

# PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND RIGHT-WING POPULIST ATTITUDES – EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM GERMANY

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Conference “Going forward or backward?  
Perspectives on an European Social Citizenship”,  
Panel Session II, November 23rd, 2022, 1:30pm  
Dr. Andreas Hövermann, WSI

# Perspective and research questions

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focus on one specific country: Germany

focus on individual perceptions: subjective perception and attitudes toward politics & democracy → political integration

focus on the role of inequality (inequality within a country and not between different countries; unequal access & content)

focus on illiberal, anti-democratic attitudes

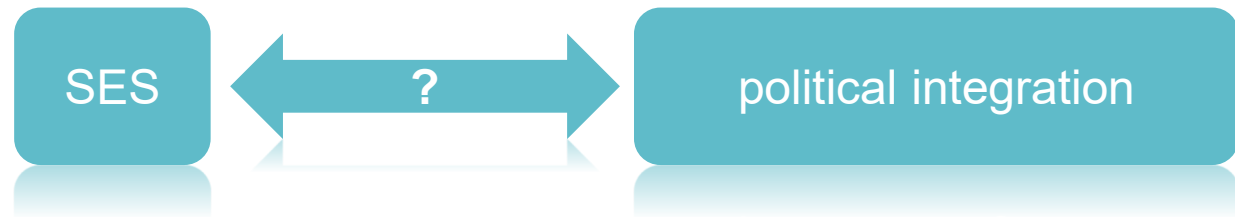
Findings from 2 projects (based on surveys):

1. How strongly is the social class position associated with political integration and anti-democratic attitudes in Germany?
2. What are recent developments? What's the impact of energy crisis on right-wing populist attitudes? (against the backdrop of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and its social and economical aftermaths in Germany)

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# 1. POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC INTEGRATION – HOW EQUAL IS IT?

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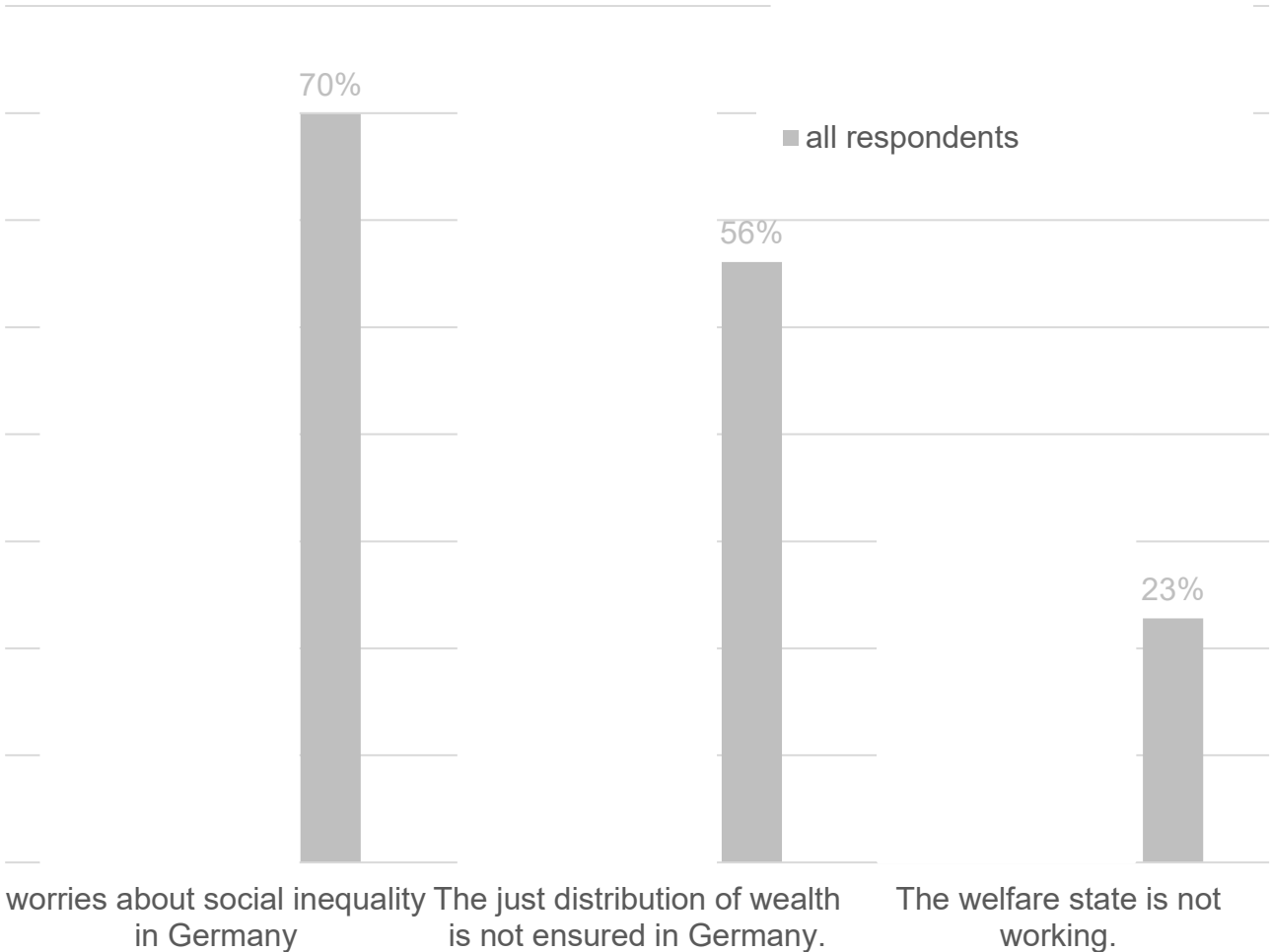
# Data: project „Social stratification and democratic integration“

