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Vielfalt statt Abgrenzung

Wohin steuert Deutschland in der
Auseinandersetzung um Einwanderung
und Flüchtlinge?

Abstract

Where is German society headed with the migration and refugee debate? In this publication, we explore the risks and opportunities associated with the influx of refugees and ask how we can successfully ensure diversity and inclusiveness in German society. A look at the demographic data shows that we already are a diverse and open society. In fact, Germany has been a country of immigration for several years now. Promoting openness to diversity and inclusion is also a call to work together in creating an integrated society and countering parallel societies.

But where are we headed? Will we, as a society, embrace greater diversity anchored in liberal and democratic institutions? Or will German society be increasingly marked by exclusion and isolation?

Conclusive answers to these questions lie beyond the scope of this volume. However, it does explore the changes underway from different perspectives, thereby providing an inventory of various recent developments – from the rise of the AfD and growing populism to the role of different media and a *Leitkultur* (guiding national culture) to discussions on Islam and how to manage diversity. Through this inventory, we aim to provide guidance in determining the steps needed to achieve an inclusive and integrated society.

The contributions to this volume

For many Germans, references to right-wing extremists conjure up images of skinheads in combat boots wielding baseball bats in their

hands. But Germany's right-wing scene has changed and made inroads into the very heart of the country's political landscape. *Patrick Gensing* describes in his contribution the emergence of a new »Popular Front from the Right« that includes the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NPD) and draws on forces that lie beyond the formal political process. New for Germany, however, is the fact that this movement also includes the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), a party active within the formal political process. Tracking the roots of this development, Gensing identifies its key actors. Outlining how those active in Germany's right-wing scene mobilized quickly and early on against the refugees, he exposes the close relationship between protests on the street and anti-refugee Internet campaigns.

Gensing pays particular attention to the rise of the AfD, which has gained traction from heated debates regarding the refugee situation and shifted increasingly toward the political right. According to Gensing, this new right-wing populism is the driving force behind Germany's polarized political climate. Indeed, he argues, it "maintains a nominal consensus defined entirely by exclusion: One opposes the refugees and equal rights for everyone – and is highly distrustful of both parliamentary democracy and the established media" (Gensing, in this volume: 50). We face, he asserts, an urgent need to reinvigorate democracy.

The fact that the current crisis is in essence a crisis of democracy is taken up by *Hans Vorländer* in his contribution. He asserts that every democracy depends on the participation and cooperation of its citizens. A representative democracy draws its strength from the fact that political decision-making is not held hostage to the daily moods of its citizens and anchored instead within a system of checks and balances among the branches of government. This strength, however, is also its weakness: There is the risk that the cleavage between citizens and their political representatives becomes wide enough to undermine the legitimacy of the system as a whole. At the same time, new social media are changing the nature of how public opinion is formed. Media such as television, radio and newspapers are no longer instrumental

to shaping public opinion and have been superseded by more detail-oriented, rapid and event-driven forms of Internet communication. And it is exactly those areas where, says Vorländer, “anger, aggression, scandals and conspiracy theories can determine opinion that the digital age seems to be cultivating a new political form, an *Empörungsdemokratie* or democracy of outrage” (Vorländer, in this volume: 65).

Parallel to a perceived division between the public and elites, there is a growing sense of political alienation and dissatisfaction with democracy. Slogans invoked by Pegida demonstrators such as *Lügenpresse* (lying press), *Volksverräter* (traitor to the people), *Wir sind das Volk!* (We are the people!) tap into and fuel these sentiments, which can then be instrumentalized by populists. The current refugee crisis seems to provide a perfect stage for their aims. There is, however, hope to be found in the major mobilization of civil society efforts demonstrated in recent months, according to Vorländer. When citizens begin addressing issues and problems themselves, politics returns to its roots.

Right-wing populism draws on a dual set of definitional boundaries, asserts *Denis van de Wetering* in his contribution. Characteristic of this politicized form of communication is an assumed antagonism between “average citizens” and societal elites who are depicted to be corrupt, incompetent or motivated by self-interest alone. At the same time, a second distinction is drawn between a presumed ethnically and culturally homogeneous group of people and those believed to be “other” or “foreign.” These dual divisions figure prominently in the AfD’s political agenda and the issues addressed by Pegida. However, right-wing populist sentiments such as xenophobia and distrust in democracy are also found among the broader public beyond these organized movements. Although right-wing populism is more prevalent in Germany’s eastern Länder than in its western Länder and lower-income populations express these views somewhat more frequently than do higher-income populations, the phenomenon is found not just on the margins but at the center of society.

The author explores “the extent to which right-wing attitude archetypes correlate to a sense of an eroding shared identity or the longing for a shared sense of ‘we’” (van de Wetering, in this volume: 89).

