

Interview with Vera Hanewinkel

Q1: Which aspects of the election manifestos are you analysing, and which criteria have you applied?

Vera Hanewinkel (VH): We look at the demands and positions of those parties currently represented in the Bundestag regarding migration, integration, forced displacement and asylum, sum them up and compare them. This gives us a quick overview of the migration policy stance of the different parties and their concrete ideas on the future shaping of migration-, integration- and asylum policy. Which positions and demands are similar? Where do the parties differ? This, too, quickly becomes clear.

To find out about the positions and demands for the parties regarding migration, integration, forced displacement and asylum, we first took a look at the table of contents of the respective election manifesto and summarised the relevant sections. But migration is a cross-cutting topic, and this is also reflected in most of the manifestos, where migration policy demands in line with 'mainstreaming' can also be found in sections whose title does not necessarily suggest that they contain statements about migration, integration, forced displacement or asylum. This is why we also searched the entire manifestos for keywords, such as immigration, integration, migration, asylum, forced displacement, forced mobility, citizenship, neutralisation, deportation, expulsion, foreigner, Frontex, safe countries / states of origin, migrant, qualified persons, emigrants, racism, anti-Semitism.

Q2: Looking back at the Federal elections 2017: Have migration, forced displacement and integration lost importance compared to other topics, such as climate- and health protection?

VH: Migration, forced displacement and integration continue to play an important role in the respective election manifestos but have taken a back seat to other topics. Climate policy, in particular, must be mentioned here, which now features more prominently in the manifestos of most parties than it did in 2017. Due to the COVID pandemic, which obviously was not an issue then, health policy questions have also gained importance.

It is primarily the opposition parties that are outlining their ideas on how to deal with migration-, integration- and asylum policy 2021 in similar detail as they did in their manifestos for 2017. This is not surprising; after all, they were not part of the federal

government and had much less room for manoeuvre to implement their ideas. In contrast, the parties currently in government seem to have already shot their bolt. The Social Democrats (SPD) have the shortest manifesto this year and state their migration policy ideas and positions only on one and a half pages. The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) mainly point to the migration policy goals and measures they have achieved in the past years and underline that they want to adhere to their migration policy course stressing security and order. By contrast, the SPD partly distances itself from the migration-, integration- and asylum policy it supported in the past four years as a junior partner in the government coalition and intends, for instance, to revoke the restrictions on family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

Observing the election campaign, we can say that the topic of migration only played a minor role in political debates and among voters until mid-August. Surveys of the Forschungsgruppen Wahlen (election research group), for instance, showed that, until the first half of August, the topic of forced displacement and migration continued to be important for voters but that it only ranked third among the "currently most important problems" far behind the corona pandemic and the environment. Overall, its relevance for the respondents has markedly decreased since the last federal election. Whether this will change as a result of the take-over of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan in mid-August and the refugee movements expected as a result remains to be seen. At least in the political debates, the topic of forced displacement has gained importance as a result of the events in Afghanistan. Representatives of all parties represented in the Bundestag took a position on the admission of Afghan people seeking protection shortly after the take-over of power by the Taliban.

The candidates for chancellorship Armin Laschet (CDU) and Olaf Scholz (SPD) spoke out in favour of supporting Afghanistan's neighbouring countries above all in receiving refugees. Laschet stressed that a situation like that in 2015 must not happen again. Conversely, candidate Annalena Baerbock (Green Party), called for refugee quotas "in the five-digit range". The Free Democrats (FDP) want to give more financial support to UNHCR to support refugees in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries; they are also in favour of agreeing on safe corridors with the neighbouring countries, setting up a visa programme for girls and women and besides wanting to help those who were employed by Germany, they include those who were employed by private contractors in Afghanistan. The Left Party calls for the "establishment of safe passage for all people who want to leave the country", a permanent ban on deporting refugees and the right to remain for Afghans in Germany. Alice Weidel, co-chair of the far-right Alternative for Germany Party (AfD), however, argued for suspending the right of asylum.

