

The Future Voters of Germany: The impact of demographic developments and policy changes on the electorate

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Demographic studies have very rarely addressed the question of how the electorate in different European countries might change in the future due to demographic processes or policy changes. The few studies that do touch upon these issues mostly state whether the percentage share of migrants who cannot vote in their host country is expected to increase in the future (Münz/Seifert/Ulrich 1999:196, Münz/Ulrich 1997:55, Deutscher Bundestag 1998:791, Ulrich 2001). Studies from other academic areas have analysed past legal changes of citizenship laws (Preuss 2003, Bauböck et al. 2006) and have discussed the question whether immigrants should be allowed to vote in their host country (Rubio-Marín 2000). Very few studies have however sought to quantitatively estimate future developments of the electorates in Europe.

This topic is however a highly important one, as members of the electorate confer democratic legitimacy to a political system by participating in elections. If the size of the electorate of a state changes in the future, the democratic legitimacy of the political system might thus be affected. Two groups of factors can be distinguished which are assumed to have an impact on the future development of the electorates of European states: first, demographic variables and second, legal definitions of who is a member of the electorate, which are normally included in citizenship laws and voting laws.

Concerning the first factor, demographic variables such as fertility, mortality and migration determine how many individuals will be born into or leave the electorate and the non-electorate of a state. In most European countries today, the two major groups of individuals who are excluded from voting (non-electorate) are children of minor age as well as residents of foreign nationality (Beckman 2008). Especially future fertility rates and migration rates will therefore have a strong influence on how many young people below voting age and how many foreign residents will live in a country and thus influence the relative size of the non-electorate. Apart from the above-mentioned demographic variables, future naturalization rates are of interest, as they determine how many migrants acquire the citizenship of their host country and thus become part of the electorate.

Concerning the second factor, citizenship laws and voting laws matter in determining the future relative sizes of non-electorate and electorate within a population. In most democratic systems today, only citizens who have reached a certain minimum age enjoy full voting rights. The definition of who is a citizen is provided by citizenship laws. These laws also set out the procedures and requirements for naturalization. Voting laws specify age limits or other criteria which have to be met to be entitled to vote. Changes in these laws could have an impact on the future relative size of the electorate of a country e.g. by facilitating naturalization or by lowering the voting age. The extent to which such changes in law could have an impact on the future development of the electorate in European states has however not been systematically analysed.

Focusing on the case of Germany, this study contributes to close this research gap by modeling the impact which demographic factors and changes in policy would have on the future development of the electorate. The focus is set here on the electorate of federal level elections, which under current law consists of German citizens above age 18. While the study

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will be limited to Germany, the methods and analyses used here could also be applied to other countries. In this case, Germany was chosen as a case study for two reasons.

First, it has been the destination of major numbers of foreign migrants during the past decades, many of whom have settled down there. As naturalization rates have generally been low, only a part of these migrants has acquired full political rights (Münz/Ulrich 1997). Consequently, this group of the non-electorate has increased in size. In 2008, about 7.2 million foreigners who are not entitled to vote because of their lack of the German nationality were living in Germany. At the same time, low fertility rates have persisted in Germany since the 1970s (Dorbritz 2008). As fewer young people were born into the German society, this group of non-eligible voters decreased. It will be interesting to see which of those two trends will be dominant in the future, i.e. if the share of the non-electorate in Germany will be more likely to increase in the future due to migration or if it will be more likely to decrease as fertility rates stay at a sub-replacement level.

The second reason for which Germany was chosen as a case study is that German citizenship laws have been subject to several reforms during the last 20 years in order to allow for a better integration of the foreign resident population into the political community. Hence, naturalization was made somewhat easier and children of migrant parents now acquire the German citizenship at birth if certain conditions are met (Hailbronner 2006). To the knowledge of the author, no studies have so far systematically analysed to which extent these or other changes in laws will have the desired effect, that is, to include more of the long-term foreign residents and their children into the German electorate in the future.

By analyzing the impact of both demographic developments and policy changes on the future size and development of the electorate in Germany, this study will contribute to our understanding of how political rights will be distributed in societies experiencing low fertility rates and high immigration and how political reforms of citizenship and voting policies might be used to influence these trends. The following central questions guide this research project, the first focusing on the impact of demographic factors, the second question analysing the influence that future changes in pertinent law might exert:

1. Assuming that current citizenship law and voting law will remain unchanged in the future; will the relative size of the electorate decline or increase in relation to the non-electorate?
2. In case the relative size of the electorate is found to decrease in the future, could this trend be counteracted by reforms of the citizenship law or the voting law?

