

Securitization of European Union's Immigration Policy in 2021 German Federal Elections

Authors

Yonca Ok^{1*}

Affiliations

¹ Master's Program in Political Science and International Relations, Graduate School of Social Sciences Yeditepe University, Istanbul, 34755, Turkey.

*To whom correspondence should be addressed; E-mail yoncaok@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The phenomenon of international immigration has been one of the important issues both at the international and local level for many years. In Europe, especially after the Second World War, immigration has become a controversial issue in international politics. After the Second World War, while immigration was considered necessary to improve the deteriorating economy of Europe, after the 1970s, immigration began to be limited and border controls were strengthened. This can be clearly seen in the immigration policies developed by the European Union. In 2015, Europe faced a serious immigration crisis. This situation occurred as a result of the 2011 Syrian civil war and affected both the European continent and the EU. As a result, asylum applications to the EU have increased. In particular, as an EU member state, Germany has been the first country in Europe to receive the highest number of asylum applications. In this process, Germany is of vital importance as the EU's country that receives the most Syrian immigration. Therefore, the securitization of immigration policy in the EU has had implications for Germany's immigration policy. In the changing world agenda with the climate and the COVID-19 crisis, what will be unique for this study is the ability to understand the role of securitization on immigration in the 2021 German Federal elections. To do this, the immigration policies of the EU and Germany will be examined and the election manifestos of the political parties on immigration in the 2021 German federal elections will be analyzed. Thus, this thesis aims to question whether immigration in Germany is securitized or not. While making this analysis, securitization theory and speech act methodology developed by the Copenhagen School were used.

Keywords: Copenhagen School; european union; germany; immigration, securitization

INTRODUCTION

After the Syrian civil war that broke out in 2011, millions of people left Syria and immigrated to neighboring countries. Not only neighboring countries, but also European countries became one of the important destinations. Germany has become one of the main destination countries in the EU. When immigration reached its peak in 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel, who followed an open-door policy and a welcoming policy towards immigrants, also called for solidarity with EU member states. Thus, Merkel has become a leading actor in both international and domestic dynamics. However, in 2017, Merkel's immigration policies and the EU's stance against immigration began to be questioned. In this direction, it was necessary to examine the securitization theory pioneered by the Copenhagen School in order to analyze how immigration is constructed and perceived as a security concern. The effects of EU immigration policy on German domestic politics were also examined to illuminate the research question of the study. Therefore, this study aims to understand the interplay between the international and domestic dynamics of the EU immigration policy by focusing on the variety of discourses generated by the political parties in Germany in the context of the immigration crisis. Hence, the securitization theory forms the theoretical framework of this study and becomes a result of the political discourses that will be positioned in the analysis of German practices related to immigration.

Securitization theory has played a key role in the analysis of both EU and German practices regarding immigration because it is an important way of understanding the changing policy conjuncture regarding immigration. After the Second World War, while security studies focused more on military issues defended by traditional theories, the scope of security was widened under the leadership of the Copenhagen School. Widening the meaning of security to the economic and environmental realm has brought new lenses to the international relations literature such as “societal security, human security, food security and others” (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p.2). The Copenhagen School, established in 1985, challenged mainstream theories of international relations based on the traditional security approach. The main argument in these criticisms was that focusing only on the military dimension led to a narrow understanding of security. In addition, the Copenhagen School, which is a part of the critical approach, opposes the state-centric of security in the traditional approach and draws attention to the fact that individuals or people should be the referent object. Moreover, the new security approaches challenge the traditional assumption that world politics is unchanging and constant, but instead they emphasize the room for change when they define world politics as consisting

of social structures. The three main components that bring the securitization process together are very important in understanding the general atmosphere of the thesis. To clarify, security issues through speech acts constructed by actors and related security policies become a security issue by being categorized under the name of "security". Then, the audience should accept the security problem or threat posed by the securitizing actor. Thus, the securitizing actor legitimizes the extraordinary measures taken to eliminate the labelled security problem or threat (Buzan et al., 1998, p.26).

