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A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY ON TRANSPHOBIA, COMPASSION, AND CRIME PERCEPTION IN GERMANY[1]

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Introduction

In the 1960s, Harold Garfinkel conducted a series of interviews with Agnes, who we would today describe as a trans woman. Garfinkel emphasised how Agnes tried to 'pass' and hide her gender status, which resulted in her minimising social contact and going out of her way to avoid drawing attention to herself. The environment of 1960s Los Angeles did not have the vocabulary to let Agnes be fully recognised, and 'normal society' operated based on broad assumptions about the natural order:

> For normals, the presence in the environment of sexed objects has the feature of 'a natural matter of fact'. This naturalness carries … the sense of its being right and correct, i.e., morally proper that it be that way. Because it is a natural matter of fact, for the members of our society there are only natural males and natural females. The good society for the member is composed only of persons who are either one sex or the other. Hence the bona fide member of the society … finds the claims of the sciences like zoology, biology, and psychiatry strange.
>
> *(Garfinkel, 1967: 123)*

Decades later, the transgender community[2] has not only gained visibility but also formed a more interconnected and supportive network, with transgender people able to find others to share their experiences with and to be open about their identity and sense of self. A transgender identity is not necessarily a 'discreditable identity' (Goffman, 1963: 42ff.) or one that can only be disclosed in specific environments.

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Increasing visibility has led to greater academic interest (cf. Stryker, 2017) and to identification of the many ways in which gendered assumptions permeate institutions ranging from the church (Crasnow, 2021) to the justice system (Greene, 2023). The strategies which transgender people employ to 'do gender' vary but are no longer limited to simply 'blending in' (Marques, 2019).

The political discourse over transgenderism has itself been fragmented, with human rights-based approaches sharing the aisle with outright demonisation. Positioning the transgender community as a political threat has become a cornerstone of politics in many arenas, leading to new rounds of globally enacted symbolic legislation: for example, a bill proposed in the Texas state legislature in March 2025 would establish 'gender identity fraud' as a crime, essentially criminalising being transgender (Galbraith, 2025). The defence of 'binary gender' has subsumed various antifeminist and traditionalist perspectives to become both a significant political issue but also one often framed in terms of 'common sense' (Geertz, 1975), even as scholars continue to explore how 'doing gender in a way that does not reflect biological sex can be perceived as a threat to heterosexuality' (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009: 442).

Hostility to the transgender community is not limited to the US context. Friedrich Merz, Chancellor of Germany, has also expressed his views on the 'gender question': During a political debate on 9 February 2025, when asked his opinion on Donald Trump's plan to officially only recognise binary gender in the US, Merz responded, 'this is a decision, that I can understand' ['*Das ist eine Entscheidung, die ich nachvollziehen kann*'] (Mendgen, 2025).

The use of the transgender community as a *Feindbild* – a constructed public enemy and a scapegoat, literally meaning 'image of the enemy' – parallels increasing public awareness and displays of support. Increasing visibility, not only of the broader LGBTIQA+ community, but especially of transgender people, has also triggered a backlash both in rhetoric and discourse as well as through direct violence. Pride events in Germany have increasingly become targets of aggressive protests by far-right groups (Whittle, 2024; Die Sachsen News, 2024).

Even as legal protections for transgender people become a major focus in public discourse, it remains unclear to what extent different segments of the public, political actors, and media institutions frame transgender people as a legitimate social concern. It is also uncertain whether they are instead dismissed as a 'problem category' shaped by claims-makers in public debate (cf. Spector and Kitsuse, 1977). While some narratives emphasise transphobia as a human rights issue, others position transgender identities as a political controversy, shaping how hate crimes against transgender individuals are perceived and whether they are taken seriously. Despite signs of acceptance, transgender people still experience difficulty accessing healthcare (James et al., 2016), are subject to a variety of intrusive and often changing laws covering the use of restrooms (Schilt and Westbrook, 2015), and face discrimination,

if not outright bans, in many social spaces, professions, and institutions. Complicating the issue is terminology, not just in terms of transgender issues (Stryker et al., 2008) but also in how hate crime is conceptualised and understood both among scholars and the general public (cf. Colliver, 2021).

