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## Understanding Support for Diversity: The Role of Fundamental Beliefs

Sören Petermann · Eloisa Harris · Karen Schönwälder

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**Abstract** Understanding popular responses to immigration and sociocultural diversification is an important concern. Sometimes they are seen as key to a new cleavage dividing democratic societies. Previous research has often focused on attitudes towards levels and types of new migration, and mainly analysed hostility towards immigration. Yet European societies have also accommodated sociocultural diversification resulting from decades of immigration. How can we understand the support for such diversity? In this paper, we argue that such positivity towards diversity, or diversity assent, is associated with fundamental beliefs about the development of society. Employing novel data from a survey of around 3000 residents of German cities and multiple statistical techniques, we demonstrate that multiple dimensions of diversity assent are associated with specific fundamental beliefs, but not quite in the way one might expect. Importantly, egalitarian and pro-diversity beliefs are not in conflict but are positively associated. The most important basis of diversity assent is humanitarianism, a belief that captures not only a willingness to help the needy but also a general orientation towards an inclusive society. By disentangling the relationship between underlying beliefs and attitudes towards different dimensions

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Online Appendix: [www.kzfs.uni-koeln.de/sites/kzfs/pdf/Petermann-et-al.pdf](http://www.kzfs.uni-koeln.de/sites/kzfs/pdf/Petermann-et-al.pdf)

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of diversity support, the paper contributes to a better understanding of responses to societal diversification and the ways they are interlinked with more general social developments.

**Keywords** Migration · Sociocultural cleavage · Humanitarianism · Egalitarianism · Self-interest

## Warum Vielfalt befürwortet wird: Zur Bedeutung grundlegender Überzeugungen

**Zusammenfassung** Reaktionen der Bevölkerung auf Einwanderung und soziokulturelle Diversifizierung besser zu verstehen, ist ein wichtiges Anliegen. Manche Beobachter sehen hier den Schlüssel für die Herausbildung einer neuen Spaltungslinie in demokratischen Gesellschaften. Die Forschung hat sich bislang vorrangig mit Einstellungen zu Ausmaß und Arten zukünftiger Migration befasst und dabei insbesondere feindselige Haltungen untersucht. Europäische Gesellschaften haben aber seit Jahrzehnten Einwanderungsprozesse verarbeitet und eine soziokulturelle Diversifizierung erlebt. Wie können wir die Akzeptanz und Wertschätzung dieser gesellschaftlichen Vielfalt erklären? Dieser Artikel argumentiert, dass solche positiven Haltungen, *diversity assent*, mit grundlegenden Überzeugungen zur Entwicklung der Gesellschaft zusammenhängen. Gestützt auf die Auswertung neuer Daten aus einer Befragung von ca. 3000 Bewohnerinnen und Bewohnern deutscher Städte, für die unterschiedliche statistische Verfahren genutzt werden, zeigen wir, dass die Akzeptanz von Diversität mit bestimmten grundlegenden Überzeugungen zusammenhängt – allerdings nicht ganz so, wie man erwarten könnte. Egalitäre und Pro-Diversitätsüberzeugungen widersprechen sich nicht, sondern sind positiv assoziiert. Die wichtigste Grundlage der Akzeptanz von Diversität sind humanitäre Überzeugungen, die nicht nur den Willen umfassen, Bedürftigen zu helfen, sondern eine allgemeinere Befürwortung einer inklusiven Gesellschaft zum Ausdruck bringen. Indem er die Beziehung zwischen Diversitätseinstellungen und grundlegenden Überzeugungen klärt, trägt der Artikel zu einem besseren Verständnis von Reaktionen auf gesellschaftliche Diversifizierungsprozesse und deren Verknüpfung mit allgemeineren sozialen Entwicklungen bei.

**Schlüsselwörter** Zuwanderung · Soziokulturelle Spaltungslinie · Humanitarismus · Egalitarismus · Eigeninteresse

## 1 Introduction

Sociodemographic and sociocultural diversity have come to define many industrialised societies. In European countries, much scholarly, media, and political attention has been paid to the question of how residents perceive, respond to, or accept diversity in their societies. Some studies have pointed to a contentious or polarising

nature of, in particular, immigration and migration-related diversity, suggesting that society is divided between pro- and anti-immigrant publics. As Hutter and Kriesi (2021, p. 1) maintain, “conflicts over immigration are part and parcel of a new structuring divide in European societies and politics”, based on values, beliefs, and identity, rather than class or income groups. Other scholars, however, have voiced doubts as to whether, indeed, such a new and clearly distinct divide has emerged across different countries (Mau et al. 2023; Teney and Rupieper 2023).

The question of whether and how attitudes to diversity and immigration are systematically linked with more fundamental orientations towards the development of society is at the centre of controversies about the nature of a changing political space. Yet empirical studies often underestimate the role of such fundamental beliefs vis-à-vis the commonly tested sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Further, where general beliefs are addressed, we find divergent expectations regarding the beliefs that align with attitudes to diversity. This is illustrated by conflicting arguments in the literature that sometimes portray support for diversity as superficial, potentially promoting market liberalism, quick profit, and individualism, and as contradicting egalitarian and antiracist objectives (Aquino et al. 2022, pp. 268, 273; Ahmed 2007). Others associate diversity with cosmopolitanism, humanitarian aims, and equal participation (see Vertovec 2012, pp. 305–307; Zick and Küpper 2010, pp. 62–63). The ways in which attitudes to diversity are linked with important general orientations and lines of conflict are described rather differently. Given this unsatisfactory knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon, scholars have called for research contributing to a deeper understanding of support for diversity and an inclusive society (Ivarsflaten and Sniderman 2022, p. 146; see also Dennison and Geddes 2019; Newman et al. 2013). We respond to such calls and target the following question: In what ways are attitudes to diversity and specific fundamental beliefs systematically linked, if at all?

