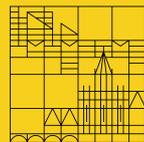


# Inequality

magazine

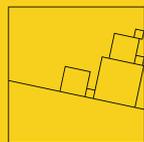
N°6

Universität  
Konstanz



# (In)equality of Opportunities

Cluster of Excellence  
The Politics of Inequality



**In\_equality** magazine

**(In)equality of  
Opportunities**

*Research Magazine of the  
Cluster of Excellence  
“The Politics of Inequality”  
at the University of Konstanz*

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# Editorial

## DEAR READERS

The public outcry following the release of the most recent PISA results is still ringing in our ears. Various newspapers raced to outdo each other spinning negative headlines: “German education hits rock bottom,” “The worst results ever,” and “Germany experiences a new PISA shock.” It didn’t take long for the debate on possible causes to evolve: was it due to remote learning and school closures during the coronavirus pandemic? Was the lack of school equipment and digital literacy to blame? Do the results reflect rising immigration figures? Germany’s practice of tracking children into different types of school at an early age—controversial not only among education researchers—soon became part of the debate again.

At the “Politics of Inequality” Cluster of Excellence, we have been exploring *educational inequalities* for several years in numerous research projects devoted to a special aspect: how are the extent and the causes of educational inequalities perceived by the population, and how does this perception affect people’s support for the education system and their willingness to change it? What is the role of educational inequality with respect to political preferences and participation? The sixth issue of the In\_equality magazine on “Unequal Opportunities” that’s in your hands right now explores various aspects of social inequality, including social mobility, meritocracy, education, and the promise of upward mobility.

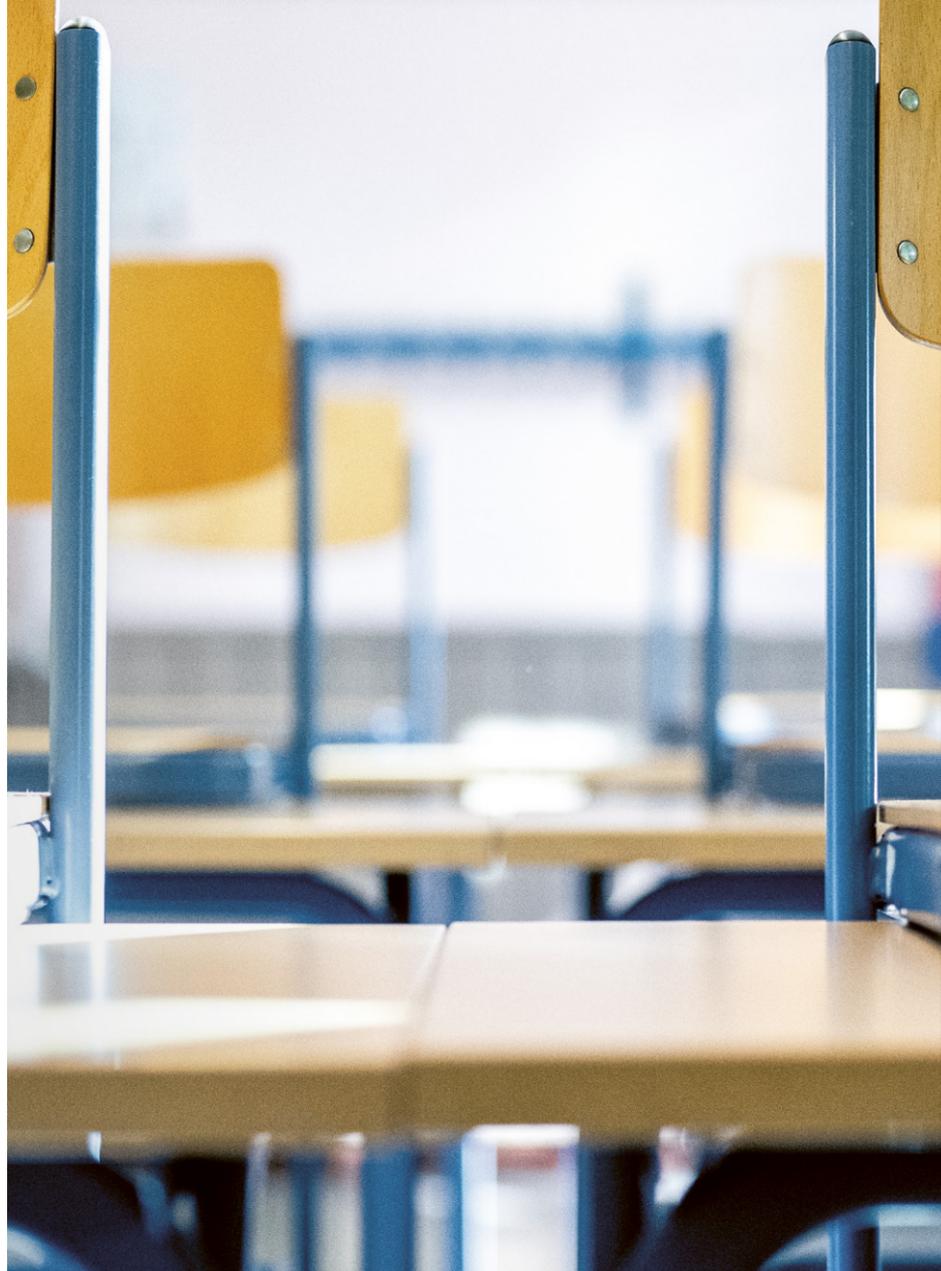
For example, in the Cluster project “Digitalization, Automatization and the Future of Work in Post-Industrial Welfare States,” researchers conducted a cross-national survey in multiple OECD countries to learn more about the links between people’s perception of the quality of their education

system and the degree of digitalization—watch out for a surprise when you look at the results for Germany. Strong media coverage was also achieved for another study that explored the impact of school closures during the coronavirus pandemic on young people’s mental health. The author, Christina Felfe de Ormeño, sat down with In\_equality magazine to talk about her motivation for this research and the personal challenges she encountered during the pandemic.

The project “Students’ Perceptions of Inequality and Fairness (PerFair)” explores, among other things, whether the early tracking of children into different types of secondary school and the corresponding placement recommendations are perceived as fair—including, for the first time, the students’ point of view. But what happens if young people drop out of the system completely, and how do poverty, social inequality and *structural* components factor into educational outcomes? In our transfer project “Film & Talk” we interviewed the director of the film “KALLE KOSMONAUT” on these issues.

The year 2024 holds many exciting and groundbreaking events in store for our Cluster. One example is the *In\_equality Conference 2024* which will take place as early as April at Bodenseeforum Konstanz. Featuring speakers from over 20 countries and 27 panels the conference serves as an international platform for exchanges on current inequality research. We would be delighted to meet (and reconnect with) many familiar and new faces there. /

Yours  
 MARIUS R. BUSEMEYER,  
 CLAUDIA DIEHL &  
 GABRIELE SPILKER



INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

# The Power of the Status Quo. *What Students and Parents Think about Fairness in the School System*

(C. Diehl, T. Hinz)

*According to a recent survey of high schoolers, many young people believe that the German practice of tracking students into different school types at an early age is fair.* Their parents are somewhat more critical, but overall they also think the transfer recommendations their own children receive are fair. Children with a history of migration are particularly dissatisfied with their position in the education system, as new evidence from the “PerFair” Cluster project reveals.



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## Separate or together: the controversy over Germany’s multi-tiered school system

In Germany, the unwieldy term “Gymnasialempfehlung”—meaning a recommendation for admission to a university-preparatory secondary school (Gymnasium)—is well known—and frequently dreaded, even among elementary schoolers. The transition to secondary school—and hence the possibility of earning a coveted Gymnasium spot—occurs after fourth grade for most children, and the decision about eligibility is made even earlier.

Defenders of Germany’s multi-tiered secondary school system point out that tracking academically stronger and weaker students into different school types helps create a better match between school offerings and the respective needs of these two groups. In such a setup, they argue, no student is academically overwhelmed or underwhelmed; students compare themselves to a reference group of

similarly able peers and hence feel neither superior nor inferior. Critics counter that assignments to the different educational tracks are by no means based exclusively on achievement and, more importantly, that the sorting is done much too early. While correcting potential errors is possible, it is primarily achieved by students from families with academic backgrounds. Furthermore, according to the critics, students enrolled in lower school tracks are often stigmatized as “educational losers” and unable to benefit from a positive makeup of the classroom. These questions have so far been discussed exclusively by education researchers, policymakers, and parents. That is why we—the Perfair project team (see info box, p.10)—wanted to know how students themselves think about these and other issues related to educational inequality and injustice.

It is often unclear how to best measure and evaluate whether a multi-tiered secondary school system makes sense or not. What matters more: a system in which disadvantaged children →

acquire more skills or a system in which they acquire higher credentials? Does it make sense to look exclusively at the academic impact of early tracking? Or should we also consider what it means for society if the social environments of children from university-educated parents and those from non-university-educated parents start drifting apart at an early stage? Is tracking itself the problem or rather the fact that it is done unfairly?

What we know for sure is that the enrollment of children from non-university-educated backgrounds in Gymnasium schools is very small. There are three main reasons for this. First, even upon school entry, these children have lower skills than children of parents with higher levels of education. Processes of socialization (e.g., leisure

activities at home involving more or less education) and heredity (e.g., intellectual ability or personality traits) both play an important role here. Second, teachers are less likely to recommend that these students transfer to Gymnasium schools after elementary school. This is mostly—but not exclusively—a reflection of the inferior academic achievements of disadvantaged children. Third, parents with higher levels of education spend more time and energy on ensuring their children attend a Gymnasium school and even tend to enroll them there if teachers advise against it. All these are established findings of empirical education research. The data collected as part of the “PerFair” Cluster project are the first in many respects to offer insights into the student perspective on these issues.