At the same time, public attitudes are not static. Changes in gender orders do not follow a simple linear trajectory, but they result from long-term political and civic engagement (Bereswill and Ehlert, 2023). It remains to be seen whether increasing visibility and greater public contact with transgender communities will, over time, chip away at stereotypes and foster broader acceptance. If so, this could have significant implications for legal frameworks, media portrayals, and everyday interactions shaping the lived experiences of transgender people.

This study contributes to the broader examination of hate crime trends across different contexts and communities. By focusing specifically on transphobic hate crimes in Germany, we connect to similar patterns of identity-based violence documented globally, while applying theoretical frameworks of intergroup contact and diversity beliefs to this specific context. Our findings have implications for understanding the mechanisms behind public perceptions of hate crimes more generally, as explored in other chapters of this collection.

Research on transphobic hate crime in Germany

Hate crimes are taking place every day – sometimes visibly but mostly invisibly for the majority of the society. These crimes are defined by three key elements in Germany: (1) the presence of a criminal act;[3] (2) the perpetrator's prejudice-based motivation, which targets individuals based on 'assumed or actual' characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, origin, skin colour, religion, gender, gender or sexual identity, sexual orientation, social status, political views, external appearance, or disability (Kugelmann, 2015: 12); and (3) the broader impact of these offences, not only on the direct victims but also on the entire affected group (Coester, 2008; Kugelmann, 2015). Beyond the physical and psychological harm inflicted on victims, hate crime carries a *symbolic message* with far-reaching consequences. This not only affects those directly targeted but also instils fear and insecurity within their social environment and among individuals who share their characteristics or identify with the affected group (Bender and Weber, 2023).

As a result, hate crime extends its harm beyond immediate victims, undermining entire communities and eroding social cohesion. By attacking individuals based on their identity, such crimes threaten fundamental democratic values and principles, ultimately destabilising society as a whole (Bender and Weber, 2023, 2025; Coester, 2017; Perry, 2014). Since 2001, hate crimes in Germany have been documented by the Criminal Police Reporting Service

(CPRS).[4] These offences fall under the broader classification of politically motivated crime and are further categorised into right-wing, left-wing, foreign ideology, religious ideology, or other forms of political extremism. Within the hate crime category, a total of 16 subcategories[5] exist, providing a more detailed classification of the specific forms of hate crime offences.

When examining the development of hate crime in Germany over the past few years, official police crime statistics reveal the following changes: In 2016, hate crime incidents reached a record high, nearly doubling from 5,376 cases in 2001 to 10,751 cases (BMI and BKA, 2020). This upward trend continued peaking in 2023 with 17,007 recorded hate crime offenses (BMI and BKA, 2024). This marks a 47.63% increase compared to the previous year (2022: 11,520 cases; Weber et al., 2025).

The CPRS has undergone significant changes affecting the classification of reported hate crimes related to gender and sexuality. In February 2020, the police created 'gender/sexual identity' as a subcategory to register hate crimes against LGBTIQA+ people but mostly to make a clear distinction between homophobic and transphobic crimes (Ponti, 2023). Two years later, the category of 'gender-related hate crimes/crimes related to sexual identity' was removed and replaced by the broader category of 'gender-related diversity' (BMI and BKA, 2024). These adjustments affect how such offences are recorded and analysed. This highlights a gap in the recording of gender- and sexuality-related offences, making it challenging to assess their development over time. This also indicates that Germany, particularly its law enforcement agencies, has only recently begun to prioritise criminal acts against LGBTIQA+ people. Meanwhile, members of this community and advocacy organisations have been reporting an increase in such offences for years (Ponti, 2023).