Studies on securitization of immigration in Germany have been carried out in different ways. To explain, Banai & Kreide has categorized immigrants and asylum seekers as long-term and short-term threats in the securitization process. Accordingly, in the short-term category, refugees and asylum seekers are associated with an "immediate threat of violence, crime and terrorism", while naturalized persons or persons with an immigrant background are classified as a long-term threat to socio-cultural values (Banai & Kreide, 2017, p.915). Another study showed far-right parties presenting immigrants and asylum seekers as existential threats (Mushtaq et al., 2021, p.16). Accordingly, it is argued that the discourses of right-wing parties exert pressure on the government and that the issue of immigration is thus securitized. Another study examined the posters and advertisements of far-right parties and the presentation of immigrants and asylum seekers as a cultural and economic threat (Schmuck & Matthes, 2015, p.1578) . Accordingly, it has been argued that the parties use the effect of posters and advertisements to present immigrants as a threat. Therefore, negative political campaigns against immigrants can increase anti-immigrant attitudes. Finally, in line with political campaigns, the use of the language of risk regarding immigration in media discourse also contributes to securitization (Galantino, 2022, p.339). Especially between 2015/2016, it was explained that the subject of immigration was used with risky words such as "EU border management and Balkan migration route" in the German press. In the changing world agenda with the climate and the COVID-19 crisis, what will be unique for this study is the ability to understand the role of securitization on immigration in the 2021 German Federal elections. Frankly, this study is important in terms of emphasizing that the issue of immigration is still important, even though the climate crisis and the sudden pandemic have covered the whole world agenda.

This study consists of four main parts. The first chapter is "Theoretical approaches to international security", which is related to the conceptual and theoretical framework of the

thesis. In this context, the securitization of immigration is discussed by examining the conceptual view on security and traditional and new security understandings. In the second chapter, the arguments on how the securitization of immigration is constructed as a security problem in the European political agenda through securitization theory and speech act were discussed. In the third chapter, Germany's approach to the immigration crisis between 2014-2021 and the tendency of political parties are examined. The last chapter, the official political statements and election manifestos of the political parties during the 2021 German federal elections were examined.

RESULTS

This study aimed to address the findings of the 2021 German federal elections and to reveal the impact of immigration on the political process. While making this analysis, securitization theory and speech act methodology developed by the Copenhagen School were used. Results of the thesis: Firstly, political parties did not construct the issue of immigration as a threat to national security, but rather approached it from the perspective of human rights that need to be protected. Although radical right parties acted as a driving force in the politicization of immigration, like the AfD, was not able to achieve its expected result in the 2021 elections because, the issue of immigration was replaced by climate change and the corona pandemic. Secondly, they focused more on the EU dimension of immigration to Germany, emphasizing cooperation with the EU at the external borders, on the basis of rule of law and human rights. Lastly, in the 2021 German federal elections, immigration was not seen as a priority threat to the national security because the public did not accept the immigration issue as a security threat. Instead of the immigration issue, the 2019 pandemic crisis and 2020 climate issues were the main focus of the voter.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the securitization of immigration in the 2021 elections was investigated and the findings showed that the climate and pandemic crisis replaced immigration in the 2021 elections compared to the 2017 elections. Accordingly, although the issue of immigration is included in national election manifestos, it has been observed that it is reflected in political campaigns as a

humanitarian issue rather than a security issue. Therefore, the audience did not perceive the immigration issue as a security concern, which made the securitization process unsuccessful. In the changing world agenda with the climate and the COVID-19 crisis, what will be unique for this study is the ability to understand the role of securitization on immigration in the 2021 German Federal elections.

When the 2021 German federal elections were examined, it was concluded that the issue of immigration was not securitized. One of the obvious reasons for this is that although the radical right parties act as a driving force in the politicization of immigration, the AfD, a radical right party, did not achieve the expected result in the 2021 elections. However, since the issue of immigration was a major concern in the 2017 elections, it contributed to the securitization of immigration. Thus, it also put pressure on mainstream political parties, and in 2017, it enabled all political parties to consider immigration as a security concern. However, this was not the case in the 2021 elections because, pandemic crisis and climate and environmental issues were influential in the election campaigns of these parties. In the 2021 German federal elections, immigration was not seen as a priority threat to the national security. New developments (i.e., Ukrainian case) demonstrated that priority moved from immigration to energy issues. To explain, immigrants from Ukraine have different perceptions compared to immigrants from the Middle East and the Balkans. Obviously, while immigrants from Ukraine were easily accepted, the situation was not the same for immigrants from the Middle East and the Balkans. Therefore, the influence of political culture on immigration emerges. Could political culture be the reason why immigrants from the Middle East and the Balkans are perceived differently? This proves that the cultural approach is an issue that requires further research.

