

English Summary of the research report

"Perspectives of university students. Results of a survey regarding politics, religion and community within the framework of the project 'Radicalisation within the digital age'"

The research report "Perspectives of university students. Results of a survey regarding politics, religion and community within the framework of the project 'Radicalisation within the digital age'" (German: Perspektiven von Studierenden. Ergebnisse einer Befragung zu den Themen Politik, Religion und Gemeinschaft im Rahmen des Projektes „Radikalisierung im digitalen Zeitalter (RadigZ)“) is based on a quantitative study. The study is part of the joint project "Radicalisation within the digital age – risks, processes and strategies for prevention (RadigZ)", which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Further information on the research questions, methods and goals of the eight subprojects that are part of RadigZ can be found at www.radigz.de/en. The study was developed within the framework of subproject II, carried out by the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony, and focuses on the identification of potential risks and the identification of vulnerable groups. The project duration was set for three years (February 2017 to February 2020).

The aim of the student survey was to investigate what moves university students in today's digital age, how they see society and how they participate in it. Their experiences and orientations as well as their political and social commitment should be mapped and various aspects of everyday life should be taken up. Topics such as the personal life and study situation, family, friends and leisure activities were also discussed. In addition, questions were asked about political views, worldview and religion. Attitudes that contradict general values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which can sometimes be viewed as extremist, were also examined. In this way, vulnerability factors for extremist attitudes that are relevant for further analyses and possible preventive measures could be identified.

Method and Sample

The study is based on a nationwide quantitative, multi-topic cross-sectional survey of university students in Germany. The study was designed as an online survey and took place in the winter semester 2018/2019 (September 2018 to March 2019).

- A random sample of one-third (144 universities) was drawn from the total of 431 universities in Germany (including universities of applied science, art and music academies). In addition, six universities were involved because of existing cooperation within the RadigZ project.
- At least 57 universities took part in the survey. The sample and results do not represent all university students in Germany.
- Of the 6,189 cases (gross sample), 4,835 cases (net sample) could be taken into account after data correction.
- Of these, 57.5 % are female, 41.9 % male, 0.6 % diverse.
- 18.1 % have a migration background.
- 94.3 % were born in Germany, 97.1 % have German citizenship.
- On average, the respondents are 24.2 years old ($SD = 5.4$).
- 13.6 % of the students grew up in a big city, 37.3 % in rural areas.

- 44.9 % live alone or with a partner in their own apartment, 35.1 % in a shared apartment or dormitory and 19.8 % with their parents.
- 43.5 % study at a university, 54.9 % at a university of applied science.
- The respondents are matriculated in numerous different courses of study. The largest groups are law and economics courses (20.0 %), social sciences (19.3 %), engineering (18.3 %) and natural sciences and mathematics (17.0 %).
- Around half of the participants are studying in their first to fourth semester.

Overview of essential results

The views of university students on society, especially on the topics politics, religion and community, represent a special interest. Universities are not only considered as institutions of education, scientific qualification and innovation, but also as places of personal development and intellectual dealing with social developments as well as political issues.

Community

Students usually maintain many different social contacts (including parents, friends and communities of interest). In addition to the cooperation in lectures and seminars and the contact with fellow students, many other aspects also shape the social environment of the university students. Besides numerous activities that are offered at universities, many students are active in groups to which they belonged before studying. Furthermore, other interests often develop during the course. Therefore, in addition to topics such as family and friends, activities in and outside the university were also part of the survey.

