



# Identity and Belonging: Emotional Assimilation in Two Immigrant Communities in Germany

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## Abstract

In this article, we analyze emotional assimilation (host country identification) within Germany's two largest immigrant communities—ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union and those German citizens with an ethnic Turkish migration background. Specifically, we investigate the strength of emotional assimilation among these two communities and the differences that might exist between them. To what degree have these two large immigrant communities cultivated a sense of host country identification or German national identity? What factors shape emotional assimilation in these two communities? We find that ethnic German citizens with a background from the former Soviet Union have a stronger German identity than do citizens with a Turkish background. Nevertheless, the difference between these two groups is substantively small, perhaps because the transformation of immigration rules, citizenship laws, integration policies, and social norms in Germany over the last two decades has led to a greater identification with Germany and its emerging multicultural society.

**Keywords** German politics · Immigrant identity · Citizenship · Emotional assimilation · Integration policies

Immigrant assimilation is best understood as a multidimensional process involving integration into the social, economic, political, and cultural structures of a given society, with integration along various dimensions (e.g., language adaptation, educational level, labor market entry, etc.) occurring at different rates or levels (Diehl and Schnell, 2006; Kurthen and Heisler, 2009; Schaeffer and Bukenya,

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2014; Doerschler and Jackson, 2011; Demmrich and Arakon, 2020). One particularly important dimension in this process has been referred to as “emotional assimilation”—host country identification or a national identity oriented towards immigrants’ new country (Alba and Nee, 2003; Diehl and Schnell, 2006; Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2009; Ersanilli and Saharso, 2011; Hochman et al., 2018). The degree to which emotional assimilation is successful and a sense of deep belonging created is perhaps the most important challenge facing both immigrants and their new host countries.

In this article, we analyze the degree of emotional assimilation within two of Germany’s largest immigrant communities—ethnic minority Germans from the former Soviet Union (*Aussiedler* or *Spätaussiedler*, often referred to collectively as “Russian-Germans”) and those German citizens with an ethnic Turkish background. Specifically, the purpose of our study is to investigate the strength of emotional assimilation and the differences that might exist between these two communities—one that for many years enjoyed a privileged immigration and citizenship status and (because of ethnic German heritage) a seemingly easier path to integration, and one that did not. To what degree have these two large immigrant communities cultivated a sense of national identity in the wake of significant changes (discussed below) in citizenship and immigration policies in Germany over the last two decades? Do differences in age, gender, wealth, and involvement in social bodies such as unions make a difference in explaining emotional assimilation within these two groups? Are there differences between the ethnic German immigrant community and the Turkish immigrant community in terms of their degree of emotional assimilation? If so, why might this be the case? We analyze these questions here. Finally, we look at some of the other factors that could shape emotional assimilation in both these communities. These include the perception that the host country (and native citizens) does not fully welcome immigrants as equal citizens as well as the evolution of legal rules, immigration policies, integration efforts by the state, and the remaining barriers to obtaining citizenship (e.g., restrictions on dual citizenship), factors that have been explored in recent scholarship (Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2010; Ersanilli and Saharso, 2011; Kaya, 2012; Low, 2015; Goodman and Wright, 2015; Yanasmayan, 2015).

## Theoretical Background

Hochman et al. (2018) argue that a basic understanding of assimilation is premised on the decrease in dissimilarities between immigrants and natives and an increase in their similarities, while Schaeffer and Bukenya (2014) provide a pithy definition of assimilation as “a process that reduces differences between immigrants and natives.” This reduction of differences does not imply a complete acculturation of newcomers to the host society but rather “leaves open the possibility that the host society may make some of the adjustments, something that acculturation does not” (Schaeffer and Bukenya, 2014: 158). Alba and Nee (2003) focus on assimilation within the cultural, sociological, and institutional contexts of immigrant sub-cultures, while Freeman (2004) conceptualizes assimilation as involving four broad sectors—states, markets, welfare, and culture. Diehl and Schnell (2006) meanwhile see assimilation

and integration occurring within three broad processes of identificational, cognitive, and social assimilation. Emotional assimilation can be seen as an aspect of “culture” a la Freeman (2004) or identificational assimilation a la Diehl and Schnell (2006).

Emotional assimilation can be understood as involving the ethnic and national identification preferences of immigrants and immigrant descendants (Hochman et al., 2018). Emotional assimilation does not require a reduction per se in identification with an immigrant’s previous homeland or decrease in their ethnic identification, but merely an increase in the degree to which an immigrant identifies with the new host country and its culture, values, and customs. Indeed, scholars have distinguished between the two very different processes of ethnic culture retention and settlement country identification. Ersanilli and Koopmans (2009) suggest that host-culture and ethnic-culture orientations can be classified into four broad categories: “full integration,” in which both cultures are combined; “assimilation,” in which the host culture is adopted and the ethnic culture lessens significantly; “segregation,” in which the ethnic culture is maintained and there is little adoption of the host culture (often seen in so-called ethnic enclaves); and “marginalization,” in which immigrants become distanced from both cultures (see also Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2009; Ersanilli and Saharso, 2011). While emotional assimilation is sometimes measured through behavioral markers (e.g., naturalization rates), most scholarship surveys are used to measure how strong the feeling of national identity is within immigrant communities (Diehl and Schnell, 2006; Schaeffer and Bukenya, 2014; Hochman et al., 2018; Demmrich and Arakon, 2020).

