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# UNDERSTANDING THE CREATION OF PUBLIC CONSENSUS: MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION IN GERMANY, 2005 TO 2015

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By Friedrich Heckmann

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Migration and Integration in Germany,  
2005 to 2015

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For more on the Transatlantic Council on Migration, please visit: [www.migrationpolicy.org/transatlantic](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/transatlantic).

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## Executive Summary

As immigrant-skeptic movements gained salience, and even political representation, in several European countries in recent years, Germany remained a relative outlier until mid-2015, when increased inflows of refugees and migrants touched off an immigration crisis in the fall of that year.

In the decade between 2005 and 2015, leaders across the political spectrum supported immigration to Germany and emphasized the importance of maintaining a culture that is open to newcomers and diversity. Even as migration and asylum numbers began rising significantly, polling data and surveys suggested the German public was equally supportive. In early 2015, the share of respondents who thought Germany could not absorb further immigration was just 18 percent, while about 50 percent saw immigration as extremely important for the German labor market.<sup>1</sup> Another comparative survey of public opinion, conducted in 2011, put German doubts about immigration at half the level seen in Spain, Italy, or the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

These views persisted for years despite a rise in immigration, with new arrivals almost doubling between 2011 and 2013.<sup>3</sup> And in 2014, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) announced that Germany had become the largest immigrant destination after the United States among OECD members.<sup>4</sup> This consensus was a recent development, however, emerging out of a long and at times divisive debate on national identity. The topic of integration—citizenship in particular—as well as the role of diversity and multiculturalism in German society have been especially contentious. Between 2005 and 2015, however, the conflict abated as the major political parties expressed relatively consistent views on immigration- and integration-related issues.

A number of factors stemming from Germany's economic, immigration, and policy context played a role in this development, including:

- **Sustained economic strength.** Since 2005, Germany has maintained positive economic growth and a strong labor market with low unemployment. The country's economic strength kept native workers' fears of competition or threat at a minimum, while demand in the labor market led to calls for more liberal immigration policies.
- **Link between immigration and economic growth in public narratives.** Over the past ten years, public discussions of immigration policy in Germany have increasingly linked immigration with economic growth and competitiveness. Recruitment of fresh talent has been seen as a tool to ensure Germany's ability to compete in the global market, particularly considering the country's otherwise aging society. Issues of identity and culture have also been seen more as obstacles to overcome in order to attract needed labor, rather than as flash points for controversy.
- **A strong elite consensus on immigration.** The shifting narrative on immigration in Germany was reinforced and even promoted by politicians, the private sector, media, and other elites across German society. Representatives of industry and trade associations, which compose a powerful force in German policymaking, have been outspoken in their support for new immigration and for the better integration of existing immigrant populations.

1 Renate Köcher, "Die Meinung der Bürger: Ergebnisse des Allensbach Instituts zum Thema 'Zuwanderung,'" *Forschung und Lehre* 4 (2015): 266–67.

2 German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS), *Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2014* (Washington, DC: GMFUS, 2014), 34, [http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2012/09/Trends\\_2014\\_complete.pdf](http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2012/09/Trends_2014_complete.pdf).

3 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Germany," in *International Migration Outlook 2014* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014), 256–57, [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2014/germany\\_migr\\_outlook-2014-18-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2014/germany_migr_outlook-2014-18-en).

4 Anthony Faiola, "The New Land of Opportunity for Immigrants is Germany," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-new-land-of-opportunity-for-immigrants-is-germany/2014/07/27/93464262-7eff-4931-817c-786db6d21ec8\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-new-land-of-opportunity-for-immigrants-is-germany/2014/07/27/93464262-7eff-4931-817c-786db6d21ec8_story.html).



- ***Comprehensive investments in immigration and integration policy.*** A new immigration law in 2005 and further liberalization in 2012 emphasized the selection and management of immigration to Germany in line with economic needs. These changes have been accompanied by significant investments in integration measures at the federal and local levels to ensure that both existing and new immigrant populations have the skills and resources they need to succeed once in Germany.

This report, written for the summer 2015 plenary meeting of the Migration Policy Institute's Transatlantic Council on Migration, explains how a pro-immigrant consensus evolved and persisted in Germany during the period from 2005—as the country emerged from recession and embarked on a reform of its immigration laws—through to the events of mid-2015. While it is too early to tell what the outcome of the renewed migration debates in Germany will be, this analysis provides a valuable historical lens through which to understand recent events, and offers important—and still relevant—lessons about the nature of public consensus.

## I. Introduction

Opinion polls throughout Europe have captured a pronounced lack of public trust in the governance of immigration and integration processes. Amid a painfully slow recovery from the economic crisis of 2008-09—alongside massive youth unemployment and harsh austerity programs—this distrust has been accompanied by rising support for anti-immigrant, nativist parties in many European countries.<sup>5</sup>

Although Germany is the main recipient of immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe, frustration with the German government's handling of migration was—until recently—less significant than in the rest of Europe.<sup>6</sup> Opinion polls support this assertion: in 2011, negative views of immigration in Germany were at half the level reported in Spain, Italy, or the United Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Instead, political and business leaders, the media, and welfare and other civil-society organizations sought to establish and strengthen “a welcoming culture” to make Germany more attractive to talent from abroad. Even as migration began to increase in 2014 and early 2015, anti-immigrant parties remained politically weak, overshadowed by an enormous upsurge of practical solidarity with refugees.

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How did Germany maintain supportive public opinion for immigration and relatively high trust in government in the period from 2005 to 2015, despite an increase in flows and related pressures? There are valuable lessons to be drawn from an analysis of the factors that drove its creation and allowed it to persist largely unchallenged for a decade.

This report aims to assess what factors underpinned Germany's robust support for refugee and migrant arrivals between 2005 and 2015. It begins with a historical look at how debates around migration

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5 Far-right parties have, for example, recently experienced electoral success in the April 2016 Austrian presidential elections when the far-right candidate narrowly missed winning the presidency, Denmark's 2015 parliamentary election, the 2014 Swedish parliamentary election, and 2014 European parliament elections. See GMFUS, *Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2014*.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.



have shifted in Germany over time, and then considers the reasons behind the development of a pro-immigration consensus. Finally, the report concludes by probing the extent to which increased inflows and shifting responses threaten consensus in Germany, and offers some broad lessons for restoring and preserving public trust in the government's ability to manage migration in the future.

## II. The Migration Debate in Germany Since the 1950s: From Controversy to Consensus

Germany's embrace of immigration and the positive majority view of immigrants are relatively new phenomena. (See appendix Table A-1 for an overview of the phases in Germany's immigration history). Guestworker immigration in the 1950s was viewed as temporary, but measures were taken to include guestworkers in major state welfare institutions. This, however, was not regarded as an integration policy, but as a welfare state measure for temporary workers that should also protect native workers from wage dumping.<sup>8</sup> Even after large-scale family reunification began in the late 1960s and early 1970s (a sure sign that immigrants were not, in fact, temporary), the German government refused to recognize immigration as a lasting phenomenon and to take appropriate measures to integrate new arrivals.

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Immigration and integration remained highly contentious topics in Germany for decades.<sup>9</sup> As in many other countries in Europe and beyond, migration issues were politicized and became points of disagreement between major political parties. Passion and even hatred were voiced in political and media debates.<sup>10</sup> In the 1990s, rhetoric turned to violence with a series of xenophobic attacks on shelters housing asylum seekers.<sup>11</sup>

From the 1970s until very recently, immigration debates in Germany centered on three questions: First, is Germany a country of immigrants? Despite ample evidence that this was already the case,<sup>12</sup> political figures and organizations for decades remained reluctant to accept Germany's changed identity.<sup>13</sup> "Germany is not a country of immigration" became a rallying cry against any proposed liberalization

8 The term "wage dumping" describes the practice of offering wages lower than the industry standard, often to foreign workers.

