991 showed that 21% of East Germans and 38% of West Germans were shifting towards "radical rightist tendencies."<sup>18</sup> West Germans polling 17% higher than East Germans in far-right tendencies is surprising as today this trend is believed to be more prevalent in the former East Germany. These early election figures from 1991, however, serve as evidence that extreme right tendencies and anti-immigration was a sentiment shared by young Germans all over the country, not only in the East.

The strong correlation between these riots, particularly those in Hoyerswerda, and the results of the election in Bremen clearly show that these violent actors were beginning to make a direct impact in German politics. Although the government denounced these violent attacks and political leaders referred to them as a "return to barbarism," their policy began to shift more towards anti-immigration.<sup>19</sup> Politicians at this point were likely conflicted as they did not want to seem like they were anti-foreigners given recent German history but also felt the need to meet the demands of the public and take action to reduce the number of foreigners coming into Germany. The Leipziger Volkzeitung mentioned in an editorial from 1991 that these riots were a result of disappointment, anger, and 45% unemployment in towns across Germany.<sup>20</sup> However, according to police reports many of the youths that were arrested during these riots were employed and had apartments to live in. In addition, most of the attacks took place in western Germany, where there

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<sup>17</sup> Ibis.

<sup>18</sup> Ibis.

<sup>19</sup> Ibis.

<sup>20</sup> Ibis.

was no specific pattern of poverty or social dislocation during this time, as the West German economy was doing far better than that of the East.

Similar to today's wave of anti-immigration attitudes, the violence against foreigners in Germany in the 1990s was a result of other underlying issues and this underground Neo-Nazi culture. It was certainly more than just a large presence of immigrants. Nonetheless, the German government at the time seemed to think that reducing the number of immigrants entering Germany was the solution to ending the violence. By August 1992, even more far right violent attacks had taken place, this time throughout eastern Germany. Between August 22nd and 24th, 1992 violent riots broke out in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Pomerania, a state in the former GDR. At the scene, hundreds of young people, cheered by 2,500 bystanders, were throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at police who were protecting a hostel for Romanian asylum seekers and Vietnamese immigrants.<sup>21</sup> This hostel was significant as it was the largest housing complex for asylum seekers in the state of Mecklenburg-Pomerania. Following these attacks, more hostels were attacked with petrol bombs in Eisenhüttenstadt, near the Polish border, and in Zielitz, Cottbus, and Leipzig.<sup>22</sup> In November 1992, neo-Nazis set fire to two houses of Turkish families in Mölln, Schleswig-Holstein, killing two young girls of age 10 and 14 and their grandmother.<sup>23</sup> In 1993, a group of neo-Nazi youths in Solingen, in the outskirts of Cologne, set fire to a Turkish family's home,

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<sup>21</sup> The Independent, "Neo-Nazis attack refugee hostel." August 24, 1992. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/neo-nazis-attack-refugee-hostel-1542207.html>

<sup>22</sup> The Independent. "Racist violence sweeps over Germany in Rostock's wake." August 31, 1992. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/racist-violence-sweeps-over-germany-in-rostock-wake-1580472.html>

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "3 Turks Killed; Germans Blame A Neo-Nazi Plot." The New York Times. November 24, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/24/world/3-turks-killed-germans-blame-a-neo-nazi-plot.html>

killing five people.<sup>24</sup> The riots in Rostock and the succeeding attacks that were sparked by it, were perceived as the greatest acts of violence against foreigners since the Hoyerswerda riots in 1991.

The violence and chaos created by neo-Nazis during this time was essentially terrorism. Although this word is sometimes used by news sources today, it was not used back when these attacks took place. The use of violence by these groups was entirely for the purpose of inducing terror among immigrant populations and pressure politicians into shifting the political discourse towards anti-immigration policy. Neo-Nazis soon began to succeed in achieving these goals and see policy changes in government. As a result of the violent events conducted by far-right groups, in August 1992, politicians began to take more concrete action against immigration. Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) had been trying to shift towards stricter immigration laws for some time but had not been able to make any reforms because Germany's immigration law was part of the 1949 Constitution that was drafted when the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was created.<sup>25</sup> This constitution outlined that all foreigners who claimed to be persecuted in their home countries for political reasons could petition for asylum in Germany. The German Parliament required a two-thirds majority vote to make any amendments to the constitution, thus any changes needed to be approved by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which was the second largest party in parliament. The left leaning Social Democrats were up to this point creating an opposition front for these reforms,<sup>26</sup> and without their party's vote, the CDU had its hands tied.

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<sup>24</sup> Die Zeit. "Mord aus der Mitte." May 21, 2008.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080528051124/http://images.zeit.de/text/2008/22/A-Solingen>

<sup>25</sup> The New York Times. "Germany Agrees on Law to Curb Refugees and Seekers of Asylum." December 8, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/08/world/germany-agrees-on-law-to-curb-refugees-and-seekers-of-asylum.html>

<sup>26</sup> Ibis.

By November 1992, polls showed that the Social Democrats' stand on immigration was becoming increasingly unpopular. Senior officials then decided to call a special party congress in the fall of 1992, in which party members were asked for their position on changing the country's immigration policy. After much internal debate, the party eventually gave in to the pressure from the public and the coalition and changed their position.<sup>27</sup> This is likely because federal parliamentary elections were fast approaching in 1994, and the Social Democrats risked losing the election if they did not succumb to public pressure and respond in some way to the protests. In 1993, Kohl's expanded coalition, now supported by the Social Democrats, changed the constitution to limit Germany's obligation to admit asylum seekers.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the reforms that were made on immigration policy in the early 90s and the shift towards anti-immigration in the German government, the far-right scene was not satisfied. Neo-Nazi groups like the National Socialist Underground wanted more to be done on immigration or perhaps in their eyes, they simply would not rest until all foreigners were removed from Germany. In January 1998, the police were tipped off by an anonymous source that led them to Böhnhardt's garage in the NSU's hometown of Jena. Inside the garage the police found 1.4 kilograms of TNT,<sup>29</sup> indicating the group was making homemade bombs and plotting a big attack as they had enough TNT to bomb a vehicle. By the time a warrant was issued, however, Böhnhardt had joined Zschäpe and Mundlos and fled to Zwickau, a town 80 kilometres east of Jena, where evidence was later found linking the group to their crimes. During this period that the NSU was in hiding, they engaged in criminal activity and conducted bank robberies in several towns across Thuringia and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibis.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Ibis.

Mecklenburg-West-Pomerania between 1999 and 2011, to supplement their personal income and finance their plots.<sup>30</sup>

Following this period of focusing on criminal activity, the NSU stepped up their agenda and began a killing spree all over Germany that lasted for seven years, between 2000 and 2007. These murders were initially known as “die Dönermorde,” the German word for kebab murders. “Dönermorde” was a racist term used widely by the police and the media at the time given the Turkish background of the victims. The word was labelled “Unwort des Jahres,” the nonword of the year, by a jury of linguists on January 17th, 2012 because it trivialized the murders and discriminated against the ethnicity of the victims.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the NSU was conducting these robberies in addition to murder and went by unnoticed for twelve years highlights an inefficiency problem within the local police departments and intelligence community. Moreover, it alludes to ethnic intolerance within the bureau, as not much was done to investigate these murders. Although it is true that the crimes took place in different locations and months or years apart, making it perhaps difficult for the police to connect the crimes to the NSU, these perpetrators took very few precautions to avoid being captured. They used fake IDs, rented the apartment under aliases, and had a precise escape method, using bikes to escape the scene and hiding in a van until police stopped searching for them.<sup>32</sup> Besides taking these precautions, they were not all that careful, which goes to show how little concern the NSU had about a possible capture. During those twelve years, the police were only able to connect the robberies and murders to each other but failed to connect them to the three NSU members, not until Zschäpe turned herself in in 2011.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibis.

