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# Public Discourse on Migration in Germany and the United States Before and After 2015: Racist Media Narratives in the Global Right

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**Abstract**

Within the past decade, migration has become an increasingly controversial subject in Western countries, producing a right-wing and nationalist backlash. In Europe, Germany became the core of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 and gained global attention for Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door policy towards refugees. This substantial influx of refugees into the country caused a sharp discursive shift regarding migrants and refugees in the German media during and after 2015. At the same time, Donald Trump announced his eventually successful presidential campaign by cultivating a starkly anti-immigrant platform, which generated disproportionate media attention for his campaign and intensified anti-immigrant rhetoric in mainstream media. In both countries, the discourse on migrants and refugees derived from similar racist historical stereotypes about men of color being sexual predators. I argue that despite the differences in the German and American contexts of these discursive shifts, the similar discursive trends in both countries' mainstream media and the manufactured, transnational accumulation of racist rhetoric on social media demonstrate that migration is the primary issue that increasingly unifies right-wing parties.

1. **Introduction**

The year 2015 marked a watershed moment for public discourse on migration in both Germany and the United States, though for different reasons; Germany accepted an unprecedented one million refugees during the Syrian refugee crisis, the most of any EU country, just as Donald Trump announced his presidential campaign in the U.S. with an inflammatory speech that labeled Mexican immigrants as "rapists and criminals" (Lee 2018). The similarities that these countries share render their comparison a fruitful exercise to examine the subject of migration discourse in developed Western countries, but the differences between the German and American contexts are perhaps even more pertinent to the development of migration discourse, in which one of the universal key actors is the media.

In both countries, the media has played a critical role in molding discourse about migrants by normalizing discriminatory labels used to describe migrants. This paper analyzes the extent to which discursive shifts occurred in and around this pivotal year in Germany and the U.S. in their respective historical contexts. After paying due attention to the specific sociocultural and economic contexts of each case, I demonstrate that both cases do not exist in separate vacuums, but are symptomatic of a broader transatlantic far right phenomenon that hinges foremost on the issue of migration and relies increasingly often on social media as its primary vessel.

Specifically, I concentrate on crossnational discourse about male migrants and analyze their perceived reputation as perpetrators of sexual violence, which in both countries has constituted much of the cited rationale behind the racist rhetoric that proliferates in nationalist right wing political parties. In examining the driving factors behind the changing discourse in Germany and the U.S., I further demonstrate the transnational nature of anti-immigrant discourse

by analyzing specifically the role of foreign intervention - Russian media manipulation particularly - although the existing literature lacks precise and thorough research in this area, partly due to the recency and inherent elusiveness of the topic. I examine the specific Russian interests in destabilizing Western democracies through the distribution of fake news and hot-button phrases targeting immigrants and refugees of color.

In my literature review, I evaluate existing research on migration discourse in each country and the role of both social and mainstream media in Western migration discourse. I justify my focus on the right wing by examining the role of political leaning in the volatility and intensity of this overall rhetoric. I also present a brief anthropological framework to establish the broad assumptive lens of my arguments and clarify the nuanced distinctions among the terminology salient to discourse analysis. Then, I further justify my selection of Germany and the U.S. as the optimal case studies for interrogating the nature of transnational ideological diffusion linked to migration. In my case studies and analysis, I rely chiefly on news reports, journalistic pieces, politicians' direct statements, and opinion polls as my primary sources, while analyzing and drawing from the arguments of scholarship on migration discourse that often employ the same or similar sources as evidence.

I argue that the shared discursive patterns in Germany and the U.S. in 2015 demonstrate an increasingly unified and global white supremacist movement, fueled by far-right politicians and foreign powers whose shared advocacy of racist historical narratives targeting migrant men of color in mainstream media overrides their other ideological differences. This movement relies on social media to amplify the ideas of far-right parties into mainstream media platforms, which feeds into a cycle of cumulative racism.

## 2. Literature Review

Until recently, the existing body of academic research on right-wing discourse concentrated chiefly on national media outlets, print publications, and television programs. Since 2018, scholarly interest in political discourse has shifted to analyze the transatlantic proliferation of right-wing populism through social media hubs like Facebook and Twitter. In his research study, Mattias Ekman determines the rendering of migrant stereotypes online and the salient role of emotions in stoking racist rhetoric. He argues that the spread of emotionally charged anti-immigrant speech online has normalized racism in mainstream media by turning neutral news subjects into covert denunciation of migrants (Ekman 2019).

Using the case study of Sweden, Ekman affirms Liz Fekete's proposed idea of "cumulative racism," in which social media amplifies the rhetoric of fringe parties into mainstream platforms, allowing the hate speech to circulate in public and gain credibility by mere means of exposure. This process, Ekman argues, continually augments the boundaries of acceptable speech in mainstream media, which I propose is paramount to understanding Donald Trump's accruement of both domestic and international support. Ekman determines that Facebook contributes to cumulative racism, generated first by common users and displayed later in more mainstream platforms. However, he does not specifically interrogate the agency of politically interested parties or state actors in determining the discursive direction, focusing rather on the bottom-up flow of discourse.

Tobias Heidenreich et al. address the top-down angle of discourse by analyzing European politicians' rhetoric on Facebook. They find that the frequency of negative migration discourse on politician accounts is directly related with both the volume of immigrants in a receiving country and the ideological extremity of the politician's party, both on the left and the right

(Heidenreich et al. 2019). This finding is particularly significant to migrant discourse analysis because, contrary to conventional belief, it argues that the far-right is not the only driving agent behind negative migrant discourse; the far-left contributes indirectly to the volatility of migrant discourse because of its emotionally charged, one-sided rhetorical framing of the issue to appeal to the same voting demographic as the far-right, even though the far-left essentially disagrees with the right on migration policy. Heidenreich posits that 2015 was a turning point for migration-related discourse in the West, citing the influx of more than a million Syrian refugees to continental Europe, particularly to Germany, which was recognized as the core of the refugee crisis (2019). Journalist Heather Horn of *The Atlantic* argues that the phenomenon was unprecedented and mentions that the U.S. experienced no such migration parallel in 2015, an observation which encompasses the tension between my case studies.

