

Between generalization and differentiation

Attitudes towards Muslims and Islam in Germany

English
Summary



The full study is
available in German only:

Zwischen Pauschalisierung und Differenzierung

Einstellungen gegenüber
Muslim:innen und dem
Islam in Deutschland

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Anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim attitudes weaken democracy and social cohesion

Yasemin El-Menouar

For 75 years, Germany's Basic Law has governed social cohesion in the country. It is the foundation for freedom and equal participation in a democratic society characterized by a diversity of heritages, religions and social circumstances. Everyone in the country has the right to self-development and social participation. As one of the most important basic rights, freedom of religion promises people the right to freely practice their religion regardless of which faith they adhere to. As a result, the degree to which religious freedom is upheld in a society whose religious diversity is increasing is an important indicator of how socially cohesive and harmonious that society is.

The resurgence of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents in Germany after October 7, 2023 show, however, that this freedom is under pressure. Only two months after the escalation of the Middle East conflict, there were almost as many anti-Semitic attacks as in all of 2022. Anti-Muslim offenses have also increased significantly. These are the outwardly perceptible, criminally relevant facts. An analysis of the Religion Monitor published in December of last year (El-Menouar and Vopel 2023) illustrates how widespread anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment was in Germany even before the terrible events of October 7, a situation that provided a dangerous breeding ground for public disturbances and attacks. According to the analysis, in late summer 2022 some

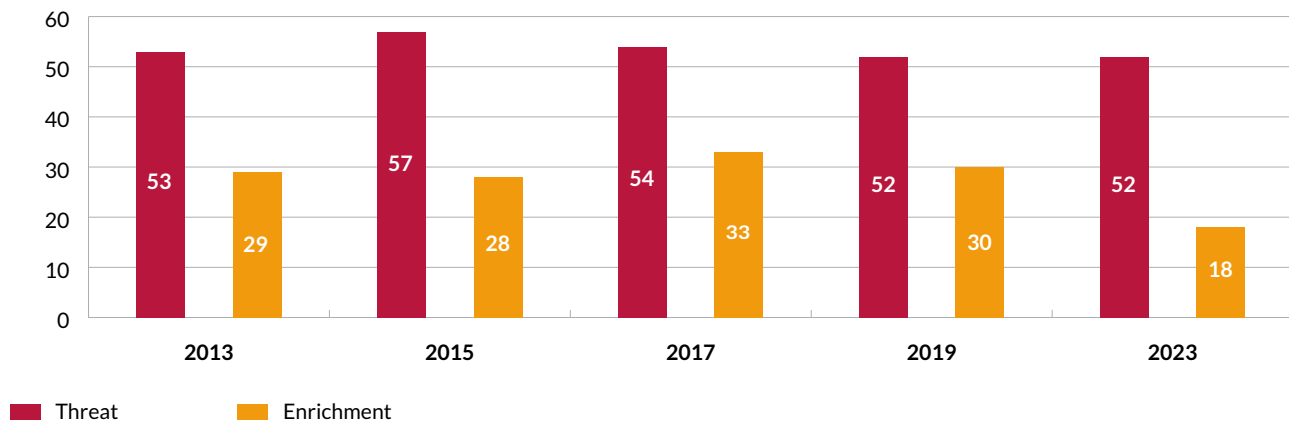
40 percent of the respondents already agreed with Israel-related anti-Semitic statements, while approximately one in two agreed with anti-Muslim statements. It is to be feared that both forms of animosity have since gained additional support.

The present study focuses on anti-Muslim sentiment, taking a closer look at attitudes towards Islam and Muslims among the non-Muslim population. It is based on data collected in 2022, i.e. before the attack by Hamas in October 2023 and the resulting escalation of the Middle East conflict. An analytical instrument was used that makes it possible to evaluate generalizing prejudices against and more differentiated perspectives of Islam and Muslims, along with (non-) discriminatory behavioral intentions about them.

