

Whom Do We Naturalize? A Factorial Survey on Naturalization Preferences in Germany

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ABSTRACT

German citizenship law, historically viewed as an ethnocultural regime, is undergoing reforms, including a reduction in required years of residence and a shift towards accepting dual citizenship. These changes not only reflect alterations in legislation but also propel the broader society into a discourse on membership criteria. Leveraging data on public opinion towards naturalization requirements from three waves (1996, 2006, and 2016) of the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) and drawing on existing studies, this research formulates hypotheses on public attitudes toward naturalization applicants. These hypotheses are tested using vignettes of hypothetical naturalization applicants in a survey with 1.500 respondents (resulting in 6.000 vignette evaluations). The analysis reveals that respondents are more inclined to support naturalizations when integration of the applicants is demonstrated through language proficiency and employment, coupled with an extended period of residence. Additionally, origin-related preferences are evident – British citizens are given priority for naturalization compared to individuals from Turkey and India. Older respondents tend to reject dual citizenship, expressing a preference for applicants willing to renounce their former citizenship upon naturalization. In summary, the analysis documents a shifting landscape of attitudes toward naturalization in Germany, with instrumental consideration gaining salience. Although ethnic considerations remain important, instrumental considerations dominate. The analysis suggests that dual citizenship, currently a reason for exclusion primarily for older respondents, may be viewed more positively in the future.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship; naturalization; migration; factorial survey

Introduction

Naturalizations are sensitive membership decisions for any political community, as they require an agreement on who belongs or should belong in the future (Orgad 2017). These decisions also convey specific rights and duties which can have substantial bearing on life chances (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017). Beyond enabling access to a relatively prosperous territory, German citizenship facilitates global mobility by granting visa-free entry to 79 states (Mau et al. 2015), showcasing the tangible impact of citizenship on individuals' opportunities. The access to these benefits is intricately structured by citizenship and naturalization laws, rendering citizenship "a powerful instrument of social closure" (Brubaker 1992: 23).

Regarding naturalization and citizenship acquisition, states can be less or more open (Vink 2017). Different regime typologies have been proposed to capture underlying understandings of citizenship. Many typologies are derived from Brubaker's (1992) influential comparison of nationhood in France and Germany which follow a civic or ethnocultural understanding, respectively. While civic conceptions underscore acquired criteria, ethnocultural understandings emphasize nativity and ancestry. Legal traditions that enable naturalization to persons born within a state's territory (*jus soli*) and those that emphasize "blood" descent (*jus sanguinis*) are often mapped onto this civic/ethnic dichotomy. However, empirical evidence shows that naturalization policies often integrate elements of both conceptions (Reeskens and Hooghe 2010). In addition, states can overcome legal traditions and reform their naturalization laws over time (Vink 2017).

Germany serves as a compelling case in this context. Post-reunification, the country transformed from a paradigmatic case of an ethnocultural regime, allowing naturalization only through descent, to a more liberalized system introducing birthright citizenship and reducing access requirements. However, in contrast to the global trend, Germany has maintained a commitment to the principle of avoiding dual citizenship (Gerdes, Faist, and Rieple 2007; Palmowski 2008).¹ Subsequent amendments, such as the naturalization test, linked naturalization to measurable integration efforts (Goodman 2011). Despite ongoing debates between political parties, a recent reform initiative suggests a further liberalization of citizenship law. This includes proposals to reduce the required residence period and to generally accept dual citizenship. These changes not only reflect alterations in legislation but also propel the broader society into a discourse on membership criteria.

¹ As of the year 2000, 48.4 percent of countries enforced a renunciation requirement for naturalization. Nevertheless, the percentage consistently declined, and in 2022, only 35.7 percent of countries globally maintain such a mandate (calculated based on Vink et al. 2023). Notably, Germany is one of the nations where naturalization applicants are still required to renounce their previous citizenship, with certain exceptions for EU and Swiss nationals, recognized refugees, elderly, and individuals from countries where renunciation is impractical.

Claims to equal membership are regulated through formal procedures outlined in naturalization law, and extensive research exists on citizenship policy and politics (Vink 2017). Nevertheless, studies on *everyday nationhood* indicates that individuals' perspectives on citizenship may diverge from policy content (Miller-Idriss 2006; Reijerse et al. 2013; Witte 2018). Thus, an individual's acceptance as an equal citizen depends not only on naturalization law requirements but also on ordinary citizens' evaluation of a claimants' legitimacy. This evaluation is influenced by citizenship law but may also consider additional factors such as cultural similarity and economic deservingness. This article aims to enhance our understanding of this relational process of recognition (Bloemraad 2018), including both the definition of membership criteria and the evaluation of whether a specific applicant satisfies these conditions. To achieve this, I employ a factorial design (i.e., vignette study) to examine how individuals weigh attributes of hypothetical naturalization applicants when deciding whom to grant German citizenship. This approach enables me to examine the shared understanding of citizenship criteria and subgroup heterogeneity.

Following this introduction, I will first present the current state of Germany's citizenship law and the proposed reform, providing the background for the study. Subsequently, I delve into existing findings on public attitudes toward naturalization requirements and applicants, drawing on the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS). This dataset allows me to document the shifting landscape of attitudes toward naturalization in Germany between 1996 and 2016. In conjunction with existing studies, this forms the basis for formulating hypotheses on public attitudes toward naturalization applicants. I then proceed to present my data and methods before introducing my main results. Finally, I assess the robustness of my findings and discuss their implications.

Background

German citizenship law and reform

As previously mentioned, German citizenship law has often been regarded as a paradigmatic case of an ethnocultural regime, primarily allowing acquisition through descent.² Initial adjustments were made shortly after reunification with the introduction of the Foreigners Act (*Ausländergesetz*, *AusG*). This act simplified naturalization procedures for young immigrants and older immigrants who had resided in Germany for at least fifteen years (Green 2000: 110-111). However, a decisive departure from *jus sanguinis* was only achieved with the enactment of the new Citizenship Act in 2000 (*Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*, *StAG*). This regulation introduced *jus soli*, albeit under strict

² Although the ethnocultural understanding is evident in the *Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz* (RuStAG), which was regulating (West) German citizenship from 22 July 1913 until 2000, it has been argued that reforms were not only stifled by ethnocultural undercurrents but also West Germany's claim towards the GDR to be the sole representative of Germany's interests (Green 2000: 109; Gerdes and Faist 2006).

conditions, marking what has been described as “a seismic shift in German citizenship law” (Green 2000: 114).