Between 2022 and 2023, crimes related to the category 'gender-related diversity' increased significantly, rising from 417 to 854 offences, marking an increase of 104.8% (BMI and BKA, 2023: 11). Criminal acts targeting 'sexual orientation'[6] also saw a notable rise. From 2021 (870 cases) to 2022 (1,005 cases), the number of cases increased by 15.52%, followed by a sharp rise of 49.15% in 2023 (1,449 cases). In contrast, the years 2019 (576 cases) and 2020 (578 cases) showed only a marginal increase of 0.35% (BMI and BKA, 2020, 2023, 2024). Different studies explored the low reporting behaviour of members of the LGBTIQA+ community and other individuals who experienced hate crimes (Bender and Weber 2023; Deutscher Bundestag, 2021; Ponti, 2023). A study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) states, that

> 51% of victims of harassment and 33% of victims of physical or sexual attack indicated that they considered the incident too minor or not serious enough to merit reporting it to the police.
>
> *(FRA, 2020: 47)*

The reasons for this behaviour include fear of homophobic or transphobic reactions from the police (FRA, 2020). Only 13% of LGBTIQA+ people in Germany reported experiencing physical or sexual violence to the police (FRA, 2020: 48). The Association of Lesbian and Gay Police Officers estimates that 80–90% of hate crimes against LGBTIQA+ people remain unreported, highlighting a significant dark figure of unrecorded offences (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021).

Significant research gaps in Germany remain regarding the scope, manifestations, and underlying factors of queer-hostile violence. There is also a lack of empirical data on perpetrators and their motivations as well as on how law enforcement and the judiciary respond to these hate crimes (Ponti, 2023). Our study aims to bridge these critical research gaps.

In the international research landscape, a greater number of studies focus on the predictors of transphobic attitudes that contribute to prejudice or criminal behaviour. The following section presents key findings from these studies.

Predictors of hate crime against transgender people

Criminal acts committed against people based on certain group characteristics, such as gender/sexual identity, are referred to as hate crime (Bender et al., 2024). Violence against transgender people because of their gender identity can therefore be seen as acts of transphobic hate crime. In this study, in order to ensure suitable response rates, we did not ask directly about actual propensities for violence, but instead about the support for police action against transphobic violence. This serves as an indicator of transphobic hate crime acceptance, with lower levels representing more transphobic hate crime acceptance.

The majority of transgender people have already experienced forms of harassment in public. This includes insults as well as physical and sexual abuse (Turner et al., 2009). Transphobic hate crimes are mostly driven by prejudice against the victim's transgender identity (Turner et al., 2009). Previous research has found that more negative attitudes towards the protection of minority groups, such as transgender people, were associated with lower levels of blame and punitive recommendations for the perpetrator in cases of hate crime (Cabeldue et al., 2018). Further studies suggest that the propensity for aggression and violence towards transgender people is related to transphobic attitudes (McGonigal et al., 2023).

Based on these associations, we assume that transphobic attitudes are related to less support for police action against transphobic violence as an indicator of advocacy of transphobic hate crime. In order to be able to derive possible implications that reduce hate crime against transgender people, it

should therefore also be understood how transphobic attitudes arise. Therefore, a number of factors potentially influencing transphobic attitudes will also be considered.

(Positive and negative) intergroup contact

Intergroup contact can effectively reduce negative stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In 1954, Allport introduced the contact hypothesis, proposing that repeated contact with other social groups group can – in suitable circumstances – foster more positive attitudes towards members of that group. Subsequent research has consistently supported this theory (e.g., Brown et al., 2007; Dovidio et al., 2017; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Studies show that direct, incidental, and indirect contact with members of other groups contribute to diminishing negative attitudes and prejudices (Brown and Paterson, 2016; De Coninck et al., 2021; Lemmer and Wagner, 2015; Pettigrew et al., 2007). Additionally, more frequent contact with individuals from different social groups leads to lasting positive attitude shifts (Brown et al., 2007; Lemmer and Wagner, 2015).

Improved empathy, perspective-taking, and positive affect toward the other group mediate the effects of contact (Pettigrew et al., 2011; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). Research further demonstrates the universality of these effects across nations, genders, and age groups (Pettigrew et al., 2011), highlighting the broad applicability of intergroup contact.