Reservations about Muslims and their religion have been entrenched in Germany for many years. The Religion Monitor shows that a majority of the population (52 percent) views Islam as a threat. This figure has remained high for 10 years, although it has fallen by 5 percent compared to 2015. At the same time, the share of Germans who feel that Islam is enriching has declined significantly over this period and recently fell to its lowest level ever, at 18 percent.

Germany is no exception in this regard. Anti-Muslim attitudes are also widespread in

Perception in Germany of Islam as threat or enrichment, 2013 to 2023 (in %)



Source: Religion Monitor data from different surveys/years; German population aged 16 and over; valid cases, weighted.

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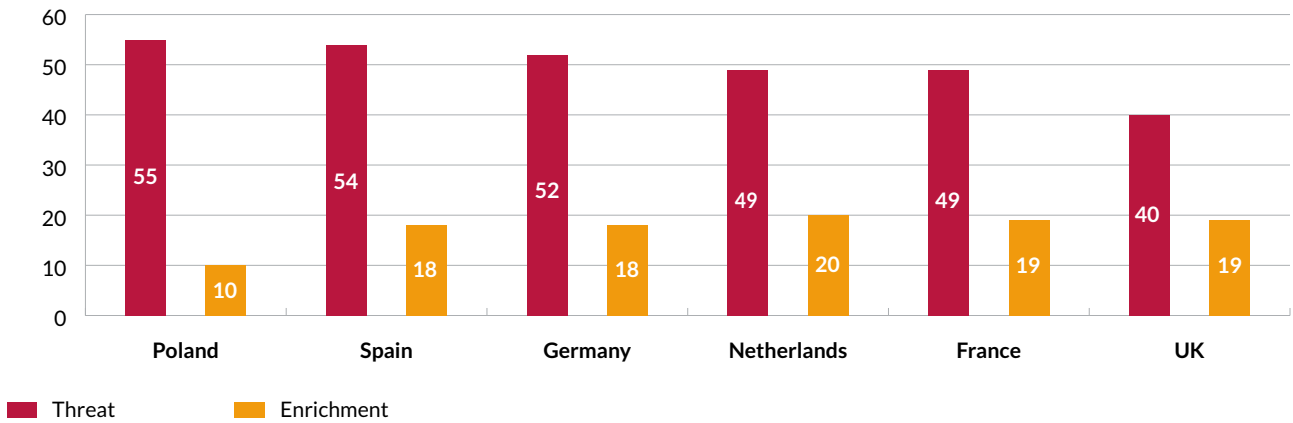
other European countries. Islam is viewed particularly negatively in Poland, where 55 percent of the population sees it as a threat, and only one person in 10 says it benefits society. In Spain, attitudes towards Islam are just as negative as those in Germany. And although fewer people feel threatened by Islam in the Netherlands and France, one person in two feels it to be a threat all the same. Only in the UK is the figure significantly lower, with 40 percent of respondents saying they view Islam as a threat. This does not mean, however, that most people have a positive image of the religion. In the UK, too, only one person in five feels Islam enriches society.

Islam's special position becomes particularly clear when we look at how people perceive other religions. In Germany, for example, not only is Christianity seen by a majority as enriching, so are Buddhism and Hinduism; only a few – between 10 and 20 percent of respondents – see these religions primarily as a threat. These figures have also converged steadily over the last decade, so that today

there is little difference in how the various religions are perceived – with the exception of Islam. This pattern can also be seen in the other Western European countries included in the survey: France, the UK and the Netherlands. In Spain and Poland, however, reservations about Judaism are somewhat higher, at around 25 percent. In Poland, 27 percent also feel threatened by atheism. In contrast, across all six European countries surveyed, Islam is the outlier in that it is predominantly perceived as “very threatening” or “rather threatening.”

