

Factsheet No. 2 – August 2020

Artificial Intelligence and Discrimination

How does the German public think about the discrimination potential of artificial intelligence?

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Key Findings

In general, discrimination by Artificial Intelligence (AI) is only perceived as a moderate risk by the German population. However, when it comes to negative economic consequences, the use of AI is viewed rather critically. Many citizens would like to see stronger regulation of AI.

Background

The fact that discrimination is an important societal problem was made clear not least by the Black Lives Matter demonstrations taking place worldwide in summer 2020. But it is not only people of color who are affected by discrimination - every day, people are discriminated against on the basis of their gender, their religious beliefs, their sexuality or their family background. Recently, systems with artificial intelligence have also repeatedly come into focus in connection with discrimination. In the past, there have been examples of discriminatory AI applications in personnel recruitment, in policing or in connection with the utilization of chatbots (Beck et al., 2019).

As can be seen on the [\[MeMo:KI\] Dashboard](#), the German population is generally supportive of the use of AI, at least in some areas of application. However, it is unclear whether German citizens are aware of the risk potential of AI technologies and in which concrete areas of application citizens even suspect discrimination

potential through AI. Furthermore, the question arises as to how discrimination can be prevented. In this context, the EU Commission (2020) has drawn up guidelines for trustworthy AI, which propose various countermeasures to prevent discrimination by AI. For a political legitimization of these countermeasures, it is further also relevant to record to what extent citizens consider them to be effective and which ones should be implemented most urgently.

In the latest survey of the [MeMo:KI], 1,022 German citizens were interviewed on the topic of "AI and discrimination". The central results are presented in this factsheet. Since a basic understanding of artificial intelligence is a prerequisite for an evaluation of the questions, only citizens who stated that they know what the term means or could possibly explain it were taken into account in the following analyses. In this survey, this applied to 915 people (89.5% of respondents).

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Methodology

Method	Online Survey
Executing Institute:	forsa Politik & Sozialforschung GmbH
Population:	German population over 18 years of age who use the Internet at least occasionally
Sample:	Weighted random sample (N=1,022)
Weighting Criteria:	Age, gender and region (federal state)
Survey Period:	2020, July, 27-31
Further Information:	Detailed Methodology Overview for the MeMo:KI project [in German language].

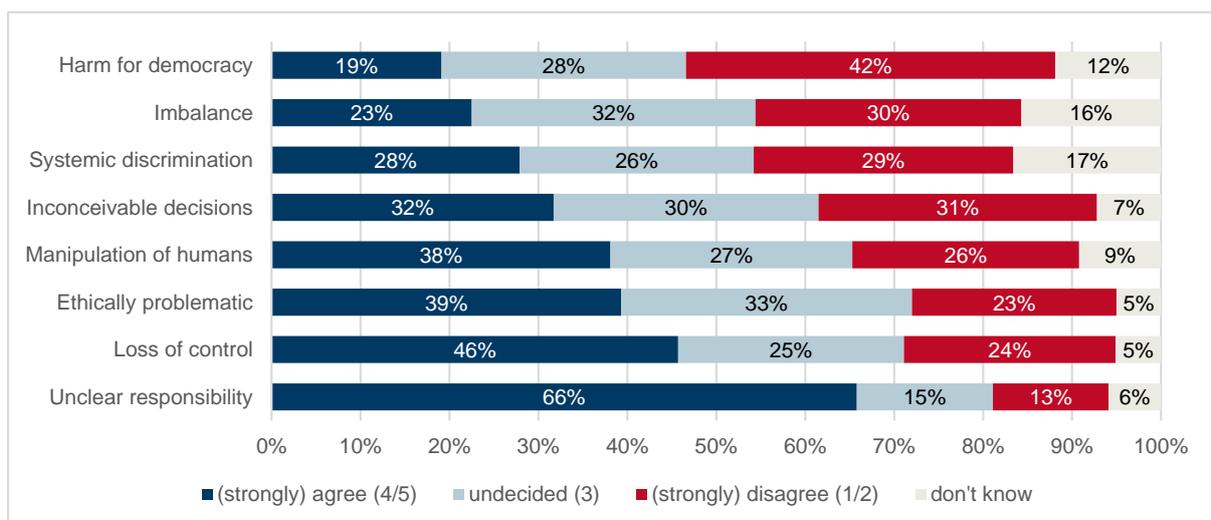
Only medium risk awareness of discrimination by AI

Discrimination is one of many possible risks that AI technology can bring with it. We asked German citizens to rate the extent to which they see various problems in the use of AI for society. They were able to rate their opinion on a five-point scale, with (1) representing "strongly disagree" and (5) representing "strongly agree". For the evaluation, the gradations (1) and (2) were combined to represent "no risk perception" and (4) and (5) were combined to represent "risk perception".

