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DOI : 10.14746/rie.2025.19.24

Germany's Migration Policy Dilemmas in the Light of Parliamentary Debates in 2021–2024

Introduction

Germany has been the most popular immigration destination in Europe, and the world's second most popular one after The United States (OECD, 2023). Due to its scale, migration in Germany is an important element in the social, economic and political dynamics. Consequently, migration policy, as the state's activity regulating migration flows and shaping the relations between migrants and the host society, plays a key role in managing these processes (Lucassen, 2005; Matusz-Protasiewicz, Stadtmüller, 2007; Zolberg, 1999).

Creating their own policies, the state governments face the necessity to address numerous dilemmas, which are situated on a continuum with its opposing ends defined by, respectively, openness versus closure to immigrants and liberal migration policy versus restrictive migration policy (Adamson, Triadafilopoulos, Zolberg, 2011; Freeman, 1994; Hadj-Abdou, 2021).

In recent years, public debate in Germany has many times focused on the issue of "migration crisis" caused by the influx of immigrants, the scale of which exceeds organizational capacity of entities responsible for dealing with them (Cuperus, 2024). The situation causes social tensions in local communities and results in anti-immigrant and nationalistic social climate (Muller, 2024; Schnaudt, Weinhardt, 2017). Additionally, migration issues have been used by the opposition far-right party Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) as an instrument to achieve their political goals, which results in growing social support of the party. Both anti-immigrant public sentiment and the growing popularity of the AfD have compelled the parties forming the current governing coalition as well as the federal government to deal with migration-related issues that have become the main topic of social discourse (Kinkartz, 2024).

The purpose of this article is to present the fundamental dilemmas concerning migration policy that arise during parliamentary debates in the Bundestag as well as the ways to resolve the dilemmas, resulting from political decisions made by the parliament. The decisions developed during parliamentary debates lead to the introduction of new migration policy instruments into the social sphere.



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The time frame of the analysis presented in this article spans from December 2021 to October 2024, during which Olaf Scholz was Chancellor. The power base of the government was provided by the so-called “Traffic Light Coalition” (Ampel-Koalition), consisting of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD), the Green Party (Die Grüne), and the Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP).

During this period, migration policy was undergoing dynamic changes. Chancellor Scholz announced that there would be a historic turning point in migration policy, consisting of a shift in the existing migration paradigm. That is why the analysis of German migration policy must follow the transformation process and determine its hypothetical future directions.

This need accounts for the necessity to identify the dilemmas in Germany’s migration policy that arise during parliamentary debates, and thus define the range of possible resolutions that shape the future of Germany’s migration policy.

Migration Policy and Its Dimensions

Migration policy is characterized by a broad spectrum of regulated issues. Krystyna Iglicka-Okolska (2008) notes that the state and its policy are the key elements of explaining the migration process from both theoretical and practical perspectives. James F. Hollifield and Neil Foley (2022) identified four main dimensions of migration policy: security, economic interests, cultural issues, and rights. Christina Boswell (2007) shares a similar view; she argues that the legitimacy of migration policy depends on the extent to which it fulfills its functions in terms of ensuring security, stimulating economic growth (wealth accumulation), and aligning with popular will. The findings of these authors are regarded as the core dimensions of migration policy, around which the political debate on migration progresses. These are the critical areas in which policymakers seek solutions aimed at shaping migration policy in accordance with the prevailing migration doctrine and the goals of migration policy that derive from it.

Considering the dimensions outlined above, it can be argued that migration policy is confronted with a range of challenges and dilemmas, including balancing openness with border control, integration with social diversity, the need to meet economic demands, issues related to the protection of migrants’ rights and addressing illegal migration. Migration policy consists of a wide range of measures aimed at managing migration flows, integrating immigrants, and protecting refugees. The dynamics of national migration policy is shaped by a combination of political, economic, demographic, or social factors (Iglicka-Okolska, 2008).

Migration Situation in Contemporary Germany

Germany is a country of immigration. This statement has been justifiable due to social and economic reality since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 (Beyme, 2020). The number of foreigners has steadily been increasing, which is

reflected in the percentage of foreign nationals within Germany's overall population. Currently, nearly 30% of the German population has a migration background. As of the end of September 2024, approximately 13.9 million people in Germany did not hold German citizenship, accounting for 15% of the total population (Destatis, 2024). The largest group of foreign nationals are Turks, followed by Ukrainians, Syrians, Romanians, Poles, and Italians (Destatis, 2024).