9 See for example Oya S. Abali, *German Public Opinion on Immigration and Integration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/german-public-opinion-immigration-and-integration](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/german-public-opinion-immigration-and-integration).

10 Rainer Geißler, "Migration, Integration, and Media," in *Medienpolitik*, ed. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (BPB) (Bonn: BPB, 2013), [www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/medien/medienpolitik/172752/migration-integration-und-medien?p=all](http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/medien/medienpolitik/172752/migration-integration-und-medien?p=all). For another example, see Gualtiero Zambonini, *The Evolution of German Media Coverage of Migration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/evolution-german-media-coverage-migration](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/evolution-german-media-coverage-migration).

11 Charles Hawley and Daryl Lindsey, "Twenty Years after Rostock: Racism and Xenophobia Still Prevalent in Germany," *Der Spiegel*, August 24, 2012, [www.spiegel.de/international/germany/xenophobia-still-prevalent-in-germany-20-years-after-neo-nazi-attacks-a-851972.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/xenophobia-still-prevalent-in-germany-20-years-after-neo-nazi-attacks-a-851972.html).

12 Friedrich Heckmann, *Die Bundesrepublik: Ein Einwanderungsland? Zur Soziologie der Gastarbeiterbevölkerung als Einwandererminorität* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981); Klaus J. Bade, *Vom Auswanderungsland zum Einwanderungsland? Deutschland 1880-1980* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1983).

13 For a full discussion of the shift in discourse on migration in Germany, see Rita Süßmuth, *The Future of Migration and Integration Policy in Germany* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/future-migration-and-integration-policy-germany](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/future-migration-and-integration-policy-germany).



of immigration and integration policy throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s, voicing a position supported by Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl throughout his tenure as chancellor from 1982 to 1998. When Kohl left office in 1998, the newly elected Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Green coalition government declared, in a watershed moment, their agreement that Germany had in fact become an immigration country.

With the start of the new millennium, this explicit definition of Germany as a country of immigration slowly became part of a consensus among all major parties, including conservative ones. It laid the foundation for the government's first large-scale overhaul of the immigration system in 2005 and the establishment of a systematic integration policy. As a result, the federal government became actively involved in both facilitating immigration and managing integration. The Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF), once focused only on asylum, took on primary responsibility for implementing migration and integration policy. Its functions grew to include the administration of other forms of integration policy; the organization of large-scale language and integration courses; the distribution of EU funding and resources from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); the coordination of various hotlines to serve the immigrant population; and the management of a large research department.<sup>14</sup>

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Second, immigration debates in Germany were typically driven by the question of whether it was possible—and if so, how—to become German, demonstrated most clearly by the issue of citizenship. The question at the heart of the debate was whether in addition to the principle of citizenship by descent (*ius sanguinis*), children born to non-German parents in Germany could assume German citizenship based on their place of birth (*ius soli*). Controversy also emerged over what should be required of those seeking to acquire German citizenship by choice, through naturalization. Various conceptions of the German nation lay behind the controversy. Prior to the adoption of a new citizenship law in 2000, German nationality was based primarily on the principle of descent, emphasizing ethnicity. Naturalizing required a lengthy period of residence, and children born in Germany to non-German parents could not obtain citizenship except through naturalization. The 2000 reforms made substantial changes on both fronts. Naturalization was made easier; more importantly, the law introduced the possibility for children born in Germany to receive German citizenship on the condition that they surrender any other nationality they may have acquired through *ius sanguinis* once they turned 21. The lack of tolerance for dual nationality continued to generate controversy throughout the 2000s. The debate was finally resolved in 2014, when the ruling Social Democratic Party (SDP)–Christian Democratic Union (CDU) coalition government amended the law to allow children born and raised in Germany to retain their second nationality.<sup>15</sup>

The final set of issues encompasses questions of identity, integration, and multiculturalism that have been at the heart of complex and emotionally charged debates in Germany. While the changing ethnic composition of the German population is undeniable, normative and political questions about how to adapt policies to keep pace with this demographic change were much more difficult to resolve. German institutions and the public were confronted by recurring questions about how to address cultural

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14 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), “Bundesamt: Von der Dienststelle zum Bundesamt,” accessed June 16, 2015, [www.bamf.de/DE/DasBAMF/Chronik/Bundesamt/bundesamt-node.html](http://www.bamf.de/DE/DasBAMF/Chronik/Bundesamt/bundesamt-node.html).

15 For a further discussion of the changes to the citizenship regulations in Germany, see Süßmuth, *The Future of Migration and Integration Policy in Germany*.





differences in mainstream institutions, such as how to include Islam alongside Protestant and Catholic religious instruction in schools. Most famously, Chancellor Angela Merkel questioned the legitimacy of multiculturalism as an organizing principle when she claimed in 2010 that “the multicultural approach [to integration] has failed, utterly failed” in Germany.<sup>16</sup> Partly in response to these concerns about multiculturalism, the idea of a “welcoming culture” that recognizes the value of cultural diversity (see Box 1) emerged in 2010 as an alternative guiding principle for Germany’s immigration and integration efforts. The concept was broadly taken up and promoted by major political actors, private sector stakeholders, and the public.

### Box 1. “Welcoming” and “Recognition” Culture

The phrases “welcoming culture” (*Willkommenskultur*) and “culture of recognition” (*Anerkennungskultur*) have been used to describe a culture that recognizes the value of immigrants’ contributions to society and thus supports intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, mutual respect, and social cohesion.

The concept aims to support the integration and participation of migrant populations in Germany’s social, economic, and political processes. At the same time, it signals that Germany is an open and welcoming home for potential migrants, where they can enjoy respect and recognition.

While the terms *Willkommenskultur* and *Anerkennungskultur* are used interchangeably, the first aims to attract new immigrants, while the second focuses on the existing diversity in society. The concept of *Willkommenskultur* appeared in political rhetoric around 2010, as part of a debate on labor market shortages; *Anerkennungskultur* followed in 2011, in response to existing immigrants’ requests for greater inclusion.

Sources: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur: Handlungsempfehlungen und Praxisbeispiele Abschlussbericht Runder Tisch “Aufnahmegesellschaft”* (Nuremberg: BAMF, 2013), [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/abschlussbericht-runder-tisch-aufnahmegesellschaft.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/abschlussbericht-runder-tisch-aufnahmegesellschaft.pdf?__blob=publicationFile); BAMF, “Anerkennungskultur vor Ort: Bürgerschaftliches Engagement interkulturell öffnen und stärken,” accessed June 16, 2015, [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Veranstaltungen/DE/2014/140908-erkennungskultur-nuernberg.html](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Veranstaltungen/DE/2014/140908-erkennungskultur-nuernberg.html).

## The Emergence of an Immigration-Friendly Consensus

The evolution of these three primary debates mirrors the dramatic changes in public narratives on immigration in Germany.<sup>17</sup> After immigration was officially recognized as a key part of modern German society in 1998, the resulting political consensus created space for needed reforms to the integration and immigration systems. Policymakers further reinforced positive public opinion and trust by ensuring that both immigration and integration were managed in a comprehensive and transparent manner.

An anecdote from April 2015 illustrates this shift. In an interview,<sup>18</sup> the then-president of BAMF, Manfred Schmidt, declared, “[The consciousness of Germans] has changed so much. The amount of helpfulness and engagement refugees are shown today—we didn’t have that twenty, thirty years ago. Everything is so much more laid-back today than twenty or thirty years ago,” a reference to the heightened volunteer spirit and openness of the public toward recent asylum seekers. In other words, all evidence indicated that a positive consensus around immigration had emerged out of the heated debates of the 1990s and early 2000s—and persisted, despite rising immigration and refugee flows.

