

# Current challenges of “Politische Bildung“ in Germany in the light of the historical development

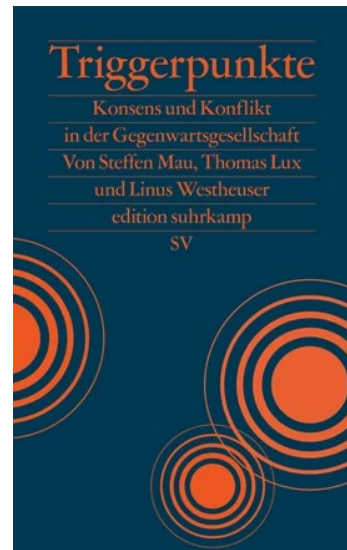
*Nordic Conference in Social Science Education – NOKSA 2024  
Challenges of social science education in times of change and crisis  
University College in Odense, Denmark, April 11th - 12<sup>th</sup>  
May Jehle, TU Dresden*



# Outline

1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”
2. The Historical Development of “Politische Bildung”
3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”



- development of anti-democratic and inhuman attitudes
- polarization and concern for social cohesion

(Quent 2019; Mau et al. 2023; Zick et al. 2023)



- upcoming elections in Saxony, Thuringia, and Brandenburg in September 2024

# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”



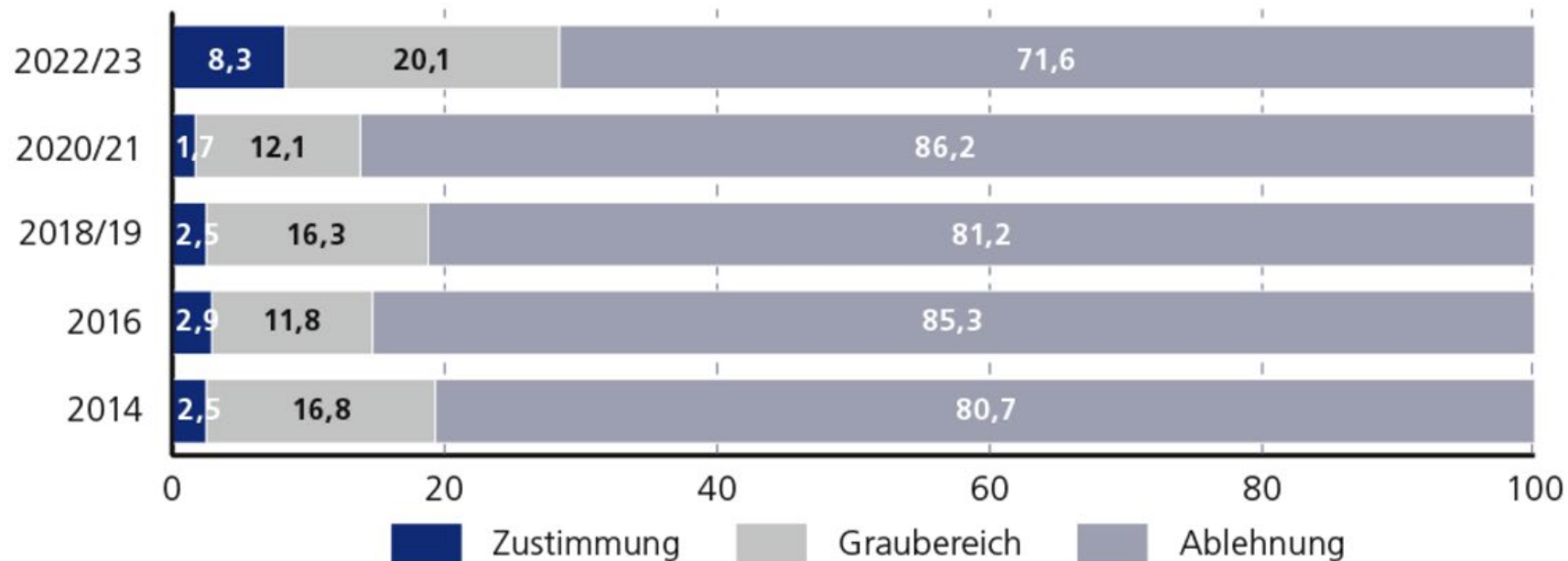
- biennial investigation of extreme right-wing, anti-democratic and inhumane attitudes in the German population
- 2022/23: significant increase of frankly expressed approval to extreme right-wing, anti-democratic and inhumane statements

(Zick et al. 2023)

# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

manifest extreme right-wing world view 2014-2023

**Manifest rechtsextremes Weltbild in Deutschland 2014–2023** (Angaben in Prozent) **Abb. 3.4**



Die distanzierte Mitte · © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2023  
Satz/Grafik · Gerd Kempken (Marburg)

# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

group-focused enmity: approval rates for racism, anti-semitism, hetero-sexism, clasism

Ablehnung bzw. Zustimmung zu den Aussagen  
Gruppenbezogener Menschenfeindlichkeit 2022/23 (Angaben in Prozent)