Table 1
Germany's population and foreigners in Germany 2020–2023

Year	Total Germany's population	Total of foreigners in Germany
2023	84,706,917	13,895,865
2022	84,358,845	13,383,910
2021	83,237,124	11,817,790
2020	83,155,031	11,432,460

Source: Own study based on Destatis, 2024; Migrationsbericht, 2023.

Currently, the following trends can be observed in migration processes in Germany: a constant increase in the number of people seeking employment, an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers as well as a growing number of international students (Destatis, 2024). The three trends in migration processes show the complexity and diversity of contemporary Germany's migration policy, which must take into account the needs of the labor market, humanitarian concerns, and the educational aspirations of young people from around the world.

Table 2
Overview of the main forms of migration in 2020–2021

Year	Asylum seekers	Intra-UE migration	Family reunification from non-EU countries	Education	Employment seekers from non-EU countries
2023	3,117,975	466,500	130,799	249,600	131,200
2022	3,078,650	611,744	93,960	60,395	73,065
2021	1,936,350	581,699	87,705	102,594	40,421
2020	1,856,785	601,073	58,022	86,529	29,747

Source: own study based on Destatis, 2022; Migrationsbericht, 2023.

The Bundestag as a Place for Defining the Objectives, Instruments and Legal Frameworks for Migration Policy

Germany's migration policy is shaped within a complex institutional context, encompassing four main political arenas: the executive, legislative, electoral, and judicial. Parliamentary democracy is based on the principle of the supremacy of the legislative power, which gives special significance to the Bundestag as the center for setting the agenda, shaping attitudes and public opinion, and making political decisions (Held, 2010). The core position of the Bundestag in the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany stems from the fact that it is the only body elected in

general election, which makes it the sole representative of the superior authority and the will of the people, since the German Constitution does not provide for any form of direct democracy (referendum, plebiscite) (Ismayr, 2006).

Aleksandra Trzcielińska-Polus (2008) emphasizes the role of the Bundestag as a forum for discussing national goals, strategies, and interests. The parliament makes it possible for not only the government and the governing coalition but also for the opposition to express their attitudes and standpoints, thereby reflecting the expectations, concerns, and objections of various social groups. Debates in the Bundestag allow the government to amend its previous decisions, making them align more closely with the implemented policies. Thus, the Bundestag can be considered a key factor in determining the direction of migration policy.

The analysis of parliamentary debates makes it possible to understand political processes, public sentiment that prevails, major lines of political division, and reasoning behind the adoption of specific solutions. It also reveals both overt and hidden interests that influence the legal decisions being made (Meier, 1999).

The fact that the Alternative for Germany (AfD) gained representation in the Bundestag has made migration one of the most frequently discussed topics in political, journalistic, and public spheres. Since migration is socially relevant, political parties have been devoting more and more attention to migration in their electoral and political platforms (Gessler, Hunger, 2023). With the politicization of migration, the role of political parties and parliamentary debates as arenas for shaping migration policy has clearly grown (Hadj-Abdou, 2021). During election periods, mainstream parties risk losing voter support to far-right parties if they refuse to satisfy popular demands to reduce immigration (Meyer, Rosenberger, 2015).

Bundestag Parliamentary Debates on Migration – Sources of Information and Research Procedure

Political parties represented in the Bundestag have numerous instruments for controlling government activity and influencing the course of parliamentary proceedings. Using various instruments depends on whether a given party supports the government or is in opposition (Ismayr, 2006).

Legislative proposals and motions (Anträge)² are of greatest importance in initiating parliamentary debate, because a parliamentary debate on them is mandatory. It is as the result of such debates, followed by a vote, that a bill or motion is either adopted or rejected. Putting forward a motion is a form of parliamentary activity that plays a key role in the legislative process and in shaping the state policy. It serves functions such as initiating legislation, controlling the government, and shaping public debate (Beyme, 1997; Beyme, 2000; Ismayr, 2006).