These negative views are also reflected in the perceptions Muslims have of being discriminated against. For example, around one-third of Muslims in Germany say they regularly experience discrimination in a variety of everyday situations (see Sticks and Pfündel 2023). Scientific research also shows that Muslims – or people perceived as such – experience systematic bias on the labor and housing markets. They thus have fewer opportunities to participate in society than those who are not labeled as Muslim. This

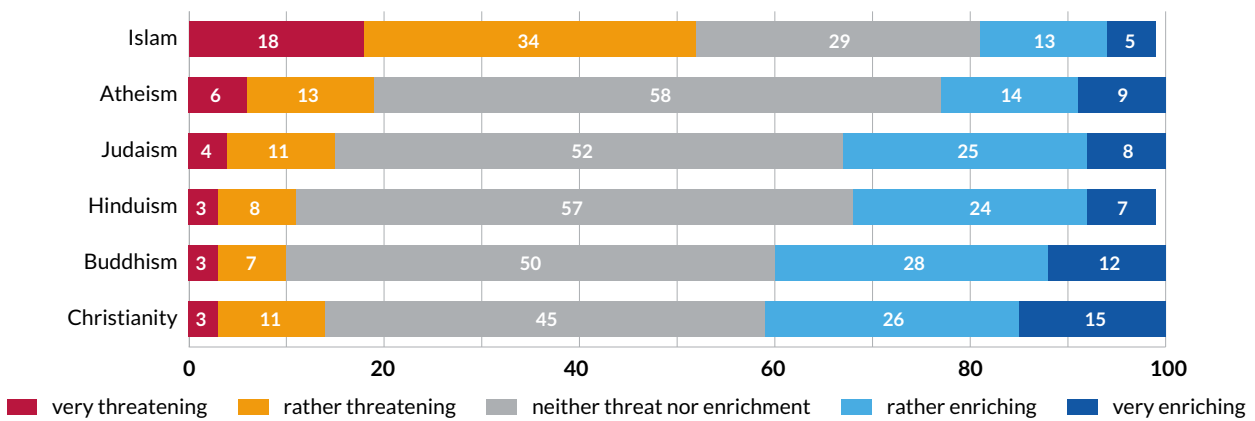
Perception of Islam as threat or enrichment, comparison of European countries (in %)



Source: Religion Monitor 2023; population of each country aged 16 and over; weighted.

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Perception in Germany of different religions and world views (in %)



Source: Religion Monitor 2023; German population aged 16 and over (N = 4,363); valid cases, weighted.

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also applies to well-educated Muslims, who are more likely to be affected by poverty than others (see Salikutluk and Podkowiak 2024). Even young Muslim academics who have had above-average educational careers report that they regularly experience discrimination (see Türkeli-Dehnert 2022). Given the shortage of skilled labor and the growing international competition for talent, this is disadvantageous for Germany as a business location.

It should also be noted that deep-seated prejudices have an impact not only on the social participation of those who experience them. They also impact society as a whole, since they serve as a gateway for extremist forces and can lead over the long term to the erosion of fundamental values and the undermining of liberal democracy.

This study's approach

Like other forms of animosity, anti-Muslim attitudes are a multifaceted phenomenon and can manifest in a variety of ways (see Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit 2023). Whether different religions are perceived as a threat or an enrichment, a subject we have been conducting surveys on for many years, can indicate distrust or appreciation on a fundamental level. What remains unclear, however, is what informs these attitudes. Anti-Muslim prejudice is usually tied to negative images that people associate with Islam or its adherents. The question must therefore be posed of which prejudices against Islam and Muslims are widespread in Germany – and how they affect everyday interactions there.

In this 2023 Religion Monitor study, we have therefore examined a broad spectrum of prejudices that can be directed against Islam as a religion, on the one hand, and against specific people, i.e. Muslims or those per-

ceived as such, on the other. Second, we have analyzed behavioral intentions, since this dimension is particularly relevant when it comes to discrimination and social participation. Also crucial is the extent to which prejudices translate into discriminatory behavioral intentions, which is why we also examined the connections between prejudices and the intention to act.

Third, focusing on solutions was also a central concern for us, which is why we collected data on the extent to which people have a differentiated understanding of Muslim life in Germany. Based on an in-depth analysis of the relationships between all three dimensions, we can demonstrate how effective this understanding can be in combatting prejudice and discrimination.

