

First findings of the representative survey 'Menschen in Deutschland 2021' (People in Germany 2021)

The study 'Menschen in Deutschland' (MiD) is a Hamburg University research project. It is part of the German-wide research network MOTRA funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI), in which research groups from 8 universities and research institutes cooperate. Central aim of MOTRA is the long-term observation and analysis of political radicalization processes and its particular manifestations in Germany. Within this research network, the MiD study examines people's opinions and attitudes on political, social, and religious topics. For this, repeated representative surveys of the adult population in Germany are conducted annually from 2021 onwards, in which more than 4,000 people will have their say on these issues. First results of the 2021 survey will be presented below. They show how people in Germany perceive important social and political matters. Furthermore, they provide information about the prevalence of certain politically relevant attitudes, and about how respondents judge specific social problems and current developments in our society.

People in Germany 2021 - Who are our participants? ¹



- 4.483 people aged 18 years and older participated in the survey between April and June 2021.
- 49% of the respondents are male, 51% female.
- The average age is 50.8 years.



- About one third of the respondents (33%) have a lower secondary school graduation or no school-leaving certificate. A further 32% have completed intermediate school and 36% have A-levels.
- More than half of the respondents (53%) are employed full-time or part-time. Most of the employed respondents are employees or workers (82%).
- Almost 30% of the respondents are retired or in early retirement.



- Slightly less than a quarter of the respondents (23%) have a migration background.
- 88% of the respondents have German citizenship (either as their first or second nationality).



- In their spare time, almost every fourth person (23%) is sometimes or often involved in non-profit organizations and institutions.
- Every third person is active in leisure, sports or cultural clubs.



- Two thirds of the respondents place themselves in the political center.
- Just under a quarter place themselves politically on the left.
- A minority of just under 7% position themselves politically on the right.



- Most of the respondents belong to a Christian religion (58%).
- About 8% belong to Islam.
- Other religions are represented with only 1% of respondents.
- One third say they do not belong or do not feel they belong to any religion.

¹ All evaluations were carried out with weighted data. This ensures that the sample corresponds to the conditions of the adult population in Germany with regard to central socio-structural characteristics. This means that the results are representative and can be generalized to all adult inhabitants of Germany. Further information on the weighting method used and the size of individual sub-samples can be found in the "Forschungsbericht No. 2" to the MiD 2021 study, which is available online on the Hamburg University - Institute of Criminology website.

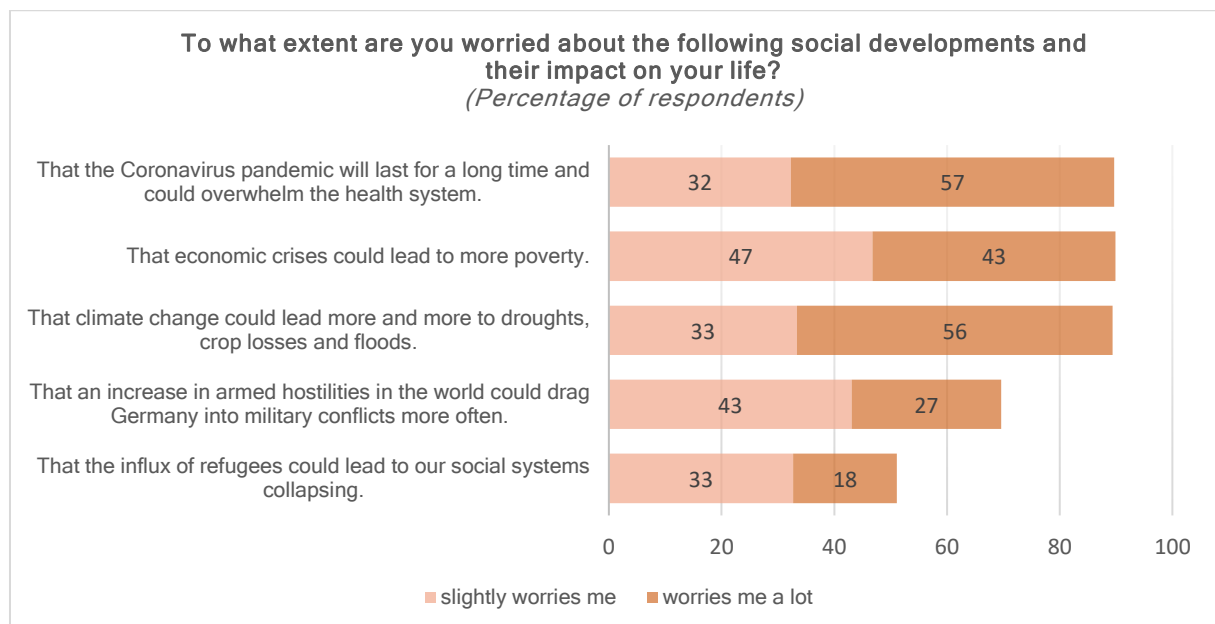
Worries and uncertainties amid social challenges and changes

