Half of Germans would like immigrants to adapt to mainstream society. One third would prefer a merging of cultures – and among younger people, this is even the majority view. These are the findings of a special analysis of our Religion Monitor, in which we investigated attitudes among the German population about successful coexistence in cultural diversity.

Dr. Yasemin El-Menouar

As a result of immigration, people with different cultures and traditions and greater religious diversity are now living together. When asked how we can best live together in cultural diversity, 52 percent of the German population responded that immigrants should adapt to the culture of the mainstream society. On the other hand, 36 percent would like to see a merging of cultures. And about one in ten (11 percent) support the idea that people should maintain their own cultures. These were the findings of a special analysis of our 2017 Religion Monitor, published in conjunction with the 2018 Reinhard Mohn Prize, “Living Diversity – Shaping Society.”
Attitudes about successful coexistence in an immigration society differ significantly across generations: the younger the person, the less the wish for adaptation. While 66 percent of the population over 70 years of age express the opinion that immigrants should culturally adapt, this proportion gradually declines among younger groups, to 22 percent among respondents under 25 years of age. A majority of young adults want all sides to draw closer together: A significantly higher proportion (55 percent) of respondents under 25 years old would like to see a merging of cultures.

The diversity policy of an immigration society needs a guiding model

The purpose of the survey was to show how the German population views living together in diversity – especially in regard to migration and an increasing diversity of cultures, traditions and religions. Therefore, the investigated models deliberately allow for a certain spectrum of opinions, making it possible to better reflect emotional attitudes about the topic.

The results show a rather diverse range of attitudes in Germany. While half of those surveyed want to maintain the existing situation, younger people are more open to social change. This indicates a need in society to reach agreement about successful coexistence. To be sure, this is grounded in the local laws and German as a common language. Within such a binding framework, however, there is much for the population to negotiate. How greatly should immigrants adapt? How can cultural diversity be used as an opportunity for societal development as a whole? How much should the majority change its ways? And how culturally independent should the various groups be?

Living together in diversity requires a lively exchange of views

Many years of research have shown that personal contact helps to reduce prejudice and promote mutual acceptance. This study is no exception: Among people who support a merging of cultures, 58 percent frequently interact with people of other religions – as compared with only 40 percent of people who want immigrants to adapt.

People under 40 years old have more often grown up together with the children of immigrants. Thus, for young adults diversity has long been a reality – whether in school, in vocational training, on the job or in their free time. That creates a connection.

Stephan Vopel, Bertelsmann Stiftung expert on social cohesion
On the other hand, young adults also express a greater desire for cultural independence: One in five of people under 25 support the idea that people should maintain their own cultures. Because this opinion is mainly expressed by young people from educationally disadvantaged environments, the finding could indicate the potential for conflict among young adults from different backgrounds in such environments. Action is needed in this regard.

In order for differing cultures and traditions to come together and form the foundation for a common “us,” people need opportunities to approach and get to know each other. “Cities and communities that succeed in taking appropriate measures to create a lively exchange of views among people with different backgrounds play a major role in terms of social cohesion,” Vopel explains.

The foundation for an inclusive community is the Basic Law

The foundation for this sort of macrosocial dialogue of cultures is the diverse and democratic social order based on human and civil rights. Only this order guarantees every person the right to self-determination in religious, ideological and cultural issues, as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. Among immigrants and the majority population alike, globalization, digitalization and economic uncertainties create feelings of rootlessness and a longing for home and security.

A modern concept of homeland should be open to people of different backgrounds, cultures and religions.

Yasemin El-Menouar, project manager for the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Religion Monitor

“Germany today includes not only the Christian cross, but also the Jewish kippa and the Muslim headscarf. The constant discussion of who belongs and who doesn’t is perceived by minorities as a lack of recognition. This creates divisions in society,” she says.

Modern diversity policy is about building networks

The answer for policymakers lies at the community level as well as the state and federal level. Modern diversity policy has the task of bringing citizens into a dialogue across ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries. This requires institutions that act as mediators, supporting people as they express their
interests to each other and develop from these a common commitment. It is also important to build the skills of dealing with diversity starting early on, in early childhood centers and in schools. Finally, what is needed is a dialogue across the whole society, based on our fundamental rights and a democratic culture of debate, in which we can negotiate a new self-awareness of Germany as a country of immigration.

Publication

Living in Cultural Diversity

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Background

Our Religion Monitor regularly conducts international comparison studies on the importance of religion for social cohesion. It is based on representative surveys of the population. In this contribution, Professor Marc Helbling and Verena Benoit of the University of Bamberg analyzed these data in terms of the prospects for Germany’s population to live together successfully in cultural diversity. The data for Germany consist of a representative random sample of approximately 1,500 respondents; in addition, the Muslim population of Germany (not including the more recent influx of refugees since 2010) was surveyed and better represented by a more precise random
sample of over 1,000 respondents. The special analysis entitled “Living Together in Cultural Diversity: Attitudes and Preferences in Germany” is the third in a series of publications associated with the 2017 Religion Monitor.

About the Reinhard Mohn Prize

The Reinhard Mohn Prize is awarded in honor of Bertelsmann Stiftung’s founder Reinhard Mohn (1921 – 2009). The prize is awarded to exceptional, globally active individuals who have played a key role in creating solutions for social and political issues.

This year, the topic is “Living Diversity – Shaping Society,” and the prize goes to Joachim Gauck, the former president of Germany. In awarding the prize, we recognize Mr. Gauck as a bridge builder in a culturally diverse society. He will receive the prize on June 7, 2018, at a ceremony in the Gütersloh Theater. You can follow the event and all the publications related to the topic on social media under #RMP18 as well as #Vielfaltleben. Find us also on our blog (http://blog.vielfaltleben.de/), on Twitter (https://twitter.com/Vielfalt_BSt) and on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/VielfaltGesellschaft/) at “Vielfalt leben – Gesellschaft gestalten.”

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