



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Facultat de Ciències Polítiques i Sociologia

Final Degree Project

Executive Summary

Opening borders: A triumph or a failure?

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

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In 2015, Europe witnessed the entrance of more than a million people through European borders fleeing the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria requesting political asylum.

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.

This research project aims to develop a study of the impact of Angela Merkel's “Open-door” policy in Germany, to understand, at the same time, how it affected to Chancellor's public perception among the population in Germany. With the aim of being able to focus on the information search process and collect it in clear conclusions, the following two hypotheses have been marked:

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.

To be able to justify the future conclusions of this research project, it has been necessary to review the most relevant documents on the “Open-door” policy, both primary and secondary sources. Due to the fact that the research process is intended to be of a qualitative format with the analysis of the three social indicators through academic works and quantitative data from official sources like Polizeiliche Kriminalistik, Deutsche Welle and Pew Research Institute.

The results obtained through the analysis of the research data have made evidence of the affectations that have caused a negative image of Angela Merkel at the national level. In the case of the crime rate, there was not a sudden or disproportionate increase. It is possible to observe a small upturn in the data on crime recorded¹ 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. On the case of the 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 system². This, fueled by the negative message of the extreme right, provoked in German society a feeling of rejection towards refugees who seemed conformist. Finally, Angela

¹ Team, B. R. C. (2018, 13th September). Reality Check: Are migrants driving crime in Germany? BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45419466>

² Brücker, 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.

Merkel 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 battle³. This, led her to take a step back and apply limitations on the flow of refugees, even signing an Agreement in 2016 with the president of Turkey about European border safeguard.

In conclusion, Angela Merkel did the right thing, she set aside her pragmatic face and became a conviction leader. However, German population was constantly bombarded with messages by the far-right parties like Alternative für Deutschland that alluded to the negative impact of refugees. She would have had to promote rigorous statistical studies and show the real impact of the arrival of refugees in Germany, thus nullifying the negative propaganda of the opposition. Added to this, and immediately after the arrival of the refugees, a large apparatus of integration policies must have been put into operation, not only for the refugees, but also for the nationals, who are experiencing a new situation that creates great fears. These policies must be aimed at promoting the independence of refugees shortly after their arrival, as well as the creation of direct ties between refugees and nationals. This research project aims to 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.

³ 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>