From 2021 to 2024, the opposition parties proposed 52 motions (Anträge) to the President of the Bundestag. They concerned issues such as the protection of Germany's

² Antrag (motion) is a form of parliamentary scrutiny, similar to the Polish interpellation. Other forms of parliamentary scrutiny include: written questions, oral questions, topical hour, request for presence, request for information, and request for a hearing (Wojtaszczyk, 1993).

and the EU's external borders, curbing illegal migration, boosting development policy with the aim of stopping migration from Africa, supporting federal states in implementing asylum policy, defining the role of Islam in German society, protecting Germany's cultural identity, Germany's active participation in shaping the EU's common migration policy, expanding the list of safe third countries, limiting social benefits for asylum seekers, combating immigrant crime, and providing support for refugees from Ukraine.

Each of the motions was subject to debate. Although none of them were formally accepted, they served as inspiration and subsequently became part of the legislative bills proposed to the Bundestag by the government or the coalition parties. This kind of 'appropriation' of the opposition proposals by the government occurred in the following cases: the introduction of controls along the entire external border of Germany, increased financial support for Länder in conducting asylum policy, expansion of the list of safe third countries, and limited access to social benefits for asylum seekers.

During the period under analysis, a total of 792 questions regarding migration policy were addressed to the government, and debates were held on 18 draft laws concerning migration policy, 8 of which were passed and the remaining ones were rejected. All the passed laws were proposed by the government or its political allies.

The empirical material analyzed in this article consists of debates on migration law bills conducted in the Bundestag between 2021 and 2024. They are compiled in Table 3 below, along with summaries of the bills and information about their initiators. Six bills were proposed by the federal government, three – by the factions forming the governing coalition, another five – by CDU/CSU; the AfD and the Left Party (Die Linke) proposed two bills each. For the purposes of this article, 18 Bundestag debates on migration bills were analyzed, which means that official documents are the source of information and the basis for the analysis presented in the article (Sułek, 2002). The selection of these documents was determined by the main goal of this article, which is to demonstrate the role of parliamentary debates in resolving the dilemmas of migration policy. The debate transcripts used in this article are available in the Bundestag's Documentation and Information System (Das Dokumentations und Informationssystem für Parlamentsmaterialien, DIP).

The basic unit of content analysis of the selected official documents is the statement made by individuals participating in parliamentary debates on migration law bills. The applied method of content analysis (Babbie, 2024; Johnson, Dudzińska, Mycoff, Reynolds, 2010) made it possible to identify opposing positions within the statements of the debate participants, regarding changes in Germany's migration policy.

Table 3
Law bills on migration debated in the Bundestag in 2021–2024

Date	Initiator	Law bill title	Summary	
1	2	3	4	5
28.09.2022	Federal Government	Gesetz zur Einführung eines Chancen-Aufenthaltsrechts Law Introducing Opportunity Residence Permit	12-month long-stay visa for people with temporary residence permit to meet further requirements to obtain permanent right of residence. Waiving language proof for family reunification with skilled workers from third countries. Easier access to integration and job-related language courses for asylum seekers.	(+)

1	2	3	4	5
08.12.2022	AfD	Fünftes Gesetz zur Änderung des Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetzes Fifth Act to Amend Nationality Act	Return to the provisions of the Nationality Act from before 1 January 1999: acquisition of German citizenship solely by birth based on the principle of <i>ius sanguinis</i> , naturalization as a discretionary decision in each case and only when there is a public interest, and avoidance of dual citizenship.	(-)
24.11.2023	Federal Government	Rückführungsverbesserungsgesetz Return Improvement Act	Extension of custody pending deportation from 10 to 28 days. Search of shared accommodations, including third-party rooms, at night to carry out deportation.	(+)
17.05.2022	DIE LINKE	Erleichtertes Bleiberecht Simplified Right to Stay	Reduced minimum prior stay in Germany for well-integrated youth; introducing temporary residence permit for individuals who have lived in Germany for 5 years who accept the democratic order and have no criminal background.	(-)
08.11.2022	BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, FDP, SPD	Gesetz zur Beschleunigung der Asylgerichtsverfahren und Asylverfahren Law for the Acceleration of Court and Asylum Procedures	The goal of the law is to accelerate processing times of asylum and appeal procedures in Germany. It introduces measures aimed at shortening the duration of asylum procedures handled by administrative authorities and speeding up judicial processes related to appeals against asylum decisions.	(+)
17.05.2022	DIE LINKE	Deutschnachweise beim Ehegattennachzug German language certificates for the purposes of foreign spouses joining their partners	The coalition agreement includes a provision that tightens the language requirement for family reunification: a person arriving to join a family member must prove the required German language skills immediately upon arrival.	(-)
14.11.2023	CDU/CSU	Asylbewerberleistungsweiterentwicklungsge setz Asylum Seekers' Benefits Amendment Act	Extended duration of benefit eligibility for asylum seekers in Germany with the aim of reducing secondary migration and relieving local authorities.	(-)
13.06.2023	CDU/CSU	Moldova and Georgia as safe third origin		(-)
26.09.2023	BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, FDP, SPD	Bundesvertriebenengesetz – BVFG) Federal Expellees Act	The act aims to ensure economic support, social integration and compensation for expellees and their descendants. It covers various aspects, such as access to social benefits, settlement opportunities in Germany and rules for granting citizenship.	(+)
02.10.2023	Federal Government	Mołdawia i Gruzja jako bezpieczne kraje trzecie Moldova and Georgia as safe third origin		(+)
14.03.2023	AfD	Gesetz zur Behebung von Fehlanreizen im Asylverfahren und zur klaren Trennung von Asyl- und Erwerbsmigration	The law aims to eliminate incentives that may result in misusing the asylum system in Germany. The aim of the law is to ensure that asylum-seekers are treated in accordance with applicable rules and regulations and, at the same	(+)

