



Democracy and Equality

Antifeminism in Europe and Implications for the UFZ

This reader aims to provide an in-depth introduction to the origins and impact of antifeminist movements on gender equality work at the UFZ and beyond. At the end, there is a collection of videos and literature for further learning.

It thus builds on the presentation given by the Equal Opportunities Officer, Dr. Ines Thronicker, and her deputy, Julia Schmidtchen, at the workmeeting in the summer of 2024.

Content

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Antifeminism in Europe..... | 1 |
| What is Antifeminisms?..... | 1 |
| What role does Antifeminism play in Europe?..... | 2 |
| 2. Equality under pressure | 2 |
| Why is gender equality work still needed? | 2 |
| Why do antifeminist narratives pose a threat?..... | 2 |
| 3. Commitment and activities at the UFZ..... | 3 |
| What does the UFZ do for equality? | 3 |
| What can I personally do to achieve more equality?..... | 3 |
| 4. Recommendations for deepening..... | 3 |
| To watch:..... | 3 |
| To read:..... | 3 |
| 5. Sources | 4 |

1. Antifeminism in Europe

What is Antifeminisms?

- Antifeminism means fighting or rejecting feminist goals and positions in a sweeping, active, and often organized manner (...).
- (...) is not only directed against feminism and equality but also against accepting the diversity of sexual, gender, romantic, and familial lifestyles and identities as equal.
- An anti-modern, heteronormative, right-wing conservative to extreme right-wing worldview is shared. This is closely linked to other ideas of inequality, such as racism or anti-Semitism.
- Antifeminism legitimizes discrimination against groups of people, which is inherently anti-democratic.

Quelle: [Initiative Antifeminismus begegnen – Demokratie Stärken](#)



What role does Antifeminism play in Europe?

- Antifeminism and traditionalist images of family and women are a central pillar of anti-democratic/right-wing narratives¹
- Around a quarter of Germans agree with anti-feminist and sexist statements (as of 2022)¹
- **Political:**
 - Groups from the right-wing nationalist/right-wing populist spectrum represent a traditionalist image of women and the family; alternative life models and identities are slandered, ridiculed, and fought against.²
 - Antifeminism is a gateway and connector between different actors and often serves as a gateway for other misanthropic narratives, such as anti-semitism or racism.³
- **Socially:**
 - An image of masculinity characterized by power, dominance, and superiority (e.g., in the INCEL movement) is trendy in social media. It leads to violence against women, both online and offline (see documentation in the [recommendations at the end](#))
 - The overlap of actors becomes apparent in the example of the church: far-right parties such as the AfD have substantial overlaps with the Catholic Church about abortion and LGBTQ* rights⁴; the example of the USA shows how this overlap can translate into active joint mobilization (especially among evangelicals) when the right to abortion was overturned⁵. These efforts are also increasingly evident in European churches.⁶
- **In Science:**
 - The "Network for Academic Freedom" prominently repeats anti-feminist attitudes by opposing gender-inclusive language, discrediting gender equality efforts as "cancel culture,"⁷ and labeling activism for the rights of trans* people as "neo-religious dogma"⁸.
 - Conservative forces in politics and academia repeatedly call for the abolition or termination of funding for gender studies.⁹

2. Equality under pressure

Why is gender equality work still needed?

- Women still earned 18% less per hour in 2023 (gender pay gap)¹⁰
- According to estimates by the World Economic Forum, economic gender equality would not be achieved at the current rate for another 169 years.¹¹
- At 35%, women are clearly underrepresented at non-university research institutions; this effect increases the higher the management level ("leaky pipeline").¹²

Why do antifeminist narratives pose a threat?

- Gender equality work is described as "gender totalitarianism" and an "instrument for systematic male disadvantage" in the Bundestag, among other things, and thus publicly discredited (Nicole Höchst, AfD, 2018)¹³
- Right-wing parties in state parliaments repeatedly demand the abolition of the position of equal opportunities officer or the removal of funding for women's and queer projects.¹⁴
- Mobilization against the right to reproductive self-determination (access to legal abortions) physically and structurally restricts women's bodily autonomy.¹⁵



3. Commitment and activities at the UFZ

What does the UFZ do for equality?

- The UFZ management has often spoken out in favor of protecting and promoting democracy and against any form of discrimination, for example, in this statement and by signing the [Leipzig Declaration](#) of the Leipzig Science Network.
- One of the strongest tools against attacks on gender equality work is networking within the UFZ and with other gender equality officers, e.g., through our involvement in [akfifz](#).
- Particularly, given the attacks on gender equality, it is essential to step out of the defensive and actively set impulses and uncover more forms of injustice.
 - At the UFZ, new aspects of gender equality are constantly being highlighted as part of the [Diversity Lectures](#).
 - Aware that the division into a binary gender variable does not correspond to the lived reality of many people and that trans*, inter- and non-binary (TIN*) people experience particular forms of discrimination, employees are encouraged to raise their awareness via the reader [Third Option: diverse](#) and the [Guidelines for the respectful treatment of TIN* people](#).

What can I personally do to achieve more equality?

- Vote against antifeminism in local and national elections. An overview of the programs for the state election in Saxony 2024, for example, can be found [here](#).
- Especially as a person who is not affected by repression or sexist discrimination (e.g., as a cis-hetero white man), you are usually in the majority (especially in academia). You can publicly oppose antifeminism, and support affected colleagues with less concern about consequences.
- Antifeminism is multifaceted. Sexist, misogynistic, and queer-hostile messages and attacks on equality must be made visible. Antifeminist incidents can be reported to the nationwide reporting office: <https://antifeminismus-melden.de/>

4. Recommendations for further understanding

To watch:

- The documentary "Incels: From Misogyny to Rampage" gives an insight into the anti-feminist online scene and its genuine offline consequences. ([ZDF](#)) The documentary is in German but [here](#) is an article on the same topic.
- The documentary "Glaube, Macht, Ideologie: Das gefährliche Netz der Abtreibungsgegner" (Faith, Power, Ideology: The Dangerous Network of anti-abortion activists) sheds light on how anti-abortion activists unite various groups and influence politics. ([ZDF](#)) You can find an English documentary on the same issue [here](#).
- The feminist Arte magazine KREATUR provides insights into the anti-feminist agenda of right-wing, populist, and religious movements: [ARTE](#) (german)

To read:

- Anyone who is confronted with anti-feminist statements in their private or professional environment will find practical support in discussion guidelines for example here [→ Link](#)
 - Specific information on individual arguments, their backgrounds, and how to debunk them can be found in the online tool „[Antifeminismus erkennen und widerlegen](#)“ (german)



- The Amadeu Antonio Foundation's scrolly-telling (a website that interactively explains a topic as you scroll through it) "Women in the Extreme Right" sheds light on the other side of the coin - what characterizes women who join anti-Leninist networks? → [Link](#) (german), an english article on the same topic can be found [here](#).
- The "Leipzig Authoritarianism Study 2022" examines authoritarian attitudes and developments in Germany. The study shows how uncertain times and crises trigger and reinforce old authoritarian reactions. --> [Link](#) (currently only the 2018 version of this longitudinal study is available [here](#))

5. Sources

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