The data show that discrimination (response option "systematic disadvantage") is seen as a

great or very great risk by only around 28% of respondents. By contrast, the proportion of those who (tend to) see no risk of discrimination in the use of AI slightly outweighs this at 29%. Strongly perceived risks, on the other hand, are unclear accountability in the use of AI technologies (66%) or a possible loss of control (46%). In contrast, the fact that AI can cause injustice (23%) or even harm democracy (19%) is assessed as a low risk. Overall, it can be seen – especially in comparison to the other risk potentials – that discrimination through AI is rated by the respondents as a minor problem.

Figure 1: Risk perception towards AI technology



Annotation: N=913

Question: Now we are also interested in your personal opinion on the influence of artificial intelligence on society. Please rate to what extent the following statements apply or do not apply to AI. (1=strongly disagree to; 5=strongly agree)

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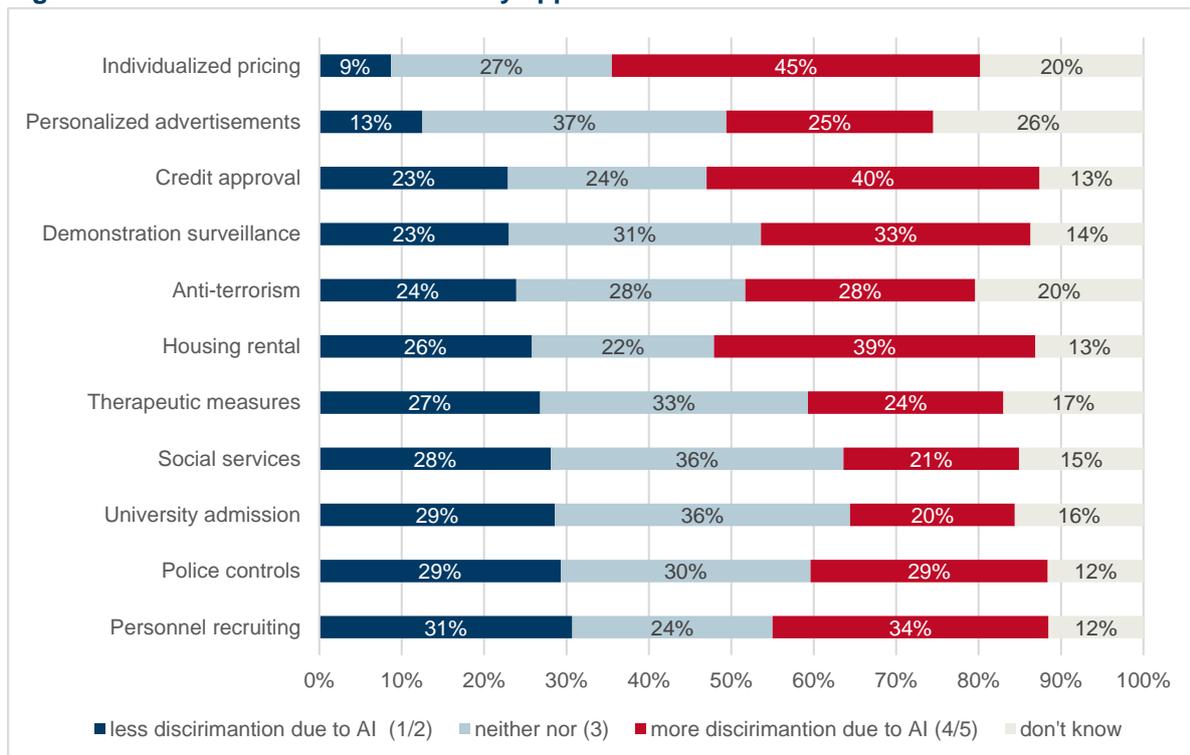


Concern about discrimination in regard to economic issues

Discrimination takes place in different areas of society. In 2017, the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency published a report on the status quo of discrimination in Germany, listing problematic areas (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2017). Nowadays, AI is used in many of these areas. In addition, the European Council commissioned a legal assessment on the potential for discrimination through the use of AI (Borgesius, 2018). For our survey, we identified

relevant applications from both reports and asked citizens whether they thought the use of AI in these areas would lead to more or less discrimination. Respondents could indicate their opinion on a five-point scale, with a score of (1) representing "significantly less discrimination" through the use of AI and (5) representing "significantly more discrimination" though AI. As before, the two upper and lower response categories were combined in each case.