1	2	3	4	5
14.03.2023	AfD	Law to Eliminate Mis-guided Incentives in the Asylum Procedure and to Clearly Separate Asylum and Labor Migration	time, to facilitate legal migration for employment seekers.	(-)
11.09.2023	Federal Government	Pauschalentlastungsgesetz Flat Relief Act	Change in horizontal VAT distribution in 2023 and from 2024 to deal with migration across the states and municipalities; release of the third tranche of the federal funding agreed under the Pact for Public Health Service; dissolution of the profit from the sale of border and frontier properties fund and the federal government's assumption of the rights and obligations related to the fund.	
08.09.2023	Federal Government	Gesetz zur Modernisierung des Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts Citizenship Law	Reduced standard residency in Germany requirement preceding filing an application for citizenship and simplifying procedures related to confirming the knowledge of the German language.	(+)
24.04.2023	Federal Government	Gesetz zur Weiterentwicklung der Fachkräfteeinwanderung Law for the Advancement of Skilled Worker Immigration	The law offers lower salary thresholds for shortage occupations, lower minimum salary threshold for graduates with academic degrees, facilitating the change of employer for EU Blue Card holders, facilitating family reunification, recognition of informal qualifications for IT specialists without a university degree	(+)
19.03.2024	CDU/CSU	Bezahlkartengesetz – BezahlkG Payment Cards Act	Legal basis for the introduction of payment cards for asylum seekers	(-)
09.09.2024	CDU/CSU	Zustrombegrenzungsgesetz Law to Limit the Influx of Third-Country Nationals	It aims to regulate and limit the number of asylum seekers and other forms of protection in Germany. It establishes limits on the admission of refugees and procedures aimed at accelerating processing of asylum applications. Also, the law provides for strengthening cooperation with migrants' countries of origin and third countries to better manage migration and more effectively enforce the return of those denied protection.	(-)
20.02.2024	CDU/CSU	Gesetz zur Änderung des Aufenthaltsgesetzes zur Verhängung eines Einreise- und Aufenthaltsverbotes auch bei erstmaliger Einreise The Law to Amend the Residence Act to Impose Entry and Residence Bans Even on First-Time Entry	The aim of the law is to strengthen border controls and ensure greater internal security by enabling migration authorities and border guards to respond more quickly and effectively to violations of migration regulations. This law serves as a tool to prevent illegal migration and protect public order by allowing for a more restrictive approach towards individuals who do not meet the entry requirements to Germany.	(-)

1	2	3	4	5
09.09.2024	DIE GRÜNEN FDP, SPD	Gesetz zur Verbesserung der inneren Sicherheit und des Asylsystems The Law to Improve Internal Security and the Asylum System	The law provides for an increase in resources and competencies of the security services, including the police and intelligence agencies, stricter border controls, and better coordination of actions at the federal and state levels. This is aimed at improving the management of the influx of migrants and refugees. Additionally, it strengthens international cooperation in the exchange of information and joint actions for security, as well as humane treatment of asylum seekers	(+)

Note: The bill was (–) rejected (+) passed.

