

# Who can become German? Xenophobia and Attitudes Towards Naturalization

by Claudia Diehl and Ingrid Tucci

Germans are opening up to the topic of immigration: According to the representative data of this report, less and less Germans without a migration background feel threatened by immigration. Also, their attitude towards naturalization has changed. The question “What is the decisive factor for granting German nationality?” is now answered differently than in the 1990s. A significant part of the population without migration background considers ethnic German descent as less important. More and more Germans, however, believe that individual behavior should be the decisive factor for naturalization. In contrast, this doesn’t necessarily imply a decline of xenophobia: Persons placing high importance on behavior and cultural adaptation have equally frequent xenophobic tendencies as persons considering ethnicity to be more important. Still, the number of Germans feeling strong hostility towards strangers went down at large.

The fear of immigration is the first indicator for the openness of a society towards migrants. If a high number of persons without migration background<sup>1</sup> is strongly concerned about the phenomenon of immigration, social closure is at a high level. Data collected by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)<sup>2</sup>, which is connected to DIW Berlin and sponsored by the Leibniz-Gemeinschaft (WGL), allow a longitudinal analysis (see box). In 1999, about a third of all German citizens without migration background was strongly concerned about immigration; ten years later, this figure has gone down to a quarter (Figure 1). In contrast, the percentage of persons who are not concerned about immigration has increased from 16 to 32 percent between 1999 and 2009.

This tendency of decreasing concern can be observed in all analyzed groups—the only exception is the group of unemployed persons (Figure 2). The strongest decline can be found in the group of senior citizens. This can probably be attributed to cohort effects: A growing number of individuals in the old generation has grown up after the war and shows less xenophobic attitudes.<sup>3</sup> All in all, the figure shows that people are less concerned about immigration the higher they rank in their professional hierarchy. Persons whose jobs strongly depend on economic ups and downs—such as manual labor or non-manual routine jobs<sup>4</sup>—worry most about immigration of potential workforce. This finding can partly be explained by the fact that a low level of educa-

**1** We define persons without migration background as persons of German nationality who have not immigrated themselves and whose parents have not immigrated either.

**2** Wagner, G.G. et al. (2008): Das Sozio-oekonomische Panel (SOEP): multidisziplinäres Haushaltspanel und Kohortenstudie für Deutschland—Eine Einführung (für neue Datennutzer) mit einem Ausblick (für erfahrene Anwender). *ASTA Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv*, 2(4), 301-328.

**3** See Rippl, S. (2008): Zu Gast bei Freunden? Fremdenfeindliche Einstellungen und interethnische Freundschaften im Zeitverlauf. In: F. Kalter (Hrsg.): *Migration und Integration*. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 48, 488-512.

**4** Non-manual routine jobs are professions like clerks or cleaning staff.

### Dataset and Method

The Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) is a representative survey of private households which is carried out annually by TNS Infratest Sozialforschung on behalf of DIW Berlin as part of the German research infrastructure. The survey was begun in 1984 in West Germany and since 1990 also includes East Germany. The SOEP collects data on socio-structural indicators as well as attitudes and concerns of respondents regarding specific topics and areas of life. In 2009, more than 20,000 persons above the age of 16, representing more than 10,000 households, took part in the survey.

Another survey belonging to the research infrastructure is the Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften (ALLBUS). It is conducted biannually on behalf of GESIS (Mannheim) and collects data on behavior and attitudes of the German population, with a specific focus for each survey. In 1996 and 2006, respondents were asked about their attitude towards foreigners and the importance of certain criteria for granting German nationality. This allows for example an analysis of a link between attitudes and changes over time. In this article, xenophobic attitudes are measured based on the following set of questions:

1. Foreigners living in Germany are a burden for the welfare system.
2. Foreigners living in Germany enrich the cultural life in Germany.
3. Foreigners living in Germany and their presence here cause problems on the housing market.
4. Foreigners living in Germany take away jobs from Germans.
5. Foreigners living in Germany commit crimes more often than Germans.