16 Sabine Siebold, “Merkel Says German Multiculturalism Has Failed,” Reuters, October 16, 2010, [www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/16/us-germany-merkel-immigration-idUSTRE69F1K320101016](http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/16/us-germany-merkel-immigration-idUSTRE69F1K320101016).

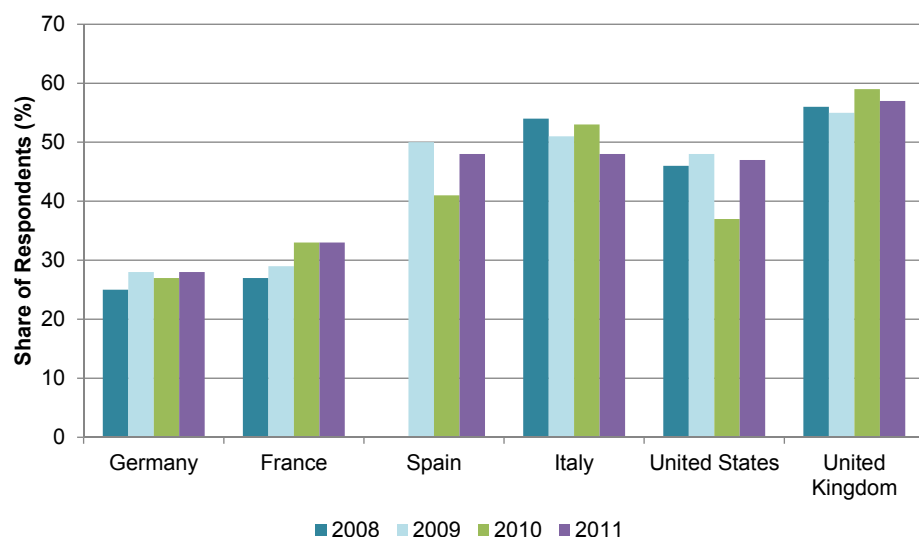
17 See the Appendix for a detailed list of changes to integration policy since the 1950s.

18 Jan Bielicki and Roland Preuß, “Es gibt nicht eine Lösung,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 26, 2015, [www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/asylpolitik-es-gibt-nicht-die-eine-loesung-1.2452953](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/asylpolitik-es-gibt-nicht-die-eine-loesung-1.2452953).



Empirical data support Schmidt's assessment. Surveys conducted by Transatlantic Trends, for example, indicate that in 2008-11 anti-immigrant sentiment was lower in Germany than in the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy, Spain, or France (see Figure 1). The differences between countries are quite clear and stable over time. More recently, the 2014 Pew Global Attitudes Survey also found that support for more immigration was larger in Germany (14 percent of respondents) than in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, or Poland. The share of those favoring less immigration was also lower than in any of the other seven countries surveyed, with the exception of Poland.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 1. Share of National Population Who Agree There Are “Too Many Immigrants in the Country,” 2008-11**



Source: German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS), *Transatlantic Trends 2011* (Washington, DC: GMFUS, 2011), [www.gmfus.org/publications/transatlantic-trends-2011](http://www.gmfus.org/publications/transatlantic-trends-2011).

Another study from 2014 found that about half of respondents believed immigration to be extremely important for the German labor market.<sup>20</sup> The skeptics were few: just 18 percent believed that Germany could not absorb further immigration, and about 30 percent believed that continuing unemployment would make immigration unnecessary. This was a noticeable change from previous years, when negative views towards immigration were substantially higher, at 61 percent in 2005. Given that net immigration to Germany rose continuously between the first and second study,<sup>21</sup> the persistence of and even increase in pro-immigration attitudes is particularly noteworthy. Similarly, Pew's Global Trends survey found in 2014 that 66 percent of Germans surveyed felt immigrants made their country economically stronger, higher than in any of the other seven European countries surveyed.<sup>22</sup>

The effects of these positive perceptions of immigration were clearly felt in the political sphere. No clearly anti-immigrant party was able to gain significant political influence during this time. The right extremist and partly neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) won only a 1.3 percent share in the 2013 national elections, for example, and opinion polls did not indicate any increase in support for the party in the years

<sup>19</sup> Pew Research Center, *A Fragile Rebound for EU Image on Eve of European Parliament Elections* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, May 12, 2014), [www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/12/chapter-3-most-support-limiting-immigration/#many-want-less-immigration](http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/12/chapter-3-most-support-limiting-immigration/#many-want-less-immigration).

<sup>20</sup> Köcher, "Die Meinung der Bürger."

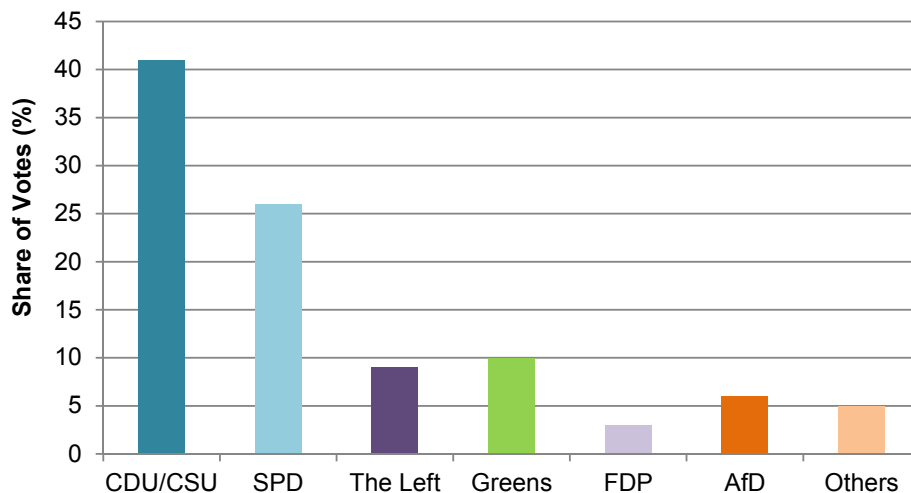
<sup>21</sup> OECD, "Germany."

<sup>22</sup> Pew Research Center, *A Fragile Rebound for EU Image on Eve of European Parliament Elections*.



immediately following the election.<sup>23</sup> Support for a new far-right party, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) that recently broadened its scope to include anti-immigrant views, similarly remained low through early 2015. As of April 2015, 6 percent of polled respondents indicated their support for the party (see Figure 2). From time to time the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian sister party of Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling center-right CDU, has also made forays into populist campaigns<sup>24</sup> to bind right-wing segments of the population to the party. But until 2015, the CSU's views generally stayed in line with the mainstream consensus on immigration.

**Figure 2. Responses to the Question, "If the Election Were Held Next Sunday, Who Would You Vote For?" by Political Party, April 2015**



Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen E.V., "Politbarometer April 2015," accessed May 23, 2016, [www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer\\_2015/April\\_2015/](http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer_2015/April_2015/).

Positive perceptions of migration and integration were accompanied by a rise in civil-society support of asylum seekers. As flows of refugees and migrants increased in 2014 and early 2015, volunteer initiatives sprang up all over Germany to help new arrivals with financial and in-kind donations and with informational and psychological support. The most well-known of these is the Berlin-based "Refugees Welcome," which established a platform for private citizens to offer refugees accommodation in their homes.<sup>25</sup> Other initiatives, such as "Rechts gegen Rechts"<sup>26</sup> sought to directly counter anti-immigrant and racist views. Moreover, counter-demonstrations against anti-immigrant groups such as Pegida (a group that emerged in Dresden in late 2014, discussed in further detail below) consistently and substantially

23 For National Democratic Party (NDP) results, see Roderich Egeler, "Endgültiges amtliches Ergebnis der Bundestagswahl 2013" (news release, October 9, 2013), [www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/BTW\\_BUND\\_13/presse/w13034\\_Endgueltiges\\_amtliches\\_Ergebnis.html](http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/BTW_BUND_13/presse/w13034_Endgueltiges_amtliches_Ergebnis.html). For opinion polls, see Wahlrecht, "Sonntagsfrage Bundestagswahl: Wenn am nächsten Sonntag Bundestagswahl wäre...", accessed May 23, 2016, [www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen](http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen).

