

Opening borders: A triumph or a failure?

The impact of Merkel's asylum policy in Germany during the refugee crisis



Roser Lafont Colomines
Bachelor Thesis
International Relations
2021-2022
Tutor: Juan Pablo Soriano Gatica

"I think that there is a huge division in German society and there are a lot of sectors that do not accept us, like some of the refugees that I know do not accept German people. This just creates huge hate in society and of course a lot of division between "us" and the "others". However, I do believe that is a human thing to be more attached to the ones that are from your group, but as I say, we should try and not give up because it is great to feel integrated."

Interview Ahmad Bkaira

Introduction

2015 Refugee Crisis → Entrance of 1M refugees fleeing the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria

Angela Merkel completely changed her political discourse and applying her **humanitarian side** opened up the borders of Germany. The Chancellor found an important **opposition sector** led mainly by the **far-right** in Germany. Their main arguments against the "Open-door" policy were the increase in **crime rate** and the **negative impact** on the **German economy**.

Objective

This research project aims to develop a study of the **impact** of Angela Merkel's "**Open-door**" policy in **Germany**, in order to understand how it **affected** to Chancellor's **public perception** among the population in Germany.

Hypothesis

1.- The **negative predictions** regarding the high increase in the **crime rate** and the stagnation or decline in **economic development** announced by the opponents of the "Open-door" policy did **not come true**.

2.- Although the negative predictions of the crime rate and economic development are not fulfilled, the German **national perception** of Angela Merkel among the **public opinion worsens** due to the success of the negative propaganda of the opposition over the implementation of solutions by the Chancellor.

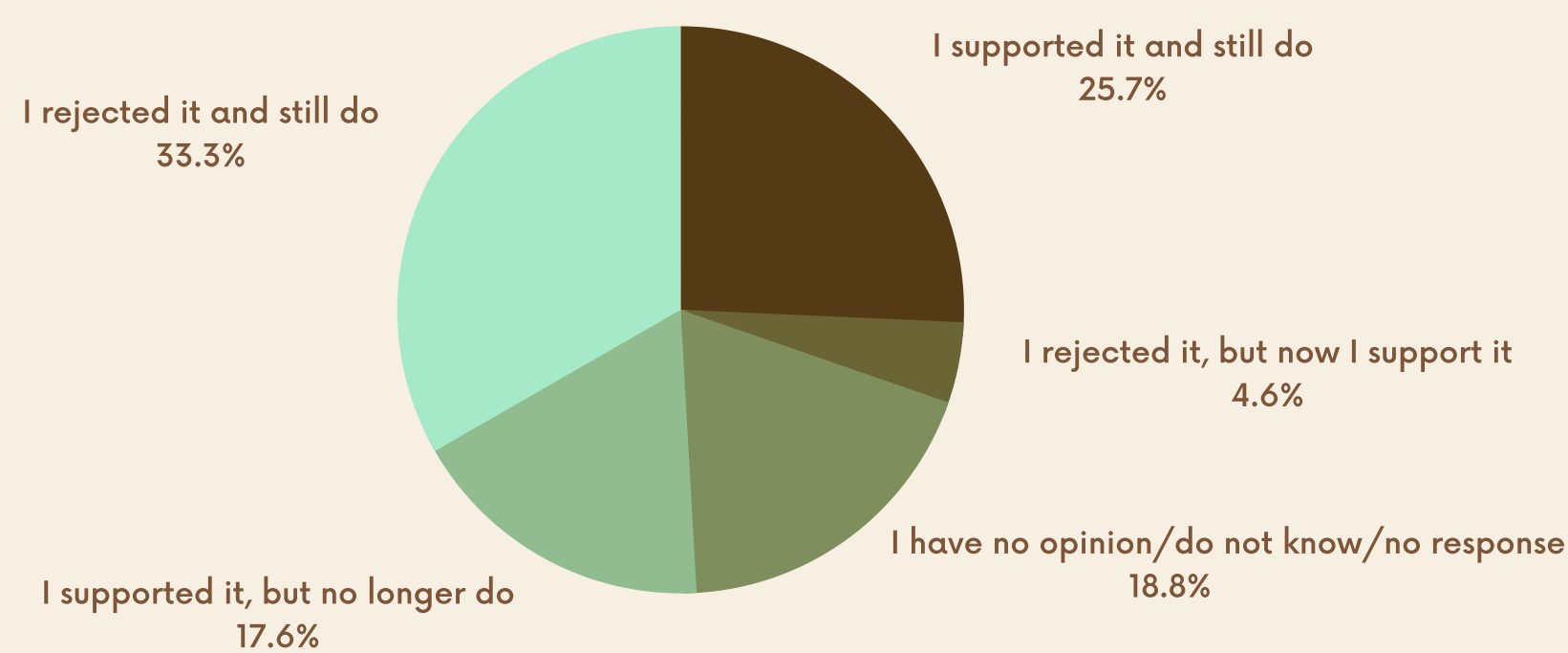
"My brother saved up and he paid a smuggler in order to help me leave Syria. So, when I was 14 years old I entered Turkey illegally and alone through a criminal mafia."