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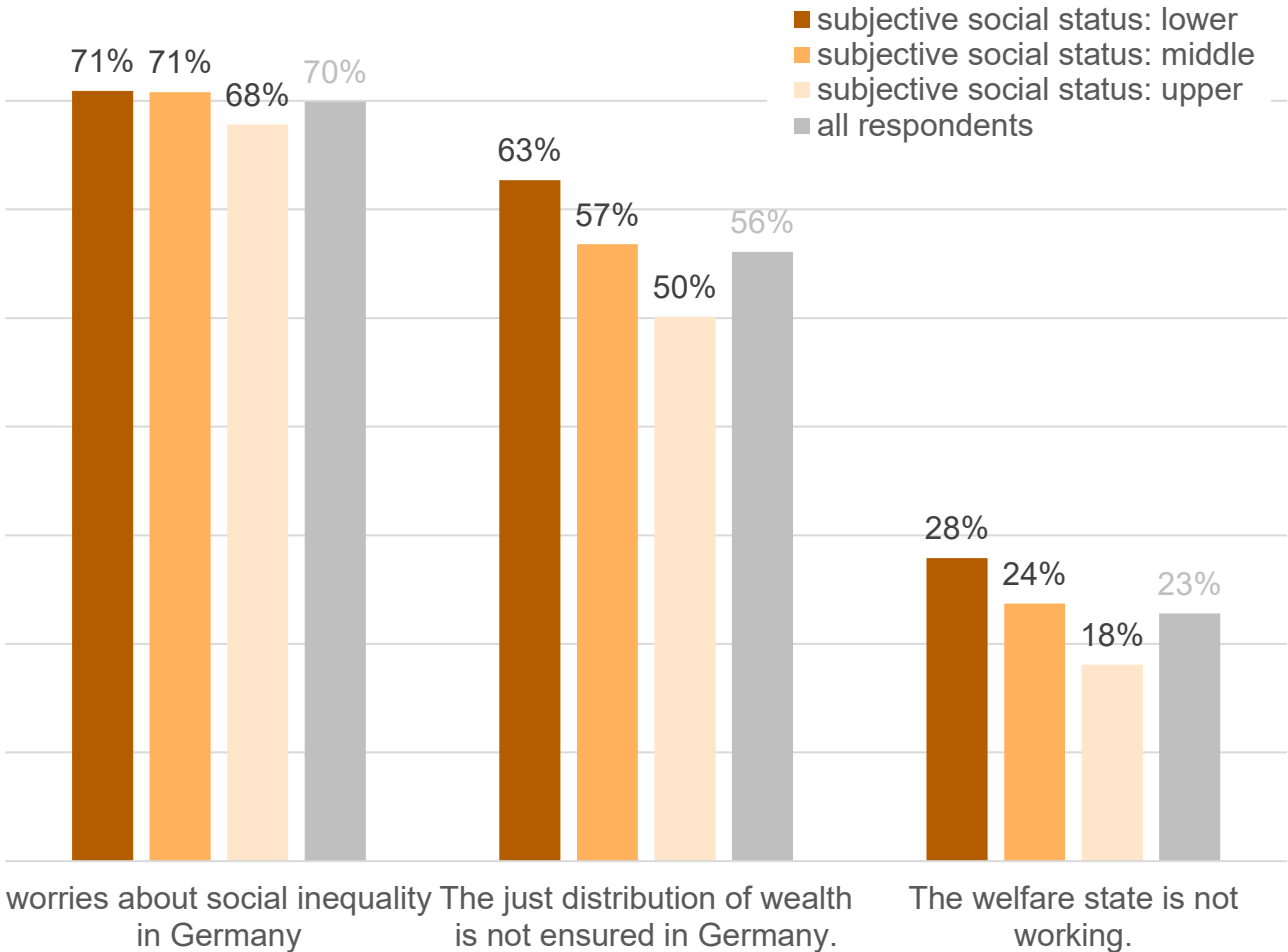
- 5-year-survey project (2020–2024); Key objective: against the backdrop of immense societal transformations: analyzing the associations of social stratification and democratic integration
- Additional focus topics: attitudes toward social-ecological transformation and digitalization of work environment
- so far: one survey (CATI) between November '20 and January '21 targeting Germany's total population >16yrs
- real random sample (N=4.100 total population, N=2.900 labor force).

# inequality and welfare state

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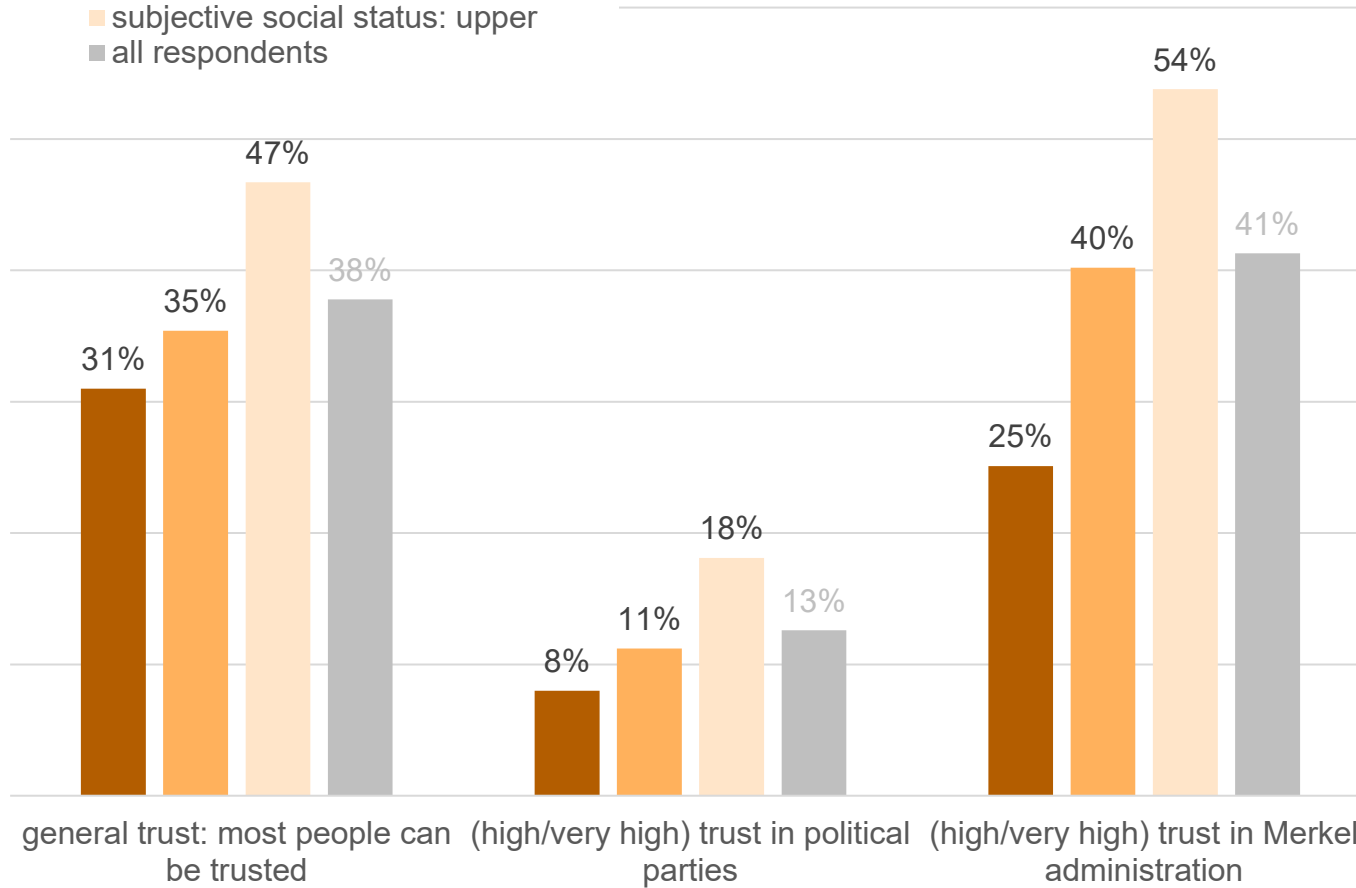


