

“Muslims in Germany” study: State-propagated racism under the guise of science

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For two weeks, the state premier of Hesse, Roland Koch (Christian Democratic Party—CDU), has centred his election campaign on attacking foreigners and demanding harsher penalties and quicker deportations for young foreign offenders. Koch began this campaign in an interview with the news magazine *Focus*, by suggesting that the burqa—the full-body robe worn by Muslim women—be prohibited in schools, despite the fact it is not worn by a single schoolgirl in the entire state.

In the tabloid newspaper *Bild*, Koch escalated his campaign even further, demanding adherence to traditional “German values” such as discipline, order and diligence. In the same breath, Koch implied that all foreigners, Muslims in particular, were unhygienic because they “slaughter ?animals? in the kitchen and do not dispose of waste properly.” Koch’s racist demagoguery immediately called to mind National Socialist leader Joseph Goebbels’ tirade on “maintaining the purity of the German race.”

The witch-hunt of Muslims, however, is far from being simply an election campaign tactic. Far more significant are Koch’s demands for harsher penalties, deportations and increased state control and surveillance, which not only represent sharp attacks on the democratic rights of immigrants and refugees, but also those of the entire population.

These demands were also made clear in a study presented in December last year by Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) in Berlin. Anyone who thought the neutral title of the report—“Muslims in Germany”—meant it would provide a balanced analysis of the social and cultural situation facing Muslims in Germany would have been sorely disappointed.

The scope of the study, undertaken by Hamburger criminologists Katrin Brettfeld and Peter Wetzels, and commissioned by the interior ministry, was to investigate the potential risk of Muslims for “politically and religiously motivated violence.” Muslims were thereby placed under the general suspicion not only of tolerating terrorist suicide attacks in Germany, but also of planning and executing them.

This line of argument was highlighted by Schäuble in the first sentence of his preface to the study, in which he writes, “Dear readers, worldwide Islamic terrorism is today one of the biggest dangers posed to our security.” For Schäuble, whether “Islamic terrorism” indeed operates “worldwide” is not the point; the intention of the study is to fan the flames of hysteria. Schäuble makes a direct connection between terrorist attacks and German Muslims. He warns of “Islamic terror attacks arising from the centre of our society” and the “phenomena of the growth of home-grown terrorism.”

Schäuble laid particular emphasis on the fact that the study was not just about “terrorism” and “politically motivated violence,” but also uncovered their “initial forms, the potential reservoir for recruitment” of “Islamic extremism,” which “has developed into a serious potential for political radicalisation in Germany.”

Based on the findings of the study, Schäuble demands that “the radicalisation process be recognised early on,” which amounts to a call for

the massive strengthening of the security services.

This interpretation by Schäuble was repeated throughout the press. Statistics were taken out of context and simply published without further question. For example, it was reported that 40 percent of respondents to the Muslim study identified themselves as having a religious fundamentalist orientation; that 14 percent of respondents had a low regard for democratic principles and at the same time accepted politically and religiously motivated violence; and that half of the young people asked agreed with the statement: “Muslims who die for their beliefs in the armed struggle go to paradise.”

The authors themselves share a similar position, viewing a general acceptance of violence by young Muslims as forming susceptibility for political agitation and as “the decisive basis for recruitment” for politically and religiously motivated violence.

The 500-page study was originally commissioned in 2004 by Otto Schily, the former interior minister from the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the SPD-Green Party federal government. The intention of the study was clear: to place blanket suspicion on all Muslims for having the potential to carry out terrorist attacks in Germany in order to legitimise increased state surveillance and an expansion of police powers.

This was underlined in the very selection of Muslim respondents. Alongside a survey of Muslims under 18 years of age and school pupils, another survey was carried out of Muslim students, who were to serve as the predominant stereotype of “terrorist sleepers” at German universities.

The major fault in this study was that its methodological approach inevitably leads to artificial conclusions. In this regard, the predetermined categories of questions concerning integration, religious orientation, rejection of democracy and acceptance of violence are highly questionable.

For example, a lack of integration was concluded if respondents agreed with the statement, “Foreigners in Germany should retain their own culture.” Integration as here defined is seen as a deficit on the part of immigrants, who should adapt to “German mainstream culture.” This underlines that a principal division is being drawn between the “culture of the country of origin” and the “culture of the adopted country.” As a consequence, the researchers assume the existence and validity of a single, homogenous, ethnic-national culture, in the process sweeping aside differences between social classes and layers.

The assessment of religiosity is likewise based on apparently strange questions and reckless constructions. On the questions of the rule of law, only 10 percent of those polled said they would support Sharia (Islamic) law, while around one third supported the death penalty. On the basis of just two questions, Brettfeld and Wetzels draw the far-reaching and malicious conclusion that a “democratic deficiency” exists among Muslims. This rejection of democratic principles has been widely exaggerated by the media and politicians based on the line of questioning in the study. But this does not prevent the authors from concluding that there exists a significant authoritarian-Islamic milieu within Germany.