<sup>31</sup> Der Spiegel. “Döner-Morde ist Unwort des Jahres.” January 17, 2012.  
<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/sprachkritik-doener-morde-ist-unwort-des-jahres-a-809512.html>

<sup>32</sup> Ibis.

The first murder of the NSU took place in Nuremberg on September 9th, 2000. The victim's name was Enver Şimşek, a 38-year-old Turkish-German male who ran a flower-import company in southern Germany. On June 13th, 2001, 49-year-old Abdurrahim Özüdođru was killed while working after hours in a tailor's shop in Nuremberg. Two weeks later, on June 27th, 2001, 31-year-old Süleyman Taşköprü, was killed in his grocers' shop in Hamburg. In August 2001, 38-year-old male Habil Kılıç was shot in his shop in the suburbs of Munich. In 2004, 25-year-old Mehmet Turgut, was murdered in a kebab shop in Rostock. On June 9th, 2005, 50-year-old İsmail Yaşar, was killed in his kebab shop in Nuremberg. This was the third murder in this town, clearly a pattern should have been noticed at this point. A few days later on June 15th, 2005, Theodoros Boulgarides, a 41-year-old Greek-German locksmith was killed in his shop in Munich, the first victim of non-Turkish origin. On April 4th, 2006, Mehmet Kubaşık, 39-year-old Turkish male was shot in Dortmund. Two days later, on April 6th, Halit Yozgat, 21-year-old, was killed in the internet cafe he ran in Kassel, Hesse. The final murder took place in Heilbronn, Baden-Württemberg on April 25th, 2007, when two police officers were attacked while on duty. Policewoman Michèle Kiesewetter, age 22, was killed in the attack, while her partner was critically wounded and has no memory of the event.<sup>33</sup>

Besides the ethnic background of the victims, these murders had few characteristics in common, except for one, the very particular killing method the NSU employed in every murder. Most of the victims were shot in the face several times at close range, indicating the perpetrators were likely looking at the victim directly in the eyes at the time of death.<sup>34</sup> The bullets in each crime scene were also traced back to the same weapon, a silenced Česká CZ 83 pistol.<sup>35</sup> Because

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Ibis.

<sup>35</sup> Ibis.

of this method of attack, the police assumed that the murders had been intimate and for personal vengeance. Thus, they believed it to be a result of Turkish gangsters fighting “turf battles,” even though there was little evidence to support this theory. The “Bosphorus” team that was assigned to these murders in the police department displayed severe confirmation bias, as for years they tried and failed to find evidence that confirmed their Turkish gang theory. The police wasted time and resources trying to link the murders to the Turkish mafia instead of finding other angles to the story and investigating the crimes from an unbiased perspective. They targeted the families of the victims, accusing family members of murder or made up stories to get families to admit the victims had been involved in the mafia. A notable example can be seen in how the police tried to persuade the Enver Şimşek’s wife that her husband was connected to the mafia by fabricating a story about marital infidelity, arguing Şimşek was having an affair and had a secret family, hoping that she would then turn on her husband and reveal his ties to the Turkish gangs.<sup>36</sup>

Although the strategy the police was implementing throughout this investigation did not prove to be successful, authorities continued trying to find evidence to support the mafia theory. This theory, however, did not seem to make much sense, based on the evidence that was presented during the trial. For instance, two of the murders took place near police stations, which would be an undesired location to commit murder for a mafia member who does not want to be captured. In addition, these were murders done in broad daylight in front of eye witnesses, an intimate murder between gang members would have been done in a more clandestine manner. They also used the same weapon for each murder, allowing the police to connect the murders to each other, which would have in theory traced the crimes back to the perpetrators. Further evidence showed that several victims were killed on days when they had broken their daily routines. They were, for

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<sup>36</sup> Ibis.

instance, staying past their regular work hours or located in a different city than the one they usually worked at. It is highly unlikely that mafia members who are supposedly tracking their victim and trying to kill them for vengeance would find them where they are least expected to be found. The fact that they were killed outside of their daily routines would indicate that the victims were likely chosen at random.

Even more evidence portrayed the police in a negative light after the murder of Halit Yozgat. During this investigation, police discovered that a German intelligence agent named Andreas Temme, had been inside the café at the time of the murder. However, this small but very important detail was left out of the report. Temme argued that he did not hear the silenced shots or notice the blood and dead body behind the counter where Yozgat was shot. Temme denies any involvement in the murders arguing he was “in the wrong place and the wrong time” and that he did not report being at the crime scene because he did not want his wife to find out he was surfing dating websites at the internet café.<sup>37</sup> There is little evidence to prove or disprove Temme’s arguments, however, it makes authorities look untrustworthy if they are willing to conceal such a key piece of information from a report. After Temme gave his testimony in the trial, Yozgat’s father said from the audience, “We all know this man is lying,” receiving approval from the crowd.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time the NSU was committing these murders, the group also orchestrated three bombings targeting Middle Eastern immigrants. The first took place in 1999 when Böhnhardt and Mundlos placed a pipe bomb disguised as a flashlight at a bar owned by a Turkish immigrant

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<sup>37</sup> Ibis.

<sup>38</sup> Ibis.

in Nuremberg.<sup>39</sup> An 18-year-old employee sustained severe injuries when he accidentally detonated the bomb. This case had not been fully solved and had “obviously fallen through the cracks” according to Federal Prosecutor Herbert Diemer.<sup>40</sup> The case later resurfaced during the trial in 2013 after a witness testimony linked the NSU to the bombing. The second bombing took place at an Iranian grocery store in Cologne in 2001. The NSU placed an explosive in a tin of a German Stollen cake and left it in a gift basket in the store, severely injuring the 19-year-old daughter of the shopkeeper.<sup>41</sup> The third bombing took place on June 9th, 2004 in a predominantly Turkish neighbourhood in the Keupstraße district of Cologne, also known as Little Istanbul. The NSU detonated a bomb filled with nails on a crowded shopping street where flying nails injured at least seventeen people, mainly those inside the shops where the bomb detonated.

In 2014, Der Tagesspiegel wrote an article essentially deeming this bombing an act of domestic terrorism.<sup>42</sup> The author stated that the goal of the NSU was to kill as many defenceless people as possible and that it was an attack founded solely on the hateful ideology of people who wrongfully believe they have the right to deny others the right to life and render them powerless.<sup>43</sup> At the time of the incident, however, the rhetoric in the media was vastly different because the police were convinced that this bombing was a result of an inner feud between Turks. For instance, in 2004, The New York Times reported that although the attack did not seem to have the

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<sup>39</sup> Deutsche Welle. “German federal prosecutor investigates new NSU-bomb lead.” June 13, 2013. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-federal-prosecutor-investigates-new-nsu-bomb-lead/a-16877454>

<sup>40</sup> Ibis.

<sup>41</sup> Deutsche Welle. “German informant linked to neo-nazi Cologne bombing.” June 14, 2015. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-informant-linked-to-neo-nazi-cologne-bombing/a-18517206>

<sup>42</sup> Hatice Akyün, “Die Bombe in Köln galt uns allen.” June 9, 2014.

<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/nagelbombenattentat-in-der-keupstrasse-die-bombe-in-koeln-galt-uns-allen/9976256.html>

<sup>43</sup> Ibis.

characteristics of a terrorist operation by Al Qaeda or any other Islamist fundamentalist group, the police did not want to rule out any suspects,<sup>44</sup> meaning they would still consider Muslim immigrant groups as possible suspects. Furthermore, The Independent reported the possible motives for the incident as a feud between Kurdish and Turkish immigrant groups or an act organized by the Muslim extremist group based in Cologne headed by the Turkish immigrant Metin Kaplan.<sup>45</sup> As a result of the intelligence community's bias, the bombings and ten murders remained unsolved for several years. Only in 2006 did the police begin to consider other suspects. A young policeman on the Bosphorus team, named Alexander Horn, looked at the evidence aforementioned and identified the killing tactics as a characteristic of far-right groups. Although officers were tasked to find evidence that would support this theory, they kept focusing on the initial mafia theory and not much was done with Horn's analysis.<sup>46</sup> The NSU was not discovered to be connected to these crimes until November 2011, eleven years after the murder of their first victim.