More recent literature regarding the American discourse on migration tends to view Donald Trump's emergence in politics as a default turning point, but it is important to note that migration has long been a contentious topic of political debate in the U.S. Although the symbol of the wall at the Mexican border seemed to rise to the forefront of migrant discourse after Donald Trump's firm campaign promise to build the barrier in 2015, the idea of the wall did not originate with Trump. Leo Chavez points out that Herman Cain, a Republican presidential candidate for the 2012 election, promised to build a border wall in October 2011 (2013, 3). In an even earlier 1997 piece on immigrant discourse, Hugh Mehan underscores the repetitive use of the term "illegal alien" in California Proposition 187, which encouraged voters to exclude the children of undocumented immigrants from public schools and health facilities. Mehan argues the term "illegal alien invokes images of foreign, repulsive, threatening, even extraterrestrial beings" (1997, 258).

Since negative migrant discourse in the U.S. has a long history, literature on the influence of Donald Trump on migrant discourse always necessarily addresses the special role of social media as a vessel for his political success and unique cult of personality. In his book on social media and globalization, Ralph Schroeder argues that traditional media platforms were not the active instigators of Donald Trump's disproportionately high airtime during his presidential campaign; rather, they "were compelled to give a lot of time to Trump's view" (2018, 64). Schroeder writes: "The role of Twitter can be singled out here: it was a transmission belt to visibility in traditional media" that was unprecedented (65). Therefore, he views the discursive spectacles of Trump through a similar lens to Fekete's "cumulative racism" paradigm.

However, although Schroeder examines the case studies of the U.S., Sweden, India, and China to discuss how social media has bolstered nationalism in these countries, he does not address the possibility of transnational discursive interplay between these or other countries that may partly explain the burgeoning global populist phenomenon he describes. I argue that the rising nativism in each country is not only a response to local conditions, but to the ontological anxieties produced by an increasingly globalized and digitalized world in which information from around the world, both factual and flawed, is more accessible than ever. In my research, I will examine the role of transnational media coverage in distributing and influencing the discursive style and content of right-wing politicians in the U.S. and Europe. My research deals with the question of whether the issue of migration in 2015 has produced an identifiable, if imagined, global right-wing community through media discourse. I am interested in both the distinct driving actors and sociological forces behind the formation of this community.

Therefore, I further the existing literature by focusing specifically on Russian manipulation of migrant media narratives and the common stereotype of men of color as sexual

predators. The former point examines the agenda of external politically motivated actors to destabilize Western democracies, particularly Germany and the U.S., through capitalizing on internal discord. The latter perspective is critical to understanding migrant discourse because it furnishes a point of universality for racist accusations against migrants among different host countries in the West. I will demonstrate the historical roots of this stereotype in the U.S. and Germany, whose contrasting historical attitudes towards migrants and differing geography render the two countries apt case studies for examining how the contemporary migration question may have produced transnational ideological solidarity.

**Theoretical Framework for Discourse**

As Hillary Parsons Dick posits, post-truth is an integral component of contemporary migrant discourse and refers to the practice of rejecting factual truths that disadvantage a certain group's favorability and instead accepting emotionally biased perceptions as truth. She further presents the nuances of post-truth:

> … post-truth epistemology produces… spectacles in which factual truths are
> established, verified, and authorized through the use of a semiotics of
> individuation that favors peculiarity and simplicity over patterns and complexity.
> A "spectacle" can be understood as a form of public engagement in which the
> determination of issues of broad social concern is organized by processes of
> commodification, such as branding (2018, 180).

Dick examines post-truth in the context of Trump's Mexican border wall campaign promise, which she claims became a rallying cry for his supporters. I will extrapolate this paradigm to evaluate the discourse in both Germany and the U.S., arguing that post-truth extends

beyond the American context. In order to conduct effective and precise discourse analysis, I will also lay out the semantic parameters of my paper's discussion of migration, beginning with the distinction between the terms "migrant" and "refugee." Common discourse perceives migrants to have a variety of motivations for leaving their home country, commonly economic reasons, while the term refugee indicates a person who flees from violence, natural disaster, and/or political unrest in their home country. The consensus in literature is that the term refugee evokes more sympathy from receiving countries than the word migrant, and that the media employed this distinction to frame the topic of migration in a biased light. Jakob Moritz-Eberl et al. write that English newspapers and tabloids often favored the term "migrant" rather than "refugee" or "asylum-seeker" in their coverage of the 2015 refugee crisis to subtly de-legitimize the dire circumstances of refugees, a choice which acknowledges the less sympathetic implications of "migrant" in common discourse. Furthermore, according to Bastian Vollmer and Serhat Karakayali, refugee men, unlike children and women, "tend to be seen as illegitimate - an economic migrant who does not deserve protection" (2017, 3). This perspective invalidates economic motivation as a necessary reason for migration. Therefore, the blurred distinction between migrant and refugee also emerges from this gendered perspective, which will play a salient role in my later discussion of the racist sexual predator stereotype.

The differing linguistic implications of the construction of migrant discourse in a receiving country and the inherent "othering" of migrants by nature of the term necessitate the consideration of Michel Foucault's widely assessed theory of normalization. Foucault argues that parties who possess knowledge possess power, which then reproduces and redistributes knowledge by the will of the empowered, allowing them to determine the parameters for the conditions that constitute "normal" in a society. The process of normativity imbues daily

language with inclusive terminology indicating the empowered "normal" and exclusive terminology to delineate marginalized, powerless, and "abnormal" groups (Power 2011, 39) . In my paper, I will assume Foucault's theory to analyze the language used to describe migrants and refugees, demonstrating that such discourse in a receiving country deprives migrants and refugees of individual agency in the collective imagination.

### 3. Justification of Case Study Selection and Historical Context

#### I. *Similarities*

Germany and the U.S. share key similarities relevant to the topic of migration: both are developed, leading GDP democratic countries with majority white populations, and both have a history of institutionalized racism, Germany through the Holocaust during the Nazi regime and the U.S. through the slavery of black people and genocide of Native Americans. According to the OECD, Germany became the second most common destination in the world for permanent migration in 2015, while the U.S. retained its spot as the number one destination (Migration Data Brief 2019). Germany also has the highest GDP in Europe, ranking fourth in the world behind the U.S., China, and Japan (World Population Review 2020). Given their high influx of permanent migrants, Germany and the U.S. comprise a compelling comparative case study for evaluating discourse about migration.

#### II. *Geography*

However, there are also foundational differences that I must address to establish the assumptions, arguments, and parameters of this paper. Firstly, Germany and the U.S. differ greatly in their geography; Germany, a country smaller than Texas, borders nine other countries in the middle of continental Europe with a relatively close proximity to the Middle East, whereas

the U.S. is located in North America, bordering only Canada and Mexico. The differing locations determine the flow and demographic characteristics of migrants in each country.