24 For example, the campaign "Wer betrügt, der fliegt" ("He who cheats must leave"). See *Der Spiegel*, "CSU-Kampagne 'Wer betrügt, fliegt': Seehofer verteidigt Stimmungsmache gegen Zuwanderer," *Der Spiegel*, January 1, 2014, [www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/seehofer-verteidigt-kurs-der-csu-im-streit-um-armutsmigration-a-941433.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/seehofer-verteidigt-kurs-der-csu-im-streit-um-armutsmigration-a-941433.html).

25 See Flüchtlinge Willkommen, "Refugees Welcome," accessed May 23, 2016, [www.refugees-welcome.net](http://www.refugees-welcome.net).

26 Wunsiedel is a small town in upper Franconia in the state of Bavaria that is the unwilling host of an annual neo-Nazi march to the grave of Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Heß. In 2014, the group "Rechts gegen Rechts" (Rights versus the Right) decided to turn the action into something positive. When 200 neo-Nazis turned up, they unwittingly put themselves at the starting line of a charity walk to raise money benefiting EXIT-Germany, a group that helps people leave right-wing extremist groups. Every meter they walked, an additional 10 euros was put into EXIT-Germany's fund. "We wanted to create an alternative to counter-demonstrations," an organizer explained. The marchers inadvertently raised 10,000 euros in total. As they crossed the finish line, the neo-Nazis were showered with rainbow confetti and offered certificates of completion. A sign informed them that they had just raised money against themselves. See Sabine Devins, "Charity Turns Neo-Nazi March into Fundraiser," *The Local*, November 17, 2014, [www.thelocal.de/20141117/charity-turns-neo-nazi-march-into-fundraiser-wunsiedel](http://www.thelocal.de/20141117/charity-turns-neo-nazi-march-into-fundraiser-wunsiedel).



outnumbered anti-immigrant demonstrators across Germany.<sup>27</sup> The federal government also quickly took a strong position against Pegida: Chancellor Merkel used her 2014-15 New Year's speech to call on the German population not to follow the movement's leaders, as "all too often they have prejudice, coldness, even hatred in their hearts."<sup>28</sup>

While the exact number of voluntary activities in support of refugees remains unknown, the Berlin-based Institute for Empirical Research on Migration and Integration estimated that the number of volunteers supporting refugees rose by 70 percent in 2014 alone.<sup>29</sup> The study comes with two caveats: survey respondents were overwhelmingly female and well-educated, and thus not representative of the overall population and its sentiments. The increase may also reflect an overall rise in volunteer engagement and donations in recent years, in part due to federal campaigns promoting volunteer work (*Ehrenamt*).<sup>30</sup> Regardless, the fact that most of the growth in the number of organizations and volunteers was driven by spontaneous local groups providing direct help to refugees and asylum seekers in their immediate neighborhoods is a further sign of the positive manner in which migrants were perceived in Germany.

### III. Explaining the Pro-Immigration Climate

The immigration-friendly consensus that developed in Germany from 2005 through the summer of 2015 was driven by a unique combination of economic and contextual factors, as well as specific policy decisions.

#### A. Contextual Factors: Economics, Demographics, and High-Level Support

The conjunction of a strong economy with evolving demographics has underpinned much of Germany's immigration narrative. Public trust in government largely depends on the success or failure of its economic policies, and Germany's relative economic strength has allowed it to escape some of the political turmoil suffered by its European neighbors. Since Germany's social welfare policies were reformed in 2005, the country has seen constant economic growth, expanding employment (and shrinking unemployment),<sup>31</sup> and good prospects for both increased production and employment.<sup>32</sup> Public views have largely mirrored these economic trends. While 18 percent of the population was against new immigration in early 2015, more than 60 percent had negative attitudes toward immigration a decade earlier in 2000-05 as Germany suffered a short economic recession.<sup>33</sup>

In parallel, concerns about demographic change, and its potential effects on Germany's labor market and economic competitiveness, contributed to positive views of immigration. Germany's working-age

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27 Justin Huggler and Richard Burgess, "Germany's 'Islamisation' Marches: How the Pro- and Anti-Pegida Rallies Measured Up," *The Telegraph*, January 13, 2015, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11342953/Germans-Islamisation-marches-how-the-pro-and-anti-Pegida-rallies-measured-up.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11342953/Germans-Islamisation-marches-how-the-pro-and-anti-Pegida-rallies-measured-up.html).

28 Der Newsburger, "Neujahrsansprache von Bundeskanzlerin im Wortlaut: Europa hat sich entschlossen, sich nicht spalten zu lassen," *Der Newsburger*, December 20, 2014, <https://newsburger.de/neujahrsansprache-der-bundeskanzlerin-im-wortlaut-76276.html>.

29 The source was an explorative online survey of 460 individuals and 70 organizations. See Serhat Karakayali and J. Olaf Kleist, *EFA-Studie Strukturen und Motive der ehrenamtlichen Flüchtlingsarbeit (EFA) in Deutschland—1. Forschungsbericht Ergebnisse einer explorativen Umfrage vom November/Dezember 2014* (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2015), [www.bim-hu-berlin.de/media/2015-05-16\\_EFA-Forschungsbericht\\_Endfassung.pdf](http://www.bim-hu-berlin.de/media/2015-05-16_EFA-Forschungsbericht_Endfassung.pdf).

30 Lukas Koschnitzke, "Rekordjahr der Spenden," *Die Zeit*, March 6, 2014, [www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2014-03/spendenbereitschaft-deutschland-rekord](http://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2014-03/spendenbereitschaft-deutschland-rekord).

31 Statistisches Bundesamt, "Arbeitsmarkt, Arbeitslosenquote Deutschland," accessed June 16, 2015, [www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/Indikatoren/Konjunkturindikatoren/Arbeitsmarkt/arb210.html](http://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/Indikatoren/Konjunkturindikatoren/Arbeitsmarkt/arb210.html).

32 OECD, "Germany—Economic Forecast Summary (November 2015)," accessed May 23, 2016, [www.oecd.org/economy/germany-economic-forecast-summary.htm](http://www.oecd.org/economy/germany-economic-forecast-summary.htm).

33 Köcher, "Die Meinung der Bürger," 266.



population is projected to shrink in the coming decades, and while estimates of the extent of the decrease vary, the aging of the German population and its potential to affect the strength of the German economy is broadly considered an undisputed fact.<sup>34</sup> Predictions of a severe lack of workers in the coming decades, particularly of skilled ones (*Fachkräftemangel*), have been frequently cited in the media and by political and public leaders.<sup>35</sup>

Industry and employers' associations—powerful voices in public and policy debates—seized on the issue of skills shortages to change the narratives and political goals of immigration.<sup>36</sup> Support for labor migration has been widespread in recent years among small- and medium-sized businesses and large corporations alike. The positive messages put out by influential stakeholders at various levels of economy and society were instrumental in building a positive consensus on immigration. Support for immigration and integration is, for example, visible in the programs and projects of large foundations such as the Hertie School of Governance, the Mercator Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation, and the Volkswagen Foundation.