In this article, we focus on attitudes towards diversity and related policies, henceforth, “diversity assent”, which allows for our theoretical framework to distinguish between different dimensions of support for diversity. We operationalise diversity attitudes using the concept of *diversity assent*, a two-dimensional concept between (a) positive views of societal diversity and (b) desirable consequences for institutions and the distribution of resources (Harris et al. 2024). Further, we follow scholarship that argues for a distinction of broader beliefs or values and attitudes (Davidov et al. 2020; Bandelow 2015; Kriesi 2010). As “fundamental beliefs”, we depict more general guiding principles of how society should be. Drawing from previous literature, we derive expectations about the effect of four key *fundamental beliefs* on attitudes towards diversity: *humanitarianism*, *traditionalism*, *egalitarianism*, and *self-interest*. Crucially, we expect different effects across the four fundamental beliefs and the two diversity assent dimensions.

We tested these differences using data from a telephone survey (redacted), covering around 3000 residents of German cities in 2019–2020. Running bivariate and multivariate analyses, we find that diversity assent is certainly associated with specific fundamental beliefs, but not quite in the way one might expect. Humanitarian, nontraditionalist, and egalitarian beliefs are influential to different degrees, suggesting that the subsuming of diversity attitudes into a “sociocultural” axis, juxtaposing

a distributive one, is misleading (see also Mau et al. 2023). The most important basis of diversity assent, however, is what is commonly understood as humanitarianism, apparently a belief that captures not only a willingness to help those in need but a general orientation towards an inclusive society. Egalitarianism, conceptualised as distribution related, apparently does not to the same extent convey this general sense of inclusivity.

This article contributes to existing scholarship in several ways: The paper contextualises diversity support in debates in political sociology regarding the role of values and beliefs in structuring the political space. Our analysis helps us better understand popular support for diversity and its systematic foundations, a key issue for the development of inclusive societies.

## 2 Previous Scholarship and Theoretical Assumptions

This paper examines the foundations of individual attitudes to sociocultural diversity. It draws from a broad scholarship holding values and core or fundamental beliefs as distinct from attitudes. This hierarchical structure of individuals' views enables the more general to be divided from the specific and, likewise, the more durable from the more situational (Abels 2019; Dalton and Welzel 2014; Rokeach 1973; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, pp. 360–361; Davidov et al. 2008b; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014, p. 484). Terminologies differ somewhat for what we call "fundamental beliefs", ranging from "social preferences" (Emmenegger and Klemmensen 2013, p. 227) and "normative orientations" (Hüller et al. 2018) to "justice judgements" (Liebig 2002), but the general intention is similar across different scholarly traditions. For example, scholars linked with the Advocacy Coalition Framework refer to "core beliefs" as an "abstract core of general aims and perceptions" (Bandelow 2015, p. 310, translated by the authors), which are resistant to change, apply across policy domains, and reflect a "deeply held personal philosophy" (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014, p. 485; see also Converse 2006). Other scholars argue that views on more "general" principles such as equality or tradition are separate from those on more "transient political issues of the day" that express favourable or nonfavourable responses to more immediate challenges and situations (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, pp. 360–361; Heath et al. 1993, p. 115). Davidov et al. (2008a, p. 421) suggest that "[v]alues may enable people to organize their political evaluations in a relatively consistent manner; they may provide a general structure to political attitudes". Similarly, Heath et al. (1993, p. 115) suggest that individuals adopt a stance towards "general moral and political principles like equality" and that such "enduring core beliefs can account in part for the individual's attitudes towards the more transient political issues of the day". In sum, fundamental beliefs are distinct from attitudes in that they are more general, are stable across situations and over time, and serve as "evaluative standards" (Bayram 2015, p. 453).

In the field of immigration attitudes, many antecedent studies focus on sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables, such as education level, class, migration background, and occupational status in their explanations of attitudes, sometimes alongside selected political views but without systematically distinguishing funda-

mental beliefs from attitudes (for a recent overview of political science research, see Dražanová 2022, pp. 90–93). Yet recent research has argued for relative stability of individual immigration attitudes (Kustov et al. 2021), as they tend to be underpinned by slower-changing belief systems. A number of studies have thus addressed the relationship between values or core beliefs on the one hand and attitudes towards immigration on the other: Using the “Schwarz values scale” in the European Social Survey (see Davidov et al. 2008b, p. 585), Davidov et al. have assumed two “unified values” of “self-transcendence” (universalism, benevolence) and “conservation” (security, conformity, tradition) and studied to what extent they underlie certain immigration attitudes (Davidov and Meuleman 2012; Davidov et al. 2014). Whereas self-transcendence and universalism predict pro-immigration attitudes, conservation values predict anti-immigration attitudes, even beyond the power of most sociodemographic variables (Davidov and Meuleman 2012, p. 767). Others refer to values or beliefs such as “humanitarianism”, which increases opposition to restrictive immigration policies and support for government programmes that support immigrants or specifically refugees (Newman et al. 2013, p. 603; Leong and Ward 2006; Fraser and Murakami 2022). Eisentraut (2019) demonstrated reciprocal longitudinal effects of values and attitudes towards minorities. Altogether, while the importance of fundamental beliefs or values has been demonstrated, definitions of the influential core beliefs or values are not uniform across these studies. For example, some authors include egalitarian values in universalism (Davidov et al. 2014), whereas others see values regarding equality as linked with national membership, not universal humanity (Kymlicka 2015). This makes it difficult to compare and conclude the effect of beliefs across studies.

Other relevant literature suggests that beliefs and attitudes are not only related but are consumed within a new sociocultural cleavage in political competition. This cleavage divides society along two poles between “cosmopolitanism” and “communitarianism”, or “universalism” and “particularism”, or “authoritarian” and “libertarian” (Bornschier 2010; Hooghe and Marks 2018, p. 123; Kriesi 2010, p. 683). Here, views on immigration and diversity are seen as crucial, along with others on globalisation, gender issues, and cultural liberalism/tradition, for structuring electoral conflict. “Cutting across the ‘old’ distributional axis, a cultural line of conflict with opposing libertarian and authoritarian values had come to structure the attitudes of voters” (Bornschier 2010, p. 421). Typical for this view is a dyadic picture, in which attitudes and beliefs form starkly distinct bundles (see Mau et al. 2023, p. 13). Andreas Reckwitz (2017) also assumes alternative poles, which he calls “culturalisation regimes”, but does not necessarily understand them as political camps.