In early November 2011, the NSU sent DVDs to various German newspapers, which was later used as evidence in the trial.<sup>47</sup> The DVD contained a Pink Panther video in which the group claimed responsibility for all their crimes and made a mockery of the victims. In this video, the Pink Panther is walking around a city where he steps in front of a poster with the sentence "Steh zu deinem Volk, Steh zu deinem Land, Unterstütze den NSU,"<sup>48</sup> meaning, "stand with your people,

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<sup>44</sup> The New York Times. "Nail Bomb in a Turkish Area in Cologne Hurts 17." June 10, 2004. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/10/world/nail-bomb-in-a-turkish-area-in-cologne-hurts-17.html>

<sup>45</sup> Tony Paterson, "Bomb injures 17 in Cologne's Turkish quarter." June 10, 2004. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/bomb-injures-17-in-colognes-turkish-quarter-731654.html>

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> Tanjev Schultz, "'Ali9' und 'Ali9 aktuell': Die Video-Arbeit des NSU." March 15, 2016. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/nsu-prozess-ali-und-ali-aktuell-die-video-arbeit-des-nsu-1.2908458>

<sup>48</sup> NSU-Paulchen-Video. <https://vimeo.com/146814814>

stand with your country, support the NSU.” The Pink Panther then places a bomb in front of a grocery store and the video cuts to real news footage of the NSU’s 2001 Cologne bombing. The Panther goes through a slideshow with news headlines of the murders and faces of the victims while a map is in the background marked with an ‘x’ on each of the cities where the murders took place. The Panther later looks at news footage from Stern TV in which reporters are discussing the “Döner-Killers.” The video then cuts to the panther dreaming, showing footage that the NSU filmed of actors recreating Şimşek’s murder in his flower van, additionally showing real photographs of the crime scene. This pattern repeats itself for each murder, with news footage and horrific photographs of the victims once they had been shot. Finally, footage is shown of the 2004 bombing and the Pink Panther celebrating getting away with it all, until it ended up bombing itself.

The police were at this point confused, not fully knowing what to make of this video, as they worked on trying to narrow down the location of the group. Soon after the release of the video, on November 4th, 2011, witnesses reported two men fleeing a bank robbery on bicycles in Eisenach, Thuringia. The police were later tipped off and found the van near the crime scene, where the two suspects were hiding until police left the area. Before being captured, the two men, according to police reports, killed themselves and set fire to the van. The men were later identified by investigators as Mundlos and Bönnhardt. Inside the vehicle, the police found a large supply of guns and ammunition, including the gun of police officer Michèle Kiesewetter.<sup>49</sup> Four days after this incident, Zschäpe called the Jena police stating she was the one they were looking for. Before she was captured by the police, Zschäpe set the apartment where the three of them had been living in Zwickau on fire, attempting to get rid of the evidence. Inside the apartment, the police found newspaper articles about the murders, copies of the Pink Panther DVD, and the Česká pistol they

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, op. cit.

used to commit the murders. Despite Zschäpe's attempt, most of the evidence was retrieved from the apartment, at least enough to connect Zschäpe, Mundlos and Böhnhardt to the crimes and begin an investigation on the NSU.

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the prosecution began the proceedings against the NSU at the Higher Regional Court of Munich and conducted a trial that lasted five years, until July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The main defendant, Beate Zschäpe, was charged with nine murders, an attack on police involving one murder, and two attempted murders by bombing. Four other men were also trialled for providing support to the NSU. Ralf Wohlleben, who procured the silenced gun, was sentenced to 10 years for aiding and abetting murder. Carsten Schultze was sentenced to three years for giving the pistol to the group. André Eminger was charged with aiding a terrorist group and was given a sentence of two years and six months. Holger Gerlach was sentenced to three years for giving his birth certificate and other ID to Uwe Mundlos for fake identification.<sup>50</sup> The NSU trial, which involved the testimonies of more than 600 witnesses, was one of the largest, longest and most expensive trials in Germany's post-war history.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the trial, Zschäpe denied all culpability to the crimes she was being accused of, claiming she had no knowledge of Mundlos and Böhnhardt's bank robberies and killings while she was living with them. In December 2015, she eventually admitted that she indeed knew about the bank robberies and confessed to having set the apartment in Zwickau on fire but continued to deny any knowledge about the killings and bombings.<sup>52</sup> She was eventually found guilty of all crimes related to the NSU and sentenced to life in prison.

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<sup>50</sup> BBC News. "Beate Zschäpe given life in German neo-Nazi murder trial." July 11, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44764827>

<sup>51</sup> Philip Oltermann, "Germany neo-Nazi Beate Zschäpe sentenced to life for NSU murders," July 11, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/11/german-neo-nazi-beate-zschape-gets-life-for-nsu-murders>

<sup>52</sup> "A brief history of German neo-Nazi group NSU." December 13, 2018. <https://www.apnews.com/3d1631f7210641a8829f88373565d674>

The NSU proceedings shed much light on issues of institutional racism and intolerance within German state authorities and the intelligence community. Amnesty International defined institutional racism as “the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin ... [that] can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.”<sup>53</sup> This is exactly what was done by German police regarding the murder cases of these Turkish and Greek immigrants. The group committed these crimes practically right under their noses, but police nonetheless failed to solve the murders. Mainly, because they were unable to assess the evidence from an unbiased perspective. According to Mehmet Daimagüler, a lawyer who represented the families of the victims in the trial, “the police were racist for not believing that Turkish individuals could actually be victims.”<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Barbara John, the government’s ombudswoman for the victims and their families, stated that the NSU murders “could have been avoided, if the relevant authorities had assessed the crimes better and with less prejudice.”<sup>55</sup> She also mentioned that this trial was a way for the authorities to compensate for their failure and inefficiency in solving these crimes. For several family members, however, the NSU trial was not sufficient.

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<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International. “Living in Insecurity: How Germany is failing victims of racist violence.” 2016.

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2341122016ENGLISH.PDF>

<sup>54</sup> Friedel Taubel, “Racism is socially acceptable in Germany, says lawyer in neo-Nazi trial.” <https://www.dw.com/en/racism-is-socially-acceptable-in-germany-says-lawyer-in-neo-nazi-trial/a-44593388>

<sup>55</sup> Frank Jordans, “As German neo-Nazi trial ends, families demand more answers.” <https://www.apnews.com/2ee98dff0fe44b09b0cb54d2cb3631c5>

The families' lawyers in this trial argued that there was enough evidence to suggest that the NSU had a wider network of supporters. Their theory is that there were more people within the justice system who were directly involved with the NSU, including paid right-wing informants for German security services.<sup>56</sup> One of the reasons for why they believed this to be true was due to the wide geographic distribution of the murders. They believe the NSU received intelligence about the victims and their location from local contacts in the cities where the murders took place.<sup>57</sup> In addition, lawyers were also able to discover the fact that there were informants for federal and state-level security using various codenames, such as Primus and Corelli, who had been close to the NSU for years.<sup>58</sup> To make matters worse, during the investigation, in June 2012, it was revealed that the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Germany's domestic intelligence agency, destroyed files related to the NSU case.<sup>59</sup> The German parliament investigative committee launched an investigation on the agency and discovered that on November 12<sup>th</sup>, the day after the NSU crimes were made known to the general public, the office shredded documents with intel on an operation to recruit far-right informants in Zwickau.<sup>60</sup> The agency told Der Spiegel at the time that the shredding was the result of misguided actions made by an individual in their office, not of any orders that were made to destroy the files.<sup>61</sup> Later in the investigation, it was made aware that this order came from higher up in the chain of command. The head of the intelligence agency, Heinz Fromm, was forced to resign given public outrage at the revelations. In July 2012,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibis.

<sup>57</sup> Ibis.

<sup>58</sup> Ibis.

