The effect of populism on European politics since 2010

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Abstract: The wave of populism has become the most concerned and important political phenomenon in Europe. It has a profound influence on the domestic politics of European countries and affects the integration process and the development of democratic politics. Although the manifestations of populism are varied and far-reaching, the examples of Germany and Britain can also be instructive. As far as British populism is concerned, the supporters of brexit have strong right-wing conservatism. The British independence party wants Britain to recover its sovereignty, emphasize the state's more control over the economy, and hope to reshape social rules. The example of Germany shows that the rise of populism has led to a decline in social and political stability. The rise of populism reflects the conflict between the people and the elite, the division of politics and society, leading to the rise of a new Populist Party. The rise of populist political parties also makes political discourse such as immigration threat theory and geopolitical threat theory become the mainstream discourse of German society, resulting in more obvious class conflict, a more and more tense political environment, and more aggressive and inflammatory. This study provides some new perspectives and Enlightenment for the study of populism and European Politics in recent years.

1. Introduction

The rise of populism in Europe is a political phenomenon that emphasizes the rights of the common people in politics. It is characterized by right-conservatism, anti-establishment, anti-elite, anti-tradition, and anti-immigration. The economic background is the weak long-term growth, high unemployment rate, and extremely high youth unemployment rate in European countries since the financial crisis. The social background is the increasing class contradictions, intergenerational contradictions, and ethnic contradictions in European countries. Since the financial crisis in 2008, the anger of the European people has been accumulating, and the sense of insecurity has been on the rise. The "class cooperation" and "social harmony" that Europe was proud of after World War II have been seriously eroded, and The European society has turned from "diversification" to "fragmentation". At the political level, the governments of European countries are unable to cope with the crisis, the differences between mainstream parties are becoming smaller and smaller, the traditional left-right "pendulum politics" fails, and voters have no choice. Finally, the economic and social crisis in Europe has become a political crisis, and the rise of populism is the manifestation of this crisis.

Today, populism has exploded in Europe, with the rise of a large number of right-wing populist parties and populist leaders. In European countries, populist movements also broke out more frequently. Especially in Britain, Italy, France, Finland, and other countries, the social trend of thought showed signs of the rise and development of populism, with left-wing and right-wing populist parties either taking power or gaining strength. The rise of populism shows that there is something wrong with the representativeness of western political

parties. In fact, populist parties are a kind of "revolution" without destroying the political system. The most common denominator of populist parties on both left and right is their call for "popular

sovereignty", accusing political authorities of being "separate, unrepresentative or irresponsible between the ordinary people, the 'authentic' citizens or voters of the political community" [1]. Although populism takes many forms, the examples of Germany and the United Kingdom are instructive.

When discussing populism in Germany, it is not uncommon to analyze the refugee crisis as it was highly related to the rise of populism, with the establishment of a range of the populist party. Among them, the extreme right-wing party The Alternative of Germany was dominant for its high support rate in the federal election of 2017. Therefore, a range of articles and books mention the party AfD as a representative example of the rise of populism in Germany.

The 2015 Refugee Crisis in Germany: Concerns about Immigration and Populism indicates that immigration is positively correlated with political support for the relatively new, right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) [2]. The article's findings also suggest that the refugee crisis, and the related government's asylum policy, affected public opinion on immigration in Germany by substantially increasing the share of people who are very concerned about immigration. These are consistent with some other claims about the cause of the remarked success for AfD: AfD voters in 2017 were driven solely by two factors: their attitudes towards immigrants/refugees and anti-establishment satisfaction with democracy in Germany [3]. Some articles believed that only with the refugee crisis did the AfD regain its electoral fortunes and obtained its best results thus far in the March 2016 state elections. The AfD appropriately took advantage of peoples' preferences and the dissatisfaction towards the governments and mainstream parties at that moment among the public, since although the country Germany was least affected by the 2008 economic crisis, and it received the most refugees, those asylum seekers influenced peoples' anxieties. As Germany concluded its six-month European Union (EU) presidency in June, Germany's federal policymakers passed a reform package to update the 2005 law on migration and integration [4]. So, it was in the year 2005 and the German government first realised formally that Germany had become an immigration country. The later refugee crisis would rather be a trigger.