This could help explain the success of the AfD and Pegida in the eastern Länder. Right-wing populism, according to van de Wetering, represents an “anti-politics” that “turns its back to the existing society as it eschews pluralist values and lifestyles in seeking the return to a romanticized concept of ‘community’” (ibid: 90). Responding to every right-wing populist statement is not the answer, he concludes. Instead, he argues, we must offer democratic solutions to societal challenges, promote civic education and democracy training, and provide new forms of participation. Most importantly, government and society must also respond more effectively to the question of who makes up the »we« in society. “From this perspective, integration involves a never-ending but regulated debate over the definition of ‘we’ in society that is grounded in the German Basic Law and affords equal weight to the spectrum of positions” (ibid: 92).

For many observers, the German government’s decisions on issues related to immigration and the refugees, in particular Chancellor Merkel’s oft-cited “We can do it!” statement, lie at the root of all the current tensions and problems. Against this background, *Orkan Kösemen* examines in his contribution migration and refugee policy-making in Germany. In his view, the government has, in recent years, for the most part held fast to a pragmatic problem-solving approach that has led to an increased opening of the country. Yet the absence of resolute government action in this regard has left behind a definitional vacuum in what is de facto a country of immigration. As a result, there is a battle over definitional primacy in Germany’s migration debate in which facts rarely play a role and various groups can instrumentalize vague fears of change. Counteracting this development involves working toward a new, shared narrative of what Germany and being German is. “Such a narrative,” asserts Kösemen, “must explicitly include citizens in Germany’s eastern Länder as well as migrant populations” (Kösemen, in this volume: 99–100).

Just as the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany in the postwar era each underwent a process of nation-building, modern Germany must undergo a process that brings together what has in the past been understood to constitute the German

nation and what constitutes this nation today as a result of migration and German unification. Kösemen points to Canada's multiculturalism policy as a potential role model in this regard. He sees Germany's current refugee situation not as the trigger but as the event having "in recent years rapidly expedited changes in society [...] and increasing the pressure felt to deal with these changes" (ibid: 102). In fact, he argues, Germany has already changed and taken several major steps forward in the migration discourse. Chancellor Merkel, he notes, has thus far managed – despite growing tensions – to eschew populist rhetoric. However, it remains unclear whether the goals of an open and multicultural society can be advanced in Germany.

Migration policy and how to manage cultural, religious and ethnic diversity stand at the center of the current discussion driven by both populist and democratic forces. Where Germany stands on these issues and who, exactly, comprises the current "we" in Germany are explored by *Astrid Messerschmidt* in her contribution. The debate on migration in Germany is shaped by a longing for a homogeneous community that is reflected in the discussions on a *Leitkultur*. Here we see a focus on contrasting notions of "the Germans" versus "the migrants," of "we" and "others," distinctions which appear natural and obvious in the context of a nation-state. In this way, the so-called "West" can claim all that is emancipatory and enlightened as its own and thereby exclude all others (i.e., Muslims) from staking a claim in this discourse. Pointing to the ways in which self-criticism – a key element of the Enlightenment – is shut down in this kind of argument, Messerschmidt exposes its inherent contradictions. The same applies to the West's calls to uphold universal human rights, which are respected within national borders as civil rights but largely denied to refugees through the limits placed on residency status. Inequal treatment and discrimination are then placed outside the scope of politics and dismissed as "external" problems.

Drawing on the discourse of human rights, Messerschmidt calls on Germany to leave behind discussions about cultural identity and differences, which slide easily into a definitional language of exclusion, and focus instead on committing to the principles of equality

and dignity for all human beings. Civic education in Germany should also focus on this by exploring inequalities in the distribution of economic and social resources as key drivers of the current influx of refugees. This would also entail launching a political project that does much more than promote integration and apply universal democratic principles by “targeting fair opportunities and rights for everyone” (Messerschmidt, in this volume: 120). Doing so would involve a shift in thinking about the achieved state of well-being in Germany from a “national resource” to “conceiving oneself and society in relation to global developments and to ask oneself to what extent these developments relate to me and the society in which I live” (ibid: 125).