# inequality and welfare state

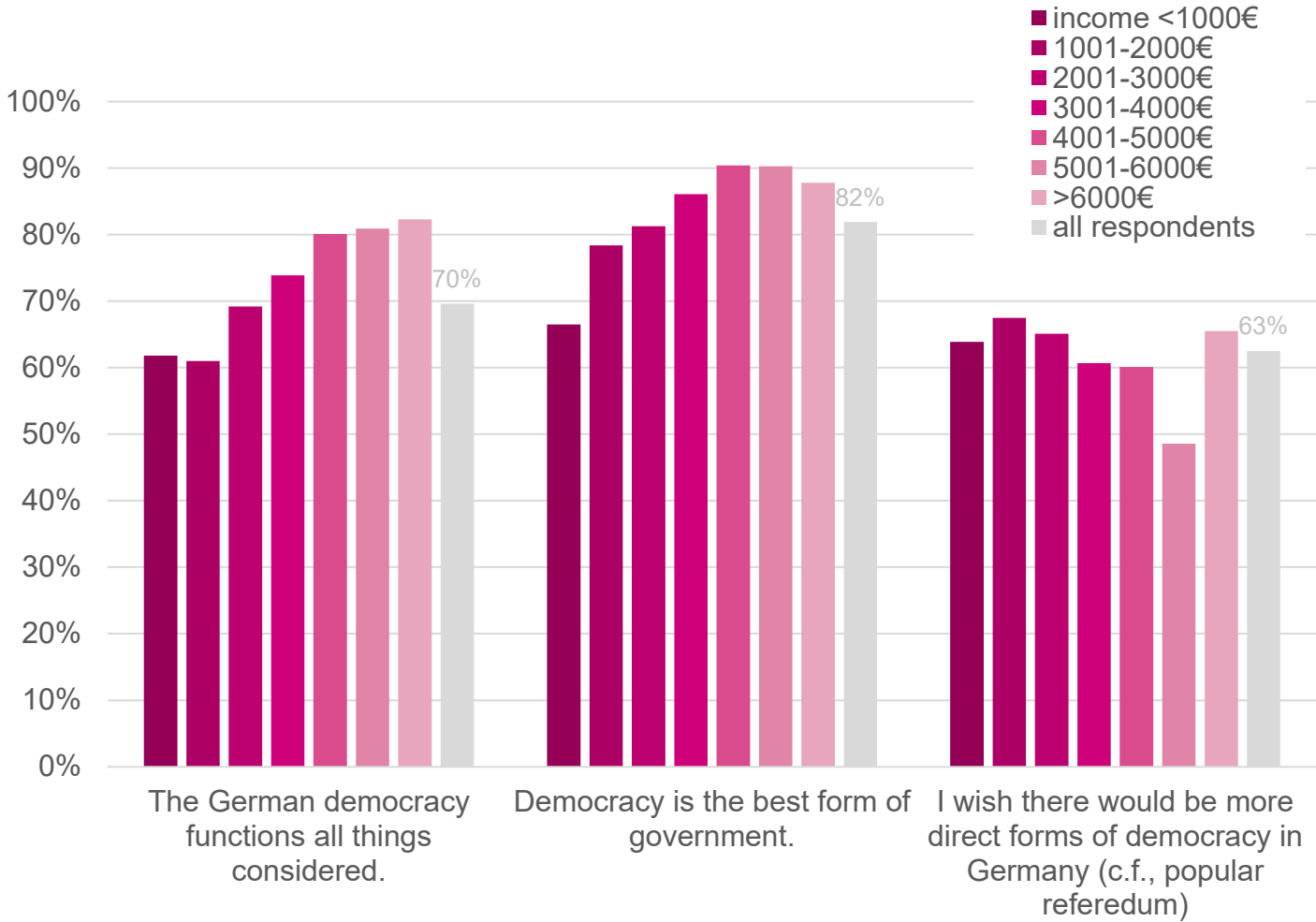


# trust

- subjective social status: lower
- subjective social status: middle
- subjective social status: upper
- all respondents

