

## ***Crises and processing of crises***

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## **Crises and processing of crises**

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Our society is currently confronted with numerous conflicts and changes. The war in Ukraine, climate change and the Corona pandemic, growing social inequality and polarisation – the list of crises goes on and on. As research has shown, times of severe crisis are also times of extremism (cf. Klapsis, 2014). In times of crises, there is an increased risk of disinformation, conspiracy campaigns and transnational attacks on the free democratic basic order and its institutions. Simultaneously, group-focused enmity (Zick, Küpper & Heitmeyer, 2009) and radicalization phenomena are closely related to economic, social, and political conflicts, which can be experienced individually as insecurity and loss of control.

Especially in situations experienced as crises, radical and anti-democratic groups can seem attractive for people who are seeking for orientation, control, and a sense of belonging. According to the data published in the Munich Security Index 2022, it can be assumed that in crises such as the Corona pandemic, not only authoritarian regimes but also authoritarian and extremist groups gain in popularity as they are expected to provide security and the restoration of order and control (Bunde et al., 2023).

We therefore examine how societal groups deal with insecurity and uncertainty during crisis and conflict. How do they relate to radicalization processes and group-focused enmity? At the same time, there will be a focus on how insecurities are deliberately constructed and staged by populist and extremist groups and how they are used and instrumentalised for their own purposes. What does this mean for prevention, and what approaches and measures are available?

## Conceptualisation of crises

When speaking of crisis events as drivers of group-focused enmity and authoritarian developments, it is first necessary to explain what generally characterises a crisis (cf. Koselleck, 1982; Mergel, 2012). However, research provides neither a generally accepted definition nor a universally valid understanding of the conditions, causes, processes and the impacts of crises. So far, it has not been possible to give a generally valid and binding answer to the question when an event or development can be classified as a crisis, when exactly a crisis is present, when it begins or ends, and how we can measure it empirically. Similarly, it is not possible to predict how crises will turn out and how crises will be evaluated afterwards (Steg, 2020, p. 429). Moreover, crises are always the subject of social and public debates. Through the inflationary use of crisis metaphors, the term also runs the risk of becoming an arbitrary and imprecise concept without any real significance (*ibid.*).

Another difficulty in defining crises lies in the dual structure of crisis indicators. Crises can be defined by objective factors, such as economic and financial crises. However, they always have a subjective dimension: they are perceived and interpreted, and this determines the extent of the perceived objective factors. The social philosopher Jürgen Habermas explicitly argues that one can only speak of crises "when members of a society experience structural alterations as critical for continued existence and feel their social identity threatened" (1988, p. 3); in other words, when members of society interpret and perceive a development as crisis-like. This makes it even more urgent to ask under what conditions crises occur, what determines their perception and at what point their consequences become visible (Koselleck & Richter, 2006).

Despite all the problems underlying the concept of crisis, it is possible to identify some central criteria that are characteristic of almost all types and forms of crises. In doing so, we do not claim to shed light on all aspects, but rather to highlight a few facets that are relevant in the context of the many current crises discussed in this article.

The sociologist Ulrich Oevermann (2016) has developed a concept for this perspective. According to this concept, crises are the culmination of events in which previous political, social, and economic procedures are

no longer sufficient and effective. Thus, crisis events are largely beyond control and management (see also Frankenberg & Heitmeyer, 2022, p. 45; Steg, 2020, p. 430). Since their outcome is principally open, crises systematically produce a moment of ambiguity, uncertainty and refer to a future that cannot be assessed in advance. Secondly, the conditions before the crisis cannot be restored. Frankenberg and Heitmeyer (2022, p. 45) agree with this concept, but also emphasise that in crisis situations, which can neither be completely cognitively controlled nor preventively resolved, different ways of coping compete with each other. Among other things, this creates insecurity and uncertainty and, as currently observed, can fuel delusions and conspiracy myths (see e.g., Goertzel, 1994). The sociologist and philosopher Antonio Gramsci therefore also described crises as an "interregnum", an intermediate or transitional space in which the old perishes and the new cannot emerge (2011, p. 33). In this respect, crises and the analyses of crises always involve a struggle for hegemony, in which the aim is to assert a narrative and gain interpretive sovereignty over the crisis, i.e. the diagnosis of the crisis, the causes of the crisis and, in particular, the strategies for crisis management (Steg, 2020, p. 323).

