














# Außenblick

# Außenblick

International perspectives  
on Germany in times of the  
Covid-19 pandemic





<b>Foreword</b>	2	
<b>Summary</b>	4	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	14	
<b>2. COVID-19: a turning point with consequences.</b>	22	
<b>3. Reasons we are respected. Hard-working. Efficient. Reliable.</b>	30	
<b>Digression: In the historical shadow of National Socialism</b>	42	
<b>4. Reasons people shake their head. Inflexible. Critical. Hesitant.</b>	44	
<b>5. What people are warning us about. Reserved. Dominant. Smug.</b>	52	
<b>6. What people believe we are capable of. Solution-oriented. Trustworthy. Responsible.</b>	62	
<b>Digression: Speaking German, thinking German</b>	72	
<b>7. What people hope. Open. Cooperative. Future-oriented.</b>	74	
<b>Reflection: the images of others as a navigation aid in times of radical change</b>	88	
<b>Mixed methods design of the study</b>	98	
<b>Annex</b>	108	
<b>Imprint</b>	116	



# Dear readers,

This publication is a joint production by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Goethe-Institut. As organisations with an international orientation, we were already regularly exchanging ideas, embarking on joint projects, identifying cooperation potential and creating synergies even before COVID-19. However the wide-scale disruption we're currently experiencing as a result of the coronavirus, the lasting impact of which we can only predict, has caused our collaboration to become even more intensive. Not least because the exceptional circumstances have posed challenges for everyone and raised very similar questions for each of us: what will the consequences of the pandemic be for international cooperation in education, academic research, economics, culture and non-governmental organisations? How will we find a way out of crisis mode, and what lessons will we learn for our work? How will the crisis management be perceived? And what effects will it have on future international cooperative ventures for our country?

But as organisations – and also as a society – we need to find answers to these and other important questions. What could be more appropriate in such a situation, we thought, than to seek advice from experts and outstanding authorities on Germany from all over the world? Our organisations are represented in numerous countries on all the continents with overseas offices and representatives, and they have access to networks and structures that have grown over many decades. We've joined forces to achieve this, working together closely to give our international partners and friends the opportunity to outline their perspective on our country.

The outcome is some exciting, indeed fascinating insights from diverse sectors of international cooperation – an informative outside view of our country at the start of the 21st century just as we're undergoing a historical turning point. Without giving away too much at this point: people hold our country in high regard, we are valued, appreciated and respected, they have high expectations of us. Admittedly, and we should analyse this extremely closely, there are voices of caution, warning and criticism, communicating their honest perception of our weaknesses and failures – from a friendly perspective of solidarity. Maybe as internationally active organisations, but also as a cosmopolitan society and export-oriented economic nation, we can learn the most from precisely these critical voices. What we were very pleased about: the project showed us yet again that we have access to strong global networks that complement each other wonderfully with their different focuses. In any case the willingness to take part in the study was overwhelming – the response was far higher than we anticipated. At this point we'd also like to thank the numerous German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK) for providing us with additional support in the form of local contacts while this study was being compiled.

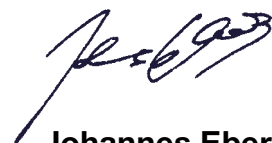
We hope you find it an interesting read and are able to benefit from what you learn!



**Dr. Kai Sicks**  
Secretary General  
of the DAAD



**Tanja Gönner**  
Chair of the Management  
Board of GIZ



**Johannes Ebert**  
Secretary General of the  
Goethe-Institut



# Summary

**How is Germany viewed by the world? The DAAD, GIZ and Goethe-Institut have addressed this question together in the study “Außenblick – International perspectives on Germany in times of the Covid-19 pandemic”. From the perspective of science, culture, economics and politics. A particular focus of the study is the Covid-19 pandemic, which affects all areas.**

## **Mixed methods design of the study**

The study is based on a dual level mixed format: a combination of a structured online questionnaire and semi-narrative in-depth interviews. We contacted experts from the partner networks of the three organisations who know Germany well and are able to formulate the expectations, desires and fears they have of Germany based on their observations. 622 people from 37 countries responded to the quantitative online questionnaire. 48 interviewees from 24 countries were questioned on their perspective of Germany during the in-depth interviews.

# COVID-19: A turning-point with consequences

**Management of the Covid-19 pandemic** in spring 2020 was to a large extent viewed as efficient and exemplary. This opinion changed in the **second wave**. A gradual reduction in discipline was observed in the population, as well as problems with sourcing, logistics and organisation in the vaccination campaign. The interviewees felt that the **lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic** include the necessity for stronger international cooperation, as well as the importance of a functioning healthcare system and the requirement for an effective crisis management strategy.

## In the historical shadow of National Socialism

From an external perspective, German history is strongly linked with the history of National Socialism:

**“When Germany is thinking about its future, the neighbours are thinking about its past.”**

## Speaking German, thinking German.

Without German skills it's difficult to gain access to Germany and the Germans:

**“The easiest way to make Germany your own is to speak their language.”**

At the same time, learning the German language is considered a great challenge.



# Reasons we are respected. Hard-working. Efficient. Reliable.

Germany's **political system** is seen as a stable democracy that follows a constitutional rule of law. The way different interest groups interact works well and is institutionally anchored. Germany is viewed as a leading **economic power** in the European Union, and "Made in Germany" still represents outstanding quality.

Accessibility of schools and universities, as well as an analytical approach to specialist topics, are considered to be great strengths of the German **education systems**. Furthermore, **research institutions** are attractive because of their interdisciplinary character and practical orientation. The **cultural programmes** in Germany are also highly valued and accessible to a wide range of people. The comprehensive health insurance cover and high quality of care are evidence of a strong **healthcare system**.

Other countries also feel that respect is due to Germany for coming to terms with the National Socialist period. Politicians and society had learned lessons from the past. The reunification of Germany and the acceptance of refugees in 2015/16 are perceived as further **major achievements**.

**"At this time [2015/2016] the German government acted humanely and assumed global responsibility."**

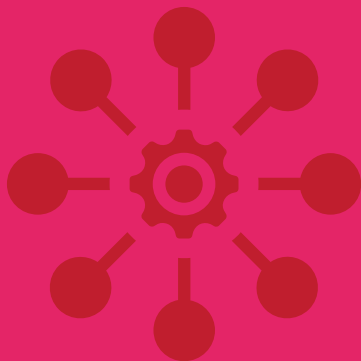


# Reasons people shake their heads. Inflexible. Critical. Hesitant.

Germans are often over-cautious and over-critical, or simply **unyielding** – **with extremely high standards**. People think Germany needs to develop the **digital infrastructure** and improve conditions for **entrepreneurial innovation**.

## “Which areas will see innovation in Germany over the next few years?”

Environmental protection is a huge topic in discussion, but isn't something companies are really focusing on. A discrepancy **between ambition and reality** is reinforced by recent scandals in politics and business. It was also noted that Germany has not adequately addressed its **colonial history**. **Academic hurdles and rigid hierarchies** in German university systems are perceived as effective weaknesses.



# What people are warning us about.

## Reserved. Dominant. Smug.

**Populist and extremist tendencies** are perceived as being on the rise in Germany – no other area of risk is under such diverse discussion abroad. Interviewees describe that they have experienced less tolerance and friendliness in recent years while staying in Germany. They are **feeling increasingly unwelcome**.

**“I never felt discriminated against in Germany. But in recent years I did and that makes me incredibly sad.”**

The assumption abroad is that these tendencies are the result of **deep-seated anxieties and social tensions** in Germany; for instance the fear of losing one’s job or identity. Germany is struggling to **find its own identity** and is torn apart in many respects.

Germany is expected to be very active at the international level, but at the same time it is warned against being too **dominant**. There is also a risk that Germany will **rest on its economic laurels** and be outpaced, especially in the area of digitalisation.



# What people believe we are capable of.

Solution-oriented. Trustworthy.  
Responsible.

Being **solution-oriented** and competent are attributes used to describe Germany in a wide variety of social areas. Germany possesses a **high level of credibility** and the interviewees are confident that Germany is able to reinforce democratic values and partnerships, and assume **international responsibility**. To this end, Germany needs to adopt a **clear stance**. Germany is firmly anchored in the European Union, which is why there is an expectation for Germany to join forces with other member states to **represent a strong Europe**.

**“You can only understand Germany if you understand Europe – and you can only understand Europe if you understand Germany’s role in Europe.”**



# What people hope. Open. Cooperative. Future-oriented.

Migration is seen as a reality now and in the future. The desire for an open Germany that embraces this diversity, is both great and global. People hope for an **open country and open hearts**.

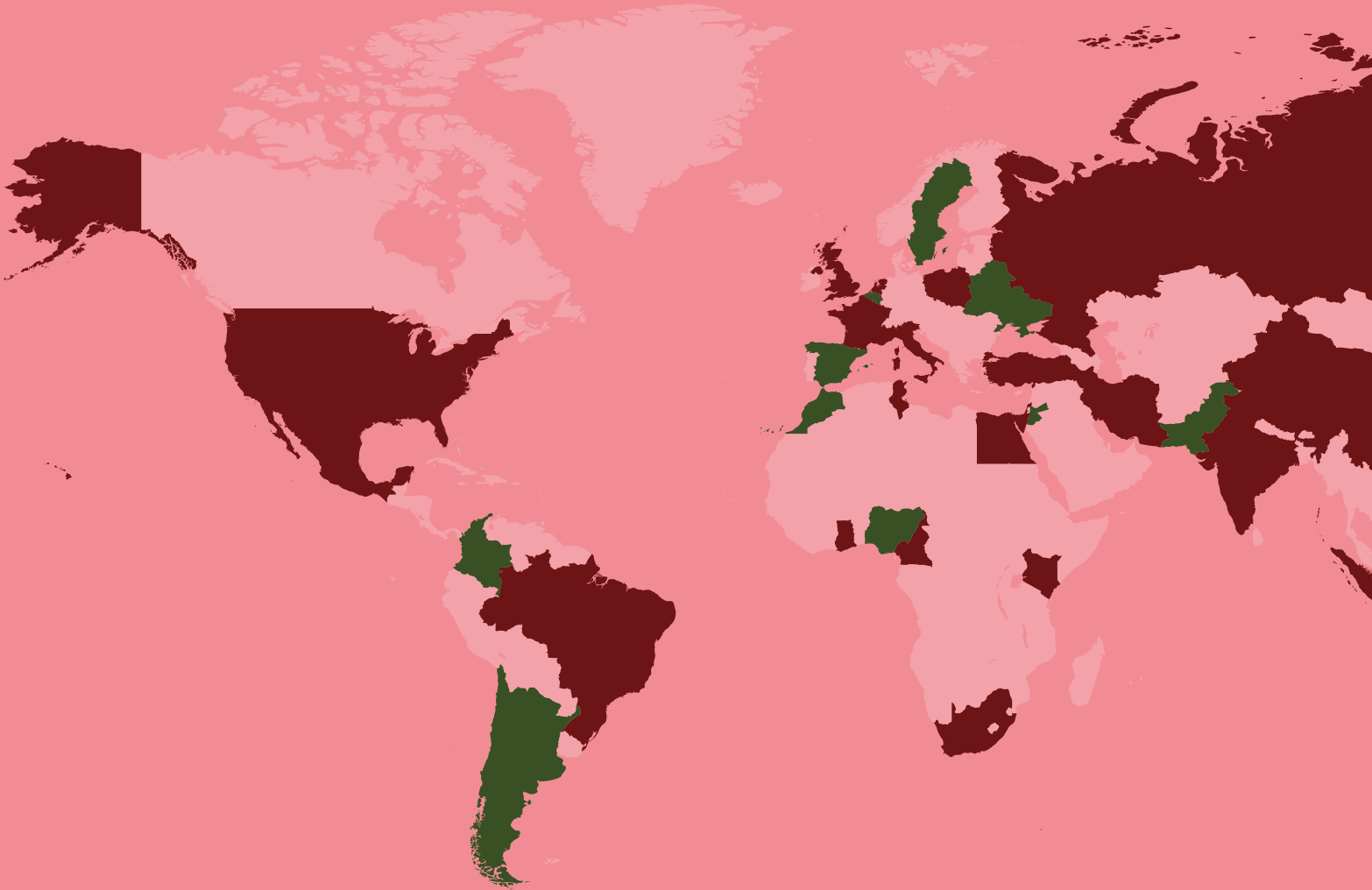
**“Germany should meet other cultures and diversity with open arms.”**

The interviewees continue to expect **fair and multifaceted cooperation in external relations**. They consider Germany as a popular partner for joint projects and development of cooperation is desirable. The expectations are great that Germany will catch up fast, particularly with regard to digitalisation, and will contribute towards finding **solutions for the digital world of tomorrow**. A pioneering role is also expected of Germany in the areas of **environmental protection, climate change and sustainability**. The imminent departure of the German Chancellor in autumn 2021 is being followed attentively. Interviewees hope for **both continuity and a fresh start in politics**.



