

# Religion Monitor

Understanding common ground

Special study of Islam, 2015

An overview of the most important findings



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## Database

This special study of Islam in Germany draws on data from the Religion Monitor and a recent survey by the Emnid Institute on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

1. Between October and December 2012, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor asked 14,000 people in 13 countries about their personal religiosity, their values and the relationship between religion, politics and society. The survey was conducted by the Institute for Applied Social Sciences (infas) in Bonn. The sample included individuals over the age of 16 in Germany as well as in Brazil, France, the United Kingdom, India, Israel, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, South Korea, Turkey and the United States.

This study is based on an analysis of the results for Germany and Turkey. A sample of Muslims was added to the population sample in Germany. Using data from the Religion Monitor, we examined perceptions of Islam in Germany and the factors that influence them. We also looked at the lives and living situations of German Muslims (N=322) and compared them with Muslims in Turkey (N=974). Since the beliefs of Muslims from different branches of Islam (Sunnis, Alevites, Shiites) differ, we focus some of our analyses on Sunni Muslims, who make up the great majority of Muslims in Germany (N=200) as well as in Turkey (N=655). This is particularly relevant when seeking to determine to what extent intensity of belief affects an individual's values, for example. It was not possible to carry out similar analyses of the other branches of Islam because the numbers were too small.

2. The November 2014 Emnid survey included certain key questions about Germans' perceptions of Islam that had previously been asked by the Religion Monitor. This allowed us to identify changes in attitudes toward Islam between 2012 and 2014, particularly in the light of recent political events. Additional questions were asked about people's attitudes and their contact with Muslims. Information was gathered from a total of 937 respondents (non-Muslim Germans over the age of 16).

Prof. Dirk Halm and Dr. Martina Sauer (Center for Turkish Studies and Integration Research), Prof. Kai Hafez and Sabrina Schmidt (University of Erfurt) and Prof. Richard Traunmüller (Goethe University Frankfurt am Main) analyzed the data on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. The results have just been published by the Bertelsmann Stiftung (see [www.religionsmonitor.de](http://www.religionsmonitor.de), only available in German).

Based on the collected survey data, we were able to explore the topic of Islam in Germany from different perspectives. By comparing the religiosity of Muslims in Germany and Turkey and exploring perceptions of Islam in Germany in 2012 and 2014, we are able to present a meaningful picture of Islam in Germany.

## **An overview of the most important findings**

1. Muslims in Germany feel closely connected to the German state and society – no matter how intense their religious faith may be.
2. Living as members of a religious minority shapes their religious attitudes and values. Muslims in Germany think about questions of faith more often and are generally more liberal in their views than their fellow Muslims in Turkey.
3. Yet while many of Germany's four million Muslims are quite open, there is increasing animosity toward them on the part of a majority of the German population. Germany's Muslims suffer from a negative image, presumably shaped by the small minority of radical Islamists who account for less than one percent of all Muslims.
4. Islamophobia is not a marginal phenomenon, but can be found throughout society. When it is considered socially acceptable, it can be used to legitimize discrimination against and exclusion of the Muslim minority.
5. Regular personal contact can help to overcome prejudice against Muslims – but opportunities for such contact are often lacking.

## **1 Muslims in Germany feel closely connected to the German state and society – no matter how intense their religious faith may be.**

The Muslims surveyed indicate that they feel closely connected to Germany; this is clear from the support they express for the fundamental values of German society and from their extensive contact with non-Muslims. As far as they are concerned, therefore, the conditions are in place for social cohesion in an environment of cultural and religious diversity – namely shared values and diverse social relationships.

However intense their religious faith may be, Muslims attach considerable value to the basic principle of democracy. They are open to religious diversity and have a great deal of respect for other religions.

This is reflected, for example, in their interactions with people of other faiths. Only a small minority of Muslims have no regular contact outside of the work context with individuals who are not part of their religious community. There is no evidence supporting the common contention that Muslims are living in a separate, parallel society. On the contrary – from the perspective of German Muslims, members of diverse religious groups in Germany are quite successful at living and working together.

