

Tucci, Ingrid; Wittenberg, Erich

Article

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Dr. Ingrid Tucci, Research Associate of the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) at DIW Berlin

SIX QUESTIONS TO INGRID TUCCI

“Germans are less worried about immigration”

1. Dr. Tucci, you have studied the Germans' attitude toward xenophobia and naturalization. Which requirements do foreigners have to fulfil in order to be eligible for naturalization in Germany? In 1999, there was a very important reform of German citizenship law which led to significant changes. Birthright citizenship was introduced, meaning that immigrant children who were born in Germany, would automatically be Germans. In most cases, they have to decide for either German citizenship or their parents' citizenship until the age of 23. Also, the necessary time of residence for immigrants was reduced from 15 to eight years. In 2007, additional criteria were introduced, such as commitment to the German Fundamental Law, sufficient command of the German language and passing a naturalization test.
2. Traditionally, ancestry used to be an important factor in Germany. Did that change? Yes. In our study, we observed that the importance of cultural adaption has increased for the interviewed persons between 1996 and 2006. This includes criteria such as adoption of German lifestyle or command of the German language. In contrast, so-called ethnic requirements, such as birth in Germany or German ancestry are considered less important than they used to be. We could say that there has been a culturalization of the border between “us” as Germans and “the others”, meaning those considered as strangers, since the 1990s. It is interesting though that persons who demand cultural adaption have just as strong xenophobic attitudes as persons who consider ethnic factors to be very important.
3. What is the Germans' attitude toward immigration? In 2009, there were less persons who worried about immigration issues a lot than persons who did not worry at all.
4. So the Germans are generally less afraid of immigration? Exactly! We also looked at the time between 1999 until 2009 and observed that the number of persons who claim to be very worried about immigration issues has decreased. What we observed as well however, is that this factor as well as attitude toward immigration is subject to strong fluctuation.
5. How about xenophobia in Germany? Has it decreased or increased? We found out that the number of persons who are very xenophobic has decreased between 1996 and 2006. The percentage of these persons used to be higher in the East of Germany. In 2006 however, this number does not differ much from the one in West Germany. We observed that the percentages of very xenophobic persons in East and West Germany have adjusted. Altogether, the level of xenophobia tends to have slightly decreased.
6. A classic position that could be overheard in any pub used to be: “The foreigners are taking away our jobs!” Is this attitude still relevant today? Yes, for some people it might be true. But the data tells us that in between 1996 and 2006, fewer and fewer people were willing to agree to this statement. This means that most people are not convinced by this point. After all, 80 percent of interviewed persons agree that Germany is an immigration country.

Dr. Tucci was interviewed by Erich Wittenberg.

DIW Berlin – Deutsches Institut
für Wirtschaftsforschung e.V.
Mohrenstraße 58, 10117 Berlin
T +49 30 897 89 -0
F +49 30 897 89 -200

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Publishers

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Renate Bogdanovic
Tel. +49-30-89789-249
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