Previous research has shown that the factors affecting emotional assimilation can be classified into two broad categories, one internal to immigrant communities and the other external. In regards to the former, emotional assimilation—indeed, many dimensions of assimilation/integration—can be seen as dependent upon the generational cohort involved, with second-generation migrants integrated more fully (Mushaben, 2010; Schaeffer and Bukenya, 2014; Doerschler and Jackson, 2011; Green, 2013; Hess, 2016; Hochman et al., 2018; Demmrich and Arakon, 2020). “Segmented assimilation” theory, however, has suggested that not all second- or subsequent-generation immigrants assimilate along all dimensions to a greater degree than the first generation regardless of policy (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Hochman et al., 2018). That being said, there is much evidence in the literature that generational change has a substantive impact, be it negative or positive, on the degree of assimilation along all dimensions. In their study on immigrants in Germany, for example, Diehl and Schnell (2006) find little support for the contention that the adaptation process of second- and third-generation immigrants has slowed or reversed.

A host of studies has demonstrated that among the chief external factors affecting emotional assimilation is the perception of discrimination against the immigrant community by the host society (see for example, Rumbaut 2005). In his study on discrimination against immigrants in Germany, Steinmann (2019) confirms earlier studies on the so-called paradox of immigration, whereby immigrants with higher levels of education report experiencing a greater degree of discrimination than those with lower levels of education. Hess (2016) and Goerres, Meyer, and Spies (2018) show that a subset of ethnic German immigrants, despite a seemingly more

privileged immigration and citizenship status, perceive significant discrimination and feel poorly integrated into German society. Schaeffer and Bukenya (2014) conclude that the perception of poor treatment/discrimination was highly negatively correlated with emotional assimilation. Although they do not exclude the possibility that cause and effect were reversed—that is, that those with a low degree of emotional assimilation perceive the host society as less welcoming—they argue that it is relatively unlikely. Similarly, Hochman et al. (2018) show that the perception of discrimination is negatively correlated with national identification with the new host country, even though it is not correlated with the degree of immigrants' own ethnic identification.

Citizenship and immigration policy are other external factors shaping emotional assimilation. Here, the literature suggests a nuanced understanding. While some studies have looked at how the degree of integration along various dimensions can be a factor affecting rates of naturalization (Zimmermann, et al. 2009), others have analyzed how naturalization affects the degree of assimilation (Bevelander and Veenman, 2006). Ersanilli and Koopmans (2010) find that while on the one hand naturalized immigrants exhibit higher level of emotional assimilation (host-country identification), on the other hand, linguistic and social integration lag well behind for naturalized immigrants. Scholars analyzing the link between dual citizenship and naturalization have similar mixed conclusions. While some have argued that immigrants from countries that allow dual citizenship have higher naturalization rates (Jones-Correa, 2001), others reach the opposite conclusion (Yang, 1994). Ersanilli and Koopmans (2010) suggest that dual citizenship may not have the negative effect on emotional assimilation it is sometimes claimed to have, even if a demonstrable connection between naturalization and dual citizenship cannot be definitively shown. Yanasmayan (2015), in an article based on a comparison of three case studies, argues that a rigid dual citizenship policy might lead to the decoupling of the legal and emotional aspects of citizenship, in effect inhibiting the development of a high degree of emotional assimilation. Low (2015) and Kaya (2012) argue that current rejection of dual citizenship has led to a weakening of emotional ties of immigrants to Germany.

Integration policies by the host country have also been investigated by scholars for their potential impact on emotional assimilation. Goodman and Wright (2015)—in a study of mandatory integration requirements meant to further assimilation among immigrants—show that those Western European countries with such requirements do not produce better outcomes in integration and emotional assimilation than those countries without such practices. Meanwhile, in a comparative study of integration policies in Germany, France, and the Netherlands, Ersanilli and Saharso (2011) find that although these policies differ widely among the three countries, they have no impact on the ethnic identification of the children of immigrants (ethnic culture retention). However, they also find that more inclusive integration policies have a strong correlation to host country identification, i.e., emotional assimilation. Similarly, a study by Ersanilli and Koopmans (2009) using the same country cases finds that ethnic culture retention is strongest in the Netherlands (with a stronger tradition of multicultural accommodation) but host culture identification is strongest in France, with its long-standing republican model of integration or cultural

assimilation. Germany, which is somewhere in the middle in terms of integration strategies but has moved away from a stricter French model, falls in between the Netherlands and France in host country identification.

## The Dimensions of Emotional Assimilation in Germany

Germany provides a fascinating case for the study of emotional assimilation and has long been an object of study for researchers. Its longstanding challenges in facilitating—or rather, even providing the opportunity for—emotional assimilation among much of its immigrant population were illustrated for many years both by its citizenship law as well as its immigration policy. According to the Citizenship Law of 1913, German citizenship was to be acquired through the principle of *jus sanguinis* (“blood lineage” or ethnic descent) rather than through *jus soli*, or membership in the state territorial community (Hogwood, 2007). The old Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) preserved the Citizenship Law of 1913 and claimed to be the sole legal heir of the German state. Indeed, *jus sanguinis* played an important state-building role after the Second World War, simultaneously denying the legitimacy of the “other” German state (the communist German Democratic Republic, or GDR) while holding open citizenship to all ethnic Germans who resided outside of the FRG’s boundaries (Palmowski, 2008; Green, 2013; Hess, 2016). This also served the important political purpose of contrasting a “free Germany,” open to all of its ethnic kin, primarily those countries behind the Iron Curtain with a sizable German minority (Palmowski, 2008; Green, 2013). The largest sub-type of these ethnic German immigrants were so-called Russian-Germans who immigrated to Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and whose descents then migrated to West Germany after the creation of the two German states after 1945. Russian-Germans came to Germany in large numbers in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Those coming to the Federal Republic after 1993 were known as *Spätaussiedler*. As Hess (2016) has argued, co-ethnic immigrants were classified as “belonging to the German people” (*deutsche Volkszugehörigkeit*) and German identity was measured by German descent. Because of their ethnic German background, *Spätaussiedler* were given citizenship immediately upon arrival in Germany.