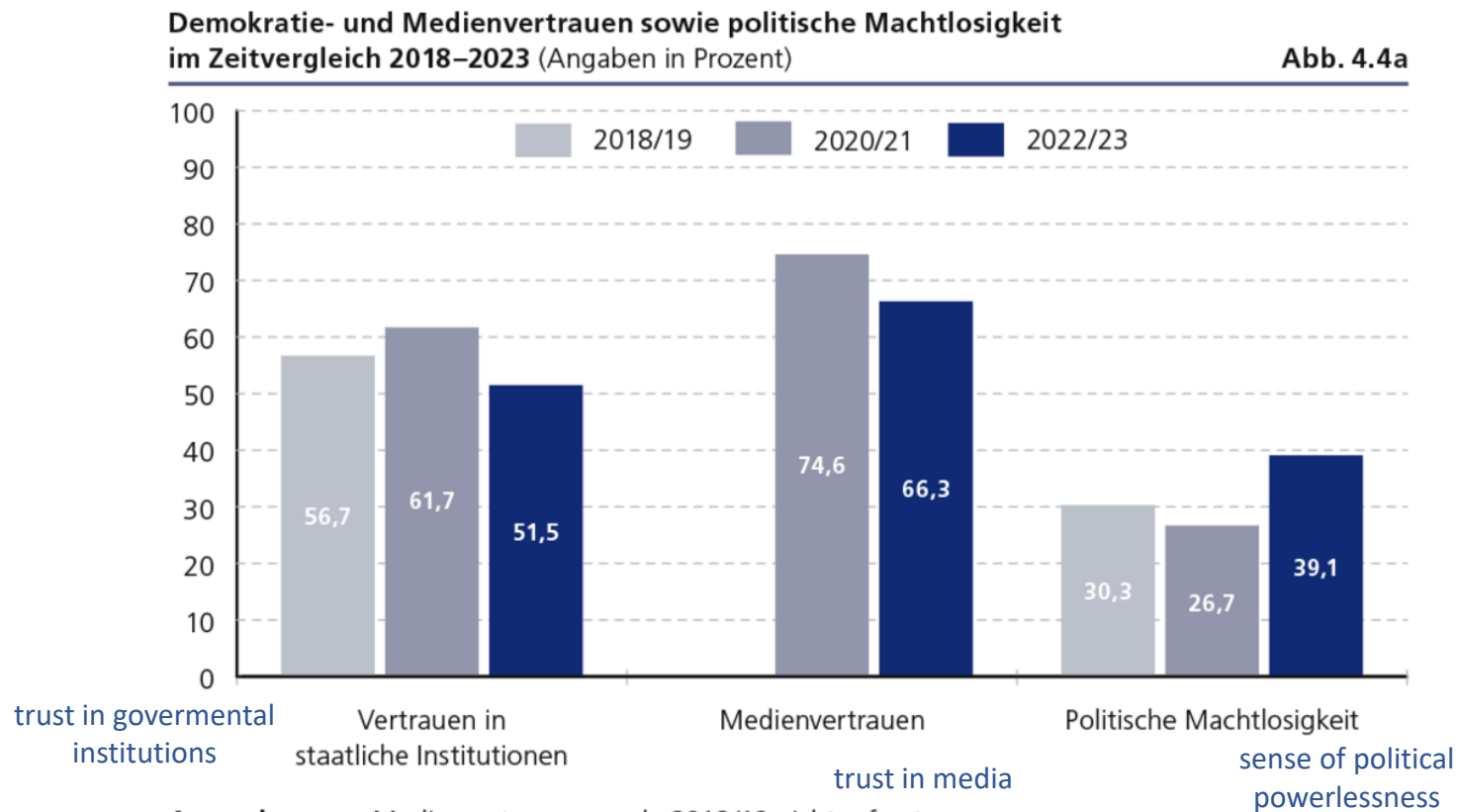
Tabelle 5.1

Ich stimme ... →	... überhaupt nicht zu	... eher nicht zu	teils/teils	... eher zu	... voll und ganz zu
<b>Rassismus</b> (M = 2,83; SD = 1,04; n = 2.023; $\alpha = ,82$ )					
Die meisten Flüchtlinge kommen nur hierher, um das Sozialsystem auszunutzen.	19,1	17,4	29,3	15,1	19,0
Muslimen sollte die Zuwanderung nach Deutschland untersagt werden.	41,1	17,7	23,0	9,7	8,4
Sinti und Roma neigen zu Kriminalität.	23,6	22,1	25,8	16,9	11,5
Wer irgendwo neu ist, sollte sich erst mal mit weniger zufriedengeben.	8,6	13,8	29,9	27,4	20,2
<b>Antisemitismus</b> (M = 1,98; SD = 1,00; n = 1.973; $\alpha = ,79$ )					
Viele Juden versuchen, aus der Vergangenheit des Dritten Reiches heute ihren Vorteil zu ziehen.	44,8	20,0	18,8	8,8	7,7
Durch ihr Verhalten sind Juden an ihren Verfolgungen mitschuldig.	68,0	14,0	10,8	4,1	3,1
Bei der Politik, die Israel macht, kann ich gut verstehen, dass man etwas gegen Juden hat.	40,2	20,2	24,2	10,1	5,3
<b>Hetero-/Sexismus</b> (M = 1,97; SD = 1,00; n = 2.022; $\alpha = ,81$ )					
Ich finde es albern, wenn ein Mann lieber eine Frau sein will oder umgekehrt, eine Frau lieber ein Mann.	50,8	15,7	16,8	7,5	9,3
Es ist ekelhaft, wenn Homosexuelle sich in der Öffentlichkeit küssen.	56,3	12,7	14,8	8,3	7,9
Frauen sollten sich wieder mehr auf die Rolle der Ehefrau und Mutter besinnen.	58,3	16,7	14,4	7,1	3,5
Bei der Gleichberechtigung geht es eigentlich darum, dass Frauen mehr Macht bekommen als Männer.	48,8	20,9	18,1	7,9	4,3
<b>Klassismus</b> (M = 2,50; SD = ,95; n = 2.025; $\alpha = ,77$ )					
Langzeitarbeitslose machen sich auf Kosten der Gesellschaft ein bequemes Leben.	17,7	16,2	31,2	17,2	17,6
Empfänger von Sozialhilfe und Bürgergeld neigen zu Faulheit.	24,9	19,7	32,5	14,7	8,2
Arme Menschen können nicht mit Geld umgehen.	42,7	28,2	20,3	5,8	3,0
Bettelnde Obdachlose sollten aus den Fußgängerzonen entfernt werden.	32,8	25,1	22,4	10,9	8,9

Anmerkungen M = arithmetischer Mittelwert; SD = Standardabweichung; n = Anzahl der Befragten;  $\alpha$  = Cronbachs Alpha.

# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

loss of trust in democracy

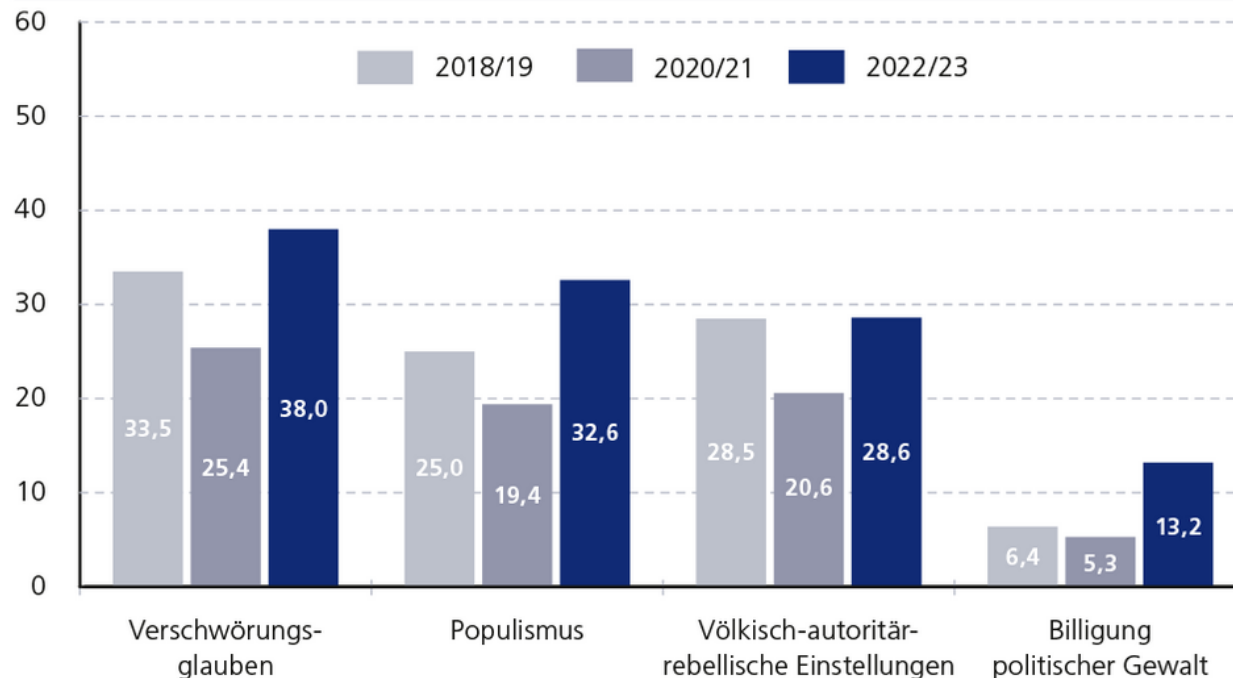


# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

threat for democracy

**Demokratiegefährdende Einstellungen im Zeitvergleich 2018–2023**  
(Angaben in Prozent)

Abb. 4.4b



**Anmerkungen** Für den Zeitvergleich wurden die Indizes nur mit Aussagen gebildet, die in allen Jahren erfasst wurden, wodurch es zu leichten Abweichungen gegenüber den jeweils bereits berichteten Prozentsätzen kommt.

from left to right:

- beliefs in conspiracy theories
- populism
- völkisch-authoritarian-rebellious attitudes
- advocating for political violence



# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

*Contextualization for more detailed explanations and interpretations:*

- continuity of extreme right-wing attitudes and violence in the Federal Republic of Germany
- new quality of organized networking, building structures, uninhibited public appearance, shifting of boundaries, barbarization of public discourse
- development of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) to an extreme right-wing party correlates with electoral success
- first time that an extreme right-wing party has potential to win the majority in elections

(e.g. Quent 2019)

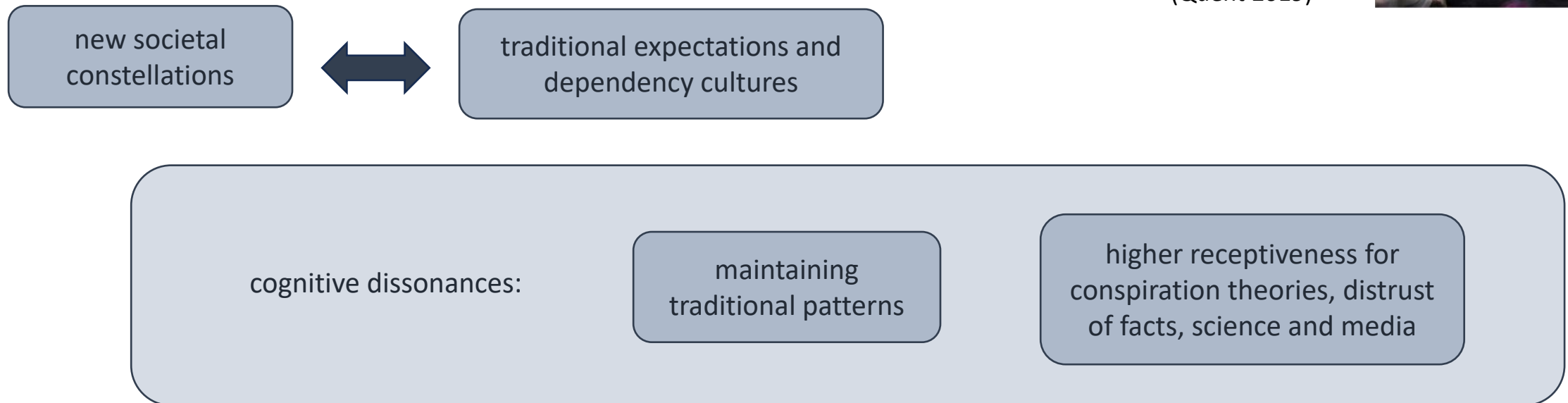


# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

*Correlation with a widespread perception of various societal crises:*

- increasing support for radical positions → acute disorientation in parts of the population
- Durkheim ([1897] 1983): “condition of anomy”: societal values and norms loss significance on times of rapid societal changes

