Attitudes towards inclusion in the context of 'intellectual disability': Demographic characteristics of attitude types and how social privileges might lead to denying inclusion

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Abstract

The paper at hand presents results of the online survey "Attitude(s) towards inclusion" which inquires the attitudes of the German population towards inclusion in various life contexts (i.e., recreation, work, residence) with regard to people with 'intellectual disabilities'[1]. Extensive data were generated from a representative sample (n= 3695) which was analyzed using hierarchical cluster analysis and one-factorial analyses of variance. Here, we examine selected results that focus on the demographic parameters that influence people's attitudes towards inclusion. Overall, we found a mostly positive and supportive attitude, especially among older demographic groups, female persons, persons with regular contact with people with '(intellectual) disabilities', and voters of socially progressive parties[2]. Notably, a small but distinct demographic group was identified that was rather unsympathetic towards inclusion. Significant characteristics of this group included being male, being well-educated and favoring socially conservative politics. The ensuing discussion implies that perhaps the negative attitudes towards inclusion held by this group are intertwined with the issue of social privileges.

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Introduction

Investigating attitudes is a common and widespread research strategy, particularly in the field of quantitative social science. Corresponding research approaches are frequently seized in the context of the inclusion paradigm, which is reflected in the abundance of publications in academic discourse. In these publications, it is often assumed that so-called successful inclusion is largely dependent on the attitude people have towards the paradigm and the (marginalized) groups of people that are implicitly considered while inclusion is being discussed [3] (Griffin et al., 2012; Schwab & Seifert, 2015; Gasterstädt & Urban, 2016; Nelissen et al., 2016; Seifried & Heyl, 2016). People who exhibit a positive attitude towards inclusion or the respective groups of people to be included will presumably have a favorable effect on the implementation of inclusive practices – and vice versa. This article follows from the professional discourse on the topic of "attitude(s) in the context of inclusion", essentially following the basic assumption outlined above. While connecting a positive attitude towards inclusion of people with 'intellectual disabilities' to the successful establishment of inclusive practices on the one hand, on the other hand having a negative attitude or denying inclusion throughout certain population groups could equally raise negative effects. Arguably, it is important to focus research not only on positive attitudes towards inclusion but also on identifying circumstances and social contexts where denying inclusion takes hold. In this paper, the results of the representative online survey "Attitude(s) towards inclusion" (n= 3695), which covered the subject of the attitudes of the overall German population towards inclusion will take center stage. The primary parameters for our research on attitude towards inclusion were the attitude of people towards inclusion in the areas of recreation, work and residence and people with 'intellectual disabilities'. This is based on the particular risk of social exclusion experienced by those (Trescher, 2017) and them even being referred to as "losers of inclusion" (Becker, 2016, p. 33). After elaborating on the questionnaire, we present the results of a cluster analysis that identifies four types of attitudes towards inclusion and their respective characteristics. Further, we put a particular emphasis on a specific demographic group that was found to frequently disapprove of the propositions formulated in the questionnaire.

Materials and Methods

Ethical Approval

In our study, anonymous data were collected via an online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and a written declaration of consent to process collected data for scientific purposes was added to the questionnaire. Therefore, no further ethical approval was necessary.

Design and conduction of the survey

The questionnaire "Attitude(s) towards inclusion" was designed as part of the research project "Kommune Inklusiv" (2017-2023) (transl.: "inclusive municipality"), which is funded by Aktion Mensch e. V.[4] (transl.: "action for people") and scientifically supported by Goethe University Frankfurt (Germany) and Philipps University Marburg (Germany). The majority of available studies in the field of inclusion-related attitude research determine an educational environment more or less directly as the context of reference – for example, through research on (prospective) teachers (Schwab, 2015; Kunz, Luder & Moretti, 2010). In contrast, a broader

approach was chosen in our project by selecting areas of recreation, work, and residence. 15 propositions were formulated for each area of life, which – apart from their context-specific indications – were always formulated in the same or (as far as possible) similar terms in order to enable an analytic comparison of the areas of life. Both negative and positive formulations were used. The propositions were established according to a categorical system, which determined the content of the propositions.

