RESIST

Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics

The RESIST Project Report

Effects of, and Resistances to 'Anti-Gender' Mobilisations Across Europe:

A Report on Germany

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Germany

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Executive Summary

Despite Germany's recent strides towards gender and sexual equalities on a legal level, several states have introduced a ban of gender-inclusive language in public institutions, including schools and universities. In the case study interview data, oppositions against the term 'gender' were therefore mainly associated with these so-called 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse, as well as with debates around minority gender identities. By the participants, these contestations were seen as an expression of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility.

With the ascent of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD), participants identified 'ignorance' and a lack of knowledge not only as a breeding ground for far-right mobilisations but also for institutional erasure and interpersonal micro-aggressions. The participants reported deep concern about the rise of the far-right, the threat of funding being cut, parliamentary inquiries into political and civic education projects and the targeted disruption of feminist and LGBTIQ+ events. As a result of this, participants reported feelings of fear and helplessness.

Participants reported an increasingly hostile visibility of trans people in media debates and an intensification of both physical and online violence against trans people and their allies. Participants associated this shift with the debates around the recently passed Self-Determination Act (SBGG).

Various participants reported targeted attacks, due to their professional activities, activism or voluntary work, such as media controversies or online 'shit storms'. These attacks took place against educators, researchers, and counsellors working on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, anti-feminism, and abortion. Participants reported that they often felt alone in dealing with the effects of being targeted, even when attacks occurred as part of their employment. Various interviewees reported that they had to mobilise private resources to mitigate the attacks.

As a result, many participants reported retreating from the public sphere, including social media and publications, due to experienced attacks or the threat of them. Facilitating a democratic discourse that is safe for minorities to engage in was identified as an important and sustainable means of making mainstream society more resilient against far-right mobilisations. The participants also demonstrated an investment in political and civic education as an important means of combating discrimination and reaching mainstream society.

Media controversies were seen as a central arena where anti-trans hostility is fueled. Some trans participants reported that they also engage in public activities to create positive visibility in order to counter the negative images portrayed in media debates. Many participants also demonstrated an investment in coalition politics and a politics of solidarity, including the sharing of resources to combat anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility.

Multiple marginalisations, erasure, internal political divisions and an increasingly hostile tone were identified as threats to feminist and LBGTIQ+ community cohesion. The majority of interviewees were active community members and identified their communities as vital to mitigating both a hostile political climate and experiences of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. Being in spaces where experiences and identities were validated rather than challenged was deemed important to the respondents.

Keywords: Germany; LGBTIQ+; antifeminism; democracy; feminism

Introduction

This case study report presents the experiences of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility as well as resistances against these phenomena in Germany. It illustrates how 24 research participants encounter anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility in their every-day lives, what effect they have on their wellbeing, their work and their communities and what individual and collective strategies of mitigation and resistance they engage in. The report is written based on qualitative interview data from five focus groups and 13 individual interviews with activists, community leaders, academics, professionals working in health care, education, and equality and diversity, as well as members of the general public. They were recruited from across the country and responded to the call for participation because they have experienced organised forms of so-called 'anti-gender' politics, anti-feminism or anti-queer hostility. The sample was recruited through targeted emails to civil society organisations, feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups and individuals with a platform. Following an introduction to the national context, this report will outline the key findings that crossed the focus groups and individual interviews.

Context

In post-unification Germany, gender and sexual equalities are increasingly claimed as pillars of national identity. While this can be situated within broader liberalisations witnessed across Western Europe, there are distinct historical and social processes that are worth mentioning. Firstly, the unification of Germany challenged the traditional gender roles prevalent in West Germany[1]. West Germany was dominated by the less egalitarian sole breadwinner model, while it was more normalised for mothers in East Germany to be employed. Secondly, the increasing articulation of gender equality and lesbian and gay rights as 'German values' in post-unification Germany has also been attributed to specific forms of racism that have, since the 1990s, framed migrants from Muslim countries and ethnic minorities that practise Islam as illiberal, patriarchal and homophobic[2], leading to the idea of German culture as egalitarian, liberal and progressive in the area of gender and sexuality (ibid.)

However, feminist and LGBTIQ+ gains have been hard-fought for by civil society in post-unification Germany. Germany has a longstanding tradition of feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements. The 2010s witnessed an increasing mobilisation around everyday sexism online (#Aufschrei), sexual harassment (#metoo) and intersectionality (#ausnahmslos). However, the regulation of abortion in the penal code (§ 218) remains a central concern for the feminist movement in Germany. Abortions can be sought within the first 12 weeks under the condition of seeking 'pregnancy conflict counselling'. This one-time counselling session is usually compulsory for those seeking an abortion regardless of whether the person has already taken a decision[3]. Moreover, doctors were banned from 'advertising' abortions, which also included providing information on

[1] Böttcher, S. (2020) *Nachholende Modernisierung im Westen: Der Wandel der Geschlechterrolle und des Familienbildes*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung BPB, 15 October. Available at https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/316321/nachholende-modernisierung-im-westen-der-wandel-der-geschlechterrolle-und-des-familienbildes/ (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[2] Dietze, G., Brunner, C. and Wenzel, E. (2009) *Kritik des Okzidentalismus: Transdisziplinäre Beiträge zu (Neo-)Orientalismus und Geschlecht*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

[3] Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2024) *Schwangerschaftsabbruch nach § 218 Strafgesetzbuch.* Available at https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/familie/schwangerschaft-und-kinderwunsch/schwangerschaftsabbruch/schwangerschaftsabbruch-nach-218-strafgesetzbuch-81020#:~:text=Straflos%20bleibt%20der%20Schwangerschaftsabbruch%20auch.k%C3%B6rperlichen%20oder%20seelischen%20Gesundheitszustandes%20besteht (Accessed: 1 July 2024)

their website[4], until 2022. In 2024, an expert commission, deployed by the Government, advised the decriminalisation of abortions with reference to constitutional and international law[5].