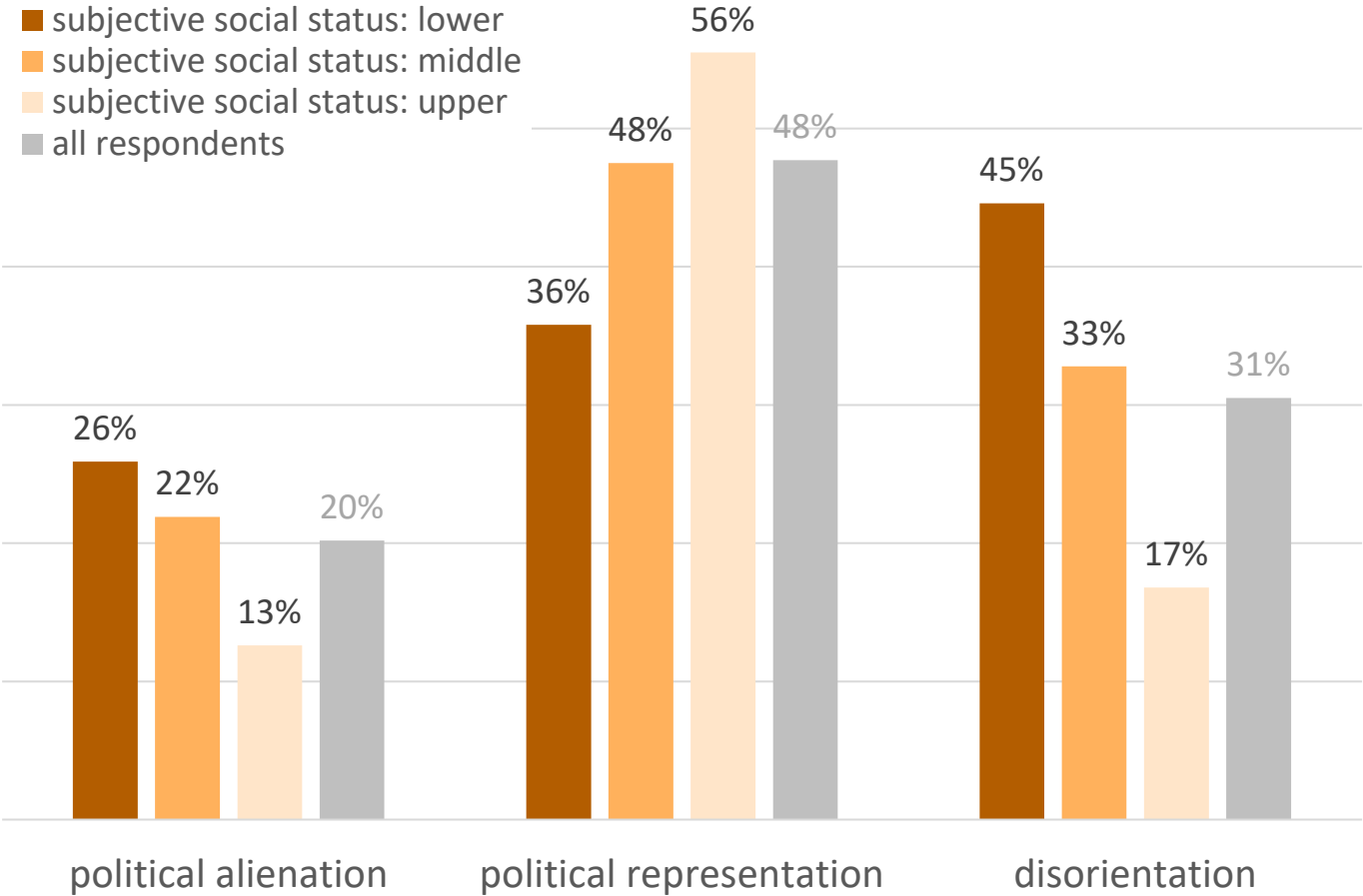


# attitudes to democracy

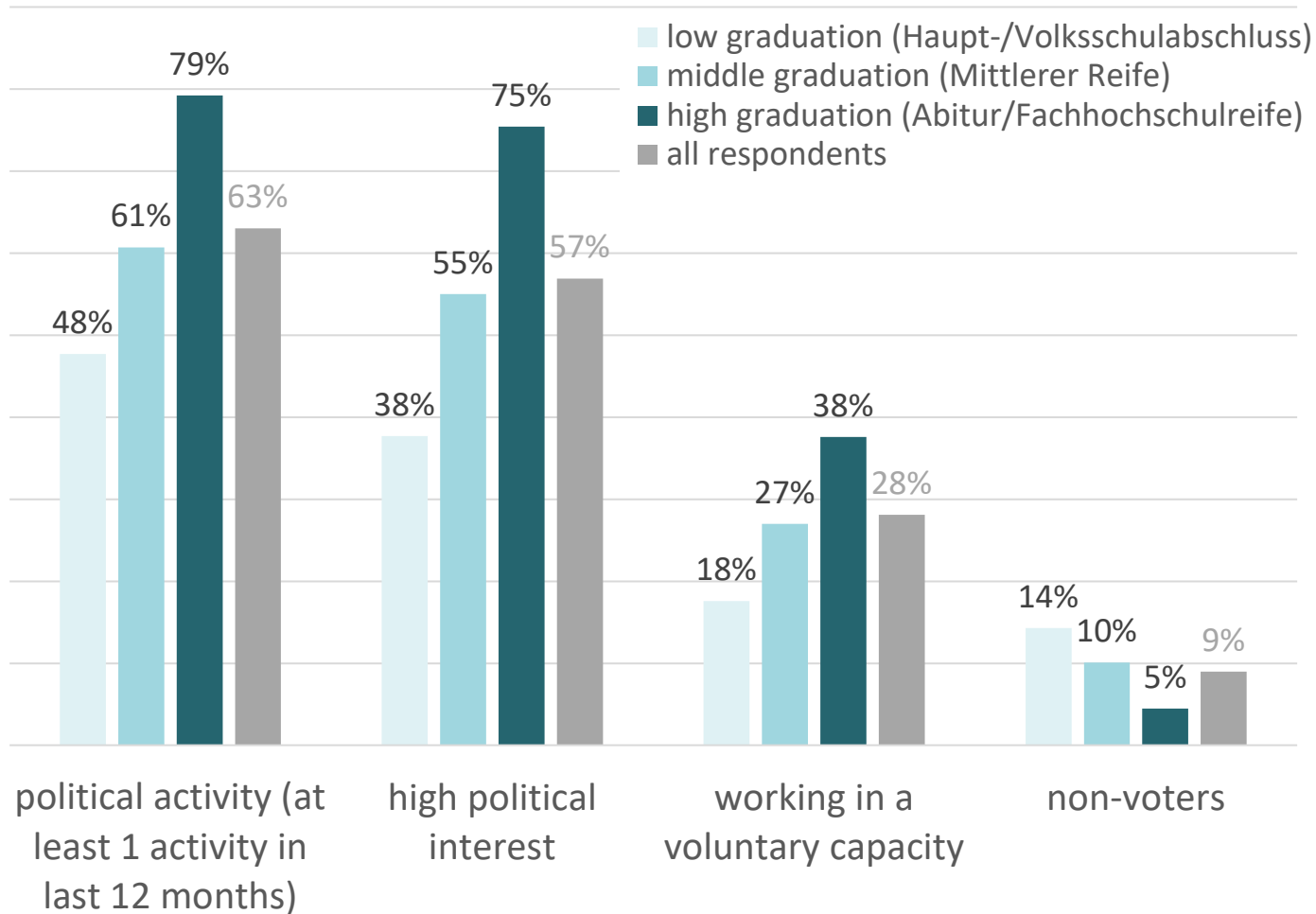




# political integration I



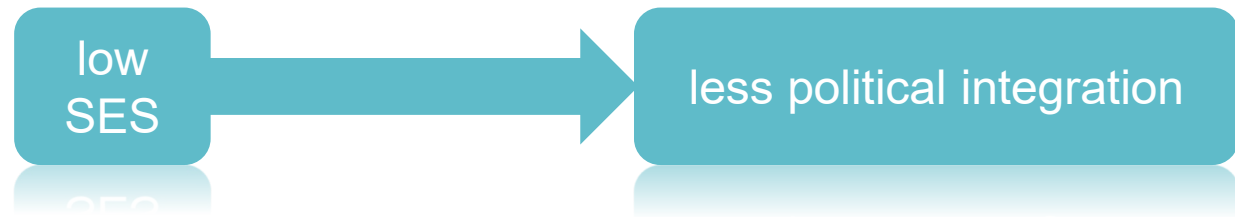
# political integration II



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***DEPRIVED SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IS CONSISTENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH LESS POLITICAL INTEGRATION IN GERMANY***

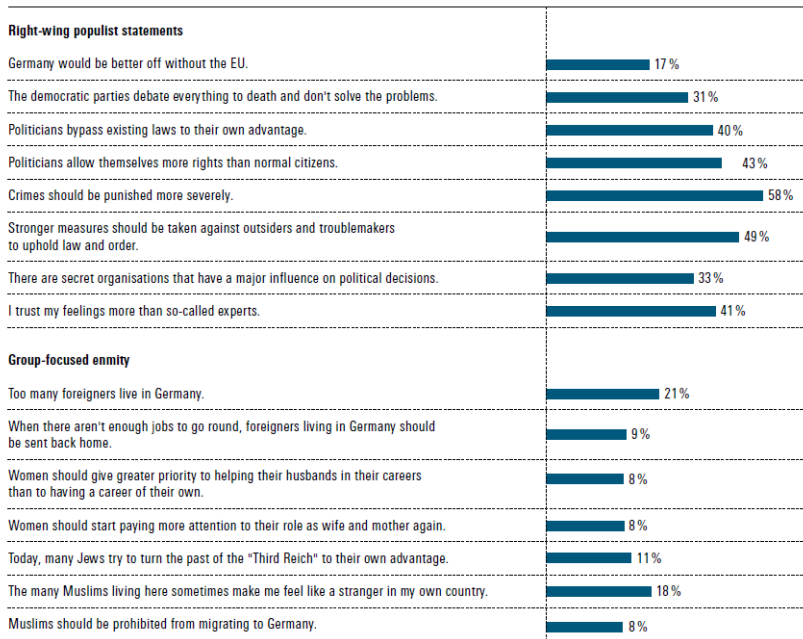
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# anti-democratic attitudes

Figure 2

Approval ratings for right-wing populist attitudes and statements on group-focused enmity



Remarks: all respondents N = 4,116; share of "agree entirely" and "rather" on a scale of 1 to 5