At the same time, as the FRG’s economy grew dramatically and it suffered a subsequent labor shortage in the 1950s, it recruited foreign or “Guest” workers (*Gastarbeiter*), principally from the Mediterranean countries, Yugoslavia, and above all, Turkey, to live and work in the FRG. After 1973, when the recruitment of foreign workers was halted, many Guest workers remained in the country and were subsequently followed by a new migration influx in the form of chain or dependent migration and later, asylum seekers, who were guaranteed the right to remain in Germany under the FRG’s constitution or Basic Law (Mushaben, 2010). Despite this reality, public policy for decades denied that Germany was a “country of immigration” and naturalization procedures for non-ethnic Germans were extremely difficult. The public position towards immigration was obviously not a statement of the facts on the ground but rather a normative policy goal towards the ideal of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state. As Hogwood, (2007: 133) has written, the failure to recognize the

reality of (non-ethnic German) immigration revealed the “close links in the German political elite’s perception of citizenship, immigration, and asylum.” In other words, both policy and public pronouncements privileged ethnic German descent in any claim to belonging: emotional assimilation thus was largely assumed for ethnic German immigrants and was not really facilitated for non-ethnic German immigrants.

Beginning in the late 1990s, however, German policy towards immigration and citizenship changed significantly. Privileged immigration rights for ethnic Germans and their dependents were curtailed, new categories for immigrants outside the EU and EEA were introduced, and a “Green Card” program for skilled migrants was developed. Most significantly, the new citizenship law of 2000 introduced the principle of *jus soli* for the first time, making it far easier to obtain German citizenship through naturalization, despite some new barriers (principally having to do with the carrying of dual citizenship) being erected and language-competence and income self-sufficiency tests remaining (Hogwood, 2007; Mushaben, 2010; Green, 2013). As Green (2013) has argued, this decidedly does not mean that Germany has completely embraced its ethnic and cultural diversity: in particular, debates over whether its Muslim citizens are fully integrating, a 2010 statement by Chancellor Merkel that multiculturalism has “utterly failed,” an insistence in the earlier part of this decade by some German conservatives that all citizens acknowledge a so-called German ethnic *Leitkultur* (“core values” in Germany) echo past policies of acculturation, and the rise of the radical right-wing populist party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), indicate that a significant portion of German citizens have yet to reconcile with Germany’s multicultural realities. Yet although the new citizenship law and other reforms were indeed limited (and for some, underwhelming) it has nevertheless been striking in its symbolic impact. As Wüst already noted in 2004 (2004: 343), “For the first time in Germany’s post-war history, the majority of regularly naturalized people are foreign citizens without German ethnicity.” Moreover, in the last two decades immigration and citizenship policies have moved away from administrative language which refers to non-ethnic German immigrants as “foreign fellow citizens” (*Ausländische Mitbürger*) to one which recognizes “citizens with a migration background” (*Migrationshintergrund*). Indeed, Laubenthal (2019) has argued that changes in citizenship acquisition, immigration policies, and integration strategies introduced over the last two decades—but especially during the third government of Angela Merkel, from 2013 to 2017—have transformed Germany from a country that consciously disdained immigration and immigrants to a country of immigration much more welcoming and inclusive to its immigrant groups.

Such a transformation has been seen by Brubaker (2001) as heralding a “return” of assimilation. According to him, while old assimilationist models assumed the virtual eradication of differences or the complete acculturation of immigrants into a homogenous social body, a new assimilationism recognizes difference-within-similarity, aiming for a *direction of change*, not a particular *degree of similarity* among immigrants to be integrated (Brubaker, 2001: 534). In a slightly different formulation, Schönwälder and Triadafilopoulos (2016: 367) argue that changes in German immigration policy and its emerging multicultural society exhibit rather a “new differentialism,” a policy that is “inclusive in that it accepts differences among citizens, while also being individualistic.” However, this attitudinal and policy shift is

conceptualized, it signals a marked change to previous policy in that it requires adaptation on the part of both immigrants and the host country (Schaeffer and Bukenya 2014).

Given the history detailed above, it would appear that ethnic German immigrants have been in a better position to develop a high degree of emotional assimilation given their privileged status as “co-ethnics” within Germany’s citizenship and immigration regime. Has this been the case, however, especially in light of these dramatic changes in Germany? Little previous research has actually tested the differences in degree of emotional assimilation between different immigrant communities in Germany, either including all immigrant groups in a single sample (Schaeffer and Bukenya, 2014; Hochman et al., 2018) or focusing simply on Muslim immigrants (Doerschler and Jackson, 2011; Demmrich and Arakon, 2020). Moreover, as Hess (2016) argues, despite their political-legal advantages there is evidence that ethnic German immigrants have had difficulties in successfully integrating and developing a high degree of emotional assimilation, evidenced both by those immigrants’ development of “parallel societies” as well as the perception of both discrimination and neglect from the host country. Perhaps as a political consequence of perceived discrimination and neglect, ethnic German immigrants—who historically supported the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) in gratitude for its support in facilitating their emigration to Germany over the last two decades—have increasingly turned since 2017 to the populist radical right party, the Alternative for Germany (Hansen and Olsen, 2020). On the other hand, Wüst (2004) shows that historically naturalized Turks strongly favored the Social Democrats and there is little support among this group for any right-wing party, with some 60% of naturalized Turks saying they could not imagine voting for the CDU/CSU.