LGBTIQ+ movements have continuously pushed for recognition and access to rights. In 2024, during data collection for this report, the government passed the Self-Determination Act (SBGG), a law that makes it easier for trans, intersex, and non-binary people to change their legal name and gender by making a declaration to the registry office. In 2018, the civil status law was amended to include a legal third gender, the so-called third option: 'diverse'. In 2017, marriage was opened to same-sex couples, although the law of descent was not amended so that same-sex married couples still have to adopt their partner's biological child. In 2017, Germany included hostility against gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people in the terms of reference of their already existing national action plan against racism, aimed at the protection of minorities from discrimination[6]. Important tools of implementation are civic and political education initiatives. Since 2022, the government has also been drafting a national LGBTIQ+ action plan together with civil society organisations that will be presented to parliament in late 2024[7]. Most German states already have action plans against LGBTIQ+ hostility[8].

However, since the mid-2010s Germany has witnessed an increasing public support for the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD). The party has been identified as being supportive of anti-democratic positions and ethnic nationalism[9]. The growing success of the party has been attributed to its ability to mobilise middle-class voters of traditionally centre-left to centre-right parties.[10] The AfD has repeatedly campaigned against LGBTIQ+ rights [11] while also mobilising the discourse of migrant homophobia. LGBTIQ+ organisations have been warning against what they identify as an increase in anti-queer hostility in public discourse as well as an increase in hate crimes across Germany[12]. In the context of the recent debate

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[4] Schulze A. (2022) *Aufhebung des §219a*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung BPB, 28 July. Available at: https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/511299/aufhebung-des-ss219a/ (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[5] Deutschlandfunk (2024) *Paragraf 218 StGB - Kommission empfiehlt, Abtreibungen zu entkriminalisieren*. Available at: https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/abtreibung-schwangerschaftsabbruch-paragraph-218-100.html#:~:text=Paragraf%20218%20StGB,Fr%C3%BChphase%20der%20Schwangerschaft%20zu%20legalisieren (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[6] Zech, T. (2021) *Gegen das Gift*, deutschland.de, 23 November. Available at: https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/leben/initiativen-gegen-rassismus-in-deutschland (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[7] Regenbogenportal.de (2023) *Gemeinsam für ein queerfreundliches Deutschland: Aktionsplan „Queer leben"*, 2 August. Available at: https://www.regenbogenportal.de/aktuelles/uebersicht/details/gemeinsam-fuer-ein-queerfreundliches-deutschland-aktionsplan-queer-leben#:~:text=Am%2018.,Menschen%20(LSBTIQ*)%20weiter%20voranzubringen (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[8] Lesben- und Schwulenverband LSVD (n.d.) *Welche Bundesländer haben Aktionspläne gegen LSBTIQ*-Feindlichkeit?* Available at: https://www.lsvd.de/de/ct/424-Welche-Bundeslaender-haben-Aktionsplaene-gegen-LSBTIQ-Feindlichkeit (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[9] Pfahl-Traughber, A. (2019) *Rechtsextremismus in Deutschland: Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme*, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-24276-3.

[10] Pickel, S. (2019) *Die Wahl der AfD. Frustration, Deprivation, Angst oder Wertekonflikt?* In Korte, K.-R. & Schoofs, J. (eds.) *Die Bundestagswahl 2017: Analysen der Wahl-, Parteien-, Kommunikations- und Regierungsforschung*. Springer Fachmedien: Wiesbaden, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-25050-8_7, pp. 145–175.

[11] Lesben- und Schwulenverband LSVD (n.d.) *Die Homophobie der AfD - eine unberechenbare Alternative*. Available at: https://www.lsvd.de/de/ct/426-Die-Homophobie-der-AfD-eine-unberechenbare-Alternative (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

[12] Bundesverband Trans* (2023) *IDAHOBITA: Langsamer Fortschritt angesichts zunehmender Gewalt und Anfeindung*, 16 May. Available at: https://www.bundesverband-trans.de/idahobita-langsamer-fortschritt/ (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

Lesben- und Schwulenverband LSVD (n.d.) *Trans*: Hype der Gender-Ideologie und Gefahr für Kinder und Jugendliche?* Available at: https://www.lsvd.de/de/ct/6456-Trans-Hype-der-Gender-Ideologie-und-Gefahr-fuer-Kinder-und-Jugendliche (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

regarding the Self-Determination Act (SBGG), trans people have become particularly visible in hostile debates that not only stem from the far-right but also from some feminists[13].

In addition to these concerns, two states under conservative leadership have recently passed so-called 'gender bans' which prohibit the use of gender-inclusive language in public institutions including schools and universities. These governments have explicitly banned the use of symbols such as the asterisk or underscore, which are increasingly used in gender neutral language. This comes at a time when public institutions have increasingly been using typographic solutions, especially the asterisk to mark inclusive language.

Findings

1. Opposition to the term 'gender' is seen as an expression of structural inequality

The so-called gender bans in Bavaria and Hesse were seen as proof that anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility persist in Germany.

Bavaria and Hesse have banned the use of gender-inclusive language in public institutions, including in schools and at universities. Participants understood these politics against the term 'gender' and its conceptual implications not only as symbolic politics and struggles about meaning but also as a denial of trans identities. In particular, they saw opposition to the term 'gender' in German as an expression and site of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. The interviewees framed anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility as structural phenomena, meaning that they are present at both societal and state level. Organised targeting and attacks and erasure in public debates as well as public institutions were framed as expressions of these structural inequalities.

Politically organised attempts to 'undo' certain equalities, such as the 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse as well as threats and physical attacks towards individuals and organisations were named as an expression of structural anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. Examples of these politically organised attacks included not only creating media controversies and online 'shit storms' but also physical protests and targeted actions against organisations, such as protests in front of organisations that provide the state mandated 'pregnancy conflict counselling', and parliamentary inquiries against projects that provide civic education.

