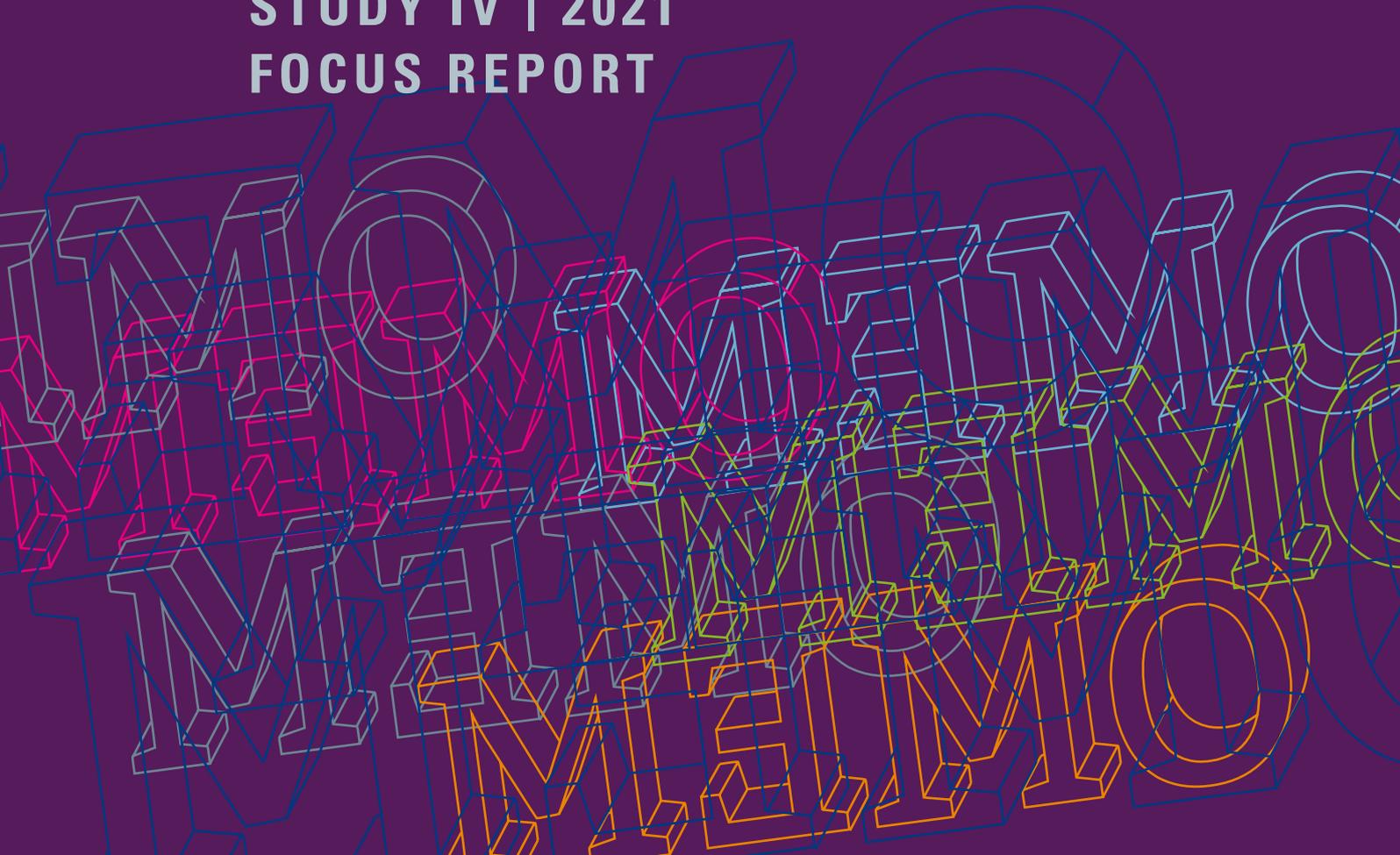


MEMO

Multidimensional
Remembrance
Monitor

STUDY IV | 2021
FOCUS REPORT



MEMO IV | FOCUS REPORT | 2021

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THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL REMEMBRANCE MONITOR

