

The Research of Der Spiegel's Reports of the Right-wing Populist Alternative for Germany Party

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Abstract

In the past decade, the impact of the 2008 US subprime mortgage crisis has affected every country in the five continents and seven oceans. The political crisis caused by the economic recession has led to the wave of populism sweeping many western developed countries including Europe and the United States. The "democracy and freedom" that western countries have always pursued is threatened by populist parties. In this context, the paper carries out quantitative analysis and content analysis on der Spiegel's report on the AfD, and on this basis, combs its reporting framework, discovers and analyzes the imbalance of its reporting from the reporting framework, and probes into the causes and enlightenment of the imbalance of reporting.

Keywords

Germany; Populism; Der Spiegel; Alternative for Germany (AfD).

1. The Rise of Populism

1.1. A Wave of Populism Sweeps Europe

With the outbreak of the SUBPRIME mortgage crisis in the United States in 2008, the global financial storm was triggered. In the following year, the European sovereign debt crisis first broke out in Greece. As time went on, the crisis deepened further and gradually spread to other European countries, including Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Spain, which were affected to varying degrees. It was the most severe economic crisis to hit the capitalist world since 1929, and western scholars called it "the Great Recession". The fallout has devastated Europe's heavily indebted countries and triggered a series of political crises. Affect political stability, economic depression in the country of representative polity some politicians to win more votes using social contradictions voters to gain sympathy and support, the power of the populist party rising and highlight, the continent's political ecology is undergoing unprecedented change and challenge since world war ii, eroding the mainstream values of the Europe established after the world war II.

In recent years, almost all of Europe has been clouded by populism. Brexit shocked the world, the far-right Rassemblement National party (Rassemblement National) made a huge impact on French politics, and the rapid rise of the Right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AFD) as a dark horse in German politics made the world doubt the most stable German politics. The old continent of Europe entered a period of upheaval in which various forces surged.

1.2. The Rise of Populist Parties in Germany

Under the influence of a series of major international events, such as the European debt crisis, refugee crisis and Brexit, German politics has also undergone great changes since the end of World War II. The 2017 Bundestag election saw six parties enter parliament for the first time, with the far-right AfD surging to become the third largest party in parliament, while Germany's two traditional parties (CDU and SPD) -- are losing ground.

The AfD was founded in 2013 as an anti-euro party. Although it had a strong momentum of development at the beginning of its birth, it was unable to enter the Federal Parliament due to the extremely high support rate of volkswann (the combined support rate of the League party and the Social Democratic Party was more than 67%). However, four years later, the AfD is no longer a fledgling party. The AfD not only has a firm foothold in 13 states (out of Germany's 16 federal states), but also has a significant influence in the Federal Parliament, and has developed into a serious threat to traditional political parties.

The AfD has grown steadily over the past few years. In the 2017 Bundestag elections, the AfD quickly became the third largest party in German politics. In 2018, the support rate of the AfD surpassed that of Germany's oldest mainstream party, the Social Democratic Party, for the first time. This year was also the most active year for the AfD, and the domestic media paid a lot of attention to it. To some extent, the party's growth also reflects the deepening of social fragmentation in Germany, as well as the weakening influence and appeal of Germany's established political parties. Many politicians are helpless in the face of the current changes in the domestic political ecology.

2. Text Analysis of Der Spiegel's Reports on the AfD

The reason why this paper chose the reports of this year as the research sample is mainly due to the following considerations: In 2018, the German politics was in turmoil, and the difficult formation of a government, the rise of Right-wing forces, and the serious xenophobia of the domestic public tested the ecological balance of German politics. It was also a year of rapid growth for the AfD in German politics. In the local elections of Hesse and Bavaria in 2018, AfD won 10.3% and 13.1% of the votes, and successfully entered the local assemblies of 16 German states. This year can be regarded as a "highlight moment" in the history of AfD's development, and at the same time, it also attracted extensive media attention. Therefore, the data selected in 2018 are typical and representative to a certain extent.

