# Germany's 2024 Citizenship Reform and Turkish Immigrants: Responses to the Liberalization of Dual Citizenship Policy

*By*

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the effects of Germany's reform of its citizenship law, officially titled the *Act to Modernise Nationality Law*, which came into force on 27 June 2024 and liberalized access to dual citizenship. Focusing on the naturalization intentions of Turkish immigrants who were eligible for German citizenship both before and after the reform, the study analyzes 15 semi-structured interviews with Turkish immigrants in Germany who have not yet naturalized. Participants are grouped into three categories based on their naturalization intentions: (1) those who were interested in naturalization both before and after the reform, (2) those who were previously uninterested but have become interested after the reform, and (3) those who remain indifferent. The study examines how the liberalization of dual citizenship affects naturalization decisions, drawing on literature that emphasizes the multidimensionality of citizenship, as well as scholarship that transcends the conceptual dichotomy between instrumental approaches and symbolic understandings. It also explores additional factors beyond citizenship policies, such as symbolic boundaries, intergenerational factors, and dynamics in the homeland and destination country, that shape individuals' decisions about naturalization.

# AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Ülkü Rümeysa Kaygısız candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies Program declare herewith that the present thesis titled "Germany's 2024 Citizenship Reform and Turkish Immigrants: Responses to the Liberalization of Dual Citizenship Policy" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

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I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 10 June 2025

Ülkü Rümeysa Kaygısız

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the implications of Germany's 2024 reform of its citizenship law, known as the *Act to Modernise Nationality Law*, which came into effect on 27 June 2024. One of the most significant changes introduced by the reform is the removal of the requirement to renounce one's original nationality in order to naturalize. As a result, dual citizenship is now permitted (German Federal Foreign Office, 2024). Before the reform, only EU and Swiss nationals, as well as citizens of countries that do not effectively allow for the revocation of citizenship (e.g., Afghanistan, Iran, Morocco, Syria), could retain their previous citizenship while acquiring German citizenship. The liberalization of nationality law now allows citizens of all countries to become German citizens without abandoning their former citizenship (German Federal Foreign Office, 2024).

The recent acceptance of dual citizenship is expected to increase the naturalization rates of immigrants since being allowed to keep their original citizenship when naturalizing in the destination country encourages immigrants to naturalize (Peters & Vink, 2024). The abolishment of the dual citizenship ban is particularly important for Turkish non-citizen residents in Germany, who constitute the country's largest group of foreign nationals (German Federal Statistical Office, 2024). Nevertheless, not all Turkish immigrants in Germany are entitled to German citizenship, as eligibility depends on criteria such as years of residence in Germany, income level showing their ability to live without relying on state assistance, passing the German language test, and the civic knowledge test (German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, n.d.).

Considering that Germany has recently fully accepted dual citizenship and that Turkey's citizenship law already permits it, Turkish immigrants are expected to be more inclined to naturalize in Germany, compared to the previous situation when they faced a trade-off between the two. This study aims to explore the factors influencing Turkish immigrants' decision to

either naturalize or not naturalize in Germany, with a specific focus on the impact of the June 24, 2024, reform on naturalization motivations. It will also investigate the emotional, symbolic, and practical factors that shaped these decisions and examine how these dimensions may have intersected.

Although there is a growing body of research on citizenship laws and their role in immigrant naturalization, few studies have examined how specific policy reforms affect the naturalization intentions of groups that had previously been hesitant to naturalize. While existing scholarship has addressed legal and social barriers to naturalization, less attention has been given to how reforms in citizenship law might reshape immigrants' perceptions of the citizenship of both their origin and residence countries. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on Turkish immigrants' responses to the 2024 reform and exploring how their views of both Turkish and German citizenship are evolving in its aftermath, based on qualitative interviews.

The study is both timely and significant in exploring how individuals navigate naturalization decisions in response to policy changes, what citizenships of origin and destination countries mean for immigrants, how dual citizenship is perceived among an immigrant group with low naturalization rates, and how naturalization decisions are made not only with individual focus but also considering family and community effects, from a bottom-up perspective. Understanding how reforms affect naturalization decisions matters not only for policymakers but also for researchers working on migration, citizenship, and integration. As citizenship policies continue to gain attention in migration studies, this thesis contributes to the discussion by focusing on a country with a long immigration history and a previously restrictive approach to dual citizenship, as well as on a migrant group that is not only the largest but also particularly relevant for understanding the implications of the reform. Thus, this project's decision to focus on the Turkish immigrant community, which will be discussed in the

methodology chapter, is not solely based on their numerical plurality among non-citizens in Germany.

The thesis is structured as follows. The next chapter provides a review of the existing literature on the multi-dimensionality of citizenship, dual citizenship, and the various factors influencing naturalization decisions beyond policy frameworks. The subsequent chapter presents the research questions and hypotheses that guide the study. The methodology chapter outlines the research design, sampling strategy, participant categorization, data collection, and analysis method. The findings and analysis chapter presents an analysis of the interview data in the context of the citizenship law reform and explores its impact on perceptions of citizenship. The final chapter concludes by summarizing the key findings and discussing their implications for policy and future research.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of citizenship has undergone significant transformations. It has evolved beyond a purely legal relationship between individuals and states. Today, citizenship is understood in different ways. For some, it carries symbolic meaning and reflects identity and belonging. For others, it functions as an instrumental resource that offers practical advantages depending on the context. With growing transnational mobility and migration, traditional understandings of citizenship (such as those based on territoriality, exclusivity, and national belonging) have been called into question. Scholars now propose a more multidimensional approach. This literature review draws on these contributions to explore how individuals make decisions about citizenship. It pays particular attention to dual citizenship, naturalization policies, and the broader migration context. The review first outlines instrumental and symbolic approaches to citizenship, then presents studies that combine both approaches. It then turns to research on immigrant naturalization and citizenship policies (especially those related to dual citizenship). In connection with this study, the review aims to understand how the citizenship policies of sending and destination countries influence immigrants' naturalization decisions. It also examines how immigrants assign value to both the citizenship of their origin and country of residence, and how other factors (such as family or community) affect their choices.

## 2.1. The Multi-Dimensionality of Citizenship

### 2.1.1. Instrumental and Strategic Approaches to Citizenship

Individuals might attribute different values to the citizenship they hold by birth and the citizenship they acquire later in life as secondary citizenship, particularly in the case of non-resident citizenship. Some scholars approach non-resident citizenship acquisition from an instrumental perspective and focus on the practical benefits it can offer, such as visa-free travel

and easier access to job markets. Yossi Harpaz and Pablo Mateos (2019) study the increase in the number of individuals from non-Western countries who seek a second citizenship as a complement to their primary citizenship for strategic purposes. According to them, the growing acceptance of multiple citizenships in many countries has resulted in a "post-exclusive shift" in national membership (p. 846). They employ the concept of "strategic citizenship" to describe the adoption of instrumental and practical motivations for acquiring a long-distance citizenship, rather than perceiving it as holding an identity-conferring role or attaching a symbolic meaning to it (p. 843). This approach minimizes the conventional conceptualization of citizenship as "sacred" (Brubaker, 1990), which was defined by characteristics such as being territorial and exclusive. This shift in the meaning of citizenship is described by Christian Joppke (2010) as "citizenship light."

In another study, Harpaz (2018) attributes non-resident citizenship acquisition with instrumental motivations to global inequalities in citizenship values, a phenomenon Ayelet Shachar (2009) terms the "birthright lottery." Harpaz frames how different citizenships are ranked in the "global citizenship hierarchy" (p. 2) and divides citizenship worldwide into three tiers: first-tier, middle-tier, and third-tier countries, ranked according to their position in the hierarchy. He shows that individuals' interest in acquiring a second citizenship is influenced by the rank of their original citizenship in the global hierarchy. He defines seeking second citizenship from first-tier countries (e.g., Western countries) by holders of non-Western citizenship as "compensatory citizenship" (p. 2). Such an approach is driven by the desire to complement birth citizenship with low instrumental value by gaining access to additional opportunities, such as freedom of movement and economic opportunities.

Comparative studies, such as those examining individuals with immigrant origins living in the USA and Argentina who are applying for Italian citizenship (Harpaz, 2019, p. 35), show that the demand for a secondary citizenship is higher in middle-tier countries than in first-tier

countries. Harpaz (2019) also provides examples of individuals from non-Western countries seeking Western citizenship without emotional value attachment to their secondary citizenship, such as Israelis seeking German citizenship. Moreover, individuals pursuing secondary citizenship from Western countries typically do not intend to immigrate to the country granting secondary citizenship. For example, Skulte-Ouaiss's (2013) study finds that many Lebanese citizens apply for European citizenship while still residing in Lebanon, not necessarily to move to Europe immediately. Due to continuous conflicts and economic instability in Lebanon, European citizenship is seen as a source of security and a potential means to escape Lebanon, if necessary, as reflected in the article's title: "Home is where the heart is; citizenship is where it is safe" (p. 142).

However, in some cases, non-resident citizenship is acquired with the aspiration to migrate, particularly to the European Union. The way Moldovans engaged with Romania's implementation of a policy of restoring citizenship to those who were previously Romanian citizens but lost it, as well as to their descendants, might be a good example (Iordachi, 2004). As Harpaz (2015, p. 2091) notes, 97% of Moldovans who were granted Romanian citizenship received it while residing outside Romania. However, in contrast to the cases mentioned above, where secondary non-resident citizenship is acquired without the primary intention of emigrating from the origin country, Moldovans' application for Romanian citizenship is mainly motivated by their desire to work and live in EU countries, because of the poor living standards of Moldova. This practice has led some to describe acquiring Romanian citizenship for Moldovans as a way of "entering the EU through the back door" (Suveica, 2013). Similarly, Argentinians of European descent, such as those with Italian or Spanish ancestry, have mainly applied for European citizenship to migrate to the EU, motivated by the financial crisis in Argentina and the search for better job opportunities and living standards (Cook-Martín, 2016).

The citizenship acquisition practices mentioned above primarily apply to non-resident, long-distance secondary citizenship acquisition with instrumental motives, where applicants mainly do not intend to live in the country of their secondary citizenship, but rather use it to complement their primary citizenship while residing in their country of origin. Even if they intend to use a second citizenship for future migration purposes, these practices may not be directly relevant to immigrant-centered citizenship acquisition, in which long-term resident immigrants decide whether to apply for citizenship in their country of residence while either retaining or renouncing the citizenship of their country of origin, where they no longer reside permanently. However, these literature can still be useful for understanding immigrants' attitudes toward the citizenship of both their country of origin and their country of residence, since they may weigh potential costs and benefits when deciding whether to acquire citizenship of the country of residence, as in the case of immigrants in Germany who hold Turkish citizenship and have had the option of applying for German citizenship. For example, while Turkish citizens with a permanent residence permit in Germany do not need a visa to travel to other Schengen countries, they still require a visa to visit countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which German citizens can enter without a visa.[2] This highlights one of the practical advantages of acquiring German citizenship: enhanced mobility.

### 2.1.2. The Symbolic and Identity Dimensions of Citizenship

Beyond its instrumental implications, citizenship may hold symbolic significance to individuals and serve as a marker of ethnic identity and belonging to a particular community. A study arguing that the passport can function beyond its instrumental value is by Szabolcs Pogonyi (2018), who studied non-resident citizenship acquisition by ethnic Hungarians in the diaspora. While Harpaz (2019) examined how the Hungarian government's decision to grant

[2] German citizens can travel to the United States under the ESTA waiver program and to the United Kingdom for short stays without a visa.

citizenship to ethnic Hungarians from territories that were once part of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Habsburg Monarchy was taken advantage of by non-Hungarians seeking the practical benefits of Hungarian citizenship (an example of an instrumental approach),[3]Pogonyi's study highlights another dimension. It focuses on how citizenship fosters a sense of belonging to a particular nation and is utilized by holders to prove ethnicity. Acknowledging cases of citizenship acquisition where applicants are mainly motivated by economic considerations, Pogonyi argues that in some cases, applicants are instead motivated by the "symbolic implications" of extraterritorial citizenship (p. 980). For example, although interviews with newly naturalized Hungarians in the United States, Romania, Serbia, and Israel show that, especially for non-EU applicants, instrumental considerations such as access to EU job markets were significant, the motivations of applicants from Romania cannot be explained solely by instrumental reasons. He observed that for individuals whose ancestors had been born as Hungarian citizens and later lost that status, Hungarian citizenship represented the "restoration of their original identities" (p. 985) and functioned as a "tool of national identity management" (p. 990).