*i*

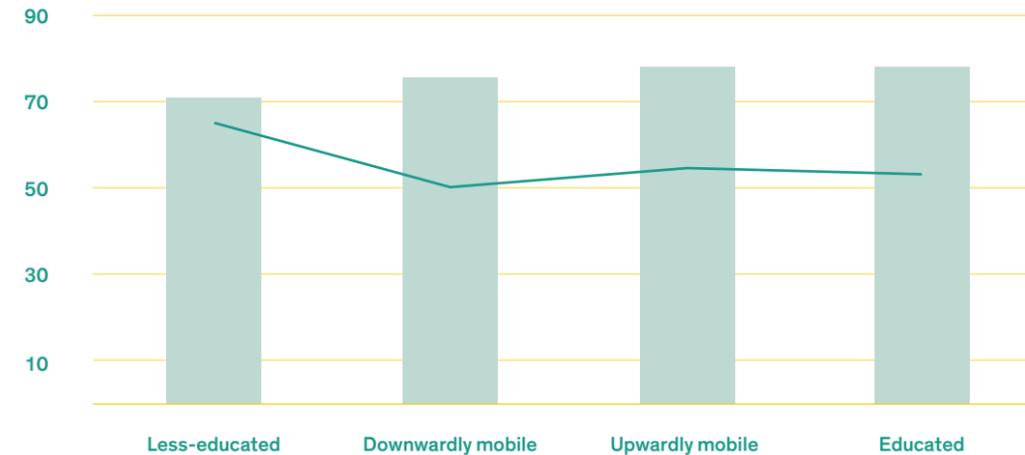
**The PerFair Projekt**

In the Cluster project “Per-Fair” (Students’ Perceptions of Inequality and Fairness), nearly 3,000 seventh graders were surveyed about their perceptions of inequality in schools and in society, as well as their political attitudes and involvement. Additional survey waves are scheduled to follow. The project team includes researchers from sociology (Claudia Diehl, Thomas Hinz, and Katja Pomianowicz), from political science (Marius Busemeyer, Susanne Garritzmann, and Nadja Wehl), from empirical education research (Axinja Hachfeld), and from linguistics (Theo Marinis). The questions analyzed here were worded as follows:

In some countries, students attend the same school until they are about 16 years old. How fair do you think it is that students in Germany attend different school types (such as Gymnasium or Hauptschule) after elementary school? At the end of elementary school, every student receives a recommendation regarding the type of secondary school they are expected to attend. In your opinion, how fair are these elementary school recommendations? Response options for both questions: very fair, rather fair, rather unfair, very unfair. Do you think a different school type would be a better fit for you? No; Yes: Haupt-/Werk-realschule; Yes: Realschule; Yes: Gemeinschaftsschule; Yes: Gymnasium.

**Figure 1:** General assessment of fairness of the multi-tiered school system from the perspective of children and parents (percentage shares very/ rather fair). Source: PerFair, student survey (N = 2,261), parent survey (N = 1,407)

● Children’s perspective  
● Parents’ perspective



**Do students think educational tracking is fair?**

We started by asking seventh graders for their general assessment of the early tracking of students into different school types and whether they believe assignments to the various school types are frequently unfair. In the corresponding survey item, we first provided a short explanation of tracking (see info box) and then asked about students’ fairness perception. In Figure 1, the answers to this question are broken down by four different groups: “educated” (child attends Gymnasium, parents have a university education), “less-educated” (child does not attend Gymnasium, parents do not have a university education), “upwardly mobile” (child attends Gymnasium, parents do not have a university education), and “downwardly mobile” (child does not attend Gymnasium, parents have a university education). In this way, it is possible to see at first glance what matters more: whether your parents attended a Gymnasium or what type of school you are attending yourself. Most students find educational

tracking to be generally very or rather fair (between 70 and 80 percent). The scores are highest in the “upwardly mobile” and “educated” groups, that is, among those who attend a Gymnasium school themselves.

Given that children may find it difficult to imagine alternatives to the multi-tiered school system, we asked the parents of the surveyed students to answer the same question. It turns out that the share of parents who find early tracking after elementary school to be fair is much smaller than the corresponding share of students. Surprisingly, early tracking receives the highest fairness ratings among parents in the “less-educated” group. Previous studies found similar results, by the way. Our data does not provide any information as to why this is the case. On the one hand, “less-educated” parents may very well believe that their children’s needs are better addressed in an environment characterized by educational homogeneity. On the other hand, they may not be aware of the benefits associated with a more diverse mix of children from different backgrounds. →

**Who believes they belong in a different school track?**

Aside from asking students for their opinion on tracking, we also asked them about their subjective perception of whether the school they attend is a good fit for them. Detailed analyses reveal that dissatisfaction with individual fit is concentrated in the group of students attending the lowest type of secondary school (Hauptschule), with more than half of them believing they should be enrolled in a higher-level track. That said, it is worth noting that only about 10 percent of all students attend a Hauptschule, with a downward trend. By contrast, Realschule or Gemeinschaftsschule students aren't any less satisfied with their school type than those attending a Gymnasium school. Most of

those voicing dissatisfaction think a higher-level track would be a better fit for them.

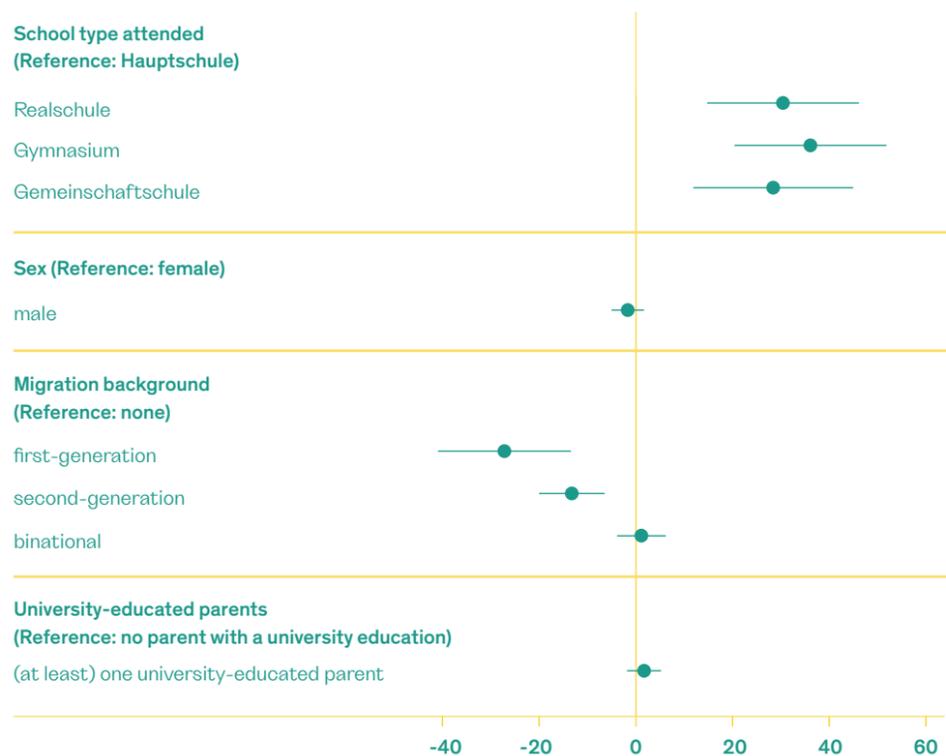
There is also more dissatisfaction in the group of students with a history of migration with regard to the personal fit of the type of school. This may result from the frequently described phenomenon of immigrant optimism. People leaving their home to seek a better life in a foreign country usually differ positively in terms of their personality traits from people without a migration history. Moreover, they tend to have high aspirations—leading to disappointment when these high aspirations are not fulfilled. This is one of the broader hypotheses we will test using the PerFair data. In this comprehensive view, it no longer matters whether the parents have a university degree or whether boys or girls are considered.

**Strong satisfaction with the education system—especially among the more privileged**

Perhaps these findings explain why, despite all criticism, early ability tracking remains unchanged. Although almost half of all parents are critical of sorting students into different school types early on, the vast majority of them are convinced that the recommendations their own children received were fair and that they attend the right type of school. The negative impact and dissatisfaction with the system and their own position within it is therefore felt primarily by disadvantaged groups such as Hauptschule students, and those with an immigrant background who usually do not have much of a voice in the public debate.

Overall, our initial analyses of the PerFair data reveal strong general satisfaction with the German education system. Whether this changes as the children get older, what it means for their educational choices, their behavior towards children from different social backgrounds, and their political attitudes and involvement are among the many questions the PerFair team will be investigating over the next few years. /

**Figure 2:** Which characteristics increase (>0) or decrease (<0) the likelihood of finding the school type attended to be a good fit (in percentage points)?  
Source: PerFair, student survey (N = 2,120), logistic regression, average marginal effects are shown



INTERVIEW

# “The System Is Stupid.” *Arthouse Cinema Meets Social Science*

(K. Pomianowicz, A. Kampermann: Interview with T. Kugler)

*Sharing insights from inequality research with a wider audience is one of our goals in the Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality.”*

That is why we developed the “Film & Talk” format in which we screen films that explore various aspects of inequality, followed by a panel discussion featuring our scientists, the film’s directors, and persons confronted with the issue at hand in their daily (professional) practice.

The second “Film & Talk” event featured the documentary “KALLE KOSMONAUT.” For more than a decade, directors Tine Kugler and Günther Kurth accompanied the initially 10-year-old Kalle as he grew up in a deprived Berlin neighborhood, showing how social inequality can determine a biography. Open and expressive, the film chronicles young Kalle’s coming of age: first love and friendship; poverty, loneliness and drug abuse; shattered dreams and violence; and finally prison and an arduous but ultimately hopeful return to life.

In\_equality magazine sat down with Tine Kugler to talk about her long-term project, her experiences during filming, and her views on the problems of social inequality. Katja Pomianowicz, a sociologist and research associate at the „The Politics of Inequality“ Cluster of Excellence, complements the interview by sharing sociological findings on the topic—like she did as a panelist at the “Film & Talk” event. →



↑ Trailer

IN\_EQUALITY MAGAZINE *“KALLE KOSMONAUT” is a very special film project. How did you come to accompany Kalle for ten years filming his life?*

TINE KUGLER In 2011, we shot a film on latchkey children with ZDF. I met Kalle during my research for this film. I was at the Arche, a Christian children’s and youth project in Berlin, when all of a sudden the door opened and Kalle walked in. He sat down next to me right away, with his freckled face, and started chewing my ear off. I thought this was a great kid, because he was so curious and full of questions. After we had finished shooting the ZDF feature, we knew this could not be the end. I was desperate to find out how his life would evolve, and that’s how we eventually came up with the idea of documenting his coming of age.

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*Was the project designed to last ten years from the outset or did that just happen by coincidence?*

In the beginning, we always thought we would accompany him until he is about 18 years old. But then Kalle had to go to prison at the age of 16 and also spent his 18th birthday there. Ending the film like that was not an option for any of us, so we kept accompanying him after his release from prison until he was 20.



KATJA POMIANOWICZ As a sociologist, I explore inequality issues from an empirical-quantitative perspective. This means I analyze large amounts of data from large-scale educational studies. The advantage of quantitative studies is that we gain representative insights into the student population with the aim of making average statements for groups of students. It is therefore often not possible (or desirable) to focus on young people’s individual fates. That is why film projects like “KALLE KOSMONAUT” are so important, because showing Kalle’s biography as a typical example vividly describes and brings to life what it means to grow up in poverty in Germany. →

↓ Snapshot from the film “KALLE KOSMONAUT”



*You just mentioned that Kalle became a delinquent in his youth and was sent to a juvenile detention center for almost three years. During this time, you kept in touch with him via letters. One of Kalle's statements is particularly impressive: When asked to what extent he believes prison contributes to resocialization, his response is: "The system is stupid." What's your take on that?*

“Stupid” is actually quite accurate.

In juvenile detention in particular, you often serve too little time to get an education but long enough to fall behind. In formative phases like the teenage years, that's total poison. It's stupid for everyone involved that this time is simply spent doing nothing. It can't be used to change anything. That's the big issue when it comes to the penal system generally.