## Methodology and Data

The data in our analysis comes from the 2017 Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES) (Goerres et al., 2020). The study was conducted from October 2016 until March 2020. The study specifically surveyed 1,044 German citizens aged 16 and over with either a Turkish migration background ( $n = 530$ ) or an origin from former Soviet Union countries ( $n = 514$ ). It is important to note that although the IMGES study’s survey does not explicitly identify ethnic Germans in the sample of those immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Goerres, et al. (2020) show that such immigrants are overwhelmingly of ethnic German descent. We should also note that our research here focuses solely on immigrants who have citizenship, not emotional assimilation among all immigrants. As such, it does not distinguish between first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants, only that subset of immigrants who have obtained citizenship. IMGES is the first survey to explicitly include immigrants that are German citizens in order to better understand political attitudes and behavior among these groups. In our analysis, we include post-stratification survey weights for all empirical modeling to reduce potential sampling error and non-response bias. The survey was translated by the authors from German to English. Tables 1 and 2

**Table 1** Models predicting strength of German identity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.01 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	- 0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender	- 0.05 (0.13)	- 0.08 (0.13)	- 0.15 (0.15)	- 0.07 (0.13)
Income	- 0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	- 0.01 (0.03)	- 0.01 (0.03)
Union member	0.02 (0.21)	0.07 (0.22)	0.04 (0.24)	0.03 (0.22)
Soviet background	0.62* (0.16)	0.40* (0.14)	0.47* (0.15)	0.45* (0.14)
Political ideology	- 0.05 (0.03)	- 0.05 (0.03)	- 0.05 (0.04)	- 0.06* (0.03)
Discriminated group	- 0.58* (0.16)	- 0.52* (0.16)	- 0.71* (0.18)	- 0.51* (0.16)
Born in Germany	0.50* (0.18)			
Born citizen		0.73* (0.17)		
Years citizen			0.02* (0.01)	
Dual citizenship				- 0.36* (0.15)
<i>N</i>	849	844	662	841
AIC	2184.37	2162.22	1692.03	2166.71
Not at all/hardly/some	- 2.02* (0.39)	- 2.00* (0.37)	- 2.53* (0.44)	- 2.61* (0.36)
Some/predominately	- 0.30 (0.38)	- 0.28 (0.35)	- 0.69 (0.42)	- 0.88* (0.34)
Predominately/fully	1.19* (0.38)	1.20* (0.36)	0.91* (0.42)	0.59 (0.34)

\*Indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.05$ ; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized

## Dependent Variable and Method

In order to better understand immigrant attitudes towards German identity, we include two dependent variables in our analysis (Fig. 1). First, we explore a question that asks about the respondent's strength of German identity. The prompt states that, "Besides religion, other things are important to many people when it comes to describing who they are. How is it with you? Generally speaking, how much do you feel like..." Then, the respondent is asked to reflect on the extent to which they feel German. The choices that the respondent is offered are "not at all," "hardly," "in

**Table 2** Models predicting importance of German values and traditions

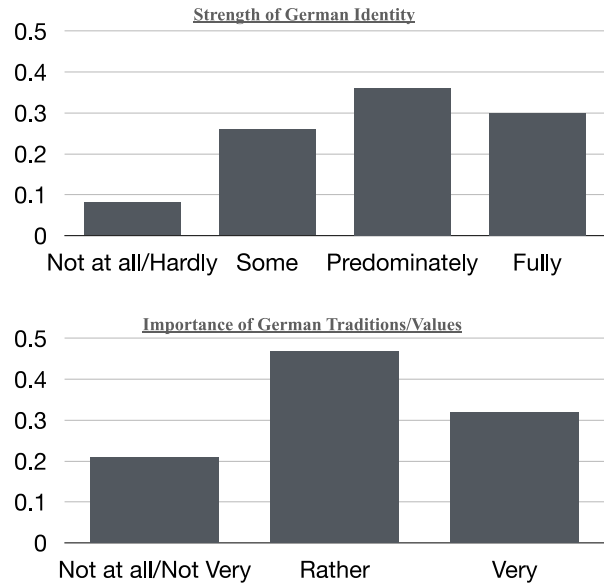
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Gender	- 0.17 (0.13)	- 0.17 (0.14)	- 0.12 (0.15)	- 0.19 (0.13)
Income	- 0.01 (0.03)	- 0.00 (0.03)	- 0.04 (0.03)	- 0.00 (0.03)
Union member	- 0.38 (0.24)	- 0.41* (0.24)	- 0.36 (0.26)	- 0.38 (0.24)
Soviet background	0.84* (0.17)	0.99* (0.15)	0.93* (0.17)	0.95* (0.15)
Political ideology	0.08* (0.24)	0.07* (0.24)	0.02 (0.36)	0.08* (0.03)
Discriminated group	- 0.08 (0.17)	- 0.10 (0.17)	- 0.14 (0.19)	- 0.09 (0.17)
Born in Germany	- 0.292 (0.193)			
Born citizen		- 0.312* (0.175)		
Years citizen			- 0.01 (0.01)	
Dual citizenship				0.05 (0.16)
<i>N</i>	840	834	654	832
AIC	1699.68	1689.49	1331.72	1689.29
Not at all/not very/rather	- 0.71 (0.41)	- 0.66 (0.38)	- 1.32* (0.46)	- 0.42 (0.36)
Rather/very	1.48* (0.41)	1.52* (0.39)	0.85 (0.45)	1.76* (0.37)

\*Indicates statistically significance at  $p < 0.05$ ; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized

some respects,” “predominately,” or “fully.” In our analysis, we collapse the “not at all” and “hardly” categories into one category. In the sample, less than 2.5% of respondents ( $n = 25$ ) indicated “not at all” and only 5.7% of respondents ( $n = 58$ ) selected “hardly.” Therefore, the categories are collapsed due to a lack of variation.