This geographical distinction alone, however, is not meaningful enough in the context of discourse analysis to constitute the basis for this research paper, though it is necessary to explain the varying demographics of the refugees and migrants in each location—Germany's location offers greater accessibility for Syrian refugees (and historically, Turkish and Italian immigrants during the 1970s guestworker program), whereas the U.S. southern border has helped to make Mexico the most common origin country of immigrants to the U.S. (Pew Research).

*III.       Differing Historical Reputations on Migration*

The second pertinent difference between the two countries is their seemingly contrasting attitudes towards migration and ethnic diversity in the popular Western imagination. The Nazi regime's agenda of racial cleansing and nationalism during the Holocaust ties inextricably into the world's collective imagination of Germany; the term "Nazi" has even become synonymous with the concept of evil and any mildly punitive figure in mainstream Western culture. Both ends of the post-WWII political spectrum in West and East Germany have commonly used "Nazi" as a reference point of immorality for arguments against the other side, while labeling itself the "true" antidote to Nazism (Herzog 2007, 221). Only during the 1960s did West Germany open up its borders for guest workers from other countries such as Italy, Turkey, and Vietnam to stimulate the economy, and many guest workers decided to permanently reside in Germany, which was not the intent of the state. Guest workers often faced daily racism and antisemitism in both East and West Germany, and locals often adhered to the notion that even the German-born children of immigrants could never be "true Germans," a notion reflected in the German law

determining citizenship only through blood relation, which remained in effect until 2001 (Radvan and Troschke 2012, 23).

On the other hand, the founding of the U.S. by English colonists has generated the historical reputation of an inherently hospitable "country of migration," a concept further consolidated in the globally recognized symbols of the Statue of Liberty in the 19th century and Ellis Island in the early 20th century. This romanticized facade of American hospitality indeed conveniently overlooks the country's ironic foundational violence against Native Americans, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese internment camps, and other racist and/or anti-immigrant politics in U.S. history. Nonetheless, the U.S. has consistently hosted more immigrants than any other country (U.S. Department of State). Therefore, the historical background of each country (and consequently the country's unique formation of nationalism) is a possible influencing factor in the discursive treatment of migrants. Germany first became a unified nation only in 1871 and experienced more than four decades of political division as East and West Germany during the Cold War, reunifying a mere thirty years ago in 1990. In comparison, the history of the U.S. has been less turbulent, its most glaring period of political polarization culminating in the 19th century Civil War, which is followed only by the Civil Rights Movement a century later—both heavily entrenched in the racial topic of rights for black people.

*IV.    Patterns of Migrant Intake Over Time*

The third and final potential point of tension is the proportion of migrants in each country. There are currently 83 million people living in Germany, compared to about 328 million in the U.S. While data on migrants is difficult to collect due to undocumented migrants and non-permanent migrants, the Federal Statistics Office of Germany estimates that about 12.5

percent of the population in Germany were foreign nationals (including undocumented people) as of 2018, the most recent available year of migrant data collection (Reuters 2018). The U.S. had a slightly higher proportion of immigrants in the country at about 13.7 percent of the total population in 2018, only a slight uptick compared to 12.9 percent in 2010 (Migration Policy Institute 2020). Although the proportion of immigrants in each country in 2018 seems effectively the same, it is imperative to note that Germany's share of immigrants rose quickly since 2010, most notably in the 2015 refugee crisis, marking a departure from the steady American increase. The share of immigrants in Germany jumped from 8.8 percent in 2010 to 12.5 percent in 2018, a significantly more drastic uptick than in the U.S. case over the same period (Statista).

Critically, it is not the population size or proportion of migrants that bears the most significance in the country comparison, but the presence or lack thereof of a major migration event in the past decade. For Germany, it was the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis—for the U.S., no such influx occurred.

V.   *Significance of Differences*

Therefore, despite the similarities that render Germany and the U.S. a strong comparison, this research project finds itself in the unusual position of having three potential contributing factors in its analysis: the geography of each country, the differing historical narratives, and the pattern of migrant intake over time. These factors are important to explain the specific context in which discourse on migrants changed in each country. However, I do not aim to isolate a single factor or argue that any one factor was the primary contributor to the discursive shifts. Rather, I argue that the cyclical media rhetoric of politicians and the general population allowed the mainstream discourse on migrants in both countries to converge along the same racist stereotypes. They also enabled each country's politicians to cite the migration circumstances of

the other in their arguments. This phenomenon attests to a broader political movement that must be situated in the global tide of discourse, due to the inherently international nature of migration. The international convergence of racist discursive construction of migrants has overridden the significance of any local particularities in receiving countries.

The following section will examine specific events in their historic context surrounding the year 2015, establishing that both countries experienced a discursive shift, but one (Germany) by means of a true uptick in migrant population and the other (the U.S.) through cumulative racism in social media on which right-wing politicians capitalized. In my analysis, I will demonstrate that the similar discursive patterns and direct political cross-referencing between the two countries, despite their other differences, demonstrate a larger transnational discourse that has fallen under the control of a strengthening global far-right movement.

## 4. Case Studies

### Germany

*I.       Initial Discourse During Germany's Long Summer of Migration*

Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to accept more than one million Syrian refugees into Germany in 2015 became widely remarkable for the significance of the "one million" threshold, a common indication of the presence of a truly high volume of anything, as Vollmer and Karakayali argue. The German media underscored this number; the major newspaper *Augsburger Allgemeine* published a wary headline in 2015 that read: "One million refugees? The atmosphere is threatened to change" (Vollmer and Karakayali 2017, 1-2).

Despite this implied "threatened" state of the country, Vollmer and Karakayali maintain that initially, the attitude of much of the German population revealed itself to be more

welcoming and less hostile than expected, as volunteers waited at train stations to welcome

Syrian refugees with singing and applause that ultimately earned the name "September fairy

tale" (2017, 10). The term "fairy tale" particularly emphasizes the unlikelihood of such an

accepting atmosphere towards migrants, indicating a laudable deviation from the expected

response to the arrival of an unprecedentedly high volume of refugees. Even the conservative

newspaper *Die Welt* published sympathetic images of refugee children to supplement their

emotional stories, although *Die Welt* ultimately "leans much more towards closure and the

problematization of migration," which became obvious later in Germany's refugee timeline

(Griebel and Vollman 2019, 1). Nonetheless, from the joyous celebrations at train stations and

Merkel's resonant slogan "we can do this" emerged the term *Willkommenskultur* (or "welcome

culture") as Germany seemed to redefine itself as a proudly hospitable nation.