Unipolar Likert scales with a rating range from 1 to 7 (1 = do not agree at all; 7 = completely agree) were used as answering formats. In the final section, personal data were acquired, such as age, gender, highest level of education, interest in politics, and electoral behavior. In addition, four overarching questions followed regarding personal interest in the topic of inclusion and life-history contact with people with disabilities in general and with people with 'intellectual disabilities' in particular. In line with the so-called contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Cloerkes, 2007), the latter was categorized as a relevant criterion for an open or negative attitude towards the selected topic (cf. Trescher, 2015 p. 118 f.). The same applies to the question of whether the interviewee has a '(intellectual) disability'.

After conceptualization, the questionnaire was tested and revised in two pretests (N = 100 and N = 370). The questionnaire was distributed using a germany-wide panel. We obtained a representative population sample (N = 3695), including the categories of age, gender, and education. People between the ages of 18 and 95 years were surveyed.

Cluster analysis

By conducting hierarchical cluster analysis (cf. Backhaus 2018, 435 ff.), different types of attitudes towards inclusion were identified in our data set, which within their groups (clusters) have as homogeneous an attitude to inclusion as possible and at the same time differ significantly from the other groups. Cluster analysis was performed using Ward's method. A one-factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) and subsequent post-hoc test (cf. Diekmann 2016, 694 ff.) identified the four-cluster solution as the most suitable cluster solution with a significant difference between all clusters of p ≤ 0.001.

Results

Cluster analysis

The four clusters (see figure 1) resulting from the cluster analysis were allocated to different levels of approval for inclusion in the respective areas of life:

- Cluster 1: open attitude type (40,19%)
- Cluster 2: rather open attitude type (28,63%)
- Cluster 3: rather negative attitude type (27,63%)
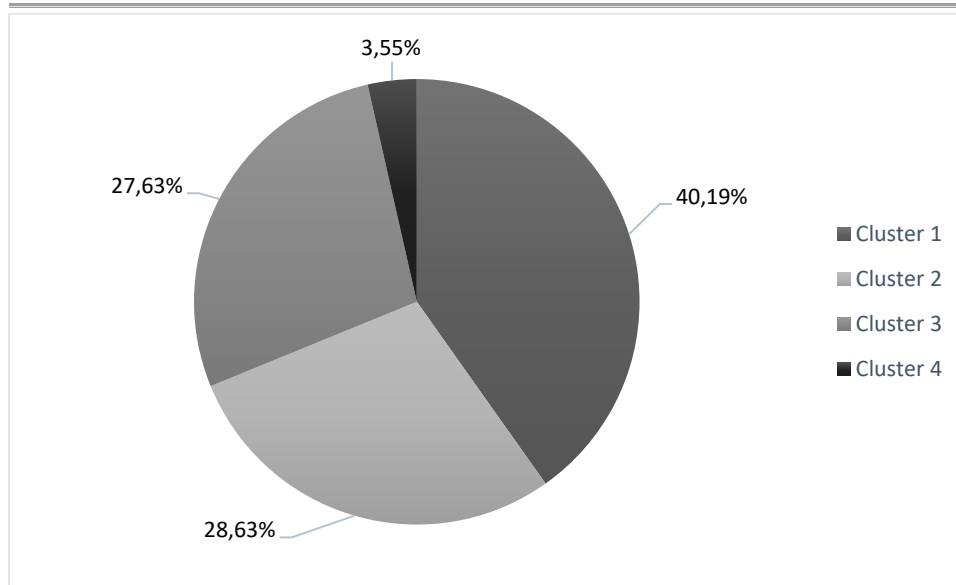- Cluster 4: dismissive attitude type (3,55%)

Figure 1: *Distribution of cluster shares*

Cluster 1 was the largest, accounting for 40.19 % of the total group. It subsumes those people who have a high degree of approval for inclusion in the areas of residence, work, and recreation, and therefore show an open or positive attitude towards inclusion.