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*In your film, people from Kalle's environment who are involved in this system, including social workers at the Arche or police officers, have their say before the prison sentence. What was your impression of the support structures?*

I think the structures are often not the problem, there is a lot of help available. What didn't exist during Kalle's childhood, however, was something like after-school care or all-day programming at school. That would have been incredibly important in this neighborhood. The main problem—at least that's what struck me with Kalle—is that there are very few encounters at eye level. He was always given the feeling that he wasn't “functioning.” You live in a system where you are the disruptive factor from an early age. Everyone involved is there to get you back on track in this system, but honest encounters at eye level don't usually take place.

*Why do you think that is?*

One reason may be that the system is run by people who are recruited from a certain milieu. People like Kalle don't usually become social workers or join the police. These are people whose daily realities are completely different. Kalle currently works at the Arche and is thinking about training for a social profession. And theoretically he can do it, of course, but there are a lot of obstacles in his way. That's why we very often find people in these positions and jobs who themselves come from a completely different world. It would be incredibly helpful for kids and

young people in deprived neighborhoods if social workers had a similar background, especially in terms of self-awareness and the feeling of really being understood. We need to investigate whether the career paths and entry criteria we have in Germany need to be reformed.



KATJA POMIANOWICZ What Tine Kugler is talking about here relates primarily to the structural components of our education system. In Germany, formal access to a wide range of careers is very closely linked to specific educational qualifications. Many careers require a university degree; others are only accessible via vocational training. The problem with this is that university admission requires the Abitur diploma, with few alternative entry options available. In Germany, formal access to the Abitur is mainly via the Gymnasium (and in some cases via a comprehensive school).

At the same time, the division into different types of secondary school takes place very early on. This leads to a series of selections that do not give all children and young people a real chance of obtaining the Abitur. In reality, this selection can only rarely be compensated for via second-chance education or other educational institutions. Other countries are more flexible in this respect, not only in terms of early tracking but also when it comes to the extent to which educational qualifications determine future career qualifications. Another problem is that selection into the various school types is also based on social factors. The homogeneity of milieus mentioned by Tine Kugler thus extends from school to the jobs people perform and can lead to a separation of lifeworld perspectives. To counteract this, the entire education system in Germany would have to be fundamentally reformed.

*Speaking of self-perception versus outside perception: we keep hearing the narrative about the promise of upward mobility, that you can achieve anything if you work hard enough. How did Kalle view his own chances for upward mobility and was he aware of the marginalized position in which he grew up?*

The self-perception that “it's a world that wasn't made for me” develops very early on, I think. To give you an example: Kalle came to visit us at home over the years and got to know my son. When my son was studying, Kalle told him that he had to work hard so that he could make progress at Gymnasium. I tried to encourage Kalle that he could achieve the same. He replied in a matter-of-fact manner and without envy: “Nah, I come from a completely different world.” Early on, Kalle accepted the existence of a “different” world that is not his world. Of course, you might argue a certain laziness is at work here as well. However, I believe this is about accepting and adapting a self-image in early childhood that



KATJA POMIANOWICZ The question of equal opportunities is a key issue in sociological research on inequality. As suggested by Tine Kugler, it is more of a slogan that is not only used by some politicians but also enjoys great popularity among the population. As scientific studies have shown, a major share of the population believes that hard work is more important in achieving upward social mobility than, for example, social background characteristics. The belief in the meritocratic principle can even be observed among schoolchildren. But is it really true?

According to the principle of equal opportunities, every person, regardless of their origin and externally ascribed characteristics, has the same chance to access important social resources, including education, labor market opportunities and income, but also health

and life satisfaction. According to the meritocratic understanding, achievement, hard work, and talent lead to a successful life, whereas factors such as social origin, migration background or gender do not have an impact. Regarding access to education—a core resource for an individual's entire life—researchers have agreed for many years that there is a lack of equal opportunities: social background (and this includes the aspect of poverty) also plays a role in whether children attend a Gymnasium, regardless of how well they actually do at school.

Why is this the case?

On a theoretical level, the educational capital that exists within families plays a major role: parents with a higher level of education give their children knowledge and skills that are particularly beneficial for their school career even before they start school. As a result, these children

already have a considerable competitive advantage when they start elementary school compared to children whose parents do not have an Abitur or a university degree. To make matters worse, parents with a higher level of education usually place more value on their children's education, leverage more resources to support them, and get more involved in their children's schooling. All these factors make these children more likely to earn higher educational qualifications. Even if there is

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still a need for research into some of these mechanisms, there is no doubt that educational outcomes in Germany are passed on from one generation to the next. →

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The “Film & Talk” event and the interview with Tine Kugler took place in June 2023. Since September, Kalle has been successfully pursuing school-based training as a social assistant and plans to study social work afterwards. He also works part-time as a youth worker at the Arche.

*Despite all the adversity, your film and what you've told us today inspires hope in the end: Kalle left prison behind him, got his Hauptschule diploma, and seems to have found a certain degree of stability in life, partly thanks to his work at the Arche. Is Kalle an exception or is his story a typical case?*

→ Snapshot from the film "KALLE KOSMONAUT"



What I do find special about him is his character. His humor, his curiosity, and his thoughtfulness are extraordinary. The path he took, on the other hand, is rather typical, I guess. There are certain patterns that repeat themselves: you get offered drugs early on, you hang around on the street a lot, you have too much time on your hands, and you start messing up. Then you commit minor crimes and things get worse and worse with the drugs. Unfortunately, this is a common trajectory. But what makes Kalle special again is that he has managed not to relapse to this day.

“His humor, his curiosity, and his thoughtfulness are extraordinary.”



KATJA POMIANOWICZ Is Kalle a special case from a sociological perspective as well when it comes to the inheritance of inequality? Yes and no. On the one hand, the inheritance of unequal starting opportunities and their influence on his own educational career are quite obvious. Even as a child, Kalle is often left to his own devices, is exposed to alcohol, crime, and drugs at an early age, and has friends with similar problems. Furthermore, his living circumstances are precarious, both in terms of money and the support he receives for school—to the extent that school doesn't really matter in his everyday life. It is not surprising, therefore, that he barely managed to graduate and that his job market prospects are uncertain. None of this is special, but rather a well-researched pattern: in sociology, we refer to this as the inheritance of unemployment and poverty, which are portrayed very vividly in the film. On the other hand, this is not the whole story. Although the theory of the inheritance of inequality obviously applies here,

there are also signs that Kalle manages to break the cycle of poverty. In contrast to his own childhood experiences, he wants to play a greater role in the upbringing and care of his own child. He also continues to strive for long-term and stable employment.

What is interesting at this point from a scientific perspective, and requires further research, is the role that one's own perception of inequality plays in the inheritance of actual inequality. This includes, for example, being aware of one's own precarious situation. Another aspect is resilience, that is, the ability to gain positive experiences despite extremely difficult and adverse circumstances. Both phenomena are repeatedly addressed in the film by Kalle himself. Overall, therefore, it is quite possible that he will experience a certain degree of upward social mobility despite his difficult starting conditions. /



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*Tine Kugler studied Sociology and Comparative Literature at the University of Konstanz and worked as a Lecturer in Media Sociology.*



*Annalena Kampermann is Public Relations and Science Communications Officer at the Cluster of Excellence "The Politics of Inequality."*

TALES FROM THE FIELD

# Traversing the Data Collection Landscape.

## *Anecdotes from Urban India*

20 *India* (S. Agarwal, R. Ankam, N. Bhagavatula)

↑ Data collection set-up in a school in urban India

Can career guidance support students' career choices in India? To answer this question, the research team had to overcome a variety of challenges. Logistics, stakeholder management and communication strategies had to be adapted and revised for the variety of stakeholders involved. *After surveying more than 7,000 students, the local team reports on the many challenges and instructive experiences.*

Like the meandering of the Ganges, our project on female empowerment has also seen its fair share of turns. What started as a quest to identify potential agents of social change who could empower women constrained by rigid gender norms has now turned into a project focused on understanding whether and how career guidance in school can support women's career choices. Now, let us share our experiences of making this project come to life over the last one-and-a-half years.

### From pilots to the main study

To answer our research question, we, research staff at Inclusion Economics India Centre, jointly

with the principal investigators Ankush Asri, Viola Asri and Anke Hoeffler, have been working with a local NGO, Alohomora Education Foundation (AEF) since the winter of 2021–2022. This organization has been implementing a career guidance program primarily targeting girls in the final grades of secondary school for the last seven years. Based on insights from two pilots, conducted in August–October 2022 and November 2022–February 2023, we developed a research design to carry out a school-level clustered randomized trial to assess whether and how a low-cost Career Exploration Program (CEP) supports students' transition from secondary school to higher education and further skill formation. The CEP sessions, conducted by AEF, focus on providing career guidance to the students, enabling them to plan, think through, and pursue their professional objectives.

During our first pilot, we tested a questionnaire with one-on-one student surveys. The field team conducting baseline data collection could not finish the data collection within the time prescribed by the school authorities. So the team was asked to leave the school premises. “We didn't →

even get the chance to pack our stuff. Balancing our belongings and the tablets, we hurried out and waited in a park outside of the school for the final bell. As soon as the students walked out, we completed the survey of the remaining students in the park itself,” quips Ridhima, one of the field staff members, recalling her experiences from the pilot. These first experiences helped us to develop alternative methods for collecting data.

In the second pilot, we designed our data collection differently. Instead of one interviewer interviewing one student at a time, we now use a self-administered survey mode in which students receive a short introduction from an instructor and then answer the survey questions on a tablet that we provide to them during the survey. We could survey 50–55 students in an hour with self-administered surveys. Throughout the second pilot, we improved on efficiently conducting the self-administered surveys, which became the bedrock of the data collection method for our main study.

Our eagerness to constantly observe, inculcate and adapt from our learnings has been vital to ensuring high-quality data collection and smooth implementation of the intervention in the school setting. We replaced enumerator-led surveys with instructor-led surveys to suit the school setting better, saving time and resources. Instead of randomly selecting individuals and inviting them to participate

in the program, we moved to assign classrooms to participate in the program randomly. We shifted the program implementation from after school to during school hours. Both these changes drove up participation rates in the intervention through network effects and reduced opportunity cost of time for the students. Finally, a request from the competent school authority with whom we had established a good working relationship resulted in a final change in the randomization level for the second time from classroom to school level.

#### Delays, discussions and determinations

Despite making progress on the research design for the main study, it was not very straightforward to get approvals from the competent school authority, which were delayed until the end of April 2023 for various reasons. Hence, our initial interactions with the schools started in late April 2023, a week before the planned data collection. The support from the competent school authority allowed us to secure appointments with the heads of all the schools and their permission to collect data. The real challenge was establishing a synergistic relationship with the schools to meet our logistic requirements.

During the baseline data collection, the schools had several questions for our team, the most common being: “Why are you doing the data collection? What would come out of this exercise? Would you also provide our students with career guidance after this?” Niharika added that responding to these questions satisfactorily, without giving too much information about our research design, took a lot of effort but was crucial in building trust with the schools. Similarly, we had to adhere to timelines given by the schools and be polite and professional in every situation to maintain a good working relationship with the schools.

