

## **Towards Explaining Anti-Foreign Violence in Germany**

by Jens Alber  
Universität Konstanz  
Working Paper Series #53

### **Abstract**

Germany has recently witnessed a vast increase in anti-foreign violence. Assembling data from a wide variety of recent research, the paper addresses two basic questions: to what extent is the outburst of xenophobic attacks a German peculiarity? and what are the explanations for the increasing violence? An analysis of criminal statistics of various European countries and of comparative opinion polls in the European Community shows that Germany has indeed witnessed a growth of anti-foreign sentiment, and a level of violence that is conspicuous from a comparative perspective. Four possible determinants of this peculiarity of recent German history are discussed: (1) the growing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity due to the vast increase in immigration from non-European countries; (2) the increasing costs of foreigners' claims on the German welfare state; (3) the economic context of immigration; and (4) the transformation of national identity in the context of German unification. It is shown that neither the rate of immigration nor the position of foreigners in the German welfare state yields satisfactory explanations for the recent upsurge in violence, which only occurred after unification. The key for an explanation lies in a particular macro-constellation that is characterized by the concurrence of a massive wave of immigration with an economic crisis, and with the ethnicization of German national identity in the context of unification. Anti-foreign sentiments do not automatically follow increases in immigration, but grow in a specific political climate to which the political elites actively contribute.

## TOWARDS EXPLAINING ANTI-FOREIGN VIOLENCE IN GERMANY

Jens Alber, Universität Konstanz

### **Introduction**

Germany presently presents a rather confusing and ambivalent picture to the world. On the one hand, since the German unification hardly a day has passed without an outburst of anti-foreign violence. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of German citizens rallied in demonstrations against anti-foreign violence, German newspapers were filled with ads expressing solidarity with foreign residents, and, in almost every town, associations spring forth that seek to promote the integration of foreigners.

Attempts to explain the explosion of anti-foreign violence in recent years are just as multifaceted as the presentation of the country in everyday life. On the micro as well as on the macro level we find diametrically opposed hypotheses. One explanation prominent on the **micro level** is that the increasing readiness to resort to violence is the result of the permissiveness of parents of the 68er generation who failed to draw limits for their children and to perform the social control functions required by adults in the socialization process. On the other side, there are explanations in the tradition of the "Authoritarian Personality", according to which the emotional deprivation suffered by children in too repressive families is a major cause of the upsurge in right wing violence.

On the **macro level**, there are similarly contradictory ideas. On the one hand, we have hypotheses which view anti-foreign violence as a sort of collective self-defense against an excessive immigration of asylum seekers and an exploitation of the German welfare state by foreigners. On the other hand, there are hypotheses which highlight the problematic German national identity as the root of the problem. Thus, several politicians and intellectuals champion the idea that the wave of anti-foreign violence is the result of a too heavy tabooing of national pride. By overstressing cosmopolitan values, the political establishment of the Federal Republic has left it exclusively to right wing radicals to satisfy the neglected desire for national pride and identity. As rebellious adolescents try to challenge the established adult world by transgressing taboos, and as German nationalism has become more or less the only taboo left in an otherwise permissive society, the adolescent rebellion against the established insider culture articulates itself in a new radical nationalism. If this may be called the "vacuum hypothesis" of national identity, there is also a rival hypothesis which sees the recent violence as the result of an excessive mobilization of national consciousness after German unification, and of a fading of cosmopolitan, pluralist political orientations. From the latter perspective, not the neglect of, but rather the overemphasis on national identity, is the root cause of the recent outbursts of right wing violence.

In my opinion it is the task of social science to narrow the margin of possible interpretations by systematically confronting such conjectures with empirical data. Hence I will try to summarize and re-evaluate the available empirical evidence in the light of competing theoretical explanations. As I am a sociologist rather than a psychologist, I will concentrate on explanations on the macro level.

The two rival hypotheses on national identity - the vacuum hypothesis and the mobilization thesis - have one aspect in common. Both imply the idea that the upsurge of anti-foreign violence is a specifically German problem which is rooted in the peculiarities of German history. I will test this idea by examining first whether Germany is more xenophobic than other European countries. This will serve to specify the dependent variable of the analysis. Then I will move to a discussion of four explanatory variables that figure more or less prominently in current public debates. First I will test two popular hypotheses that view the wave of anti-foreign violence as a sort of collective self-defense against (1) foreign exploitation of the German welfare state, or (2) against a wave of immigration which has moved beyond tolerable limits. Then I will discuss two further determinants, i.e. (3) the economic context of the recent immigration, and (4) the mobilization of a specific kind of national consciousness in the context of German unification.

My **hypothesis** will be that neither the rate of immigration nor the position of foreigners in the German welfare state yield satisfactory explanations for the recent upsurge in anti-foreign violence. The key for an explanation lies rather in a particular macro constellation that is characterized by the concurrence of a wave of migration with an economic crisis, and with the ethnization of German national identity in the context of unification. As I see the prime task of social science less in developing speculations than in testing hypotheses, I will add a final section in which I discuss how this idea and the rival vacuum-of-national-identity-hypothesis could be empirically tested.

### 1. The dependent variable: Are Germans more xenophobic than others?

There are two ways by which to approach an empirical answer to the question whether the level of xenophobia is exceptional in Germany. First we can take a look at the criminal statistics of various countries in order to measure the incidence of anti-foreign violence. Secondly, we can turn to the comparative opinion polls of the European Communities in order to see if anti-foreign sentiments prevail in Germany to a stronger degree than elsewhere in Europe.

#### a) Anti-foreign violence in a comparative perspective

As there is no comparative source on anti-foreign violence, I have written to a number of European embassies in order to obtain their national data. Data were supplied by the govern-

ments of France, Great Britain, Sweden, and Switzerland. In addition some comparative newspaper accounts could be utilized.

According to these data, only **Great Britain** has witnessed an increase in anti-foreign violence that is comparable to Germany. Between 1988 and 1991, the number of instances of racial assault and racial harassment almost doubled in Britain from 4,383 to 7,882. In 1992 7,793 incidents with a racist motivation were registered (Home Office Fax of 9/12/1993). In the first ten months of 1993 12 deaths were attributed to violence with a racist background (International Herald Tribune November 3, 1993: 4). In **France**, anti-foreign violence reached a climax on a much lower level during the mid-1980s, but has been declining since. Between 1980 and 1992, a total of 641 criminal anti-foreign activities were registered in which 1,652 persons became the victims of racist threats. 25 fatal incidents occurred from 1980 to 1992, non of which happened in the two most recent years (Consulat Général de France, letter of 28/10/1993). **Germany** registered some twenty fatal incidents in the year of 1992 alone.<sup>1</sup>

**Switzerland** counted 34 anti-foreign violent acts in 1990 and 81 in 1991, including one fatal incident (Schweizerischer Bundesrat 1992: 33). **Sweden** registered 25 acts of anti-foreign arson or explosive attacks in 1992, but no deaths. In the same year the country hosted some 83,000 asylum seekers (Swedish Embassy Fax of 16/9/1993; see also Steinke 1993). In **Germany** the number of violent acts committed by right wing extremists increased from 270 in 1990 to 1,483 in 1991, and to 2,584 in 1992 (see table 1). The German authorities also give data on the number of attacks with explosive devices or arson which are roughly comparable to the Swedish data. In 1992, there were 722 such attacks (Bundesministerium des Innern 1993: 70). If this is compared to the 25 attacks in Sweden, it becomes clear that with a population size 9.4 times larger than the Swedish one, the Federal Republic accepted 5.3 times as many asylum seekers as Sweden, but experienced 29 times as many acts of anti-foreign arson.

In sum, Germany is not the only European country to experience increasing anti-foreign violence in recent years, but the number and the intensity of these acts seems to be higher than elsewhere in Europe. Data from comparative polls also confirm that there is a remarkable degree of xenophobia in Germany.

---

<sup>1</sup> In a very detailed account of each individual act the periodical DIE WOCHE (No 24/1993) arrives at a total number of 26 deaths whereas the government's *Verfassungsschutzbericht* for 1992 states the number of deaths in a summary account as 17 (Bundesministerium des Innern 1993: 70).

## b) Attitudes on foreigners in comparative opinion polls

The 1992 **Eurobarometer** carried out by the Commission of the European Communities contained several items measuring anti-foreign attitudes. In none of these items does Germany rank as the country with the highest degree of intolerance. In contrast to other nations, however, she consistently appears among the 2-4 countries with the highest proportion of xenophobic statements. Thus Germany has above average proportions of people saying that there are too many foreigners in their country, that the presence of foreigners is disturbing, that the rights of foreigners should be restricted rather than extended, or that asylum seekers should no longer be accepted. If a compound index of xenophobia is constructed from the various items, only the Belgians stood out as as equally hostile to foreigners in 1992 as the Germans (Wiegand 1993:4; Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften 1992).

By and large, we may conclude, then, that Germany is not unique in experiencing increasing xenophobia in recent years, but that the level of anti-foreign attitudes and of anti-foreign violence is conspicuously high in a comparative European perspective. This requires explanation.