One key finding that allows for cautious optimism is the following: In addition to widespread anti-Muslim prejudices, a differentiated understanding of Muslim life in Germany also exists among broad sections of the population. Moreover, a majority of people in Germany are aware that Muslims face disadvantages and hostility in everyday situations. Until now, such differentiated views have not been able to dispel the prejudices; rather, both perspectives – negative generalizations and differentiated viewpoints – exist side by side, more or less independently of each other. At the same time, differentiated knowledge helps ensure that an individual's prejudices do not translate into biased or discriminatory practices. This is an important finding which underscores the relevance and effectiveness those efforts that impart a differentiated understanding of Muslim life in Germany. Religious and inter-faith education therefore remains a central factor, even in a country in which religion is supposedly losing importance. Especially after the events of October 7, society must take a more differentiated and objective view, thus preventing prejudices from solidifying

further and working towards their long-term elimination.

Another important finding is the significantly more positive, relaxed view that the younger generation in Germany has of Islam and the Muslim population. It is natural for young people to grow up attending school and undergoing training with people of different backgrounds and religions. They therefore have more frequent contact with Muslims of the same age. Anti-Muslim prejudice is less appealing to them, since it is refuted by their personal, everyday experiences. This once again shows the importance of personal contact and spaces that facilitate interaction. They are essential in an increasingly diverse society. When people have a differentiated understanding of others and when everyone interacts, those trying to create divisions do not stand a chance.

We would like to thank the authors of the study – Dr. Isabell Diekmann and Olga Janzen – for the valuable insights gained from their analysis of the 2023 Religion Monitor data.

Key findings

1. Prejudices against Islam and Muslims are not interchangeable, but analogous.

In the prejudices examined in this study, we differentiate between generalizing ideas of Islam as a religion and reservations about Muslims themselves. For both forms of prejudice, various overlapping aspects play a role, some specific to religion and some to migration (see Point 2). Attitudes towards Islam are consistently more negative than those towards Muslims or people perceived to be Muslim. Nevertheless, there is a strong correlation between the two phenomena. Negative, generalizing debates about Islam can therefore not be viewed independently of this religion's adherents in Germany. Such

debates have an impact on how the latter are perceived – and ultimately on the discrimination they experience. Moreover, negative, generalizing debates about Islam can often be understood as a form of circumspet communication that can include disparagement of Muslims.

2. Muslims in particular are assumed to lack the ability to integrate – Islam is primarily associated with backwardness and violence. The negative image of Muslims and their religion that is widespread in Germany is promoted by various attributions related to migration policy debates, cultural values and issues of religious extremism. Anti-Muslim prejudices most often reference the idea of self-segregation. For example, in large parts of the non-Muslim population, many people believe that Muslims prefer to keep to themselves (74 percent), like to live in their own neighborhoods (70 percent) and are misogynistic (65 percent). Prejudices against Islam as a religion are even more widespread. They are associated with the idea that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with “western” values and incites violence. Some three-quarters of non-Muslim respondents believe that Islam is backward and refuses to accept today's realities. Equally high is the share of respondents who consider Islam to be misogynistic or believe that it provides support to Islamist terrorists.

3. Rejection and exclusion of Muslims are widespread in large parts of the population.

The findings show that 58 percent of non-Muslim respondents would have a problem moving to a neighborhood where many Muslims live. This is remarkable in light of the widely held belief that Muslims keep to themselves. For approximately one respondent in two, religious affiliation plays a role when they are deciding which political candidates to elect, with 51 percent saying they would not vote for a mayoral candidate simply because he or she is an adherent of Islam.

Respondents have fewer concerns about Muslim teachers donning headscarves, with as many as 60 percent saying they would enroll their child in a school where a Muslim woman teaches who wears a headscarf. In light of the many polarizing debates on the topic, this can be seen as a positive trend – albeit one requiring a caveat, since it cannot be ignored that 40 percent say they would not choose a school if a woman wearing a headscarf taught there. Moreover, more than 25 percent say they would vote for a party that explicitly opposes Muslims.