Fig. 1

## Criteria-led selection of countries and survey participants



### Criteria for country selection:

- Historical relations to Germany
- Economic involvement with Germany
- Importance of the countries for bilateral and multilateral processes
- Maximum diversity of perspectives

### Criteria for expert selection:

- Current, in-depth knowledge of Germany
- Professionals from a variety of fields
- Independent of the project partners
- Balanced spread with regard to age groups and gender

# 622

online survey  
participants

# 48

interviewed  
experts

# 37

countries in the  
quantitative  
online survey

# 24

countries in the  
qualitative  
interview series



Argentina  
Australia  
Belarus  
Belgium  
Brazil  
Cameroon  
Chile  
China  
Colombia  
Egypt  
France  
Ghana  
India  
Indonesia  
Iran  
Israel  
Italy  
Japan  
Jordan  
Kenya  
Mexico  
Morocco  
Nigeria  
Pakistan  
Poland  
Russia  
South Africa  
South Korea  
Spain  
Sweden  
The Netherlands  
Tunisia  
Turkey  
USA  
Ukraine  
United Kingdom  
Vietnam

Australia  
Brazil  
Cameroon  
China  
Egypt  
France  
Ghana  
India  
Indonesia  
Iran  
Israel  
Italy  
Japan  
Kenya  
Mexico  
Poland  
Russia  
South Africa  
The Netherlands  
Tunisia  
Turkey  
USA  
United Kingdom  
Vietnam





# 1. Introduction

## In times of Covid-19

“It’s serious”, warned Chancellor Merkel on 18th March 2020 in her televised address, probably not realising herself the extent to which our idea of normality, of social togetherness, was still to be put to the test. At that point there was not yet a vaccine against the virus, merely the conviction that limiting the damage would be dependent on acting together in solidarity. If you were to evaluate progress at this point, things would be rather mixed. We Germans have had a good degree of success in many senses, maybe even better than other countries. But there were also moments of irritation and surprising weak points. It would be a missed opportunity if we were unable to learn from all this.

We are still dealing with overcoming the pandemic. At the same time, issues that seemed challenging enough before need our attention now: climate change, the increasing inequality between countries and social classes, the state budgets of European countries – some of which are heavily in debt – or the geopolitical power shifts. That throws up questions: can things go on as before? What faults are becoming visible in the inner structure of our nation? Where does Germany stand on the international stage and what expectations are being placed on us? What changes do we have to navigate?

The Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Goethe-Institut have made use of their overseas networks for a joint study project that will contribute to a discussion of these questions: “Außenblick – International perspectives on Germany in times of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

# A unique perspective on things

Two assumptions guide this study: firstly, the complex nature of the challenges calls for an interdisciplinary approach, a skilful interlinking of perspectives. Secondly, alongside the expertise in our own country and the views within the discourse, more than anything else it is observations from other countries that enable us to see a rounded picture of the overall situation. The strength of the three project partners and their combined forces (their global networks) is their ability to meet these two requirements.

The fundamental idea behind it is a reconciliation between self-perception and external perception. We are collecting the differentiated external images and insightful comments from experts on Germany in order to identify our own blind spots and calibrate known viewpoints and approaches.

Since it is not ideal to compare one's self-image with any external views, feedback is usually sought from people who know us well. This would require intensive contact of a private or professional nature over a longer period of time. Otherwise it is difficult to observe our own ideas and behaviour. To protect this interest we've formed our reference group – a hand-picked selection of people whose views can be trusted, because they know what they are talking about.

To reflect a broad spectrum of the way Germany is seen from abroad, we sought out experts with experience of Germany in 37 countries of the world. The first step was to invite this selection of 1,255 experts on Germany, randomly spread in terms of age, gender and professional background, to complete an online survey, which was done in January 2021. The impressions gleaned from this were then used as a starting point for a more detailed interview series involving 48 of the experts taken from the same pool.

Using this mixed methods approach allowed us not only to find out about perspectives on Germany, but also put the spotlight on the people questioned. Knowledge of the diverse personal references and relations others have with Germany doesn't just help us to understand the pictures drawn of Germany. These relationship stories themselves become a part of the image created of Germany by collecting them.

This study joins the increasing ranks of information-gathering projects over the past ten years in an endeavour to examine Germany's role in the world. Unlike most of them, we use primarily qualitative methods. This approach allows us to investigate and understand the different perspectives on Germany in terms of rival but also interrelated reality structures.

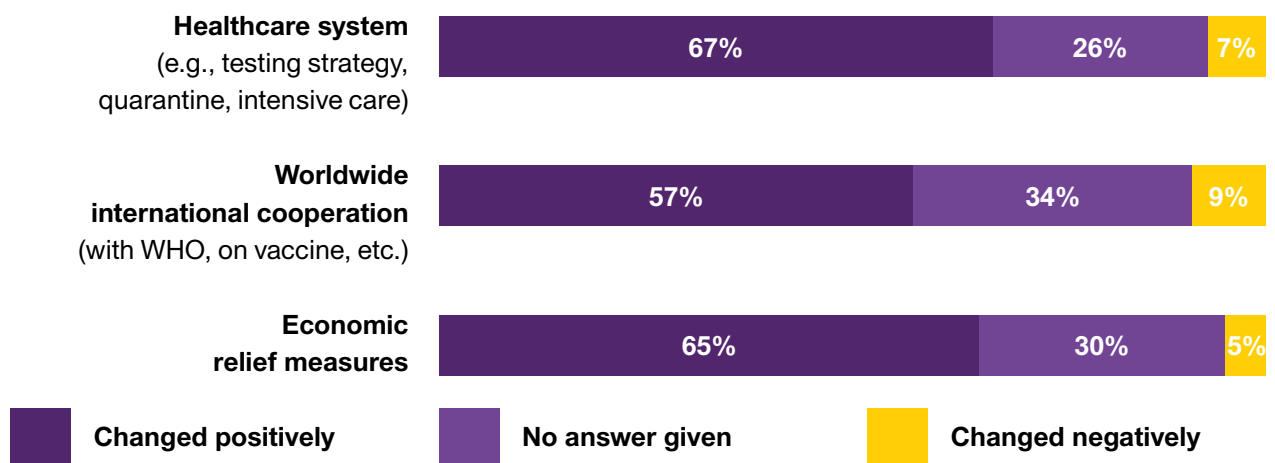
# Dragged onto the world stage

In times of crisis the essence of a society becomes particularly visible – including the socio-economic rifts that need to be overcome. What's new to this crisis is the mutual observation between countries. There has never before been such a sensation of being dragged onto the world stage. Never before has benchmarking been performed in such pedantic detail on the basis of health statistics. It was possible to track the numbers of positive covid cases, intensive care patients and consequently deaths, sorted by country. Never before was it so easy to observe the implementation of globally tracked strategies to monitor their success.

This was probably why the perception of Germany from abroad came something of a cropper. Germany's strengths, for instance the contribution to German medical research in the form of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the well-equipped healthcare system or the comprehensive financial support packages, grew even stronger than they would otherwise have been, and were admired and coveted.

Fig. 2

## How have developments in the following areas of life during the COVID-19 pandemic changed your perception of Germany? (January 2021)



The online survey conducted in January 2021 showed an improvement in image during the pandemic in the three areas mentioned.

At the same time, events and attitudes with negative associations were becoming more apparent. Whether it was the closing of the borders to our neighbours, the in some cases violent demonstrations against Covid-19 crisis management measures, the suspicion of corruption in German politics or, most recently, the slow start of the vaccination campaign – from a foreign perspective, a number of things seemed difficult to reconcile with the previous image of Germany.

## **Global insecurity, projected hope**

This extraordinary situation was also reflected in the participation in the online survey. With a response rate of 50 per cent (!) even in the current context it is no longer accurate to call it a high level of willingness to participate, those surveyed positively needed to participate. The trend seen in the online survey data was then confirmed in the interview series: the world is in distress. And Germany acts as a surface on which insecure global citizens can project all their expectations and hopes.

**“People sometimes imagine that problems disappear if Germany waves a magic wand.”**

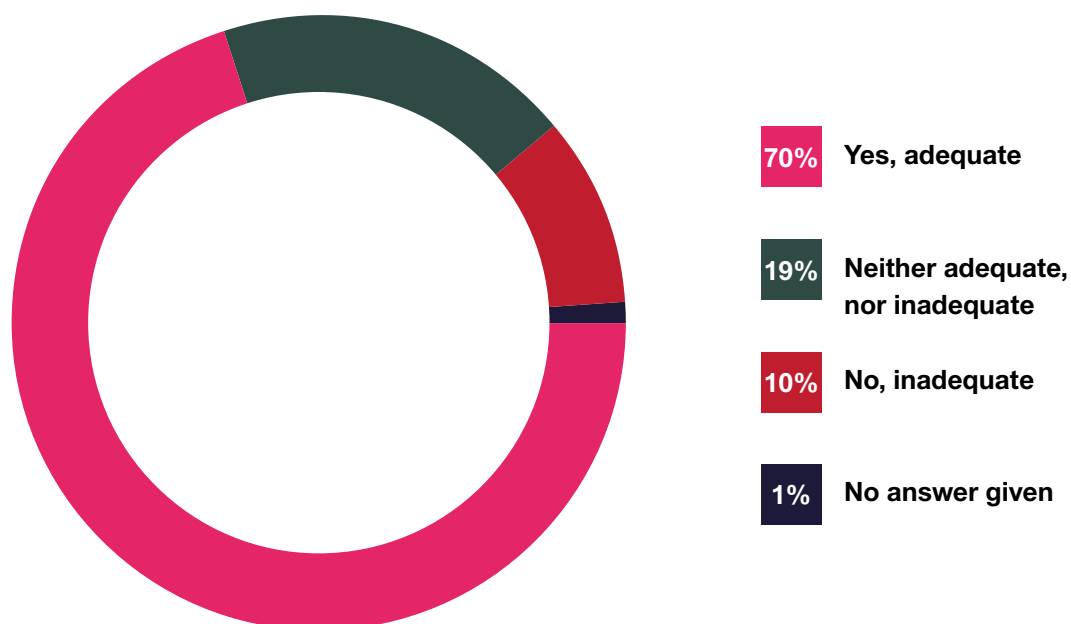
Should Germany meet these expectations and hopes with stronger leadership, or are we assuming enough international responsibility in the light of current events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, displacement and migration?



Fig. 3

# In the light of recent events, is Germany meeting its international responsibilities adequately?

(January 2021)



**70 per cent of those questioned rate the perception of Germany's international responsibility as adequate, around one third thinks otherwise.**

We followed up these results from the online surveys in more detail in the interviews. Something that shone through was the image of Germany as a bearer of hope in relation to preservation of democratic and constitutional principles and the safeguarding of human rights.

It is with even greater suspense that people are looking towards Germany, with the election of a new government coming up in the autumn. This study can then hopefully unlock its full force and provide valuable information. The fact is, not only does it reveal what people respect us for, but also the reasons they are shaking their heads, what they are warning us about and where they have confidence in us – and not least the hopes they harbour in us.

At least 30 suitable participants were identified in each of 37 selected countries for the online survey. Selection of both countries and individuals was conducted according to specific criteria (see below). A total of 1,255 people were invited to participate in the survey of whom 622 (50 per cent) completed it in full. Having conducted the survey beforehand serves several purposes: first of all, it was a way of identifying the current main topics to focus on and thus defining fields of observation for the series of interviews. Furthermore specific questions could be asked – for instance relating to the Covid-19 pandemic – without them dominating the interviews too much. The online survey also helped to select the countries for the interviews. And finally we were able to apply a differentiated description to survey participants thanks to the preselection process.

For the qualitative interview series the focus was on 24 countries, with two interviews conducted for each country (48 interviews altogether). The in-depth interviews each took 60 to 90 minutes and were organised into an open section and a semi-structured section. While the open part comprised largely open-ended questions, in other words they were asked about freely associated perceptions of Germany, in the second part, participants were asked to choose around four to six broad topics of twelve.

The unique feature of this study is the particular selection of experts questioned. They are experts from abroad with experience relevant to Germany.

**This makes the survey group more than the experts of the study. They represent a reference group, whose perceptions can be used for a comparison with the image of Germany we have ourselves.**



## Reading tips

The content of the six main chapters is based on statements from the interviews. The qualitative approach guarantees that the study is representative in terms of content, even if individual statements cannot be statistically generalised.

Formulations such as *“In Africa we hear...”* or *“Across the Atlantic people are saying...”* serve to contextualise the quotations geographically without linking them directly to our sources. Survey participants have been guaranteed this form of anonymity.



Passages with the adjacent symbol and coloured font as well as graphics are results from the online survey conducted in January 2021.





# 2. **COVID-19: a turning point with consequences**

## **Overcoming the first wave efficiently**

Management of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020 was generally perceived to be efficient and exemplary. People quickly realised that Germany had the pandemic very effectively under control in the first phase. Firstly because of an efficient system and secondly because of the self-disciplined attitude of the population with regard to the state-imposed measures. The scientifically oriented perspective of the Chancellor during the Covid-19 pandemic was frequently seen as thoroughly positive and reliable, “It was a very rational, sensible and convincing approach.” German efficiency was apparent in the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, “People are interested in rules and follow them. They respect what the government says. That turned out to be a very positive thing for overcoming the crisis.”

Treatment of employees and companies was considered to be exemplary, “This image of a country providing financial support into the billions is very impressive. Moreover, I find the high appreciation of culture in Germany remarkable.” There was good mutual support within the population, and Germany also provided plenty of social assistance during the pandemic, in particular by supporting sick people overseas. These images of German solidarity were followed attentively and viewed favourably by the foreign media.

# Evaluation of the Covid-19 crisis management measures in Germany according to an online survey of the reference group in January 2021



At this time, Germany's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic overall is rated as very good (detailed questions of 20–44%) or fairly good (detailed questions of 39–47%).

It was felt that the following factors helped Germany very much or somewhat with regard to how the Covid-19 pandemic was handled: the German social/value system overall (very much 41%, somewhat 35%), the style of political communication (very much 38%, somewhat 37%), the role of Germany in the European Union (very much 35%, somewhat 31%) as well as media reporting (very much 26%, somewhat 42%). What is significantly less clear is the image with regard to Germany's federal structure. At least 15 per cent of those questioned think it was more of a hindrance to Germany with regard to how the Covid-19 pandemic was handled.

Over half of those questioned view the behaviour of Germans during the pandemic as very disciplined (57%) and in line with expert guidance (49%).

The development in some life areas has led to a positive change in Germany's image for the survey participants. Above all this applies to the following areas: healthcare system (67%), financial aid (66%), international cooperation (58%), regulations in the workplace (53%), the switch to digital learning in schools and universities (46%) as well as health and social care for the elderly (45%).