The citizenship acquisition practices discussed so far involve non-resident, long-distance secondary citizenship acquisition, whether for instrumental or symbolic reasons. In such cases, applicants generally do not reside in the country granting the secondary citizenship and often have no immediate intention of moving there. However, this study focuses on a different form of citizenship acquisition, namely immigrant naturalization. This refers to individuals who reside permanently in a country other than their country of origin and consider acquiring the citizenship of their country of residence. Although the motivations behind non-resident citizenship acquisition may differ from those shaping immigrant naturalization, the existing literature still offers valuable insights. It helps explain why, in the past, some

[3] In his book, Harpaz (2019) illustrates how Hungarian language courses prepare ethnic Serbs in Vojvodina, Serbia, to apply for Hungarian citizenship (pp. 47–53).

immigrants chose to retain the citizenship of a country they no longer lived in and refrained from naturalizing in their new country of residence at a time when dual citizenship was not permitted. What follows is a closer look at how immigrants and their non-citizen descendants make decisions about acquiring citizenship in their country of residence, and at the meanings they attach to the citizenship of both their country of residence and their country of origin.

In her comparative study of Surinamese and Turkish immigrants residing in the Netherlands, Liza Mügge (2012) highlights how the citizenship policies of both the sending and receiving countries affect immigrant naturalization patterns. Despite being similarly sized groups, the two populations exhibit differing naturalization rates and citizenship statuses. Surinamese immigrants, who are not permitted to hold dual citizenship under Surinamese law, are more likely to choose Dutch citizenship. In contrast, Turkish immigrants often retain Turkish citizenship while acquiring Dutch citizenship, as both the Netherlands and Turkey allow dual nationality under certain conditions. Moreover, Mügge finds that Turkish immigrants tend to associate Turkish citizenship with identity and loyalty (p. 4), whereas for Surinamese immigrants, citizenship is perceived more as a legal status. This is partly due to Suriname's legal prohibition on dual nationality and is less likely to carry strong emotional or symbolic significance.

The symbolic value attached to citizenship can also reveal itself when individuals are faced with choosing between two citizenships, as seen in a study by Steven van Gorkum (2015), who examined the decision-making process of second-generation immigrants in Germany who became dual citizens at birth and had to choose between German citizenship and the citizenship of their parents upon turning 18 (a choice imposed by the Option Model, which came into force in 2000 and was entirely eliminated by the recent citizenship reform in 2024). In his study, he found that some second-generation young immigrants perceived Germany as their "home" while simultaneously displaying a rebellious attitude toward the Option Model and choosing

their parents' citizenship over German citizenship. Thus, although the ban on dual citizenship was intended to prevent dual loyalties to both countries and undesirable feelings toward the country of origin, some individuals responded in unexpected ways. Van Gorkum argues that while choosing German citizenship over Turkish citizenship may seem to be the rational choice because of the practical benefits of German citizenship, perceiving citizenship as a symbol of identity led some individuals to reject it in protest against Germany's citizenship law. Besides their rebellion against the state, the main reason these individuals attributed an identity-conferring role to their Turkish citizenship was that, although their German identity was self-evident because they were born and raised in Germany and they felt no need to prove it, the Turkish passport held significant meaning for them, as they had little tangible connection left to Turkey apart from their citizenship.

In the case of Turkish immigrants who did not naturalize in Germany before the recent reform, many remained reluctant to revoke their Turkish citizenship to become German citizens. Here, it is important to mention the Turkish government's introduction of a form of quasi-citizenship for its emigrants in 1995, known as the "blue card" (initially the "pink card"), which aimed to diminish the costs of renunciation of Turkish citizenship upon naturalization in destination countries (Kadirbeyoğlu, 2010). The blue card guarantees certain rights previously attached to citizenship, such as real estate ownership, inheritance rights, and the right to return, without granting political rights to those who naturalize abroad (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). However, despite Turkey's Blue Card policy, for many, renouncing Turkish citizenship may still have posed a significant obstacle, as the expected benefits of German citizenship did not outweigh the costs of renunciation. In this context, Rainer Bauböck (2018) argues that if there are differences in rights between citizens and long-term residents, these differences may create instrumental incentives for immigrants to apply for citizenship of the destination country (p. 8). While acknowledging the potentially perceived minimal difference

between a long-term residence permit and citizenship in Germany, immigrants may still be less interested in acquiring the destination country's citizenship if it requires renouncing their original one because citizenship holds emotional value for them and connects them to their homeland, not only literally but also symbolically.

### 2.1.3. Beyond the Dichotomy of Instrumental and Identity Dimensions

The previous two subsections presented instrumental and symbolic approaches to citizenship separately. However, it is important to move beyond the dichotomy between these two approaches. After reviewing several works focused on either the instrumental or identity values of citizenship, Bauböck (2018) argues that these values are not mutually exclusive but are instead closely connected. He suggests that citizenship holders can attribute both instrumental and non-instrumental values to their citizenship, except in cases where citizenship is granted solely for instrumental purposes without any "genuine link" (p. 8). While he acknowledges that in some situations one value may outweigh the other, he emphasizes that this does not imply a conflict between them. Additionally, he argues that holding multiple citizenships does not necessarily diminish the non-instrumental value of citizenship, as individuals can have genuine connections to more than one country.

Building on this integrative view, his perspective invites an understanding that reconciles utilitarian and communitarian logics. From a rational choice perspective, a rational individual is expected to maximize her utility. She first compares the rights and obligations tied to the citizenship of her origin country with those linked to her legal status as a non-citizen resident in the host country. If the destination country requires renouncing her primary citizenship, she also evaluates what she might risk losing, such as property rights, inheritance rights, or the right to return, against what she may gain. When the benefits of the host country outweigh these potential losses, including administrative costs, she may choose to naturalize

(Bauböck, 1994, p. 104). However, he argues that "identities and affiliations" should also be considered alongside pragmatic interests, and the naturalization decision of immigrants should not be reduced to mere cost-benefit calculations (p. 104). Immigrants' decisions are shaped not only by rights and obligations but also by the emotional and symbolic ties they hold to both origin and destination societies. Thus, he bridges the instrumental and symbolic approaches mentioned in the previous two subsections and suggests that individuals pursue a "harmonization" between interests and identities (p. 105). He emphasizes that rational choice might not always lead to naturalization, and identities do not always obstruct naturalization. In some cases, to find this harmonization, individuals might adjust their identities as well.

Bauböck (1994) offers two hypotheses that are especially relevant to this study. Firstly, when the naturalization process in the destination country minimizes the loss of rights in the country of origin, immigrants have a greater incentive to naturalize, driven by both utilitarian and emotional motivations. Secondly, when long-term residents feel legally secure and enjoy rights approaching those of citizens, the utility of naturalization may decrease. Yet this very security may strengthen their emotional attachment to citizenship and the host country (pp. 105-115).

In line with Bauböck's argument that "instrumental and non-instrumental values generally do not conflict but complement each other" (2018, p. 7), MariaCaterina La Barbera and Claudia Finotelli (2025) argue that "the subjective dimension of citizenship is embedded in a complex constellation of strategic choices and affective motivations that cannot be analyzed in dichotomic terms" (p. 1). They define strategic considerations regarding citizenship acquisition as securing legal status, gaining freedom of movement, accessing better job opportunities, improving quality of life, obtaining voting rights, and reducing bureaucratic obstacles. The affective dimension of citizenship acquisition is associated with being recognized as part of society, feeling a sense of belonging, pursuing personal growth, and

feeling a responsibility to be a good citizen (p. 8). Based on a qualitative study on migrants in Spain, the authors show that the affective dimension of citizenship acquisition is no less important than the strategic one. By examining the everyday meanings of citizenship for those migrants, they demonstrate that these two dimensions are intertwined and cannot be considered in isolation.

Zeynep Yanasmayan's (2015) comparative study on Turkish immigrants' naturalization decisions illustrates how instrumental and identity dimensions of citizenship coexist and interact. In cases when individuals are faced with renouncing their original citizenship, they may still go ahead with it, even if they attach symbolic value to it, and then adjust their perception of its value. Yanasmayan explores the impact of varying citizenship regimes on immigrants' naturalization decisions and their underlying motivations and provides a perspective on how host countries' citizenship policies influence immigrants' valuation of both their origin and residence country citizenships. Her analysis identifies a "self-bargaining" process that immigrants undergo before deciding on naturalization (p. 788). When the destination country has a strict ban on dual citizenship that can be interpreted as "an intentional act of non-recognition of undesired emotions" (p. 789), immigrants cope with the emotional cost of renunciation of original citizenship by devaluing the identity aspect of citizenship, which leads to the adoption of a "thin sense of citizenship." Conversely, in countries that permit more liberal access to dual citizenship, where "multiple affinities" are recognized (p. 789), immigrants can develop a "thick sense of citizenship," and they may even extend their emotional attachment to the destination country's citizenship. Despite acknowledging the role the prohibition of dual citizenship plays in hindering immigrant naturalization, the study demonstrates that some immigrants nevertheless decide to naturalize by dismissing the identity-conferring role of citizenship.

Even though this project focuses on naturalization intentions, meaning the decision-making process of immigrants, the literature on "dual citizenship as a practice" is still helpful. For example, Jussi Kasperi Ronkainen's (2011) work provides valuable insights into how dual citizens perceive their citizenships. He acknowledges the focus of prior studies on citizenship policies, country comparisons, and normative discussions on citizenship. However, he claims a lack of attention on how dual citizens identify with their citizenships. He distinguishes four distinct categories of individuals residing in Finland with dual citizenship: resident-mononationals, expatriate-mononationals, hyphenationals, and shadow-nationals. Resident-mononationals ascribe their identity exclusively to their Finnish citizenship, disregarding any identity association with the other citizenship. In contrast, expatriate-mononationals view Finnish citizenship exclusively as an instrumental object, while keeping an emotional attachment towards their other citizenship. Hyphenationals show identification with both citizenships, and shadow-nationals do not identify with either, perceiving them only as practical objects. Using these four categories might not be accurate in my study's context since the participants will not yet have dual citizenship, but Ronkainen's insights can still help to understand how individuals relate to both their original (e.g., Turkish) and potential (e.g., German) citizenship beyond their legal status.

The literature that goes beyond the dichotomy between identity and the instrumental dimension of citizenship is significant in exploring how immigrants assess the value of citizenship in both their origin and destination countries after a legal change regarding dual citizenship. Although most Turkish citizens in Germany did not revoke their Turkish citizenship to acquire German citizenship, this does not mean that they did not attach any symbolic meaning to German citizenship or expect any additional practical benefits from it. Thus, scholarship that blends both approaches is significant for understanding individuals who might attribute both instrumental and symbolic meaning to both citizenships.

## 2.2. Dual Citizenship

In this section, the focus will be on how citizenship policies, particularly dual citizenship policies in both the destination and origin countries, affect immigrants' naturalization intentions. Existing literature mainly focuses on dual citizenship policies either from the perspective of the origin country or the destination country. Origin-country restrictions about dual citizenship refer to the deprivation of citizens abroad from citizenship when they naturalize in their destination country, while destination-country restrictions make renunciation of their original citizenship a condition for granting citizenship to individuals.

