

Diversity assent: Conceptualisation and an empirical application

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Abstract

Recent evidence suggests that in many European countries generally positive views about societal diversity predominate. Yet, as research has rather focused on negative attitudes towards immigration and diversity, less is known about positive attitudes and those who hold them. The paper makes a conceptual and an empirical contribution to filling this gap. We introduce a new concept, “diversity assent”, distinct from existing approaches, that captures residents’ attitudes to a diverse society. This concept is multidimensional, to capture both evaluations of diversity and attitudes towards institutional adjustments. The concept is then tested and applied to the German urban population, drawing from a large, purpose-built survey. We demonstrate that, while assent differs for the two dimensions, a sizeable majority of those who evaluate diversity positively also agree with representing diversity in official policy and institutions. We use descriptive and multivariate analyses to compare assenters and non-assenters as well as different groups within the assenters. Our analysis illustrates that different social and political factors drive support for the two dimensions of diversity assent.

Keywords: diversity, attitudes, Germany, survey, immigration

Introduction

In recent decades, Germany has experienced successive major migration movements, contributing to an ongoing socio-cultural diversification of society. Particularly in German city contexts, individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds live together, and society is unmistakably diverse. A diversification of forms of life and the increasing visibility of sexual and gender minorities adds to this presence of socio-cultural diversity. In the political realm, leading representatives, from mayors to presidents, now embrace diversity as beneficial for

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the country (Schönwälder and Triadafilopoulos, 2016). Yet, skepticism is widespread in public and scholarly discussions regarding the stability and substance of such pro-diversity declarations and policies. Against the background of electoral advances of extreme-right forces in past decades, fears are widespread that public opinion will turn against socio-cultural diversity and its public recognition. Given this threat and the importance of positions on immigration and diversity for the emergence of “a new structuring divide in European societies and politics” (Hutter and Kriesi, 2021, 1), anti-immigration and anti-diversity attitudes have been a focus of recent scholarship.

Although of unquestionably great importance, this focus runs the risk of an imbalance. Several years ago, Newman et al. (2013, 583-4) lamented an “asymmetry in the [immigration] opinion research” such that opposition, rather than “the factors that lead people to be supportive”, gain most academic interest. This may fuel a misperception that European publics more generally have turned against immigration. As Dennison and Geddes (2019, 107) point out, contrary to common perceptions, this is not the case, and attitudes towards EU and non-EU migrants have remained “remarkably stable”, if not having become “gradually more positive [...] during and since the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015”. Similarly, Ivarsflaten and Sniderman (2022, 150) point out that more citizens are inclusive towards immigrant and religious minorities than often assumed. They call for a re-orientation of research towards “a new territory”, that is, “the beliefs, the concerns, the convictions of majority citizens who are open to a more inclusive society” (2022, 146).

Yet, this new research territory is, by virtue of its novelty, rather under-specified. We do not know as yet how best to conceptualize such positive perspectives, nor do we sufficiently understand what motivates their supporters and what exactly they support – or not. This paper is a contribution to closing these gaps. It also responds to another imbalance: Previous scholarship has often focused on what resident populations think about future immigration and the expectations of newcomers, but this is limiting when conceptualizing positive attitudes to diversity. Diversity goes beyond recent immigration, and the former newcomers are part of a population that shapes the jointly inhabited society. We focus our attention on given and desirable features of a diverse society and on how the whole population, including immigrants and their descendants, respond to diversification. We introduce the concept of *diversity assent*, which is two dimensional, allowing researchers to distinguish between

citizens' judgements about diversity (evaluation assent) and positions on the political consequences of a diverse society (participation assent).

We apply the concept using unique survey data gathered in 2019-2020 in a random sample of German cities, the DivA-survey (Drouhot et al 2021). To test the empirical worth of the concept, we investigate which social and political factors are associated with individuals supporting diversity using bivariate and multivariate analyses. Our results show the empirical utility of our multi-dimensional concept, as different factors drive support for the two dimensions differently. Furthermore, we demonstrate that diversity assent is widespread in Germany's urban population, although distinct for the two dimensions, corroborating other empirical studies into positive attitudes towards immigration and diversity, while adding differentiation.

Conceptualizing Diversity Assent

Diversity Assent and its conceptual neighbourhood

In this paper, our intention is to describe and better understand the attitudes of individuals who hold positive views of diversity in society. Socio-cultural diversity, and the ongoing diversification of societies has become a common experience in many European countries and beyond (Vertovec, 2022). We build on previous scholarship, but suggest a new concept which is distinct from tolerance, multiculturalism and attitudes to immigration or minority rights. This concept, *diversity assent*, is defined as a certain set of attitudes capturing (a) positive views of the socio-cultural heterogeneity of the social environment (*evaluation assent*) and (b) support for adjusting institutions and resource allocations in light of such heterogeneity (*participation assent*). Following other scholars' work on related concepts (Hjerm et al. 2020 on tolerance; Knight and Brinton 2017 on gender), we understand the concept as multidimensional. This means that we do not just see more or less assent, but aim to reflect that assent to diversity can take different forms.

We acknowledge that our understanding of diversity assent and its different forms shares some features with concepts and thoughts introduced in previous scholarship. Firstly, a number of scholars have used the term "tolerance" to capture attitudes towards individuals who one dislikes. Tolerance means "accepting the objectionable" (Rapp and Freitag, 2015: 2;

Forst, 2003). Some studies move beyond mere acceptance of others, and stress that respect and appreciation for individuals should be seen as further aspects of tolerance. For example, Hjerm et al. (2020: 899, 903) define tolerance as “a positive response to diversity itself” and a “value orientation towards difference”. Using the terms of a UNESCO definition, they propose “a three-dimensional concept, which includes acceptance of, respect for, and appreciation of difference”. Ivarsfalten and Sniderman (2022) extend the concept towards the support for political consequences. Their terms “recognition” and “appraisal” respect express the difference between toleration of different concepts of life and, as appraisal, acceptance of a societal obligation to actively support or protect minority cultures. Nevertheless, these studies uphold an analytical focus of the majority accepting or protecting the existence of minorities, rather than a diverse society negotiating the terms of coexistence. Moreover, the term “tolerance” – although used differently by several authors – is commonly associated with putting up with something one dislikes. While we agree with the intention to distinguish different forms of relating to difference, we prefer to introduce a new term in order to stress the differences with older conceptualizations.

A second line of research which aims to identify views of desirable features of society and related policies refers to attitudes towards “multiculturalism”(Banting and Kymlicka 2006; Goodman and Alarian, 2021; Verkuyten, 2009). Berry’s (2011, 2.3) definition of a “multicultural ideology” or “multicultural view” as implying “that cultural pluralism is a resource, and inclusiveness should be nurtured with supportive policies and programmes” addresses positions also captured in the extended definitions of “tolerance”. We share the intention to capture both general views and attitudes to policies (see Goodman and Alarian 2015). Still, the concept of multiculturalism is narrower than that of diversity in its focus on immigrant minorities, and we do not follow the group-focused perception of participation and rights underlying it. By, instead, referring to diversity and diversity assent we allow for both individual and group-oriented conceptualizations of participation and rights.

Scholarship on affirmative action in the United States also supports the conceptual distinction between more general views and views regarding political interventions. Explaining the discrepancy between Americans’ support for the principal of racial equality and their more sceptical views on specific policies to ensure this equality, has been a key concern in US-scholarship (Peterson 1994, Krysan 2000).

Third, there is a huge body of literature on public opinion towards immigrants and immigration. Mostly, this literature is interested in questions such as which immigrant categories are deemed acceptable, what is expected of immigrants and how they should be treated (e.g. Heath et al. 2020). Another focus is on explaining what drives opposition to immigration. However, among the policy-related questions investigated here, some also relate to minority and immigrant rights in the country, that is, what we refer to as the participation dimension of diversity assent (Wasmer and Koch 2003; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2009; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002; Ziller and Berning 2021). Studies have also considered support for the rights of religious minorities, in particular Muslims (e.g. Statham 2016; Carol, Helbling, Michalowski 2015) as well as solidarity with refugees (Drohout et al 2023). These scholarships thus also offer some insights into how societies adapt to diversification.