The Multidimensional Remembrance Monitor (MEMO) uses representative surveys to monitor the status and developments of the culture of remembrance in Germany. The MEMO studies analyze the remembrance and critical examination of historical events within the population, attitudes toward these events, and factors that could shape or distort the interpretation of history. MEMO, now in its fourth edition, has been contributing to the empirical documentation of the culture of remembrance in Germany since 2017. Each edition of MEMO surveys representative samples of the population to determine a range of aspects, including the events people in Germany consider to be historically significant, the attitudes the respondents themselves have toward the culture of remembrance in Germany, whether and how these attitudes are changing, the role that various ways of critically examining history play, and the consequences resulting from a critical examination of history. Prior to MEMO, there was a lack of systematic, representative studies to inform the recurring debates surrounding the status of the German culture of remembrance. MEMO is helping to close this gap so discussions can be based on empirical data. One particular focus of the studies is the remembrance of the persecution, displacement, and extermination of people and groups of people during the period of National Socialism. Experts who work in the research and practice of the culture of remembrance are involved in the design and interpretation of the studies to support their preparation and critical reflection. Over 70 experts have collaborated on the MEMO studies so far and made significant contributions.

A particular aim of the fourth MEMO study was to address key topics that had only been touched on briefly or not at all in the previous surveys. What stance do respondents take toward new, digital ways of critically examining the National Socialist era? How differentiated is their knowledge of the groups of victims of National Socialism? Do respondents see the remembrance of the groups of victims of National Socialism as sufficiently differentiated? What do respondents know about the forced labor that occurred and the involvement of German companies during the National Socialist era? What is their judgement of the role of the German population back then? Which events and developments since 1945 do respondents connect with National Socialism? What is the correlation between a belief in conspiracy theories and the relativization and denial of historical facts?

The study is based on data collected by the Ipsos survey institute between December 2020 and January 2021 on behalf of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University. One thousand randomly selected respondents from all of Germany's federal states participated in the standardized CATI survey (computer assisted telephone interviewing). Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The respondents were 16 to 87 years old ($M = 48.1$) and formed a representative sample of the German population that was split approximately equally by gender (50.8% female). This focus report examines and discusses selected results. The full report of the results from MEMO IV is available for download on the homepage of the "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" Foundation website, along with the reports from the previous MEMO studies.

DO WE NEED NEW WAYS OF CRITICALLY EXAMINING THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST ERA?

Specific ways of accessing the topic of National Socialism are well established within the German society. The previous MEMO studies have consistently shown that many people use sources such as books, films, and memorial sites to critically examine the history of National Socialism. At the same time, the fact that contemporary witnesses are passing away means that important, personal ways of remembering the National Socialist era are being lost. In recent years, there have been efforts to establish new ways of critically examining the National Socialist era in order to respond to social developments such as the loss of contemporary witnesses as well as the increasing digitalization of our everyday lives. The need for new ways of accessing historical and political education became particularly clear in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent comparatively “new” ways of critical examination are well received over the long term. MEMO IV addressed the topic by asking participants how much they would like to use various new ways of critically examining the National Socialist era. The ways mentioned in the survey do not fully reflect the wide range of developments we are currently seeing – but they allow to determine how open the respondents were to new education offers.

The opportunity to speak with so-called digital contemporary witnesses was met with comparatively high interest among the participants in MEMO IV, with 40.2% of respondents indicating that they would “rather a lot” or “very much” like to critically examine National Socialism by taking part in this type of conversation. About a quarter of the respondents said they would be interested in addressing the topic of National Socialism by listening to a podcast (27.1%) or making a virtual visit to a concentration camp memorial site (26.3%). At the same time, the results show that a large share of respondents would “rather not” or “not at all” like to use the mentioned means of critical examination; this extended across all methods of access mentioned in the survey. As expected, older respondents were consistently less open to new ways of critically examining the National Socialist era in comparison to younger participants. The results also showed that those respondents who have more intensively dealt with National Socialism in the past via established methods were also more open to new ways of accessing this history. Conversely, this means that respondents who have not previously examined the National Socialist era are also less likely to do so using new, digital means of access.

Based on the results, it cannot be concluded that the mentioned means of access are unsuitable for conveying the history of National Socialism. However, the results corroborate that the culture of remembrance and historical and political education continue to face the challenge of providing a sufficiently broad range of offers in order to reach as many people in our society as possible. It appears that an increased digitalization of ways to access the topic of National Socialism is necessary, but this will not be sufficient. Structural problems in existing contexts, such as schools, youth work, and adult education, need to be remedied so that new means can be integrated in these areas in a meaningful way. Existing and analog ways of accessing the history of National Socialism need to be enhanced. Participative approaches in the culture of remembrance appear to be particularly suitable in terms of accommodating individual motives for critically examining history.

HOW DIFFERENTIATED IS OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVERSITY OF THE VICTIMS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM?