On the other hand the image has shifted slightly in a negative direction as a result of observing certain areas like the border situation and travel regulations, or hospitality and trade.

# The irritating way the second wave was handled

Part of the explanation as to why Germany came through the initial phase of the pandemic so well relates to Germany's crisis experience and that of its politicians. "Germany has overcome many a crisis and always gotten back on its feet again. Hardly a soul can teach Germany anything more about handling a crisis." On the other hand a number of respondents report that many countries initially rated Germany as exemplary, but as the crisis management continued they began to feel surprise and finally disappointment.

In the second phase, according to widespread opinion, the German population felt too safe, and Germany's people became tired of the Covid-19 crisis management measures.

Although politicians tried to cushion this, the discipline gradually declined. Instruments such as the corona app were never really accepted because the data protection reservations were too great – even in the second wave and despite the seriousness of the situation. The laborious coordination between central and regional government and the resulting non-uniformity of federal state regulations also had a negative influence on morale in the country. Finally, the discontent became manifest even through demonstrations.

Other countries were very surprised about the difficulties they noticed in Germany with regard to vaccination strategy. "What perplexes me, indeed what I find inconceivable in a country such as Germany, is the slow rate of vaccination and the shortage of vaccines. [...] Why couldn't Germany get its act together?"

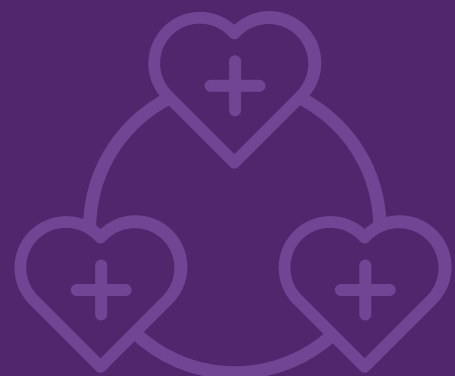
One cause of observed problems relating to acquisition, logistics and organisation of distribution is thought by many to have been attributable to the federal structure and cumbersome nature of German bureaucracy. "Maybe in this case it's partly because scepticism towards vaccination in general is greater in Germany", wonder others. Warnings of the dangers of pandemics, a subject discussed in parliament years earlier, had not been taken seriously enough.

# Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic?

The Covid-19 pandemic clearly showed that a pandemic knows no borders. “The outcome will not be a good one if the European countries all try to solve the medical challenges on their own. In this situation more cooperation is needed, and it must be less bureaucratic.” Despite the good healthcare system, it has become apparent in some areas that investments in the healthcare system have been neglected since 2010. Furthermore, the healthcare system has become too heavily institutionalised.

**“Germany should not just view its healthcare system in institutional terms, but give more attention to the aspect of social health connectedness. Mental health and health overall benefit from family and social connectedness.”**

Overall it should be questioned critically whether profit holds too high a value in the German healthcare system. “Sometimes too much is done in the German healthcare system. Doctors perform therapies that aren’t necessary, but which result in financial benefit. And equipment is written off too readily. That doesn’t make economic sense.”



In addition to these questions about healthcare policy, a rapid response and clear prioritisation are required to effectively counter a crisis. “The principles of autonomy, freedom, individualism and federalism lead to paradoxes in a crisis, which makes overcoming that crisis more difficult and protracted.”

Respondents were surprised to note that conspiracy theories were spreading and tracking of infections via digital solutions in Germany was not being accepted by some. Individuals were focusing too much on themselves. “In Germany the welfare of the individual is of primary importance, in our country it’s about the welfare of the community and public health.”

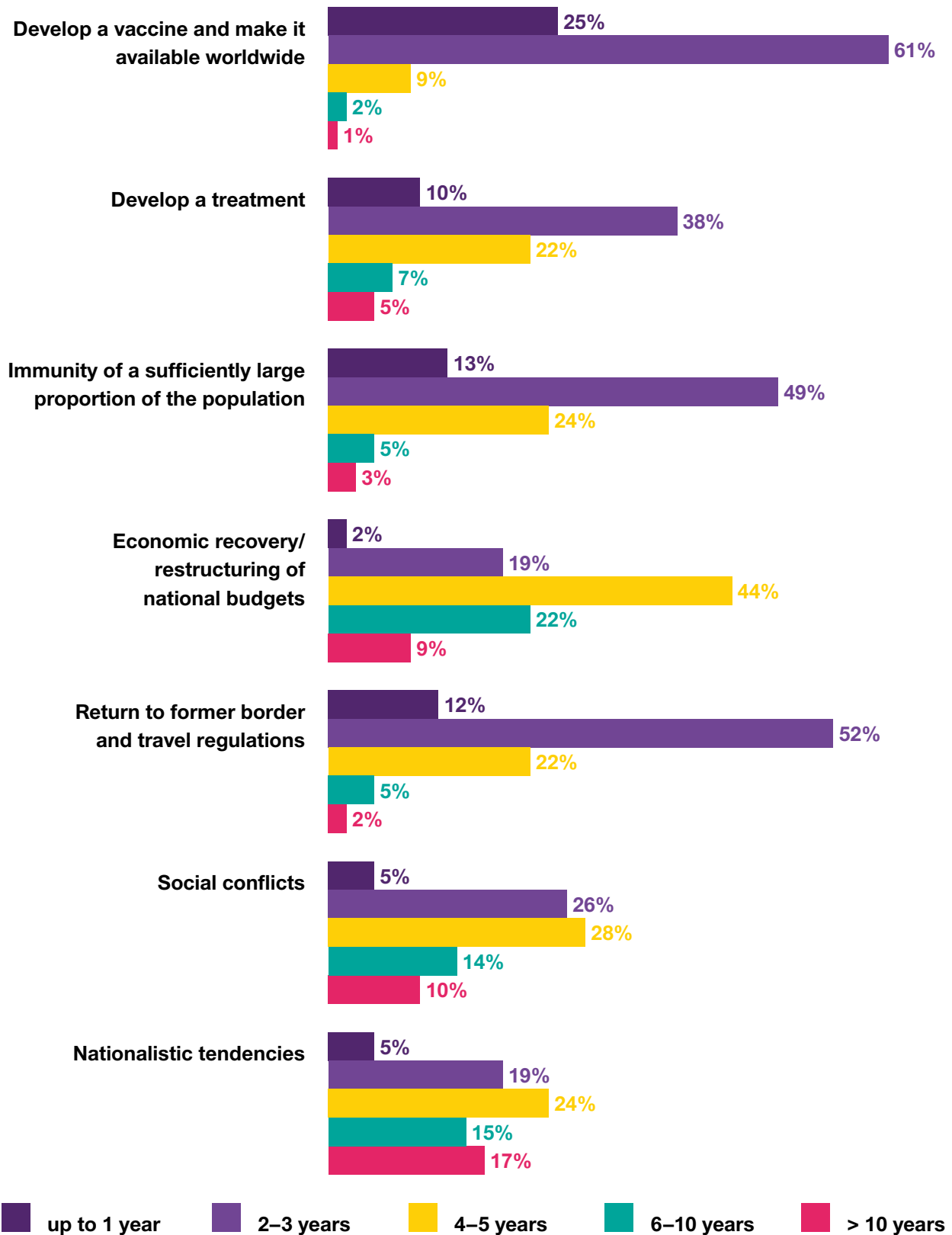
**“You live in a utopia in Germany. When a virus such as the coronavirus strikes, you have government support, you have access to vaccines. This is not the case in Africa.”**

But overall the Germans are seen as too critical with regard to the situation in the Covid-19 pandemic, “You are forgetting how good the situation is in general. Maybe you’re a little spoiled and blind to your own achievements. Things like personal freedom, the right to demonstrate and freedom of opinion are not valued, they are taken for granted.”



Fig. 4

# How long will it take to overcome Covid-19 and the consequences of the pandemic? (January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.



**Those surveyed expect a two- to three-year timeframe will be required to overcome the pandemic. Social consequences are expected for four to five years.**





# 3. Reasons we are respected. Hard-working. Efficient. Reliable.

## Stable democracy with role model effect

In times when many countries of the world are exhibiting the emergence of national socialist tendencies, Germany stands out favourably with its political system – despite pressure from the right-wing camp that exists here too. From an American perspective, but also an African and Asian one, the image seen is one of stable German politics on the basis of robust democratic principles, “Germany is a constitutional state that I respect!” So Germany positively radiates dependability and will play, it is hoped, a central role in future as well, in regard to the protection of human rights and democratic order.

**“German politics radiates outward stability and at the same time dependability.”**

The pillars of this stability are the strong parliamentary system and the rational interrelations between the traditional political parties. There is also acknowledgement of the frequently used form of coalition government, which represents respect for the will of the people and always aspiring to reach consensual agreement. In countries with authoritarian forms of government, the diversity of parties available for election in Germany is praised, “and a city such as Cologne even has a female mayor! This is true democracy.”

The political system is also seen as robust because of its outstanding fiscal stability, which was viewed to as the backbone of the European Economic Area in several interviews.

There is fascination regarding German federalism in all its facets (e.g., or such as fighting the pandemic, culture, education). Even though federal structures might make quick decisions harder, they did prevent disproportionate centralisation of power and encouraged regional autonomy. “Power centres and focal points are found everywhere. Berlin for example, is an interesting city, but from an economic point of view you don’t have to be based in Berlin.”

The location of the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, the Federal Labour Office in Nuremberg and the Deutsche Bundesbank in Frankfurt demonstrates a balance of decentralisation.

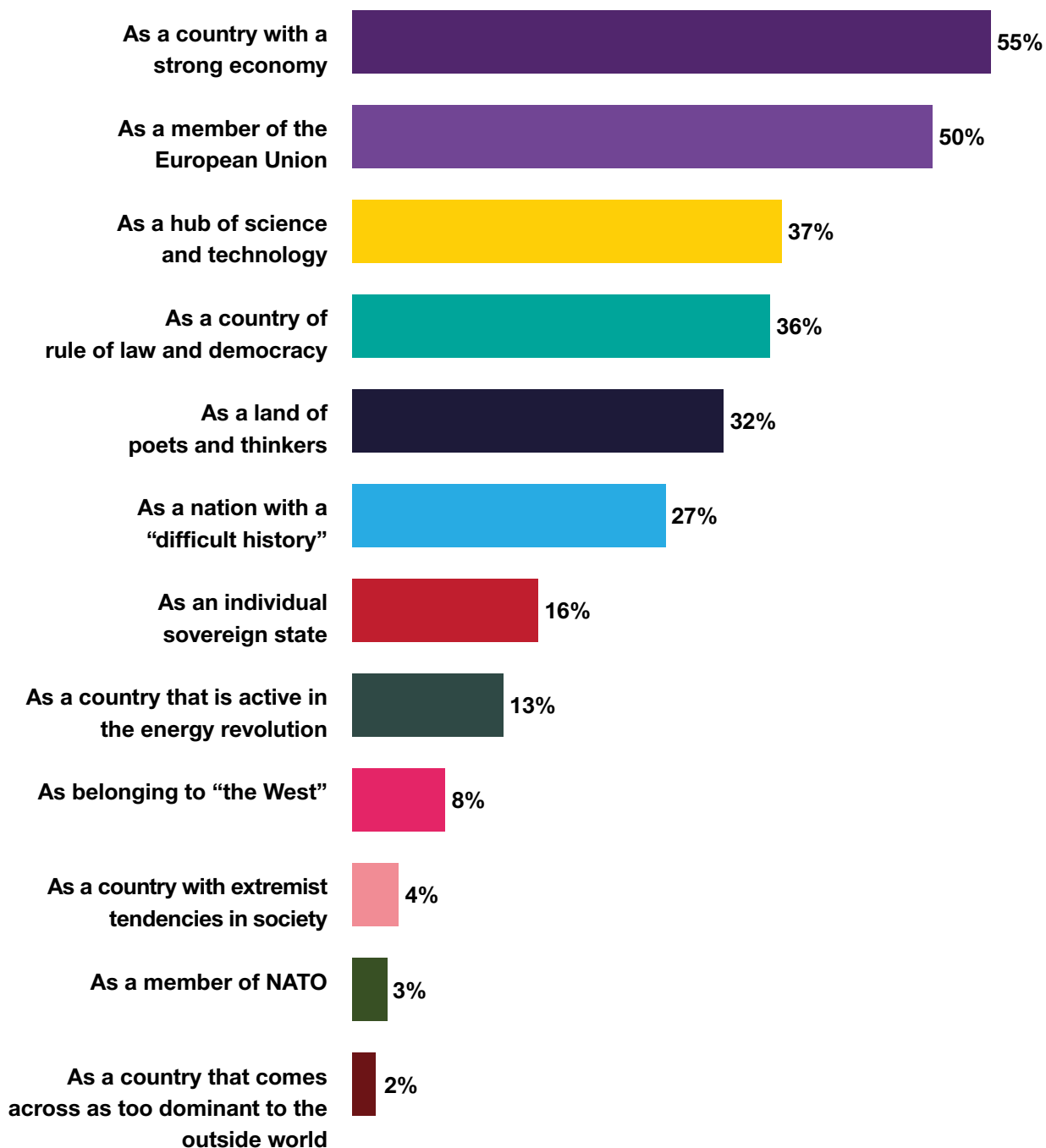
The German social legislation and the interaction between employer associations and trade unions is seen as a role model for many countries. One opinion from Asia for instance states, “We exchange ideas intensively with German experts, in particular regarding the dialogue between the social partners, because the system is balanced and sustainably structured.”

Often perceived as cumbersome, German bureaucracy has very positive connotations abroad because it creates clear structures, reliability and order. “I wish that some of our political decision-makers would go to Germany for a kind of training course or work placement. Then they would understand that a functional bureaucracy is important. They could learn that corruption leads to breakdown.”