Answers were given on a scale from 1 to 7. For the calculation of the level of xenophobia, these answers were transformed into values from 0 to 6. Answers to the second question were rescaled to values from 6 to 0. Respondents with extreme values between 25 and 30 are considered as strongly xenophobic and receive the value 1. Others receive the value 0. This dichotomous indicator is then used as explaining variable.

The set of questions testing the attitudes towards naturalization was introduced with the following explanation: "I am going to list certain aspects which can play a role in the decision on granting German nationality. Please tell me with the help of the scale how important these aspects should be in this decision:

1. Whether the person was born in Germany,
2. is of German descent,
3. masters the German language,
4. has been living here for a long time,
5. is willing to adapt to German lifestyle,
6. is a member of a Christian church,
7. has not committed any crimes,
8. is able to earn their living."

These criteria underwent a so-called factor analysis. This way, two dimensions of belonging became clear: an ethnic dimension (questions 1, 2, and 4) and a civil-cultural dimension (questions 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8). From these dimensions based on the respective questions, four types were created: strong agreement in both dimensions, weak agreement in both dimensions, agreement predominantly in the ethnic dimension and agreement predominantly in the civil-cultural dimension. Strong agreement is considered as values of at least 5 on the scale from 0 to 6.

tion generally implies more skeptical attitudes towards immigration.<sup>5</sup>

On the whole, the level of concern was significantly lower in 2009 than in 1999. However, there were strong fluctuations within this ten-year period: Between 2001 and 2005, a considerable increase of concern was observed in all professional groups. This might go back to the rise of international terrorism and the discussions on

the integration of Muslims as well as political debates on migration: In 2001, the so-called immigration commission<sup>6</sup> published their report, which intensified the public discussion of the need for immigration to Germany and the necessity of integration.<sup>7</sup> From 2006 onwards—one year after the Immigration Act came into

<sup>5</sup> See Coenders, M. and Scheepers, P. (2003): The Effect of Education on Nationalism and Ethnic Exclusionism: An International Comparison. *Political Psychology*, 24(2), 313-343.

<sup>6</sup> See Bundesministerium des Inneren (Hrsg.) (2001): *Zuwanderung gestalten. Integration fördern. Bericht der Unabhängigen Kommission „Zuwanderung“*, Berlin.

<sup>7</sup> In this regard see also the report of the so-called immigration council: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (2004) (Hrsg.): *Migration und Integration. Erfahrungen nutzen, Neues wagen. Jahresgutachten des Sachverständigenrates für Zuwanderung und Integration*. Nürnberg

force—the percentage of Germans who were strongly concerned about immigration went down. Even if it remains unclear which role the changed political treatment of this topic has really played: It is striking that nearly 40 percent of Germans are satisfied with their government regarding immigration and integration. This is a high value, both in comparison with general satisfaction with the government and in international comparison.<sup>8</sup>

### Less and less persons show strongly xenophobic attitudes

The ALLBUS (Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften) dataset analyzed for 1996 and 2006 shows<sup>9</sup> that the average level of xenophobia in both East and West Germany has somewhat decreased (see table). The share of German respondents<sup>10</sup> with a strongly xenophobic attitude declined quite significantly: From nine to four percent in West Germany and from 15 to four percent in East Germany.<sup>11</sup> Obviously, there was a convergence of attitudes between West and East Germany on a generally lower level. It is especially striking that in 2006, less respondents stated that foreigners living in Germany were taking away jobs from Germans or causing problems on the housing market.

Earlier studies have shown a correlation between the degree of xenophobia and the legal or collective definition of national identity.<sup>12</sup> The concept of national identity has changed over the past years. The reform of nationality law may have contributed to this trend.

The new law, which came into force on January 1, 2000, introduced the birthplace principle, which was already

<sup>8</sup> Own calculations based on data by Transatlantic Trends on Immigration, [www.trends.gmfus.org](http://www.trends.gmfus.org).

