

On the One-Sided, Distorted Perspective of the “Leipzig Authoritarianism Study”¹

Günter Roth

Recently, the “Leipzig Authoritarianism Study” once again attracted significant attention with its claim that right-wing authoritarian attitudes in Germany extend deep into the center of society and pose a major threat to democracy.² However, the study presents a one-sided and distorted picture of authoritarianism: For one thing, it looks only to the right, while left-wing, technocratic, or religiously motivated authoritarian attitudes are ignored. Furthermore, the interpretations and analyses of “right-wing authoritarianism” itself are at times exaggerated and distorted. Above all, the study fails to recognize the background of widespread political frustration and growing resentment in terms of both symptoms and causes. For the “neglect of democracy” lamented by Decker et al. does not stem solely or primarily from the people, but rather from the ruling (academic) political elites and a technocratic-authoritarian policy presented as “without alternative.” But first things first: before examining the study’s findings in greater detail, we must ask what authoritarianism is, what forms it takes, and how it should be identified or “measured.”

What is authoritarianism, and what forms does it take?

On the one hand, authoritarianism refers to an autocratic, dictatorial form of government that demands obedience, conformity, and harsh punishments for deviations from rules or orders. This stands in contrast to a liberal-democratic order, characterized by equal rights and participatory decision-making within a pluralistic political arena, elections, and the separation and checks on power.³ This corresponds more to authoritarian or liberal attitudinal types, whereby authoritarianism manifests itself in three “sub-dimensions”:

1. Subordination to hierarchies (*subjugation*),

¹ This article first appeared on January 28, 2025, at: www.einfachkompliziert.de, and on February 5, 2025, in Overton Magazine <https://overton-magazin.de/hintergrund/wissenschaft/die-einaeugige-und-verzernte-sicht-der-leipziger-autoritarismus-studie/>.

² Decker, Oliver, Johannes Kiess, Aylene Heller, and Elmar Brähler, eds. 2024. *United in Resentment: Authoritarian Dynamics and Far-Right Attitudes (Leipzig Authoritarianism Study)*. Giessen: Psychosozial-Verlag.

³ See Schmidt, Manfred G. 2019. *Theories of Democracy: An Introduction*. Wiesbaden: Springer-Verlag, VS.

2. Conformity to norms, values, and moral principles (*conventionalism*) and
3. advocacy of strict social controls and punishments for deviations (*aggression*).⁴

Authoritarian attitudes can be based on various ideologies, but research since Adorno/Horkheimer has focused almost exclusively on right-wing authoritarianism—as has the Leipzig Study. Some even claim that left-wing authoritarian tendencies are irrelevant⁵ or a myth.⁶ Left-wing authoritarianism has only been a topic of research to a limited extent.⁷ In this context: the emerging technocratic authoritarianism (which is not even recognized as such) and religious authoritarianism should not be overlooked (e.g., Muslim, but also Christian, which plays an often-overlooked, central role with regard to anti-Semitism and racism).⁸

What about left-wing or technocratic authoritarianism?

Authoritarian attitudes (submission, conformity, and aggression toward dissent) also exist on the political left, not just in “real-existing socialism.” In addition to violent attacks on right-wing politicians or institutions, radical leftists frequently prevent or disrupt public events and the free exchange of ideas, with “cancel culture” and a form of authoritarianism—under the banner of what is supposedly the only “truth and goodness”—having spread particularly on college campuses.⁹ This tendency is reinforced by a constant perception of crisis, leading to the emergence of a technocratic

⁴ See Beierlein, Constanze, Frank Asbrock, Mathias Kauff, and Peter Schmidt. 2014. “The Short Scale of Authoritarianism (KSA-3) <https://doi.org/10.6102/zis228> (January 23, 2025).

⁵ See Beierlein et al., op. cit., footnote 3, p. 5.