The 2000 Citizenship Act notably reduced the required residence period for naturalization from fifteen to eight years. More significantly, it allowed children born in Germany to immigrants to acquire citizenship if at least one parent has eight years of residency and a permanent residence permit. However, despite these progressive steps, the intended acceptance of dual faced obstacles due to necessity for a political compromise (Green 2012). In particular, the opposition party, the Christian Democrats (*CDU/CSU*), politicized the proposal to accept dual citizenship by orchestrating a petition campaign.³ This campaign played a role in their victory in the federal election in Hesse. The success of the Christian Democrats meant that the governing coalition of Social Democrats (*SPD*) and Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) lost its majority in the *Bundesrat*, curtailing their legislative power (Gerdes, Faist, and Rieple 2007: 52).

Initial expectations suggested an increase in naturalizations following this reform, but the effect proved unsustainable, resulting in a steady decline in naturalizations (see Figure 1). Apart from the notable surge in naturalizations by British citizens just before the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2020, the annual naturalization numbers remained relatively stable, hovering around 110,000 per year.⁴ The new citizenship law also imposed additional requirements, such as a declaration of loyalty to the principles of Basic Law and demonstration of proficiency in the German language. Furthermore, the naturalization fee was raised from €55 to €255. Scholars emphasize that Germany’s formal rejection of dual citizenship stands out as a significant obstacle for many foreigners (Green 2012; Weinmann 2022; Witte 2018: 73).⁵

³ The opposition to dual citizenship has historical roots, reinforced by a 1974 ruling from the German constitutional court categorizing dual citizenship as an “evil” to be avoided, a principle entrenched in political rhetoric since (Gerdes, Faist, and Rieple 2007: 50).

⁴ The recent uptick in naturalizations is primarily attributed Syrian refugees, whose heightened interest in becoming a German citizens overwhelmed many naturalization administrations, leading to extended waiting periods.

⁵ However, there are exemptions for EU and Swiss nationals, recognized refugees, elderly, and individuals from countries where renunciation is impractical. In fact, most naturalizations are today carried out while accepting multiple citizenships. In 2022, 74.2 percent of all naturalizations were conducted with acceptance of dual citizenship (Statistisches Bundesamt 2023).

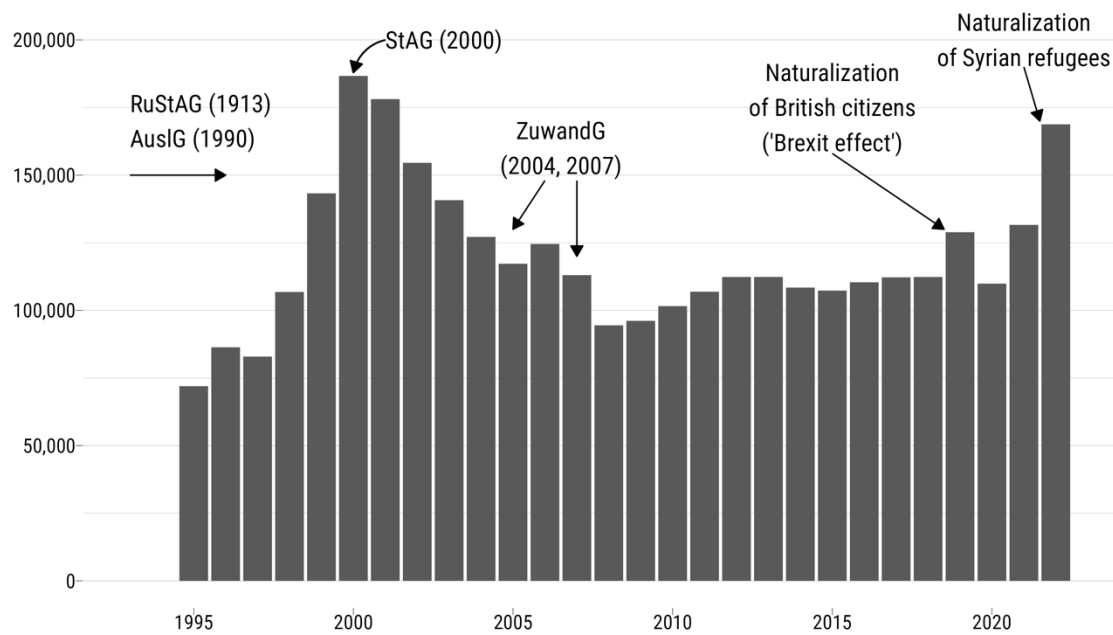


Figure 1. Naturalizations and major policy reforms 1995–2022

Later legislation such as the 2004 Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*, *ZuwandG*) and its reform in 2007 extended the mandatory integration requirements outlined in the Citizenship Act of 2000, thereby placing an “‘integration’ price tag” (Hartnell 2006: 61) on the liberalizations. The policies introduced a state-mandated integration course and subsequently an integration test. Moreover, German language proficiency requirements for naturalization were delineated (Green 2012). As highlighted by Goodman (2012), these policies are “defining in an explicit way—for the first time—what it means to be (...) German (...) for status-seeking immigrants” (674).

Since 2019, regulations were implemented in response to nationals returning after joining the terrorist network ISIS in Iraq and Syria. These regulations specify the conditions for the revocation of German citizenship. Additionally, measures were introduced to prevent the acquisition of German citizenship in cases of polygamous marriages. Criticism has been raised regarding the vagueness of the paragraph on “integration into German living conditions,” with concerns that it may contribute to culturalizing citizenship (Tabbara 2023).