However, when speaking about experiencing anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility in their everyday lives, the interviewees listed **systemic and institutional erasure as central issues**, as the following examples will illustrate. This included, for example, being invisible in public debates, as our participant Stefan stated:

> I had my legal gender changed to the third option […] and that does not get represented in the public sphere. Almost everything or a lot is spoken in binary terms, and that's a bit difficult for me sometimes.

Participants also noted the failure of public institutions and health care providers to recognise trans people or people with the legal gender 'diverse', as the following experience of a trans woman, Emili, illustrates:

> (M)y health insurance just recently changed my gender entry to female. Not long ago, I received a letter on preventing cervical cancer […] what about the prevention of testicular

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[13] Bundesverband Trans* (2023) *Was sind TERFs? Oder: Warum manche Strömungen des Feminismus nicht für alle Frauen kämpfen*. Available at:
https://www.bundesverband-trans.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Broschuere_TERFs_2024_web.pdf (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

cancer or similar? Do I get a letter about that? I don't think so, because now I'm registered as female, like, some bodies are just not intended in our healthcare system and that shows on many different levels [...].

Moreover, the participants emphasised that they also **experience anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility through everyday microaggressions**. These were framed as interpersonal situations in which certain political ideas are reproduced, such as oppositions against the term gender, gender-inclusive language, pronouns, identities, or the idea that equality has gone too far. One participant (GERINT07) who curates a FLINTA space—German acronym for women, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender people—commented on how her work is constantly ridiculed by cis men, and how hearing the same comments over and over again is tiring to her. She sees most of the men making comments presenting them as jokes, and although she does not read them as hostile attacks, they are annoying to her as they ridicule women's and gender minorities' experiences of everyday discrimination.

Across the case study, the data illustrates that besides the well-documented politically organised expressions of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility, participants in this sample also experience erasure linked to their identities. These material experiences result in them having to fight for recognition, often with public institutions. In addition, they experience interpersonal situations in which political discourses and oppositions against the term 'gender' are used to intentionally misrecognise or ridicule their identities and needs.

2. 'Ignorance' is seen as a catalyst for anti-feminist and anti-queer politics and hostilities

Participants see a difference between hostilities around anti-feminism and anti-queer politics, and what they frame as 'ignorance' and a lack of knowledge amongst the general population.

Participants identified ignorance, lack of knowledge, and the absence of sensibility amongst mainstream society as a breeding ground for anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ mobilisations. **Participants noted that they witness people repeating sensationalist media narratives uncritically**. For example Patricia and Sandra, who run a self-help organisation for trans people and their families, have observed how family members sometimes reproduce problematic narratives that they have picked up in the media, such as trans children are just imitating their friends, or the idea of trans identities as an infectious disease amongst youth. They feel a lot of people lack the knowledge to critically assess what they pick up, deeming education about trans issues very important, whilst also noting that there are very prominent ideologically motivated anti-trans activists in the media who are highly educated, such as psychologists and lawyers. They believe that those lacking the relevant knowledge can easily be baited when confronted with anti-trans activists who claim a medical or legal expertise.

Participants noted that the legal advances of recent years combined with **the increasing visibility of feminism and LGBTIQ+ issues might have led mainstream society to feel out of touch** with what could be perceived as a 'fast pace', fuelling the idea of equalities going too far. Rena, a diversity professional at a university, describes the following contradiction she witnesses in her role:

[O]n the one hand there is a strong awareness, which we also see among our students, that they just acknowledge with self-evidence that there are more than two genders and that they can name them and that they think differently about sexism, which creates a sort of pressure, somehow, like: "we have already come a long way" and so on. And on the other hand, there seems to be a feeling of some people that they can no longer keep up with that or that it has gone too far and is over the top.

Participants felt that **the general public is more susceptible to far-right and conservative mobilisations** when they lack knowledge regarding queer issues and are unable to critically assess discriminatory ideas in public discourse, for example the ability to recognise opposition to gender-inclusive language and anti-feminist statements as being directed against gender diverse minorities. Pepe: "I have the feeling that many reactions against gender identities and gender diversity are coming from a place of ignorance."

On the one hand, interviewees identified ignorance as an expression of 'privilege', of not having to worry about one's gender recognition or hostility and violence in everyday life. However, participants also described mainstream society as being confused and unsure about gender and sexual diversity, in the sense that they do not oppose it, but they do not understand it, know how to speak about it and therefore how to behave appropriately towards minorities. They see this insecurity as a gateway towards outright refusal, or fear of using the wrong terms when speaking, for example, about gender diversity. One respondent—who curates a party for women, lesbians, intersex, trans, and agender people—mentioned that the inclusive language that is used in queer-feminist circles that are white-dominated and largely middle class is often not understood by those who do not follow political debates; the informant also connected this to social class and educational background. This lack of assuredness can also lead to a rejection of terms that are associated with queer-feminism, as GERINT07: reflects in the following statement:

> [M]y mom told me, [...] that somehow a friend of hers really liked the concept and that she was following us on Instagram but also said to my mom like: "That's a bit too much FLINTA for me", and so on. And I was like, "What, what is she talking about", it's somehow too much, ranting about political issues, about unimportant details, and I think a lot of people, who have not confronted themselves with it [feminism] and who are not in this bubble, would perceive it that way.

Nevertheless, participants have empathy with mainstream society and feel that work could be done to make inclusive language intelligible to all.

3. LGBTIQ+ minorities fear the rise of the far-right

LGBTIQ+ participants worried about how to prepare for expected increased hostility and a potential rollback of rights linked to the far-right.

