



TRANSATLANTIC TRENDS: IMMIGRATION FOCUS PAPERS

# THE IMPACT OF THE “SARRAZIN DEBATE” ON THE GERMAN PUBLIC’S VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION

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JAN-PHILIP STEINMANN



TRANSATLANTIC TRENDS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the late summer of 2010, the comparatively moderate German debate on the issue of migration suddenly gained great momentum when the book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (the title may be translated into “Germany abolishes itself”) was published, written by the now former board member of the German Federal Bank, Thilo Sarrazin. Throughout the book, the author criticizes the allegedly adverse effects of immigration on German culture, economy, demography, and criminal behavior, as well as Muslim migrants’ supposed failure to integrate.

In this paper, we use data from the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* (TTI) survey in order to analyze if and to what extent the heated German debate about this book had an impact on migration-related attitudes. Fieldwork for TTI 2010 started by chance almost simultaneous with the pre-release of the book, a unique opportunity for those who are interested in the impact of the media on public opinion. In order to also grasp medium-term changes, a second wave of data collection in Germany was completed about two months after the first wave was finished. This second wave of data collection is also analyzed here.

The most important result is that there was no substantial and enduring change in public attitudes on immigration. This overall attitudinal stability can also be found for those societal groups that usually differ in their evaluation of the consequences of migration, i.e. natives with relatively high and low levels of education or with right and left wing political orientations. However, this more detailed look yields some exceptions to the overall stability. Most importantly, natives with low levels of education evaluated Muslim migrants’ integration significantly more negatively after the debate evolved. The increase in migration-skeptical attitudes peaked by the beginning of the second wave of data collection, i.e. about two months after the book was published. These findings are

in accordance with results from earlier studies that have shown that news reports on migration are most likely to affect attitudes with a time lag of about one to two months.

However, the identified effects have not only been rather small but also temporary. It seems that those who were skeptical about immigration and integration before the book’s appearance have felt vindicated by Sarrazin’s book, while those who have had a more positive opinion have remained optimistic and joined the broad alliance of those who have met the publication with criticism. While both sides have held on to their beliefs, there is, overall, no evidence that they have become more polarized during the debate. An exception to this finding is mainly the slight and temporary polarization of the attitudes of natives with high and low levels of education about Muslim migrants’ integration.

The authors are confident that the moderate dynamic in attitudes is in fact related to the debate. Most importantly, this is because the findings reveal that attitudes on exactly those issues that were at the center of Sarrazin’s book have changed — even if only slightly and temporarily. Attitudes on issues that are not featured prominently in the book, e.g. attitudes on migrants’ integration in general and on perceived economic competition, have, in turn, remained absolutely stable throughout the debate.

While TTI data enabled the study of the impact of the debate on the attitudes of natives in a very detailed way, the authors cannot say anything about the question of how the debate affected the attitudes of migrants themselves. The number of migrants included in TTI is too low to analyze them separately, especially if one is interested in migrants with a Muslim background. Despite natives’ overall attitudinal stability, the authors therefore cannot rule out the possibility that Muslims’ own perceptions of their social acceptance have become more pessimistic.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, the German public debate on immigration and integration has undergone a fundamental transition. It has been increasingly acknowledged that Germany has become a country of immigration — a view now shared by almost 80 percent of all Germans (see *Transatlantic Trends 2010*). Compared to other European countries, immigration is currently not a heavily contested topic in German public debate. Survey data show that few Germans consider immigration to be a political issue of primary importance and many seem satisfied with the performance of the government in this field (*ibid.*). When it comes to the integration of immigrants, many Germans remain more skeptical. In this regard, it is important to note that integration is no longer considered to be a general problem of “foreigners” (“*Ausländerproblem*”) but increasingly related to the issue of Islam (Schiffauer 2007: 114; Spielhaus 2006: 30). However, demands for a ban on “Burkas” or “Minarets” have not been as prominent in Germany as in some other European countries like France or Switzerland. The same applies to support for populist or right wing parties promoting these issues (Lubbers et al 2002).

In the late summer of 2010, the comparatively moderate German debate on this issue suddenly gained great momentum when the book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (the title may be translated to “Germany abolishes itself”) was published, written by the now former board member of the German Federal Bank, Thilo Sarrazin. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with that statement, it sparked off “the most heated German controversy since the ‘*Historikerstreit*’ between Ernst Nolte and Jürgen Habermas in the mid-1980s” (Stefanidis 2011). The weeks and months after its first publication showed that migration is still a contested issue in Germany. The book was the number one bestseller for 21 weeks ([www.buchreport.de](http://www.buchreport.de)). The chancellor, the

federal president, and many other political leaders commented on the case, and for weeks it was almost impossible to switch on the TV or open up a newspaper and not hear or read about Sarrazin’s book.

The public debate was not merely focused on its substantive statements. It also discussed whether the author was finally telling the truth the German public has not been allowed to hear out of political correctness, or whether he was hiding blatantly racist ideas under the blanket of distorted scientific facts. Some — though a minority of — critics painted the book as a “fearless” attempt to finally enlighten the public about the failing integration of Muslim migrants (Kelek 2010), while others described it as similar to the objects of Sarrazin’s rage: “uneducated, quickly proliferating, and way too fat” (Bernard 2010).

It is not the aim of this paper to examine the substantive statements of Sarrazin’s book. There is a broad academic literature on the issues it raised, such as the economic impact of migration and the specifics of integration processes of different ethnic groups. Instead, we want to ask if and to what extent the debate had an impact on migration-related attitudes. As mentioned, the debate was very visible in the media, even though the book was probably bought by many but read by few. Given the important role of news reports in shaping public attitudes on the topic (Schlueter and Davidov 2011; Boomgarden and Vliegenthart 2009), it is an interesting question if Germans in general or certain subgroups have become more skeptical in their assessment of the economic and cultural impact of immigrants’ presence in Germany, or if attitudes remained stable throughout the debate. According to opinion polls conducted by the German Expert Council on Integration and Migration “*Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration*” (see press release from January 10, 2011

under <http://www.svr-migration.de>), the debate had an adverse impact on migrants' optimism on the co-existence of migrants and Germans, while the attitudes of the latter group have just become "more pragmatic." However, these surveys had been conducted between the end of 2009 and the end of 2010 and thus do not allow for a more direct assessment of the more immediate effects of the debate. Furthermore, while majority as well as minority members are interviewed in these surveys, they emphasize the measurement of personal experiences with and perceptions of diversity. They thus provide only limited insight into respondents' attitudes on the general impact of migration on German culture and economy, the very topics that are the focus of Sarrazin's argument (Fassmann 2011).