## 2. Possible explanations

### 2.1 The position of foreigners in the German welfare state

Right wing radicals see asylum seekers and other foreigners as menacing competitors who not only take away jobs in the labor market, but also exploit the German welfare state by an excessive claim of benefits. The authors of a study on anti-foreign violence which was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Women and Youth summarized this position as follows: *"It is not a set of shared ideologies or political convictions that serves as a bond between the heterogeneous groups of violent actors but rather a diffuse sense of general deprivation of Germans vis-à-vis foreigners, especially asylum seekers. This perception is above all connected to problems of housing and of social transfer payments for asylum seekers"* (Willems/ Würtz/ Eckert 1993: 132; translation from the German original by this author).

Since the idea that foreigners are parasites who exploit the German taxpayer serves as a legitimizing bridge that helps to redefine anti-foreign violence as legitimate self-defense, I will examine briefly to what extent foreigners indeed overburden the German welfare state.

As in all legends, there is a grain of truth in the right wing view. It is true that foreigners are increasingly overrepresented among the recipients of social assistance, which is the German form of poor relief. From 1980 to 1990 the proportion of foreigners among social assistance recipients increased from 8 to 22 % (Beck 1992: 300). Only 6 % of all Germans, but 16 % of the foreign residents draw social assistance benefits. This may

be seen as a basis for the growing resentment. However, the social assistance scheme is only a minor program, representing merely 5 % of the Federal Republic's social expenditure. The bulk of social outlays goes to the pension insurance system, where foreigners account for roughly 8 % of the income from contributions, while drawing only 2 % of the outlays for benefits (Rehfeld 1991: 491).

The aggregate impact that foreigners have on the German tax and transfer system was recently examined by one of the country's leading economic research institutes. It came to the conclusion that foreigners paid around 30 billion DM in taxes and social insurance contributions in 1991, while receiving transfers worth 16 billion DM. In other words, the presence of foreigners amounts to a fiscal gain of 14 billion DM per year (Barabas et al 1992: 145). Hence foreigners actually unburden the German welfare state. Thus there is no empirical basis for interpreting anti-foreign violence as an economically rational act of self-defense against an exploitation of the welfare state. Let us now examine to what extent anti-foreign activities can be seen as an act of self-defense against excessive immigration.

## 2.2 The increasing pressures from immigration

Following the official view frequently expressed by German politicians, Germans have friendly feelings toward foreigners, but their basically positive attitude became recently overstrained by an excessive wave of immigration, as Germany accepted more asylum seekers in 1992 than all other EC-countries together. From this perspective, anti-foreign violence is the inevitable consequence of an overflowing wave of immigration, which must be broken if domestic peace is to be restored.

It is certainly correct that Germany is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe. It is also correct that this densely populated country witnessed a massive wave of immigration in recent years with conspicuously high numbers of asylum seekers (see table 1). Since 1961 the **proportion of foreigners** has risen from 1.2 to over 8 %. Moreover, the structure of the foreign resident population has changed significantly. Most of the immigrants now come from non-European countries so that the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the population has rapidly increased. Within the European Community, Germany ranks third after Luxembourg and Belgium with respect to the proportion of resident foreigners, but by far first with respect to the proportion of foreigners from non-EC countries (presently roughly 6 % - see Fuchs/Gerhards/Roller 1993: 248).

If we analyze the Eurobarometer data on anti-foreign sentiments, it becomes evident that the frequency of xenophobic sentiments is highly correlated with the proportion of foreigners in the country. The more foreigners there are, the more frequent are anti-foreign attitudes. This pattern shows up consistently regardless of whether we ask for evaluations of the presence of foreigners or for opinions concerning their rights as citizens (see graphs 1-5).

In none of these analyses does Germany appear as an outlier which deviates from the general pattern. On the contrary, the country is to be found below the regression line which indicates the statistically normal relationship between the presence of immigrants and xenophobic sentiments. In other words, xenophobic attitudes are less marked in Germany than one would expect, given the statistics on the proportion of foreign residents. The data thus seem to support the hypothesis of German politicians that Germans nourish friendly feelings toward foreigners and that the dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers which occurred in the 1990s is the root cause of current anti-foreign activities.

Although this interpretation may be viewed as the consensus opinion shared by politicians and most social scientists in Germany alike, I think that it is flawed in several respects. First, opinion poll data on attitudes must not be confounded with the frequency of anti-foreign violence. Secondly, an analysis of the available empirical evidence from a comparative and a longitudinal perspective shows that such an interpretation would not be in line with the facts.

A **comparison with Sweden** shows that immigration alone cannot be interpreted as a sufficient cause of anti-foreign violence. With a population of 8.5 million, Sweden accepted 83,200 asylum seekers in 1992 (The Swedish Institute 1993: 2; see also *Süd-deutsche Zeitung* 40/1993: 7). In proportion to its population size, it thus accepted twice as many asylum seekers as the Federal Republic. Yet, as was shown above, the level of violence in Sweden remained much lower, and without any death toll so far.

A **longitudinal analysis** of the association between the influx of asylum seekers and anti-foreign violent acts<sup>2</sup> in Germany during the past decades is even more striking. Generally speaking, it is true that the absolute number of violent acts increased as the number of foreign immigrants rose. However, there is a phase-specific pattern. Throughout the 1980s there has not been any strong statistical association between the two developments. From 1983 to 1990 the number of asylum seekers increased tenfold, while the number of right wing violent acts only rose moderately from 67 to 128 incidents per year (see table 1 and graph 6). Only after the unification did a sudden explosion of right wing violence occur. Within one year, the number of violent acts in the united Germany jumped from 270 in 1990 to 1,483 in 1991, while the number of asylum seekers merely increased by 33 %.

The argument that increasing immigration leads to growing anti-foreign violence may have two different meanings. First, it

---

<sup>2</sup> The official report on anti-constitutional activities (*Verfassungsschutzbericht*) gives data on violence from right wing extremists without drawing a distinction between anti-foreign and right wing violence (see Bundesministerium des Innern 1993: 68-70).

could mean that there is a constant relationship between the number of foreigners and the degree of anti-foreign hostility. This would imply that violence only increases in absolute terms, because there is growing opportunity to express hostility, as the growing number of foreigners or asylum seekers increases the number of potential targets. Secondly, the argument could mean, however, that the growing presence of foreigners actually leads to an increasing intensity of anti-foreign aggression so that there are not only more violent acts in absolute terms but also in relative terms. If we take the changing number of potential victims into account by calculating the ratio of violent acts per 1,000 asylum seekers, the first version of the argument would imply a constant ratio of right wing violence over time, whilst the second version would predict the ratio to increase as the number of asylum seekers grows.

In actual fact, the ratio of anti-foreign violence increased only briefly in the context of the government turnover from the social democrats to the christian union in 1982/83, but declined in subsequent years during the 1980s despite a growing influx of foreigners (graph 7). Throughout the 1980s there was even a negative relationship between the influx of asylum seekers and the ratio of right wing violence (graph 8). After the unification, the ratio of right wing violent acts then suddenly increased from 1.4 to 5.8 per 1,000 potential victims. As anti-foreign violence grew vastly out of proportion to changes in immigration after the unification, it follows that migration data alone cannot account for the sudden increase in right wing radicalism in the united Germany. Other explanatory factors also need to be considered.

### 2.3 The economic context of immigration

The mere number of foreign residents says only very little about the potential of anti-foreign violence. Only in the **context of crises** do foreigners and other minorities typically become the target of violent acts. This may be related to more and less rational considerations or motives. Economic rationalism teaches us that, in the context of economic downturns, distributional conflicts assume the character of zero sum games, in which one group can only get what another group loses. In such situations, social transfers for foreigners also have growing opportunity costs for natives, so that the competition for shares in the budget becomes fiercer.

There is also a more irrational aspect related to crises, however. Crises usually give rise to a search for scapegoats. In his history of the Jews, Abba Eban (1970) pointed out that the rights of minorities have always been threatened when economic or national crises break forth. In his *Studies on Germany* ("Studien über die Deutschen" -1990), Norbert Elias developed the argument that men strive for the control of events, and that in the presence of crises and the absence of rational knowledge about their complex causes, they are prone to turn to magic rather than rational mechanisms of control. Similarly, Max Weber

stated that charismatic leadership typically presupposes a charismatic situation in the sense of an extraordinary crisis that creates a demand for miraculous capacities which promise to release people from the emergency (Weber 1980). In sum, only the challenge of crises creates chances for political seducers who offer simple answers to complex problems.

Now it is important to realize that the massive influx of foreigners combined in several respects with **crisis tendencies** in Germany. First, it coincided with an economic recession and a concomitant crisis of the welfare state. Secondly, it combined with a crisis of German identity in the context of the unification.

The increasing immigration met with a very tense labor market situation in Germany. For several years the German economy has had difficulties in creating an adequate supply of jobs to meet the growing demand. Departing from an already high level, the unemployment rate increased sizeably after the unification. Roughly one third of those who are currently unemployed have been out of work for more than one year (Bundesministerium für Arbeit and Sozialordnung 1991: 75).