People who are summarized in Cluster 2 measure considerably high levels of approval in all areas of life. This cluster contained more than a quarter (27.63 %) of respondents.

Cluster 3 was characterized by medium levels of approval and an unassertive attitude towards inclusion. Clusters 2 and 3 differ marginally in terms of group size: Cluster 3 also bundles more than a quarter of the respondents (28.63 %).

With a share of 3.55% of the total group, Cluster 4 comprised the fewest people. People in Cluster 4 show a low level of approval in all areas, as well as low interest in the issue of inclusion, and therefore have a reluctant or negative attitude towards inclusion.

Overall results

Comparing the high proportion of the open attitude type (Cluster 1) and the low proportion of the clearly negative attitude type (Cluster 4), one is inclined to recognize inclusion as an issue fundamentally supported by a broad section of the German population. However, we can speak of a positive attitude among the entire population to a limited extent. Considering the proportion of a combined Cluster 2 and Cluster 3 of over 50 percent, the majority of people appear to have an inconclusive to ambivalent approach towards inclusion. This raises the question of which factors have a concrete influence on the attitude(s) towards inclusion and to what extent the attitude types differ from one another. Once the distribution of the overall group across the respective clusters and their attitudes towards inclusion were identified and worked out, we compared the clusters in terms of their (demographic) characteristics and whether significant characteristics of a demographic group could be determined (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Distribution of demographic characteristics in Cluster 1 to Cluster 4 regarding gender, age, and frequent contact to people with 'intellectual disabilities' as well as general disabilities*

demographic characteristics		Cluster 1: open	Cluster 2: rather open	Cluster 3: rather negative	Cluster 4: dismissive
gender	female	52,03 %	53,68 %	44,92 %	39,69 %
	male	47,97 %	46,32 %	55,08 %	60,31 %
age	average	52,85 years	48,95 years	42,97 years	49,17 years
frequent contact to people with intellectual disability		43,37 %	30,07 %	17,58 %	22,14 %
frequent contact to people with disability		60,00 %	46,82 %	30,34 %	35,88 %

In an overall comparison, significant differences were found between the four different clusters´ demographic characteristics of age, gender, contact with people with 'disabilities', contact with people with 'intellectual disabilities', political interest, and electoral choices in the 2017 federal election.

An analysis of demographic categories such as migration background, marital status, belief, having an '(intellectual) disability', and place of residence (large city yes/no), revealed only marginal differences or no significant differences at all.