In her contribution, *Sabine Achour* also takes up the issue of a *Leitkultur*. The term, coined by the German-Syrian political scientist Basam Tibi in the late 1990s, became a politicized matter in 2000 through a national debate about multiculturalism and immigration fostered by then-CDU Chair Friedrich Merz who outspokenly criticized the citizenship reforms driven by the SPD and Greens. Attempts to relax the legal definition of citizenship fostered a growing desire in some parts of society to define cultural boundaries more precisely. This heated debate over a *Leitkultur* was split along party lines with the CDU/CSU advocating the need for a *Leitkultur* and the government coalition of SPD and Greens rejecting it. The debate has been taken up again with the influx of refugees coming to Germany in 2015. This time, however, party lines have softened and the concept of a *Leitkultur* purportedly as well, now anchored in a commitment to Germany’s Basic Law and civil rights. In this way, the term has become a culturally charged issue that continues to serve mechanisms of delimitation and exclusion. This definitional approach, explains Achour, fails to recognize that “by cultivating diversity in values [...] open societies cannot formulate a ‘canon’ of values” (Achour, in this volume: 142).

Fundamental democratic values such as human dignity, justice, equality and solidarity are critical for living together in a (culturally) diverse society. However, as “unsaturated placeholders,” they offer no concrete, predetermined solutions, but rather must be brought to life

through the democratic process of negotiation. According to the author, “Fundamental values and basic laws do not themselves constitute a *Leitkultur*, but rather form a legal and decision-making framework that lend direction and form to the perpetual change within society and democracy” (ibid: 143). Instead of arguing over a *Leitkultur*, Achour writes, it would be better to take stock of the political culture. Conflicts, even over values, have an integrative function, and are drivers of social change. It is thus important to provide every individual with the skills and capacity to deal with conflict through democratic means.

Political contention over immigration and refugees is dominated by the idea of a confrontation between a purportedly enlightened West and a seemingly backward Middle East. Nuances in this public debate are altogether lacking, with Islam transformed into an empty label that has little in common with the actual diversity among Muslims, as *Yasemin El-Menouar* describes in her contribution. Media reporting linking Islam with terrorism, misogyny and criminality has become all too common; in this way, a negative Islam narrative is created that can be retrieved and reused without difficulty. The label “Islam” functions as a general-purpose, unquestioned explanation, and thus conceals the real social problems associated with immigration, integration and coexistence within diverse societies. Right-wing populists have therefore found it easy to excite anti-refugee sentiments; they have “thus simply been able to draw on the negatively charged ‘repertoire of knowledge’ created by the public and media discussions” (El-Menouar, in this volume: 157).

The author contrasts the reality of the lives experienced by Muslims in Germany with the opinions of the majority population, using Religion Monitor data as a basis. Although Muslims generally share fundamental democratic values and engage in broad-ranging social relations, the attitude toward them is clearly negative. The attacks in Cologne during New Year’s Eve night lead under these conditions to a reflexive “doubt regarding Muslims’ overall integration capacities, as well as regarding Islam’s compatibility with general Western values. This dangerous amalgamation of social phenomena with putatively

religious causes is social dynamite” (ibid: 164). Among other conclusions, El-Menouar therefore calls for changes in media reporting. A more realistic view of Islam is necessary, she says.

According to *Michael Haller*, the media acted as integrative facilitators of society’s self-understanding even into the 1980s, thus enhancing the common good. Since that time, a widening public cleavage and a loss of trust have been palpable. For media scholars, the accusations of a “lying press” and the closed camps of opinion that foreclose any possibility of mutual dialogue are only the most obvious symptoms of this crisis. Haller places these current observations in the wider context of the long-observed structural changes within the media world. Among other forces, he says, this shift has been driven by the fact that journalistic media on the one hand hold a public responsibility, but on the other must produce profitable, market-oriented products and compete with one another for attention. In this process, he says, the media have devolved to a point of “surpassing one another in exaggerated sensations, transforming themselves into a kind of thrill-producing machinery” (Haller, in this volume: 181). Indeed, this trend showed itself clearly even before the advent of competition from the Internet.

In another trend, the manner in which political parties, government agencies and companies communicate with the public has also changed. With the advent of professional public relations, media outlets gladly began to take on prepared and tailored information for their use. At the same time, however, the critical distance between journalists and the powerful has narrowed. And although classical media such as newspapers, television and radio still have the greatest reach, according to long-term media studies, classical media has an image problem in comparison to emergent Internet-based media, which are perceived to be diverse, up-to-date, informative and independent. Haller thus concludes that journalism must focus on credibility as its core brand as it cultivates a new understanding and means of managing transparency. In addition, says Haller, the field of journalism must redefine its role by “eschewing one-way journalism [...] to become more interactive and dialogic” and therefore take online

commentators able to shape opinion more seriously. By helping readers navigate massive amounts of information, journalism could more effectively promote critical thinking in an age of rapid change.

In this volume's final contribution, *Kai Unzicker* and *Gesine Bonnet* summarize the diverse approaches, analyses and recommendations proposed while identifying how they relate to each other and thereby offer a look into the future during a period of great uncertainty. Throughout, they focus on how to cultivate and maintain social cohesion.