A large proportion of the respondents expressed concern about the impact of current developments such as the COVID-19 pandemic, looming economic crises, and climate change.

In spring 2021 people were most concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic. With 89%, the majority of respondents are "slightly" or "a lot" worried that the pandemic "will continue for a long time and could overwhelm the health system". Equally high was the level of concern that climate change "could increasingly lead to droughts, crop losses, and floods". 90% of respondents expressed their concern in that regard. A similar level of worry was also expressed with respect to economic crises and a potential increase in poverty in Germany.

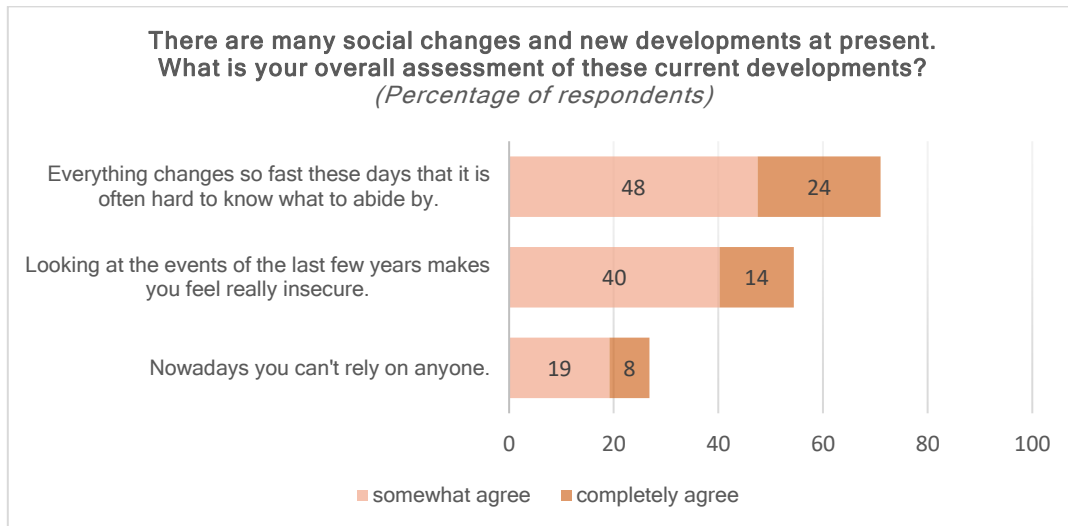
More than two-thirds of people were also concerned that Germany could be drawn into military conflicts more often due to an increase in armed conflicts in the world, although comparatively few people (27%) expressed "great concern" in this regard. In view of the developments in Ukraine, it is to be expected that these concerns of the population recorded here could turn out differently in the second survey 'Menschen in Deutschland 2022'.

Respondents were less concerned that the influx of refugees could lead to the collapse of our social systems, although these fears were still shared by more than half of the sample. It should be emphasised, however, that with 18% only a relatively small proportion of respondents expressed themselves as "very concerned" about this.