In this regard, crises can also be determined by historical crisis phenomena. Looking at the last two decades, several crises can be identified:

- The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 triggered a *religious-political* and *security crisis*.
- The passing of the Hartz IV laws in 2005 caused a *social crisis* for certain parts of the population, accompanied by considerable fears of social decline, which also spread to the middle class.
- After a short interval, the global banking and financial crisis of 2008-2009, as an *economic-political crisis*, put other parties under pressure and soon became a debt and (in Europe) a currency crisis.
- Finally, looking at the years 2015 and 2016, the migration of 1.5 million refugees to Germany needs to be mentioned, which has been perceived by some as an existential crisis. By politics and the media this was formatted as a *socio-cultural crisis* and perceived and portrayed by parts of the population as a social competition that threatens their very existence and the dominance of their own cultural identity (Heitmeyer, Freiheit & Sitzer, 2020, p. 45; see also Heitmeyer, 2018, pp. 91-93).

However, these crises were mitigated by the fact that they occurred over time and in different parts of society. In addition, there were different instruments available to contain these crises, at least to some extent (ibid.).

The *Corona pandemic* brought a new quality to the scene: in contrast to earlier crises, which affected subsystems and were then accompanied by specific losses of control of the affected groups and institutions, it was now losses of control of the health and the political regulatory systems that led to temporary closures or restrictions of areas of life and functional systems for all members of society (ibid.). Frankenberg and Heitmeyer's concept of crisis therefore distinguishes between two main types of crises: sectoral and systemic crises (Frankenberg & Heitmeyer, 2022, p. 46). While the first type focuses on crises affecting different spheres of life and functional systems of a society, the second type of crisis affects the social system as a whole. In addition to the *Corona/COVID-19* crisis, these also include, for example, the *climate crisis* and the *energy crisis* that has come to light since Vladimir Putin's war of aggression (ibid.).

Crisis events are processed differently, depending on individual affectedness and resilience, and translated differently into individual anxieties and collective fears. Nevertheless, "taken as a whole, they are likely to generate notions of loss of control and destabilization (Heitmeyer 2018, pp. 94-109), which can be identified as drivers of [group-focused enmity and] authoritarian aspirations" (Frankenberg & Heitmeyer, 2022, p. 45-46).

Crises have far-reaching consequences. They increase the likelihood of anti-democratic orientations by loss of control as well as threats, relative deprivations, authoritarian as well as dominance-oriented reactions that come with them. In the following chapter we want to explore this, and in particular show how crises and loss of control go hand in hand with hostile attitudes and radicalisation processes. In doing so, we pay particular attention to the results of representative population surveys in order to gain an impression of the social danger of crisis effects on the exclusion and devaluation of groups.

## **Crises as drivers of group enmity**

It is well documented that the loss of control and the experience of threat as a result of perceived crisis favors devaluation processes of socially marked groups. For example, the attack on the World Trade Center on 11

September 2001 triggered fears of Islamist terrorism among many Americans. This resulted in an increase in hostility towards Islam and Muslims in American society (Goodwin & Devos, 2002; Pyszczynski, Solomon & Greenberg, 2003). Similar trends and attitudes can also be observed in Europe (see e.g. Bayrakli & Hafez, 2016; Pfeffer-Hoffmann & Fritsche, 2019). Theories on stereotypes and prejudice can explain why Islamist attacks have a high probability of increasing hostility towards Islam and Muslims: the attacks are associated with the group and social category of 'Muslims or Islam', and people who share this social category but are not involved in the attacks are attributed characteristics and blame for the attacks (Uenal et al., 2020). This 'scapegoat mechanism', which is consistently generated on political, media and social levels in society becomes obvious in crises when their causes remain unclear and 'outsiders' are blamed: "If there were no 'strangers', migration and immigrants, the crisis would not be so bad." Apart from massive violent events, this trend is commonly seen in times of economic and financial crises.