Adding a new dimension to the previous studies, namely a dyadic perspective, Vink et al. (2024) provide an examination of the relationship between both countries' dual citizenship policies. They conclude that when both countries allow dual citizenship, immigrants are more inclined to naturalize in the destination country. Previously, Alarian and Goodman (2016) also found that not only receiving states' but also sending states' citizenship policies play a key role in migration flow. Thus, they revealed that migrants' decision to move to a country is influenced by the interaction between the citizenship policies of the country of origin and the country of destination. This implies that migration decisions are informed and taken rationally, and if both countries allow for dual citizenship, migration is more likely.

Peters and Vink (2024) also hypothesized that if immigrants are allowed to keep their original citizenship, they would be more inclined to get the citizenship of the host country. The propensity to naturalize depends on a cost-benefit calculation, which takes into account the cost of renouncing the original citizenship and the benefit of naturalizing. If the expected benefit outweighs the expected cost, the immigrant would be more likely to naturalize. In their comparative study, they showed that lifting the requirement to renounce origin country citizenship upon naturalization increases immigrants' citizenship acquisition rates, as in the case of Sweden, while the reintroduction of the renunciation rule, as in the case of the

Netherlands, decreases the immigrant naturalization rates. Nevertheless, they argue that not every immigrant reacts to the renunciation requirement in the same way since being able to hold the origin country's citizenship does not matter to all in the same way. Coming from a country that has relatively better citizenship value increases the cost of renunciation, thus decreasing the propensity to naturalize. They identify a "heterogeneous effect" of citizenship law reforms (p. 1547) where immigrants from the EU countries are more discouraged when they have to renounce their original citizenship to get the destination country's citizenship than immigrants from countries with lower citizenship value. Even in the case where renunciation of origin country citizenship is not a requirement, the study by Kosyakova and Damelang (2024) demonstrated that EU citizens benefit less from dual citizenship compared to non-EU citizens.

Similar to the previously mentioned studies, Martin Weinmann (2021) examines how the ban on dual citizenship in the destination country affects immigrants' inclination to become citizens of that country. In line with the previous findings, he identifies the requirement to renounce original citizenship as a significant legal barrier to immigrant naturalization, which impedes immigrants' "ability to integrate and fully participate" in the destination country (p. 238). Acknowledging the requirement of giving up original citizenship to be able to become a citizen of the country of residence as a major barrier to naturalization, he questions the reasons why immigrants find giving up their original citizenship challenging and what keeps immigrants from trading off their original citizenship. In order to understand immigrants' reluctance, he emphasizes that citizenship is not only a legal status but also carries a symbolic meaning for the holder. Thus, adding a new perspective to the above-mentioned studies, he not only takes into account bureaucratic obstacles, such as the dual citizenship ban, but also perceived subjective barriers such as the perception of acceptance and belonging, and hypothesizes that perceived barriers regarding acceptance and belonging would decrease

immigrants' propensity to apply for citizenship. However, his empirical findings show that immigrants' perception of being accepted by society and the feeling of belonging do not play a key role in the naturalization decision; rather, they weigh the cost of becoming citizens, considering the potential benefit of this status change. Yet, he finds that rather than destination-country-related barriers having a major influence, immigrants who perceive origin-context-related barriers regarding giving up citizenship, such as having families opposed to naturalization, are less likely to naturalize (p. 247).

From the perspective of the country of origin, Turkish citizens are already allowed to hold more than one citizenship. In response to a significant migration trend, Turkey abolished restrictions on dual citizenship for Turkish emigrants in 1981 (Bauböck & Valchars, 2021). Moreover, by reducing the costs of giving up Turkish citizenship, the Blue Card policy helps Turkish immigrants manage the naturalization process in countries where dual citizenship is banned. However, despite the Blue Card policy having been in effect for a long time and Germany's liberalization of naturalization rules in 1999, the naturalization rates of Turkish immigrants have remained relatively low. This situation demonstrates that the requirement to renounce Turkish citizenship was an obstacle to naturalization, while the potential practical costs of giving it up cannot fully explain the non-naturalization behavior of Turkish immigrants.

## 2.3. Factors Influencing Naturalization Decisions: Beyond (Dual) Citizenship Policies

The reasons behind immigrant naturalization go beyond citizenship policies alone. They also involve how immigrants feel in the destination country, for instance, whether they perceive it as home. Nils Witte (2018) explores the role of "symbolic boundaries" in the low naturalization rates of Turkish immigrants in Germany, offering a new perspective to earlier studies that primarily emphasized legal barriers. Witte fills a gap by giving agency to minorities,

namely Turkish immigrants, concerning the establishment of boundaries, which was overlooked by previous studies that generally centered on boundaries drawn by the majority. Rather than portraying Turkish immigrants as the sole victims of exclusion by the majority, the study argues that they can also find ways to counter the stigmatization they face, which in turn influences their naturalization decisions. Despite acknowledging the predominance of the majority group in constructing and maintaining symbolic boundaries, immigrants' reactions to stigmatization show that boundary-making is a reciprocal process. Witte's study found that a sense of belonging to the host country, in this case, Germany, is associated with a higher likelihood of naturalization. On the other hand, the perceived exclusion from the majority group by the immigrant population hinders the naturalization process.

While Witte highlights how symbolic boundaries shape naturalization decisions, the political environment of the destination country is also important in influencing immigrants' decisions. For example, Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes and Mary Lopez (2021) examine how increased interior immigration enforcement in the US reshapes the naturalization intentions of immigrants. Their study finds that intensified immigration enforcement raises the propensity of legal permanent residents to naturalize. They propose that fear caused by uncertainty motivates immigrants who are eligible for citizenship to secure their status and protect themselves from possible legal changes, including the risk of deportation. This study is significant because it demonstrates that not only citizenship policies but also other policies in the destination country, especially those that are hostile toward immigrants, can influence naturalization rates.

Although much of the existing literature on the varying values of citizenship and immigrant naturalization focuses mainly on the individual level, treating naturalization decisions as if they were made by individuals in isolation, Alex Street (2014) offers a different perspective in explaining the unexpectedly low naturalization rates following Germany's citizenship reform, which came into force in 2000 and introduced conditional *jus soli*. He

examines the reasons behind immigrant naturalization by emphasizing the role of intergenerational motives, namely how parents make naturalization decisions while taking into consideration their children's future. Paradoxically, despite the legal liberalization of naturalization in 2000, naturalization rates declined. Street explains this puzzling outcome by arguing that before the reform, parents were inclined to naturalize to secure their children's citizenship in the country of residence. However, after the introduction of *jus soli*, this incentive was removed since children born in Germany to parents who had resided there for a sufficient period became eligible for citizenship automatically.

Street's study is important because it challenges research that focuses primarily on individual motivations for naturalization while disregarding the significance of family and community dynamics. In the case of Turkish immigrants, for instance, the decision to naturalize might have been shaped by family discussions influenced by encouragement or pressure from the surrounding community rather than purely by individuals calculating the costs and benefits of each citizenship. For example, Bauböck (1994) also mentions a case study from Vienna where, in some families, a collective decision is made for one adult to naturalize while the others retain their original citizenship. In this way, immigrants can indirectly circumvent the disadvantages caused by the dual citizenship ban, as other family members benefit from the rights gained through the naturalized member. He also discusses cases where a single person decides either to naturalize or not on behalf of the entire family. Following the German citizenship reform, it is also likely that families would discuss the new law collectively before making a decision.

Together, these studies demonstrate that naturalization decisions are influenced by several factors beyond merely citizenship policies, such as symbolic boundaries between majority and minority groups, family dynamics, and broader immigration-related policies in the country of residence.

# 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The research questions this study raises are as follows:

**Research Question 1**: How has the removal of the requirement to renounce original citizenship influenced the motivation to naturalize among non-naturalized Turkish immigrants in Germany:

a. who had already considered naturalization before the reform,
b. who had not considered naturalization before the reform?

**Research Question 2:** How do non-naturalized Turkish immigrants perceive the value of German and Turkish citizenship after the reform, and how do these perceptions vary among:

a. those who had already considered naturalization before the reform and remain interested afterward,
b. those who had not considered naturalization before the reform but began to consider it afterward,
c. those who have not considered naturalization either before or after the reform?

Based on the first research question, I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *Turkish immigrants who were previously eligible for German citizenship but did not naturalize will now be more inclined to do so after the reform that enables holding dual citizenship.*

Hypothesis 2: *Those with a 20 or more years of residence will not be significantly more interested in naturalization after the acceptance of dual citizenship.*

Hypothesis 3: *Those who strongly identify with Turkish citizenship will be less likely to naturalize, even after the acceptance of dual citizenship.*

Since this is a small-N qualitative study, these hypotheses are not intended for statistical testing or for making generalizable claims. Rather, the study is exploratory and seeks to identify recurring patterns. However, it can provide a foundation for future large-N quantitative research that may test these hypotheses empirically.

For the second research question, which explores how immigrants assess the value of the citizenship of the origin and destination countries after the reform, a qualitative, open-ended approach will be adopted instead of hypothesis testing.

# 4. METHODOLOGY

In this section, I begin by outlining the methodological approach used to address my research questions and the reasoning behind choosing it. I then explain why I selected Turkish immigrants as the case study, how I narrowed down the sample within this group, and how the participants were categorized. This is followed by a description of the data collection process, including how participants were recruited and how the interviews were conducted. I then present a detailed overview of the interview guide. Next, I describe how the data was analyzed. Finally, I reflect on the study's limitations.

## 4.1. Research Design

I employed content analysis of semi-structured interviews to answer my research questions and test my hypotheses. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher follows an interview guide while allowing interviewees the flexibility to express themselves. Additionally, follow-up questions not included in the interview guide may be asked based on points that emerge during the interview. In this format, interviewees are given room to reflect broadly, while the interviewer maintains focus on the key topics (Bryman, 2016). Given that I aimed to understand how Turkish immigrants perceive and respond to the dual citizenship component of Germany's recent citizenship reform, this method was well-suited to explore subjective interpretations and motivations in depth. This study focuses on participants' awareness of the reform, their perceptions of it, which aspects stand out to them, and whether the lifting of the dual citizenship ban holds particular significance. Therefore, the interview questions were designed to encourage participants to reflect on the reform in a broader sense and allow the topic of dual citizenship to emerge organically rather than being introduced through direct questions. This approach enabled more authentic and reflective responses while maintaining a clear focus on the core themes of the study.

## 4.2. Sample Selection and Categorization

### 4.2.1. Case Selection: Turkish Immigrants in Germany

The abolishment of the dual citizenship ban is particularly important for Turkish non-citizen residents in Germany. Three main reasons underlie the choice of Turkish immigrants as the case study. Firstly, as of December 31, 2023, official data from the Federal Statistical Office of Germany shows that 1,548,095 residents held only Turkish citizenship, including 372,720 individuals born in Germany.[4] This makes Turkish citizens the largest group of non-citizen residents in the country (German Federal Statistical Office, 2024).

Nevertheless, the population size of Turkish immigrants is not the only reason for choosing them as the case study. Turkey's liberal stance on dual citizenship since 1981 and Germany's recent policy change regarding dual citizenship make Turkish immigrants an interesting group for examining naturalization intentions within the framework of *citizenship constellations*, which Bauböck (2010: 848) defines as "a structure in which individuals are simultaneously linked to several such political entities, so that their legal rights and duties are determined not only by one political authority, but by several."