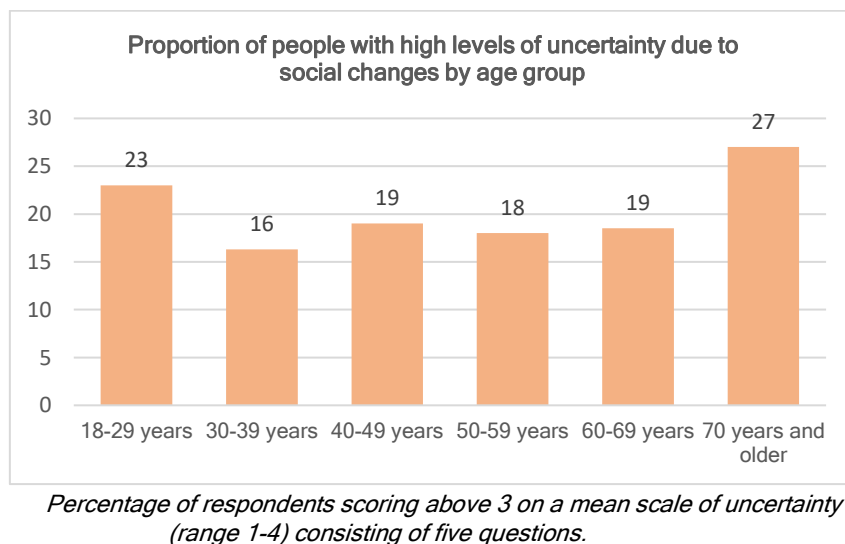


Beyond concerns with respect to this selection of specific social challenges and developments, feelings of insecurity and alienation in times of social changes were surveyed on a general level. Almost three quarters (72%) of respondents agreed with the statement "Today everything is changing so fast that you often don't know what to stick to". More than half of the respondents (54%) also stated that social developments and important events that took place during the last few years were accompanied with increased feelings of uncertainty. It can be assumed that these two statements are largely related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the concomitant short-term changes in political measures and social rules in Germany. However, they also point to a general uncertainty caused by rapid and far-reaching multidimensional changes in society and politics.

In contrast, significantly fewer people - although still a substantial proportion at over a quarter of respondents - agreed with the statement *"Nowadays you can't rely on anyone"*. Thus, social connectedness or feelings of trust in other people seems to be impaired only in a smaller proportion of people compared to the other worries, concerns and insecurities described above.



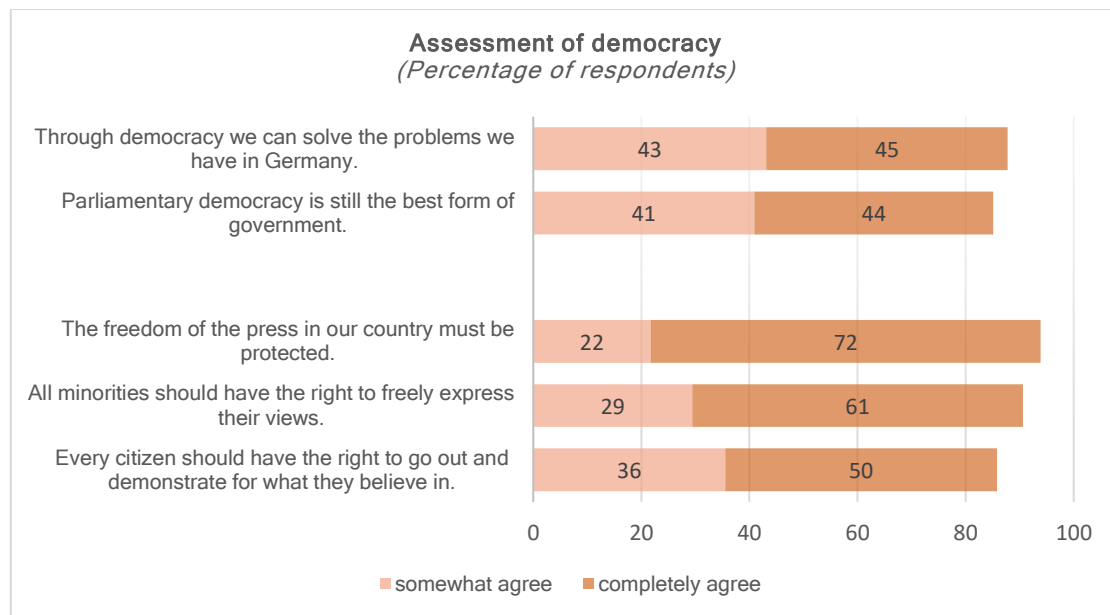
If we look at the average uncertainty, using a scale based on all five questions we asked the participants on this topic, a high degree of such generalized uncertainty is found in 20% of all respondents. Younger people under 30 (23%) and older people over 70 (27%) show the highest rates.