In contrast, in our study we will analyze data from the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* (TTI) survey that has been conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) annually since 2008. While many surveys collect data on public attitudes on migration-related issues, this one is unique in asking much more specific questions on topics such as the perceived success of Muslims' integration; the assessed economic, fiscal, and cultural impact of immigration in Germany; attitudes about high and low skilled migration; and satisfaction with government performance in this field. By chance, the fieldwork for 2010 started just a few days after the pre-release of Sarrazin's book. This coincidence of a heated public debate about the consequences of migration and the collection of public opinion data on this very topic turned TTI 2010 in Germany into something like a quasi-experiment. To take advantage of this opportunity, i.e. to analyze the medium-term impact of the Sarrazin debate on public attitudes, the survey was

repeated two months later in November 2010.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, many items asked in 2010 were also asked in 2009 and 2011. In sum, we could thus analyze public opinion data from 2009, from the first weeks immediately after the pre-release of the book in 2010, from about two months after the release, and from 2011, one year after the publication of the book. Taken together, these data allow for a detailed analysis of the debate's short-, medium- and long-term impact on public perceptions of immigration and integration in Germany.

We will start out our paper by presenting a chronology of the debate in 2010 and some of Sarrazin's basic statements on immigration and integration. Based on this, we will discuss the relevant theoretical approaches on the issue of migration-related attitudes and specify the mechanisms through which the debate may have affected these attitudes. After describing the measurements and the methodology of our analyses, we will present our findings on how public attitudes evolved over the course of the debate. A discussion concludes this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Two recent empirical studies consider a lag of one or two months as the most relevant time period for the impact of news reports on migration-related attitudes (Schlueter and Davidov 2011; Boomgarden and Vliegthart 2009).

## 2 THE “SARRAZIN DEBATE”: OVERVIEW AND CHRONOLOGY

A pre-release of the book *Germany abolishes itself* was published on August 23, 2010. Four days later, fieldwork for the TTI survey started in six European countries, in the United States, and in Canada, collecting data on public attitudes on migration and integration. Officially the book was released on August 30, 2010. The debate gained momentum in September when Sarrazin appeared on several talk shows, the Federal Bank prepared his removal from office — he resigned from his post on September 9 — and the Social Democratic Party looked into the possibility of excluding him as a party member. By September 13, the book was a number one bestseller, where it stayed until February 5, 2011. By early October — only one month after the book’s publication — more than 1 million copies had been sold.

The book’s general strategy is to formulate poignant and provocative statements and to “prove” them with allegedly “hard” but convoluted and distorted data and facts. The main topics relevant for this paper are immigration, its impact on German culture, demography, public services, and the economy, as well as the supposedly failing integration of Muslim migrants. Sarrazin considers the immigration of Muslim migrants a direct threat to German liberalism and lifestyle (2010: 266) and claims that this cultural threat is even more problematic since this group is not making any meaningful contribution to the German economy. According to the author, Muslim migrants are uneducated, unproductive, and not motivated to work; the same applies to this group’s allegedly higher tendency for violent behavior (ibid.: 291). Sarrazin views these problems as typical for Muslim migrants and argues that, compared to native Germans, other immigrant groups have similar employment levels and lower crime rates (ibid.: 283).

When it comes to explaining Muslim migrants’ alleged failure to integrate, he discusses cultural and motivational aspects (ibid.: 260-265, 282-299). According to the author, discrimination does not contribute to this group’s lagging integration (ibid.: 287). Instead, cultural backwardness and Islam itself are held responsible, in combination with a lack of interest in becoming independent and being successful: “*A lack of integration is due to the attitudes of Muslim immigrants*” (ibid.: 289, own translation, italics in the original). Furthermore, he claims that this group can improve its standard of living (as compared to the respective country of origin) just by living on transfer payments, while migrants from richer countries need to work in order to do so. Family reunification is accelerating this “migration into the welfare system” (ibid.: 370, own translation). Sarrazin expects this situation to worsen in the future because second and third generation migrants are even more likely to apply for social benefits instead of engaging in the labor force (ibid.: 264, 284). Moreover, Muslim migrants have higher fertility rates than natives, especially when compared to more educated German women (ibid.: 346f). Following his own calculations, Muslim migrants’ share of the German population will thus increase to about 70 percent in four generations from now (ibid.: 359).

Summed up, the allegedly adverse effects on German culture, economy, demography, and criminal behavior, as well as Muslim migrants’ supposedly failing integration even in the second and third generation are the focus of the migration-related chapters of the book. Several items are included in the TTI survey that capture public attitudes on these very issues. Why would one expect these attitudes to be affected by the “Sarrazin-debate” at all?

**Table 1: Chronology of Events**

Survey Wave	Date	Events
	Aug. 23	• First coverage by SPIEGEL and BILD
	Aug. 25	• Gabriel (party chairman of the Social Democratic Party) asks Sarrazin to leave the party • Merkel (Federal Chancellor) calls Sarrazin's statements defamatory
First Wave <sup>1</sup>	Aug. 27	• Käßmann, former chairperson of the Evangelical Church in Germany, calls Sarrazin's comments on Muslims "inhuman"
	Aug. 30	• Official publication of <i>Deutschland schafft sich ab</i> in Berlin • The book's first edition is temporarily out of print • Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank rejects Sarrazin's statements • Sarrazin is a talk show guest on the TV show "Beckmann"
	Aug. 31	• Two public readings by Sarrazin are cancelled
	Sept. 1	• TV appearance by Sarrazin on the TV show "hart aber fair" • Wulff (Federal President) implicitly calls for a removal of Sarrazin from his office as board member of the Deutsche Bundesbank
	Sept. 2	• Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank puts in a request to the federal president to disempower Sarrazin as a board member
	Sept. 3	• Sarrazin's district chapter in Berlin instigates his exclusion from the Social Democratic Party
	Sept. 6	• Sarrazin takes part in a discussion about integration in Berlin
	Sept. 9	• Sarrazin's first public reading in Potsdam • Consensual termination of Sarrazin's employment with the Deutsche Bundesbank at the end of the month
	Sept. 10	• Sarrazin's second public reading in Berlin
	Sept. 13	• The federal executive board of the Social Democrats begins internal proceedings against Sarrazin • <i>Deutschland schafft sich ab</i> is the bestselling book in Germany for the following 21 weeks
Sept. 18	• Sarrazin gives his view on the intraparty proceedings against him • Federal Chancellor Merkel confirms her criticism about Sarrazin's statements	
Sept. 27	• Sarrazin is a talk show guest on the TV show "Vis-à-vis"	
Sept. 29	• Presentation of the book in Munich	
Oct. 1	• About 1 million copies of <i>Deutschland schafft sich ab</i> had been sold	
Oct. 3	• In the context of German Unity Day, Federal President Wulff expresses his opinion on questions regarding integration in Germany and emphasizes: "Islam also belongs in Germany"	
Oct. 8	• Sarrazin presents his book at the Frankfurt Book Fair	
Oct. 27	• TV show "Stern TV" invites Sarrazin	
Oct. 31	• Sarrazin criticizes Federal President Wulff for his statements concerning Islam	
Nov. 8	• Presentation of Sarrazin's book in Pforzheim with live stream online	
Second Wave <sup>2</sup>	Nov. 11	• Sarrazin presents his book in Menden
	Nov. 14	• The 13th edition of Sarrazin's book contains a foreword, which comments on the current debate, and a few passages are modified
	Nov. 15	• Public reading by Sarrazin in Dortmund • The former federal minister of finance and Social Democrat Steinbrück rejects an exclusion of Sarrazin from the party
	Nov. 23	• Sarrazin gives a reading in Düsseldorf • Former chancellor Schmidt denies the need to exclude Sarrazin from the party
	Nov. 25	• Presentation of Sarrazin's book in Görlitz
	Nov. 29	• Public reading by Sarrazin in Duisburg • Appearance of Sarrazin on the TV show "Menschen bei Maischberger"
	Nov. 30	• Sarrazin gives two readings in Sindelfingen