Several interviewees expressed concerns about the far-right party AfD, which was characterised as anti-democratic. Participants also felt unsettled by investigative journalists uncovering a secret meeting between members of the AfD, the formerly governing German Democratic Union (CDU) and right-wing extremists. **Worries associated with the looming ascent of the far-right, especially at state and national levels, included the threat of a rollback of rights**. The rise of the far-right is experienced by participants in very contradictory ways. One participant from Bavaria (GERFG3.3) noted that the Bavarian government recently granted funding for queer projects for the first time, while also pursuing an open anti-queer agenda such stirring up controversies about inclusive language, ultimately moving to ban it. GERFG3.3 said: "There is this glaring ambivalence, the very dangerous simultaneity, the weaponisation of topics."

Participants named the so-called 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse, implemented under the governing CDU/CSU party leadership, banning the use of gender-inclusive language in public institutions and schools, as evidence of the rise in anti-LGBTIQ+ hostility. Some also noted that these symbolic policies have an effect on them; several participants said that they experienced the Bavarian gender ban as an erasure of them as a person. Multiple participants also noted that they experience that teachers feel increasingly emboldened to voice their stance against gender-inclusive language.

Additionally, **participants said** that there is **an increasing public sentiment that is anti-feminist, anti-trans and increasingly racist**. In certain media outlets, narratives that participants accredit to the far-right are being repeated as 'common-sense'. The trans participants also noted that the recent debate in relation to the Self-Determination Act has created a hostile visibility for trans people, translating further onto social media where they witness increasingly hostile comments. Trans visibility was perceived as something ambivalent by the participants, on the one hand, as a state that is unprecedented, that opens possibilities, and that is a move away from erasure, but at the same time, as a risk that makes trans people 'targets'. Multiply marginalised participants emphasised that they also experience increasing hostility regarding disability inclusion and anti-racism. Participants underlined that the political situation in Germany is causing them to feel helpless and stressed, which for some of them materialises in mental health struggles and sleeplessness. Participants noted that a general feeling of fear has increased in feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Queer emigration was a common community narrative in the data. This narrative showed how distressed gender and sexual minorities are about a potential AfD government. Trans and multiply marginalised participants considered it a possibility that they would need to leave the country. Momo, for example, said: "[T]ogether with my partner I applied for a passport, because we thought that at some point we might need one." Contemplating migration and making preparations was seen as one of the few things that can be done in the current climate. SJB:

> It just hurts so much hearing about the passport thing, because I hear it a lot. That people talk more and more about how to liquidate property and their possessions. And I would agree that the strategies right now should not be awaiting, but preparing what is going to happen. That's the activist thing about it I'd say.

A deep concern and fear surrounding the potential electoral successes of the AfD, as well as more hostile policies against LGBTIQ+ minorities, runs through the data. Participants expressed feelings of fear and helplessness, which in some instances resulted in mental health issues.

4. Trans people experience both hostile and positive visibility

Participants reported an increase in both visibility and anti-trans hostility from across the political spectrum, including from institutions who are not 'far-right' or invested in 'anti-trans' mobilisations.

The recent debate surrounding the Self-Determination Act (SBGG) was seen as a catalyst for both positive visibility and for hostility. **Trans visibility was experienced as ambivalent by the participants**. On the one hand, it was characterised as unprecedented and hopeful, but on the other hand, it was associated with fear of being targeted, as GERFG1.2 explained:

> So, I do know that fear as well, but I do believe that lots of it is connected to the increasing visibility, which can absolutely have something positive, like it can be hard and frightening to be so visible right now, but there are also a lot of new possibilities that haven't been there before.

Cornelia, a trans activist and a public figure, recounted that she was shot at last year, this in addition to other physical attacks on her home. During her interview she noted that "the violence, especially for visible people, is highly complex and very diverse and very active, the rise of the far-right is definitely notable".

Other interviewees observed that **anti-trans hostility exists outside of the right-left dichotomy**. The respondents referenced what they called 'trans-exclusionary feminists' who were seen as coming from 'the left'. While some had direct experiences with feminists who mobilise against trans rights and inclusion, others indirectly encountered such arguments through media or referred to local anti-trans feminist and

lesbian structures. Patricia, who is trans and runs a self-help organisation, was targeted by trans-exclusionary feminists on a social media platform where she is not active. Screenshots were sent to her by a friend. The attacks were very personalised: she was accused of "selling" "gender affirming surgeries" to children, and was intentionally misgendered throughout. She was particularly concerned and indeed nervous about the level of personalisation of the attack since, as the president of her organisation, her personal details, including her address, can easily be looked up. SJB, a lesbian participant, spoke about hosting a trans-inclusive lesbian event that was disrupted:

> In the second year a group of TERFs signed up and intentionally blew up the whole event [...]. They attacked trans and nonbinary people who were attending with scripted actions. They played people off against each other.

Both trans and inter* participants noted that open opposition to their self-determination did not just come from the far-right and anti-trans movements; they have experienced it from institutional actors as well. GERINT12 recounted several instances in which public institutions refused to recognise their legal gender—the third option—for example, when they were refused a graduation certificate with their legal gender. GERINT12, part of a trans/inter/non-binary student group, recounts that the university president actively pushed back against the third option. It was only when they complained to the ministry governing the university that they were issued a correct certificate. GERINT12 has also had similar experiences when they were unemployed and had to engage with the job centre: despite providing evidence of legal gender recognition, job centre personnel repeatedly misgendered them, and called them by the name they had chosen not to use anymore. However, as they were dependent on the goodwill of their job coach, they were too scared to raise a complaint.

Another issue that emerged in relation to media representation was the question of how the trans community should be depicted. This theme also rendered visible some **tension within the heterogenous trans movement**. Some participants felt that a focus on perspectives deemed 'too' critical or activist has the potential to alienate mainstream society and foster 'polarisation'. They felt that the majority of trans people who seek social assimilation are underrepresented, whilst also recognising that these are the positive role models that mainstream society would relate to more.

5. People who are multiply marginalised are particularly vulnerable to anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility

The effects and fear of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility were particularly pronounced amongst interviewees who were multiply marginalised.