Assessment of democracy and trust in politics

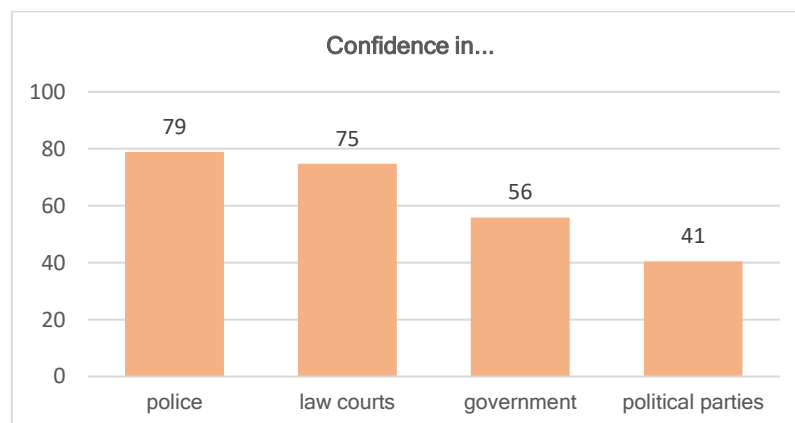
Democracy as the basis of the political system in Germany enjoys a broad approval among the population. Between 85% and 90% of the respondents agreed with the corresponding statements that named democracy as the best form of government and as suitable for solving problems in Germany. Fundamental rights and liberties such as freedom of assembly (*"Every citizen should have the right to go out and demonstrate for what they believe in"*), freedom of opinion (*"All minorities should have the right to freely express their views"*), and freedom of the press (*"The*

freedom of the press in our country must be protected") were considered worthy of protection by 86% to 94% of respondents and to that extent were rated very positively.



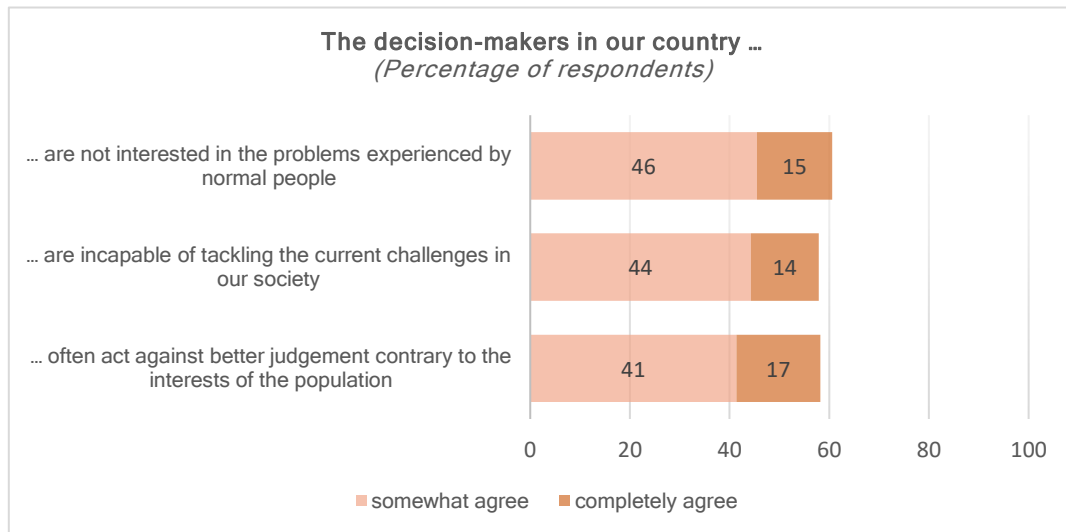
However, this positive picture with regard to the normative basis of the democratic constitution is only partially confirmed when looking at the confidence of respondents in relevant political institutions. While the trust in executive state institutions like the police and the courts was very high at 79% and 75%, respectively, the respondents' trust in political actors, i.e., the government and political parties, was significantly lower. Only slightly more than half of the respondents expressed trust in the government. Trust in political parties was even lower at only 41%.

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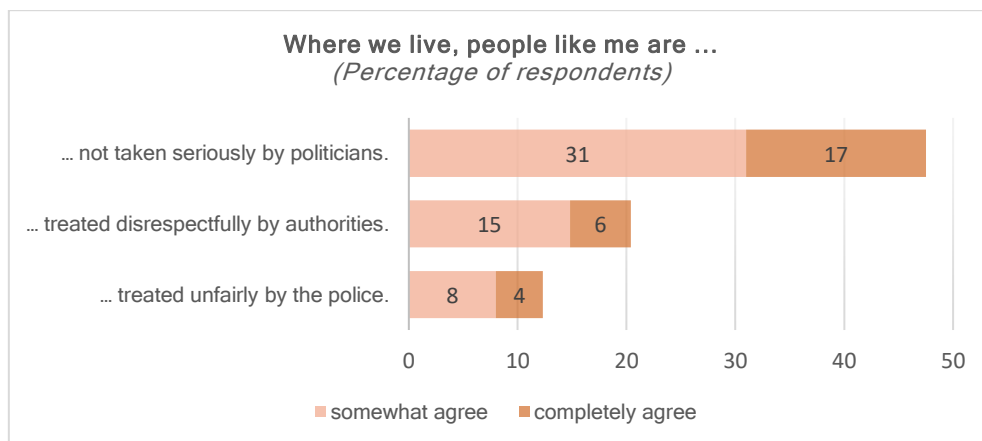


Proportion of respondents in % who indicated at least a value of 4 on a scale of 1 ("no confidence at all") to 6 ("complete confidence").