As it stands, applicants must meet diverse set of conditions encompassing legal, cultural, and economic considerations. Fundamental requirements include a stipulated residence period of eight years and legal residency status. Cultural assimilation is gauged through language proficiency, participation in integration courses, and knowledge of the German legal and social system. Economic stability is a crucial aspect, ensuring applicants’ self-sufficiency. Specific criteria may vary

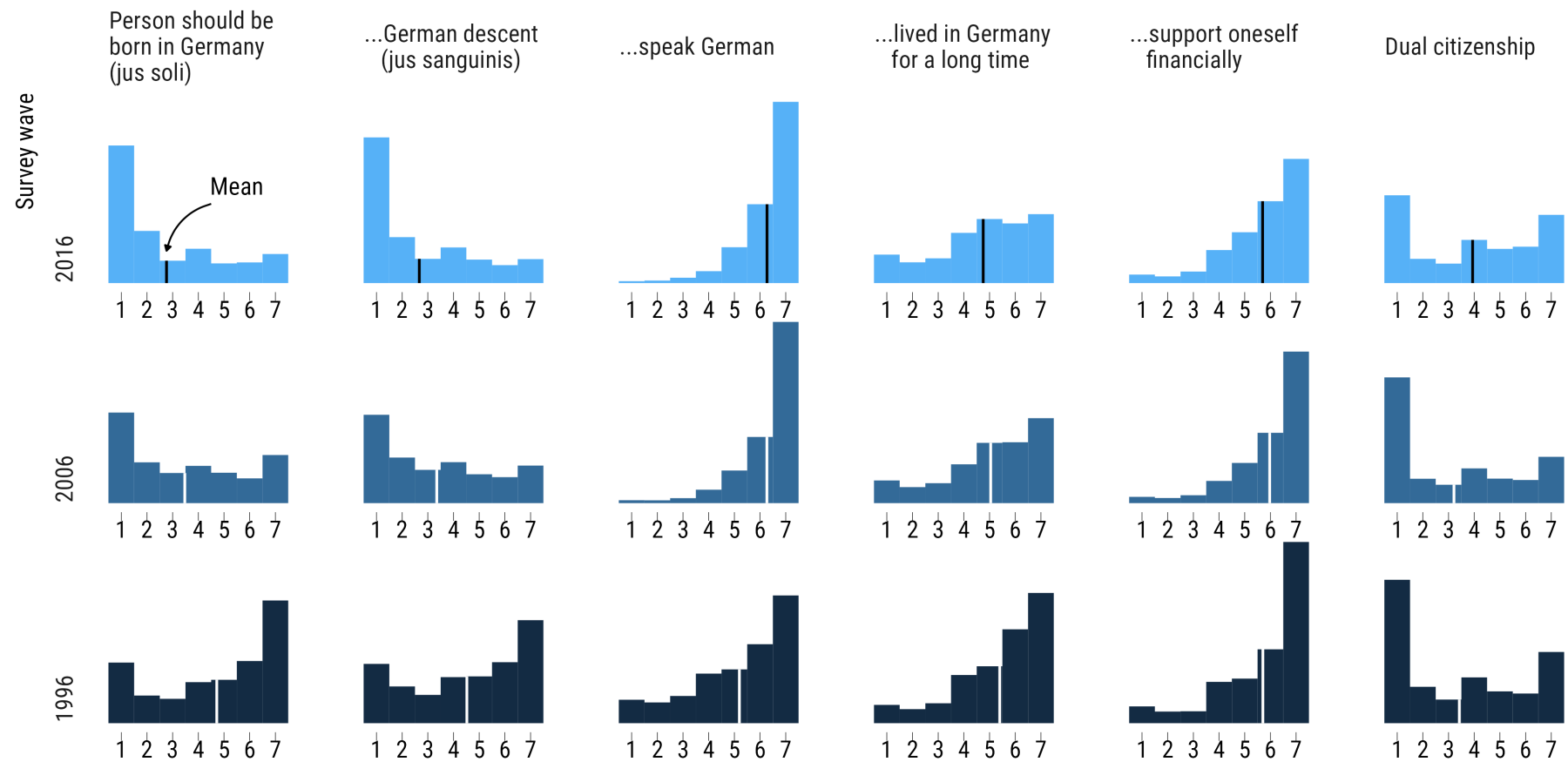
based on individual circumstances, and applicant may be required to renounce their previous citizenship.

The current citizenship reform, passed by the federal government and awaiting parliamentary approval, proposes a general acceptance of dual citizenship. Additionally, the required residence period is set to be reduced from eight to five years (in special cases, to three years). Plans also include lowering requirements for immigrants who arrived in Germany as guest or contract workers (Schmid 2022). In many ways, the current political debate echoes arguments that already accompanied the Citizenship Act of 2000. While the largest opposition party, the Christian Democrats, underlines that a reduction of the required residence period may hamper immigrants' integration efforts, the governing coalition of Social Democrats, Greens, and Liberals emphasizes that naturalizations are an integral element in the integration process. They argue that facilitating citizenship acquisition can contribute positively to the overall integration of immigrants.

Public attitudes toward naturalizations requirements

Immigration stands as a highly salient issue across European societies, with long-term surveys indicating that it currently ranks as the foremost concern in Germany (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2023). While prior research has successfully identified individual characteristics such as age and education as explanatory factors for attitudes toward immigrants (Dražanová et al. 2023), a crucial gap in our understanding persists regarding one of the immigrants' most pivotal claims—the demand for equal membership.

Drawing on data from the 1996 and 2006 waves of the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS), Diehl and Tucci (2011) contribute valuable insights by demonstrating a shifting landscape in the criteria deemed important for acquiring German citizenship. Their findings unveil a diminishing significance of ethnic criteria, such as being born in Germany or German descent, among respondents. Concurrently, cultural considerations, including German language proficiency and lifestyle adaptations, have gained prominence over time (also see Worbs 2009). The authors posit that citizenship law reforms may have played a role in shaping this changing of public opinion (Diehl and Tucci 2011; Worbs 2009).



Source: ALLBUS 1996, 2006, 2016; weighted

Figure 2. Attitudes toward naturalization requirements and dual citizenship

To build on these insights, Figure 2 extends the analysis by incorporating the most recent wave of the ALLBUS (GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften 2021). In addition, attitudes toward dual citizenship are also examined. The figure confirms the departure from ethnic criteria, which continuously lost significance over time. Simultaneously, instrumental criteria such as language proficiency and economic independence, which always were important as membership criteria, have gained salience. Interestingly, respondents now place less emphasis on extended residence periods. Regarding the acceptance of dual citizenship, the population is nearly evenly divided between supporters and opponents of such a policy.

In a study examining individual-level drivers of attitudes toward naturalization requirements, Levanon and Lewin-Epstein (2010) find that individuals who perceive economic or cultural threats are more likely to support restrictive citizenship policies. Their research thus underscores that factors explaining general attitudes toward immigrants also influence membership decisions.