Participants who have been subjected to racism, are disabled or identified as trans, inter* or as lesbian were particularly vulnerable to anti-feminist and anti-queer hostilities. Physical attacks and fear of attacks curtailed the mobility of participants with disabilities. Josephine, for example, who is a disabled trans activist in a rural region, noted that she does not feel safe by herself in public:

> I completely avoid public transport; I only drive my car if I need to go anywhere. For public appearances, for example, for meetings [...] I always have an assistant by my side, because without him I wouldn't be able to do it.

Many **participants who face multiple discriminations recounted how they often retreat to safer and smaller communities where they seek support and understanding**. Participants were vocal about racism and anti-trans hostility in various feminist and LGBTIQ+ spaces, noting that raising these issues with individuals in said spaces was difficult as this can result in accusations of divisiveness.

On a political and institutional level, participants noted that conflict regarding gender is not only experienced in the context of the right-left dichotomy, but is also evident in feminist and LGBTIQ+ politics and communities. GERINT01 noted: "[T]his left-right-story doesn't work for many situations anymore." Participants cited racist stereotypes, especially around Muslims, that are also propagated by feminist and LGBTIQ+ actors and communities. Both institutionally and in LGBTIQ+/feminist community settings, participants noted that it was difficult to raise issues regarding intersectionality. For example, Momo, a diversity professional at a higher education institution, noted that taking into account how multiple discrimination works is sometimes framed as a threat to the achievements of gender equality. They said that there was a belief amongst some gender equality professionals that: "[…] intersectionality destroys everything, that diversity destroys everything […]". This experience was echoed by SJB, a lesbian community organiser who has increasingly experienced a rejection of intersectional and trans-inclusive perspectives, such rejection at times taking on very violent and organised forms. She has experienced this in white, cis-lesbian networks, noting that often it materialised around an inter-generational conflict; she felt that young people are rejected with 'their' ideas by older lesbian feminists.

Interpersonally, **interviewees facing multiple discrimination stated that they often feel erased by those around them** who are unable or unwilling to comprehend their experiences, as those experiences can complicate dominant narratives within their communities. Racialised participants in particular recounted the avoidance or withdrawal from certain social environments, specifically noting that the intersection of racism and sexism is often not understood, even in feminist and queer spaces. GERINT1.1:

> I also went through a phase where I thought, well, I can't be in touch with any white Germans, because they don't understand these things, they don't understand the burden and they can't understand my life situation.

In addition to this feeling of not being seen, they recounted experiences of **microaggressions within feminist and LGBTIQ+ spaces** which also results in social withdrawal. Pepe said: "[…] so, I downgraded multiple, white, queer friends to acquaintances and no longer as friendships, because I realised that there was a lack of empathy."

In relation to these experiences of feeling misunderstood and isolated within the broader feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities, participants repeatedly used the term 'bubble' to describe spaces where they feel recognised in their multiple marginalisations and minoritised identities; spaces where they felt that their identities were not devalued or questioned and where they are free to seek the intimacy of personal relationships to mitigate feelings of helplessness.

6. Participants were often left to deal with the effects of anti-feminist and anti-queer attacks on their own

Participants who have suffered organised anti-feminist or anti-queer attacks as a result of their work said they did not receive institutional support to mitigate the effects of these attacks on their own.

The nature of attacks experienced by participants ranged from online bullying and 'shit storms', to threats, media campaigns, litigation, disruption of events as well as physical violence. The targets of these attacks in the sample were politicians, authors, academics, and those working in civic education. Those who experienced the attacks said that they largely had to **rely on private resources to mitigate the effects of the attacks**. Although many were in employment and suffered the attacks as a result of their professional roles, they felt unsupported, reporting none to very little institutional support or safety measures from employers or funders. Interviewees experienced these instances as isolating and fear-inducing. One participant, GERINT08, who works in civic education described their situation:

> (O)n a construction site we would all be wearing helmets to be able to go to work. Just like others are able to do their work without the fear of getting reported and of losing a lot of money because all of a sudden, the employer no longer has your back or something like that.

In addition, participants recounted fear of physical attacks, and described mixed experiences with the police.

Lena, an academic, spoke of an organised online attack on her new publicly funded research project. This situation was particularly challenging because it required her to have a conversation with her new employer within a few weeks of starting her new position. Although her line manager was sympathetic, the situation rendered visible that her new employer lacked processes for dealing with such attacks, a feeling echoed by many academic participants. Universities were characterised as being slow in their response, or as not responding at all. As a result, the research participants in the German sample recounted how they had to rely on personal resources to mitigate the effects of the experienced attacks, including **relying exclusively on their personal network for emotional support, and on personal financial resources to pay for security measures at home, or legal fees**, even when attacks occurred as a response to their work.

Moreover, various participants recounted how they withdrew themselves from public platforms, social media or publications as a result of the attacks. **Through withdrawal, participants felt they could avert future attacks**. Various participants described that the experience of anti-feminist attacks had a 'silencing effect' on them as the following example illustrates. GERINT08: "I try to get as little out there as possible, regarding publications or similar. I'm thinking about whether I do it anonymously or not. I silence myself. That's an effect." Participants negotiated the experience of being silenced and seeking retreat as a necessity to conserve their mental wellbeing but also as a form of defeat. One participant noted that they retreat from public arenas to conserve energy and try to focus on areas where they feel they can have an impact: their diversity work at their university. Momo: "So, I have definitely withdrawn from many public spaces, it affected me, and I tried to save the energy I had to do things, from which I think they have an impact." However, interviewees also expressed concern that this withdrawal means that queer people are forced out of public life due to increasing hostilities.

The theme of being left alone to deal with the effects of organised anti-feminist and anti-queer attacks runs through the case study data. Participants who suffered attacks as a response to their professional activities recounted having little to no institutional support to mitigate the effects of the attacks. This led not only to them relying on personal resources but also to employing mitigation strategies that have the effect of self-silencing.

