

# Welfare State Deservingness of Immigrants in Germany

Examining Deservingness Rankings and the Role of Identity

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In the ‘deservingness literature’, it is argued that people use five criteria to discern whether an individual deserves to receive social welfare: control, need, identity, attitude, and reciprocity. Regarding welfare support, the public usually views immigrants as the least deserving group compared to the sick, the elderly, and the unemployed. There has been an ongoing debate about the role that the ‘identity’ criterion plays for immigrants’ position. Using a vignette design, this paper proposes the existence of at least three types of deservingness rankings regarding immigrants in Germany – a *core nationalistic deservingness ranking*, a *European Union deservingness ranking*, and a *differentiating deservingness ranking*. At the same time, it identifies a *universalistic counter-discourse*. The results indicate that identity often plays a role either within a *pure identity discourse* or a *combined discourse*; only an *anti-identity discourse* seems to negate the role of identity.

abstract

## Keywords

welfare state deservingness; immigrants; deservingness criteria; identity; social welfare; Germany

## Introduction: Ranking Immigrants' Welfare State Deservingness

The topic of immigrants' access to welfare state benefits has consistently been a central issue for the German public since the arrival of 'guest workers' in the 1960s. A representative survey conducted in 1974 revealed that, on average, a significantly lower share of those polled supported the provision of government welfare assistance to 'guest workers' in comparison to other groups in society (cf., Roller 1992: 143). More recently, the German executive branch has made it more difficult for immigrants to access social welfare benefits, while also reducing the amount of benefits they may receive (cf., Pro Asyl 2015; Pro Asyl 2016). This has magnified the differences in social welfare entitlements between natives and non-natives.

Research about deservingness examines the societal legitimation behind the classification of groups as deserving or undeserving – that is, as (un-)deserving of social welfare state support. This topic is relevant because public opinion on such issues can influence public policy (cf., Raven et al. 2011) and increasing diversity can diminish overall support for the welfare state (cf., Wright/Reeskens 2013: 1444). In his ground-breaking work, Wim van Oorschot recognized a clear pattern in how people evaluate different groups'

deservingness: across the EU, immigrants are usually regarded as the least deserving group when compared to the elderly, the sick and disabled, and the unemployed (cf., van Oorschot 2006: 31ff.). He also found that people consider five underlying deservingness criteria when they are asked to answer this welfare question and judge an individual's (un)deservingness: control, need, identity, attitude, and reciprocity. These findings are well established, yet there remains an ongoing controversy about which criteria are the most relevant – or, put differently, which criteria are most responsible for immigrants being ranked last. This debate has especially revolved around the role of identity (cf., Reeskens 2017; Kootstra 2016).

So far, studies on this issue mainly have used quantitative methods – apart from a few qualitative approaches (e.g., Osipovič 2015; Kremer 2016; Larsen et al. 2018) – and focused on a small number of countries, such as the Netherlands and Britain, while Germany has been mostly disregarded. To scrutinize the case of Germany is especially worthwhile since it exhibits a specific combination of characteristics setting it partially apart from the two aforementioned countries. The German welfare system has been classified as a conservative welfare regime whose benefit levels are linked to prior contributions made (cf., Esping-Andersen 1990; Goldschmidt 2015: 625). It is less influenced by migration flows from

former colonies and shows high levels of hostility towards foreigners (Decker/Brähler 2016: 14ff.). Furthermore, strict legal distinctions exist between natives and non-natives in respect of each group's access to welfare benefits (e.g., Engels et al. 2011). The increasing number of immigrants since 2010 (Statista 2019) as well as the recent influx of refugees and asylum seekers have put this whole subject of immigrants' social rights further at the heart of the German political arena.

For the purposes of analysing the welfare state deservingness of immigrants in Germany and the role of the identity criterion, my two main research questions are: 1) how do people in Germany construct their deservingness ranking in regard to immigrants? 2) How does the identity criterion relate to the other deservingness criteria in said ranking?

In order to answer these two questions, the paper is structured as follows: I present the literature on deservingness (Section 2), introduce the method and the data (Section 3), and describe the results (Section 3). I conclude with a summary that answers and discusses my research questions (Section 4) before highlighting further implications and drawing a final conclusion (Section 5).

