

**poli
lab**



**POLITICS
OF
BELONGING**



**Handbook
Political Education**

POLITICS OF BELONGING

About the repoliticisation
of hardened debates

A handbook for political education

Publisher: Research project PoliLab

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GEFÖRDERT VOM



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„Strangers in their own land? A study on the malleability of national narratives using political laboratories (PoliLab)“ is a research project at the Department of Political science at Leipzig University.

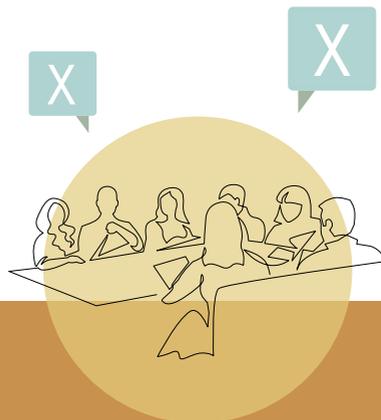
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Politics of Belonging: About the repoliticisation of hardened debates

The allegedly threatened social coexistence and lack of social cohesion has become an alarming and ubiquitous diagnosis in Germany. Different people men-on different causes for this: Some think increasing globalisation and migration are to blame, other see racism and right-wing extremism as endangering our society. Both diagnoses interpret social division as an expression of contrary ideas of belonging. It is as if there were only two groups: Those who pursue the goal of an open, pluralistic society (the “cosmopolitans”) and those who advocate a closed, homogeneous society (the “communitarians”).

This public polarisation of the debate works to create a compulsion for each of us to assign ourselves to one side or another. So taken a position in the debate often means denigration of the other side, both politically and personally: each side claims to represent the only truth about Germany and the Germans. New identity-politics emerge, and the debate on migration often serves as a means for self-aggrandisement.



Thus, those who think differently become enemies with whom every conversation becomes a political struggle. In such a polarised situation, what are the conditions of success of civic education? How can the actual complexity and investedness of positions be made visible?

With our video-based discussion format called PoliLabs (for Political Laboratories), we are offering one solution to this. The format was developed at Leipzig University within the framework of a BMBF-funded research project PoliLab: “Voices on the Nation”. The videos “Voices on the Nation” make a change of perspective possible by confronting the participants with a variety of opinions on belonging, citizenship and the nation. Everyone’s own opinion is recognised as one among many.

This effect is key. This handout for civic educators shows how a didactic implementation can be successful.



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Discussion Workshops

PoliLab on-site

Torgau
Wurzen
Erlau
Kamenz
Kirchberg
Aue-Bad Schlema
Annaberg-Buchholz
Oschatz 2x
Görlitz
Taucha
Borna
Hohenstein-Ernstthal

Between 2018 and 2020, the PoliLab research project tested various methods to facilitate dialogue in times of social division in 25 workshops in Saxony, Berlin, Thuringia and Schleswig-Holstein on the basis of which we developed the PoliLab format. It combines political science expertise with moderation techniques of civic education and helps transform emotionalised debates into a constructive dialogue.



Discussion Workshop Procedure

Handouts

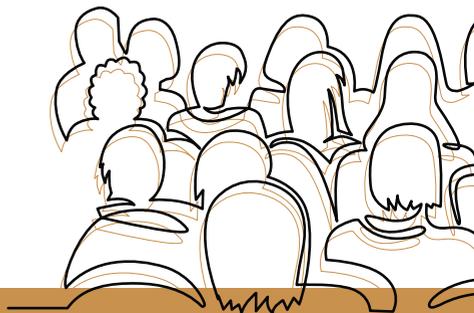
The handouts are available at the beginning of the event on the participants' seats. They summarise central statements of the video sequences in concise theses and encourage discussion. The theses are intentionally so pointed that it is difficult for the participants to agree or to disagree with either side: In the discussion, they learn the different reasons given by the other participants.

Voices on the Nation

The "Voices on the Nation" consist of video sequences, each with a person who answers questions about belonging in Germany. They confront the participants with a variety of views.

1. Presentation of the "Voices of the Nation"

Discussion workshops are guided group discussions that use video sequences to help question certainties. At the beginning of the event, the organisation team distributes the handouts in the participants' seats. After a greeting, the videos "Voices on the Nation" are shown. They present the participants with views that are familiar to them as well as views that are foreign to them.