Instrumental to the phenomenon of *Willkommenskultur* was the German media, which

mobilized support for refugees through its distribution of sensational images that provoked moral

outrage from German viewers. News outlets capitalized especially on the drowning of the

three-year-old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi in September 2015 during his family's attempt to cross

the Meditarranean. The image of his lifeless body on the beach in Turkey elicited a strong

sympathetic response from viewers due to his youth and thus his perceived innocence, producing

an association between refugees and victimhood rather than threatening invaders. This

atmosphere of sympathy emerged alongside similar solidarity among media outlets

representative of the average German like the *Bild,* which popularized the slogan "Refugees

Welcome." At the same time, the number of volunteers for refugee work increased significantly

in "a population that was hitherto not active in terms of refugee support" (Vollmer and

Karakayali 2017, 7-11). Thus, September 2015 marked an unprecedented event in German migrant history in terms of the mobilization of the German population in support of refugees.

II.      *Cologne 2016 — Discursive Shift Along Gendered and Racial Lines*

However, as Vollmer and Kayakali argue, "the atmosphere of hospitality was always fragile," (2017, 11) as Germany witnessed a significant discursive shift less than half a year later that illustrates the fluctuation of sympathy for refugees based on gender that nonetheless produces consequences for the overall perception of refugees and their "deservingness." The most significant turning point of discourse was the series of New Year's Eve sexual assaults of women in Cologne in 2016, which were allegedly committed by a group of "North African" men who were reported to have arrived in Germany during the Long Summer of Migration. The outrage surrounding the assaults correlated with the increase in the proportion of people who believed that Germany could not sustain the current volume of refugees from 46 to more than 60 percent (Vollmer and Karakayali 2017, 13).

Most significantly, the media quickly emphasized the gendered aspect of the sexual assaults, depicting the perpetrators as "an attack on German gender norms" (Boulila and Carri 286). This development marked the shift of attention from innocent refugee children like Aylan Kurdi to the adult male sexual perpetrators of Cologne 2016 as the new face of refugee discourse. According to Vollmer and Karakayali, refugee men, unlike children and women, "tend to be seen as illegitimate—an economic migrant who does not deserve protection" (2017, 3). This perspective invalidates economic motivation as a necessary reason for migration. Thus, the distinction between migrant and refugee also emerges from this gendered perspective, with refugees seen as driven out of their home country by immediate physical danger while migrants are perceived to be motivated by other less severe reasons. *Die Welt,* the conservative Berlin

paper which had participated in sharing sympathetic or neutral views of refugees at the beginning of the Long Summer of Migration, published an opinion article boldly named "The Mob Has Raped Us All" less than a week after the assaults. Remarkably, the author of the article is infamous for condemning feminism, despite springing to the defense of female bodily autonomy in his article, revealing the hypocrisy of his alleged stance. At the same time, Cologne activist and feminist Alice Schwarzer also positioned herself as anti-Muslim, attributing feminism exclusively to European society and juxtaposing its liberal values with the threatening and specifically male presence of Muslim refugees (Boulila and Carri 288). As I later demonstrate in my historical analysis of racist stereotypes, this paradigm of masquerading as a defender of women's bodies derives from a long global tradition of instrumentalizing women's bodies as a talking point to fuel racism against the perceived "other."

The perceived depravity of the refugee men and connotation with degenerative terms like "mob" and "terror" produced a swift backlash against refugees overall and became a popular justification for the belief that refugees were undeserving of sympathy and hospitality of Germans, who increasingly saw Cologne as "proof" that asylum seekers could not integrate in Germany (Boulila and Carri 2017, 288). "Failed *Willkommenskultur*" and the supposed failure of political correctness emerged as common themes in discourse as a result of this single event. The sexual assaults allowed right-wing groups like the AfD to gain traction and champion "honesty," a term that veils racist rhetoric with an apparently morally upright defense of feminism and Western values that are perceived to be the antithesis of Islam's "backward" concepts of gender. This culturally-focused racist discourse preceded new stricter immigration policies that meant faster deportations and a limit on refugee acceptances into Germany with the 2016 Immigration

Law, and since 2014, there has been a documented 364 percent increase in attacks on refugees in

Germany (Boulila and Carri 2017, 291).

The swiftness and severity of backlash against refugees from the isolated Cologne sexual

assaults highlight the volatility of discourse on refugees in Germany since 2015, as Vollmer and

Karakayali demonstrate in their research. This complicated reality rests on the dynamic that

"when German citizens provide hospitality… it is implicitly expected and required that refugees

respond with gratitude" (Vollmer and Karakayali 2017, 12). This expectation constitutes an

unequal power dynamic between the volunteer, who possesses the power to provide or refuse

aid, and the thus agency-deprived refugee. Therefore, Cologne became the powder keg for an

already delicate relationship.

**United States**

*I.        Pre-Trump Discourse on Immigrants*

At the time of Donald Trump's 2015 controversial speech labeling Mexicans rapists,

security and immigration on the southern U.S. border had long been the subjects of contentious

political debate. The U.S. began to view the securitization of the Mexican border as a military

issue in the 1950s as the perception of Mexican migrants as dangerous became more common,

and the number of Mexican migrants coming to the U.S. increased significantly in the 1980s,

situating the Mexican border at the center of immigration debate. However, migration from

Mexico has been at net zero in recent years, rendering perceptions about overwhelming

migration unfounded (Dick 2019). Nonetheless, inflammatory rhetoric from politicians warned

that illegal aliens from Mexico would swarm the country; conservative political commentator Pat

Buchanan announced in 2009 on MSNBC that "Mexico is the greatest foreign policy crisis I

think America faces in the next 20, 30 years… We're going to have 135 million Hispanics in the United States by 2050, heavily concentrated in the southwest. The question is whether we are going to survive as a country" (Chavez 2013, 1).

From the usage of terms like "survive" emerges what Leo Chavez calls the "Latino Threat Narrative," which hypothesizes that Latinos, unlike other previous immigrant groups in the U.S., will not integrate into U.S society and thus pose a threat against which the U.S. must defend itself. This narrative and its precursors (e.g. the Chinese immigration threat, the Catholic threat) purport to express the "truth" about migration by painting migrants in a hostile light without ever producing evidence to support these claims. Chavez cites the example of a 2010 Republican campaign advertisement that depicted three Latino-looking young men above the caption "illegal aliens," even though the photo was taken in Mexico and offered no proof that these men were indeed illegal migrants or had ever set foot in the U.S. (Chavez 2013, 2). This example is also significant because of its decision to use Latino men as the face of the anti-immigration campaign even before Trump's ascension to the political arena, while Middle Eastern men became the target of racist attacks after the Cologne 2016 sexual assaults.