- For 84.7 % of the respondents the statement applies that one helps and supports each other in the family.
- 80.7 % of the respondents turn to their parents if they have problems.
- 65.7 % do a lot together with friends.
- 82.3 % of the respondents find support in the circle of friends with worries and problems.
- 68.4 % find enough contact persons at their university in case of problems.
- 43.6 % see the university as a place where only their performance in their studies is required.
- 35.4 % state that nobody at their university would notice if they were absent for a week.
- 23.3 % say that you can get lost in the crowd of students.
- 28.7 % of the students are active in a university sports group, 12.8 % are involved in cultural university activities such as theater, music or orchestral groups, 7.7 % in student councils and 5.5 % of the respondents are active in self-administration or student representative groups. Over 90 % of the respondents are "never" active in the latter groups or in religious, political university groups and official self-governing bodies such as the senate or council or in student associations.
- Outside the university, 42.0 % of the participants take part in a sports, gymnastics or riding club, 20.1 % in music, dance or theater, 11.6 % are involved in nature, environmental protection or animal welfare associations and 11.7 % in socio-political groups (e.g. party, political group, NGO).

Religion

When it comes to religion, the importance of religion and religious activities are taken into account in addition to membership in a denomination.

- 36.4 % of the students do not belong to any religious denomination. 32.8 % are Protestant, 23.1 % Catholic and 3.8 % belong to another Christian denomination. 2.7 % are Muslim.
- For 72.6 %, religion is "completely unimportant" or "rather unimportant" in their everyday life. For 15.1 % of the students, religion is "rather important" or "very important" in their everyday life.
- The importance of religion in the group of friends is seen as "completely unimportant" or "rather unimportant" by the majority (75.0 %). For 5.3 % of the students, religion is "rather important" or "very important" in their group of friends.
- In the family, the students ascribe more importance to religion than in the circle of friends. 19.0 % consider religion to be "rather important" or "very important" and 59.1 % consider it "completely unimportant" or "rather unimportant".
- 50.9 % of the respondents never prayed in the last 12 months, 16.5 % prayed at least once or twice in the last year. 5.0 % prayed several times a week and 6.3 % prayed daily.
- 34.8 % of the students did not go to a place of worship in the last 12 months, 5.4 % of the students went to a place of worship once a week or more in the last 12 months.
- 29.3 % of students attended a religious event once or twice in the last 12 months, 4.4 % did so once a week or more often and 48.0 % never did.
- Both Christian and Muslim students predominantly reject fundamentalist theses.

Politics

Students can get involved in political activities in a wide variety of ways, both inside and outside the university.

- 47.9 % of students have a "strong" or "very strong" interest in politics.
- On average, 57.9 % of the students are convinced that they are good at assessing political issues and are confident enough to take part in a conversation about political issues.
- In the past 12 months, 36.1 % of the respondents took part in a collection of signatures (e.g. petition) and 34.5 % in an online protest. 19.0 % have posted a comment on a political or social topic on the internet in the last 12 months and 21.7 % have taken part in an approved demonstration/rally in the last 12 months.
- The occasions of the demonstrations/rallies were mostly "against the right-wing scene", "for better education" and "for animal and environmental protection".
- 86.9 % would never take part in activities that lead to property damage.
- 53.5 % of students "sometimes" or "often" visit pages with political content on the internet.
- 19.2 % of the respondents "sometimes" or "often" share political questions with others on the internet.
- At 73.2 %, the proportion of students who "never" make political posts on social media is high. Only 9.3 % of the respondents do this "sometimes" or "often".

Extremism

The study results show that extremist tendencies and attitudes can be found among the students in the sample. Nevertheless, a few factors must be taken into account: The present results have been developed considering the existing scientific discussions about concepts, terminology and differences in the measurement of extremism. Established measuring instruments were initially used to measure extremist attitudes (conceptualisation A). It should be noted that some of those measuring instruments have been criticised and do not always measure extremism in the sense of the definition of Beelmann (2019) on which the project is based. In a second step, these measuring instruments were critically examined with regard to their fit to the definition of extremism by Beelmann (2019) (conceptualisation B). According to this definition, the items used have to include deviations from certain legal norms and humanitarian value systems and aim at their at least partial abolition. By checking the items, it became apparent that some items of conceptualisation A could no longer be taken into account and are therefore omitted for the measurement of extremism according to Beelmann (2019) (conceptualisation B). A conceptualisation of left-wing extremism in the sense of the extremism definition according to Beelmann could not be developed. In the case of Islamist attitudes, the low variance of the data lead to the decision to omit further statistical analysis. The following table shows the proportion of students with extremist attitudes.