### **Data**

Ninety percent of highly religious Sunni Muslims regard democracy as a desirable form of government. Approximately the same percentage of moderately or minimally religious Sunnis hold this view. Ninety-three percent of highly religious Sunnis agree with the statement that people should be open to all religions. Nearly as many – 85 percent – believe that every religion has a kernel of truth. The increasing religious diversity of German society is perceived as positive by 68 percent of highly religious, 71 percent of moderately religious and 75 percent of minimally religious Sunnis in Germany.

Ninety percent of Muslims have regular contact with people of other faiths outside of work hours. For approximately 60 percent of the Muslim population, non-work contacts outside of their religion outnumber those within their own religious community. Only eight percent of Muslim respondents associate only with other Muslims during their leisure time. It is interesting to note that there is no correlation between the heterogeneity of the respondents' networks of leisure-time contacts and the intensity of their religious practice (centrality index).

## **2 Life as members of a religious minority shapes the religious attitudes and values of German Muslims**

Muslims are considerably more religious than individuals of other faiths in Germany. Their religious ties remain stable from one generation to the next, but their values are more liberal than is often assumed.

Rather than simply carrying on their religious traditions, they are more likely than average to think seriously about their faith. Highly religious Muslims, in particular, often contemplate questions of faith. As members of a religious minority living in a pluralistic society, it is not self-evident to be a member of the Islamic community. Instead, it is one alternative among many. It requires making a conscious choice. The situation is different in countries where Muslims are in the majority; there it is more or less assumed that people are believers. Thus Muslims in countries like Turkey give less thought to matters of faith.

This suggests that the environment in which Muslims are living also shapes their religious life. Highly religious Muslims in Germany tend to be more liberal than Muslims in Turkey – especially when they are highly reflective. Homosexuality is more widely accepted in Germany than in Turkey, and this difference is reflected in the views of Muslims in the two countries. It should also be noted that opinions on ethical and moral issues are less closely correlated with the intensity of an individual's religious faith for German Muslims than for Muslims in a country like Turkey – the country of origin for most Muslims living in Germany.

### **Data**

According to the centrality index, 57 percent of Sunni Muslims between the ages of 16 and 30 are highly religious; this is true of 63 percent of 31- to 40-year-olds, 49 percent of 41- to 50-year-olds and only 20 percent of people over age 50. By comparison, only 29 percent of all Catholics in Germany and even fewer – 13 percent – of 16- to 30-year-old Catholics are highly religious.

Asked how often they think about aspects of their personal religious beliefs, 47 percent of all Muslims surveyed and 63 percent of highly religious Sunnis responded “often” or “very often.” Only 36 percent of highly religious Sunnis in Turkey give much thought to their religious beliefs.

Overall, 40 percent of highly religious Sunnis in Germany support the right of a homosexual couple to marry. Among highly religious, reflective Sunnis, the corresponding share is 58 percent. In Turkey, only 12 percent of respondents support gay marriage.

There is a correlation in both countries between views on ethical and moral issues and the intensity of religious faith. However, this correlation, while highly significant, is considerably weaker for Muslims in Germany (Gamma coefficient: 0.35) than in Turkey (Gamma coefficient: 0.44). Breaking down these findings by degree of religiosity, we find that 67 percent of those who are not, or only minimally, religious support gay marriage; this is true of 60 percent of moderately religious and 40 percent of highly religious Muslims. In Turkey, similarly, 67 percent of those who are not at all or only minimally



religious believe that homosexual couples should be allowed to marry. That percentage drops dramatically among moderately religious Muslims, to 33 percent, and to only 12 percent among the highly religious. The fact that attitudes among Muslims in Germany differ less than in Turkey may suggest that in Germany, the intensity of religious faith is becoming less and less of a factor in an individual's views on ethical and moral questions.

### **3 While Muslims tend to be open to other perspectives, there is increasing animosity toward them on the part of Germany's majority population.**

Although Muslims have become part of German society, the majority population is showing increasing hostility toward them and their religion. Over half of Germans think that Islam poses a threat, and an even greater percentage regard it as incompatible with the Western world. This negative view of Islam has become much more prevalent over the past two years.

