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Press Release

New Ways for a Compromise in Migration Policy

The German populations' immigration policy preferences are more nuanced than commonly understood and it is possible to bring together contrasting views. This is shown in a current study of sociologists and political scientists of the University of Mannheim and New York University.

Migration is an increasingly dominating topic in politics and is discussed with increasing vehemence among the German population. Those in favor of migration say that the lack of skilled workers and shortage of staff will become worse without immigration. Those who oppose migration fear that an increasing number of immigrants will exceed the reception capacities of the country. The new study headed by Mannheim sociologist Professor Dr. Marc Helbling and the Mannheim political scientist Professor Dr. Richard Traunmüller shows that the populations' immigration preferences depend on two factors, besides the sheer number of immigrants: the entrance criteria for immigration and the migrants' participation rights in Germany. Professor Rahsaan Maxwell, Ph.D. of New York University is co-author of the study published in the *Comparative Political Studies journal*.

“When it comes to evaluating the migration policy, the number of persons allowed to enter the country currently plays the biggest role,” Helbling explains. “However, migration policy should also take into account who is allowed to enter a country and which rights immigrants enjoy.” Despite the close connection between these two aspects of migration policy, they are usually analyzed separately in research – without checking if the preferences for the one dimension depend on the policy for the other dimension. “With our study, we follow a new path,” says Traunmüller.

The study shows that those critical of migration are 40 percent more likely to agree to a larger number of immigrants if the entrance criteria become stricter. Stricter entrance criteria would mean, for example, that immigrants with suitable qualifications are prioritized when it comes to issuing residence permits.

Among those in favor of migration, every third person will agree to a more restrictive migration policy if migrants have more participation rights such as access to social benefits and the labor market.

Another study, which the authors have published together with Felix Jäger in the *International Migration Review* journal, shows how this could look like. The study shows that persons in favor of more or less migration have relatively similar ideas on how integration should take place. Those in favor and those against migration are of the opinion that migrants should learn the language as best as possible, take part in integration courses and not be dependent on social benefits. At the same time, they should have the same rights as locals on the labor market and have the option to extend their work permit.

For their current study, the authors have evaluated several survey experiments in which almost 10,000 people from Germany took part between 2020 and 2023. The respondents were asked to evaluate certain policy suggestions.

“The migration debate often gives the impression that the positions of both camps are irreconcilable. Our study shows, however, that it is possible to bring those in favor of and those opposing immigration together,” says Helbling. According to the study, most people would welcome the compromise to reduce the number of immigrants in total, introduce stricter entrance criteria, and extend the participation rights of migrants in Germany.

Helbling, M., Traunmüller, R. & Maxwell, R. (2023). *Numbers, Selectivity, and Rights: The Conditional Nature of Immigration Policy Preferences*. *Comparative Political Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140231178737>

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