⁶ See Conway III, Lucian Gideon, Alivia Zubrod, Linus Chan, James D. McFarland, and Evert Van de Vliet. 2023. “Is the myth of left-wing authoritarianism itself a myth?” *Frontiers in Psychology* 13: 1041391. doi:[10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1041391](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1041391).

⁷ See Costello, Thomas, Shauna Bowes, Sean Stevens, Irwin Waldman, and Scott Lilienfeld. 2020. “Clarifying the Structure and Nature of Left-Wing Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 122(1): (preprint). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000341>; Costello, Thomas H. 2023. “The Conundrum of Measuring Authoritarianism: A Case Study in Political Bias.” In *Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology: Nature, Scope, and Solutions*, ed. Craig L. Frisby, Richard E. Redding, William T. O'Donohue, and Scott O. Lilienfeld. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 585–601. doi:[10.1007/978-3-031-29148-7_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29148-7_22); Costello, Thomas H., and Christopher J. Patrick. 2023. “Development and Initial Validation of Two Brief Measures of Left-Wing Authoritarianism: A Machine Learning Approach.” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 105(2): 187–202. doi:[10.1080/00223891.2022.2081809](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2022.2081809).

⁸ On the historical background of Christian-motivated racism and anti-Semitism: Sommer, Antje (1984): *Race*. In: Brunner, Otto / Conze, Werner / Koselleck, Reinhart (eds.): *Basic Concepts of History*, Vol. 5. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta; Deschner, Karlheinz. 1965. *With God and the Fascists. The Vatican in Alliance with Mussolini, Franco, Hitler, and Pavelic*. Stuttgart: Günther; Deschner, Karlheinz. 1968. *Once Again the Rooster Crowed. An Unmasking of Christianity from the Evangelists to the Fascists*. Stuttgart: Günther.

⁹ See Hopf, Wilhelm, ed. 2019. *Academic Freedom and Its “Enemies.”* Münster: LIT Verlag Münster. Revers, Matthias, and Richard Traunmüller. 2020. “Is Free Speech in Danger on University Campuses? Some Preliminary Evidence from a Most Likely Case.” *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 72(3): 471–97. doi:[10.1007/s11577-020-00713-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-020-00713-z); Traunmüller, Richard, and Matthias Revers. 2021. “Freedom of Speech at the University.” *KZfSS Cologne Journal of Sociology and Social Psychology* 73(1):

137–46. doi:[10.1007/s11577-021-00758-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-021-00758-8); Traunmüller, Richard. 2023. "Testing the 'Campus Cancel Culture' Hypothesis." doi:[10.2139/ssrn.4392840](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4392840).

Authoritarianism gained momentum, expressed in slogans such as “there is no alternative” or “follow the science,” and became ubiquitous during the “COVID-19 crisis.”¹⁰ During this most recent state of emergency, authoritarian attitudes grew to the point of being virtually endemic, so that all dissenting views were reflexively defamed and censored across the board, even by reputable scientists, who were increasingly removed from their professional positions.¹¹ During the “coronavirus crisis,” it was particularly those on the left who displayed alarming intolerance, hatred, and contempt toward anyone who criticized or rejected the authoritarian “anti-coronavirus measures.”¹² Amid the growing authoritarian furor and zeal for censorship¹³, a journalist on public broadcasting recently even suggested in all seriousness that freedom of speech be nominated as the “unword of the year,” to which a “philosopher” attested that this was a “right-wing populist battle cry.”¹⁴

Are “libertarians” actually “authoritarians,” and are all “conspiracy theories” right-wing authoritarian?

Far-fetched constructs and analyses serve to obscure left-wing authoritarianism in the Leipzig study. Thus, people protesting for freedom and against authoritarian coercive measures during the COVID-19 state of emergency are reinterpreted and defamed as “libertarian authoritarians.” However, this self-contradictory label dissolves or conflates the logical polarity between liberal and authoritarian (described by Orwell as “doublethink”). In fact, as expected, people with *libertarian* leanings were the most vocal in their opposition to the freedom-restricting anti-COVID measures.¹⁵ To reinterpret these libertarians as authoritarians simply because they rejected the authoritarian “measures” sailing under the false flag of consideration and solidarity (which

¹⁰ Roth, Günter. 2023. “Crisis Politics and Authoritarianism of ‘Good and True,’” <https://einfachkompliziert.de/krisenpolitik-und-autoritarismus-des-guten-und-wahren/> (January 6, 2024).