The broadly positive image of Germany is strongly connected with the Chancellor’s leadership. “Mrs Merkel has done many good things, she is a wise person, she comes across as very pleasant, in some ways she is not typically German.” Especially her approachable nature and her pragmatic, self-aware and modest leadership style have been highlighted. “For me and many others, Angela Merkel is the strongest woman in the world. She is a role model, both for leaders and for normal people.” The leadership role of Chancellor Angela Merkel has earned great respect for Germany on a global scale. She is considered one of the central leader figures in the world.

Fig. 5

# How do you predominantly perceive Germany? (January 2021)



Respondents were allowed to select 1–3 relevant answers.



Germany is primarily perceived as a country with a strong economy and as a member of the EU, but not so much as a NATO state (< 3%).

# Economic power in the heart of Europe

Germany – not least because of its stable state budget – is viewed as a leading economic power in the European Union. Respondents still perceive “Made in Germany” as a representation of superior quality. “For as long as I can remember, people in my country have believed that things made in Germany are of high quality and excellent design.”

The economic leading position is primarily reserved for the automotive industry and pharmaceutical industry due to the technological quality of products. Interaction between science and society also fosters trust in the quality brands and creates a good basis for innovation and technological development, respondents think. “The German automotive sector is well respected, for its engineering achievements but also for professional training and qualification of employees.” Another notable feature of German commercial enterprises is that they have retained their environmental and social standards even in locations outside Germany.

**“The German economy is strong. If it was a person, it would be a well organised person with a large budget. It’s good that Germany has a plan, and I am happy about the well organised structure of the German economy.”**

For many development and threshold countries the German economy and industry also serves as a role model for their own progress. “We can learn how to develop a technology-based economy by looking at Germany.”

The eco-social market economy has also been highlighted. Business activities in Germany are not just oriented towards individual wealth, but also for national prosperity. The recent stronger orientation towards a Green Economy is indicative of the future. “I admire this strategic perspective in Germany!”

# Educational diversity and research strengths

Particularly in less industrialised countries, the German school system is perceived as one that encourages openness and analytical approaches to topics by students and manages not to have too much pressure and formalism. “In Germany the children benefit from so much more. In terms of sports, experiments, creativity and social thinking.”

Another positive aspect is that, in addition to academic training, there are other other attractive routes into a career. “Not everyone has to go to university if they don’t want to. There are alternative education opportunities.” The vocational training system is considered to be highly respected in German society, offering opportunities for a secure income and a decent life. Aspects of professional training that were highlighted include the fact that it’s a robust training and professional titles are protected.

In particular the combination of a high-quality apprenticeship and at the same low costs to students gives the German university system a huge advantage over competition, which Germany should exploit more. The low costs of education has made the German university system not just attractive to overseas students, but it also eases social mobility in society.

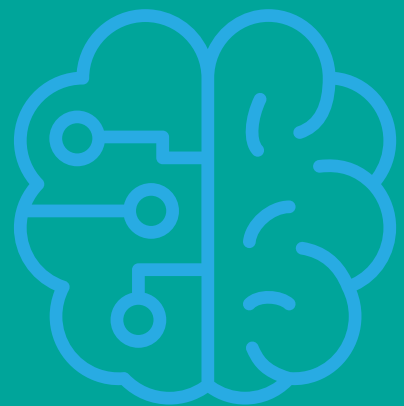
A further positive comment was that German universities cooperate with partners all over the world and many international (guest) researchers can be found there. Another strength of the German university environment mentioned in the survey is its decentralised structure – what they mean is the numerous smaller university towns that have an outstanding reputation. This provides the new generation of academics with more opportunities and influences those towns in a positive way. There are many options for degree courses and a broad spectrum of apprenticeships. At the same time Germany has taken an important step with the excellence initiative in university education.

A further strength of the German university system became apparent primarily from interviews with respondents from Africa: the independence and ability for critical reflection that is implicitly learned through studying in Germany. “Young people in Germany are very independent. Students are on a very individualist path, often left to their own devices. They are not treated like small children who have to have everything done for them. I first had to understand that this is also part of the German culture.”

The interviews also revealed respect for the strengths of German research institutions. From an external perspective this respect applies especially to their interdisciplinary character, capacity for innovation and practical orientation. Interdisciplinary research groups allowed more flexible research approaches. One particular strength is practically oriented research institutions like the Fraunhofer-Institutes, which transform theoretical approaches into practical, cost-effective solutions. It is often the case when science is linked with business that above-average resources become available as a result.

**“At my German university there was all the equipment you could wish for, and the best resources. If you do something with your hands, it goes into head more effectively! That’s why I was able to develop my engineering skills to a higher level quickly in Germany and I could publish plenty of my work as a result.”**

From outside, the funding of German research appears exemplary as well. “The German state attaches great importance to research and provides it with sufficient resources.” State but also private funding also lends more flexibility to the financing of research projects. “There is a wide variety of funding options to which researchers have access.”



# Rich cultural landscape

The charisma of German cultures extends far out into the world. The cultural diversity from Germany is perceived abroad in a variety of ways and through very different channels. The German classics in the fields of music, literature and art are still held in high esteem. “There are German literature authors for every generation in my country – they include Thomas Mann, Günther Grass and Heinrich Heine.” Heinrich Böll and Erich Maria Remarque are mentioned as well, who are allegedly read more abroad than they are in Germany.

Of late, German theatre and the fine arts have been influencing the way people experience culture from Germany abroad to a greater degree than German literature, we hear from the east. German film is not as popular on an international scale as film works from other countries. Regions such as America and Scandinavia are perceived more strongly in this respect.

**“Germany has provided great contributions in the fields of art, film and sports, which not only play a major role in German society, they also affect the international perception of Germany.”**

The broadcaster Deutsche Welle is described as a mega export of Germany. It provides a lot of insight into various aspects of culture and sport from Germany, a point made by African respondents, for example.

But Germany is also culturally present in relation to its European neighbours. With both old and new ideas. For example with electro-music from Berlin. Or with the many cultural events, the music scene and festivals. That’s something which connects young people especially with Germany.

Nevertheless, the stereotype of Bavarian culture (Oktoberfest, beer, sausage) stubbornly persists abroad as the core of German culture. “The Oktoberfest is one of the best festivals I’ve ever experienced in Germany. Here you can see what authentic German culture is: the beer, the clothes, the dancing. I had a great time.”

One thing is made clear in the many interviews – art and culture have a high status in Germany. That’s particularly obvious at the moment under the pandemic conditions: financial support for artists and institutions is ongoing and a digital programme has been created to facilitate the continuation of cultural services. Access to cultural services is open to a wide audience thanks to the public funding. “Germany is a role model in the way it funds culture.” And the status of cultural artists in Germany is very good as well. They feel as though they are something special. It isn’t like that elsewhere.

In English-speaking countries overseas, they say culture in Germany brings about a kind of stability. This is because democracy and tolerance are derived from the appreciation of culture, as people summon up understanding and empathy for others. In short: culture in Germany is a good facilitator.

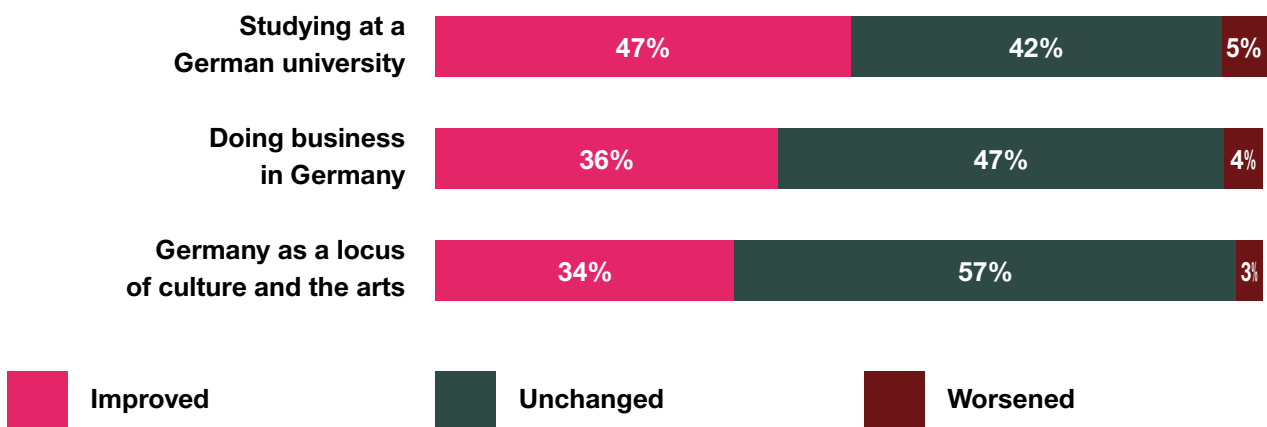
**“Culture in Germany is more than just civilisation. It’s the raised platform on which some are permitted to dream. Dreaming without justification remains just a dream. Art and culture however are the justification of dreaming in Germany. That’s why they play such an important role in the country.”**

The increasing diversity of the German cultural landscape is perceived as a particular strength and also symbolises Germany’s openness. The topics addressed in the cultural sphere are observed to have become more diverse in recent years, and reflect the changing society more strongly. Multiculturalism has been a reality in Germany for many years and this is evident in contemporary German literature, for example.

Fig. 6

## How has Germany’s image changed in your country over the last five years?

(January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.

**The image of Germany has improved somewhat for the reference group. Especially university studies in Germany appear attractive to many.**





# The German healthcare system: a coveted product

According to statements by those surveyed, Germany plays a pioneering role with regard to its healthcare system, in particular with regard to organisation and financial resources. In many places, this high quality of care is looked upon with great respect. "People in our country wish for medical care like Germany's. Then at least you'd have some hope of getting better if you became sick."

Above all the comprehensive coverage of the health insurance is highlighted, which guarantees good care from GP to hospital in this country, including care for the elderly and medical rehabilitation. But Germany is also viewed as a leading global force in medical research and preventive medicine. This entails a responsibility and therefore an even stronger commitment to cooperation with other countries is expected. "In my country we have always considered German medicine to be the best in Europe."

The good healthcare system in Germany is also reflected in the high life expectancy. Germany is wealthy and can invest money in the healthcare system accordingly. Also the Germans have a good awareness of their physical health and are careful about their diet, respondents thought.

# What we've achieved

Respect is due to Germany for the way they have come to terms with the National Socialist period. The open handling of the NS past is perceived from abroad as a very positive thing and has given Germany a great moral significance.

Academic analysis of individual aspects of this era has also been praised. "Research on forced labour, the 1930s, the history of National Socialist and Communist terror, concentration camp research – there are many topics that have been addressed effectively in the German academic environment." Overall the availability of information on the dark events of the past is high, which shows that Germans are particularly aware of their own history and engage politically with the awareness of their own historical guilt as well. "Nowhere have I learned more about the Second World War and the Holocaust than in German libraries."

**“Germany has learned from its history and is thus a moral authority that impresses with its self-aware and healthy unpretentiousness. That worked well under Merkel. This high moral standard must be maintained.”**

The Germans have learned their lessons from the past, "Germans never want to be perpetrators again. How do they prevent that? They meticulously observe international law by only entering into multilateral unions, and all international agreements have to be consensual. Military force and strength are scorned."

Another achievement of historical significance from a foreign perspective is the reunification of Germany. "Germany has managed to heal itself." The reunification was seen as a successful process both politically and socially, even though Germany is still paying a price for that. "The fall of the wall was an extraordinary transformation. So much so that I can't even get my head round it. What happened then was remarkable!" It is considered to be an incredible success that the Germans have largely overcome the rift between East and West. The fact that Chancellor Merkel comes from the East is remarkable too.

The acceptance of refugees in Germany in 2015 and 2016 is viewed internationally as a huge achievement. “The German government has acted in a humane way here and taken responsibility on a global scale.” Germany played a model role here, even though this decision involved some risks and not all European partner countries evaluated this as unconditionally positive. One thing everyone agrees on is that Chancellor Merkel behaved in a very humane way.

**“Many people in my country, myself included, have a very positive perception of Germany due to the way they handled the refugee crisis. The German government behaved very humanely and took responsibility on a global scale.”**



# Digression In the historical shadow of National Socialism

From outside, German history appears to be closely connected with the history of National Socialism. As the interviews show, this background continues to characterise the image of Germany and it becomes a subject of discussion abroad when specific circumstances give rise to this.

**“The problem remains: when Germany thinks of its future, its neighbours think of its past.”**

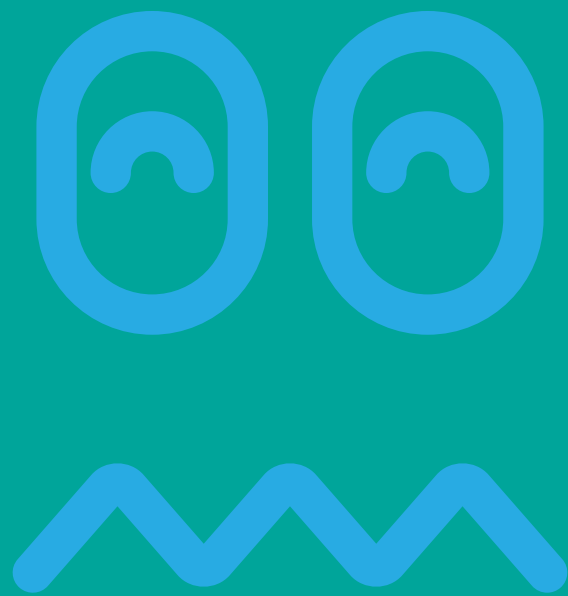
The perspective on Germany is divided, especially in the neighbouring European countries. Some of them highlight the guilt borne by the Germans in the past, then on the other hand they value the strong role of Germany within Europe and the country’s readiness to bear responsibility in Europe. People have plenty of respect for each other, but simply find it difficult to put aside the Second World War.