Chavez particularly condemns the role of the media in perpetuating this narrative by objectifying Latinos through spectacles, which he defines as "productive acts that construct knowledge about subjects in our world." This objectification, evident in the way Pat Buchanan's diction frames Latinos as akin to an invasive foreign species that threaten the survival of the U.S., leads to the dehumanization of Latinos, which erodes the empathy people have for them (2013, 3-6). In a 1997 piece on immigrant discourse, Hugh Mehan cites the rhetoric of Peter Wilson, Governor of California in 1994, who used the term "flood of illegal immigration"

(Mehan 1997, 258). The choice of the word flood emphasizes the overwhelming and harmful nature of immigrants, who are represented here not as individuals but rather as an invasive mass.

II.     *Islamophobic Discourse in the U.S.*

Mexican migrants are not the only major discursive target of conservatives in the U.S. Since the 9/11 terror attacks, Islamophobia has also emerged to the forefront of anti-migrant rhetoric in the media, thriving independently of Trump, although experts agree that he amplified the anti-Islamic rhetoric. Khaled Beydoun, author of the book *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear,* argues that "even though Islamophobia animates a modern form of bigotry ... the essence of the hate is not new. It's deeply rooted in American political discourse… But it's been given a new face — a new caricature — as a consequence of the war on terror, and then intensified by the rhetoric of, mainly, President Trump." Beydoun also lays partial blame on the left in the U.S. for racially profiling Muslim Americans during the Obama Administration in a surveillance agenda intended to thwart terror attacks by extremists (Underwood 2019).

However, Trump—a fond proponent of the phrase "radical Islamic terrorism"—was largely responsible for driving public discourse about Muslims into explicitly racist territory. During a September 2015 campaign rally in New Hampshire, Trump remarked on the Syrian refugee crisis, promising to expel every Syrian refugee (most of whom were Muslim) from the country, saying, "They could be ISIS, I don't know. This could be one of the great tactical ploys of all time. A 200,000-man army, maybe" (Johnson and Hauslohner 2019). This fear-mongering rhetoric fortifies the stereotype of Muslims necessarily being extremists or terrorists, while simultaneously attributing to Muslims an exaggerated perception of the inflated power of the perceived "enemy" through the use of hawk-like phrases such as "tactical ploy" and "army."

Here lies the irony of such racist rhetoric; in order to reject the "other," one must first empower them in one's imagination with the capacity for such violence and cohesive hostility.

Moreover, Trump's track record of anti-Muslim rhetoric even before his presidential campaign overtly demonstrates not only xenophobia but marked racism against brown people, particularly through his propagation of the lie that former President Barack Obama was a Muslim who was not born in the U.S. (Johnson and Hauslohner 2019). This unfounded claim demonstrates Trump's hostile conflation of people of color with people of Islamic faith, a common phenomenon in racist anti-immigrant rhetoric and an indication that such rhetoric harms not only the named target of discourse but all people of color who share similar identifying features.

### III. Trump and the Supposed Intensification of Anti-Migrant Rhetoric

Although the symbol of the wall at the Mexican border seemed to dominate American migrant discourse after Donald Trump's firm campaign promise to build the barrier in 2015, the idea of the wall did not originate with Trump. Chavez points out that Herman Cain, a Republican presidential candidate for the 2012 election, promised to build a border wall in October 2011: "'It's going to be 20 feet high. It's going to have barbed wire at the top. And there's going to be a sign on the other side saying, 'It will kill you - Warning.' Mr. Cain said later that he was joking but then quickly added, 'but… not really'" (Chavez 2013, 3). Trump later echoed this form of violence-supporting rhetoric, according to two New York Times journalists who claimed that Trump proposed shooting migrants in the legs at the border and "fortifying a border wall with a water-filled trench, stocked with snakes or alligators... He wanted the wall electrified, with spikes on top that could pierce human flesh" (BBC 2019).

Thus, the right-wing backlash against Mexican migrants in the U.S. cannot be attributed to Trump alone, as it existed long before he rose to political prominence. Although the content of Trump's rhetoric was not novel for the U.S., the spectacle of his successful presidential campaign breached unprecedented territory, as no candidate with such an openly anti-immigrant stance had ever attained presidential office. Trump's election in 2016, however, did not coincide with a surge in the presence of Mexican migrants in the U.S. Rather, according to the Migration Policy Institute, the number of Mexican migrants in the U.S. declined from 11.7 to 11.3 million people between 2010 and 2017, having reached a peak of 12.8 million in 2007 and only declining ever since (Gonzalez-Barrera 2018).

Therefore, unlike Germany's Long Summer of Migration and Cologne 2016, the United States witnessed no major migration event that preceded shifts in discourse on the topic. Rather, the emergence of Trump's unusually bold xenophobic statements comprised its own spectacle that compounded on itself through the media. Trump received disproportionate media attention during his presidential campaign, earning around 33 percent of news coverage of the GOP presidential field immediately after his candidacy announcement, compared to the average media share of the other candidates after their announcements, which was only around 27 percent. Even almost 30 days after their respective candidacy announcements, Trump's share of news coverage remained as high as 30 percent, whereas the other GOP candidates only averaged around 12 percent (Sides 2019).

The above data indicate that Trump stood out from his opponents after his June 2015 presidential candidacy announcement, in which he made the following statement about Mexico: "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Time 2015). Thus, the fact that media attention of Trump sharply increased after this speech attests to the fact that such

pronounced xenophobia marked a departure from the usual rhetoric in similar political contexts, establishing a discursive shift in the volume and intensity of these nonetheless pre-existing perspectives on migrants. Similar to Germany's escalation of racially motivated hate crimes after Cologne 2016, the FBI reported that the frequency of violence against Latinos rose sharply by 21 percent in 2018 under the Trump administration, the same year the white supremacist terror attack in El Paso, Texas claimed the lives of 23 people (Brooks 2019).

## 5. Analysis

I.    *Shared Racist and Sexist Historical Narratives and "The Significant Other"*

### a. Post-Truth Rhetoric

The diction of Trump's rhetoric reveals a heavily gendered component to U.S. migrant discourse, as drugs and rape mentioned in his campaign announcement speech are often associated with male perpetrators. I have shown above that Germany's overall discursive shift on migrants was more dramatic in its content than its U.S. parallel due to the sharp increase of migrants in the overall population in Germany in 2015. Here, I argue that the discursive shifts in both the U.S. and Germany cannot be separated from this racialized perspective of male migrants of color as sexual predators. Given that Mexican immigration began to decrease before Trump's announcement and continues to decline, Trump's xenophobic rhetoric contributes to the phenomenon of "post truth," as Hillary Dick argues (2019). Despite Trump's claims that Mexicans bring rape and drugs to the U.S., and despite the fact that research on migrants is difficult to conduct, studies at the time of Trump's speech and more recently have demonstrated that "there is no evidence that immigrants [in the U.S.] commit more crime than native-born Americans" (Lee 2018; Flagg 2019).

