

## **Choosing hope over fear? Examining racism and the democracy crisis in German-US exchanges**

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### **Abstract**

In three thematic sections, this article outlines how German-US expert exchanges have examined racism and the democracy crisis, and contrasts these insights with the current state of play in the professional discourse.

The first section focuses on monuments in the US and Germany, specifically how they shape the cornerstones of remembrance culture in both countries against the backdrop of the current discourse around racism. The way US society processes the country's history of segregation is just as relevant in this context as the manner in which the country commemorates Black victims of the Nazi regime. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D. C. and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin were used as starting points for a critical review of remembrance-related controversies in both countries.

The second section uses storytelling to outline experiences of racism. The biography of an American Muslim serves to spotlight crucial aspects of stereotyping and the absurdity of racial attributions in the US justice system.

The third section describes the context in which the subject of "democracy in crisis" was discussed during a bilateral expert programme. The American group referred to the incongruity between the electoral college system and the popular vote, political polarisation, voter intimidation and the attack on the US Capitol as indicators of a profound crisis of democracy in their country. The German participants identified the discrepancies in attitude towards Syrian and Ukrainian refugees and the murder of German politician Walter Lübcke as major challenges; yet they also acknowledged as positive the fresh breeze brought in by the new "traffic light" coalition government of 2021 and the largely smooth handover of power, along with Germany's security policy about-face after the start of the war on Ukraine, which found widespread public support.