¹¹ See Shir-Raz, Yaffa, Ety Elisha, Brian Martin, Natti Ronel, and Josh Guetzkow. 2023. “Censorship and Suppression of Covid-19 Heterodoxy: Tactics and Counter-Tactics.” *Minerva* 61: 407–33. doi:[10.1007/s11024-022-09479-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-022-09479-4); on dismissal of female professors and male professors in German-speaking countries: Egner, Heike, and Anke Uhlenwinkel. 2024. *Anyone Who Causes Trouble Must Go!* Neu-Isenburg: Westend Verlag GmbH; Meyen, Michael. 2023. *How I Lost My University: Thirty Years of the War on Education. An East German’s Assessment*. Berlin: edition ost; Frey, K, and ST Stevens. 2023. “Scholars Under Fire—Attempts to Sanction Scholars from 2000 to 2022.” *Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression*. <https://www.thefire.org/sites/default/files/2023/04/Scholars%20Under%20Fire%20-%20Attempts%20to%20Sanction%20Scholars%20from%202000%20to%202022.pdf> (April 23, 2023).

¹² See Klöckner, Marcus, and Jens Wernicke. 2022. *Let the Entire Republic Point the Finger at Them: The COVID-19 Injustice and Its Perpetrators*. 1st edition, unabridged version. Munich: RBmedia Verlag; Müller-Ullrich, Burkhard. 2023. *I Was There: The Archive of the COVID-19 Injustice*. Steckborn (CH): Kontrafunk Edition.

¹³ See: Hofbauer, Hannes. 2022. *Censorship: Publication Bans Through the Lens of History. From the Church’s Index to YouTube Deletions*. Vienna: Promedia Verlag.

¹⁴ Martens, René: “Dark Times Bear the Mark of Derealization” (Altpapier column), Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (July 12, 2024), <https://www.mdr.de/altpapier/das-altpapier-3742.html> (Accessed: Nov. 22, 2024).

¹⁵ Peng, Yilang. 2022. “Politics of COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates: Left/Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, and Libertarianism.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 194: 111661. doi:[10.1016/j.paid.2022.111661](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.111661).

were excessive, ineffective, and harmful)¹⁶ is, however, absurd. This is not to deny that among those protesting the anti-COVID measures there were also some right-wing authoritarians and esoteric “crazy people.” The majority of the protesters, however, held left-wing or center-left as well as radical democratic positions.¹⁷ Incidentally, it is, of course, possible for a person who generally holds liberal views to also hold authoritarian views on certain issues. However, blurring or conflating these opposing *types of attitudes* is misleading.

The same applies to the trendy catch-all term “*conspiracy mentality*,” which is also primarily associated with right-wing authoritarian attitudes in the Leipzig study. The construct remains vague, however, because conspiracy theories exist across the entire political spectrum—ranging from the absurd to those empirically confirmed (see, for example, the 2003 Bush/Powell administration’s conspiracy regarding the Iraq War). In any case, conspiracies are possible even in democracies, albeit made more difficult by checks on power and transparency—provided these mechanisms function effectively. Furthermore, it should not be denied that there is a certain connection between political disillusionment, conspiracy theories, and right-wing authoritarianism. The question, however, is to what extent, and what is the symptom and what is the effect in this complex structure? The reflexive association of conspiracy theories with right-wing authoritarianism is, in any case, misleading and itself betrays an authoritarian tendency to suppress free thought.

