



In touch with politics? How people with and without a migration background perceive their political self-efficacy

The share of the German population with a migration background is set to continue rising. That is why, when it comes to ensuring that democratic decisions get broad backing, it is important that both people with and those without a migration background are willing to actively participate in political life. That is as true for Germany as it is for other immigration countries. Ideally, everyone – regardless of their origin – should have the feeling that politicians represent their interests. However, if they believe that political decision-makers are not interested in the body politic but only in representing individual interests or those of political parties, then that is detrimental to the population's relationship with those who are called to represent them. That, in turn, can reduce people's willingness to get actively involved in politics.

One important indicator of that willingness to participate in political life is how people rate their political self-efficacy. Put simply, "political self-efficacy" is a measure of the extent to which people think they themselves understand political issues on the one hand and the extent to which they believe that politicians are actually responsive to their concerns on the other. If people feel that they don't understand political issues or that political representatives are indifferent to what matters to them, then they are more likely to be critical of democratic processes and democratic institutions such as elections and political parties.

In order to be able to investigate these issues, the SVR's 2018 Integration Barometer for the first time incorporated a Political Efficacy Scale developed by the GESIS Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences. It measures the political self-efficacy of the people surveyed. More than 9,000 people with and without a migration background across Germany were interviewed between July 2017 and January 2018 for the Integration Barometer. The survey provides a deeper insight into the political self-efficacy of people living in a country of immigration like Germany.

Both people with and without a migration background rate their political self-efficacy similarly in many respects: For instance, the majority in both groups believe that they understand political issues in Germany. The proportion of people with a migration background who believe this to be the case is slightly smaller than those without a migration background, though (some 74 per cent and 81 per cent respectively). They are also less likely to actively participate in political debates (some 55 per cent and 66 per cent respectively). Sometimes there are slight differences between specific groups of origin within the population with a migration background – in some cases even very marked differences. More men than women state that they understand political issues.

Nevertheless, more people with a migration background than those without a migration background are of the opinion that the population can influence politicians. A clear majority in



both groups, however, believe that their elected representatives are not interested in what concerns the population as a whole. Only around 36 per cent of those people surveyed with a migration background, for example, agreed with the statement that elected representatives are interested in what concerns ordinary people. Only around 25 per cent of those without a migration background who were included in the survey agreed with that statement. It appears that large sections of the German population regard politics as an abstract process which has little to do with the concerns of its inhabitants. What is also striking is that people with a migration background rate their relationship with German elected representatives worse the longer they are in Germany. Thus, looking to the future, it will be important to eliminate the perceived deficits in regard to political representation. That is why politicians will have to do more to reach out to different population groups and invite people to participate in the political life of the country.