The fieldwork allowed our team to interact with several teachers. “Most students do not have the guidance on what to do after 12th (secondary education), and if they do, they lack the financial resources. They mostly work in a call center for a few thousand rupees. But this year, I convinced three students to fill out the form for the university-level entrance exams,” recounted one teacher with some hope for the bright future of these three students glimmering in her eyes. In addition to the dearth of resources, information, and adequate guidance, these students are limited by rigid gender norms, societal expectations and financial means among other things.

*i*

The Cluster project “Agents of Social Change: Female Empowerment in India” is being carried out by the Principal Investigators Viola Asri, Ankush Asri and Anke Hoeffler. They are working locally with the Inclusion Economics India Centre, based at IFMR/Krea University. This field report was written by the Research Associates working at the partnering research organization in India.

Recounting one of his conversations with a female student, Ramanujan notes: “Sir, I am living alone. So what should I write to answer this question?”, asked a female student responding to a request to count the number of people she was living with. “What started as a routine conversation had inspired me so much by its end,” says Ramanujan. The 16-year-old had moved 500 kilometers away from her family after her father passed away to continue her secondary education. She had moved out of her relatives' house in the new city due to pressure to discontinue her education and get married. She now stays alone, goes to school in the first half of the day, and works as a house helper in the second half to save money for her higher education. Such scenarios are commonplace across many schools in our sample.

#### Rocky roads – not just an all-boys affair

While the support from many schools made data collection more manageable, the experiences in trickier schools enabled us to navigate the realities of the fieldwork. One of the schools was particularly difficult. Sunidhi recalls: “The Head of School was not only disrespectful to our team members but did not value the consent of her students. ‘Since I have permitted them to sit here and take the survey, they don’t need to give their consent now,’ said the Head of School, bringing our first attempt at data

collection in the school to a halt and ordering the students back to their classrooms.” Multiple conversations with the Head of School and interventions from the competent school authority finally allowed us to complete the data collection in this school.

Working with the students and the staff of all-boys-schools is a different dynamic altogether. The students are full of energy and get little attention from the teachers in the school. “During my first visit to a boys’ school, there was little coordination between the Head of School and the teacher-in-charge to collect the baseline data. Some students broke the separators during the →

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**The Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality. Perceptions, Participation and Policies”**

is an interdisciplinary Cluster of Excellence at the University of Konstanz within the framework of the Excellence Strategy of the federal and state governments. The gap separating the poor from the rich, the worldwide rise of populism, the division of burdens in the fight against climate change, unfairly distributed access to education—many current debates are as much about inequality as they are about other issues. These topics pose highly complex questions, yet scientifically grounded answers are still few and far between. This is where we come in to investigate “The Politics of Inequality:” the political causes and consequences of inequality.

**The Cluster of Excellence is grateful to the University of Konstanz and the German Research Foundation for their funding and support.**

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- p. 51: Ines Janas (left), Lisa Beller (top), private (bottom)



*Sunidhi Agarwal is a Research Associate at Inclusion Economics India Centre at IFMR / Krea University.*



*Ramanujan Ankam is a Senior Research Associate who is working on the Agents of Social Change (AoSC) study at Inclusion Economics India Centre at IFMR in Delhi.*



*Nibarika Bbagavatula is a Research Assistant at Inclusion Economics India Centre at IFMR.*

sessions and took them away in their bags. The biggest challenge, though, was to keep the students attentive to the instructions we gave in the beginning and to all the questions asked in the survey,” recalls Ramanujan. The attendance rates were low during our initial visit. We had to take the support of teachers with whom the students had a good rapport to improve participation rates in the surveys.

**Sunsets in winter:  
Concluding remarks**

Our wide-ranging experiences as we surveyed over 6,500 students taught us the importance of communication skills and efficient stakeholder management. We also understood how crucial it is to share data confidentiality agreements with the schools well in advance. The preliminary data from our baseline shows that 85 percent of the students did not receive any formal career guidance, highlighting the over-pouring need for career guidance and backing our anecdotal evidence about students’ limited access. With the recent completion of the endline data collection, it will be interesting to see whether and how the career guidance program has changed these numbers and shaped these students’ lives. Stay tuned for more updates on the same! /

INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

# What Covid Teaches Us about Digitalization in Schools.

## 26 *Results from a Cross-national Survey*

(M. R. Busemeyer)

In many OECD countries, citizens rate the quality of their national education system based on the degree of digitalization. Germany is an exception: Here, the school system gets higher overall approval ratings than the state of digitalization. *Another surprising result of the survey is that when it comes to digitalization in schools, Germans are comparatively little concerned about the misuse of personal data by the government and tech companies.*

### Public opinion about the success of digitalization in education

These and similar questions are analyzed in the context of the Cluster project “Digitalization, Automation and the Future of Work.” In this project, we implemented an internationally comparative survey of public opinion on the perceived impact of digitalization on labor markets and education systems as well as individual policy preferences on these issues. The fieldwork for the survey was conducted in the summer of 2022 in six countries: Germany, the United States, Japan, Poland, Sweden, and Spain. These countries were selected as diverse representatives of different welfare state and political economy models. In each country, about 3,000 respondents (recruited from the working age population, i.e. residents between the ages of 18 and 65) participated in the survey. The survey was conducted as an online survey, using online access panels implemented by the professional survey company Kantar.

Figure 1 gives a first impression on how individuals rate the quality of their education

system and how they perceive its success regarding the digitalization of education. Respondents were asked to rate both of these aspects on an 11-point scale from 0 to 10. There are significant cross-national differences in these perceptions. Germany stands out as the country with the lowest perceived success in digitalization (5.37 on the scale), whereas these perceptions are highest in Sweden (6.89) and the US (6.81). And indeed, Sweden and the US have been pioneers in promoting digitalization in schools, whereas Germany continues to struggle with catching up.

What is also noticeable is that perceptions of digitalization success are strongly correlated with perceptions of the overall quality of education. This could indicate that in most countries, the system’s performance in the digitalization dimension is tightly coupled with (perceptions of) the overall performance of the system. In this case, the only clear exception is the case of Germany, where survey respondents rate the overall quality of the education system as significantly better than the system’s success in digitalization. →

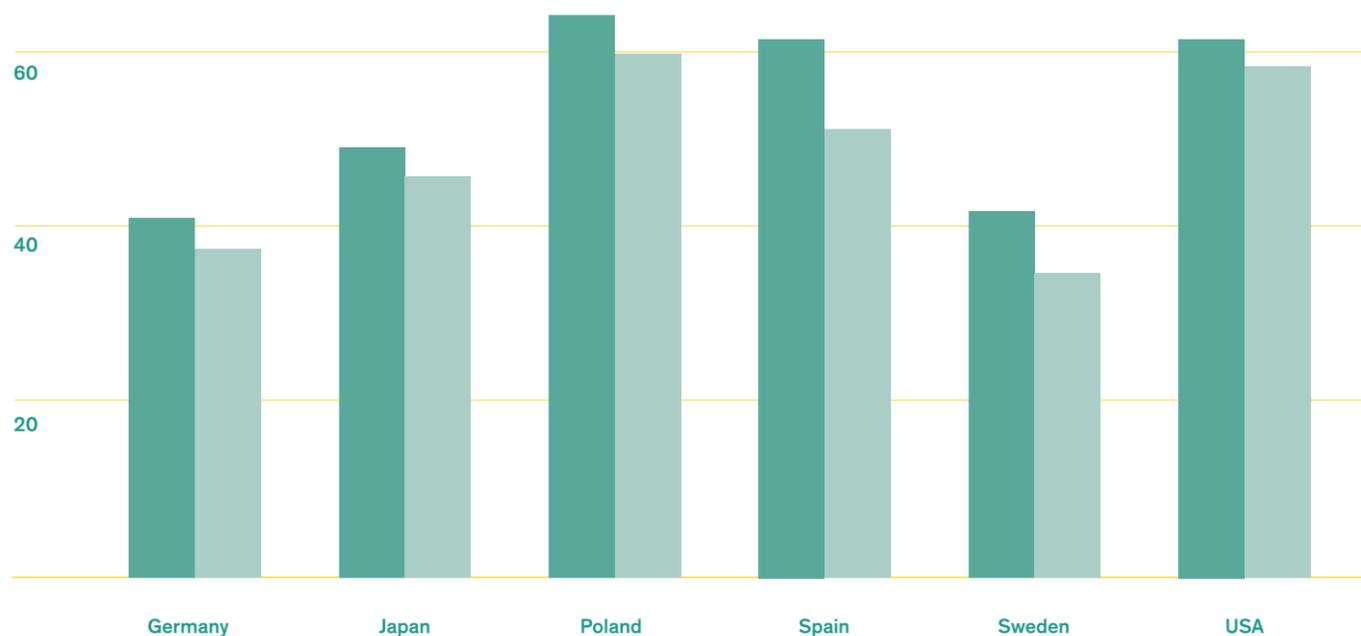
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The wide-spread school closures and lockdowns in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic have put a cruel spotlight on the relative advances of different countries in the digitalization of their education systems. The move from in-person teaching in classrooms to digital formats went smooth in countries that were already well ahead in promoting the digital transformation of their education system. In other cases, notably Germany, schools, parents, teachers, and policy-makers struggled first to provide students with the right technical equipment and then in their efforts to adjust their teaching methods to new digital formats. The enforced digital transformation was accompanied by public debates about key societal questions: Which role should the state play, which role could private companies have in such a crisis? Which funding priorities should governments have? Is softening data protection rules a price citizens are prepared to pay if it helps implementing swift change?



Marius R. Busemeyer is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Konstanz and Speaker of the Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality.”