Overall, people who favor inclusion are, on average, slightly older than those who reject inclusion and tend to be female rather than male. Contact with people with a 'disability' proved to be highly favorable to a positive attitude towards inclusion; however, Cluster 4 shows that this is not necessarily the case as respondents from this cluster had similarly frequent contact to people with 'disability' as respondents from Clusters 2 and 3. Therefore, contact alone is not the decisive factor: other factors must also be considered, such as the type and nature of the contact or the respective support needs of the person with whom the contact exists. Furthermore, the cluster comparison emphasizes that the majority of people across all clusters have no regular contact with people with 'intellectual disabilities', which once again confirms the limited integration of people with 'intellectual disabilities' into the life practices of mainstream society. There is also a correlation between (high or low) political interest and approval or disapproval of inclusion represented by the clusters (see Figure 2): Political interest and political orientation ostensibly influence one's attitude towards inclusion. However, low interest in politics and non-voting behavior (see Figure 3) proved to be quite common in all clusters, with a top value of 36.5% non-voters in Cluster 3, whose respondents were also with a percentage of 29.5% not interested (at all) to medium interested (37.1%) in politics.
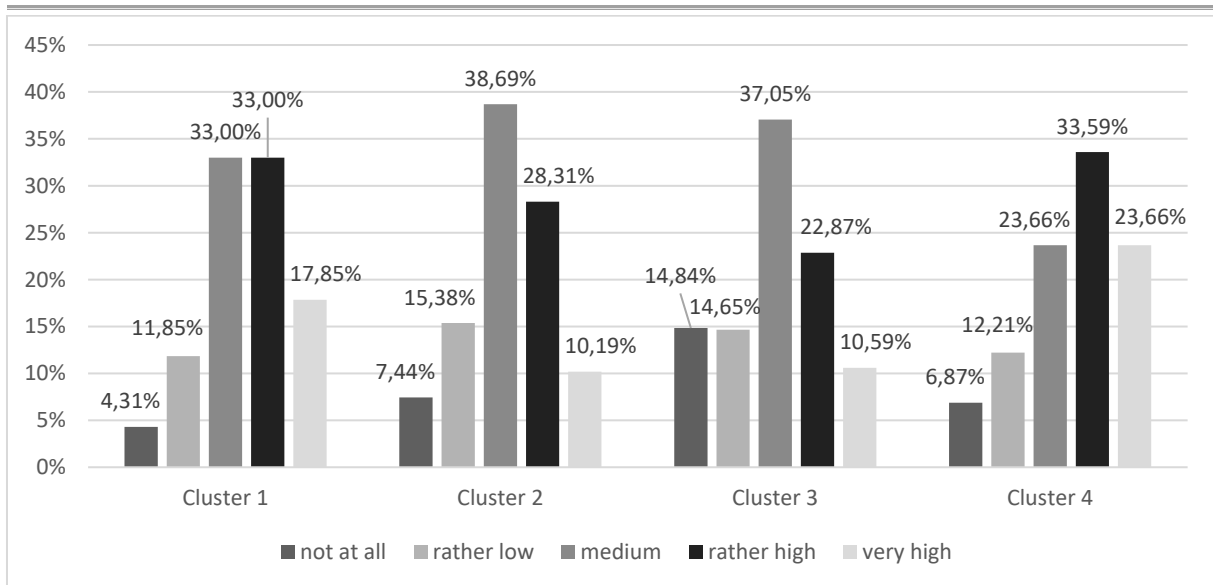
Figure 2: *Interest in politics from "not at all" to "very high" through Cluster 1 to Cluster 4*

Our analysis furthermore indicates that people inclined towards more socially progressive politics, (represented in Figure 3 by voting for "SDP", "Linke" and "Grüne") have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than those dispositioned towards a more socially conservative political orientation (represented in Figure 3 by voting for "CDU", "FDP" and "AfD").
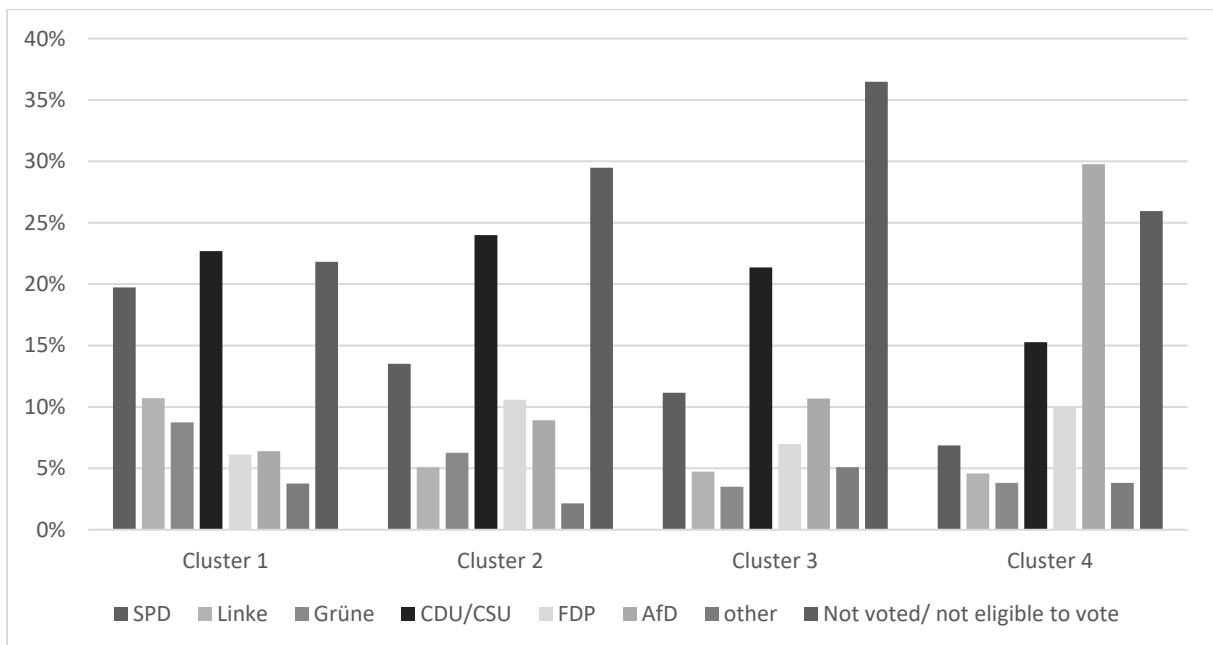