Source: Own study based on DIP.

The Most Essential Migration Policy Dilemmas in Germany in 2021–2024 in the Light of the Results of the Bundestag Debates

A dilemma is a problem whose solution involves choosing between two equally valid reasons. Each option within a dilemma has its negative and positive consequences. A characteristic feature of a dilemma is that choosing one option involves giving up the benefits offered by the other.

Having analyzed the content of the parliamentary debates on the legislative proposals included in Table 3, it is possible to formulate three dilemmas based on the aspects of migration policy mentioned in the introduction. Each of them contains extreme options, presented in a manner that excludes alternatives. It does not mean, however, that intermediate solutions do not exist. The dilemmas concern security, economic interests, cultural and ideological issues, public sentiment, and respect for the law.

Interpreting the results of the content analysis of the debate on migration policy and its dilemmas, one can refer to the words of Andrea Lindholz: “Humanitarianism in migration policy also means order, management, and restrictions” (Drucksache 20/6731). The analysis of parliamentary debates on Germany’s migration policy made it possible to formulate the key dilemmas of the policy, as well as to identify what kinds of restrictions should be introduced, how they can be implemented, and to what extent these restrictions will change the immigration policy currently followed.

Dilemma 1

Providing protection for people fleeing persecution, armed conflict, or extreme poverty, or conducting a migration policy that attracts individuals with specific skills and qualifications that match the country’s demands.

Alexander Throm’s (CDU/CSU) statement from the Bundestag debate exemplifies the dilemma:

“Germany needs skilled workers: through mobilization within the country and the European Union, as well as through targeted recruitment from third countries [...] What would be more helpful here are faster digital procedures for recog-

nizing qualifications and a genuine distinction between immigration of skilled workers on the one hand and immigration related to asylum and refuge on the other.” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/100, pp. 12003A–12023B)

The politician clearly points out that labour migration and humanitarian migration should be distinguished and clearly separated. What Nancy Faeser (SPD), Federal Minister of Home Affairs, said during the debate is complimentary to the statement by the opposition representative:

“As a result, we are now lacking hundreds of thousands of skilled workers across various fields: healthcare, childcare, IT, crafts, and many others. At the end of last year, there were approximately 2 million job vacancies. We experience shortages of skilled workers on a daily basis: parents – when suddenly childcare hours in nursery schools are no longer sufficient, or when we need a tradesperson to fix the roof, or when hospitals lack staff. The shortage of skilled workers is harmful to our country. Many companies hope that the influx of qualified workers from third countries will continue to be facilitated. [...] These two issues – qualified worker immigration and modern citizenship law – are inseparably linked.” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/100, pp. 12003A–12023B).

The above statements demonstrate how serious social and political problems the shortages of both skilled and un-skilled workers have become. The scale of the labour market gap is so large that it is clearly felt across various sectors of the economy.

Statements made by parliamentarians across the political spectrum show they both support the recruitment of foreign workers and want to restrict the right to asylum. The analysis of the statements raises a number of questions concerning the first dilemma:

- How to cope with the influx of illegal migration and at the same time ensure the required level of labour migration?
- Is it possible to use the internal labour potential so that recruiting migrant workers will not be necessary?
- Is it possible and reasonable to provide migrants applying for asylum with access to the job market as soon as possible?

The answer to the dilemma and the questions about the details concerning it are the migration policy instruments proposed during parliamentary debates, such as:

- introducing quotas;
- introducing benefits in kind instead of cash;
- accelerating the procedure for recognizing employees’ qualifications acquired abroad;
- increasing employers’ freedom to recognize migrants’ qualifications based on experience.

Rasha Nasr (SPD) emphasizes the need to listen to entrepreneurs’ opinions and to recruit employees; she also says that refugees should be treated as a resource that should be made use of, as it is impossible to completely stop migration for humanitarian reasons.

“Have you ever listened to the voice of businesses, how difficult it is for them to find workers? [...] Work bans must be eliminated, and we must integrate refugees into the workforce and society more quickly.” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/137, pp. 17348C–17364A)

Demands to regulate migration – and in some cases even to resist or reject migration – dominate public discourse and shape the social attitudes. A growing distinction between desirable and undesirable migration is becoming increasingly evident. Migrants whose presence is intended to meet Germany's demographic and economic needs are welcomed. All others are increasingly perceived as unwanted. This opens up a debate, mainly on asylum and humanitarian migration.

