

Neo-Nationalism — Economical & Political Aspects

The Rise of Neo-Nationalism in Europe

: Focusing on the Economic Costs and Political Outcomes of Refugee Migration to Greece
and Germany

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Introduction

In modern times, globalization and liberalism are very important ideas. In particular, it seems that the whole world is becoming like a single community, influencing one another politically and economically. However, as the 2008 economic crisis and other events unfolded, nations are becoming increasingly troubled as a new political personality called neo-nationalism emerges as a response to such crises.

Neo-nationalism is a political phenomenon that has emerged since 2010, which advocated that states should prioritize their interests over free trade and globalization. Europe has particularly shown strong tendencies of neo-nationalism in the world and has a special cause that no country has experienced, refugees. Europe gradually turned against globalization after suffering the refugee crisis in 2015, and it put the needs of its own people before those who entered the country.

We focused more on two countries, Greece and Germany. These two countries accepted numerous number of refugees at the beginning more than other countries such as UK with their open-minded policy to refugees. However, their society has gradually changed in many negative ways. The more refugees they receive, the greater changes in society, which is the way that Greece and Germany chose.

The purpose of this study is to focus on how refugees caused the rise of neo-nationalism in Europe by analyzing economic costs and resultant political consequences, focusing on Greece and Germany.

Analysis

The migration of refugees made Greece and Germany face financial burdens. This caused several political issues including the emergence of right-wing parties within their governments.

1. Economic costs

Many European countries accepted the refugees due to various reasons reflecting the spirit of globalism. However, as more and more refugees came to the country, the country has had to face a financial burden. The cost includes financial aid for basic needs, social integration cost, and cost during the process of accepting refugees. The substantial amount of burden eventually caused countries to accept fewer refugees and led to the rise of neo-nationalism.

Greece

Among European countries, Greece has the largest number of refugees. It is the first country that refugees reach when they move across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe or when they travel through Turkey. For Greece, refugees could not be ignored. In 2015, 124,000 migrants arrived in Greece. About 16,000 refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan remain

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on many Greek islands even after the agreement of restricting border crossings. There are 38,000 more refugees living on the Greek mainland. In this way, Greece has accepted numerous refugees but ended up as one of the least economically viable countries.

One of the key reasons for the decline in economic conditions was the increased financial burden on the government. In 2015, refugee arrivals cost the government 451 million euros. Later in 2016, the cost increased to 600 million euros. Greece spent 160 million euros a year on just maritime research and rescue operators. In this way, the costs of refugees in Greece gradually piled up, which increased Greece's national debt.

The way to make up for Greece's debt was to make money from their main business: tourism. Greece, however, has been hit hard in the local economy due to a surge in refugee migration flows since 2014. The economic fallout has not only caused a drop in the number of tourists but also caused a decrease in spending and investment confidence, which resulted from the unrest that rose in the relevant areas. A single report of a sudden increase in the flow of refugees to Greece caused cancellation of reservations in related cities as well as in other places.

In the case of Kos and Lesbos islands, the refugee burden is particularly high, as the number of people has already exceeded the number of who will be admitted to refugee camps. Those two islands recorded a rise in cancellation rates of up to 400 percent from the previous year. The tourism association reported that the fallout from the refugee crisis has spread across the whole country, and the number of tourists on the island of Kos has dropped 60 percent this year from last year. As tourism, a means of livelihood, has become troubled due to refugees, islanders have staged violent protests, adding to the conflict between refugees and residents.

Germany

During the refugee crisis in 2015, almost 1.1 million people applied for asylum in Germany. There are currently 1.4 million refugees in Germany. Because of this large number, Germany also faced a financial burden. Germany spent 23 billion euros last year to help integrate the refugees, which is an increase of nearly 11 percent from the previous year. According to the Kiel Institute for World Economy, Germany would need to spend 25 billion to 55 billion euros on accepting refugees. Many people argue that Germany has such high costs because of the long processing time. Applicants need to spend more than 6 weeks in an assigned reception facility, and it takes about five to six months to receive refugee status. Because of the sudden incoming refugees, more people are on the waitlist than ever.

Moreover, Germany also has to spend a large amount of money on funding basic needs. According to Germany's asylum laws, each refugee should be given an additional 354 euros monthly for clothes and food. Before obtaining refugee status, a person who lives alone can get 143 euros, and the person will get 359 euros after getting that status. In 2015, Germany took in about 890,000 refugees. They cost the average German taxpayer 12,680 euros annually, which is more than 1,000 euros a month.

Aside from this direct financial aid for basic needs, there is a large social integration cost to help the refugees adapt to the German society. Education in schools is needed for children and teenagers, and adults are required to take classes on the German language and career readiness for at least 660 hours. After they finish learning, they can be paid workers.

2. Political Outcomes

The political orientation against globalization and immigration has been protectionism and nationalism. With the spirit of globalization, many European countries have implemented policies to accommodate and accept refugees, but the social and economic costs of the numerous refugees have given rise to some extreme reactions.

(i) Right-Wing Parties and Victory

The arguments of the people negatively affected by refugees and the politicians who are nationalistic, conservative, or anti-globalized are that their citizens rather than the refugees should be the priority of their own country's policy. Since then, conservative, right-wing political parties and politicians who have not previously consequently been in the mainstream have entered the political stage or received media spotlight. The policies of the countries have shifted towards that of neo-nationalism, which is focused on nationalism and anti-globalization.