Moreover, the origin country's diaspora policies also significantly make Turkish immigrants a unique case study. Particularly during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era, diasporic engagement of the state has increased, especially through the enfranchisement of external citizens and institutions such as the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*) that aim to strengthen the

[4] For individuals born in Germany, eligibility for citizenship depends on the nationality and residency status of their parents. Children with one Turkish and one German parent automatically acquire dual citizenship at birth under the *ius sanguinis* principle of both countries. Children with two Turkish parents have been eligible to acquire German citizenship at birth under the *ius soli* principle since the introduction of the 1999 Nationality Act, which came into effect on January 1, 2000. This is possible if at least one parent has resided in Germany for eight years with permanent residence status. Until 2014, children in this group were subject to the *Optionspflicht* rule, which required them to choose between German and their other citizenship by age 23. With the last reform, the *Optionspflicht* rule has been entirely eliminated, and the required parental residence period for citizenship eligibility has been reduced to 5 years (German Federal Foreign Office, 2024; Falcke & Vink, 2020).

ties between the diaspora and the homeland (McFadden, 2019). Although these increased engagement efforts can be interpreted as the AKP government's willingness to include its citizens abroad as part of "the people," Yanasmayan and Kaşlı (2019) argue that while these policies can be inclusive for certain diaspora members, they may also serve as a means of control and exclusion for other members of the diaspora who are not seen as loyal to the homeland. Thus, the Turkish government's promotion of naturalization for certain Turkish expatriates in destination countries, which could potentially increase their political participation in their country of residence, is another reason to focus on this immigrant group in this project.

### 4.2.2. Sample Criteria

While the recent German citizenship reform introduced multiple changes to the naturalization process, this study focuses exclusively on dual citizenship acceptance. For instance, the reform reduced the required residence period for naturalization from eight to five years (or even three in certain exceptional cases). However, to be able to observe possible differences in motivations due to the dual citizenship policy, I kept the eligibility constant by limiting my empirical focus to non-naturalized Turkish immigrants who were already eligible for German citizenship under both the old and the reformed laws. Thus, I excluded individuals who became newly eligible for citizenship due to the reform, which shortened the required residence period.

Moreover, in the recent reform, there is a special exemption for the *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) generation. Unlike other applicants, those who migrated to Germany under the guest worker program are only expected to have an oral command of German for everyday conversation, and they are not required to take the naturalization test. Germany introduced this exemption as an acknowledgment of its lack of integration programs in the past and the role of migrant workers in its development (German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community,

2024). Despite the *Gastarbeiter* generation meeting the residence requirement, I excluded this group, since the exemption might have resulted in a change in their interest in applying for German citizenship, and their value assessment of German citizenship might also have been affected by Germany's acknowledgment of their generation's initially blocked integration in the citizenship law. Since my focus is solely on examining the effects of the change in dual citizenship policy on immigrant naturalization, participants were selected according to the following criteria:

- They held only Turkish citizenship at the time of the interview.
- They had lived in Germany for at least eight years by the time the citizenship law reform came into effect on June 24, 2024.
- They had not yet acquired German citizenship (some had applied but had not received it at the time of the interview).
- They had not migrated to Germany under the *Gastarbeiter* program.

### 4.2.3. Categorization of Participants

Before narrowing down my sample, I had conducted preliminary interviews with Turkish citizens residing in Germany. I noticed that those who met the above-mentioned criteria did not form a homogeneous group in terms of their naturalization intentions, either before or after the reform. For example, some individuals remained reluctant to naturalize in Germany even after the reform, while others expressed interest in doing so due to the acceptance of dual citizenship. Since my first research question focuses on whether removing the renunciation requirement affects the motivation to naturalize, treating all individuals who met the criteria as a single group would not allow for a nuanced answer. Additionally, since my second research question concerns whether the change in dual citizenship policy alters how individuals assess the value of Turkish and German citizenship, it is again important to categorize individuals

based on their intentions before and after the reform. For these reasons, I subdivided the group of individuals who met the criteria mentioned above into three subgroups:

1) Individuals who were inclined to naturalize in Germany before the reform but did not apply, and who have continued to consider naturalization after the reform;
2) Individuals who had no inclination to naturalize before the reform but began considering it afterward;
3) Individuals who remained uninterested in naturalization both before and after the reform.

To operationalize "inclination" toward naturalization before and after the reform, I used two separate scale questions during the interview. I asked participants to rate their interest in becoming a German citizen before and after the reform on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Not at all' and 10 means 'Very strongly.' Those who rated from 0 to 4 were categorized as 'low interest,' those who rated from 5 to 7 were categorized as 'moderate interest,' and those who rated from 8 to 10 were categorized as 'high interest.'

The first subgroup consists of individuals who had high or moderate interest before the reform and still have high or moderate interest after the reform. The second subgroup consists of individuals who had low interest before the reform and now have moderate or high interest after the reform. The third subgroup consists of individuals who had low interest both before and after the reform.



### 4.3. Data Collection

While mass migration from Turkey to Germany began in the 1960s, initially driven by labor migration with the recruitment of so-called *Gastarbeiter*, it has continued over the years for various reasons, including family reunification, political persecution (e.g., left-wing political dissidents after the 1980 military coup), ethnic conflict (e.g., Kurds), religious

oppression (e.g., Alevis), and, more recently, new generation brain drain (e.g., highly educated young professionals who seek better opportunities abroad). (Ozturk et al., 2022; Danış et al., 2023). Given the heterogeneous composition of the Turkish immigrant population in terms of socio-economic background, religion, ethnicity, and political identity, I initially aimed to reflect at least some level of this diversity in my sample. To support this goal, I sought to limit the use of snowball sampling, as it carries the risk of generating a sample with similar views on citizenship.

Recruiting participants was the most challenging part of my research, as I have no family migration history to Germany and have never lived there myself. Additionally, my specific criteria prevented me from interviewing just anyone of Turkish descent residing in Germany. Another reason is people's reluctance to participate in my research, which may be due to their expectation that my questions would focus on either German or Turkish politics, topics that might make them uncomfortable speaking with a stranger.

Nevertheless, as a first step, I reached out to my close circle in Turkey since many families in the country have relatives in Germany, mostly due to the guest worker program in the past. Through these indirect connections, I was able to recruit six participants. These included a friend's uncle's brother-in-law, a neighbor of a family acquaintance of a friend, two people introduced by someone my friend met while studying in Berlin, and two others through the family of a classmate of my friend who, like her, studies in Munich.

To broaden my reach, I also used online platforms. Through a WhatsApp group called *Münih'in Sesi* ("The Voice of Munich"), which has around 1,000 members, I shared a brief announcement about my research and initially recruited two participants. One of them later introduced me to two more individuals, one of whom referred me to an additional participant. I also recruited one person through another WhatsApp group called *IEL München*, which is for alumni of Istanbul High School, a German international school.

When I had only conducted six interviews and was struggling to find more participants, I decided to travel from Vienna to Munich to conduct fieldwork. During my one-week stay, several people already contacted me online, which reduced the need for many in-person interviews. I conducted three interviews on site at *Trabzon und Schwarzmeer Kultur Solidarität Verein* ("Trabzon and Black Sea Culture Solidarity Association"), a community organization in Munich, primarily for people from Turkey's Black Sea region, though it is open to others as well.

When I reached out to potential participants, I introduced the general topic of my research as the perceptions of Turkish immigrants in Germany regarding acquiring German citizenship. I did not mention the recent reform at that stage because I wanted to ask participants whether they were already aware of it during the interview. I aimed to prevent them from looking into the reform beforehand. I also did not bring up the issue of dual citizenship in my first contact with them. Instead, I wanted to see if participants would mention it themselves during the interview, which helped me understand whether the dual citizenship article in the reform mattered to them.

All interviews were conducted in Turkish as it is the mother tongue of the interviewees and myself. I conducted the interviews online, by phone, or in person, and audio-recorded them with participants' oral and written consent[5] for transcription and analysis. Interviews were conducted between 28 March 2025 and 19 May 2025. The duration of the interviews was 47 minutes on average. The longest lasted slightly over two hours, and the shortest lasted 23 minutes.

Not all participants showed the same level of interest in my study. Those who perceived the previous ban on dual citizenship as an obstacle and had been waiting for its removal for years tended to be more engaged and provided more detailed responses. In contrast, participants

[5] See the Appendix for the participant consent form (in English and Turkish).

who had remained uninterested in naturalization both before and after the reform were generally less engaged. In such cases, I asked follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. This variation in attitudes toward citizenship may have also made it more difficult to find participants initially, as not everyone viewed the reform as significant or considered it worthwhile to participate in an interview about it.

In terms of my positionality, although I do not have any family migration history to Germany, I was in a relatively advantageous position during the interviews. I was able to fully understand participants even when they spoke in dialects or had difficulty expressing themselves in Turkish due to being born or having lived abroad for many years. Additionally, I was familiar with the social, cultural, and political references they made about Turkey.

The list of interviewees and their characteristics is mentioned in the tables below. All participants' names have been anonymized, and pseudonyms have been used. The first group consists of 4 interview participants, the second group of 7, and the third group of 4 participants. Since this is a small-N study, the number of participants in each group should not be taken as representative of the broader population. A large-N study could indicate different proportions across the groups.

**Table 1**

*First Subgroup (Individuals inclined to naturalize before the reform who remain interested after the reform)*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Birthplace | Residence[6] | Migration Generation[7] | Education[8] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leyla | Female | 43 | Turkey | 20 | 1st generation | High School |
| Nesrin | Female | 66 | Turkey | 54 | 1.5 generation | High School |
| Leman | Female | 54 | Germany | 54 | 2nd generation | High School |
| Nazım | Male | 58 | Turkey | 22 | 1.5 generation | High School |

**Table 2**

*Second Subgroup (Individuals who had no inclination toward naturalization before the reform but started considering it after the reform)*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Birthplace | Residence | Migration Generation | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demir | Male | 44 | Turkey | 13 | 1st generation | Master's Degree |
| Tolga | Male | 41 | Germany | 41 | 2nd generation | Bachelor's Degree |
| Fatma | Female | 37 | Turkey | 11 | 1st generation | PhD |
| Vildan | Female | 54 | Turkey | 31 | 1st generation | Master's Degree |
| Zehra | Female | 39 | Turkey | 15 | 1st generation | Master's Degree |
| Nihat | Male | 45 | Turkey | 24 | 1st generation | Master's Degree |
| Ziya | Male | 39 | Germany | 39 | 3rd generation | Bachelor's Degree |



[6] The "Residence" column refers to the number of years participants have lived uninterruptedly in Germany.

[7] In my study:

- 1st generation refers to individuals who were born in Turkey and migrated to Germany as adults.
- 1.5 generation refers to individuals who were born in Turkey and later migrated to Germany during childhood or adolescence through family reunification, typically following a parent (often the father) who had previously migrated as a *Gastarbeiter*.
- 2nd generation refers to individuals who were born in Germany to at least one parent who migrated from Turkey.
- 3rd generation refers to individuals who were born in Germany and have at least one grandparent who migrated from Turkey to Germany.

[8] The "Education" column refers to the highest level of formal education completed by the participant.

**Table 3**

*Third Subgroup (Individuals who remained uninterested in naturalization before and after the reform*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Birthplace | Residence | Migration Generation | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hatice | Female | 54 | Turkey | 33 | 1st generation | High School |
| Pelin | Female | 45 | Turkey | 9 | 1st generation | Bachelor's Degree |
| Poyraz | Male | 40 | Turkey | 10 | 1st generation | Bachelor's Degree |
| Burcu | Female | 58 | Turkey | 48 | 1.5 generation | Middle School |

## 4.4. Interview Guide

Interviews started with a narrative question where I asked participants about their migration story or, if they are not the first generation, their family's migration story. This question is helpful to engage the interviewee in the conversation and to gather background information about them, such as the reason for migration, time spent in Germany, details about their extended family, occupation, children, and their relation to Turkey, all of which are important for understanding their citizenship acquisition behaviors.

I divided the interview guide into four sections. The first section focused on the recent citizenship law reform: whether participants were aware of it, how they heard about it, what they knew had changed, their opinions on the reform, whether any particular aspect stood out to them, and whether they had discussed it with people around them. It also included questions about their Turkish citizenship status and what being a Turkish citizen means to them personally.

The second section addressed participants' naturalization intentions pre-reform. Different sets of questions were asked depending on their level of interest in naturalization. For those with moderate or high interest, I asked about their motivations for considering naturalization in Germany before the reform, any obstacles that prevented them from moving forward, and whether they believed they would have been naturalized had they applied. For

those with low interest, the questions focused on understanding the reasons behind their lack of interest.