## Welfare State Deservingness

Following the economic turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s, European states cut spending and reduced the overall social protection of citizens so that welfare systems would be less universal and instead more selective and conditional (cf., Raven et al. 2015: 1). As a result, the basic welfare question of "who should get what, and why" (van Oorschot 2000: 33) has become more salient once again. This has especially important implications for social welfare recipients. While individuals seen as deserving by welfare institutions and the general public are typically entitled to receive public resources, individuals seen as undeserving are given less or even nothing (cf., Jeene et al. 2013: 1103).

As mentioned previously, the deservingness approach argues that people take the five deservingness criteria into account when distinguishing between deserving and undeserving welfare recipients:

- (1) *control*: poor people's control over their neediness, or their responsibility for it: the less control, the more deserving;
- (2) *need*: the greater the level of need, the more deserving;
- (3) *identity*: the identity of the poor, their proximity to the rich or their 'pleasantness'; the closer to 'us', the more deserving;
- (4) *attitude*: poor people's attitude towards support, or their docility or gratefulness: the

*more compliant, the more deserving; (5) reciprocity: the degree of reciprocation by the poor, or having earned support: the more reciprocation, the more deserving. (van Oorschot 2000: 36)*

While these five criteria have been well established in the literature, there is an ongoing debate about which categories are the most important. Generally, control is said to be the most relevant factor, followed by identity and reciprocity (cf., van Oorschot 2006: 26). However, research also suggests that the impact of each category depends on the respondent because socio-structural and cultural factors influence how individuals evaluate these criteria.

Besides these individual differences, there is a general pattern among the European public on how to rank certain groups according to their deservingness: elderly people are usually regarded as the most deserving, followed by sick and disabled people; the unemployed are seen as less deserving, and immigrants are seen as the least deserving of all. While immigrants come last in this ranking despite their often objectively higher need (cf., Reeskens/van Oorschot 2012: 121), we should be conscious of not erroneously regarding immigrants as a set and homogeneous group (cf., Reeskens 2017: 1). In fact, previous research has hinted at the existence of an ethnic hierarchy, referring

to a ranking of immigrant groups according to their social distance and identity (cf., Kootstra 2016: 327).

So why is it that immigrants usually come last in natives' deservingness rankings? On the individual level, identity is often regarded as one of the most relevant factors (cf., van Oorschot/Reeskens 2017: 15f.). According to a new study, identity "plays a strong role in the perceived deservingness of welfare claimants; it is only control and reciprocity that have a stronger influence" (Reeskens 2017: 1). In addition, this paper suggests that the immigrant penalty – that is, their deservingness gap to natives – persists no matter how favourable an immigrant's non-identity-related traits are (ibid.: 2). This implies that the impact of identity can never fully be diminished, which is especially significant since racist prejudice towards and stereotyping of certain immigrant groups can extend the distance between newcomers and natives, either by portraying the former as culturally different or by reinforcing the image of a 'lazy immigrant' who burdens the social welfare system. Identity could also matter most because the legitimization for welfare systems rests heavily on a national group identity (Offe 1988, quoted in Jeene et al. 2013: 1115).

In contrast to the idea that identity – along with reciprocity and control – is especially important, another study about the deservingness of immigrants has challenged



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the notion that identity is one of the most decisive criteria. In her paper, Anouk Kootstra (2016) investigates whether the preference for natives is truly a sign of identitarian closeness and anti-immigrant attitudes or if it is instead driven by concerns regarding other deservingness criteria. Her findings suggest that, on one hand, identity is not the main driver for the immigrants' position since newcomers who exhibit 'favourable' traits – e.g., who have shown an effort to reciprocate and who have a long work history in the respective country – are generally regarded as equally deserving as members of the majority who contribute in a comparable way. On the other hand, she finds that ethnic minority claimants with 'unfavourable' characteristics – like a shorter work history or a disinclination to look for a job – are penalized more heavily than natives with similar characteristics; the author describes this as a "double standard" (ibid.: 326). The latter result supports the idea that deservingness criteria are applied differently to members of the out-group based on their set of attributes, while also rendering the identity criterion of negligible importance when immigrants have high scores on reciprocity and low scores on control.