## Right-wing populist attitudes

Politicians/  
Party-  
Distrust

right-wing  
authoritarianism

Conspiracy  
myths

EU-  
Opposition

# anti-democratic attitudes

## Group-focused enmity

anti-  
immigrant

antisemitism

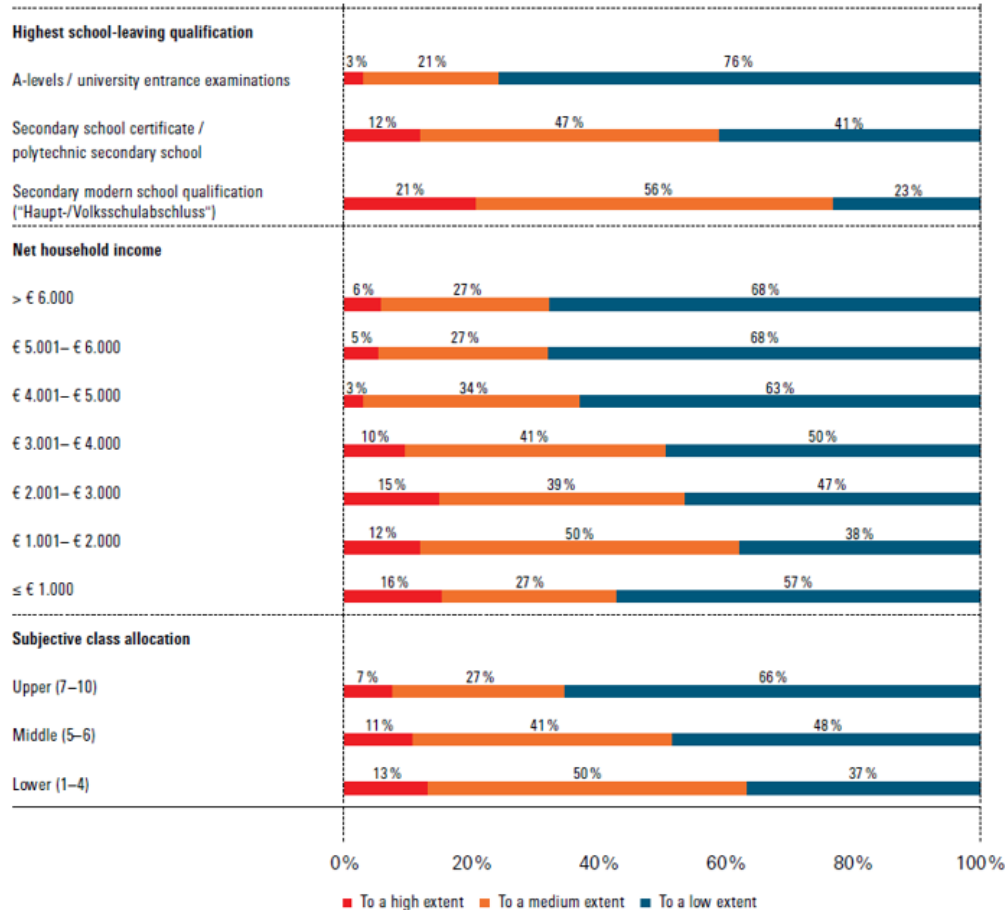
anti-muslim

sexism

# social class position & anti-democratic attitudes

Figure 5

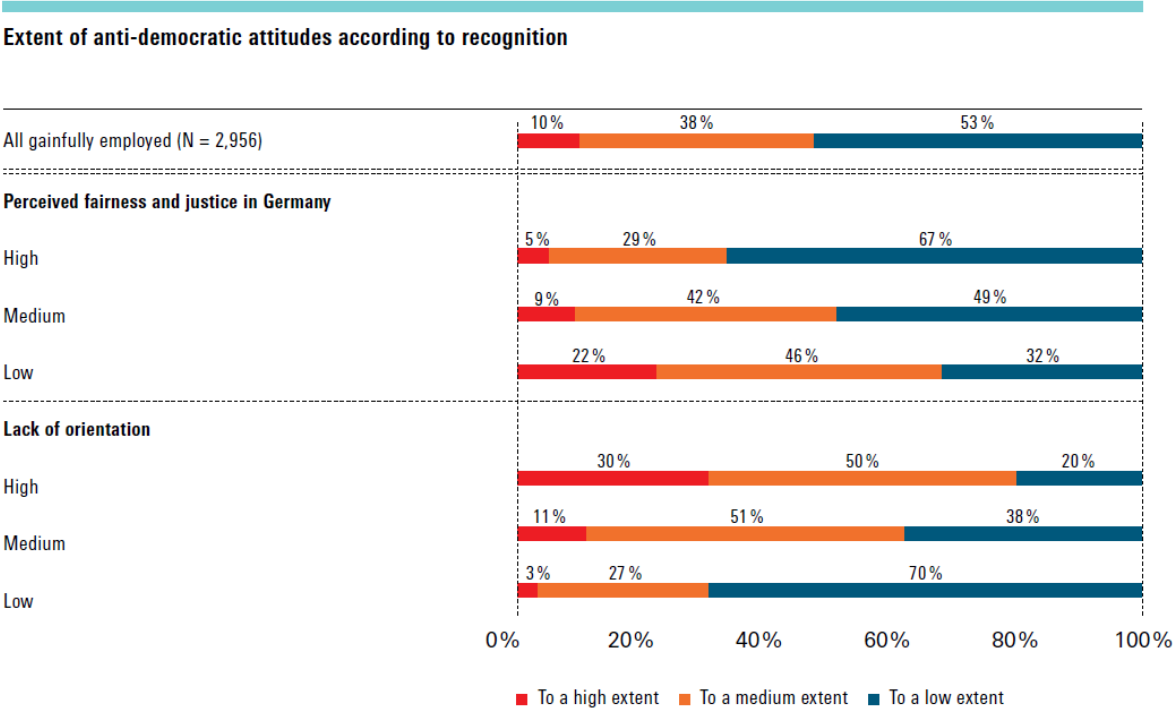
## Extent of anti-democratic attitudes according to life circumstances



Remarks: Only gainfully employed (N = 2,956)

# Political integration & anti-democratic attitudes

Figure 6



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***DEPRIVED SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IS NOT ONLY ASSOCIATED WITH LESSER POLITICAL INTEGRATION BUT ALSO WITH MORE AGREEMENT TO ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN GERMANY***

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## **2. CURRENT SITUATION:**