Other scholars have argued against jumping to the conclusion that core beliefs “constitute an integrated ideology” (Heath et al. 1993, p. 116). Indeed, newer work that has aimed at disentangling assumed political polarisation along sociocultural issues shows that, for instance, attitudes towards gender equality and immigration have developed rather independently of each other (Caughey et al. 2019). Mau et al. (2023) also criticise a picture of two opposed-opinion syndromes and, instead, distinguish four sites or arenas of conflict, with migration/inclusion and identity/recognition sorted into different sites. These studies call into question the analytical leverage of “mega-dimensions” such as communitarianism and cosmopolitanism. We

engage with this critique of the cleavages literature and investigate the links between distinct beliefs and attitudes in the remainder of this paper. We focus specifically on diversity, that is, sociocultural heterogeneity and its consequences, not solely immigration. Furthermore, we argue that it is useful to distinguish different dimensions of support for diversity. We first present our concept of “diversity assent” and then introduce our theoretical expectations of which beliefs underpin such support for diversity.

## 2.1 Conceptualising Diversity Assent

We use a conceptualisation of diversity assent developed elsewhere (Harris et al. 2024). Following other scholars’ work on related concepts (Hjerm et al. 2020; Knight and Brinton 2017), we understand the concept as multidimensional. Thus, we conceptualise assent in different forms, rather than as “less” versus “more”. More precisely, diversity assent is defined as a certain set of attitudes capturing positive views of the sociocultural heterogeneity of the social environment and support for adjusting institutions and resource allocations in light of such heterogeneity. We denote, first, evaluation assent, namely, the evaluation of diversity as affecting society and individuals, assuming that individuals evaluate how diversity affects their environment and lives and that they thereby form perceptions of existing diversity and its effects as positive, neutral, or negative. Second, to capture assent to possible consequences of sociocultural diversity, such as the reflection of diversity in institutions and in the allocation of societal resources, we introduce participation assent. This group of attitudes pertains to supporting the reflection of sociocultural diversity of society in its institutions, politics, and public sphere (and may exist regardless of individuals’ general evaluation of diversity). Theoretically, we assume that the determinants of the two diversity dimensions may differ. In this analysis, we tend to capture attitudes to diversity in general and to immigration-related diversity.

## 2.2 Conceptualising Diversity-Relevant Fundamental Beliefs

This paper tests whether and in what ways assent to diversity is associated with “fundamental beliefs”. We use this term here to avoid confusion with existing specific conceptualisations of human values or core beliefs. It refers to general views regarding the development of society and the direction of politics (similar to Hülle et al. 2018).

We derive our theoretical framework from a broad range of literature, including scholarship on immigration attitudes and underlying beliefs, the cleavages literature, and also literature on cosmopolitanism, humanitarianism, and value change. From this literature, we identified beliefs assumed to matter for views on societal diversity. We integrated our understanding of diversity into these discussions to disentangle which fundamental beliefs are important, and why, in the theoretical framework.

Following widespread practice in the scholarly literature, we assume that humanitarianism informs attitudes to social diversity. Humanitarianism is a common and widely applied concept, understood as a pro-social orientation that emphasises seeing people as fellow human beings, and it includes responsibilities towards those

**Table 1** Hypothesised associations of fundamental beliefs and diversity assent

	Evaluation assent	Participation assent
Humanitarianism	+	?
Traditionalism	-	-
Egalitarianism	?	+
Self-interest	+	-

in need (Newman et al. 2013, p. 585; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001a, p. 370). It has been defined as “the belief that people have responsibilities towards their fellow human beings and should come to the assistance of others in need” (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001b, p. 659). In parts of the literature, the terms universalism or cosmopolitanism are preferred to humanitarianism (e.g. Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Mau et al. 2008). Conceptualisations of the three terms somewhat overlap. Thus, the definition of cosmopolitanism used by Mau et al. (2008, p. 2) includes “the approval of political responsibility at the supranational and global level”. Following Martha Nussbaum (see Lamont and Aksartova 2002, p. 2), we define cosmopolitanism as “moral commitment to universals”. However, as the concept often includes attitudes to diversity (pointedly in the definition used by Inglehart and Norris 2016, p. 7),<sup>1</sup> using it risks conflating the two concepts. Conceptualisations of universalism, e.g. by Lipset (1963, p. 209),<sup>2</sup> may include egalitarian elements, while we intend to separate humanitarian and egalitarian views. Thus, to avoid conflating concepts, we theorise solely on the relationship between humanitarianism, grounded in a concern for the welfare of fellow human beings and a belief in personal and societal responsibility for helping those in need (Barnett 2011, p. 11), and diversity assent. Concern for those in need, regardless of nationality, in theory should be associated with openness regardless of differences, thus positively related to the evaluation dimension of diversity assent. However, participation assent regards attitudes that go beyond helping the weak or those in need. Equal rights for disadvantaged groups to participate in political, economic, and social life are in theory unrelated to attitudes towards openness. We thus do not have firm expectations regarding the association of humanitarian beliefs and participation assent (for a full overview of our theoretical expectations, see Table 1).

Second, in different ways, various literature suggests a central belief around a high regard for homogeneity and continuity. In the literature on “cleavages”, for instance, the opposing pole to “universalist” and “humanitarian” values is “traditionalism” or “demarcation”, in which the “particular”, such as national customs or culture, is preferred to the “universal” (Kriesi 2010). We follow previous scholarship and assume an importance of traditionalism for diversity assent. Traditionalism implies adherence to sociocultural patterns of thought and behaviour supposedly inherited from prior generations, guaranteeing social stability and security. In the literature,

<sup>1</sup> They define cosmopolitanism as “the value of open national borders, shared multicultural values, diversity of peoples and lifestyles in outward-looking and inclusive societies”.

<sup>2</sup> Lipset juxtaposed universalism, meaning that all people should be treated according to the same standard, and particularism, meaning they should be treated according to their qualities or group membership. See also Lamont and Aksartova (2002), Note 4, for a helpful summary of different definitions.

the term “particularism” is sometimes used in a related sense (e.g. Häusermann and Kriesi 2015), which relates to the prioritisation of national to non-national, of the culturally defined national in-group to the other. In order to keep immigration-related aspects separate, we define traditionalism first and foremost as an aversion to change; a traditionalist fundamental belief is characterised by worries about change and a preference for retaining traditions. We theorise that societal diversification may be perceived as a threat to cultural unity and as endangering tradition and an established order. We expect a strong traditionalist fundamental belief to reduce the likelihood of pro-diversity attitudes, both in terms of evaluation and participation assent, as neither the appreciation of diversity nor the extension of participation for disadvantaged groups aligns well with traditionalist views of how society should be.