The study "Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit (GMF)" (Group-focused Enmity/GFE) published in the "Deutsche Zustände" (German Conditions) book series, has empirically shown this connection between the crisis years of 2008 and 2009 (cf. Heitmeyer, 2002-2012; Zick, Küpper & Heitmeyer, 2009). The data of the ten-year long-term study in Germany show that approval ratings for stereotypes and prejudices increased significantly due to simplistic crisis diagnoses from the middle of society. For example, Julia Becker and colleagues (2010) observed in their study that those who subjectively felt threatened by the economic and financial crisis tended to have more anti-Semitic and xenophobic attitudes than people who felt less affected. However, according to the authors' analysis the perceived threat of crises does not per se lead to more group-focused enmity. It is more important what or who is perceived as the cause of the crisis or to whom responsibility is attributed (Becker, Wagner & Christ, 2010, p. 138). People were more likely to agree with xenophobic statements if they suspected "foreigners" behind crises. If bankers and speculators were blamed, people who were subjectively affected by the crisis were more likely to hold anti-Semitic attitudes (ibid.). According to Becker, Wagner and Christ (2010), blame is attributed in particular to groups for which certain collective stereotypes and prejudices already existed (ibid., p. 140; also see Glick, 2002). Similar connections and causal attributions can also be found for the Corona crisis. For example, in the

context of the various conspiracy myths, which in multiple variations connect to existing anti-Semitic attitudes in parts of the population and are picked up and mobilised by authoritarian and extremist groups (see also Heitmeyer, 2022, p. 263). In the face of fundamental social changes and insecurities, people may therefore tend to create scapegoats in order to find subjective explanations for social, political and economic distress (see also Billig, 1976; Tajfel, 1981; Glick, 2002).

Jürgen Mansel and Viktoria Spaier (2010, p. 60) came to similar conclusions. They also show that the assessment of the economic and financial crisis is significantly linked to perceived control problems in relation to individual lifestyles, everyday life organization and life planning. And that corresponding experiences and fears are "favouring primarily the devaluation of such persons who are perceived as potential competitors for scarce goods" (ibid., p. 67).

Andreas Zick, Rebecca Lobitz and Eva Groß (2010) add another aspect to these interrelations. Not the individual feeling of being affected by the crisis, but the feeling of being a "crisis loser" leads to a crisis-related denouncement of equality and the devaluation and desolidarisation of socially weak groups (ibid., p. 83-84). This applies in particular to claims of establishment privileges as well as to racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic resentments (ibid., p. 80). Similar results are documented in the cross-European GFE-Study (Zick, Küpper & Hövermann, 2011).

The German "Leipziger Autoritarismus-Studien" (Leipzig Authoritarianism Studies) came to similar conclusions. In the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, they also observed a stronger rejection of migrants. Temporarily, these rejection values decreased significantly, but in recent years they have risen continuously again (Decker et al., 2022, p. 52). Also, in the "Bielefelder Mitte-Studie" (Bielefeld Middle Study) conducted in 2022/23, 26 per cent of the representative sample for Germany believed that too much consideration is given to minorities, and 34 per cent agreed that "in the national interest, we cannot grant everyone the same rights" (Zick, Küpper & Mokros, 2023).

Overall, the analyses indicate that the demonstrated patterns of prejudice that emerge during crises are not individual psychological dispositions. They are socially generated by groups, especially populist and extremist groups. They create enemy images of minorities especially in times of