<sup>59</sup> Der Spiegel. "Intelligence Agency under Fire for Shredding Files." June 29, 2012.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/intelligence-agency-slammed-for-shredding-files-linked-to-zwickau-cell-a-841759.html>

<sup>60</sup> Ibis.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob Kushner, "10 murders, 3 Nazis, and Germany's moment of reckoning."

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/16/10-murders-3-nazis-and-germanys-moment-of-reckoning/>

Germany's domestic intelligence agency came forth about destroying even more files pertaining to the far-right extremist scene, this time coming from the Ministry of Interior in Berlin. The ministry, however, denied any allegations that the files had anything to do with the NSU and that they were files on a separate right-wing investigation. There is no evidence to prove whether this is true or not but again the timing of the incident was highly suspicious and raised many questions about professionalism within the agency.<sup>62</sup>

The discoveries regarding the intelligence community that arose during the investigation portrayed the German authorities in a very negative light. Perhaps there was no substantial evidence in the files that could have been used in the trial, as the agencies continuously claimed. However, the timing, secrecy, and false statements given by the agencies leads people to think otherwise. Their actions made family members and their lawyers suspicious of government agencies as a whole and the government's involvement in the NSU murders. There are several holes in the investigation and questions that remain unanswered, such as why and how the victims were chosen and targeted by the NSU. Questions and factors that suggest the families' lawyers are right and there was more to the NSU murders than the government is willing to acknowledge. In a Foreign Policy article, Jacob Kushner argues that the government is likely trying to hide the fact that these murders took place not only because of structural racism and unwillingness to see Turkish men as victims, but also because the intelligence community watched these crimes take place and deliberately turned a blind eye.

The way the NSU committed these crimes show that they believed they had some level of impunity; they would have been more careful and acted in a more clandestine manner otherwise.

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<sup>62</sup> Matthias Gebauer, "Interior Ministry Ordered Destruction of Intelligence Files." July 19, 2012. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/families-of-victims-of-neo-nazi-trio-nsu-peace-with-germany-a-887314.html>

Furthermore, instead of questioning how it was possible that the NSU conducted these murders for seven years and went by unnoticed, the media at the time sensualized the group, portraying it as an evil and twisted love triangle. The group was moreover portrayed as a singularity and three murderous extremists who did not necessarily fit into contemporary trends. The German government was also willing to accept this idea that the NSU were merely a group of sociopaths that did not represent or speak for the rest of the country. Although the NSU was an extreme case of neo-Nazism and a group that resorted to murder to express their xenophobic views, they were still part of a movement towards neo-Nazism that was fairly common among youth in the former GDR. Moreover, the group was formed during a period when Germans all over the country were shifting their political views towards anti-immigration. Their methods may have been extreme but some of their fundamental beliefs about the presence of foreigners and immigrants in the country was shared by many Germans. Specifically, young Germans, who are now in their 40s, an age group that makes up the strongest support base for right-wing parties like Alternative für Deutschland.<sup>63</sup> The NSU was part of a right-wing, anti-immigrant culture that remains prevalent in Germany today, a culture that had been largely neglected and underestimated until this trial and the parliamentary elections in 2017.

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<sup>63</sup> Forschungsgruppe. “Bundestagswahl 2017.” [http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Wahlen/Grafiken\\_zu\\_aktuellen\\_Wahlen/Wahlen\\_2017/Bundestagswahl\\_2017/](http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Wahlen/Grafiken_zu_aktuellen_Wahlen/Wahlen_2017/Bundestagswahl_2017/)

## Chapter 3

### The Rise of the AfD and Anti-immigration

The first big sign of a new shift towards anti-immigration rhetoric and xenophobia in Germany was the release of a book written by former Berlin Senator of Finance and member of the Bundesbank, Thilo Sarrazin. The book, titled “Deutschland schafft sich ab: wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen,” in English, “Germany Abolishes Itself: How We Are Playing with Our Future”, was released in August 2010 and immediately became widely popular, selling out in a matter of days. Sarrazin’s book had already sold 1.5 million copies by early 2011 and became a best-selling book on politics by a German author.<sup>64</sup> The book discusses how Germany is slowly deteriorating as the German population is getting older, steadily decreasing and also becoming “dumber” and dependent on government payments.<sup>65</sup> Sarrazin comments on several aspects of the state, including Germany’s education system, social welfare programs, and immigration policy. Primarily, this book revolves around the topic of immigration and heavily criticizes foreigners, particularly Muslim migrants. He argues that immigrants in Germany are poorly educated people with low socioeconomic status who fail to assimilate to German culture and way of life.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, he claims that migrants have too many children and live off the welfare system without making any

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<sup>64</sup> Gottfried Hahn, “Schadet sich die SPD mit ihrem Sarrazin-Kurs?” May 1, 2011. [https://www.focus.de/magazin/debatte/focus-leserdebatte-schadet-sich-die-spd-mit-ihrem-sarrazin-kurs\\_aid\\_623031.html](https://www.focus.de/magazin/debatte/focus-leserdebatte-schadet-sich-die-spd-mit-ihrem-sarrazin-kurs_aid_623031.html)

<sup>65</sup> Regina Krieger, “Wie Sarrazin Millionär wurde.” May 21, 2012. <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/it-medien/lukratives-buch-wie-sarrazin-millionaer-wurde/6647994.html>

<sup>66</sup> Michael Meng, “Silences about Sarrazin’s Racism in Contemporary Germany,” *The Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 1 (2015): 102-35.

significant contribution to the economy and the country's overall productivity.<sup>67</sup> Sarrazin even goes as far as bringing up the concept of ethnic genetics and ties it into his critique on immigration. He believes that there is a relationship between an individual's intelligence and his or her cultural or "genetic" background.<sup>68</sup> Thus, he assumes that immigrants from Arab and predominantly Muslim countries have a lower level of intelligence.<sup>69</sup> A statement that makes absolutely no sense since there is virtually no connection between one thing and the other and little evidence to support that claim. Nonetheless, readers seemed to agree with this assumption and take it as fact, which goes to show how much people are willing to believe a false statement if it corroborates or coincides with a predisposed belief.

The criticism in Sarrazin's book is mostly targeted at immigrants from Turkey who first moved to Germany in the 1960s as part of the Gastarbeiter program implemented by the West German government. In an article about Sarrazin's racism, Historian Michael Meng mentions that one of the issues with the book is the language and use of terms that group millions of individuals into a single religious or ethnic category.<sup>70</sup> For instance, he extends the term "Turkish migrants" to include German citizens of Turkish ethnicity, many of whom were born and raised in the country. He also often refers to Turkish people and immigrants from the MENA region in general as "Muslims," making immediate assumptions about their religious affiliation and placing them in a category they may or may not fall into. Sarrazin's language in this book contributes to the otherness of Muslim migrants in Germany and the stigmatization of these groups. His main

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<sup>67</sup> Ibis.

<sup>68</sup> Nicole Berbuir, Marcel Lewandowsky, and Jasmin Siri, "The AfD and Its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?" *German Politics* 24, no. 2 (2014): 154-78.

<sup>69</sup> Ibis.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Meng, *op. cit.*

argument and conclusion that he reaches is essentially that Germany must restrict immigration from predominantly Muslim and Arab countries because Muslims will lead to Germany's decline. In other words, he believes Germany's problems are the result of a large presence of Muslims and Turkish people who are draining resources, have little value added to German society, and are reproducing at a higher rate than ethnic Germans. The issue with this rhetoric is that not only is he using Muslim people and immigrants as a scapegoat for problems that may well have little to do with them, but he is portraying them as an immediate threat to the country and German way of life.