4. Prejudice is closely linked to discriminatory behavioral intentions. Prejudices are initially abstract, generalizing ideas and are not necessarily expressed as derogatory and discriminatory behavior. The Religion Monitor findings indicate, however, that there is a close connection between negative stereotypes and discriminatory behavioral intentions towards the Muslim population. This shows that negative prejudices have an impact on Muslims' everyday lives. It also shows that prejudices directly associated with Muslims more often drive behavior than do negative attitudes towards Islam. In particular, the assertion that Muslims are susceptible to extremism clearly impacts behavioral intentions and triggers the strongest distancing reflex.

5. People are aware of anti-Muslim resentment and discrimination. In German society, not only are anti-Muslim prejudices widespread, a more differentiated understanding is also present. For example, 83 percent of respondents are aware that there are both devout and less devout Muslims. This runs counter to the general prejudice that, in terms of their religion, Muslims are homogenous. Moreover, 85 percent know that the actions of individual Muslims are often attributed to the entire group. The same applies to perceptions of discrimination against the Muslim population, with 60 percent

agreeing with the statement that Muslims are often discriminated against or face hostility, and 69 percent saying Muslims experience racism. This means that, in Germany, prejudices exist alongside more differentiated views of Muslims. The two are not mutually exclusive; people can have prejudices and still be aware that Muslims are disadvantaged.

6. Similar prejudices exist in western and eastern Germany – in the east, they more often result in derogatory behavior. Contrary to earlier studies, which showed a greater presence of prejudice and racism in eastern Germany, both parts of the country seem to have converged in this respect. The Religion Monitor data shows that no significant differences exist when it comes to prejudice against Muslims. In eastern Germany, however, respondents are more willing to act in accordance with their prejudices, thus exhibiting behavioral intentions that lead to systematic exclusion and discrimination. For example, 31 percent say they would be more likely to vote for an anti-Muslim party and only 37 percent could imagine electing a Muslim mayor.

7. Young people disagree much more with anti-Muslim attitudes. They youngest non-Muslim respondents (aged 16 to 24) have a much more positive image of Muslims and are much less likely to agree with generalized, disparaging ideas. For example, only 40 percent of this cohort believe that Muslims prefer to live in their own neighborhoods, while 80 percent of 55- to 69-year-olds say this is the case, and 83 percent of those 70 or older say it is true. The youngest respondents also disagree when it comes to imputations of violence, with only one-third saying that Islamist terrorists are supported by Muslims, something 58 percent of the non-Muslim population in general think is true. Among respondents aged 70 or older, the figure is 66 percent. Moreover, only 39

percent of 16- to 24-year-olds say that Muslims are misogynistic, compared to 65 percent of the non-Muslim population in general, and 78 percent of those 70 years old or older. Finally, the younger generation's openness can also be seen in the fact that 57 percent would be willing to vote for a Muslim mayoral candidate and a majority (60 percent) would have no problem moving to a neighborhood where many Muslims live. .

8. Differentiated images of Muslims do not reduce prejudice, but do prevent discrimination. In-depth analysis shows that counter-discourse can only overcome anti-Muslim prejudice to limited extent. Rather, it is possible to harbor anti-Muslim prejudices and still have a differentiated view of the Muslim population. The two attitudes are compatible with each other. The results of our analysis show all the more clearly, however, that agreement with the counter-discourse tends to prevent exclusionary behavioral intentions. Above all, being aware of discrimination and racism hinders existing prejudices from manifesting as exclusionary behavior. This underscores the effectiveness of counter-discourse and its importance in the fight against discrimination and exclusion.

Recommended responses

The study's results show that anti-Muslim attitudes were already widespread even before the escalation of the Middle East conflict on October 7, 2023. It can be assumed that the situation has worsened in Germany as elsewhere, given the polarized debates, and that anti-Muslim attitudes have become more entrenched or even increased. Yet the Religion Monitor findings also suggest possible solutions: Efforts to take a differentiated perspective in debates can promote social cohesion even in challenging times such as these. This is indicated by findings on so-called counter-narratives and their poten-

tial to curb prejudice's discriminatory effects. Even if it is not yet tangible today, such differentiated perceptions of Muslims and their religion in Germany can help overcome existing prejudices and thus dispel them. It is particularly important to distinguish here between fundamentalist minorities – such as Islamist movements – and the broad diversity of Muslim beliefs. The latter include pious and conservative attitudes which cannot be dismissed across the board as incompatible with democracy, just as conservative Christian beliefs cannot.

