



## Far right in Germany

### Nemecká krajná pravica

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#### Abstract:

*This study is about German political extreme right-wing radicalism and the impact of migration on their situation. The extreme right-wing groups have the biggest share in the German politically motivated crime cases. Their activities have many forms and some crime delicts (homicides, recruitments) create big anxiety in German society. In this study there is a short review of German scientific literature as well as an analysis of the radical right-wing crimes and the countermeasures issued by the police for these crimes in the annual reports between 2015 and 2019. Middle of this study it will be concluded that most of the crimes committed by the extremist right-wing groups are nonviolent, but the increasing tendency of their crimes can provide us reason to worry, next to factors like the social situation of the criminals, the people targeted by criminals, and the mass-mobilizing ability of those topics that are interesting for the extreme right-wing groups. At the end of this study, it will be discussed, that in the time of the COVID-19 the focus of the extreme right-wing- related groups has changed, and the struggle against extreme right-wing ideologies has been expanded to taking under surveillance the police as well.*

**Keywords:** Germany, right-wing radicalism, extremism, political motivated crime, COVID-19

#### Abstrakt:

*Štúdia píše o nemeckej krajnej pravici a o tom, aký vplyv mala na nich migrácia. V Nemecku krajná pravica je zodpovedná za najvyššie percento vo vykonaných politicky motivovaných zločinoch. Ich skupiny vykonávajú veľa zločinov, z ktorých niektoré (ako napr. vraždy, nábor nových členov) vyvolávajú strach v obyvateľstve. Štúdia predstaví akademickú literatúru a k nej patriace výrazy o nemeckej krajnej pravici v celku. Ďalej štúdia predstaví kriminálne aktivity spáchané krajnou pravcou založene na kriminálnych štatistikách z rokov 2015 až 2019 a k nej patriace výsledky z policajných vyšetrení. V strede štúdie bude objasnené, že väčšina členov krajnej pravice a nimi spáchaných zločinov nie sú násilné, ale ich zvyšujúca sa tendencia a témy zaoberajúce sa s nimi v celku vedú mobilizovať davy ľudí čo je už plnė obáv. Záverečná*



*časť štúdie sa zaoberá ako pandémia COVID-19 zmenila operáciu a témy krajno pravicových skupín, a ako sa zvýšilo policajné pozorovanie týchto skupín.*

**Kľúčové slová:** *Nemecko, krajná pravica, radikalizmus, extrémizmus, politicky motivovaný zločin, COVID-19*

## **Introduction**

Next to emigration and immigration there is another, specific form of migration, which is the internal migration, inside the psyche of the individual. Because of globalization, the social processes accelerated and resulted in such negative effects as unemployment. However, next to these factors with similar nature, there are numerous other factors (psychological, religious, family, values, community) that are able to make a shift in the attitude of the individual towards more radical thoughts and perceptions. In Germany, the right-wing radicals are those who commit the most crimes from the radical groups of the country.

In this article, first I introduce those definitions in connection with the topic that are mentioned in the documents of the German Federal Criminal Office and the Federal Constitution Protection Office. Secondly, I discuss the changing trends of the activity of the extreme right-wing groups between 2015 and 2019, according to the annual reports of the Federal Constitution Protection Office.

The above-mentioned two organization form the basis of this analysis and because they are maintained by the state, they can explore the issues in relation with the extreme right-wing side only through those opportunities that are provided by the political leadership (financial sources, means, methods) These organizations have the obligation to make reports to the political leadership as well. In order to avoid the one-sided approach of the topic, here I introduce the fresh and relevant literature.

I use the terminology of the above-mentioned two organizations. In connection with the topic of right-wing radicalism, the utilized terminology of the two organizations are similar.

The politically motivated crime (PMK – *Politische Motivierte Kriminalität*) means that the criminal commits crime with political motivation, and his/her motivation is:

- against the liberty of free speech;
- against the democratic state and its institutions;
- wants to spread violence on federal territories;
- wants to choose individuals as targets, according to religion, political orientation, sexual orientation, physical and intellectual features. [1]

The crimes committed by extremists form part of the politically motivated crimes. In the case of the extremist crimes it can be stated that the crime is committed against the constitutional principles as well as the free democratic statehood. [2]

Both in the case of politically motivated crimes and extremist crimes, the terminology distinguishes crimes with right-wing, left-wing, regional-ideological, and foreign ideological background [3].

