Politics Essay

**Has electoral success for right-wing parties in Europe brought about a decisive shift in national immigration and integration policies?** (4000 words)

Introduction

Radical right-wing parties consider immigration to be a threat to national culture and associate it with crime and terrorism (Akkerman, 2012:516). They also claim that uncontrolled immigration places strains on the welfare state and takes employment away from the indigenous population (Zaslove, 2004:99). The central issue of radical right-wing parties is therefore immigration, with their demand for more restrictive immigration policies proving to be popular across Western European electorates (Bale et al, 2010:410-411). For example, the vote share for such parties across Europe averages at around 10% (Akkerman, 2015:54). This essay considers whether this electoral success has brought about a decisive shift in national immigration and integration policies. For the purposes of this discussion, three contrasting and distinct examples will be examined: Austria, France and Germany.

Examining Austria will be useful as the radical right has consistently achieved high levels of electoral success and has actually made it into office (Zaslove, 2004:100). While discussing the radical right in France will also be useful as, although they have not formed a government, they are thought to have had a significant impact on French immigration and integration policy (Mathaler, 2008:385). Germany will also be discussed as there has recently been a decisive shift in this policy area (Martin, 2014:224). However, this shift has occurred in the absence of an electorally successful radical right party. Germany will therefore strengthen the overall argument that is made throughout; that the electoral success of the radical right has not brought about a decisive shift in national immigration and integration policies in Europe. The strategy which each of these three countries have employed in-terms of dealing with and containing the radical right will also be discussed. Within this discussion, the primary focus will be on the actions of right-wing parties as they are believed to take more restrictive policy measures (Bale 2008:320). However, left-wing parties will also be analysed. Examining three distinct cases will enable for an overall consensus and generalisation to be drawn for Europe as a whole. It is important to note that within this context, a decisive shift in policy is considered to be a complete change in policy direction. Before examining each of these three countries, the arguments empathising that the electoral success of the radical right has bought about a decisive policy shift and those that ague that it has not, will be discussed.

Conclusion

Radical right-wing parties have contributed to the politicisation of the issue of immigration. However, they have not led to a decisive shift in immigration and integration policies in Austria, France and Germany. Austria has always pursued restrictive immigration policies. This, coupled with the fact that the policies enacted by OVP-FPO coalition is no more restrictive than previous or subsequent government policy, illustrates that the electoral success of the FPO has not brought about a decisive shift. This restrictive immigration regime also highlights that the Austrian mainstream parties have not adopted the stance of their radical right electoral opponents. While, the electoral support for the FN in France has led to the mainstream parties adopting elements of their approach. However, this again has not brought about a decisive shift in French immigration and integration policies. A decisive shift occurred in the form of an immigration ban which was introduced before the FN were an electoral threat and as a result of French economic decline, which was induced by the oil crises in the 1970s. While greater empathies on immigrant integration is a reflection on an assimilative tradition and growing security concerns in France. However, there has not been a decisive shift in this policy area.

The mainstream parties in Germany face no serious electoral competition from radical right-wing parties and have successfully restricted them by pursuing a ‘logic of defence’ and to some conflicting degree, a defuse strategy. The implementation of Germany’s first immigration act in 2005 represents a decisive shift in German immigration and integration policy, which has not been brought about by the electoral success of the German radical right. Therefore, based on these distinct cases, the statement that the electoral success of the radical right has not brought about a decisive shift in national immigration and integration policies can be generalised to Europe as a whole.