# **WAR IN UKRAINE, ENERGY-CRISIS AND RIGHT-WING POPULIST ATTITUDES**

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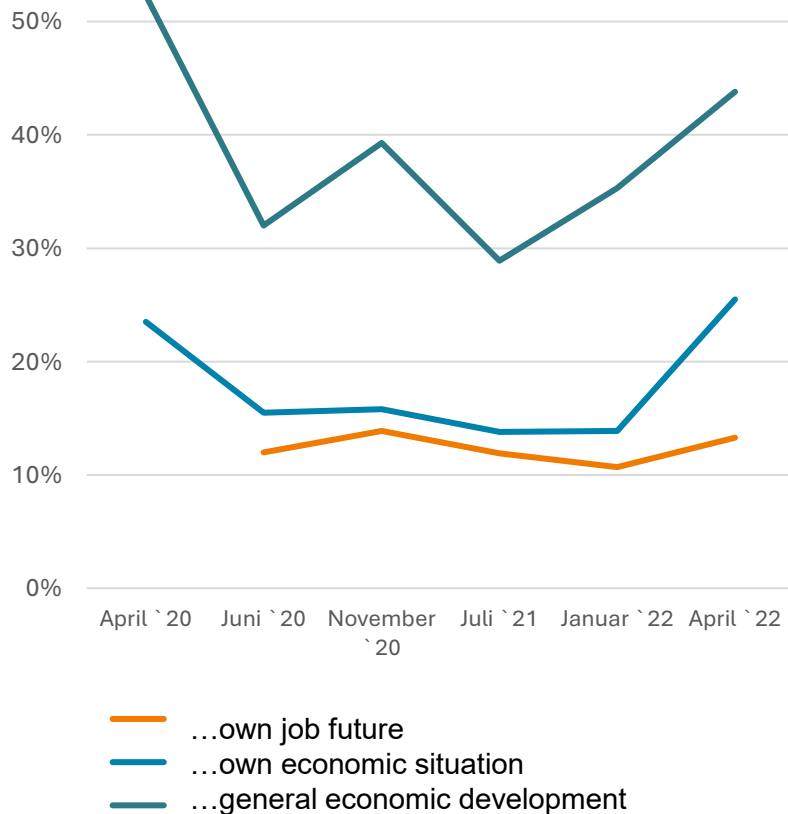
## Data: WSI's labor force panel

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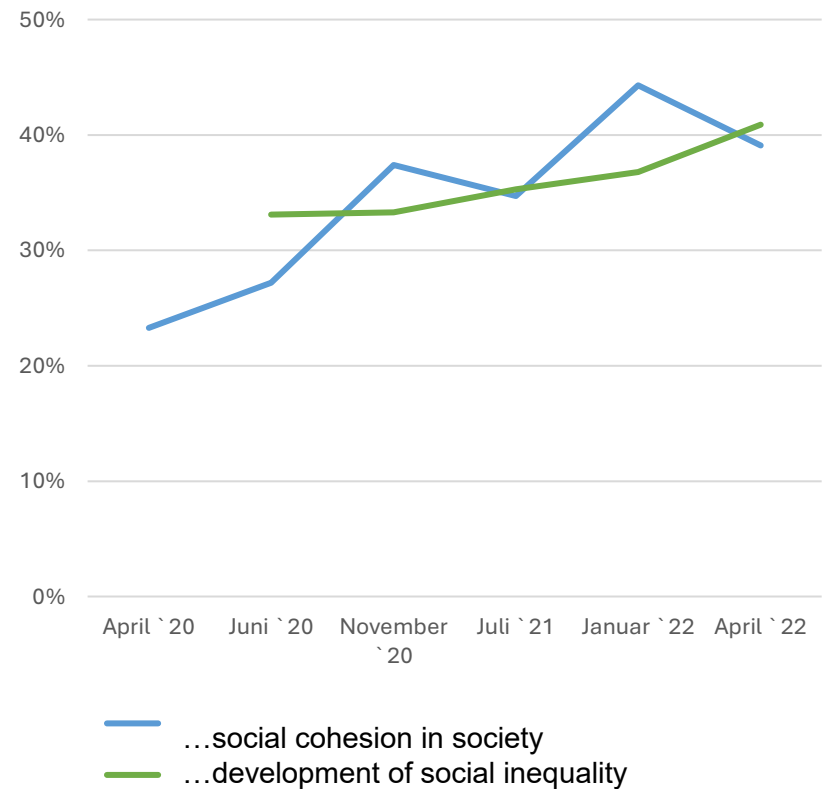
- Key objective: how does the German labor force cope with the crises? Target population: working population & unemployed. Started at the beginning of the pandemic
- Panel-Study: the same persons were asked online repeatedly (N=7.500 – 5.000 depending on wave), by now for 8x between April '20 and April '22 – 9<sup>th</sup> wave currently in the field

# Financial and societal worries rising recently

share of respondents that are very worried about...

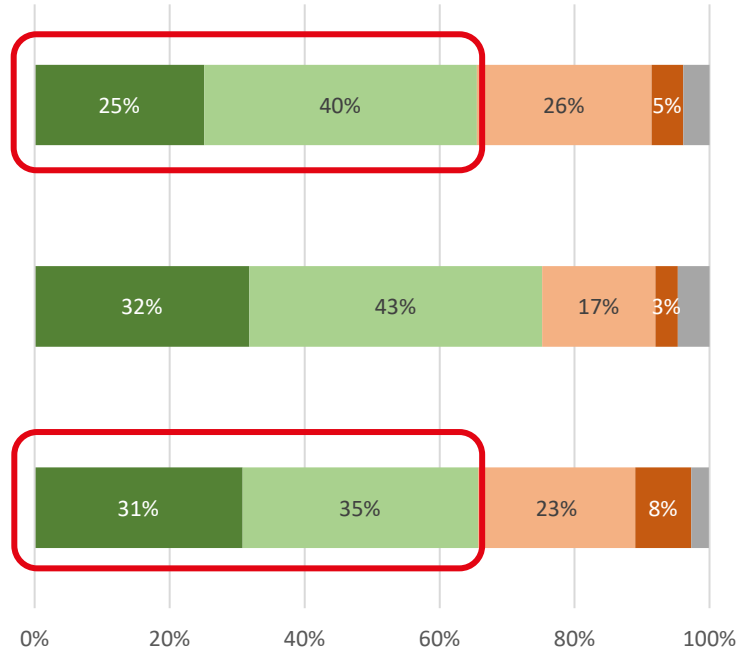


share of respondents that are very worried about...