<sup>1</sup> The first wave took place Aug. 27 - Sept. 10, 2010

<sup>2</sup> The second wave took place Nov. 9 - Nov. 24, 2010

# 3 WHY SHOULD THE DEBATE HAVE AFFECTED MIGRATION-RELATED PUBLIC ATTITUDES?

The question of why and how migration-related public attitudes should have been affected by the “Sarrazin debate” cannot be answered without elaborating on the question of which factors affect these attitudes in general. Nevertheless, many existing theoretical approaches in the field can legitimately be ignored here because they are not suitable for explaining the short-term variation in attitudes we are interested in. This applies, for example, to some micro-level explanations such as authoritarianism, as well as to macro-level approaches focusing on anomia (i.e. the absence of norms and rules) or societal disintegration that aim to explain historical change or cross-national differences in anti-immigration attitudes (for an overview see Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Ganter 2003). We will thus limit ourselves to those approaches that concentrate on the conditions that lead to increasing economic or symbolic group conflict (Semyonov et al 2006).

Theoretical approaches focusing on perceived or real competitive threat feature prominently in this field of research, especially because they offer an explanation for observable differences across contexts or change over time in the strength of anti-immigrant sentiment. Competitive threat can take different forms, most importantly economic or cultural, and these are not mutually exclusive. Theories of realistic group conflict focus on economic threat to real group interests, practices, and resources, while group-threat theory, “emphasize[s] the perception of threat to dominant group prerogatives” (Quillian 1995: 588). Increased group competition enhances in-group solidarity and the proneness to out-group devaluation (see Sherif & Sherif 1979: 11). The latter is met with collectively shared feelings of superiority, social distance, and fear of status loss (see Blumer 1958: 3f). These dynamics have been shown regarding migrants in general (see Schneider 2008: 62) as well

as Muslims specifically (see Velasco González et al 2008: 678).

Important factors that have been identified as increasing (perceived) group threat are rising numbers of migrants, worsening economic conditions (Quillian 1995) — and negative news reports on migration issues (Schlueter and Davidov 2011; Lubbers et al 2000). Not all individuals are affected by changes in these conditions to the same degree; rather, macro-level changes interact with individual characteristics. Perceptions of economic threat are influenced by socio-structural variables such as education or occupational status: “Individual-level characteristics indicate in part which individuals are most vulnerable to expressing prejudice when they perceive that their group is threatened” (Quillian 1995: 591). Cultural threat, i.e. perceived threats to collective identity and national homogeneity, is mostly mediated by individual level variables such as political orientation or type of national identity (Semyonov et al 2006: 428).

Based on theoretical approaches emphasizing the importance of perceived economic or cultural threat in explaining migration-related attitudes, it seems quite possible that Sarrazin’s book would affect the attitudes under consideration here. On one hand, it could have increased perceptions that natives and migrants compete for scarce resources such as social benefits. As outlined in the last section, migrants, especially those with a Muslim background, are strongly blamed for their alleged tendency to live on transfer payments. On the other hand, the author’s statements about “culturally distant” Muslim migrants demographically taking over soon may have fostered fears that Germans are becoming a cultural minority in their own country. Empirical research has shown that negative mass media coverage about migration-related issues can have an independent effect on perceived threat (Schlueter and Davidov 2011; Lubbers et al 2000)

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and may increase anti-immigrant attitudes (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009). Even if the debate under consideration here is certainly a special type of media coverage, it seems quite possible that it has strengthened perceived economic or cultural threat in the aftermath of the dispute on Sarrazin's criticism.

Starting out from these theoretical considerations, it seems worthwhile to analyze change in respondents' answers to migration and integration-related questions over the course of the "Sarrazin debate."

# 4 DATA, MEASUREMENTS, AND METHODOLOGY

The following analyses are based on data from the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* survey that has been conducted annually since 2008 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States in six European countries in addition to the United States and Canada. The number of countries included in the survey changes slightly between the years. Computer assisted telephone interviews with 1,000 randomly sampled adults per country are conducted by TNS opinion. The survey allows for cross-sectional analyses of public opinion on issues such as migration, integration, and migration-related government policies (see Gustin and Ziebarth 2010). Depending on the item under consideration, the analyses presented here are based on cumulative data that was collected in Germany between 2009 and 2011. Since we are interested in how Sarrain's book affected the attitudes of native Germans on immigrants and their children, only those respondents that have at least one parent who was born in Germany were included in the analysis. This reduces the number of cases to about 900 respondents.

## **Dependent Variables: Attitudes on the Impact of Migration and on (Muslim) Migrants' Integration**

Since the choice of the dependent variables follows the content of Sarrain's book as outlined above, we will focus on two groups of attitudes: attitudes on the impact of immigration and attitudes on (Muslim) migrants' integration. The former set of attitudes is often measured with item batteries that ask about respondents' perceptions of the impact of migration on national culture, on the economy, on public safety, and on the fiscal system. They are often the focus of researchers in the field (see Fertig and Schmidt 2011; Zick et al 2010; Ceobanu and Escandell 2008; McLaren 2003; for Germany: Diehl and Tucci 2010; Rippl 2008), certainly more often than attitudes on immigration, e.g. on the "right" numbers or preferences for certain types of

migrants (see Gustin and Ziebarth 2010; Meuleman et al 2009; Kessler and Freeman 2005; Lahav 2004). In this paper, we will focus on those items that capture the perceived impact of migration in fields that are prominent in Sarrain's book.