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Furthermore, many of the most contentious debates surrounding immigration and integration policy in Germany were carried out during a period of low net migration, the norm in the late 1990s through the mid-2000s.<sup>37</sup> After the European Union's 2004 and 2007 enlargements, Germany opened its labor market to nationals of the new EU Member States in Eastern Europe in gradual, managed phases. Many of the key reforms of Germany's integration and immigration systems were carried out during this relative lull in immigration. By contrast, the United Kingdom and Sweden allowed nationals of the 2004 accession countries immediate access to their labor markets (the United Kingdom later restricted access to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals when these countries joined the European Union in 2007), and as a result saw a large surge in immigration from these countries.<sup>38</sup> In both the United Kingdom and Sweden, this immediate access corresponded with a sharp increase in nativist movements and the formation of successful anti-immigrant parties.<sup>39</sup>

34 For instance, a recent Bertelsmann Stiftung study estimated the working-age population to decrease from 55 million to 35 million by 2050. See Johann Fuchs, Alexander Kubis, and Lutz Schneider, *Zuwanderungsbedarf aus Drittstaaten in Deutschland bis 2050* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015), 24, [www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Studie\\_IB\\_Zuwanderungsbedarf\\_aus\\_Drittstaaten\\_in\\_Deutschland\\_bis\\_2050\\_2015.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Studie_IB_Zuwanderungsbedarf_aus_Drittstaaten_in_Deutschland_bis_2050_2015.pdf).

35 The most recent study on this is Prognos AG, *Arbeitslandschaft 2040* (Frankfurt: VBW Bayern, 2015), [www.vbw-bayern.de/Redaktion/Frei-zugaengliche-Medien/Abteilungen-GS/Sozialpolitik/2015/Downloads/20150521-Studie-AL-2040-final.pdf](http://www.vbw-bayern.de/Redaktion/Frei-zugaengliche-Medien/Abteilungen-GS/Sozialpolitik/2015/Downloads/20150521-Studie-AL-2040-final.pdf).

36 For example, in early 2015 the German Chamber for Industry and Trade (the largest German umbrella organization for industry associations) released a position paper expressing support for expanding immigration to Germany and linking support for new immigration to economic competitiveness. *Fachkräfte für die Region*, "Chancen von Zuwanderung und Integration nutzen!" April 10, 2015, [www.fachkraeftebuero.de/news-detailseite/news/detail/News/chancen-von-zuwanderung-und-integration-nutzen](http://www.fachkraeftebuero.de/news-detailseite/news/detail/News/chancen-von-zuwanderung-und-integration-nutzen).

37 BAMF, *Migrationsbericht 2013* (Nuremberg: BAMF, 2015), [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2013.html](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2013.html).

38 Eurostat, "Immigration by Five Year Age Group, Sex and Citizenship," updated June 15, 2015, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

39 As a further example, a 2014 Ipsos MORI study contrasting changes in views of immigration in Germany and the United Kingdom over time found that while the countries began the 2000s with similarly skeptical views of immigration, opinions in Germany converged around a much more positive narrative, while in the United Kingdom, opinion became more negative. At the same time, support for the government's immigration policy in Germany (51 percent) was double that in the United Kingdom (23 percent) as of 2013. See Bobby Duffy, Tom Frere-Smith, and Hans-Jürgen Friess, *Perceptions and Reality: Public Attitudes to Immigration in the United Kingdom and Germany* (London: Ipsos MORI, 2014), [www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-public-attitudes-to-immigration-in-britain-and-germany.pdf](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-public-attitudes-to-immigration-in-britain-and-germany.pdf).





A shift in the German media toward somewhat more pro-immigrant and informed reporting on migration compared to prior decades also served to support the positive climate.<sup>40</sup> A change in attitude can be seen at different levels. For example, one study suggests that between 1996 and 2006, print reporting on immigration was more positive at the local level than the national.<sup>41</sup> Major media outlets have also taken pro-immigration and pro-integration stances, and there are efforts to recruit more journalists with a migration background (*Migrationshintergrund*).<sup>42</sup> A media service that began operating in 2012 further facilitated this shift by providing journalists with background information on immigration and integration.<sup>43</sup>

## B. Policy Factors

Perhaps more significant, policy reforms enacted in the past decade put in place a comprehensive system for managing new immigration and for supporting the integration of existing immigrant populations, thus laying the groundwork for public trust in the governance of migration. Three changes were particularly important: (1) the adoption of a migration law in 2005 that eased restrictions on employment-based immigration, (2) the transformation and introduction of new federal institutions to foster integration, and (3) the strengthening of integration policies in states (*Länder*) and cities.

The immigration law of 2005 (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*), in particular, has been called an epochal turn.<sup>44</sup> The adoption of the law indicated that the major political actors at the national level had accepted a realistic definition of the country's migration situation; the law created a formal legal framework for allowing the permanent settlement of foreign workers in Germany.

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*The new regulations ... focus on tying new immigration closely to the labor market—an important step, in light of projected increases in demand for skilled labor.*

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The immigration provisions of the new law, and a later update in 2012 to bring German policies in line with the new EU Blue Card Directive for recruiting highly qualified labor, were primarily aimed at opening Germany to high-skilled and employer-driven immigration. The 2012 update was particularly significant. While the 2005 rules limited new immigration to occupations designated as experiencing shortages, the 2012 regulations provided the possibility for high-skilled workers with job offers over a certain salary threshold to obtain temporary residency permits (convertible to permanent status under certain conditions). For workers in shortage occupations, the threshold salary requirement was lowered, and the requirement that employers do a priority review for other eligible German or EU workers was removed. The law also created a six-month “job search” visa for individuals with a tertiary education. The new regulations thus focus on tying new immigration closely to the labor market—an important step, in light

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40 Zambonini, *The Evolution of German Media Coverage of Migration*.

41 Patrick Fick, “Der Wandel der Darstellung von Migranten am Beispiel Siegener Lokalmedien in 1996 und 2006,” in *Massenmedien und die Integration ethnischer Minderheiten in Deutschland*, eds. Rainer Geißler and Horst Pöttker (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), 235–69.

42 The term “migration background” (*Migrationshintergrund*) is used in German policy-making to describe someone who is either themselves an immigrant or is the child of at least one immigrant parent. See Statistisches Bundesamt, “Migrationshintergrund,” accessed April 21, 2016, [www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/Glossar/Migrationshintergrund.html](http://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/Glossar/Migrationshintergrund.html). For more in this particular initiative, see Geißler, “Migration, Integration and Media.”

43 Mediendienst Integration, “Über Uns,” accessed June 16, 2015, <http://mediendienst-integration.de/ueber-uns.html>.

44 Statement from a 2015 conference at the Federal Office for Refugees and Migration by Interior Minister Thomas de Maizièrre, Federal Commissioner Aydan Özoguz, and former President of the Bundestag Rita Süßmuth. BAMF, “Nürnberger Tage für Integration: Deutschland braucht Zuwanderung,” April 16, 2015, [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2015/20150416-0006-pressemitteilung-bamf-nuernberger-tage-fuer-integration.html](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2015/20150416-0006-pressemitteilung-bamf-nuernberger-tage-fuer-integration.html).