The deterioration of public sentiment and the rise of anti-immigration attitudes in Germany are strongly influenced by appeals from local residents and authorities at the municipal and state levels, who are increasingly calling on the federal government to limit or even completely stop humanitarian migration. These demands are justified by the lack of capacity to receive refugees in a way that ensures proper shelter and care. What is often discussed during parliamentary debates in Germany is the inability to provide language courses for migrants, alongside the overall inefficiency of the education system, including shortages of school places and the lack of qualified teaching staff. Another important argument that is often raised during parliamentary debates is financing migration. The costs of accepting such a large number of immigrants are born by German society as a whole. The funds allocated for migrants could be better spent elsewhere, for example, invested in increasingly worn-out technical and social infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, hospitals, playgrounds, parks).

The ongoing dispute over funding responsibilities between the federal government and the states in Germany's parliamentary debates on migration has influence on public sentiment: anti-immigrant attitudes keep growing.

Despite implementing stricter asylum politics, Germany has actively recruited foreign workers in response to workforce shortages, particularly in sectors such as IT, engineering, healthcare, and construction. The Immigration of Specialists Act, introduced in March 2020, aimed to facilitate the arrival of skilled workers from non-EU countries. Reforms from 2021 to 2024 focused on simplifying visa procedures, recognizing professional qualifications and shortening waiting time for decisions from migration authorities. Arguments concerning the labour market and the German economy are put forward in parliamentary debates on any form of migration observed in Germany. They are the most frequently used counterarguments addressed to those who opt for limiting illegal migration and humanitarian migration. Consequently, the government has made an effort to integrate asylum seekers into the labor market as quickly as possible, since the workplace is also perceived as the most effective tool for social integration

Dilemma 2

Enabling migrants to become full members of society and the need to protect Germany's cultural and social identity

This dilemma has been present in parliamentary debate since the publication of Til-lo Sarrazin's (2010) book "Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen." Arguments relating to security and cultural identity are particularly prominent in statements by AfD and CDU/CSU politicians, e.g. the following statement by Dr. Gottfried Curio (AfD):

“In recent years, we have witnessed illegal immigration at a net level of one million people – not only in violation of the law, but also without regard for the catastrophic housing situation, the rapidly increasing multi-billion burdens on the social welfare system, the erosion of internal security, and the collapse of education in our schools. We are told that this is necessary for humanitarian reasons. Yet these individuals arrive here after passing through dozens of safe transit countries. It is claimed that this will solve the problem of the shortage of skilled workers. In fact, however, majority of these people rely on our social welfare systems. And what about us? We should train young people in Germany to become skilled workers rather than continue down this wrong path” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/91, S. 10879B–10897B).

The statement quoted above is clearly anti-immigrant, both in content and form. It clearly highlights a number of reasons why it is impossible for migrants arriving in large numbers to become full members of German society. Firstly, this is not possible because of the scale of the migration. Germany is no position to provide migrants with sufficient social benefits, including in particular the access to nurseries, preschools, schools, and hospitals. Secondly, migrants' attachment to their own religion, culture and traditions makes them come across as unwilling or even unable to fully integrate. Thirdly, the author of the above statement does not see among the masses of incoming migrants any motivation to assimilate into German society, but only a desire to receive social benefits.

During the debate, voices opposing the anti-immigrant stance can be heard. One example is the statement by Katharina Dröge (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN):

“We need a culture of welcome which invites people arriving to our country, greets them and does not create an atmosphere that fuels resentment – resentment against those whom we ‘somehow do not want to have,’ resentment to those who might come to exploit us” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/100, S. 12003A–12023B).

The analysis of the statements raises a number of questions concerning this dilemma:

- Having filed an asylum application, when should an asylum seeker be able to do a language course, an integration course or have full access to the labour market?
- How to protect Germans' cultural identity and at the same time benefit from cultural diversity?
- Is immigration from Islamic countries a threat of terrorism?
- Is Islam compatible or in conflict with German culture and identity?