The evaluation and assessment of decision makers from politics, science, and economy with respect to their motivation to act and their competences to deal with social challenges further confirm this lack of trust and confidence among many people. More than half of the respondents (58% each) stated that decision-makers often acted *"against better judgement contrary to the interests of the population"* and were *"incapable of tackling the current challenges in our society"*. With 61%, the highest level of agreement was registered for the statement that decision-makers were not *"interested in the problems experienced by normal people"*.



Additionally, almost half of the respondents (48%) stated that they felt that people like themselves were *“not taken seriously by politicians”*. As before, the assessment of state institutions, authorities and the police was much better. Only 21% agreed with the statement that people like themselves are *“treated disrespectfully by authorities”*, and a minority of 12% think that people like themselves are *“treated unfairly by the police”*.



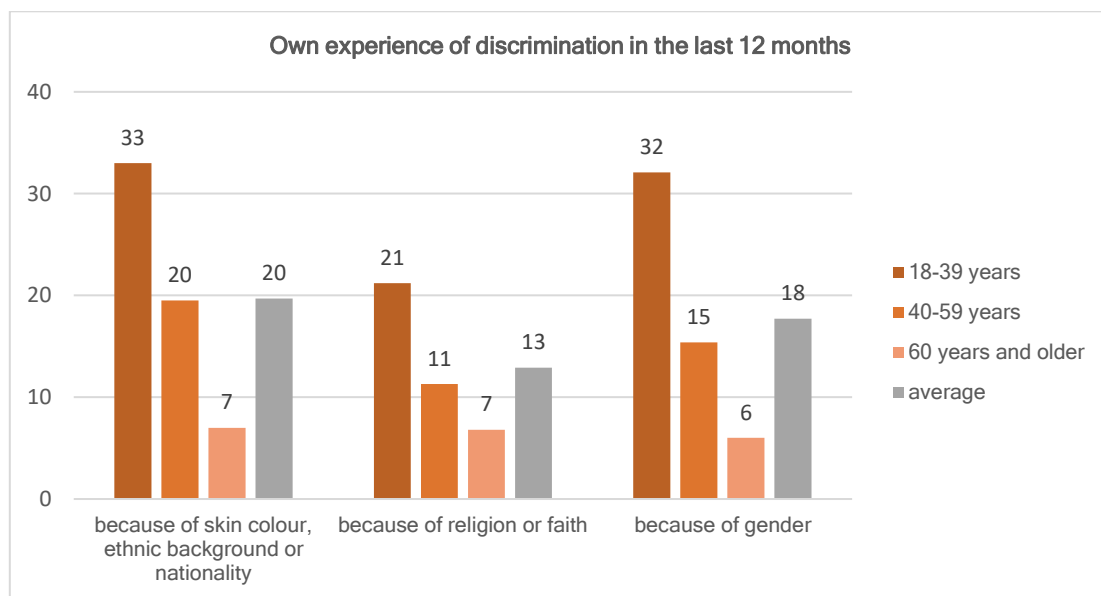
In other words, citizens tend to criticize specific political actors (i.e., government and parties), not so much the democratic system in general or state institutions with which respondents actually come into contact in everyday life (i.e., administrative authorities, police, and courts). It becomes apparent that not only the general trust in political actors is low among the population, but that large parts of the population do not trust relevant decision-makers and that their ability to cope with current challenges is seen with great doubts. Furthermore, a majority of respondents attribute politicians and decision makers a lack of interest in the problems of the population or even a willingness to act in ways that are explicitly contrary to the interests of the general population.

Our study puts a major focus on political and social conditions and their evaluation by the respondents. Only when people tell us what their experiences and observations are, we can see what problems they perceive and how they judge these problems. Therefore, we ask our participants about personal experiences with discrimination on the one hand and about observations of a variety of situations in their living environment that indicate intolerance, prejudice, and political extremism on the other hand. This helps us to find out how common such situations and experiences are throughout Germany and to what extent people feel threatened by them.