● Worries tech. companies  
● Worries state actors

**Figure 2:** Worries about state actors and technology companies in the context of digitalization of education (shares of respondents who are “very” or “extremely” concerned, percentages)

**Different policy priorities**

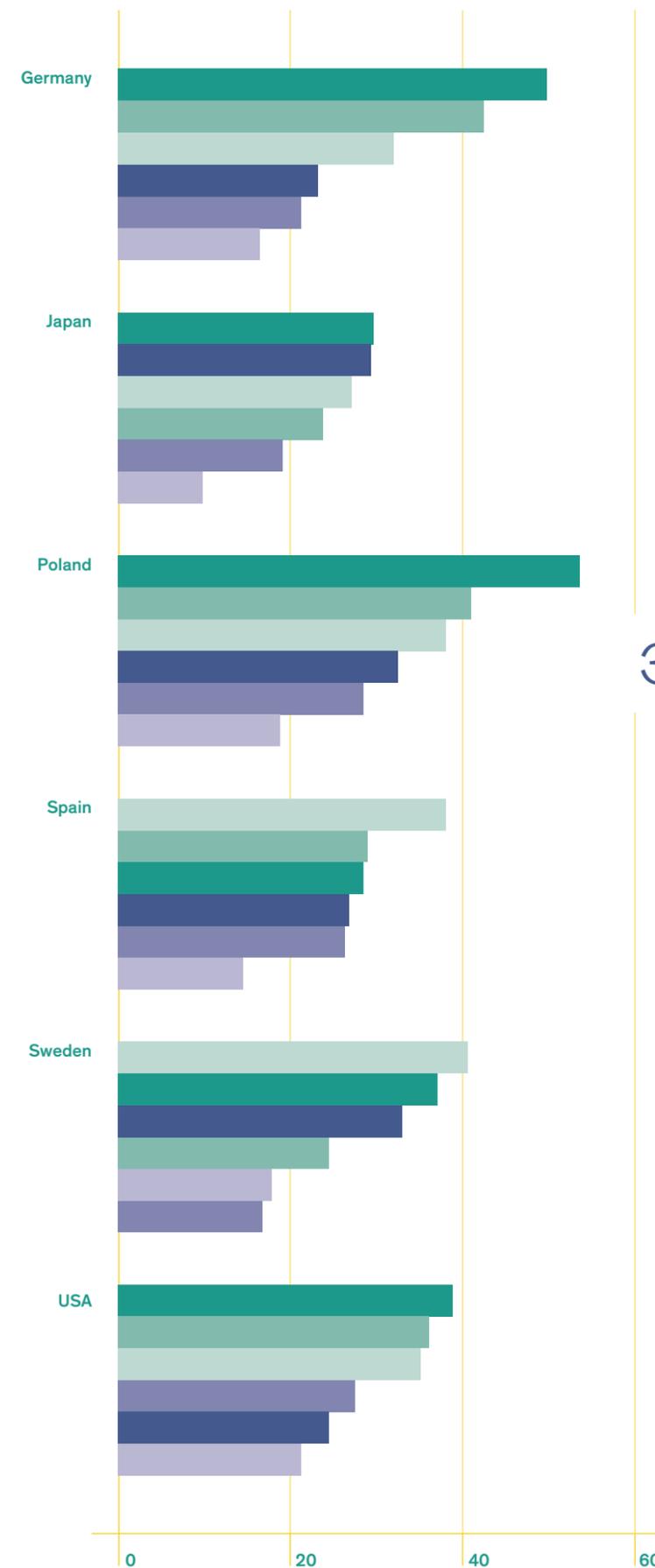
As a last piece of evidence, Figure 3 presents data on the perceived priorities of digitalization in education, for instance whether the government should invest in the IT equipment of schools, students or teachers, or whether it should focus more on providing broadband internet and further training to teachers. In this survey question, the respondents could name up to three priorities. The figure shows the percentage of respondents who have ticked the respective item in the different countries. What we see is a large degree of cross-national variation—both in terms of relative priorities as well as in the perceived relative urgency of prioritizing certain issues over others. In Germany, for instance, citizens regard it as a priority to provide reliable broadband access to the internet and wi-fi in schools as well as to spend more on IT equipment at schools, whereas providing equipment to teachers, students or parents is less of a priority.

By contrast, investing more in the further training of teachers to enable them to make use of digital technology more effectively is at the top of the list in Sweden and Spain.

Across all countries, providing teacher training and enhanced access to the internet in schools are the top priorities, whereas the increasing public spending on the provision of equipment to individual students and teachers is less important. Quite likely, these different priorities reflect a general preference for investments in the digital infrastructure rather than supporting individuals. Potentially, respondents might also regard the provisions of IT equipment to students and teachers more as a private matter.

**Figure 3:** Priorities for the digitalization of education—from the citizens’ point of view (percentages)

● Broadband and wi-fi in schools  
● IT-equipment for schools  
● IT-equipment for students  
● IT-equipment for teachers  
● Skilled IT personnel in schools  
● Further training for teachers



**Conclusion**

This evidence on the dynamics of public opinion on the digitalization of education across a range of OECD countries shows that citizens tend to associate the overall quality of education in their country with its success in promoting digitalization, with the notable exception of Germany. The survey data also reveal a significant degree of concern about state or private actors getting access to sensitive data from students and parents, although there are significant cross-national differences reflecting overall levels of political and social trust. Finally, citizens tend to prioritize public spending on improving the digital infrastructure in education systems rather than spending on individual equipment for teachers or students. /

# “Are You Better off than Your Parents?”

## *Findings from the Inequality Barometer* (N. L. Schönhage)

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How do you perceive your own social situation, compared to your parents' generation? What do you expect for your future? How do you see social mobility in Germany in general? *The Inequality Barometer offers answers to questions like these.* Analysis shows that higher educated respondents are clearly more negative in their mobility perception. A graphic explanation.



Nanna Lauritz Schönhage was a postdoctoral researcher in the project “Inequality Barometer” at the Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality.”

Are you doing better than your parents? Do you think your child(ren) will experience a better life than you have? If so, that is what we call upward social mobility—that is the mobility of personal circumstances of an individual in relation to that of their parents. Social mobility is an important characteristic of a social market economy. It involves the potential to improve one's income status, and the ability of the welfare state to shield people from significant income losses and to ensure a basic standard of living. It also affords access to economic opportunities for all segments of society. This is vital to foster social cohesion and to secure broad support for democratic institutions. Most importantly, upward social mobility increases economic stability.

Perceptions of mobility can inform people's redistributive preferences—that is, those who are pessimistic about the possibility of upward social mobility tend to be more supportive of redistributive policies. With that in mind, we have asked a representative sample of the German population a number of questions: what are people's perceptions of their own social mobility? What do they think social mobility looks like in Germany? What kind of factors are important for upward social mobility?

*i*

The Inequality Barometer is one of the larger projects from the Cluster, and collects opinions from the German public about perceptions of inequality and social mobility. We do this by surveying the German adult resident population each year. The data we detail below is from the 2022 surveywave, which was conducted between November 14 and December 2, 2022, and consists of 6,319 respondents.

1

### What do people think of their own position?

Overall, people perceive that they have experienced downward social mobility. We see this by asking people where they think their economic position currently is, and where they think their parents were on the income or wealth ladder (when they were the same age as the respondent). By subtracting the perception of their own economic position from their parents' position, we can get an estimate of people's experienced social mobility.

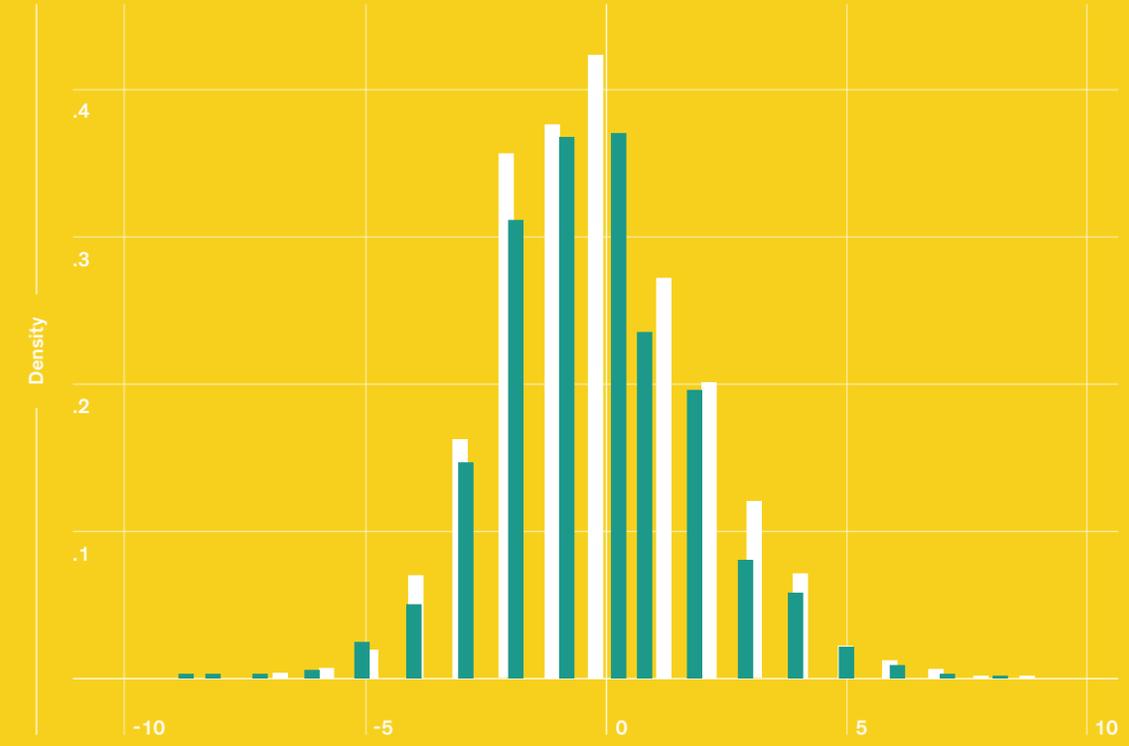
perfectly normal distribution, it is slightly skewed towards the negative. We ask half of the respondents about social mobility in terms of wealth, and the other half in terms of income. However, we see no real differences between perceived social mobility in wealth versus income. Although the items are distinct from a financial perspective, many people often mistakenly think they are the same thing. In our survey, this occurs even though we inform respondents about what wealth and income entails. →

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In Figure 1, a negative number indicates downward social mobility, whereas a positive number indicates upward social mobility. Although Figure 1 almost looks like a

Figure 1: Mobility experienced

- Income
- Wealth



2

Education and mobility experience

When we look at differences across education groups, we see that people from the higher educated group (those with Abitur or Fachhochschulreife) are significantly more negative in their mobility perception. You can see this in Figure 2, where the higher educated group reports to have experienced more of a downward social mobility than lower educated groups (Haupt-, Volksschulabschluss or less, and Mittlere Reife or the like).