The adverse labour market conditions entail massive processes of **downward mobility**. Empirically, these manifest themselves in the growing indebtedness of private households, and in the changing structure of poverty. The proportion of private households in serious debt is now estimated at 5 % (Korczak 1992: 112/113; Süddeutsche Zeitung 110/1993: 48). Poverty increasingly threatens also economically active categories. According to recent poverty research, over one quarter of all private households fall at least temporarily under the poverty threshold during a period of five years (Habich/Headey/Krause 1991; Krause 1992). Today it is no longer the elderly, but younger cohorts who face overproportionate poverty risks. Amongst people aged 18-25 the ratio of registered poverty has increased sixfold since 1970. Whereas in 1970 only every hundredth younger person had to resort to poor relief, now every sixteenth lives on public assistance (Deiningner 1983: 506; Statistisches Bundesamt 1992a: 504). Various indicators suggest that the abandonment of democratic procedures and of civil forms of behavior is heavily concentrated in these increasingly impoverished younger cohorts.

The degree to which **political alienation** is associated with social downgrading processes is first revealed by electoral statistics. In federal elections voter turnout amongst those aged 18-25 decreased by some 20 percentage points between 1972 and 1990 (Mayer 1991: 252). In the most recent federal election (1990), the right wing Republicans polled only 2.1% of the votes on aggregate, but 5.2 % among men below age 25 (Mayer 1991: 256). Younger age cohorts are heavily overrepresented amongst Republican voters. This is especially true in the new eastern territories. Thus the Republicans scored their best election result - 7 % - among male East German voters below age 25 (Mayer 1991: 257).

Opinion polls confirm the social concentration of right wing extremism among younger men and in the eastern territories (see e.g. Roth 1989). In January 1993, 5 % of West German adults, but 8 % of East Germans expressed an understanding for anti-foreign violence (ipos 1993: 81). The highest degree of approval - 24 % - was found among young East Germans with little schooling (ipos 1993: 82).

These findings fit well with the sociology of stratification and mobility which has always suggested that downward mobility favors extremist nationalism. According to this sociological research, people in stratified societies tend to develop concepts of the social order which allow them to uphold a positive self image (Zetterberg 1957: 184). Thus members of the lower classes tend to cultivate concepts of social stratification that allow them to consider themselves as belonging to superior categories. Hence, they frequently adhere to ethnic or moral categorizations of the social order that make it possible to define other groups as socially inferior. Sociologists have called this tendency "**status cosmetics**" (Mayer 1975: 92). Following this sociological concept, I would argue that the downward mobility experienced by young Germans in recent years favors the mobilization of ethnic classifications which enhance the distinction between Germans and foreigners while emphasizing the superiority of Germans. This allows the economically disadvantaged groups to bolster a positive self-image.

The tendency to mobilize an ethnic concept of national identity is further strengthened by the massive migration movements from Eastern to Western Europe and from the South to the North. These have led to increasing competition in the labour market where the underqualified lower classes now face growing numbers of foreign competitors. This fiercer competition for jobs also fuels nationalistic resentments. Thus, the most recent study of German youth has shown that the rejection of foreigners among young East Germans increases with the degree to which they perceive their jobs to be threatened (Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell 1992: 58).

The German unification considerably intensified the problems in the economy and in the labor market. In addition, it also spurred a crisis in German national identity.

#### 2.4 The transformation of German national identity in the context of unification

In contrast to England or France, Germany did not experience the formation of nation states within stable territorial borders prior to the social mobilization of the masses. This belated nation-building had manifold consequences. While the French Revolution conceptualized the nation as a political bond amongst free people subject to the same laws and represented by the same national assembly, the Germans thought of the nation as a natural bond amongst people of the same ethnic extraction (Neumann 1977: 135/137). Thus the **concept of the nation** denoted not only

a political bond ("Staatsnation") but also a cultural bond ("Kulturnation"). According to the sociologist Rainer Lepsius this fusion of various facets of national identity implied an ethnization of the concept of the nation-state and a politicization of the concept of national culture (Lepsius/Ludz/Scholz 1974: 68). Lepsius also argues that political elites may emphasize different dimensions of national identity to varying degrees depending on what kind of political unity they consider desirable in a given historical situation (Ibid.: 69). Picking up this idea, I would argue that during the Cold War the Federal Republic emphasized the concept of the nation as a political unit in order to stress the difference to the GDR, while the crumbling of the GDR led to the mobilization of the concept of the nation as an ethnic and cultural unit. By stressing the features that the two parts of Germany had in common, the emphasis on the cultural definition of the nation allowed post-unification political leaders to bridge the post-war differences in eastern and western political traditions. A side-effect of this ethnic concept of national identity was, however, that the difference between Germans and foreigners became accentuated.

The transformation of German national identity was favored by a second aspect, which has to do with the mechanism of status cosmetics I have described as a means to cope with downward mobility. As a consequence of the unification, the citizens of the former GDR mutated from the rich men of Eastern Europe to the pauper of the united Germany. Given the marked East-West disparities in the country, there was a strong incentive for the citizens in the East to downplay their relative deprivation by mobilizing the concept of a common superiority of all Germans over foreigners. Since the old regime had barred them from foreign travel and the concomitant contacts with foreign cultures, there has been little room for developing cognitive dissonances, which would impede the development of such concepts.<sup>3</sup>

The recent reports of the Ministry of the Interior on anti-constitutional activities (*Verfassungsschutzberichte*) provide some interesting **empirical findings** which are perfectly in line with the above interpretation. The most recent report issued in 1993 pinpointed the fact that anti-foreign violence is overproportionately concentrated in the new eastern territories. Although representing only one fifth of the population, the eastern territories registered one third of all violent acts with a right wing background (Bundesministerium des Innern 1993: 70). The preceding 1992 report also revealed that right wing violence escalates at special dates with a symbolic political meaning. While the number of violent acts increased mildly on Hitler's birthday, it virtually exploded on the day of German unification in October 1991 (Bundesministerium des Innern 1992:

---

<sup>3</sup> A recent study showed that 15 % of East German adolescents who had travel experience to foreign countries, but 27 % of those without foreign travel rejected the idea of having foreign friends as a matter of principle (ipos 1993: 90).

75). Moreover the 1993 report showed that 67 % of all suspects of anti-foreign violence were under 21 years of age in 1992 and that they came predominantly from non-established social categories. While pupils, apprentices and unemployed people were heavily overrepresented among the suspects, more established groups like employees were heavily underrepresented. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Women and Youth confirmed that anti-foreign violence is heavily concentrated in groups with low education: 78 % of all suspects had either no or only the lowest educational degree (Willems/Würtz/Eckert 1993: 22).

How can these findings be put into a broader **theoretical perspective**? I think the work of the American sociologists of delinquent behavior, Sykes and Matza (1957), provides a useful clue. Sykes and Matza argue that delinquent acts are not rooted in socially closed and homogenous deviant subcultures, but that delinquents are rather subject to ambivalent influences of a conforming and a deviant nature. In order to justify deviant acts, the delinquents therefore need "techniques of neutralization" that allow them to relate their deeds to norms which they perceive as more urgent or more valuable than the norms that they violate. In other words, norm violations are facilitated if inhibitions or remorse are successfully neutralized by legitimizing bridges that provide justifications for the deviant acts. Following Sykes and Matza one crucial neutralization technique consists in conceiving of the victim as someone inferior who deserves punishment. The chance to label a victim as inferior or as deserving punishment is a function of the social distance between him and the perpetrator. Therefore, especially socially distant groups become selected as targets of delinquent acts (Sykes/Matza 1957).

According to the empirical evidence that is presently available, anti-foreign violence in Germany was so far only seldomly a product of planned, organized actions (Willems/ Würtz/ Eckert 1993: 138). Most acts developed spontaneously from contingent constellations in which the consumption of alcohol in gangs combined with petty private resentments, as well as more general political prejudice. Thus the killers of a Turkish girl in Solingen were apparently motivated by the fact that they had been kicked out of a Turkish restaurant. Whether individual aggressions will be repressed as illegitimate or else be freely expressed, is a function of the availability of legitimizing bridge concepts, which provide a superior justification for petty private motives. The mobilization of an ethnicized concept of national identity after the German unification, and the perceived increase in competition from foreigners in the economic slump, provided bases for techniques of neutralization that helped to justify anti-foreign violence as legitimate self-defense.

If this interpretation is correct, it follows that anti-foreign violence is less a persisting trait of German culture than a **transitory phenomenon**, which will vanish to the degree that the economic problems and the social disintegration processes following the German unification will be overcome. First indica-

tions of a gradual return to normalcy may be seen in the fact that the number of anti-foreign violent acts declined again in 1993 from 2,584 in the preceding year to 1,814 (see table 1). The question then is what practical policy consequences my analysis implies.

### 2.5 Summary and policy conclusions

I have interpreted the upsurge of anti-foreign violence as the **product of a macro-constellation** in which growing pressure from migration combined with an economic crisis in the context of German unification, and with a concomitant mobilization of an ethnic concept of national identity. Given these major explanatory variables, the question then is which of these can be successfully controlled by political action.

The problem pressure created by international migration and economic stagnation is likely to persist because of the wide discrepancies in the standard of living of the northern and the southern hemisphere as well as between western and eastern Europe. Despite of the heavy immigration into the Federal Republic during the past decades, the official German policy continues to be built on the premise that Germany is not an immigration country. It now appears necessary to deny reality no longer and to channel the influx of immigrants by an **immigration law**, which would define annual quotas that help to define immigration as something normal, rather than as a deviation from standard conditions.