Nonetheless, Trump declared after his campaign announcement that he was simply telling the truth about Mexicans while offering no evidence: "I can never apologize for the truth. I don't mind apologizing for things. But I can't apologize for the truth. I said tremendous crime is coming across. Everybody knows that's true. And it's happening all the time" (quoted in Lee 2018). As in this statement, the word truth and its variations appear often in Trump's rhetoric, which relies on the moral significance of the term and the straightforward framing of his message to encourage people to believe in his unfounded claims. This phenomenon is also apparent in Chavez's aforementioned example of the three Latino-looking men photographed for a political advertisement that labeled them "illegal aliens," although no evidence existed to prove this label true.

Post-truth was also evident following the Cologne 2016 sexual assaults, as this incident provoked "racist and anti-feminist AfD [proponents to accuse] feminist voices… of masking the 'real' dangers German gender equality was facing…. as post-Cologne debates dismissed racism as 'hysteria.'" Magazines like *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Germany published provocative cover pages, including one depicting a black hand reaching into the genital area of a white woman (Boulila and Carri 2017, 287-291). The minimalist nature of the image reduced the complexity of the Cologne incident to literally a black and white issue, announcing that the former group poses a universal threat to the latter. By labeling the supposedly threatening nature of male migrants as "real" while rejecting the realness of racism without supporting evidence, these beliefs constitute a form of post-truth encouraged by the immediate xenophobia that the Cologne New Year's Eve incident intensified.

### b. Shared Racist Historical Stereotypes

I maintain that the Cologne assaults *intensified* the racist discourse against refugee men and not that it *produced* this reaction anew, due to the established historical narrative of men of color as rapists in both Germany and the U.S. Boulila and Carri argue that "the figure of the 'African rapist'... emerged in the 1920s during the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, when the black colonial soldier was imagined to threaten the white *Volkskörper*" (2017, 288). This phenomenon earned the title "Black Horror on the Rhine" after the First World War as Germany assumed the following perspective about Black men: "In stationing colonial African troops in the Rhineland, France was perceived to have abandoned its civilizing mission and placed German girls and women at the mercy of 'primitive' black men unable to control their sexual urges" (Campbell 2019, 472). In this narrative, the perceived threat of sexual violence in particular reveals fears of interracial mixing, and conveniently instrumentalizes the female body as a political point of reference, apparently upholding the idea of female bodily autonomy only in relation to the "black sexual predator threat" to fortify racist anxieties against men of color. This insidious myth of the black man assaulting the white woman preys on white men's anxieties about losing their perceived corporeal possession of "their" women.

A similar myth labeling men of color as sexual predators exists in American history. Biljana Oklopcic, who analyzes the racist stereotype of the black rapist in *Tarzan of the Apes,* argues: "Invented after emancipation, the black rapist stereotype was the result of the increasing panic about racial intermixture after the abolition of slavery and reflected the American South's obsession with protecting white womanhood to ensure the purity of the white race" (Oklopcic 2017, 315). Thus, this focus on white racial purity constitutes an antagonist stance not just against black men but against all men of color, whom racist white men perceive to be genetically "polluting" agents. In a recent opinion piece condemning Trump's racist statements about

Mexicans, Cindy Casares echoes Oklopcic's point and argues: "[t]here is a perverse pleasure taken... in generating and regenerating the myth that they are protecting 'their' women (and thus their pale future) from the voracious sexual appetites of nonwhite men" (Casares 2019). Once again, the sham of defending female bodily autonomy only serves to fuel the desires of racist white men to exert control and ownership over white women, adding an additionally sexist component to the racist discourse in which self-proclaimed contemporary feminists themselves (such as the previously cited anti-Muslim Alice Schwarzer) partake and propagate.

### c. The Significant Other

The concept of the "significant other" emerges from this harmful stereotype, which Werner Schiffauer claims is the group whose practices and beliefs are seen as the antithesis of the values of one's own group. Schiffauer claims that Islam has been deemed the significant other of Europe (Schiffauer 2013, 114). This discourse intensified after the Cologne 2016 incident and Mexican immigrants and refugees emerged as a clear significant other of the U.S. after Trump's escalation of racist rhetoric. In both Germany and the U.S., the basis for this discourse hinged on the historically generated stereotype of migrant men of color as sexual predators.

II.     *The Transatlantic Similarities of Politicians' Anti-Migrant Discourse*

The similarities that Germany and the U.S. share in migrant discourse only suggest a coincidental overlapping of racist and sexist tendencies in the nationalism of both countries; they do not necessarily attest to a greater global community effort to push these racist narratives about migrants. I argue that there exists a greater transatlantic interconnectedness of media in this dynamic through the presence of discursive interplay between the German and American

migration contexts, the international appeal of Trump's personality cult to German right-wing proponents, and the role of Russian media manipulation in both countries.

### a. Trump on Germany's Handling of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Politicians in both countries have directly praised their right-wing counterparts in the other on their stance towards immigration. Trump has openly commented on the Syrian refugee crisis in Germany. In June 2018, he tweeted: "The people of Germany are turning against their leadership as migration is rocking the already tenuous Berlin coalition. Crime in Germany is way up. Big mistake made all over Europe in allowing millions of people in who have so strongly and violently changed their culture!" (Taylor 2019). Aside from the false claim about high crime rates in Germany, the diction "strongly and violently" harshly condemns all of the "millions of people" Trump mentions, and though he does not name Syrian refugees, he heavily implies their fault with the accusation that they have overhauled the German "culture," a common argument of anti-migrant proponents who ascribe to the idea of differential racism. According to Etienne Balibar, differential racism is based not on the idea of biological superiority between races, but cultural incompatibility (and implicitly, hierarchy) (Balibar 1991, 21). Trump's statement is also an ideal example of how populist rhetoric on both left and right uses simple, emotional, black-and-white speech to appeal to the fears of its target audience (the anti-establishment advocates of the masses).

### b. AfD on Trump

Even without explicit reference to the topic of migration, Trump's platform has appealed to German right wing proponents who claim support for his anti-establishment, nationalist stance: "The victory of Donald Trump is a signal that the people of the Western world want a clear

political change," wrote AfD deputy leader Beatrix von Storch in a Facebook post. "This was

only a surprise for the establishment, for me it was expected" (Deutsche Welle 2016). In the

context of the AfD's platform focus of anti-immigration, von Storch's usage of the phrase

"Western world" serves as covert recognition of an imagined global white community, which

dabbles in the territory of differential racism by using the cultural/geographical label "Western"

rather than the more biologically evocative term "white."