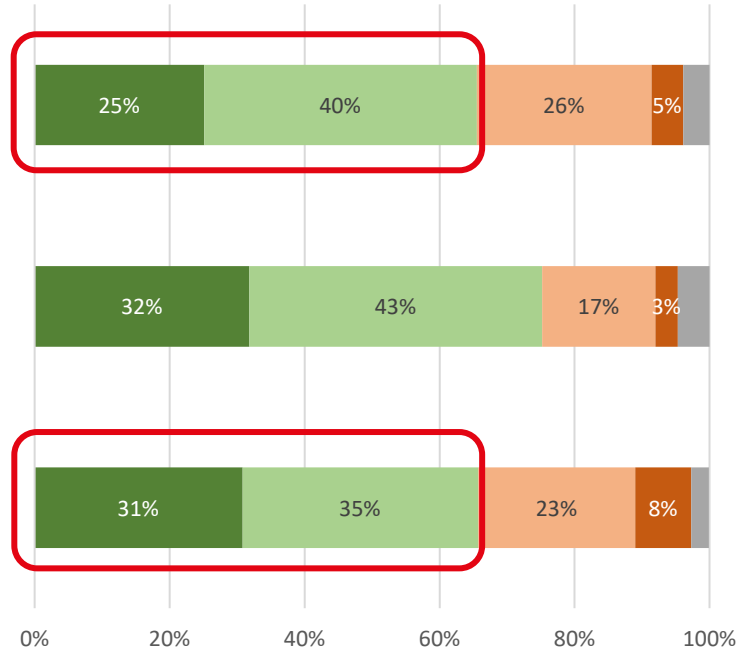


# Widespread feeling of social injustice; many feel „abandoned“

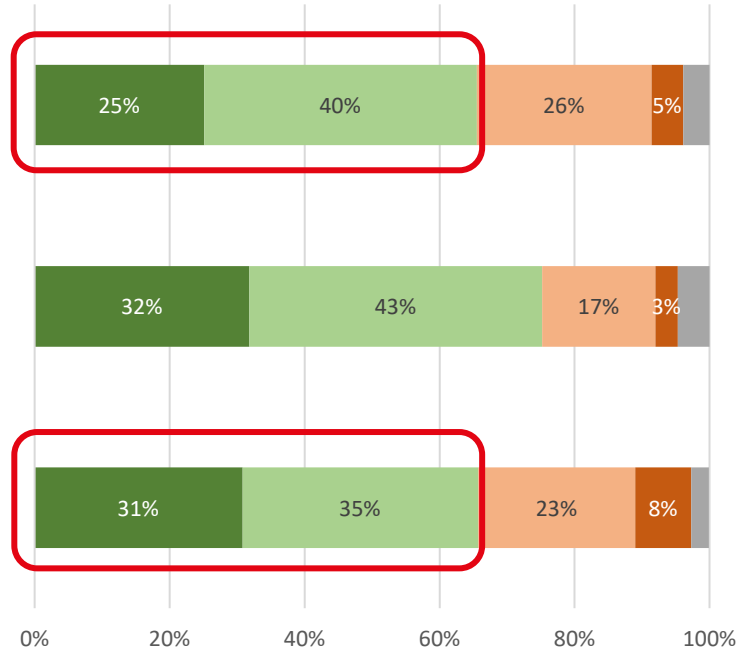
I fear society is drifting so far apart that it is in danger of breaking apart.



I fear that the distribution of income in Germany will become more unequal as a result of the war in Ukraine.



I don't feel that I have enough financial support from the state.

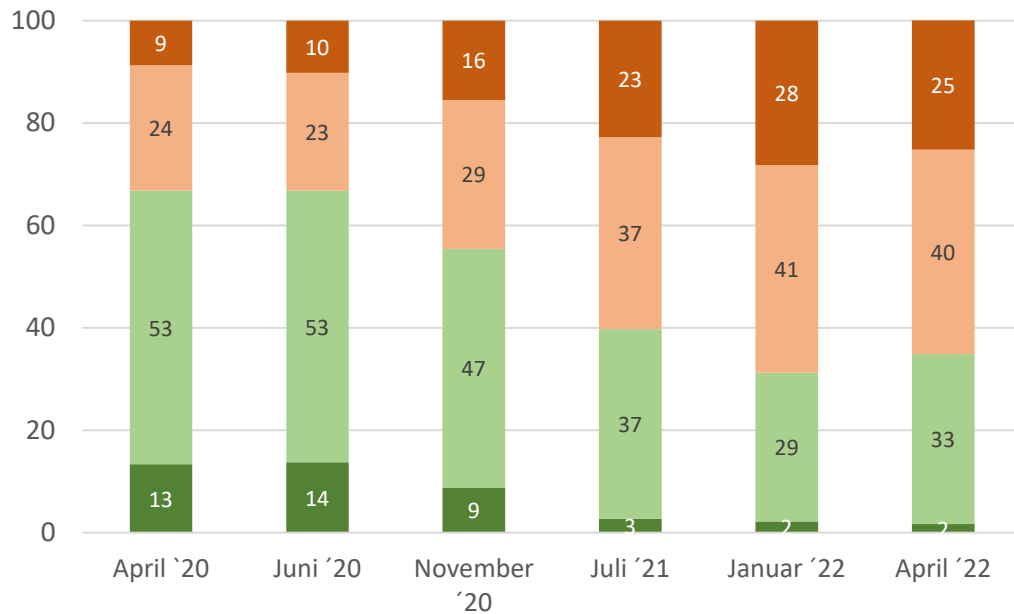


- fully agree
- rather agree
- rather not agree
- fully disagree
- don't know

Welle 8 - April 2022, N=6.234, gewichtete Werte

# Indications of rising political alienation during pandemic

development of content with pandemic  
crisis management of German  
administration



- very content
- content
- less content
- not content at all

# Anti-democratic dynamics against the backdrop of the energy-crisis, inflation, rising number of Ukrainian refugees

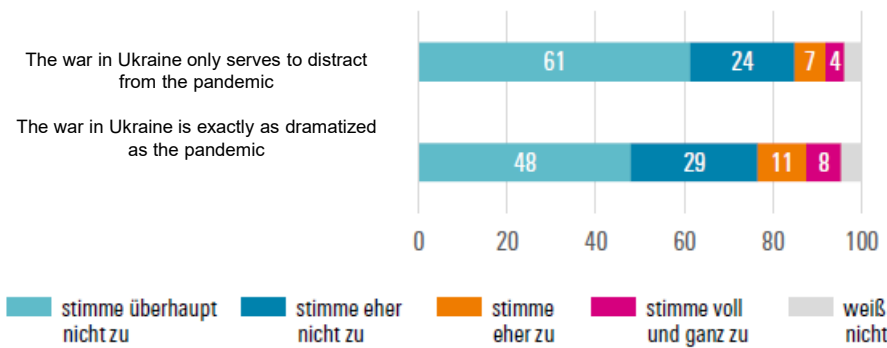
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- How does rise in financial worries and political alienation impact anti-democratic attitudes and what is to expect when the energy-crisis aggravates in the coming winter? (destabilizing effects of uncertainty, loss of control, competition)

# Focus on devaluating attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees and conspiracy myths about the war in Ukraine as form of expression of anti-democratic, right-wing populist attitudes

Abbildung 1

Operationalization of conspiracy myths:  
agreement in %

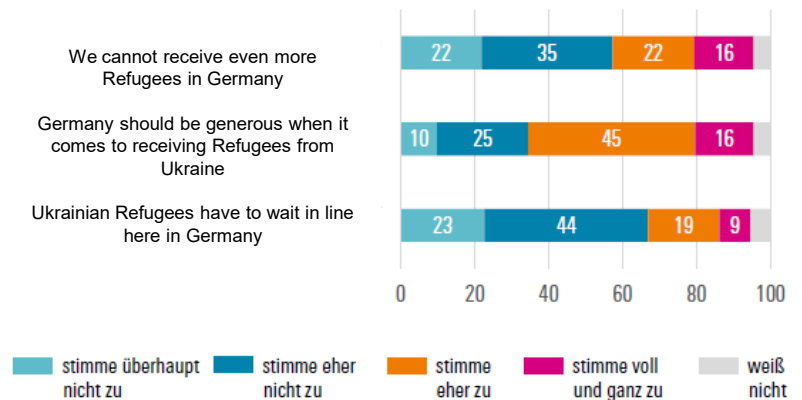


Quelle: HBS-Erwerbspersonenbefragung 2022, Welle 8 (N = 6.234)



Abbildung 3

Operationalization of devaluation of Refugees from Ukraine  
agreement in %



Quelle: HBS-Erwerbspersonenbefragung 2022, Welle 8 (N = 6.234)