The tensions that are associated with the increasing cultural heterogeneity of the population will only be eased, however, if sufficient openings in the labor market can be created which lessen the competition for jobs. Although it is presently hard to imagine how unemployment may be successfully reduced, demographic changes will make for a rapidly shrinking labor force after the turn of the century. In this new situation, migrant workers who contribute to alleviate the pressure on the pension insurance scheme will probably be more welcome.

As long as the problems in the labor market persist, however, it will be necessary to channel the mobilization of national consciousness in a way that keeps anti-foreign violence within limits. This can be done on three levels. The first concerns **symbolic politics**. This is where the behavior of political elites is important. As the values cherished in the political center of a society disseminate to the periphery, those who occupy the center become a crucial reference group for citizens at the margins (Shils 1965). The political elites can mobilize or inhibit anti-foreign sentiments. As long as there was little pressure from foreign countries or from business circles concerned about the export chances of German products in international markets, the political leaders of the Federal Republic did little to inhibit the formation of anti-foreign attitudes. Not only did they downplay the significance of anti-foreign violence, but they also contributed to mobilize anti-foreign

sentiments. Thus in september 1991, the former secretary general of the CDU, Volker R  he, wrote a circular to all officeholders of the party down to the district level, in which he demanded to make the influx of asylum seekers an item on the political agenda. In the letter he gave concrete examples of how to mobilize public concern over the alleged overburdening of German local authorities (DIE ZEIT 23/1993: 1). After the murder of Turkish immigrants in Solingen, Chancellor Kohl deliberately decided not to travel to the site of the assault to express his solidarity with the victims, but preferred to go to Berlin in order to celebrate the restoration of a monument of German history. This attempt to appeal to voters of the right wing fringes of the party system is in striking contrast with the actions taken by French President Mitterrand, who opted to march at the head of a demonstration against right wing radicalism after an assault on the Jewish minority. In combination with determined police actions against right wing radicalism, ostentatious acts by political leaders of this kind can serve to enhance the de-legitimation of access to violence.

A second level of possible political action refers to the definition of **citizenship**. The Federal Republic is not the only country in Europe which links citizenship to ethnic descent. The Netherlands also do that, for example. Moreover, other countries like France presently consider shifting from a territorial to an ethnic definition of citizenship. Hence, it would be unrealistic to advocate that the Federal Republic now change to a territorial concept. As a compromise between the alternative concepts, it would be possible, however, to introduce the possibility of a **dual citizenship** for second generation immigrants. This would contribute to reducing the social distance between Germans and foreigners and would promote the social integration of foreigners who are now prone to withdraw into their national subcultures.<sup>4</sup>

A third level of political action could consist in extending the **right to vote in local elections** to foreign workers. The creation of universal suffrage for all residents of a certain duration could contribute to overcome the segmenting effects that are associated with the ethnic definition of citizenship, and could help to narrow the social distance between Germans and foreigners. The experience made in Sweden and the Netherlands shows that an extension of local voting rights to foreigners does not necessarily have any destabilizing political effects. Sweden granted foreigners who have been living in the country for at least three years the right to vote in local and regional elections already in 1976. The Netherlands changed their electo-

---

<sup>4</sup> Of course, citizenship does not only convey rights but also obligations. One of the most fundamental obligations tied to citizenship is mastering the language of the country one is living in. It is difficult to comprehend why the employment of foreign workers was not tied to an obligation for workers and employers alike to ensure participation in language courses of an extended duration.

ral law in 1985 to extend voting rights in local elections to foreigners who have been residing in the country for five years.

In both countries, the concern that foreigners might vote for new ethnic parties of a radical type was not substantiated. The voting pattern of foreigners actually followed class lines rather than ethnic affiliation. Thus, the Turks residing in Amsterdam and Rotterdam cast 78 and 81 % of their votes for the Dutch Workers' Party (Graziani 1992: 79/80). This Dutch example shows that the barriers to an extension of voting rights to foreigners lie less in concerns over a possible disruption of the party system than in the electoral calculus of the established parties, who fear that parties of the left might benefit from such a change. It is noteworthy, however, that an extension of voting rights to foreigners would not be popular among German voters. According to the EC-Eurobarometer, only the Danes are more opposed to an extension of voting rights to foreigners than the Germans (Wiegand 1993:3). Within Germany, followers of the Greens are the only population group where a majority support the extension of suffrage to foreigners (Noelle-Neumann/Köcher 1993: 529). Politicians advocating such a step would therefore have to work hard to persuade the voters.

### **3. An alternative hypothesis and possible strategies for testing who is right**

I had indicated in the introduction that there is a serious counter-argument to the ideas I developed here. According to this counter-argument, the explosion of right wing violence is not so much an expression of xenophobia or chauvinism as an expression of the resentment that adolescents nourish against the dominant cosmopolitan culture of the political establishment. From this perspective, anti-foreign violence is not the result of a mobilization of ethnicized national sentiments, but, on the contrary, the consequence of a long-standing suppression of national pride.

This is not merely an academic debate but rather an argument which has immediate political repercussions. My interpretation suggests tearing down legitimizing bridges for the justification of anti-foreign violence by promoting the social integration of foreigners, by expressing solidarity with foreigners, and by tabooing chauvinism. The counter-argument implies that such a policy would only fuel resentments against the taboos of the establishment, and enhance the potential for right wing violence. Hence it advocates consciously developing patriotism and national pride in order to occupy the space which would otherwise be left free for extremist groups of the radical right.

This counter-argument deserves serious consideration. The question then is how we can decide who is right. Scholars who are more impressed by Popper than by Feyerabend should think of ways to discriminate empirically between rival hypotheses. There are at least three ways that would help us to find out which of

the two arguments is more compatible with the empirical facts.

### **3.1 Political agenda setting and monthly attitude change**

A first way to test the rival hypotheses could consist of a time-series analysis that would relate the monthly changes in attitudes towards foreigners to preceding attempts of the political elites to put the problem of immigration on the political agenda. German policy makers have frequently voiced their concern over the excessive influx of asylum seekers. The letter mailed by CDU-secretary Volker Ruhe to the party's office holders is only one of several examples. If my hypothesis is correct, we should find an increase in anti-foreign sentiments following such activities on the part of politicians. The counter hypothesis would predict, in contrast, that radical right wing views decline once the political elites prove that they are responsive to concerns over the excessive immigration. As there is a monthly opinion poll - called "Politbarometer" and carried out by the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen* -, it should be possible to administer this test.

### **3.2 Regional distribution of anti-foreign violence**

A second way to test the rival hypotheses could consist in an analysis of the regional distribution of anti-foreign violence. My hypothesis suggests that anti-foreign violence is concentrated in regions where there is a favorable context for the development of neutralization techniques that allow the perpetrators to deny any guilt. Hence anti-foreign violence should predominantly occur in regions with a high proportion of immigrants, with high unemployment, and with a local political center that is occupied by conservative and patriotic political elites who do not ostentatiously de-legitimize excessive nationalism. Holding the first two factors constant, anti-foreign violence should be lower where the local center is occupied by liberal forces of a cosmopolitan outlook who actively engage in promoting solidarity with foreigners. The counter hypothesis would imply just the opposite distribution, with violence concentrated in liberal areas. Data that allow to pursue this strategy of hypothesis testing are available from the study commissioned by the Ministry of Women and Youth which has the records of more than a thousand suspects who participated in anti-foreign violence.

### **3.3 Target groups of anti-foreign violence**

A third strategy, finally, could consist in examining which groups became the targets of right wing violence. The counter hypothesis would predict that violent acts are not heavily concentrated on a specific group of foreigners, since taboos of the political establishment can be violated regardless of which group is made the target of aggression. My hypothesis, in contrast, would predict that the violent acts are targeted on those groups of foreigners to which the greatest social distance is

felt. As we have data on the perception of foreigners by nationality, this hypothesis can be subjected to a first preliminary test.

In his study "Wie deutsch sind die Deutschen" (1991), Erwin K. Scheuch showed the Germans to feel most distant from Turks and non-white asylum seekers and to direct most anti-foreign resentment against these groups (Scheuch 1991: 167). So far Turks and asylum seekers have also been the groups on which anti-foreign violence has been heavily concentrated (see e.g. the account of fatal assaults in DIE WOCHE 24/1993). Thus there seems to be a rather strong association between the image of foreigners and the targeting of violent acts. This suggests that anti-foreign violence is not primarily aimed at violating taboos of the political establishment, but indeed an expression of xenophobia that focusses on those specific groups of immigrants to which Germans feel the greatest social distance.

In terms of policy making, this analysis implies that German politicians have so far seen anti-foreign violence too exclusively from a perspective focussing on the wave of foreign immigration. The data presented here suggest instead that the core of the problem is less related to the mere quantitative facts of migration, but rather of a political nature. Anti-foreign sentiments do not automatically follow immigration, but grow in a specific political climate which the political elites can actively influence.

### References

Abba Eban, 1970: Dies ist mein Volk. Die Geschichte der Juden. München/Zürich: Droemersch Verlagsanstalt.

Barabas, G./Gieseck, A./Heilemann, U./von Loeffelholz, A., 1992: Gesamtwirtschaftliche Effekte der Zuwanderung 1988 bis 1991. RWI-Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsforschung 43: 133-154.