It tends to color people's opinions of individual Muslims as well. Nearly half of all Germans indicate that Muslims make them feel like strangers in their own country. This is true of approximately 40 percent of the population even in areas where very few Muslims are living, and where people almost never come in contact with them – such as many parts of eastern Germany.

A quarter of the population even believes that Muslims should be prevented from immigrating to Germany. This situation is a breeding ground for right-wing populist parties, most of which include an anti-Muslim agenda as part of their platforms.

Animosity toward Islam runs especially high in regions where very few Muslims live, such as Saxony. In North Rhine-Westphalia, home to one-third of all of Germany's Muslims, people tend to perceive Islam as less threatening. Even there, however, roughly the same percentage believe that Islam is incompatible with the Western world as in other parts of Germany. When Muslims live nearby and people discover that they are not, in fact, a source of danger, the perception of them as a threat diminishes. Animosity toward Islam is still present, however.

It appears that the small minority of radical Islamists – a group that has long been the focus of public attention, despite accounting for less than one percent of all Muslims – shapes perceptions of Germany's four million Muslims. It bodes ill for social cohesion when all Muslims are viewed with suspicion and pushed to the fringes of society.

#### **Data**

The 2012 Religion Monitor included two items to determine how Islam is perceived in Germany: Respondents were asked "To what extent do you think Islam poses a threat to or enriches our society?" and whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "Islam is compatible with the Western world." In November 2014, they were also asked to what degree they agreed with the following statements: "Because there are so many Muslims in Germany, I sometimes feel like a stranger in my own country" and "Muslims should not be allowed to immigrate to Germany." Figure 1 shows the results of both surveys. In 2012, 53 percent of non-Muslims in Germany believed that Islam was "very much" or "somewhat" a threat; that share has since increased to 57 percent. The percentage of those who believe that Islam is incompatible with the Western world has increased even more, from 52 to 61 percent.

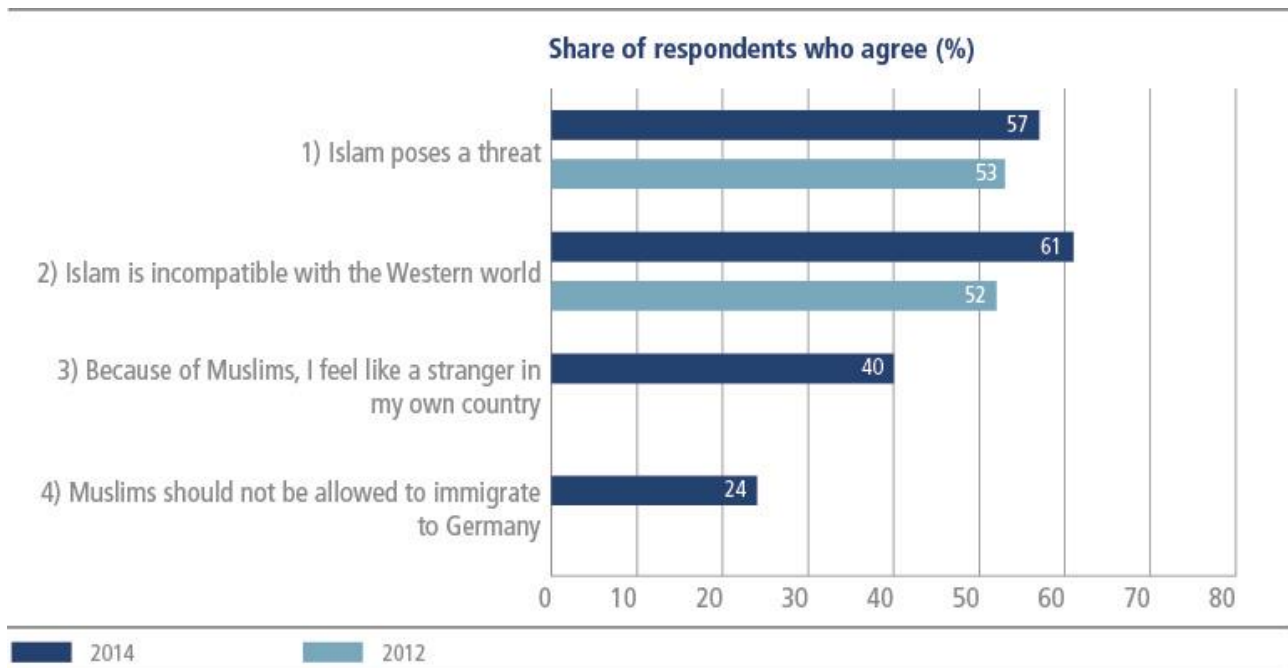
In western Germany, 55 percent of respondents said that they saw Islam as a threat; this was true of 66 percent of respondents in the eastern part of the country. The highest percentage holding this view was found in Saxony (78 percent), the lowest in North Rhine-Westphalia (46 percent).