¹⁶ See, for example, an early work: Sönnichsen, Andreas. 2020. “COVID-19: Where Is the Evidence?” *EbM Network*. <https://www.ebm-netzwerk.de/de/veroeffentlichungen/covid-19> (December 20, 2020) or: Bendavid, Eran, Christopher Oh, Jay Bhattacharya, and John P. A. Ioannidis. 2021. “Assessing Mandatory Stay-at-Home and Business Closure Effects on the Spread of COVID-19.” *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/eci.13484>; Chin, V, J P Ioannidis, M A Tanner, and S Cripps. 2021. “Effect estimates of COVID-19 non-pharmaceutical interventions are non-robust and highly model-dependent.” 136. doi:[10.1016/j.jclinepi.2021.03.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2021.03.014); Bendavid, Eran, and Chirag J. Patel. 2024. “Epidemic outcomes following government responses to COVID-19: Insights from nearly 100,000 models.” *Science Advances* 10(23): eadn0671. doi:[10.1126/sciadv.adn0671](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adn0671).

¹⁷ See: Grande, Edgar, Swen Hutter, Sophia Hunger, and Eylem Kanol. 2021. Are *They All “Covidiot?” The Political Potential of the COVID-19 Protests in Germany*. WZB Discussion Paper. Working Paper. <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/234470> (November 27, 2021) and my critical analysis of it: <https://einfachkompliziert.de/medien-und-die-erosion-der-demokratie/>; Koos, Sebastian. 2021. “The ‘Querdenker.’ Who Participates in COVID-19 Protests and Why? Results of a Survey Conducted During the ‘Corona protests’ on October 4, 2020, in Konstanz,” University of Konstanz: Working Paper, Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality,” Koos, Sebastian. 2021. “The ‘Querdenker.’ Who Takes Part in COVID-19 Protests and Why? Results of a Survey Conducted During the ‘COVID-19 Protests’ on October 4, 2020, in Konstanz”; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348591651_Die_Querdenker_Wer_nimmt_an_Corona-Protessen_teil_und_warum_Ergebnisse_einer_Befragung_waehrend_der_Corona-Proteste_am_4102020_in_Konstanz; Nachtwey, Oliver, Nadine Frei, and Robert Schäfer. 2020. *Political Sociology of the COVID-19 Protests*. Basel: University of Basel. Working Paper. doi:[10.31235/osf.io/zyp3f](https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/zyp3f); on the media’s defamation of the protests: Waldhaus, Christoph. 2021. “On ‘Covidiot,’ COVID-19 Deniers, and Other Right-Wing Conspiracy Theorists: An Analysis of Media Frames.” *Synergies Pays Germanophones* (14): 45–60.

How is authoritarianism identified or “measured”?

While authoritarian behavior can be observed, the underlying attitudes must be determined through surveys using questions, statements, or “items.” Either general stimuli or those targeting right-wing or left-wing, technocratic, or religiously motivated authoritarianism (e.g., Islamism) can be used. However, common instruments focus only on right-wing authoritarianism: For example, Decker et al. ask respondents whether they agree with the following statement: “In the national interest, a dictatorship is the better form of government under certain circumstances.” (using a 5-point response scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) mostly disagree, (3) partly agree, partly disagree, (4) mostly agree, (5) strongly agree). Here, the middle, ambivalent, undecided response (partly agreeing, partly disagreeing) is unilaterally interpreted as “latent agreement.” For this item, instead of “in the national interest,” left-wing, technocratic, or religious ‘stimuli’ could also be used—for example, agreement with a dictatorship in the interest of climate protection or public health, etc. The same applies to the third item, “What Germany needs now is a single strong party that embodies the national community as a whole,” whereby the willingness to support a one-party system for the sake of climate protection or other causes could also be tested. Accordingly, the short scale for authoritarianism (or, more precisely, right-wing authoritarianism)—which was included in the Leipzig study (albeit under the peculiar term “somasochism”) and which will not be discussed further here—would also need to be adapted. Incidentally, this could also serve to further develop the (improvement-needing) measurement tool for left-wing authoritarianism presented by Costello et al., which cannot be explored in depth here either.¹⁸