Baratta, M. von (Hrsg.), 1992: Der Fischer Weltalmanach 1993. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

Beck, M., 1992a: Sozialhilfeaufwand 1990. Wirtschaft und Statistik 44: 30-34.

Beck, M., 1992b: Sozialhilfeaufwand 1991. Wirtschaft und Statistik 44: 891-826.

Beck, M., 1992c: Sozialhilfeempfänger 1990. Wirtschaft und Statistik 44: 299-310.

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, 1991: Arbeits- und Sozialstatistik. Hauptergebnisse 1991. Bonn.

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, 1992a: Statistisches Taschenbuch 1992. Bonn.

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, 1992b: Arbeits- und Sozialstatistik. Hauptergebnisse 1992. Bonn.

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, 1993: Ausländer-Daten. Bonn.

Bundesinnenministerium des Innern, 1993: Verfassungsschutzbericht 1992. Bonn.

Bundesministerium des Innern, 1992 etc.: Verfassungsschutzbericht 1991 (und frühere Ausgaben 1980-1988). Bonn.

Consulat Général de France, 1993: Rapport 1992 sur la lutte contre le racisme en France et l'antisemitisme (zugestellt mit Schreiben vom 28.10.1993).

Deininger, D., 1983: Sozialhilfeempfänger 1981. Wirtschaft und Statistik 35,6: 505-511.

Der Spiegel, 1993: Türken in Deutschland: Menschen zweiter Klasse 23: 16-29.

Deutscher Bundestag, 1991: Jahresgutachten 1991/92 des Sachverständigenrates zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung. Drucksache 12/1618. Bonn.

Deutscher Bundestag, 1992: Jahresgutachten 1992/93 des Sachverständigenrates zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung. Drucksache 12/3774. Bonn.

Elias, N., 1990: Studien über die Deutschen: Machtkämpfe und Habitusentwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, 4. Auflage. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Fuchs, D./Gerhards, J./Roller, E., 1993: Wir und die Anderen. Ethnozentrismus in den zwölf Ländern der Europäischen Gemeinschaft. Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 45: 238-253.

Graziani, R., 1992: Neue Konzeptionen der Integrationspolitik für ausländische Arbeitskräfte. Universität Konstanz: Diplomarbeit.

Habich, R./Headey, B./Krause, P., 1991: Armut im Reichtum - Ist die Bundesrepublik eine Zwei-Drittel-Gesellschaft? S. 488-509 in: U. Rendte/G. Wagner (Hrsg.), Lebenslagen im Wandel: Zur Einkommensdynamik in Deutschland seit 1984. Frankfurt/New York: Campus.

Home Office, 1993: Fax vom 9.12.1993.

ipos (Institut für praxisorientierte Sozialforschung), 1993: Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene in Deutschland. Mannheim.

Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell (Hrsg.), 1992: Jugend '92. Die neuen Länder: Rückblick und Perspektiven. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, 1992: Eurobarometer Nr. 37. Brüssel.

Korczak, D., 1992: Überschuldungssituation und Schuldnerberatung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - Studie im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Familie und Senioren und des Bundesministeriums der Justiz. Band 3 der Schriftenreihe des Bundesministeriums für Familie und Senioren. Stuttgart.

Krause, P., 1992: Einkommensarmut in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B49: 3-17.

Lepsius, M. R./Ludz, P. C./Scholz, R., 1974: Nation. S. 1-154 in: Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (Hrsg.), Bundesrepublik Deutschland - Deutsche demokratische Republik. Systemvergleich 3. Materialien zum Bericht zur Lage der Nation. Berlin.

Mayer, H.-L., 1991: Wählerverhalten bei der Bundestagswahl 1990 nach Geschlecht und Alter. Ergebnis der repräsentativen Wahlstatistik. Wirtschaft und Statistik 43: 248-260.

Mayer, K.-U., 1975: Ungleichheit und Mobilität im sozialen Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zur Definition der Mobilitätssituation.

Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Neumann, F., 1977: Behemoth: Struktur und Praxis des Nationalsozialismus 1933-1944. Köln/Frankfurt a.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

Noelle-Neumann, E./Köcher, R. (Hrsg), 1993: Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1984-1992. München u.a.: K.G. Saur.

Rehfeld, U.: 1991: Ausländische Arbeitnehmer und Rentner in der gesetzlichen Rentenversicherung. Deutsche Rentenversicherung 7: 468-492.

Roth, Dieter, 1989: Sind die Republikaner die fünfte Partei? Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 41/42: 10-20.

Scheuch, Erwin K., 1991: Wie deutsch sind die Deutschen? Eine Nation wandelt ihr Gesicht. Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe.

Schwedische Botschaft, 1993: Fax vom 16.9.1993.

Schweizerischer Bundesrat, 1992: Extremismus in der Schweiz. Bericht des Bundesrates zum Extremismus in der Schweiz. Bern.

Shils, E. A., 1965: Charisma, Order, and Status. American Sociological Review 30: 199-213.

Statistisches Bundesamt, 1991: Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991. Wiesbaden: Metzler-Poeschel.

Statistisches Bundesamt, 1992a: Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1992. Wiesbaden: Metzler-Poeschel.

Statistisches Bundesamt, 1992b: Datenreport 1992. Zahlen und Fakten über die Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Bonn.

Steinke, Wolfgang, 1993: Rechtsxtremismus. Ein Blick auf die Lage in Europa und den USA. Kriminalistik 8-9: 507-508.

Svenska Institutet, 1993: Immigrants in Sweden. Fact Sheets on Sweden. Stockholm.

Sykes, G. M./Matza, D., 1957: Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency. American Sociological Review 22: 664-670.

Weber, M., 1980: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, 5. Auflage. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Wiegand, E., 1993: Ausländerfeindlichkeit in der Festung Europa. Einstellung zu Fremden im europäischen Vergleich, S. 1-4 in: ISI Informationsdienst Soziale Indikatoren, Nr. 9. Mannheim: Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA) e.V.

Willems, H./Würtz, S./Eckert, R., 1993: Fremdenfeindliche Gewalt: Eine Analyse von Täterstrukturen und Eskalationsprozessen. Forschungsbericht im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Frauen

und Jugend und der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft . . . .

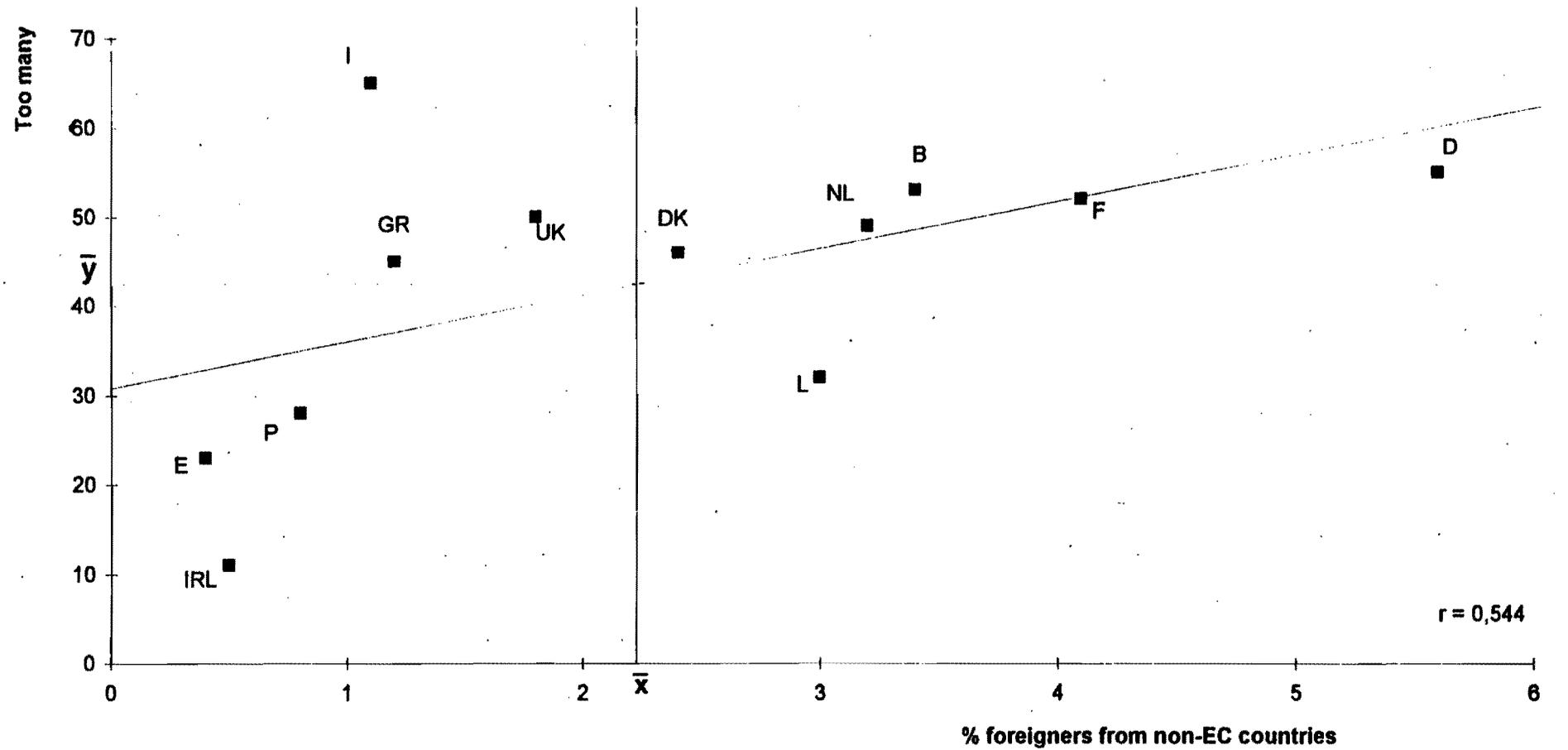
Zetterberg, H. L., 1957: Compliant Actions. Acta Sociologica 2:  
179-201.

