

# Study: Germans more satisfied with democracy as a form of government

November 9 2022, by Pia Siemer

---



The Leipzig Authoritarianism Study 2022 has just been published. Since 2002, scientists at the Leipzig University have been observing the development of authoritarian and right-wing-extremist attitudes in Germany. Credit: Thomas Häse

Public satisfaction with democracy in Germany has risen over the past two years, while in some cases extreme right-wing attitudes have declined significantly. At the same time, hatred of migrants, women, Muslims and other groups in Germany has increased and become widespread. In addition, stronger desires for authority can be observed in the wake of the pandemic. These are key findings of the representative "Leipzig Authoritarianism Study."

Professors Oliver Decker and Elmar Brähler from the Competence Center for Right-Wing Extremism and Democracy Research at Leipzig University presented the study results today (9 November) at the Federal Press Conference (BPK) in Berlin. The study, which also explores attitudes towards [political decisions](#) regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the war against Ukraine, was conducted in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Otto Brenner Foundation.

According to the study, only 2% of people in eastern Germany still have a narrow, extremely right-wing world view. In 2020, this figure was still around 10%. "Agreement with extreme right-wing statements is not only decreasing in the whole of Germany, but especially in eastern Germany. That's good news, but it's only half the picture," says head of the study Professor Oliver Decker.

"While elements of neo-Nazi ideology are rarer, resentment of those perceived as 'different' has actually increased," adds co-head Elmar Brähler. According to the study, the percentage of people with "manifestly xenophobic" attitudes in eastern Germany has risen from 27.8% to 31% compared to 2020, whereas it has fallen from 13.7 to 12.6% in western Germany. Forty percent of eastern Germans say they believe Germany is being "swamped with foreigners," and 23% of western Germans also agree with this statement.

The percentage of people who are satisfied with constitutional democracy rises from 65% to 90% in eastern Germany; nationwide, it is approved of by 82% of people. "Compared with authoritarian systems, democracy as a form of government is becoming more popular," comments Oliver Decker. But: only just half of respondents expressed their approval of everyday democratic practice. Despite the high level of satisfaction with the form of government, there is evidently a widespread feeling of not having any political influence.

The two researchers see this as fitting into the crisis situation during the pandemic and the current war: the executive branch is strengthened and its actions are widely supported, but this authoritarian security comes at a price. Though people accept their feelings of powerlessness and the restrictions on their own lives, this also leads to an increase in aggression.

"That is why neo-Nazi ideology, and with it elements of extreme right-wing attitudes, are less important at present. But now other anti-democratic motives are coming to the fore," explains Professor Elmar Brähler, "they are prejudices, hatred of 'others,' and this is not less common and is served just as well by far-right parties."

For example, opposition to Muslims has increased in eastern Germany compared to 2020, with 46.6% agreeing with the statement that Muslims should be banned from immigrating to Germany, compared to 23.6% in western Germany. Sinti and Roma are also disapproved of by 54.9% of eastern Germans and 23.6% of western Germans.

Meanwhile, "guilt-deflecting anti-Semitism" remains the most widespread expression of anti-Semitism across Germany, with just under half of respondents agreeing with corresponding statements. Support for anti-feminist statements has also increased since 2020. Twenty-seven percent of respondents believed that women "who demand too much shouldn't be surprised if they're put back in their place."

"The simultaneous rise in anti-feminism, guilt-deflecting anti-Semitism and also hatred of Muslims, Sinti and Roma, indicates a shift in the motives of anti-democratic attitudes, not a strengthening of democracy," says Professor Oliver Decker. "Besides xenophobia, right-wing extremists today have many more opportunities to find a foothold in mainstream society, not fewer."

In addition, society is still polarized by the pandemic. It is true that one positive development is that the proportion of respondents with a tendency to believe in conspiracy theories has declined significantly since 2020, from 38.4% in 2020 to 25% in 2022. "Due in no small part to the internet, [political discourse](#) is dominated by two groups: an entrenched group of 13% who oppose vaccination versus 19% who strongly resent those who oppose vaccination," says Professor Oliver Decker. "In both groups, resentment not only of each other, but also of many 'others' is equally strong."

Decker and Brähler observe a similar fragmentation of society to some extent in respondents' reactions to the Ukraine war. Although no one explicitly supported the war, the supporters of arms deliveries to Ukraine on the one hand and those who sympathize with Russia on the other also share a generally higher propensity for authoritarian aggression. "Here, too, it can be seen that the authoritarian mobilization potential still exists, but it can currently be satisfied with socially conformist goals," says Professor Elmar Brähler.

## **About the 'Leipzig Authoritarianism Study'**

The two researchers at Leipzig University have been observing changes in authoritarian and far-right attitudes in Germany since 2002. From 2006 until 2012, the so-called "Mitte" Studies were carried out in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Since 2016 the Leipzig studies have been published in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Otto Brenner Foundation.

In the eleventh wave, the opinion research institute USUMA surveyed 2,522 people nationwide between early March and the end of May 2022 on behalf of Leipzig University using a paper-and-pencil method. In order to be able to analyze attitudes towards the war in Ukraine, an [online survey](#) with 4000 respondents was commissioned from the polling

institute Bilendi & respondi after the start of the representative study.

All of the results from this new authoritarianism study have now been published in the book "Autoritäre Dynamiken in unsicheren Zeiten. Neue Herausforderungen—alte Reaktionen?," which is available from Psychosozial-Verlag.

Provided by Leipzig University

Citation: Study: Germans more satisfied with democracy as a form of government (2022, November 9) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-germans-democracy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.