The extreme right-wing thinking defines the value of individuals according to their ethnical and racial identity. Therefore, the human and residential rights are forced to the background- which attitude stands against the constitutional values and the democratic system of the German state.

## **1. The literature on the German extreme right-wing political groups**

In the topic of extreme right-wing political groups, the dominant line deals with searching for reasons about why these extreme right-wing groups are forging ahead. [4] Next to this, the analysis of the activity of extreme right-wing political groups on a given territory is also present in the contemporary literature. [5] The literature on the psychological background [6] of the formation of such groups, as well as thoughts on social activities to prevent and divert extreme right-wing activities are representing a separate field. [7] There is also a set of articles on the presence of extreme right-wing groups in the political dimension, and in this topic the connection between the AfD and the extreme right-wing side can be regarded as a fresh issue. The reason is, that thanks to the intensification of AfD's presence in the political life, the traditional internal political relations have changed.[8] Another group of literature deals with crimes committed by extreme right-wing groups (by giving special attention to the crimes and recruitment activity in the online dimension) [9] and the victims of these crimes (Muslims, Jewish people, and political adversaries). [10] Last but not least, there are works on the legislative and psychological approach. [11]

In this part of the section, on the basis of the German literature I discuss those factors that drive an individual towards the extreme right-wing way of thinking. The most frequently mentioned factors are the sense of inequality and the taint for violence because they can provide opportunity for escaping into the sense of superiority and opportunity for the violent termination of inequality. According to the social „disintegration theory”, the problems occurring during the social integration and socialization of the individual can push him/her towards the extreme right-wing attitude. According to the theory of „dominant culture”, the individual chooses a dominant culture and the nimbus of this culture is the one that the individual tries to validate against the culture with „lower prestige”. According to the theory of „the losers of modernization”, the individuals from those groups who got into a disadvantageous situation during modernization can be ready to fight against the winner individuals and aim to restore that state which is ideal for them. In the 21st century became famous the theory of the „group-specific misanthropism”, where the individual feels hatred against a specific group of society (Muslims, Jews, gipsies, feminists, etc.). [12]

(It has to be emphasized, that the scale of German right-wing way of thinking is wide, and there is difference between the individuals and groups in their attitude

towards democracy, political adversaries, and violence. Therefore, not every right-wing thinker is extremist. Because of this fact it is essential to monitor the phenomenon of radicalization frequently. Moreover, the role of the civil society, and the role and responsibility of family cannot be ignored as well.)

## 2. Trends

Before the explanation of the current trends, the definitions concerning the German extreme right-wing should be introduced.

The ideology of the extreme right-wing parties distinguish people according to nationalist, racist, national socialist and socialdarwinist grounds. If the sample of the committed crime includes any of these ideologies, the crime will be classified as one from that category. [13] The hate-crime, hate-posting and the terrorism also belong to the above mentioned group of politically motivated crimes. [14]

During the progress of radicalization, the individual or the group reaches the level of executing its own ideology with illegitimate tools. The Federal Crime Office highlights the fact that certain periods of life, when the individual is in bad condition, could be a good starting point on the way towards radicalisation, since the radicalist ideology can be a good way out of the hardships. [15]

Those crimes can be defined as extremist politically motivated crimes, which are proven to be committed against the state (free elections, free will, right to law enforcement) as well as against the constitutional state order (legislative system and human rights). [16]

The politically motivated and violent crimes includes not only the political motivation, but also one of the following crimes: murder, assault, violence, misuse of combustible and explosive materials, truculence, endangering the proper progress of traffick, coercion, obstruction against law enforcement, and sexual abuse. [17]

The German criminal statistics and the legal practice approaches the notion of terrorism from different perspectives. The German law enforcement defines terrorism as the establishment, the operation and the member management of such an organisation, whose motivation is committing organised and effective politically motivated violence. Moreover, those individuals who are working alone can also be classified as terrorists, if commits the crime with the motivation of intimidating the residents, endangering the system of international organisations, or committing crimes against the political, constitutional, social and economic order. [18]