crisis. Thus, right-wing populist "leeways" and authoritarian temptations in times of crisis arise also depending on how people assess politicians' behaviour and their own lack of influence, and to what extent they are willing to engage themselves. For people who felt threatened, the assessments are and were much more negative. Also Control Theory approaches in social psychology (e.g., Lord & Levy, 1994) refer to the importance of control loss in the context of political and economic crises for the devaluation, discrimination and also violence against weak groups. Trust in democratic institutions can be considered as quite high in Germany (e.g., Küpper et al., 2021, p. 48). However, opposing this satisfaction with democracy, there is a continuously high level of political deprivation in both East and West Germany; i.e. a feeling of receiving less compared to others. It is about the discrepancy between a desired influence on politics and the perceived political powerlessness and lack of influence. In the 2020/2021 Middle Study, for instance, only 45 per cent of the respondents see possibilities of participating in their local environment. 28 per cent of the respondents also believe "people like me have no influence on what the government is doing anyway". The sentiment of political powerlessness is thereby lower than that of the 2018/2019 Middle Study, but overall only one in three respondents is convinced that they are able to influence government decisions (ibid., p. 49). More than one in five also doubts that a democracy can lead to appropriate decisions. 16 per cent of the respondents even think: "Our country is more like a dictatorship than a democracy now", a further 11 per cent of the respondents agree with this at least in part (Häusler & Küpper, 2021, p. 238).

Studies on right-wing populism also show that people subjectively affected by crises have significantly higher approval values for right-wing populist attitudes than those subjectively not affected (cf. Schaefer, Mansel & Heitmeyer, 2002; Zick, Küpper & Mokros, 2023; Metten & Bayerlein, 2023). The anomie linked with crises or the perception of a lack of rules can make people receptive to populism and extremism (cf. Hövermann, Messner & Zick, 2015). Particularly during times that are perceived as complicated, confusing, contradictory and unsettling, there is an increased likelihood of finding claims of simple truths and solutions or good-and-evil schemes of authoritarian and extremist ideologies appealing. Similarly, the number of organised groups and movements that are promising solutions and salvation increases, as witnessed during the corona pandemic (e.g., Heinze & Weisskircher, 2022). It is therefore even more

relevant to understand how people deal with this affective side effects such as fear, uncertainty or powerlessness that crises inevitably bring with them.

## **Processing and instrumentalisation of crises**

The fact that people have a basic need for control and self-efficacy is well documented in research. Unexpected events and crises can disrupt this image of a secure understanding of the social environment (Hogg et al., 2007) and an autonomous self, and thus create feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness and helplessness (Zick & Sandal-Önal, 2023). Stress theoretical approaches (e.g. Lazarus & Laier, 1981) conclude that situations perceived as uncontrollable affect the self-esteem as they are interpreted as weakness in introspection, especially in a system which is oriented towards performance and a demonstration of strength. Therefore, it is quite natural that people pursue different processing and coping strategies to compensate for the loss of personal control and to counter the feeling of helplessness towards crises. For example, "immunisations" can be used that propagate a "carry on" despite ongoing crises (Heitmeyer, Freiheit & Sitzer, 2020, p. 46). Consistently, studies show a splitting or fragmentation of reality due to different assessments of the social and the individual situation: "Society is doing poorly, but I (and my personal environment) are doing well" (ibid.).

Believing in conspiracy myths (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), esoteric ideologies and collective blaming are further compensation and processing strategies. They can be directed against "those up there", but also against "those down there" as well as other social groups (Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mral, 2013). By attributing blame or power and a capacity for action to certain actors, the image of an orderly and explainable world shall be straightened out.

Such defensive reactions and causal attributions are not unique to individuals. Groups can also pursue them collectively and thus develop and strengthen radical ideologies. Moreover, defending against the experience of powerlessness and the shared need for control and ability to act can also be achieved through a collective denial of the situation (e.g., Sandrin, 2021). Examples for this are the denial of the climate crisis or statements

like "there is no pandemic". In addition, in terms of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) devaluing weak groups can serve the function of revaluing a damaged self that was affected by the sense of loss of control. People strengthen their sense of belonging, unity and collective efficacy by complying with the predominant beliefs of their in-group. Therefore, people's belief in being a part of an efficient and closely-knit group compensates for the loss of control (ibid.).