Methodology and Data

The two research questions defined above will be approached in the following way:

In a first step, this study will project the population living in Germany in the future by means of a multistate population projection. The software which will be used for this purpose is the Population - Development - Environment (PDE) software which was developed at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Vienna. The projection period will be 2008 to 2050.

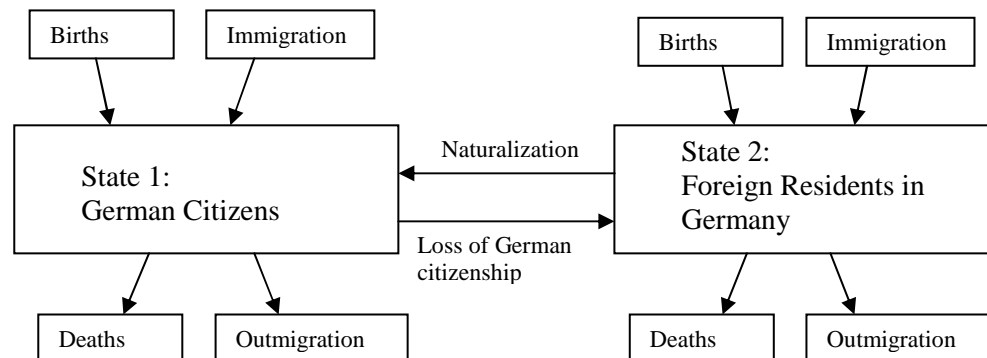
The population will be distinguished by single years of age and sex as well as by citizenship (State 1: German citizens, State 2: Foreign residents). By setting the parameters of the multistate model in this way, it will be possible to calculate for each projection year of different scenarios the relative size of the electorate (German citizens above age 18) and of the non-electorate (German citizens of minor age and all foreign residents).

For each of the two sub-states of the model one to three separate assumptions will be defined concerning the future trajectories of fertility, mortality and migration. The two sub-states will furthermore interact in the model via predefined rates accounting for changes in citizenship (compare Figure 1). The different assumptions of these projection parameters will

be combined so that all in all around nine different scenarios will be used for the population projection.

The assumptions about the future developments of the four parameters will be made on the basis of past developments of the respective demographic parameters and on the basis of research results concerning the factors that have driven these past developments. Data series covering fertility, mortality, migration and naturalization developments of the past 30 years or more have been obtained from the Federal Statistical Office (data on fertility, migration, naturalization) and from the Federal Health Monitoring System (data on mortality).

Figure 1: The Multistate Population Projection Model



In a second step, the focus will be set on those scenarios which result in a declining share of the electorate among the overall population. For each of these scenarios, it will be calculated to which extent specific changes in citizenship or voting laws could be used to counteract this trend. The following policy scenarios will be used for this analysis:

1. Lowering of the voting age by two years, i.e. all 16- and 17-year old citizens will be included into the electorate;
2. Increase in naturalization rates: This could be the result of an abolishment of the requirement to renounce the previous nationality upon naturalization. This step has led to significant increases in naturalization rates in other countries (Groenendijk/Heijs 1999). It is assumed that such a reform would have the same result in Germany, and hence lead to an increase naturalization rates. As a result, more foreign residents would acquire the German citizenship and full political rights each year.
3. Abolishment of a current requirement in citizenship law, according to which children of migrants can acquire the German citizenship at birth² but have to opt for one of their nationalities within five years when they turn 18 (Hailbronner 2006:224). In this policy scenario, it will be assumed that in the future all concerned young persons will be allowed to keep both of their nationalities when they reach majority age. The result would be that all concerned second-generation migrants keep their German nationality and will become part of the electorate after their 18th birthday.

² Children who are born in Germany to parents of foreign nationality acquire the German citizenship at birth if at least one of the parents has legally lived in Germany for eight years and has been in possession of a residence permit (*Aufenthaltsberechtigung*) or an unlimited *Aufenthaltserlaubnis* for the last three years (compare Gesetz zur Reform des Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts, BGBl. 23.07.1999, p. 1618).