Second, we explore respondents’ attitudes towards German traditions and values. Using this question allows us to broaden out the indicators for emotional assimilation beyond a specific question on German identity. It can therefore capture an indicator of assimilation reflecting a more traditional understanding of integration and one that—at least in the case of ethnic German immigrants - might also capture identification with their specific ethnic culture (see discussion above on identification with host country versus ethnic retention). The prompt states that, “some people

**Fig. 1** Immigrant strength of German identity and importance of traditions and values



think that the following things are important in order to truly be a German. Others don't consider them important." Then, the respondent is asked how important they think German traditions and values are in order to truly be German. The categories that the respondent is offered are "not important at all," "not very important," "fairly important," or "very important." For this question, only 2.9% of respondents ( $n = 29$ ) indicated that German traditions and values were "not at all important," while 17.8% of respondents ( $n = 178$ ) selected "not very important." Therefore, due to the low number of respondents that indicated "not at all important" we combine these individuals with the individuals that selected "not very important."<sup>1</sup>

The two dependent variables explored here represent different versions of Likert-scale survey questions. Therefore, the appropriate categorization for these measures is ordinal level. Since the measures are ordinal level, the statistical method that we utilize in our empirical analysis is ordered logistic regression. Ordered logistic regression allows us to test whether there are statistically significant differences between the categories as a respondent progresses on the Likert-scales.

## Independent Variables

There are a number of independent and control variables included in the multiple regression analysis (Appendix 1 and 2). First, since we wish to explore whether these two different immigrant groups have developed different levels of emotional assimilation, we include a measure for the respondent's immigrant background.

<sup>1</sup> Models were estimated without the categories collapsed. Unfortunately, the standard errors were large due to the low number of observations. That being said, the models without the categories collapsed did not convey substantive differences in the findings. However, the appropriate statistical approach is to collapse the categories.

Thus, we include a binary measure for whether the respondent has a background from the former Soviet Union (the country of origin for the overwhelming number of ethnic Germans) rather than a Turkish background.<sup>2</sup> Second, the analysis includes several sociodemographic variables. In particular, we explore whether age, gender, income, and union membership have any meaningful relationship with German identity and the importance of German traditions and values.<sup>3</sup> Third, we include a measure for political ideology since it would be reasonable to assume that ideology might play a role in the importance of identity and traditions and values to a respondent.

Next, we include a measure that reflects how larger societal views might affect attitudes towards strength of German identity and the importance of traditions and values. Specifically, we want to explore how perceived discrimination might play a role, in line with existing scholarship on this issue. The question in the survey asks respondents whether they would describe themselves as a member of a disadvantaged group based on discrimination (0 = no; 1 = yes). Inclusion of the variable will be useful for understanding whether perceived discrimination in society impacts an immigrant's German identity or their views on the importance of German traditions and values.<sup>4</sup> Our expectation is that viewing one's self as a member of a discriminated group might reduce the strength of both identity and identification with German traditions and values. We might also expect that those with a Turkish heritage would experience more discrimination than those with an ethnic German heritage.

Finally, we include four measures representing the formal, legal status of citizenship to test an issue that has figured prominently in the literature. These variables are included in order to convey the relationship between citizenship and factors surrounding citizenship, and an individual's strength of German identity and views on the importance of German values and traditions. First, we include a measure for whether the respondent was born in Germany (0 = no; 1 = yes). Second, we include a measure for whether the respondent was born a citizen, regardless of location of birth (0 = no; 1 = yes). Third, a continuous measure is utilized representing the number of years since the respondent acquired citizenship if they were not born with citizenship. Lastly, a measure is included that represents whether the respondent currently holds dual citizenship (0 = no; 1 = yes). Again, although these variables do not specifically distinguish between first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants (only that they are citizens), these variables and our models largely capture this idea. There are four models estimated in the empirical

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<sup>2</sup> Our preference would be to estimate separate models for respondents of different backgrounds. Unfortunately, there are not enough observations to successfully implement such a statistical technique. Therefore, we err on the side of caution and implement the most appropriate tools available for comparison.

<sup>3</sup> Ideally, the analysis would also include education as a predictor variable. Unfortunately, due to the large number of missing observations, we were not able to include education in the analysis. That being said, as a robustness check we did estimate additional models where we include education as a predictor. However, we did not find any meaningful trends.

<sup>4</sup> The variables measuring the background of the respondent and the variable measuring whether the respondent perceives themselves as a member of a discriminate group correlate very low at 0.2.

analysis with each one of these citizenship variables due to a high correlation between them. The expectation is that being born in Germany, born a citizen, and the number of years since obtaining citizenship will be positively related to German identity. On the other hand, we believe that dual citizenship will be negatively related to the strength of Germany identity. For the importance of German values and tradition, we do not expect that the variables related to citizenship will have an impact.

## Results

In Fig. 1, we present descriptive statistics for the two dependent variables. For strength of German identity, the modal category was “predominately” with 36% of respondents selecting that choice. Only 8% of respondents indicated “not at all” or “hardly” for their strength of German identity. Around a quarter of respondents selected “some.” Finally, 30% of respondents indicated that they are “fully” German. Besides the “not at all/hardly” category, there is a great deal of variation in terms of immigrants’ strength of German identity.

The importance of German traditions and values variable also contains important variation. The category that the least number of respondents selected was “not at all” or “not very” with 21% of respondents choosing it. The modal category was “rather” with just under a majority (47%) of respondents selecting it. Finally, 32% of respondents indicate that German traditions and values are very important for truly being considered German.