Figure 3: *Voting behavior in the 2017 federal election*

Characterization of Cluster 4

Age and gender

Although accounting for only 3.55% of the respondents, we took an interest in the characterization of Cluster 4. We found some particularities that distinguished Cluster 4 significantly from the other clusters (especially Clusters 1 and 2), which we considered worthwhile to explore and discuss further. Respondents from Cluster 4 were on average 49.17 years old, with relatively even distributed shares through all age brackets, but the largest share was between 18 and 34 years of age (22.14%), and thus significantly[5] younger than respondents from Clusters 1 and 2. In addition, the share of males (60.3%) was significantly[5] larger than that in Clusters 1 and 2.

Political interest and electoral behaviour

In terms of politics, respondents from Cluster 4 were moderately to very politically interested (see Figure 2). More than half of the respondents (57.25%) – even more than respondents from Cluster 1 (50.8%) and significantly[5] more than those in Clusters 2 and 3 – were quite strongly or very strongly interested in politics (see Figure 2). Apart from those who did not vote (26.0%), most people in Cluster 4 voted for the AfD party ("Alternative for Germany") in the 2017 federal election (29.77%), with the AfD being Germany's right-wing populist party. The second strongest party was the CDU/CSU ("Christian Democratic Union"/"Christian Social Union") (15.27%), with CDU/CSU representing traditional social values and addressing conservative and moderate right-wing voters (see Figure 3).