### c. "Trumpification" of German far-right

Moreover, Trump's cult of personality has expanded beyond U.S. borders to reach German

supporters. The AfD, unlike the Republican Party, lacks a personality cult among its leadership,

whereas Trump has all but re-branded the GOP with his name. Katrin Bennhold, journalist of

*The New York Times*, writes in her September 2020 piece on Trump, Germany, and COVID-19

that Trump has increasingly attracted support from the far-right fringe communities in Germany

despite his unpopularity with the country's Chancellor Angela Merkel and the general

population. Far-right extremism expert Miro Dittrich argues that "Trump has become a savior

figure, a sort of great redeemer for the German far right" (Bennhold 2020). According to

Bennhold, the AfD has modified Trump's oft-used slogan "America First" to be "Germany

First," and the white supremacist perpetrator of the February 2020 Hanau terror attack in

Germany explicitly praised Trump's "America First" policy in his manifesto. Extremism experts

agree that the "Trumpification of the German far right" stokes the flames of radicalism and white

supremacism terrorism, which pose the largest threat to German democracy today (Bennhold

2020).

### d. Comparing Trump supporters and AfD supporters

Indeed, the overlap between German far-right supporters and Trump supporters finds its similarities mostly in racist ideological leaning and nationalism, not in economic background. "[I]ncome and material circumstances ... are not especially important for understanding right-wing populism. Instead, authoritarian attitudes appear to be a much bigger factor," states a study conducted by Birbeck College in London (Deutsche Welle 2016). The article also details a study by the Cologne Research Institute, which finds that most AfD supporters in Germany are young and male; while Trump voters in 2016 were mostly male as well, they tended to belong in the above 45 age category. However, the Cologne study "showed that fear of immigration is spread evenly across income brackets," and likewise, "[f]or Trump supporters, 'immigration' and 'terrorism' were the issues that worried them the most" (Deutsche Welle 2016). Therefore, the association of immigration and terrorism—as well as the common citation of immigration as the primary concern of right-wing German and U.S. voters—demonstrate that racist concerns of far-right advocates are universal across transatlantic boundaries, overruling concerns about the economy and even the age of supporters in the priorities of the global right-wing community.

III. *Cumulative Racism and Foreign Intervention—The Amplification of Social Media Discourse into the Mainstream*

a. **Domestic Misinformation and Manipulation**

Politicians are only one driving force behind anti-immigrant rhetoric in the media. In order to understand the normalization of racist discourse in mainstream media, it is necessary to examine the inevitable interplay between major media outlets, user-generated social media information, and politicians. In his research on how social media propagates anti-immigrant ideas, Matthias Ekman describes the process of recontextualization, in which media outlets render neutral news topics into covertly racist denunciation of immigrants by linking them with negative themes like

crime and economic difficulties. This process begins with social media users who use the

platform to either knowingly or unknowingly spread misinformation, which anti-immigrant

proponents then amplify into the mainstream:

> For example, Facebook users provide anti-immigration actors with raw material
>
> for stories by sharing mainstream news, circulating narratives relating to refugees
>
> and immigrants, or articulating experiences, and in return share the 'news'
>
> produced by anti-immigration websites. These user practices are not necessarily
>
> intentional; oblivious users share and disseminate information from
>
> anti-immigration actors without reflecting on the reliability or political objective
>
> of the source. In parallel, anti-immigration actors exploit a growing distrust
>
> towards mainstream media, particularly regarding immigration reporting (Ekman
>
> 2019).

Ekman derives this analysis from his case study of Sweden, another developed European

country with a high proportion of immigrants in the population. Likewise, Juan Serrano et al. of

the Bavarian School of Public Policy find that the AfD uses similar tactics of exploiting social

media to push their anti-migrant agenda. The AfD has also employed social bots on Facebook

and Twitter to viralize their topics on social media, and Serrano et al. determine that other

right-wing populist parties in Europe follow a similar method of accruing support using

alternative media while decrying traditional media (Serrano 2019). In the case of the U.S., I have

demonstrated in my case studies section that Trump received disproportionate air time on major

news outlets, which then fed into the cycle of his popularity and brand sustaining itself through

social media platforms—even through the circulating discourse of his critics—during the 2016

election.

**b. Russian Intervention in Media and International Right-Wing Agendas**

Aside from internal agents interested in driving an anti-immigrant agenda, external forces have political interests rooted in cultivating a far-right wave across Western countries. Russia, historically the Western capitalist sphere of influence's number one enemy during the Cold War, has demonstrated a consistent agenda in the 21st century to destabilize Western democracies by taking advantage of existing cleavages in each society. Most notably, Russia intensified its disruption efforts during the 2016 American presidential election, by hijacking existing hashtags to polarize social media and using trolls and bots on Facebook and Twitter to overtly promote pro-Trump ideas:

> During the election, for example, a [Russian] imposter Facebook page called "Being Patriotic" used hot-button words such as "illegal", "country" and "American" and phrases such as "illegal alien", "Sharia law" and "welfare state", according to an analysis of Albright's data by the Associated Press. The page racked up at least 4.4m interactions, peaking between mid-2016 and early 2017 (McCarthy 2017).

The association of such negative terms with the slogan "Being Patriotic" reveals the Russian understanding of the jingoistic and racist sentiments of Trump supporters. Therefore, Russia's meddling in the 2016 elections no doubt played a critical role in Trump's success.

The role of Russian political interference, however, speaks volumes to the strength of racist anti-immigrant sentiment not only through its moments of success but also in its moments of failure. The U.S. is not Russia's only target of disruption; Germany is another critical target country for disinformation trolls, being a "focal point for Russian and Soviet information

operations since the Cold War" (CSIS 2020). The AfD is an attractive target for Russian agents to foster a pro-Russia agenda, and in the most blatant attempt to accrue more AfD supporters, Russian meddlers fed to major media outlets a fabricated story in 2016 about a Russian-German girl named Lisa who was raped by migrants, which caused public uproar against Chancellor Merkel's open-door policy towards Syrian refugees. The story circulated quickly on social media and entered mainstream outlets before producers could vet its authenticity (CSIS 2020). In light of the previous analysis conducted in this paper, the "Lisa" case presents itself as a classic case of misinformation targeting the racist sentiments of the public, relying on the male migrant rapist stereotype to provoke widespread outrage against a particular demographic.