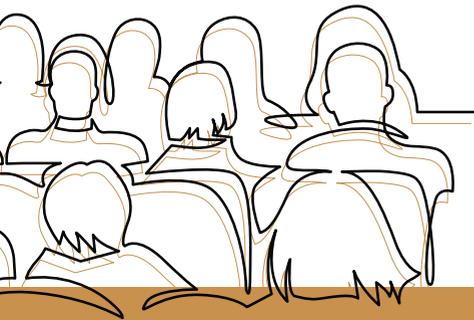
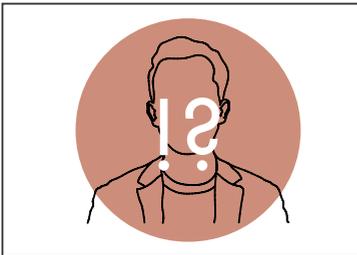


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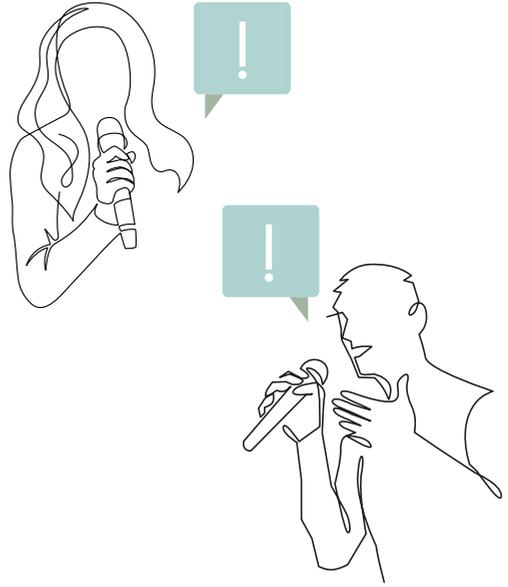
2. Work in small groups

This is followed by a discussion in small groups during which participants are expected to agree to a common position. In the small groups, the barriers to participate in the discussion and to express one's own opinion are smaller than in the plenum. It gives everyone the opportunity to have their say. The basis of the small group discussion are the handouts, which serve as a conversation impulse for the participants and lead the debate. The task of reaching an agreement in the group additionally stimulates the discussion.



3. Plenary discussion

Finally, the small groups meet in the plenary. The participants are invited to tell the others how the discussion in the small groups went: Where did we have different opinions in the small group? When was I able to convince others of my points of view? When was I myself convinced by others? What arguments were put forward? This reflection makes the participants again aware of the diversity of ideas.



Topic Blocks

The multitude of views expressed in the “Voices on the Nation” videos reflects current social issues. The following four questions can be discussed in the discussion workshops:

Can someone become German?

What is Germany?

Who is obligated to integrate?

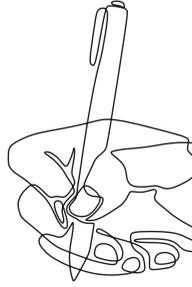
Where do I belong?

Our tip:

The success of a discussion workshop does not depend on individual points of view being pushed, but on the participants taking the opinions of the others seriously. Rather, the aim is to motivate participants to learn to live with different positions and to develop empathy for alternative points of view. In this way, hardened debates can be transformed into constructive discussions.

Handout

It is advisable to ask the participants to complete the handouts only after the presentation of the videos. Optionally, short pauses can be inserted between the video sequences. The breaks offer the participants the opportunity to fill out the handout directly after the respective video sequence.



1. People who were born in another country cannot become German.

I agree

I disagree

2. Germany has a problem with its national identity.

I agree

I disagree

3. Integration is primarily the duty of the state.

I agree

I disagree

4. Globalisation is rendering German identity meaningless.

I agree

I disagree

Voices of the Nation

A Video Project of Communication

Watching the videos confronts the viewers with more or less familiar views. A comparison of the viewer's own views with the statements on screen takes place. One's own position thus has a chance of becoming one among several. The devaluation of other views is made more difficult by directly addressing the audience and the identification with the interviewees is made easier. A repoliticisation of the hardened debate becomes possible.

The "Voices on the Nation" comprise 47 shortened and edited video interviews with one person each. The interviewees answer questions on the topic of belonging in Germany. The videos are provided online on the project website at:

www.politische-laboratorien.de

Inspired by the US-documentary: *Whiteness Project: Inside the White/Caucasian Box*, the research project developed the video project „Voices of the Nation“. In 47 intimate and direct video portraits, the interviewee's line of sight is directed frontally at the viewers. The direct address of the viewers results from the special recording technology of the Interrotron, which uses two cameras and two teleprompters. This allows both the interviewee and the interviewers to see each other in their teleprompters.