### Impact of Migration:

- a) Culture: *Some people think that immigration enriches German culture with new customs and ideas. Others think that these new customs and ideas negatively affect German culture (2-point-scale: immigration enriches German culture — immigration negatively affects German culture)*
- b) Crime: *Legal immigrants increase crime in our society (4-point scale: strongly agree — strongly disagree)*
- c) Social benefits: *Legal immigrants are a burden on social services like schools and hospitals (4-point scale: strongly agree — strongly disagree)*
- d) Economy (index): *Immigrants take jobs away from native-born Germans; Immigrants generally help to fill jobs where there are shortages of workers (recoded); Immigrants help create jobs as they set up new businesses (recoded); Immigrants bring down the wages of German citizens (4-point scale: strongly agree — strongly disagree)*

Items about integration measure respondents' perceptions of how well migrants should or do adapt to their new context. Available data suggest that it is important to differentiate between various groups of immigrants when it comes to public perceptions of integration. In Germany, perceived cultural and social distances toward Turks is much higher than toward other immigrant groups (see Blohm and Wasmer 2008). Survey research has shown that a large majority of Germans think that Turks themselves are prone to segregate (see Leibold and Kühnel 2006: 144). This group's unpopularity is most likely related to their mostly Muslim background. Recent studies show that

Muslims are perceived as being aggressive, egotistical, arrogant, intolerant, and supporting terrorist activities (see Fischer et al 2007: 379; Wike and Grim 2010: 18; Zick and Küpper 2009: 3). About one-third of the German public holds attitudes critical of Islam (see Leibold and Kummerer 2011: 321). This general skepticism about Muslims could have been fueled by Sarrazin's book; as outlined above, Sarrazin draws a strong line between "good" migrants and Muslim migrants, who are allegedly responsible for "70 to 80 percent of all problems in the fields of education, labor market, public transfers, and criminal behavior" (Sarrazin 2010: 262, own translation).

#### Evaluation of Integration:

*Generally speaking, how well do you think that (split sample: Muslim immigrants / immigrants in general) are integrating into German society? (4-point scale: very well — very poorly)*

Half of respondents were asked about Muslim migrants' integration and half about migrants' integration in general. This enables us to analyze if Sarrazin's differentiation between "good" and "bad" migrants found increasing support during the course of the debate.

#### **Independent Variables: Education, National Identity, and Political Orientation**

Since perceived economic competition has been shown to play an important role in explaining attitudes on migration-related issues, the differentiation between natives with high and low levels of education is crucial: the latter group is more prone to compete with overwhelmingly unskilled migrants for jobs and social benefits. We draw the line between people who have achieved the "Abitur," i.e. who are entitled to attend university, and those who have lower educational degrees (see Rippl 2002: 143).

Starting out from a cultural threat perspective, additional independent variables should also be examined. Migration-related threats to in-group integrity and status are higher for those who see migrants as out-group members per se. This is expected to be more strongly the case for natives with an ethnic national identity than for those with a civic-cultural national identity (Diehl and Tucci 2010; Lewin-Epstein and Levanon 2005; Hjerm 1998). In TTI 2010, national identity was captured in a way that yielded a heavily skewed distribution, with most respondents favoring a civic-cultural identity. We will thus take a closer look at right-left orientation in our analyses instead. This variable is not only closely related to national identity, it can also be expected to be an important predictor of perceived migration-related cultural threat (Semyonov et al 2006: 428).

The empirical section of this paper analyzes if and how the answers to the above mentioned items on the impact of migration and migrants' integration have changed over the course of the "Sarrazin debate." With regard to the latter, we built a time dependent variable grouping two to four days of interviewing so that we end up with nine time units spread over the two waves of data collection. According to our theoretical assumptions, we not only analyze attitudinal change over time on the aggregate level but also look separately at natives with high versus low levels of education and with a center-right versus left wing political orientation. This will enable us to analyze if, in the rather short time period under consideration here, existing attitudes that typically vary between subgroups with different levels of education and political orientations may have become more polarized in the course of the Sarrazin debate.

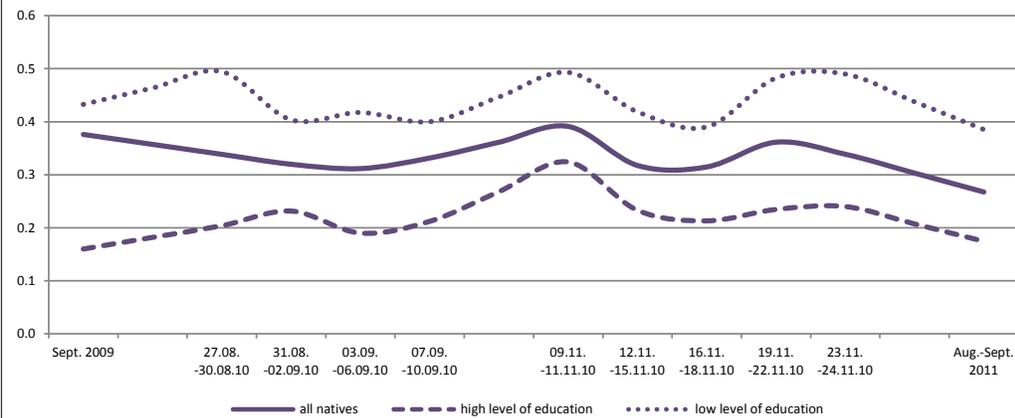
# 5 FINDINGS

A first look at perceptions of the cultural impact of migration shows high stability over time. Sarrazin's worries that his offspring will no longer live in a country that has maintained its "cultural and intellectual capacity" (2010: 392) are obviously not shared by the German public, at least not more strongly than before the publication of the book (see figure

1a/b). This rather optimistic view about the impact of migration on German culture has also been demonstrated by other studies (see Semyonov et al 2008: 12). The slight changes during 2010 are statistically insignificant.