In MEMO II/2019, we asked participants which people or groups of people that were persecuted and murdered during the National Socialist era should be remembered. The largest share of respondents (49.4%) stated that “all victims” or “all groups of victims” should be remembered. In MEMO IV we asked the participants to name all groups of victims they can recall. No further specifications were made; the respondents’ answers were recorded verbatim and systemized subsequently. On average the respondents in MEMO IV recalled two to three victim groups of National Socialism; some respondents recalled no groups at all while others recalled up to seven groups that were persecuted and murdered by the National Socialists.

Jews were the group of victims mentioned by the largest share of respondents (82.1%), while less than half mentioned the group of Sinti and/or Roma (44.5%). About a quarter each mentioned homosexuals (28.8%), politically persecuted people (e.g., “communists,” “social democrats”) (27.8%), and people with illnesses and disabilities (23.1%). About one in ten of the respondents in MEMO IV did not recall any groups (10.9%). Other specific groups of victims, such as members of resistance groups, religious groups, or specific professions were mentioned by only a small share of the respondents.

On a personal level, how much would you like to critically examine the history of National Socialism in the following ways?						
	not at all	rather not	neither/nor	rather a lot	very much	I don't know
By speaking with so-called digital contemporary witnesses.	29,6 %	11,4 %	15,0 %	21,8 %	18,4 %	3,8 %
By making a virtual visit to a concentration camp memorial site, e.g. using a computer.	40,8 %	13,2 %	13,5 %	15,5 %	10,8 %	6,1 %
By listening to a podcast.	38,6 %	16,1 %	10,1 %	20,0 %	7,1 %	8,2 %
Through influencer posts, e.g. on YouTube or Instagram.	56,1 %	15,9 %	10,5 %	8,3 %	3,4 %	5,7 %
By playing a computer game set in the National Socialist era.	67,2 %	13,4 %	5,8 %	5,0 %	2,9 %	5,6 %

Can you name groups of people that, to your knowledge, were persecuted and murdered by the regime during the National Socialist era?	
Group	Percentage of respondents mentioning the group
Jews	82,1 %
Sinti and/or Roma	44,5 %
Homosexuals ¹	28,8 %
Politically persecuted people	27,8 %
People with illnesses and disabilities	23,1 %
I don't know / no response	10,9 %
Non-specific or mentioned only once	7,0 %
Members of specific nationalities	4,8 %
Members of resistance groups	4,8 %
Members of specific professions	4,6 %
Members of specific religious groups	4,4 %
Members of other racialized groups	3,2 %
Specific individuals mentioned	2,2 %
Lesbians	1,9 %
Prisoners of war	0,8 %
"Social misfits"	0,6 %
"Professional criminals"	0,5 %

When specifically asked whether they thought that the perspectives of the groups of victims of National Socialism – e.g., those of Jewish people or Sinti and/or Roma – are sufficiently represented in the German culture of remembrance, a third of the respondents (33.7%) said they thought the perspectives of the groups of victims were already sufficiently represented. Around one quarter of the respondents (28.2%) disagreed with this statement.

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
The perspectives of the groups of victims themselves – e.g., those of Jewish people or Sinti and/or Roma – are sufficiently represented in the German culture of remembrance.	7,9 %	20,3 %	35,6 %	22,1 %	11,6 %

¹ This included both unspecific references to homosexual individuals in general as well as homosexual men (typically "gays") in particular. Specific references that were made to homosexual women (typically "lesbians") in some cases were included under a different category in order to emphasize these references and differentiate them.

Although we do not evaluate the number of two to three victim groups that respondents recalled on average, we conclude that this extent of differentiation does not meet the demand to remember all the groups of victims of National Socialism. About one third of the respondents states that the perspectives of the groups of victims are already sufficiently represented in Germany's culture of remembrance today. Based on the current data we can not determine to what extent this assessment of the majority society coincides with the perspectives and assessments of the affected groups themselves. However, social marginalization of specific communities can also be reflected in a lack of awareness of the fact that they were victims during the period of National Socialism. In light of the actual knowledge we find regarding the diversity of the groups of victims of National Socialism, it seems desirable to strengthen the perspectives of these groups in the German culture of remembrance.

WHAT ROLE IS ASCRIBED TO THE GERMAN POPULATION DURING THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST ERA?

In the previous MEMO studies, the participants were asked a number of questions regarding the role and involvement of German society during the National Socialist era, including which percentage of the German population they assume were perpetrators, victims, and helpers. The participants were also asked about whether, to their knowledge, any of their ancestors were involved in National Socialism. The results of the studies show that the respondents estimated the share of perpetrators among the German people as comparatively small and the share of victims and helpers as comparatively large, and that these distortions were even more pronounced in their knowledge of the involvement of their own ancestors.