In contrast to the literature on attitudes to immigrants, we refrain from conceiving of newcomers and citizens, and the latter granting rights to the former. Rather, we allow for the attitudes of all residents to be considered, and are interested in two dimensions: We distinguish, first, the evaluation of diversity as affecting society and individuals. We assume that individuals assess or evaluate how diversity affects their environment and people's lives and form an opinion on whether they perceive the existing diversity and its effects as positive, neutral or negative. We call this *evaluation assent*. Second, we intend to capture support for steps potentially following from the existence of socio-cultural diversity for institutions and the allocation of societal resources and aiming to reflect that diversity (*participation assent*). Individuals may or may not be of the opinion that the socio-demographic diversity of society should be reflected in its institutions, politics and public sphere, regardless of their general opinion of diversity. Thus, we argue for the theoretical distinction between the two dimensions.

Who assents to diversity?

We apply our concept by asking which social and political factors are associated with support for diversity – along the two dimensions. The novelty of our conceptualization calls for a partly descriptive and exploratory approach. Before beginning to empirically explore the extent and size of diversity assent in German cities, there are a number of expectations to be drawn from existing studies as to how the two forms of diversity assent relate to each other and concerning

the major characteristics of those assenting to diversity in different forms before turning to an analysis of the main drivers of such assent.

How far should we expect attitudes to *evaluation* assent and *participation* assent to align and correlate? By presenting a concept with multiple dimensions, rather than a scale, we join researchers from other fields, from immigration levels and policies (Bonachich 1972; Gorodszeisky et al 2009) to gender (Knight and Brinton, 2017). Individuals may believe that diversity is an asset for their society and for individuals – but not support any steps towards active minority or anti-discrimination policy, and vice versa. Indeed, some scholars suspect that pro-diversity pronouncements are limited to a preference for a vibrant and colourful city-life, but do not encompass a willingness to engage with others (Blokland and van Eijk, 2010) or ensure more equality, and thus should be treated with caution. Some scholars suggest that the popular “drive for diversity” distracts from deep-seated inequalities and has rather “contained the struggle for racial equality” (Berrey, 2015: 276). Our research will contribute to clarifying to what extent generally positive views of diversity and egalitarian commitments are indeed disconnected or rather related. Furthermore, theoretically, support for equal participation need not be based on positive views of the effects of diversity - but could be a matter of principle, based on egalitarian views. Respondents may support participation, but fear that diversity has negative effects. We know from studies of diversity discourses that “diversity” can have rather different meanings (e. g. Berrey, 2015; Dobusch, 2017).

The extent to which individuals support one, both, or neither of the diversity assent dimensions of course begs the underlying question of the motivation behind such support. Given the limited evidence existing so far, clear hypotheses are difficult to generate, and we engage in a more exploratory fashion with a number of studies in similar fields. Firstly, the role of socio-economic background has been highly researched as a motivator for negative attitudes towards immigrants and out-group members. Traditionally, individuals from working class backgrounds, with lower income and education, were theorized to perceive “ethnic threat”, and thereby be more likely to support the exclusion of immigrants (Helbling and Kriesi, 2014), and exhibit prejudice and intolerance (Scheepers et al 2003). In recent years, however, other scholars illustrate the more nuanced effect of education on exclusionary attitudes (see Rapp, 2014. Dražanová, 2022). These nuances do not detract from the general finding in western Europe, that higher education level is rather consistently associated with

support for cosmopolitanism (Maxwell, 2020), lower concerns about immigration (Berg, 2009; Ha, 2010) and support for the extension of immigrant rights (Wasmer and Koch, 2003). We thus expect a positive relationship between education and support for both evaluation and participation assent. Yet, given that our participation dimension requires support for reducing privileges, it may be that those on higher incomes express lower support despite higher education level, due to lower support for general redistribution as shown in the political economy literature (Cavaille and Trump, 2015). We thus intend to explore the relationship more closely between education and income.

Secondly, numerous studies have explored whether attitudes towards others are a function of everyday interactions. Intergroup contact has been shown to reduce prejudice and outgroup divide (Schönwälder et al. 2015). We therefore assume that diversity assent is stronger among individuals with higher levels of intergroup contact, and we look as to whether different types of such contact, from neighbourhood interactions to friendships, impact assent in the two dimensions. Belonging to a minority – as well as female gender – has also been shown to affect attitudes to interventions favouring minorities (Crosby et al., 2006: 596; Scarborough et al., 2019). It is plausible that members of a group identify with it, and possibly also with equally disadvantaged groups.

The third major group of variables we are interested in is political attitudes. Attitudes to societal diversity and to participation are likely correlated with broader beliefs about fairness, equality and plurality. Studies into affirmative action and intervention in favour of disadvantaged groups have illustrated that general political beliefs as well as beliefs about inequality and discrimination matter (Möhring and Teney, 2020; Ziller, 2020; Scarborough et al. 2019: 207). Nonetheless, the role of beliefs around redistribution and inequality is unclear, as some in the literature suggest that the popular “drive for diversity” distracts from deep-seated inequalities and has rather “contained the struggle for racial equality” (Berrey 2015, 276). Our research will contribute to clarifying to what extent generally positive views of diversity and egalitarian commitments are indeed disconnected or rather related. Furthermore, general political beliefs are expressed in sympathies for political parties, and we expect such sympathies to impact on diversity assent. As all major parties in Germany (except the extreme Right) express generally positive views of diversity, it remains to be seen how this is reflected in their supporters’ attitudes.

Data, operationalization and methods

*Data*³

In this paper, we exploit a unique dataset on support for societal diversity among the general population in Germany – the DivA-survey (Drouhot et al. 2021). The survey instrument was designed to fill a specific gap: while much past social scientific research focuses on understanding determinants of hostility towards minority groups, there is a dearth of research and data on what motivates those who support a diverse society. Hence, this survey focuses on measuring the social experience and perception of diversity, as well as attitudes towards representing this diversity in political and public life, public expenditures, employment. The specific items and measurements we use are described in more detail below.

The survey was administered by telephone between November 2019 and April 2020 on a random sample of 2,917 respondents through a dual-frame strategy mixing landlines and mobile numbers (for a similar strategy see the German survey on voluntary engagement, Simonson et al. 2022). The sample was drawn in twenty randomly selected German cities.⁴ To test the fruitfulness of the concept, we focus on a population likely to have experienced diversity, namely, those living in cities, where immigrant shares are higher than elsewhere. Further, an urban sample is more likely to provide us with larger variation in attitudes, appropriate for the study of different dimensions of *diversity assent*.

Respondents include people of different migration background and citizenship. The response rate was 5.6% - which is in line with rapidly declining response rates to telephone surveys in general (Keeter et al. 2017, Berinsky 2017, Couper 2017).⁵ In our analyses, we calibrate our estimates with design and post-stratification weights using rich data from the *Mikrozensus*, the major official annual household survey conducted by statistical offices in Germany. Specifically, we use the *Mikrozensus* to construct reference points on high-dimensionality cells for multiple sociodemographic variables of interest (municipality size, age, education level, and gender, adjust for over- or underrepresentation on these cells, and accordingly weigh

³ Some sentences in this section also appear in Drouhot et al. 2023 as they describe the same data set.

⁴ Stratified sampling to include East and West, and cities of different size. We sampled in cities of 50,000 or more inhabitants. 41% of the German population live in cities of that size.

⁵ Research based in the United States, where issues of nonresponse in telephone surveys have appeared earlier than in Europe, has shown that low response rates need not be conflated with response quality or nonresponse bias (Keeter et al. 2017), particularly if high quality auxiliary data are available for post-survey calibration (e.g. Groves 2006, Koch and Blohm 2016) – which is our case here.

results from our empirical analyses. Full technical details on the survey are available in a dedicated report (Drouhot et al. 2021). Weighted results are representative of adults living in German cities of at least 50,000 inhabitants.

Operationalisation of Evaluation and Participation Assent

The DivA-survey includes a large battery of questions regarding evaluation of diversity, its experience and support for interventions. We use three questions each to approximate the latent dimensions *evaluation* and *participation* diversity assent. We use questions with the same answer categories for analytical ease, presented in table 1. Evaluation assent refers to questions that ask the respondents to evaluate diversity broadly, whether it is an asset for society (enriching for the city, language plurality is a good thing) and individuals (young people benefit from contact). Participation questions ask whether the diversity of society should be reflected in its institutions and the public space. The three items address the distribution of public resources (public funding for minority cultures), political representation (diverse parliaments) and public presence of minorities (mosque building).