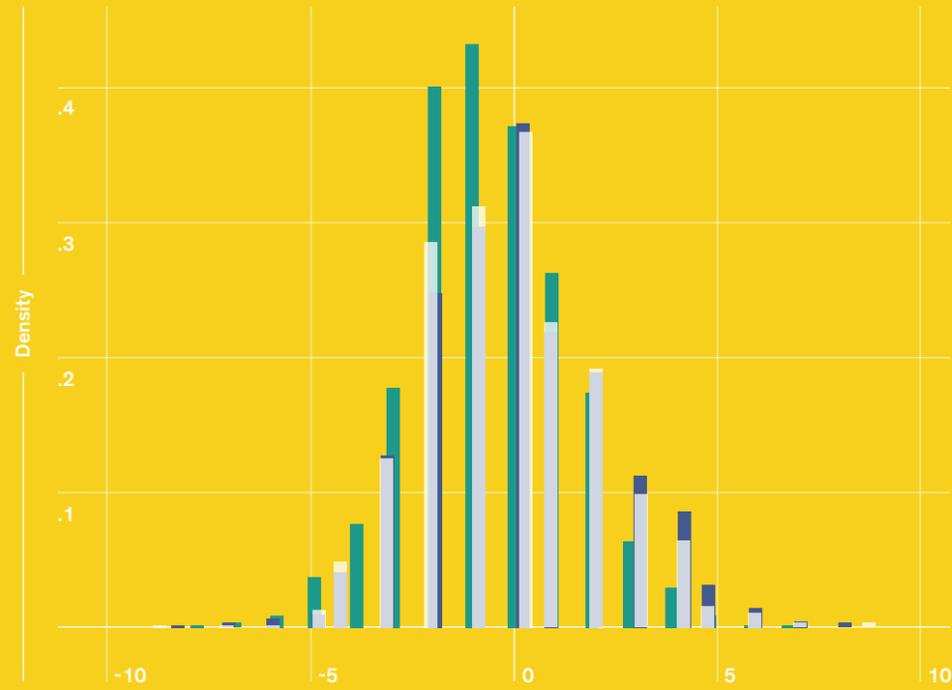


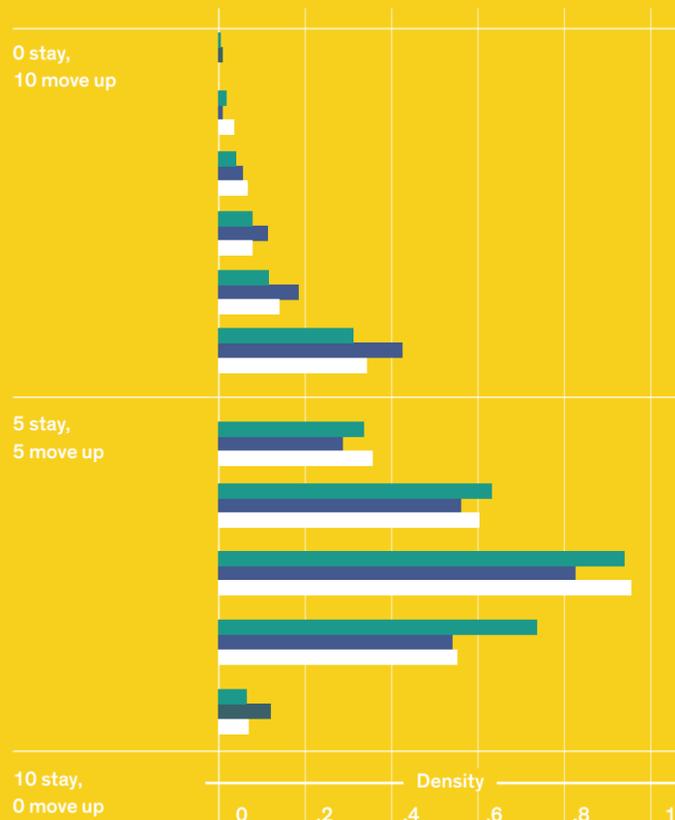
Figure 2: Mobility experienced, combined variables

- Abitur, Fachhochschulreife
- Mittlere Reife or the like
- Haupt-, Volksschulabschluss or lower

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Figure 3: Social mobility ladder

● Abitur, Fachhochschulreife  
● Mittlere Reife or the like  
● Haupt-, Volksschulabschluss or lower



3

What do people think of the upward social mobility chances of the poor?

What do people think of the upward social mobility chances of the poor? Most respondents in our sample have a rather pessimistic perspective on the chances of upward mobility. In this survey question we asked respondents to estimate how many children from the 10 percent poorest households will experience upward social mobility, and move up. Although there aren't huge differences visually in figure 3, statistical tests show that the higher educated respondents are slightly more pessimistic in their answers. \*

\* This is tested using the Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank test. This is a non-parametric method used to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the medians of two or more independent groups.

4

What kind of factors are important for upward social mobility?

Social mobility is strongly linked to the concept of equal opportunity. That is, whether we have the same chances to do well in life, regardless of our socio-economic background. Regardless of how our parents did, our gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other factors beyond our control. One way we can get an indication of how people think about equal opportunity is to gauge their meritocratic beliefs.

Meritocracy is the idea that we are rewarded for our effort, and that this reward will come to us if we work hard, regardless of our personal characteristics or socio-economic background. Meritocracy and social mobility opinions tend to be linked, as having experienced upward social mobility likely strengthens belief in a meritocratic society where everyone can climb the social ladder.

Having experienced downward mobility, or no mobility at all, may instead depress those beliefs. We see this phenomenon in our data in Figure 4. The more educated

respondents indicate that they have experienced negative downward mobility, and these respondents also tend to recognize the privilege it takes to succeed. That is—they recognize (more so than the other groups) how important one's socio-economic background is for succeeding in life. /

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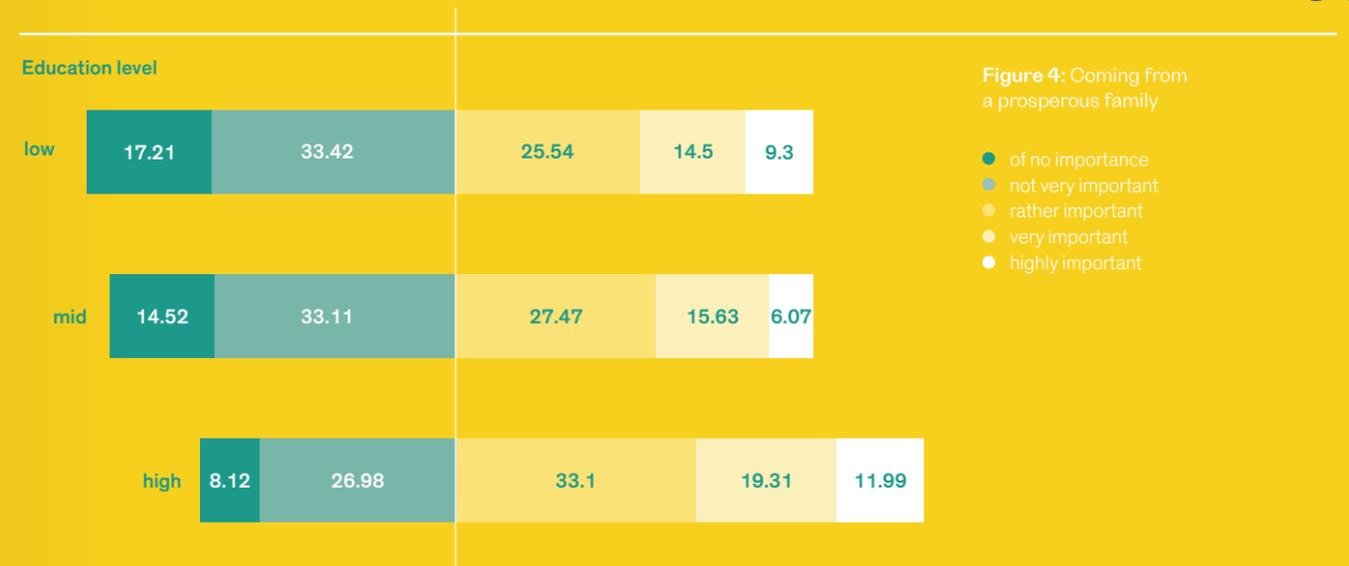
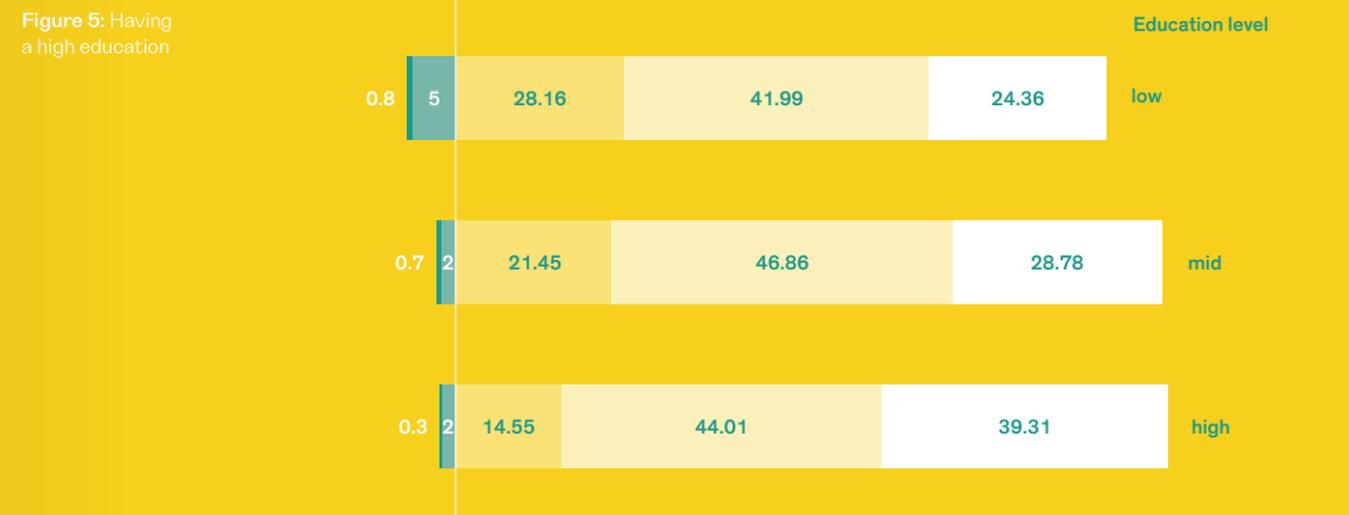


Figure 4: Coming from a prosperous family

● of no importance  
● not very important  
● rather important  
● very important  
● highly important

Figure 5: Having a high education



## INTERVIEW

# When Research Questions Emerge from Your Own Life.

## *An Interview with Christina Felde de Ormeño*

36 *Felde de Ormeño* (Interview: A. Kampermann)



↑ Portrait of Christina Felde de Ormeño

“During the pandemic, you were expected to be in the lecture hall or, in my case, the virtual lecture hall, working full-time, providing childcare and home-schooling—and that just wasn’t possible. *I reached my limits and could hardly sleep at night at first.*”

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IN\_EQUALITY MAGAZINE *Christina, you are our most recent PI at the Cluster. Would you tell us a bit about yourself?*

CHRISTINA FELDE DE ORMEÑO

Sure! I’ve been at the University of Konstanz since April 2023, but before that I was already an External Senior Fellow at the “Politics of Inequality” Cluster of Excellence. Prior to that, I was a professor at the Faculty of Business Management and Economics at the University of Würzburg for five years. During my time there, I established a collaborative project involving colleagues from sociology and psychology, with the Konstanz Cluster of Excellence serving as our model, as it were. Previously, I was based at St. Gallen and at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, where I did my doctorate. During my five years in Würzburg, I kept looking for ways to return to this area, for both professional and personal reasons: I have three children, nine, seven, and six years old. Together with my husband, we live in Zurich, where we feel very much at home. I’m delighted to be back near the mountains again and to be working at the Cluster of Excellence in an interdisciplinary research environment. →



*Let's talk about your professional profile: you're a professor at the Chair of Applied Microeconomics. Where does your fascination for this subject come from?*

Well, first of all, microeconomics is an extremely broad term that by itself doesn't mean very much. In my doctoral research on the "Female Labor Supply," I investigated why women earn less money than men. I quickly realized that it isn't women generally who earn less, but mainly mothers. When I started my dissertation, I wasn't aware I would need microeconomics, and econometrics specifically, I kind of stumbled into this a bit naively at the time. But I needed a theory, plus statistics, I had large data sets—all these things that can be processed with the tools of microeconomics and econometrics. So what brought me to microeconomics was my interest in social issues such as the gender pay gap or a better integration of children from immigrant families. I believe these questions can only be answered if you have a theory that comes from a micro perspective, that is, from the individual. Econometrics, then, is the means to that end.