Educational qualifications

The characteristic of 'highest educational qualification' differed statistically significantly[5] by comparing Cluster 4 to all of the other clusters. Interestingly, respondents in Cluster 4 held the largest share of higher educational degrees, starting with Abitur (a particularity of the German tripartite educational system: only Abitur qualifies one directly to attend university), university degrees, and PhD degrees (see Figure 4). Out of the 49.6% of people in Cluster 4 with higher educational qualifications than school graduation levels up to technical diploma/baccalaureate, 14.5% held Abitur as the highest educational qualification; 6.1% graduated from university with a bachelor's degree; 25.2% graduated with a master's degree and 3.8% held a PhD.
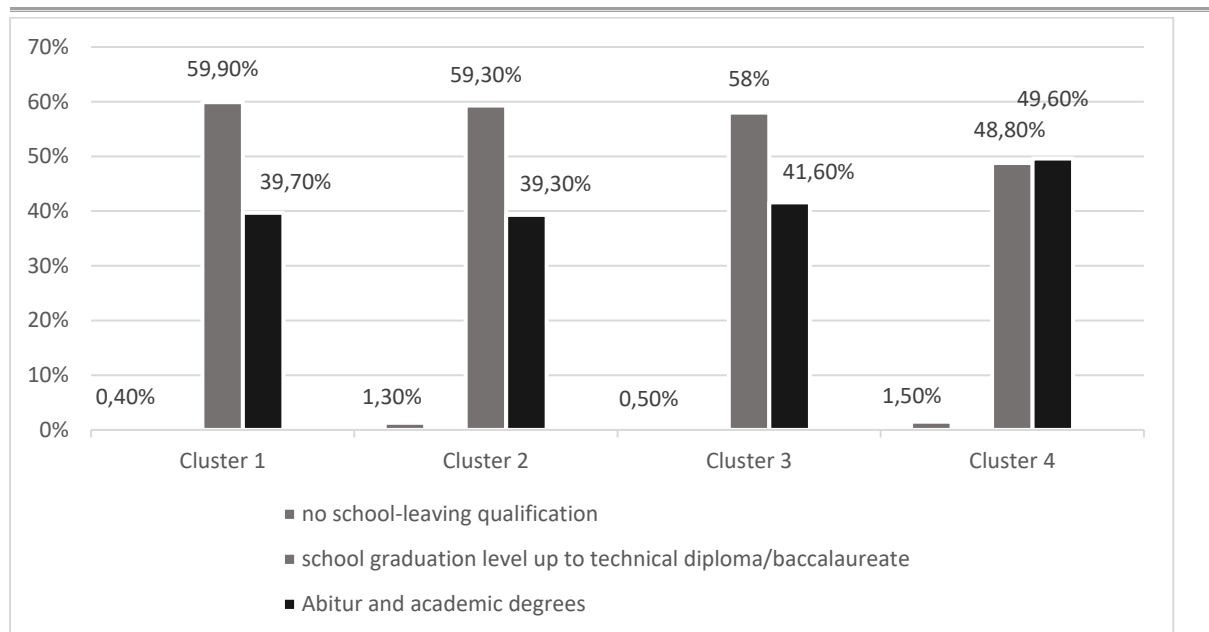
Figure 4: *Level of educational qualification through Cluster 1 to 4*

In conclusion, demographically notable characteristics of respondents from Cluster 4 were predominantly being male, of younger average age, being either politically indifferent or strongly interested in politics, being either non-voters or voting mainly for a conservative or populist party, and having significantly higher educational qualifications than respondents from other clusters.

Discussion

In general, our results – both those selected here as examples and the overall results (Trescher, Lamby & Börner, 2020) – feature a positive attitude towards inclusion and inclusive changes across all categories and areas of life, which might be interpreted as an existing potential for inclusion in the respective areas of work, residence, and recreation. Setting the approval ratings for inclusion in relation to the overall results, critical and ambivalent positions can partially be associated with low interest in politics and a lack of real-life contact with people with '(intellectual) disabilities', primarily for people have had contact with people with '(intellectual) disabilities' in the past expressed affirmation of the propositions. Therefore, the results of our analysis support the so-called "contact hypothesis", which states that contact in everyday life tends to have a positive effect on the perception of a group of people (Allport, 1954; Cloerkes, 2007) and can even reduce stigma (Scior et al., 2013). However, the overall positive result in terms of open-mindedness is offset by the fact that less than half of the respondents had contact with people with '(intellectual) disabilities'. Interestingly, our results align with results from studies conducted in other cultural contexts: Griffin et al. (2012), for example, researched the attitudes of US-American college students towards people with 'intellectual disabilities', from which roughly 50% reported not having contact with people with 'intellectual disabilities' on a regular basis. These numbers suggest that people with '(intellectual) disabilities' are still insufficiently visible in the discourse of society as a whole: seemingly, general open-mindedness is met by a lack of opportunities for participation.

Furthermore, a small but distinct part of the respondents disapproved of inclusion altogether, although they had with similar frequency contact to people with '(intellectual) disabilities' as respondents from Clusters 2 and 3. Conspicuously, the respondents in question exhibited some demographic characteristics that are usually affiliated with having social privileges in society: being male and having high educational qualifications.