Table 1: Survey questions used for evaluation and participation assent

Dimension	Item	Abbreviation
Evaluation	It is enriching for a city when the people come from different backgrounds and cultures.	<i>enriching city</i>
	Young people benefit from being in contact with peers of other backgrounds or beliefs.	<i>benefit contact</i>
	It is a good thing if many languages can be heard on our streets.	<i>language plurality</i>
Participation	Government support for culture should include minority cultural traditions.	<i>funding culture</i>
	Parliaments should reflect the diversity of the population through their members.	<i>diverse parliaments</i>
	The Muslims living in Germany should have the right to build mosques, including in your own neighbourhood.	<i>build mosques</i>

Note: All items measured with a 5-point Likert-scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither/nor, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.

To check the empirical relationship between these items, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. We can confirm, albeit with some level of covariation between the two factors, that

the questions do load onto two separate factors with satisfactory measurement fit statistics. See supplementary material A1 for the full CFA table. We deliberately included the more contested issues of language and Islam to arrive at a realistic evaluation of diversity assent.

Who are those supporting diversity in one or both dimensions, and which issues bring them together or drive them apart? In the empirical analysis, we follow a set of coding rules, shown in table 2, to allocate individuals into different diversity-assent groups for evaluation and participation assent respectively. These groups are “assenting”, “non-committing” and “dissenting”. We apply a relatively strict threshold to allocate an individual into the “assenting” group: They must somewhat or strongly agree to two or more of the evaluation questions to join the “evaluation assenting” group, and the same to join the “participation assenting” group. Given that negative answers are few and that respondents may be reluctant to openly oppose diversity, we create an even stricter criterion to belong to the “dissenting” group: any negative answer given leads to membership of this group. The remainder of the respondents are “non-committing”.

Table 2. Criteria for forming assenting and dissenting groups

	Group	Condition 1	Condition 2
Evaluation	Assenting	$\geq 2/3$ (strongly) agree	No negative answers
	Non-committing	≤ 1 (strongly) agree, Rest NA or middle ⁶	No negative answers
	Dissenting	≥ 1 negative	
Participation	Assenting	$\geq 2/3$ (strongly) agree	No negative answers
	Non-committing	≤ 1 (strongly) agree, Rest NA or middle	No negative answers
	Dissenting	≥ 1 negative	

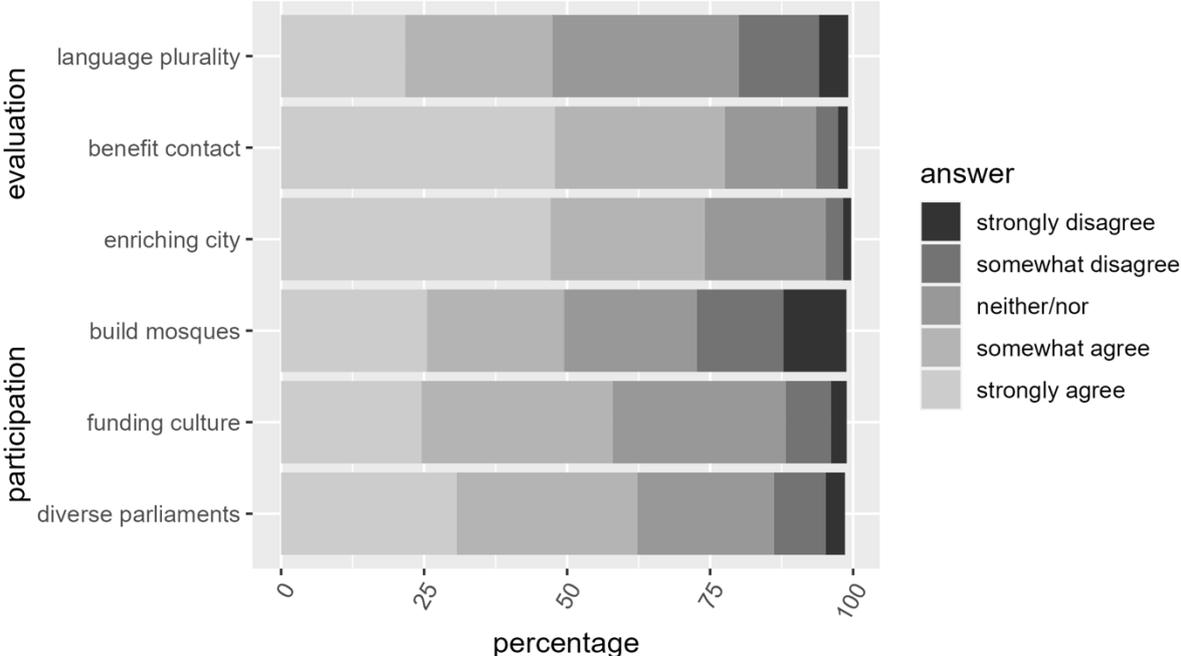
⁶ Those individuals answering more than one question with “don’t know” or refuse to answer are removed from the analysis. This totals five individuals.

In the following empirical analysis, we proceed in three main parts. First, we investigate the distribution of evaluation and participation assent and the overlap of these dimensions in the urban German population. Second, we analyze the characteristics of the group of “assenters” (those holding one or both forms of assent) using descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis. Third, we use multinomial regression models to investigate which characteristics are associated with either just supporting evaluation assent or, rather, supporting both evaluation and participation assent.

Analysis: Exploring diversity assent and the assenting

We first show the distribution of answers to our individual six items (figure 1) and then proceed in the manner explained above. Firstly, we observe that the majority of questions received a majority of “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” answers: For the evaluation questions, this is 78% for “benefit contact”, 74% for “enriching city” and 48% for “language diversity” – the lowest supported question of the six items. There are lower levels of overall assent for the participation questions, but agreement remains between 63% for “diverse parliaments”, 58% for “funding culture”, and 50% for “build mosques”.

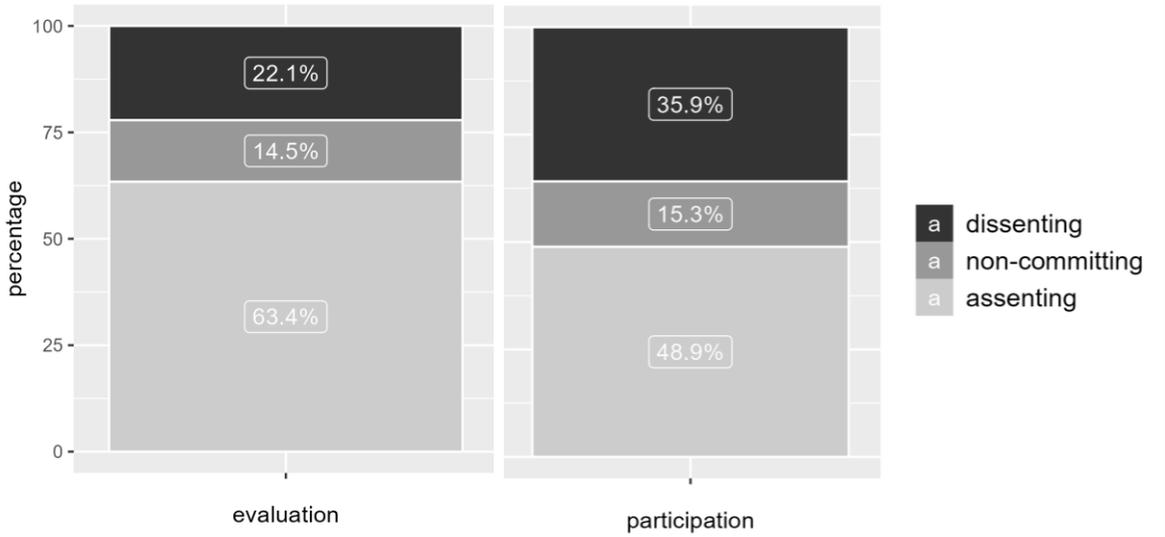
Figure 1. Distribution of answers to the diversity assent items



Note: N = 2893, missings (don’t know or refuse to answer) per question shown in table A2b in the supplementary material. Weights are applied.

Secondly, there are two questions with reduced support – namely “language plurality” and “build mosques”, the latter with the highest share of opponents with 26% choosing strongly or somewhat disagree. Clearly both language and Islam are contested issues in Germany. It is plausible that limited appreciation of linguistic plurality reflects the long-term emphasis on the importance of German language competencies for immigrant integration in dominant politics and the public debate (Elrick and Winter 2018). Limited (though majority) assent to a right to build mosques confirms that skepticism towards the public presence of Islam is widespread (Pollack 2013).

Figure 2. Evaluation and participation assent and dissent among survey respondents



Note: N = 2893. Weights are applied.