Contact, which is experienced as positive, enhances future interactions, reinforcing their impact (Schäfer, 2020). However, negative contact exerts a stronger influence, intensifying biases, eroding trust, and reducing willingness for future engagement (Aberson, 2015; Graf et al., 2014; Meleady and Forder, 2019; Schäfer et al., 2021). Although positive contact is more frequent, negative interactions shape attitudes more profoundly (Graf et al., 2014; Schäfer et al., 2021).

Klocke et al. (2019) show that German schoolteachers with more contact with LGBTIQA+ people are more likely to integrate diversity topics into lessons and intervene more frequently against discrimination. Similarly, Hatch et al. (2022) demonstrate that negative attitudes and limited contact with LGBTIQA+ people reinforce prejudice over time. Based on this, we presume that positive contact is negatively related and negative contact positively related to transphobic attitudes.

For the present model, we also assume direct correlations between positive and negative contact and hate crime against transgender people. Previous literature has already shown that contact experiences are associated with discriminatory behaviours (e.g., violence based on sexual identity), with positive contact experiences predicting more supportive behaviours

and past negative contact experiences predicting more discriminatory behaviours (Hutchison and Rosenthal, 2011; Pettigrew, 1998; Reimer et al., 2017). We therefore assume that positive contact is positively and negative contact negatively related to the support for police action against transphobic violence.

Political orientation

Beyond contact, the study by Klocke et al. (2019)[7] also examined teachers' *political orientation*, finding that left-leaning teachers address sexual and gender diversity more often than conservatives, who are less likely to teach these topics or intervene in cases of discrimination. We presume that an increasing right-wing political orientation is positively associated with transphobic attitudes.

Political orientation appears to have a direct influence on hate crime, with increasingly right-wing political attitudes being associated with less support for increased punishment for hate crime offences (Cramer et al., 2017). This study therefore also focuses on the direct effect of political orientation on hate crime against transgender people, assuming that increasing right-wing political orientation is associated with less support for police action against transphobic violence.

Diversity beliefs

Stronger pro-diversity beliefs are related to lower transphobic attitudes (Schudson and van Anders, 2022) and reduced discriminatory behaviour towards minorities (Kauff and Wagner, 2012). Therefore, we assume that diversity beliefs are negatively associated with transphobic attitudes and positively with the support for police action against transphobic violence.

Demographic variables

Gender is considered a predictor of transphobic attitudes, with men showing stronger transphobic attitudes on average than women (Dierckx et al., 2017). Existing evidence on the impact of education is mixed (Dierckx et al., 2017; Mizock et al., 2017) and remains unexamined in Germany. Accordingly, we explore education as a factor, assuming men and the less educated show stronger transphobic attitudes. Socio-economic and demographic characteristics have shown no correlation with the extent of victimisation by hate crime in previous European studies (Van Kesteren, 2016), which is why no direct correlations between education and gender and support for police action against transphobic violence are assumed in the present study.

The present study

Considering the presented empirical findings and theoretical derivations, we sought to identify predictors of transphobic attitudes in a representative German sample (HaSteX; Bender et al., 2024).[8] The hypotheses were tested in a path model using the statistics software R Studio Version 2024.09.0 (Posit Team, 2022) and the lavaan package for structural equation modelling (Rosseel, 2012), as described in the following section.

The selection of predictors for our model – particularly political orientation, contact experiences, and diversity beliefs – was guided by prior research demonstrating their significant relationships with attitudes toward marginalised groups. Political orientation was included as a key predictor based on consistent findings in German contexts showing its strong relationship to views on gender diversity (Klocke et al., 2019). Our operationalisation of demographic variables followed established international standards, with education coded using the International Standard Classification of Education to ensure comparability across studies.

Sample and procedure

The Survey on Perceptions of Hate Crime, the Penal System and Sex Work (HaSteX) was conducted as a cross-sectional survey, representative of the German population in terms of age, region, gender, and education (Bender et al., 2024). Data were collected by Ipsos from July to August 2024 using an online questionnaire.

From the original, representative HaSteX sample of N = 3,652 people who stated that they did not identify with the male or female gender were excluded due to a lack of meaningfulness and simplification of the analyses (n = 3). Furthermore, individuals were excluded if they had missing values in variables relevant for the analysis (n = 259). Univariate outliers were excluded on the basis of standardised residuals above 3 (n = 59). Following Leys et al. (2019), 21 cases were excluded from the analysis as they were identified as multivariate outliers with $p < 0.001$ by the Mahalanobis distance.