In the seventh chapter of Sarrazin's book, where he addresses the integration of migrants in German society, he states that he wants Germany and Europe as a whole to maintain its cultural identity as a part of the "occident." Coincidentally using language that is very similar to that of the right-wing political group PEGIDA, the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident. A group that was perhaps influenced by the ideas in this book. Sarrazin explains that he wants immigrants to fully assimilate to European culture and fit the profile of what makes one European and German, one of the characteristics of this profile being secularism. He states, "I do not want the country of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to be largely Muslim...where over large stretches Turkish and Arabic is spoken, women wear a veil, and the rhythm of daily life is determined by the call of the muezzin."<sup>71</sup> The language used in this chapter makes it seem like Muslim immigration and decreasing birth rates among middle to upper class "autochthonous" Germans<sup>72</sup> is a national crisis and one that requires immediate attention. In a way, he argues that failure to take action on this issue will lead to there being more of "them" and less of "us," an idea

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<sup>71</sup> Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010), 308.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Meng, op. cit.

that further exacerbates the divide among Germans and installs fear in people. To make matters worse he tries to install this fear with false information and data. For instance, he claims that in 120 years, immigrants from Africa and the Middle East will make up more than 70% of the German population. However, this claim is based on outdated and inflated figures. In an article by Der Spiegel, which debunks several of his arguments, they point out that the birth rate among immigrant women is significantly lower than Sarrazin makes it out to be.<sup>73</sup> In addition, his estimate of 100,000 immigrants from the MENA region has been inaccurate for several years now and since 2006 more Turkish people have been leaving Germany than coming in, with 8,000 Turkish people leaving Germany in 2008 alone.<sup>74</sup>

Overall Sarrazin's book has a racist and Islamophobic connotation that is difficult to ignore. Everything he discusses in the book promotes and advances a xenophobic and racist ideology that was clearly already present within German society. The book's wide success and the way it was received by the public makes it apparent that Sarrazin did not necessarily voice any new concerns, he merely stated publicly what others were already thinking. However, this book seems to have brought xenophobia to the front of people's consciousness and made it more acceptable to openly voice racist opinions regarding Muslims and migrants in Germany. Furthermore, this controversial book sparked a nation-wide debate about immigration and the role of migrants in Germany. Sarrazin's book was the beginning of a shift towards anti-immigration sentiment, which Meng highlights, the country had not experienced since the early 1990s. A time when, as

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<sup>73</sup> Der Spiegel, "Why Sarrazin's Integration Demagoguery Has Many Followers," September 6, 2010. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-man-who-divided-germany-why-sarrazin-s-integration-demagoguery-has-many-followers-a-715876.html>

<sup>74</sup> Ibis.

previously discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, there were mass outbursts of anti-immigration sentiment and right-wing violence targeting asylum seekers and migrants all over Germany.

The timeline of when this book was released is quite interesting as well because it raised concerns about immigration and perhaps increased intolerance towards foreigners before the European migrant crisis of 2015 even took place. Many experts attribute the rise of the AfD and shift towards an anti-immigration platform to the migrant crisis. This argument makes sense as parties have to adjust their position on issues and policy as domestic pressures change and new interests come into play. But, could this book have played a role in shifting the conversation within the AfD and influenced their xenophobic party platform? Sarrazin's book, whether intentionally or not, planted a seed in its readers. Mainly, by portraying immigration as an immediate threat to the country, one that when the opportunity arises they should act on, and by painting an inaccurate picture of a future Germany taken over by Islam. A scenario that is highly unlikely, but nonetheless created a powerful image that could have made readers fear and hate Muslims more than they already did. Similar to how this book influenced German citizens, the leaders of the AfD could have also been heavily influenced, either by the actual content of the book or its success. After the book was released, an experimental study by Thorsten Faas concluded that roughly 26% of Germans would vote for a hypothetical party led by Thilo Sarrazin.<sup>75</sup> The AfD could have realized then that xenophobia is an ideology that is largely present in society but neglected in modern politics, one they could easily capitalize on to win votes. The influence of Sarrazin's book on the AfD's party platform and ultimate rise may be very indirect but the possibility is still there. What is important about this book is that it made the political discourse shift back towards anti-

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<sup>75</sup> Nicole Berbuir, Marcel Lewandowsky, and Jasmin Siri, *op. cit.*

immigration policy, which combined with the migrant crisis a few years later created the perfect conditions for right-wing parties to gain momentum.

The right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was founded in April 2013 by macroeconomics professor Bernd Lucke in response to the European financial crisis.<sup>76</sup> He and a group of professors were concerned about the future of the Euro and disagreed with Angela Merkel's response to the crisis, specifically the bailout of EU member states like Greece. At the time, Merkel stated that there was no alternative to the policies her administration had adopted to save the euro. The AfD was then created to challenge Merkel's government and show that there indeed were alternatives for Germany.<sup>77</sup> Their initial anti-Euro party platform was based on ending Germany's participation in the Eurozone, reintroducing the Deutsche Mark and ending the bailouts of banks and member states using taxpayer funds.<sup>78</sup> In September 2013, when the last parliamentary election took place, the AfD managed to win 4.7% of the vote share. Missing the 5% threshold, the percentage of votes needed to gain seats in the Bundestag, by only a small margin.<sup>79</sup> These numbers were quite impressive for such a new political party. As the financial crisis wound down, however, the AfD lost much of its popularity and relevance in the political stage. Figure 1 shows that in early 2015, the AfD only polled at 5%-6%, obtaining 6.1% of the vote in the Hamburg state elections held in February and 5.5% in Bremen. By the spring of the following year, the numbers changed drastically, with the party seeing a significant increase in votes. After the migrant crisis in September 2015, when the federal government decided to allow

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<sup>76</sup> Daniel Hough, "Germany's AfD: how to understand the rise of the right-wing populists." September 24, 2017. <http://theconversation.com/germanys-afd-how-to-understand-the-rise-of-the-right-wing-populists-84541>

<sup>77</sup> Ibis.

<sup>78</sup> Achim Goerres, Dennis Spies, Staffan Kumlin, "The Electoral Supporter Base of the Alternative for Germany," *Swiss Political Science Review* 24, no. 3 (2018)

<sup>79</sup> Daniel Hough, op. cit.

890,000 refugees who were stranded in Hungary to enter Germany, the AfD began to gain back its popularity. The party immediately began to criticize Merkel's immigration policy and positioned themselves as the "voice of outrage," pushing for anti-immigration and anti-refugee policy.<sup>80</sup> By April 2016, the AfD polled at 12%-24%, gaining the most support in the Saxony-Anhalt state election with 24.3% of the vote share.

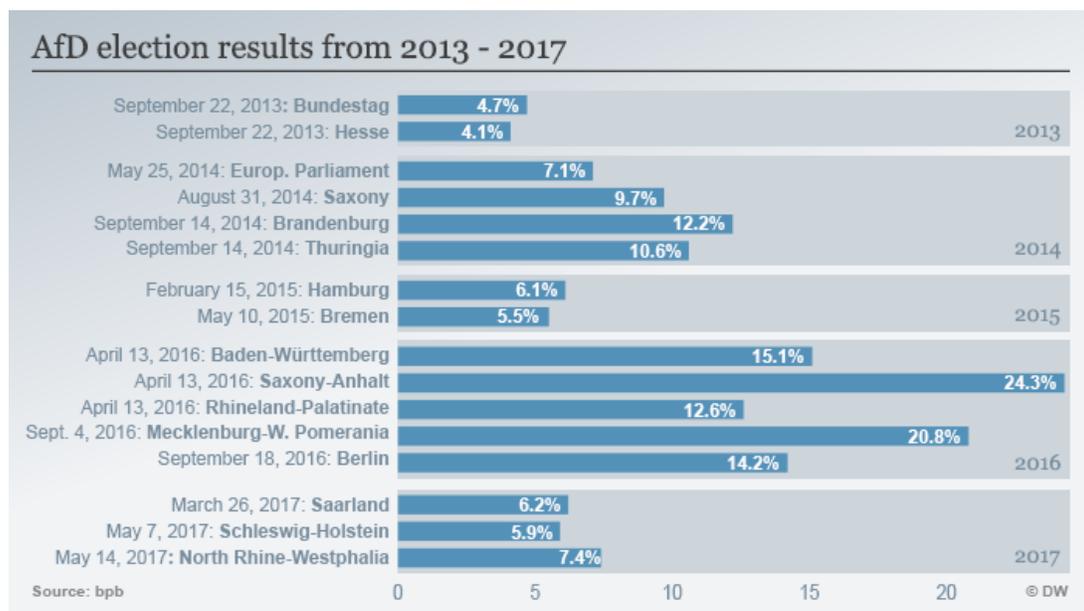


Figure 1: AfD election results from 2013 to 2017<sup>81</sup>

In September 2017, the AfD again ran in the federal parliamentary elections, this time gaining wide national support. Only four years after its founding, the AfD more than passed the 5% threshold, winning 12.6% of the vote share, which allowed them to send 94 representatives to

<sup>80</sup> Benedikt Peters, "5 Reasons for The Far Right Rising in Germany."