*You just mentioned it: Your research addresses major socio-political issues such as migration, education, gender equity, and the labor market. Isn't that too much to handle sometimes?*

It's too much to handle all the time (laughs). But these are always projects that tackle the big questions: "How can we eliminate inequalities?" or "What are the roots of inequalities?"

*You recently investigated how school closures during the coronavirus pandemic affected the mental health of young people. How did you come up with this topic?*

My doctoral supervisor used to say that her research was always shaped by her personal circumstances. My life circumstances, like those of many others, changed radically in March 2020. I suddenly had three children at home, and the entire network of formal and informal childcare we had painstakingly built up collapsed overnight. And yet you were expected to be in the lecture hall or, in my case, the virtual lecture hall, working full-time, providing child-

care and homeschooling—and that just wasn't possible. I reached my limits and could hardly sleep at night at first. I couldn't sleep because I was so outraged and indignant at the way people were being treated, often based on arguments that just didn't hold up. Of course, I saw and understood that the pandemic was a big unknown in the beginning. But children, young people, and families were the first parts of society to be affected and the last to be allowed to return to a normal life. I spent many sleepless nights trying to understand the personalities of the politicians who made these decisions. At some point I said to myself, maybe I need to transform this destructive energy into constructive energy and do some research on it.

*The results of that study were quite drastic and received a lot of media coverage. To put it provocatively, why do we need a social science perspective on this topic?*

We said from the outset that we would not be doing any research on the pandemic itself. We are not epidemiologists, and we don't want to do anything where we can't also describe the causal relationships between policies. But the policies that were adopted in response to the pandemic not only had medical or economic consequences but also social, educational, and behavioral consequences. And that's where I think social scientists can make an important contribution. We wanted to examine the specific collateral effects of certain policies, and school closures were an obvious choice. All German states were quick to shut down their schools, but their re-opening strategies varied widely. Depending on grade level, type of school, and state, children and young people returned to school at completely different times. This enabled us to precisely compare the effects of this policy and to look at the well-being and mental health of young people.

Our colleagues from the child psychology department had already collected the data; we then contributed the statistical expertise needed to assign this data to the specific policies. Ultimately, that was exactly what I wanted to achieve with the study: if we ever find ourselves in a situation like this again, we should have learned from the past and consider not only a policy's potential to contain the pandemic but also the damage it can cause. As social scientists, we certainly cannot fight pandemics, but we can make evidence-based scientific recommendations for the policies to be adopted.

→ The hallway between office and lecture hall, University of Konstanz



*How does the Cluster of Excellence factor in your research and how does it benefit your work?*

The Cluster is unique for me in the sense that it provides me with contacts and expertise from other disciplines. I have these contacts in my own discipline, of course, but interdisciplinary contacts are not always so easy to come by. The Cluster gives me the opportunity to work on my research topics from an interdisciplinary perspective. I also feel that the Cluster is excited about my research and that I receive a lot of support for my projects. This gives me the opportunity to repeatedly explore topics that are not necessarily at the core of my own research. →

*Shall we do a few quick-fire questions at the end?*  
Yes, of course.

Optimist or pessimist? *Pessimist.*

Office or lecture hall? *The hallway in between.*

40 Being invisible or being able to fly? *Being able to fly.*

Solo or team player? *Team.*

Early riser or night owl? *Both.*



*Annalena Kampermann is Public Relations and Science Communications Officer at the Cluster of Excellence "The Politics of Inequality."*

*Your colleagues and students will be reading this interview. What would you like to share with them from your journey?*

My journey was never straightforward, but ultimately it was always mine. Interestingly, looking back now, it all makes sense, and each part was important. But there were many hurdles in between, many detours, many stumbling blocks. Now I am where I feel really comfortable and where I feel I can learn a lot from my colleagues and the people at the University of Konstanz. At the same time, I also hope to be able to contribute a lot myself, I think it's an excellent fit. /

Chaos or order? *Chaos. I wish I had order.*

Chaos too can contain some kind of order. *I need order. I'm working on creating order.*

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INEQUALITY RESEARCH

# In\_equality Conference 2024

10–12  
April

Bodenseeforum  
Konstanz & online

→ [inequality-conference.de](https://inequality-conference.de)



News



# PUBLISHED

Selected publications by Cluster researchers  
(Published June—December 2023)



44

↑ **Sharon Baute** (2023)  
Mass Euroscepticism Revisited: The Role of Distributive Justice”. European Union Politics. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165231170789>

**Luna Bellani, Kattalina Berriochoa, Vigile Marie Fabella** (2023)  
Social Mobility and Education Policy: A District-level Analysis of Legislative Behavior. Socio-Economic Review. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwad038>

← **Ole Jakob Brüggemann** (2023)  
Employees’ Perceptions of Co-workers’ Internal Promotion Penalties: The Role of Gender, Parenthood and Part-time Work. European Societies. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2270049>

**Liam F. Beiser-McGrath, Marius R. Busemeyer** (2023)  
Carbon Inequality and Support for Carbon Taxation. European Journal of Political Research. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12647>

**Urs Fischbacher, Dorothea Kübler, Robert Stüber** (2023)  
Betting on Diversity: Occupational Segregation and Gender Stereotypes. Management Science. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2023.4943>

**Benjamin A. Korman, Florian Kunze, Sebastian Koos** (2023)  
How Political Context Affects Immigrants’ Social Contact Dynamics and Mental Health at Work. Academy of Management Proceedings 2023 (1). <https://doi.org/10.5465/amproc.2023.70bp>

**Sophie Moser, Florian Kunze** (2023)  
Starting-out in a Gender-atypical Occupation: A Dynamic View on Male and Female Token’s Experiences. Academy of Management Proceedings 2023 (1). <https://doi.org/10.5465/amproc.2023.10990abstract>

**Rusen Yasar, Fabian Bergmann, Anika Lloyd-Smith, Sven-Patrick Schmid, Katharina Holzinger, Tanja Kupisch** (2023)  
Experience of Discrimination in Egalitarian Societies: The Sámi and Majority Populations in Sweden and Norway. Ethnic and Racial Studies. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2243313>



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# HONORS

Honors, memberships, appointments,  
and awards for Cluster members  
(Selection, June—December 2023)

**Miriam Butt** was honoured by the University of Konstanz as a “Diversity Champion” for her partnership and active promotion of researchers from the Global South.

**Gabriele Spilker** has been associate editor of the journal “Political Science Research and Methods” since 2023.

**Sebastian Koos** received the “Teaching Award of the University of Konstanz by Students (LUKS)” for Sociology.

Our Cluster presented the “In\_equality ECR Excellence Award” for the first time. Outstanding and scientifically innovative papers by **Qi Yu** and **Viktoria Jansesberger** in the “Doctoral Candidates” category and **Felix Wolter** and the joint work of **Nadja Wehl** and **Susanne Garritzmann** in the “Postdoctoral Candidates” category were honored.

Best Paper Award for **Marius R. Busemeyer** and **Gianna Maria Eick**. The researchers received the award from the “Research Network on Political Economy and Welfare” of the Council for European Studies (CES) for their paper “Migration Levels and Welfare Support: Evidence from the Local Level.”

**Florian Kunze** was selected by HR magazine Haufe as one of the “40 Leading HR Minds 2023” from management, science and consulting.

**Susanne Garritzmann, Nadja Wehl**  
How Education Policies Shape Political Inequality: Analysing Policy Feedback Effects in Germany. Comparative Political Studies, revise and resubmit status 2023.

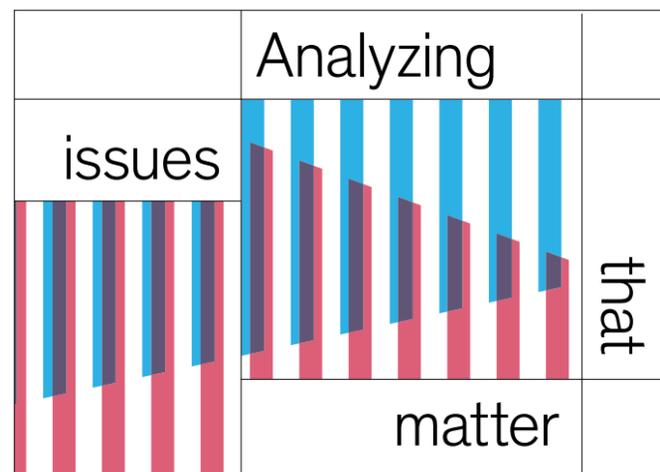
**Viktoria Jansesberger**  
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**Maila Mertens, Or Cohen Raviv, Felix Wolter**  
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**Qi Yu**  
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**Master’s Program “Sociology of Inequality”**

This English-language Master’s program—first starting out in winter term 2022/23—is characterized by a research-oriented study program dealing with contemporary topics and problems. Small seminar groups under individual supervision and a six-month external internship allow students to study the issues at hand in-depth and expand their opportunities on the labor market. In its subject matter and scientific connectivity to the Graduate School of the Social and Behavioural Sciences (GSBS) and the Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality,” the program is considered outstanding in Germany and the European Union. Students will mainly work on topics such as migration and social integration, gender inequalities, education and the labor market, organization and economy, culture and social networks, often in an international, comparative perspective. Students will receive



research-oriented training in theory building, issue-focused application of concepts of social inequality, and analytical and categorizing methods, and will be purposefully involved in ongoing sociological research.

