

Campus Chemnitz

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BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE – SOCIAL NORMS IN COLLECTIVE NEGOTIATION PROCESSES ON MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION IN GERMANY

Social Norms Conference

1 May 2025

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DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

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DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION CONCEPTS

concept #1 (guiding theories):

- (qualitative) discourse analysis (e.g., political statements, publicism)
- social identity (group categorization)
- multiculturalism (recognition vs. essentialism = acknowledged differences vs. attributed “natural” traits)
- transnationalism (networked identities)
- dichotomy between continuity and change (liberal abstractions vs. local negotiations = normative ideals and universal principles on the macro level vs. situated practices and on-the-ground processes on the micro level])

01

DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION CONCEPTS

concept #2 (social norms):

- shared expectations about behavior and values that – unlike laws – are informal yet powerful via politics, media and everyday interaction
- create belonging
- regulate conduct
- structure power relations

concept #3 (norm change):

- Migration stress-tests existing norms.
- Migration opens space for innovation (e.g., new urban belongings).
- Migration opens space for (re-)essentialization (e.g., assimilation demands).

02

MECHANISMS OF NORM CONSTRUCTION

mechanism #1 (law and sanctions):

- “General Equal Treatment Act” (“Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz”): provides hard-law baseline, outlawing discrimination and thus shifting “subjective norms”
- group-specific effect: legal norms override group norms (for most people), while extremist milieus still follow their own codes

mechanism #2 (social interaction):

- direct contact: changes norms “from below” (e.g., in neighborhoods, schools, clubs, intercultural projects) and can reduce prejudice
- community organizations: act as brokers (but can cement segregation if they only serve their own ethnicity)

mechanism #3 (discursive processes):

- agenda-setting by media: decide which migration topics matter
- framing: determines whether norms become more inclusive (framed as enrichment) or exclusive (framed as threat)
- language as belonging-symbol: standard German = norm = successful integration vs. foreign language or German with foreign accent = deviancy = lack of integration

mechanism #4 (knowledge production):

- research-policy dialogues: shape which ideas of integration (e.g., language, work, citizenship) enter legislation
- knowledge: itself acts as a norm actor

03

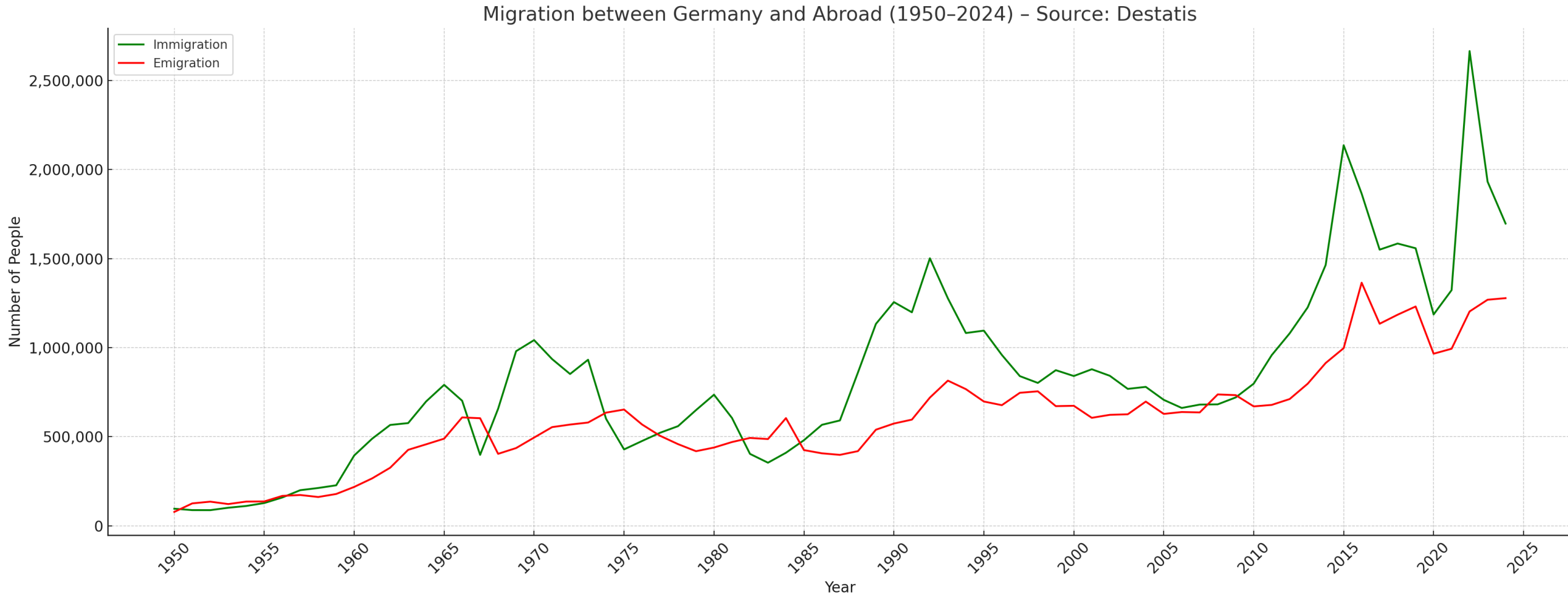
REINFORCEMENT VS. TRANSFORMATION OF EXISTING NORMS