The third section explored participants' naturalization intentions after the reform. Again, participants were grouped according to their self-reported level of interest. For those with moderate or high interest, I asked whether they had taken any concrete steps toward naturalization, their main motivations for acquiring German citizenship, and what becoming a German citizen would mean to them. For those who continued to show low interest even after the lifting of the dual citizenship ban, I sought to understand the reasons for their disinterest and whether any specific barriers discouraged them.

In both the second and third sections, I asked participants not only about their own naturalization intentions at the individual level before and after the reform, but also about the intentions of people in their social circles (e.g., family, friends, colleagues) and whether they discuss naturalization with them, in order to assess the potential influence of community on their decision.

The final section included hypothetical questions, regardless of participants' previous or current naturalization intentions. I asked them to imagine holding both Turkish and German citizenship and to describe how they believed this would affect their lives and sense of identity. I also explored whether they thought dual citizenship would bring any disadvantages and how they believed they would be perceived by Turkish and German societies.



### 4.5. Data Analysis

Firstly, I transcribed all interviews in Turkish. I then conducted a close reading of the transcripts to identify recurrent topics across the transcripts. Using a color-coding system, I organized the data into thematic categories. The main themes that emerged include: *general views on the reform*, s*ymbolic meanings attached to Turkish citizenship*, *symbolic meanings*

*attached to German citizenship*, *instrumental benefits of Turkish citizenship*, *instrumental motives for acquiring German citizenship*, *family dynamics*, *homeland dynamics*, and *feelings in the destination country*. Finally, I translated the relevant excerpts into English for use in the analysis.

### 4.6. Limitations

In this section, I reflect on the limitations of the research sample. Firstly, this study is based on a small group of 15 participants and does not aim for statistical generalizability. Rather, it seeks to offer insights into individual perceptions.

The participants include one person with a middle school education, five with a high school education, four with a bachelor's degree, four with a master's degree, and one with a PhD. While the sample includes individuals with varied educational backgrounds, 60 percent hold higher education degrees (i.e., a bachelor's degree or above). This overrepresentation of highly educated individuals may have shaped the content and articulation of their views. Therefore, the findings may not fully reflect the perspectives of individuals with lower levels of formal education.

Another limitation relates to the age distribution of the sample. Participants ranged in age from 37 to 66, with an average age of approximately 49. Most were in their 40s and 50s. The absence of younger generations (e.g., individuals in their 20s or early 30s) may have influenced the findings, as age can shape how people experience and interpret legal or political changes. Additionally, 13 of the 15 participants were married and had children. This family status might also have shaped their perspectives, as many frequently referred to their children when discussing future plans, the desire for security in the destination country, and concerns about family unity.

Lastly, although I aimed to limit snowball sampling as much as possible, as explained in the "Data Collection" section, some participants introduced me to others, which may have contributed to a degree of homogeneity in the sample.

Future research with a larger and more socioeconomically and age-diverse sample could offer a broader spectrum of views.

# 5. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

## 5.1. Group 1

I interviewed four individuals who were inclined to naturalize in Germany before the recent reform (but did not for some reason) and remain interested in naturalization after the reform. Among them, Leman is a second-generation immigrant born in Germany whose father was a *Gastarbeiter*; Nesrin and Nazım are 1.5-generation immigrants born in Turkey who came to Germany later, whose fathers were *Gastarbeiter*; and Leyla migrated for marriage, with her husband's father being a *Gastarbeiter*. Leyla, Leman, and Nazım did not take any action regarding the application. Nesrin only contacted the relevant office to ask about the required documents and has not submitted anything yet.

I asked them to rate their interest in acquiring German citizenship before the reform on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest level of interest. Two participants gave a score of 8, one gave a 6, and the other a 5. When asked to rate their interest after the reform, their responses were 9, 8, 6, and 5, respectively. This group is important for understanding the factors influencing naturalization decisions that go beyond dual citizenship policies, as they were interested in naturalization even before the reform.

### 5.1.1. Belonging and Safety in the Context of Citizenship

Firstly, I asked the participants what Turkish citizenship meant to them. Three out of four respondents stated that they do not attach a particular emotional or symbolic value to their Turkish citizenship, even though they feel positively about Turkey. For example, Leyla, who sees Turkey as the place where her roots lie and where she belongs, said:

> *Living in a place like Berlin, we do not look at the world through blinkers. We live among people from many different national backgrounds... The world is moving in that direction, it is less about which passport you hold. Of course, I feel a sense of belonging to Turkey because I was born and raised there. Most things feel familiar when I go*

> *there. You can build a connection with the past. Here, it is hard to form that kind of bond, but Turkish citizenship itself is not something particularly special for me.*

Nazım stated that while he does not see Turkish citizenship as a privilege, he is content to hold it. Leman described herself as very lucky, as she has two homelands: Germany and Turkey, which she loves equally. While she expressed affection for Turkey, she said Turkish citizenship holds no special meaning for her. Compared to the other three, Nesrin described her Turkish citizenship in more sentimental terms:

> *Pride. Turkey is my homeland. The crescent and star are my pride. I am a proud Turkish citizen. I am grateful to everyone who fought for this country, from Atatürk to even Sultan Suleiman. After all, they fought for the homeland. So why should I give up my country just to get another citizenship? Even if my ID states dual citizenship one day, my blood, my identity, the way I was raised, and my family will always be Turkish.*

When it comes to why they did not apply for German citizenship despite their interest, the reasons vary. For example, when he first moved to Germany with his daughter as a single father, Nazım initially considered returning to Turkey shortly thereafter. Because of this uncertainty, though he was somewhat interested in German citizenship at the time, he ultimately postponed the decision. Later, as his daughter completed her education and got married in Germany, it became clear that he would remain there permanently. He did not perceive the ban on dual citizenship as an obstacle at the time since he considered the Blue Card sufficient for his needs. He emphasized that his decision not to apply for German citizenship before the reform was not due to a rejection of German citizenship, but rather shaped by his personal circumstances: "I did not have any racist thoughts like 'I cannot become a German citizen.'"

In the past, Leman even collected the necessary documents to apply for German citizenship, primarily so that her children could become German citizens. Leman's previous motivation appears to be driven by intergenerational reasons, as discussed by Street (2014). However, she eventually gave up on the application after her former husband decided that they would return to Turkey. The requirement to renounce Turkish citizenship was not what prevented her from applying. Leyla, who had previously assumed that she could not apply for

citizenship because she did not have unlimited residence status, explained why she did not see renouncing Turkish citizenship as a problem at the time. She emphasized the practical value of holding citizenship in the country where one resides. The requirement to give up Turkish citizenship to acquire German citizenship previously did not significantly affect her decision, as she perceived the Blue Card sufficient:

> *I had many people around me who acquired German citizenship and have the Blue Card. Since we live in Germany, I think German citizenship is more important. For example, without citizenship, we do not have the right to vote. I would not feel bad about not voting in Turkey, since I do not live there. But not being able to vote here, where I live, feels uncomfortable.*

Leyla's perspective was important for understanding both how the Blue Card functions for Turkish immigrants and how the surrounding community can influence naturalization decisions. In her case, it was encouraging to see people around her obtaining German citizenship without losing significant rights in Turkey, thanks to the Blue Card.

Nesrin shared her past experience of applying for German citizenship, which she recalls took place 15 to 20 years ago. She had completed all the necessary steps, with only the final signature remaining. However, as she remembers, she was required to write something negative about her homeland, Turkey, which she refused to do.[9] As a result, she withdrew her application. Although her exact point is somewhat ambiguous, it still suggests that rules like declarations of loyalty or oaths can hold significance for immigrants.

When it comes to their current motivations, Nazım says that since he no longer plans to return to Turkey, he has become more interested in acquiring German citizenship, although he has not yet taken any formal steps. He explains what having dual citizenship would mean to him as follows:

[9] There was no previous policy requiring applicants to write something negative specifically about Turkey. She might have recalled the declaration of loyalty, in which applicants officially declare their commitment to the "free and democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany," and interpreted the requirement in her own way. However, the participant could not remember the details of the sentence. For more information, please see the official website: *How the naturalisation process works*: https://www.xn--einbrgerung-whb.de/ablauf.php?l=en

> *If I become a German citizen, I would start to think of myself as having two countries. I would take on the responsibilities that come with being part of Germany… We still feel like Gastarbeiter in Germany. "We came, and we will leave." But that period is over now. Our children were born here, are growing up here, and are serving this country.*

Nesrin, with some hesitation, said that her motivation to consider German citizenship stemmed from the current situation in Turkey. In her view, the country is heading toward lawlessness, which is why she no longer even wants to travel there for holidays. After describing this growing distance, she questioned herself: "But then I think, what if something happens here one day? Europe is not guaranteed either. So in a way, I think at least I would have a country to escape to. If something happens here, I still have Turkish citizenship, I could leave."

Leman does not expect her self-identification to change after naturalization, as her roots are Turkish, but she also sees Germany as a homeland. She admitted that she still finds the paperwork in the application process burdensome. Her main motivation is to avoid facing difficulties when entering or leaving Germany, especially since her children will remain there, while she is still considering the possibility of living in Turkey in the future. She noted that for her, German citizenship does not offer substantial additional rights, although visa-free travel is something she finds appealing.

What draws Leyla most to German citizenship is the right to vote and the feeling of belonging it might bring. Her children are the main reason. Having them in Germany makes her feel connected to the country. She fears the possibility of being separated from them due to citizenship issues: "Life can bring anything. My children are here. I have heard cases where, without a stable job, you can only stay until your children turn 18." While she feels a sense of belonging to Turkey through her extended family, her immediate family is in Germany. She feels rooted in both places. However, Leyla's motivation to apply for German citizenship has increased recently, not because of the reform, but due to the changing political dynamics in Germany and her young son's concerns:

> *My 13-year-old son keeps telling me, "Mom, racism is on the rise and the AfD is gaining votes. You need to get German citizenship as soon as possible." As I have discussed with my son, depending on how things change in the future, it might be more advantageous to hold German citizenship, whether we stay here or have to leave. It feels safer. We would not have to be separated from each other. Maybe in case of a war... Nobody knows what life will bring…Maybe citizenship gives a person a greater sense of safety, of certainty.*

Nazım also mentioned that the recent increase in racism has heightened fears among many Turkish immigrants of being sent back to Turkey, which he believes is pushing people toward acquiring German citizenship. Although he thinks he will feel more a part of Germany after naturalization, he does not believe society's perception of him will change: "Your name stays the same, so you will still face racism. Even if you become a citizen, you are still a foreigner."

Nazım, Leman, and Leyla expressed emotional expectations after obtaining German citizenship, particularly feeling more rooted in Germany, while still maintaining an attachment to Turkey. This case is similar to what Bauböck (2018) also discusses (and as will be discussed further in Group 2): people can have genuine ties to more than one country. Nesrin's case was different: due to her disappointment with the political situation in Turkey, she was motivated to apply for German citizenship. However, like Nazım and Leyla, she still considers possible instability and security concerns in Germany, viewing Turkish citizenship as a potential exit option.



### 5.1.2. Instrumental Benefits of German Citizenship

Leyla does not think that obtaining German citizenship would significantly change her daily life, except perhaps helping her avoid the strict attitudes of civil servants in official institutions. Leman also does not see much difference between having a residence permit and citizenship, as the former already grants her the right to live and work in Germany. However, she still wants to acquire German citizenship because she plans to live in Turkey after

retirement, and being a German citizen would make it easier for her to travel back and forth. Similarly, Nesrin does not see a significant difference between the two statuses, as she believes that as long as one follows the rules in Germany, it is possible to live comfortably without being a citizen. Therefore, both Nesrin and Nazım, who also do not see any additional benefit in citizenship, do not seem to have strong instrumental motivations. This relates to my second hypothesis about immigrants who have lived in Germany for a long time, as Nesrin and Nazım also mentioned, such people see naturalization as "it's too late for us," though they still encourage the younger generation to naturalize so that they can participate more in German society and politics. Nevertheless, this group still wants to naturalize.