Table 1 presents output from the models predicting strength of German identity and Table 2 presents output from models predicting the importance of German values and traditions. The first clear finding is that there are no sociodemographic predictors for either of the dependent variables. Age, gender, income, and union membership have no impact on the strength of respondent’s German identity or the importance of values and traditions. On the other hand, political ideology does appear to impact the importance of German values and traditions. A conservative respondent will view German values and traditions as more important when compared to a respondent with a liberal ideology.

For both strength of German identity and the importance of German values and traditions, a background from the former Soviet Union is positively related. Citizens with a background from the former Soviet Union report a stronger German identity than do citizens with a Turkish background. In addition, citizens with a background from the former Soviet Union are more likely than citizens with a Turkish background to think that German values and traditions are important for identifying as German. The results align with expectations: Since immigrants from the former Soviet Union are not just citizens, but also overwhelmingly ethnically German, this question also speaks to ethnic culture retention.

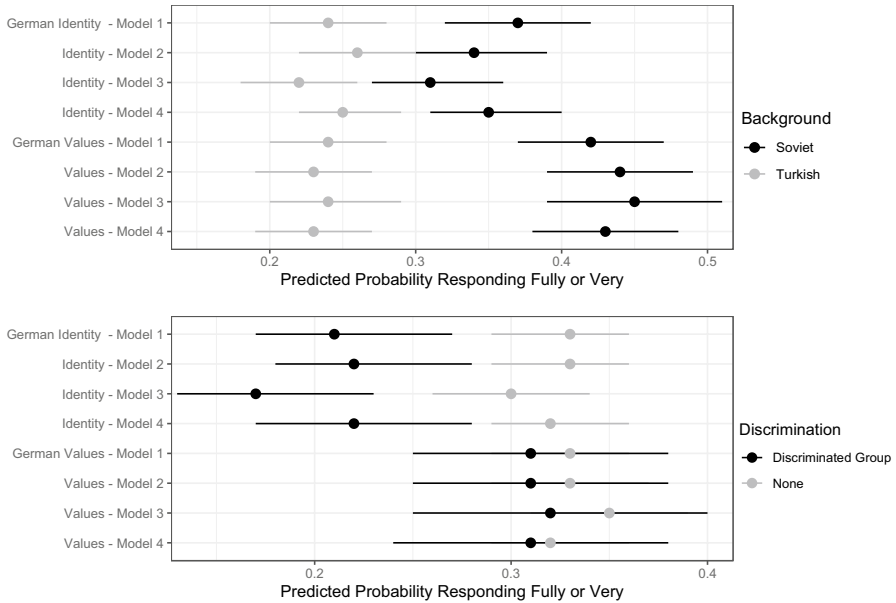
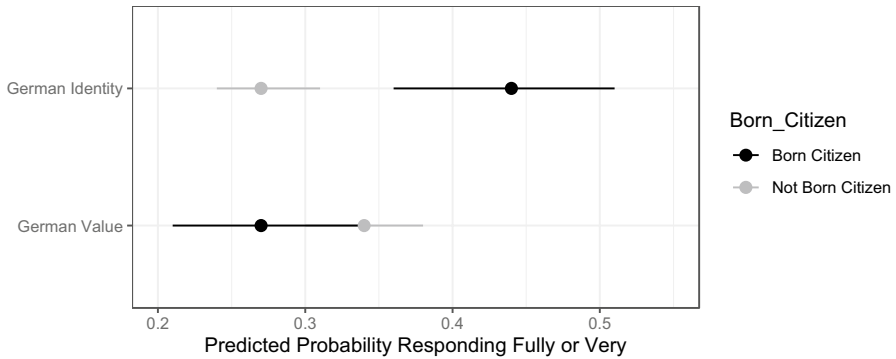


Fig. 2 Impact of background and discrimination on identity and values

In Fig. 2, predicted probabilities are displayed for the immigrant background variable.<sup>5</sup> In particular, we present the likelihood of a respondent “fully” identifying as German for each of the four models in Table 1. We also present the likelihood of a respondent indicating that German values and traditions are “very important” for each of the four models in Table 2. Quite strikingly (as the top of Fig. 2 demonstrates), there is only a small substantive difference between immigrants with an ethnic German background when compared to those with a Turkish background in terms of strength of German identity. On average across the four models, there is around a 4.5 percentage point gap in the probability of indicating that the respondent fully identifies as German. In comparison, there are much larger gaps between immigrants with an ethnic German background when compared to immigrants with a Turkish background when predicting the importance of German values and traditions. On average across the four models, there is a 12 percentage point gap in the probability between the two groups of immigrants in predicting whether German values and traditions are very important. For immigrants with a background from the former Soviet Union, German traditions and values play a much more important role. As noted above, this might capture strength of ethnic retention even more than that of identification with the host country.

The results in Tables 1 and 2 provide mixed results for the importance of perceived discrimination on attitudes towards identity and the importance of values

<sup>5</sup> Predicted probabilities are calculated holding all other independent variables at their survey weighted means.



**Fig. 3** Impact of being born a citizen on identity and values

and traditions. In Table 1, the output demonstrates that individuals that perceived their group to be disadvantaged due to discrimination are statistically less likely to hold a strong German identity. The result indicates that perceived discrimination could act as a barrier to fully adopting the identity of the country of citizenship. The implication here is that wider societal trends could be internalized by an individual and impact the attitudes that they develop regarding their identification. In Fig. 2, the predicted probabilities are displayed for the discrimination variable across the four identity models. Across the four models, there is a 6 percentage point gap in the probability of indicating that a respondent fully identifies as German when comparing those that perceive themselves as members of a discriminated group to those individuals that do not. On the other hand, identification as a member of a discriminated group has no statistically significant impact on the importance a respondent places on German values and traditions. Even when individuals perceive themselves to be members of a discriminated group, they are equally likely to think that German values and traditions are very important. The result indicates a substantive difference between an individual's identity and their views on values and traditions. Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 5 in Appendix 3, around 30% of Turkish migrants identified as being a member of a discriminated-against group compared to 12.4% of immigrants with a Soviet background. Significantly, immigrants with an ethnic German background are far less likely to believe they experience discrimination.