<https://projekte.sueddeutsche.de/artikel/politik/afd-5-reasons-for-the-far-right-rising-in-germany-e403522/>

<sup>81</sup> Jefferson Chase, "AfD: what you need to know about Germany's far right party." September 24, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199>

the Bundestag. The AfD is now the third largest party in parliament after the CDU and SPD, and the first right-wing party to enter the Bundestag and have significant political power since 1961. Experts attribute various factors to the rise of the AfD and the far right in Germany. One of the main factors for the party's wide success naturally being the migrant crisis and the rapid rise of refugees. As aforementioned, the party's anti-immigration and anti-refugee stance at the time of the crisis is what gave it political momentum and helped it regain popularity. In the absence of a refugee crisis, the AfD may have remained primarily focused on the Euro or other economic issues and become irrelevant in today's political scene. According to a study performed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, a prestigious think tank based in northern Germany, the main issue that drives AfD supporters is refugee and anti-immigration policy. The report states that the party's policy to deport a large amount refugees increases their support from voters by 51%.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, the performance of other parties with more liberal views on immigration clearly show how this issue was a main force that led to the AfD's success. More than one million people who voted for Merkel's CDU party in 2013 voted for the AfD in this election, along with 11% of Die Linke voters, which has traditionally supported open borders.<sup>83</sup> Experts also attribute the popularity of the AfD to their anti-establishment platform and willingness to challenge Merkel's government. According to an article published by economist Thomas Gratoski, 62% of AfD supporters voted for the party as a result of general disappointment with established parties, such

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<sup>82</sup> Robert Vehrkamp, "Majority of German voters do not hold populist views." July 25, 2017. <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/press/press-releases/press-release/pid/majority-of-german-voters-do-not-hold-populist-views/>

<sup>83</sup> Die Zeit, "The AfD Profits from Non-Voters and Merkel Defectors." September 25, 2017. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-09/german-election-alternative-for-germany-angela-merkel>

as the CDU and SPD.<sup>84</sup> Gratowski argues that the main support base of the AfD are those middle aged, average educated working males who were most challenged by globalization, exactly the kind of voters who are more likely to seek anti-establishment movements.<sup>85</sup> We can see this in the amount of voters each party lost to the AfD in this election. The SPD lost 4.5% of voters to the AfD, that is 510,000 voters.<sup>86</sup> Evidently, they did not lose as many voters as the CDU, as they have more mixed stances on immigration policy, but it still is a significant number of voters. The SPD generally does want to reform immigration law and wants to introduce one that is similar to the Canadian immigration system. However, they are against limiting the number of asylum seekers that are allowed to enter Germany.<sup>87</sup> The leader of the SPD, Martin Schulz, said in an interview that it did not make sense to implement a quota or an upper limit when it came to refugees because, he states: “What would we do with the first refugee to reach the European border once the quota is reached? Would we send them back to a certain death?”<sup>88</sup> Gratowski’s argument about AfD supporters voting for anti-establishment is further emphasized when assessing the number of traditional non-voters that came out to vote in this election. According to election data, the AfD managed to gain the support of 1.4 million non-voters in the 2017 election.<sup>89</sup> Even though a large number of supporters voted for the AfD as a protest to the system, however, the presence of

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Gratowski, “How the refugee crisis transformed the AfD.” March 17, 2016. <https://www.global-counsel.co.uk/blog/how-refugee-crisis-transformed-afd>

<sup>85</sup> Ibis.

<sup>86</sup> Die Zeit, op. cit.

<sup>87</sup> Mara Bierbach, AfD, CDU, SPD: Where do German parties stand on refugees, asylum and immigration. September 24, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-cdu-spd-where-do-german-parties-stand-on-refugees-asylum-and-immigration/a-40610988>

<sup>88</sup> Ibis.

<sup>89</sup> Die Zeit, op. cit.

refugees and the party's stand on immigration was their main appeal, with 65% of voters stating the arrival of refugees was their main concern.<sup>90</sup>

Far right voters' reasoning for supporting the AfD and anti-immigration policy is largely based on economic factors. Citizens who live in impoverished areas in the former GDR with high income inequality and high unemployment rates are by and large disappointed with the system and the status quo. This can be seen in the results from the election, which shows that the lower the available household income and per capita GDP was in given electoral districts the more votes the AfD received.<sup>91</sup> In addition, most AfD voters came from less educated backgrounds. Mainly those with intermediate level high school and vocational high school education, as opposed to university-prep high school education, voted for the AfD. The party was also very popular among wage workers and the self-employed. Meanwhile, the CDU and SPD support from workers decreased by 10% and 4% respectively.<sup>92</sup>

In the former East German city of Dresden, where the right-wing movement is quite strong, residents argue that with the arrival of refugees many felt like they were being neglected and forgotten by the government and that priority was being given to the refugee families.<sup>93</sup> For instance, in Koitschgraben, a low income district in Dresden, residents complain that their living standards are still from the times of the GDR and that years of neglect have taken a toll on their neighborhood.<sup>94</sup> The residents of Koitschgraben are upset about the fact that many of them live in old concrete apartment buildings while refugees are being placed in newly renovated apartments.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Gratowski, op, cit.

<sup>91</sup> Die Zeit, op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Ibis.

<sup>93</sup> Nina Haase, Sumi Somaskanda, "Why Germany's far-right flourishes in Dresden." June 16, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/en/why-germanys-far-right-flourishes-in-dresden/a-39076094>

<sup>94</sup> Ibis.

<sup>95</sup> Ibis.

This has led to rising tension among locals and led many people in the area to shift more towards anti-immigration and right-wing politics. Moreover, there is a racist factor that goes into some residents' disapproval of incoming refugees. They believe they are violent and are unwilling to assimilate, arguing they do not act like guests in Germany.<sup>96</sup> In a Deutsche Welle interview, a man from this district said that refugees simply have a different mentality and that to an extent they are inherently violent because they are used to seeing and being around violence in their home countries.<sup>97</sup>

Germans nationwide share some of the feelings of Koitschgraben residents. They make the same arguments right-wing youth made in the 1990s for why they supported the Neo-Nazi movement and why they were engaging in right-wing violence. A lot of them argued that immigrants were taking jobs and housing from native Germans, even though those who protested had jobs and apartments. Today, it is a very similar situation. Jasna Zajcek, an expert on the rise of the far right in eastern Germany, argued that people in the former GDR do not feel like they have been integrated into modern Germany.<sup>98</sup> People in low income areas feel like they are at a disadvantage and that almost thirty years later, they are still suffering from the aftermath of the former socialist system. This group of Germans are tired of the being left out of the system and their financial hardships being ignored by the state, while refugees receive all the attention and economic benefits. Many seem to be using racism and refugees as a scapegoat to express their discontent with the system and the living conditions in their areas. Even though their living

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<sup>96</sup> Ibis.

<sup>97</sup> Ibis.

<sup>98</sup> Lauren Said Moorhouse and Schams Elwazer, "Four graphics that explain how a far-right party won third place in Germany." September 25, 2017.  
<https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/25/europe/germany-afd-election-graphics/index.html>

conditions and high unemployment in these districts is the government's fault, not the immigrants that are moving into the neighbourhoods.