To sum up, people apply five different deservingness criteria (control, need, identity, attitude, and reciprocity) to judge an individual's welfare state deservingness. As immigrants are usually regarded as one of the least deserving groups in society, the deservingness of immigrants can be based on an 'us-versus-them' logic where – on average – conditionality is high and newcomers' deservingness is rated as low. While some researchers stress the importance of identity for this phenomenon, others reject this idea and do not regard identity as the main cause of immigrants' disadvantageous deservingness ratings. Both positions judge identity to be relevant, yet in different ways: whereas the first one emphasizes identity and its lasting impact, the second one considers it to be largely counteracted (in certain cases) by other factors to a point where this criterion is relatively insignificant. Against this theoretical backdrop, this paper's first objective is to examine whether and how deservingness rankings in regard to immigrants are employed during the DF. The second objective is to put both positions regarding the role of the identity criterion – identity as the core criterion or as counteracted by other criteria – to the test by investigating its usage during discussions

about immigrants' welfare state deservingness. Before proceeding with the empirical analyses, the next chapter addresses the overall context of Germany in which the data was collected and describes particular research for the German case.

### Setting the Context: Welfare State Deservingness of Immigrants in Germany

A recent study confirmed findings from prior research that immigrants are awarded less welfare state deservingness in Germany: it found widespread public opposition to government programmes benefiting immigrants, while other welfare programs remained unopposed (e.g., Oorschot 2008; Goldschmidt 2017: 33ff.). As Germany has a historically conservative corporatist welfare regime, its welfare benefits are conditional on prior contribution, which is why it has been described as exclusionary towards immigrants (cf., Sainsbury 2006: 234ff.). This exclusionary character has been bolstered by a legacy of ethnicity-based naturalization laws – which were only recently amended to add a *ius soli* principle to the pre-existing *ius sanguinis* one – as well as by its general limits on social rights, its persistently high obstacles to becoming naturalized or receiving residency rights, and its differentiated rights for different immigrant groups (cf., Sainsbury 2006: 234ff.). Hence, Germany as a state already practices a hierarchy of

social rights in terms of distinct immigrant groups being treated differently by law. In addition, the restructuring of the German welfare system in the early 2000s has had a profound impact on its social welfare architecture, since it has led to a partial transformation of the unemployment insurance into a means-tested arrangement. These means-tested provisions have been criticized as creating a sharp divide between the people financing these programs and the recipients of unemployment benefits who, as a consequence, are often seen as undeserving and lazy (cf., Crepaz/Damron 2009: 446). The idea of contributing reciprocally might be regarded as the central and legitimizing requirement in such an environment.

Unfortunately, more recent and detailed research on the possible relevance of identity is sparse for Germany. In line with the arguments in favour of the importance of identity, a study among German students by Lauren Appelbaum (2002) found that the deservingness of minorities was almost exclusively related to as how 'German' these groups were seen. Identity was that important that it even tended to suppress other deservingness criteria. Refugees represented a slight exception to this overall pattern. Participants in this study seemed to be more willing to consider them deserving, tended to disregard their identity, and generally viewed this group's capacity for control as small. Yet, with the recent rise in

the numbers of refugees during the “summer of migration” (Hess et al. 2016), the debate about immigrants’ social rights has become a core and increasingly discussed issue among the German public, making this topic a highly controversial one. Before presenting the empirical results, I will now briefly introduce the stages of collecting and analysing the data.

## Methods

The data analysed for this paper was taken from the second round of the Deliberative Forum (DF), as described in greater detail in the introduction to this volume. During this second round, the objective was to tease out information and clarify participants’ judgments on welfare recipients’ deservingness by using a vignette design (cf., Beck/Opp 2001). Vignettes are short descriptions of certain circumstances, situations, or people usually written on a piece of paper and modified systematically (i.e., the vignettes vary purposefully regarding specific characteristics) (cf., Reineck et al. 2017: 104). This method helps to understand how participants interpret and differentiate between different cues, and it allows us to tap into participants’ perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs.

For this paper, I focused solely on the discussions regarding one out of four vignettes, namely the one which described

a male immigrant (Adrian). The statement read: “Adrian has been living in Germany since recently and is unemployed. Before that, he worked in his country of origin.” The participants were allowed to decide on additional information or even change Adrian’s features during the discussions.