Also, those articles usually mention the causes of the rise of populism. It is found that the essential factors of the rise of populism in Germany could be the injustice and instability within the society. Said in peeling an onion: the "refugee crisis" from a historical perspective: peeling the onion of societal discontent with migrants and refugees has revealed five necessary and sufficient conditions, and one of the conditions was the rise of the radical extreme-right populist parties, as well as an increasing public discomfort with Islam [5]. It could be seen that these two conditions conclude the two main factors when talking about populism in Germany. Others found that people who feel more socially marginal because they lack strong attachment to the normative order, social engagement, or a sense of social respect are more likely to be alienated from mainstream politics and to support radical parties [6]. And this also goes back to the reasons for the success of the right-wing party AfD, and it was those people who had increasing anxiety and voiced what the public thought but dared not to say through the Alternative for Germany.

2. Populist Movements In The United Kingdom

Populist movements have influenced British politics heavily since the mid-2010s. Rather than being limited on one side of the political spectrum, populist movements in the United Kingdom had been both left and right wing.

The most significant consequence of left-wing populism was the rise of Jeremy Corbyn, a far-left political figure, to the leader of the opposition. Despite the challenges he faced from the Labour MPs, Corbyn was able to gain support from members (especially new members) of the Labour party, trade unions, and progressive left-wing voters. Corbyn is best known for his conviction of anti-austerity and anti-elitism, which are typical things populist left-wing politicians believe in. Corbyn had also campaigned for abolishing all private schools in Britain to resolve inequality, although he put that down from the Labour manifesto at the last moment before the General Election 2019. Apart from the radical and populist policies he wanted to implement, Corbyn had never hesitated to use populist

languages. For instance, he saw the 'people' and the 'elites' as differentiated on economic and political grounds. With all these, Jeremy Corbyn had attracted many young voters while alienating some traditional Labour party voters, which ultimately led to the fall of the red wall in the 2019 general election as many Labour supporters in the North of England shifted toward the Conservatives.

The rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party is a more successful example of populism. Although UKIP had never succeeded in any domestic election, it did become the biggest British party in the European Parliament in 2014 and successfully pushed and won the Brexit referendum in 2016. The UK Independence Party wanted Britain to get its sovereignty back from the European Union, as its name suggests. They planned to achieve that by withdrawing Britain's membership from the EU. During the period of its success, UKIP had swayed the Conservative party to become more supportive of Brexit. Nigel Farage, the former leader of UKIP, was a populist to the letter. In fact, he seems very proud of being a populist. In his final speech in the European Parliament, Farage said, 'You may loathe populism, but I tell you a funny thing, it is becoming very popular." Nigel Farage shaped his public image as an 'ordinary British person', to trigger the British national identity to appeal to the group of people he was trying to target. In effect, the party was popular among aged people who demanded stricter border control, as they believe their jobs and traditional values are threatened by the immigrants and the 'globalist' European Union.

The rise of populist figures had challenged the role of the traditional party system. Sharply contrast to the 2010 General Election when the candidates from all three major parties in the UK had been relatively centrist; the 2019 General Election was predominately a battle between two populist candidates. The more conventional partisan politicians, such as the former Prime Minister Theresa May, was defeated partly for her vagueness on salient issues like Brexit. Representing only a proportion of the people with a much clearer and stronger attitude over Brexit, Boris Johnson was able to win the divisive election in 2019. From then to the final settlement of Brexit, populism had dominated the government and influenced Britain's political climate

After the 2020 American presidential election and a definitive solution to many issues surrounding Birtain's relationship with the European Union, the wave of populism is declining in Britain. The influence of the UKIP and Corbynism is slowly fading away from the mainstream political arena, even PM Boris Johnson is trying to get rid of the label of 'a populist' and introduce less partisan policies such as the recent rise in national insurance. Thus, we are now entering a period of post-populist explosion.

3. Populist Movements In Germany

Modernisation, globalisation, and European integration have brought benefits to Germany, but meanwhile, it could result in, for example, the rise of unemployment and the decrease in retiring age. Also, the European debt crisis triggered a further deterioration in the respective countries, including Germany. It led to a fierce protest by the affected populations against these policies and against the German government and Chancellor Merkel. A series of problems caused the emergence of German nationalist and right-wing populist parties, who advocated economic liberalism and conservatism. The Alternative for Germany was also one of them which had similar advocation and opposition. Economic liberalism is a political and economic ideology based on strong support for a market economy and private property in the means of production. Economic liberals tend to oppose government intervention in the market when it inhibits free trade and open competition but support government intervention to protect property rights and resolve market failures [7]. Maybe the populations intend to receive appropriate governance for the reason why they support such a policy. It has even affected the voters' decisions in the later federal election in 2013 [8]. Therefore, the populist parties like the Alternative for Germany had that many supporters as they were organised on behalf of the public willing. In the context of the EU debt crisis, along with the later problems like the refugee crisis, there are increasing complaints towards the government and the current mainstream political parties. The stunning event of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was actually the beginning of those days' conflicts with populism and political polarisation and Muslims and minorities. The

AfD appropriately took advantage of these preferences and aimed to lead a life that the German public was expecting, becoming an extreme right, anti-immigration and anti-Islam party. The party also meets the lowest common denominator of nativism, which could be found in a wide range of parties that emerged in that period of time. Nativism is an ideology combined with nationalism and xenophobia [9].