We now present the distribution of evaluation and participation diversity assenters into assenters, non-committed and dissenters (see figure 2), following the aggregation scheme shown in table 2. Evaluation diversity assenters, that is, individuals who broadly believe that socio-cultural diversity is an asset for society and individuals within it, comprise almost two thirds of our sample (63%). About one fifth of the sample are evaluation dissenters, and the smallest group of all do not state a clear view, the non-committed (15%). Not committing to an opinion can be an expression of insecurity or unwillingness to disclose an opinion. As a result of our stricter threshold we show a lower level of pro-diversity views than analyses

based on single questions in other German surveys (GESIS 2017; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017: 23).⁷

Regarding participation assent – that is, the notion that societal institutions and the distribution of resources should take the diversity of society into account – two observations are of note compared to evaluation assent. Firstly, 14 percentage points fewer respondents (49%) are in the assenting group, and 14 more (36%) are in the dissenting group. Unsurprisingly, issues of participation are more controversial than the evaluation of diversity effects. Still, close to half of the urban population support the more demanding items on reflecting socio-demographic diversity in societal institutions. Among those treated as opponents (“dissenters”) single items may find support – 60% of the whole sample favour diverse parliaments, for example – but this is not part of a coherent position in favour of presence of societal diversity in institutions and public life. Secondly, while the “non-committed” group stay roughly the same size as the evaluation non-committed, only around a third are the same people⁸.

In order to understand better how the two dimensions of diversity assent relate to each other, we construct overlapping groups of evaluation and participation assenters. We find that both overlap to a great extent: About two thirds, of those who evaluate diversity positively, also agree with representing diversity in societal institutions (*evaluation and participation assenters*). A smaller group of 21% of the sample evaluate diversity positively, without being participation assenters (*evaluation only*). From additional analysis we observe that mosque building is the most contentious aspect: 53% of the *evaluation only* groups’ negative answers are for “building mosques”.⁹ Yet, it is apparently inadequate to see diversity assenters as merely superficial consumers of a diverse culture – contrary to popular belief. Rather, the 43% figure for *evaluation and participation assent* shows that those with positive evaluations of diversity mostly appreciate that society must adapt and acknowledge diversity. A small share of 6% support participation assent, but do not fulfill our criteria for evaluation assent. Figure

⁷ In the ALLBUS 2016 (GESIS 2017), 74% agree to the statement „A society with a high degree of cultural diversity is more capable of tackling new problems.“ In the *Vielfaltsmonitor* 2017 the question „How do you feel about cultural diversity in Germany?“ received 72% positive answers (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017).

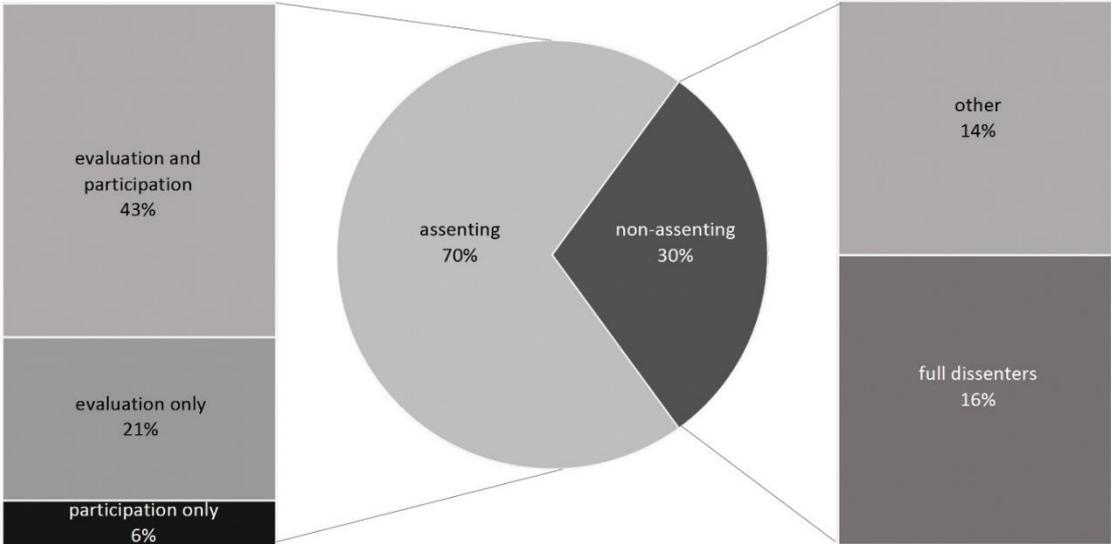
⁸ Of these participation “non-committed”, 38% were “non-committed”, 13% were “dissenting” and 48% were assenting in the evaluation questions. This suggests that many non-committed for participation assent, do rather evaluate diversity positively. Conversely, we see that 44% of the evaluation “non-committed” were dissenters in the participation stage. The overlapping group of non-committed only totals around 5% of the whole sample.

⁹ At 23% of answers, opposition to diversity in parliaments is also noticeable. 14% of negative answers were given to the question of funding for minority cultures.

3 presents two connected pie charts of those individuals falling into one of the “assenting” groups (*only evaluation, only participation or both evaluation and participation*), or one of the “non-assenting” groups (“full dissenters”, who are against both forms of assent, or “other” respondents).

Taken together, those who assent to evaluation or participation, or both, account for 70% of our sample. We continue by comparing this group with the rest of the sample. The remaining 30% are non-assenters of which 16% are full dissenters (to both evaluation and participation) and 14% are “others” with combinations of dissent, don’t know or no answers. We first highlight a number of differences at the descriptive level, before proceeding to explore which factors associate with assent by means of a regression analysis.

Figure 3: Groups of Diversity Assenters



Note: N = 2893, Weights are applied

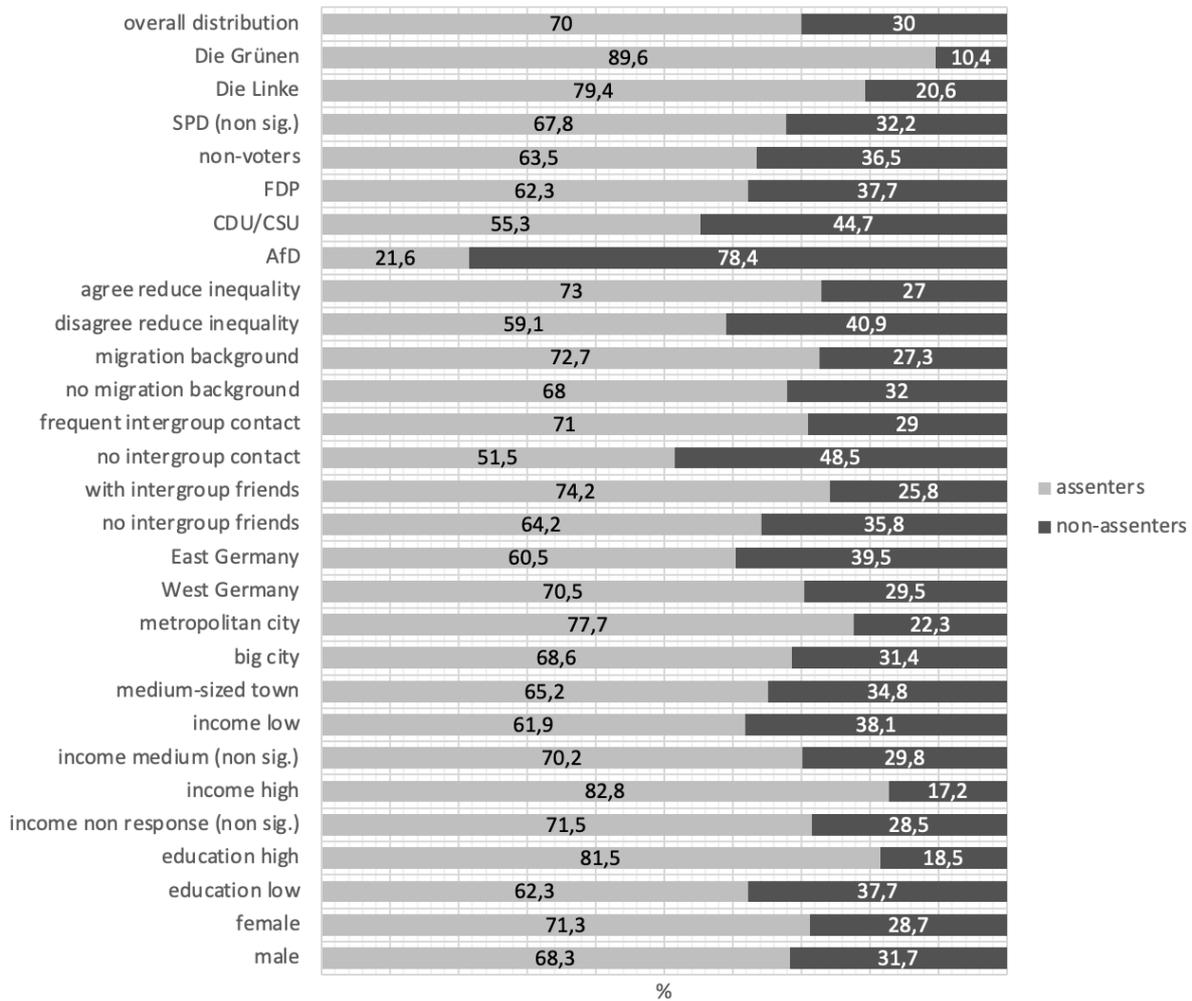
Who assents to diversity?

