Far Right Politics and the Shaping of Migration Policy
Austria and Germany’s Divergence

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Abstract — This paper examines the underlying explanatory factors in Germany and Austria’s disparate reactions to the migrant crisis in Europe. Although the EU has established the parameters for dealing with migration and the refugee crisis, Germany has circumvented European Union law in order to accept more refugees, whereas Austria has made efforts to accept as few asylum seekers as possible. Despite the two country’s apparently similar demographics and economies, Germany and Austria have circumvented EU law in order to pursue one of the most accepting and one of the more hostile asylum policies in Europe, respectively. Although the economic impact of Germany’s aging and declining population is often used to explain its openness to refugees, this does not explain why Austria, facing the same demographic realities, has been so loath to accept migrants. Instead, this paper posits that differences in the influence of radical right-wing populism in the two countries, informed by divergent denazification processes and past immigration trends, provides the basis for understanding Germany and Austria’s dichotomous asylum policies. To better explain the divergences between German and Austrian migration policy, this paper posits the framework of the radicalization spiral to explain the increasing influence of the radical right over migration policy. The framework operates as a spiral, because it is a feedback loop that continually grows to encompass larger segments of the political system. With each cycle, radical right-wing populist parties radicalize their own supporters, pull established parties to the right, and absorb more voters into their sphere of influence.

In 2015, an unprecedented number of refugees began to reach Europe, fleeing conflicts in states like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia (Human Rights Watch 2015). This influx came to be known as the refugee crisis or migrant crisis. Germany and Austria have been at the forefront of
policy responses to the migrant crisis, but despite the two countries’ intertwined histories, economic similarities, and overlapping cultures, they have pursued antithetical policies. Where Germany has suspended the implementation of certain European Union (EU) laws in order to allow more asylum seekers to settle in the country, Austria has closed its border to refugees. The most commonly cited factor in explaining European states’ refugee policies is the population decline (see, for example, Chu 2015; Kanter 2015; Nardelli 2016; Reguly 2017), the demographic process by which populations become older, as fertility rates drop and life expectancies rise. But in this paper, I analyze the insufficiencies of the economic and demographic effects of the population decline in explaining states’ asylum policies, and propose that a more complete picture is formed by considering the historical and political effects of radical right-wing populism.

While the population decline is common throughout the developed world, Germany and Austria stand at the forefront, with two of the world’s lowest fertility rates and oldest populations (World Bank 2017a, 2017b).¹ These demographic changes can lead to a host of economic problems, as the working-age population shrinks and old-age services see ever-increasing demand. Some have proposed replacement migration policies, which would bring in migrants to make up for the shrinking working-age population. But while this framework is effective in explaining Germany’s acceptance of migrants, it suggests Austria should pursue the same policies. Therefore, there must be other factors driving Austria’s hostility towards migrants.

I propose that this other factor is radical-right wing populism (RRP), a nebulous movement built on a suspicion towards elites and championing the values of the common people (Canovan

¹ Of the 201 states and territories for which the World Bank collected 2015 fertility rates, Austria and Germany rank as joint eighteenth lowest. Of the 193 for which they collected old-age dependency ratios, Germany ranked fourth and Austria ranked seventeenth highest.
Mudde (2007) considers nativism, which mixes nationalism and xenophobia, to be the unifying factor of RRP movements. It is this nativism that leads states’ with stronger histories of RRP and contemporary RRP parties to shun refugees. Nativists believe states should be inhabited only by those who “belong to it” and that outsiders threaten security, wellbeing, and identity (Mudde 2007, 19). I propose that the differences in radical right-wing populism in Germany and Austria can be explained by two main factors: the collective memory of the Nazi regime and the radicalization spiral, the process by which the presence of RRP parties radicalizes the political system as a whole.

Differences in the collective memory of the Second World War in Germany and Austria emerged as a result of differences in the denazification process. Denazification in Germany focused on national culpability and the prevention of similar movements in the future. On the other hand, Austria’s denazification allowed it to avoid blame for the regime’s atrocities. This has created differing collective memories in the two states. While German collective memory is built on vergangenheitsbewältigung, the struggle to overcome the sins of the past, Austria’s is based on the victim myth, which abdicates responsibility for Austria’s Nazis. As a result, German RRP movements have been suppressed by links to the shame of the Nazis, while Austrian RRP movements have not carried the same baggage.

This has led to differences in the presence of RRP parties within the two states’ political systems. While Germany has had short-lived radical right-wing populist parties throughout its history, Austria’s major radical right-wing populist party, the Freedom Party (FPÖ), has been a powerful force in its politics for its entire post-war history. This is important, because the presence of radical right-wing populist parties, even if they do not control government, can create anti-immigrant policies in three key ways. Most directly, RRP parties can come into power and help create national policies. In the case of Austria, the FPÖ has participated in governing coalitions, giving it a
direct path to effect anti-immigrant policies. Second, Rydgren (2003) proposes the theory that RRP parties fill niches, appealing to voters who feel their needs are not being served by mainstream parties. In two-party systems, which arguably exist in both Austria and Germany, this encourages mainstream parties to adopt some of the RRP party’s policy positions in order to gain an edge on their main opponent. Germany and Austria both currently have strong RRP third parties, creating an incentive for the two countries’ mainstream parties to adopt RRP positions. Under this framework, RRP policies can be enacted even when RRP parties do not govern, as a result of mainstream parties’ attempts to appease RRP voters. Third, Gilens and Murakawa (2002) apply Downs’s (1957) theory of heuristics in political decision-making in their theory of elite cues. According to the theory, voters generally only have strong feelings about some issues and support the party that best aligns with their views on these particular topics. But when it comes to issues that voters do not have strong opinions about, they generally internalize the party line. As a result, RRP parties radicalize their supporters. If a voter decides to support the FPÖ or Alternative for Germany (AfD) because of one issue, they will often gradually adopt the party’s positions on other issues. RRP party support can be driven by ethnic concerns or as an act of political protest (Rydgren 2003). This means that RRP parties that successfully appeal to voters with anti-elite, political protest messaging radicalize their supporters, leading them to adopt the party’s ethnic concerns against migration. This in turn creates a larger anti-immigrant base and increases the pressure to adopt anti-migrant policies.

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2 In Germany, the Christian Democratic Union and Social Democratic Party dominate. In Austria, the People’s Party and Social Democratic Party dominate. However, both states have an RRP party as their third most powerful, Germany’s Alternative for Germany and Austria’s Freedom Party, suggesting each state’s mainstream parties have not sufficiently absorbed the ideas of their RRP party.
Based on these three theories, a strong strain of radical right-wing populism can effect restrictive migration and asylum policies even if RRP parties do not come close to majority support. Radical right-wing populism simply needs to reach a tipping point where it can affect policy either through RRP parties entering coalition governments, RRP ideologies spilling over to mainstream parties, or RRP supporters becoming increasingly radicalized and impassioned, creating a loud voice against migration. While this tipping point appears to have been reached in Austria, where the FPÖ is poised to reenter coalition government, it remains to be seen whether the AfD’s 2017 electoral success, which has been insufficient for the party to enter government, reflects radical right-wing populism’s tipping point in Germany.

Background

As members of the European Union, Austria and Germany do not have complete control over their own migration policies. Germany’s openness and Austria’s hostility to refugees required both states to circumvent EU policies. Therefore, to understand the differences between the two countries’ policy responses to the refugee crisis, it is first necessary to understand the shared European Union framework that both shapes and limits the policy options available to them.

Migration has been at the heart of the European Union from its very beginnings. The Treaty of Paris (1951) had provisions barring member states from preventing nationals of other member states from working in their coal and steel industries or from paying non-nationals different wages. Further, the treaty required states to amend their immigration laws to allow citizens of other member states to fill any shortages in their coal and steel industries (art. 69). Of course, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) only regulated a defined area of European economies, limiting the scope of these requirements. But with a model set by the Treaty of Paris, the original six members went on to sign the Treaty of Rome (1957), which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and broadened these protections to migrant workers in all industries (arts. 48–51).
While the rights of workers traveling between EU countries gradually grew over time, it was not until the Schengen Agreement that the next great expansion of European migration policy took place.

The Schengen Agreement (1985) began as an intergovernmental agreement outside the structure of the European Union between France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg which abolished border controls between its members (Ademmer et al. 2015, 2; Schengen Agreement 1985, art. 2; Tanaka and Macias 2007, 1–2, 7). Over time, several other member states, as well as a few non-member European states, joined the agreement (Ademmer et al. 2015, 2; Tanaka and Macias 2007, 1–2, 7). In 1997, Schengen became a part of EU law when it was included in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997). While the freedom to work in any member state had long been enshrined in EU law, the introduction of the Schengen Agreement marked the first time that the freedom of movement protected by the EU would be noticeable in daily life (Ademmer et al. 2015, 2).