## 5.2. Group 2

I interviewed 7 individuals who were not inclined towards naturalization before the reform and began considering naturalization after the reform. While five individuals in this group migrated to Germany for education and employment opportunities, two are second- and third-generation migrants born in Germany to families from the *Gastarbeiter* generation. Everyone except Tolga had applied for German citizenship at the time of the interview. Tolga was gathering his documents to submit his application.

I asked them to rate their interest in German citizenship before the reform on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest level of interest. Six of them gave a score of 0, and one gave a score of 1. When asked to rate their inclination toward naturalization after the reform, five gave a score of 10, and two gave a score of 6.

### 5.2.1. Perceptions on the Recent Reform

This group perceives the recent reform as a positive step. For all of them, the article about dual citizenship stood out more than any other change. They believe that dual citizenship

was already a deserved right for Turkish immigrants and that allowing it now is a late but reasonable decision.

All of them stated that they were not interested in acquiring German citizenship before the reform due to the ban on dual citizenship. However, a couple of them shared more nuanced perspectives that went beyond a simple reluctance to naturalize because of the required renunciation of their original citizenship. They perceived the dual citizenship ban, which applied only to citizens of certain countries, as unfair. For example, Nihat, who sees the previous dual citizenship ban as an obstacle to immigrant integration, expressed:

> *An EU citizen did not have to give up their original citizenship, but when I was forced to give up mine, I was told: "Your citizenship is not as valuable as that of an EU citizen, so you have to give it up to become a German citizen." If I were to give up my Turkish citizenship, it would mean I accepted this imposition.*

Thus, his justification for his reluctance to naturalize in Germany before the reform was not only caused by the ban on dual citizenship but also by his belief that the naturalization policy was unfair and reflected a double standard. He emphasized this further by saying, "If everyone were treated equally like in Austria,[10] then I might have considered becoming a German citizen." Nihat believes that the reform is in line with the needs of the time and that Germany is addressing a long-standing shortcoming. He sees it as a more modern law that treats everyone equally. He also noted that it will allow many people to participate in politics. Demir also thinks that this reform will make German society more inclusive: "Previously, you either had to be Turkish or German. That was highly problematic... This rigid policy has now shifted towards a 'you can be both' approach. I believe this will benefit society." He further stated:

> *They took a step to correct an inequality. While dual citizenship was granted to citizens of some countries, Turkish citizens were excluded. With the law change, dual citizenship is now allowed regardless of the country of origin. This is a sensitive issue for me*

[10] In Austria, for incoming naturalization, all former citizenships have to be renounced, including those of EU member states. Exceptions are only made in limited cases, such as countries where voluntary renunciation is impossible (such as Iran), or in cases where excessive fees are required for release. (Bauböck & Valchars, 2021, pp. 213–214).

*because I believe the previous restriction constituted a human rights violation…I refused to be part of a rule that was a human rights violation.*

Zehra also commented: "It was never fair that Turks had to make a choice," emphasizing the injustice of the previous policy. She also believes that the main reason behind the reform is the SPD's aim to attract Turkish votes, as they are the largest non-citizen immigrant group and will be most affected by the change. Fatma, who describes the reform as a long-overdue but necessary decision, said she had always found it very strange that, while citizens from other EU countries were allowed dual citizenship, those from other countries were not.

As can be seen from the responses of participants, the dual citizenship ban was not only an obstacle to naturalization but was also perceived as an injustice directed at particular immigrant groups. As expressed by Nihat and Demir, their decision not to apply for German citizenship under those conditions was, in part, a form of resistance against this perceived injustice. Nihat and Demir's reactions resemble the cases van Gorkum (2015) describes in his study, where second-generation Turkish immigrants in Germany deliberately chose Turkish citizenship as a form of protest when faced with a forced choice.

### 5.2.2. Reasons for Reluctance to Naturalize in the Past

Although they explained that they did not want to naturalize due to the dual citizenship ban and their unwillingness to give up their Turkish citizenship (which I will later explain through their symbolic attachment to their original nationality), I still wanted to understand why they remained reluctant to naturalize. I was particularly curious whether they felt any need for German citizenship while living in Germany.

The most important factor here was the perceived relatively small difference, in practical daily life, between holding a residence permit in Germany and having German citizenship. For example, with a residence permit, they can travel freely within the Schengen area. Especially for participants with stable and well-paying careers, obtaining visas for

countries like the US or the UK may require some paperwork, but is not considered particularly difficult. Thus, they did not find this inconvenience significant enough to justify giving up their Turkish citizenship.

They also mentioned acquaintances who had renounced their Turkish citizenship to gain German citizenship and become more mobile, and who indeed experienced increased mobility afterward. Still, participants brought up these examples somewhat critically and implied that they did not see the visa process as difficult enough to warrant such a trade-off. As Bauböck hypothesizes in his 1994 book, when long-term residents feel legally secure, the perceived utility of acquiring citizenship tends to decrease. He (2018) also argues that when residents perceive a meaningful distinction between citizenship of the destination country and residence status, this may lead to instrumental motivations for naturalization. However, participants in this group did not perceive such a significant instrumental difference. This may be due not only to the extensive rights associated with residence status in Germany but also to the fact that all participants have stable careers, which would, for example, likely enable them to obtain visas without requiring German citizenship.

### 5.2.3. Meanings Attached to Turkish Citizenship

To understand the factors that discouraged them from revoking their Turkish citizenship, I asked participants to describe what being a Turkish citizen meant to them. All of them used sentimental language to describe the value they attach to their Turkish citizenship. For example, Nihat, who perceives his Turkish citizenship as sacred and precious, defines it as "my identity, my *raison d'être*, how I was when I was born, and my sense of belonging." Fatma said, "My roots, the place I belong to, where I was born and raised, the culture I grew up with… One of the things that makes me who I am is my citizenship." Demir explained, "I feel that I am Turkish and a part of that country both officially (*citizenship*) and emotionally... It is part

of my very being. I say this regardless of nationalism. It is my identity." Vildan said she has always seen herself as emotionally connected to her Turkish passport. Mügge (2012) also found in her study of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands that their perception of Turkish citizenship extended beyond legal status and became closely tied to identity and loyalty. Similarly, in my research, participants frequently used terms such as identity, belonging, loyalty, and gratitude while talking about their Turkish citizenship.

For two interviewees who were born and raised in Germany, their Turkish citizenship represents a bond to Turkey that is at risk of weakening after they have lived in Germany for decades, making it something that should be protected. Ziya, a third-generation immigrant, says he feels a connection to his "homeland," and that if he gave up his Turkish citizenship, he would feel as if that bond were torn apart. This bond also appears important to pass on to the next generation, as seen in Tolga's case: "It is important for me that my child has the right to Turkish citizenship because I am a Turkish citizen. If I were not a Turkish citizen, she would have become only a German citizen." These two cases are similar to the findings of van Gorkum (2015), who showed that some Turkish-origin individuals born in Germany chose Turkish citizenship when faced with a compulsory choice. For them, Turkish citizenship held particular importance because it was one of the few remaining tangible links to Turkey. In the present study as well, these two participants, who are second and third generation immigrants, viewed Turkish citizenship as a symbol of their bond with Turkey, and might have perceived this bond to be at risk of weakening over time.

Among the five individuals in the group who were born and raised in Turkey, four expressed a feeling of loyalty and gratitude towards Turkey, which had previously influenced their decision not to revoke their Turkish citizenship. For example, Fatma, who perceives her citizenship as something that made her who she is today, said, "I was born, raised, and studied in Turkey. Turkey is what shaped me into who I am today. So, there's a deep bond there." Nihat

said, “I have a sense of loyalty debt to Turkey, which I have not yet repaid,” since he came to Germany right after finishing his undergraduate studies in Turkey. He contrasted his situation with his friends who came after their 30s or 40s, who perceive themselves as having already served Turkey in some way. Zehra’s sense of loyalty to Turkey, which influenced her previous refusal to renounce her citizenship, is rooted in her attachment to the ideals behind the establishment of the Turkish Republic. She said:

> *I will not feel emotionally bad anymore because I am not giving up my Turkish citizenship. I will not have a guilty conscience toward them [the founders of the Turkish Republic and martyrs], so I am at peace with this.*

The main reason Zehra refrained from giving up her Turkish citizenship was the right to vote (since holders of the Blue Card do not have voting rights). She links this voting right to the founding principles of the Republic and said, “This right to vote [for women] was not easily won. A republic was established out of a sultanate. Maybe I am romanticizing it, but still.” Here, I categorized voting rights as a symbolic reason for not renouncing citizenship, as the participant not only views voting as a civic duty but also associates it with the ideals of the Turkish Republic. Similar to Zehra, Vildan also expressed a strong connection to the narrative of the establishment of the Turkish Republic and its ideals. She said:

> *Those ideals live somewhere inside me, and I feel a sense of duty. Maybe that duty will never actually come in my lifetime. I might end up quietly fading away alone in a small room in front of a computer, but I see myself as a soldier of that ideal.*

#### 5.2.4. Homeland Dynamics

Additionally, two participants, both opposed to the incumbent government in Turkey, reflected that their decision not to revoke Turkish citizenship was influenced not only by dynamics in the destination country but also served as a reaction to political developments in their homeland, Turkey. These responses are certainly intertwined with the symbolic meanings they attach to Turkish citizenship.

Zehra has always kept the idea of returning to Turkey in mind, and she still does. However, she said that her hopes of returning have gradually faded as, in her view, the government in Turkey has become increasingly authoritarian over the years.

> *I feel that I have become more attached to my origins and the society I come from. In recent years, attempts to denigrate Turkishness in Turkey have triggered a kind of counter-reaction in me. Because of the situation in Turkey, I have felt an even stronger urge to preserve my sense of Turkishness, especially by participating in elections… The Republic of Turkey granted me the right to vote, and if the supporters of a party that resents Atatürk's Turkey[11] are also going to the polls in the diaspora,[12] then I should also exercise my right here as well. It felt like an obligation, as if not doing so would be a kind of betrayal. That is why the right to vote has always been deeply important to me. I never wanted to lose it… I cannot just say "I have lost all hope [from Turkey]" and give up my Turkish citizenship.*

Like Zehra, Vildan's earlier decision not to renounce her Turkish citizenship was also shaped by political developments in Turkey that she found troubling.

> *I am someone who is not happy at all with the current government. We have left the country in the hands of those who are leading it into darkness. The so-called intellectuals are leaving in droves. There is a brain drain. And if I also get the German passport, I would not even be a citizen of that country anymore. It would feel as if I had handed the country over to them and said, "Here, let it be yours."*

I did not come across any literature that explores citizenship choices influenced by political dynamics in the country of origin, particularly motivated by opposition to the incumbent government. Therefore, these two perspectives are especially valuable. They also illustrate how voting rights can represent more than just a civic duty, as discussed in the previous subsection. However, not every Turkish citizen who recently migrated to Germany perceives their citizenship like Zehra and Vildan. For example, Zehra observes that people who came from Turkey for education or work purposes, like herself, tend to fall into two groups.



[11] The expression 'Atatürk's Turkey' (*Atatürk Türkiyesi*) generally refers to the ideals upon which Turkey was founded, including secularism, modernism, democracy, and women's rights. In context, it is often used in contrast to the current policies and administration in Turkey.

[12] Here, the participant refers to the election results of Turkish citizens residing in Germany. In 2023 Turkish presidential election, 59.71% voted for Erdoğan in Germany, while 51.91% voted for him in Turkey. For more detailed statistics, you can visit the Supreme Election Council's website: https://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/secim-i%CC%87statistikleri/78318 (available only in Turkish).