For analysing the data, I used a two-stage qualitative content analysis (cf., Mayring 2010) with the help of the software program MAXQDA. First, I coded inductively, forming codes and – whenever necessary – merging them into more abstract codes regarding deservingness until the data was saturated. Saturation in this case means that I could not find anymore meaningful new codes. In a second phase, I compared the codes I obtained to the five deservingness criteria given in the literature. In this way, I ensured that the codes originated from the data while at the same time making it possible to verify whether they corresponded to the theoretical considerations. And indeed, the results were compatible.

## Empirical Analyses

In this chapter, I intend to successively examine the obtained data with respect to my research questions: first, how is the deservingness ranking regarding immigrants constructed in Germany? And second, how does the identity criterion relate to the other deservingness criteria in said ranking?

## Types of Deservingness Rankings

Regarding the first question, a discourse about a deservingness ranking materialized during the discussion of the 'Adrian' vignette. It can be differentiated into three sub-discourses, each representing a distinct form of deservingness ranking. In the following, I will present each type and its specific characteristics.

To begin with, there is evidence that some participants support the notion that German natives should receive more welfare benefits than immigrants. I term this *core nationalistic deservingness ranking (1)* – exemplified by Viola's statement:

*You simply have to have an advantage as a citizen of your own country compared to non-citizens in your country. [...] [Otherwise,] this is simply unfair towards the citizens of their state, I think, because then I have no advantage of being a citizen of my state. (MX2: 476; 492 – the quotes' citation method is explained in the introduction by Heuer et al.)*

A central theme here is clearly nationalism: a distinction is drawn based on nation state borders and citizenship. Accordingly, immigrants, no matter whether they are from the European Union or so-called third countries, should not have the same social rights and benefits as German na-

tives. Hence, the *core nationalistic deservingness ranking* discourse represents an understanding whereby an individual's own national identity group is most deserving of welfare support. Everyone else deserves less or even nothing.

A second sub-discourse I could identify is the *European Union deservingness ranking type (2)*, which is constituted by the construction of a common European identity, or, more precisely, a shared identity of European Union member states. Natives of these countries are seen as belonging to a common political unit. Hence, they are considered as similarly deserving. Therefore, this discourse constructs an in-group of deserving individuals that is more comprehensive and includes more individuals than the first one. It undermines the nationalist element of the deservingness hierarchy while still holding on to the concept of an in- and out-group that differ in the deservingness of social welfare benefits. This type of argument is sometimes brought up in combination with an utopian idea of a shared European welfare system, as in the following example:

*What we do on a global scale is something I do not want to think about at all right now. But, indeed, we should at least implement this supranational idea in a shared social security system in Europe. (Günther, EL2: 747)*

From this point of view, all citizens of the European Union should have the same social rights. But while the point of reference – that is, the in-group – is more comprehensive, this approach still applies a hierarchy that deliberately excludes everyone who is not an EU citizen. In other words, the in-group is larger while the out-group is smaller but the implied logic stays the same. The above-cited quote made this quite obvious: in essence, it says that, right now, we should not even think about anything else but EU citizens. Other countries are excluded and their citizens are categorized as less deserving. Taking this into account, one could argue that the *European Union deservingness ranking* is not anti-nationalistic per se or at least does not undermine nationalistic elements as drastically as implied before. It shifts the underlying category from a single political unit to a group of political units forming a state-like entity. But it still very much works on the ideas of borders and citizenship.

In addition to this EU-centric viewpoint, there is another type of sub-discourse that envisages varying assessments of EU citizens and those from third countries: the *differentiating deservingness ranking* (3). This form sidesteps both previously presented discourses insofar as it avoids the dichotomies proposed: the German natives versus the rest or the EU citizens versus the rest. Instead, the *differentiating deservingness ranking* puts forward a trichotomy: the most deserving welfare recipients are German natives, EU citizens are deemed less deserving, and third-country citizens are the least deserving. The following exchange with Jakob exemplifies this:

*Jakob: First of all: is he an EU citizen or a non-EU citizen?*

*Moderator: Is that important?*

*Theodor: Yes, that is a difference.*

*Moderator: Well. Then let us get straight into the discussion. Why is it important? Where is the difference? [...]*

*Jakob: Oh well, EU citizens have different rights.*

*Moderator: In your ideal world?*

” [T]he *differentiating deservingness ranking* puts forward a trichotomy: the most deserving welfare recipients are German natives, EU citizens are deemed less deserving, and third-country citizens are the least deserving.