Based on this history, it is worth adding a caveat to the initial assertion that migration has been at the heart of the European Union: internal migration has been a central pillar of the union, but it was not until much later that the EU began to adopt policies addressing migration from outside the union. While the EU has been characterized by an expansion of internal migration, it has often clamped down on external migration. By the 1980s, most EU member states had ended programs to attract migrant workers, meaning migrations from outside Europe was not a significant issue in their politics (Betz 1993, 195). However, the 1980s also saw a noticeable rise in asylum-

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3 However, not all member states of the EU are also part of the Schengen Area. The UK and Ireland were allowed to opt out of the agreement, and while Denmark is a member of the Agreement, it does not participate in other initiatives designed to create “an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers,” including judicial and police cooperation (Ademmer et al. 2015; Sy 2017; Tanaka and Macias 2007, 2). Additionally, new member states are not immediately added to the agreement due to security concerns (Ademmer et al. 2015, 2; Tanaka and Macias 2007, 2).
seekers entering the European Union, fleeing violence and persecution around the world (Betz 1993, 195). These refugees were often met with suspicion and hostility, with many governments making attempts to discourage asylum-seekers entering their borders (Betz 1993, 195). Schengen presented a clear threat to this regime because migrants granted entry to any member state could freely travel to any other. In order to maintain this focus on border security, Schengen states attempted to counterbalance the loss of their internal borders with a strengthening of their external borders, a phenomenon often referred to as “Fortress Europe” (Ademmer et al. 2015, 2). This has led to controversy over policy regarding the union’s external border. The system’s lack of flexibility to respond to humanitarian crises has faced criticism, while populist parties have called for the reintroduction of internal borders to increase security (Ademmer et al. 2015, 2).

While the union worked toward increased cooperation to ensure freedom of movement for its citizens, it also worked toward standardizing another aspect of migration. In 1999, the European Union created the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which works to harmonize national asylum policies and create union-wide institutions and policies to manage asylum (European Commission 2016b). The first phase of the CEAS included the creation of the European Refugee Fund, which provides financial assistance to states with disproportionate numbers of asylees, the Temporary Protection Directive to provide a temporary status for asylum seekers when formal processes are overwhelmed and the Family Reunification Directive to ensure refugees can exercise their right to family reunification across European states (European Commission 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e). The CEAS is built on the United Nations’ qualification for refugee status, as defined in the Convention on the Status and Protection of Refugees (European Commission 2016b; “Refugee Convention” 1951). This makes the union’s member states fully compliant with the international asylum regime, but leaves out economic migrants. Because they are not covered by the convention, the
European Union considers economic migrants to be voluntary, even though many consider the severity of their economic hardship to have forced their migration (European Commission 2016a).

Because of the ease of traveling through the European Union, the Dublin Convention (1990) lays out the criteria for determining which member state will examine asylum claims from refugees who enter the EU (arts. 4-8). This became even more important when the Schengen Agreement came into effect, allowing migrants to travel between many of the EU’s member states unencumbered. The Convention lays out four criteria for determining which member will process an asylum claim. If a member state has granted asylum to an asylum seeker’s family member, that member state must process their application (Dublin Convention 1990, art. 4). Otherwise, if the asylum seeker has permanent residency or a visa to a member state, subject to some exceptions, that state must process their application (Dublin Convention 1990, art. 5). Otherwise, the first state the asylum seeker entered must process their application (Dublin Convention 1990, arts. 6-7). If no state can be shown to fit the first three criteria, the first state in which the asylum seeker submits an application must process it (Dublin Convention 1990, art. 8).

Because of Dublin, asylum policy in the EU has always suffered from a clear problem: the states toward the exterior of the EU must process the bulk of asylum applications. Because international law prohibits a state from sending a bona fide refugee away, this means the states on the EU’s periphery bear most of the costs of settling refugees, while the states on the interior can take in only the refugees they select. The eminently accessible Greece, Italy, Spain, and Malta bear most of the cost of Europe’s refugees, while the much wealthier countries of Northern Europe remain out of reach to most asylum seekers. As a result of Dublin, the bulk of Europe’s refugees have applied for asylum in Greece and Italy, the states most accessible from the Middle East and Africa. However, some refugees have attempted to cross Europe clandestinely in order to circumvent Dublin and apply for asylum in wealthier states with less strain on their asylum systems (Scherer 2015).
Policy responses

Germany and Austria have had near-opposite responses to the refugee crisis. While Germany gained a reputation as the most welcoming host of refugees, Austria expressed hostility to migrants. Interestingly, however, both countries’ responses involved a breakdown of the norms governing EU migration policy. Germany circumvented the Dublin Convention, which governs asylum applications in the union. Austria reinstituted border controls, in violation of the spirit (but not the letter) of the Schengen Agreement. In this section, I examine the specific policy responses taken by each country, so that they can be analyzed in the later sections of this paper.

Throughout the refugee crisis, Germany has been Europe’s largest host for asylum seekers (Benedek 2016, 951–52). In 2015, Germany received over 1 million refugees, far surpassing the previous peak of 440,000 in 1992 at the height of the Yugoslav Wars (Vasilyev 2016, 179–80; Zimmermann 1995, 47). In a break with EU policy, Germany suspended the implementation of the Dublin Agreement within the country (Bauder 2016, 64). As a result, any migrant that could reach Germany could apply for asylum there rather than waiting in Europe’s less generous periphery states (Bauder 2016, 64). This has led to political controversy in Germany. The chancellor, Angela Merkel of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and the junior coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), support increased aid for migrants in order to make Germany a safe haven for refugees (Vasilyev 2016, 180–82).

But the government has faced outcry from opposition parties and internal dissent from more conservative members of the center-right CDU and its Bavarian regional partner, the Christian Social Union (CSU)\(^4\) (Vasilyev 2016, 180–82). It has also created a sharp divide in German society. As early as 2014, the German public has clashed on migration, most evidently in the form of protests.

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\(^4\) The CSU only runs in Bavaria and forms a coalition with the CDU in all national elections.
by the vociferously anti-refugee Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West) and counter-protests by pro-migrant individuals and groups (Bauder 2016, 64). This protest movement turned into electoral success when the anti-migrant party Alternative for Germany (AfD) gained 94 out of 709 parliamentary seats after 2017’s election and became Germany’s third-largest party (Federal Returning Officer 2017). Despite these challenges, Merkel’s policies have continued largely unchanged, continuing to welcome refugees into the country.

Austria’s response to the refugee crisis shows a distinct departure from Germany’s strategy. Like its neighbor to the northwest, Austria originally showed great support for those refugees fleeing conflict (Benedek 2016, 950). However, it performed a complete reversal of policy in 2016, adopting some of Europe’s most restrictive asylum legislation (Benedek 2016, 950). Austria instituted its first post-refugee crisis asylum policy in 2015, bearing a striking resemblance to German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s (Benedek 2016, 950). That year, Austria was one of Europe’s most generous hosts for refugees. Austria received 88,340 asylum applications, the third most in Europe after Sweden and Germany; at 10.3 per 1000 residents, it was second only to Sweden in asylum seekers per capita (Benedek 2016, 951–52). However, Austria quickly reversed this policy of openness.

While Austria received over 88,000 asylum applications in 2015, it was estimated that over ten times that number of people crossed through the country in order to reach Germany, Sweden or other European states (Benedek 2016, 951). Under electoral pressure from the radical right-wing, anti-migrant Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Austrian government amended its asylum law to state that if the government believed mass migration threatened national security and rule of law, it reserved the right to institute border controls and checkpoints (Benedek 2016, 950, 955). As a result of the influx of migrants traveling through the country, Austria reestablished the border with its southern and eastern neighbors to stem the flow of migration into the country, contradicting its responsibilities to maintain open borders under the Schengen Agreement (Benedek 2016, 950–51).
The Amsterdam Treaty allows for the reintroduction of border controls for thirty day periods within the Schengen Area when there is a threat to security (Tanaka and Macias 2007, 3). While border controls are usually used to provide additional security for events like European Council meetings or international sports championships or in response to threats like terrorist attacks in neighboring countries, there is a precedent for border controls being used to stop asylum seekers (Tanaka and Macias 2007, 3). In 2000, Belgium reintroduced its internal border in anticipation of a wave of irregular migrants (MacAskill 2000; Tanaka and Macias 2007, 3). However, the example of Belgium substantively differs from the border controls Austria proposed. Belgium temporarily closed its border to migrants after announcing that it would institute an amnesty for its undocumented population in order to avoid migrants from neighboring states entering to take advantage of the program (MacAskill 2000).

But border controls were only the start of Austria’s policy reversal. While early criticism focused on migrant movements rather than the migrants themselves, the FPÖ quickly began to draw attention to the burden of hosting refugees in the country (Benedek 2016, 951). Under pressure from the right-wing, the Austrian government placed an upper limit on the number of asylum applications the government would receive. Under the plan, only 37,500 applications can be reviewed in 2016, with the number set to steadily decrease each year (Benedek 2016, 951). Further, only 127,500 refugees can be accepted from 2016 to 2019 (Benedek 2016, 951).

