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## Survey: Who's a German, then?

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**Abstract:** Foreigners settling in Germany have found it extraordinarily hard to become German. There are 7.3m residents who do not have German citizenship, nearly 9% of the population. Yet few indigenous Germans accept the notion that Germany is, or should be, a multicultural country. Earlier this year, Gherard Schroder passed a law which marked Germany's first serious effort to match immigration with Germany's economic needs, with provision for a points system to lure skilled workers from abroad.

**Links:** [Check Columbia Libraries for fulltext](#)

**Full Text:** Multiculturalism still jangles national nerves IT IS an oddity of modern Germany that, even though the country has been friendlier than any other in Europe to asylum-seekers and refugees, foreigners settling there have found it extraordinarily hard to become German. There are 7.3m residents who do not have German citizenship, nearly 9% of the population. Some demographers argue that Germany will need 260,000 immigrants a year for the next 20 years just to keep its present population stable and avoid a financial crisis in its welfare and pension systems. Yet few indigenous Germans accept the notion that Germany is, or should be, a multicultural country. Mr Schroder, to his credit, has started to change this by updating the rules on naturalisation, which were based on an imperial law of 1913 that defined Germanness mainly by blood. This meant that descendants of Germans who had settled in Russia under Catherine the Great could become German again at the stroke of a pen without knowing a word of German. Since the Soviet Union broke up, more than 3m have done so. For the 2.5m German residents of Turkish origin (of whom about 500,000 may now have got citizenship), many of them second- or even third-generation, it has been much harder to get German passports. But now, thanks to Mr Schroder's change in the law, children of foreigners born in Germany, provided at least one parent has lived there for a minimum of eight years, are automatically given German citizenship at birth--though they have to choose whether to keep it when they come of age. Earlier this year, Mr Schroder passed a law which marked Germany's first serious effort to match immigration with Germany's economic needs, with provision for a points system to lure skilled workers from abroad. The law, due to come into force next year unless the Constitutional Court blocks it, builds on a controversial scheme endorsed by Mr Schroder two years ago to give permits to up to 20,000 computer specialists from India and Central Europe to work in Germany on five-year contracts. The new bill also makes it easier for foreign students educated at universities in Germany to stay on, and easier for self-employed foreigners to work in Germany. Many politicians, mostly on the right, have opposed the changes. Two years ago Jurgen Ruttgers, the Christian Democrats' leader in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous Land, demanded "Kinder statt Inder (children, not Indians)", meaning that Germans should have more babies instead of relying on workers from abroad. Mr Stoiber backed him, suggesting that the current rate of child benefit should be tripled. Friedrich Merz, the Christian Democrats' then leader in the Bundestag, said immigrants must accept that each country has its Leitkultur, or predominant culture, to which newcomers must adapt. That set alarm bells ringing in Germany. By any standard, Germans of foreign origin--and particularly from Turkey, easily the biggest minority--are woefully under-represented in politics and public life. For example, only a couple of them sit in parliament, compared with 38 non-whites currently in Britain's two chambers. Being generous to asylum-seekers is one thing, but absorbing foreigners into the German family still revives old neuroses about national identity.

Illustration Caption: Side by side doesn't mean together

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