More interaction and exchange are needed if such differentiated counter-discourses are to develop and people are to experience them in their everyday lives. In particular, there must be more interfaith contact among people who approach each other as equals. Educational events and programs can actively impart differentiated knowledge. Finally, more reportage is needed on examples of successful coexistence and everyday solidarity so that more nuanced images of Muslim life and its diversity can become visible and reduce existing prejudices.

To promote social cohesion and coexistence in Germany's diverse immigration society, we recommend the following responses:

1. Create spaces for meeting and interacting – promote diverse contacts. One positive finding from the Religion Monitor is that the younger generation has a much more differentiated view of Muslims and Islam. This view is based on everyday experiences and, in particular, on interfaith contacts in schools and training programs, as we have already highlighted in previous Religion Monitor publications. Positive contacts among equals are essential for examining and overcoming prejudices. This is especially true in a diverse society with different religious communities and an increasing number of people without a religious affiliation. That makes it all the

more important to create opportunities and spaces, from school age to adult life, that facilitate interaction and build bridges. Social media can play a growing role here. They are the public marketplaces which have the potential to connect people with each other and reveal new aspects of communal life – even beyond heated political debates. For this to happen, suitable framework conditions are needed. Thus, one welcome development is that legal standards have been tightened on both the national and European levels in order to put hatred and hate speech in their place and lay the foundation for a democratic culture of discussion. If we encourage people to have a range of contacts and focus on individuals and their stories, positive experiences and narratives can become more widespread and promote social cohesion.

2. Develop educational offerings on religious diversity in Germany – strengthen basic interfaith skills. Adults in particular must be made more aware of the impact prejudice and discrimination have. In addition to opportunities for personal contact, what is needed here is more differentiated knowledge about religious diversity in Germany and especially about Muslim life in the country. What is required is not so much a detailed knowledge of theological principles as an engagement with daily practices. Those who understand why certain everyday rules or holidays are important for a religious group are more likely to develop understanding and tolerance. It is also crucial to include people for whom religion plays no role in daily life or who tend to view it critically. Interfaith skills are understood here to be a specific subset of intercultural skills and thus essential for getting along in an open, pluralistic society. In addition to media offerings for the general public, providers of political education should also develop suitable training programs for educators. Although anti-Muslim attitudes are less prevalent among young people, they can still be

found among one-third of this cohort. Anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents are not uncommon in school settings. Schools can offer a space for reflection in which young people can talk about experiences of discrimination, combining this with a discussion of society's fundamental values and their importance for everyday coexistence. As a result, lesson plans should include an active discussion of discriminatory attitudes of all sorts and the development of interfaith skills more than they have in the past. Religion classes that focus on specific denominations could also be opened up to interfaith projects. Moreover, a critical examination is needed of lesson plans and textbooks which, according to the report issued by the Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit (2023, Independent Expert Group on Islamophobia), sometimes perpetuate anti-Muslim attitudes and narratives.

3. Treat and combat Islamism as a form of extremism. The study's findings show that Islam and the Muslim population are suspected of being extremist, even though, according to a report by Germany's domestic intelligence service, the number of Islamists in the country is less than 1 percent. Germany's Muslim population is a diverse religious community with various expressions and understandings of faith. Islamist extremism lies outside a generally accepted spectrum of beliefs and is viewed – even by Muslims – as a dangerous fringe phenomenon. Situating Islamism within the Muslim mainstream places it inadmissibly in the center of society and thus strengthens this religiously embellished ideology. Moreover, such a placement leads to uncertainty among the public and causes large sections of the population to doubt whether it is even possible to distinguish between religious practices guaranteed by freedom of religion and extremist interpretations of Islam. It is possible to counter this if the fight against Islamism is situated where it belongs: in efforts to prevent

extremism. Despite differences in content, the ideological, social and political means that Islamist, right-wing and other extremist movements use for taking action are very similar. It may be assumed that these different forms of extremism have more in common than Islamists do with Muslims in general. Civil society actors – Muslim associations and communities in particular – are also called upon to actively distance themselves from Islamist movements and take a closer look at who is preaching in their houses of worship.