Among non-Muslim Germans, 40 percent said that they felt like strangers in their own country because there were “so many Muslims.” This item revealed no difference between the eastern and western regions of Germany.

In Germany as a whole, 24 percent agreed “completely” or “somewhat” with the statement that Muslims should not be allowed to immigrate to Germany. This was true of 22 percent of respondents in the western and 29 percent in the eastern region of Germany.

Figure 1: Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims in 2012 and 2014



Statements: 1) "When you think of the religions that exist in the world: How threatening or rewarding do you perceive the following religions? Islam", proportion of respondents who perceive Islam as "very threatening" or "rather threatening". 2) "Islam fits well in the western world", proportion of respondents who "totally disagree" or "rather disagree". 3) "Because of the many Muslims, I sometimes feel like a stranger in my own country", proportion of respondents who "totally agree" or "rather agree". 4) "Muslims should not be allowed to immigrate to Germany", proportion of respondents who "totally agree" or "rather agree".

Source: Emnid November 2014, representative sample of the population over the age of 16, not including Muslims (N=937); Religion Monitor 2013, representative sample of the population over the age of 16, not including Muslims (N=1683).

## 4 Islamophobia is not a marginal phenomenon, but can be found throughout society.

Analyses of the association between perceptions of Islam and socioeconomic factors show that neither political orientation nor level of education has an appreciable effect on a person's perception of Islam. Germans who consider themselves part of the center-left politically view Islam somewhat more favorably, but the difference is small. And although higher levels of education tend to be associated with lower levels of xenophobia in general, education has a much weaker effect on Islamophobia in particular. University graduates are the only group that manifests a somewhat lower level of Islamophobia. Yet even among that group, one person in two perceives Islam as a threat, and 40 percent believe that Islam is incompatible with the Western world. This indicates that Islamophobia has become a socially acceptable trend – despite the fact that a large majority of the population is, in general, open to religious diversity. When it comes to social tolerance, Islam seems to be an exception. It is likely that those who reject Islam, despite being basically in favor of religious diversity, regard Islam as intolerant and see that as justifying their negative views.

Considerably more positive perceptions of Islam can be found only among young people between the ages of 16 and 25. In this age group, respondents are much less likely to view Islam as a threat and to believe that Islam is incompatible with the Western world (see Figure 2). Among members of the younger generation, we can expect to see an increase in the percentage of those who are growing up with Muslims and thus more likely to view them as part of German society. It remains to be seen, however, whether young people's perceptions of Islam will become more negative when they are no longer in contact with Muslims at school or during vocational training. Indeed, we are seeing a distinct increase in Islamophobia in the next older age group (25- to 40-year-olds).

Other differences in perceptions are associated with life satisfaction and openness toward religious people in general. Respondents who distrust people of any religion also have a more negative view of Islam. Among those who trust religious people, more believe that Islam enriches our society than perceive it as a threat. While respondents who express satisfaction with their own lives do not have a more positive view of Islam than average, those who express dissatisfaction are much more likely to be Islamophobic. This suggests that it is people's perceived, rather than actual, situation that affects their view of Islam.

### Data

We find no clear association between political orientation and perceptions of Islam; it is those who describe themselves as on the left politically or as part of the (center) right who feel most threatened. Among these respondents, roughly twice as many perceive Islam as a threat as believe that Islam enriches Germany society. As for respondents who consider themselves as clearly belonging to the political right, four times as many see Islam as a threat compared with those who view it as a positive factor. Among individuals who identify themselves as part of the center left, approximately the same percentages view Islam positively and as a threat.