<sup>9</sup> This Weekly Report is mainly based on an already published contribution of the authors: see Diehl, C. and Tucci, I. (2010): *Ethnische Grenzziehung in Ost- und Westdeutschland: Konvergenz und Kulturalisierung*. In: Krause, P. and Ostner, I. (Hrsg.): *Leben in Ost- und Westdeutschland. Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Bilanz der deutschen Einheit 1990-2010*, 557-572.

<sup>10</sup> This evaluation includes only respondents who stated they were German by birth.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that ALLBUS provides an old and a new set of questions for measuring xenophobic attitudes (for more information see Alba, R. and Johnson, M. (2000): *Zur Messung aktueller Einstellungsmuster gegenüber Ausländern in Deutschland*. In: Alba, R., Schmidt, P. und Wasmer, M. (Hrsg.): *Deutsche und Ausländer: Freunde, Fremde oder Feinde?* 229-253. If xenophobia is measured with the old foreigner items, a decline of strongly xenophobic attitudes can also be observed, while the average level remains quite stable (see also Diehl and Tucci (2010), l.c.).

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the correlation between the concept of nation and xenophobia see Hjerm, M. (1998): *National Identities, National Pride and Xenophobia: A Comparison of Four Western Countries*. *Acta Sociologica*, 41(4), 335-347 and Lewin-Epstein, N. and Levanon, A. (2005): *National Identity and Xenophobia in an Ethnically Divided Society*. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 7(2), 90-118.

Figure 1

### Concern about Immigration

In Percent<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Persons without migration background.

Source: SOEP.

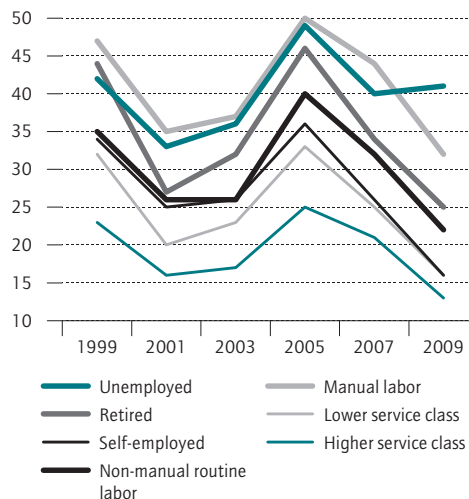
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Though a peak occurred in 2005, concern about immigration is generally on the decline.

Figure 2

### Persons Strongly Concerned about Immigration, by Professional Status

Percentages<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Persons without migration background.

Source: SOEP.

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Persons in manual labor are more concerned about immigration.

Table

**Attitudes Toward Preconditions for Naturalization and Xenophobia in 1996 and 2006**

Scale from 1 to 7

	1996	1996	2006	2006
	West	East	West	East
	Germany		Germany	
<b>Indicators for xenophobia</b>				
Foreigners living in Germany...				
... are a burden for the welfare system <sup>1</sup>	4.0	4.6	4.0	4.7
... enrich the cultural life in Germany <sup>12</sup>	3.9	3.7	4.1	3.9
... cause problems on the housing market	4.3	4.0	2.7	2.1
... take away jobs from Germans	3.6	4.7	3.3	3.9
... commit crimes more often than Germans <sup>12</sup>	3.9	4.5	4.2	4.3
Total xenophobia (Scale from 0 to 30) <sup>3</sup>	14.8	17.3	13.1	14.2
Percentage of strongly xenophobic attitudes	9.4	15.3	3.7	4.1
<b>Preconditions for Naturalization</b>				
Born in Germany <sup>2</sup>	4.7	5.0	3.5	3.6
German descent <sup>2</sup>	4.4	4.7	3.3	3.5
Master the German language <sup>2</sup>	5.4	4.5	6.3	6.2
Living here for a long time <sup>12</sup>	5.5	5.2	5.0	5.1
Willingness to adapt German lifestyle	5.0	4.8	5.6	5.9
Member of Christian church <sup>1</sup>	2.2	1.8	2.5	2.0
No crimes committed <sup>2</sup>	6.1	6.3	6.3	6.5
Earn their living <sup>2,4</sup>	5.7	5.8	6.0	6.0

1 Changes between 1996 and 2006 in East Germany are not statistically relevant.

2 Differences between East and West Germany in 2006 are not statistically relevant.

3 Rescaled to 0 – 6. The values of the second indicator are inverted.

4 Differences between East and West Germany in 1996 are not statistically relevant.

Source: ALLBUS 1996 and 2006.