In the case of Dresden and a few other districts where people voted for the AfD, their support for right-wing politics and intolerance towards immigrants makes sense. While their intolerance is not justified, it is easier to understand why they want anti-immigration policy. These residents are directly responding to issues they are seeing and experiencing in their neighbourhoods. What does not make sense, however, is the people who voted for the AfD who live in areas where there are barely any refugees and immigrants. Electoral data from 2017 highlighted the fact that the voter base of the AfD is primarily located in states that have the least number of refugees and immigrants. The first map on Figure 2 displaying the percentage of AfD support by region, shows in darker blue the states in the former GDR with the highest number of AfD voters. States like Sachsen, Brandenburg, Sachsen-Anhalt and Thuringia were some of the states with the highest percentage of AfD voters, with a 20-30% support rate. Figure 3 shows the percentage of refugees that settled in each state, depicting the states with the highest percentage in dark pink and those with the least percentage in light pink. We can see that all of these aforementioned states that voted for the AfD are in light pink, having received less than 3% of the total number of refugee settlers. The only exception was Sachsen, which received 5.1% of refugees, but even then, the number is quite low compared to Western states like Bayern and Nordrhein-Westfalen, which received 15% to 21% of refugees. These figures and overall outcome of the election clearly highlights the presence of a xenophobic factor to the party's success. The data shows that these voters are mostly concerned about immigration and the presence of refugees, thus their support for more radical right-wing policy, yet they live in areas with very few refugees and immigrants. A lot of AfD voters are essentially worried about an issue that may



Since 2017, many scholars have attempted to find an explanation to how a right-wing party made it to the Bundestag in a country where xenophobia and any far-right platform that resembles the Nazi ideology is largely unpopular and taboo in modern politics. The explanation most experts have come up with is this “losers of modernization” theory, which establishes that those who are currently suffering from recent economic structural change as a result of globalization and digitization are more likely to support right-wing parties.<sup>101</sup> This mainly includes unskilled and low skilled workers who are voting for right-wing parties as a protest to the system and these economic changes that have placed them at a disadvantage. Essentially right-wing parties are addressing the political concerns and needs of these groups that, in their view, have been largely ignored and forgotten by established parties. Although economic factors such as unemployment, income inequality and lower standard of living in East German states are certainly important factors that contributed to the rise of the AfD, there seems to be a large cultural factor that is also crucial.

A study performed by scholars at the University of Zurich and Bremen assessed the pattern of electoral data in the districts where the AfD was particularly successful, in order to determine what role economic factors had on the party’s success in 2013 and 2014.<sup>102</sup> Their data actually determined that these economic factors linked to globalization and modernization have little relation to the success of the AfD. They did find, however, that there was a strong correlation between the success of the AfD in given districts and that of other right-wing parties in past

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<sup>101</sup> Hanna Schwander and Philip Manow, “It’s not the economy, stupid! Explaining the electoral success of the German right-wing populist AfD,” *Center for Comparative and International Studies* (2017) [https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/cis-dam/Working\\_Papers/WP94\\_A4\\_newest.pdf](https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/cis-dam/Working_Papers/WP94_A4_newest.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> Hanna Schwander and Philip Manow, op. cit.

elections. Specifically, they found that in the 1995 and 1999 European Parliament elections, the districts with the highest number of votes for right-wing parties like the Nationaldemokratische Partei (NDP), German People's Union (DVU) and The Republicans party (REP) are the same districts that voted for the AfD 20 years later. They also highlight that these were districts that did not show signs of economic disadvantage. Thus, they argue that economic deprivation does not necessarily lead to right-wing populist votes. On the contrary, what seems to be leading these votes is a tradition of radical right voting in certain areas of Germany and a political culture that allows for right-wing parties like the AfD to grow.<sup>103</sup> Just as Sarrazin's xenophobic and racist ideology was so widely approved of because clearly a large group of the population held these views, the AfD attracted voters because support for radical right policy was already prevalent in political culture. According to these scholars the AfD was able to gain more success than older parties like the DVU because they arrived at a time when broader political and social conditions in Germany created an environment where a right-wing populist party could be more successful in.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

The investigation and trial of the Nationalist Socialist Underground brought to light many issues regarding right-wing violence and structural racism in Germany. The documentation of the crimes and the trial of Beate Zschäpe provided more than enough evidence to suggest that xenophobia and racism played an important role in the colossal failure that was the NSU investigation. The evidence lies primarily in how government authorities handled the investigation from the moment Enver Simsek was murdered until even after the group had turned themselves in. Throughout the investigation police officials in the “Bosphorus team,” already an inappropriate term used by the police, treated victims and their families like criminals. Government officials immediately considered the victim’s families as suspects without any evidence that could suggest culpability. They also hypothesized the victims had been murdered as a result of their involvement in criminal activity and gangs, again with no signs of criminal history or substantial evidence to support it. These crimes were also given little priority as the police was not taking concrete actions to find other suspects and solve these crimes. They instead wasted their time and resources following false leads, aggressively questioning families and making up lies about the victims’ past.

The police essentially continued to make futile efforts to find evidence that would prove their biased and racist Turkish mafia theory even after it was made clear that they would not find it. Even after Horn, the young policeman who brought to his superior’s attention that the killing tactics employed in these crimes were characteristic of far-right groups, police continued to follow

their initial theory. Moreover, evidence shows that the NSU was careless and took little precautions, leaving trails that the police could have followed, such as tracing back the origin of the Česká pistol they used in every single murder. Government authorities were also supposedly tracking Mundlos and Böhnhardt's movements and had informants within the Neo-Nazi scene. If the group was being watched, how was it possible that they went underground in the first place? On top of all this neglect and bias, government agencies acted suspiciously by destroying files that may have contained information on the NSU at the worst possible time. Throughout this entire investigation, police and government agencies acted questionably and unethically, again and again giving families and the public reasons not to be trusted.

At the end of the NSU trial in 2018, many questions were still left unanswered about pieces of the investigation that simply do not add up. The specifics of why and how a group of Neo-Nazis go on a killing spree across Germany of all places and police completely fail to stop it are still up in the air. Additionally, the how these victims were chosen and how the NSU was able to find them, did they have intel on these victims? and, if so, who gave them that intel? These are questions that many family members have raised but have not received an answer to because authorities failed to investigate members of the intelligence community. The evidence thus far confirms that the police was clearly inefficient because of their biases and xenophobic views that failed to see Turkish people as victims. However, there is much speculation about the extent to which the intelligence community was involved in the NSU crimes. Was it purely bias or did they know all along and willingly turned a blind eye? Precisely how far does the structural racism in Germany go? These are important questions that we do not have concrete answers to at this point. Perhaps the justice system will seek to answer these questions in the future and uncover who else was behind these murders and what role the intelligence community played in all of it. The families

and victims of the NSU deserve more answers and the Turkish community needs to know that the country has its back. Unfortunately, this trial took place in the midst of a growing right-wing movement and the rise of a populist party that capitalized on an existing racist and xenophobic political culture in Germany. An intolerant ideology that rejects exactly those minority groups whom this trial is meant to give justice to.

The research shows that this culture of intolerance towards immigrants became more prevalent during the times of the GDR when Neo-Nazism became widely popular among youth. The Neo-Nazi movement that the NSU was a part of initially began as a protest against the communist system and repressive nature of the GDR. Young people rebelled against the state by adopting an ideology they did not fully understand because there was a lack of education about Nazism in the East. The GDR made Nazi ideology and the swastika illegal without explaining why it was frowned upon, which made neo-Nazism an attractive form of rebellion. The system indirectly allowed the development of this racist way of thinking influenced by the Nazi ideology, that rejects anyone who does not look or behave “German.” The research also suggests that there is a relationship between the right-wing extremist youth from the early 1990s and those who voted for the AfD in 2017. These two groups had similar rhetoric and blamed immigrants for the same reasons, particularly a lack of housing and financial difficulty. Research further shows that for many East Germans who are struggling with the aftermath of the former socialist system and new economic structural changes, immigrants are a scapegoat for their poor standard of living. The 2017 election data showed that some of the members of these two groups may as well be the same people. The neo-Nazi youths who set fire to homes where asylum seekers and immigrants lived in the 1990s are now middle-aged men in their 30s and 40s, the main electorate of the AfD party.

