

Study (2024):

# Loud Hatred – Quiet Withdrawal

How online hate threatens  
democratic discourse

Results of a  
representative  
survey.  
Summary

The internet is one of the most important public debate platforms of our time. But digital interaction is coming under increasing pressure. Many people are withdrawing from public discourse online in the face of insults, death threats or rape threats. Right-wing extremists in particular are mobilising on social networks in large numbers, spreading hate and disinformation.

A representative study of internet users in Germany entitled "Lauter Hass – leiser Rückzug. Wie Hass im Netz den demokratischen Diskurs bedroht" ["Loud Hatred – Quiet Withdrawal . How online hate threatens democratic discourse"] (February 2024) shows that online hate is commonplace and that **urgent action is needed** if we want to protect democracy from this trend. *The study* was carried out by the non-profit organisations Das NETTZ, Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur, HateAid and Neue deutsche Medienmacher\*innen as part of the *Kompetenznetzwerk gegen Hass im Netz* (Competence Network against Hate on the Internet), an association of organisations which is committed to combatting hate in the digital space.

This new study is the most comprehensive survey on perceptions, concerns and consequences of online hate in Germany since 2019.

**The results show:**

- **Online hate can affect everyone. But not everyone is affected equally.** Almost one in two people (49%) have been insulted online at some point. A quarter (25%) of respondents have been threatened with physical violence, and 13% with sexual violence. According to their own statements, those groups which are particularly affected are people with a visible migration background (30%) and those with a homosexual (28%) or bisexual (36%) orientation. Almost half of young women (42%) have received an unsolicited nude photo.
- **Online hate leads to withdrawal from democratic discourse.** More than half of respondents are less likely to express their own political opinion (57%), are participating less often in discussions (55%) and are deliberately formulating their contributions more carefully (53%) on the internet due to fear. 82% of respondents fear that online hate is endangering diversity on the internet. More than three quarters (76%) are concerned that online hate will also lead to more violence in everyday life. The majority (89%) agree that online hate has increased in recent years.
- **Platforms must take responsibility for online hate.** 86% of respondents believe that social media platforms need to take more responsibility. 79% agree that these platforms should also bear financial responsibility for the damage to society caused by online hate.

As part of the Kompetenznetzwerk gegen  
Hass im Netz



Kompetenznetzwerk  
gegen  
**Hass im Netz**

## Political challenges

This study confirms: online hate is destabilising the foundations of our democracy. Politicians must act urgently to counter this development:

- **Those affected must be better protected and supported!**

What is needed is a nationwide network of specialised advice centres, as well as law enforcement authorities who have been trained and informed, who take those affected seriously and do not dismiss them. In addition, the existing German laws must be consistently applied online. Also, social media platforms must take consistent action against hate speech and violations of youth media protection laws.

- **Social media platforms must be held financially**

**accountable!** Hate, disinformation and violence are amplified by the business models of the major social media platforms and are causing significant damage to all of us and to democracy. So, platforms should do all they can to consistently prevent this damage. At the same time, very large online platforms must spend a portion of their profits to adequately cover the social costs of this damage.

- **Media literacy and political education must be**

**strengthened!** For this purpose, a national initiative for media literacy education must be implemented. To achieve this, funds of at least the same amount (€6.5 billion) as the Digital Pact must be made available by the federal and state governments.

Targeted and consistent action against online hate also requires the existing pro-democracy civil society structures to be promoted and hate dynamics on the internet to be continuously monitored.

As early as 2023, publishing associations had developed *recommendations* for political action.

## About the study

The study "Lauter Hass – leiser Rückzug" was commissioned in 2023 by the civil society organisations Das NETTZ, Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur, HateAid and Neue deutsche Medienmacher\*innen as part of the Kompetenznetzwerk gegen Hass im Netz.

The aim of the survey was to provide an up-to-date picture of online hate in Germany. This is the first time since the *IDZ's* (Institute for Democracy and Civil Society) 2019 study that empirical data of such a scope and level of detail have been available. More than 3,000 internet users in Germany aged 16 and over were surveyed.

**Editors:** Das NETTZ, GMK (the Association for Media Education and Communication Culture), HateAid and NdM (the New German Media Makers) as part of the Kompetenznetzwerk gegen Hass im Netz.

**Scientific implementation:**

pollytix strategic research GmbH  
(preliminary survey: Bilendi GmbH).

**Survey period:**

October – November 2023 (preliminary survey: July – August 2023)

**All the information on the study:**

<https://kompetenznetzwerk-hass-im-netz.de/lauter-hass-leiser-rueckzug>

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