**“Germany is particularly aware of its own history and acts politically with an awareness of the historical guilt.”**

The image of the “evil German” still exists. The conservative media, in particular, still make references to the Second World War and the role of the Germans. German history has left scars in many countries, which is why it is still difficult to overcome the image of the Nazi past. “Germany, the enemy of the 20th century, now has a leading position in democracy. If you have never lived in Germany, it is perhaps more difficult to understand that Germany has overcome much of its history.”

A radical review of historical guilt has taken place, interviewees in diverse countries assured. Awareness of their own history continues to shape the behaviour of Germans to this day – a fact that is viewed ambivalently. For example they don’t want to have elites in Germany because of the National Socialist past. Germany’s global political weight is in fact greater than its reserved attitude would suggest. For European neighbours the fact that Germany has found it so difficult to disassociate from the USA where defence is concerned is also due to historical reasons.

But despite or maybe even because of the difficult history, the young generation should also concentrate on the future. The literature of the 21st century depicts a completely different image of Germany. It is no longer characterised by dealing with their own history. “Nowadays Germans [are] more willing to take on a leadership role.” Maybe a younger generation will find it easier to emerge from their own shadow – without forgetting the events of the past.



# 4. Reasons people shake their head. Inflexible. Critical. Hesitant.

## Unyielding – with very high standards

Admittedly in many places Germany – associated with concepts like order, organisation and planning – is still seen as a strong country. We are represented by slogans such as “Quality. Chocolate. Squared.” But square also represents a lack of spontaneity. People are less flexible, stubbornly holding onto things that are set down in a contract and governed by law. The idea of securing and the structured character of Germany stands in the way of visions.

Germans are overcautious and hypercritical. That sometimes holds back the development of potential. People are asking the question, “Don’t the Germans want to see what’s happening in the world?” They are protecting themselves from innovations from Asia with high standards and formal requirements, but that won’t work in the long term. To become more innovative itself, Germany needs to be more willing to take risks and experiment. Instead of aiming for strict perfectionism, respondents felt it would be better to advance iteratively, with a streamlined approach and in short sprints.

**“There are prejudices and stereotypes that the Germans still confirm. For instance, they are over the top with their absurd adherence to punctuality. It’s a drama if the train’s late! But what’s going to happen?**

**What effect does that have on society?**

**I can see a tendency towards something called pseudo-rituals. This structure entrenched in society allows no spontaneity, no poetry, no levity.”**

The critical spirit of the Germans is not just seen positively either. Being brought up to think independently and question critically is seen as a strength. On the other hand criticism is often exaggerated, leading to excessive demands on others and oneself, and getting in the way of pragmatic behaviour. “If you can’t find anyone to criticise, you criticise yourselves.”

Whether German bureaucracy is a product of this German precision and compliance, or the other way around, was not clear from any of the many interviews.

**“A joke about German bureaucracy is doing the rounds: why is Germany still coping so well with the coronavirus mutations? The mutations haven’t been able to enter Germany because of all the paperwork.”**

On the other hand there is no shortage of examples in which German bureaucracy is perceived as cumbersome: the slow start to the Covid-19 vaccination campaign, but also complicated visa processes were mentioned. The excessive bureaucracy hinders the rise of German universities to the global academic elite, as well as the acquisition of qualified professionals from abroad.





# Innovation stagnation and digital backlog

Germany is highly regarded for its strong industry, but this position is being increasingly weakened: the framework conditions are inflexible, there is a lack of digital infrastructure and innovative spirit. Germany seems saturated. Despite its solid education and research system, Germany runs the risk of missing out on developments in the world in the long run. “In which areas will Germany develop innovations in the next few years?”

The future is not always in the automotive industry, and even there they are playing catch-up in terms of electric car development. Ten years ago Germany was still considered an innovative country. But now there’s the impression that Germans have spent too long sitting on their laurels and are missing out on current development opportunities as a result. Unlike many Germans, other people have to fight. “They don’t get their university studies free of charge – and that’s what gives rise to innovation.”

Germany needs to strengthen the framework conditions for entrepreneurial innovation. Suggestions for this range from more stringent regulatory interventions, for example preventing sales such as KUKA Robotics, to creating an innovation-friendly funding set-up (for example, venture capital) or improving sandbox initiatives, such as the ones successfully implemented in London. A discrepancy is perceived between Germany’s high innovation ambitions on the one hand, and on the other the actual support and funding of innovation. It’s essential to overcome the dichotomy between tradition and innovation. It leads to a further unpleasant discovery that’s described on the basis of personal experience: “When we have virtual meetings with people from Germany, even events with high-level German politicians, we’ve really noticed how bad Germany’s internet infrastructure is. I find that shameful and disappointing for such a respected country.” Respondents also have a lack of understanding for the backlog that is being experienced in the field of digitalisation. Far too little is being invested in digital infrastructure.

In the Covid-19 pandemic the lack of digitalisation became very apparent particularly in schools, say respondents. There was no clear strategy, no straightforward guidelines for teachers and pupils. And in the finance sector it was established that, “Compared with my country Germany is lagging far behind where digital transactions are concerned.”

A more global observation is shared from an African perspective. “The people of the world have to decide between American or Chinese platforms today. There are no others.” Maybe that could be a nudge in the right direction?

But why is it that Germany is lagging behind its potential in terms of digitalisation? The digitalisation debate in Germany is more caught up in anxieties and fears relating to lack of data protection, tracking and surveillance. Individual data protection rights are then often prioritised over the collective common good, it is thought.

The lengthy discussion about 5G mobile phones is also being followed with bewilderment. “On the one hand they are supposed to be introducing it, on the other hand people are very concerned. I wonder if the worries are justified.”

The interviewees left no doubt that there is a considerable digitalisation backlog in Germany. Finally a fundamental question was asked, “How does Germany intend to make a living in future? That’s an important economic question that needs to be asked.”



# Between ambition and reality

Germany appears to attribute value to environmental protection. So the reactions to the fact that sustainability in the economy is not seen as a priority are all the more surprised and outraged. In many of the interviews it became clear that the green aspiration is increasingly being thrown into question. “The leading industry in Germany is neither innovative nor green enough.” The perception of Germany as a pioneer in themes relating to sustainable development is at stake. “Germany runs the risk of losing this image if German industry doesn’t become greener.”

**“Although environmental protection in Germany looks good on paper, at the same time there was the VW scandal and so much money is invested in road construction. That confuses me.”**

The global propagation of renewable energies also seems incredible if Germany itself is clinging onto energy from coal and importing nuclear power from France.

The fact that companies in Germany have to adhere to environmental standards is acknowledged, “But German firms often behave differently in other countries. Environmental protection plays less of a role in that case.” And on a day-to-day basis when visiting Germany what you see is not always exemplary either. “When I came to Germany I was surprised that there were so many people who don’t use litter bins, even though there are plenty. There’s rubbish in the street, on the train, it’s just everywhere! Chewing gum, cigarettes and masks are just thrown on the floor. I can’t understand it!”

The beautiful image of the correct German has also been tarnished by recent scandals, they say. As well as the Wirecard scandal, the emissions scandal made people angry. “The VW scandal was unbelievable and it revealed how German capitalism works. The automotive industry can get away with a lot. Control and transparency are lacking here.” The latest mask scandal is also causing irritation in politics. “It showed that there are a few sharks in the German system –Germany used to be considered immune from such things.”

# The hidden colonial history

The interviewees also credited the Germans with historical memory lapses. In this context Germany's colonial history is frequently hidden; both in Germany itself and also in many former European colonies. The reproach is growing loud, Germany is accused of not coming to terms with its colonial history sufficiently and solidarity with its former colonies has broken down. More reflection and commitment is expected of Germany in this respect.

**“Our grandparents suffered under the colonial era. What they build up back then was done under duress. It wasn't voluntary. The colonial era is our shared history. We can't change that now. But we can change the future.”**

Germany should maintain more contact to its former colonies and for instance build a network of alumni. That would pay dividends for Germany too in the long term. It's been noticed that there haven't been any visits from high-profile German politicians. “Where is Germany now that they've left us in the lurch like this?”

Critical words have also been expressed regarding the efforts so far to get a restitution policy underway. Strong opinions against the return of artefacts are still being heard in presentations, and this is justified by the fact that there are no suitable opportunities to display and preserve the artworks in Africa.

# Academic hurdles and hierarchies

German university education is superior in terms of quality, but it lacks a good public image. That might be a good summary of how it is perceived from abroad. Despite high quality teaching and research it's surprising that German universities don't perform better in international rankings. Anglo-American universities do a better job in their external communication. The lack of self-marketing and failure to foster a sense of belonging at German universities make Germany less attractive as a study location, especially for students aspiring to management roles.

In addition, effective weaknesses of the German university system are also highlighted. The academic system is said to be structured very hierarchically, giving individual professors too much influence. Rigid structures prevent the development of new ideas and initiatives.

International talents would like easier access to the German university system. As well as administrative hurdles, the language barrier has prevented more international students from studying in Germany. Many bachelor level university courses are only offered in German language.

Overall, while the requirements at universities are increasing, the funding however frequently lags behind. Especially in the English-speaking world, people are pointing out that the infrastructure at German universities is somewhat weak and underfunded, when you consider that it's intended to cater for all social strata.

Furthermore German professors are under enormous pressure to achieve research results. They appear to have too little time to tutor students. Facilitation of academic downtime should be prioritised again, in other words allowing more freedom to perform academic work, "Otherwise Germany will lose its intellectual strength and flair. The intellectual flair we used to see has morphed into a technocratic orientation. That's short-sighted."



# 5. What people are warning us about. Reserved. Dominant. Smug.

## The spectre of nationalism

German democracy is viewed as strong and stable, that was assured multiple times, and yet we need to remain vigilant! No other risk area has been discussed in so many guises as the danger to Germany's political and social system from populist and extremist tendencies. "An event equivalent to what happened on 6th January in the USA – the storm on the Capitol – could also happen in Germany," they warn us. At the same time people are worried about the rapid abandonment of an open social ideal that can be seen throughout broad swathes of German society.

In the past ten years, extremism has increased in Germany. "A certain aggressiveness can be felt, not just amongst politicians, but also in German society. When I'm standing at the train station I always keep back from the tracks because I feel safer that way."

Particularly against the backdrop of worldwide recognition of how Germany has come to terms with its history, the extremist tendencies irritate and unsettle the interviewees overseas. "I thought that Germany would be free of radical right-wing ideology because of its history. It hurts to see that it's still happening in Germany."

People are particularly worried about new manifestations. “Right-wing populism in Germany is now reaching intellectuals too. That’s something we never used to see.” The existence of right-wing parties and also institutional links that could be seen between radical right groups and certain sections of the police and army are viewed with horror. “It’s particularly worrying, especially as it evokes memories of Nazi rule. That needs to be addressed through political channels.” Attacks such as the one in Hanau were followed with shock. The feeling was that it is necessary to confront this issue and act decisively against it. Radicalisation and right-wing extremism in Germany will only continue to rise if people look the other way.

Causes for the growing extremist tendencies are thought to stem from an increasing social divide in Germany. Until recently Germany was less affected compared with other countries, but it’s now becoming clear that so far they have failed to integrate fringe groups and incorporate all parts of society.

People also think there is a widening rift between the will of the government and what the people want. “The official authorities in Germany are striving for cultural diversity, however there is a huge discrepancy between official aspirations and the actual circumstances.” There is also discussion as to whether opening the borders to asylum seekers in 2015 could have increased the tendencies towards right-wing ideology.

## **A feeling of being unwelcome**

Interviewees from diverse world regions describe that they have experienced less tolerance and friendliness in recent years while staying in Germany. “Today, some people in Germany feel that it’s okay to articulate their rejection more openly and say, ‘You have to get out!’”

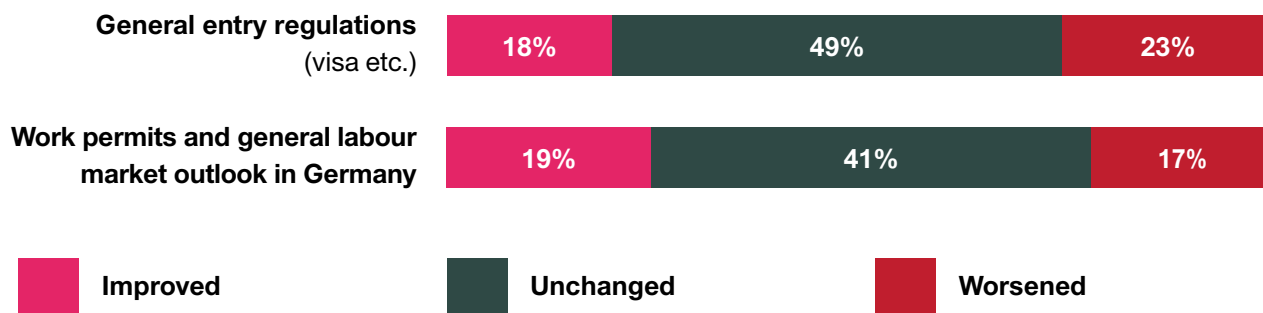
**“I never used to feel discriminated against in Germany. But in recent years, I felt it and that makes me incredibly sad. At some point I started to feel real fear in my own city – a diverse city! – even though nothing ever happened to me. What I miss in Germany at the moment is tolerance.”**



Fig. 7

# How has access to Germany from your country changed over the last five years?

(January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.



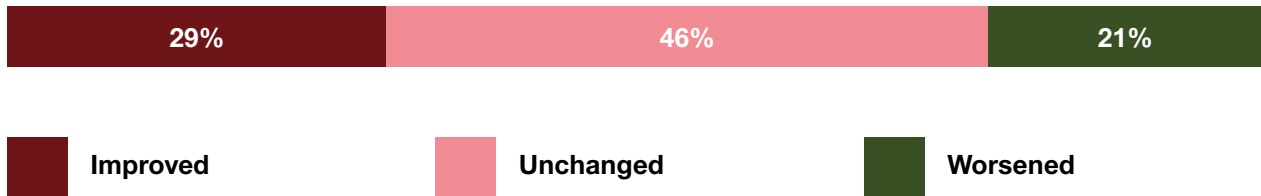
**The general entry conditions in recent times have worsened somewhat, according to survey respondents. Access to the job market has only marginally improved.**

In the meantime, people no longer have a feeling of security even when the police are in the vicinity. “I’ve noticed that the police check the identity of dark-skinned individuals. That makes me feel unsafe even if I never get checked, because I look like a Helga.” That happens in her country as well, but she expected something else in Germany.