process #1 (reinforcement):

- assimilation discourses: portray migrants as “others” and shift the burden of integration solely onto them (esp. Turkish migrants)

process #2 (incremental change):

- after 1960s: ignored integration (cf. guest-worker programs)
- since 1999: accepted migration as a permanent phenomenon and therefore the need for integration (including controversies: “Dual Citizenship Debate” on German identity [1999], “Leitkultur Debate” on belonging to German society [2000], “Children instead of Indians” Debate on Germany’s skilled labor immigration policy [2000], “Sarrazin Debate” on integration problems in Germany [2010] etc.)



process #3 (establishing new norms):

- entrepreneurial city marketing: creation of economized inclusion norms by promoting diversity as a location asset (i.e. economically successful migrants = “good” and “desirable” migrants)

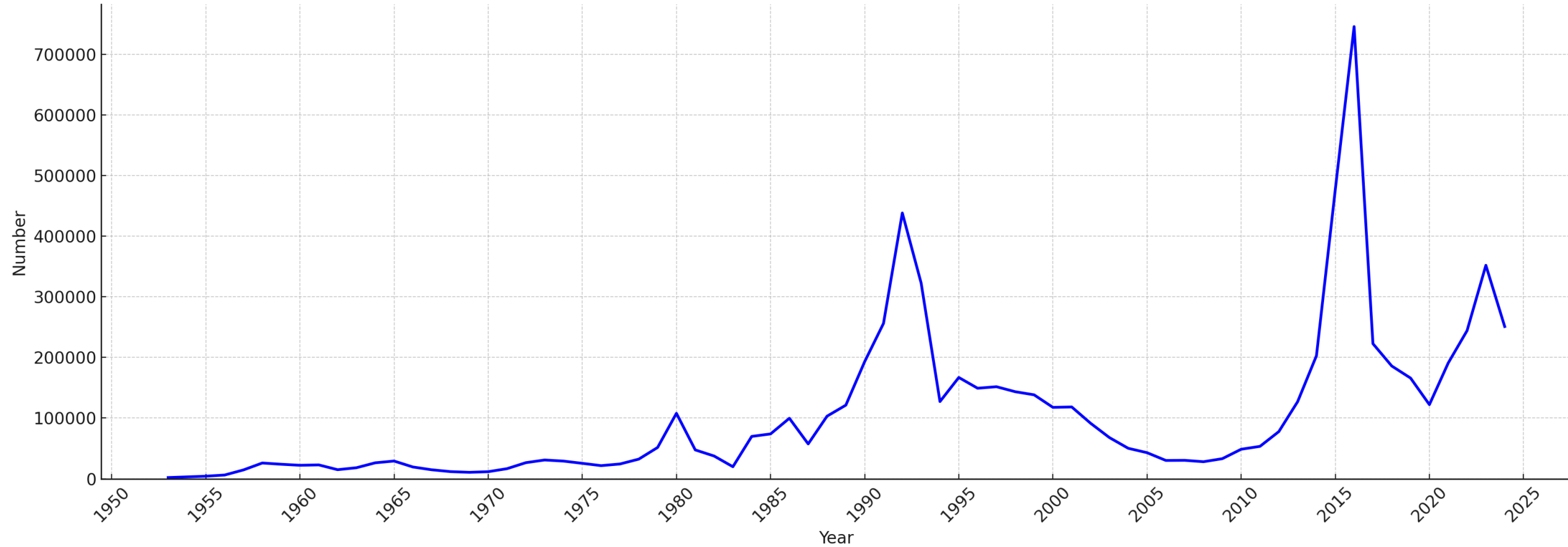
process #4 (breaks and paradigm shifts):