Like its institution of border controls, Austria’s upper limit policy violates its obligations under EU law and further stands in opposition to the international legal regime on asylum (Benedek 2016, 953). But Benedek (2016) argues that the point of the laws is not for them to actually be enforced; instead, it is designed to give the impression that Austria has a strict stance on asylum, deterring refugees (949). The push–pull theory of migration states that migrants’ decisions are rational choices based on the economic concept of utility maximization; they are based on the effects
of two groups of factors (King 2012, 13). Migrants weigh the pros and cons of staying in their origin country, and then of each destination country they could travel to, before arriving at the most beneficial decision (King 2012, 13). Push factors describe the reasons that a migrant chooses to leave their country of origin, the factors that ‘push’ them away (King 2012, 13). Pull factors, on the other hand, are the reasons that migrants settle in their chosen host country, the factors that ‘pull’ them into a specific country (King 2012, 13). While this theory is generally applied to the decisions of migrants, it also helps to explain the actions taken by Austria’s government. In instituting its anti-immigrant policies, Austria sought to reduce its own pull factors, making the country less attractive to migrants. Austria’s actions create increased difficulty in entering Austria, making other, comparatively easy to enter European countries more attractive. More importantly, Austria’s actions communicate that refugees are not welcome in the country; even if specific policies were reversed, this message would not be, leading migrants to seek more gracious hosts.

**Comparison of German and Austrian political environments**

To explain the differences between Germany and Austria’s policy responses, I will examine two theoretical frameworks: the replacement migration frame and the radical right-wing populism frame. The theory of replacement migration states that Germany’s aging population and shrinking labor force have necessitated the immigration of new workers to maintain the economy, and that refugees can fill this role. However, this framework falls short when explaining Austria, which faces similar demographic and economic realities but has been loath to accept refugees.

To create a more complete picture, it is necessary to examine ideological differences in the German and Austrian political arena through the radical right-wing populism framework. Both history and party institutions have formed these differences. First, Germany’s acceptance of responsibility for the atrocities of the Second World War have made radical right-wing politics taboo in a way they are not in Austria, which has largely avoided responsibility for its role in the war. Second,
and in many ways as a result, Austria has long had a powerful radical right-wing populist (RRP) party in its political system, while German RRP parties have so far been short-lived or weakly-supported. Through a process I refer to as the radicalization spiral, the presence of powerful RRP parties can radicalize the political system as a whole, creating a pervasive anti-migrant ideology. Because Austria abdicated responsibility for the Nazi regime, its RRP party has been able to flourish and radicalize its political system. On the other hand, because German society has accepted collective guilt for the Second World War’s atrocities, its RRP parties have been mired in associations with the Nazis, and so far have not been able to radicalize the political system.

The replacement migration frame

Throughout Europe’s refugee crisis, links have been made between migration and European states’ aging and declining populations (see, for example, Chu 2015; Kanter 2015; Nardelli 2016; Reguly 2017). However, this can only explain the generous asylum policies that Germany has offered to refugees. Both the migrant crisis and population decline are problems for the entire European continent, but Germany seems to be the only country that has made the link between the two. Austria serves as a perfect counterexample: with nearly the same population growth and aging rates as Germany, why has it been so loath to accept refugees? Clearly, the population decline cannot be the only factor affecting Germany and Austria’s divergent policies. However, the population decline certainly does seem to play a significant role in explaining Germany’s actions, so it would be unwise to dismiss the theory out of hand. In this section, I explore the theory of replacement migration, its influence on Germany’s asylum policy, and why this explanatory framework falls short when applied to the case of Austria.

For as long as demographers have studied the demographic transition, the process by which populations transition from high fertility and high mortality rates to low fertility and mortality, they have been aware of the possibility that populations may begin to decline in the most developed
countries (see, for example, Notestein 1945). As mortality rates fall, populations become older, and falling fertility rates compound this problem as fewer young people take their place (UNPD 2001, 11). This demographic transition is exacerbated by societal factors, which further reduce fertility rates. Cultural shifts towards the delaying of parenthood, paired with the introduction of more effective forms of birth control, bring fertility levels below those predicted by the demographic transition (Lesthaeghe 2000, 2). Because of these factors, fertility rates can fall so low that populations begin to shrink as succeeding generations become smaller (Bongaarts 2002, 420).

The population decline began to have widespread ramification in the 1990s. At the start of the decade, the first countries reached the threshold that demographers consider the “lowest-low” fertility, falling below a total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.3; by the end of the 1990s, fourteen countries had fallen below this level (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002, 641–43). At this low level of fertility, a state’s population would be cut in half every 45 years (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002, 642). While Germany and Austria were not among the countries with lowest-low fertility, they stood just on the cusp, with TFRs of 1.36 and 1.34 respectively (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002, 643). Additionally, the former territory of East Germany exhibited the lowest observed fertility rate for several years: less than 0.8 children per woman from 1992–95 (Golini 1998, 60). Golini (1998) estimates this to be near the lowest possible naturally occurring fertility level.

Fertility trends began to reverse in the 2000s, with TFRs rising across the developed world, and particularly in Europe (Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasilioniene 2009, 664). The primary exceptions were in East Asia, with several countries remaining in the “lowest-low” fertility category, and the

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5 In order for a population to merely maintain its size, a fertility rate above two children per woman is necessary, although the exact value varies based on differences in premature mortality and the sex ratio at birth (see, for example, Espenshade, Guzman, and Westoff 2003). This rate is referred to as the replacement rate, and is close to 2.1 children per woman in developed counties.
German-speaking countries of Europe, where fertility never reached “lowest-low”, but has remained between 1.3 and 1.5 children per woman (Eurostat 2017c; Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasilioniene 2009, 664). However, some demographers argue that the 2000s’ increase in fertility does not reflect an actual change in demographic realities (Billari and Dalla-Zuanna 2011, 105; Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasilioniene 2009, 666). Instead, they argue that fertility statistics in the 1990s were artificially low due to a generational shift to a later childbearing age, and that the figures for the 2000s reflect not an increase in fertility, but a more accurate reflection of the underlying fertility in both the 1990s and 2000s (see, for example, Bongaarts 2002). This is corroborated by evidence showing a near-secular shift towards a later mean age at first birth for women across Europe leading up to the 1990s (European Population Committee 1997, 48; Golini 1998, 61). If this is the case, the fertility increases seen in the 2000s may not actually mean that Europe’s fertility decline is coming to an end. Instead, the true fertility rate may be staying still or even still falling and our fertility statistics are simply inadequate to detect it (Golini 1998, 70). And even if the increases in fertility rates reflect a legitimate demographic change, demographers do not expect fertility rates to return to levels above the replacement rate in Europe (Bongaarts 2002, 419; Lesthaeghe 2000, 1). This means absent exogenous change, the population decline will continue, albeit at a slower pace.

6 To better understand this mechanism, imagine an exaggerated example of a society in which all women who reach the age of 20 before 1990 begin having children at age 20, and all women who reach the age of 20 after 1990 begin having children at age 30. Fertility statistics measure the number of children women have each year, and extrapolate this data to estimate the number of children the average woman will have in her lifetime (Bongaarts 2002, 420). Therefore, the fertility rate in the 1990s would drop precipitously in the 1990s, as women who turned 20 before 1990 age out of their childbearing years at a normal rate, but are not replaced by younger people aging into their childbearing years. Starting in 2000, however, these women will reach 30 and begin having children, driving the fertility rate back up. As this example shows, generational shifts in the childbearing age can create significant swings in the fertility rate even if the average number of children women have in their lifetimes remains unchanged. (See Bongaarts and Feeney 1998 for a more complete discussion on the effects of timing on fertility statistics.)
The population decline can lead to a host of problems in states experiencing shrinking and aging populations. Across the developed world, population declines have placed strains on services like pension, healthcare, and long-term care systems, as well as requiring reforms of policies targeting the shrinking young population, like education (Productivity Commission 2005, xii; UNPD 2001, 11). The Australian government Productivity Commission’s (2005) study of the effects of population aging found that this would increase government spending, as the growing need for old-age services would outpace the shrinking of services aimed at education or childhood welfare. The population decline also weakens the economy, as the population growth rate is one of the key determinants of the size of the labor force (Billari and Dalla-Zuanna 2011, 106; McDonald and Kippen 2001, 1; UNPD 2001, 11). Additionally, population aging leads to lower labor force participation and lower hours worked per capita, because older people are more likely to cut back on work or stop working altogether (Productivity Commission 2005). This creates a vicious cycle: the growing older population requires more services, but there are fewer workers to support them, whether directly or through taxes (McDonald and Kippen 2001, 1).