**Table 1: Asylum seekers and right wing delinquency in Germany**

Year	Asylum seekers	Right wing violence			Right wing delinquency	
		No of violent acts		Violent acts per 1000 asylum seekers		No of delinquent acts
GERMANY		Total	East Germany		Ratio	
	N	N	N	%		
1993	322842	1814	...	25	5.62	...
1992	438191	2584	865	33	5.90	7121
1991	256112	1483	493	33	5.79	3884
1990	193063	270	....	..	1.40	1848
OLD FEDERAL REPUBLIC						
1990	193063	128			0.66	1380
1989	121318	103			0.85	1853
1988	103076	73			0.71	1607
1987	57379	76			1.32	1447
1986	99650	71			0.71	1281
1985	73832	69			0.93	1569
1984	35278	83			2.35	1714
1983	19737	67			3.39	2169
1982	37423	53			1.42	2475
1981	49391	92			1.86	1824
1980	107818	113			1.05	1643
1979		97				1483
1978						992
1977						616
1976						319
1975						206
1974						136

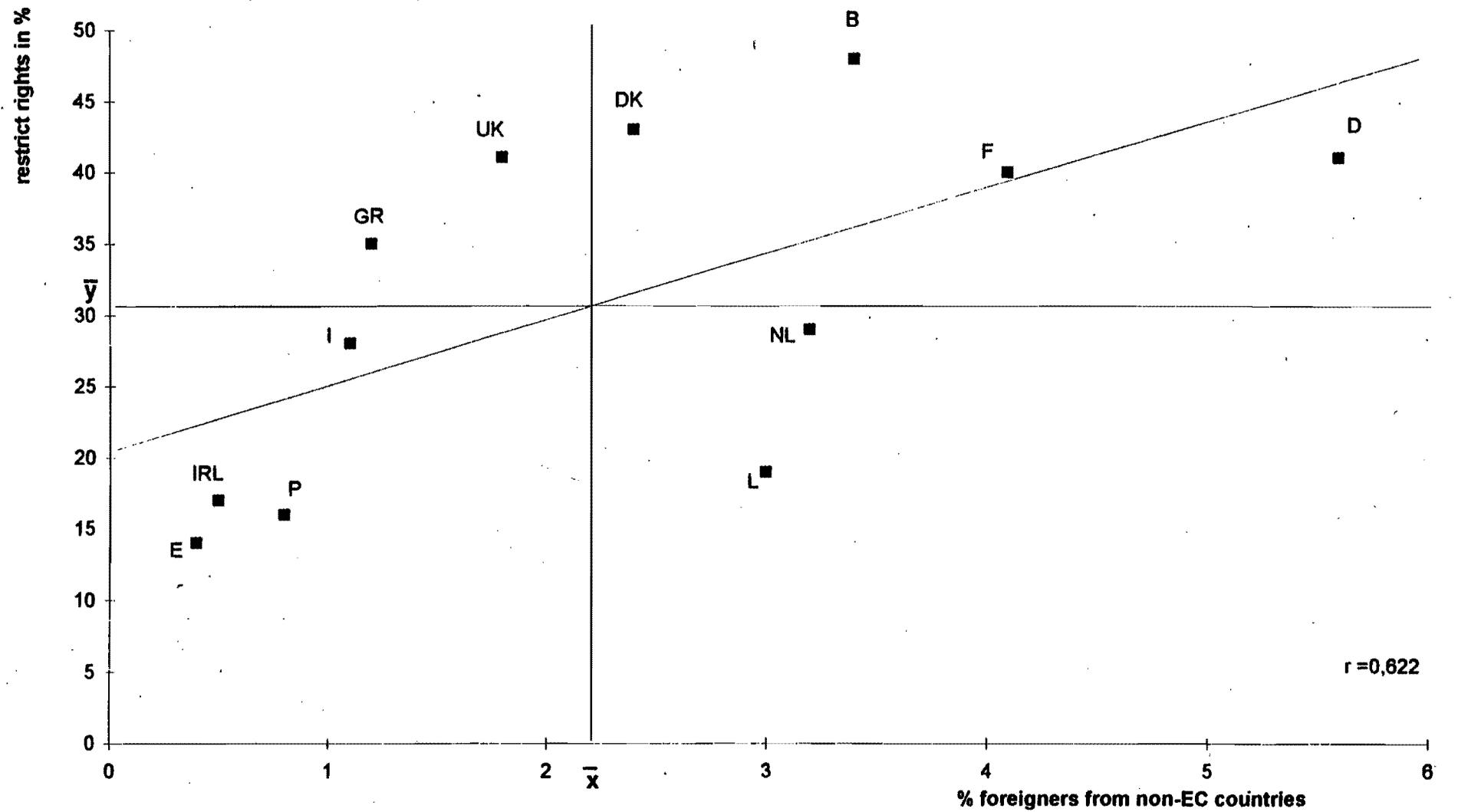
Sources: Bundesministerium des Innern: Verfassungsschutzberichte 1992, 1991, 1990, 1988, 1987, 1985, 1983, 1981, 1980; Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung: Ausländer-Daten (1993 - for asylum seekers 1990-1992); Süddeutsche Zeitung no 10/ 1994: 6 (for violent acts 1993) and no 4/1994: 6 (for asylum seekers 1993); DER SPIEGEL 46/1992: 41 (for asylum seekers 1980-1990).

**Graph 1: Attitudes towards non nationals of the EC 1992**  
(Presence, in one's country, of people coming from non-EC countries)



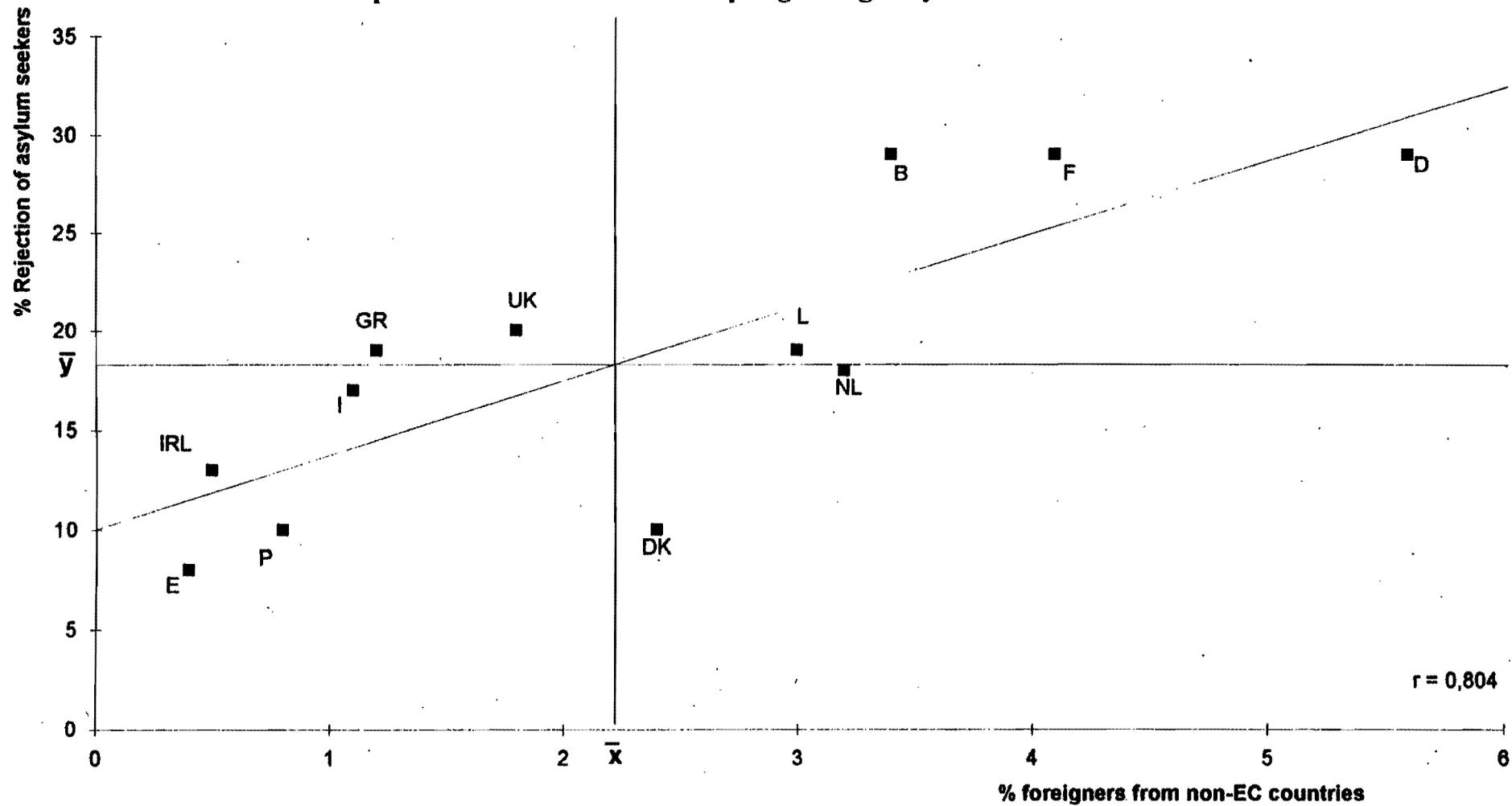
Source: Own calculations, based on raw data from: Eurobarometer 37 and Fuchs/Gerhards/Roller (1993).