Hate-crime is, when the criminal commits a crime because of political opinion, nationality, colour of skin, religion, ideology, country of origin, sexual orientation, disabilities, and other external or internal differences in personality, as well as belonging to certain group of people. Hate-crimes, from the 1st of January, 2014, belong to the group of politically motivated crimes. In 2017, hate-posting became a separate category inside the group of politically motivated crimes. As a consequence, the number of data in connection with such crimes fall back, in 2017 22070 cases and in 2018 1473 cases were administrated. [19] Crimes against foreigners and the crimes of antisemitism also belong to the group of hate-crimes. Germany objected against the internationally agreed conception of hate crimes. [20]

In case of politically motivated crimes, there was a rising tendency between 2010 and 2016, and the year of 2016 meant a peak in every category. The illegal migration crisis and those phenomenons that accompanied it (protests, crimes, terrorist attacks) affected the methodology of statistics making. The politically motivated crimes with foreign context became divided into religious ideology-based and foreign ideology-based groups, and in this way came into existence the formerly already discussed way of crime category classification, which they recently use. After 2016, there was a decreasing tendency in case of politically motivated crimes, but after 2018 a new rising tendency has started and it has been still on rise in 2019. With analyzing this tendency it can be stated, that the intensification and the fallback of illegal migration was one, but not the only factor that affected the tendency of the German politically motivated crimes.

The distribution of commission of crimes is relatively stable between the categories of the criminals of politically motivated crimes. Between 2015 and 2019, the extreme right-wing side was between 50 and 60%. The extreme left-wing side was between 22 and 25% during these four years. The category of politically motivated crimes with foreign context remained always under 10%, even after it was divided into two groups after 2015. The rate of those crimes that cannot be put under any of these categories was between 11 and 16%. [21] It is worth to consider, that the 70-80% of the politically motivated crimes were with extremist background. It can be valued as a positive fact, that most of the politically motivated crimes (independent of the year and motivation) were propaganda crimes, and violent crimes were only present with low rates.

**Table 1:** The distribution of the German politically motivated crimes (PMK) according to the motivation of the criminal. **Source:** Designed on the basis of data of the Federal Criminal Office [22]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
PMK right	60%	56%	64%	54%	52%	59%	57%	52%	57%	54%
PMK left	25%	29%	23%	27%	25%	25%	23%	25%	22%	24%
PMK other	11%	12%	10%	16%	15%	11%	13%	16%	13%	16%
PMK with foreign context	3%	3%	3%	3%	8%	5%	8%			
PMK with foreign ideology								4%	7%	5%
PMK with religious ideology								3%	2%	1%

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<b>PMK sum</b>	27180	30216	27440	31645	32700	38981	41549	39505	36062	41177

In the hierarchy of crimes with extreme right-wing motivation the dominant ones are the propaganda crimes with the highest rate (in 2019: 63,77%), the next ones are the crimes of vandalism. The third ones in the hierarchy are the crimes of physical abuse, but this type of crime showed a decreasing tendency during the period of analysis, always under the rate of 10%. Consequently, it can be stated that the main dimension of the struggle against politically motivated crimes (and their spread) is the field of communication. With the decreasing dynamics of the illegal migration towards Germany after 2016, the rate of violent crimes between the crimes committed by extreme right-wing groups have decreased, but the rate of the propaganda crimes has increased at the same time. In the background of this process could be found the drop of violent intents simultaneously with the decrease of illegal migration, as well as the success of the activity of the police.

**Table 2:** The crimes committed by right-wing groups

**Source:** Designed on the basis of data of the Federal Criminal Office [23]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Violent crimes	6,47%	7,21%	5,51%	5,66%	4,41%
Propaganda crimes	53,03%	53,12%	58,64%	61,58%	63,77%

From the geographical context, Nord-Rhine-Westfalen can be highlighted from the provinces in case of the distribution of crimes committed by extreme right-wing groups. In addition, the eastern provinces of Germany (including Berlin as well) can also be highlighted with their higher rate, while the rates of the western provinces have dropped. [24]