But increasing birth rates is not the only way to address the population decline. The United Nations Population Division points out that there are three ways to reverse population aging and decline: increasing fertility, increasing mortality, or increasing immigration (UNPD 2001, 9). Increasing fertility will have the most impact in the long-term, but is too difficult to change to be a feasible short-to-medium term remedy; while pro-natalist policies should be pursued, they will be insufficient on their own (UNPD 2001, 9). Increasing mortality is wholly anathema to the human rights regimes entrenched in both national and international politics, making it an unacceptable policy.

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7 While labor force statistics exclude those younger than 16 and older than 65, the Productivity Commission notes that older people who have not yet reached retirement age are still more likely to take fewer hours or retire early (2005, xii).
proposal; further, while it would decrease population aging, it would increase the pace of population shrinking (UNPD 2001, 9). This leaves increasing immigration as the only feasible policy path to alleviate the population decline in the short-to-medium term, which the UNPD considers to encompass at least the next fifty years (2001, 9). McDonald and Kippen (2001) corroborate the UNPD’s findings, but add that efforts to increase the labor force participation rate could similarly alleviate the problems associated with the population decline in the short-to-medium term.

Coale (1972) first proposed the idea that immigration and fertility could offset one another to achieve the same levels of population growth, but his analysis came from the opposite perspective of the UNPD’s (Lesthaeghe 2000, 16). In an effort to prevent a rapid population growth, Coale set out to find a reduction target for fertility to offset the population growth resulting from immigration. The UNPD (2001) reversed this analysis, suggesting that migration could fill out shrinking younger generations by “replacing” the births that drove population growth in the past, and coining the term “replacement migration” to refer to immigration that serves this purpose (Billari and Dalla-Zuanna 2011, 106). Migration can be a key determinant in the size of the labor force, helping to break the vicious cycle of falling economic output and rising expenditure on old-age services (Billari and Dalla-Zuanna 2011, 106). Replacement migration also presents the added benefit that these migrants generally come from higher fertility societies, often helping to raise fertility rates in their new homes (Billari 2008, 12–14). While replacement migration cannot reverse population aging, it could at least alleviate population shrinking and keep the labor force at a constant size (Billari and Dalla-Zuanna 2011, 106).

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8 This increased fertility from migration is one of the reasons that the United States, unlike other similarly developed countries, maintains a fertility above the replacement rate (Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasliioniene 2009, 664; Lesthaeghe 2000, 19).
Since the concept’s introduction into policy spheres in the UNPD’s (2001) report, replacement migration has received widely varying reception from researchers. Coleman (2002) argues that the level of migration needed to counteract the population decline would be entirely unfeasible and would entirely displace native populations. Van Nimwegen and van der Erf (2010) add that migration would only alleviate the demographic problems Europe faces, and would not actually alter them. Golini (1998) agrees with Coleman (2002) and van Nimwegen and van der Erf’s (2010) analyses, but concludes that in societies with very low fertility rates, large, sustained migration may be the only option, as the population may lose the ability to solve their own demographic problems. On the other hand, Lesthaeghe (2000) concedes that the immigration rates necessary to address the decline are large, but argues that researchers have focused too much on preventing population aging, and that simply maintaining a constant population size or labor force size would go a long way in addressing the decline, while requiring lower levels of immigration. Billari (2008) and Sobotka (2008) add that migration can actually change the underlying demographic realities of states, because immigrants typically have higher fertilities than native populations. Immigrant fertility makes up a disproportionate share of total fertility in most European countries, and may have been the driving force in Spain and Italy’s escaping lowest-low fertility (Billari 2008, 12–14; Sobotka 2008, 229). Espenshade (2001) also counters Coleman’s concerns that native populations will be overrun by migrants: if immigrants are well integrated, native and migrant cultures may blend together and the distinction between the two groups may fade, provided the immigrant group remains relatively constant over time.

Keely (2001), on the other hand, contests that turning to replacement migration may be too hasty a solution, as the trends of population decline are too recent to confidently predict that it will be a long term trend. In fact, Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasiliuniene (2009) find that fertility rates
have increased in most of the countries which showed the lowest TFRs in the 1990s. However Bongaarts (2002) points out this fertility increase may reflect a measurement error rather than a legitimate trend reversal and Billari (2008) finds that much of this recovery may be the result of immigrant fertility, speaking to the success of replacement migration.

The European Union has long had to confront the demographic realities of population aging and decline. Europe stands at the forefront of these issues, with the lowest population growth rate and largest older population, per capita, of any world region (van Nimwegen and van der Erf 2010, 1360; UNPD 2015, 26). The population aging problem is particularly exacerbated in Europe due to its post–Second World War baby boom, causing an abnormally large cohort to reach age 65 in the 2010s (McDonald and Kippen 2001, 1). The European Commission (2004) acknowledged the role migration could play in alleviating aging. It noted that migration had prevented population declines in some member states with shrinking native populations (3). It acknowledged that in the future, increasing migration will play a profound role in abating growing natural population declines (European Commission 2004, 9).

The Commission distilled the recognition of these demographic issues into a 2005 report calling for measures to address the union’s declining population (European Commission 2005). The report recognized the problems posed by the increasing life expecting and falling birth rates in its member states, which puts increasing strain on both job markets and social services (European Commission 2005). The Commission recommended three policy measures to mitigate the harmful effects of this demographic transition: economic reforms, pro-natalist policies, and increased immigration from outside the union (European Commission 2005). As it stands now, the majority of European population growth is the result of international migration, suggesting that replacement migration has been the most effective strategy for combating the population decline so far (van
Nimwegen and van der Erf (2010, 1359). However, Eurostat (2017b) projects that the European Union’s population will peak between 2050 and 2060 and the decline if current trends continue, suggesting current policy measures are insufficient to stave off the population decline. A 30% increase in projected migration rates would be necessary to stave off population shrinking until 2080, and even this would not necessarily counteract population aging (Eurostat 2017a, 2017b).

The population decline and replacement migration in Germany

Germany is indisputably experiencing a population decline. The country’s total fertility rate of just 1.50 births per woman puts it well below the replacement rate of about 2.1 (Eurostat 2017c). While it has shown an increase from a low of 1.33 in 2006, this increase has not been near sufficient to stabilize Germany’s population: the UN Population Division projects the countries’ population will decline by 11% from 2000 to 2050, and that the share of the population sixty-five or older will increase from 16 to 28% (Eurostat 2017c; UNPD 2001, 8). Because Germany already has a high labor-force participation rate (McDonald and Kippen 2001, 2), efforts to increase participation, as proposed by McDonald and Kippen (2001), are unlikely to yield significant benefits. As a result, replacement migration is the only path to alleviate Germany’s population decline in the short-to-medium term.

While host states often see refugees as burdens, German financial institutions have touted the economic advantages of the country’s new refugee population. The Deutsche Bundesbank’s Monthly Report (2015) captured this attitude in its projections of the German economy for 2016 and 2017, emphasizing that while the primary reason for accepting refugees should be the hardship they have experienced, it is also worth considering their economic impacts. The central bank predicts

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9 This analysis assumes a constant membership of the union, therefore not accounting for potential population growth resulting from expansion or losses from, for example, the United Kingdom leaving the union.
that, as a result of the demographic trends associated with population decline, Germany will likely experience a lasting labor shortage (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 23). But while Germany is expected to maintain a labor shortage, the Bundesbank raised its forecast for the country’s growth rate because of the economic benefit of Germany’s refugees (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 13). Because it is predicted that economic migration, mostly from within the European Union, will decline, refugees will have an increasingly important role in making up for shortages in both fertility and immigration (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 24–25). The age structure of Germany’s new refugees, nearly entirely below 65, means almost all of them may eventually enter the labor force (BAMF 2017, 7; Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 25–26). While many of the refugees entering Germany are less skilled than native workers or economic migrants, their benefits are expected to increase over time, as refugees become better integrated into the labor market, particularly because their low average age gives them opportunities to take full advantage of Germany’s education and vocational training systems (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 23–26; IAB 2015).

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10 Although refugee migration, at its current rates, will not be enough to outweigh the shrinking of the native labor force (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 23).

11 According to Germany’s Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF 2017)’s analysis of refugees entering the country between January and April 2017, only 0.7% of Germany’s new refugees are over the age of 65. About 55% are prime working age, between 18 and 65, over half of whom are under 30. An additional 43% are children, who will presumably join the labor force eventually.

12 Germany’s Institute for Employment Research (IAB 2015) reports that in September 2015, 71% of migrants from crisis- or war-torn countries in the labor force had completed no vocational training. The same is true of just 16% of natives and 41% of migrants overall (IAB 2015, 13). A sample of asylum seekers found that a higher proportion had post-secondary educations than the German population as a whole – 37% versus 21% – but a higher proportion also had no educational qualifications – 34% versus 9% (IAB 2015, 4).