**Graph 2: Attitudes towards rights of immigrants in the EC 1992**  
(Extend or restrict)



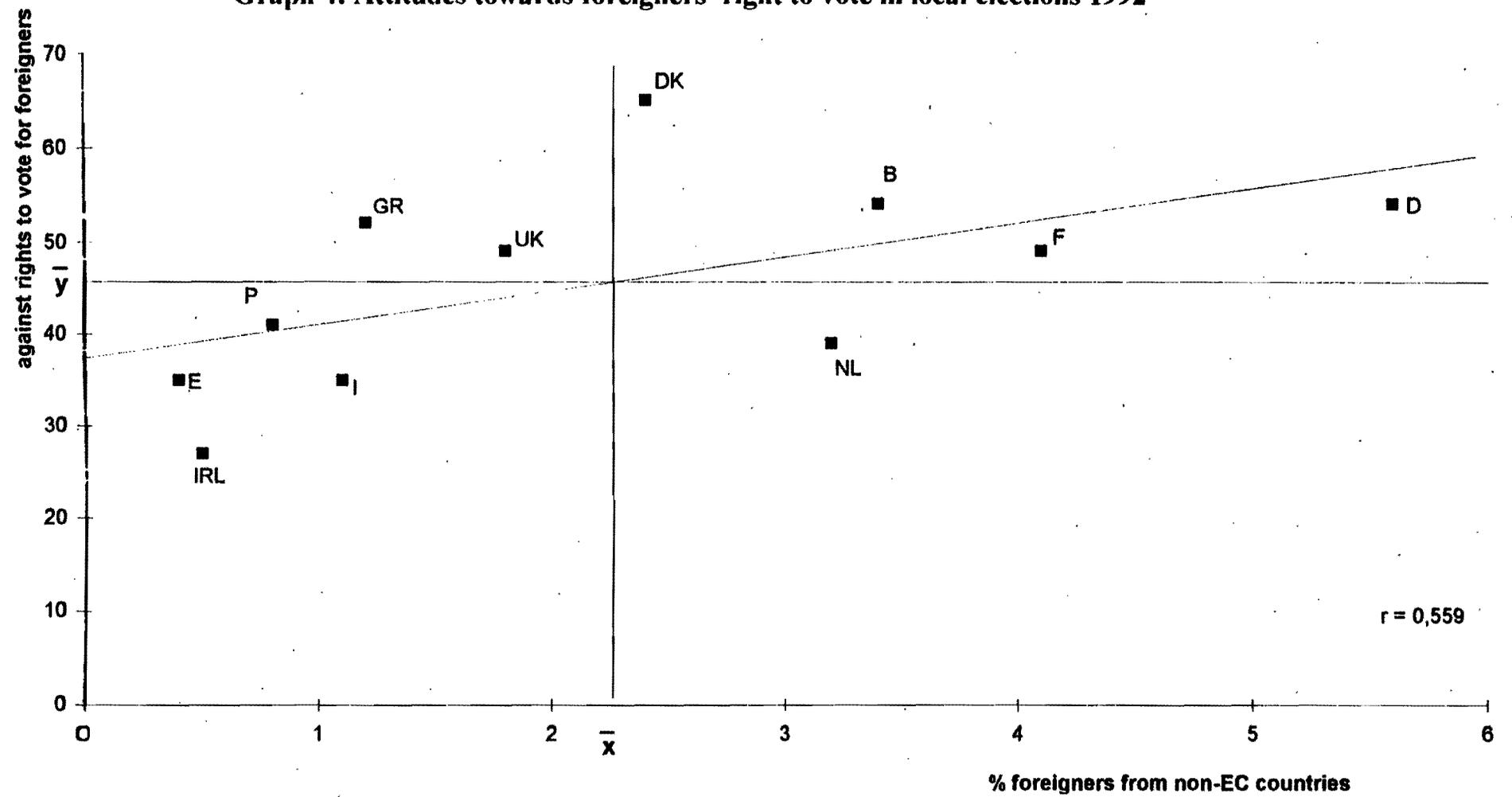
Source: Own calculations, based on raw data from: Eurobarometer 37 and Fuchs/Gerhards/Roller (1993).

**Graph 3: Attitudes towards accepting foreign asylum seekers 1992**



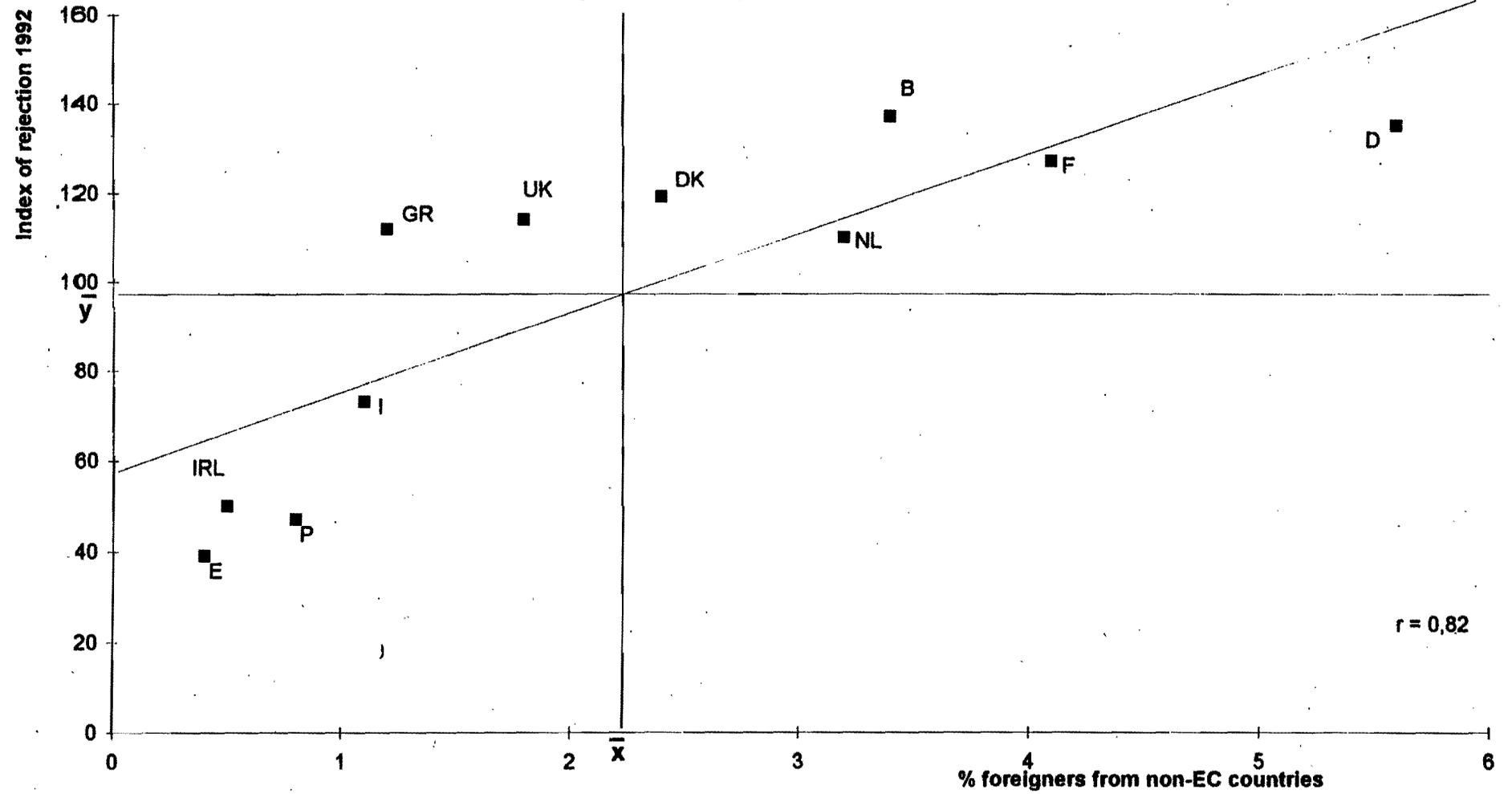
Source: Own calculations, based on raw data from: Wiegand (1993) and Fuchs/Gerhards/Roller (1993).