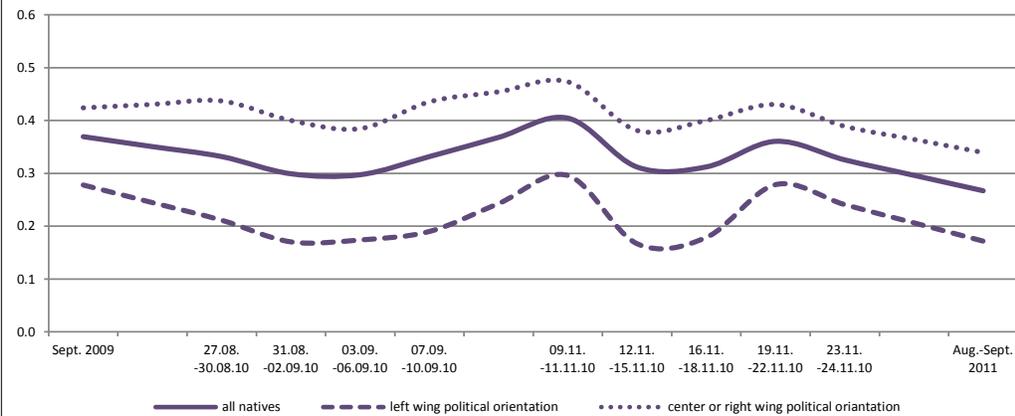
A closer look at attitudinal change among natives with low and high levels of education and differing

**Figure 1a: "Immigration Affects German Culture Negatively" by Level of Education** (means)



Means on a scale from 0 (immigration enriches German culture) to 1 (immigration negatively affects German culture)  
Source: *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (TTI) 2009, 2010 and 2011*, own calculation

**Figure 1b: "Immigration Affects German Culture Negatively" by Political Orientation** (means)



Means on a scale from 0 (immigration enriches German culture) to 1 (immigration negatively affects German culture)  
Source: *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (TTI) 2009, 2010 and 2011*, own calculation

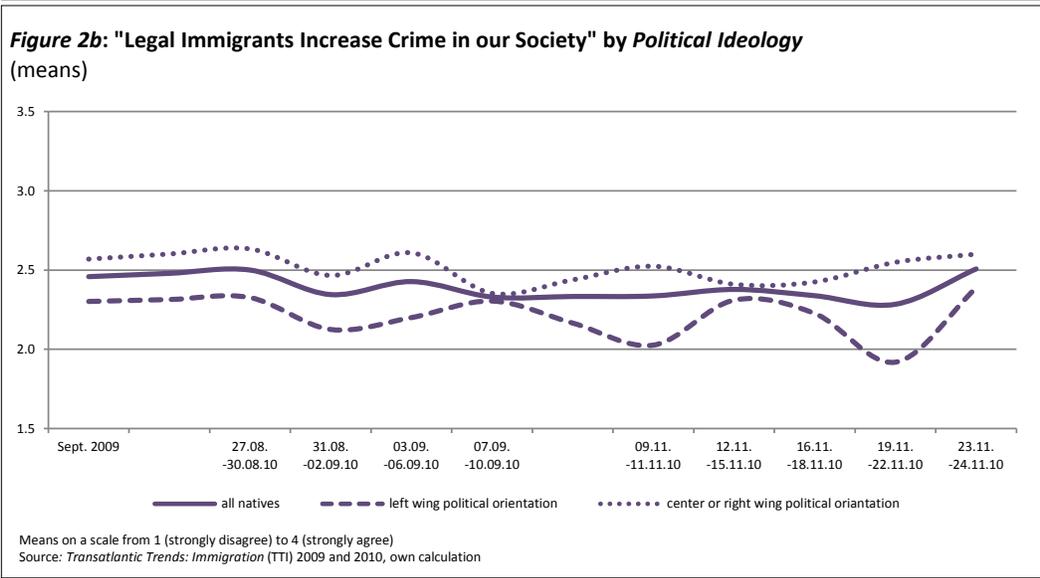
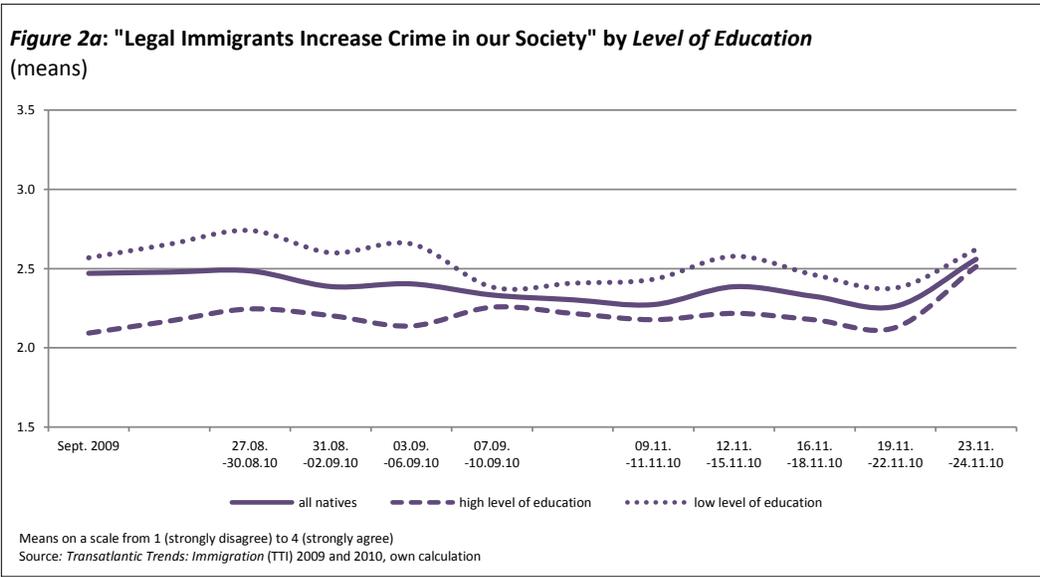
political orientations confirms the theoretical arguments that these groups differ substantially in their assessment of migrants' impact on national culture. Highly significant differences can be found between the groups. Furthermore, we can see in Figure 1a that educated natives show higher levels of skepticism at the onset of the second wave of surveying than during the first wave. However, this increase — though statistically significant — was only of a temporary nature, as we see declining levels of affirmation afterwards. In 2011, the mean is back to the level of 2009, one year before the book's release. Respondents' political orientations have, in turn, a large but rather stable impact on attitudes over time (see Figure 1b).

Knowing that public attitudes about migrants' impact on German *culture* have overall remained rather stable, we can now turn to the perceived impact of immigration on crime, public services, and the economy. As we outlined above, migrants' allegedly higher crime rate is a prominent topic in Sarrazin's book, along with the criticism that this group does not contribute to the German economy. Even more central is the claim that many Muslim migrants show little inclination to work, and live on social benefits instead. Against this backdrop, it is astounding that at least the attitudes on the legal and economic consequences of immigration show a high stability over the course of the debate (see Figure 2-4 a/b).

We can find a statistically significant increase only for worries about migrants being a fiscal burden. Again, skepticism peaked at the beginning of the second wave. It should also be noted, however, that approval of this item was overall lower in 2010 than in the year after the debate and fluctuates rather strongly throughout 2010, which raises the question whether this increase can really be attributed to the "Sarrazin debate." A closer look at the items on migrants' impact by educational level and political orientation (see Figures 2 a/b, 3 a/b and 4 a/b)

shows that natives with low levels of education and a conservative political orientation generally tend to hold more skeptical attitudes than highly educated natives and liberals. This differentiation also reveals that the increase in skepticism about migrants being a burden on social services was particularly pronounced among natives with center or right-wing political orientations and low levels of education (even though the increase is not statistically significant for the latter group).