13 However, the report points out that Germany recently instituted a new minimum wage, which may hurt new migrants’ employment prospects (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 23).
Additionally, new refugees are unlikely to disadvantage native workers, because they generally possess different skills, filling labor market gaps (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 27). Manacorda, Manning, and Wadsworth (2012) and Ottaviano and Peri (2012) find that immigrants are generally imperfect substitutes for native workers. Therefore, while new migrants may depress the wages of other migrants, they have little effect on natives’ wages. In fact, Foged and Peri (2015) find that an influx of refugee workers may push low-skilled native workers to pursue less manually intensive work, increasing their wages. This fits with Ottaviano and Peri’s (2012) finding that new immigrants have a small positive effect on the wages of native workers.

Outside labor force impacts, the refugee population is also expected to help grow the economy by strengthening consumer spending, as new refugees are expected to spend almost the entirety of their financial support from the government (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 20). The Deutsche Bundesbank has gone so far as to compare this spending on refugees to a stimulus package (2015, 28) While the refugee population has contributed to a large increase in German government spending, the other major source of the increase was spending on healthcare and long-term care (Deutsche Bundesbank 2015, 21). If the influx of refugees helps to mitigate the population decline, as expected, it would help to lower these aging-related expenses over time.

The population decline in Austria

The population decline offers a compelling explanation for Germany’s migration policy. However, under this theoretical framework, Austria’s hostility towards immigration would suggest that it does not face the same demographic challenges. This could not be further from the truth.

Austria’s total fertility rate is below Germany’s, at 1.49 children per woman, and it reached the same low rate as Germany, 1.33, in 2001 (Eurostat 2017c). The country’s projected population decline is even more extreme than Germany’s, with the UN forecasting a population loss of 14% from 2000 to 2050 and an increase in the share of the population 65 or older from 15% to 30% (UNPD
23

Austria has been considered a particular risk for the population decline for decades, due to its consistently low fertility rates, so much so that it is often taken as a benchmark for assessing other state’s declines. Spain, for example, became an area of intense interest in the 1980s, when its fertility rate dropped to “the Austrian level” (Wattelar and Roumans 1991, 57). Wattelar and Roumans’s study of the population decline in OECD members predicted that, without immigration, Austria could see a 0.5% decline in population per year by the 2000s, and more than a 1% annual decline before the 2050s (1991, 59). Their model predicted that to ensure a stable population, Austria would have to take in about ten thousand immigrants per year starting in the 2000s (Wattelar and Roumans 1991, 61).

The fact that Austria has not been more open to migrants despite facing demographic challenges on par with Germany’s leads to the conclusion that the population decline is insufficient in explaining Austria and Germany’s policy responses to the refugee crisis. While economic and demographic factors clearly motivate Germany’s actions to a large extent, other factors must be preventing them from having the same effects on Austria. I propose that the greater influence of radical right-wing populism in Austria has prevented its government from considering the refugee crisis in purely economic and demographic terms, instead viewing it also through the lens of nativism.

The radical right-wing populism frame

Canovan (1999) defines populism as a political ideology built upon a tension between “the people” and political elites, institutions, and even values (3). Mudde (2004) builds on this idea, stating that populism views politics as a struggle between the “corrupt elites” and “pure people,” which advocates for a political system which reflects the “general will” of the people (543). However, populism
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is often nebulously defined, both in common and political usage; often, we are more aware of the
group of political actors we classify as populist than the common threads that unite them (Linden
2008, 3; Mudde 2004, 541). Mudde (2007) goes on to classify the feature that characterizes radical
right-wing populism (RRP) in particular: nativism. Nativism combines nationalism and xenophobia
into an ideology built on the concept that only the people that belong to a nation should inhabit it
and that outsiders, be they people or ideas, are threatening to the nation (19). Open racism has
debated in RRP parties since World War II, in favor of coded forms of racism (Beyme 1988, 5;
Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009, 1). Their nationalist xenophobia often manifests itself in skepticism
of and hostility towards foreign and immigrant workers, so much so that scholars have questioned
whether some RRP parties have become single-issue parties (Beyme 1988, 6).

Bauer (2011) points out that RRP need not be right-wing in all respects; many Eastern European
RRP parties actually favor left-wing economic policies inspired by their former communist
governments. While this may lead to the conclusion that RRP parties are at least reactionary or
conservative, if not always right-wing, Beyme (1988) adds that they may be progressive, whether
through calls for expanded social programs or modernization efforts, as was the case as far back as
the fascist regimes in Italy and Germany. Rather, RRP parties are united by their nationalism, au-
thoritarianism, and anti-elitism, the latter two features often inspired by a frustration with the
democratic status quo (Bauer 2011, 58). This tradition stretches back to the fascist regimes of the
Second World War and, as I will explore later, associations with the Nazis explain some of the
difference between RRP support in Germany and Austria.

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14 Mudde (2007) provides examples to show that this conception of “national” and “outsider” can be fluid. Many Eastern European forms of RRP exclude “indigenous minorities” who have been part of the society for generations, while American RRP excludes the Native Americans who predate the United States and Israeli and Palestinian RRP each label the other as outsiders (Mudde 2007, 19).
As immigration in Western Europe began to rise in the 1980s, hostility towards migrants grew alongside it. In the most visible cases, migrants were confronted with threats and violence from extremists (Betz 1993, 195). But more broadly, political systems across Western Europe saw the rise of radical right-wing populist (RRP) parties: by the early 2000s, the majority of Western European countries had an electorally significant RRP party and almost half had seen one of these parties garner more than 10% of the vote in an election (Betz 1993, 195; Mudde 2013, 3; Swank and Betz 2003, 215–16; Zaslove 2004, 99). Similar parties began to emerge in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, garnering up to 20% of the vote share in some national elections (Rydgren 2011, 132). At the turn of the century, two RRP parties, the Freedom Party and Northern League, became coalition parties in the governments of Austria and Italy, the first time RRP parties have reached such a level of success since the end of the Second World War (Rydgren 2003, 45–46).

Rydgren (2003) attempts to capture the drivers of RRP support in two frameworks: “ethnic mobilization” and “mobilization of political protest.” Appreciable levels of xenophobia have always existed in Western European society, but RRP parties only see political success when issues that hinge on this xenophobia, notably immigration, come to public prominence (Rydgren 2003, 49). This analysis brings to light two structural changes that have helped these two mobilizations develop. First, political cleavages have begun to realign around social and cultural, rather than economic issues (Rydgren 2003, 49). This has strengthened ethnic mobilization, because ethnic groups that may previously have been split along socioeconomic lines are now more likely to band together on cultural issues. Second, political systems have seen growing discontent with entrenched political institutions and dominant parties (Rydgren 2003, 49). This has set the stage for the mobilization of political protest, with voters supporting less established parties, who may flout political norms, in order to express their disapproval of elites and the status quo. Rydgren (2003) attributes both these changes to the transition to post-industrial economies. This transition has laid the foundation for
both the decline in importance of economic cleavages, because traditional class structures are changing, as well as the growing discontent with entrenched institutions and elites, because the increasingly globalized world has taken power away from individual states – voters often misattribute this decline in power to a lack of effective leadership (Rydgren 2003, 49). This aligns closely with Inglehart’s (1971, 1977, 1997) theory of postmaterialist values and Inglehart and Norris’s (2017) analysis of this theory specifically regarding radical parties.

In Lipset and Raab’s (1970) analysis of the growth of right-wing extremism in the United States, they attribute rises in RRP movements to formerly entrenched dominant groups losing economic and political power and status, what they term the “once-hads.” As a result, these groups turn to conservative movements that aim to bring back the former status quo (Lipset and Raab 1970, 23–24). Similarly, post-industrialism and growing migration have created openings for political groups to appeal to the new European cohort of once-hads by calling for a return to the old status quo, both economically and ethnically (Rydgren 2003, 49).

Lipset and Raab point out that “never-hads” in the United States tend to gravitate towards left-wing movements that aim to increase government distribution towards them (1970, 23–24). However, there are important differences between America’s never-hads – largely made up of ethnic minorities – and Europe’s, who are drawn from generally more homogeneous populations. Rydgren postulates that European never-hads may be more persuaded by RRP rhetoric that blame economic problems on new immigrant populations, particularly claims that immigrants are using social services that natives “rightfully deserve” (2003, 49–50). Additionally, the decline of economic cleavages may erode the traditional right–left barrier between the once-hads and never-hads, strengthening the possibility of RRP parties exploiting ethnic mobilization (Rydgren 2003, 49–50).

But the recent rise in support for RRP parties in Europe is not solely the result of long-term socioeconomic changes. The more sudden events of the 2008 financial crisis and its slow recovery,
with effects still being felt today, must also shoulder some of the blame. Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch (2016) find that support for far-right parties increases after recessions, both because of economic anxieties as explained by Lipset and Raab and Rydgren, and because financial crises often force governments to take unpopular policy actions, like bailouts, which create animosity and precipitate the mobilization of political discontent. While the structural transition to a postindustrial economic system laid the groundwork for RRP to flourish, it was the post-2008 financial crisis which provided the spark for the rise in RRP movements we see today.