2.1. The Overall Picture of Report

By combing Die Spiegel's coverage of the AfD from January 1 to December 31, 2018, I obtained a sample of 71 articles from the 8 nature weeks constructed. According to the data, the number of reports per week can be calculated to be more than 8, and the probability of 1 report per day can be calculated. It can be seen that Spiegel Online pays more attention to the AfD in general, as shown in Figure 1 and 2.

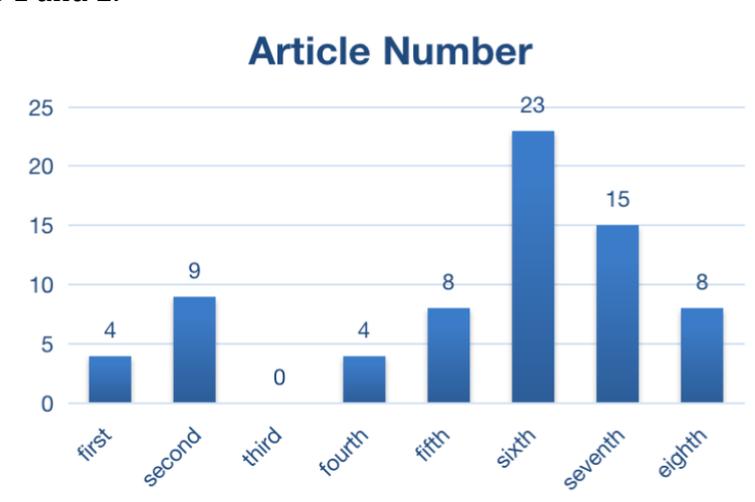


Figure 1. Number of Spiegel Online's reports on the AfD in 8 Nature weeks in 2018 (unit: article)



Figure 2. Proportion of Spiegel Online's reports of the AfD in 8 Nature weeks in 2018

As can be seen from the above data, in the eight-week report sample, the sixth week (corresponding to the sampling period from September 3 to October 23) received the largest amount of coverage, with 23 reports related to the AfD, accounting for 32% of the total number of reports. There are clear signs of populism being stoked in Germany following the Chemnitz riots in August and subsequent demonstrations. Therefore, AfD, as a far-right party whose support rate in the Federal Parliament is second only to that of the CDU and SPD, has attracted public attention.

However, the data showed that in the third week (corresponding to the sampling period of April 9 to May 27), Spiegel Online's reports of the AfD was zero, focusing on the Trump-Kim meeting, which was covered at great length. Therefore, coverage of the AfD was not captured in the sample.

Looking at the reports of the other weeks, the number of reports in the seventh week (the corresponding sampling period is from October 22 to December 9) is relatively large, reaching 15. During this period, AfD was deeply involved in the financial scandal. With the development of the situation, the media paid more attention to AfD. At this time, AfD was Mired in a financial scandal, and as the situation developed, media attention on AfD increased. The number of reports on the AfD varied little in the remaining weeks, with weekly reports accounting for around 6% to 11% of the total.

Based on the above analysis, the German cabinet reshuffle was successful at the beginning of 2018, but the support rate of the two main traditional parties was not optimistic. The German Alternative party (AfD), a rising power in German politics, has also become the focus of public opinion. Especially at a time when there are frequent populist and anti-populist demonstrations in Germany, reports about the Right-wing populist Alternative for Germany party have increased.

2.2. Report Subject Analysis

After sorting out the contents of the text, this paper extracts several major themes of Spiegel Online's coverage of the AfD, including party competition, Right-wing populism, Chemnitz riots, criticism or opposition to the AfD and other six themes. Specific reports are shown in Table 1 and figure 2.

Table 1. Spiegel Online's coverage of the AfD in 2018 (Unit: Article)

Keywords	Party competition	Populism	Chemnitz riots	scandal	Criticize or oppose AfD	else
The report of all kinds of key words	13	30	5	11	6	6

As can be seen from the above data, the most reported topic of The AfD in 2018 was populism, with a number of 30 articles, accounting for 42% of the total coverage. Specifically, they mainly focused on racism, xenophobia, activities of extreme Right-wing elements, neo-Nazis and other aspects. This part mainly talks about the connection between AfD and Right-wing populism, reports AfD officials contacting Right-wing populists or discussing the relationship between AfD and neo-Nazis, etc.