We now proceed to analyse how specific social and political groupings are represented in the 70% “assenters” group shown in figure 3. We measure the variables of interest as follows: We calculate household income and adjust it to take number of children and other dependents into account, and divide respondents into four income groups (here as: low, medium, high

and non-respondents). Education is measured as a dummy variable, between those with upper-secondary education versus the rest) (Dražanová 2022; Rapp 2014). To capture general political orientations, we use a standard question on voting intention. To measure support for egalitarianism and reducing inequality, we include an item which asks for support for interventions to reduce social inequality. Given extensive research on contact and interaction between in and out-groups (Schönwälder et al. 2015), we include variables on intergroup interaction between non-immigrants and those with a migration background (neighbourhood contact and friendship). Residence in larger cities (Maxwell 2020) may also be associated with more intense diversity experiences, we thus distinguish three groups of cities (medium, large, metropolitan). To capture potential divisions between East and West Germany (Berning and Ziller 2022), we also include a dummy-control variable. We also distinguish whether an individual has a migration background, or not. A full list of variables and measurement decisions can be found in table A2a in the supplementary material.

To best illustrate how assent and non-assent is represented among individuals with different characteristics and political attitudes, we report percentages of assent for each grouping. This should be read relative to the 70% assenters in the whole sample, that is, the urban German population overall. We employed χ^2 independence tests for all associations. Given that most associations are statistically significant at the 5% significance level, we only explicitly report on significance for the few insignificant results in this section.

Figure 4: Frequency of assenters and non-assenters across different groups



Note: missings for each variable are reported in table A2a in the supplementary material, weights are applied.

In all groupings tested but one (AfD supporters), the assenters are in the majority, suggesting that diversity attitudes do not clearly polarize along various social and political criteria. Political-party sympathies are among the variables with the most variation between assenters and non-assenters. As may be expected, there are clearly more assenters on the left rather than the right side of the political spectrum. Supporters of *the Green Party* are about 90% and of *The Left* about 79% assenting, while the sympathizers of the Social Democrats represent the average of assenting (68%, non-significantly different from 70%). Lower percentages of diversity assent are among the non-voters (64%), Liberals (FDP 62%, however non-significant due to a small number of FDP sympathizers in the sample) and conservatives (CDU or CSU) at 55%. The extreme right (AfD) has by far the lowest share of assenters (22%). Thus, a clear left-right divide is visible regarding diversity assent, with significant shares of non-assenters

among supporters of mainstream-right parties CDU, CSU and FDP, and SPD representing the average of the population. Nevertheless, even among the FDP and CDU/CSU, many assenters can be found, suggesting a broad church of political backgrounds even within the assenting group.

One can also observe that diversity assent is associated with support for a more balanced income distribution. Among people agreeing with the statement “Our society should ensure that differences in living standards are reduced” the assenting are over represented (73%), while among people disagreeing they are underrepresented (59%). This larger (11 percentage points) difference for the disagreeing group suggests that anti-egalitarian views are less typical among diversity assenters than pro-egalitarian views.

It is plausible that diversity assent may be associated with ones’ own migration experience as respondents may tend to identify with immigrants as a group and their recognition (see Street and Schönwälder 2021). Social interactions beyond boundaries have been shown to increase sympathies for people who are different (Schönwälder et al. 2016). However, we find that a person’s own migration background only shapes their diversity assent marginally: While people with migration background assent to 73%, people without a migration background do so by 68%, i.e. there is a small range of ± 3 percentage points around the benchmark. Social cross-group interactions seem to matter more: People with at least one close intergroup¹⁰ friend are 74% assenting, while people without such a friend are only to 64% assenting. The picture is even more pronounced for intergroup contact in the neighbourhood. Respondents with at least some intergroup interactions in their neighbourhood reflect the normal spread of assenters (71%), but among individuals without such encounters assent is significantly underrepresented at 52%, 18 percentage points below the benchmark. Intergroup contact is clearly associated with diversity assent but in a non-linear way: the divide is between no contact and at least some contact, and not between lower and higher frequency of contact. Having friends does not divide the sample to the same extent.

Another observation may be associated with the experience of diversity: Assent goes along with city size: in medium-sized towns (50-100,000 inhabitants) assenters are underrepresented

¹⁰ Defined as people without a migration background have at least one friend with a migration background or people with a migration background have at least one friend without a migration background.

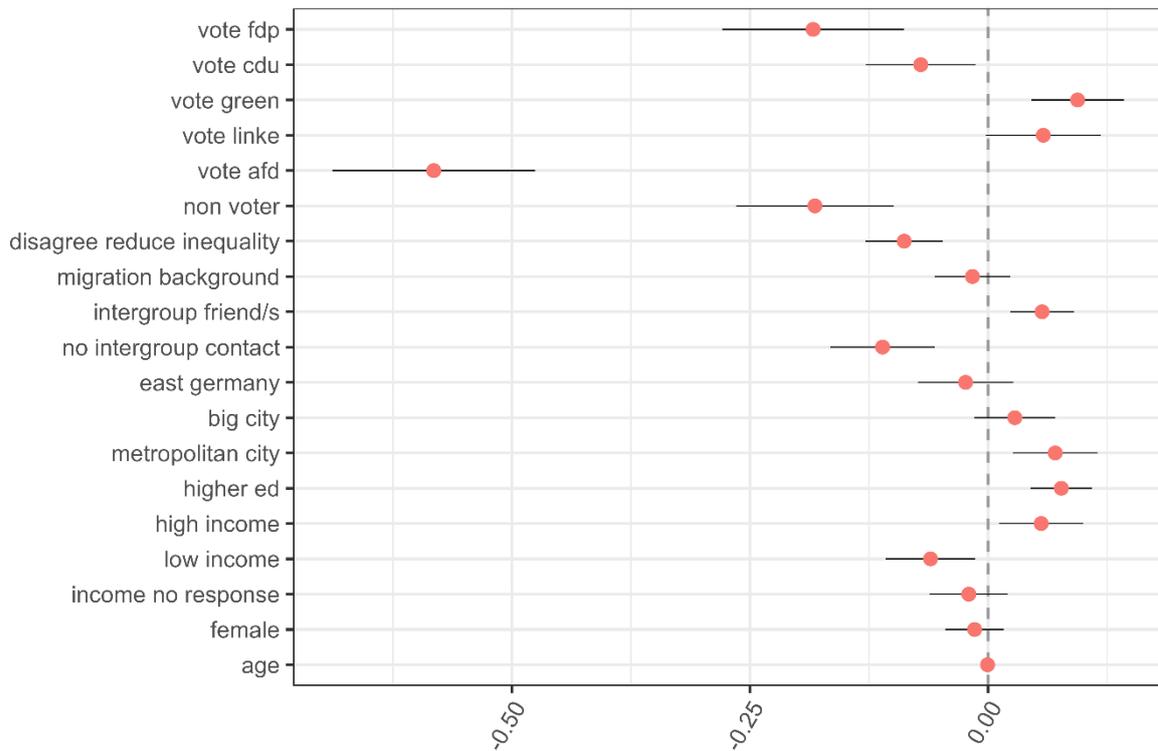
(65%), big cities (100-500,000) reflect the normal (69%, non-significant) and in metropolitan cities (over 500,000), the diversity assenting group is overrepresented (78%).