### 3. The extreme right-wing subculture

According to the reports of the Federal Constitution Protection Office, a separate, extreme right-wing cultural field can be discovered. (Obviously, next to the work of the law enforcement, there are numerous other factors working against this field, for example the political culture that can force the extreme right-wing side to the background, as well as the preventive activity through education.) Those parties who are running on the elections, along with the cultural events, newspapers, online platforms, aid activities are also parts of this cultural field. [25] In my opinion, the future and subsistence of this cultural field is depending on the factor how an antithesis/alternative field can be created, since the possibility of this field's success can be found in that fact, that it reaches those social groups that are ignored by the political leadership and tries to compensate the fulfilment of duties (in reality owned by the political leadership) for these groups. In the subculture of the extreme right-

wing side, the most dangerous opportunity is that it can encourage people to commit violent actions, and it can train and arm the sympathizers. A warning sign for such ambitions can be found in their annually organized combat sport events. Additionally, the system of widespread international relations of the extreme right-wing side can also not be ignored. The members of extreme right-wing groups participated in the Hungarian 'outburst memorial tour', the Bulgarian Lukov-march, the events of the Greek 'Golden Dawn', and on other events organized by the Czech, Polish, Austrian and the French extreme right-wing groups. [26] The 'Die Rechte' party is in connection with the Hungarian 'Légió Hungaria'. [27] Because of the international relations, the German extreme right-wing groups can be the tools of foreign influence-making intents.

The three big extreme right-wing party (NPD, Die Rechte, III. Weg) put under surveillance have different history, membership, media presence, attitude towards the state as well as national coverage. [28] During the period of the analysis, the number of members of the NPD decreased and the number of members in the case of the Die Rechte and the III. Weg increased. [29] In the background of this phenomenon can be found the political conjuncture of the German right-wing side because of migration.

On the elections neither of the parties reached rates above 1,5%. [30] (in case if we do not take the AfD into account, whose suborganizations have been put under surveillance recently). This form of political parties is nevertheless suitable for money laundering, asking for subsidies and organizing events under the aegis of a party.

Next to the above-mentioned political groups, clusters like Reichsbürger (the residents of the empire) and Selbstverwalter (self-managers) are specific groups on the extreme right-wing side. Into the cluster of Reichsbürger belong those individuals, who regard the social situation of the Third Reich and the German Empire as ideal. Into the cluster of Selbstverwalter belong those individuals, who deny the social system and order, and wants to be the ruler of a new kind of society. These two kinds of groups are less popular and have less influence on society. The number of violent crimes committed in these groups are relatively low, compared to the crimes committed extreme right-wing side. Most of the crimes committed by the members of these two clusters can be related to the province of Bavaria and Berlin, that were famous for their nazist attitude.

The increasing tendency of those individuals, who are sympathizing with the extreme right-wing side, but are not members of any parties and organizations, should also not be ignored. However, the calculation of the number of these individuals can be an extremely difficult task. [31]

During the interval of the analysis occurred many scandalous crime in connection with the subculture of the extreme right-wing side. For example, an investigation was initiated against soldiers of the German special forces, suspecting them to support the extreme right-wing side. [32] Moreover, attacks also occurred against Jewish synagogue, and the prime minister of Hessen province was murdered in his home after a serious conspirative preparation, because the prime minister showed positive attitude towards the issue of migration. It is worth to notice, that right-wing origin series of protestations with violent features were initiated couple of times in the country (for example the events in Chemnitz with political consequences). The reason of these events is that German residents allegedly or demonstrably became victims of

crimes committed by individuals with migrational background. From this phenomenon it can be concluded that the extreme right-wing side in itself and a news/rumors that belong to its circle of interest have the certain ability to mobilize people. [33]

#### **4. Actions against the extreme right-wing groups**

As it is in the case of terrorism with also ideological backgrounds, so it is in the case of the politically motivated crimes and subcultures: the question arises about what are those factors that can foster the termination of a given group. In the case of the question of extreme right-wing groups, the literature on the topic mentions various factors, such as the disappearance of the political reason to exist, the efficiency of the police's work, as well as the internal and external disruptive activity, which makes the function of the organization impossible from the personal, financial and operational side. Probably in the recent way of functioning of the extreme right-wing groups every factor has a share.