Third, beyond humanitarianism and traditionalism, other beliefs regarding the just distribution of resources in society are potentially of high relevance for diversity assent, particularly participation assent: Support for extending political, economic, and social participation to disadvantaged groups is likely to be related to one’s understanding of a fair distribution of resources and the role of the state in it. Egalitarianism is a widely applied concept capturing a preference for redistribution, state intervention, and equality of both “outcomes” and “opportunities” (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001a, p. 373; see also Emmenegger and Klemmensen 2013; Hülle et al. 2018). This fundamental belief is characterised by support for state intervention in economic processes and an emphasis on equal life chances and outcomes—as distinct from a belief in the equality of people as human beings. Such a belief should thus align with the equal participation of people regardless of their diverse backgrounds. However, egalitarian and pro-welfare state beliefs are sometimes seen as potentially in conflict with openness to diversity, as solidarity may be reserved for established members of a community (Kymlicka 2015). Generally, the literature on the relationship between redistribution and immigration preferences suggests otherwise: In the most part, in Western Europe, support for redistribution and equality is correlated to preferences for extending rights to immigrants (Attewell 2020; Harris 2023). We expect strong egalitarian beliefs to support participation-related diversity attitudes. We do not see theoretical reasons to assume an association of egalitarian beliefs and the evaluation of diversity; theoretically, they may be associated both with a positive or a negative assessment of the effects of sociocultural heterogeneity.

Finally, diversity assent may, as mentioned in the introduction, be associated with individual or group-level interest promotion: Personal pleasure and consumption may be important priorities for individuals holding such beliefs and lead them to support diversity, as it can potentially be seen as increasing choice and variety in the living environment. On the societal level, diversity might be appreciated because it fuels the country’s economic development. The concept of self-interest is therefore of use here, as this underlying belief captures normative evaluations in terms of rational utility for a specific society or the person concerned. Thus, an individual’s positive evaluation of diversity may be related to self-interested dispositions or to placing one’s priorities above others. On the other hand, calls for interventions to ensure more equal participation could run counter to a principle of individual effort and responsibility. We thus expect self-interest to be positively associated with evaluation assent, as the effects of diversification are perceived as positive, but not

participation assent, as this suggests intervention against inequalities rather than individual responsibility. Table 1 illustrates how we assume four fundamental beliefs to motivate attitudes to diversity, or diversity assent: humanitarianism, traditionalism, egalitarianism, and self-interest. Our conceptualisation is not understood as exclusive; other research may well test additional beliefs as impacting on diversity assent. However, we do believe that the four beliefs introduced here are theoretically well founded and plausibly importantly related to the two dimensions of diversity assent examined here.

### 3 Data and Measurements

We used data from the Diversity Assent (DivA) survey for our empirical investigations of the relationship between fundamental beliefs and diversity assent. As distinct from other surveys, the DivA survey contains a broad range of questions on the experience of diversity and views on it. To ensure quality and reduce survey errors, cognitive testing and a quantitative pretest with 60 interviews were implemented prior to the main survey. The questionnaire was translated into English, Russian, and Turkish to include respondents whose command of German may not have been strong enough to answer the survey. DivA is a telephone survey conducted from November 2019 until April 2020 (for details, see the technical report, Drouhot et al. 2021). The survey is based on a multistage random sample. In the first stage, 20 cities were selected, stratified according to city size and share of foreigners. In the second stage, telephone households were randomly selected within each city. This was based on landlines localised via the area code (96.8%), which were contacted via random-digit dialing; mobile connections (3.2%) were also used. Within each sampled household, the interviewing process randomly selected a respondent among household members via a Kish selection grid. The survey comprises 2917 interviews and covers the adult population in urban Germany. Poststratification weighting based on comparison with data of the German *Mikrozensus* (a 1% sample of the German population) was used to report descriptive values and distributions that were as unbiased as possible. The data are representative for the urban population of German cities with at least 50,000 inhabitants. Univariate statistics are summarised in Table A2 in the Online Appendix.

#### 3.1 Measurement of Diversity Assent

To approximate the latent dimensions evaluation and participation diversity assent, we used three questions each (Online Appendix Table A1). 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) or for individuals (young people benefit from contact). Here the emphasis is on how respondents judge the effects of diversification. In contrast, participation questions are about possible consequences and 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). We deliberately included the more contested issues of language (evaluation assent) and Islam (participation assent) to arrive at a realistic evaluation of diversity assent (for more details, see Harris et al. 2024).

We constructed an additive index from each of the three underlying items. Both indices have acceptable reliability properties (Cronbach's alpha is 0.74 for evaluation assent and 0.68 for participation assent). On a scale of one to five, the average scores are 3.9 for evaluation assent and 3.6 for participation assent. Both indices show comparatively strong agreement, with the evaluation aspect being agreed with even more strongly than the participation aspect. This is also reflected when we group the distribution along the scale into levels of agreement and disagreement: The assenting group (i.e. scores above  $3\frac{2}{3}$ ) is the largest group in both dimensions, but more people agreed with the evaluation dimension (75%) than the participation dimension (61%). Although there are substantial proportions of dissenters (scores below  $2\frac{1}{3}$ ), they are clearly in the minority in both dimensions (5% and 10%, respectively). We distinguish a group that does not clearly commit to assent or dissent (scores between  $2\frac{1}{3}$  and  $3\frac{2}{3}$ ). We cannot rule out that social desirability concerns influenced the respondents. At the same time, answers to the individual questions vary considerably. For a stricter measure of diversity assent, see Sect. 4.4.