(Quent 2019)



# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”



- strong impact of beliefs in deservingness and justified privileges  
↔ human rights for everyone

(Mau et al. 2023)

- „Society of singularities“: lack of common values and sense of solidarity

(Reckwitz 2017)



- no completely polarized society
- radicalization of the extreme right-wing political spectrum with consequences for the whole societal discourse
- potential for more polarization and shift of political cultures, values and norms

(Mau et al. 2023)

# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

*Call for “Politische Bildung” in and for democracy*

- early attempts of Re-education by the Allies after the crimes of National Socialism
- further development of Politische Bildung in the 1950s and 1960s: measures of fostering democracy against Nazism, Communism, and anti-semitism

(e.g. Gagel 1995)



# 1. Contemporary Diagnoses of Society: Times of Crises and Polarization – and a Call for “Politische Bildung”

## Call for “Politische Bildung” in and for democracy

- Federal Program “Live democracy” (Demokratie leben!)
- „Law for Strengthening of Measures for Democracy Promotion, Diversity, Prevention of Extremism and Civic Education“ (Demokratiefördergesetz – Democracy Promotion Law)

## Critical Debate

- difference between internal security policy and Politische Bildung
- limited understanding and instrumentalization of Politische Bildung as affirmative defense

(e.g. DVPB 2023; Widmaier 2022)

The collage consists of three main elements:

- Top Right:** A screenshot of the website "Demokratie leben!". The header includes the logo of the Federal Government of Germany and the text "Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend". The main banner reads "Bundesprogramm 'Demokratie leben!' ab 2025". The background features colorful, overlapping text elements like "BETRIEB", "ARTIZIPATION", "RESPEKT", "FREIHEIT", "DIVERSITÄT", and "MENHALT".
- Middle Left:** The cover of a book titled "EXTREMISMUS-PRÄVENTIVE DEMOKRATIE-FÖRDERUNG" by Benedikt Widmaier. The cover has a green and white color scheme with a stylized graphic of a person's head and shoulders.
- Bottom Right:** A screenshot of the Council of Europe website. The header shows the Council of Europe logo and the title "Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture". The main content area is titled "Model of Competences" and includes a diagram of the framework. The diagram is a circular flowchart with four quadrants: Values, Attitudes, Knowledge and critical understanding, and Skills. Each quadrant lists specific competencies.

## 2. The Historical Development of “Politische Bildung”

despite of all scepticism in view of “the end of the grand narratives” (Lyotard 1986) and ambiguities concerning the field and the subject of the discipline:

engagement in historical self-reassurance is linked to “telling a story of legitimation”



### 3. The Historical Development of “Politische Bildung”

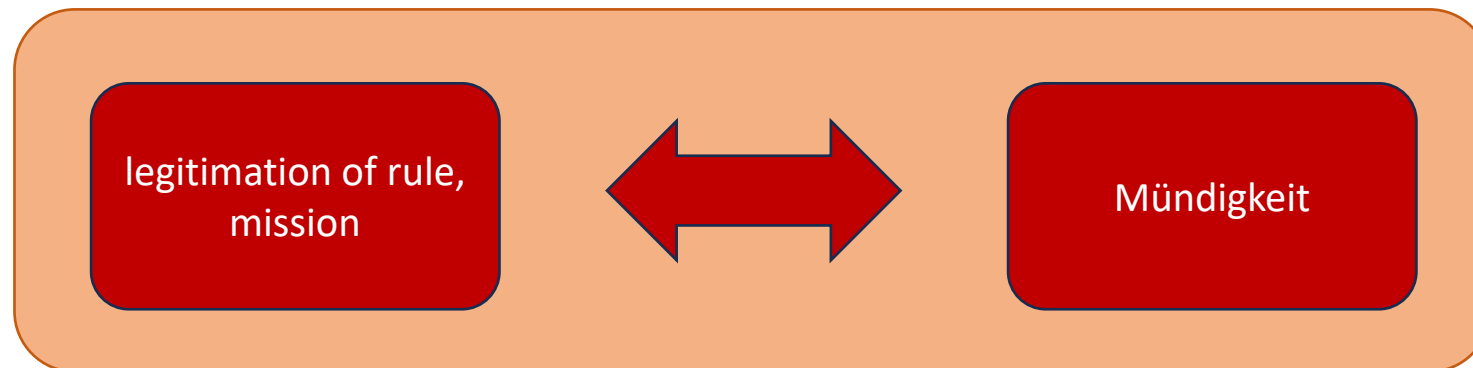
- systematization: historical patterns of “Politische Bildung”

legitimation of rule	mission (improvement of societal-political conditions)	Mündigkeit (maturity)
e.g. German empire, National Socialism, German Democratic Republic	e.g. early idealist national education, socialist education within the labor movement, Re-education	e.g. principles of Beutelsbach Consensus

(Sander 2022)