7. Political and civic education initiatives are targets of organised attacks

Participants working in the field of political and civic education reported various forms of attacks against their organisations and projects through parliamentary inquiries, concerted media or online attacks, disruption of events and physical attacks on premises. Examples in our sample include opposition to public funding in various parliaments, organised media and online controversies, targeting educators online as well as in-person disruption of events.

Several interviewees reported how they are concerned that the AfD systematically uses **parliamentary questions at the state level to target educational initiatives that focus on LGBTIQ+ issues or anti-feminism**. Such questions challenged, for example, why such initiatives are publicly funded. According to those participants who work in this field, such parliamentary inquiries have the effect of debilitating the work of political and civil society education initiatives. GERFG1.4:

> (Th)is debilitation of work processes, the fact that we increasingly have to hide things that we used to be open about, just to avoid accusations and or potential consequences.

Alongside parliamentary questions targeted against projects and initiatives, participants were concerned about the political opposition to the Democracy Promotion Act, a new law which seeks to strengthen and institutionalise funding for initiatives and education against extremism, racism, sexism, and anti-queer hostility, amongst other issues.

Besides these parliamentary attempts to curtail education projects, the interviewees recounted how their organisations or themselves, as representatives, became targets of organised media attacks both off and online. GERINT08 recounted how the use of the term 'patriarchy' in a press release announcing their publicly funded project resulted in a media controversy and online 'shit storm'. Lena, who works for an online education project on gender and sexual diversity geared towards young people, has been targeted by large Twitter/X accounts that she identified as anti-feminist and 'anti-gender'. These accounts shared conspiracy theories about her support for trans children and accused her of personally conducting medical treatments on children.

The informants also reported **organised disruption of events**. Several interviewees have experienced anti-feminists strategically disrupting workshops that they facilitated under the pretence of being interested audience members. GERINT08 said:

> And we had one participant in the seminar who, as we talked about what anti-feminism is, started to deny it, who also denied the existence of trans people to a trans person in the room and so on. And that was a way to argue against the existence of trans people, and not just like attacking the workshop leaders, but like an established move to use a clear line of argument that we know […] So, I clearly set the boundaries and the person then left and said: "I wanted to go anyways, I'll leave now". And we also experienced that elsewhere. Like, they come, place […] their anti-feminist arguments and when they did so and notice that they don't find a wide audience to support them, then they'll leave.

The interviewees have several strategies to mitigate such disruptions. One interviewee reported that when she gives guest lectures or seminars, she refrains from announcing them on social media. When she attends pride events with her Youth LGBTIQ+ project, she does not post this on social media until the day of the event in order to avoid organised protests.

Those working in political and civic education said that **they find solidarity and support amongst colleagues and people who are working against anti-feminism**. They also draw support from those communities and stakeholders they work with, who are grateful for the training and insights they receive.

8. Anti-feminist attacks threaten academic freedom, and universities lack processes to support academics who become targeted

Targeted anti-feminist attacks on gender studies scholars have curbed participants' academic outreach, negatively affected their well-being and have detrimentally impacted democratic culture at higher education institutions. The data revealed that universities in Germany and other European countries where the participants had lived previously lack policies and processes to deal with targeted attacks on scholars and lack processes that safeguard scholars and democratic institutional culture.

Gender studies scholars in the sample reported concerted attacks on their research projects, on themselves as scholars and on their impact initiatives. The interviewees listed litigations against them, having been targeted by large social media accounts and publications in media outlets that are aligned with the far-right.

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As part of these attacks, the affected scholars were ridiculed for working in gender studies, their research accused of being "unscientific". **Participants reported being targeted by actors from outside of academia but also from within**. The ideological battle against gender studies was identified as being fought by some actors in the natural sciences and quantitative social sciences.

Academics who publicly advocate for dialogue and democratic debates at universities are vulnerable to organised mobilisations against them. Luise recounted being targeted after publicly criticising an event that was organised by her former employer, a university in another EU country, with a speaker who is internationally renowned not only for opposing trans rights but also for his anti-feminist views. She co-authored an open letter which demanded that the event would also include a speaker who counteracts those views. The celebrity speaker published the authors' names on his website and the story was picked up by right-wing media in the country where she worked, prompting letters and threats, resulting in the involvement of the police to protect her. The university sided with the celebrity speaker and as such Luise felt that they had not even engaged with her and her colleagues' critique. Luise was afraid and felt helpless:

> It was quite horrendous and at that time I was still writing my doctoral thesis, so I was still at the beginning of my research career, I would say, and this somehow frightened me a lot. Yes.

Many of the interviewees reported a **retreat from science communication** due to previously experienced attacks and fear of attacks. This is detrimental as the academic respondents identified interdisciplinary dialogue and public debate as key strategies to counter attacks on gender studies from outside academia and within the academic community. GERINT01, who leads a gender studies centre, has been advocating for interdisciplinary projects between gender studies, biology, medicine and psychology as an avenue to move beyond simplistic biologism, which often serves as the vehicle for the denunciation of gender research both within and outside of academia. Moreover, all academic interviewees saw public engagement as a responsibility of their role as scholars and as a means to combat anti-feminist and anti-queer narratives in public.

Academics who work on the topic of gender, as well as scholars who publicly advocate for democratic debates have become targets of organised attacks. This has a negative impact on gender scholars' ability to engage in science communication and impact. The attacks have also been identified as a threat to academic freedom. In our sample, German universities mostly lacked processes and support for academics who become targeted. Institutional awareness and long-term policies towards equity and anti-discrimination were identified as important pillars of institutional resilience against both anti-feminism and mobilisations against gender studies.

All participants in academia wanted universities to be institutionally aware of anti-feminist, anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks. GERINT01 mentioned that their university's management takes actions to make the university more diverse and equitable, which she also sees as an important pillar of institutional resilience against anti-feminist attacks. Some academics mentioned that their experiences led to their institutions creating processes to mitigate future attacks, for example,having been attacked in relation to her high-profile research project, and targeted by right-wing media, Ute was invited by her university to give a high-profile lecture as a sign of institutional solidarity. Participants advocated for processes and policies to deal with targeted attacks on scholars, and sometimes even supported their institutions in creating them, deeming such policies that safeguard academic freedom as important pillars alongside equality and diversity policies, such that academic freedom cannot be weaponised against minorities.