The populism itself would have a significant effect on the European regimes. Apart from Germany, the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, and other parties in different countries were gaining fewer elections. Those new populist parties have drawn voters' attention, especially those with a low level of income and education. The essential factors of the rise of populism in Germany could be the injustice and instability within the society, which led to dissatisfaction among people. It might be the same for other countries. The above statement may mean that populist parties would become the ones that most countries in Europe are against in a certain period. As such, parties might result in the collapse of European integration. There are also other negative influences for the forming of an increasing number of the far-right party. For instance, the AfD will try to prevent citizens from holding events, like the ones that support integration and against racism. At the same time, this will increase tension, and this tension will affect how residents coexist together. Therefore, the instability within society was affected, coming back to the reason for the rise of populism. So, it is like a circle flowing with negative influence. People had not expected that the Alternative for Germany would become the first extreme right-wing party that entered the German Bundestag in 2017. It soared a phenomenal success, representing in 13 of the country's 16 state parliament. [10] Within little more than a year, the AfD has become one of Germany's most successful newly founded parties since the 1950s. Its result of 4.7 percent of the vote in the general election in 2013 and 7.1 percent in the European election in May 2014 certainly indicated that the AfD was becoming a new stable party in the German party system [11].

Since the foundation of the Alternative for Germany in February 2013, the character and its electoral success have been widely discussed throughout the German public and media. It is said that AfD voters in 2017 were driven solely by two factors: their attitudes towards immigrants/refugees and anti-establishment satisfaction with democracy in Germany [12]. The central to the problems of a refugee should be an understanding of integration. Initially, when it was established in 2013, it actually only held the opposition to the policies in the eurozone, while after the refugee crisis in 2015, Actually, it was first in 2005 that the German government formally recognized that Germany had become an immigration country, so it supposed to be a long-term problem, and the crisis would rather just be a trigger. Then, it was a series of terrorism events relating to immigrants that stimulated citizens' xenophobia. But why did it happen? As a significant character in the European economies, the country Germany took the major responsibility of helping the asylum seekers and migrants. The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, decided to open the boarder of Germany in terms of the country's interests in an international scene. The refugees, therefore, swarmed into the area. At the same time, the financial aid and other welfare systems, including health care and education, were also operating. However, taking the city Essen for example, with the increase in refugee numbers, crimes there were rising, the unemployment rate was at 11%, and 40% of the residents were migrants. The city seemed to be broken, which might be why people intended to form such a party that fought for the voice of people. What they said tends to be what the general public thought but dared not to voice.

4. Conclusion

This paper mainly analyzes the populist wave in Germany and Britain to explore populism and its influence in European countries.

The populism in the UK is the simultaneous rise of left-wing populism and right-wing populism. In general, left-wing populism is people against elites or the establishment, while right-wing populism is against alien groups such as immigrants and refugees. Left-wing populism is represented by Corbyn, who served as Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition. Due to the economic recession and welfare cuts, they were required to improve the welfare level of the public and expand

public spending. In terms of policy, it is required to reflect more directly the people's demands, protect the interests of the people and oppose corruption. Right-wing populism has a lot to do with Brexit. Supporters of Brexit have a strong right-wing conservatism. The UK Independence Party wants Britain to reclaim its sovereignty, stresses more state control over the economy, and reshapes the rules of society.

The example of Germany that the rise of populism leads to a decrease in social and political stability. The rise of populism reflects the conflict between people and elites of political and social fragmentation. So this has led to the rise of a new populist party, the AFD, in Germany. The AFD became the first far-right party to enter Parliament in 1961. After that, it showed distinct characteristics of anti-elite, anti-tradition, and anti-immigration. Also, the AfD has been on the offensive on a variety of topics, questioning government decisions. The rise of populist parties has also made political discourses such as immigration threat theory and geopolitical threat theory which become the mainstream discourse of German society, resulting in more and more obvious conflict between classes, a more tense political environment, and more aggressive inflammatory.

Although there are still some deficiencies in this study, which can not fully cover the whole picture of the European Populist Movement, this paper still has some enlightenment and reference significance for the discussion of the EU Populist Movement.

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