Finally, in Tables 1 and 2 the model output provides mixed results for the role that legal, formal notions of citizenship play in attitudes towards the two dependent variables. In terms of strength of German identity, measures of citizenship have a statistically significant relationship with German identity. A respondent that was born in Germany is more likely to have a strong German identity. To our surprise, a majority of respondents with a Turkish background (53.1%) indicated being born in Germany compared to a mere 6.1% of ethnic German immigrants with a Soviet background. Together with the finding that ethnic German immigrants from the former Soviet Union have a stronger host country identification, the results here indicate that being born in Germany is much more impactful for emotional assimilation

for those with an ethnic Turkish background than for those with an ethnic German background.

Similarly, if an individual was born a citizen, even if they were not born in the country, he/she/they have a statistically stronger German identity. In Fig. 3, the predicted probabilities indicate that a person born a citizen is 10 percentage points more likely to fully identify as German in comparison to a person that received citizenship later on. Again, there is a higher proportion of immigrants with a Turkish background born a citizen (25.2%) when compared to immigrants with a Soviet background (16.8%). The result indicates that formal legal rules have an outsized impact on immigrants that are not ethnically German. If an individual was not born a citizen, the number of years since they have acquired citizenship is positively related to the strength of German identity. Lastly, if an individual holds dual citizenship, they are less likely to have a strong German identity in comparison to an individual that only holds German citizenship. The result can be explained by the simultaneous pull of two competing identities based on two, legal citizenships. Here, we see that immigrants from the former Soviet Union are more likely to have dual citizenship (33.2%) when compared to migrants with a Turkish background (18.6%). The results provide evidence that German identity is strongly affected by legal, formal rules of citizenship, and that impact applies to immigrants that are not ethnically German.

In comparison, Table 2 demonstrates that there does not appear to be a clear trend in regard to citizenship types having a relationship with the importance of German traditions and values. A respondent that was born in Germany is not more likely to think that German values and traditions are very important. Similarly, neither years since acquiring citizenship nor dual citizenship impact the importance an individual subscribes to German values and traditions. In comparison, the output in Table 2 shows that being born a citizen has a negative, statistically significant relationship with the perceived importance of German values and traditions. However, the predicted probabilities displayed in Fig. 3 demonstrate that there is no substantive difference between people born citizens and people not born citizens in the importance they place on German traditions and values.

## Summary Discussion and Conclusion

Little previous research heretofore actually tested the differences in degree of emotional assimilation between different immigrant communities in Germany, either including all immigrant groups in a single sample (Schaeffer and Bukenya, 2014; Hochman et al., 2018) or focusing simply on Muslim immigrants (Doerschler and Jackson, 2011; Demmrich and Arakon, 2020). This study has aimed to fill this gap through an analysis of the degree of emotional assimilation within Germany's two largest immigrant communities—ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union, often referred to collectively as “Russian-Germans,” and those German citizens with an ethnic Turkish background. We wanted to know to what degree these two large immigrant communities have cultivated a sense of national identity, especially in the wake of significant changes in citizenship, immigration, and integration policies in Germany. Accordingly, we explored potential differences between

the ethnic German immigrant community and the Turkish immigrant community in their degree of host country identification. Finally, we analyzed some possible factors impacting ethnic Germans' and Turkish Germans' degree of emotional assimilation, including the perception that the host country does not fully welcome immigrants as equal citizens, as well as legal rules that might help (or hinder) fuller host country identification in Germany.

The most important takeaway from our analysis is that ethnic German citizens with a background from the former Soviet Union have a stronger German identity than citizens with a Turkish background. Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly, the difference in the degree of emotional assimilation between these two immigrant communities is substantively small. This small difference could reflect the impact of two decades of changes in immigration rules, citizenship laws, integration policies, and social norms in Germany over the last two decades. At the same time, we also found that ethnic German citizens with an immigrant background from the former Soviet Union are more likely than citizens with an ethnic Turkish background to think that German values and traditions are important for identifying as German. The difference between the two groups is substantively large, but perhaps speaks to the identification of the ethnic German community with its ethnic culture more than host country identification per se. Having said that, it appears that despite Germany's evolution away from a society that privileged ethnicity in citizenship and immigration, ethnic German citizens still feel a stronger sense of belonging than do those with a Turkish background.

Why that would be the case can perhaps be explained by the impact of external factors on emotional assimilation in these two communities. While we found that some common sociodemographic predictors for either of the dependent variables—age, gender, income, and union membership—have no effect whatsoever on the strength of respondent's German identity (nor on the importance of German values and traditions), we did confirm previous scholarship (e.g., Rumbaut 2005; Steinmann 2019; Hess 2016; Goerres, Meyer, and Spies 2018; Schaeffer and Bukenya 2014) that the perception of discrimination has, in contrast, quite a substantive impact on emotional assimilation. Across all four models, there is a significant gap in the probability of indicating that a respondent fully identifies as German when we compared those that perceive themselves as members of a discriminated group to those individuals that do not. Identification as a member of a discriminated group has no statistically significant impact on the importance a respondent places on German values and traditions. Ethnic German immigrants are far more likely than immigrants with a Turkish background to place a value on traditional German values and traditions. Accordingly, the former's degree of emotional assimilation does not appear to be impacted by this variable. Thus, and in line with Hochman et al. (2018) finding on immigrants' ethnic identification not being impacted by discrimination, our analysis strongly suggests that while ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union's identification with *Germany* might be impacted by perceived discrimination, their identification *as German* is decidedly not. Moreover, while around 30% of Turkish immigrants identified as being a member of a discriminated against group, only 12.4% of migrants with a Soviet background did. Significantly, this suggests that immigrants with an ethnic

Turkish background are far more likely to experience discrimination, undoubtedly hindering a fuller degree of emotional assimilation within this immigrant community.