*Jakob: Yes, and non-EU citizens have, [in turn], different rights. (EL2: 641-651)*

In these cases, refugees are actually often regarded as more deserving than EU citizens.

Later on, Jakob clarified that while EU citizens should have more rights like the right to work as well as the eligibility to social welfare benefits, Adrian's access to support in Germany should be time-limited and should not exceed the amount of money he would receive in his country of origin (cf., EL2: 657). In the end, the imagined immigrant from the EU is still not one of 'us' and, thus, less deserving. To introduce the notion of differentiation, I use the term 'differentiating' as this type's defining feature. Theoretically, there are endless ways of constructing (meaningful) identities and introducing new variations regarding the deservingness of each group. Nevertheless, the trichotomy is the most common one within this discourse. Sometimes, participants split third-country citizens into two subcategories: refugees versus non-refugees. Take the following quote, which belongs to the *differentiating deservingness ranking* category but applies a different hierarchy:

*For reasons of fairness, [Adrian] – I mean if he comes from the EU – should not receive any benefits. But if he is a refugee, [...] officially recognized [...], then, I think, he should get housing and food and counselling in order to have a start here. (Viola, MX2: 466)*

Yet, the general idea of a deservingness hierarchy for immigrants in its various forms was not unopposed. A universalistic or egalitarian standpoint emerged in the discussions, one that runs counter to any ranking. This *universalistic or egalitarian counter-discourse* (4) makes no distinction between groups at all, undermining the very notion of a deservingness hierarchy along with the associated in- and out-group logics. This attitude is often accompanied by a humanistic worldview in which Adrian is seen as a "human being like everyone else" (Hakan, ET2: 1113) or as a "human being just like me" (Cem, MX2: 516). One of the participants summarized this position in the following statement, which criticizes the very idea of borders and birth-rights:

*Because I say that all human beings, no matter where they are from, are the same. [...] And that when they come to Germany [...], they should be treated like the people born in Germany. Just because you somehow say you are born here and think since you are born within these borders you have rights and that you can defraud other people of these rights – that is just [wrong]. (Lena, ET2: 667)*

By deconstructing rights purely based on citizenship and a randomly allocated place of birth, this participant subverts – on moral grounds – the inherent logic of welfare deservingness hierarchies, that is, the differentiation between natives and immigrants' access to social welfare benefits.

So far, I have been able to identify three different patterns of deservingness rankings as well as one counter-discourse. But the role the identity criterion plays in relation to the other criteria in these discourses is still unclear. Is it a decisive, if not the most dominant criterion, or is it eclipsed by other criteria? I will address this question in the following section.

## The Role of Identity

In order to answer the second research question about the role of identity in relation to the other deservingness criteria, it is necessary to know first which criteria were used during the DF. This enables us to recognize which criteria might be linked with the identity criterion. Consistent with the literature on deservingness, I found evidence of all of the five categories during the DF. But even though all of them could be found, the different discourses do not necessarily relate to one another. Theoretically, each criterion could have its own autonomous discourse without any interconnection. That is how the literature

presents and ranks them: it treats each one as a separate unit. Empirically, the data bears this notion out sometimes. However, identity can also be linked to the rest of the criteria. Specifically, I found three main discourses differing in the ways identity is positioned vis-à-vis the rest of the categories: (1) the *identity discourse*; (2) the *combined discourse*; (3) the *anti-identity discourse*. I will now present each discourse chronologically in more detail.