In the context of the WHITENESS PROJECT people in the USA who see themselves as white were asked about their experiences as white people and their views on being white. For further information see:

<http://whitenessproject.org/>



How constitutes belonging in Germany?

Car



“

People who come to Germany should follow certain rules of our social coexistence. We can give ourselves and them some time. But certain things are not negotiable, such as the Basic Law. This must be made clear, which perhaps has happened too little in the past. – S3



“

I myself don't have much influence on saying "I am German or I am not." That depends on who recognises me as German. – S5

“

Me? I am definitely not German! I'm just a foreigner. I'm neither born here nor have I grown up here.– B2



Can someone become? German?

“

Whether I am going to become German? Well, I can't change my appearance and I don't think I have to. And I won't. But I will adapt to the life here. – S11

How does immigration change Germany? Can one become German? These questions can be discussed in the discussion workshops.

“

Either one is German or not; you can't become German. Even if I lived in another country now, I couldn't become Spanish or anything. It's also a matter of temperament. – TH6



“

I am definitely of the opinion that someone can become German. It is up to each person to decide whether he or she wants to. – B12



What is Germany?

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall at the latest, there has been a heated debate about how Germany sees itself. With the help of the “Voices on the Nation” you can therefore ask: “What is Germany?”

“

Let me put it this way: East Germans are always made to look stupid, and we East Germans make the West Germans look stupid, but in the end, we are one people. – TH5



“

With sixteen federal states, you actually have sixteen different way of thinking. – SH4



“

I think for many people Germany could mean future opportunities, development and progress. Simply good chances to have a fair life, a good job that is fairly paid. So I guess there's a certain basic trust in this feeling of “Germans are fair” or “just”. – B11



“

I think it perhaps has something to do with history, with the past, with cultural imprint, whether you care about something when you think about it. For me it is actually natural to be German. – S10



“

No country has managed to achieve what Germany has, namely the mass murder of millions of people in the Nazi era, and only because they were Jews. – B6



“

Whoever is German and hates Germany hates himself. Why would I hate myself? I only hear this from young people and it makes me really sad. – B13



“

But I also think you are German even if you are racist. Because that is part of this society. – B9



“

I believe that Germany should give these people the same opportunities that we have as Germans.
– SH2

“

So I think it also depends on whether we can manage to integrate the asylum seekers and other foreigners well in the future and whether it works better than it has perhaps done in the past. And if it works better, then perhaps this hatred will decrease in some people. – TH7

“

Because, even if you talk about it like that – Integration: Into what? Into a society that has certain basic values? – yes. And these are stable. Which brings us back to the Basic Law. But beyond that it becomes difficult. – S7



“

Of course there are rules in this country and you have to follow them, but it's the case in every country that you have to follow certain rules. But that also means that you should and may take advantage of services here. People who come here almost never have the feeling that they belong or are considered German. – B10

Who is obligated to integrate?



Since 2015 there has been increasing talk of integration in Germany again. The concept of integration is interpreted in different ways. In the discussion workshops you can pursue the question: "Who is obliged to integrate?"



“

I think integration it is primarily the task for these individuals and not the state. Here in Germany, they always act as if it were the state's responsibility to integrate all these people. – B3



Where do i belong?

The significance of national identity in times of globalisation is controversial. With the help of the "Voices on the Nation" you can find answers to the ques-on: "Where do I belong?"

“

First, I am a born Swabian, with a 25% share from the Oberallgäu. Then, I became a Lusatian in soul and heart. Today I live in Lusatia, after that I am German and after that I am also a professed European. – S2



“



Mostly I feel like a Friesian. For me that means to be part of my own culture and to be part of my ethnic group, with my own cultural customs. Well, yes, I would differentiate myself from the German.– SH6



“

Well, I lived in the GDR for 33 years. Of course, that has shaped me and it still does. – B4



I'm part of an organisation where a saying of this organisation, a basic concept of this organisation is: "A member of an ethnics German minority is whoever wants to be one." But it's also the other way around: "Member of the Majority, in this case German, is who wants to be one." – SH8



Because if you have (German ethnic minority) Sorbian ancestors in Germany, you think more about your ancestors, more than if it were all so simple. For most people, it's simple. They are born in Germany and have German ancestors, and they will not worry at all about belonging, not like someone whose grandmother spoke Sorbian. – S12



I would say that this feeling of being German is receding a little bit and it is going more and more into the direction of being European. – SH1



So the local – I come from Leipzig – is a bit more important to me than "I come from Germany" or "I am German". – S9



There is no definition of what is German, so I would simply say I am just a human being. – B1