One group does not hesitate to give up Turkish citizenship and does not see it as particularly important. She notes that this group often has a distant or even resentful relationship with Turkey and does not hold positive feelings toward the country because of the current political situation in Turkey. In contrast, the group she identifies with is very pleased with the new dual citizenship allowance. Nihat also contrasted his attachment to Turkish citizenship with that of other white-collar migrants from Turkey, who, due to the changing political environment, feel less connected to it. Here, it is important to acknowledge that the year of migration might matter, as Zehra and Nihat have been away from Turkey for 15 and 24 years, while the others they mentioned are more familiar with recent changes in Turkey.

### 5.2.5. Meanings Attached to German Citizenship

The fact that these individuals have attributed emotional significance to Turkish citizenship and therefore refrained from acquiring German citizenship previously does not mean that they have attached no emotional value to potential German citizenship. This subsection is particularly important as it illustrates what has been discussed in the literature review regarding going beyond the dichotomy of instrumental and identity dimensions of citizenship. As Bauböck (2018) argues, holding more than one citizenship does not eliminate the non-instrumental value of citizenship; individuals can maintain genuine attachments to more than one country, as seen in this study with ties to both Germany and Turkey. For example, Ziya, who is a third-generation immigrant and did not revoke his Turkish citizenship because of his connection to Turkey, said:

> *It feels like we are finally about to relax, finally about to feel that we truly belong here. Even after 40 years, there is still a slight feeling of being a guest…To feel more settled here and like a homeowner. I get that feeling in Turkey, but here I still feel like a foreigner, though I was born and raised here…I know that even if my citizenship*

*changes, my appearance will not. I will still be seen as a 'dark head,'*[13] *but I think the feeling will change a little. Even just applying already made me feel a bit more at ease.*

Demir expressed his desire to obtain German citizenship as a reflection of a sense of belonging to Germany:

*When I become a German citizen, I will probably have both identities. It feels like a step toward world citizenship. It is like another color. There is this big set called human identity, and within that, there is my Turkish identity. When I get German citizenship, that will be added too. It is an intersecting set, not an either-or. Even if the German passport did not grant access to any country, I want to make my sense of belonging here official.*

From a similar perspective, Vildan said*:*

*Getting German citizenship would also be something emotional. At some point, the time I had spent in Germany exceeded the time I had spent in Turkey. It would feel like recognition of all those years I have spent here and of the emotional bonds I have built with the people around me here. That citizenship would give me the feeling that I have lived as a part of this country.*

Every participant in this group expressed a desire to vote in Germany. While this cannot be attributed to a single factor, the recent rise of the far right in the country may have contributed to this interest, a development that will be explored further in the next subsection. For example, though even after the reform, Zehra did not feel any urgency to apply for German citizenship, the collapse of the government in Germany and the rise of the far-right in the polls have significantly increased her concerns:

*Then, I have become convinced that we need to have a say. Having a political voice here might give me the feeling that I did something against racism. "I had a power in my hands and I used it."*

Tolga, a second-generation immigrant, said that he used to feel upset about not being allowed to vote in referendums and even shared this concern with some authorities. Now, he is happy that he will be able to vote, although he explained that he does not attach much meaning to citizenship since, for him, culture is more important and citizenship is just a piece of paper at the end of the day. For Nihat, acquiring German citizenship would also mean equality with

[13] The expression 'dark head' (*kara kafalı*) came up in a couple of interviews, used by participants to express their feeling that they would never be fully seen as German due to their phenotype.

other EU citizens. He also mentioned that he might identify as "*Almanyali*" (from Germany) in addition to being Turkish.

### 5.2.6. Feelings in the Destination Country

Another topic related to the feelings in the destination country affecting the naturalization decisions that came up, although not directly related to my interview questions but mentioned by the interviewees, was a sense of insecurity in Germany and the fear of being sent back to Turkey one day, fears that may be fueled by the rising support for the far-right and the possibility of war in the future, which I had not expected them to bring up. However, while discussing these issues, participants found comfort in knowing they had a homeland to return to and that holding its citizenship offered a sense of security. For example, Zehra, who made a clear decision to apply for German citizenship after seeing the polls about AfD votes, stated:

> *Maybe we are not refugees, but we are migrants. If anti-immigrant sentiment rises in Germany... Look at what they did to the Jews during World War II, who had lived together with them for 500 years. There is no guarantee that something like that will not happen in this century. If things get out of control… In this election, maybe there was no coalition with the AfD, but I noticed the warning bells have started ringing... They have started ringing for us… But if things get worse, I remind myself that I have my country waiting for me.*

Ziya said that he sees Turkey "as a place to escape to if a war breaks out in Germany." Similarly, Vildan, who feels she has a safe place to go back, said:

> *I have always thought that if I face discrimination or mistreatment in Germany, I would tell them, "Fine, take your country and keep it. I have my own place, my homeland somewhere else in the world… I know where I belong." That is how I have felt.*

These responses did not appear in the literature I reviewed, which mostly focuses on cases where non-resident citizenship is acquired as a form of security. For example, Lebanese citizens applying for European citizenship while residing in Lebanon in anticipation of conflict, Israelis seeking European citizenship due to potential insecurity in Israel, or Argentinians acquiring Italian or Spanish citizenship to migrate to the EU because of economic crises in their

home country. In contrast, this study finds that origin country citizenship is perceived as a potential exit option by some Turkish immigrants in the case of far-right governance in Germany.

Moreover, none of them expect society to see them differently after receiving German citizenship, since their names, appearance, and accent will not change. However, it might change how they feel about themselves in the destination country, for example, by giving them a greater sense of security. Vildan also said:

> *Although I have never been involved in any criminal activity, I have always told myself to be extra careful, even about saying something that might be interpreted as offensive. If I were convicted, I am not a German citizen, so my residence status could be at risk. Unlike a German citizen, I do not have the same security. So I always think: I must stay out of legal trouble.*

### 5.2.7. Instrumental Benefits of German and Turkish Citizenships

One of the main points emphasized by the participants was that they did not see significant instrumental benefits in holding German citizenship compared to having a residence permit, and therefore felt no urgency to apply for citizenship at the cost of giving up their Turkish one before the reform. For example, their residence permits already allowed visa-free travel within the Schengen area and did not pose obstacles to employment in Germany.

Nevertheless, German citizenship was seen as more advantageous when it came to travel to countries outside the Schengen zone, such as the United Kingdom or the United States. Still, this was not a strong enough reason to renounce Turkish citizenship, especially since all participants in this group had stable careers that allowed them to obtain such visas when needed. For those who often travel between Germany and Turkey, having German citizenship would mean they no longer need to worry about spending too much time outside Germany, which is critical for keeping their residence status. They will even be able to move to Turkey as dual citizens without losing their rights in Germany. Participants also agreed that citizenship would reduce bureaucratic hassle, such as renewing the residence permit, because it is connected to

the passport. One participant also mentioned that non-German citizens are sometimes not allowed to take part in certain projects, and in sectors like aviation, being a German citizen makes it more likely to be hired.

One participant, who was anxious about the rise of the far right, said that her Spanish husband encouraged her to apply for German citizenship, pointing out that if they ever had to leave Germany due to the political situation, she would have better employment prospects in Spain as a German citizen than as a Turkish one.

Four participants also mentioned the practical benefits of keeping Turkish citizenship, such as being eligible for public sector jobs in Turkey or enjoying certain advantages while living there. These benefits are not possible with only the Blue Card. For example, Tolga said:

> *I see my future in Turkey, I do business there, and it is easier for me to acquire real estate and land in Turkey, so I stayed as a Turkish citizen. The Blue Card does not provide any real benefits. When you go to a hospital or museum in Turkey, you are charged differently compared to a Turkish citizen. The Blue Card is not as strong as a passport.*

Thus, Group 2 illustrates how individuals can attach both instrumental and symbolic meanings to multiple citizenships, even if the balance between these meanings varies. As Bauböck (2018) argues, these two dimensions of citizenship are not mutually exclusive but complement each other if citizenship is granted with a "genuine link." People tend to seek harmonization between interests and identities rather than acting solely according to a "rational choice" model. This group also exemplifies Yanasmayan's (2015) idea that immigrants living in countries with liberal access to dual citizenship develop a "thick sense of citizenship" that encompasses both their homeland and destination country citizenships. According to her, immigrants in such contexts are more likely to develop meaningful attachments to both their homeland and host country citizenships. In this sense, the members of Group 2 do not simply view dual citizenship as a practical solution but as a form of identification with both countries.

Their perspective also resembles the "hyphenationals" described in Ronkainen's (2011) study, who actively identify with both nationalities.

## 5.3. Group 3

I interviewed four individuals who were not inclined to naturalize before the reform and remained uninterested afterward. One came to Germany through family reunification, as his father was a *Gastarbeiter*. Two migrated for marriage, and their husbands are children of *Gastarbeiter*. The fourth moved to Germany for a job opportunity and does not speak German at all.

I asked them to rate their interest in German citizenship before the reform on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest level of interest. All of them gave a score of 0. When asked to rate their inclination toward naturalization after the reform, three gave a score of 0, and one gave a score of 2. Similar to Group 1, the case of Group 3 highlights the importance of literature that explores factors beyond citizenship policies in shaping naturalization decisions, as they showed disinterest both before and after the reform.

### 5.3.1. Meanings Attached to Turkish Citizenship

All of them answered sentimentally when asked what meanings they attach to their Turkish citizenship. For example, Burcu, who moved to Germany through family reunification and has been living there for 48 years, said:

> *Though I grew up here…Being Turkish is a privilege and a source of pride. I can express it freely wherever I go. Having Turkish citizenship also shows my Turkish identity. It is not just something on paper. It carries meaning. Even walking under the Turkish flag at the Turkish Consulate feels like a privilege.*

Pelin, who moved to Germany through marriage and had previously considered returning to Turkey because she struggled to adapt, explained what Turkish citizenship meant for her:

*My culture and roots are there, and being a Turkish citizen is important to me. I am not racist, but I care about my citizenship. If I am Turkish, I believe I should be known as Turkish. This is an emotional perspective of mine… Knowing that you belong somewhere feels good for the soul. It feels good to know where I belong and where my roots are. That is why Turkish citizenship is important to me.*

Hatice, who moved to Germany through marriage 33 years ago and considers both Turkey and Germany as her homelands, shared a similarly emotional attachment to her Turkish citizenship:

*When someone asks about my citizenship, if I cannot say "I am Turkish," it feels like a huge loss to me... I am a child of Atatürk;*[14] *I admire him deeply. If I can freely say "I am Turkish" and walk around saying "Turkey is my homeland," I owe that to him. Giving up my citizenship sounds like rejecting all of that. It is something very valuable.*

Like many in Group 2 who came to Germany for educational or professional reasons, Poyraz also migrated as a white-collar worker and feels a sense of gratitude and moral obligation toward Turkey:

*I come from a very poor family. Turkey gave me every opportunity I could have wished for. I believe I received the best education possible. This country took a poor child, educated me, and brought me to the point where I can now work abroad. That is why I feel a sense of indebtedness. If citizenship is the symbol of that debt, then I want to honor it.*

### 5.3.2. Reasons for the Reluctance to Naturalize

This group was not interested in the recent reform; one was not even aware of it. None of them perceived the reform as something that would affect their lives since they do not consider naturalization. Although there are a couple of different reasons behind the reluctance to naturalize, all share one common reason: not perceiving a difference between German citizenship and permanent residence. They do not see any additional benefits in German citizenship that would significantly change their lives. They also do not expect acquiring German citizenship to change how German society perceives them. For example, Burcu stated:

[14] The expression 'Atatürk's children' signifies identification with the republican, secular, and modernist values promoted by Atatürk during Turkey's nation-building process.