### 3.2 Measurement of the Fundamental Beliefs

For the fundamental beliefs, we also used multiitem measures to ensure the data quality of the concepts. An overview of the items used, many of which were taken from established surveys, is shown in Table 2. Our humanitarianism items reflect the conceptualisation tested in the American National Election Studies (ANES) and are used widely in other studies (e.g. Newman et al. 2013; Shen and Hatfield Edwards 2005; Oyamot et al. 2012). Egalitarianism is also measured with items that reflect widely accepted conceptualisations.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we followed the suggestion to include items that measure positions on equality as well as on state intervention to ensure more equality (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001a, p. 373; Newman et al. 2013). For our two other concepts, we partly drew from previous research (on self-interest, see Shen and Hatfield Edwards 2005, p. 805) and partly conceptualised new questions. We tested whether the hypothesised fundamental beliefs are indeed expressed by the survey questions and form distinct concepts. In the survey, the individual items were asked in a random order to avoid order effects. With a principal component analysis (PCA),<sup>4</sup> we were able to identify four components that we understand as

<sup>3</sup> The European Social Survey, for instance, uses a question on state intervention to reduce income inequality. The DivA survey includes a similar item that states, "Our society should ensure that differences in living standards are reduced".

<sup>4</sup> Principal component analysis is closely related to factor analysis. It is a statistical technique for reducing the dimensionality of a set of variables. This is achieved by transforming the data into a new coordinate system in which (most of) the variation in the data can be described with fewer dimensions (or principal components) than the initial set of variables. The principal components can be interpreted as latent variables and can be used in subsequent analyses.

**Table 2** Measurement and principal component analysis of fundamental beliefs

Statement	Components as fundamental beliefs	Humanitarian	Traditionalist	Egalitarian	Self-interested
Our society should always help people in need, no matter who they are	0.580	—	—	—	—
We should always look for ways to help others who are worse off than we are	0.523	—	—	—	—
Our society should also assume responsibility in crises that take place elsewhere	0.512	—	—	—	—
Our traditional values must remain the foundation of our society	—	0.563	—	—	—
Our society should put more effort into protecting its cultural unity	—	0.556	—	—	—
In our society, too many people can do whatever they want	—	0.516	—	—	—
The existing inequality in our society is NOT all right because it is a result of unequal opportunities	—	—	0.627	—	—
The existing inequality in our society is all right because it is a result of different levels of talent and performance	—	—	—	-0.546	—
Our society should ensure that differences in living standards are reduced	—	—	0.488	—	—
All people should be able to shape their lives according to their OWN desires	—	—	—	0.606	—
We should all be concerned first and foremost with how WE ourselves move forward	—	—	—	—	0.583
Our society should first and foremost take care of the things that are to its OWN advantage	—	—	—	—	0.503

DivA survey 2019/2020,  $n = 2716$  (weighted). All items measured agreement with a four-point Likert scale: strongly, somewhat, not really, not at all. Principal component analysis was performed of the correlation matrix. Rotation of the Kaiser normalised matrix with oblique promax rotation criteria (allows correlations among the principal components). All loadings to other components, i.e. beyond the identified fundamental beliefs, are between |0.012| and |0.216|

representing fundamental beliefs (Table 2).<sup>5</sup> Principal component analysis identifies principal components that are based on the common information of the underlying manifest variables and thus correspond to latent constructs (Jolliffe 2002). Because these latent constructs can be meaningfully interpreted as fundamental beliefs, they can be used as independent variables in regression models on diversity assent.<sup>6</sup> In the empirical determination of the fundamental beliefs, correlations between the components were allowed. However, there are only weak to moderate correlations between the four fundamental beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

## 4 Empirical Results

### 4.1 Fundamental Beliefs and Diversity Assent

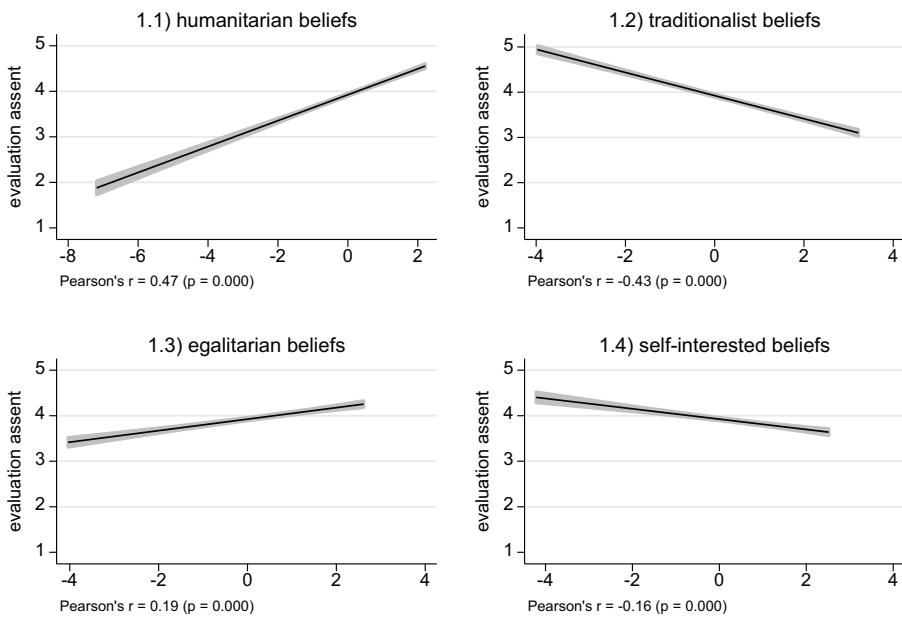
First, we examine in what ways the four identified fundamental beliefs are associated with two dimensions of diversity assent. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the bivariate associational strength between fundamental beliefs and evaluation and participation assent. Both diversity attitudes vary on a scale from 1 to 5, with larger numbers corresponding to stronger attitudes. The value ranges of the four fundamental beliefs differ, but here, too, larger values correspond to stronger beliefs.