While these theories explain the rise of RRP throughout Europe, the influence of RRP is very different between Germany and Austria. Austria’s RRP party, the Freedom Party, has been one of Europe’s most influential, but RRP parties in Germany have been among the continent’s least successful (Art 2005, 6). Although the AfD saw success in Germany’s 2017 election, this was an outlier in a country with a history of poor showings for RRP parties. It remains to be seen whether this portends a decline in the country’s aversion to RRP parties, or if it is simply a fleeting success.

Both historical and institutional factors help explain the differing levels of RRP support in Austria than in Germany. From a historical perspective, Germany’s post-war collective consciousness has focused on shame and reparations for the war’s victims, stunting the development of RRP parties, while Austria’s is built on victimhood and an abdication of responsibility that has allowed RRP parties to flourish. Institutionally, Germany’s RRP parties have each only existed for short periods of time, while Austria’s Freedom Party has had the opportunity to enter coalition governments and was the only viable opposition party in Austria for decades. While the presence, or lack thereof, of RRP parties is in many ways a result of these differences of memory, it can also be a self-reinforcing factor. The influence of RRP parties today is an effect not just of memory, but also of the radicalization spiral, a process by which RRP parties radicalize their own supporters and, if allowed to reach a tipping point, the entire political system.
Collective memory and the Nazi regime

A key factor in understanding the differing role of radical right-wing populism in Germany and Austria today is the differences in the two states’ development of collective memory after the Second World War. Art (2005) shows that the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust has played an active role in both German and Austrian politics since the end of the war. However, both political elites and the people have come to vastly different conclusions regarding how the war should be remembered, and the differing extents to which the two states’ have accepted and atoned has deeply affected their political systems.

Nino (1996) argues that the very process of coming to terms with atrocities strengthens democracy and combats authoritarian tendencies. By debating and deliberating over the atrocities of authoritarian regimes and the correct recourse for its perpetrators, societies simultaneous debate and precipitate the reform of their own political systems (Nino 1996, 132–33). On the other hand, if societies dodge culpability for their actions, the systems which allowed autocracy to rise to power and human rights abuses to propagate unchecked. This leaves the potential for these ideologies to rear their heads again in the future.

While Nino (1996) focused his study on authoritarian Argentina, Booth (1999) finds that the process of confronting past injustices can also help deepen democratic norms in advanced, industrial societies. Austria and Germany transitioned from an authoritarian regime characterized by many of history’s greatest human rights abuses to two of the world’s most developed, democratic states. Therefore, per Nino and Booth’s frameworks, a historical reckoning at any point in their histories could have profound effects in stamping out the authoritarian current that helped the Nazis come to power. However, only Germany has taken significant steps to address its past.

Initial responses to Nazism in post-war Germany and Austria were similar. Both countries viewed Nazism as perversions of their national identities, and elites argued that the German and
Austrian people were victims who had been corrupted by the Nazi regime (Art 2005, 9). However, as time went on, the collective memory of the war evolved quite differently in the two states.

Germany’s collective memory of Nazism has been termed “vergangenheitsbewältigung,”15 or “the struggle to overcome the past.” Fulbrook (1999) argues that German collective memory of the Nazi regime has come to be characterized by collective guilt. While the Nazi past was initially erased, German national identity has gradually come to institutionalize the shame of the past, and set the Nazi regime as a baseline anti-identity (Fulbrook 1999, 28). Germany’s post-war identity has become as much about what it must not be – the Nazi regime – as what it is.

In contrast, Austria’s collective memory has been referred to as “the victim myth,” an abdication of responsibility for the atrocities of the Nazi regime. An unbiased examination of history reveals that Austrians were largely complicit with the Nazis, with many supporting and even leading acts of Nazi brutality (Luža 1975; Pauley 2000). On the whole, Austrians were no more resistant to the Nazis than Germans. But despite this reality, Austria’s collective memory paints a different picture: Nazi policies were imposed on Austria by the Germans, and Austrians were the Nazis’ first victims. By denying their people’s role in the Nazi regime, Austrians fail to reconcile with past atrocities. As such, the country has not seen the democracy-strengthening effects of coming to terms with the past, and have not eradicated the deep roots of authoritarianism, leaving fertile ground available for future RRP movements.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Germany

After the end of the Second World War, Germany’s immediate response was an attempt to erase all associations with its recent Nazi past (Fulbrook 1999, 25–28). Nazi monuments and symbols were removed from the public, and buildings were reappropriated for innocuous purposes

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15 ver-gahng-in-hytes-bah-vel-tih-guung
(Fulbrook 1999, 25–28). The occupying Allies encouraged this erasure: occupying Americans worried that intact monuments and buildings could become sites of resistance to the post-war regime; occupying Soviets replaced Nazi monuments with Communist symbols in the East (Fulbrook 1999, 26). But mere erasure did not last long. Soon, both East and West Germany sought to define new identities based on the repudiation of Nazi values.

Fulbrook (1999) argues that Germany sought to use the memory of Nazism and the Holocaust as an anti-identity. The regime and its atrocities were set as the baseline for what German national identity would no longer be (Fulbrook 1999, 27–28). In East Germany, national identity centered around Communist resistance to the Nazis (Fulbrook 1999, 28–35). Fulbrook describes the collective memory of the West, on the other hand, as defined by institutionalized shame (Fulbrook 1999, 36–45). The initial erasure of the Nazi past was slowly replaced by collective guilt.

Lutz (2012) points out that there has been a shift in German culture since the 1990s, corresponding with the end of the last generation to experience the Nazi regime firsthand. One explanation, therefore, for the rise in support for the AfD is that German collective shame towards the Nazi regime has declined along with the deaths of the Holocaust’s victims and perpetrators. Without living reminders of the horrors of right-wing authoritarianism, it is easier for the AfD to escape the intense scrutiny that has been placed on other RRP parties (Lutz 2012).

The victim myth in Austria

Austria’s denazification differed in important ways from Germany’s, leading to marked differences in the two countries’ post–Second World War national identities. Bunzl (1987) attributes Austria’s national identity to three primary factors: the “negation of Austrian co-responsibility for the Nazi era,” the Allies efforts to prevent Austro-German reunification, and economic development after the war (3). Rather than accepting full responsibility for the horrors of the Nazi regime in Austria, the Ally-backed Austrian government focused on a narrative under which Austrians had
been victimized by Nazi occupation and had not been involved in the regime’s atrocities to the same extent as German nationals (Knight 1992, 287; Young 1993, 91). Botz (2006) refers to this as the “victim myth” and Bunzl (1987) asserts that this constitutes the founding myth of the modern Austrian nation.

While Germany is clearly the most culpable nation for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, the Austrian people were cooperative and in many cases supportive of Nazi policies after the Anschluss, the period during which Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany. There is significant scholarly debate as to the extent that Austria welcomed unification, but it is clear that Nazi ideology did not face significant resistance in Austria when the two nations were joined (Knight 1992, 286–87). While it faced some elite opposition, unification with Germany fulfilled a national goal many Austrians felt had been deprived by the peace treaties after the First World War, which prohibited a union between the two states (Botz 2006, 191; Luža 1984, 3). Many Austrians, including powerful political parties, considered themselves members of the German nation and refused to accept the independence of the Austrian state (Luža 1984, 3). When the Nazis took power, their occupation was greeted with popular support and cheering crowds; the subsequent wave of pan-German nationalism overpowered the voices of the Anschluss’s opponents (Luža 1975, 44, 1984, 7).

Nazi rule received consensus support from wide swaths of the Austrian population, bolstered in particular by pan-German nationalists and the antisemitism of the Austrian Catholic Church, as well as by working class Austrians drawn in by the Nazis’ economic message (Botz 2006, 191; Pauley 2000, 150–56). Over 30% of politically active Austrian men went on to join the Nazi party,
a higher proportion than in most parts of Germany itself (Botz 2006, 191). While there was resistance to the Nazis in Austria, Nazi party members in Austria outnumbered resistance fighters by more than six to one (Botz 2006, 191). And even then, Luža argues that Austria’s resistance, more than any other Second World War resistance movement, was based more on patriotism than any ideological conflicts with Nazi rule (1984, 8). Nazi policies fit into a long lineage of Austrian antisemitism, built on religious foundations in the Austrian Catholic Church and amplified by social Darwinist arguments in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Botz 2006, 191; Knight 1992, 287; Pauley 2000, 11, 27, 150–56).