Exaggerated, Often Distorted Interpretations

There is hardly any support for authoritarian forms of government

The main thesis of the Leipzig study is that right-wing authoritarian attitudes are widespread, extending into the center of society—a point already expressed in the title or, for example, on p. 51. However, autocratic, anti-democratic attitudes are rare: Over 90% of respondents endorse democracy as an idea (p. 72); fewer than 5% agree that a dictatorship is the better form of government, while over 80% reject this view, even when presented with the prompt “under certain circumstances.” Equally clear is the rejection of a “leader” who “rules with a strong hand” (p. 36). Overall, only 4.5% of people in Germany hold a “consistent far-right worldview” (in

¹⁸ Costello, Thomas H., and Christopher J. Patrick. 2023. “Development and Initial Validation of Two Brief Measures of Left-Wing Authoritarianism: A Machine Learning Approach.” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 105(2): 187–202. doi:[10.1080/00223891.2022.2081809](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2022.2081809).

In 2002, the figure was just under 10%) (p. 50). Even among AfD voters, the vast majority reject the statements regarding a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship, although 16.9% agree with them somewhat or completely. Overall, the statement that Germany now needs a single strong party that embodies the national community as a whole is rejected to a slightly lesser extent, with 61% of respondents disagreeing. 4.5% agree fully, 13.1% agree mostly, and a large group of 21.4% respond as undecided or ambivalent (p. 36). Decker et al. interpret this one-sidedly as “latent” agreement and misleadingly exaggerate it on p. 186: “In 2024, just under 39% of people in Germany believe we need a single strong (ethnic) party.”¹⁹ Presumably, it should have been stated more clearly that there should be “only a single party...” In this regard, one must take into account the consensus-oriented political culture of “concordance democracy,” which is characterized by antipathy toward political parties that produce or block decisions contrary to the will of the majority—a point to which we will return. Finally, the Leipzig study also claims—contrary to the collected data—that: “The proportion of supporters of an autocratic political system has thus increased significantly.” (p. 186) In fact, however, these percentages have fallen from 7.6% (2002) to 3.2% (2024) (see p. 45). In summary, the data do *not* indicate *any* trend toward support for a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship in Germany.

Right-wing Authoritarian Resentments: Definition and Background

The far-right advocacy of an authoritarian order is generally accompanied by nationalist, chauvinist, xenophobic, and racist sentiments, to which are added anti-Semitic, social Darwinist, and sexist disparagements. In the following, I will focus on *xenophobia* because it is particularly widespread and is considered the “cornerstone” of right-authoritarian tendencies and the starting point for right-authoritarian radicalization. However, this raises a particularly difficult question regarding the distinction between national-conservative and right-authoritarian attitudes. To what extent, for example, should widespread demands for the primacy of traditional, “indigenous” culture be classified as right-wing authoritarian? It is also often forgotten that every nation-state, by definition, grants privileged rights to its citizens (e.g., regarding residence, employment, and voting) and, furthermore, implicitly or explicitly favors and places a higher value on the native (indigenous) language, culture, and ethnic groups (e.g., by designating only Christian holidays as official). Added to this, as a backdrop to xenophobia, is the fact that the mostly low-skilled

¹⁹ A corresponding one-sided interpretation is also evident in the responses to the Short Scale of Authoritarianism (listed as “sodomasochism”), which is why these will not be interpreted here (p. 81).

immigrants are, objectively speaking, competitors for scarce wages, housing, welfare benefits, and status and power—especially among the lower or middle classes with low levels of education. This can easily give rise to resentment, even if it does not thereby become legitimate. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that immigrants from foreign cultures often reject or oppose—even violently—the customs and laws prevailing in this country (especially regarding gender equality). All of this fuels or reinforces fears of “strangers,” as well as prejudices and resentment. The link between fear and resentment is well documented, and it often takes alarmingly little to incite people against other groups labeled as competitive, threatening, or hostile. Recently, for example, the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated how easily fears can give rise to authoritarian resentment—a phenomenon that was particularly and alarmingly evident among left-leaning and academically educated individuals.²⁰ Once again: These background notes are in no way intended to legitimize resentment of any kind or origin.