Table Z1. Proportion of students with extremist attitudes in the StuPe sample according to conceptualisation A and conceptualisation B; Figures in valid percentages; $N_{\min} = 4.295$

	Right-wing extremism	Left-wing extremism	Islamist Extremism
Conceptualisation A	2,3	10,1	0,2
Conceptualisation B	1,1	-	0,3

Comment: The proportion is based on values > 3.00 on the mean value scales (Min = 1, Max = 5); For left-wing extremism according to conceptualisation B, the number of items is not sufficient; For left-wing extremism according to conceptualisation A and Islamist extremism after conceptualisation B, the internal consistency of the scale is unsatisfactory.

Vulnerability factors for extremist attitudes

Different vulnerability factors can be identified. It should be noted that the relationships are correlative and do not represent causal relationships or causal explanations for extremist attitudes.

Right-wing extremist attitudes (conceptualisation A and conceptualisation B)

Sociodemographic factors:

- The connections between extremism and the socio-demographic factors are rather low. The significantly higher mean values for right-wing extremist attitudes among male students and slightly higher mean values for students with a migration background are an exception.

Community:

- Students in civil service courses and engineering courses show the highest mean values for right-wing extremism according to conceptualisation A, whereas engineering, natural sciences and mathematics as well as civil service courses show the highest mean values in conceptualisation B.
- Students in student associations as well as members of rifle clubs, traditional costumes or carnival clubs are more likely to show right-wing extremist attitudes.
- The climate in the family and the circle of friends is little related to right-wing extremist attitudes.

Religion:

- There are significant differences in mean values between the religions. The highest mean values for right-wing extremist attitudes are found among Muslim students as well as those who belong to a small religious group ("other").
- Muslim students in whose families religion plays a larger role are more likely to show right-wing extremist attitudes.
- Fundamentalist attitudes correlate strongly positive with right-wing extremist attitudes both among Christians and Muslims.
- Hostility against religion in general and right-wing extremist attitudes correlate positively.

Politics:

- Right-wing extremist attitudes are related to commitment in the field of security and order at the place of residence (positive connection), for the maintenance of German culture and tradition (also positive) as well as the commitment to refugees (negative) and for the better cohabitation of Germans and foreigners (negative).
- Political activities on the internet are little related to right-wing extremist attitudes.
- Students who would vote for the AfD are more likely to show right-wing extremist attitudes.
- Interest in politics and political efficacy are little related to right-wing extremist attitudes.

Selected vulnerability factors:

- Clear positive connections with right-wing extremist attitudes after conceptualisation A are found for political deprivation and a bleak view of the future of society. Relative deprivation, ambiguity intolerance and anomie show weaker correlations. For the conceptualisation B of right-wing extremist attitudes, there are similar, but smaller, connections.
- The very strong and positive connections between violence-legitimizing masculinity norms and right-wing extremist attitudes are even stronger for men than for women. A similar picture emerges for the connections between right-wing extremist attitudes and a traditional image of women and homophobia.
- Cynical attitudes towards the legal system and the legitimization of violence correlate strongly with right-wing extremism after conceptualisation B and less with right-wing extremism after conceptualisation A.
- Trust in the police is little related to right-wing extremist attitudes.

Left-wing extremist attitudes (conceptualisation A)

Sociodemographic factors:

- There are only little connections between left-wing extremist attitudes and sociodemographic factors. Only students with a migration background and students who live in shared flats or dormitories show slightly higher mean values.

Community:

- There are only minor differences in mean values for left-wing extremist attitudes between the courses of studies. Civil service courses show the lowest mean and courses such as arts, design and music show the highest mean.
- Students in a master's degree course show more often left-wing extremists attitudes than students who are currently aiming for another degree.
- A slightly positive correlation can be seen between commitment in political student groups and left-wing extremist attitudes.
- Activities in political-social groups outside the university are also slightly associated with increased left-wing extremist attitudes.
- If the climate in the family is positive, students are less likely to have left-wing extremist attitudes.
- The climate in the circle of friends has no effect on left-wing extremist attitudes.