> *Even if you carry a German passport, people still judge you based on your name. Just saying "I am a German citizen" does not change much. When you apply for something, your name, your last name, and your dark hair and eyes always become a barrier. Being a German citizen does not mean that all doors will open for you. That is why I was never really interested.*

Similar to what Burcu described, Pelin shared an example from her husband's workplace, where a German colleague called him a "German on paper" during an argument, even though he was born and raised in Germany and holds German citizenship. Moreover, two of the participants think that even though they are not required to renounce their Turkish citizenship anymore, they would feel emotionally uncomfortable having a German citizenship. For example, Hatice, who spent 33 years of her life in Germany, considers both Turkey and Germany as her homelands. She sees her future in Germany with her children and is happy living there. She is comfortable with the idea of her children choosing German citizenship since they grew up there. While she has always considered German citizenship for her children, she has never considered it for herself, even after dual citizenship is allowed. She stated:

> *Since I grew up in Turkey, my Turkish identity and sense of nationalism are strong in certain things, so I never considered giving up my Turkish citizenship to gain German citizenship or to have both. I always want to keep my Turkishness. I never thought about adopting the German identity. Integration is necessary, but without losing our roots. …Saying "I am German" just does not feel right to me…I would feel like I had betrayed my Turkish identity…My husband and I always thought that since we came here as Turks, we should remain Turks.*

Thus, Hatice sees acquiring German citizenship, even alongside keeping her Turkish citizenship, as a betrayal of her Turkish identity. She also explained that she made this decision together with her husband, which shows that family dynamics are important in naturalization decisions, as Bauböck (1994) also explains in his case study from Vienna. Similar to Hatice, Poyraz does not want to apply for dual citizenship and feels a debt of gratitude to Turkey. He also feels that acquiring German citizenship would be a betrayal:

> *If this feeling of indebtedness is symbolized by my citizenship, or if I am being too sentimental about it… Emotional bonds are formed this way, or concepts are created like this. I respect that. That is why I do not want to carry an additional passport in my pocket. I am not someone who is after many things. Atatürk founded this country and*

> *went through many hardships. I do not want to carry someone else's passport just to avoid applying for a couple of visas. It seems very strange to me.*

The situation of Hatice and Poyraz is similar to what Witte (2018) describes regarding symbolic boundaries, which are drawn not only by the majority population (e.g., Germans) but also by minorities (e.g., Turkish immigrants). In his study, Witte emphasizes the agency of Turkish immigrants in shaping these boundaries, which is also evident in this study. For Hatice and Poyraz, German citizenship is not only perceived as unnecessary but also evokes discomfort, making it unattractive to them.

Additionally, Burcu said she could have considered applying for German citizenship after the reform; however, after learning about the expanded naturalization test questionnaire,[15] including questions about Israel, she decided not to apply. She interpreted the expanded test as follows:

> *I thought about applying for dual citizenship because both countries are my homeland. But one paragraph in the application stated that by signing, I agree to recognize Israel and promise not to write anything against them or oppose them in any way. That made me uncomfortable, so I did not even consider it.*

Since Burcu was the only participant in this group who decided against applying for German citizenship specifically because of the naturalization test, it is not possible to draw a general conclusion about the impact of the revised questions. However, Nesrin from Group 1, who had previously withdrawn her application before the reform, also hinted that being asked questions about Israel implies accepting the situation faced by the Palestinian people. While these concerns were expressed by only two individuals, they show that the content of the naturalization test may influence some individuals' decisions to naturalize. Expressing her distrust toward such policies, Burcu also added: "What if one day they pass another law and try

[15] With the recent reform, the naturalization test questionnaire was expanded. New questions were added about the right of the State of Israel to exist. See Bundesministerium des Innern (Federal Ministry of the Interior of Germany), "Neues Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht tritt in Kraft: Einbürgerungen schneller möglich, Voraussetzungen aber strenger" [New Nationality Law Comes into Force: Naturalizations Possible Sooner, but Conditions Stricter], June 25, 2024, https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2024/06/stag-inkraft.html.

to deport us? Where would they send me? I have a homeland. I would go to my country. No problem at all." Poyraz also expressed his distrust toward the stability of citizenship policies and raised concerns about potential future changes. He also referred to the potential of being "sent away":

> *I do not really believe it is very realistic because the rights you are given can be taken away. You think you are in a very democratic place, but then you realize democracy is not really there... When they see the economy going a bit badly, then they will say, "You have to choose between the two citizenships." ...What could happen if they were to expel me? I am not stuck in their country. I can always go back and live in my own country, so I do not have such worries.*

Group 3 does not see an urgent reason to naturalize, and although two of them mentioned concerns about German politics, they are confident that they have a homeland they can return to anytime. This is also seen in previous groups, with Turkey and Turkish citizenship regarded as an "exit." This does not mean the participants are totally happy with Turkey's current situation. On the contrary, the majority expressed negative views about current Turkish politics, but they still see it as a safe home to which they could flee and could always be welcomed, in contrast to the destination country, where anti-immigrant sentiments are on the rise.

# 6. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the implications of Germany's recent citizenship law reform on the naturalization intentions of Turkish immigrants. It argues that it is not possible to draw a general conclusion about these intentions, as motivations vary before and after the reform. Therefore, participants were grouped based on their naturalization preferences before and after the reform.

The first group consists of individuals who were already motivated to naturalize before the reform but had not done so. Although they did not see the dual citizenship ban as a direct obstacle, they recognized the significance of lifting it for the broader immigrant population. In this group, Turkey's Blue Card policy played a role in shaping their attitudes. It provided a sense of reassurance that rights in Turkey could be retained (except voting rights), which made naturalization in Germany seem less risky even before the reform. While they do not have strong instrumental reasons to naturalize, three participants expressed that acquiring German citizenship could positively affect their sense of belonging, as they view both Germany and Turkey as "home." Their motivations also included rising anti-immigrant sentiments in Germany, which was a recurring concern in the second group as well. Regarding the first subsection of my first research question, which examines how the lifting of the dual citizenship ban has affected the naturalization decisions of individuals who had already considered naturalization before the reform, findings show that among the four individuals in this group, there was no change in their intentions before and after the reform. Both before and after the reform, they were inclined to naturalize.

The second group had refrained from naturalizing before the reform specifically because of the dual citizenship ban. Moreover, two participants emphasized that the ban created an inequality between immigrant groups, particularly between EU citizens and others. Although they had no major instrumental incentive to naturalize in the past (since it would have required renouncing Turkish citizenship), they now feel more open to it. Notably, some members of this

group also described German citizenship in emotional terms, an unexpected finding of this study. The third group remains indifferent to the reform; they did not want to naturalize before, and still do not. They do not perceive additional benefits in acquiring German citizenship. In fact, two participants said they would feel uncomfortable holding both Turkish and German citizenship, which would be a betrayal in their view.

Regarding the second subsection of my first research question, which examines how the lifting of the dual citizenship ban has affected the naturalization decisions of individuals who had not considered naturalization prior to the reform, the participants diverge into two groups. The first group consists of those who were previously disinclined to naturalize due to the dual citizenship ban but are now inclined to pursue naturalization. The second group includes those who remained indifferent both before and after the reform, for various reasons discussed in the Analysis chapter. Thus, while my initial hypothesis suggested that Turkish immigrants who were previously eligible for German citizenship would be more inclined to naturalize after the reform, the findings reveal a more nuanced picture that is better captured through the groupings used in this study.

Regarding the second research question, which explores how non-naturalized Turkish immigrants perceive the value of German and Turkish citizenship before and after the reform, emotional attachment to Turkish citizenship emerged as a recurring theme across all three groups, although it was least pronounced in Group 1. Despite this, members of both Group 1 and Group 2 said that obtaining German citizenship might help them feel more settled in Germany. This finding challenges the "either-or" narrative asserted by certain segments of the literature. Participants recognized both the instrumental and symbolic value of each citizenship.

Moreover, the second hypothesis suggested that individuals with 20 or more years of residence would not become more interested in naturalization after the reform. The findings partially support this: while some long-term residents (20+ years of residence) in Groups 1 and

3 maintained their original stance, others with the same length of residence in Group 2 became newly interested, showing that residence length alone does not fully explain changes in naturalization intentions. However, a large-N study is needed to test this hypothesis.

One unexpected theme that emerged across groups was a desire for security in Germany. Many participants raised concerns about being deported or having to flee to Turkey if a far-right government were to come to power, even though they all held legal residency and had no criminal record. Also, some imagined having to leave in the event of war. Interestingly, despite acknowledging Turkey's political and economic issues, they saw it as a potential safe haven.

Another surprising finding was the influence of homeland politics on participants' attitudes toward their Turkish citizenship. For one participant, political developments in Turkey led to a sense of alienation from Turkey. For two of them, who are opposed to the current Turkish government, these developments deepened their attachment to Turkey, as they felt a duty to protect the ideals of the republic. Many participants, especially in the second group, expressed strong feelings of indebtedness and loyalty, often invoking Atatürk and the founding values of the Turkish Republic. Although I was expecting them to attribute emotional values to their Turkish citizenship, I was not expecting them to make a connection between their citizenship and the ideals of Turkey's founding leader.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that those who strongly identified with Turkish citizenship would be less likely to naturalize even after the reform. This was not broadly supported. In Group 1, one individual strongly identified with Turkish citizenship but still intended to naturalize (even before the reform). All participants in Group 2 shared a strong attachment to Turkish citizenship, yet expressed interest in naturalizing, but only after dual citizenship acceptance. Only two individuals in Group 3 aligned with this hypothesis, viewing naturalization (even as dual citizens) as a form of betrayal.

In terms of my contributions to the literature, this study offers insights into a very recent reform that has not yet been explored through either quantitative or qualitative research. Specifically, one of my key contributions is in showing that individuals can maintain genuine ties to more than one country and attribute both instrumental and symbolic meanings to multiple citizenships simultaneously. This case study provides empirical support for Rainer Bauböck's previous theorization on the topic.

The limitations of the research are also acknowledged. Due to time, funding, and the novelty of the reform, a broader and mixed-methods approach was not feasible. With more resources and available data, this study could be expanded to include a larger survey and follow-up interviews. Additionally, Turkish citizens in Germany are highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, political views, and occupation. This study was not able to capture the full spectrum of perspectives. Thus, further inquiry should incorporate a wider empirical reach that better reflects the heterogeneity of the research subjects.

# APPENDIX

## Participant Consent Form (English and Turkish Versions)

### Participant Consent Form

I hereby consent to participate in a conversation within the scope of a research project conducted by Ülkü Rümeysa Kaygısız under the supervision of Professor Rainer Bauböck and Associate Professor Szabolcs Pogonyi at Central European University. I agree to participate voluntarily, without any pressure or coercion. I confirm that I have been briefed on the research project by the researcher.

I consent to the conversation being recorded using a voice recorder and understand that my identity will be anonymized in the research. The data will be only used for Ülkü Rümeysa Kaygısız's master's thesis, and my statements may be quoted verbatim without my name.

I may withdraw my participation within 24 hours by notifying the researcher. Upon withdrawal, my data will be deleted and not used in the research.

**Participant's Name:** _____

**Signature:** _____

**Date:** _____

### Katılımcı Rıza Formu

Bu belgeyi imzalayarak, Orta Avrupa Üniversitesi'nde Profesör Rainer Bauböck ve Doçent Dr. Szabolcs Pogonyi'nin danışmanlığında, Ülkü Rümeysa Kaygısız tarafından yürütülen bir araştırma projesi kapsamında gerçekleştirilecek görüşmeye katılmaya rıza gösterdiğimi beyan ederim. Katılımımın tamamen gönüllü olduğunu, herhangi bir baskı veya zorlama altında bulunmadığımı onaylıyorum. Araştırmacı tarafından proje hakkında bilgilendirildiğimi kabul ediyorum.

Görüşmenin ses kaydı alınmasına rıza gösteriyorum ve kimliğimin araştırmada anonimleştirileceğini anlıyorum. Elde edilen veriler yalnızca Ülkü Rümeysa Kaygısız'ın yüksek lisans tezinde kullanılacak olup, ismim belirtilmeden doğrudan alıntılanabilir.

Katılımımı geri çekmek istersem, araştırmacıya bildirimde bulunarak 24 saat içinde ayrılabilirim. Bu durumda, verilerim silinecek ve araştırmada kullanılmayacaktır.

**Katılımcının Adı:** _____

**İmza:** _____

**Tarih:** _____

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