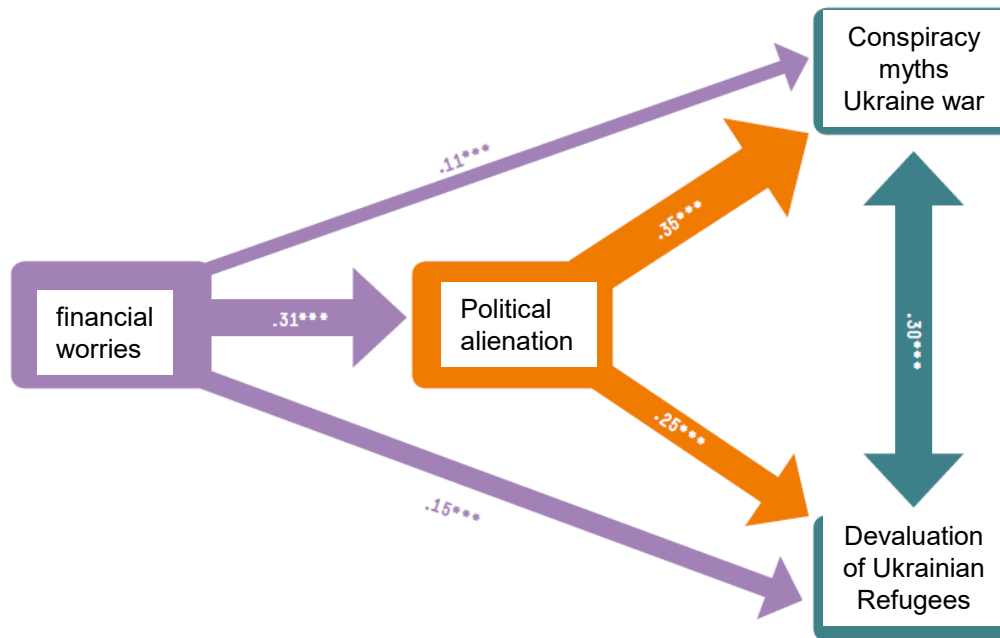


# What's the role of financial worries and political alienation for right-wing populist attitudes?

Abbildung 25

postulated Model of worries, political alienation and conspiracy myths und devaluation of Ukrainian Refugees:

controlled for sociodemographic factors: sex, age, income, educational level. \*\*\*:  $p < .001$



Quelle: HBS-Erwerbspersonenbefragung 2022, Welle 8 (N = 4.975)

WSI

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***CONSPIRACY MYTHS AND DESOLIDARIZATION  
PROCESSES ARE PARTICULARLY COMPATIBLE IN  
TIMES OF CRISES – WHEN OWN FINANCIAL  
SECURITIES ARE CHALLENGED***

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# Conclusion

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- general finding:
  - **disadvantage** in Germany appears strongly **associated with less political integration** → consequence: less representation, more turning back on established politics;
  - **instead** many turn to **illiberal anti-democratic alternatives** → more anti-democratic, right-wing populist attitudes.
- more recently:
  - **rise of political alienation** during pandemic: loss of faith in politics that they are capable of solving the overwhelming problems
  - in current energy-crises, many are **financially highly worried** and **feel abandonend** (too less state support for them)
  - widespread **feeling of injustice**: social inequality hardly acceptable anymore
    - given that inflation is here to stay and more might be financially insecure, this combination poses a **real danger for further societal destabilization** as right-wing positions are highly compatible with the Disappointed and the Insecure.

## 4 Implications for current situation

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1. **financial relief** is urgently necessary – especially for the Disadvantaged → counteract pressing insecurities
2. **Inequality must be tackled** – be it through excess profit or wealth taxes. Feelings of injustice very present.
3. challenging issue of **communicating politics**: providing securities while not promising too much; Heitmeyer: "Political lectures don't compare to social experiences." Perceived inequality, real financial hardship, and feelings of being left alone go against the promises of many politicians.
4. **Democratic civil society is demanded**: dissatisfaction and often justified worries need to be channeled democratically – compatible with democratic constitutional order; protest potential cannot be left to radical right & conspiracy groups who are already mobilizing and who can fall back on recently established protest structures.

# THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

**WSI**  
Institute of Economic and  
Social Research

The WSI is an institute of  
the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung

## POLICY BRIEF

No. 66, January 2022

### ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES

The influence of work, digital transformation and climate change

Andreas Hövermann, Bettina Kohlrausch and Dorothea Voss

When anti-democratic attitudes find great popular acclaim, it is time to sit up and take notice: people are turning away from the democratic system and no longer put their trust in the political and social rules and instances that organise and structure societal coexistence. As a result, social cohesion and the acceptance of democratic decisions come under increasing pressure. And yet a stable democracy is particularly important at a time in which the "three Ds" – decarbonisation, digitalisation, demography – are challenging German society and triggering change.

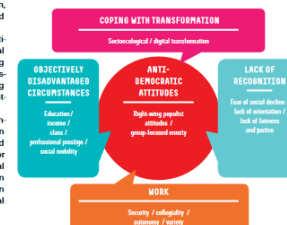
So how widespread are anti-democratic attitudes and how is the connection between social circumstances and democratic integration during times of announced and actual change processes? How do perceptions and experience resulting from gained employment influence anti-democratic attitudes?

We have taken the evaluations of a representative public opinion poll to show that people in objectively precarious circumstances are denied access to opportunities for participation and for shaping their own lives also in view of external changes. Subjective perception also plays a role in anti-democratic attitudes: the lack of recognition is experienced as devaluation of one's own social and professional status.

Anti-democratic attitudes are also closely linked to the fear and experience of getting left behind by social change processes such as digital or socioecological transformation.

Figure 1

Schematic representation of issues closely linked with anti-democratic attitudes



**WSI**  
Wirtschafts- und Sozial-  
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Hans-Böckler-Stiftung

## REPORT

Nr. 78, September 2022

### VERSCHWÖRUNGSDENKEN UND DIE ABWERTUNG UKRAINE-GEFLÜCHTETER IN DER SICH ZUSPITZENDEN ENERGIEKRISE

Analysen anhand des Erwerbepersonenpanels der Hans-Böckler-Stiftung

Andreas Hövermann

#### AUF EINEN BLICK

Der vorliegende Report analysiert anhand von Befragungsdaten des HBS-Erwerbepersonenpanels (N=6.234) vom April/Mai 2022 vor dem Hintergrund des Kriegs in der Ukraine und der sich zuspitzenden Energiekrise Ausprägungen rechtspopulistischer Einstellungen in Deutschland. Hierzu wird auf das Verschwörungdenken und die Abwertung von geflüchteten Ukrainer\*innen fokussiert.

Die Analysen zeigen hohe Zusammenhänge zwischen den beiden Phänomenen und größere Zustimmungsraten unter Befragten jüngerer Alters sowie unter Befragten mit niedrigem Schulabschluss oder geringem Haushaltseinkommen;

jedoch auch, dass die Phänomene keineswegs ausschließlich in diesen Populationen verortet werden können. Analysen früherer Einstellungen der Befragten ergeben, dass viele Zustimmung auch zuvor Verschwörungsdanken mit Bezug zur Pandemie teilten und gegen den Regierungskurs aufbegehren.

Finanzielle Sorgen und Belastungen sowie ein geringes Vertrauen in politische Institutionen erweisen sich schließlich als hochrelevante Erklärungsfaktoren, die in Kombination einen bedeutenden Wirkmechanismus in der aktuellen Krise darstellen.