In addition, political party competition was also the focus of Spiegel online's coverage, among other topics. Reports of this segment is also relatively large, accounting for 18% of the total reports. Such reports are mainly carried out from the following three aspects: analyzing the support rate of each party based on the poll results, analysis of the influence of each political party by the number of donations received from each party, AfD's political threat to the CDU. Scandal-themed stories accounted for 16 percent of the total, focusing on the donation scandal to the AfD, allegations of racial discrimination by AfD officials and the party's suspected collaboration with Russian intelligence. Since the reports are largely based on a series of scandals involving the AfD, it is grouped under the subject matter.

3. Case Analysis of Typical Reports

3.1. Party Competition

Spiegel Online's report on the subject mainly analyzed the rapid rise in popularity of AfD based on the support rate of each political party, and expressed concern over the declining support rate of traditional political parties. For example, a report on 1 December 2018 quoted Friedrich Merz, the former CDU group leader, as saying: "Teile der CDU unterschätzen die Politische Gefahr, Die von der AfD Ausgeht (some CDU members underestimate the political threat of the AfD)", Merz suggested the AfD was Nazi and said "Mir Lauft es Eiskalt den Rucken Herunter, Wenn in diesem Land Leute MIT dem Hitlergruß durch die Gegend laufen. (I feel a shiver down my spine as people walk across the Land with Hitler's salute). In response to this situation, Merz added, "Da Mussen wir doch was dagegensetzen. Das ist Das, was Mich umtreibt und Antreibt (What do we have to do, and that's why I'm running now).

3.2. Populism

Spiegel Online has the most reports around populist themes. A report on June 5, 2018 quoted Martin Schulz, former president of the Social Democratic Party, in his introduction as saying, "Die AfD ist eine offen Fremdenfeindliche, Demokratieskeptische und Autoritar Argumentierende Partei (The AfD is an openly xenophobic, democratic and authoritarian polemical party). " The article quotes Schulz throughout, attacking the AfD and calling for Germany to lead the EU's campaign against populism. A report on 19 September focused on "In Wahlkämpfen postete er unter Anderem rassistische Au ßerungen. Der afd-Bundestagsabgeordnete Thomas Seitz hat Durch einen Gerichtsbeschluss Jetzt Seinen Beamtenstatus Verloren (Thomas Seitz, an AfD's official, was ordered to resign by a court after making racist remarks during the campaign)."

3.3. Chemnitz Riots

Spiegel Online reported a surge in populism after the Chemnitz riots in August 2018. The AfD became the target of criticism as some reports referred to the party only on the subject, while

others linked the Right-wing populist party to the unrest caused by extreme Right-wing populists. In the wake of the Chemnitz conflict, there have been calls for the country's constitutionally protective body to monitor the AfD. According to a report dated 3 September 2018, "Auch die Mehrheit der Deutschen wünscht sich einer Umfrage zufolge eine Überwachung der AfD. (Majority of Germans want an investigation into the AfD)".

3.4. Political Scandal

Spiegel Online's scandalous reports of the AfD is also informative. A report on August 17, 2018 focused on "Niedersachsens früherer Umweltminister Stefan Wenzel hat Strafanzeige gegen Vertreter der Rechtspopulisten erstattet. Der Vorwurf: illegale Wahlkampffinanzierung (Stefan Wenzel, a former environment minister in Lower Saxony, has filed criminal charges against politicians from the Right-wing populist AfD party, alleging illegal campaign financing)." "Nun muss die frühere AfD-Vorsitzende auch in Leipzig vor Gericht. Der Vorwurf: Steuerhinterziehung (Now the former head of the AfD has to go to court, accused of tax evasion)." Said an Oct. 30 story. In addition to the financial scandals, the AfD has been accused of having links to Russian intelligence services, receiving donations, and officials deriding Turkish resignations.