of projected increases in demand for skilled labor. The regulations also reward individuals who learn the German language by making it easier for them to convert their temporary Blue Cards to permanent residency. The government has since invested significantly in promoting the new immigration rules. A dedicated website, “Make it in Germany,” provides information on applying for a Blue Card and contains an online jobs database to connect employers and would-be immigrants.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to new immigration provisions, the 2005 and 2012 laws are also an expression of a new, stronger federal role in the area of integration policies. The position of Federal Commissioner for Integration was given more authority and moved to the Chancellor’s office in 2005.<sup>46</sup> New federal institutions have been created, and existing ones expanded and redefined. BAMF is a stunning example. Originally an agency that handled only asylum procedure, today BAMF manages a broad spectrum of responsibilities in migration and integration. It encompasses a huge suite of language and orientation programs (*Integrationskurse*) with an annual budget of 250 million euros, the German Islam Conference (a body dedicated to improving the German government’s relationship with Muslim communities), and a large research unit. The number of employees at BAMF has grown along with its increased responsibilities, reaching around 2,800 in early 2015 and in response to a new influx of refugees, its ranks have since swelled even further.<sup>47</sup>

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*Significant investments in the successful integration of the  
immigrant population have been a key element in securing support  
for new immigration.*

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Alongside the shift toward increased federal-level support for integration, city administrations have been implementing local integration policies throughout Germany. Cities and municipalities not only bear the brunt of the change brought by immigration, their role in providing services and community infrastructure means they are also in the best position to foster connections between immigrant and native-born communities and to ensure the integration of newcomers.<sup>48</sup> Many cities therefore developed a systematic integration policy at the local level much earlier than the federal government. These policies often feature the following core elements: a local integration strategy, integration projects that receive top priority from local government, political structures that focus on improving connections between municipal institutions and minorities, adaptations that allow administrations to better serve the needs of migrants and minorities, policies to improve intergroup relations, campaigns to encourage naturalization, and integration monitoring systems.

*Länder* in many cases support local efforts and create their own programs; initiatives to support the education of migrant children offer a good example. Some *Länder*, such as Baden-Württemberg,

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45 See Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and Bundesagentur für Arbeit, “Make it in Germany,” accessed June 17, 2015, [www.make-it-in-germany.com/en](http://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en).

46 The Integration Commissioner advises the Chancellor on all migration-related matters, and regularly informs the parliament and the German public about the state of immigration and integration in the country. See Bundesregierung, “Beauftragte für Migration, Flüchtlinge, und Integration, Aufgaben und Ziele,” accessed June 16, 2015, [www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/DE/Bundesregierung/BeauftragtefuerIntegration/amtPerson/aufgabenZiele/\\_node.html](http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/DE/Bundesregierung/BeauftragtefuerIntegration/amtPerson/aufgabenZiele/_node.html).

47 The hiring of an additional 2,000 employees was announced as a result of the May 8, 2015 refugee summit convened by Chancellor Merkel. See *Der Spiegel*, “Flüchtlingsgipfel: Bind will 2000 zusätzliche Bearbeiter für Asylanträge einstellen,” *Der Spiegel*, May 8, 2015, [www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/asylantraege-bundesregierung-will-2000-neue-bearbeiter-einstellen-a-1032915.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/asylantraege-bundesregierung-will-2000-neue-bearbeiter-einstellen-a-1032915.html).

48 See for example, Demetrios G. Papademetriou, *Migration’s Local Dividends: How Cities and Regions Can Make the Most of Immigration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migrations-local-dividends-how-cities-and-regions-can-make-most-immigration-transatlantic](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migrations-local-dividends-how-cities-and-regions-can-make-most-immigration-transatlantic).



have established ministries of integration, and every region has a commissioner for migration and integration.<sup>49</sup>

These significant investments in the successful integration of the immigrant population have been a key element in securing support for new immigration. Positive views of immigration in general and of new arrivals in particular depend on the successful integration of those who are already there. Success depends on a country's ability to ensure immigrants' positive labor market outcomes (such as earnings and career progression), to support the inclusion of migrant children in education and qualification systems, and to ensure the development of language competency, among other factors. While Germany's integration policy is still evolving, and will continue to do so in response to mounting flows, the efforts made so far demonstrate that leaders and policymakers understand the importance of investing in integration.

## IV. The Current Migration Crisis—Cracks in the Consensus?

Openness and support for immigration in any society, including Germany, are not limitless. When the society's capacity to provide necessary resources is exceeded, the credibility of the national migration system is often called into question. In many cases, investment in integration and openness to future immigration are diminished.<sup>50</sup>

Events in Germany during the second half of 2015 have proven this to be true. The summer and fall of 2015 saw an unprecedented increase in migration, as the country became the leading destination in Europe for refugees and economic migrants. By the end of 2015, Germany had registered more than 1 million new arrivals, many of whom have either claimed or will likely claim asylum.<sup>51</sup> As of early 2016, the flows looked likely to continue on a significant scale for the near future, although the closer of several borders in the Western Balkans—along with a readmission agreement struck between the European Union and Turkey in March—appeared to bring some respite in late spring. Amid uncertainty about when, or if, the flows would slow, people voiced their distrust: was the government in control over who entered the country, and how?

### A. Mixed Public Response

At the core of the current migration debate in Germany lies a tension between Chancellor Merkel's public affirmation, "We can accomplish this" (*Wir schaffen das*),<sup>52</sup> and many other voices who wonder, "Can we accomplish this?" (*Schaffen wir das?*)

On the one hand are the images of thousands of helpers greeting refugees with cheers as they arrive from Hungary in Munich—pictures that have become emblematic of Germany's response. There has

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49 For a full list of all commissioners for immigration and integration in the *Länder*, see Bundesausländerbeauftragte, "Ausländerbeauftragte der Länder: Integrationsbeauftragte der Bundesländer," accessed June 16, 2015, [www.bundesauslaenderbeauftragte.de/auslaenderbeauftragte-bundeslaender.html](http://www.bundesauslaenderbeauftragte.de/auslaenderbeauftragte-bundeslaender.html).

50 Friedrich Heckmann, *Integration von Migranten—Einwanderung und neue Nationenbildung* (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2015).

51 BAMF, "476.649 Asylanträge im Jahr 2015," January 6, 2016, [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Meldungen/DE/2016/201610106-asylgeschaefsstatik-dezember.html](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Meldungen/DE/2016/201610106-asylgeschaefsstistik-dezember.html).

52 *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, "Merkel nennt Flüchtlingskrise nationale Aufgabe," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, August 31, 2015, [www.faz.net/aktuell/angela-merkel-kuendigt-hartes-vorgehen-gegen-rextsextreme-an-13778017.html](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/angela-merkel-kuendigt-hartes-vorgehen-gegen-rextsextreme-an-13778017.html).





been a simultaneous increase in civil-society support for refugees all over the country. Almost all refugee shelters now have a civil-society network assisting them, without whose help the situation would be almost unmanageable.

Many Germans still voice positive views of immigration. Economists, for example, point to newcomers' potential contributions to the labor market, and see the influx of government funding and refugee support measures as stimulus for the economy.<sup>53</sup> The leaders of several large corporations, and employers from Porsche to Deutsche Post, have stated an interest in employing newcomers and helping them integrate.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, hate speech, arson, and crimes against refugees—and the volunteers who help them—are on the rise.<sup>55</sup> More broadly, growing skepticism toward immigration and the reception of refugees is visible in public opinion polls, as is a decrease in support for Chancellor Merkel and her party.<sup>56</sup> Even centrist members of the public have begun to question the capacity of German society to integrate newcomers; some ask whether limits on immigration would better ensure successful integration.<sup>57</sup> Yet, the institution of asylum itself makes such limits difficult to enforce: asylum cannot be restricted to a particular number, as it is an individual right protected by the German state.