Finally, scholars have employed factorial surveys to probe into attitudes toward hypothetical naturalization applicants (e.g., Atzmüller and Steiner 2010; Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015; Donnalaja 2022; Donnalaja and Vink 2023; Helbling et al. 2023). In an investigation involving a sample of British respondents, Donnalaja (2022) highlights that British citizens express a preference for applicants who have resided in the United Kingdom (UK) for several years, are employed, preferably in high-status jobs, and possess a strong command of the English language. Intriguingly, British respondents do not differentiate between applicants from various countries of origin once additional factors are considered. While Donnalaja interprets her findings as aligning with a merit-based perspective on citizenship, her analysis also uncovers disparities: Muslim immigrants are less likely to be granted citizenship compared to their Christian counterparts. In addition, hypothetical applicants with British ancestry are preferred over individuals without ancestral ties to the UK.

By and large, these findings are confirmed by Harell et al. (2012), who find for Canada and the United States that the job status of hypothetical applicants is more important than their ethnicity in regard to naturalization preferences. In contrast to these findings, Hainmueller et al. (2015) report a distinct preference among Swiss nationals for applicants from EU countries. Similarly, Kobayashi et al. (2015) reveal that Japanese respondents favor Korean over Chinese nationals. They also highlight that hypothetical applicants who show a willingness to integrate and have a high-status job are preferred by Japanese nationals.

While considerations grounded in merit and quantifiable integration efforts, such as employment and language proficiency, hold significance universally, there exist country variations in their preferences for naturalization applicants based on their countries of origin.

Hypotheses

Building upon the historical legacy of Germany's citizenship law and existing studies of public attitudes toward naturalizations, I formulate hypotheses regarding stated preferences for specific hypothetical naturalization applicants in Germany.

The trajectory of German citizenship law and analyses of public opinion both underscore a growing emphasis on measurable integration efforts. Consequently, I hypothesize that respondents are inclined to prefer applicants with a good proficiency in the German language and stable employment (*Hypothesis 1a*).

Existing research highlights a persistent in-group preference among states that traditionally have not been considered immigrant countries. In alignment with this finding, I assume that hypothetical immigrants from countries of origin perceived as culturally distant are less likely to be granted citizenship (*Hypothesis 1b*).

Despite the widespread acceptance of naturalizations with the allowance of multiple citizenships in Germany, I propose that the historical rejection of multiple citizenships may still influence the rejection of candidates wishing to retain their previous citizenship (*Hypothesis 1c*).

At the individual level, I align with studies emphasizing the significance of education and age for more liberal attitudes towards immigrants. Hence, I hypothesize that respondents with a higher educational level are more likely to accept immigrants as fellow citizens than their counterparts with lower educational level (*Hypothesis 2a*). Additionally, older respondents are expected to be less willing to grant citizenship to immigrants than younger individuals (*Hypothesis 2b*). Finally, I hypothesize that respondents who express concern about the economic situation (*economic threat*) and cultural diversity (*cultural threat*) are less likely to extend citizenship to immigrants than individuals with lower threat perception (*hypothesis 2c*).

Data and measures

I use a factorial survey, a vignette study, to test the proposed hypotheses. For the vignette study, 1,500 individuals were surveyed online in early September 2023. Respondents were sampled to be nationally representative of age, gender, and federal state.⁶

In the vignettes, six dimensions were varied, each with up to three attributes, resulting in a vignette universe of $2^4 3^2 = 144$ vignettes (see Table 1).

Table 1. Vignette dimensions and balance

Attribute	Level	N	Percentage
Gender	Female	3,007	50.1
	Male	2,993	49.9
Country of origin	United Kingdom	1,998	33.3
	India	2,012	33.5
	Turkey	1,990	33.2
Residence period	3 years	2,018	33.6
	5 years	1,992	33.2
	10 years	1,990	33.2
Employment	Seeking employment	2,988	49.8
	Employed	3,012	50.2
German proficiency	Little	3,008	50.1
	Very good	2,992	49.9
Dual citizenship	Retain	2,999	50.0
	Renounce	3,001	50.0
Total		Vignettes: 6,000 Respondents: 1,500	
		100	

In the survey, all vignettes were used in a “full factorial” design and divided into 36 blocks. Consequently, each respondent evaluated four vignettes.⁷ The vignettes were presented in a random order within each block. In the resulting sample, the vignette dimensions are orthogonal and exhibit level balance (see Table 1 and Table A1 in the Online Appendix). Using the full factorial allows the estimation of all relevant interaction terms. Figure 3 shows an example deck of four vignettes.

⁶ Using secondary data from the ALLBUS it can be shown that the respondent characteristics closely resembles the general population (see Appendix).

⁷ The block design was implemented using the “AlgDesign” (Wheeler 2022) software package in the R programming language (R Core Team 2023).

A female individual from Turkey

A male individual from India,
who has been living in Germany for 5 years,
who is **employed**,
who speaks **little** Germany,
who wishes to **renounce** his current citizenship.

Should this person be granted German citizenship?

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

Figure 3. Example vignette deck

Factorial surveys combine the advantages of experimental designs and surveys, thereby enabling researchers to study the causal effect of multiple treatments within larger and diverse samples (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 9-12). In contrast to direct questioning, factorial surveys have proven effective in mitigating social desirability bias (Auspurg et al. 2015). Moreover, benchmark studies have shown that treatments effects observed in factorial surveys closely align with real-world behaviors (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015; Petzold and Wolbring 2019).

However, to take advantage of factorial surveys, the experiments must be well planned and implemented.⁸ Methodological research recommends limiting the number of vignette dimensions to 7 ± 2 . This ensures that respondents are not overwhelmed by too many dimensions, while maintaining enough experimental conditions to prevent boredom. Simultaneously, it is imperative to keep the number of levels per dimension to a minimum to obtain precise estimates and avoid the so-called “number-of-levels effect” (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 19-20).

Additionally, careful design of vignettes is essential to minimize illogical combinations (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 41). For example, citizens from EU member states can already naturalize in Germany under the current legal situation without renouncing their previous citizenship. Consequently, individuals from countries of origin who can already be naturalized by accepting multiple citizenships were intentionally excluded from the selection process.

The survey also gathered socio-demographic and additional attitudinal data on the respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Respondent characteristics

⁸ In setting up the factorial survey, I followed the guidelines formulated by Auspurg and Hinz (2015).