Greece

Greece has had a strong left-wing party. During its financial crisis in 2015, the main and the largest party was Νέα Δημοκρατία (Νέα Dhimokratía), which built the bailout system. Since then, they tried to pay off all of the Greek debt. However, on 7th July 2019, there was a Greek general election. In the end, the ruling party changed to the middle-right SYRIZA from the middle-left ND. Also, new parties such as Golden Dawn appeared. Golden Dawn is the most right-wing Greek party that follows neo-nazis.

Germany

Since 2005, Germany's United Council was composed of many parties; however, thanks to Angela Merkel, four major parties that had middle or leftist tendencies united as a ruling party. On the other hand, Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany), which is a right-wing party in Germany, gained 23 seats in the 2016 Land Baden-Württemberg state election and 14 seats in the 2016 Land Rheinland-Pfalz state election. Ultimately, Alternative für Deutschland now has 92 of 709 seats, making Alternative für Deutschland the largest opposition party in Germany.

On 1st May 2016, Alternative für Deutschland adopted a formal creed that Islam is not part of Germany with some concern from the media. According to the report, the number of Alternative für Deutschland members increased due to many issues and incidents related to refugees. According to the results of the 2019 German local elections, middle-right Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany), led by Angela Merkel, topped the list with 32.1 percent of the vote, followed by Alternative für Deutschland with 27.5 percent. Although Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands maintained its position as the largest party, their approval ratings dropped 7.3 percentage points compared to the 2014 local elections. However, Alternative für Deutschland's approval rating rose 17.8 percentage points from five years ago.

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(ii) Increasing Crime and Social Instability

The refugees coming into the country soon became members of the host society, but mainly occupied the lower-income segments, with many economic difficulties. Greece's government is in dire deficit, forcing refugees to feel burdened. Moreover, the money that should be spent on their own people has been spent on refugees, which has led to relatively lower welfare costs. Also, conflicts between refugees and citizens erupted in many parts of the country. For example, in 2016 there was a horrible group rape incident in Cologne, Germany. One thousand refugee applicants (asylum seekers) have committed crimes against 100 women.

Greece

As the economic crisis deepened due to refugees, racism and other issues emerged, causing social conflict. The right-wing party and neo-Nazi Χρυσή Αυγή (Golden Dawn) created a racist event in which left-wing politicians were verbally abused or beaten. They also did a performance of giving food such as bread to only Greek people, to show their nationalism.

In the repeat general election of 2015, Golden Dawn gained 18 seats out of 300, which means that the percentage of votes cast is 7 percent, or about 500,000 people. According to *The Guardian*, the local society became unstable because of the refugees on Lesbos Island, Kos Island and Attica. It was mainly unemployed people of Greece who voted for Golden Dawn due to economic deterioration. The people of the islands believed unemployment was increasing because the number of refugees who can work in Greece was greater than that of Greek people.

Germany

Life in Germany has also changed with the acceptance of a surging number of refugees. Germany took a total of 120,000 refugees until the end of 2016. According to the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zürich research team, since Germany accepted these refugees, the rate of crime in Land Niedersachsen increased by about 10.4 percent in 2015 to 2016.

(iii) The Connection between Economic Cost and Political Outcomes

With the acceptance of refugees, the financial burden and debt of the Greek and German governments have grown. At the same time, the continuing economic recession has led to reduced welfare benefits for their people, and many Greek and German people have concluded that refugees are the cause of economic deterioration. Conservative politicians who appeal to such voters have begun to appear across Europe. Since then, many conservative politicians won elections, exploiting the public's concerns. Political parties and politicians with racist, anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic tendencies began to enter mainstream politics. The politicians of those political parties implemented policies and laws that closed borders and tightened inspections.

Conclusion

The refugee problem caused many European countries to face a particular financial burden. Germany and Greece had to spend more on various financial aids, refugee rescue operations, education, and food. Overall, the Greek and German economies are in a state of fiscal emergency. Residents turned to the opposition while tourist destinations in Greece and increasingly refugee-rich areas such as southern Germany fell into a slump because local people in Greece and Germany blamed the refugees for their countries' economic woes. The resulting political backlash was that popularly elected conservative parties and politicians have driven anti-globalization and nationalistic agendas, including the exclusion of refugees. In other words, they represent a new but familiar phenomenon called neo-nationalism in various political stages. It is therefore clear that the rise of neo-nationalism is a direct consequence of the economic and social costs of sudden large waves of refugees.

Once the shock of sudden refugee inflow subsides, the costs and problems are reduced, and the source of refugees stabilizes with the end of war and hunger, such reactionary political movements and ideologies may lose their steam. To keep this situation, the global community should strive to solve problems in such key troubled regions and prevent the phenomenon of mass refugees from recurring.

Internally, governments should also plan and implement effective policies. As the refugees settle down, assimilate themselves and become citizens of their host country, many of their social and economic problems may be alleviated. However, this would require active government programs to assist immigrants and provide effective protection from social and economic pitfalls. Although costly in the short term, such "investment" will pay off in the long term with reduced crime, higher average incomes, reduced social tensions, and lesser ground for political extremism. Based on the evidence that connects neo-nationalism with social and economic difficulties, we suggest such measures to enable refugee-ridden countries to overcome neo-nationalism and truly embrace globalism.

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