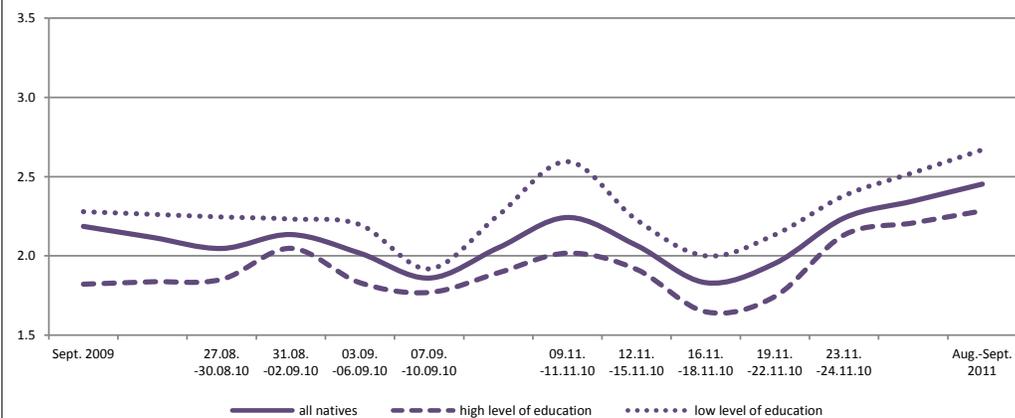
The items we have analyzed so far refer to migrants in general. As we have outlined above, Sarrazin makes a sharp distinction between "good" and "bad" (i.e. Muslim) migrants. It is thus possible that the book and the subsequent debate have not so much changed people's attitudes about migrants in general. After all, many natives have, though often hesitantly, realized that Germany needs migrants for demographic and economic reasons. It is thus an interesting question whether the German public follows Sarrazin's distinction between successful and unsuccessful migrant groups — and if this differentiation has gained salience during the course of the debate. Fortunately, a closer look at TTI data can settle this question. In 2010, a new question was inserted into the questionnaire asking about the perception of migrants' integration. Half of the sample was asked about migrants in general, and half of the sample was asked about Muslims in particular. The results are displayed in Figures 5a and b. We can see, first of all, that Muslim migrants' integration is regarded with substantially greater skepticism than the integration of migrants in general, a finding that has also been shown for other European countries such as Spain and the U.K. (*Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings* 2010). However, we can also see that the size of the gap between the attitudes on migrants in general and of Muslim migrants in particular has widened only marginally throughout the debate.



A first interesting result regarding the differentiation between natives with high and low levels of education is unrelated to the “Sarrazin debate” but important to highlight here: Unlike the attitudes on the impact of migration, attitudes on migrants’ integration do not show a marked difference between natives with high and low levels of education. However, the *evolution* of

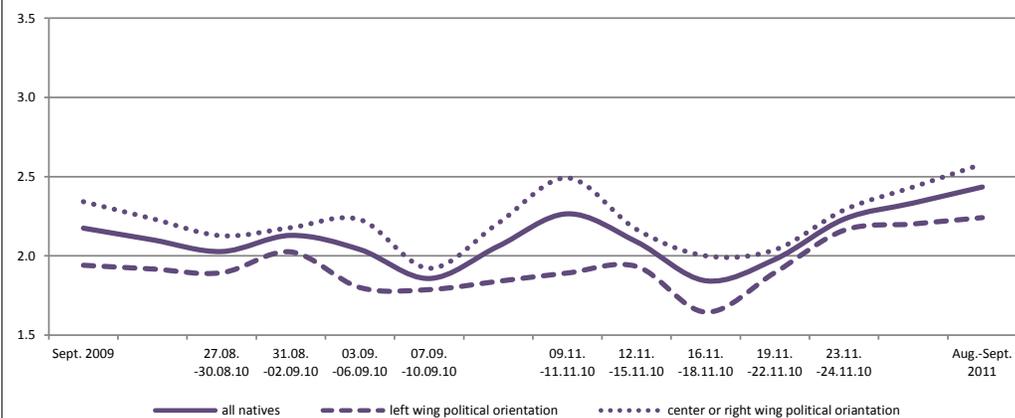
these attitudes over the course of the debate is not the same for skilled and unskilled natives. While attitudes on *migrants’* integration in general have remained stable for both groups of natives over the course of the debate, there was significant change in the attitudes of respondents with a low level of education when it comes to assessing *Muslim* migrants’ integration. Before Sarrazin’s book

**Figure 3a: "Legal Immigrants are a Burden on Social Services like Schools and Hospitals" by Level of Education (means)**



Means on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)  
Source: *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (TTI) 2009, 2010 and 2011, own calculation*