3.5. Criticize or Oppose the AfD

The number of reports criticizing or opposing the AfD is relatively small compared with the topics analyzed above. The main content is that the AfD is criticized or opposed by other parties or individuals. For example, a February 27, 2018 report titled "Unionsfraktion Lehnt Zusammenarbeit MIT AfD AB (The Syriza party refused to cooperate with the AfD)." However, it can be seen from the following report that the Coalition party refuses to cooperate with the AfD and the Green Party, but only the AfD is reflected in the title without the Green Party. It also quoted other officials as criticizing the AfD and saying monitoring was justified.

3.6. Else

In addition to the above five themes, a small number of reports only mentioned AfD without too much analysis and reporting, so detailed analysis is not made for the time being.

4. Frame Analysis of the Reports

4.1. A Populist Party with High Approval Ratings

It is also impossible to ignore the fact that reports on the high support rate of the AfD have basically penetrated reports on the above topics. Polls cited in the January 9, 2018 report showed the AfD narrowly trailing the SPD. From a news article on September 3, 2018: Die AfD Habe 'Ihre Bürgerliche Maske Endgültig Fallen Gelassen', Sie sei 'Zur Vorfeldorganisation von Rassisten und Faschisten' Geworden (Andrea Nahles, the SPD's leader, said the AfD had "finally given up their bourgeois mask" and had become a front for racists and fascists).

4.2. The Danger of Germany Lurching to the Right

In commentariat that delve into the AfD, the question of whether Germany is in danger of lurching to the right is often raised, and that is where the ruling party, or some politicians, are most worried about the country. A March 15, 2018 article titled "Ich bin Gegen Einen Dialog MIT Rechtsextremisten (I refuse to talk to Right-wing extremists)" interviewed Bernhard, a Vienna-based expert on Right-wing extremism Mr Weidinger has many suggestions for how Germany could do better to deal with the Right-wing Alternative for Germany party. A news article on June 5th quoted Martin Schulz, a former leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), as saying that the EU was in danger and that it was about democratic freedoms, not just billions or a few families, his fears and his determination to fight for them.

4.3. There have been Scandals Involving Non-mainstream Parties

From the analysis of the sample content, the AfD scandal has become an important issue of concern to Spiegel Online. Spiegel Online reported six scandals, including AfD's links with Russian intelligence, unknown donations, illegal means to protest Merkel's visit to Nizhsen, allegations of tax evasion, and racial discrimination. Some of the scandals were also cited in other reports as the situation deepened.

5. Conclusion

It has been more than a decade since the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis broke out in 2008, but its impact is still growing. The resurgence of populism in continental Europe is the most direct manifestation of popular dissatisfaction with the political system at the bottom of the economic depression. This paper takes der Spiegel, the representative of Germany's advanced serious journalism, as the research object of its report on Germany's Right-wing populist Alternative for Germany party. Based on reading many reports, content analysis and case analysis are used to explore the content, characteristics and the framework presented by the reports. The study found that der Spiegel's coverage of the AfD was largely negative, mainly because Germany had paid a terrible price for the Nazi party. After the War, the German government and all sectors of society made unremitting efforts to reflect on the crimes of the Second World War and prevent the resurgence of Nazism. Now, the rise of populism has made them alert once again to prevent it from turning into Nazism and once again pushing Germany, Europe and the world into the abyss of the World War II. From this perspective, the German mainstream media's disregard for populism and suppression of reports can be regarded as its efforts to safeguard social and national security and stability, and is the embodiment of the German mainstream media's high sense of social responsibility.

However, the influence of blindly suppressing reports on the guidance of public opinion is not satisfactory. In this respect, the rising support rate of the AfD is the most direct proof. Therefore, German mainstream media should also pay attention to and reflect on this point. What kind of reporting method can better play its role in guiding public opinion and stabilizing society? In the rapid development of information technology at present, the media also should innovate its report way, improve reporting concept, to meet the needs of era and audience habits, so to remain the invincible position in the flood of information, to better play its guiding public opinion, safeguard national and social stability, to better reflect its social responsibilities and bear.

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