Socio-economic background, measured by educational levels and equivalized household income is strongly associated with diversity assent. Among individuals with higher levels of education, the assenting are 12 percentage points over-represented, whereas among those with lower education they are under-represented (8 percentage points). This follows expectations in parts of the literature which suggest that education predicts openness to immigration attitudes (Harris, 2022). Higher levels of income are similarly over-represented in the assenting group (by 13%) and lower levels are under-represented by 8%. Taken together, this suggests that a class difference exists in the urban German population with reference to their diversity attitudes: At least for the analysis of general assenters vs non-assenters, we find that assenters are more numerous among those with higher education and higher income than in the population overall.

Moving on to demographic factors, we find that although among women the assenters are slightly over-represented (71%, 68% among men), the difference is non-significant. However, where individuals live appears to have an impact on diversity assent: West Germans are on average assenting (71%) but among East Germans the assenting are underrepresented (61%).

In the next step, we estimate a regression model for diversity assent to distinguish assenters from non-assenters. Regression models make use of the third-variable-control, i.e. coefficients show the net statistical effect that is not confounded by (or controlled for) all the other variables in the model. Because of the binary outcome of the dependent variable, we employed a logistic regression. Figure 5 shows the coefficients of all independent variables included in the model, with the full table shown in table A3 in the supplementary material.

Figure 5: Results of logistic regression, assenters vs non-assenters



Note. N = 2723. Plotted are average marginal effects calculated from logistic regression shown in table A3 in the supplementary material. Ref. categories for categorical variable, voting (SPD), cities (large town), income (low income).

Most bivariate associations of factors of diversity assent remain stable in the regression model in terms of direction, strength and significance. The overall message remains that income, education, experience of diversity (contact and friendships with outgroups) as well as political preferences divide assenters from non-assenters.

Four remarkable results are different in the regression. First, FDP-sympathizers are significantly less likely diversity assenters than SPD-sympathizers, our comparison group here. Moreover, the coefficient even exceeds the negative coefficient of CDU/CSU voters, meaning that FDP supporters tend to be even less likely assenters than CDU/CSU supporters. Second, the coefficient of migration background is negative but close to zero and non-significant. Migration background is not relevant for diversity assent; the significant positive bivariate association seems to be a spurious correlation. Third, the coefficient of big cities is non-significant. As medium-sized towns are the reference group in the regression model, this

means that medium sized towns and big cities do not differ in the level of diversity assent. There is still a difference between metropolitan cities (500,000+) – with higher levels of diversity assent – on the one hand and medium sized towns and big cities on the other. Fourthly, the negative bivariate association between east Germany and diversity assent appears to have been spurious, and in the full model appears to be explained by other covariates – such as party sympathy or other political opinions, as the plot would suggest (see also Benoit et al. 2018).

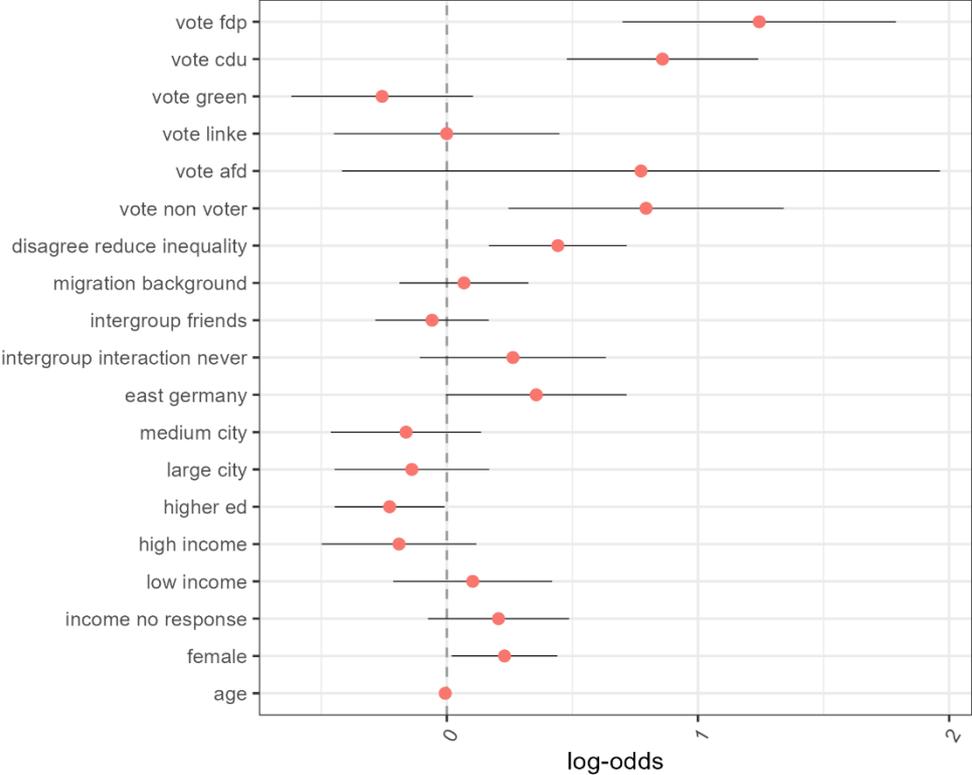
Divisions within the assenting group

Whilst useful for assessing the differences between all assenters and non-assenters, the above analysis does not allow for distinguishing between groups of assenters. We are most interested in the difference between those who just evaluate diversity positively, but do not support institutional consequences (21%), and those who support both evaluation and participation assent (43%). In this section, we thus investigate which factors are associated with belonging to the two sub-groups (Figure 3). This analysis should also allow for establishing which issues and socio-demographic/economic factors determine the difference between evaluation and participation assent. Similar to above, we first conducted descriptive analyses, followed by a regression analysis. For the sake of parsimony, we only report the results of the regression here, and the full table of chi-squared analysis can be found in table A4 in the supplementary material.

Differently to the previous section, we use multinomial logistic regression models, because we are interested in investigating the difference between two groups, in relation to the broader sample. Our outcome is categorical, namely, whether an individual is in the “evaluation only”, “evaluation and participation”, “other”, “full dissenting” group. We then run a regression model using “evaluation and participation assent” as the baseline outcome and generate a series of coefficients for each of the remaining outcomes. These can be read as, holding all else constant, how a one-unit increase (for categorical or dummy variables, moving from 0 to 1) in the variable in question affects the log-odds of being in one of the assent/dissent groups, compared to the “evaluation and participation” group. The full model can be found in table A5 in the supplementary material. Here, we present a dot-whisker plot for the part of the model which only compares the “evaluation only” with the “evaluation and participation

assent” respondents. The coefficients in figure 6 thus reflect the log-odds of belonging to the “evaluation only” group.

Figure 6: Results of multinomial regression model, “evaluation only” assenters



Note: N = 2723. Plotted are log-odds for belonging to the groups “evaluation only” assenters in comparison with evaluation and participation assenters, calculated from model 1 in table A5.

The main finding from the multinomial logistic analysis shown here is that socio-demographic and socio-economic factors tend to be insignificant, compared to political attitudes. Supporting the FDP, CDU/CSU, and not intending to vote, increases the log-odds of belonging to the group that evaluate diversity positively, but do not support participation assent the most, whereas, interestingly, supporting the Greens and The Left does not account for differences between these two groups of diversity supporters. This is interesting, because in the analysis of assent versus non-assent, sympathies with these two parties were significantly related to assenting – and yet, the association is not significant in understanding differences between evaluation only and evaluation plus participation assenters.

Furthermore, those individuals who oppose societal reduction of inequality are significantly likely to be in the *evaluation only* group. This implies that, as one may expect, pro-egalitarian

views are aligned with support for reflecting different groups in a diverse society in its institutions and public space. Combined with the significant effect of sympathy for the FDP and CDU, this finding suggests that right-wing socio-economic preferences seem to be aligned with rejecting participation assent – in spite of a generally positive view of diversity in the bivariate analyses.