There is little difference by level of education in the extent to which people regard Islam as a threat (see Figure 2). Even among graduates of an academic high school, 52 percent report that they feel threatened by Islam. Slightly more favorable perceptions are found only among university graduates. Here too, however, 46 percent perceive Islam to be a threat.

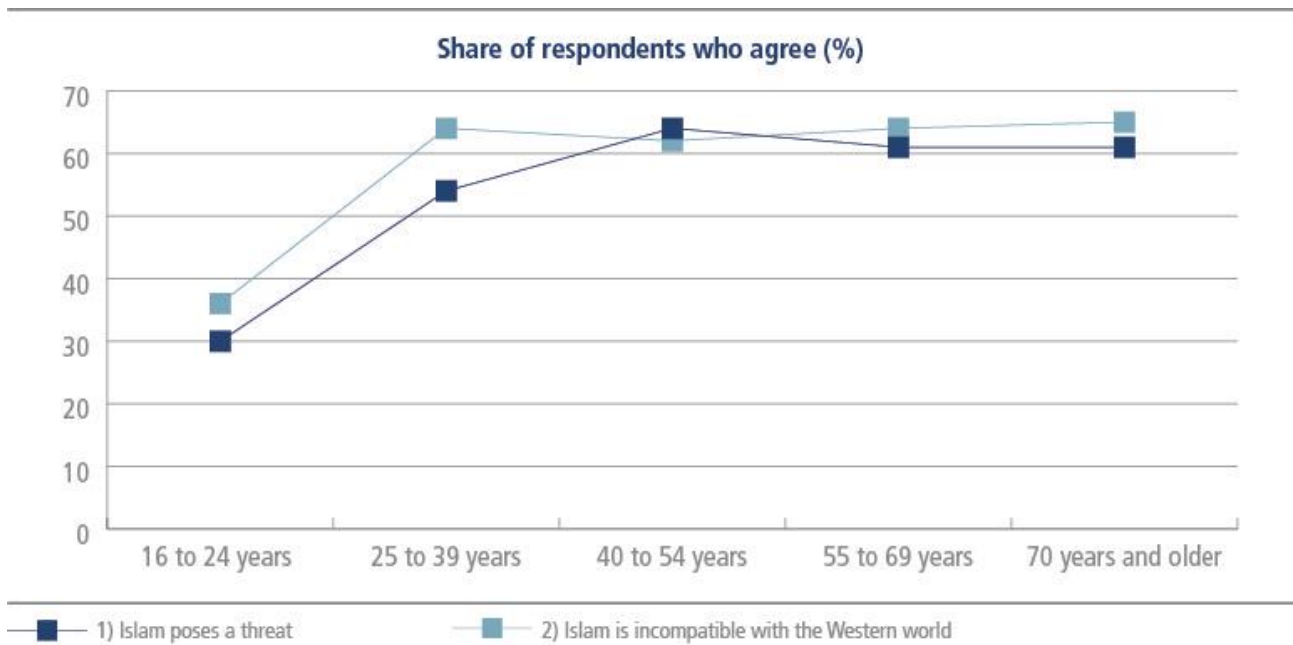
Level of education has a somewhat greater influence on respondents' views as to whether Islam is compatible with the Western world: Fifty-eight percent of those who have completed only a lower-level secondary school education (*Hauptschule*) say that Islam is incompatible with the West.

This view is held by 52 percent of those who have completed an intermediate-level secondary school education (*mittlere Reife*), 45 percent of graduates of an academic high school (*Abitur*) and 40 percent of university graduates.

Three-quarters of respondents who tend to be dissatisfied with their own lives perceived Islam to be a threat.

Respondents who express complete trust in religious people have much more positive views; of this group, 40 percent see Islam as a threat, while 45 percent believe that it enriches German society.

