

## Handout

### **Attitudes towards extremism in German society**

**In the so-called "Mitte"-Study (Centre Study) of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which is carried out every two years, scientists study how widespread far-right and misanthropic views are among the population. These are the key findings for 2016:**

**The classic far-right patterns of thinking, such as xenophobia, antisemitism or the desire for a dictatorship, attract only a small - and consistently small - minority of followers. Conspiracy theories and myths of victimhood, promoted by the new far right and right-wing populists, are widespread. Society is becoming more polarised and the propensity to violence is increasing. The mood with regard to the refugee situation is relaxed.**

Since 2002, negative views about social groups - group-focused hostility (GFH) - are stable or even declining. Prejudice against people with disabilities is virtually undetectable (2%). The denigration of gay people continues to decline (currently 10%). Overt (classical) antisemitism is also receding (to 6% agreement).

Prejudice against newly arrived residents (39%), immigrants (19%), Sinti and Roma (25%) and homeless people (18%), as well as racism (9%) and sexism (9%), were declining until 2014 and have been relatively stable since then.

Agreement with prejudice against asylum seekers in Germany is rising, however, from an already significant 44% in 2014 to 50% in 2016. Anti-Muslim attitudes are also widespread. 40 percent perceived the country as being undermined by Islam and 32 percent agreed with the statement that it was necessary to fight back "against current policy". Almost 43 percent of respondents thought the government was concealing the truth from people.

Agreement with more subtle forms of prejudice has intensified, as for example with secondary and Israel-related antisemitism. 25% believe Jews are "exploiting the past of the Third Reich to their advantage nowadays", 40% are of the opinion that "in view of Israel's policies, it is understandable to have something against Jews. Moreover, some aspects of GFH are showing signs of polarisation. Extreme agreement or disagreement with prejudice is intensifying.

When looking at differences between demographic groups, significant differences between East and West German respondents can be detected. Xenophobia, Islamophobia, the denigration of the Sinti and Roma, asylum seekers and homeless people are significantly more pronounced in the East. The view that newcomers generally should first join the back of the queue in society is stronger in the East.

People with lower and middle incomes and lower-to-medium levels of education are more likely to support misanthropic views.

The misanthropic views among respondents who sympathise with the ideas of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party are particularly striking. A majority of its followers and supporters agree with xenophobic (68%), anti-Muslim (64%) and antiziganist views (59%), as well as with the denigration of asylum seekers (88%) and the unemployed (68%).

Misanthropic attitudes have consequences. Agreement with the various aspects of group-focused hostility disproportionately coincides with a higher general propensity to using and condoning violence.

### **Focus on AfD**

The approximately 26% AfD sympathisers stand out for their strong agreement with prejudiced and right-wing populist views.

The data confirm that those who approve of the AfD's ideas have clearly shifted to the right. AfD sympathisers have more misanthropic and far-right attitudes than non-AfD sympathisers. The misanthropic attitudes towards immigrants, asylum seekers and Muslims, as well as "foreigners", are rising.

### **Focus on new far-right attitudes**

The new far right conveys its nationalist and ethno-nationalist ideology through the concepts of "identity" and "resistance". Conspiracy myths involving the supposed infiltration of Islam; the assertion that views are being dictated; the lambasting of the "establishment" for being illegitimate, dishonest and deceitful; demands for a return to nationalist ideals against the EU and the call to resist current policies form a coherent, new far-right pattern of attitudes that almost 28% of the population espouse. The further respondents position themselves to the right, the more likely they are to advocate these types of new far-right attitudes. 84% of AfD voters lean towards new far-right attitudes.

40% of respondents believe that German society is being undermined by Islam. More than every fifth person (28%) thinks "the ruling parties are deceiving the people". Just as many complain that "you can no longer freely express your opinion in Germany without getting into trouble" (28%) and demand that "it's time to increase resistance against current policies" (29%). Those who advocate new far-right attitudes are less proud of democracy and the constitution. Instead, they are considerably more likely to lean towards group-focused hostility and overt far-right attitudes.

Conspiracy myths with regard to Islam and the political establishment, the claim to freedom of expression and the call for resistance often conceal fundamentally antidemocratic attitudes.

Classic far-right affinities are increasingly being replaced by the modernised version of new far-right attitudes, which are more subtle and intellectual in conveying nationalist and ethno-nationalist ideologies.

