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Press Release

“Taking the Pulse of the Country:” Anti-Semitic, Anti-Zionist and Pro-Palestinian Attitudes in Germany

In the latest installment of the series "Taking the Pulse of the Country," Mannheim professors Dr. Marc Helbling and Dr. Richard Traunmüller investigate the connections between longstanding anti-Semitic sentiments, anti-Zionist beliefs, and pro-Palestinian attitudes across various age groups, political affiliations, and educational backgrounds in Germany.

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, there has been a considerable up-tick in anti-Israel demonstrations across Germany. How to effectively respond to anti-Israel viewpoints at rallies, on social media, and in public discourse is a contentious issue within German society. In light of these events, the German Internet Panel (GIP) has analyzed the social segments in which anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, and pro-Palestinian attitudes are significantly widespread. A total of 3,702 participants from Germany were surveyed as part of the study conducted in January of this year.

Traditional Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism

Evidence indicates that conventional anti-Semitic beliefs remain clearly noticeable within German society. For instance, 8 % of the population in Germany appears to hold the belief that Jews are “more driven by financial interests” than other groups. About 13 % of people tend to support the claim that Jews have “too significant an impact on global affairs.” The number of people who feel that Jews “bring up the Holocaust merely to promote their political agenda” is even more significant at 18 %. While traditional anti-Semitism specifically targets Jews as a group, anti-Zionist anti-Semitism critiques the actions of the Israeli state and assigns collective blame to Jewish people for those actions. Anti-Zionist rhetoric often masquerades as “criticism of the state of Israel,” a tactic that is frequently employed to obscure its true intent.

Notably, anti-Zionist and anti-Israel statements also resonate with parts of the population. In spite of this, there is a remarkably strong consensus within German society that Israel has the undeniable right to exist as a nation-state, serving as “a homeland for the Jewish people.” A total of 82 % of participants agreed with this statement. 86 % of respondents agreed that the state of Israel has the right to defend itself against those who wish to

destroy it. Furthermore, participants overwhelmingly rejected the notion that Palestinian terrorists should be viewed as “freedom fighters,” with only approximately six percent in favor of this notion.

Differences of Opinion Between Different Groups

The findings from the GIP indicate that traditional anti-Semitic attitudes are most prevalent among those over 65 years old who identify as right-leaning and do not hold a college degree, with an average score of 2.7 on a 1 to 5 scale. Individuals under the age of 35 who consider themselves to be on the political left exhibit the lowest levels of anti-Semitism, with an average score of 1.4. Similarly, young people with a university degree have fewer anti-Semitic prejudices than their non-degree holding peers.

The impact of age, political ideology, and educational level on anti-Semitic sentiments centered around anti-Zionism is negligible and rather small, with average scores ranging from 1.8 to 2.0.

Pro-Palestinian Attitudes

Among younger people who consider themselves politically left-leaning, a significant distinguishing factor compared to other groups is their fervent pro-Palestinian stance, demonstrated by a mean score of 3.3 on a scale of 1 to 5. Findings from the survey indicate that the largest variances in perspective on Palestine are found within the same generations, not across different ones. In comparison to their left-leaning counterparts, right-leaning individuals under the age of 35 demonstrate a considerably lower level of support for the Palestinian side, with an average score of 2.6.

Furthermore, young, educated individuals with leftist views tend to be the most receptive to severe criticism of Israel, a phenomenon the authors attribute in part to a strong pro-Palestinian sentiment. The prevailing sentiment within the German populace demonstrates a strong support for Israel's right to exist, as only 35 % and 26 % of respondent, respectively, would condone remarks that reject this right on social media or at rallies calling for such actions.

Overall, there is little evidence to suggest that pro-Palestinian attitudes are linked to traditional anti-Semitism. The overall correlation for the entire population is quite low at 0.07, while for left-leaning individuals with a university education, it is virtually absent at -0.04.

“German society as a whole tends to hold pro-Palestinian views that are largely free from traditional anti-Jewish sentiments.” The researchers assert that while some extreme activist factions may use anti-Semitic rhetoric, this should not be seen as representative of the entire leftist academic milieu.

You can find the full “Taking the Pulse of the Country 2/2024” policy brief at:

<https://www.uni-mannheim.de/news/gip-policy-brief-2-24/>

New Report Series “Taking the Pulse of the Country”

The aim of the series is to make the research results from the German Internet Panel available to the public, to journalists and policy makers. It is intended to contribute research-based insight and analysis to potentially controversial issues in society and politics.

The German Internet Panel (GIP) is based at the University of Mannheim and committed to long-term research. The GIP examines the individual attitudes and preferences that can impact political and economic decision making processes. To this end, the GIP has been conducting surveys with more than 3,500 respondents throughout Germany between the ages of 16 and 75 since 2012.

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