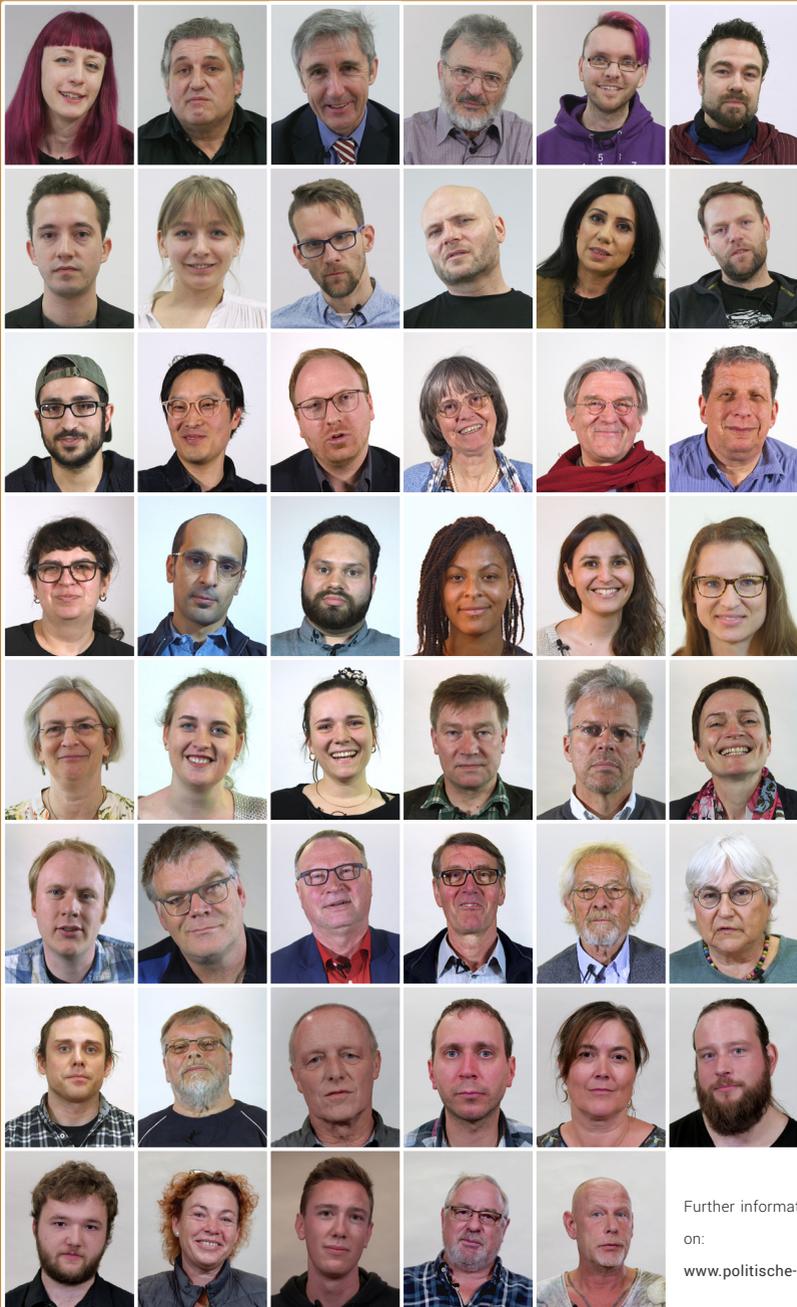
Civic education reacts to social conditions. For it to have a chance of working, participants must show a willingness to engage in discussion and to change their perspectives. However, it is questionable whether people are interested in other opinions in polarised times. Such hardened situations are characterised by the fact that dissidents within a society are not opponents in a political debate but rather seen as enemies in a political struggle. In such situations, those who engage in disputes want to serve to reassure themselves of the superiority of their political views and civic identities.

Where other citizens turn from opponents to enemies, the likelihood of acts of self-defence rise, which may explain the increase in politically motivated riots, arson, bodily injury or even murder and manslaughter that we have seen in parts of the country of late. This increase in political violence under the guise of nationalism is a fundamental problem for democracy.

Democratic debate is vanishing, only “truths” migration and belonging are exchanged: One’s own views on belonging are understood to represent a general truths about ‘the Germans’.

The aim of the method we have developed is therefore to repoliticise and open up the debate. The video-supported method removes the claim to universality from one’s own position and transform it into one of several views. The discussion workshops are intended to unsettle the participants in their “friend or foe” paradigm of thought.





Further information can be found
on:

www.politische-laboratorien.de