Figure 2: Discrimination assessment by application area



Annotation: N=905

Question: What do you think: will AI lead to more or less discrimination in the following areas? The term discrimination means that a person or a group is treated preferentially or disadvantageously in comparison to others because of particular personal characteristics. (1=significantly less discrimination due to AI; 5=significantly more discrimination due to AI)

The results show clear differences in the expectations of the potential for discrimination through AI in the individual application areas. In seven out of eleven applications, the respondents fear that the use of AI will lead to more discrimination. In particular, AI activities that may have personal economic consequences, such as individualized pricing, credit approval, or housing rentals, are believed to have an increased potential for discrimination by AI. In some applications, however, respondents also

see potential for reduced discrimination through the use of AI. These applications relate primarily to societal or social areas. For example, in the case of therapeutic measures in medicine, the distribution of social welfare services and the allocation of university places, the proportion of those who expect less discrimination through the use of AI predominates. The use of AI in police controls – as has recently been the subject of more frequent media discussion – is

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viewed in a balanced manner by the respondents; 29% believe that the use of AI will lead to more or less discrimination in this area each.

In the majority of applications, AI is associated with increasing rather than decreasing discrimination potential. Although overall awareness of

the problem of AI discrimination is in the middle range, it is apparent that in concrete applications people or institutions are trusted to make a more non-discriminatory assessment than machine.

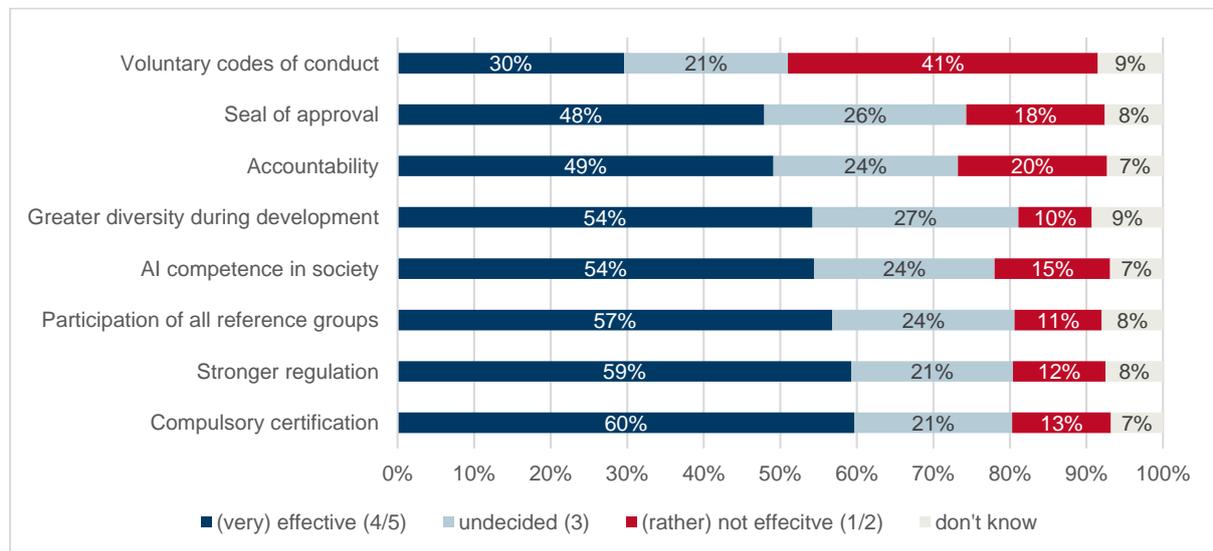
Respondents favor regulation to prevent AI discrimination

In its guidelines, the EU Commission (2020) has proposed a number of measures to prevent discrimination from AI applications. These include economic interventions (e.g., through regulation), as well as social initiatives (e.g., through education). But as how effective do citizens evaluate them? The assessment of citizens is fundamental in that public opinion can have significant political weight in initiating, accelerating or, conversely, preventing the implementation of policies. Again, citizens were able to indicate their assessment of the effectiveness of the countermeasures on a five-point scale; for the visualization of the results, the answer options (1) and (2) were combined into

"(rather) not effective" and (4) and (5) into "(very) effective".