Religion:

- There are small, significant differences in mean values between the religions. The highest mean values for left-wing extremist attitudes can be found among Muslim students and those belonging to a small religious group ("other").
- Christian students, for whom religion plays a larger role, show left-wing extremist attitudes more often.
- Muslim students, in whose circle of friends religion plays a major role, are less likely to have left-wing extremist attitudes.
- Fundamentalist attitudes and left-wing extremist attitudes correlate little among Christians and strongly among Muslims
- Hostility against religion in general and left-wing extremist attitudes have a slightly positive correlation.

Politics:

- Positive correlations with left-wing extremist attitudes can be found in the commitment for refugees and for a better cohabitation of Germans and foreigners, for people in poor countries, for environmental and animal protection as well as for social and political change in Germany. The commitment to maintaining German culture and tradition shows slightly negative correlations.
- Political activity on the internet is slightly associated with left-wing extremist attitudes.
- Students who would vote for "die Linke" (The Left) are more likely to show left-wing extremist attitudes.
- Interest in politics and political effectiveness are little related to left-wing extremist attitudes.

Selected vulnerability factors:

- Clear positive correlations with left-wing extremist attitudes after conceptualisation A are evident for anomie and a bleak view of the future of society and of one's personal future. Political deprivation shows a weaker positive correlation.
- Norms of masculinity that legitimize violence as well as homophobia show a little connection with left-wing extremist attitudes.
- A traditional image of women is associated with less left-wing extremist attitudes among women.
- Cynical attitudes towards the legal system and the legitimization of violence correlate strongly with left-wing extremism.
- Trust in the police has a strong negative correlation with left-wing extremist attitudes.

Table 22. Correlations between extremist attitudes and selected factors; $N_{\min} = 4.294$

	Right-wing extremism		Left-wing extremism
	Conceptualisation A	Conceptualisation B	Conceptualisation A
Self-efficacy	.05**	.02	-.08***
Relative Deprivation	.15***	.09***	.07***
Political Deprivation	.34***	.26***	.10***
Intolerance of Ambiguity	.13***	.08***	.05**
Anomie	.16***	.10***	.14***
Confident Future Vision (personal)	-.09***	-.07***	-.15***
Confident Future Vision (community)	-.25***	-.20***	-.23***

Comment: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In the context of TV II, the potential dangers of extremist students should be identified and vulnerability factors analysed. In summary, it turns out that the majority of the students surveyed do not have any extremist attitudes.

The information on political commitment clearly shows that the respondents choose the legitimate means of political or social commitment significantly more often than the illegitimate means.

Regarding the analysis of the vulnerability factors, it became clear that many correlations were very weak. This could lead to the assumption that other factors not considered here are more relevant. Although this point cannot be ruled out, the thesis is supported that radicalisation is the interaction of several factors, which can differ from individual to individual. Many vulnerability factors only become relevant for radicalisation processes when they interact with other factors. In a next step, multivariate models have to be calculated to enable further investigations of the complex interplay of various risk factors. In addition, a further analysis should only take a closer look at the people at risk, in particular to uncover connections with risk factors. This is of great importance with regard to future prevention

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work. The causal relationship between the factors, especially over time, cannot be checked using correlations. Therefore, longitudinal studies are necessary, which are required in the field of radicalisation research.

Difficulties and disagreements exist in the conceptualisation of extremist attitudes. The research team advocates basic research in order to critically examine the previous discussions on concepts and measuring instruments and to develop suitable instruments for measurement. This seems to be necessary due to the frequent criticism of the most recent studies, so that especially forms of fundamental social criticism and attitudes protected by the constitution are not included in the term of extremism and are put under general suspicion.