Attributes	Levels	N	Percentage
Gender	Female	766	51.1
	Male	734	48.9
Education	Hauptschule (8/9)	227	15.1
	Realschule (10)	519	34.6
	Abitur, Fachhochschulreife	744	49.6
	No diploma/in school	10	0.7
Citizenship	German	1,331	88.7
	Third country	52	3.5
	Dual citizenship	108	7.2
	Prefer not say	9	0.6
Age group	18–29 years	249	16.6
	30–39 years	229	15.3
	40–49 years	226	15.1
	50–59 years	292	19.5
	Over 60 years	504	33.6
Party preference	CDU/CSU	296	19.7
	AfD	217	14.5
	SPD	212	14.1
	Die Linke	85	5.7
	FDP	75	5.0
	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	165	11.0
	Other	62	4.1
	No preference	388	25.9
Total	—	Respondents: 1,500	100
		Mean	Standard deviation
Economic threat		4.6	1.9
Cultural threat		5.1	1.9

The resulting data has a multilevel structure, with vignettes (*level 1*) nested in respondents (*level 2*). Accordingly, the methodological literature suggests using multilevel models to account for the hierarchical data structure (Auspurg and Hinz 2015; Baguley, Dunham, and Steer 2022). The data analysis follows a stepwise procedure – bottom-up strategy – whereby (1) only vignette variables are included, (2) respondent level characteristics are added, and (3) cross-level interactions are investigated (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 91; Luke 2020: 24). The first analytical step captures the shared understanding of vignette variables, while the subsequent models shed light on subgroup differences (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 91).

Main results

Vignette variables

In the initial stage of analysis, I assess how respondents evaluate the vignettes of hypothetical naturalization applicants. Figure 4, illustrating the main effects of the vignette variables, highlights

a clear preference for naturalization applicants from the United Kingdom over individuals from Turkey and India. On the seven-point scale, individuals from Turkey and India are rated 0.37 and 0.32 points lower, respectively, than British citizens, aligning with the expectation outlined in Hypothesis 1b.

In comparison to characteristics that measure integration, however, the effect sizes are relatively small. Naturalization candidates with “very good” German language skills are 1.35 points more likely to be granted citizenship than those with limited language proficiency. Similarly, employed individuals are 0.95 points more likely to be granted citizenship than those who are seeking employment. These findings strongly support Hypothesis 1a. Moreover, respondents exhibit a preference for individuals seeking naturalization with a longer duration of residence, with applications from individuals with a ten-year residence period being more likely to garner support than those with three or five years of residence.

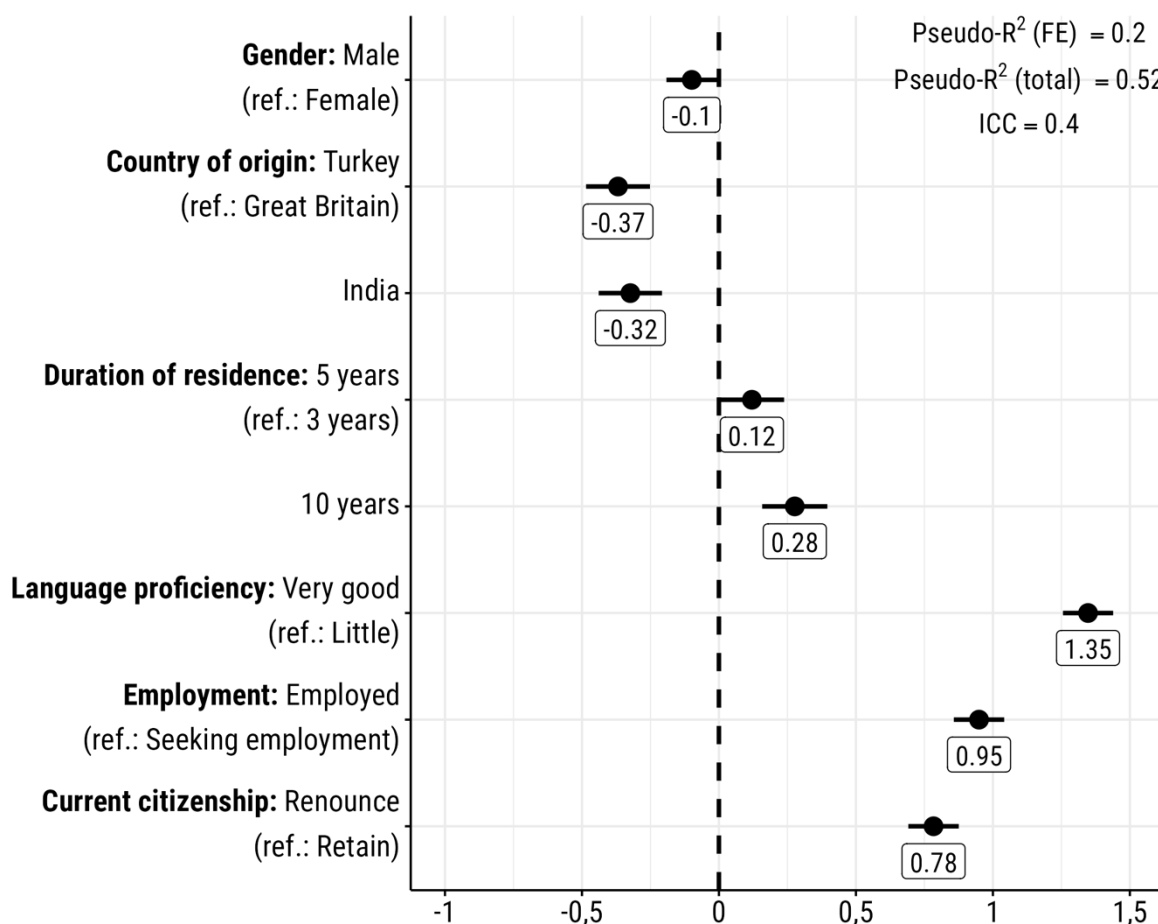


Figure 4. Linear multilevel regression model for naturalization preference on vignette dimensions; see Tables A2 in the Online Appendix for the full regression table. N (Respondents) = 1.500; N (Vignettes) = 6.000

Consistent with Hypothesis 1c, naturalization candidates willing to renounce their previous citizenship are strongly favored over individuals intending to retain their current citizenship. Those willing to renounce their previous citizenship are 0.78 points more likely to be granted citizenship than their counterparts opting for a second citizenship.

