

The German Federal President's History Competition
Results of the 24th German History Competition in 2014/2015

Report

In the 24th competition, students aged under 21 were asked to conduct their own research on the topic of »Being different. Outsiders in history.«

5,109 students took part and submitted 1,563 contributions.

Being different from others is a universal human experience. Already at a young age we understand that we all differ in our appearance and background, our interests and beliefs. While differences are a part of life and make it more colourful, problems arise when they lead to degradation and exclusion. Whether people are ostracised and labelled as »outsiders« or whether being different is accepted, seen as normal and even appreciated, is an important indicator of a society's political culture and essential for peaceful coexistence.

Laws and directives, customs and traditions often determined who is perceived as different, alien, or »unfitting«. Yet these definitions and attributions change with time, and often outsiders or members of minorities themselves took an active part in overcoming prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. Women fought for and gained access to higher education, German Sinti and Roma were recognised as a national minority, migrants stood up for greater participation and equal opportunities. But even if legal and political disadvantages have decreased, prejudice has remained commonplace. Until today, homosexuality is a taboo in professional sports, people with a darker skin colour encounter reservations, and foreign-sounding names lead to disadvantages when searching for an apartment or work.

Participants researched how outsiders and members of minority groups were treated throughout history. They looked into cases of persecution during the Third Reich and pondered on the meaning of being different in Socialist East Germany. Flight and expulsion after 1945, witch-hunting in the early modern era or the position of disabled persons in society – these are only a few of the topics that encouraged participants to look into their local and family histories and to capture their findings on film, to record them in a creative manner or to put them in writing. Work groups handed in approximately half of all entries. Participants succeeded in a critical appraisal of otherness in both the past and the present, winning historical insight and often juxtaposing it with current debate topics. In doing so, participants took a stand against continuing prejudice and exclusion and called for greater tolerance.

Competition magazine [»spurensuchen«](#), No. 29/2015 includes competition results