After exclusion, this resulted in a final sample of N = 3,310 participants for further data analysis. Within this sample, 1,664 identified as female (50.3%) and 1,646 as male (49.7%).The participants were on average 48.43 years old (SD = 15.32; age range 18–75). The level of education was coded using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, Federal Statistical Office, 2020) from level 1 (primary education) to level 8 (doctorate or equivalent). Level 1 and 2 respondents were categorised as having a low level of education, while levels 3 and 4 were coded as having a medium level of education and levels 5 to 8 as having a high level of education (Wagner et al., 2024). The education of 1,200 respondents was classified as a high level of education (36.25%), while 1,607 reported a medium level of education (48.55%) and 503 respondents reported a low level of education (15.2%).

Materials

Political orientation. We assessed political orientation by means of self-placement on a left-right political spectrum (Breyer, 2015). Participants were asked to indicate their own political views in social questions on a seven-point scale (1 = left, 4 = centre, 7 = right).

Positive/negative intergroup contact. With two questions, participants were asked how often they personally had direct positive and direct negative contact with transgender people, consistent with the intergroup contact framework outlined above. The frequency of positive/negative contact could be assessed on a seven-point scale (1 = never, 4 = occasionally, 7 = very often). In order to obtain the variance in the dependent variables, people who stated that they had never had contact with transgender people in general were also assigned a value of 1 (never).

Diversity beliefs. Participants' diversity beliefs were surveyed using six items (e.g., 'I value cultural diversity in Germany because it benefits the country'; Kauff et al., 2019; Meyer and Schermuly, 2012; Nakui et al., 2011). Agreement with the items was indicated on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither, 7 = strongly agree). For the analysis, each participant's score was the mean of six items.

Transphobic attitudes. Attitudes towards transgender people were assessed using two items. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statements on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither, 7 = strongly agree; Zick et al. (2023):

1 I think it's silly for a man to prefer to be a woman or, conversely, for a woman to prefer to be a man.
2 Transgender people should try not to stand out so much.

The mean value of agreement with the two items was included in the analysis.

Support for police action against transphobic violence. Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statement: 'The police should take consistent action against verbal and physical attacks against transgender people'. Participants rated the statement on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither, 7 = strongly agree). As this variable relates to the assessment of criminal behaviour towards people based on their gender identity, the variable was used in the following study as an indicator for hate crime against transgender people.

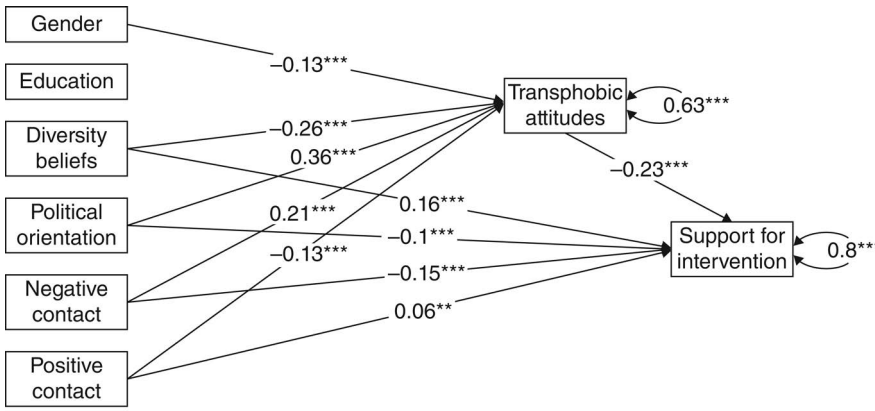
Results

First, we present bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for all measures in our analysis in Table 9.1.