Finally, the results reveal no significant gender disparities in the likelihood to be granted German citizenship.

Two-way vignette interactions

The factorial design also provides the opportunity to explore two-way interactions between the vignette variables. In assessing potential two-way interactions, I follow the approach outlined by Baguley et al. (2022: 1156-1157) by conducting a likelihood-ratio test (LRT). This test evaluates model fit by successively removing interactions from the full model (see Table A3 the Appendix). Figure 5 illustrates the two-way vignette interactions between both gender and dual citizenship (Panel A) and gender and residence period (Panel B).

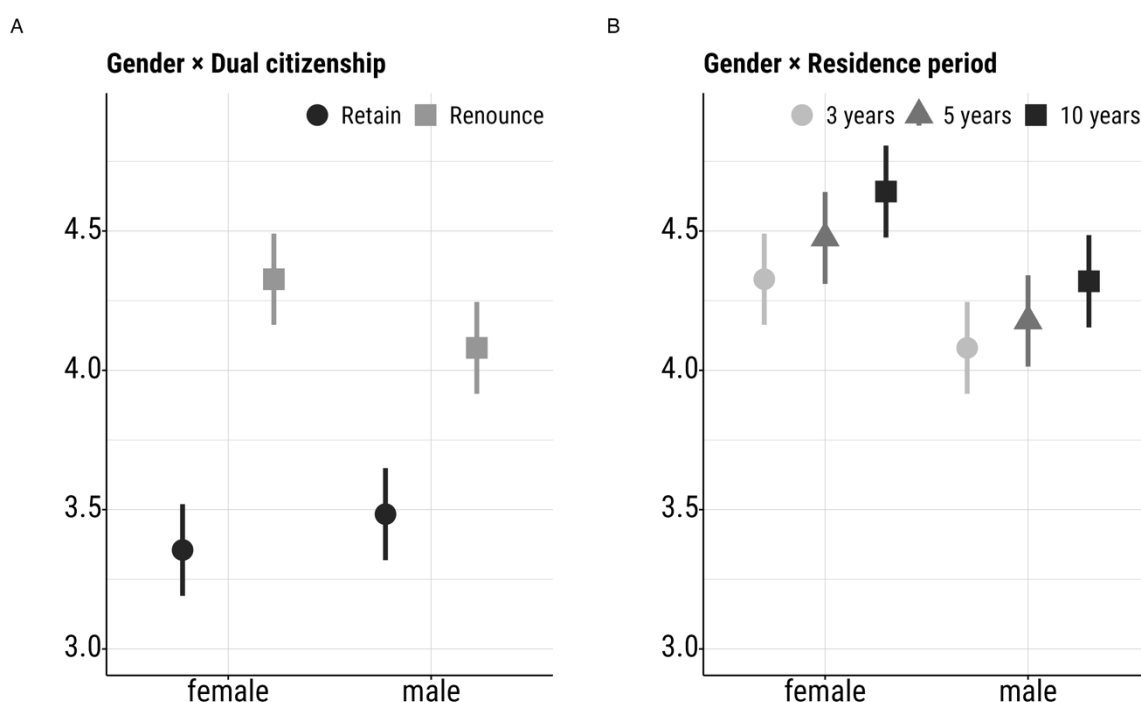


Figure 5. Conditional-Effect Plots of Two-way Vignette Interactions; see Tables A2 in the Online Appendix for the full regression table. N (Respondents) = 1.500; N (Vignettes) = 6.000

As illustrated in Panel A, naturalization applications from individuals intending to retain their current citizenship are evaluated less positively than those of individuals willing to renounce their

previous citizenship. However, among individuals inclined to give up their previous citizenship, women receive more favorable evaluations than men for their renunciation intent.

Consistent with this finding, Panel B shows that residence periods of female applicants are also assessed more positively than those of men. However, while the interaction effect improves model fit, it does not reach statistical significance.

Respondent characteristics

In the second step of the analysis, I include respondent characteristics as predictors to examine whether they impact vignette evaluations. Figure 6 shows that only a few respondent characteristics exert a significant effect on vignette evaluations. Individuals who themselves have dual citizenship are 0.48 points more likely to grant citizenship than respondents with only the German citizenship. Additionally, individuals with a party preference for the incumbent Social Democrats (SPD), whose Minister of the Interior, Nancy Faeser, is also responsible for the draft reform, evaluate naturalization applications 0.48 points more favorably than individuals with a preference for the largest opposition party (CDU/CSU). Supporters of the other coalition parties, *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* and *FDP*, are also more likely to grant citizenship than individuals in support of the CDU/CSU; however, the respective coefficients are not statistically significant. Finally, individuals who prefer the anti-immigrant *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) are much less likely to grant citizenship compared to individuals in favor of the *CDU/CSU* (-0.37 points).

The results are neither in support of Hypotheses 2a nor 2b. Respondents' educational level does not affect preferences to naturalization applications. Additionally, respondents' age is not associated with the general preference to award citizenship to hypothetical naturalization applicants. However, Hypothesis 2c finds partial support. Although the economic situation of respondents does not influence the preference toward citizenship applications, respondents who are concerned about immigration are less likely to grant citizenship. Increasing immigration concerns, which are measured on a seven-point scale, by one point, decreases the preference toward naturalization applications by 0.24 points.