Within the *identity discourse*, participants emphasized who someone is rather than what this person has done, accomplished and contributed, or what they need, or what level of control they have. In other words, when discussing this issue, participants only used the category of identity, or extensively favoured identity over any other criteria. The proximity or distance to one's own in-group is seen as a sufficient reason to make an argument about another person's deservingness. Since it does not draw on any other criteria, the identity discourse is congruent with what I described when presenting the identity category. We already encountered one example earlier in this paper, where a participant remarked that it would be unfair if citizens did not have an advantage over non-citizens (Viola, MX2: 476; 492). She based her argument on identity purely – embodied by the citizenship status – in order to make a judgment. In her statement, Viola neither needed nor used any

other argument to come to this conclusion. Other standpoints used a mutual culture and a feeling of community as the common denominator to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’ regarding the identity discourse. The following exchange depicts this line of thought:

*Maria: Where does this claim come from that you, somehow, think that you have an entitlement just because you were born within the borders?*

[...]

*Theodor: Because we are an economic community as well as a community of shared values.*

(EL2: 738; 741)

It is worth noting that the envisioned community is one that distinguishes itself from outsiders in terms of values and the economy. The construction of the in-group’s identity works not only by stressing German culture in general but also – on a global scale – by emphasizing that the powerful German economy should belong to natives only or at least primarily.

All in all, the identity discourse is illustrated by cases that are straightforward when viewed as isolated instances. The arguments about identity are made without any further link to other deservingness criteria. Still, the results suggest that a clear-cut identity discourse is rather rare or at least ambiguous, especially when

conducting research on the individual level. Even one person can be expected to refer to a variety of criteria. This fact always leaves open the possibility of conflation.

The second *combined discourse* is different as it links the deservingness criteria to someone’s identity. The connection can usually be within one statement or even sentence. The information conveyed only makes sense when we think of it as a combination of the identity criterion and at least one other criterion. This distinguishes it from the identity discourse, in which the quotes about identity are sufficient on their own. We can find cases of the combined discourse for each of the remaining four criteria. For instance, the following statement is an example of the link between identity, need, and reciprocity:

*Nowadays, we have 300,000 German citizens who do not have a postal address all over Germany. First, we Germans should take care of our poor, poor fellow citizens. A great number of these 300,000 homeless Germans have surely paid their fair share of social security benefits in the past. So they have the right, but not Adrian [...].*  
(Jakob, EL2: 715)

At first sight, this quote could be seen as part of the identity discourse, because it makes a strong case in favour of Germans. But it is not merely about German citizens

who should be privileged; rather it is about needy Germans who have paid into the social security system. Instead of a pure identity discourse, it is a connection of criteria – namely need, reciprocity, and identity. Nevertheless, the identity criterion is especially salient and puts the other two into perspective. This is because need and reciprocity are explicitly linked to who somebody is and what citizenship they have. These two categories are only fully incorporated into deservingness considerations when Germans are affected.

Another participant mirrored this attitude when she talked about restricting claims regarding welfare benefits for non-citizens working in Germany: foreigners have a claim if they work here, “[...] but only to a certain extent” (Daniele, EL2: 668). It is a fitting phrase: even if you reciprocate (or even if you are needy, for that matter), your deservingness only goes so far, to a certain extent. The reason why you are treated in this way is because you are a member of the out-group, not because you have not contributed. However, immigrants who work and pay taxes are at least seen as more deserving than those who do not.

Taken as a whole, within the combined discourse, deservingness rests on the combination of identity (i.e., who somebody is and where they come from) and certain personal characteristics an individual has to have to receive welfare benefits. Hence,

the evaluation criteria are applied differently and more severely to immigrants, which is why this group will likely face more scrutiny with regard to their welfare benefit deservingness. As identity is linked to one or more other deservingness criteria, the importance of each category varies from case to case. Theoretically, this could blur the lines to the extent that we can say that a pure identity discourse is evident whenever identity completely gains the upper hand. Although this grey area certainly exists, I argue that whereas the identity discourse usually deploys

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identitarian arguments in a self-contained manner, the combined discourse can only be understood if we combine identity with other criteria. In these interconnections, identity can play the most salient role. In all cases, the other categories only make sense in reference to a person's identity.