9. Participants are invested in political and civic education, democratic dialogue and positive visibility to make mainstream society more resilient

Participants stated it was important to address mainstream society in the work against anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility.

Participants engaged in public dialogue as an important means of engaging mainstream society in areas of contestation. Participants saw science communication, political education, and positive media representations as means of creating a societal dialogue. Some also listed confrontation, for example in the form of protest, as an important and legitimate aspect of gaining public attention, which then enables a dialogue about issues that have previously been swept under the carpet. However, participants emphasised that public dialogue has to take place in a way that is safe for minorities; the reported hostile visibility and attacks have led to many participants retreating from the public sphere. For some trans activists, staying publicly visible was an act of defiance; older activists argued that they had to stay visible to support younger trans people. Being visible in an adversarial climate was depicted as a double edged sword: whilst they recognise the precarity that it brings, they also feel a responsibility to more vulnerable members of the community as the following quote illustrates. Josephine: "(W)ho does it if not me? And if I leave and […] stop holding up the rainbow flag, no one will do it. It forces me into this communication, and I do find that problematic sometimes." This shows that minorities consider their safety and wellbeing when engaging in public dialogue.

The interviewed academics were active in public education regarding queer issues, seeing such public engagement as part of their professional role even though it comes with risks. **Those working in political and civic education expressed that their ability to resist is contingent on political and institutional commitments**, especially in view of the financial resources that anti-feminist actors have access to. Educational activities that participants were engaged in included education projects in schools, but also free workshops and events for the general public. As inclusive language remains an important site of political contestation in Germany, various participants stated that they try to engage mainstream society in an accessible rather than alienating manner in order to counteract the ideological crusades against inclusive language.

While political and civic education are used by participants to protect them from ideological anti-feminist and anti-queer mobilisations, participants also expressed that they often feel helpless in view of media controversies targeting minorities. Participants were divided on the effect visibility has on minorities. While some emphasised the need to show mainstream society that minorities are 'normal' rather than 'radical' activists, others deemed protest an important way of gaining attention for issues that are otherwise not reported on.

10. Coalition politics, community and solidarity are important for resilience

Community-building, mutual support, and solidarity were mentioned as key practices against anti-feminism and queer hostility.

Various participants spoke about the relief of retreating to their communities, or 'bubbles', where their identities, experiences and values are not up for discussion, where they do not face erasure. Others argued that coalition politics are important, denoting the threat from the far-right and arguing that people need to work together in solidarity in order to resist politically.

For the mitigation of attacks, hostility and fear, communities were identified as particularly important. Being able to engage with others who are affected by the same forms of violence was seen as a form of support, as Lena, a participant who had been targeted by large social media accounts, illustrates:

> I believe the most important thing was the exchange with people, who experienced the same things and it took me a very long time to find people, who also experienced a similar level of what I experienced because it is, I would say, definitely a difference, whether you once get a hateful message or whether you get it over and over again for years.

Others emphasised that these connections are instances of solidarity. Rosa: "I feel solidarity whenever I have the feeling that someone shares the same anger, the same resistance, yes, I think anger can be something positive." Community work and building networks were not only seen as a means to connect the participants to other people who share their experiences; some also appreciated being in a role where they provide comfort to other members of their community. Josephine says: "I received, I earned a title from my protégés. I am the provider of courage."

Coalition politics and solidarity within the queer community and with other marginalised groups also emerged as a theme of resistance. In professional settings, participants mentioned how sharing resources amplifies resilience. Participants emphasised the role of informal, cross-institutional networks. Building coalitions was also identified as an important strategy and participants also spoke about the risk of intra-community divisions that often materialised in the context of multiple marginalisations or alienated groups that are underrepresented. A politics of solidarity with other minorities that are curtailed in their self-determination, such as migrants, people of colour or disabled people, were identified as desirable. Several participants further noted that the LGBTIQ+ community in particular is still struggling to give more space to the issues of people who are racialised and migrantised[14].

Participants also mentioned that they observe solidarity and community cohesion being put at risk by an **increasingly hostile tone and mistrust amongst the feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities**, referencing power relations within their communities, as well as political divisions, as reasons for this. One trans participant said that she experienced more attacks from within the trans community than from the far-right, which shows her how divided the community is; this was exacerbated by the debate regarding the Self-Determination Act. Participants stressed that the community should work together, for example to ensure that non-binary people can get gender-affirming care on health insurance, which is not the case at the moment and has led to intra-community resentment towards trans people who can.

Solidarity within communities, or 'bubbles', where participants feel validated in their experiences is deemed important to mitigate against not only attacks but also an increasingly hostile political climate. **Coalition politics, including the sharing of resources, is advanced as a strategy to support less powerful or visible groups**. However, participants also witness a lack of understanding of the position of those who are part of less visible groups or are multiply marginalised, of intra-community targeting and an increasingly hostile tone that endangers collective political action.

Conclusion

In the data, oppositions against the term 'gender' were mainly associated with the so-called 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse—which banned the use of inclusive language in the public sector—as well as with debates regarding minority gender identities. To the participants, these controversies and contestations were seen as an expression of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. However, antifeminism and anti-queer hostility were not merely framed as intentional, ideological, politically organised or directed acts but as

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[14] This term has been used as an alternative to the notion of 'migration background' which has been criticised as essentialising and homogenising. 'Migrantised' marks the negative construction of migrants and those perceived as migrants. In the DACH region, the term also helps to render visible the specific experiences of those with migration experience, history (or projected history) in Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia, while racialised refers to people affected by post-colonial racisms.

structural. This structural character of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility was linked to legislation, such as the criminalisation of abortion as well as institutional erasure, such as state institutions ignoring participants' legal gender 'diversity'. Moreover, dismissal and indifference towards feminism and LGBTIQ+ issues were also experienced by the participants as microaggressions. Participants expressed concern about how mainstream society is vulnerable to conservative and far-right mobilisations due to ignorance and a lack of awareness, especially in relation to LGBTIQ+ issues. They felt that recent legal gains and visibilities, epitomised through inclusive language, have alienated large parts of mainstream society who now feel insecure about how to speak about minorities or act towards them. This insecurity is seen as dangerous because it can result in opposition, such as the idea that 'equalities have gone too far' or that demands are excessive.