In MEMO IV, participants were asked about the extent to which they agree that the German population shared responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism and to what extent they believe the suffering of the population can be compared with the suffering experienced by the groups persecuted by the National Socialist regime. About one in five respondents (19.6%) were of the opinion that the German people did not share any responsibility for the crimes committed by the National Socialist regime. A nearly equal number of respondents (17.8%) believed that the German people "suffered just as much during the National Socialist era as the groups that were persecuted by the National Socialist regime."

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
The German population at the time did not share any responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism.	30,6 %	24,3 %	25,2 %	11,3 %	8,3 %

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
The German population suffered just as much during the National Socialist era as the groups that were persecuted by the National Socialist regime.	34,1 %	23,1 %	23,3 %	9,8 %	8,0 %

The previous studies had already shown that respondents tended to relativize the role the German population played as perpetrators and bystanders during the National Socialist era while, conversely, emphasizing their role as victims under National Socialism. The results of MEMO IV indicate that the tendency to relativize the population's responsibility, reverse the roles of perpetrators and victims, and equate the suffering of the German majority society with that of the victims of National Socialism was more pronounced among those who agreed with conspiracy theories. For this analysis, the responses of participants who explicitly agreed with such conspiracy theories during the course of the study (e.g., "Politicians and other people in positions of leadership are only puppets for the real agents of power behind them.") were compared with the responses of those who disagreed with these statements. Respondents who agreed with conspiracy theories not only made less of an effort to critically examine the National Socialist era but were also more likely to agree with revisionist statements and to question historical facts, such as the extent to which Jewish people were persecuted during National Socialism. Perspectives like these appear as an expression of and gateways to revisionist and right-wing populist attitudes in German society. Believing in conspiracy theories not only threatens the cohesion of society as a whole in our present times but also our capacity to take an undistorted view of Germany's National Socialist past.



Average of responses provided by the two subgroups. The questions were answered using a five-tier scale from "1 – strongly disagree" to "5 – strongly agree."

IS THERE AN AWARENESS OF CONTINUITIES OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN OUR SOCIETY?

In MEMO IV we sought to gain an impression of the extent to which the respondents regard the period from 1933 to 1945 as a "closed chapter" in German history or whether they see National Socialist ways of thinking as a persistent part of German society. To this end, the participants were initially asked to name an event in Germany history since 1945 which they regard to be directly linked to the history of National Socialism. This question was open-ended, and the responses were systemized subsequently.

The largest share of the respondents in the study (46.1%) were unable or unwilling to answer this open-ended question. The majority of the remaining respondents answered by mentioning assaults and attacks (24.1%), with most of them (20.0%) referring to terrorism motivated by right-wing extremism such as the National Socialist Underground (NSU) (e.g., "the NSU murders," "NSU history," "the NSU's attacks in various cities") and the terror attacks in Halle (e.g., "the attack in Halle," "assassinations in Halle") and Hanau (e.g., "the attack in Hanau"). A share of the respondents (4.1%) mentioned attacks and assaults without naming specific contexts, although it was clear in most cases that the respondents were also referring to crimes motivated by extreme right-wing views (e.g., "the attacks on Jews," "attack on the Jewish synagogue," "attacks on refugees," "arson attacks on homes for asylum seekers"). Around one in ten respondents (9.7%) referred to right-wing and extreme right-wing sociopolitical developments and mentioned associated groups ("the neo-Nazis," "the people in Pegida," "right-wing radicals," "the Reichsbürger movement"). Many respondents expressly referred to political parties such as the National Democratic Party (NPD) and the Alternative for Germany party (AfD) ("the political views of the AfD," "the AfD's success in elections," "the rise of the AfD").

Would you say that there were or are any incidents or events in recent German history, i.e., since 1945, that are directly linked to the history of National Socialism?	
Category	Percentage of respondents mentioning the category
I don't know / no response	46,1 %
Assaults and attacks	24,1 %
· Specifically extreme right-wing	· 20,0 %
· Not clearly specified	· 4,1 %
Right-wing sociopolitical developments and events	9,7 %
Sociopolitical developments and events in general	5,0 %
Events in the context of the remembrance of the National Socialist era	4,6 %
Events in the context of coming to terms with the National Socialist era	4,2 %
Group-focused enmity	1,6 %

When specifically asked whether they think National Socialist attitudes continue to be an indelible part of the so-called center of German society, 41.0% of respondents disagreed, while around a third (33.0%) percent agreed.