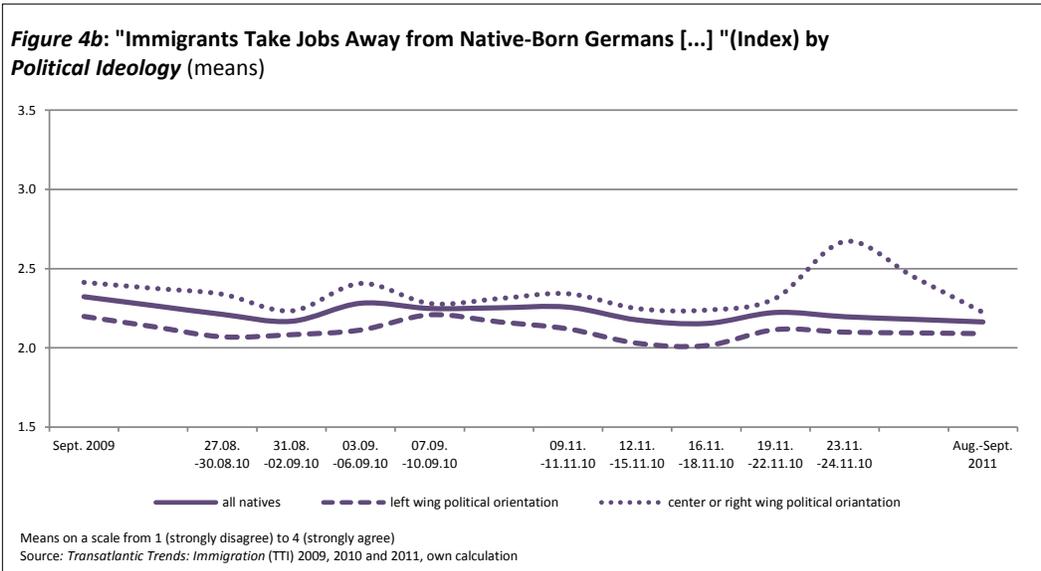
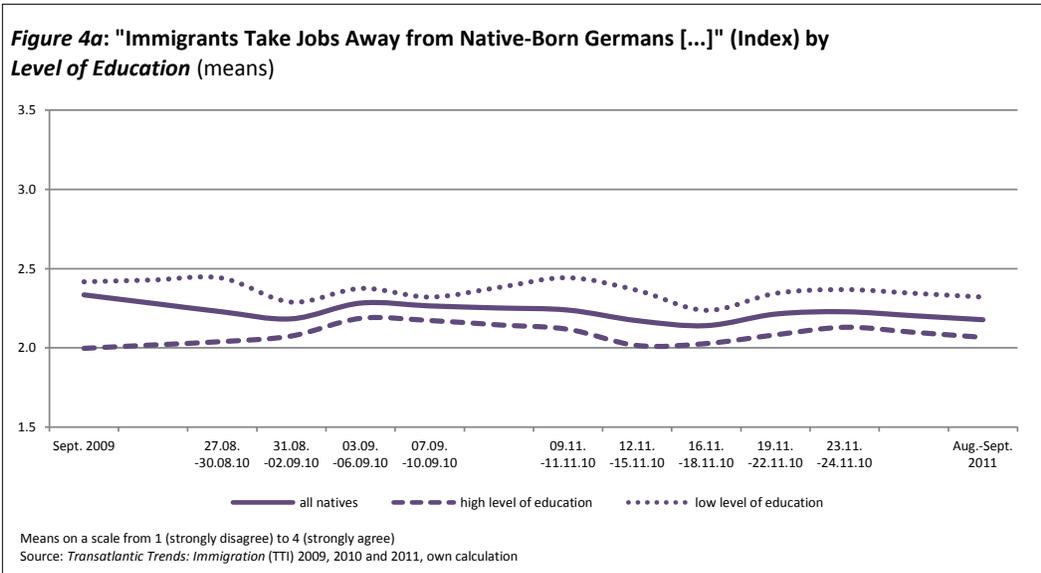
**Figure 3b: "Legal Immigrants are a Burden on Social Services like Schools and Hospitals" by Political Ideology (means)**



Means on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)  
Source: *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (TTI) 2009, 2010 and 2011, own calculation*

was published, this group had held slightly more positive views on this issue than skilled natives, but their attitudes became significantly more skeptical during the debate. On a four-point scale, skepticism rose from about 2.8 by the end of August 2010 to 3.2 in November 2010, a quite substantial change. Again, skepticism peaked at the beginning of the second wave. Since this change was limited to

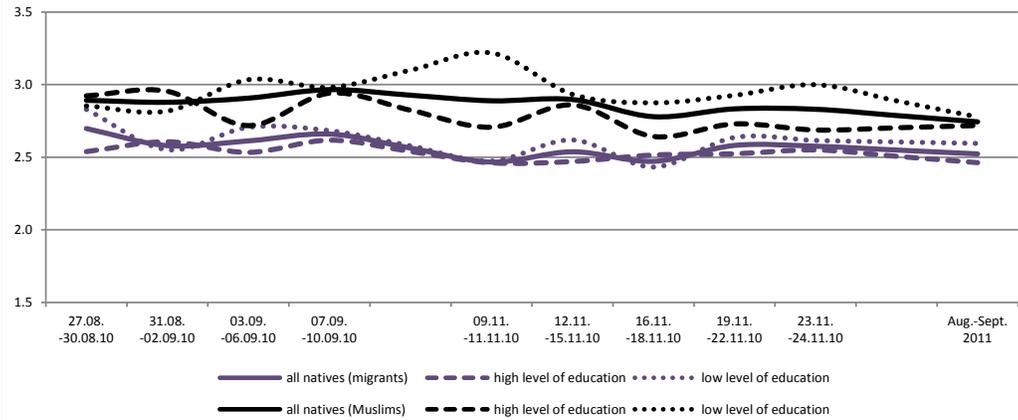
natives with low levels of education, there was a temporary polarization between both groups' assessment of Muslim migrants' integration that was most pronounced in early November. However, both groups' attitudes reconverged afterwards, and one year later there was no significant difference between both groups left. On the ideology issue, we see that the impact of political orientation on



integration related attitudes is less strong than on migration-related topics. Obviously, attitudes on integration cannot be fully explained with the “classical” variables that have been shown to be

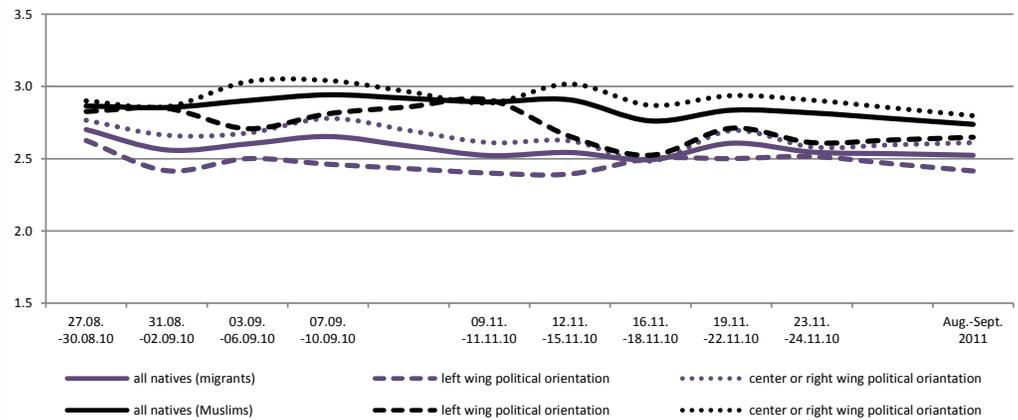
powerful predictors of attitudes on the impact of migration. Further research is needed in order to look into the determinants of integration-related attitudes.

**Figure 5a: "How Well do You Think that (split sample: Muslim immigrants / immigrants) are Integrating" by Level of Education (means)**



Means on a scale from 1 (very well) to 4 (very poorly)  
 Source: *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (TTI) 2010 and 2011*, own calculation

**Figure 5b: "How Well do You Think that (split sample: Muslim immigrants / immigrants) are Integrating" by Political Ideology (means)**



Means on a scale from 1 (very well) to 4 (very poorly)  
 Source: *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (TTI) 2010 and 2011*, own calculation

# 6 CONCLUSION

Our most important result is that there was no substantial and enduring change in migration-related attitudes during the time period considered here. A statistically significant increase in skepticism for the German public in general could only be found for migrants' perceived impact on public services — but it is hard to say if the fluctuations we have found throughout 2010 were actually related to the debate. We further analyzed if this overall attitudinal stability can also be found for specific subgroups that usually differ in their evaluation of the consequences of migration, i.e. natives with high and low levels of education or with right and left wing political orientations. This comparison yielded some exceptions to the general trend.