CONCLUSION

With the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, large numbers of people fleeing persecution and violence began to seek asylum in neighboring countries and Europe. These applications reached their peak in 2015, increasing gradually. Eventually this led to the immigration crisis in 2015. In the face of this immigration crisis, the EU immigration policy was insufficient and

could not follow a common policy in the face of mass immigration. Germany, which appears to be economically strong in the absence of a common EU immigration policy, has been of interest to immigrants. Merkel's discourses about establishing a common immigration policy have led Germany to take a leading role in policy-making compared to other EU members. The effects of EU immigration policy on German domestic politics were also examined to illuminate the research question of the study. Therefore, this study aims to understand the interplay between the international and domestic dynamics of the EU immigration policy by focusing on the variety of discourses generated by the political parties in Germany in the context of the immigration crisis. For this purpose, the securitization theory developed by the Copenhagen School has been applied to analyze how immigration is constructed and perceived as a security concern. Therefore, the securitization theory formed the theoretical framework of this study and became a result of the political discourses positioned in the analysis of German practices related to immigration. As a case study, Germany was chosen because it is the country with the most exposure to immigration and the most generous immigration policy among European countries.

The securitization theory, which forms the backbone of this study, is a challenge to traditional security understandings as stated in Chapter 1. Therefore, the points that make securitization theory different from traditional understandings are mentioned. In the second part of the study, there are discussions about how the securitization of immigration is built as a security problem in the European political agenda through the securitization theory. According to this, securitization of immigration in member states is related to economization and securitization, as a meta problem (including more than one problem), organized crime, human trafficking, terrorist activities, illegal border crossing and ontological. As a result, immigration is not only seen as a security threat to the collective identity and culture of the EU society but also constructed as a meta problem, more than one actor involves in process. In the third chapter, Germany's approach to the immigration crisis between 2014-2021 and the tendency of political parties are examined. In the first part, with the immigration crisis reaching its peak in 2015, Germany's approach to the immigration crisis in the period between 2014-2021 was examined in order to better analyze the 2021 elections. The second part focused on the general approaches of the parties in order to better analyze the approaches of the political parties competing in the 2021 elections. The last chapter, the official political statements and election manifestos of the political parties during the 2021 German federal elections were analyzed. Therefore, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD),

the Greens (Grüne), the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left (Linke)'s election manifestos were examined. As a result, this study aimed to address the findings of the 2021 German federal elections and to reveal the impact of immigration on the political process. Therefore, it has mainly been intended to reveal whether it is possible to securitize immigration in these elections. Thus, it was intended to highlight whether the securitization approach contributed to the study and whether it produced answers to existing questions. In other words, the issue of immigration was replaced by climate change, which was the main agenda in 2019, and the corona pandemic that emerged in 2020.

Three main conclusions emerged from the thesis. The first is that political parties do not construct the issue of immigration as a threat to national security, but rather approach it from the perspective of human rights that need to be protected. Secondly, they focused more on the EU dimension of immigration to Germany, emphasizing cooperation with the EU. To explain, the CDU/CSU advocated EU-level action at the external borders, the SPD emphasized cooperation with the EU on the European Asylum System, the Greens has suggested the rule of law at EU level and support of rescue operations at the borders, the Left Party has highlighted the legal and safe way to enter the EU within the scope of human rights and social security and the AfD specified the EU's inability to protect external borders. Finally, in the 2021 elections, the public does not perceive immigration as a security concern. Although immigration was built as a security concern by the AfD with anti-immigration rhetoric, it did not succeed because the public did not accept it. The important agenda topics of 2021 were the climate and pandemic crisis.

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