Q3: What is the difference between the political parties standing for election in their attitudes towards migration, forced displacement and integration? Are there any surprising commonalities in their positions?

VH: The parties differ in their fundamental approach to migration, forced displacement and integration and in how they frame these topics. The attitude towards immigration and the reception of those seeking protection oscillates between two poles: The perception of migration as a threat that must be warded off (AfD) and the emphasis on a right to migration that all people are entitled to and that is expressed in the demand for global

freedom of movement (Linke). The stance adopted by the Christian Democrats, SPD, FDP and the Green Party on migration is in-between these poles.

While CDU and CSU tend to view migration through a security policy and regulatory lens, SPD and the Green Party put greater emphasis on the socio-political element of immigration. The FDP is a proponent of orderly immigration based on clear rules. In this, it is very close to the stance of the CDU/CSU. More than the Christian Democrats, however, the Free Democrats emphasise “humanitarian obligations towards those in need of protection” and go beyond the demands by the SPD by calling for legal and safe escape routes, for instance. In their call for humanitarian visas, they concur with the Green Party and the Left Party.

Looking at the topic of integration, we can also discern two poles: The one-sided demand that immigrants adjust to or assimilate into the host societies on the one hand and the understanding of integration as a two-way process geared towards creating equal opportunities for participation in central areas of social life on the other.

While AfD is the only party that sees integration exclusively as the sole obligation of immigrants, all other parties stress that the receiving society also has a duty to remove obstacles and create access, and that it is up to politics to take active action. The Left Party goes beyond this as it wants to abandon the concept of integration, preferring to speak of participation. It demands that all people living in Germany “be placed on an equal legal, political and social footing”. Like the Green Party, the Left Party wants to remove immigration issues from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, which tends to securitise the topic, and to transfer them to a new ministry. It also shares the demand for a participation law and a reform of the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) with the Green Party and the SPD. With the exception of the AfD, all parties stress that they want to improve the representation of immigrants and their descendants in the civil service. The Left and the Green Parties demand binding targets while the SPD speaks of an obligation to greater inter-cultural openness to be anchored in law. The FDP rejects “rigid quotas” and would like to promote diversity management instead. More than the Left, SPD and the Green Party, FDP and the Christian Democrats stress the guiding principle of integration policy (‘encourage and expect’) and tend to focus on ‘classic’ integration policy instruments such as language and integration courses and measures for labour market integration. However, the FDP is in line with the Green Party in calling for a guiding principle on integration policy. The latter already has a concrete name for it, namely “unity in diversity”, while the FDP rather outlines the elements and principles that such a guiding principle should contain and stresses that its principle is to mirror “societal diversity in unity”.

Q4: What is the general stance towards forced displacement? Do the parties see a global, European or national need for regulatory requirements?

VH: The AfD is the only party that sees an almost exclusively national need for regulatory requirements when it comes to forced displacement—or migration in general. It advocates for the “replacement of the outdated international regulations, such as the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951” by a new “protection system” that focuses on providing assistance to those seeking protection in regions of crisis and only grants a humanitarian reception in exceptional cases, namely for “those particularly vulnerable persons selected by the

Bundestag whose cultural and religious background compatible with German values and social order is an important criterion for their selection". The party wants to abrogate the Global Compact for Refugees. It also advocates reversing the communitisation of asylum policy in the European Union. In its view, only the European external borders are to be further protected by Frontex.

By contrast, the Christian Democrats, FDP, the Green and Left Parties and SPD stress that dealing with refugee movements and the protection of refugees can not be regulated on the national level alone but must also be coordinated on the European and international level. They expressly declare their support of the basic right to asylum and stress that the Geneva Refugee Convention must be observed. They also make suggestions for a reform of the Common European Asylum System which essentially aim to distribute the responsibility for receiving refugees on a solidarity-based system.

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