We see some commonalities for evaluation and participation assent in their respective relationships with fundamental beliefs. First, all bivariate correlations are statistically significant, i.e. fundamental beliefs have an impact on diversity attitudes among residents of German cities. Second, humanitarian and egalitarian beliefs are positively correlated to diversity assent, whereas traditionalist and self-interested beliefs are negatively correlated to diversity attitudes. This means that strong humanitarian and egalitarian beliefs go along with strong diversity assent, while strong traditionalist and self-interested beliefs go along with diversity dissent. Third, while associations of humanitarian and traditionalist beliefs with diversity assent tend to be strong, the associations of both egalitarian and self-interest beliefs are weaker. We find that humanitarianism and egalitarianism correlate positively with both dimensions of diversity assent, not only with the dimension we would expect in each case. Traditionalism correlates negatively with both dimensions of diversity assent, as expected. Self-interest also correlates negatively with participation assent, but contrary to expectations, also with evaluation assent.

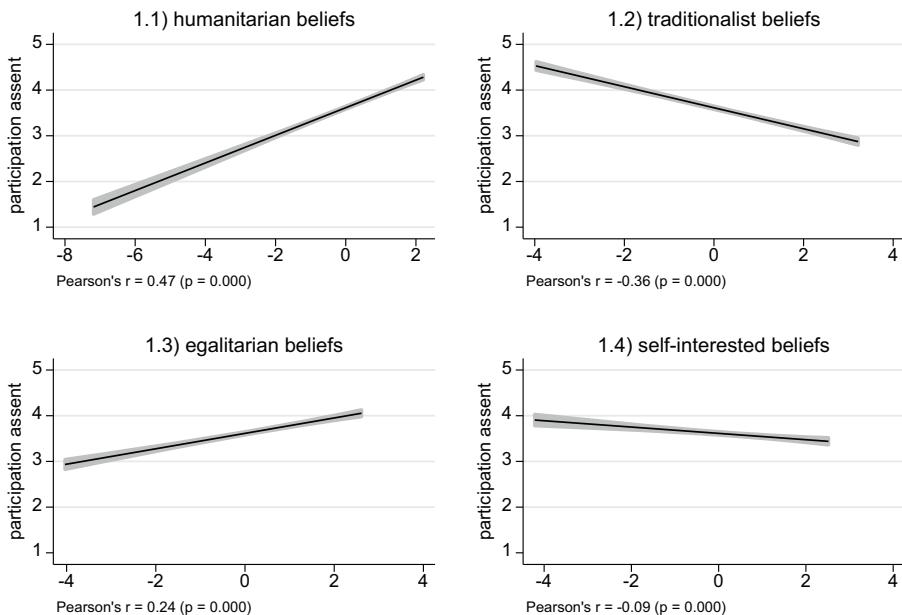
<sup>5</sup> The four components were identified via the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) and a parallel analysis. The cumulative proportion of the variance among the 12 items explained by the four components is 56.33%. See Table A3 in the Online Appendix for correlations of the 12 survey items.

<sup>6</sup> The fundamental beliefs have an average of 0. Positive values refer to stronger expression and negative values to weaker expression of a belief; i.e. the standard deviation of humanitarian beliefs is  $\pm 1.4$ , but the entire value range fluctuates between -7.2 (minimum) and +2.2 (maximum). Values between 0 and  $\pm 1.4$  therefore indicate moderate conviction, and values between +1.4 and +2.2 indicate extremely strong humanitarian convictions.

<sup>7</sup> Humanitarianism and egalitarianism correlate moderately positively, and self-interest and traditionalism correlate moderately positively. Traditionalism shows moderately negative correlations with humanitarian and egalitarian beliefs. Self-interest is also negatively correlated with humanitarian and egalitarian beliefs, but only very weakly.



**Fig. 1** Association between fundamental beliefs and evaluation assent



**Fig. 2** Association between fundamental beliefs and participation assent

#### 4.2 Strength of Relationships Between Fundamental Beliefs and Diversity Assent

We continue our analyses with regression models to confirm the relationships between fundamental beliefs and diversity assent, controlling for a number of individual characteristics often assumed to impact immigration attitudes or tolerance, that is, related concepts. Our control variables are age, gender, migration background,<sup>8</sup> years in education,<sup>9</sup> equivalised net income levels,<sup>10</sup> and region (for univariate statistics, see Table A2 in the Online Appendix). Ordinary least squares linear regressions are estimated for the two dependent variables of evaluation and participation assent (Figs. 3 and 4, Table A3 in the Online Appendix).

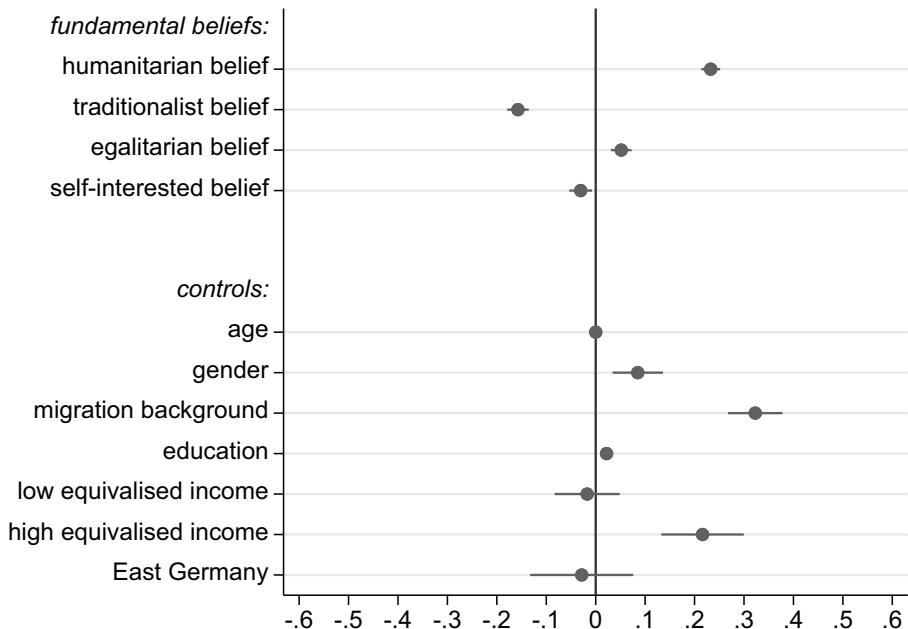
As the coefficient plots (Figs. 3 and 4) show, the regression results confirm the bivariate associations: fundamental beliefs and diversity assent are associated, even when sociodemographic and social status characteristics and region are controlled for. The relationships between fundamental beliefs and diversity assent are not determined by demographic group membership, social status, or region.