Preliminary Results and Outlook

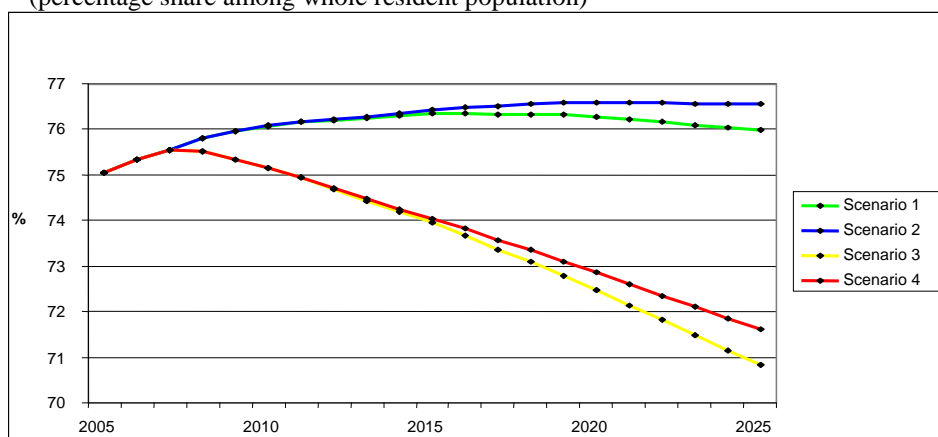
In the year 2007, 76% of the population living in Germany had full voting rights. The remaining 24% were not entitled to full voting rights because of their minor age or because they did not have German citizenship (own calculations; data obtained from the Federal Statistical Office). Preliminary analyses show that if only different trajectories concerning future net migration of foreign citizens and concerning naturalization rates are considered, the relative sizes of these two groups is likely to change during the next 15 years. However, both a relative increase and a relative decrease of the size of the electorate are possible.

For these preliminary analyses four scenarios were defined, combining a high and a low assumption about future net migration of foreign residents (net migration of 200.000 per year vs. net migration of 40.000 per year) with two assumptions about future trajectories for naturalization rates (yearly decline of naturalization rates by 3%, starting from 2007 vs. yearly increase of naturalization rates by 1%). Life expectancy was assumed to increase in a linear way in all scenarios. All of the other variables of the model were kept constant at current (2007) levels. The following four scenarios resulted:

- Scenario 1: Low net migration of foreign citizens/low naturalization rates
- Scenario 2: Low net migration of foreign citizens/high naturalization rates
- Scenario 3: High net migration of foreign citizens/low naturalization rates
- Scenario 4: High net migration of foreign citizens/high naturalization rates

Figure 2 shows the development of the electorate in Germany for each of the four scenarios until 2025. As can be seen, the share of the electorate among the whole population living in Germany ranges between around 71% and around 77%. Figure 2 indicates that the future level of net migration will have a crucial impact on the development of the electorate in Germany, much more so than future naturalization practices. The relative size of the electorate will slightly increase in case of low net migration, both if low and high naturalization rates are assumed (scenarios 1 and 2). In contrast to this, there will be a decline in the relative size of the electorate in case of high annual net migration numbers, again independently of which trajectory for future naturalization is assumed (scenarios 3 and 4).

Figure 2: Development of electorate in Germany 2005-2025
(percentage share among whole resident population)



In order to substantiate these findings, it will be tested during the next months whether different trends will appear if the assumptions about future naturalization and migration trajectories are changed. It will also be analysed whether different high and low assumptions about future developments in fertility, mortality and migration of Germans will significantly change these trends. Furthermore, the projection period will be extended until 2050 to see if the displayed trends will continue in the future. Finally, this study will focus on those

scenarios which result in a relative decline of the electorate (so far, scenarios 3 and 4) and analyze whether the three policy scenarios which were described above would have an impact on these developments if they were implemented. The results of these analyses are expected to be finished by summer 2010 and could therefore be included in the presentation at the EPC conference.

All in all, this research project attempts to show the effects of different demographic scenarios on the development of the electorate and to analyse to what extent public policies could be used to influence these trends. Thereby, this study contributes to our understanding of how policy reforms can be used to keep the share of persons who can participate in political elections stable in a context of high net migration and low fertility rates.

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