Almost all differences relating to social, demographic and spatial factors are insignificant in the multivariate analysis. Lower-education level and living in East Germany are associated with belonging to the “evaluation only” group rather than the evaluation and participation assent group, albeit the education variable is only just within conventional significance. Most social and political factors tested here are merely associated with differences in the first analysis and not the second, implying that such factors are relevant for the difference between diversity assenters and non-assenters, but not for the difference between more or less consequent assenters. As may be expected, participation assent is less widely supported than evaluation assent, and therefore a broader group of individuals are hesitant to support political consequences that reflect socio-cultural diversity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article aimed to do two things: First, we introduced a concept suitable for assessing the extent to which populations agree with the sociocultural diversity in their social environments. We suggest that it complements the existing literature, such that it provides a means to focus on residents’ views of the diverse societies they inhabit. Further, while existing knowledge is balanced towards hostility to diversity and immigration, by highlighting those who accept diversity and are willing to accommodate it, we contribute to a more balanced view of social realities. We follow previous research calling for multidimensional concepts (Hjerm et al. 2020; Knight and Brinton 2017). Our theory-driven bi-dimensional concept, *diversity assent*, addresses evaluations of the effect of such diversity on society and individuals, on the one hand, and the willingness to support an adjustment of societal institutions and resource allocations to diversity, on the other. By introducing these two dimensions, we do not rule out extending it to further dimensions, for example, assent to specific interventions explicitly addressing discrimination against certain groups.

In the second half of the paper we provided an empirical analysis of diversity assent for residents of German cities. Our results confirm that it makes sense to distinguish different dimensions of diversity assent, here conceptualized as *evaluation* and *participation* assent. For one, these two dimensions attract different levels of assent: While almost two thirds of the urban population evaluate diversity positively, assent to drawing political consequences is markedly lower and remains just under 50%. Nevertheless, such support implies that diversity assent is rather widespread. Furthermore, diversity assent does not sharply divide the population along social and political lines. While social and political factors are associated with the difference between assent and non-assent, we find both assenters to diversity as well as dissenting and skeptical individuals among the supporters of all major political parties, and across educational and income groups. Yet, the lower support for participation assent implies that those advocating interventions for more equal participation may not yet rely on a consistent backing for such interventions, although individual measures do find majority support. Unlike often assumed, most of those who in principle see diversity as beneficial (evaluation assent) also take a step further and agree with its representation in public policy and public life (participation assent). For those who do not, although agreeing that diversity is beneficial for society, the public presence of Islam is a major, although not the only, hurdle.

Another main finding is that whereas social factors (education, income, intergroup contact) are associated with the difference between assent and non-assent, the variation *within* the assenters group is mainly related to political factors alone such as party sympathy and views on inequality. Notably, education, although significant for understanding the difference between assenters and non-assenters, remains only marginally significant for explaining differences *within* the diversity assenters. The inconsistent effect of education echoes prior studies on tolerance (Rapp 2014, 153) and attitudes towards affirmative action (Crosby et al. 2006). Although traditionally, education is seen as broadening perspectives and increasing sympathy to out-groups, our findings suggests erring caution when using education to explain attitudes towards more demanding elements of diversity assent. Consistent with prior evidence for related concepts (immigration, Harris 2022) our findings suggest that political orientations explain differences between evaluation and participation assenters. Regarding the difference between *evaluation only* and *evaluation and participation assenters*, it is mainstream right sympathisers – FDP and CDU/CSU – who tend to refrain from participation assent. Views on the reduction of social inequality are clearly associated with both diversity assent

altogether and participation assent in particular, suggesting that – for a sizeable part of our population - more social equality and e.g. more diverse political representation are seen as parts of broader egalitarian policies. These different effects of social, demographic and political factors reiterate the importance of a multi-dimensional understanding of diversity assent: More analytical gains can be made, compared to considering diversity assent a linear spectrum from “less” to “more”. It is telling that individuals rejecting some element of participation assent are more heterogeneous; high earning and highly educated supporters of Liberals and Conservatives, for example. More research should be done to untangle how positions towards different responses to diversity differentiate the population.

Somewhat surprisingly, factors we interpret as diversity experiences; such as engaging with people of a different migration background as well as living in a bigger city, seem irrelevant for understanding the differences within the groups of assenters, while they are related to the difference between assenters and non-assenters. More intergroup interaction does not seem to increase the willingness to support policies and institutions that reflect social diversity, but does separate evaluation assenters and dissenters.

Further, our results defy a common assumption in existing research (Crosby et al. 2006: 596, Scarborough et al. 2019: 206) that the potential beneficiaries of measures support them to a higher extent than the previously advantaged. Both women as well as immigrants and their descendants could be seen as benefitting from more diversity in parliaments, the latter from acceptance of linguistic plurality or funding for minority cultures. Gender does not come out as very influential in our study. Even more surprisingly, migration background makes very little difference to either analysis, although at a descriptive level among those with own or familiar migration experience support for a positive evaluation of diversity is slightly higher (2.7%) than in the general population. This may be due to the composition of our sample, such that those with migrant background are skewed towards those born in Germany and those with German citizenship. The overwhelming majority are Christians (54%) or not religious (33%) and only very few are Muslims (5%). Further research should investigate to what extent such factors determine attitudes to diversity and related political interventions.

Two limitations should be noted: First, the survey questions used in this analysis partly refer to diversity in general, without offering further specification, and partly include references to origin, minorities, and religion or Islam, that is, references to immigration-related diversity.

Thus, whereas we expect to have captured assent to immigration-related diversity more specifically, it is possible that bias emerged where respondents were also thinking of other groups. It would be desirable to investigate assent to diversity in a broader sense, but given the limitations due to survey length, in the design of this survey, priority was given to in-depth investigation rather than a broader thematic scope.

Second, our study is representative for the population of German cities with at least 50,000 inhabitants. Other surveys suggest that levels of diversity assent may be lower in small towns and rural areas (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017; GESIS 2017). At the same time, we see no reason to assume that the concept is less useful for the analysis of such contexts or that associations with political and social factors would be different. Still, it would be desirable to investigate more broadly in future research, and to carry out nationally comparative studies.

Overall, the paper offers a framework for future research on attitudes towards socio-cultural diversity. It presents a theoretically-driven conceptualization of a phenomenon distinct from attitudes to immigration and tolerance. Further, by applying the concept to the urban German population, we have demonstrated how positive evaluations of societal diversity and support for representing such diversity in institutions and resource allocations are distinct.

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Note on Ethics considerations: The DivA survey was conducted by a professional company, Kantar. Practices of such companies are subject to regulations in the *Bundesdatenschutzgesetz* (Federal Law on Data Protection), ensuring strict anonymisation. We only received an anonymized dataset. Detailed written information on the survey and data protection was made available to (potential) respondents. In developing the questionnaire, great care was

taken to avoid any unethical content and of course in any way abusive or discriminatory language. A formal ethics review was at the time not available at our institution. However, the Max Planck Society has rigid regulations on research ethics and data protection, binding for all its researchers (<https://www.mpg.de/199426/forschungsfreiheitrisiken.pdf>).

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Supplementary Material

Diversity assent: Conceptualisation and an empirical application

Table A1: Unstandardized loadings (standard errors) and standardized loadings for two-factor confirmatory model of diversity assent

Item	Diversity Assent Dimensions			
	Evaluation		Participation	
	Unstandardised	Standardised	Unstandardised	Standardised
Enriching city	0.695 (0.018)	0.753		
Language Plurality	0.79 (0.020)	0.711		
Benefit Contact	0.610 (0.020)	0.662		
Build Mosques			0.893 (0.024)	0.687
Funding Culture			0.698 (0.022)	0.673
Parliamentary diversity			0.656 (0.024)	0.599

Note: Standard errors in ().

Model fit: $\chi^2(8) = 34.9$, $P < 0.001$; CFI = 0.992, RMSE lower = 0.025, upper = 0.046, SRMR = 0.014

Model fit for one factor model: $\chi^2(9) = 67.2$, $P < 0.001$; CFI = 0.983, RMSE lower = 0.040, upper = 0.058, SRMR = 0.020 . Suggests that two-factor CFA is the better model

Table A2a: Summary of socio-demographic, socio-structural and socio-economic variables for the bivariate and multivariate analysis

Item	Question	Measurement	Missings
Age	Please tell me what year you were born.	Years	23
Gender	May I ask what gender you are?	Categorical	0
East/west	Coded	Categorical	0
City types	Coded	Categorical; metropolitan cities (500,000+), big cities (100,000-499,99) and mid-sized towns (50,000-99,999)	0
Income	How high is the monthly net income of your household in total?	Using the household income provided and statistics on German demographics, we calculate an equivalized income per individual, taking into account numbers of adults and minors in household.	67
Education	What is the highest level of education you have?	Coded a) still a student, b) left school without a degree, c) 8/9 grade d) 10 th grade e) advanced technical certificate f) German abitur and g) university degree.	13
Higher education	Coded	Dummy variable 1 = e and above, 0 = below e	13
Migration background	Coded	Has/no migration background	0
Intergroup contact	How often do you talk to people in your neighbourhood who are not (are) from Germany or whose parents are (not) (brackets = if person has migration background themselves)	a) Never b) less frequent c) at least once a month, d) at least once a week, e) daily	53
Intergroup friends	Of the people with whom you feel very closely connected. How many of them are NOT from Germany (from Germany)? Once again, as a reminder, I mean people who themselves or whose parents came to Germany from another country (who have not immigrated and whose parents were also already German). (brackets = if person has migration background themselves)	0-6 and more	101

Party sympathies	Which party would you vote for if the Bundestag election was next Sunday? [If no German citizenship, add:] Please tell us who you would vote for if you were entitled to vote.	SPD, FDP, CDU/CSU, Die Grünen, Die Linke, AfD, Other, non-voting (would not vote), refuse to answer ¹¹	0
Reduce inequality	Our society should ensure that differences in living standards are reduced.	Strongly agree, somewhat agree, do not really agree, not at all agree	58

¹¹ Here, we decided to use “refuse to answer” as its own category.