Personal experiences with discrimination and intolerance

In general, more than half of the respondents reported personal experiences with some form of discrimination in the last 12 months. However, strong differences were found depending on the type of discrimination and the age of the respondents. For example, of those under 40 years of age, 33% said they had been discriminated against because of their skin color, ethnic origin, or nationality. A comparably high proportion of this age group reported gender-based discrimination. 21% of the respondents in this age group reported being discriminated against due to their faith or religion.

Experiences of personal discrimination were significantly less frequent among people aged 60 years or older. Among those elderly respondents the rate of those who felt discriminated against varied between 6% and 7%. The discrimination rates among people aged 40 to 59 lie in the middle of the three age groups.



Percentage of respondents who have "rarely", "sometimes" or "often" felt discriminated against.

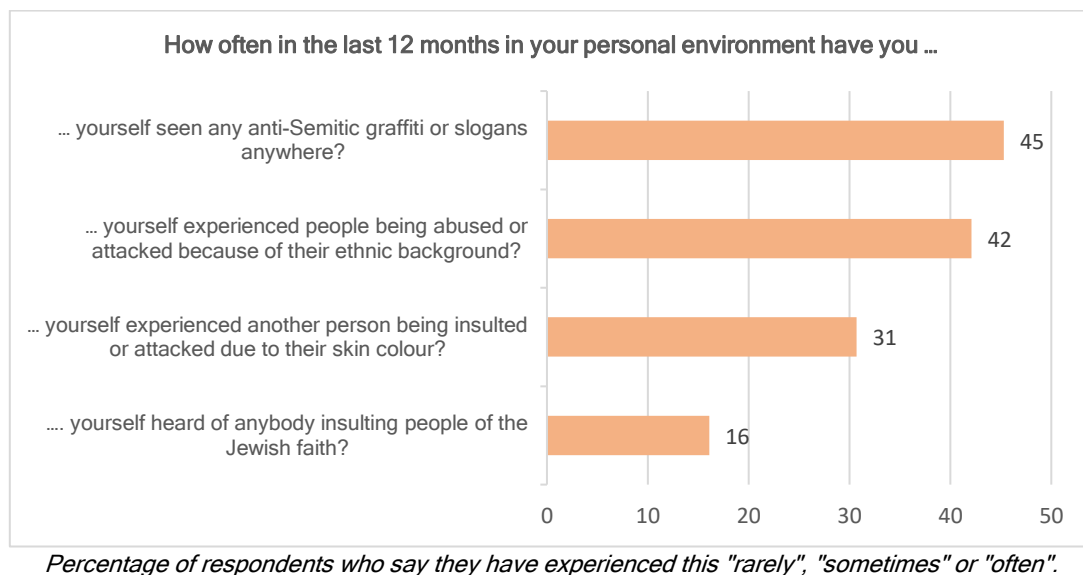
However, these results do not point to a generally more frequent discrimination of younger people. The results may also indicate a different perception of discriminatory behavior by younger people, who may be more aware and sensitive to such problematic situations. Additionally, the forms of discrimination surveyed here are only a limited selection of possible forms of disadvantage and discrimination in everyday life. For example, they did not include experiences of age-related discrimination where different results might be expected.

Perception of intolerance and political extremism in own living environments

In addition to questions about their own experiences with discrimination, respondents were asked to report their observations and perceptions of forms of political extremism and intolerance in their neighborhoods and their larger social and personal environments.

Overall, the observation of various forms of discrimination, prejudice and intolerance towards others was reported more frequently than own personal experiences of discrimination. For example, 42% of respondents said they had witnessed other people being insulted or attacked because of their ethnic origin in the last 12 months. Almost one third (31%) of the respondents observed another person being insulted or attacked because of their skin color. This shows that many respondents are directly and personally confronted with forms of xenophobia and racism in their everyday lives.