Interview Abdul Al Rahman

Methodology

- Review the most relevant documents on the "Open-door" policy, both **primary** and **secondary sources**.
- Qualitative** format
- Analysis of the three social indicators through academic works and quantitative data from official sources like **Polizeiliche Kriminalistik**, **Deutsche Welle** and **Pew Research Institute**.
- Interviews** have been carried out with Ahmad Bkaira and Abdul Al Rahman, two **refugee boys** that I met in **Berlin** with the Erasmus + Program. Both interviews were conducted once I had already returned to Spain via video call.

What is your opinion of Angela Merkel's refugee policy?



Deutsche Welle. (2017, 1st August). German media «distort» refugee crime rates, study finds. DW.COM. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-media-distort-refugee-crime-rates-study-finds/a-3992189>

Results

- Crime rate:** there was **not a sudden or disproportionate increase**. It is possible to observe a **small upturn** in the data on crime recorded but it can be clearly **explained** through different **social factors** and **shortcomings in research**. These, added to the opposition's propaganda, caused that while the **crime slowly grew** and reached a point of **decrease**, the **terror** towards refugees **increased** in German society.
- Economic development:** Germany **benefited** greatly from the entry of refugees but it was some time after their arrival. The **difference** between refugees and Germans in **academic skills**, the **slow asylum process** and **recognition** of their studies and **work experiences** caused a great **slowdown in their integration into the labour market**, and therefore a greater **dependence** on the German aid system. This, fueled by the negative message of the extreme right, provoked in German society a feeling of **rejection** towards **refugees** who seemed **conformist**.
- Perception of Angela Merkel among German public opinion:** she went from a pragmatic view to becoming a **conviction leader** motivated by principled beliefs. Initially, she found an **important sector of support** in her implementation of the "Open-door" policy. However, the **fears of a crisis** in the country's **economy** and a **rebound in crime rates** lurked the rest of the German population and **won her battle**. This led her to take a **step back** and apply **limitations**.

Conclusions

- Angela Merkel did the **right thing** → **conviction leader**.
- The **German population** was constantly **bombarded** with messages by the **far-right parties** = believe the **negative impact** of refugees in Germany.
- Solutions:**
 - Promote rigorous statistical studies and show the real impact.
 - Large apparatus of integration policies must have been put into operation, not only for the refugees but also for the nationals.

Highlight the real need for an **exhaustive study** on the **impact** of this policy, because a very similar case is being experienced with the war in Ukraine, and the view has changed when a solution to two very similar problems has been sought

Bibliography

- Brückner, H., Jaschke, P., & Kosyakova, Y. (2019, December). Integrating refugees and Asylum seekers into the German economy and society: empirical evidence and policy objectives. Migration policy institute
- Feltes, T., List, K., & Bertamini, M. (2016). More refugees, more offenders, more crime? Critical comments with data from Germany. Ruhr University Bochum
- Gehrsitz, M., & Ungerer, M. (2016, December). Jobs, crime and votes- a short-run evaluation of the refugee crisis in Germany. ZEW.
- Glenny, M. (2021, May 29). The Refugee Crisis Has Produced One Winner: Organized Crime. Revista de Prensa. <https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/the-refugee-crisis-has-produced-one-winner-organized-crime/>
- Helms, L., van Esch, F., & Crawford, B. (2018, May). Merkel III: From committed pragmatist to conviction leader? Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1462340>
- OECD. (2017). Labour Market Integration of Refugees in Germany (pag. 31-63). <https://www.oecd.org//migrationTeam>. B. R. C. (2018, 13th September). Reality Check: Are migrants driving crime in Germany? BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45419466>

UAB

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona