

Surveys on population attitudes

There is a growing debate about terms such as *extremism*, *radicalization*, *hate* and *political violence* at present. Media reports about attacks on individuals and institutions or about riots during demonstrations often contribute to the assessment that such phenomena are on the rise. Many worry about this development and see this as a growing threat to our society. The MOTRA team at the University of Hamburg (UHH) addresses the questions of the prevalence of such political attitudes in our society and the perceptions and evaluations of these current developments by people in Germany.

There is disagreement among the social and political public about which spectrum radicalization and political extremism stem from, what the dangers for social cohesion and the existence of the free democratic order in Germany are, their scope and how they are developing. There is also regular discussion on how such phenomena can be countered and how effective prevention should be designed in this context. In order to be able to answer such questions, scientific studies are needed that take a comprehensive stock of political extremism in its various forms on the basis of a broad range of data, while also focusing on its specific social conditions.

In this sense, the studies of the UHH as a subproject of the MOTRA research network pursue the goal of gaining insights into the spread of politically extremist attitudes in Germany across ideologies and phenomena and documenting any changes over time. Particular attention is paid to right-wing extremism and Islamism, and thus to attitudes that reject basic democratic principles and civil liberties. The studies also look at intolerance or hatred toward foreigners and minorities. Respondents' attitudes toward violence and breaking the law as a means of political debate and asserting interests are also addressed.

Findings about such attitudes and the factors that influence them are significant in several respects. For example, individuals with such attitudes can be circles of support and backing for groups that actively engage in politically motivated violence. Moreover, such attitudes are often a precursor to the development of extremist readiness to act.

In order to be able to recognize corresponding potentials and developments at an early stage and to analyze and assess them more precisely, this subproject will establish a permanent observation in the form of representative surveys of the adult resident population in Germany, which will be repeated annually. These take place under the title "People in Germany" ("Menschen in Deutschland", MiD). In addition to assessments of their own political opinions and attitudes, participants are also asked here to report observations of intolerance, hatred and extremism that they have made in their regional living environment. Since extremism often arises against the backdrop of insecurities or the experience of a threat to one's own person or to the group to which one feels one belongs, such experiences are also addressed. For this purpose, among other things, data and findings from the other

subprojects from MOTRA are also used, which for example contain additional background information about the regions in which the respondents live.

These surveys of the general population are supplemented by regularly repeated representative surveys of young people between 16 and 21 years of age, which take place under the title "Young People in Germany" ("Junge Menschen in Deutschland", JuMiD). Adolescents and young adults are often a particular target of recruitment efforts by extremist groups and organizations, which is why there is a particular need for developmentally appropriate preventive measures.

In cooperation with the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, further online surveys are conducted at short intervals since November 2022 under the title "People in Germany International" ("Menschen in Deutschland International", MiDIInt). These focus specifically on perceptions of international events in the context of war, pandemics, refugees, migration and economic crisis, and examine their impact on the perception of threat and political attitudes among the German population.

The comprehensive goal of the UHH subproject is to use this combination of surveys to identify, as comprehensively as possible, those social processes and tendencies that can lead to the development of extremism and endanger social cohesion. The resulting analyses of the extent to which such developments are taking place, in which subgroups and regions, and due to which influences, can help to better assess risks and, based on this, to target preventive measures more effectively.