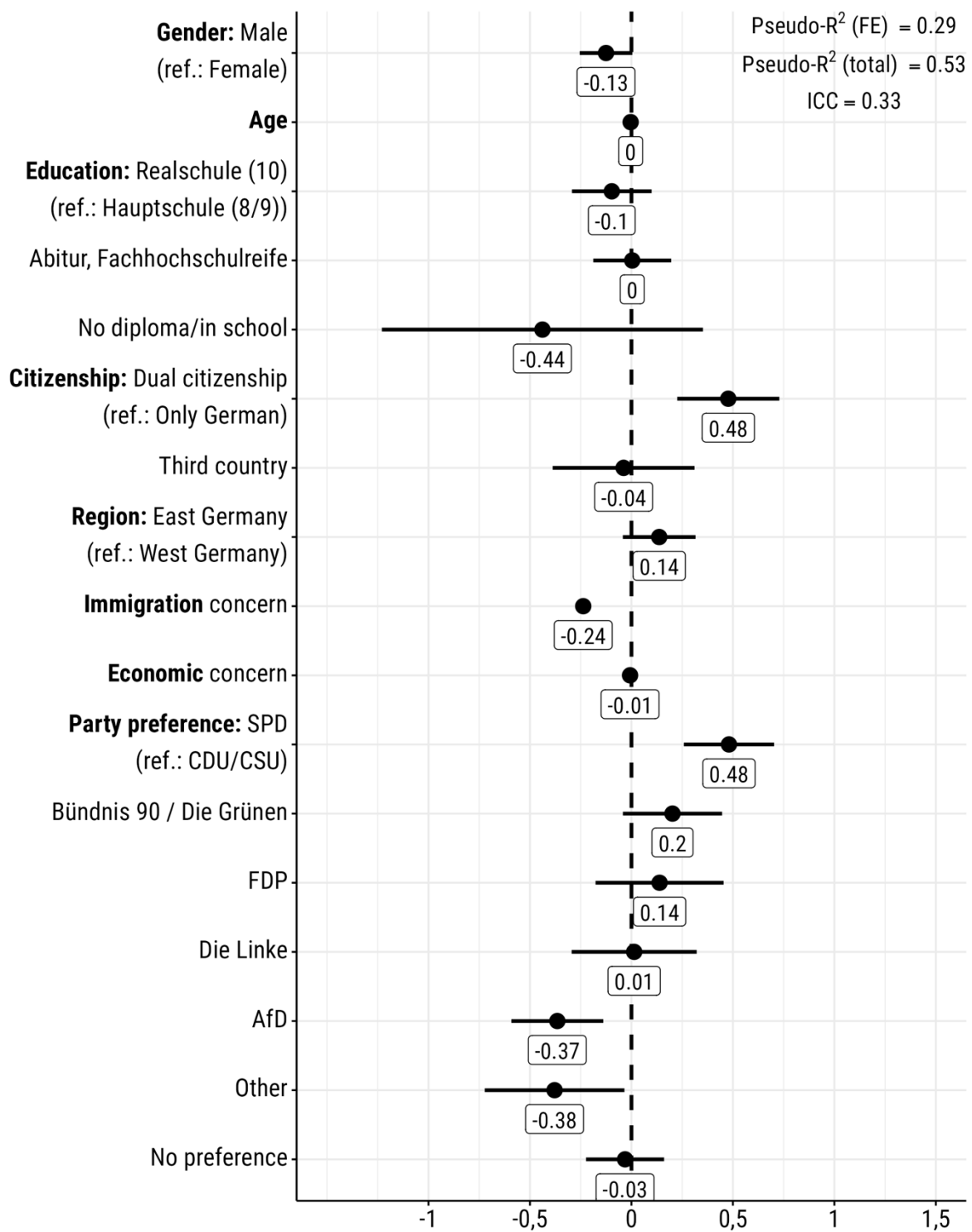


Figure 6. Linear multilevel regression model for naturalization preference on respondent characteristics. Vignette effects included in the model are not reported; see Tables A2 in the Online Appendix for the full regression table. N (Respondents) = 1.491; N (Vignettes) = 5.964

Cross-level interactions

In the last step of the analysis, I examine cross-level effects between vignette variables (*level 1*) and respondent characteristics (*level 2*), thereby revealing subgroup differences in the vignette effects. Figure 7 shows conditional effect plots of the cross-level interactions between dual citizenship and respondents' age (Panel A) and both between respondents' migration concerns and the vignette variables country of origin (Panel B) and employment (Panel C), respectively.

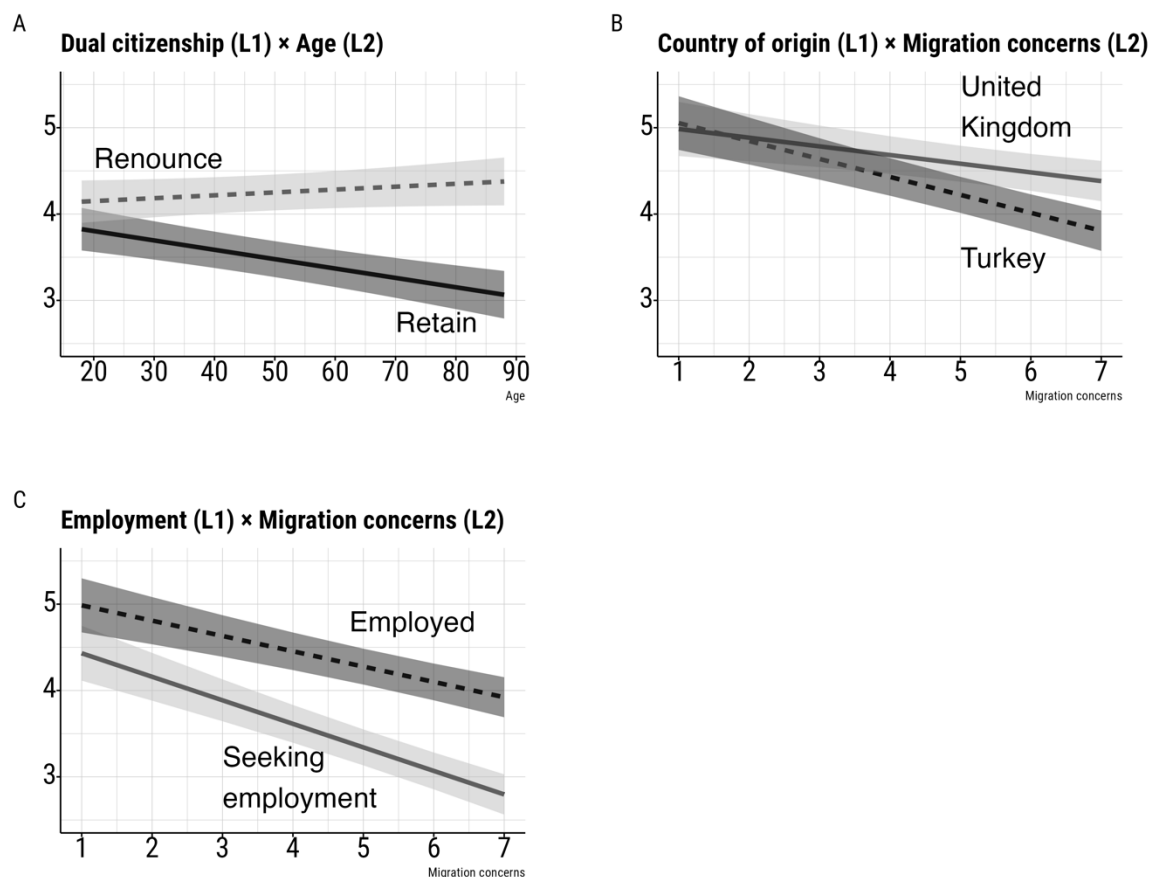


Figure 7. Conditional-Effects plots of cross-level interactions from a linear multilevel regression model for naturalization preference on respondent characteristics; see Table A2 in the Online Appendix for the full regression table. N (Respondents) = 1.491; N (Vignettes) = 5.964