The disappearance of the reason to exist can be seen in the decreasing dynamics of illegal migration towards Germany, which could result in the drop of supports of the extreme right wing groups and can indirectly decrease the number of crimes in connection with such groups. The swift and efficient work of the law enforcement after the crimes can also be a deterring factor for those who would plan to access to extreme right-wing groups and wants to commit crimes in their name. Moreover, the drop in cohesion (because of the differing opinions of the members) and the drop in the ability to act can also have a disruptive effect on the life of a group. There are many examples for external disruption. It can be regarded as a positive result that the extreme right-wing individual's license of holding arms were cancelled. Moreover, it can also be regarded as a positive result, that with banning the consumption of alcohol in the time and on the location of the events, the attendance and the level of aggression were successfully decreased. [34] It came with quick results, that it was officially declared in the parliament that the Afd and its junior organization will be put under surveillance. As a result, both organizations will lose members. [35] (Obviously, more disruptive activities happened in the last few years, but there is hardly any literature on these topics.)

#### **5. The extreme right-wing groups and the COVID-19 crisis**

The COVID-19 disease reached Germany on the 27th of January in 2020. [36] In this section I will discuss those events from this date, that are in connection with the extreme right-wing side. Because of the actuality of the issue, there is only a short set of literature available on the topic, therefore in this section only the news of the German media will be analyzed.

In general it can be stated, that the COVID-19 is one from those factors that can drive people towards radical thoughts, mainly because the measures against the COVID-19 can push people towards the sense of claustrophobia and the sense of instability. [37] Thanks to the COVID-19 crisis, conspiracy theories got into the focus of extreme right-wing way of thinking. [38]

And because of this situation, the issue of migration was forced into the background. Nevertheless, atrocities still occurred against people with migrational

background, for example in Augsburg, where the office window of a representative with Turkish origin was broken with a stone. [39]

The demonstrations against the COVID-19 measures mobilized either the extreme right-wing or the extreme left-wing next to numerous other social groups. [40] These demonstrations were successfully handled by the police and the intelligence, and there were examples for the banning of demonstrations. [41] Because of the COVID-19, the significance of internet increased in the case of communication and recruitment activity of the extreme right-wing side. [42]

In 2020, extreme right-wing organizations like the Combat18 [43] and a Nordadler [44] became banned. It is the success of the work of law enforcement against the extreme right-wing, that the deradicalization courses were successfully accomplished by 200 people in 2020. [45]

The COVID-19 crisis has had different effects on the tendency of the politically motivated crimes so far. In Bavaria [46], the activity of radical groups intensified, while in Dortmund the intensity of the activity of extreme right-groups was less intense than before. [47]

The disciplinary proceedings of the law enforcement against the members of military special forces were followed by great media attention – with the perception of the support of extreme right-wing groups. [48] Because of these events, every police were taken under surveillance and the results were published in reports created by the German counterintelligence. In these reports they intended to analyze, whether the members of the police could be accused of showing positive attitude and activity towards the extreme right-wing side. This surveillance was expanded to the communication chat-groups as well. However, this surveillance uncovered only a few problems in the system. [49]

The work of the law enforcement against the AfD has been in process in 2020 and in 2021. Some of the provincial organizations were taken under surveillance with the highest degree [50].

### **Conclusion**

From those groups in Germany who are organizing themselves on the basis of radical ideologies, the extreme right-wing groups can be highlighted because of their role in politically motivated crimes and because of their organized subculture which can be convincing to people. Next to social perception, the political culture, the activity of the law enforcement and the disruptive activities, the actuality of the topics in connection with the extreme right-wing culture, the ability to mobilize mass of people have also an impact on the situation of the extreme right-wing groups. The recently spectacular increasing and decreasing trends of the legal and the illegal migration have also had an impact on the scale of support and the crimes committed by such groups. During COVID-19, operations against extreme right-wing groups has continued. The focus of the extreme right-wing groups shifted towards the conspiracy theories. The struggle against the extreme right-wing side was expanded to taking the police under surveillance as well. Most of the crimes committed by the extremist right-wing groups are not violent, but their increasing tendency can provide reason to worry, next to the social situation of the criminals, the targets of the criminals, and the

mobilizing ability of those topics that are interesting for the extreme right-wing groups. The struggle against these phenomena require continuously renewed, delicate and precise work from the side of the law enforcement, and the role of political decision-makers as well as the role of the civil society should also not be ignored.

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