But Austrians’ widespread acceptance of Nazism was largely ignored in Austria’s post-war nation building (Améry 1985, 57; translated in Bunzl 1987, 3). As a result of the victimhood narrative, the government saw little necessity for widespread re-education, focusing their efforts on the most ardent Nazi supporters rather than the population as a whole (Knight 1992, 287). This ignored the positive views towards Nazis latent in the public consciousness. Many Austrians remembered the Nazi occupation fondly, citing the Nazi’s alleviation of poverty, building council houses, and reducing unemployment as beneficial to the Austrian nation going forward (Knight 1992, 287).

Denazification was also hindered by the “grand coalition” governing structure, which has characterized post-war Austrian politics (Knight 1992, 289). After 1945, the Austrian government was dominated by two parties: the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) (Müller 2000a, 86). No postwar government has been formed without including at least one of the two parties, and only three coalition governments have included any other party (Müller 2000a, 86–87, 2000b, 199). While the SPÖ and ÖVP have each formed single-party governments at

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16 Similarly, by the end of the war, Austrians were estimated to have made up half of the guards in concentration camps despite making up just one-tenth of Germany’s population (Young 1993, 357).
times, Austria has most often been ruled by “grand coalition” governments in which the two parties ruled together (Müller 2000a, 86–87). Knight (1992) shows that this arrangement damaged denazification efforts. The longstanding relationship between the two parties led to the development of the Proporz system, in which the two parties would divide spoils in quid pro quo arrangements (Knight 1992, 289). Instead of upholding the country’s commitment to keeping former Nazis out of political influence, one party would grant clemency to a former Nazi official with ties to the other party in exchange for the same in return (Knight 1992, 289–90). Mirroring the domestic Proporz system, the international politics of the Cold War meant that for most of Austria’s post-war history, the United States and Soviet Union strove not to upset Austria’s neutrality; as a result, both sides avoided leveling any blame for the war’s atrocities on Austria in the fear that this could push it into the hands of the enemy (Young 1993, 91).

The political failure of denazification is paralleled by a broader cultural apathy to the Nazi past. Commemorations of the war in Austria often lack shame and remorse for Austria’s actions during the Second World War. On one hand, the concentration camp Mauthausen has been preserved with monuments to its prisoners as a reminder of Nazi atrocities (Botz 2006, 191–92; Young 1993, 91–96). However, because Mauthausen was not a death camp, few of its prisoners were Jewish; while the Jewish monument notes that the Jewish prisoners were distinct in that they were accused of no crime, it is less prominent than the largest monument, to Soviet prisoners of war (Young 1993, 94–97). But on the other, war memorials throughout Austria rarely distinguish veterans of World War I and World War II when honoring those who died for the country, and many even commemorate Austrian SS officers killed in battle (Botz 2006, 192). Young characterizes Austria’s memorials as showing a deep ambivalence towards its past (1993, 91). It was not until the 2000s that plans were made for an official Holocaust memorial in Austria outside of the Mauthausen concentration camp, and the only Austrian memorials painting the country in a negative light have been constructed by
Jewish communities (Botz 2006, 192; Young 1993, 92). Even today, politicians often dog-whistle latent Nazi sympathy with calls to honor veterans of the war, attacks on injustices in the administration of denazification and the Allies’ “distortion of history,” and declarations that Austria is part of a “German cultural nation” (Knight 1992, 288).

While history provided the catalyst for the differences between RRP movements in Germany and Austria today, the process of differentiation has continued to this day. Post-war differences have been reproduced and amplified over time by the two states’ party structures.

The radicalization spiral

RRP parties are not merely the result of an environment of radical right-wing populism. The presence of these parties in the political system can fuel and strengthen RRP sentiment. To explain this process, I propose the framework of the radicalization spiral. RRP parties radicalize their political systems through three methods: radicalizing supporters, pulling mainstream parties, and entering governing coalitions. I present the framework as a spiral, because it is a feedback loop that expands to encompass larger segments of the political system, creating an ever-growing, self-perpetuating spiral. With each cycle, RRP parties radicalize their own supporters, pull established parties to the right, and absorb more voters into their sphere of influence.

Radicalizing supporters

One mechanism by which RRP parties can increase nativism is explained by the elite cues theory within the broader theory of political decision-making heuristics. Downs (1957) introduces the theory of heuristics in political decision-making. Because voters cannot have in-depth knowledge of every policy area in which they are expected to make decisions, they use intellectual shortcuts to form conclusions without needing to fully understand the issue (Downs 1957, 233). Gilens and Murakawa (2002) theorize that one of the most commonly used political decision-mak-
ing heuristics is taking elite cues: voters adopt the position of elites who they support, such as politicians, parties, or advocacy groups, when they do not have a firm position of their own on an issue. Carmines and Stimson (1980) propose that heuristics are used more in determining preferences towards “hard” issues than “easy” issues: “hard” issues require specialized knowledge, while “easy” issues reflect closely-held value. While immigration is an issue that reflects values, many of its individual aspects, like its effects on economics or social cohesion, require specialized knowledge to fully understand, leading voters to form their conclusions using heuristics (Gilens and Murakawa 2002, 19).

Hartevedt, Kokkonen, and Dahlberg (2017) corroborate this theory, showing that voters who join pro-immigrant parties become more supportive of immigration over time, and that voters who join anti-immigration parties become more hostile to immigration over time. The analysis finds that these effects are particularly extreme with regards to non-mainstream parties (Hartevedt, Kokkonen, and Dahlberg 2017, 1178). This suggests supporters of RRP parties will become more hostile to immigration, making them more susceptible to ethnic mobilization. This will in turn strengthen their support of the RRP party, creating a cycle of increased radicalization, the radicalization spiral.

This radicalization spiral can also occur, however, as a result of the mobilization of political discontent. Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange (2016) find that support for RRP parties also creates more frustration with political elites. Because RRP party leaders expose their supporters to anti-elitist messages, their supporters become increasingly unhappy with the political status quo. This, again, increases their support for the RRP party, facilitating the radicalization spiral.

**Pulling mainstream parties**

One of the strengths of RRP parties is their ability to fill political niches. When public opinion shifts rapidly, it takes time for major political parties to shift their agendas to adjust to the change (Rydgren 2003, 50). Rydgren proposes that this shift began as European economies shifted
from industrial to postindustrial production (2003, 50), and these changes were certainly intensified by the euro crisis of 2008. This leaves a space for smaller, more agile parties in the political arena, which have a greater ability to shift their positions to fill these gaps. The emergence of increased nativism as a result of the strengthening of cultural cleavages has allowed one of these niches to form (Rydgren 2003, 50). Similarly, the inability of mainstream parties to shift towards these growing sentiments has fomented discontent with the major parties, increasing the incidence of the mobilization of political protest, which the populist aspects of RRP parties stand ready to capitalize on (Rydgren 2003, 50).

But this flexibility means radical parties also serve another role in the political system: they alert major political parties to unfilled niches. Small, extremist parties carry less political baggage than large, mainstream parties, making them more capable of adapting to shifts in public sentiment. However, the major parties must shift to try to fill these niches occupied by smaller parties in order to maintain their dominance. As such, RRP parties can often lead more centrist parties to take up more radical positions, because they alert the major parties to the fact that they are no longer satisfying the voters’ desires.

Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) find that mainstream parties can also radicalize their supporters. In their analysis of the polarization of the two mainstream parties in the US system, they find that voters shift their opinions to accord with the party line when presented with polarized elite cues (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013, 65–70). Because mainstream parties adopt radical positions when the success of RRP parties expose political niches, this suggests that

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17 Slothuus (2016) further adds the caveat that experimental designs like those used by Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) likely underestimate the effect of elite cues in opinion formation.
the radicalization spiral resulting from elite cues can take place both within RRP parties and mainstream parties that adopt RRP positions.

**Entering governing coalitions**

Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) show that voters perceive parties that participate in coalition governments together to be more ideologically similar than their legislative records would suggest. This means that a mainstream party may not even need to adopt RRP positions to begin the radicalization spiral in its voters. If the party enters into a coalition with an RRP party, as the ÖVP has done with the FPÖ in Austria, this may be seen by the mainstream party’s supporters as an endorsement of RRP values. This can lead to the same radicalization process that occurs when mainstream parties adopt RRP parties’ positions.

**Radical right-wing populist parties in Germany**

Throughout Germany’s postwar history, official denazification policies and national sentiments of vergangenheitsbewältigung have stifled the development of RRP parties. While RRP movements have emerged in several waves, each has quickly receded after becoming associated with the Nazis. As a result, no party has been able to create a lasting radicalization spiral in Germany, because none has lasted long enough to create such an impact. The modern AfD represents a fourth wave of RRP in Germany. Because of its recent nature, it remains to be seen whether it will follow the same fate as its predecessors or if it will become an enduring force.