Furthermore, norms of solidarity can be revoked and establishment privileges can be claimed ("Us first"; "Germans first") as well as trust in democratically legitimised politics can be withdrawn (Heitmeyer, 2018, pp. 105-106; Heitmeyer, Freiheit & Sitzer, 2020, p. 46). This pattern is often associated with political apathy and a possible retreat from the community as a result (ibid.). Finally, because of the permanent stress of crises and the constant threat of losing control, a longing for reassurance and the restoration of order may also emerge. This can lead to various political demands, such as the control of banks and corporations, or political decisions that are supposedly directed against "the people", or even for a more rigid refugee policy (Heitmeyer, 2018, p. 106).

Some of these processing and compensation strategies are more receptive to anti-democratic and authoritarian offerings than others. According to Need Theories, radicalisation occurs particularly when individuals can't see a way to meet their basic psychological needs as individuals or as members of socially accepted, non-radical groups (e.g. Correll & Park, 2005). It should be emphasised, however, that these processes do not even require the presence of an actual threat to basic needs. The subjective perception of a threat alone can lead people to turn increasingly towards their own groups (cf. e.g. Thomas & Thomas, 1928; Stephan et al., 2016).

There lie considerable dangers in this. As demonstrated, people may react with simplified worldviews or stereotypes in order to regain order, structure, and control when situations or the presence of people are perceived as unpredictable or uncontrollable.

Authoritarian and extremist groups in particular know how to exploit these orientation patterns. This has already been well described in Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Gutermann's study of agitation in American fascism (Löwenthal & Gutermann, 2021). By pointing out and denouncing

unequal treatment and grievances or creating dark scenarios for the future, extremist propagandists create a strong sense of threat in people, which they exaggerate even further in their agitation and therefore creating massive feelings of powerlessness. At the same time, they present and portray themselves as saviours in times of need, i.e. they have the (apparently) appropriate solution at hand to counteract any threat. However, authoritarian and extremist groups do not only draw on already existing attitudes and stereotypes in society or exploit feelings of fear and insecurity. They also deliberately use unsettling information to create a maximum of uncertainty, putting people and groups in a state of loss of control and leading them to change their attitudes.

In our view, modern digital worlds in social media have become significantly important and accelerated these dynamics. As many aspects of life shifted to digital realms during the height of the corona pandemic in part due to containment measures, false reports could reach a lot of people much more easily making it easier for uncertainties to catch on. The utilization of uncertainty is therefore a central mode for understanding polarisation and recognising how social groups can use uncertainties to create and shape conflicts.

Given these developments, it is understandable that teaching tolerance for ambiguity and ambivalence can be seen as a fundamental goal of pedagogical and social work. It is also seen as a “central task of civic education” (Bothe, 2020, p. 75) and prevention. Especially adolescents and young people should be strengthened in their individual resilience enabling them to contrast different and opposing perspectives and positions, tolerate contradictions, and develop their own judgements and ideas about how to live together in society (Müller, 2021, p. 59). In principle, the promotion of resilience can be directed at individuals, but also address larger groups or entire societies (see also Dreßing, 2023, pp. 64-66).

In the concluding chapter, we will therefore take a closer look at what role tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence can play in educational work and prevention which among other things aims to prevent polarisation, radicalisation and ideologisation and to promote democratic values (see also Müller, 2021, p. 58).

## Implications for prevention

Modern societies create many ambiguities (e.g. Beck, 1983; Bauman, 1993), while clarity and unambiguousness seem to have been irretrievably lost in the course of this development. For this reason alone, the ability to tolerate ambiguity and ambivalence, i.e. to endure ambiguous, sometimes even contradictory situations in the modern world would be particularly important, if not necessary (including Frenkel-Brunswick, 1949; Krappmann, 1969; Reis, 1997; Stangl, 2021).

However, Thomas Bauer (2018) has shown that the tolerance of ambiguity in particular is constantly declining and he pointed to fatal consequences for society and politics. Following Bauer's thesis that "our time is a time of low tolerance of ambiguity", it is easy to understand why especially those offers appear attractive to people that promise "a redemption from the inescapable ambiguity of the world" (ibid., p. 30). Accordingly, diversity and plurality are no longer perceived as enriching but as burdensome (ibid.).