Social privileges can be described as "advantages that members of dominant social groups enjoy because of their group membership" (Wu & Dunning, 2020 p.1). Advantages in the context of experiences of people with 'intellectual disabilities' might start with things as simple and seemingly self-evident as autonomous access to recreation possibilities, being able to choose a career or preferred area of work or create a self-determined housing situation (cf. Börner 2023; Trescher 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). However, while privileged members of society often feel that they have earned their status and advantages in life, they tend to dismiss the impact or even existence of these very privileges (Black & Stone 2005; Wu & Dunning, 2020), rendering their own privileges invisible to themselves. Thus, people who cannot (respectively, do not want to) perceive inequality and discrimination in our society, perhaps simply do not feel the necessity of implementing inclusive practices and therefore have an adverse attitude towards inclusion. This also applies to the argument, non-privileged members of society were just "not trying hard enough" and the inherent belief: a "lack of membership in privileged groups is characteristically viewed as a lack of effort" (Black & Stone, 2005 p. 243).

Besides being members of socially privileged groups by tendency, we further connected the electoral behavior of respondents from Cluster 4 to their disapproval of inclusion by addressing party programs of moderate to far right-wing politics. A salient trait of the right-wing party agenda features purposeful exclusion of certain population groups, often connected with an (aspired) demotion of civil rights for these groups and of not only hateful Othering, but outright denying targeted people and groups of people their humanity (Pelinka 2013). We see these trends paradigmatically in European right-wing (not only far, but also moderate) parties problematizing migrants and fugitives as a homogenous, menacing quantity and fuelling islamophobia (cf. Betz, 2013; Krzyżanowski, 2013); as well as a hostile political agenda against queer people and their civil rights (cf. Binnie, 2014; Chojnicka 2015; Barát, 2022). In addition to denying the necessity of inclusion as a by-product of unreflected social privileges, a negative attitude towards inclusion could also originate from a mindset of a targeted, purposeful exclusion of people with 'intellectual disabilities' as a marginalized group. Based on our study results, we are unable to tell whether leaning towards right-wing politics promotes a dismissive attitude towards inclusion or whether people already attached to these attitudes tend to vote for right-wing parties. In their study on concerns about (lacking) inclusion in a recreational US-American context, Flynn et al. (2023) found that right-wing voters were less concerned about (lacking) inclusion as an issue in their recreational area. Flynn et al. (2023) then argue that political affiliation indeed reflects ideological beliefs and, therefore, general attitudes towards issues such as injustice, discrimination and the value of a human life.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, demographic characteristics were significantly related to attitudes towards inclusive practices. By discussing our results, we connected the distinct features of being male and well educated with membership in socially privileged groups, who might, as a consequence, not acknowledge inclusion as an important or necessary challenge in our society, as well as this

group voting by tendency for (far) right-wing parties and thus agreeing with an associated non-inclusive notion of social coexistence.

Footnotes

[1] The spelling '(intellectual) disability' is intended to emphasize that '(intellectual) disability' is not understood as a natural fact within the following explanations, but rather as a product of complex discursive practices. In this respect, inverted commas emphasize the socio-cultural-historical construction character of the category of '(intellectual) disability' (Trescher, 2017, p. 27ff.).

[2] When speaking of socially progressive versus socially conservative parties in the following article, we subsumed the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Green Party (Bündnis90 die Grünen) and the Democratic-Socialist Party (Die Linkspartei) under the term 'socially progressive', although this might not do justice to complex and sometimes ambivalent party politics. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) were regrouped under the term 'socially conservative'.

[3] These are usually people or groups of people who are threatened or are affected by social exclusion.

[4] "action for people": the largest private non-profit association in Germany that patronizes social projects, especially targeting people with 'intellectual disabilities', children and adolescents

[5] $p < 0,05$

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