4. Increase the visibility of Muslim life and its diversity, share success stories. Media reports and public debates on the topic of religion – especially Islam – continue to focus on problems. They reproduce and reinforce a negative and generalized view of Muslims, fostering resentment that manifests as discrimination and hostility. Conversely, a better understanding of Muslim life and its diversity helps to ensure prejudice does not result in discrimination – as our study clearly shows. We therefore need more stories about the normality of Muslim life to counter the negative images. It is also important that various social actors – media professionals, politicians and stakeholders from (civil) society – continue their efforts to make Muslim life more visible in all its heterogeneity and religious diversity. Prominent advocates are needed who stand up and say that this diversity is now the norm in Germany and is one of society's basic values. This is why the Ramadan decorations that were recently put up in Frankfurt am Main and Cologne are compatible with eye-catching Hanukkah menorahs and Christmas trees in public spaces. Moreover, many initiatives have impressive stories to tell of successful interfaith interactions. These include the Jewish-Muslim dialogue project Schalom Aleikum, interfaith aid projects for refugees, and smaller symbolic acts of solidarity. For example, as an expression of their sympathy

for the victims of October 7, 2023, Muslims in Bielefeld took to the streets to polish Stolpersteine, the brass cobblestones that commemorate victims of the Holocaust.

Not only can new, positive images counter anti-democratic efforts that instrumentalize existing prejudices, they can also strengthen cohesion in an extremely diverse society. This is where Muslim communities are also called upon: to continue opening up – through initiatives such as Open Mosque Day – while highlighting their activities that contribute to the common good.

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Conclusion

Key findings

Anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim attitudes are part of a multifaceted phenomenon. The analysis in Section 2 showed that, on the one hand, a distinction must be made between Islamophobia and Muslimophobia and, on the other, that both have different substantive dimensions which must be viewed together to produce a holistic picture.

Section 3 made it clear that not only is prejudice against Muslims and Islam widespread in Germany, so are distancing and discriminatory behavioral intentions towards Muslims. Intentions of this sort are closely related empirically to prejudice against Muslims and Islam.

The examination of counter-discursive statements about Muslims in Section 4 proved fruitful. Counter-discourses are widely accepted by the public and do less to counter prejudices per se than distancing and discriminatory behavioral intentions. According to the data, counter-discourses only partially invalidate attitudes (prejudice), but are closely linked to how people are willing to act (behavior).

In terms of different socio-demographic groups, the findings from the Religion Monitor are generally in line with those from existing research. Whenever there are significant differences between the groups, men, people in eastern Germany, older individuals and those with lower levels of education tend to exhibit more pronounced prejudices, more distancing behavioral intentions and less agreement with counter-discourses. However, these results are not always so clear-cut, as

a differentiated analysis of the Religion Monitor data shows. In particular, there are often no significant differences between men and women, or between people in western and eastern Germany (for similar findings, see Hafez and Schmidt 2015). It must be left to future studies to show whether or not this is the beginning of a trend.

Significance of the findings for research and practice

“The prejudices are multifaceted and differentiating them is essential for understanding this phenomenon.”

German society speaks of Islam and Muslims in ways that are negative, derogatory and racist. The Religion Monitor measures this prejudice, revealing the broad spectrum of content and addressees found in this context. The prejudices are multifaceted and differentiating them is essential for understanding this phenomenon. Just as essential for understanding, however, is thinking beyond prejudices, i.e. individual attitudes, since discriminatory actions and structures are also part of this reality. Even if it cannot be examined here, the present study clearly shows, in light of the behavioral intentions surveyed, the public's willingness to engage in discriminatory behavior.