Common Forms of Resentment Toward Strangers and Room for Interpretation

Hostile, derogatory attitudes toward immigrants perceived as “foreign” are widespread in Germany, especially toward people of the Muslim faith, who are perceived to a particular degree as a threat to the dominant, traditional culture. For example, 32.8% of respondents in the West and as many as 43.2% in the East fully or largely agreed with the statement: “The immigration of Muslims should be prohibited.” This amounts to discrimination against people based on their religious affiliation and denies them, for example, the fundamental right to asylum. Sinti and Roma are disparaged with similar frequency and openness: For instance, 40% (in both the East and the West) agreed that they should be “removed from city centers” (p. 67), which similarly denies them fundamental rights across the board. While the causes outlined above may be at play here, they can in no way legitimize such resentment. Similarly frequent are more or less hostile statements regarding foreigners that are endorsed. For example, the statement “The Federal Republic is being overrun by foreigners to a dangerous degree” is fully or largely endorsed by 33.8% (p. 42). Many likely agree with this statement out of concern for preserving the primacy

²⁰ See, e.g., Amat, F., A. Arenas, and A. Falcó. 2020. “Pandemics meet democracy. Experimental evidence from the COVID-19 crisis in Spain.” <https://osf.io/dkusw/download>; Schippers, Michaëla, John P. A. Ioannidis, and Ari Joffe. 2022. *Aggressive Measures, Rising Inequalities, and Mass Formation During the COVID-19 Crisis: An Overview and Proposed Way Forward*. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. SSRN Scholarly Paper. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4118910> (July 21, 2022); Peng, Yilang. 2022. “Politics of COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates: Left/Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, and Libertarianism.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 194: 111661. doi:[10.1016/j.paid.2022.111661](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.111661).

of the native culture as legitimate, given the very large number of immigrants from foreign cultural backgrounds. Perhaps this is why, in an earlier survey, the majority agreed that in Germany one cannot say anything negative about foreigners without being labeled a racist.²¹ Many would likely also associate the second item on xenophobia with legitimate privileges for locals: “When jobs become scarce, foreigners should be sent back to their home countries,” a statement to which 24.8% agreed (26.7% are ambivalent) (p. 42). The assessment depends, among other things, on whether the foreigner has only a temporary right of residence, which makes deportation seem more legitimate, provided that different rights for locals and foreigners are to be maintained. The third “item” on xenophobia is also less clear-cut than it seems: “Foreigners come here only to take advantage of our welfare state.” Recently, about one-third agreed with this statement (p. 42). However, the statement only becomes xenophobic with the addition of “only,” because it implies that all immigrants are primarily motivated by economic considerations. In fact, these motives are indeed at play, so it remains unclear how the respondents understood the statement and dealt with the contradiction. In summary, while xenophobic resentments are widespread, they leave room for interpretation due to the difficulty of distinguishing them from moderate national-conservative attitudes. Furthermore, it should be noted that despite widespread resentment toward certain groups, openly authoritarian attitudes remain rare, even though there is a fluid transition and a creeping radicalization of national-conservative attitudes.

“Neglected Democracy” or: “Government of the People, by Elites, for the Rich”

Decker et al. overlook the fact that the “neglect” of democracy does not stem solely or primarily from the people, but first and foremost from technocratic-authoritarian elites. For some time now, there has been cause to lament a glaring lack of representativeness and “responsiveness”—or a “government of the people, by elites, for the rich.”²² Thus, both center-right and center-left governments have been pushing through similar technocratic-authoritarian “reforms” as “without alternative” against the will of the majority of the lower classes, while social inequality has continued to grow.²³ Added to this is the constant shift of political decision-making and power to supranational, technocratic entities such as the European Union, along with a growing host of “international organizations,” such as the “World Health Organization” (WHO), the so-called

²¹ See Zick, Andreas, Beate Küpper, and Wilhelm Berghan. 2019. *The Lost Middle—Hostile Conditions: Far-Right Attitudes in Germany 2018*. Bonn: Dietz, JHW Nachf., 164 ff.