When reading this paragraph in the study, one cannot help but ask what is the concept of democracy of Germany's interior and justice ministers, in view of their constant attacks on democratic rights. These include attacks on the right to strike, as witnessed in the train drivers' strike; the searching of journalists' offices; and the spying on journalists by the police and secret services. And has Schäuble not also declared on more than one occasion that he would accept the use of torture under certain circumstances? The "democratic deficiency" of the ruling elite is not only of a greater dimension, it threatens the rights of the entire population.

The final questions about politically and religiously motivated violence also employ dubious methods and sleight of hand, through which the apparent risk of extremist and violent Muslims is exaggerated. For example, respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement, "The threat to Islam by the Western world justifies Muslims defending themselves with violence." In light of the illegal war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, it is hardly surprising that nearly 40 percent agreed with this statement.

The defects of the study are littered throughout all the topics questioned in the survey and are repeated in the survey of school pupils and students. This is not a coincidence, but serves the purpose of pillorying Muslims. The study actually lends itself to completely contrary conclusions, when one reads between the lines and is not swayed by the interpretation of the authors and the study's commissioners in the interior ministry.

For example, the survey reveals an extremely low level of education and qualification among Muslims, even though nearly 50 percent of those questioned were younger than 14 years old at the time they came to Germany and subsequently passed through the German education system. Around half of respondents only had a basic high school certificate, with the 12 percent having a university degree forming a clear minority.

In this regard, the findings of the study clearly show how far the German federal and state governments have socially marginalised migrants and created ghettos through their constant cuts in social programmes.

Furthermore, respondents also reported their widespread experiences with discrimination and racist attacks in Germany. More than anything else, Muslims in Germany feel that they are excluded from many areas of society. They are used primarily as cheap labour in industry and for performing basic jobs in the service sector. At the same time, access is barred to higher qualifications and education.

A significant part of the supposed "Islamic authoritarian attitudes" found by the study are drawn from precisely these negative experiences of social and economic marginalisation.

As a whole, the study massively distorts the positions of Muslims in Germany on religion, democracy and violence. In reality, only a small number of the study's participants hold radical, fundamentalist views and accept politically and religiously motivated violence, a number that totals far less than the 6 percent claimed by the study.

Who bears political responsibility for the fact that a section of Muslim immigrants, in light of the social crisis and their marginalisation, turn to religion?

Here, the trade unions and Social Democratic Party have played an important role. These bureaucracies primarily regard foreign workers as exercising a downward pressure on wages in Germany, in opposition to the national interests of the German workforces. These chauvinist views are expressed today in the xenophobic attitudes of a significant section of the trade union apparatus, as revealed in a study released one year ago.

Under conditions of economic decline, the SPD too quickly joined in the xenophobic campaign of the conservative parties. In 1993, it passed the so-called "asylum compromise" legislation, which sought to essentially abolish the right to asylum in Germany. And the SPD and its Green Party federal coalition partners passed laws to further restrict immigration as well as a series of anti-terror measures, which targeted Muslims and placed them under the general suspicion of supporting terrorism.

The attacks from the SPD camp on Roland Koch and the CDU, whether by former chancellor Gerhard Schröder, SPD Chairman Kurt Beck or General Secretary Hubertus Heil, are utterly hollow. The same can be said of the criticisms made by the Left Party, whose chairman, ex-SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine, has a record of campaigning against foreign workers, regurgitating the slogans of the trade union bureaucracy from the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the Left Party-SPD state government in Berlin continues to deport convicted foreigners in an effort to dispel any inference that it is too lenient towards violent criminals.

Muslims in Germany are completely alienated politically and also have to cope with a racist witch-hunt, which has increased continually ever since the September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington. Muslims as a whole are routinely associated with the enforced wearing of headscarves, honour killings, arranged marriages and violent criminality.

The ruling elite in the worlds of politics, the media and academia are systematically attempting to divert attention away from the social crisis and class tensions, instead expounding on a "war of cultures." This could be seen in the article by historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler in the *Die Zeit* newsweekly about a "Turkish problem," due to the fact that the "Muslim minority has proven itself incapable of assimilation." Writer Botho Strauß warned in *Der Spiegel* of the "Islamification of the West" and implicitly called for a crusade and fight against Muslim minorities in Western countries.

The study "Muslims in Germany" has now given new impetus to this demagoguery. Even though the authors have subsequently called for a more differentiated view to be taken on the results of their study, they are nevertheless directly responsible for the fact that the study has provided new fuel to the likes of Koch and Schäuble. This Muslim-baiting has since been joined by the interior ministers of Lower Saxony, Uwe Schünemann (CDU), and of Bavaria, Joachim Herrmann (Christian Social Union), who demand that all Muslims living in Germany must sign a "declaration renouncing violence."



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