During parliamentary debates focused on the second dilemma, the following migration policy instruments we proposed:

- granting asylum seekers access to education, language courses and the labour market from the moment they submit their application;
- forcing deportation for individuals who are not eligible for asylum;
- restricting the right to family reunification by introducing language proficiency tests;
- solidarity-based allocation of asylum seekers among EU countries;
- introducing facilitations for individuals with the “tolerated” status (*duldung*).

A turning point in the parliamentary debate was the Islamic attack in Solingen.³ In the opinion of the opposition leader Friedrich Merz of the CDU/CSU, the attack became a reason to demand a complete ban on accepting new asylum seekers until internal order and security are restored in Germany and effective integration measures are developed and implemented. According to the opposition leader, tightening border controls alone is insufficient.

The course, content and form of the parliamentary debate have been considerably affected by the presence of the AfD members in the Bundestag. The culture of political debate, its language and the intensity of emotional expression have changed since the party entered the Bundestag. The AfD tends to use the method of populist motivation and mobilization by introducing topics and vocabulary into the debate that used to be considered inappropriate in parliamentary discourse (Butterwegge, Hentges, Wiegel, 2018; Hafener, 2018; Quent, Virchow, 2024)

Dilemma 3

Approval of German citizens' concerns and anti-immigrant attitudes or compliance with international agreements and standards concerning refugees and migrants (e.g. the Geneva Convention)

This dilemma focuses on the opposing stance of politicians on both international agreements to which Germany is a signatory and the attitudes of German society towards migrants. The following statements exemplify this polarization of parliamentarians' attitudes on the migration issue:

Clara Bünger (DIE LINKE)

“What CDU/CSU prioritize is a strong attack on refugees' dignity. Individuals receiving benefits under the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act will receive benefits at the level of citizen's allowance after 36 months instead of the previous 18 months which means they will have to live for three years below the minimum subsistence” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/137, S. 17348C–17364A).

Stephan Stracke (CDU/CSU)

“Germany has reached the limit of its capacity to accept asylum applicants. The acceptance capacities in municipalities are exhausted. [...] Furthermore, citizens' trust in the state's ability to act is at its lowest level. We are facing a threat to political stability in our country” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/137, pp. 17348C–17364A).

Stephan Thomae (FDP)

“In the future, we want to have more regulated migration and less non-regulated migration. Those who need our protection and support should get them. We want to offer better opportunities to those who seek employment and education due to the fact that demand for labour force in our country is really big. However, we have to consistently insist on leaving the country in case someone does not meet any of the conditions, and, if necessary, to enforce their leaving more strictly than before” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/62, S. 7000D–7012B).

³ The attack took place on August 23, 2024 during Festival of Diversity, organized to celebrate the 650th anniversary of the founding of the city of Solingen. A Syrian man who had been denied asylum, but was not expelled from the country, attacked festival participants in Solingen, injuring eight people and killing three others.

Nancy Faeser, Federal Minister for Home Affairs

“Murderous attacks such as those that took place in Solingen and Mannheim call for direct and strong responses. And we are providing such responses. [...] As the federal government, we are doing what is in compliance with the law and necessary to be done in order to ensure the safety of people in Germany.

Dr. Konstantin von Notz (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN)

“You seem to think there is connection between Islamic terrorism and migration policy. This is simply an act political madness, an act of destruction and division in our society, which is shaped by migration” (BT-Plenarprotokoll 20/185, S. 23965C–23992D).

This dilemma raises a number of questions:

- Who should cover the costs of migration policy?
- Is migration an opportunity for Germany's development and does it bring benefits to German society?
- Does migration pose a threat to German identity and is it a cause of a decreased sense of security among local communities?
- Is Germany a sovereign country and can decide independently who crosses its borders and stay in its territory?
- Is Islam compatible or in conflict with the culture and identity of Germany?

During parliamentary debates focused on resolving the discussed dilemma, the following migration policy instruments we proposed:

- restoring stationary border controls;
- extending the waiting time from 18 to 26 months before asylum seekers are entitled to social benefits;
- turning back illegal immigrants at the border;
- expanding the list of safe third countries;
- replacing cash benefits with benefits in kind;
- processing asylum applications in third countries.

