

## Press release

### **“Society doesn’t really care about people like me”**

#### **Survey: People who feel disadvantaged feel threatened by migrants and are more likely than others to vote AfD – Cluster of Excellence investigates what drives societal cleavages**

**Münster, 4 February 2021 (exc)** People who perceive their own social group as disadvantaged are more dissatisfied with democracy than others, tend to see migrants as a threat, and are more likely to vote for the AfD. These are the findings of a study from the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster. “Our analyses show that especially older people with a lower level of education in more rural regions feel disadvantaged and have the feeling that society doesn’t really care about people like them”, explain psychologists Mitja Back and principal investigator Michael Bollwerk. The study will be published in the “European Journal of Psychological Assessment”.

“Social conflicts and the associated rise of right-wing populist parties have noticeably increased in recent years in the wake of advancing globalization”, they explain. While some of the population benefit from modernization, others feel that it disadvantages them. In order to explore what characterizes people who feel excluded and the social spheres in which these feelings arise, they conducted interviews with associations and carried out two large online surveys.

A good 2,500 people took part in the online surveys from August to November 2019, the aim being to develop an empirically sound questionnaire to measure Perceived Societal Marginalization. The questionnaire is being used in a large interdisciplinary research project of the Cluster of Excellence on threat, belonging, and the acceptance of democracy in Europe. The project, which has the subtitle “A new religious line of conflict in Europe?”, is being conducted by the sociologists of religion Detlef Pollack and Olaf Müller, the political scientist Bernd Schlipphak, and the psychologists Gerald Echterhoff and Mitja Back. They plan to present the results of the representative survey in European countries in mid-2021.

#### **Standardized tool to measure disadvantage**

The results of the representative survey are being analyzed in three sub-projects at the Cluster of Excellence: psychologists Mitja Back and Gerald Echterhoff are assessing widespread feelings of threat from foreign groups and working out factors in the emergence of such feelings; sociologists of religion Detlef Pollack and Olaf Müller are dealing with ideas and feelings of collective and political belonging; and political scientist Bernd Schlipphak is investigating how feelings of threat and ideas of belonging influence the acceptance of democratic government.

“With our current sub-study, we want to contribute to a better understanding of societal discontent”, says psychologist Mitja Back. This is particularly important in times of increased uncertainty due to societal crises such as the current corona pandemic, when, for example, conspiracy theories are becoming more popular. “We can also analyze for the first time whether economic, cultural and political aspects of the perception of marginalization have different influences on fundamental political and social attitudes”, Bernd Schlipphak explains.

The questionnaire provides a standardized tool for measuring feelings of disadvantage in the population. The researchers are currently working on studies that focus on the effect of Perceived Societal Marginalization on attitudes towards democracy and populism in different countries. Future studies will analyze the developmental conditions of feelings of disadvantage, and examine the extent to which Perceived Societal Marginalization is related to actual behaviour, such as participating in demonstrations organized by those espousing conspiracy theories. (exc/vvm)

**Publication:** Bollwerk, M., Schlipphak, B., & Back, M. D. (in press). Development and validation of the perceived societal marginalization scale. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*.

**Preprint:** <https://psyarxiv.com/3u8hn/>

**Caption:** Michael Bollwerk (photo: private ), Prof. Dr. Bernd Schlipphak (photo: WWU - Benedikt Weischer), Prof. Dr. Mitja Back (photo: private)

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#### **The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”**

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation” has been investigating since 2007 the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change, with their focus being above all on the paradox that religions often develop their innovative potential precisely by drawing on their traditions. The researchers concentrate on the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and on their polytheistic precursors. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, North and Latin America. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025.