**“In Berlin I felt that if I called the police they wouldn’t do anything. They wouldn’t protect me.”**

Fig. 8

## How has the image of Germany as a safe place changed in your country over the past five years? (January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.

**For more than 20 per cent of those surveyed, Germany's image as a safe place has worsened somewhat recently.**



You get the idea that right-wing radicalism is particularly strong in the cities where fewer foreign people live. "I'm always a bit anxious when I go there, especially as a foreign woman." Although there are self-imposed limitations, where people don't go to all areas of a city, but something has changed. "On paper all people are treated the same, but on a day-to-day basis you notice differences, for example increasing hostility towards Asian-looking people."

# Deep-rooted worries and social tension

Many of the respondents assume that the fact that scepticism towards migration has been growing in Germany in recent years can be attributed to deeper-rooted concerns and fears among Germans.

It is sometimes said in Germany that foreigners are taking jobs away from Germans. “Even a professor once said that to me. Yet I’m a foreigner myself, but I’m from an English-speaking nation, which in her eyes makes me a desired foreigner.”

Although Germany’s financial performance is very good at a national level, this does not necessarily apply at an individual level. This is frequently not seen (internationally). Some people in Germany are viewed as living in unstable circumstances, and the Covid-19 pandemic made the situation more acute in some population groups. “Negative effects can be seen in the middle-income strata, in the low-wage sector and among people without income, especially those without long-term employment contracts, such as in the arts and culture sector.” Germany needs to watch out that the social conflict caused by this is kept under control.

The fact that people treat immigrants with reservation is also related to the effects within the school system. “German schools can’t take such a uniform approach anymore because they are full of refugee children. Clearly they need to establish a language basis first before they can focus on content. The schools have a lot to do.”

# Inner conflict and new identity

It has been observed that Germany struggles with its identity. At a regional level various identities exist. “Germans are often very proud of the place in which they were born. Regional identity is very strong.” On the other hand a shared identity is harder to determine.

The Germans were very cautious about disclosing a German identity in the post-war era. “There was a dominant narrative according to which it was not okay to be proud of being German”. Reunification was then also experienced by many in East Germany as a loss of their own identity.

While from a moderate perspective the main focus is on regional or transregional – for instance European – identity concepts, politically right-wing parties have been dominating discussion with the vision of a German Leitkultur (guiding culture) that warrants preservation, as well as a lot of talk about reinforcing national identity, it is reported.

**“Germany struggles with its identity.  
That’s apparent for instance in discussions about home-grown Germans or a guiding culture.”**



It wasn't until the European World Football Championship in 2006 that things changed. "The German identity was reinvented and that was with a team that from a German perspective was not German. That was the best thing that could have happened to Germany since reunification," confirms a European neighbour.

**“Unnecessary and exaggerated pride puts a community in danger. Germany should be particularly vigilant here.”**

The growing desire to experience pride in Germany has been observed by several interviewees, "That's a good, healthy development, but it's also easy to manipulate." The thing is it also creates exclusion potential, which has to be handled very cautiously.

This exclusion potential is described through the phenomenon of authors with hyphenated identities. "I only realised through the example of Kazuo Ishiguro, a British author with Japanese origins, that it's a German phenomenon. In the UK it wouldn't occur to anyone not to refer to him as a British author. Why does the German literature sector resist referring to authors with a hyphenated identity simply as German authors?" These people grew up in Germany. They speak German, they wrote German novels. The demarcation lines that exist within Germany need to be overcome, so the warning goes. "There isn't just one Germany, there are many different kinds of Germany. The different groups of people frequently have a different perspective on the world." That needs to be perceived clearly, say respondents.

# Leadership: a work in progress

According to the survey respondents, one of the biggest challenges over the next few years will be to break down the emerging geopolitical power shifts peacefully. Germany is considered to play a key role here simply because of its economic strengths, but also where the goal is to achieve strategic autonomy for Europe in relation to the superpowers. “This process will mean a longer development of 20 to 25 years. A mixture of domestic and foreign policy as well as defence is required. In that context Germany will have to be convincingly European.”

From an American and European perspective, Germany is entitled to play a leading role in Europe. The important axis between France and Germany is referred to by European neighbours in particular.

The expectation is that Germany perceives its role to be partner-oriented, inclusive and coordinating. It must continue to support European integration, remain convincingly European and is not permitted to act unilaterally. At the same time it is feared that Germany could become too strong and might even harbour ideas of hegemony.

**“Germany stands for peace, but the Germans need to be more politically assertive – especially in Europe – and it’s always a fine line until other nations accuse them of hegemony.”**

Similar expectations are being voiced outside of Europe as well: “The role of Germany in the world is to communicate rather than to escalate – and to synchronise their own interests with those of the EU member states.” The only way forward is through partnership.

Respondents warn against Germany’s excessively dominant attitude: “We wish that this arrogance would be replaced by a more partnership-oriented approach. Germany should not aspire to play the most important role in every cooperation.”

# Resting on economic laurels

According to many of the interviewees, the image of Germany is perceived to be closely linked with the strength of the German economy. But interviewees all over the world warn against becoming complacent because

of this strength. There is scepticism with regard to innovativeness, in particular concerning the subject of digitalisation. Germany needs to reinforce innovative processes and control its bureaucracy.

It is still the case that many people favour German cars, for example, but: “There will come a time when they prefer to buy other cars – whether because of the price or for other reasons.”







# 6.

## **What people believe we are capable of.**

Solution-oriented.  
Trustworthy.  
Responsible.

### **Being solution-oriented fosters trust**

The interviewees highlighted Germany's solution-oriented approach as a global role model. It resulted in the effective functioning of many areas of society – examples were quoted in sectors including finance, infrastructure and the healthcare system. At the same time unrealistic expectations sometimes arose, along with a high demand on Germany's contribution to overcoming global challenges.

**“People sometimes imagine that problems disappear if  
Germany waves a magic wand.”**

Germany's solution orientation is initially tethered to observations during the Covid-19 pandemic. German involvement in the development of an effective vaccine has been frequently quoted, as has the well-equipped German healthcare system and in particular: images of the sick from other countries being treated in German hospitals.

The management of the Covid-19 pandemic by the German government was perceived by interviewees to be impressive and efficient. The aid packages were seen as strong and important, and the support provided by the German social system as exemplary. Finally the German media coverage was felt to be particularly transparent.

Furthermore Germany was described as solution-oriented and competent in diverse areas of society. As a result of its strong economy and practical research institutions, Germany is at the forefront in the fields of Industry 4.0 and production automation. The infrastructure and environmental awareness were also praised. “There are proper toilets, waste is sorted, the roads are well-managed (separate areas for cars, pedestrians, cyclists), many people buy organically cultivated food, and tap water is safe to drink.” The departure from nuclear power is also respected by many, as is the development of renewable energies where Germany is seen to be in a pioneering role.

In addition, praise is mentioned for the preventative medicine approach, the comprehensive health insurance coverage and care of the elderly. Respondents also rate the work-life balance enjoyed by Germans as good. “The Germans make up for their strong work ethic by closing the door at finishing time and enjoying the diverse cultural opportunities.”

This solution orientation is also said to characterise Germany in its international relations. The inclusive approach in global relations with culture and academia makes cooperation with Germany attractive for researchers and creative artists. Overall economic cooperation and development – “Germany has its own ministry for it” – was highlighted as positive: strong political anchoring is complemented by operative implementing organisations.

In contrast with other countries, Germany is viewed as being very practice-oriented, with a hands-on or down-to-earth mentality. Hence, in the context of development cooperation, other countries should learn from Germany’s technologies and their implementation.

## **Leading with values (credibly)**

It is felt that Germany's voice in the world has a high level of credibility, not least because of the solution-oriented approach practised in its own country. But Germany is also seen as a moral authority because of the responsible way they have dealt with their own past. "With its ideas and values, which have developed especially since the end of the Second World War, Germany can play a leading role for Europe and the world – it's an example that proves the opposite of the nationalist movements." Germany is also considered a leading and unifying voice from the international community on the world stage, setting great store by democratic principles.

So, Germany should embrace its leadership role and must not hide away. It should criticise and praise other countries when necessary – and this must include Russia and America. In particular China's handling of human rights or the Hong Kong question must not be ignored.

**“Germany is unbiased and sensible in many issues. That's worth a lot in international politics to neutralise the superpowers in crazy times.”**

Angela Merkel has demonstrated many times that diplomacy, values and truth play a major role in the dialogue with international partners. People would welcome the idea of Germany remaining as a moral power in the European Union and internationally in this capacity. "Germany stands for the western values of liberal democracies. That's of central interest especially in the Middle East. However Germany should step up its efforts in this respect."

In an even greater context, people think Germany is heading the right way to handle the issues facing humanity in the future. "World resources are limited and all people aspire to have a good life. In the world community, Germany is very responsible. Germany knows that the limited resources – water, air and others – can only be managed through international cooperation."

# Taking international responsibility

Germany is called upon to overcome global challenges. It should take more responsibility. That's the unanimous view of the very diverse interviewees. Germany could play a role as a mediator between the superpowers, as a credible and trustworthy advisor, and as a mouthpiece for Europe's common long-term development.

With regard to the development of a strategic autonomy in Europe, Germany is considered to be in a position to establish balance within Europe and adopt a convincingly European stance so that all the countries in Europe are included. At the same time, Germany needs to uphold the transatlantic link.

To meet these challenges, Germany needs to realign its current foreign policy – which is strongly characterised by economic interests. This process is envisaged to be a long-term development, taking up to 25 years.

**“For a long time Germany acted independently on an international level, then it became increasingly dependent on the USA. I would like to see more sovereignty in German politics.”**

In terms of foreign policy, Germany's involvement in the power struggles between China and the USA, as well as an emerging Russia, will be very significant in future. It has been observed that Germany is acting a bit more autonomously, but is still very much influenced by the USA. Apparently there are different perceptions of the potential dangers associated with Russia and China. In any case Germany should rethink the reserved interpretation of its international role, take a clearer stance in world politics, and also define, communicate and accordingly defend its own interests. It is understood that compromises are necessary in order firstly to satisfy their own society and guarantee political stability, and secondly to choose the path that is ethically correct.

# Adopting a clearer position

A certain impatience can be felt, especially among interviewees from countries with close partnership ties to Germany. “It seems that Germany doesn’t want to act as a political power in the world, but the subject needs to be addressed. When, where, how and why is Germany needed in the world? Germany should face this challenge.” People are confident that Germany could assume even greater responsibility on the world stage and also represent its national interests in terms of foreign policy.

Interviewees have warned that clearer positioning is needed in regard to Germany’s own interests as well. “Germany doesn’t give opinions on many subjects... for instance, Germany has not stated that it wants more competition on the energy market with Nord Stream 2.” One European neighbour thinks the reason for the lack of clarity lies elsewhere: “In the policy towards authoritarian states, German policy follows the economy. Germany needs to find a means of intervening more decisively here.”

They think Germany should take a clearer stance in the Middle East conflict too. “Germany is not taking a clear position in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Yet it could play a very useful role by taking a clear position. Instead Germany is absent. That’s disappointing.”

## **„Germany should play a stronger role in foreign policy security issues, especially because it is a very rich country.“**

Indeed, various interviewees have expressed the view that they believe Germany could take on a stronger role in security policy. Germany could play more of a military role, both within Europe and in the transatlantic alliance, and stop being such a freeloader. For Europe, cooperation in terms of security is felt to be just as important as economic and political cooperation. However at the moment, Germany’s behaviour is still seen as follows: “Germany is simply incapable of detaching itself from the USA where defence is concerned. That’s probably because of its history.”

# Standing up for a stronger Europe

In summary of the interview statements, Germany's strong and important role in international politics results from its embeddedness in the European Union. Because of Germany's strength within the European Union, people have confidence that Germany is capable of a leading role in European politics.

The high level of international recognition and positive perception of Germany is not only based on economic and political factors, but has been strongly influenced by Merkel's personality in recent years. "Germany needs to hold Europe together. Who will be able to continue this after Merkel?" At the same time the expectation is formulated that Germany needs to contribute even more potential to reinforce the strategic autonomy of Europe and overcome Europe's challenges.

The many images used to describe Germany's position within Europe are telling: in East Asia they refer to the "leading nation in Europe" and the "engine of the European economy". The description "mother of the EU" is used in the Middle East, in South America they talk about the "lifeblood of the EU", while the attribution "strongest player in the EU project" comes from Africa. Yet at the same time negative connotations of a strong Germany "which is using the European Union to achieve victory where it failed with the Third Reich" brings existing fears to the surface.

**"You can only understand Germany if you understand Europe – and you can only understand Europe if you understand Germany's role in Europe."**

Respondents are confident that Germany will keep control of extremism in Europe. "Germany should do more to counter authoritarian politics in Europe. Otherwise there will be developments on the fringes of the European Union that will also impact Germany." On the other hand doubts are expressed as to whether Germany is really in a position to reinforce Europe any further. "I hope that German policy can overcome its helplessness so that we do not lose sight of Europe as an idea."

Another set of topics to be addressed is the energy revolution and the challenges associated with climate change. "In Germany the energy revolution seems to be working despite discussions. At a European level not so much has happened. We need green cooperation to ensure that we can implement a departure from nuclear power in Europe."