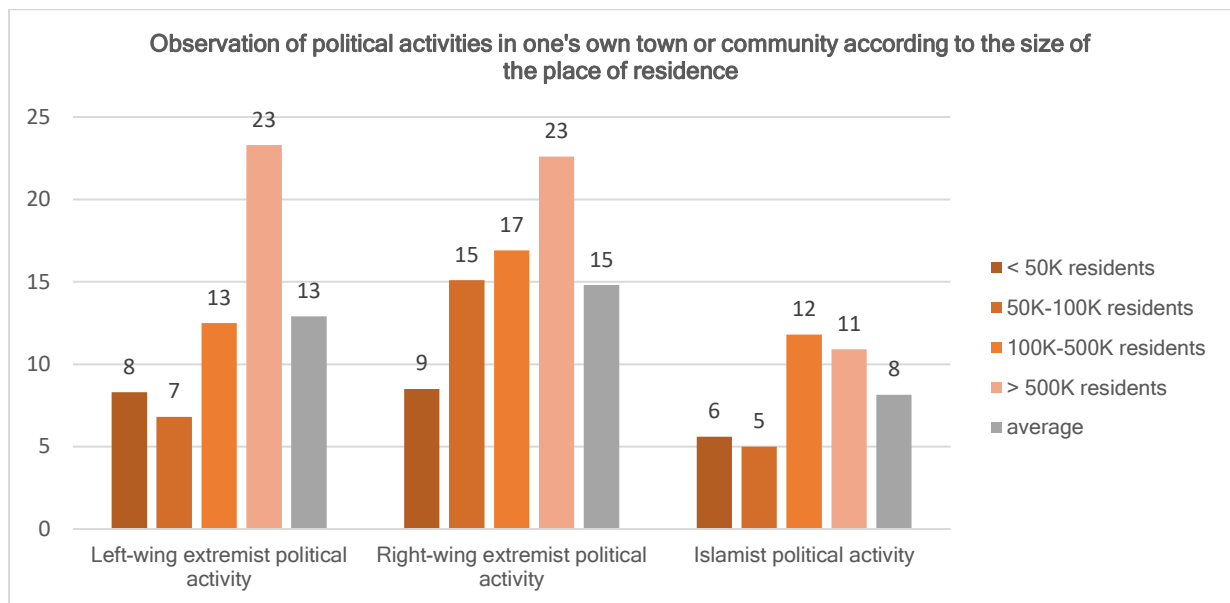
Observations indicating antisemitism were made with varying frequency depending on their form of appearance. While almost half of the respondents (45%) had seen antisemitic graffiti or slogans in their personal environment during the last 12 months, only 16% said that they had personally witnessed an insult against people of the Jewish faith during this time.



Those types of actions can be a contributing factor for the development of extremist attitudes and activities; however, they may not inevitably be interpreted as a component of extremism by respondents. Thus, respondents were further asked about their perceptions and observations of various forms of political extremism, i.e., left-wing extremist, right-wing extremist and Islamist activities, in their living environments.

Right-wing extremist activities were observed most frequently: 15% of the respondents stated that they had observed such activities "sometimes" or "often". At 13%, the rate of observations of activities attributed to the left-wing extremist spectrum was only slightly lower. Islamist activities were observed least often (8%).

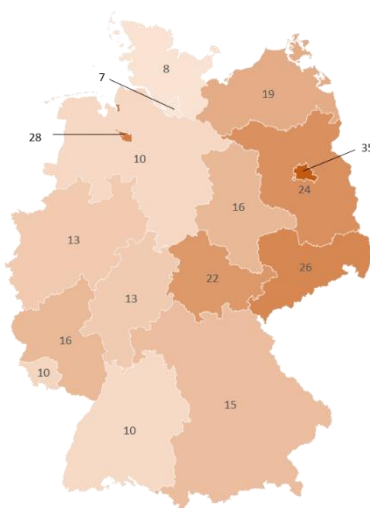
Strong differences in the frequency of such observations become apparent when looking at the size of the respondents' place of residence. For all forms of extremism, the proportion of respondents who have perceived such activities is higher in large and medium cities. Left-wing and right-wing extremist activities in large cities were observed "sometimes" or "often" by slightly less than a quarter of the respondents, while Islamist activities were observed by only 11%.



Percentage of respondents who say they have "sometimes" or "often" observed these forms of political extremist activities.

These distributions correspond to expected differences, assuming that the higher population density in large cities increases the opportunity to observe such activities, compared to the situation in smaller communities. In addition, protest events are usually more frequent there, which can lead to corresponding political statements and activities.

Observation rates of right-wing extremist activities



Considering the rates of such observations separately for the 16 German states, clear differences within Germany become apparent - shown here using the observation of right-wing extremist activities as an example.