**Graph 4: Attitudes towards foreigners' right to vote in local elections 1992**



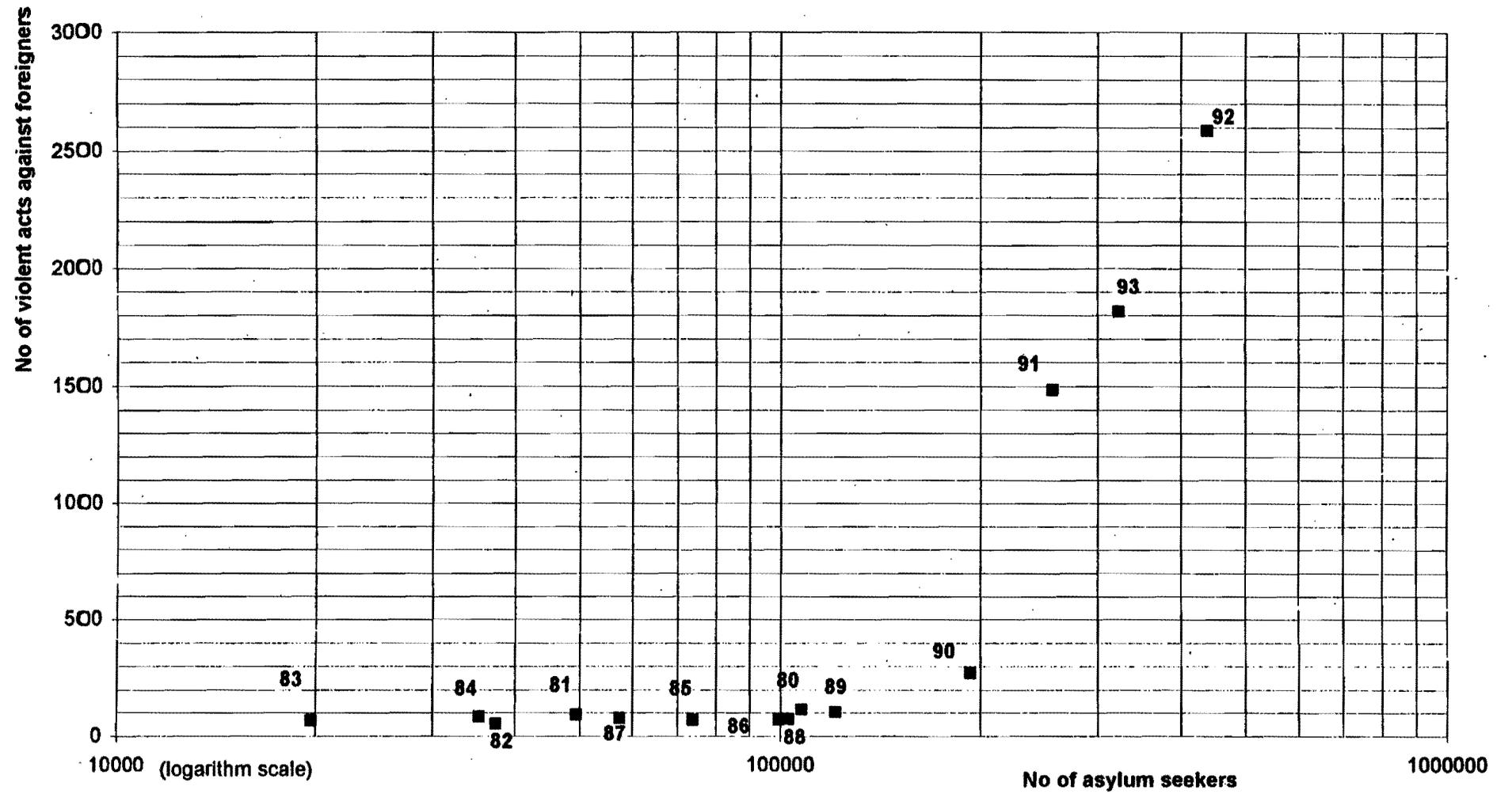
Source: Own calculations, based on raw data from: Wiegand (1993) and Fuchs/Gerhards/Roller (1993).

**Graph 5: Attitudes towards foreigners 1992**  
(Compound index of rejection)



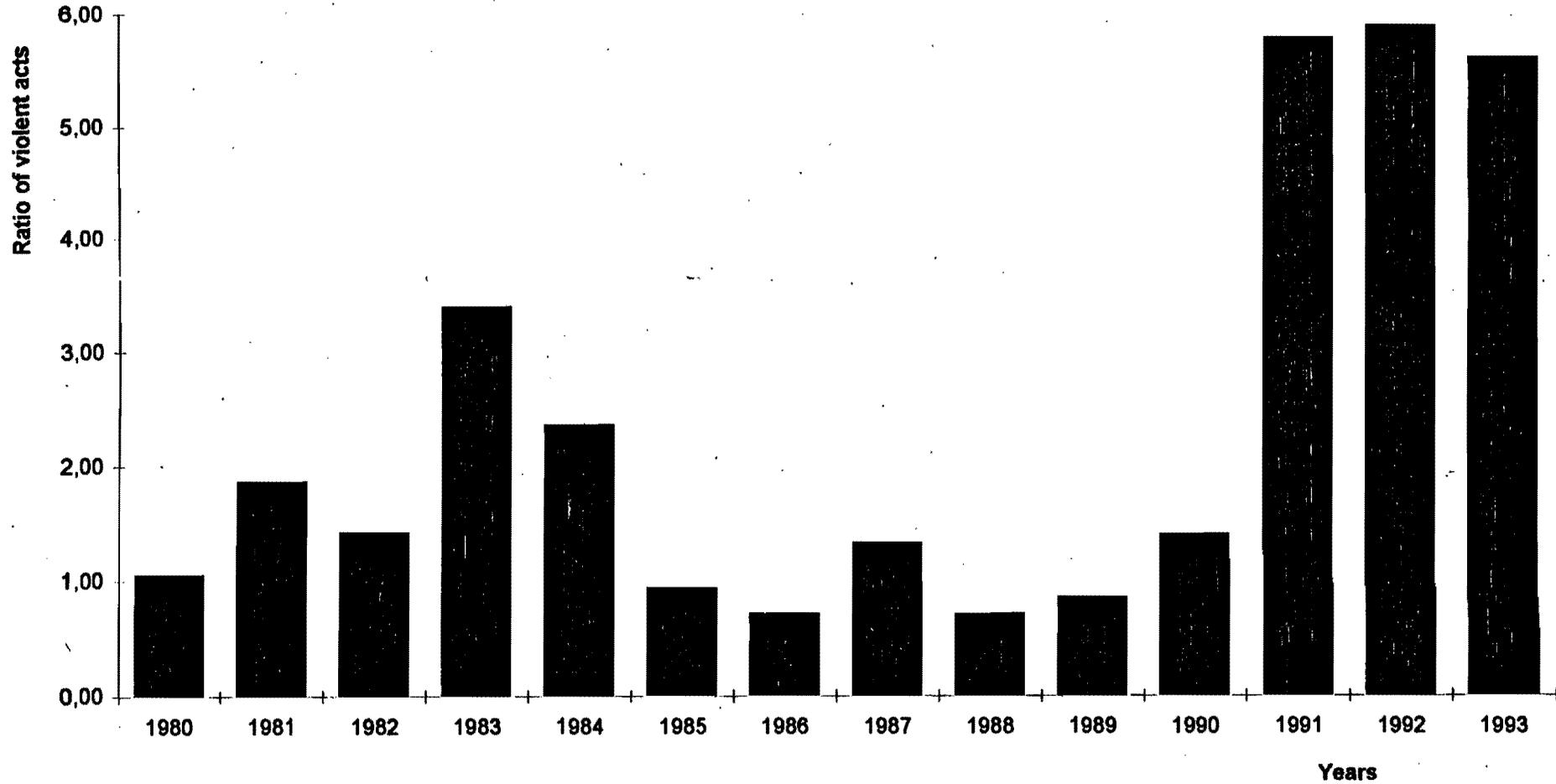
Source: Own calculations, based on raw data from: Wiegand (1993) and Fuchs/Gerhards/Roller (1993).

**Graph 6: Asylum seekers and anti-foreign violence in Germany**



Source: see table 1 (1990: united Germany).

**Graph 7: Right wing violence in Germany**  
(violent acts per 1000 asylum seekers)



Sources: see table 1 (1990: united Germany).

### The Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies

The Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies is an interdisciplinary program organized within the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences and designed to promote the study of Europe. The Center's governing committees represent the major social science departments at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Since its establishment in 1969, the Center has tried to orient students towards questions that have been neglected both about past developments in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European societies and about the present. The Center's approach is comparative and interdisciplinary, with a strong emphasis on the historical and cultural sources which shape a country's political and economic policies and social structures. Major interests of Center members include elements common to industrial societies: the role of the state in the political economy of each country, political behavior, social movements, parties and elections, trade unions, intellectuals, labor markets and the crisis of industrialization, science policy, and the interconnections between a country's culture and politics.

For a complete list of Center publications (Working Paper Series, Program on Central and Eastern Europe Working Paper Series, and *French Politics and Society*, a quarterly journal) please contact the Publications Department, 27 Kirkland St, Cambridge MA 02138. Additional copies can be purchased for \$4. A monthly calendar of events at the Center is also available at no cost.