The first observation is that many of the measures proposed by the EU to combat discrimination through AI are considered to be effective. First and foremost, regulatory interventions (e.g., compulsory certification or stronger government regulation) are seen as highly effective. However, strengthening competence in AI and greater involvement of diverse populations in development and implementation are also considered effective. The lowest effectiveness is attributed to the establishment of voluntary codes of conduct by entrepreneurs.

Figure 3: Effectiveness of discrimination countermeasures



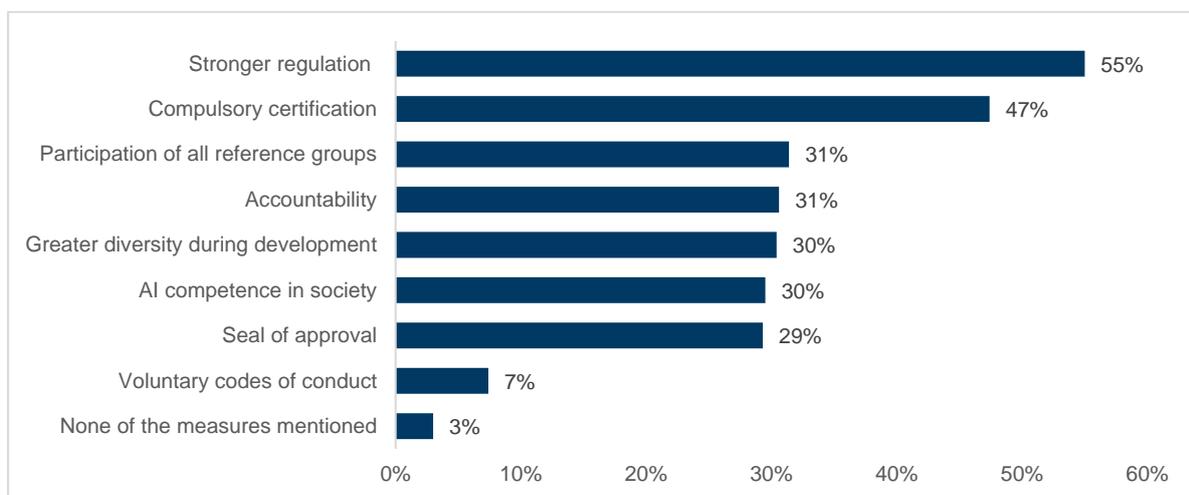
Annotation: N=898

Question: Various options are being discussed for making AI systems less discriminatory. How effective do you consider the following measures to be in reducing possible discrimination - even if you do not presently see any danger from AI yourself? (1=not effective; 5= very effective)

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate which of the countermeasures mentioned should be implemented most urgently. Respondents were able to name up to three countermeasures. The evaluation of the prioritization of countermeasures shows that regulatory interventions are likewise the most popular here as well. Social factors and voluntary controls are perceived as being of only limited urgency. Only three percent of respondents do not consider any of the measures mentioned to be useful.

Overall, a remarkable picture emerges in the assessment of measures to combat discrimination through AI. Respondents are in favor of stronger regulation and certification of AI technology to prevent discrimination. This can be interpreted as a sign that the European way of regulating AI with binding regulations and not relying solely on measures from industry is seen as desirable by German citizens.

Figure 4: Prioritization of discrimination countermeasures



Annotation: N=898

Question: And which of the measures do you think should definitely be implemented? You can select up to three measures. If none of the measures seem necessary to you, then you can also select the answer "None of the measures mentioned".

Conclusion

The survey results provide a contribution to the current discussion regarding discrimination through AI technologies. Overall, it is clear that among the respondents there is a rather moderate awareness of the problem of AI discrimination. However, when citizens are asked directly whether the use of AI leads to more or less discrimination in individual application areas, a majority of applications are expected to be more discriminatory –especially in areas that entail individual financial consequences. An application of AI in the social and educational sectors, however, is more likely to be associated with less discrimination. Finally, the majority of

the German population, which has a basic understanding of AI, considers most of the proposed EU guidelines to be effective in preventing discrimination through AI. Interestingly, the measures that respondents feel should be implemented most urgently are those that call for greater regulation of technology and businesses. The fundamental willingness for the path to human-centered and public welfare-oriented AI, laid out by the European Union, is thus quite discernible –even though awareness of discriminatory effects of AI systems is still relatively low.

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