- risk of telling a simple linear success story

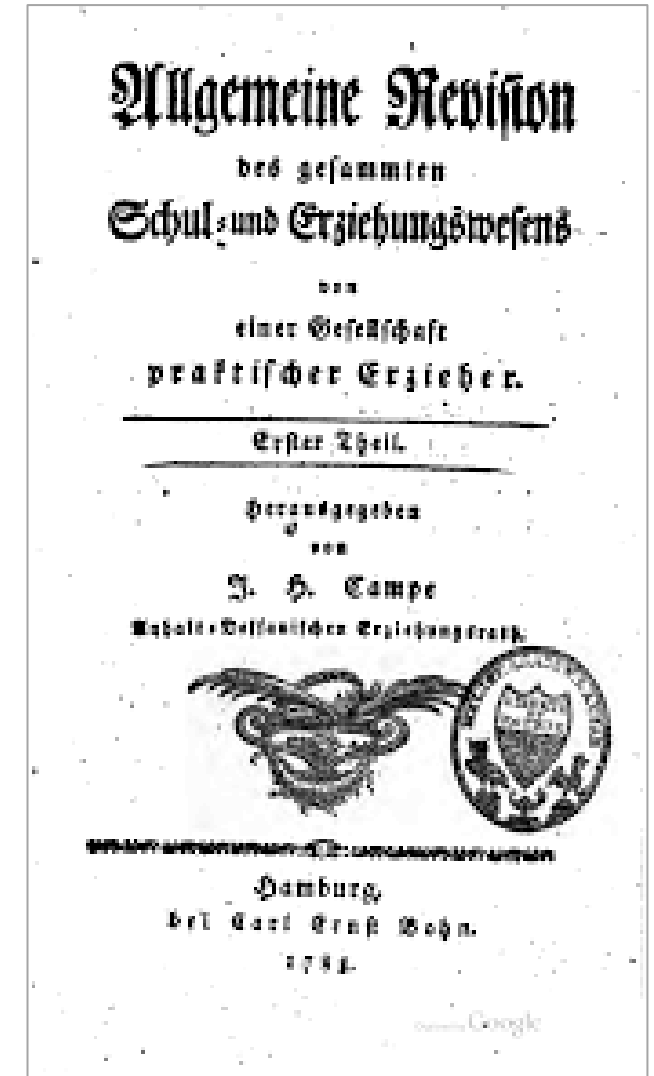
BUT: “Politische Bildung” is disputed and controversial.



## 2. The Historical Development of “Politische Bildung”

*Where to start? – Some fundamental consideration on the relations between pedagogy and politics*

- specific relation between pedagogy and politics: fundamental problem of critical education in modern societies  
(Benner/Brüggen 1997)
- discourse of enlightenment: *Mündigkeit* (maturity)
- questions of political constitution of society and its justification
- discussion of the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau within the “Society of practical educationalists” (Gesellschaft der praktischen Erzieher): education of humans or of citizens?  
(Campe [1789] 1979)





## 2. The Historical Development of “Politische Bildung“

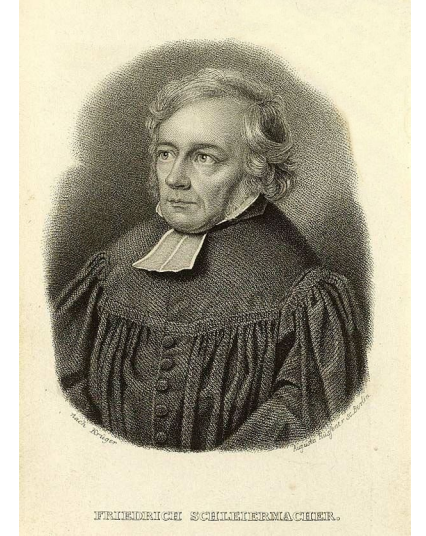
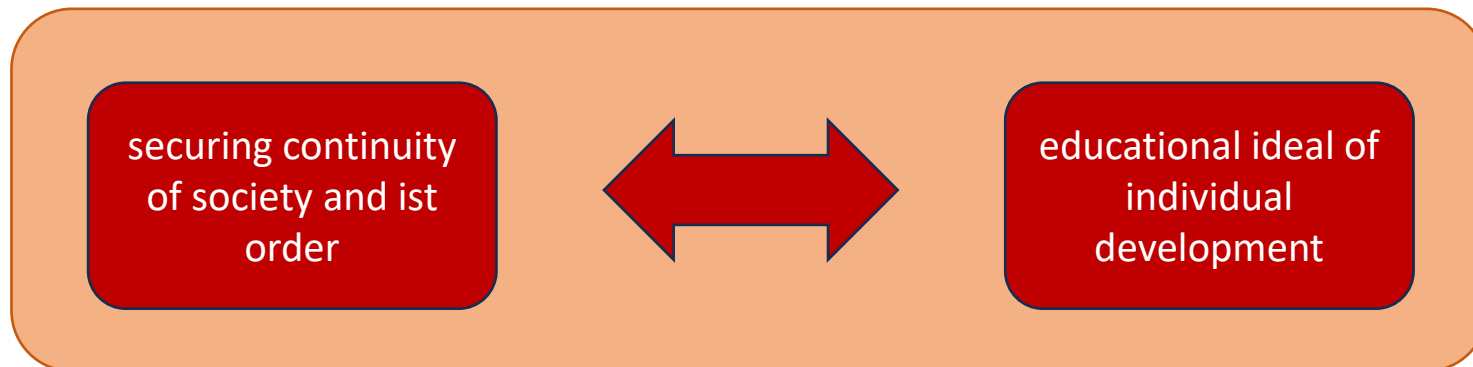
### Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Theory of Education (1826)

“What does the older generation actually want with the younger?”

“Education should be established in such a way that both [conservation and improvement] are in the greatest possible harmony – so that youth can enter into what already exist, and also energetically engage with those improvements that present themselves.”

(Schleiermacher [1826] 2023: 24;50)

➤ two-folded pedagogical task:



### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

#### Wilhelm von Humboldt: Theory of Bildung (1793/94)

- *Bildung* as a process of transformation of the relation between the self and the world (*Selbst-Welt-Verhältnis*)
- openness and indetermination in contrast to intentional education
- potential for transgression and critique
  
- concept of public education in contrast to an education by the state and solely in the interest of the state

(Humboldt [1792] 1947)

