

German government study promotes campaign against immigrant communities

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At the end of February, the German Interior Ministry published a study entitled “Young Muslims in Germany”. The study’s publication has become the occasion for a renewed campaign against immigrant communities in Germany. The tabloid *Bild* newspaper published a distorted report of some of the study results, labelling Muslims as “opposed to integration”, vilifying them as hostile to democracy and implying them to be potential terrorists.

Bild refers to a “shocking study”, citing statistics according to which 22 percent of Muslims with a German passport reject integration and emphasise their own cultural origins. For Muslims without a German passport, as many as 48 percent expressed strong “separatist tendencies”. Moreover, a quarter of non-German Muslims, according to the study, are “very religious with a strong dislike of the West, tend to accept violence and do not support integration.”

These figures, taken completely out of context, are then peppered with a quote from Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (Christian Social Union—CSU), who told the press: “Germany respects the cultural identity and origins of its immigrants. But we do not accept the import of authoritarian, anti-democratic and fanatical religious views. Those who oppose freedom and democracy have no future here. It is the task of everyone to make this clear.”

The spokesman of the Christian Democratic parliamentary faction, Hans-Peter Uhl (CSU), then added in comments to the *Neuen Osnabrücker*, “This refusal to integrate must not become the breeding ground for religious fanaticism and terrorism.”

This deliberate political campaign seeks to limit the study’s findings to that which can be exploited for the dissemination of xenophobic sentiments. In fact, the 750-page report provides a much more nuanced picture. The fact that the researchers are critical of the government’s integration policy is being swept under the carpet.

The study was commissioned by Wolfgang Schäuble, the former interior minister (CDU), in early 2009. This was allegedly due to concerns of a radicalisation of Muslims in Germany. This in turn was linked to the presentation by politicians and the press of a series of murders of Turkish citizens in Germany allegedly connected to the activities of Turkish criminals or radical Islamists. In fact, it emerged that

the killings had been carried out by a neo-fascist gang, the “Sauerland group”, which had been able to carry out its crimes for more than a decade—although the group and its activities were well known to the German intelligence forces.

For Schäuble, the purpose of the study was mainly to present arguments supporting the thesis that Muslims were potential terrorists, who by nature are “undemocratic”, radical fundamentalists. It is clear that its remit was only to look at the attitudes of Muslims, and not to consider social circumstances, as Klaus Böhnke, one of the authors of the study, told the online edition of the magazine *Cicero*.

The team of researchers from Jena, Bremen, Linz and Weimar finally commissioned to undertake the work for the Interior Ministry consisted of communication and social psychologists whose previous scientific studies dealt with terrorism, religious fanaticism and political extremism, but who had no expertise in research on migration and social inequality.

More surprising is that the team led by Prof. Wolfgang Frindte of the University of Jena chose a broad methodological approach and held open discussions with multi-generational households of Muslims, and in various Muslim communities. However, the standardised telephone survey, whose results have now caused the fuss in the media, was completely in line with the remit of the study.

This part of the study shows glaring deficiencies that were uncovered by the research project “Heimat” at Humboldt University in Berlin. At this point, it is important to consider in more detail the researchers’ use of the term “radicalisation” of young people. They define it as follows:

Those “(Muslim) persons or organisations can be considered radical who are looking for profound social and political changes in Germany, but who at least respect the current political and legal system of the Federal Republic [of Germany], and who do not undertake any illegal or violent actions or sanction them.”

Quite apart from the inconsistency between the desire for “profound changes” and the simultaneous “respect for the political system”, such a definition would probably apply to a large majority of the population. But how was this “radicalism” then captured in the telephone interviews? Respondents were presented with statements with which they could agree or

reject. For example, they were presented with the statement: “As long as the Western world exploits other peoples or suppresses them there will be no peace in the world.” It is difficult to see how anyone could fail to agree with this proposition.

Respondents were branded as anti-Semitic if they expressed criticism of Israel and agreed with the statement: “Israel alone is to blame for the emergence and maintenance of the conflicts in the Middle East.” Not a single question, however, focused on existential issues such as education, income, living and working conditions, residency status or discrimination by state authorities.

Here, the researchers clearly have taken over the views held by the Interior Ministry. And it is these passages of the study that were given to *Bild* newspaper and presented in a subsequent Ministry press release to the public.

What has been ignored, however, are the conclusions drawn by the researchers as a result of their open discussions with migrants and which diametrically contradict the figures cited in the report. For example, in the middle of the data collection in late summer 2010, the debate about the book by the right-winger Thilo Sarrazin erupted, which gave the researchers the dubious good fortune of seizing the consequences for Muslim migrants. They came to the very clear conclusion that the discussion has been by no means beneficial for integration, as claimed by the German integration commissioner, Maria Böhmer (CDU), but had mainly repelled Muslims, who felt unwanted and expressed fear and disappointment.

In the final policy recommendations, the scientists explicitly speak in favour of creating structural conditions that grant migrants equal rights. Integration is not the obligation of migrants, but a “challenge to mainstream society”. Permanent discrimination, the equating of Islam with terrorism, exclusion and denial of belonging would lead Muslim youth to seek other forms of identity, turning towards religious and authoritarian views.

On the basis of these statements, the authors of the report have been largely ignored since the publication of the study. According to Klaus Böhnke, the study was already complete and delivered to the ministry in the summer of 2011. In November 2011, the Ministry announced a joint press conference, which was then cancelled suddenly on February 27, 2012.

Two days later, *Bild* published its article on the “shocking study”, including an official statement by Interior Minister Friedrich. At this time, the study was publicly available. Clearly, the exact results of the study were leaked to the tabloid, to be exploited for a sensationalist campaign against Muslims.

Politicians from the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), a member of the coalition government, expressed criticism regarding the publication of the study. They questioned its methodology and

reasoning, and accused Friedrich of populism.

But the claim of the SPD’s integration commissioner, Aydan Özuguz, to deal “seriously with the causes of segregation and violence”, or the complaint of Volker Beck (Green Party) that Muslims are only judged “in relation to security matters”, are not serious.

It was the SPD that in 1993 agreed on the so-called asylum compromise with the Christian Democrats, by which refugees were indiscriminately accused of having “immigrated to Germany for the welfare system”. And it was the SPD-Green government that systematically curtailed the democratic rights of migrants after September 11, 2001, and viewed Muslims as potential terrorists. In Berlin, until recently, the reigning SPD-Left Party city government boasted that it systematically deported “criminal aliens”.

These parties support a government policy that aims to mobilise the dregs of society by means of chauvinism and xenophobia. It is no coincidence that Friedrich now garners applause from the far right. The chair of the ultra-right Republikaner party, Rolf Schlierer, congratulated the minister with the words: “It is high time after weeks of artificial hysteria ‘against the right’, that the real threat to internal cohesion and peaceful coexistence in our state is at last placed on the political agenda”.

Barely one week has passed since leaders of the German political establishment publicly expressed their sympathy for the victims of the neo-Nazi terrorist cell in Zwickau. The actions of these neo-Nazis had taken place for years under the eyes of, and quite possibly with the active support of, the secret service and law enforcement agencies, whose employer is the federal interior minister. The anti-democratic and authoritarian methods of the police and intelligence agencies are, however, to be excluded from public debate. Instead, a dubious scientific study has once again triggered a debate on integration, which is nothing more than a smear campaign against migrants living and working in Germany.



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