During the Sarrazin debate, natives with high levels of education became temporarily slightly more skeptical about the impact of migration on German culture. This finding, however, could be related to the phenomenon of “social desirability” rather than to real attitudinal change: The issue of mental censorship (“*Denkverbote*”) played a very important role in the debate, so that it is quite possible that perceived norms about the “appropriate” answers to migration-related survey questions temporarily changed in the course of the debate. These norms might be seen as the standard against which an answer to a survey question is evaluated before it is reported (Strack 1994). Following this, a shift in the perception of these norms may have led to more “honest” answers from those who held immigration-skeptical attitudes before but did not want to admit them because they felt that this violated the norm to be immigrant-friendly. As research has shown, this perception is particularly widespread among educated and liberal respondents (Janus 2010; Stocké 2007). The increase in skepticism about migrants' impact on public services was most pronounced among natives with a center-right political orientation.

Natives with low levels of education were evaluating Muslim migrants' integration significantly more negatively by mid-November (i.e. by the beginning of wave 2) than at the time of the book's pre-release or the year before, but again, this finding needs to be interpreted with caution.

In all three cases, the increase in migration-skeptical attitudes peaked by the beginning of the second wave of surveying. These findings are in accordance with results from earlier studies, which have shown that news reports on migration are most likely to affect attitudes with a time lag of about one to two months. In fact, it is quite possible that skepticism was temporarily even higher between the end of the first wave and the onset of the second wave. In any case, the effects we have identified have not only been rather small but also temporary in nature. Depending on the item, skepticism went back to levels comparable to those at the beginning of fieldwork by the end of the second wave or by 2011.

Overall, our results are a relief, substantively and methodologically. Substantively because it is a good sign that public opinion on the issue is not as volatile as one might think. Obviously, people have not taken the alleged “facts” the book claims to have “revealed” at face value. Or, to put it less optimistically, those who have been skeptical about immigration and integration before the book's appearance have felt vindicated by Sarrazin's book, while those who have had a more positive opinion have remained optimistic and joined the broad alliance of those who have met its publication with criticism. While both sides have held on to their beliefs, there is overall no evidence that they have become more polarized during the debate. In other words, there is no empirical evidence that the societal subgroups differentiated here have reacted *differently* to the debate. An exception to this finding is mainly the slight and temporary polarization of the attitudes of natives with high

and low levels of education about Muslim migrants' integration.

Methodologically, our findings are a relief because if we had found more pronounced change in attitudes, it would have been difficult to link it causally to the factors identified in the theoretical section of this paper. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to determine this sort of relationship on the aggregate level, especially since the effect of the media is often indirect (Schlueter and Davidov 2011: 3; for an individual level analysis on the direct impact of media exposure, see Lubbers et al 2000). In fact, rigorous empirical proof that the attitudinal change we found was caused by the publication of the book and the subsequent debate would have been extremely demanding in terms of data requirements. It would have required information on respondents' exposure to the debate, most importantly their consumption of different media outlets — plus a content analysis of the way the debate was covered in these various outlets.

However, there are several arguments supporting the view that the moderate dynamic in attitudes that we could identify — most importantly increasing skepticism about Muslim migrants' integration among natives with low levels of education — was in fact related to the debate that evolved during fieldwork. First of all, theoretical arguments and past empirical evidence suggest that negative media reports about migration issues do affect perceived threat among natives, with the described time lag being similar to the one studied here. Secondly, our findings reveal that exactly those attitudes that were at the center of Sarrazin's book have changed — even if only slightly and temporarily — while attitudes on issues that are not featured prominently in the book have remained absolutely stable throughout the debate. The latter applies to attitudes on migrants' integration in general and on perceived economic competition, mostly for jobs. Thirdly, our extensive cross-

sectional comparisons have proved that skepticism towards immigration was overall not higher at the time of the book's pre-release than in the year before. This means that the interviews conducted at the onset of the first wave of surveying, i.e. before the official release of the book, were indeed unaffected by the debate.

Our findings do not rule out the possibility that there was an even more pronounced change with respect to attitudes on issues that Sarrazin raised in the book but that were not covered by the TTI survey. One possibility for this is the public's view on Muslim migrants' fertility, which supposedly has an "adverse" impact on society's "intellectual potential" (Sarrazin 2010: 347). To a lesser extent, this note of caution also applies to the item that migrants are a burden on public services such as schools and hospitals; this formulation may not have effectively captured Sarrazin's statement that too many Muslim migrants live on social security, so that the actual increase in skepticism might have been even higher than it appears according to the TTI results. This is, in fact, the downside of a quasi-experiment: the measurements have not been tailored to grasp the effect of the — by nature unexpected — critical event. After all, TTI aims at capturing transatlantic differences, and questions asked in several countries cannot always take into account the specifics of single country contexts.

Apart from these minor shortcomings, overall we are confident that our results are not due to insufficient measurement. But why, then, didn't attitudes change in light of a debate that was unique in its intensity? According to previous studies, there are two explanations for this (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009). First, it is not so important if migrants are present in the media at all, but whether or not they are evaluated positively or negatively in various media outlets. It is possible that the "Sarrazin debate" was not so much perceived as a debate about migrants being

a problem for the country, but more about what one is allowed to think and say about migration issues, particularly if Sarrazin's assumptions are racist or not. Secondly, it has been shown that news reports affect attitudes on immigration primarily when there are additional "external shocks" such as steeply rising levels of immigration. As we outlined above, the topic had not been very salient in Germany before the book was published, so that it might not have fallen on particularly fertile ground in terms of already heightened levels of perceived migration-related threat.

In any case, a rather unfortunate shortcoming of our analyses is the fact that TTI data enabled us to study the impact of the debate on the attitudes of natives only. What it meant to Muslim minority members living in Germany — being the focus of a debate on their adverse impact on the society to which they belong — is hard to say, though easy to imagine. The number of migrants included in TTI is too low to analyze them separately,

especially if one is interested in migrants with a Muslim background. Due to the methodological challenges and high costs related to sampling and interviewing minority members, studies that compare migration-related attitudes of majority and minority members are still hard to find (for an exception, see Fassmann 2011; Kühnel and Leibold 2003). The tricky question of whether the debate had a negative impact on integration processes in Germany can thus not be answered by our analyses. Given natives' overall attitudinal stability, it seems unlikely that there will be a direct effect, for example, in terms of increasing levels of discrimination against Muslims. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that Muslims' *perceptions* of their social acceptance have become more pessimistic. This alone can have an impact on societal reality, according to W.I. Thomas' famous dictum "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

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