TABLE 9.1 Bivariate correlation

		Correlations							
	M(SD)	*Education*	*Gender*	*Diversity beliefs*	*Positive contact*	*Negative contact*	*Political orientation*	*Transphobic attitudes*	*Support for intervention*
Education	2.21 (0.69)	1							
Gender	1.5 (0.5)	–0.03	1						
Diversity beliefs	4.65 (1.53)	0.14 ***	0.04	1					
Positive contact	2.35 (1.76)	0.03	0.02	0.23 ***	1				
Negative contact	1.61 (1.29)	0.0	–0.08 ***	0.04	0.47 ***	1			
Political orientation	3.87 (1.36)	–0.1 ***	–0.06 **	–0.33 ***	–0.07 ***	0.19 ***	1		
Transphobic attitudes	3.57 (1.88)	–0.07 ***	–0.18 ***	–0.4 ***	–0.11 ***	0.22 ***	0.5 ***	1	
Support for intervention	5.6 (1.66)	0.06 **	0.11 ***	0.29 ***	0.05 *	–0.19 ***	–0.3 ***	–0.38 ***	1

Note: N = 3,310. ***p < 0.001. **p < 0.01. *p<0.05. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Support for intervention = Support for police action against transphobic violence.



Note. N = 3,310. $\chi^2(2) = 8.797$, $p = 0.995$, CFI = 0.997, SRMR = 0.008, RMSEA = 0.032, $p = .05 = .894$, *CI*[0.013; 0.055]. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Support for intervention = Support for police action against transphobic violence.

FIGURE 9.1 Path model of the significant correlations

The highest correlation was found between transphobic attitudes and the support for police action against transphobic violence ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$).

Path analysis

We tested our hypotheses in a path analysis[9] with gender, education, intergroup contact, diversity beliefs, and political orientation as predictors; transphobic attitudes as a mediator; and the support for police action against transphobic violence as a dependent variable. The calculated path model (Figure 9.1) showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(2) = 8.797$, $p = 0.995$, CFI = 0.997, SRMR = 0.008, RMSEA = 0.032, $p = .05 = 0.894$, *CI*[0.013; 0.055], and explained 36.6% ($R^2 = 0.366$) of the variance of the transphobic attitudes and 19.6% of the variance of the support for police action against transphobic violence ($R^2 = 0.196$). Figure 9.1 shows the path model with statistically significant standardised coefficients ($p < 0.05$) only.

Direct effects

Transphobic attitudes

The findings regarding direct effects on transphobic attitudes mostly confirmed our hypotheses: the results indicated that participants with stronger diversity beliefs scored lower in transphobic attitudes. With regard to gender, the results showed that women had less transphobic attitudes than men. More frequent negative intergroup contact was associated with stronger transphobic attitudes. This effect was stronger than the rather small effect of positive

contact, which indicates that more frequent positive contact may lead to lower transphobic attitudes. The strongest association with transphobic attitudes was shown by the political orientation, whereby an increasingly right-wing political orientation was related to more transphobic attitudes. Contrary to our hypothesis, the participants' education showed no correlation.

These findings align with our theoretical framework based on intergroup contact theory. The stronger effect of negative contact compared to positive contact supports previous research showing that negative interactions have more profound impacts on attitude formation (Graf et al., 2014; Schäfer et al., 2021). Additionally, the significant relationship between political orientation and transphobic attitudes reflects the increasing politicisation of transgender issues in German public discourse, as discussed in our introduction.

Support for police action against transphobic violence

Transphobic attitudes showed the highest association with support for police action against transphobic violence, indicating that more transphobic attitudes are associated with stronger disapproval of police intervention in group-based violence against transgender people. For the other variables, we observed only very small direct effects on the support for police action against transphobic violence. These results should therefore be interpreted with caution. More frequent positive contact with transgender people was associated with a stronger endorsement of consistent intervention in group-based violence against transgender people, while more frequent negative contact was associated with more rejection of such intervention. Furthermore, a more right-wing political orientation and lower diversity beliefs were associated with a stronger rejection of intervening in hate crimes against transgender people.

Indirect and total effects

Table 9.2 shows the indirect, standardised effects via transphobic attitudes. Total effects consider both the direct and indirect effects of the individual predictors on the dependent variables. The total standardised effects of the analysed variables are shown in Table 9.3.