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
National Socialist attitudes continue to be an indelible part of the center of German society.	12,9 %	28,1 %	25,1 %	21,8 %	11,2 %

Based on the available data, we can not draw any definitive conclusions regarding the awareness of continuities of National Socialist attitudes within German society. On the one hand, a relevant share of respondents drew a direct relation between the National Socialist era and acts of terror committed by right-wing extremists as well as right-wing sociopolitical developments in our present times. On the other hand, a majority of participants did not give any response when asked about events relating to National Socialism in Germany's recent history. Likewise, when directly asked about National Socialist attitudes in German society, the respondents' answers do not reflect a clear stance but rather point to ambivalence as to whether National Socialist and hostile attitudes continue to prevail in our society to this day.

DO WE OVERESTIMATE THE IMPACT OF OUR CRITICAL EXAMINATION THE TIME OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

The results of the MEMO studies often point to negative tendencies and developments with regard to the remembrance of the National Socialist era in society. These included, for example, "forgetting about" the diversity of the groups of victims of National Socialism, distorted narratives with regard to the involvement of the respondents' ancestors, and tendencies to relativize the German population's role as perpetrators during National Socialism in comparison to their role as victims and helpers. In contrast to these negative tendencies, the findings of the MEMO studies consistently showed that many of the participants agreed with statements relating to their own moral courage and to their sensitivity to the marginalization and discrimination of people and groups of people in our society. In MEMO IV, over half of respondents (58.0%) reported that they felt responsible for preventing people or groups of people from being discriminated against or marginalized in our society. More than one in three respondents (38.8%) reported that they are actively engaged in preventing the discrimination and marginalization of people in Germany. These results suggest that many people in our society have the courage to take action against injustices and are sensitive to discrimination.

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
I feel it is also my responsibility to prevent discrimination and the exclusion of people or groups of people in Germany.	13,3 %	10,4 %	17,5 %	24,1 %	33,9 %

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
I am actively involved in fighting discrimination and the exclusion of people or groups of people in Germany.	10,8 %	16,8 %	31,7 %	20,5 %	18,3 %

The results of MEMO IV show that respondents associate their courage and attitudes with their own critical examination of the National Socialist period. Around two thirds of the respondents state that critically examining the National Socialist era helped them to understand the reasons behind the rise of National Socialism (66.2%), become aware of their own social responsibility (66.5%), and become sensitive to topics such as discrimination and marginalization (64.1%). Likewise, the results point to a rather positive attitude toward Germany's critical examination of its own history at the level of society as a whole: Half of the respondents (51.4%) share the opinion that other countries can look to Germany as a model of a country that has successfully dealt with its history.

	To what extent would you say that your personal efforts to critically examine the National Socialist era have contributed so far to the fact that you have...				
	nothing at all	rather little	neither/nor	rather a lot	very much
... gained an understanding of the reasons behind the rise of National Socialism?	5,5 %	10,7 %	17,6 %	31,8 %	34,4 %
... become aware of your own responsibility to society?	5,3 %	8,2 %	20,0 %	34,0 %	32,5 %
... have become more aware of discrimination and marginalization?	11,4 %	11,1 %	13,4 %	28,9 %	35,2 %

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither/nor	agree	strongly agree
Germany can serve as an example to other countries because of how well it has come to terms with its past.	6,7 %	7,0 %	34,7 %	30,3 %	21,1 %

In summary, the results of the survey paint a picture of a culture of remembrance that is “working well,” and a critical examination of Germany’s National Socialist past that contributes to a greater sensitivity to discrimination and increased commitment, both at the individual level and in society as a whole. We do not fundamentally question this positive self-image. However, the results of the MEMO studies potentially reflect, at least to some extent, normative and socially desirable ideals of a critical examination of National Socialist history that „automatically“ immunizes against hostile attitudes and discriminating behavior. Undisputedly, there are “lessons” we as a society can draw for our present times from critically examining the history of National Socialism. It appears necessary, however, that we continually take a self-critical look at whether and to what extent individual and societal “lessons” really culminate in concrete action. Critically examining Germany’s National Socialist past can be of crucial importance for developing a clear position toward societal issues. At the same time, criteria to evaluate the concrete action resulting from our examination must be derived from the state of society – such as the extent of individual and structural discrimination and marginalization of people in the present as well as the degree of hostile continuities in the form of extreme right-wing terrorism and the successes of right-wing populist movements.

IMPRINT

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