However, the Center for Strategic and International Studies argues that Germany has been relatively resistant to Russian manipulation despite the overlapping political history of the two countries, mainly due to Germany's well-entrenched media and political institutions. I argue that Germany's far-right seduction by Trump's ideology despite its overall resilience to Russian interference demonstrates weaker political cohesion in Germany than the CSIS describes; Russian interference in Germany was unnecessary to push the anti-immigrant agenda. I have demonstrated the "Trumpification" of the German far-right, through which Trump has become a figurehead behind which German far-right proponents rally. Therefore, the German far-right's transatlantic support for Trump developed independently of these direct Russian media attacks on Germany. However, it did develop as an offshoot or shockwave of the overall successful Russian disinformation campaign in the U.S. through Trump's own involvement in perpetuating the fake news of Russian meddlers.

This theory attests to the strength of transnational right-wing solidarity between Germany and the U.S., but more importantly, it demonstrates the importance of Trump's particular cult of

personality in overshadowing the role of Russian interference in Germany by force of his own character appeal. That Trump's base of support transcends language barriers and geography is a strong indication that his anti-immigration platform and racist, fear-mongering rhetoric have become the pillars of the emerging global far-right.

### c. The Personality Factor

Until this analysis, I have made implicit throughout this paper the heavy significance of Trump's individual influence on the global right wing in contrast to the less individualist appeal of the AfD party. This distinction poses the compelling question of the extent to which right wing populism owes its recent successes to personality cults or the general will of the people who, in the process of cumulative racism, pushed these political platforms into mainstream media and positions of power. That Russian direct disinformation attacks did far less to faze German politics than the transnational appeal of Trump's particular anti-immigration platform supposedly attests to the unique power of one's individual authoritarian brand.

I argue that this revelation is unsurprising given the fame of American exceptionalism and individualism through its reputation as the widely recognized leader in the post-Cold War global order, in the arena of soft power (i.e. cultural influence and persuasion) as much as hard power (i.e. economic and military strength). The phenomenon of American individualism bears a long track record in the nation's highest office especially. The celebrated charisma of John F. Kennedy's speeches and the folksy, direct rhetoric of Ronald Reagan are notable examples of the importance of personal image on both ends of the political spectrum in watershed moments of history: respectively, the Civil Rights movement and the era of neoliberal Reaganomics. Other current world leaders—largely right wing populists—have echoed Trump's controversial and

loud persona, including Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro and the pro-Brexit Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson.

On the other hand, Germany has lacked a true personality cult in its political leadership since the death of history's admittedly most notorious personality cult leader, Adolf Hitler, having taken comprehensive anti-fascist measures to reform its political and educational systems to prevent the rise or glorification of a similar dictator. These efforts have produced the strong political cohesion described in the Center for Strategic and International Studies' report on failed Russian misinformation attacks in present-day Germany. However, racism, sexism, homophobia and antisemitism continued to thrive in East and West Germany after the defeat of the Nazis, but gained little international attention due to the broader sociopolitical turmoil of the country's division in the Cold War that immediately succeeded the Nazi era, as presented in the NGO report "Germany After 1945":

> In studies carried out between 1946 and 1952 [in West Germany], one third of the population showed strongly antisemitic attitudes, while another third exhibited partially antisemitic tendencies. The younger generations, molded by their experiences during the Nazi period, were found to be most stridently antisemitic (Radvan and Troschtke 2012).

Therefore, this example of the general public sentiment in post-Nazi Germany demonstrates merely the defeat of the Nazi regime, not Nazism as an ideology itself. Likewise, it is important to note that despite the apparent overwhelming influence of distinct figures like Trump in the global right wing movement, the core of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia has long existed independently of these public personas. This process of introducing and sustaining racist anti-migration sentiments in popular discourse again evokes the idea of cumulative racism,

in which long standing sociological forces propel distinct figures into positions of prominence, where they are now more easily than ever able to weaponize media to manipulate the same sociological forces to their benefit.

### d.   The Anxieties of Globalization

The right wing populist platform largely bases its appeal on the nationalist rejection of internationalism in the digital age of widely accessible travel and information. At the core of this ideology lies the fear of the "other" encroaching on and dissolving one's own perceived customs, language, and values, all of which hold symbolic power as markers of national identity, which ties deeply into personal identity and security for right wing populists. I have demonstrated that immigration is the common point of concern among Trump and AfD supporters, rendering it impossible to discuss nationalist fears and the attraction of right-wing parties or figures without addressing immigration as the common priority.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have determined migration and media to be the most salient lenses through which to examine the nature of the global right wing populist wave that has emerged in Western countries within the past two decades. In doing so, I have explored political themes that lie beyond the scope of migration alone and deserve further nuanced attention, such as the role of misinformation, gender politics, and economic anxieties under the broader umbrella of globalization. In the interest of maintaining focus on the nature of discursive construction of migrants, I have also only briefly mentioned in my paper some concrete hate crimes in both countries that have escalated from this compounding anti-immigrant discourse. These tragedies

deserve further exploration under a different branch of research centered on the nature of violence and terror itself.

My focus on Germany and the U.S. also limits the extent to which my argument can be extrapolated to affirm the precise cohesion of the global right among other developed Western countries, though I maintain that Germany's role as the democratic and economic leader of Europe has rendered it a strong country to compare with the U.S. regarding migration. Nonetheless, my examination of migration discourse in the wider context of the global surge in right wing popularity has proven that anti-immigration is the single common factor that unites different right-leaning parties across national boundaries and voting demographics.

The similarities that contemporary German and American discourse on migration share are striking, even more so in consideration of the dissimilar contexts that fueled this discourse. Right wing parties in both countries and Russian meddlers capitalized on social media to amplify a large volume of racist opinions into the mainstream media, thus normalizing racist language about immigrants by using post-truth misinformation as fodder for the globalization-fueled, pre-existing ontological anxieties of people. Even though a mass migration event and sexual assaults preceded the Cologne 2016 discursive shift with no parallel in the U.S., the simultaneous progression of discourse in Germany and the U.S. converged along the same historical racist stereotypes about migrant men of color being sexual predators and terrorists.

This phenomenon affirms two critical points: the increased diffusion of media across transnational boundaries, in which one country's turmoil becomes a talking point for the politicians of another, and the longstanding sociological roots of prejudice in both countries that transcend current political administrations and the lesser priorities (e.g. economy) of the voting demographics that empower these administrations. In this structure of cumulative racism and

social media lies the formation of a strengthening global right community that unifies around the platform of anti-immigration.

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