Support for police action against transphobic violence

With the exception of the effect of education, all effects of the predictors on the support for police action against transphobic violence were also mediated via transphobic attitudes. However, we observed only very small indirect effects on the support for police action against transphobic violence via transphobic attitudes. The role of transphobic attitudes for the support for police action against transphobic violence is therefore hardly dependent

TABLE 9.2 Indirect effects in the path analysis

	B	*SE*	*Z*	*p*	β
Support for intervention ~					
Education	0.0	0.01	−0.34	0.737	0.0
Gender	0.1	0.01	6.96	<.001***	0.03
Diversity beliefs	0.07	0.01	9.13	<.001***	0.06
Positive contact	0.03	0.0	6.55	<.001***	0.03
Negative contact	−0.06	0.01	−9.02	<.001***	−0.05
Political orientation	−0.1	0.01	−9.97	<.001***	−0.08

Note: N = 3,310. $\chi^2(2) = 8.797$, $p = 0.995$, CFI = 0.997, SRMR = 0.008, RMSEA = 0.032, $p = 0.05 = 0.894$, *CI*[0.013; 0.055]. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Support for intervention = Support for police action against transphobic violence.

on the predictors in our model. The results of the indirect effects should be interpreted with caution.

Gender showed a positive indirect effect via transphobic attitudes as well as a positive total effect on the support for police action against transphobic violence. Therefore, men were slightly less likely to support police interventions against transphobic violence via more transphobic attitudes, but these effects were very small and therefore negligible.

Positive contact and diversity beliefs had minor indirect effects via transphobic attitudes. Positive contact also showed a negligible total effect, while diversity beliefs positively influenced the support for police action against transphobic violence, indicating greater support for police intervention in hate crimes against transgender people.

We found very small and negligible negative indirect effects for negative contact as well as political orientation. Yet, both negative contact and political

TABLE 9.3 Total effects in the path analysis

	b	*SE*	*Z*	*p*	β
Support for intervention ~					
Education	0.0	0.01	−0.34	0.737	0.0
Gender	0.1	0.01	6.96	<.001***	0.03
Diversity beliefs	0.23	0.02	11.62	<.001***	0.22
Positive contact	0.08	0.02	4.82	<.001***	0.08
Negative contact	−0.26	0.02	−11.07	<.001***	−0.2
Political orientation	−0.23	0.02	−9.68	<.001***	−0.19
Transphobic attitudes	−0.2	0.02	−11.11	<.001***	−0.23

Note: N = 3,310. $\chi^2(2) = 8.797$, $p = 0.995$, CFI = 0.997, SRMR = 0.008, RMSEA = 0.032, $p = .05 = 0.894$, *CI*[0.013; 0.055]. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Support for intervention = Support for police action against transphobic violence.

orientation showed negative overall effects on the support for police action against transphobic violence. With increasing right-wing orientation and more frequent past negative contact with transgender people, participants indicated less support for police intervention in hate crimes against transgender people.

Transphobic attitudes nevertheless had the greatest overall effect on the support for police action against transphobic violence.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the study was to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of transphobic attitudes in relation to hate crime against transgender people and to analyse predicators for this in more detail. The present study showed an overall rejection of group-based violence, specifically a high level of agreement with police intervention in cases of violence against transgender people among participants ($M = 5.6$). Surprisingly transphobic attitudes were neither totally agreed nor completely rejected ($M = 3.57$). Although trans-hostile statements are not clearly rejected, the majority of participants at least agree that consistent action should be taken against trans-hostile acts of violence.

The queer community, and the transgender community in particular, has not always been seen (internally or externally) as such, i.e., as a distinct and unified community, but rather more as individual cases (Stryker et al., 2008). Even though this has changed, the results of this study, and political events in Germany, suggest that their recognition and need for support remains lacking. In December 2024, the governing coalition in Germany proposed the Violence Assistance Act, which focused on an improved support system for group-based violence, especially for vulnerable groups like woman and transgender people (SPD and BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 2024). In February 2025, the Act was adopted in a modified form. One of the main changes was the exclusion of transgender people (Bundesregierung, 2025). As part of the election campaign in February 2025, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of Friedrich Merz, declared that it would abolish the 'self-determination law'. This law allows transgender people to change their name and registered gender in official documents (CDU/CSU, 2024). This suggests that not only is the need for support for transgender people not fully seen and recognised, but also the visibility of the community as such is inadequate and could even be further constrained.