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**Strongly xenophobic attitudes are declining – more strongly in East Germany than in the West.**

common in other European countries like France. Before 2000, children of migrants did not automatically receive German nationality when they were born in Germany. Since 2000, children of migrants receive German nationality upon their birth in Germany if at least one parent has been living here for eight years and possesses an unlimited residence permit. In some cases, children of migrants can keep both their German nationality and that of their parents.<sup>13</sup> In other cases, they must choose one within five years after reaching maturity. Although the principle of preventing multiple nationality is kept with a number of exceptions, the introduction of the birthplace principle shows a deviation from Germany’s traditional self-understanding as nation by descent. Additionally, other preconditions for

<sup>13</sup> EU citizens and children with one German and one foreign parent are allowed to keep both nationalities.

a possible right to German nationality were changed: The necessary length of stay for immigrants was reduced from 15 to eight years. From 2006 onwards, other criteria like sound knowledge of the German language and passing of a citizenship test were discussed. These were finally introduced when nationality law was changed again in August 2007.

**Criteria for nationalization: Growing importance of cultural adaptation**

Just like the legal framework has changed, the opinions of German-born citizens on the necessary preconditions for naturalization have undergone transformation too. The question “Who can become German?” is now answered differently than before.

When looking at the average values of the indicators for more or less important preconditions for naturalization, it becomes clear that criteria like knowledge of the language and adaptation to German lifestyle are now (2006) regarded as more important than in 1996 countrywide. In contrast, the precondition of German descent has lost some importance.

In terms of the indicators for the assessment of naturalization criteria, two dimensions can be distinguished: The first dimension comprises the criteria birth in Germany, German descent and long duration of stay and is usually<sup>14</sup> called ethnic dimension. The second dimension comprises indicators relating to behavior, including the need for civil and cultural adaptation (knowledge of the language, willingness to adapt to a “German lifestyle”, membership of a Christian church, impunity, economic independence).

Whereas 12 percent of Germans in West Germany and 17 percent in East Germany strongly agreed with ethnic criteria of national identity in 1996, this figure went down to four and three percent respectively ten years later (Figure 3). The percentage of those considering both ethnic and civil-cultural criteria as equally important declined in both parts of Germany too. However, the percentage of persons placing high value on civil-cultural preconditions has sharply increased: In 2006, 57 percent of respondents in West Germany and 54 percent in East Germany considered criteria linked to behavior to be especially important. A separate look at specific indicators tells us that this increase was highest for the cultural preconditions of language skills<sup>15</sup> and lifestyle adaptation, although a slight increase could also be ob-

<sup>14</sup> Lewin-Epstein, N. and Levanon, A. (2005), l.c.

<sup>15</sup> Language skills can be considered as civil and/or cultural precondition for naturalization.

served for the precondition of church membership, at least in West Germany, between 1996 and 2006. As a result of this development, the share of respondents not mentioning any specific preconditions for naturalization has gone down over time.

On the one hand, this clear shift points to a move away from ethnic criteria and to a more open concept of nation. On the other hand—and this finding is harder to evaluate—the more frequent demand for lifestyle adaptation shows a stronger culture-related perception of the boundary between so-called “natives” and “foreigners”. A possible explanation might be the demand for respect for universal achievements such as gender equality. If this were the case, the advocates of civil-cultural criteria for naturalization should be less frequently xenophobic than those arguing for ethnic criteria. If, however, the demand for cultural adaptation or an adaptation to German lifestyle were only a new and maybe socially more acceptable form of ethnic exclusion, their representatives should be equally often xenophobic as those supporting descent-based naturalization criteria.