Participants are highly concerned about the rise of the far-right, especially about the electoral gains of the AfD. Trans participants and participants who are multiply marginalised expressed that they consider emigrating should a far-right party get into the Government. The mainstreaming of far-right politics was also mentioned as a concern, especially since the 'gender bans' in various states. In addition, trans people reported increasingly hostile visibility, which they also associated with the debate preceding the Self-Determination Act that was passed in 2024. Participants felt that the visibility of trans people is important but also ambivalent, recognising that it has also intensified the violence against trans people. In addition, participants who are multiply marginalised felt particularly vulnerable to anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. They reported retreating to communities where they did not experience erasure and felt recognised.

Various interviewees reported being attacked due to their professional activities or voluntary work. Those affected worked in academia, civic education initiatives and pregnancy conflict counselling. They often felt alone in dealing with the effects of being targeted, even when they occurred as part of their employment. Participants had to rely on their personal resources to deal with being targeted online or by different media. Some experienced physical attacks or litigations against them. What ran through the data was a disappointment at the lack of institutional support they received from employers or funders. Political and civic education projects, as well as academics, emerged as being particularly vulnerable to being targeted. Attacks against academics were identified as a threat to academic freedom and often led to scholars retreating from science communication, although they were all committed to facilitating an evidence-based public dialogue that can also help safeguard society against political mobilisations that abuse minorities. Universities were identified as lacking processes and policies to safeguard scholars vulnerable to attacks.

Participants engaged in public dialogue and education, where possible creating visibilities that felt safer to them. Participants feel particularly strongly about the role and potential of political and civic education as a means of counteracting anti-feminism and anti-LGBTIQ+ hostility. Positive visibility was identified as important to counter those negative images that can easily sway the parts of mainstream society that are not well informed about LGBTIQ+ lived realities. Coalition politics and a politics of solidarity were also deemed important to the participants. Multiple marginalisations, erasure, internal political divisions, and an increasingly hostile tone were identified as a threat to community cohesion. Otherwise, communities were identified as vital to mitigating a hostile political climate and experiences of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. Being in spaces where experiences and identities were validated rather than challenged was deemed to be important to the respondents.

The data of this study highlights further areas of research. These include empirical research into dialogue and conflict resolution within LGBTIQ+ communities as well as barriers to intra-community solidarity and transversal politics. It also highlights the need to better understand the everyday experiences of multiply marginalised feminist and LGBTIQ+ people in community contexts.

Respondent Profiles

The data for this table describing the sample was compiled from the participants' demographic forms. A total of 21 out of 24 participants completed and returned the form.

Table 1: Respondent profiles Germany

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	20	The sample is spread across all age categories surveyed, with three quarters of participants (18 out of 24) aged between 25 and 64. Only one participant was younger than 25 and only one was older than 65. Four people did not answer this question.
Gender	21	The largest proportion of the sample was made up of cis people (10 out of 24), with a total of 5 trans people represented in the sample. Two non-binary people, two inter people, one inter-non-binary person and one genderfluid female person were also interviewed. Three people did not answer this question.
Sexual orientation / identity	21	In terms of sexual identity, around a quarter of the sample self-identified as queer (7 out of 24). A similarly large proportion of respondents described themselves as heterosexual (5 out of 24). Nine out of 24 people stated a different sexual identity (lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, bi-lesbian, hetero-lesbian) Three people did not answer this question.
Country of origin	16	Around half of the participants stated Germany as their country of origin (11 out of 24), with only five people naming another country of origin (India, Austria, Russia, Spain, Turkey). Eight people did not answer this question.
Country of residence	21	As expected, the vast majority of the sample (20 out of 24) stated Germany as their current country of residence. Only one person named Austria. Three people did not answer this question.
Race / ethnicity	17	Half of the sample answered "white" in this category (13 out of 24), four people gave a different answer (white-Hispanic, German with Indian background, PoC, Russian). Around one third of the sample (7 out of 24) gave no answer to this question.
National identity	17	Around half of the sample (12 out of 24) stated "German" as their national identity, three people stated something else (German with Indian background, German-Turkish, Spanish) and two people stated that they had no national identity. Around a third of the sample (7 out of 24) did not answer this question.

Education level	20	Two thirds of the sample (16 out of 24) stated that they had a university degree (university degree with no further definition (2), bachelor's degree (2), master's degree (7), PhD (5)). Only four people stated a different educational qualification (qualification to attend a university of applied sciences, diploma, and Abitur). Four people did not answer this question.
Religion	16	In total, only five out of 24 people stated that they had a religion (Catholic, Protestant, Christian). A further four out of 24 people stated that they were atheist. Two people defined themselves as agnostic, five people stated to have no religion and eight people gave no answer to this question.
Social class	17	Around half of the sample (14 out of 24) categorise themselves in the (upper) middle class. One person categorised themselves as bourgeois, two people placed themselves in the working class and around a third of the sample (7 out of 24) did not answer this question.
Illness	19	10 out of 24 people stated that they live with an illness, nine people answered with "no" and five people did not answer this question.
Dis/ability	20	Six out of 24 people stated that they live with a disability, 14 people answered with "no" and four people gave no answer.
Settlement type	21	The vast majority of the sample lives in a large city (19 out of 24), only two people live in a medium-sized city and three people gave no answer here.