The insufficient belief in diversity in German society is linked to transphobic attitudes, as our study shows. Men especially, particularly those with a right-wing political orientation and disbelief in diversity, show tendencies to transphobic attitudes, regardless of levels of education. In our study, people with transphobic attitudes demonstrate little support for interventions in cases of group-based violence against transgender people. What may seem obvious uncovers deeper realisations when focusing on the predictors of that attitude.

The connection between transphobic attitudes and the rejection of violence against transgender people shows the threat that transphobic attitudes can pose. Violence against individual members of a minority group symbolises the violence, rejection, and degradation of the entire community.

Our results indicate that positive contact with transgender people was mentioned more frequently ($M = 2.35$), but negative contact ($M = 1.61$) is more decisive for transphobic attitudes. Personal contact is crucial for breaking down prejudices (Bender and Weber, 2023; 2025; Coester, 2008, 2017; Perry, 2014). However, this contact needs to be actively strengthened, especially given the role of the media in constructing 'images of the enemy', which are often exploited by right-wing parties. Far-right narratives deliberately fuel hostility, which is why it is not only important to strengthen the rights of transgender people, but also to increase their visibility and ensure that transgender people have a public voice. Instead of simply having conversations *about* them, they must be given a platform to speak for themselves. Better access to information and real interactions with transgender people can shape attitudes and ultimately encourage the rejection and repudiation of violence. To conduct this, we should think about the visibility of transgender people throughout the media in German society and how we talk about transgender people.

Despite our efforts to obtain a representative sample, we acknowledge potential limitations in our methodology. Self-reported measures of contact with transgender people may be subject to social desirability bias, and our cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Future longitudinal studies could strengthen our understanding of how attitudes develop over time, particularly in response to political and social changes in Germany.

When violence against a particular group is tolerated, it not only endangers this community but also normalises violence in general: 'Violence is always an outgrowth of milder states of mind' (Allport, 1954: 57). Violence against marginalised communities is never an isolated act – it erodes social cohesion, threatens democratic values, and ultimately harms society as a whole.

Notes

1 The project was financed by funds from the budget approved by the Saxon state parliament.

2 The community of trans people includes a diversity of gender and sexual identities, like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and queer, which are subsumed as LGBTIQA+ (in German: *lesbisch*, *schwul, bi- und transsexuell*, *intersexuell*, queer, *asexuell*, and *weitere Geschlechtsidentitäten*).

3 Criminal acts can occur as insults, vandalism, online and offline hate speech, discrimination, physical and psychological violence, manslaughter, murder.

4 In German: Kriminalpolizeilicher Meldedienst in Fällen politisch motivierter Kriminalität. For a critical perspective on this system see Schellenberg, 2024; Weber and Bender, 2025.

5 The categories are: antisemitic, antiziganist, xenophobic, disability, anti-Christian, anti-German, misogynistic (since 2022), gender diversity (since 2022), social status, hate crime, Islamophobic, anti-male (since 2022), racism, sexual orientation, other ethnicity, other religion (BMI and BKA, 2024).
6 This subcategory has existed since 2001. In this category, criminal acts against queer, gay, lesbian, bi-, trans-, and intersexual people are gathered (Ponti, 2023). Since 2020, crimes against transgender people were collected in the additional subcategory 'sexual identity' (although 'gender identity' would be a better category; see Ponti, 2023: 115).
7 Klocke et al. (2019) used an online survey of 1,162 teachers.
8 A detailed description of the sample, the survey procedure and all HaSteX variables contained in the dataset can be found online: https://www.zkfs.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/HaSteX_Data_Handbook_english.pdf
9 Due to a lack of normal distribution of the data in the dependent variables, bootstrapping with 1,000 draws was used in the calculation in order to obtain robust results.

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