Following the table of expectations (Table 1), our analyses suggest that, as expected, strong humanitarianism, or the fundamental belief to advocate help for people in need, is positively associated with the recognition of the positive value of sociocultural diversity (evaluation assent). However, we also find a positive association between humanitarianism and participation assent, suggesting that such beliefs also lead to more positive attitudes towards the participation of all social groups in institutions and their access to resources. Second, as expected, traditionalist beliefs undermine pro-diversity attitudes. Those who privilege cultural unity and traditional values tend to be critical of sociocultural diversity in both dimensions: They are unlikely to recognise a societal value in it and are less likely to favour reflecting such diversity in social institutions. Third, we find that egalitarianism is positively associated with participation assent, as expected, but also with evaluation assent, which we did not expect. Finally, our expectations about self-interested beliefs—that they would positively correlate with evaluation assent—are not supported: On the contrary, self-interest is significantly negatively related to evaluation assent and not related to participation assent. People with egoistic traits do not seem to perceive social diversity as an increase in opportunities and quality of life. At the same time, self-interest lends itself to indifference to the incorporation of diversity into social institutions, a surprising finding because ensuring equal participation may be seen as opposed to radical individualism. In sum, while reflecting two dimensions of diversity, our findings imply that similar beliefs underlie both evaluation and participation assent.

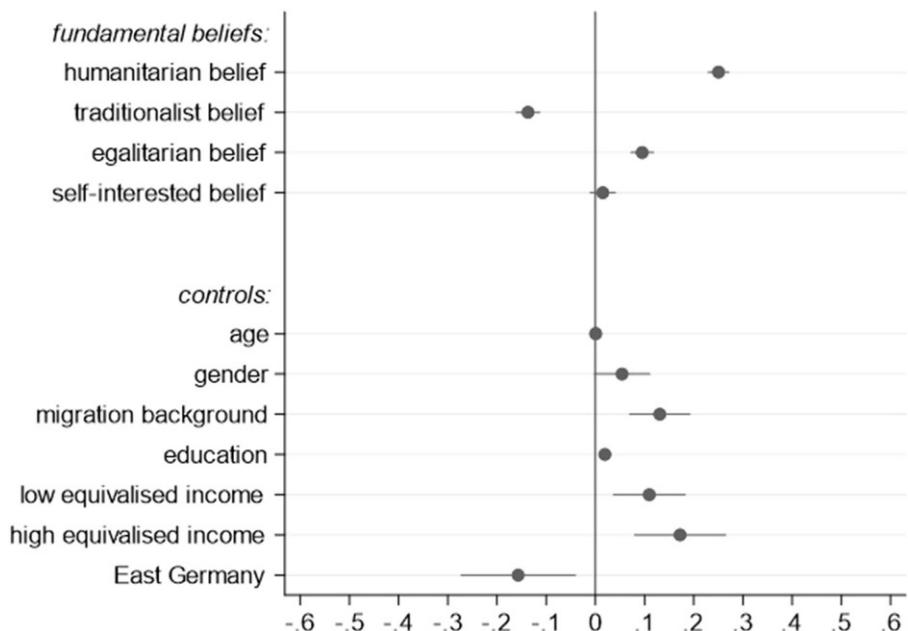
<sup>8</sup> Defined as a person with a foreign nationality, born abroad, or with at least one parent born abroad.

<sup>9</sup> Education is measured in years. It is derived from a question about the highest educational qualification. Because educational qualifications up to tertiary level were surveyed, education ranges from 8 to 18 years and has a mean value of 12 years.

<sup>10</sup> We used the monthly equivalent income. It is based on household income and takes into account the respective household structure, i.e. the number of adults and minors in the household. The monthly equivalent net income is divided into three groups: low income up to € 1250 (24% of respondents), medium income between € 1251 and € 3200 (47%), and high income over € 3200 (11%). A fourth group comprises all those with missing income information (18%).



**Fig. 3** Fundamental beliefs and evaluation assent (coefficients plot for regression model)



**Fig. 4** Fundamental beliefs and participation assent (coefficients plot for regression model)

Next, we use the same regression models to determine the relative importance of the fundamental beliefs by investigating the strength of their relationship with diversity assent.<sup>11</sup> Humanitarian orientations have the strongest relationship with evaluation assent ( $\Delta$  adjusted  $R^2=13.4\%$ ) and participation assent ( $\Delta$  adjusted  $R^2=13.8\%$ ). Traditionalist beliefs follow in second place. Their influence on evaluation assent ( $\Delta$  adjusted  $R^2=4.7\%$ ) and participation assent ( $\Delta$  adjusted  $R^2=3.2\%$ ) is less than half as strong as that of humanitarian beliefs. The strength of the relationships of egalitarian beliefs to evaluation assent (adjusted  $R^2=0.5\%$ ) and participation assent (adjusted  $R^2=1.7\%$ ) are significantly weaker. Consistent with our expectations about the relationship between egalitarian beliefs and diversity attitudes, the strength of the relationship with participation assent is three times as strong as the strength of the relationship with evaluation assent. Finally, the strength of relationships of self-interested beliefs to evaluation assent (adjusted  $R^2=0.2\%$ ) and participation assent (adjusted  $R^2=0.1\%$ ) is negligible.

#### 4.3 Robustness Checks

To test the robustness of the regression results, we carried out two additional analyses. First, we used multiple imputations of the missing values in the independent variables. Second, we calculated the two dependent variables of diversity assent with an alternative (nonadditive) index, which counteracts a potential tendency to agree with diversity attitudes for reasons of social desirability.

Item nonresponse led to about 8% of cases missing in the regression models. In those models, missing values for the control variable income were already accounted for by a dummy variable for missing income data. Multiple imputations were calculated to estimate the robustness for all missing values of the independent variables, including the income variable. The two regression models<sup>12</sup> for evaluation and participation assent were recalculated using these imputed values.