Figure 2: Perceptions of Islam, by age



Statements: 1) "When you think of the religions that exist in the world: How threatening or rewarding do you perceive the following religions? Islam", proportion of respondents who perceive Islam as "very threatening" or "rather threatening". 2) "Islam fits well in the western world", proportion of respondents who "totally disagree" or "rather disagree".

Source: Emnid November 2014, representative sample of the population over the age of 16, not including Muslims (N=937).

## **5 Regular personal contact helps to reduce prejudice against Muslims. In many cases, however, there is little opportunity for such contact.**

The Religion Monitor has found that personal contact can reduce prejudice, and that people who have no contact with Muslims outside of work show the highest level of Islamophobia. However, its results also indicate that many people who do have contact with Muslims still hold a negative view of Islam – although this applies to a much smaller percentage relative to people without such contact. It appears, therefore, that contacts must be of a certain quality if they are to have a positive effect on perceptions of Muslims and Islam. Moreover, people seem to view specific contacts and positive experiences with Muslims as exceptions, so those experiences have little effect on their perceptions of other Muslims or Islam as a whole.

Only one-third of all Germans currently have any non-work contact at all with Muslims; this is true of only one person in ten in eastern Germany. Muslims, on the other hand, have a great deal of contact with people from other religious groups. Fewer than one in ten has no contact with non-Muslims outside of work (see Figure 3).

It is important to remember, however, that minorities have more opportunities to interact with members of the majority population. Since Muslims make up only five percent of the population – and only two percent in eastern Germany – it is simply not very likely that people will encounter Muslims. Additional analyses have shown that personal preferences are not the main reason for the low level of contact between Muslims and non-Muslims; in many cases, opportunities are not available.

### **Data**

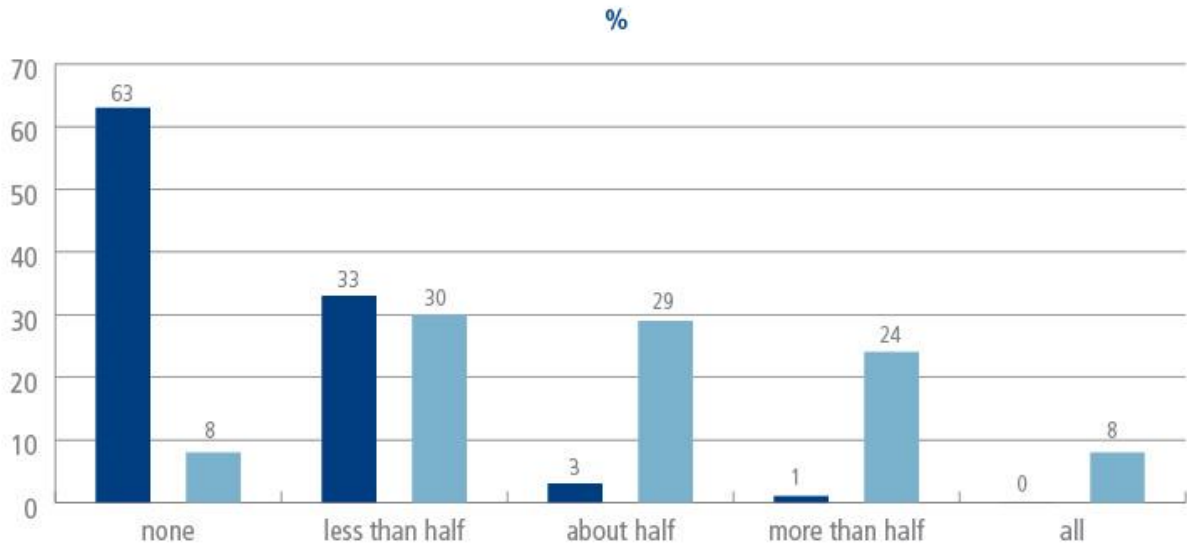
Sixty-six percent of individuals who have no contact with Muslims outside of work perceive Islam as a threat; this is true of 43 percent of people who do have such contact.

Seventy-one percent of respondents with no contact with Muslims believe that Islam is incompatible with the Western world. This share drops to 42 percent among those who are in contact with Muslims on a regular basis during their leisure hours.