The third *anti-identity discourse* follows a different path in that it subverts both the identity or combined discourses by using a universalistic discourse to render identity meaningless. Here, other criteria can be used and framed within an egalitarian framework – e.g., they can be juxtaposed in opposition to identity, or the link between them and identity can be broken. Take the following example of such a discourse in regard to need:

*Well, I just ask myself [...] what are his needs at this particular moment. I would say that he has the same needs for food, clothing or something similar like everyone else, whether they are German or non-Germans. [In this case,] he has the same claim as a German citizen. [...] [What] do we do with someone who comes here? Are we supposed to ditch him, leaving him without any means of survival? (Günther, EL2: 663)*

To sum up, the anti-identity approach is the only one of the three discourses that completely undermines the relevance of a person's identity and ignores differences between in- and out-groups. It thereby nullifies the very notion of deservingness altogether.

## **Discussion and Conclusion: Making Sense of Deservingness Rankings and the Role of Identity**

This article set out to study the concept of welfare state deservingness rankings regarding immigrants in Germany and the role the identity criterion plays in people's decision to rank immigrants last, that is, to apply a deservingness hierarchy. To investigate this, I formulated my two main research question: 1) how do people in Germany construct their deservingness ranking for immigrants? 2) How does the identity criterion relate to the other deservingness criteria in said ranking?

In this paper's empirical results, I showed that, regarding the first research question, some participants support a deservingness hierarchy between natives and immigrant claimants, as they exhibit a lack of generosity towards the latter. But there is no evidence of a unified understanding of this concept as at least three different subtypes of deservingness rankings exist simultaneously: the *core nationalistic deservingness ranking*, the *European Union deservingness ranking*, and the *differentiating deservingness ranking discourse*. At the same time, I could also detect a *universalistic or egalitarian counter-discourse* that rejects the very notion of introducing a distinction between both groups in terms of welfare state benefits.

Regarding the second research question, I identified three discourses that exhibit different relationships between identity and the other four categories: the *identity discourse*, the *combined discourse*, and the *anti-identity discourse*. Within these types, identity can occur either on its own, in combination with other criteria, or within a framework that – sometimes by employing the other deservingness criteria – neutralises the idea of identity as a legitimate criterion. I will discuss both research questions in more detail in the following before highlighting further implications and drawing a final conclusion.



## These discourses work by varying where they draw the crucial boundary between deserving in-groups and less deserving out-groups.

The results show that participants did support “a strong welfare state for ‘us’ (natives), but offered less support for welfare for ‘them’ (migrants)” (van Oorschot/Roosma 2015: 14). But at least three different deservingness rankings co-existed instead of just one. These discourses work by varying where they draw the crucial boundary between deserving in-groups and less deserving out-groups. At the same time, a counter-discourse emerged that rejects the idea of differentiating in- and out-groups and disadvantaging immigrants. Hence, we should take into account specific possibilities for how welfare state hierarchies regarding immigrants are constructed in Germany. Otherwise, we might overlook how they operate.

Interestingly, refugees as a particular group of third-country citizens were at times regarded as more deserving than other immigrants. This was despite the fact that third-country citizens are considered dubiously deserving of social welfare benefits in general, and reinforces Applebaum’s finding that German students tend to accord more deservingness to asylum seekers.

Regarding the relation of the identity criterion to the other deservingness criteria, this paper’s findings suggest that identity

often plays a role in the determination of deservingness—either on its own or in specific combinations with the other four categories. In this sense, the identity criterion seems to influence the perception of deservingness more often than not. However, we should be mindful that the combined discourse might not be about identity at all. Another possible interpretation is that the desire to exclude migrants who (naturally) have not contributed is based solely on (the missing) reciprocity, negating an automatic link between migrants and identity.

All things considered, the identity criterion seems to play a prominent role in peoples’ assessments of immigrants’ deservingness in Germany assuming they accept a deservingness hierarchy as a legitimate concept (i.e., if they are inclined to vary access to welfare benefits between groups in the first place). As outlined initially, the literature on this matter is split between two perspectives, with one emphasizing the importance of identity and the other one deeming it less relevant or even irrelevant. In light of this paper’s results, we should not regard these research poles as mutually exclusive. In reality, there is a multitude of discourses (i.e., identity, combined, and anti-identity) including both scenarios.