When comparing the regressions with and without imputed values, the directions and strengths of the effects are largely consistent. In particular, the regression coefficients for fundamental beliefs are almost unchanged. However, with imputed values, the standard errors are better estimated, which means that regression coefficients are no longer significant in some cases. This applies in particular to the regression model of participation assent. In this case, the significant coefficients of the fundamental beliefs remain significant, but not the coefficients of the control variables (migration background, education, income). Thus, the effects of the relationships between fundamental beliefs and diversity assent, which are the focus of this study, remain even when imputed missing values are used.

A second robustness test uses an alternative calculation of the indices for diversity assent. The background to this is the high approval ratings for the diversity attitudes, which can only be partially offset by the additive index. We take an approach in

<sup>11</sup> To determine the strength of a relationship, we used the difference in adjusted  $R^2$  between the full model and another model that excluded the respective fundamental belief (see the  $\Delta$  adjusted  $R^2$  in Table A4 in the Online Appendix).

<sup>12</sup> Results are not shown but are available from the authors on request.

which negative attitudes towards at least one of the three items lead to a negative attitude in the index. We accept a lower variation in the index width and distinguish three groups: assenters, noncommitting, and dissenters, an approach we successfully used elsewhere (Harris et al. 2024). For evaluation assent, the share of assenters changes from 75%<sup>13</sup> to 63% and the share of dissenters from 5%<sup>14</sup> to 22%. For participation assent, the share of assenters drops from 61% to 49%, and the share of dissenters rises from 10% to 36%. By according more weight to negative answers, we may counteract a potential social desirability bias. Although the changes in the proportions for both independent variables are substantial, we find few differences when comparing the regression results. Deviations arise only in the strength but not in the direction or significance of the effects. The only exceptions are the regression coefficients of low income and region in the regression model of participation assent. With regard to the central relationships between fundamental beliefs and diversity assent, we have stable results with the second robustness check.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

This article analysed in what ways attitudes to diversity are underpinned by more general fundamental beliefs regarding the development of society. Using the results of a survey of around 3000 inhabitants, we exploit a strong battery of items on sociocultural diversity to measure two dimensions of diversity assent—its evaluation as positive for society and individuals and the demand for equal participation. We follow previous scholarship in assuming that attitudes are underpinned by more fundamental beliefs regarding the development of society. Following mean comparison and regression analyses to investigate the relationship between selected fundamental beliefs and attitudes to diversity, our results can be summarised as follows.

Our analyses confirmed that humanitarianism, traditionalism, and egalitarianism are systematically related to both the evaluation of societal diversity and to views about reflecting such diversity in a society's institutions, controlling for sociodemographic factors. However, the ways in which humanitarianism and egalitarianism are linked to diversity attitudes are surprising on two counts. First, in line with previous scholarship showing the importance of humanitarian beliefs for helping refugees (Drouhot et al. 2023), our results show humanitarian beliefs as highly relevant for assent to diversity, both for evaluation and, unexpectedly, also for participation assent. Similar findings are present for egalitarianism, which is positively associated with both evaluation and participation assent. Traditionalism is negatively associated with support for both types of diversity, whereas self-interest is only negatively associated with evaluation assent and is nonrelated to participation assent. In contrast to assumptions popular in the political discourse, diversity assent in its evaluation dimension is only weakly associated with self-interested beliefs, convictions we see as related to individualist and egoistic liberalism. The common fear that stronger

<sup>13</sup> Grouped values of the additive index from  $3\frac{2}{3}$  to 5.

<sup>14</sup> Grouped values of the additive index from 1 to  $2\frac{1}{3}$ .

commitments to diversity are associated with market-liberal views and contradict egalitarian aims for participation assent seems unfounded.

These results point to two separate conclusions with repercussions for studying attitudes towards diversity. The first is that humanitarianism is by far the strongest factor associated with assent to diversity. Not only the general evaluation of societal diversity but also attitudes about reflecting such diversity in a society's institutions and public funding policy are particularly strongly linked with humanitarian beliefs. This general belief may be an underrated factor in the explanation of political beliefs and actions. Thus, in discussions of solidarity with refugees in Europe witnessed since their mass arrival in 2015–2016, humanitarian beliefs were sometimes dismissed as apolitical and superficial (see Drouhot et al. 2023). However, humanitarianism as measured with established items apparently appeals to solidarity among humans in a sense that includes aspects of participation, presence, and recognition—as in our participation dimension of diversity assent. It apparently captures not only a willingness to help the needy, but a general orientation towards an inclusive society.

Second, the finding that egalitarianism is associated with participation assent—that is, assent to reflecting diversity in institutions and the distribution of public resources—confirms our expectations but also runs counter to a common juxtaposition of support for redistribution and assent to sociocultural diversity. Debates in political sociology regarding the juxtaposition of pro-diversity and pro-redistribution views, as suggested in the literature on multidimensional political competition (Kriesi 2010), are apparently misguided, or our findings at least suggest that the two dimensions of “cultural” and “economic” align more closely than is given credit. Both humanitarian and egalitarian beliefs align with diversity assent. Such assent is thus arguably founded in different convictions, which we argue is an important finding.

There are a number of limitations to our findings: First, they are based on a representative sample of the population of German cities with at least 50,000 inhabitants. Our generalisations thus hold only for the urban population. Still, while the distributions of diversity assent and fundamental beliefs in the urban and rural population may differ, we see no theoretical reasons to assume that the ways in which such beliefs and attitudes on diversity are related would be any different. The latter may well be the case if, in different national or regional populations, humanitarianism or egalitarianism acquire other meanings. We are not aware of any research indicating that such differences exist between urban and more rural populations in Germany. Even though we were able to show in depth that some core beliefs are more strongly related to diversity attitudes than others, our cross-sectional survey is limited to correlation analyses. Whether core beliefs remain stable over time and thus underlie attitudes can be analysed only with panel data, and we encourage future researchers to engage in this endeavour.

In sum, our study offers a contribution to the as yet little developed study of attitudes about diversity and of support for an inclusive society. The findings contribute to ongoing survey research in understanding attitudes towards diversity in modern societies, including different questions on attitudes towards diversity, not just immigration of “non-nationals”, as included in many studies. Future research

can continue this agenda by including diversity attitudes—more systematically in established surveys alongside statements on fundamental beliefs. Our paper illustrates that, ultimately, diversity assent is underpinned by both humanitarianism and egalitarianism, importantly in both evaluation and participation assent.

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