Many of the interviews revolve around the Eurozone and the national budgets of individual member states, some of which are heavily in debt. By comparison, the German economy is said to be robust and has a low national deficit. For this reason Germany needs to take more responsibility with regard to the European Union and the Eurozone. In Asia they believe that's both an opportunity and a challenge. A challenge because many European countries would not be able to comply with the principles of a strictly disciplined state budget in the same way as Germany. An opportunity because Germany would also have to relax its former position somewhat and create new room to manoeuvre.

The discussion of social justice against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic is also seen as presenting a huge challenge for Europe. The German social system is seen as a role model for many countries of the world. They have confidence that Germany will contribute significantly to this issue as well.

After all, the pandemic has created borders in Europe again, say participants. "I hope that Germany will endorse allowing freedom to travel as before." Once Chancellor Merkel has gone, the new leadership needs to develop a clear "Roadmap for Europe" to overcome all these challenges.



**Climate change**  
57%

**Unemployment and  
social tensions**  
49%

**Refugees and  
migration**  
46%

**Growing inequality  
between countries**  
45%

**Digitalisation  
and changes  
in the workplace**  
43%

**Democracy crisis**  
42%

**Shifting geopolitical  
power relations**  
37%

**Nationalism**  
36%

**Meeting basic needs  
(e.g. health, nutrition,  
education)**  
28%

**Protectionism /  
deterioration of  
trade relations**  
19%

**National debt**  
18%

**Finite resources**  
15%

**Need for reform of  
multilateral organisations**  
14%

**Adverse economic outlook  
for companies**  
14%

**Relocation/return of  
manufacturing** 7%



Fig. 9

## Which of the following challenges will most heavily impact international cooperation over the next few years?

(January 2021)

Respondents were allowed to select up to 5 relevant answers.



The greatest challenges faced by international cooperation in the next few years are considered to be in the areas of climate change (57%), unemployment and social tensions (49%), as well as asylum and migration (46%).

# Digression

## Speaking German, thinking German

Speaking German is considered by interviewees not only to be important in order to understand German society and actively participate in it. In fact they see it as the admission ticket that allows you to establish meaningful contact to Germany and the German people in the first place: it gives you access to Germany's soul.

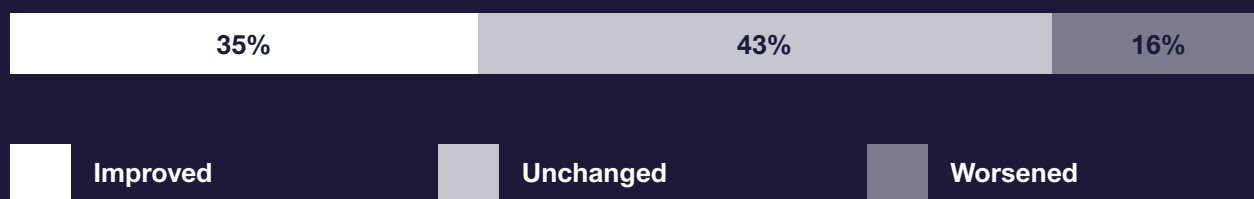
**“The simplest way to get Germans on your side is to speak their language. Speaking German is very important to establish a connection with German people.”**

Conversely a lack of German language skills would result in an individual remaining isolated. You would be perceived as a foreigner and it would be difficult to establish a social and professional network. A good knowledge of the German language is crucial for participating in life, especially outside of Berlin. “If I don't speak German, I'm perceived as a foreigner and I don't have the same opportunities.”

Even though it is possible to get by with English in Germany, it often isn't enough, especially in a scientific environment. The German language is seen as a barrier that makes Germany less attractive to professionals from overseas. At the same time they appreciate people learning German and: “The Germans are very patient when you're learning their language.”

Fig. 10

**How has the image of German as a foreign language changed in your country over the past five years?** (January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.



Although around one third of respondents identify an image improvement, the image of German as a foreign language has recently become worse according to the opinion from no fewer than 16 per cent.

As well as enabling access to German society, another reason for learning German is to have access to specialist literature as well as study and career opportunities. “When you speak German, it’s associated with the hope of better career opportunities.” German is closely linked with Germany, and conversely this means that knowing German is of little use without access to Germany. “Although it is possible to learn German in many countries, for many people migrating to Germany is not an option. This begs the question as to why they need to know German at all.”

However, learning German is viewed as a challenge. “German is a difficult language, which puts a lot of people off learning it.” For many people, German sounds hard, and the large number of dialects is an additional problem. “In the Plattdeutsch and Bavarian dialects there are completely different words and the grammar is different too. In Australia, the USA or England there might be accents that highlight a regional difference, but the differences between them are not so extreme.”

**“German is a language of commands, for example dog training or in a military environment. Because of this, many people find the language hard, especially because it is only the sound they know.”**

Many interviewees called for German language learning to be made easier, with one way to achieve this being to have more German teachers. “People need human contact to learn a language, and that should be made possible for all groups.” In addition to projects, long-term structures would help to convey an image of Germany more effectively in schools. “Offering German as a subject in schools was a very wise step. That’s part of the reason why German is the second foreign language learned in my country after English.” One example of a very good way to encourage German language learning is quoted as being the PASCH-Initiative (German teaching at partner schools abroad).

**“Learning German takes a lot of time and energy. The learning process should not be interrupted. It’s easier if you speak actively, watch films in German and listen to German music.”**



# 7.

## What people hope.

### Open.

### Cooperative.

### Future-oriented.

## Open country, open hearts

The interviewees see Germany as an economic power centre in Europe, which will continue to attract migrants in future as well. And that's not just because of the economic strength, it's also because global migration flows have increased in search of more humane living conditions and in view of noticeable effects of climate change.

Migration is viewed as a reality now and in the future, which is why Germany needs to carry on learning how to treat immigrants. In this respect the experiences of other countries are very valuable for Germany. "The Germans need to learn – with policies in place to support this – to cope with their anxieties and be open, to value migration. They can learn a lot from other countries here."

The desire for an open Germany that embraces diversity is great all over the world. At the same time the fear that Germany could shut itself off has become clear from the interviews. "Diversity is no longer such a core element of life, and positive experiences of diversity in the recent past are not processed adequately."

"Germany should welcome other cultures and diversity with open arms and stop fearing a loss of identity – getting to know new cultures is always enriching! There's nothing to fear."

The special challenge of living together involves facilitating diversity and reinforcing mutual understanding. Germany could benefit very much from the skills and knowledge brought in by migrants, but a language communication basis must be established and moral concepts must be negotiated.

For successful integration it is crucial to learn German – and at the same time that’s one of the greatest challenges. “Isolated groups are created when people don’t have sufficient command of the language and therefore only seek out their own people.”

Respondents felt that values such as the rule of law, democracy and human rights as the basis of society need to be accepted and practised by all social groups. If applicable the understanding of these values should be taught in introductory courses. At the same time the diversity of cultures and ideologies is a value that should be encouraged. “Stop forcing people to become European.”

It is especially important to reinforce contacts between people who have already been living in Germany for a long time and new immigrants, in order to avoid segregation. In this respect it is recommended that children are encouraged to mix with a variety of people even at primary school age, to help develop empathy and tolerance.

**“I never really arrived in Germany. One reason was the language, which is not easy to learn. The other thing was my temporary residence permit, which resulted in unpleasant experiences with the immigration authority and border police.”**

# Fair and diverse cooperation in external relations

Germany is seen as a popular partner for joint projects and many interviewees state that they would like to establish cooperation. They stress that close contact should be maintained in future as well, both within Europe and beyond.

In Europe, Germany is seen as having a special responsibility in environmental issues and the strategic development of Europe. Outside Europe, many countries also view Germany as a close partner with whom they share values such as lawfulness, democracy, human rights and free trade.

The cooperation of civil societies is also emphasised in addition to the political and institutional levels of cooperation. “The real achievement resulting from my country’s relationships with Germany was the cooperation between non-governmental organisations that rapidly developed. No other European country sent that many organisations (NGOs, foundations, et cetera) to my country and provided such help.”

It is seen as essential to bring people together and facilitate international meetings in order to reinforce democratic values and shape the world of tomorrow. In particular exchanges for young people and schools should be encouraged. “Young people grow up with the impressions of this exchange and remember it for the rest of their lives.”

Germany has established connections on a global scale thanks to cultural cooperation. “It needs to realise that these cultural relations are influential.” The particular strength in this context is considered the open and responsible treatment of the guest cultures. For example themes are organised locally with creative artists in a very partner-focused approach. “Ostensibly the content is not very closely oriented to Germany, but at a background level Germany is positioned above. Projects like this, especially in the field of politics, should be encouraged even more.” At the same time other interviewees stress that the most interesting projects often take pace in a non-institutional context.

The inclusive approach of the German cultural relations can also be seen in Germany itself. “In Berlin, I was at a Mozart opera where subtitles were offered – I felt well catered for and was not merely a visitor, I was part of society.”

For structuring the cultural relations in future, the interviewees hope that the open, culturally sensitive approach continues. The management is very significant in the way they are organised and how they are perceived from outside. It is seen as important to establish dialogue and use ideas for mutual inspiration. “I expect more innovation, more willingness to experiment in Germany’s international cultural cooperation.”

While some people particularly value cooperative cultural work, others are of the opinion that Germany could become more proactive and committed to ensuring that German films have a wider audience in a number of countries, for instance. Other countries would do significantly more lobbying in this situation.

Fig. 11

## How attractive does Germany seem to you for cultural and artistic inspiration?

(January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.

**Over 60 per cent of the reference group considers Germany to be very attractive in the context of being inspired by art and culture.**



**“We should not so much be looking at thesis and antithesis, but at what connects us. Especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to create links between material things and spiritual concepts, with the goal of achieving a better life for people.”**



The interviewees also hope for an active partner-oriented cooperation in economic relations. People expect Germany in particular to adopt a balanced position, having weighed up economic and value-based aspects, and positive examples are also given: “in the context of international cooperation, Germany considers it important for both sides to benefit. Germany won’t be party to every deal, for instance where exploitation of resources are involved, because it will be guided by principles.”

The desire to ramp up economic cooperation, especially with German companies at local level, was expressed in many countries. “Germany as an economic power is very strong, and this is needed by my country.” At the same time it has been observed that cooperation with German companies has taken a downturn in some cases. “Germany’s presence in my country seems to be declining at the moment, things seem a little sluggish.”

The exchange opportunities and grants for students, as well as university cooperation arrangements are highly valued by respondents. In Germany there has been a long and good tradition of university cooperation and academic collaboration projects with other countries have been actively encouraged. That’s why one of the strengths of the German university system is quoted as the presence of many international (guest) scholars.

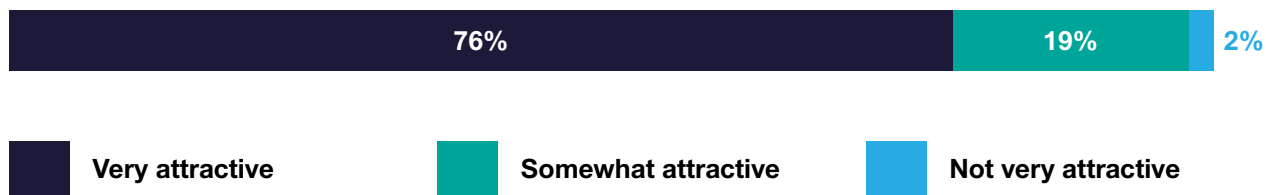
But Germany is also considered very attractive by students from many countries. “My university cooperates with various different universities in Germany. We are able to send around 50 students a year to Germany. We receive on average 10,000 applications a year for this scheme. This shows that Germany is still an extremely interesting place for the young generation to study.”

The popularity of Germany as a study location and the desire to participate in exchange programmes and scholarship schemes can also be seen from the following quote: “I think that many young people in particular have got it into their heads that Germany’s the place they want to go. There are numerous grants, but not everyone gets one.”

Fig. 12

# How attractive does Germany seem to you for university studies and research?

(January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.

**Over three-quarters of the reference group consider Germany to be a very attractive place to study and research.**



First and foremost, Germany is seen as taking a key leadership role in development cooperation, something that's highly valued by many countries. Not only would investment and advice help to deal with challenges better, joint research is also indispensable, according to the survey.

Everyone stands to learn from each other as a result of cooperative projects. The field-oriented approach followed by Germany in development cooperation is particularly valued in many places. "This approach can be recognised from the large number of regional offices and German houses. I was impressed at how many experts I encountered, and how practically oriented the work is here."

And finally interviewees from Asia to Africa emphasised how important it is to shape partnerships of this nature on an equal footing with a focus on fair cooperation. "We have confidence in Germany's efforts and achievements in international cooperation. This gives my country hope." But this cooperation is also questioned critically: "We always say that we want to work on an equal footing, but can we? Do we have the same conditions? First I had to learn to work on an equal footing with the Germans. An example: they take holiday, but we're always available."

**"In cooperation, Germans are considered to be open and polite, you can give them honest feedback – they make progress with the cooperation. You can count on them."**

Fig. 13

## How attractive does Germany seem to you in terms of international cooperation? (January 2021)



If the column does not add up to 100 per cent, this reflects survey participants who did not provide answers.



**Over three-quarters of the reference group consider Germany to be a very attractive place to study and research.**

One reference needs to be highlighted clearly because a similar response was expressed in Asia as well as Africa: Germany should not direct cooperative efforts solely at official and institutional contacts in the partner countries. Contacts to informal areas and outside of the mainstream, as well as to smaller institutions on a micro level are felt to be equally important and enriching. Programmes should address the private and non-governmental sectors as much as possible.

**“Others go straight to high potentials and provide direct support, with the aim of creating successful companies and therefore supporting jobs too. The Germans take the long route via cooperation with the government.”**

# Solutions for the digital world of tomorrow

From the many experience reports submitted by the respondents it became clear that people hope and expect Germany to catch up quickly in the field of digitalisation – from the broadband infrastructure and e-government services to standardised quality-assured applications in the education sector.