Blurred social coordinates also make it difficult to reassure and locate one's own and other's positions in social space: Is someone on the political left or on the right, is someone socio-economically at the "top" or "bottom"? Is someone in an ethnoculturally open or closed society? Is this society socio-culturally homogeneous or heterogeneous? What is true or false in the face of so-called fake news and disinformation? This blurring can activate search movements for political actors who pretend to resolve such contradictions, turning ambiguities into apparent clarities and promising the restoration of control (Heitmeyer, 2018, pp. 109-112; Heitmeyer, 2022, pp. 258-259).

Claudia Lenz therefore describes tolerance of ambiguity not only as an individual "ability to deal constructively with inconclusiveness and uncertainty", but as a "quality which is crucial for the democratic functioning of pluralistic and diverse societies" (Lenz, 2021, p. 3). Besand even calls this the "central civic virtue" of a democracy (Besand, 2021, p. 244) in dealing with social diversity and contradictions. Tolerance of ambiguity is also not limited to tolerating perspectives, opinions, positions, attitudes and values that differ from one's own. Tolerance of ambiguity means being able to endure fundamentally contradictory positions and opinions, as well as the knowledge that "there are in fact no ultimate justificati-

ons” and that “everything we say [can] turn out to be wrong in the long run”. (Besand, 2021, p. 245). It is about “a largely mutual recognition in difference”, which can also be described as “difference compatibility”, whereby different beliefs, perspectives and interpretations can stand side by side equally, i.e. in coexistence (Saner, 2013). This includes the “recognition of divergent points of view, interests and arguments”, also the “willingness to change one's own standpoints [...] and patterns of interpretation”, as well as the “acknowledgement of differences as being of equal value” and the “appreciation of non-understanding as a starting point for new insight” (Lenz, 2021, p. 4).

Strengthening tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence is hence a comprehensive task for society as a whole. It cannot be carried out by one target group alone, such as adolescents or young people, but requires the involvement of all. In the case of schools, for example, this would include not only the students but also primarily the pedagogical staff, “who must be able to deal with ambiguity, pluralism and differences or be diversity-sensitive to prevent polarisation and ideologisation in order for participation and inclusion to succeed” (Müller, 2021, p. 61).

In prevention, various formats can be used in order to achieve these goals. According to Müller (2021, p. 65), dilemma training and biographical work are particularly suitable for “practising the change of perspective as well as the recognition and endurance of contradictions, uncertainties and fears”. In general, formats that include a change of perspective are key to the development of tolerance for ambiguity and ambivalence. Different points of view should always be allowed in order to show complexities in different realities of life. It is also important not to lecture or give one perspective more importance than another. Through open discourse positive behaviour is encouraged and reinforced, at the same time boundaries should be shown when discussions become offensive or hurtful (Danner et al., 2021, p. 13). Truth claims should also be analysed and questioned without determining questions of guilt (e.g. on the topic of the Middle East conflict). The focus should also not lie on avoiding problematic behaviour or extremist attitudes (ibid.) but on giving space to thought patterns and arguments rather than stiffening solely on ideological standpoints (ibid.).

According to Kiehl and Schnerch, allowing and recognising other opinions and perspectives is also a central democratic competence (2018, p. 116). School is one of the places where tolerance of ambiguity and

ambivalence can be developed. So, it is not surprising that schools are the focus of many prevention efforts, especially since young people are one of the main target groups for prevention programs in Germany (see Lützing et al., 2020, p. 604).

For a better understanding to which extent formats for promoting tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence are already carried out in schools, data from the MAPEX research project can be used as a reference.<sup>1</sup> Out of the 423 projects and measures in the MAPEX data set that are focusing on the field of action of schools, 97 per cent (n = 412) aim at promoting tolerance and appreciation. At the same time, only 4 per cent (n = 16) of these offerings address empowerment and the strengthening of resilience as the intention of their projects.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that there are needs and gaps that have not been fully addressed, yet. When it comes to strengthening resilience and empowerment mainly educational formats are used. But also formats of intercultural exchange, sport, music and theatre are used in this context. In research these different formats appear promising for the training of tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence. Especially various areas of the arts which are generally characterised by ambiguity can be helpful. According to Kiehl and Schnerch (2018, p. 118), "[here] lie approaches to practising maturity and dealing with contradictions".