Also part of the reality are the so-called counter-discourses. Concurrent with generalizing and negative attitudes, a critical examination is taking place among the population of derogatory speech about Muslims that casts them all in the same light. This critical perspective interrogates and deconstructs the negatively connoted and generalizing

discourse, putting a greater focus on Muslims' experiences of discrimination and racism. Various prejudices and (racist) discrimination are thus part of the overall societal discussion of Muslims and Islam, as are the corresponding counter-discourses. Yet which conclusions can be drawn from this for use in practice?

One of this study's key findings is that the ability to subjectively differentiate and reflect on the representation of Muslims in public discourse must be strengthened, and efforts increased to raise awareness of discrimination of racism. In sum, these analyses clearly show the need for greater differentiation, reflection and consideration of discrimination and racism. The findings highlight the value of previous efforts in the field of prejudice prevention and educational initiatives that take a critical look at racism. For the target group of young people, various materials already exist that bring together approaches for preventing Islamophobia, Muslimophobia and anti-Muslim racism (Kaddor, Fischer and Pfaff 2020b; Seiler, Ali and Wagner 2020). For example, the transfer concept advanced by Kaddor, Fischer and Pfaff (2020a; 2020b) envisages a "prevention circle" containing various building blocks (e.g. on Muslim life in Germany, diversity in Islam and understanding anti-Muslim racism), thus making a significant contribution to strengthening the counter-discourse. However, looking at the age factor as it relates to the statements about discrimination and hostility and about Muslims' experiences of racism, it becomes clear that adults in particular must be made more aware of instances of discrimination and racism. Racist-critical education is a key element here. In addition to raising awareness of racism and recognizing racializing and culturalizing patterns and practices, another important aspect is learning to avoid them, i.e. to unlearn them (see Scharathow 2021). Racism-critical education thus goes beyond simply raising awa-

reness by facilitating reflection on one's own role, one's own involvement and thus one's own responsibility, with the goal of recognizing racist practices and no longer reproducing them. It thus strengthens the counter-discourse in a meaningful way.

"Adults in particular must be made more aware of instances of discrimination and racism."

Conclusions can be drawn for research practice as well. First, Islamophobia and Muslimophobia cannot be used synonymously: Anyone who does not distinguish between the addressees of hostile attitudes is overlooking part of the phenomenon. Second, the substantive dimensions examined here show that anti-Islam and anti-Muslim attitudes are multifaceted. When looking for predictors of derogatory stances towards Islam and towards Muslims, differentiation is essential so as not to overestimate or underestimate correlations. Third, the findings show that counter-discourses against generalizations are present in society as is an awareness of discrimination and racism, and that they receive considerable support in surveys and can counteract prejudice-driven behavioral intentions. Important questions for further research on counter-discourses are: To what extent can causality be proven (e.g. in the context of panel studies)? Under which conditions are counter-discourses most effective in reducing prejudice and discrimination? What other forms of counter-discourses exist (e.g. including in relation to Islam) and how can they be strengthened?

In this context, the relevance of gathering data on racist and Islamophobic attacks and discrimination becomes evident. Such incidents must be made visible in order to increase awareness of discrimination and racism. This is also a clear mandate for researchers, whose efforts have not yet explored this area in as nuanced a manner as they could and

indeed should. This does not mean that research on prejudice will become obsolete, but that different perspectives must be examined and all levels – including structural ones – taken into account. Quantification that focuses on discrimination and racism is an important tool for practice in the field, since it makes visible their prevalence and extent. Knowledge production within research has an impact on which perspectives are perceived by policy makers, the media and the public.

Not least for this reason, the scientific community itself must reflect on its own perspectives and approaches to research (see Sinanoğlu and Polat 2023). After all, only if measuring instruments respond to social discourse and developments, i.e. are updated regularly, can such developments be adequately depicted. This, in turn, is the prerequisite for targeted and effective prevention and intervention strategies that combat Islamophobia, Muslimophobia and anti-Muslim racism – as the Religion Monitor has impressively shown through the example of counter-discourses and their significance – and is thus essential for social cohesion.

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