**Next call:**  
15 March—15 April, 2024

**Information event:**  
18 March, 2024 and  
8 April, 2024

**More information:**  
<https://www.sociologie.uni-konstanz.de/en/study/ma-soi/>

ARRIVED

— Cluster Members

**Leo Ahrens**  
Postdoctoral Researcher

**Prateek Bhan**  
Postdoctoral Researcher

**Steffen Frenzel**  
Doctoral Researcher

**Lotem Halevy**  
Independent PostDoc

**Tommy Krieger**  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
(substitutes Sebastian Findeisen)

**Rafael Labanino**  
Managing Office  
Research Officer

**Sophie Moser**  
Doctoral Researcher

— Guests and Fellows 2023

**Tim Bartley**  
Georgetown University  
Guest Researcher

**Sebastian Findeisen**  
University of Konstanz  
Internal Senior Fellow

**Staffan Kumlin**  
University of Oslo  
External Senior Fellow

**Ryan Pike**  
Yale University  
Guest Researcher

**Dirk Leuffen**  
“23 gute Nachrichten aus 2023” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 30 Dezember 2023)

**Gabriele Spilker**  
“Politologin zur Weltklimakonferenz in Dubai: Die Gefahr von Greenwashing ist hoch” (Tagespiegel, 4 December 2023)

**Marius R. Busemeyer**  
“Bin ich reich? – Warum wir mehr über Geld reden sollten” (ardaudiothek.de, 28 November 2023)

**Florian Kunze**  
“Woran Zugewanderte auf dem Arbeitsmarkt scheitern” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 22 November 2023)

**Benjamin Korman**  
“Wo Trump dominiert, machen ausländische NBA-Profis mehr Fehler” (SPIEGEL, 10 November 2023)

**Claudia Diehl**  
“Zum Migrationsgipfel” (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 06 November 2023)

**Felix Wolter**  
“So reagieren Deutsche auf Zuwanderer in der Nachbarschaft” (Frankfurter Allgemeine, 20 October 2023)

**Gerald Schneider**  
“Wie umgehen mit antiisraelischen Protesten?” (WDR, 16 October 2023)

**Christina Felfe de Ormeño**  
“Corona: Kinder und Jugendliche litten unter Schulschließungen” (tagesschau.de, 19 August 2023)

**Daniel Thym**  
“How Ukraine’s crisis tested European attitudes towards refugees” (nature.com, 10 August 2023)

**Marcel Fratzscher**  
“Die Scham des Reichtums. Eine Kolumne mit dem Exzellenzcluster ‘The Politics of Inequality’” (zeit.de, 4 August 2023)

**Thomas Hinz**  
“Warum kaufen so wenig junge Leute Immobilien?” (faz.net, 6 July 2023)

**Marius R. Busemeyer**  
“Experte: Wahrnehmung von Einkommen ‘verzerrt’” (ZDF, 20 June 2023)

Fasting during Ramadan might have a negative impact on students' performance in school—or so one would think. However, an international comparative analysis shows that intensive Ramadan fasting has a positive effect on school performance, especially in Muslim countries. *In other countries, Muslim students, after intensive fasting, catch-up with their non-Muslim classmates, who on average perform better.*

INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

# Religious Practice, Identity and Learning Outcomes.

## *How Fasting during Ramadan Affects Academic Performance*

(E. Hornung, G. Schwerdt, M. Strazzeri)

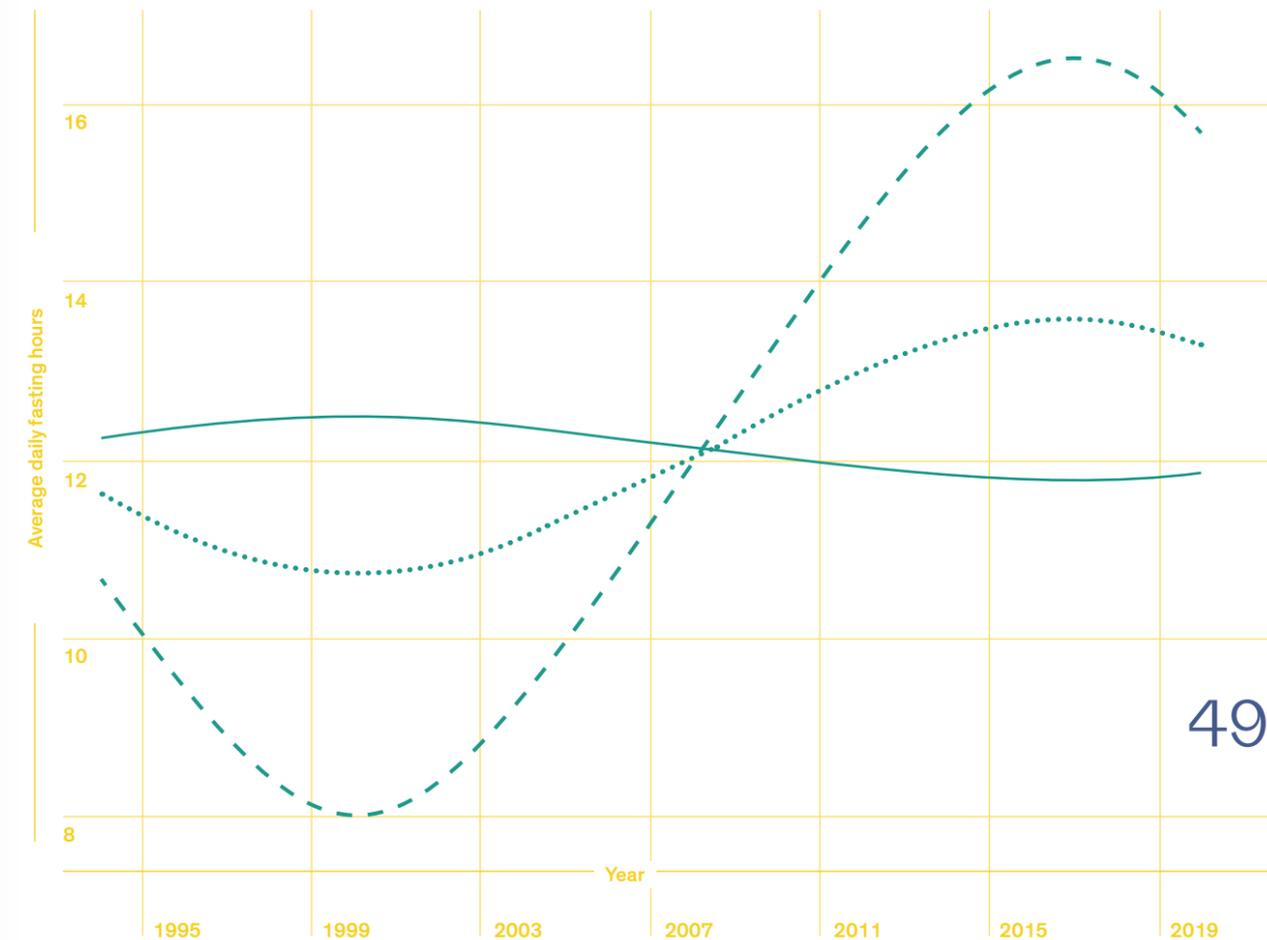


Figure 1: Average daily fasting hours during Ramadan

— Indonesia  
 - - - Kazakhstan  
 ..... Oman

Note: Average daily fasting hours in three selected countries: Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Oman. The fasting hours are determined by the time between sunrise and sunset in the respective capital city. Vertical lines show the years in which a TIMSS study was conducted.

Fasting during Ramadan, one of the five pillars of Islam, is practiced by over a billion believers every year. As fasting from sunrise to sunset is physically challenging, it is reasonable to assume that it has a negative impact on the educational outcomes of Muslim students. On the surface, this assumption seems to be supported by international comparative studies of student achievement such as the 2019 TIMSS study, in which countries with a Muslim majority score lower in math and science than countries with a Christian majority.

More specific research findings also point to negative direct effects of Ramadan fasting on educational outcomes and show a detrimental effect on individual health or overall economic performance.

Then again, in the same study, Felipe R. Campante and David Yanagizawa-Drott also find that a more intensive Ramadan, involving longer daily fasting hours, increases subjective well-being. This can presumably be explained by the feeling of greater involvement in the community (of believers) through the communal experience of a particularly challenging religious practice. This hypothesis is consistent with other research findings. For example, an analysis of the religious practice of Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, shows that this experience promotes tolerance among participants and creates a shared identity. →

### Duration of fasting and its effect on student achievement

In a recent study, we investigated whether a more intensive Ramadan also has a long-term positive effect on educational performance. In our empirical analysis, we exploited variations in the length of daily fasting over time and between countries. Since Islam follows the lunar calendar, the month of Ramadan begins a few days earlier in each solar year and shifts across the seasons. The direction and intensity of the change in fasting depends on a country's geographical location. For example, Ramadan is much more intense in countries further away from the equator when it occurs in the summer months.

We used two methods to examine the effects of Ramadan intensity (i.e., the length of daily fasting hours) on student achievement. First, we used the TIMSS data to examine the effects in countries with varying proportions of Muslim populations. Second, we examined the effects in European countries for students with different religious affiliations. For the second analysis, we used the PISA dataset. The data from these two cross-sectional international student achievement test surveys allow us to compare the educational performance of 8th

graders in the participating countries over a longer period of time. Furthermore, our empirical analysis draws on the results of school-specific tests conducted after Ramadan.

Using the TIMSS data (1995–2019), we show that increasing Ramadan intensity by 1.25 hours notably increases math and science test scores in Muslim countries (by around 11 percent of a standard deviation). In non-Muslim countries, there is no such clear variation at any given time during the school year. Using PISA data (2003–2018) from eight Western European countries, we show that an increase in average Ramadan fasting hours by 10 percent reduces the otherwise notable gap in PISA test scores between Muslim and non-Muslim students by 2.5 to 3.0 percent. For this analysis, we only used the variation between children of different religious affiliations within the same country. No such reduction in performance differences resulting from a more intensive Ramadan can be observed between natives and immigrants from non-Muslim countries. This dispels the concern that our estimation results are caused by general temporal trends in the evolution of the performance gap between natives and immigrants.

### Religious activity promotes social capital

We hypothesize two possible mechanisms to explain our results: first, religious activity might affect student performance if it enhances non-cognitive abilities (e.g., diligence) that are directly relevant to achievements. The second explanation is related to the degree of social cohesion within communities (known as social capital) and social identity. Sociological theories point out that religious activities promote the formation of social capital and hence also have a positive effect on educational outcomes. Moreover, a shared identity may also have a positive effect on students' abilities.

Drawing on various data sets, we can show that it is most likely the second explanation that drives the increase in student performance during an intensive Ramadan. Overall, our results cast a positive light on the relationship between Muslim religiosity and secular education, implying it might be worthwhile to make stronger efforts to promote the social aspects of religiosity. /



*Erik Hornung is a Professor of Economic History at the University of Cologne and Member of the Cluster of Excellence "ECONtribute: Markets & Public Policy."*



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52

peer-reviewed journal articles published



veröffentlichte Artikel in Fachzeitschriften mit Peer-Review

242

projects & research groups implemented

34

Projekte und Forschungsgruppen verwirklicht



Follower\*innen in den sozialen Medien gewonnen

3.450+

social media followers acquired



nationalities brought on board

33

Nationalitäten an Bord gebracht



professorships with Cluster links installed at University of Konstanz

9

Professuren mit Verbindung zum Cluster an der Universität Konstanz eingerichtet



Disziplinen integriert

disciplines integrated

7



Fellows welcomed (PhD, postdoc & senior)

64

Fellows empfangen (PhD, Postdoc & Senior)

colloquia & 67 trainings and workshop held



Kolloquien & 67 Trainings und Workshops durchgeführt



percent share of women realized

41

Prozent Frauenanteil erreicht



Cluster-Professuren geschaffen und besetzt

Cluster professorships created & filled

2

212

researchers connected

Forscher\*innen zusammengebracht



52