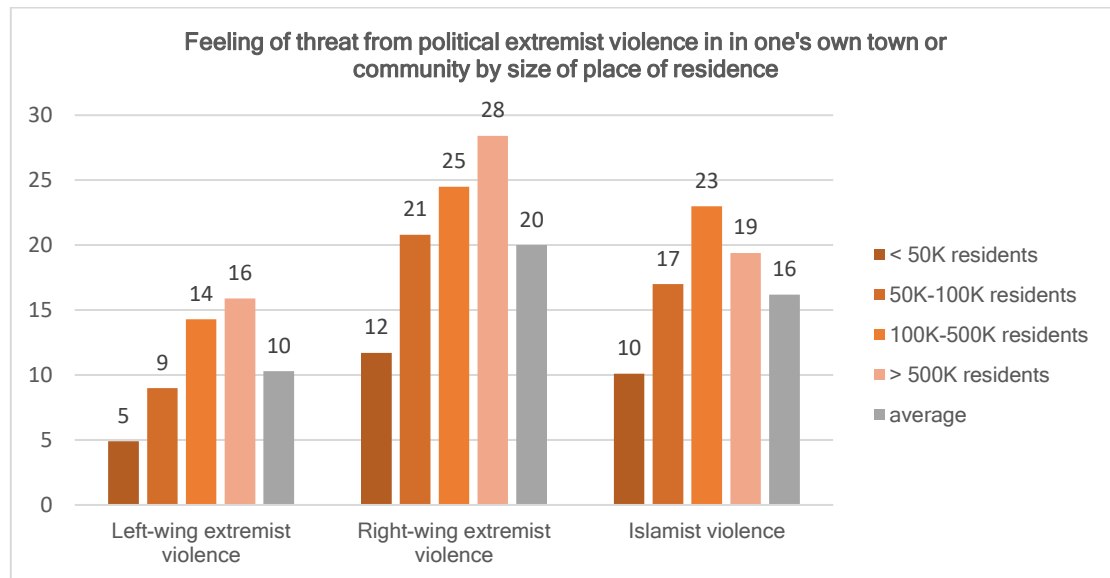
At first glance, the proportion of respondents who have observed right-wing extremist activities "sometimes" or "often" exceeds the German-wide average of 15% in Brandenburg (24%), Saxony (26%), and Thuringia (22%). However, this phenomenon does not only affect the new eastern states of Germany, which is shown by even higher rates in the city-states of Berlin (35%) and Bremen (28%). At the same time, however, Hamburg, also a city state, has the lowest rate with only 7%.

These results show that simplistic explanations, e.g., based solely on the size of the place of residence or the region in Germany, do not do the complexity of such phenomena justice. Our further research will therefore also focus on investigating the

reasons for regional differences in perceptions of extremist activities more nuanced.

In addition to the prevalence of political extremist activities, feelings of threat that are triggered by forms of politically motivated violence are a relevant factor in assessing the perceptions of respondents regarding extremism in Germany. The extent of such subjective feelings of threat was, on average, somewhat higher than the frequency of the corresponding observations. Here, too, the highest values were recorded in the area of right-wing extremism (20%). However, it is notable that despite the more frequent observation of left-wing extremist activities described above, the perception of threat from left-wing extremist violence (10%) was significantly lower than the perception of threat from Islamist violence (16%).

As was already the case with the observation of extremist activities, it is evident here that in larger places of residence and especially in large cities, feelings of threat from these three forms of extremist violence are more widespread (16% to 28%) than in smaller locations.



Percentage of respondents who felt "somewhat threatened" or "very threatened".

These first analyses show that the observation of activities that point to intolerance, hate or extremism does not necessarily have a direct effect on the perception of threats or concerns. Rather, it can be assumed that additional factors (e.g., representations of certain activities or situations in the media) become relevant here. This applies not only to political forms of extremism, but also to the perception and personal relevance of broader social problems and the evaluation of political and societal actors, as shown above.

The aim of the study 'Menschen in Deutschland' is to identify such factors and to show how social situations and their changes affect the lives of people in Germany. Furthermore, the study pursues the question of how perceptions and subjective assessments of politics and society will develop in the coming years. For this purpose, the MiD surveys will be conducted repeatedly every year starting in 2021, so that changes can be made visible, and their possible backgrounds can be examined.

This short report provided a first insight into the research questions and selected findings of our survey 'Menschen in Deutschland 2021'. We would like to sincerely thank all respondents for their efforts and their time.

Thank you for your support by participating in the survey!

If you have any questions, please contact our team at the University of Hamburg via mid-studie@uni-hamburg.de.