The anti-immigrant rhetoric of some political parties is growing. While no political party in the Bundestag as of April 2016 is openly anti-immigrant, the recent rise of AfD signals growing dissatisfaction with the system as it stands. It might be noted that AfD's party line does not oppose all immigration: it emphasizes the need for skilled migration to Germany, and calls for greater selectivity of labor migrants. But an extreme wing of the party that holds hard-line views on migration and refugee issues has gained strength in the last year and now dominates the party. Party members have, for example, warned of immigrants abusing the welfare system and demanded that non-EU migrants be admitted only to work. They have called for the deportation of all people seeking asylum for any reason other than political persecution, a narrow definition (described in Article 16a of the German Constitution) that covers only a fraction of the refugees seeking shelter in the country.<sup>58</sup>

AFD has rapidly gained support, mostly through its anti-immigrant and nationalist rhetoric. While the party did not win any seats in the 2013 Bundestag elections, it did take seats in five state parliaments between 2013 and 2015 (Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg, Hamburg, and Bremen), and expanded into Baden-Württemberg, the Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saxony-Anhalt in March 2016. Some exit polls indicated the refugee issue was a top concern for up to 90 percent of AfD voters in the March 2016 regional elections.<sup>59</sup>

53 Marcel Fratzscher and Simon Junker, "Integrating Refugees: A Long-Term, Worthwhile Investment," *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 45+46/2015, November 12, 2015, [www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw\\_01.c.519306.de/diw\\_econ\\_bull\\_2015-45-4.pdf](http://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.519306.de/diw_econ_bull_2015-45-4.pdf).

54 Nils Zimmermann, "Germany's Challenge: Integration of Refugees," Deutsche Welle, September 8, 2015, [www.dw.com/en/germanys-challenge-integration-of-refugees/a-18702361](http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-challenge-integration-of-refugees/a-18702361).

55 Melanie Amann, Maik Baumgärtner, Markus Feldenkirchen, Martin Knobbe, Ann-Kathrin Müller, Alexander Neubacher and Jörg Schindler, "Fear, Anger, and Hatred: The Rise of Germany's New Right," *Der Spiegel*, December 11, 2015, [www.spiegel.de/international/germany/refugee-crisis-drives-rise-of-new-right-wing-in-germany-a-1067384.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/refugee-crisis-drives-rise-of-new-right-wing-in-germany-a-1067384.html).

56 A poll by German broadcaster ARD in February 2016 found that 59 percent of respondents were "unhappy" with Chancellor Merkel's refugee policies, and the Chancellor's approval rating was just 46 percent for the month, down from 67 percent in July 2015. See Ellen Ehni, "SPD sackt ab auf 20 Prozent," *Tagesschau*, May 4, 2016, [www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend/index.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend/index.html).

57 An October 2015 poll by German market research firm IMSF found that 90 percent of respondents felt there should be some limits on the number of refugees able to enter Germany each year. See Initiative Markt- und Sozialforschung e.V., "Einstellung der Deutschen zur Asyl- und Flüchtlingspolitik trübt sich ein," October 5, 2015, [www.deutsche-marktforscher.de/index.php/presse/presse-2/92-einstellung-zur-asylpolitik-truebt-sich-ein](http://www.deutsche-marktforscher.de/index.php/presse/presse-2/92-einstellung-zur-asylpolitik-truebt-sich-ein).

58 For an overview of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) positions for the EP elections, see AfD, "Courage to Stand Up for Germany. For European Diversity," May 25, 2015, 14–16, [www.alternativefuer.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/04/AfD-Manifesto-for-Europe-summary.pdf](http://www.alternativefuer.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/04/AfD-Manifesto-for-Europe-summary.pdf).

59 Stefan Tomik, "Der (un)bekannte AfD-Wähler: Jung, männlich—und enttäuscht," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, March 14, 2016, [www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/afd-waehler-jung-maennlich-und-enttaeuscht-14123702.html#elections](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/afd-waehler-jung-maennlich-und-enttaeuscht-14123702.html#elections).



The recent rise of the Pegida movement—a heterogeneous group of self-proclaimed “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident”—provides a further example of growing dissatisfaction and unease in some segments of German society. The movement, which originally started as a Facebook group in the fall of 2014, first called for marches through the eastern city of Dresden to demonstrate against a perceived “Islamization” of Germany. It grew within a matter of months from a few hundred followers, rising to include about 25,000 Pegida supporters who participated in marches in January 2015.<sup>60</sup> While support for Pegida appeared to dwindle throughout the spring of 2015, the dramatic rise in refugee and migrant arrivals later in the year brought a resurgence of interest. A February 2016 rally in Dresden drew 8,000 supporters, and the group held parallel events in several other European cities. According to the German Interior Ministry, more than 200 far-right groups held protests in the last three months of 2015, more than double the number in the same period of 2014.<sup>61</sup>

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*Policymakers and observers cannot overlook the fact that a segment of the German population holds hard-line extremist views on asylum in particular and immigration in general.*

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Most of Pegida’s support is in parts of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) that have seen substantially smaller numbers of migrants and asylum seekers than states to the west. Yet some of the fears expressed by Pegida supporters ring true for the overall population. For example: will states and localities have sufficient funds to meet the needs of the increasing flows of asylum seekers arriving in Germany?

Whatever the shared concerns, policymakers and observers cannot overlook the fact that a segment of the German population holds hard-line extremist views on asylum in particular and immigration in general—views that have been activated by the current crisis. Surveys show evidence of the continuous existence of a share of the population with these opinions, although estimates of its size vary widely and depend on the interview questions asked.<sup>62</sup> With each new wave of nativism, latent prejudice shifts toward open hostility. The members of this segment of the population often cut themselves off from mainstream media and communications channels, and thus cannot be reached by anti-prejudice campaigns and are readily mobilized by anti-immigrant campaigns or movements.

A particularly disturbing signal of growing anti-immigration sentiment is the recent increase in attacks on asylum shelters. The Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt) reports that such attacks more than doubled, from 24 in 2012 to 58 in 2013, and then rose exponentially to 924 attacks in 2015 alone.<sup>63</sup> Societal constraints on the expression of anti-immigrant viewpoints—and active mobilization against them—will continue to be an extremely important tool against violent anti-immigrant tendencies.

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60 Justin Huggler, “Germany’s Pegida Anti-Islam Movement Vows to Continue Protest in Berlin and Munich,” *The Telegraph*, January 19, 2015, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11355318/Germanys-Pegida-anti-Islam-movement-vows-to-continue-protests-in-Berlin-and-Munich.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11355318/Germanys-Pegida-anti-Islam-movement-vows-to-continue-protests-in-Berlin-and-Munich.html).

61 Reuters, “Anti-Islam Movement PEGIDA Stages Protests Across Europe,” Reuters, February 6, 2016, [www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-protests-germany-idUSKCN0VF0P4](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-protests-germany-idUSKCN0VF0P4).

62 Armin Pfahl-Traugher, *Rechtsextremismus in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Beck, 2006); Andreas Zick and Anna Klein, *Fragile Mitte—Feindselige Zustände: Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland* (Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2014), [www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/pdf\\_14/FragileMitte-FeindseligeZustaende.pdf](http://www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/pdf_14/FragileMitte-FeindseligeZustaende.pdf). Looking back over the past 50 years, one can see that there have been persistent waves of nativism—in 1964-66, 1972, 1981, 1992, and most recently between 1998 and 2004. For details see Heckmann, *Integration von Migranten*, 222–23.

63 Julian Heißler, “Deutlich mehr Anschläge auf Asylbewerberheime,” Tagesschau, January 13, 2016, [www.tagesschau.de/inland/anschlaege-asylunterkuenfte-bka-101.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/anschlaege-asylunterkuenfte-bka-101.html).



## B. Explaining the Backlash and Erosion of Consensus

While some segments of the population will remain perennially skeptical of migration, the government's primary concern is an erosion of trust among the more moderate, and numerous, voices in the middle. While the broad societal consensus on immigration built over the last ten years initially protected public opinion from a major backlash, as the flow of migrants continues unabated, lingering doubts are beginning to resurface across a widening swath of the population. Underlying this tension are questions about the scope and management of the asylum system, Germany's capacity for integration, the economic and demographic effects of the flows, and potential security risks.