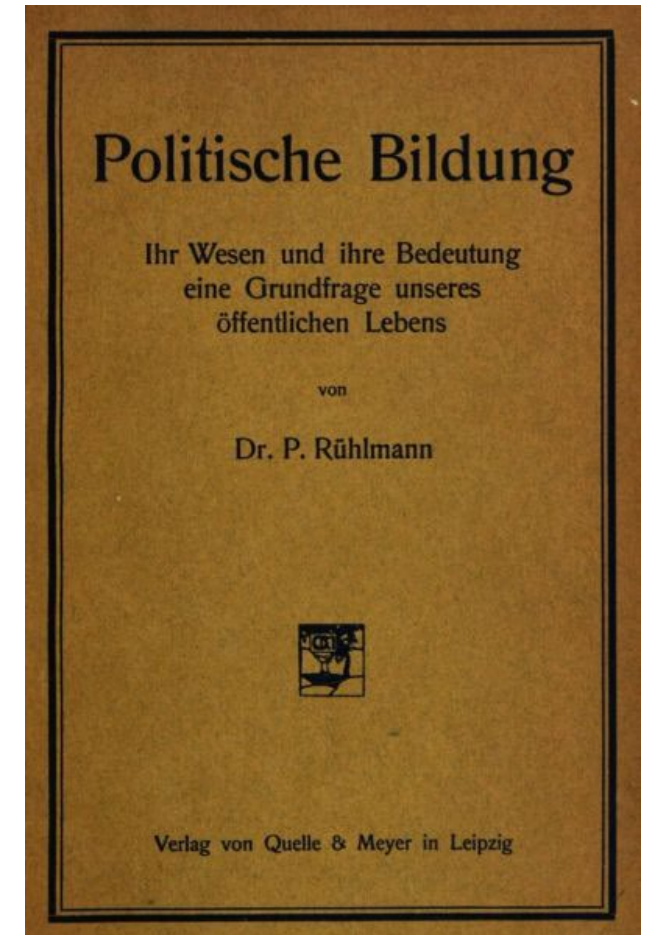


*„It is the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most restrained interplay.“*

(Humboldt 1793/94)

### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

- first mentions of the term around the turn of century from the 19th to 20th century
- Wilhelmine Empire: education of loyal subjects or citizens
- singular attempts of alternative education within the progressive education movement
- concepts of more democratic education in the Weimar Republic (not established an institutional level)
- complete instrumentalization during National Socialism
- attempts of Re-education as first “top-down”-concepts of education for democracy in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany

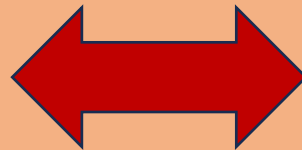


### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

- institutionalization and professionalization of the discipline in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s and 1960s
- intensification of controversies during the politicized 1970s with of high relevance for the prospective disciplinary self-concept

#### **critical approaches**

- social criticism
- critique of established power relations
- claim for emancipatory Politische Bildung and democratization



#### **conservative approaches**

- established polity as a good one
- central task of Politische Bildung: teaching the trusted institutional regulations

### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“



#### A Conference in Beutelsbach (1976)

- invitation by the Federal Agency of Political Education Baden-Württemberg
- diplomatic purpose: “to revive *pedagogical* discourse about subject matter in the field”
- informal result: minutes taken by Hans-Georg Wehling

(Christensen/Grammes 2020)

### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

#### The Beutelsbach Consensus (1976)

##### 1. Prohibition against overwhelming the students

It is not permissible to catch students off-guard, by whatever means, for the sake of imparting desirable opinions, thereby hindering them from ‘forming an independent judgment’. This is the difference between political education and indoctrination.

##### 2. Treating controversial issues as controversial

Matters which are controversial in scholarship and political affairs should also be presented as controversial in the classroom.

##### 3. Giving weight to the personal interests of students

Students should be put in a position to analyze a political situation and their own personal interests, as well as to seek ways to have an effect on given political realities in view of these interests

(Christensen/Grammes 2020)

pattern of Politische Bildung: Mündigkeit

2.8. Hans-Georg Wehling

Konsens à la Beutelsbach?

Nachlese zu einem Expertengespräch

1. *Überwältigungsverbot*. Es ist nicht erlaubt, den Schüler – mit welchen Mitteln auch immer – im Sinne erwünschter Meinungen zu überrumpeln und damit an der „Gewinnung eines selbständigen Urteils“ zu hindern (3). Hier genau verläuft nämlich die Grenze zwischen Politischer Bildung und *Indoktrination*. Indoktrination aber ist unvereinbar mit der Rolle des Lehrers in einer demokratischen Gesellschaft und der – rundum akzeptierten – Zielvorstellung von der Mündigkeit des Schülers.

2. Was in Wissenschaft und Politik *kontrovers* ist, muß auch im Unterricht *kontrovers* erscheinen. Diese Forde-

### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

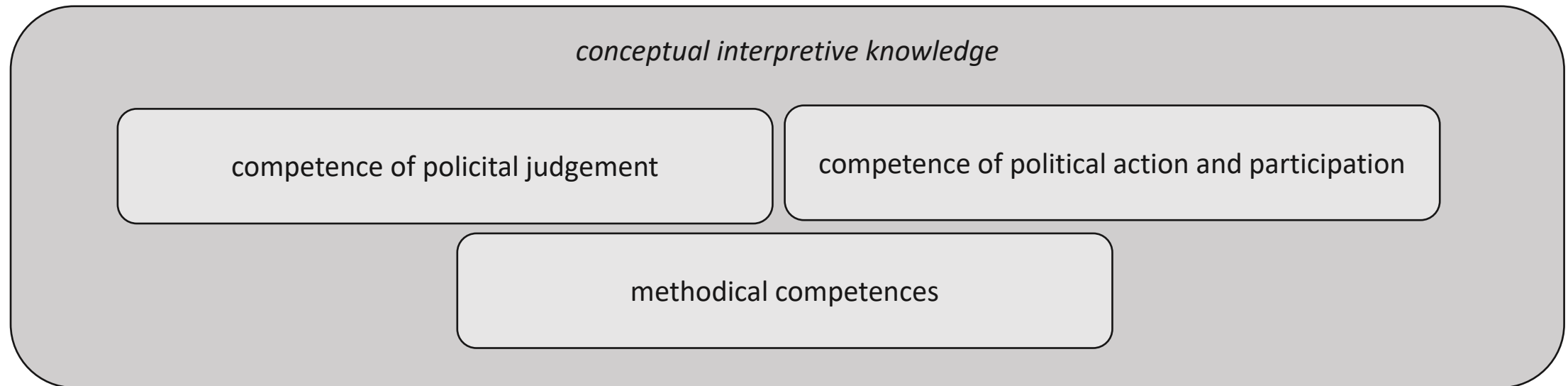
- retrospective view: de-emotionalization, normalization, professionalization, orientation towards teaching practice issues, but no release of the tension between affirmation and critique
- decade of 1980s as a “crisis of the discipline“
- revival caused by new challenges after the revolution in the GDR and the following re-unification:
  - discreditation of Politische Bildung, need for new concepts
  - orientation towards concepts already established in the Federal Republic of Germany: possible ambiguities caused by neglected consideration of East German perspectives



### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

#### Acknowledged principles of Politische Bildung nowadays

- Beutelsbach Consensus
- Mündigkeit as central aim
- Competency model by the Society for Civic Education Didactics and Civic Youth and Adult Education (GPJE)





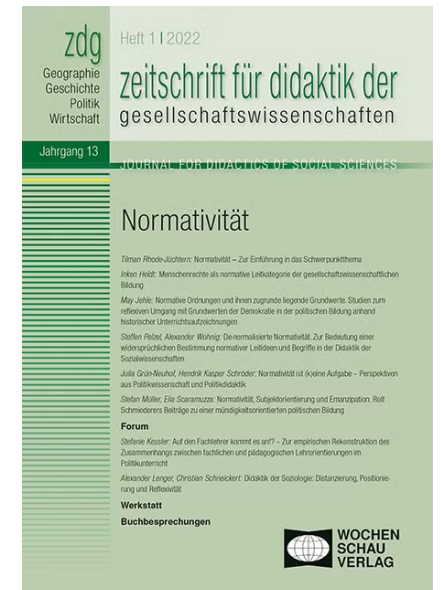
### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“



#### Remaining tensions

- asymmetrical interpersonal relation within pedagogical contexts
- specific relation between autonomy and heteronomy
- autonomy vs. institutional regulations and educational governance
- liberal-democratic basis order as normative reference point without reflection on a systematic basis
- complex and dynamic relationship between democracy and Politische Bildung:
  - need for Politische Bildung in a democracy
  - “normative surplus“ towards the realization of democratic ideals
- How to deal with inherent normativity?

(e.g. Müller 2021; May/Partetzke 2023; Massing 2002)



### 3. The Historical Development of „Politische Bildung“

#### Reflexive Politische Bildung resp.

#### Reflexive social science education towards Mündigkeit

- Schmiederer (1977): differentiation between affirmative and critical approaches
  - *affirmative approaches*: societal reality as basis and aim
  - *critical approaches*: societal reality as initial point for critical reflection of political and social conditions
- differentiation between political positions and didactic concepts
- reflection of own normative foundations
- discussion of justification of these normative foundations

(Müller 2021; Müller/Scaramuzza 2022; Jehle 2022)



### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels



#### **Threat to democracy by anti-democratic and inhuman attitudes and the Call for Politische Bildung**

##### **➤ Need for a discussion at various levels**

- (1) Challenge of the practice of Politische Bildung and its legitimation itself
- (2) Questions of the fundamental task and subject matter of Politische Bildung

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### Challenge of the practice of Politische Bildung and its legitimation

- attacks on practice of Politische Bildung by extreme right-wing protagonists:  
critical analysis of extreme right-wing positions as violation of a supposed principle of neutrality



- implementation of online platforms by the AfD to report such „violations“

- instrumentalization of principles of Politische Bildung by referencing the Beutelsbach Consensus

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### Misunderstandings and Clarifications

➤ *Neutrality*

- means not promoting certain parties or religious views
- does not mean refraining from critical analysis of political positions

➤ *Principle of controversy*

- requests to involve various perspectives in the analysis
- still requests to name violations against fundamental values as that what they are

(e.g. Behrens/Besand/Breuer 2021)



### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

## Teacher education and professionalization – Experiences at the Technical University Dresden, Saxony



PEGIDA – Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident



- one focus of work:  
How to deal with extreme right-wing attitudes and statements and group-focused enmity

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

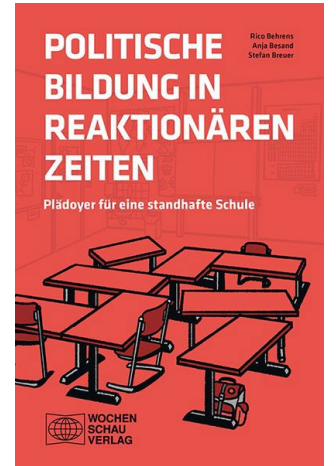
- experiences in school-practice supervision
- conduction of (interview-based) studies
- implementation of projects in cooperation with schools
- approaches to analyze the challenges and to develop strategies



### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### Problems and Obstacles

- *problem of identification*: incidents at the edge of educational settings, lack of own biographical experience, poor concepts of ideologies of inequality, blind spots
- *problem of responsibility*: blaming the parents, struggling with other actors in school, strict focus on curricula, no responsibility for school life, delegation of responsibility
- *lack of capacities or professionalism*: engaging teachers as lone fighters, lack of networks, widespread reduced understanding of Politische Bildung
- *problems of positioning and defining limits*: misunderstanding of pluralism as relativism or controversy as neutrality, narrow focus on legal questions, uncertainties regarding the own position



(Behrens/Besand/Breuer 2021)



### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### O B S T A C L E S

- (1) indifference
- (2) emotional overreactions
- (3) extensive prohibitions – de-politization of educational contexts
- (4) sole focus on subject-teaching
- (5) isolation and excessive demands on oneself
- (6) pitfall of blind legitimation