Moreover, we know that in Germany there is a large socio-cultural factor that led to the rise of the AfD and support for radical right policies. It is not purely a result of economic disadvantage. The rise of the party largely has to do with anti-immigration sentiment and xenophobia, which can be seen in the way 65% of AfD voters claim immigration is their main concern but majority of them do not live in areas with a high number of immigrants or refugees. This cultural factor is one that is prevalent in several countries and has contributed to the rise of the far right all over Europe. Economic grievances, while an important factor, is hardly the only explanation for the rise of the right in Europe as countries with the least economic pressures such as Austria and Switzerland, have experienced some of the strongest right-wing movements. In October 2017, the Freedom Party of Austria managed to win 26% of the vote share in their parliamentary elections, even more than the 12.6% the AfD managed to win in Germany. Switzerland experienced the rise of the right much earlier in October 2015, where the Swiss People's Party, which also ran on the platform of anti-immigration, won 29.4% of the vote share.

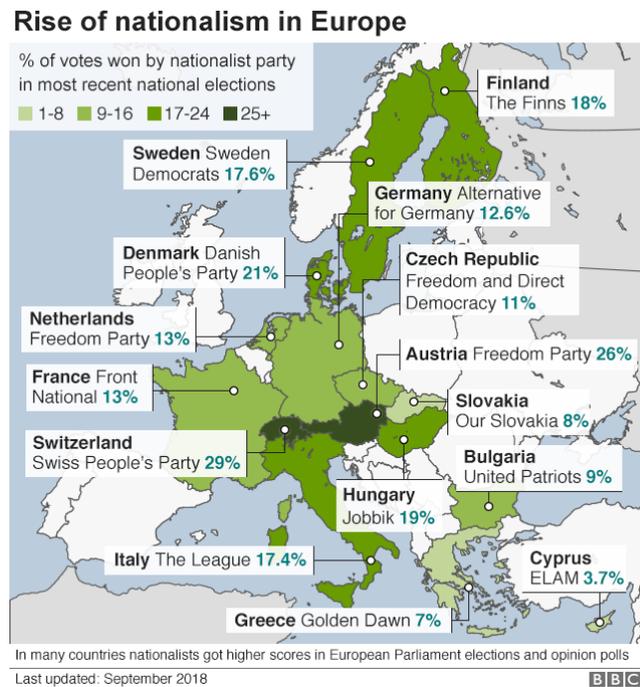


Figure 4 Rise of Nationalism in Europe<sup>104</sup>

Experts previously also used Spain and Italy as examples of countries with high economic pressure that had not yet experienced the rise of the far right. That was until recently, when the right-wing Vox party in Spain managed to win more than 10% of the vote share in the Andalusian regional elections this past December.<sup>105</sup> Andalucía has historically been a region where the left has had a wide majority, thus, experts are arguing that the party is only going to keep growing.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, The League in Italy became the third largest party in the 2018 general election, winning 17.4% of the vote share. Nonetheless, the party platform for both of these parties is still heavily based on anti-immigration policy. Both of them just as with the AfD capitalized on a prevalent

<sup>104</sup> BBC News, "Europe and nationalism: A country-by-country guide." September 10, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>

<sup>105</sup> Sebastian Faber and Bécquer Seguin, "Spain's Radical Right is Here to Stay- but did it ever leave?" January 10, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/spain-vox-radical-right-populism-catalonia/>

<sup>106</sup> Ibis.

political culture of intolerance. In a speech, one of the representatives of the Vox party made a reference to the “Muslim onslaught” during the reconquista. Although it was not explicit, it seemed he was making a comparison between the invasion of the Moors in Spanish history and the current wave of immigration from the Middle East and North Africa.

Another powerful and economically stable country that was affected by this wave of populism in Europe was the United Kingdom. In June of 2016, British people voted in a referendum to leave the European Union with a majority of 51.9%. A vote largely based on the influence of right-wing populists and their platform of limiting immigration in the wake of the migrant crisis and reclaiming national sovereignty from international institutions.<sup>107</sup> Experts argue that in addition to the rise of right-wing populism in the UK, nativist and anti-elitist attitudes also contributed to the wide support for the Brexit vote.<sup>108</sup> Brexit is now the most talked about phenomenon in politics as experts struggle to keep up with the mess that this referendum has become. To give yet another example outside of the continent where this culture is prevalent, one can look at the U.S. The presence of these anti-immigrant attitudes was clearly a main force that led to the rise of Donald Trump. A candidate who consistently used xenophobic and racist rhetoric, particularly when referring to Mexicans and immigrants from the Latin American region. Moreover, one who ran an entire campaign on the promise of a counterproductive wall on the Mexican border. The Trump campaign, again very similarly to the AfD party, drew their support from primarily lower educated wage workers in rural areas. A study performed at UCLA shows that these areas where Trump was most successful were counties that have a lower number of

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<sup>107</sup> James McBride, “What Brexit Reveals About Rising Populism,” June 29, 2016.  
<https://www.cfr.org/interview/what-brexite-reveals-about-rising-populism>

<sup>108</sup> Evgenia Lakhnis, Brian Rathbun, Jason Reifler, Thomas Scotto, “Populist referendum: Was Brexit an expression of nativist and anti-elitist sentiment?” May 23, 2018.  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2053168018773964>

Mexican immigrants and have been less affected by trade imbalance. The leader of this study, stated, “Our results show that, while many people in Trump-voting counties are struggling financially, trade and immigration are not to blame for those struggles.”<sup>109</sup> These are almost the same election results as those of the AfD and is clearly a very similar situation to the rise of right-wing parties all over Europe.

The main takeaway from the NSU trial and rise of the AfD party in Germany is that there is a significant right-wing political culture that was sitting right under the surface up until now. A culture of xenophobia, intolerance, and racism that, before the explosive sign that was Sarrazin’s book and the election of the AfD, was largely ignored and an issue many did not even know existed. Moreover, it is an issue that is becoming more and more widespread in the European region and in the U.S. It is very important that we acknowledge the presence of this cultural factor and not only attribute this trend of the far right on economic grievances and globalization. Only then can states begin to take measures and decide what are we as a society going to do about the significant societal issue that is the rise of xenophobic sentiment and right-wing politics.

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<sup>109</sup> Jessica Wolf, “Trump supporters concentrated in areas less impacted by migrants and trade imbalance.” October 28, 2016. <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/trump-supporters-concentrated-in-areas-less-impacted-by-migrants-and-trade-imbalance>

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## ACADEMIC VITA

Daniela Rojas Medina

### Education

B.A. International Politics, B.A. German, Global Security Minor

### Work Experience

Global Partnerships Assistant August 2018- May 2019  
Penn State University Libraries, University Park, PA

Handle communication and contribute to the development of international partnerships with universities around the globe. Manage logistics and marketing for events that focus on global engagement and intercultural understanding at Penn State.

International Visitor Leadership Program Intern June 2018- August 2018  
World Learning, Washington, D.C.

Assisted with programming for the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), a U.S. Department of State professional exchange program in the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau that aims to build mutual understanding between the U.S. and other nations.

Staatliche-Europa-Schule Intern May 2017- July 2017  
Friedensburg-Oberschule, Berlin

Teaching Assistant for Abitur Political Science courses. Lectured on the Venezuelan political, economic, and humanitarian crisis.

Research Assistant January 2017- May 2017  
Penn State Department of Germanic Languages, University Park

Conducted research on a Plautdietsch speaking Mennonite community from Chihuahua, Mexico for a Language Contact and Learning Lab.

Leadership Experience: President of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society

Language Proficiency: Spanish, German