- 2015 (refugee inflow): “Integration Act” and multilingual courses but also polarizing frames (“welcome culture” vs. “fortress”)

process #5 (radicalization and polarization):

- triggered dichotomic negotiation (e.g., successful integration vs. failed integration)

Asylum Applicants in Germany (1953–2024) – Source: BAMF



04

ACTOR LANDSCAPE

04

ACTOR LANDSCAPE MULTIPLE ACTOR SETTING

actor #1 (politics):

- sets legal frames (e.g., “Integration Act”) and narratives
- must tackle structural inequality

actor #2 (media):

- amplify or relativize stereotypes
- agenda-set public norm debates

actor #3 (community organizations):

- provide culturally tailored support
- may reinforce internal segmentation

04

ACTOR LANDSCAPE MULTIPLE ACTOR SETTING

actor #4 (social work):

- mediates between individuals and system (empowerment and emancipation vs. adjustment assistance and social disciplining)
- builds inclusive norms (e.g., via dialogue spaces)

actor #5 (education):

- schools as laboratories of norm learning
- defining rules of belonging by teachers, peers and curricula

05

CASE STUDIES OF NORM NEGOTIATION

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CASE STUDIES OF NORM NEGOTIATION EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

case	norm conflict	mode of negotiation	outcome
religious symbols	secularism vs. religious freedom	state laws court rulings	context-dependent compromises
language policy	German language as gatekeeper vs. multilingualism as resource	integration courses integration tests	risk of exclusion (if requirements are too rigid)
sport project ("night football")	minority of teenagers from marginalized districts and with migration background and own rules vs. majority rules (dominant societal expectations)	shared leisure rituals mutual confrontation with the respective other side	new inclusive norms (through practice)

politicians' statements:

- Thilo Sarrazin (former Berlin Senator for Finance): “Germany abolishes itself!” (2010) → integration as a “lethal factor”
- Christian Wulff (Federal President): “Islam belongs to Germany, too!” (2010) → integration by representation
- Alexander Gauland (AfD vice-chair): “Of course, we owe our resurgence primarily to the refugee crisis!” (2015) → migration as a vehikel for party-political success
- Angela Merkel (Federal Chancellor): “We can do it!” (2015) → migration and integration as manageable tasks
- Horst Seehofer (Federal Minister of the Interior): “Migration is the mother of all problems!” (2018) → migration as a “root evil” in society

06

STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE NORM CHANGE

06

STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE NORM CHANGE EXAMPLES

strategy #1 (inclusive policy design):

- move beyond culture-only lens
- address culture, economy and rights simultaneously

strategy #2 (participatory models):

- involve migrants in decisions on urban planning, schooling, media etc.
- boosts legitimacy

strategy #3 (media-literacy programs):

- enable citizens to spot frames and stereotypes (awareness)
- reduces polarization

strategy #4 (intercultural education):

- curricula that foreground discrimination history and multilingualism

07

NORM-ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

dimension #1 (justice vs. pragmatism):

- tension between human-rights norms and real-political steering (e.g., capacity, labor market)

dimension #2 (human dignity and migrant agency):

- critique of utilitarian “migrants as human capital” logic

dimension #3 (global responsibilities):

- EU frameworks as challenge or support for national inclusion logics (cf. GEAS reform)

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GAPS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

gap #1 (regional difference):

- targeted studies on East-West tensions, rural areas and low-resource municipalities needed

gap #2 (long-term effect of integration courses):

- sustainability of cultural-norm teaching underexplored

gap #3 (digital public sphere):

- speed of social-media-driven norm change only partly understood

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

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