In Panel A, the cross-level interaction between an applicants' willingness to renounce their current citizenship and respondents' age is illustrated in a conditional effect plot. It becomes clear that older respondents oppose dual citizenship. When a twenty-year old respondent is compared to a sixty-year-old in their evaluation of a naturalization applicant who wishes to retain their current citizenship, the sixty-year-old is 0.44 points less likely to support naturalization. When the twenty-year-old is compared to an eighty-year-old respondent, the latter's preference is even 0.65 points lower than that of the younger one.

Panel B and C illustrate the cross-level interaction between migration concerns and both the vignette variables country of origin and employment status, respectively. For illustration purposes, Panel B only shows the comparison between a naturalization applicant from the United Kingdom and Turkey. However, the full regression results are available in Table A2 in the Online Appendix. The figure illustrates those respondents with a high threat perception evaluate naturalization from Turkish citizens more negatively than those from British citizens. An individual with very strong threat perception is 0.58 points less likely to support naturalization of a Turkish citizens compared to a British citizen. They are also 0.45 points less likely to support the application of an Indian citizens than one of a British applicant.

Panel C shows that a similar relationship exists between migration concerns and an applicants' employment status. While employed applicants are always preferred over those seeking employment, respondents with a high threat perception are strongly opposed against applicants currently seeking employment. When a respondent with a medium threat perception is compared to an individual with very strong threat perception in their evaluation of an applicant who is currently not employed, the respondent with very strong migration concerns is 0.81 points less likely to support naturalization.

Robustness checks

To ensure the reliability of my findings, I conducted several robustness checks. First, I examined the potential impact of satisficing behavior, which could result in nondifferentiation—respondents providing the same survey response to each vignette. In the sample, only 11,6 percent of respondents exhibited such a behavior, indicating a relatively low occurrence (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015). When excluding respondents with no variance in their responses, the results remain consistent, as detailed in Table A4 of the Online Appendix.

Second, I addressed possible effects arising from the blocking of vignettes into decks (“block effects”) by introducing dummy variables for vignette decks (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 91). However, no significant block effects were observed across various model specifications.

Finally, I considered the potential impact of censoring on the rating scale used for the dependent variable. Censoring may occur when respondents would prefer more extreme responses than provided by the response scale. The distribution of responses on the edge of the rating scale suggested potential censoring. Consequently, I applied a generalized linear mixed model with left- and right-censoring to assess its impact (Auspurg and Hinz 2015: 101-104). While effect sizes for some vignette variables increased, there were no changes that altered the overall interpretation. Detailed results for the censored responses are available in Table A5 of the Online Appendix.

Discussion and conclusion

Against the backdrop of a significant law reform and heightened immigration concerns, this study explores public attitudes toward naturalization requirements and hypothetical applicants in Germany. Naturalizations, being pivotal membership decisions, invariably spark intense debates as they touch upon the essence of any political community, addressing the question on who 'we' are and who should belong. Traditionally perceived as adhering to an ethnocultural understanding of citizenship, Germany's naturalization law has undergone multiple amendments since reunification to adapt to evolving demographics. Despite these reforms, naturalization rates remained relatively low until recently, with scholars pointing to citizenship renunciation requirements as a significant obstacle for applicants.

Using data from the German ALLBUS, this article confirms a departure from ethnic criteria, such as German descent or birthright citizenship. Instead, instrumental criteria like language proficiency and economic independence have gained prominence over time, indicating a synchronization of public opinion with political reforms. Regarding the contentious issue of dual citizenship, a key focus of the current reform, the population appears nearly evenly split. Building upon these insights, a vignette study was implemented to explore how individuals decide between different naturalization candidates.

The analysis underscored a preference for naturalization applicants from culturally similar countries, while characteristics such as German language proficiency, stable employment, and a longer residence period, indicative of advanced integration, played a more significant role in the decision-making process. Notably, applicants willing to renounce their current citizenship received preferential treatment compared to those intending to retain their existing citizenship. Further examination revealed that the importance of the renunciation requirement was particularly pronounced among older respondents.

The desire to retain one's current citizenship has, at times in public discourse, been interpreted as a lack of loyalty or insufficient commitment in the naturalization process. For younger individuals, holding multiple citizenships is increasingly considered normal as Germany has become more diverse. Anticipating future cohort replacements, it is reasonable to expect increased public acceptance of dual citizenship in the years to come.

In recent years, Germany has grappled with the acceptance of a significant number of refugees, stemming from the civil war in Syria and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The ensuing societal challenges related to integration and accommodation have been heavily politicized by right-wing parties, contributing to the escalation of immigration concerns. The empirical analysis underscores

that apprehensions about immigration are associated with decreased support for naturalizations. Furthermore, individuals expressing immigration concerns place heightened importance on stable employment of applicants, revealing an intertwining of immigration and economic anxieties. However, it is noteworthy that individuals with such concerns are also less likely to support the naturalization of applicants from Turkey and India compared to those of British nationals, signaling a potential undercurrent of xenophobia.

Future studies should delve into the multi-faceted nature of immigration concerns, employing measures suitable to unravel the roots of these apprehensions. Additionally, prospective research should explore whether the varying assessment of dual citizenship between younger and older respondents is attributed to age, period, or cohort effects. Finally, research on citizenship policies and public attitudes toward naturalizations should scrutinize the extent to which policies and attitudes align. The ongoing citizenship law reform provides a unique opportunity to assess whether the proposed acceptance of dual citizenship might foster more positive views of naturalization applicants opting to retain their existing citizenship.

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