²² Elsässer, Lea, Svenja Hense, and Armin Schäfer. 2018. “Government of the People, by the Elite, for the Rich: Unequal Responsiveness in an Unlikely Case.” *MPIfG Working Paper* 18(5). <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/180215> (December 18, 2020).

²³ Piketty, Thomas. 2019. *Capital and Ideology* (translated from the French by André Hansen, Enrico Heinemann, and Stefan Lorenzer). Munich: CH Beck.

"Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change" (IPCC), etc., supported by academic elites and the media. All established parties thus advocate a similar left-liberal course of "internationalization" and "denationalization" (including the CDU/CSU and FDP, which have shifted to the left), involving the transformation of the traditional social order, the fueling of wage competition, mass immigration, and growing regulation or control in more and more areas of life (even extending to language). It is therefore more than understandable that, in the Leipzig study, approximately 70% of respondents see themselves as having no political influence (p. 74) and only 42% of respondents are satisfied with the functioning of "actually existing" democracy (in East Germany, the figure is just under 30%) (p. 74).

The Overlooked Solution: More Direct and Decentralized Democracy

The thesis of the Leipzig study—that authoritarian elements are "socially acceptable" (p. 188)—is based on arbitrary exaggerations and misjudgments. As mentioned, the *idea* of democracy is still almost unanimously endorsed in Germany today (by approximately 90%) (p. 72), and the vast majority rejects authoritarian forms (see above and p. 36). Furthermore, it is an inevitable consequence—and in itself a sign of a functioning democracy—that the outlined representational gap to the right of center has been filled by new parties such as the AfD.²⁴ In this regard, it is ignored or misunderstood that the politically disenchanted—just like the AfD, which is usually emotionally defamed as "right-wing populist" or "far-right"—primarily demand *more* democratic participation rights, especially direct and decentralized ones, modeled after the significantly better-functioning Swiss democracy. It is telling that this well-known "remedy and tonic" for democracy is barely acknowledged in the Leipzig study. This is apparently rooted in the common blanket condemnation of so-called "right-wing populism," which itself harbors arrogant, authoritarian traits. In doing so, a supposedly knowledgeable academic elite dismisses the people ("populus") across the board and equates them with the rabble or the mob. While the latter certainly exists within the context of widespread resentment and political disillusionment, not every national-conservative stance—and in particular concerns about immigration and "foreign infiltration"—should be defamed as right-wing authoritarian. Incidentally, the fact that the lower classes, in their political frustration, tend toward the right rather than the left is also due to the academic left itself, a point that cannot be addressed in detail here.²⁵ What is therefore needed is a renewed left that

²⁴ For details, see: Roth, Günter. 2024. "Dangerous Alternative: Who or What Threatens Democracy?" *Kritische Gesellschaftsforschung* No. 3 (3). doi:<https://cdoi.org/1.1/064/000062>.

²⁵ See Roth, Günter. 2020. "'Ordinary' Racism, 'Intellectual' Racism, and 'Right-Wing Populism.'" In *Reflect Racism: Notes for a Racism-Critical Practice*, ed. Tuan Tran and Hubert Steiner. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 115–51; Roth, Günter. 2023. "Crisis Politics and the Authoritarianism of the 'Good and True.'" *Simply Complicated: Society – Politics – Economy*. <https://einfachkompliziert.de/krisenpolitik-und-autoritarismus-des-guten-und-wahren/> (January 6, 2024).

approaches “populus” and its interests with less arrogance, moralizing, and authoritarianism, and takes a self-critical look at its own authoritarian tendencies, including “intellectual racism.”