For many, the greatest concern has been how long the system can hold up in the face such increased inflows. Without a sense of how many people are likely to arrive and when, or if, flows will slow, authorities have struggled to calibrate appropriate responses or develop medium- or long-term plans. Migration control structures, including the European Union's Dublin system, which assigns responsibility for asylum claims across EU Member States, appeared to break down in the late summer of 2015 in the face of the surge of migration. Germany itself received up to 10,000 new arrivals per day.<sup>64</sup> The huge influx meant that even first-step registration (before an asylum application is filed) became backlogged, leaving hundreds of thousands of people in the country unregistered and in effect creating a population of migrants without legal status who were either unable or unwilling to enter the asylum system. About 432,000 asylum applications remained unprocessed as of April 2016.<sup>65</sup> Systems for distributing refugees among the *Länder* according to economic and capacity considerations also broke down under the pressure, leaving substantial numbers of asylum applicants stuck in temporary accommodation or unequally distributed among the *Länder*.

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*For many, the greatest concern has been how long the system can hold up in the face such increased inflows.*

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The burden of the refugee crisis has been felt most acutely at the local level. Local administrations, many of them already under financial stress, are overburdened by the costs of providing for the refugees and by the sheer demand for accommodations. In September 2015, the federal government granted cities an additional 600 million euros to offset their costs, but further support will likely be needed for localities that will bear the brunt of integration efforts in the months and years ahead.

Moreover, the sheer number of arrivals and the short timespan in which they have entered Germany have made it impossible to talk of integration. Only the most basic human needs for shelter and food have been met in the thousands of provisional shelters that included gymnasiums, empty supermarkets, and tents. New problems and tensions are developing in the densely packed shelters, adding to the trauma many migrants experienced during their flight. The first steps toward integration—including organizing labor market integration and increasing the availability of housing—are mostly still in the planning phase. Schools have not been prepared for the large number of new students and their needs. Perhaps most troubling for a public that has learned to think of immigration as an economic and labor issue, it remains highly unclear to what extent the newest arrivals will be able to quickly and effectively enter Germany's complex and highly skilled labor market. The policy advancements and integration investments developed in the years prior to the crisis are not (yet) paying off for these newcomers.

<sup>64</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, "Rekordzahlen im September: Täglich kommen bis zu 10.000 Flüchtlinge," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, September 29, 2015, [www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/rekordzahlen-im-september-taeglich-kommen-bis-zu-10-000-fluechtlinge-13829653.html](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/rekordzahlen-im-september-taeglich-kommen-bis-zu-10-000-fluechtlinge-13829653.html).

<sup>65</sup> BAMF, *Asylgeschäftsstatistik für den Monat April 2016* (Nuremberg: BAMF, 2016), [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/201604-statistik-anlage-asyl-geschaeftsbericht.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/201604-statistik-anlage-asyl-geschaeftsbericht.pdf?__blob=publicationFile).



Two cardinal principles of Germany's migration consensus—control over flows and investment in integration—have thus been directly undermined by the ongoing crisis. As the public has gradually lost faith that the government will be able to either manage the flows or ensure the successful economic integration of those who have arrived, confidence in and support for the government's migration policies have begun to erode.

## V. Conclusion

From 2005 through the summer of 2015, Germany found itself in a unique position. Favorable economic circumstances, the influence of societal elites, and necessary changes in immigration and integration policies—supported by much of the media—created a climate that welcomed immigration and integration. While some vocal minorities opposed this broad consensus, there was a high degree of support among the larger population, and anti-immigrant movements sparked by rising immigration remained rather weak.

How was Germany able to build and maintain a ten-year consensus on migration, even in the face of mounting immigration pressures? There are several lessons to be drawn. Narratives that link immigration to issues of economic growth and competitiveness are a powerful force. Such narratives gain even more salience when linked to actual policy changes, as Germany did by opening up to further economic and employer-driven immigration in 2012. Furthermore, broad-based support for these narratives among political, private sector, and other thought leaders across the political spectrum can be invaluable in shaping and guiding the terms of public debate. Particularly effective was the strong link drawn in Germany between immigration and issues of economic competitiveness, especially concerns about the aging native-born population, as opposed to issues of culture or national identity.

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*The government's ability to maintain a pro-immigration consensus ... will depend on whether it can demonstrate success in controlling immigration and asylum, and effectively managing integration.*

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At the policy level, Germany's decision to invest in reforming its immigration and integration systems since 1998 played an important role in this shift. The success of integration policy was bolstered by the support of major political parties and the development of regional and particularly local integration policies. The government further supported these policy shifts by creating and expanding institutions and allocating the funds necessary to implement and enforce the new laws. Finally, the importance of investing in economic growth and human capital development cannot be ignored. Economic unease among the native-born—and the socioeconomic marginalization of immigrants—will only undermine trust in the government's ability to maintain a stable society.

Some cracks in the consensus have begun to appear, however, as the large scale arrival of migrants and refugees in Germany continues into 2016. Parties and movements like AfD and Pegida capitalize on unease, particularly among certain segments of the population. As public anxiety rises, it has become increasingly clear that the government's ability to maintain a pro-immigration consensus—and the legitimacy of relevant policy—will depend on whether it can demonstrate success in controlling immigration and asylum, and effectively managing integration.



## Appendix

**Table A-1. German Integration Policy since 1955**

Phase in German Immigration History	Integration Policy Development
Temporary guestworker recruitment (1955-73)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No specific integration policy</li> <li>Inclusion of guest workers into welfare state institutions</li> </ul>
Refusal to recognize Germany as a country of immigration (1973-98)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Controversies over integration policies following the end of temporary worker recruitment from Southern Europe in 1973</li> <li>Appointment of a Federal Commissioner for Foreigners (<i>Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Ausländerfragen</i>) in 1978 within the Labor Ministry, a predecessor of today's Federal Integration Commissioner</li> <li>Support of labor migrants' voluntary return</li> </ul>
New immigration and beginning of policy paradigm shift (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New immigration following the opening of the Iron Curtain</li> <li>Following the 1998 election, a change of government led to the official recognition of Germany as a country of immigration</li> </ul>
New integration policy (since 2000)	<p>Milestones for Germany's new integration policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New citizenship law is passed in 2000, easing naturalization requirements and making it easier for some children born in Germany to non-German parents to acquire German citizenship</li> <li>New immigration act is passed in 2005, creating a framework for foreign workers to permanently settle in Germany.</li> <li>Creation of the German Islam Conference in 2006 to improve relations between Islamic communities and the German state</li> <li>National integration plan put forward in 2007</li> <li>National action plan put forward in 2011</li> <li>Update to the 2005 immigration act in 2012, easing restrictions that limited immigration to sectors experiencing labor shortages to allow increased high-skilled immigration</li> </ul>

Source: Compiled by the European Forum for Migration Studies (EFMS). Adapted from Friedrich Heckmann and Delia Wiest, "Research-Policy Dialogues in Germany," in *Integrating Immigrants in Europe: Research-Policy Dialogues*, eds. Peter Scholten, Han Entzinger, Rinus Penninx, and Stijn Verbeek (IMISCOE Research Series, Cham/Heidelberg/New York/Dordrecht/London: Springer Verlag, 2015), 185-212.





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Dr. Heckmann studied sociology, history, and economics at the universities of Münster, Kiel, Kansas-Lawrence (USA), and Erlangen-Nürnberg. He received an M.A. in sociology from the University of Kansas in Lawrence in 1967 and his Ph.D. from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in 1972, where he worked as an assistant and researcher.



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