Germany's migration policy between 2021 and 2024 was shaped by several key trends. First of all, there was a rise in the number of refugees and asylum seekers. Germany was one of the top destination countries for refugees and migrants, especially from the Middle East, North Africa, and Afghanistan. The scale of migration influx and the growing public reluctance to accept migrants contributed to the electoral success of the AfD in state elections in Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia. The party became the second-largest political force in these states, with approximately 30%-support. The party's victory triggered a shift in migration rhetoric among the mainstream parties. Ultimately, it was decided to introduce border controls along the entire external border of Germany.

Germany's migration policy in 2021–2024 was a complex set of measures aimed at balancing the labour market, humanitarian responsibilities and successful integration of immigrants. The key reforms focused on attracting qualified workers, facilitating asylum procedures and more effective integration programmes, which was aimed to bring both economic and social benefits, both within individual states and the whole country. Various reasons influenced the migration policy instruments proposed to resolve the dilemmas, including in particular Germany's international commitments,

economic interests, rivalry between the different political parties demographic challenges, humanitarian reasons, public sentiment and the desire to implement new migration policy instruments.

Summing up the analysis of the parliamentary debates focusing on migration policy dilemmas, it can be said that efforts have been made to resolve them by passing acts concerning the following issues:

- Pursuing migration policy that attracts individuals with specific skills and qualifications meeting Germany's needs;
- Implementing migration policy that makes it possible for migrants to become full members of German society;
- Ensuring migration policy reflects concerns and expectations of German citizens.

It can be assumed that German migration policy is likely to be more restrictive in the future.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to define and resolve the dilemmas of Germany's migration policy that arose during debates held in the Bundestag between 2021 and 2024. The analysis proves that parliamentary debates can serve as a valuable source of scholarly knowledge needed to study migration. Based on these debates, conclusions can be drawn about the prevailing public sentiments, their interpretation, and attempts to use them by political parties represented in the parliament to achieve their political goals.

Referring to the work of Cas Mudde (2004), it can be assumed that the final shape of migration policy is strongly influenced by what the author described as the *zeitgeist*. A key component of this concept is the widespread disillusionment with politics, i.e. the activities of political parties and state institutions which stand in contrast to public sentiment, which results in populist mobilization.

Based on the content analysis of parliamentary debates on migration policy from 2021 to 2024, it can be assumed that in the foreseeable future, labour migration will remain the only acceptable form of immigration to Germany. All other forms are likely to be significantly restricted, and possibly, even entirely prohibited. Also, the debate over migration policy instruments not yet implemented is expected to continue. This primarily concerns the recognition of Maghreb countries as safe third countries, the introduction of quotas, efforts to establish solidarity within European migration policy and concluding bilateral agreements enabling deportations.

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Summary

The article analyzes the dilemmas of migration policy in Germany between 2021 and 2024 in the light of parliamentary debates in the Bundestag. Being the most popular immigration destination, Germany has to deal with complex social, economic, and political dynamics related to migration. Consequently, migration policy plays a key role in regulating migration flows and shaping the relationship between migrants and the host society. By addressing the three dilemmas defined in the text, the author suggests that Germany's migration policy is likely to become more restrictive in the future, with a stronger emphasis on labour migration and restrictions on other forms of immigration.

Key words: migration policy, dilemma, immigration, Germany, Bundestag

Dylematy polityki migracyjnej w Niemczech w świetle debaty parlamentarnej w latach 2021–2024

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje dylematy polityki migracyjnej w Niemczech w latach 2021–2024 w świetle debat parlamentarnych w Bundestagu. Niemcy, jako najpopularniejszy kraj docelowy imigracji, muszą mierzyć się ze złożoną dynamiką społeczną, gospodarczą i polityczną związaną z migracją. W związku z tym polityka migracyjna odgrywa kluczową rolę w regulowaniu przepływów migracyjnych i kształtowaniu relacji między migrantami a społeczeństwem przyjmującym. Odnosząc się do trzech dylematów zdefiniowanych w tekście, autor sugeruje, że polityka migracyjna Niemiec prawdopodobnie stanie się w przyszłości bardziej restrykcyjna, z większym naciskiem na migrację zarobkową i ograniczeniami dotyczącymi innych form imigracji.

Slowa kluczowe: polityka migracyjna, dylemat, imigracja, Niemcy, Bundestag

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Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist (Sprzeczne interesy: Autor oświadczył, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy): Mateusz Jamro