#### STRATEGIES

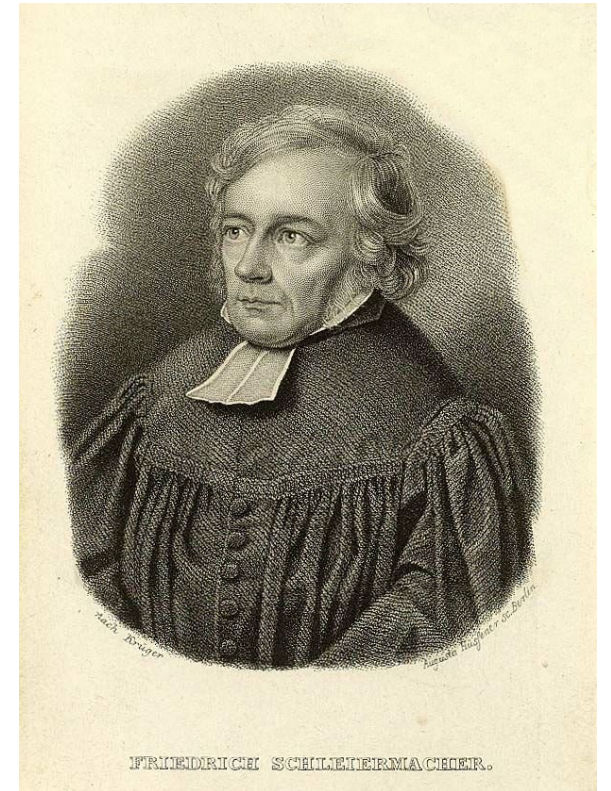
- limits of controversy: pluralism and human rights
- protect people affected
- formulation and justification of basic values as educational aims
- critical reflection of societal and educational structures
- democratic development of schools
- systemic support and networking

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### **Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Theory of Education (1826)**

„Pedagogy is a science [*Wissenschaft*] that is at once closely connected to ethics, and also derived from it as an applied field, and it is one, that is coordinated with politics.“

(Schleiermacher [1826] 2023: 28)



### 3. What is do be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

- no neutral concept of democracy
- pluralism and human rights as ineluctable principles
- intention of realization of these claims



**“POLITISCHE  
BILDUNG IST NICHT  
NEUTRAL!”**



PROF. DR. ANJA BESAND  
DIREKTORIN DER JOHN-DEWEY-  
FORSCHUNGSSTELLE FÜR DIE DIDAKTIK  
DER DEMOKRATIE

**JoD  
DID**

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### **Fundamental tasks and subject matter of Politische Bildung**

- *as a controversial and disputed field*
- *in recognition of the tension between patterns of legitimation of rule and Mündigkeit*
- *in recognition of tensions between emancipation and needs of society*

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

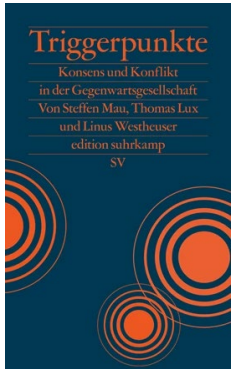
#### **Fundamental tasks and subject matter of Politische Bildung**

*in the light of a strong impacts of beliefs of deservingness and a loss of common values*

(Mau et al. 2023, Quent 2019, Reckwitz 2017)

- recall of fundamental political questions: How and on the basis of what values do we want to live, to organize our societies, to create the world?
- reflection and discussion of how “to create normativity out of ourselves“

(Habermas 1985)



### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

- reflection on normativity as part of an approach of Politische Bildung which also intends critical reflection of political and social conditions
- acknowledgement of problems and conflicts as part of social reality
- consideration, reflection, discussion and justification of understandings of democracy
- consideration of social reality in the light of democratic ideals and normative foundations
- reflection and justification of normative foundations
- justification of “normative surplus”

(Müller/Scaramuzza 2022, Fröhlich et al. 2023, Müller 2021, Massing 2002, Achour 2023)

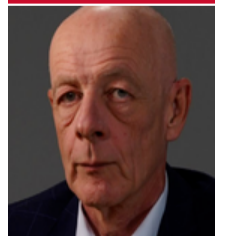
Die **Proteste gegen Rechtsextremismus** rissen in der vergangenen Woche nicht ab. Was kann daraus entstehen?

Demokratie ist, wenn alle das Glas halb leer haben. Im Idealfall, mehr kann sie nicht.

Davon ist dies Land Lichtjahre entfernt, das soziale Gefälle brutal, Bildungsnot, Kinderarmut, *you name it*. Außerdem macht sich auf Pappschildern nicht sonderlich mitreißend: „Mit geht’s okay, ich kann noch was abgeben.“ Die Autoritären kapern die Neigung der Deutschen zum Gemeinwohl und definieren schon mal durch, wer alles rausfliegt, damit der Rest Gemeinwohl hätte. Die Demokraten reagieren stumpf: Sie grenzen auch aus, verständlich – Rechte, Rechtsextreme, AfD, Nazis. Es ist halt leichter, gegen etwas oder jemanden zu demonstrieren, als für – das halb leere Glas. Aber da geht es lang.

Gesellschaft / Kolumnen 11. 2. 2024, 17:38 Uhr

KOLUMNE VON  
**FRIEDRICH  
KÜPPERSBUSCH**  
Autor



### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### **Further questions**

*in the light of correlations between societal and economic crises, their consequences and the development of anti-democratic and inhumane attitudes (and probably also cognitive dissonances behind)*

- critical reflection of neoliberal structures of capitalism resp. imperial way of life
- *What could solidarity mean on various levels of society and in global contexts?*
- *How can we discuss the reality of crises and their consequences on the basis of assured knowledge and established findings?*
- *What does it mean being responsible for the world in which we live?*

### 3. What is to be done? – Strategies and Considerations at Various Levels

#### Needs for doing that work...

- stable and long term structures
- room for problematization of normative constrictions set by the state
- room and support for independently organized Politische Bildung
- exploration of the potential of societal spaces for transparent and public discussion on normative foundations and limits of controversy





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# Current challenges of “Politische Bildung“ in Germany in the light of the historical development

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