Choosing school as an example also clearly demonstrates the primary focus of prevention efforts in Germany, also when it comes to developing tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence. Based on the MAPEX data, additional gaps in the prevention landscape can be identified here. For example, across all 588 offered formats in the MAPEX data set, only about one third of these offers (32 per cent; n = 186) address adults as a target group. Nineteen per cent (n = 111) are directed at professionals<sup>3</sup> in the field of action of schools. Of these, 98 per cent (n = 109) aim to promote tolerance and respect while 8 per cent (n = 9) aim at empowerment and strengthening of resilience. Offers that explicitly promote resilience among parents and/or relatives of radicalised or vulnerable persons, on

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1 While the MAPEX data was collected with a focus on Islamist radicalisation, there are also numerous cross-phenomena and non-phenomena-specific perspectives included. See also [www.mapex-projekt.de](http://www.mapex-projekt.de).

2 For this purpose, the filter "School" was selected in the category "Fields of action" in the MAPEX platform.

3 In this case, the filter "School" was selected in the MAPEX platform's category "Fields of action", the filter "Professionals, multipliers, etc." in the category "Target group" and "Adults (from 27)" in the category "Addressed age groups".

the other hand, only appear twice in the data set. Consequently, additional programs are needed to strengthen the tolerance for ambiguity and ambivalence of professionals working in schools, as well as of parents and relatives. And they should also be more included in prevention efforts. A stronger focus on these target groups, also within the framework of federal and state prevention programs, could have a supporting effect here.

As mentioned at the beginning, it is not only up to pupils and young people as well as their parents and school professionals to develop resilience in dealing with ambivalences and ambiguities. Other target groups and society itself must also be brought into focus in order to prevent polarisation and ideologisation and help participation and inclusion succeed. As resilience research shows, the promotion of individual resilience is interrelated with societal resilience (e.g. Fathi, 2019 and 2020), as the former positively influences the latter. With Gilan and Helmreich, individual resilience can thus also be understood as the basis for societal crisis management (see Gilan & Helmreich, 2023, p. 79).

In order to be able to reach people on a broad level adequately, the necessary structural framework has to be created. In part, projects and measures with broad target groups can already be found in currently funded projects. For example, the National Action Plan against right-wing extremism by the German government includes targeted support for a culture of democratic debate to strengthen the ability to manage conflicts and engage in dialogue to prevent polarization, division and disinformation.<sup>4</sup> Such projects could be a building block to give ambiguities a space in society, while also learning to tolerate them better. And thereby support a change of perspective that focuses on commonalities without equalizing differences. Adapting a Willy Brandt slogan from 1969, Müller suggests that "Dare more ambiguity" could be a possible conclusion (2021, p. 67). Because a different culture of discourse and discussion, as Müller puts it, "could have an inclusive and also - quite incidentally - a preventive effect. In the classroom and in public space" (ibid.).

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4 The program "MITEINANDER REDEN" (Talking To Each Other) initiated by the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Germany is explicitly mentioned here. Participatory dialogs and appreciative negotiation processes should contribute to the strengthening of a democratic political culture in order to meet the challenges of a polarising society for "new forms of social interaction, dialog, resilience as well as decision-making and responsibility" (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2023).

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- Eatwell, R. & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*. Penguin UK.

### **Media library (in German)**

- GUDialog – Salafist propaganda on the web (an example for simplified answers for complex topics)
- The podcast on identity, pluralism and extremism of the RISE project (especially episode #03: Pluralism – “Pluralismus - Wie verstehen wir uns?”) The Required Middle - Andreas Zick and Beate Küpper on Right-Wing Extremist and Right-Wing Populist Tendencies in Germany (The podcast on politics, society and history from Dietz-Verlag)
- Podcast “Wegweiser fragt nach”: #1 Interview with Prof. Andreas Zick

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