This understanding is further complicated when we consider that an individual can differ in how much they emphasize identity, as humans are not necessarily consistent and may express distinct (even antagonistic) discourses and opinions at different times. It is thus not an either-or question when we consider the discursive field as a whole: identity can play an important role or be less important to irrelevant depending on which discourse is expressed. However, this paper's results suggest that as long as people consider the idea of ranking immigrants' deservingness legitimate, identity is always relevant and never completely vanishes; this was the case with the identity and the combined discourse. It is not until participants dismissed the whole idea of deservingness altogether through a universalistic anti-identity discourse that they also rejected identity. These participants did not want to make any distinction between groups based on someone's identity or origin. This position was less prominent in the discussions during the DF.

Looking at the combined discourse specifically, the interrelations within it between identity and other criteria seem to have been largely overlooked in the literature so far. These links between deservingness criteria are also the reason why assessments of immigrant deservingness do not solely rest on how 'German' these groups are considered, as Applebaum put it back in

2002. However, there is a strategic element in how the deservingness of immigrants is discussed: besides control, identity and reciprocity are often regarded as the most relevant criteria. Immigrants score low on identity and reciprocity, as they are not natives and they usually do not have a chance to reciprocate before entering a country. The use of these two criteria naturally advantages members of the in-group sharing one national identity, which is why the above stated possibility that the questioning of immigrants' deservingness is all about reciprocity might fail to capture the whole picture (i.e., the strategic implications).

Another strategic consideration is linked to an ethnic hierarchy that ranks immigrant groups based on their socially constructed racial or ethnic identities – being German, an EU citizen, or from a third state has profound implications for an individual's ascribed deservingness. While at first glance, ethnicity, or race for that matter, does not seem to play a role, it is noticeable that, apart from Germans, Europeans (who are still predominantly white) are often the most privileged. When participants spoke about third-country citizens, they mostly assumed them to be non-white and most commonly from Muslim majority countries or (North) African countries (e.g., ET2: 1053; MX2: 554). And it was exactly these non-white groups' deservingness that was questioned the most: they are usually ranked last and told to integrate. All of this

hints at the existence of an ethnic hierarchy, especially targeting racialized non-western immigrant groups from countries at the periphery of the world economy/global power structure. Their deservingness is more easily questioned and they are often targets of racist stereotyping. These power relations between (racialized) groups have an impact on the distribution of and access to resources (cf., Rätzkel 2008: 286). In the late 1990s, Birgit Rommelspacher connected the rejection of 'the immigrant Other' by the German mainstream society with questions about the power and dominance asserted by natives. She argued that the influx of immigrants threatened privileges – like social welfare benefits – of the (predominantly white) majority society, which is exactly why majority society had rejected newcomers (cf., 1998: 85f.). The research about deservingness has apparently failed to explicitly address this – historically rooted – systemic and strategic element of ranking immigrant groups in European societies.

Ultimately, this paper indicates that a substantial share of people in Germany will not allocate welfare benefits without considering a person's identity. This finding is not without limitations, however. The non-representative character of the data makes it impossible to infer from the DF sample to the German population with certainty. Yet, the ability of qualitative analyses to tap into socially shared knowledge still enables us to recognize general patterns in society.

” [A] substantial share of people in Germany will not allocate welfare benefits without considering a person's identity.

In doing so, we should be mindful about possible biases. The participants were more left wing and educated than the average German population is. This means that identity as a criterion might have been less pronounced at the DF than it actually is in the German population. In addition to these sample issues, there are problems with the construction of separate discourses in this paper. There certainly exists a grey area, where the boundaries of the discourses start to become blurred and meanings overlap – as reality itself tends to escape clear-cut classifications. Future research could partially address these points by using a larger sample with a stronger focus on deservingness as well as by asking more questions in order to gain a more detailed understanding. This paper suggests that research taking a qualitative approach can enrich the debate about deservingness, which has been dominated by quantitative analyses so far.

All in all, it seems that the debate on deservingness has intensified within German society, which is polarized around the

topics of immigration. The emergence of (increasingly) successful right-wing populist parties exploiting welfare chauvinism and identitarian arguments has further pushed this issue to the forefront of German as well as even global politics. With the existence of substantial anti-immigrant forces, the question about immigrants' deservingness – especially in relation to their identity – is here to stay, as is research about this subject.

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