### **Focus on far-right attitudes**

Far-right attitudes in Germany are stable in comparison with 2014. They are much less pronounced, however, when compared with the extent of these attitudes in the period between 2006 and 2012. The overall index of far-right orientation in 2016 shows a reading of 2.8% (overall) or 5.9% (East) and 2.3% (West). There is agreement in mainstream society with the national-chauvinist (12.5%) or xenophobic (7.7%) dimension, in particular. Moreover, 8.6% even agree with the statement that the historical narrative has greatly exaggerated the crimes of National Socialism. More than 7% are of the opinion that Germans are superior to other peoples by nature.

In comparison with 2014, agreement with far-right statements has doubled in the case of East Germans. Respondents who are over 60 years of age, less educated, politically right-wing and on low incomes show more far-right affinities than their respective comparison groups. Far-right attitudes also strongly correlate with group-focused hostility and affinity for violence. This is equally true for right-wing populist orientations, which slightly increased in 2016 compared with 2014 and can be observed in a little over 20% of the population.

### **Focus on flight and refugees**

The mood of the population with regard to refugees is significantly more positive than often assumed. At the same time, views are polarised, which is likewise also the case with other issues.

In the summer of 2016, the majority of the population is in favour of or at least tends to be positive about admitting refugees *into Germany*. More than half of respondents (56%) consider admission to be a good thing, another 24% believe it is good at least "in part" and are optimistic that it is possible for society to cope with the current situation (77% are more likely to be hopeful or are very hopeful). Only 20% explicitly say it is "probably not" or "not at all" good that Germany has admitted many refugees.

In this section of the population many also engage in volunteer work (41% of respondents said they themselves or someone in their circle of friends and acquaintances was actively involved with refugees). Conversely, 51% said this was "probably not" or "not at all" the case.

This section of the population holds clearly negative views and is sceptical, especially when it comes to *addressing issues relating to* integration, but obviously also does less itself to improve the situation in a constructive way. The analyses show that those who worry about the movement of refugees and hold little hope that Germany will cope with the situation are more prone to prejudice against refugees, are less willing to help refugees and more willing to protest

against immigration.

Only a small minority feels personally threatened by refugees in terms of their way of life (6%) or financially (7%). About a quarter of respondents fear, however, that living standards in Germany will decline. 35% of respondents "somewhat" or "fully" believe that the German government is more concerned with the welfare of refugees than the welfare of needy Germans. The vast majority experience no major problems with refugees in their area, do not feel threatened and do not fear a decline in living standards; and 50% do not believe "somewhat" or "not at all" that the government is more concerned with the welfare of refugees than that of needy Germans. Also, opinions are split with regard to demands for a "cap on refugees in Germany" - 38% of respondents are very much in favour, 21% are strongly opposed.

The attitudes and feelings towards refugees depend less on income or other socio-demographic characteristics and much more on the basic political attitude of the respondents. Negative attitudes towards refugees are particularly widespread among potential AfD voters, whereas a basically positive attitude towards admitting refugees prevails among voters of other established parties and declared non-voters. Group-focused hostility also against other groups and far-right attitudes are significantly more widespread among respondents with a generally negative attitude towards refugees.

The population's generally positive attitude, serenity and willingness to assist refugees are being underestimated. It stands against a small, hard-core minority, which not only rejects refugees but also denigrates other social groups and leans towards far-right attitudes. The rhetoric of fear and threats with regard to refugees promotes this. The issue of refugees is exemplary of the dichotomy of society, with a majority advocating cosmopolitan attitudes, tolerance and equality and a not-so-small and vocal minority calling for isolation, a return to nationalist ideals and inequality.

### **Focus on political participation and civil society**

Since 2011, the propensity to participate in politics is stagnating. The respondents who would take part in demonstrations against immigration are a relatively small group, but one that is radical in terms of political attitudes. Thus, a significantly higher degree of distrust of democracy, greater acceptance of violence and greater agreement with all aspects of far-right extremism is found among these seven percent of respondents.

Respondents who would take part in demonstrations against racism, on the other hand, prove to be less willing to use violence, have more trust in democracy and are less likely to hold far-right views than people who would not participate in such demonstrations.

There is a broad, democratic centre in Germany that advocates equality and democracy and rejects violence. But there is also a small group willing to protest that has a high propensity to use violence and views democracy with scepticism. Although this group is much smaller, this set of circumstances can nevertheless contribute towards the escalation of conflicts, especially in

terms of the potential for violence. More than 40 percent of respondents who would take part in a demonstration against immigration show a high propensity to use violence.