Forty-five percent of those who have no contact with Muslims during their leisure time report that they feel like strangers in their own country because there are so many Muslims in Germany; this is true of 34 percent of those with such contact.

Among people who lack contact with Muslims outside of work, 29 percent favor preventing Muslims from immigrating to Germany; this is true of 15 percent of people with such contact.

Figure 3: Non-work-related contact between Muslims and non-Muslims in Germany



■ Non-Muslims: contact with Muslims as percentage of total    ■ Muslims: contact with non-Muslims as percentage of total

Question: "When you think about the people with whom you have regular contact in your leisure time: How many of them are Muslims?/ How many belong to a different religious group than yourself, so are not followers of Islam?"

Source: Emnid November 2014, representative sample of the population over the age of 16, not including Muslims (N=937), valid cases; Religion Monitor 2013, Muslims over the age of 16 (N=322), valid cases.

## Lessons for living together in harmony

- **Islam is part of Germany** and should be placed on an equal footing with Judaism and the Christian denominations. We need to prevent and combat discrimination against religious minorities in politics, business and society. We should pursue an active policy of treating all people equally, whatever their religious or ethnic background is, and recognizing each individual's potential. For example, one proven method of eliminating job discrimination is to review applications anonymously.
- **To meet the challenges of the future, Germany must develop a culture of respect and openness** that embraces religious and cultural diversity and promotes social cohesion. We are seeing progress at the institutional level. Among the general public, however, there is increasing fear and animosity, as recent events have shown (Pegida). We need a broad discussion of these events, and they need to be taken seriously. Under no circumstances should we allow extremists or populists to dominate that discussion.
- **We need more information about religious diversity in society.** Muslims, Germany's largest religious minority, are an extremely heterogeneous group with diverse religious views and roots in many different countries. Diverse societies need to be well informed about their own diversity. This is essential for understanding and addressing the lives of religious minorities and for combating stereotypes and prejudice.
- **Germany needs a sense of inclusion and community that encompasses diverse religions and cultures.**

It is often assumed that Muslims cannot be Germans, and that Germans cannot be Muslims – as if these two groups were mutually exclusive. Today, however, a large proportion of German Muslims were born and have grown up in this country. Germany is their home. Rather than questioning whether Muslims are legitimately part of Germany, we should affirm their place in our society in public discussions.

We can achieve a new, inclusive sense of community if we all work together to achieve harmony, focusing on our common future rather than on religious affiliation or national origin. Interaction and cooperation across religious boundaries can best take place within each individual's immediate environment.
- **We need to encourage dialogue and interaction.** People can only begin to develop trust if they encounter one another on a voluntary and equal basis in the context of their everyday activities. As a society, we need to provide opportunities for encounters and dialogue between members of diverse religions – not merely engaging in theological discussions, but bringing people together in their neighborhoods and day-to-day lives. Working together to solve everyday challenges leads to trust and friendship.





*Richard Traunmüller*

**Religiöse Vielfalt,  
Sozialkapital und gesell-  
schaftlicher  
Zusammenhalt**

Religionsmonitor –  
verstehen was verbindet

2014, 120 pages, paperback  
20.00 EUR (D)/28.90 CHF  
ISBN 978-3-86793-558-6

Religious pluralism has become an important social and political challenge for nearly every Western society, as well as for many developing countries.

This new diversity is the result of immigration, more visible religious minorities and, not least, an increase in the number of people who are not – or no longer – affiliated with any religion.



*Kai Hafez,  
Sabrina Schmidt*

**Die Wahrnehmung  
des Islams in Deutschland**

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Islam is now Germany's second-largest religion. Mosques and other religious symbols make it a visible presence in the public sphere. Yet much of the population has a strikingly negative perception of Islam.

In an increasingly pluralistic and multireligious society, this animosity cannot be dismissed as a fringe phenomenon. Indeed, it raises crucial questions of social cohesion.



*Dirk Halm,  
Martina Sauer*

**Lebenswelten deutscher  
Muslime**

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Approximately four million Muslims are living in Germany, and some have been part of German society for decades. Yet the German population knows very little about the diverse beliefs of this religious group. This publication explains how adherents of Islam in Germany view and practice their religion.

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