**Cultural advocates are no less xenophobic**

In the usual approaches to explain xenophobic attitudes, a number of determining factors are taken into account: structural or socio-demographic aspects (age, sex, level of education, employment, household income), social contacts (contact to foreigners), values and political convictions, anomy<sup>16</sup> and concerns. These factors are additionally included in the present multivariate analysis<sup>17</sup> for the understanding of the concept of national belonging. The results of this analysis (Figure 4) show us to what extent the percentage of strongly xenophobic persons increases in relation to their concept of national identity. To this end, respondents placing high importance on civil-cultural and/or ethnic criteria for naturalization are compared with persons who only mildly agree with both types of preconditions.

On average, eight percent of persons without migration background showed strongly xenophobic tendencies in 1996 and 2006. This percentage increases by four percent for persons considering both ethnic and civil-cultural naturalization criteria as very important. But also for respondents considering especially civil-cultural preconditions as important, the share of persons with strongly xenophobic tendencies increases by two percent.

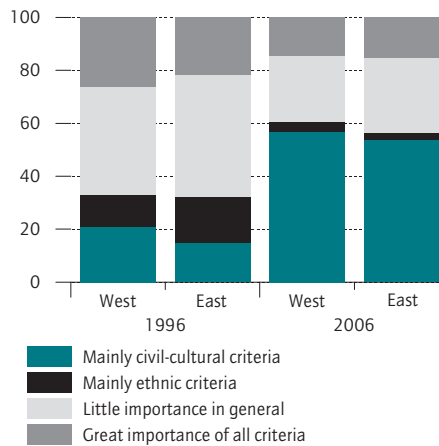
16 Anomy means a state of weakened social norms and rules causing the individual to feel a lack of orientation and emotional bonds.

17 The results for each factor are described in detail in Diehl and Tucci (2010), l.c.

Figure 3

**Attitudes Toward Preconditions for Naturalization in 1996 and 2006**

Percentages



Source: ALLBUS 1996 and 2006.

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Civil-cultural aspects dominate the attitudes towards preconditions for naturalization.

Furthermore, Germans preferring ethnic criteria are not significantly more xenophobic than advocates of purely civil-cultural criteria for naturalization.

**Conclusions**

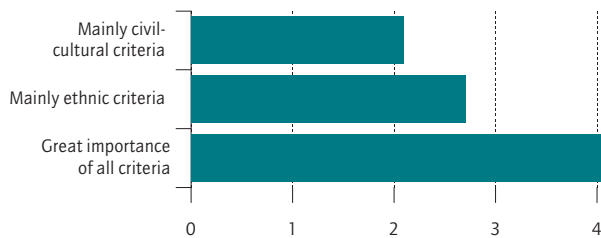
Our findings show considerable dynamics in attitudes towards immigration and immigrants since the middle of the 1990s. Still, immigration has become an integral part of German economy: In 2009, nearly 80 percent of Germans affirmed the question whether Germany was an immigration country. The heated media debate on Thilo Sarrazin’s book “Deutschland schafft sich ab” (“Germany Does Away With Itself”) hasn’t changed much in this respect either.<sup>18</sup> Although ethnic diversity seems to be part of German reality by now, demands for civil and cultural adaptation have sharply increased over the past decade; this is a development not easy to judge in its implications. It remains unclear whether lifestyle adaptation means sufficient language skills and respect for constitutional values such as equal rights for men and women, or if cultural assimilation goes beyond that. Even if this question cannot be fully answered.

18 This is backed by our own calculations based on data of Transatlantic Trends on Immigration, www.trends.gmfus.org, before and several weeks after Sarrazin’s book was published.

Figure 4

**Percentage of Respondents with Strongly Xenophobic Attitude**

Deviation from overall average in percentage points



Source: ALLBUS 1996 and 2006.

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Persons placing high importance on all criteria for naturalization are generally more xenophobic.

red, our analysis shows a changed concept of national identity. However, the overall decline of xenophobic attitudes is not due to this changed understanding of national identity: Other than expected, advocates of civil-cultural conditions for naturalization are just as likely to have xenophobic tendencies as those defending traditional ethnic criteria.

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