The Influence of Societal Challenges on Anti-Democratic Attitudes: Results from the 3rd Wave of the Study “People in Germany”

Katrin Brettfeld & Peter Wetzels
University of Hamburg, Faculty of Law, Institute of Criminology

Paper presented at ASC Conference
November 16, 2023: Philadelphia

Research funded by:
MOTRA - Monitoring System & Transfer Platform Radicalisation

German research consortium funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community.

https://www.motra.info
The Study „People in Germany“ (Menschen in Deutschland MiD)

MiD
Menschen in Deutschland

Research Interest:
Analyses of the prevalence, social distribution, risk factors and time trends of:
• political extremist attitudes (anti-democratic, right-wing extremism, Islamism)
• intolerance and group-related prejudices (xenophobia, islamophobia, antisemitism)
• attitudes towards politically motivated violence

Method:
• Annually repeated, representative surveys of persons aged 18+ living in Germany.
• Sample of general population (n ≈ 2000) with oversamples of Muslims (n ≈ 1000) and non-Muslim Migrants (n ≈ 1000).
• 3rd Wave conducted in Spring 2023 (n=3990)

https://www.mid.uni-hamburg.de
Theoretical Background

- **General Strain Theory (Agnew 2006)**
  - postulates the relationship between strain, negative emotions and deviant behaviour
  - names possible factors that make deviant behaviour more likely

- **We try to:**
  - apply the GST to political, anti-democratic attitudes (instead of deviant behavior)
  - identify relevant strains to explain anti-democratic attitudes
  - examine the significance of uncertainty and fear as a precursor to the typical negative emotion of anger
  - identify possible moderators
Application of the theoretical Model

strain → negative emotions → deviant behavior

- concerns about social challenges
- anomic uncertainty
- anti-democratic attitudes
Measures

Level of concern due to:
• number of refugees entering into our country
• economic crises leads to more poverty
• Corona pandemic will continue for a long time
• Germany could be drawn into military conflicts
• life is no longer affordable because of inflation

(1) not at all, (2) not much, (3) slightly, (4) a lot

⇒ Sum of answers with „a lot“ (min = 0 to max = 5)

concerns about social challenges

anomic uncertainty

anti-democratic attitudes
**Measures**

**Level of Agreement:**
- These days, everything has become so uncertain. You have to be ready for anything.
- Looking at the events of the last few years makes you feel really insecure.
- Things today have become so difficult. You don't know what is going on.

(1) Strongly disagree to (4) Completely agree

⇒ mean (min = 1 to max = 4)

- concerns about social challenges
- anomic uncertainty
- anti-democratic attitudes

\[ m = 2.87 \text{ (sd} = 0.75) \]
\[ \alpha = 0.84 \]
Measures

Rejection of:
• rights of freedom (opinion, assembly, press, speech)
• equal treatment (color, gender, religion, nationality)
• constitutional principles (regular elections, opposition, checks & balances, parliamentarism)

(1) Strongly disagree to (4) Completely agree

⇒ mean (min = 1 to max = 4)

concerns about social challenges
anomic uncertainty
anti-democratic attitudes
Test of Mediation
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

concerns about social challenges $\rightarrow$ anomic uncertainty $\rightarrow$ anti-democratic attitudes

$a = .280^{***}$, $b = .089^{***}$, $c = .033^{***}$
Test of Mediation
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Effect on anomic uncertainty
\[ c = .021 \quad *** \]
\[ c' = .020 \quad *** \]

Effect on anti-democratic attitudes
\[ .280 \quad *** \]
\[ .033 \quad *** \]

concerns about social challenges
(number of “concern a lot“)
Test of Mediation
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Concerns about social challenges → Anomic uncertainty → Anti-democratic attitudes

- \( a = 0.280 \) ***
- \( b = 0.089 \) ***
- \( a \times b = 0.025 \) ***
- \( c = 0.033 \) ***
Trust in state institutions (3 Items):

- Government, Parties, Public authorities

(1) no confidence at all to (6) full confidence

⇒ mean (1-6)=2.90, SD=1.10, α=.84 ⇒ % >3.5 ⇒ 0/1 (1=29.4%)
Test of Moderators I
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Trust=0: .275 ***
Trust=1: .230 ***

calls about social challenges

anomic uncertainty

Trust=0: .073 ***
Trust=1: .111 **

anti-democratic attitudes

Trust

.280 ***

-.137 ***

.089 ***

.038 **

.045 **

.033 ***
Test of Moderators I
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Trust=0: .275 ***
Trust=1: .230 ***

Trust=0: .073 ***
Trust=1: .111 ***

- .137 ***
Trust=0: .073 ***
Trust=1: .111 ***

- .156 ***

predicted values (anomic uncertainty)

predicted values (anti-democratic attitudes)

concerns about social challenges
(number of „concern a lot“)

Trust

no confidence
confidence

Trust

no confidence
confidence

low
continuous uncertainty
high

.033 ***
Test of Moderators II
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Conspiratory mindset (6 Items):
• Influence on political decisions by secret organisations, secret power or media
• Origin of the Coronavirus, Invasion of Ukraine, Climate change
(1) Strongly disagree to (4) Completely agree
⇒ mean (1-4)=2.00, SD=.76, α=.88 ⇒ % >2.5 ⇒ 0/1 (1=23.5%)
Test of Moderators II
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Concerns about social challenges

Conspiracy

Anomic uncertainty

Anti-democratic attitudes

Conspiracy = 0: .263 ***
Conspiracy = 1: .211 ***

Conspiracy = 0: .280 ***
Conspiracy = 1: .052 ***

.432 ***

.089 ***

.135 ***

.637 ***

.021 ***

Conspiracy = 0: .092 ***
Conspiracy = 1: -.044 n.s.
Test of Moderators II
(weighted data, controlled for age, sex & education, unstandardized coefficients)

Concerns about social challenges:
- Conspiracy=0: .263 ***
- Conspiracy=1: .211 ***

Anomic uncertainty:
- Conspiracy=0: .092 ***
- Conspiracy=1: -.044 n.s.

Graphs showing the relationship between conspiracy mindset and predicted values of anomic uncertainty.
Summary

• The effect of social challenges on anti-democratic attitudes is partially mediated by anomic uncertainty.

• Trust in state institutions:
  • reduce the effects on anomic uncertainty and on anti-democratic attitudes
  • moderates the effects on both sides of the mediation model
  • does not protect in case of high anomic uncertainty!

• A conspiratory-mindset:
  • increase the effects on anomic uncertainty and on anti-democratic attitudes
  • moderates the effects on both sides of the mediation model
  • For people who believe in conspiracy theories, the extent of anomic uncertainty has no effect (no mediation). They have anti-democratic attitudes - regardless of the level of anomic uncertainty.

• Next steps:
  • Analysis of other strains and moderators
  • Authoritarian attitudes and nationalism as dependent variable
Thank you for your attention!

Study „MiD“
https://www.mid.uni-hamburg.de/en/startseite.html

Research Consortium MOTRA
https://www.motra.info/

Dr. Katrin Brettfeld
katrin.brettfeld@uni-hamburg.de

Prof. Dr. Peter Wetzels
peter.wetzels@uni-hamburg.de
Research Report and Homepage of the Studie MiD

Research Report No. 1

"People in Germany 2021"
First wave of the German national representative survey:
Methodology, survey design and sampling

Rebecca Endracht, Diego Faren, Katrin Breetfeld,
Janik M.K. Fischer & Peter Wetzeis

https://www.mid.uni-hamburg.de/en/startseite.html

http://doi.org/10.25592/uhhfdm.12244