When the Federal Republic of Germany was established in 1949, a few RRP parties were founded, but few grew larger than minor local parties (Mudde 2000, 25–26). But this first wave of RRP parties came to an end by 1952, when the largest RRP party, the Socialist Reich Party (SRP), was banned along with dozens of associated parties due to their neo-Nazi characteristics (Mudde 2000, 26).
The second wave of RRP came in 1964 with the establishment of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) (Mudde 2000, 26). The party drew its leadership from established conservative parties in order to avoid the fate of the SRP; however, over two-thirds of its executives had been members of Hitler’s Nazi party (Mudde 2000, 26; Stöss 1991, 145). The NPD came on to the mainstream radar after gaining support in regional election in the late 1960s (Stöss 1991, 144–47). However, the NPD significantly underperformed expectations in the 1969 federal election, after receiving mounting criticism for its use of violence and intimidation tactics (Mudde 2000, 26–28; Stöss 1991, 147–49). After failing to gain any seats in the election, it was never seated in any federal, regional, or local legislature again, and disbanded in the 1980s (Mudde 2000, 27–78; Stöss 1991, 146–47).

The third wave of German RRP emerged with the founding of The Republicans (Die Republikaner) in 1983 (Stöss 1991, 203). The Republicans split from the CDU and CSU, moving to the right; the party embraced the label of “right-wing radicals,” but worked to distance themselves from extremism and neo-Nazism, which had brought down the NDP (Stöss 1991, 202). The Republicans embraced euroscepticism, arguing that Germany should focus on reunifying the East and West before integrating further with Europe (Stöss 1991, 203). Like other eurosceptic parties, The Republicans saw their greatest electoral success in the European Parliament (Mudde 2000, 33; Stöss 1991, 205). But during this wave, RRP in Germany saw its occasional success limited to European and state elections, and was not a significant force on the national stage, until the beginning of the fourth wave (Decker 2016, 1–2).

The fourth wave of German RRP is embodied by the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the country’s most significant RRP party today (Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri 2015, 154). When the party was founded in 2013, The Republicans regularly received less than one percent of the vote in federal elections (Mudde 2013, 3). On the other hand, while the AfD could not cross the five-percent threshold needed to gain seats in the 2013 parliamentary election, it received 7.1% of the vote in the
2014 European elections (Decker 2016, 2). The party followed this with respectable showings in state elections from 2014 to 2016, particularly in former East Germany; its support in former West Germany was more limited, but it was able to clear the five-percent threshold to enter the state parliaments in Hamburg and Bremen in 2015 (Cantow et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b; Decker 2016, 2; Statistisches Landesamt Sachsen-Anhalt 2016). The 2017 federal elections were a watershed moment for the AfD. The AfD became the first RRP party to clear the 5% electoral threshold since the end of official denazification, garnering 94 of the Bundestag’s 709 seats, becoming the third largest party in Germany (Federal Returning Officer 2017).

Immigration was not a key issue for the AfD at its founding. The movement that spawned the party was catalyzed by the euro and financial crises in the European Union and called for an end to monetary union and a halt to further European integration (Decker 2016, 2). However, the AfD began to see its greatest success when it entered Germany’s debate over immigration (Decker 2016, 3–4). The AfD has channeled the energy of protest movements like Pegida into an RRP party platform built around anti-immigrant politics. As controversy over the refugee crisis grew, the AfD became the primary mouthpiece for resistance to Angela Merkel’s pro-refugee policies.

Of any of Germany’s RRP parties, the AfD has made the greatest effort to begin the radicalization spiral. Its greatest success has come in shifting the positions of mainstream parties. First, transformed from a primarily anti-establishment party to an anti-migrant party. As a result, their elite cues have shifted from mobilizing political discontent to ethnic mobilization, radicalizing their supporters against refugees. Second, while Angela Merkel is still seen as keeping Germany open for refugees, pressure from the AfD has led to increased divisions on migration within the CDU, and forced the party to moderate some of its pro-migrant positions. Facing outcry after reports of attacks by refugees in Cologne, Merkel pushed for legislation to make it easier to deport asylum seekers (The Economist 2016; Karnitschnig 2016; Koren 2016). Pressure from the CSU has also led the
CDU to make concessions and allow for legislation to limit annual inflows of refugees (Connolly 2017). However, the AfD has had little success in entering coalitions, as Angela Merkel’s CDU has made concerted efforts to keep it out of government. This is the aspect of the spiral where the AfD has achieved the least success so far, but Germany’s mainstream parties may be unable to keep it out of government if it maintains its base of support.

*The Freedom Party in Austria*

The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) has been a significant force in Austrian politics since its founding in 1955, as the successor to the League of Independents (VdU), which had been formed just after the end of the Second World War in 1949 (Betz 1994, 11). Austria’s RRP parties have benefited from the country’s long history of grand coalition government. The dominance of the two major parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, left Austria with only one significant opposition party for most of its history: first the far-right VdU, and later its successor, the FPÖ (Knight 1992, 290; Müller 2000a, 86–87). Between the decline of the Communist Party (KPÖ) after 1947 and the establishment of the Greens in 1986, voters had no significant options outside the dominant center-left and center-right parties and the opposition far-right party (Müller 2000a, 86). This meant that the far-right often stood to benefit from discontents with the ruling government, as voters had no other viable alternatives when the SPÖ and ÖVP formed grand coalition governments. This fits with Arzheimer and Carter (2006) and Hakhverdian and Koop’s (2007) findings that RRP parties are more electorally successful in political systems with grand coalition governments and entrenched norms of political cooperation. It also aligns Rydgren’s theory that RRP parties have benefited from growing discontent with major political parties across Europe (2003, 49).

The theory of elite cues, developed by Downs (1957), Carmines and Stimson (1980), and Gilens and Murakawa (2002), detailed above, helps to explain why the presence of the FPÖ may have not simply given a voice to xenophobia and nationalism, but actually increased its prevalence in
Austrian society. Many of the FPÖ’s voters may have come to support the party in order to oppose the political establishment of the grand coalition and may not have particularly favored the party’s stance towards migration. But based on the theory of the radicalization spirals, FPÖ supporters who joined the party because of the mobilization of political discontent would have become more radicalized against immigration as a result of elite cues from the party’s leadership, creating a stronger ethnic mobilization. In this way, the political architecture of the Austrian state could feasibly have created a gradual rise in anti-migrant sentiments, particularly between the collapse of the KPÖ and the establishment of the Greens.

**Conclusion**

Austria and Germany’s divergent migration policies during the era of the refugee crisis are best explained by examining the influence of radical right-wing populism in the two countries. In particular, the presence of a strong, long-running RRP party in Austria, the Freedom Party, has radicalized the Austrian political system in a way that Germany’s short-lived, sporadic RRP parties could not.

Radical right-wing populist parties facilitate the radicalization spiral in their political systems. Through elite cues, they can radicalize their supporters’ policy preferences, even if they receive support primarily as an expression of protest against the mainstream parties of the establishment. By exposing political niches to established parties, they can pull mainstream parties to adopt radical right-wing positions, exposing mainstream voters to similarly radicalizing elite cues. And by forming coalition governments with mainstream parties, RRP parties can distort voters’ perceptions of established parties, sending voters radicalizing cues even if established parties do not change their positions. Because the Freedom Party has a larger base of support and has had more time to send radicalizing signals than any German RRP party, the Austrian political system has become more radicalized than the German system, priming it to create anti-migrant policies.
But the party system in Austria and Germany are not exogenous variables. Instead, they reflect historical differences in the post-war reconstruction of the two countries. While German collective memory of the war is characterized by *vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the guilt associated with the atrocities of the Nazi regime, the victim myth dominates Austrian collective memory, allowing Austrians to abdicate responsibility for the atrocities committed with the complicity, and often support, of the Austrian people. These different memories of right-wing authoritarianism in the two countries reproduce themselves in different attitudes toward RRP parties today. German parties have struggled to overcome associations with the Nazi party and the shame associated with it, while Austria’s Freedom Party has been unmarred by similar comparisons. The differences in Austria and Germany’s historical memory of the Second World War laid the foundation for the differences observed between the two countries’ RRP parties today.

While economics and demographics, rather than party structure and historical consciousness, are more frequently cited in explaining European refugee policies, these analyses do not explain the differences between German and Austrian policy. While Germany’s actions fit squarely within the theory of replacement migration, Austria’s actions do not reflect the economic and demographic realities of the country’s population decline. Instead, the radicalization of the Austrian political landscape has prevented Austria from acting in its economic self-interest, while the comparative lack of radicalization in Germany has allowed it to respond to the population decline with economic rationality.

But the 2017 election and the rise of the AfD represent a possible turning point for Germany. While the AfD has not yet radicalized the German political system to the same extent that the FPÖ has in Austria, it is a new phenomenon and has succeeded in mobilizing an anti-migrant base and pulling government policies to the right. It remains to be seen whether the AfD’s support will fizzle
out like that of Germany’s previous RRP movements, or if the AfD will overcome the country’s *vergangenheitsbewältigung* and begin to radicalize the country like the FPÖ. Only time will tell.
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