Other external factors also strongly affect emotional assimilation. Those born in Germany, those who have a greater number of years as a naturalized citizen, and born a citizen (even if not born in Germany), are more likely to have a strong German identity. A majority of respondents with a Turkish background (53.1%) indicated being born in Germany while only 6.1% of ethnic German immigrants with a Soviet background did. Together with our central finding that ethnic German immigrants from the former Soviet Union have a stronger host country identification, the results here indicate that being born in Germany is much more impactful on emotional assimilation for those with an ethnic Turkish background than those with an ethnic German background. Similarly, if an individual was born a citizen, even if they were not born in the country, the person has a statistically stronger German identity. In Fig. 3, the predicted probabilities indicate that a person born a citizen is 10 percentage points more likely to fully identify as German in comparison to a person that received citizenship later on. Once again, there is a substantially higher proportion of immigrants with a Turkish background born a citizen (25.2%) when compared to immigrants with a Soviet background (16.8%). The result indicates that formal legal rules have an outsized impact for emotional assimilation on immigrants that are not ethnically German. At the same time, our study has confirmed the finding from some scholars that dual citizenship may have a negative impact on emotional assimilation. We found that those holding dual citizenship are less likely to have a strong German identity (although it does not appear to have any effect on whether a respondent is more likely to think that German values and traditions are important).

The transformation of Germany's policies towards immigrants appears to have led to reducing differences between the ethnic German and ethnic Turkish communities in national identification, thus fostering emotional assimilation among both groups. However, not only do substantial gaps remain, even among ethnic Germans more could be done to further emotional assimilation and German national identification. In particular, to deepen this process, it is clear that policies aimed at reducing discrimination in all sectors of society (the labor market, housing, and other sectors) are necessary. If it is to inculcate wider and deeper feelings of belonging more successfully, Germany will need to embrace integration policies that require changes on the part of the larger society instead of fully placing the burden on immigrant communities.

What avenues exist for future research on the topic? Our research was limited to the basic emotional assimilation questions asked in the 2017 IMGES. Future surveys should ask a battery of contrasting, nuanced questions that tap into the latent trait of emotional assimilation beyond these general questions. In addition, there is a need for a larger data collection effort to better understand generational cohort differences, as well as multi-local perspectives in relation to identity. Finally, research should explore more concretely the types of discrimination different immigrant groups face, as well as focus on potential avenues for reducing discrimination.

## Appendix 1. Variable coding

Modeling variables:

- *Age*—respondent's age at the time of the survey
- *Gender*—0 = man; 1 = woman
- *Union member*—0 = no; 1 = yes
- *Income*—net monthly income, 13 categories from 1 = under 500 Euros to 13 = 10,000 Euros or more
- *Political ideology*—continuous measure, 1 = left to 11 = right
- *Discriminated group*—0 = do not identify as member of discriminated group; 1 = identifies as member of discriminated group
- *Soviet background*—0 = Turkish background; 1 = Soviet background
- *Born in Germany*—0 = no; 1 = yes
- *Born citizen*—0 = no; 1 = yes
- *Dual citizen*—0 = no; 1 = yes
- *Years citizen*—continuous measure, years since acquiring citizenship if not born a citizen
- *Strength of German identity*—categorical measure, not at all/hardly; some; predominately; or fully
- *Importance of German traditions and values*—categorical measure, not at all/not very; rather; or very

Additional variables:

- *Education*—continuous measure, models found no significant relationship, several NAs
- *East German residency*—0 = no; 1 = yes; lack of variance

## Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics

See Table 3.

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics—socio-demographics

Variable	Min	Median	Mean	Max	SD
Age	16	39	39.9	97	15.34
Income	1	7	7.13	13	2.53
Years Citizen	0	17	16	58	7.33
Variable	0	1			
Gender	53.73%	46.27%			
Union member	90.41%	9.59%			
Soviet background	50.2%	49.8%			
Born in Germany	29.7%	70.3%			
Born citizen	81%	79%			
Dual citizenship	25.9%	74.1%			

See Table 4.

**Table 4** Descriptive statistics—political attitudes

Variable	Min	Median	Mean	Max	SD
Political ideology	1	5	4.96	11	1.9
Strength of German identity	Not at all/hardly	Some	Predominately	Fully	
Importance of German traditions/values	8%	26%	36%	30%	
Member of discriminated group	Not at all/not very	Rather	Very		
	21%	47%%	32%		
	No	Yes			
	79%	21%			

### Appendix 3. Descriptive statistics by background

See Table 3.

**Table 5** Descriptive statistics by background—means and percentages

Variable	Turkish	Soviet
Age	36.6	43.2*
Income	7.3	7.1
Years citizen	15.2	16.7*
Political ideology	4.6	5.3*
Gender	43.8%	48.8%
Union member	13.6%	5.6%*
Discriminated group	29.9%	12.4%*
Born in Germany	53.1%	6.1%*
Born citizen	25.2%	16.8%*
Dual citizenship	18.6%	33.2%*

\*Indicates bivariate statistically significant difference

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### Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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