



Policy Brief

New Voters for the *Bundestag*? Potential Turnout among Third Country Nationals in General Elections

Executive Summary

Three in five foreigners in Germany come from a country outside of the EU. Unlike EU citizens who are allowed to vote in local and European elections, these third country nationals are excluded from political decision-making processes. However, an analysis conducted by the Expert Council's Research Unit shows that this group has considerable potential for democratic participation that can be achieved through naturalisation. Every other foreigner from a third country would exercise their right to vote in *Bundestag* elections if they had voting rights. This represents approx. 1.8 million potential voters who could be mobilised by the political parties.

This Policy Brief examines to what extent third country nationals are interested in voting in general elections at the federal level and identifies their potential participation in future *Bundestag* elections based on a special analysis of data from the Immigrant Citizens Survey (ICS) Germany conducted by the Expert Council's Research Unit which surveyed around 1,000 immigrants from third countries.

This analysis found that well-integrated immigrants in particular would exercise their right to vote; in many cases, interest in voting also goes hand-in-hand with the desire to become a citizen. The majority of third country nationals already fulfil the main requirements for citizenship (65%) but only a small percentage (17%) wants to have a German passport. The Expert Council's Research Unit thus recommends a stronger push for naturalisation and greater emphasis on German citizenship and voting rights. The reverse is also true: immigrants who want to be politically active and who satisfy the prerequisites for naturalisation should also apply for citizenship. Furthermore, the Policy Brief shows that immigrants' interest in participating in the political process can also be strengthened, mainly through better social integration and education, for example, school diplomas, German language proficiency and knowledge of the political system and living conditions in Germany.

The immigrants themselves see a need for change in parliamentary representation: a majority of third country nationals thinks that the German *Bundestag* should have more Members of Parliament (MPs) with a migration background. They hope that these MPs would better understand them, better represent them and believe they would be symbolically important for Germany. This means that the political parties are confronted with two integrative tasks: on the one hand, they have to recognise immigrants' concerns and problems and take them seriously; this is the only way to win over new voters. On the other hand, immigrants' interest in politics can be enhanced by more adequate parliamentary representation.