Table A2b: Missings in the diversity assent items (non-weighted), N=2893

Dimension	Item	Missings
Evaluation	Language plurality	40
	Profit contact	37
	Enrich city	11
Participation	Build mosques	39
	Parliamentary diversity	59
	Finance culture	40

Table A3: Full regression table, logistic regression

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Assent dummy
party symp.fdp	-0.975*** (0.245)
party symp.cdu	-0.419** (0.177)
party symp.green	0.764*** (0.192)
party symp.linke	0.426* (0.234)
party symp.afd	-2.876*** (0.344)
party symp.non voter	-0.967*** (0.218)
party symp.other	-0.903*** (0.309)
party symp.no answer	-0.545*** (0.173)
disagree reduce inequality	-0.533*** (0.118)
migration background	-0.106 (0.129)
friends (>= 1)	0.360*** (0.108)
no intergroup interaction	-0.650*** (0.152)
east_germany	-0.150 (0.158)
city type 2	0.169 (0.130)
city type 3	0.449*** (0.141)
upper_sec	0.488*** (0.103)

income low	-0.367*** (0.140)
income high	0.394** (0.169)
income non response	-0.129 (0.131)
female	-0.093 (0.101)
age	-0.004 (0.003)
Constant	1.261*** (0.298)
<hr/>	
Observations	2,723
Log Likelihood	-1,293.480
McFadden R ²	0.1523709
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A4: Full table of bivariate, within assenting groups.

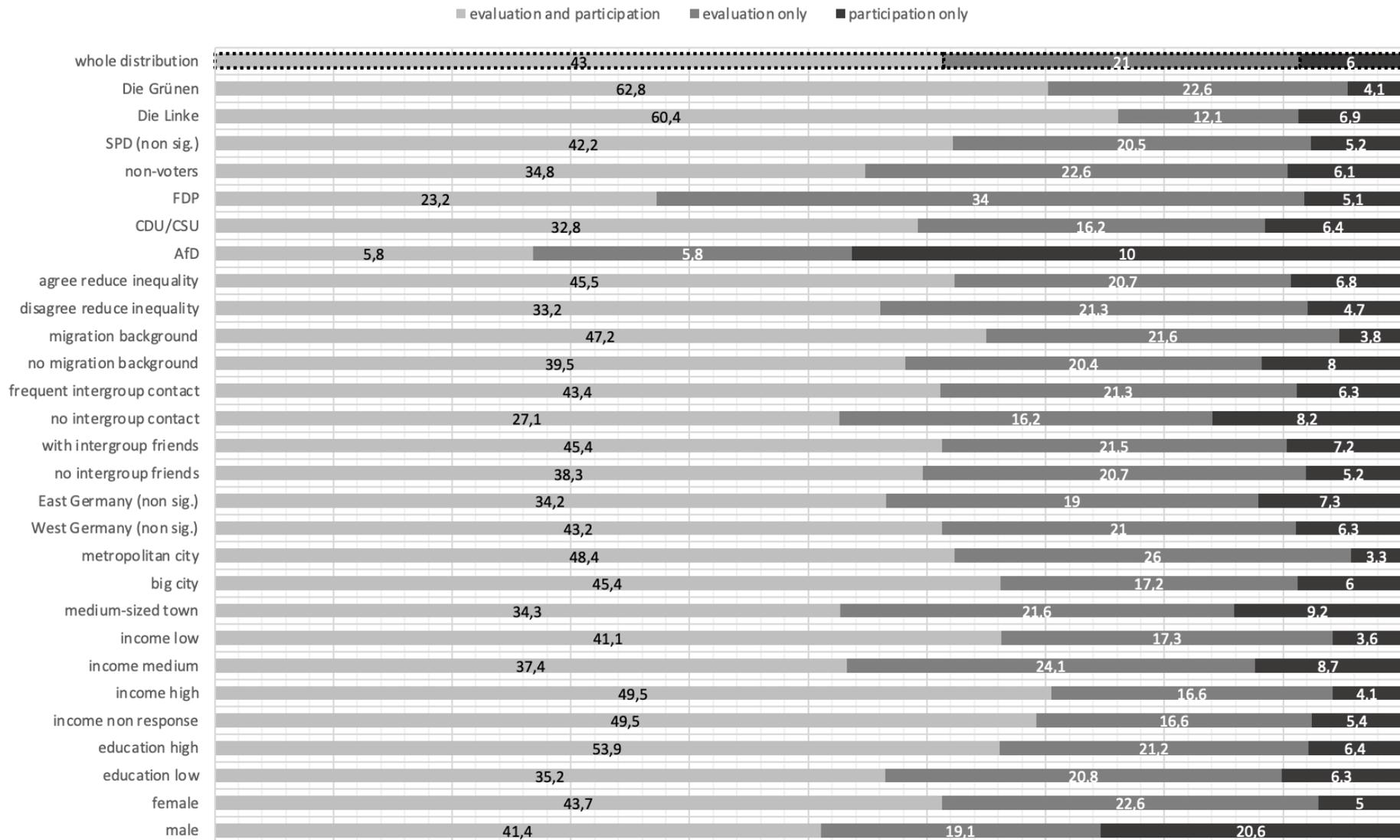


Table A5: Full regression table, multinomial logistic

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Evaluation only (1)	Other (2)	Full dissent (3)
party symp.fdp	1.242*** (0.278)	0.981*** (0.311)	1.545*** (0.342)
party symp.cdu	0.850*** (0.194)	0.692*** (0.204)	0.891*** (0.253)
party symp.green	-0.258 (0.184)	-0.564*** (0.203)	-0.919*** (0.284)
party symp.linke	-0.006 (0.229)	-0.334 (0.258)	-0.175 (0.318)
party symp.afd	0.766 (0.607)	2.089*** (0.478)	3.517*** (0.462)
party symp.non voter	0.798*** (0.279)	1.291*** (0.265)	1.525*** (0.311)
party symp.other	0.384 (0.399)	1.207*** (0.356)	1.284*** (0.429)
party symp.no answer	0.781*** (0.193)	0.824*** (0.200)	1.053*** (0.246)
disagree reduce inequality	0.440*** (0.140)	0.470*** (0.147)	0.819*** (0.160)
migration background	0.068 (0.131)	-0.013 (0.149)	0.110 (0.177)
friends (>= 1)	-0.059 (0.115)	-0.368*** (0.123)	-0.469*** (0.146)
no intergroup interaction	0.262 (0.189)	0.442** (0.188)	0.861*** (0.203)
east_germany	0.350* (0.183)	0.047 (0.190)	0.205 (0.214)
city type	-0.054 (0.077)	-0.408*** (0.080)	-0.323*** (0.095)
upper_sec	-0.225** (0.112)	-0.605*** (0.119)	-0.441*** (0.140)
income low	0.106 (0.161)	0.186 (0.166)	0.458** (0.190)

income high	-0.193 (0.157)	-0.315* (0.181)	-0.372* (0.221)
income non response	0.202 (0.143)	-0.070 (0.158)	0.235 (0.179)
female	0.229** (0.107)	0.022 (0.115)	-0.151 (0.137)
age	-0.006* (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)	-0.0005 (0.004)
Constant	-0.762** (0.354)	-0.109 (0.369)	-0.912** (0.443)
Observations	2,723	2,723	2,723
McFadden Pseudo R ²	0.09727169		

Note: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01
Other includes “participation only” and nuanced respondents