The opinion reflected in particular by critical observers in other industrial nations was that up to now there has been much talk about the necessity of digitalisation, but in Germany not enough has been done. “What lessons could both countries learn from the last twelve months? From the difficulties of digitalisation? From the digital divide? We’ve been discussing a digital agenda for years, but nothing has happened. How can the digital infrastructure be developed quickly and sustainably now?”

The conditions needed for a digital economy to function exist in Germany. For instance there is an address system that people take for granted and that works very well, making online deliveries of goods or groceries possible. “In my country there are many informal settlements that have no clear address.”

Admittedly some aspects of digitalisation are being approached more slowly due to the data protection debate, but in this critical view a strength is also seen. Partners can be advised and supported in monitoring practices and data protection. Respondents feel that Germany is thinking of the long term with regard to digitalisation. “In Germany the online banking apps aren’t as effective as they are in my country. But the reason for that is that the Germans are more concerned about personal rights. In the long term that’s a good thing.”

## **“Innovation, new technologies and the philosophy behind it make Germany a valuable partner for developing countries.”**

In Industry 4.0 – the combination of industrial production and digitalisation – respondents in a variety of countries from Tunisia to Japan hope that Germany will play a leading role. The solid research system and the high social awareness of the risks of innovation could be applied especially constructively in this context. “At the moment Germany is being overtaken by Asia as a leading industrial site. But we see a huge potential in the combination of industry and digitalisation. Germany could become the 4.0 superpower here.”

A positive side effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is the digitalisation of culture products. “The fact that German theatres have gone online as a reaction to the pandemic was fantastic. People in my country watched the plays too, even those who don’t understand German.” Particularly in the digital environment people are hoping for more cooperation with Germany in the future. “The digital world offers many opportunities for further forms of cultural interaction.”

At the same time people want Germany to contribute to funding projects such as Africa’s digital mobility. “African creative artists should be given access to Europe’s digital marketplace and find a new audience there. They could sell online tickets there and find a financial income.”

Finally Germany should utilise digital media better to convey its ethics and values more specifically.



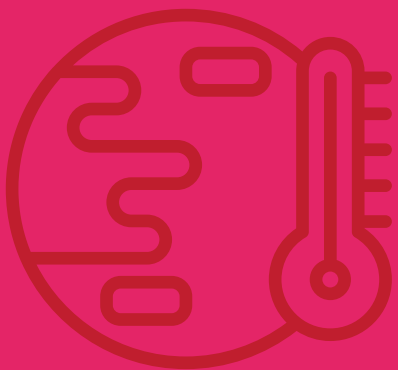
# The momentum for an ecological revolution

Most of those questioned expect Germany to play a pioneering role in environmental protection, climate politics and sustainability aspects. Particularly because Germany is economically strong, with a long tradition in caring for the environment and an experienced Green party, the expectations are high. “Today everyone is talking about it, but in Germany they are already trying to align the economy strategically to solve ecological problems.”

**“Germany should set climate goals as a framework to shape foreign policy and build international relations.”**

In terms of energy supply, people expect Germany to phase out nuclear power and encourage everyone to turn to renewable energy sources, particularly at a European level. “In Europe we don’t know exactly who wants what. A difficult process. It’s likely to take a while for Germany to demonstrate that exporting wind turbines is a business.”

A more intense cooperation and transfer of technology is something people are also hoping to see in the fields of water and waste management. “Germany is known for its outstanding hydro technology and water management, from which other nations must learn urgently, including less developed countries, so that the population can be supplied with drinking water.”



# Continuity and new starts in politics

The imminent departure of the Chancellor in autumn 2021 is being followed with interest by the interviewees. It's a long time now since Germany has been in a situation where politics are fundamentally realigning, and people are asking: "What kind of Germany will we be dealing with after the Bundestag elections?"

**"Maybe Germany should skip a political generation. As in many other countries, politics have currently become too much of an insider's game."**

The stability of the past years under Angela Merkel as chancellor has benefitted the political landscape beyond Germany. "Angela Merkel was criticised a lot, but she worked well. Any successor following her will look bad to start with."

Many of the interviewees are hoping for a continuity of German politics with regard to democratic values. "My recommendation is to continue the positive developments of the past." Sensitivity to climate policy and other global themes are just as necessary as an awareness of the fact that Germany plays an outstanding role in the political and economic interaction between European countries.

Other interviewees put stronger emphasis on this new start: today, after a year of the pandemic, you can say that people are more ready for political change. The opportunity to change things is now, because Germany can't return to the state it was in before the pandemic.

**“There is a huge question mark over Angela Merkel’s successor and it’s a challenging political moment for Germany.”**

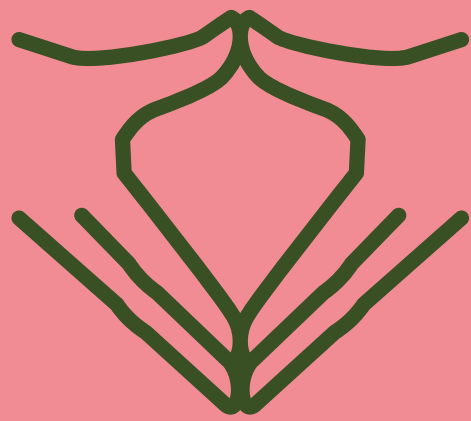
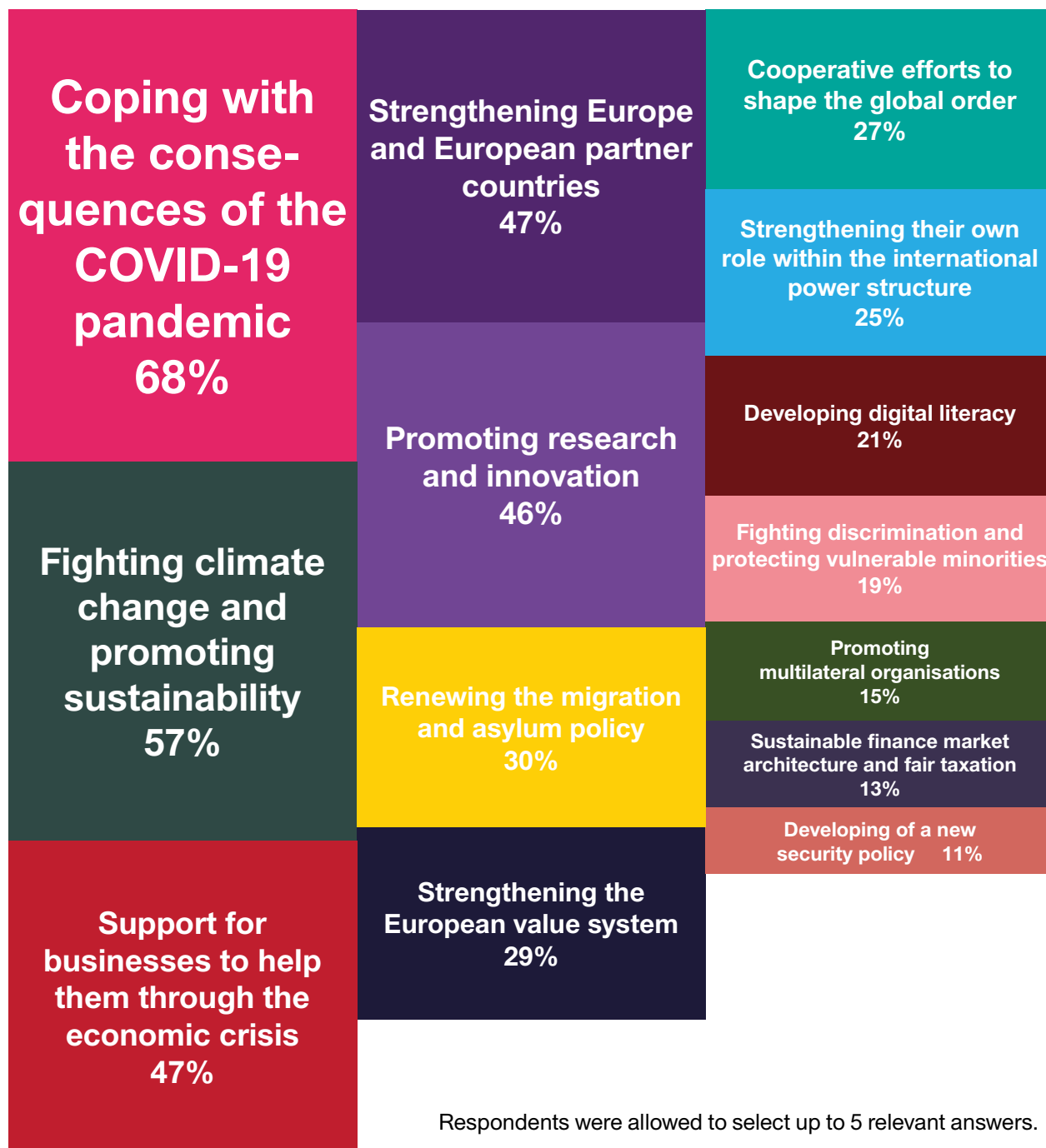




Fig. 14

# What focuses in German politics can you identify at the moment? (January 2021)



As well as the pandemic-related political focuses, the survey group also particularly noticed fighting climate change (57%), reinforcing Europe (47%) and encouraging research and innovation (46%).





# Reflection: the images of others as a navigation aid in times of radical change

The frequently cited aphorism of Winston Churchill, that you should never let a good crisis go to waste, hits the nail on the head: survive the crisis and emerge strengthened on the other side – that’s what the world expects of Germany in times of crisis. Not for our country’s sake, but because the world projects hopes, fears, desires and worries onto Germany like virtually no other country.

But what fuels these high expectations, frequently voiced fears and (often puzzling) attributions? And why do the images of Germany rear their heads especially high in the crisis?

When the “true” character really shines out in a crisis – who actually gets to describe it, to pinpoint it? Character qualities are usually attributions from an external perspective; traits allocated and evaluated by a third party. This applies equally to interpersonal and intersocietal relationships; we are constantly balancing stereotypes from the past (interpretation aids) with our current perception. The upshot of this is an expectation for the future – a never-ending loop of presumed (re)cognition, subjectively loaded perception and (actual) reality. Even if this results in scarcely any degree of objectivity, perceptions are after all always subjective truths. This optical illusion generates strong metaphors that are ideal for juxtaposing self-images with external perceptions to evaluate how future-proof they are.

In this context, (presumed) contradictions are especially helpful, because they clearly highlight – sometimes painfully, other times amusingly – how thin the line is between well-meaning self-interest and wilfulness, familiarity and concern, expectation and disappointment, virtue and folly.

If we question these images of Germany that have spent a long time maturing in other countries, the mirror they are holding up to us reflects less of a Snow White and more of a Dorian Gray: while our own self-image scarcely seems to age, the outside view changes far faster in view of the dynamic nature of events – the picture starts to crack and is painted over again, re-interpreted in the light of the changes.

# The bigger the crisis, the higher the expectations of Germany

You could almost call it a rule of thumb: the bigger the crisis, the more diverse and greater the expectations other countries have of us. There has barely been a crisis in the last century and a half that Germany has not been trusted to solve: the finance and euro crisis (2007-2012) – Germany's economic power and fiscal compass was sure to fix it; the Ukraine crisis (2014/15) – German diplomacy can be used to build a bridge between the superpowers; the European migration and asylum crisis in 2015/16 – “Wir schaffen das” (we can do it); the crisis of multilateralism 2016-2020 – Germany and France are the torch bearers; the Covid-19 pandemic 2020/21 – they came up with the first Covid-19 vaccine at the speed of light.

The fact that Germany's image has been put to the test and broken so many times by such expectations, hopes and associated fears has been shown particularly impressively by the study presented here. Almost every strength attributed to us seems to feature a weakness on its flipside – whether that's in reference to the pandemic management in our federally organised community, where the decentralised responsibility and overlapping roles have so far been praised and copied as a role model for robust crisis policy. Or whether it applies to our once so admired bureaucratic efficiency and our frequently referenced can-do approach that's now obviously past its best bearing in mind the stop-start vaccination campaign.

But first impressions are deceptive – this balance of expectations does not constitute proof that Germany's image is changing. Quite the opposite: these insecurities actually reflect the expectation of continuity and reliability – especially in a crisis. Whenever our country falls short of these attributions and expectations, whenever we break out of our attributed stereotypes, the world pricks up its ears – and so the optical illusion persists.

A few examples: when the German government adopted a firm policy of austerity during the finance and euro crisis, the ugly side of the German character seemed to show itself again – quibbling, implacable, self-serving; pictures of Angela Merkel with a Hitler moustache were doing the rounds abroad. There it was again: the historical resentment, the easily activated stereotype presumed to serve as a signpost and certainty. Only to be surprised a few years later when Germany showed humanitarian generosity during what was termed a refugee crisis and established a culture of welcome sustained by large parts of the population that other countries would never have thought possible. There it was again: the image of the good German who has learned from their history, a post-modern state seeking balance and selflessly serving the interests of the community; pictures of moving welcome gestures are doing the rounds abroad.

This paradox is a recurring theme running through the present study: efficiency vs. foot-dragging (can-do mentality = pandemic and vaccine management); beacon function vs. Pharisaism (climate protection = fossil fuel phase-out); predictability vs. solo efforts (multilateral balance of interests = North Stream II); “too big for Europe, too small for the world” (economic giant = defence dwarf).

The fact that these ambivalences are attributed to us with such clarity, openness and sometimes so emotionally is in itself evidence of the huge confidence in Germany shown by the rest of the world – and for the hopes and expectations of a country that in the view of observers has to take responsibility in the world because of its economic import, its (ecological) footprint, its historical role and geographic position. It’s only clear when you consider a long-term perspective that these contradictions follow a pattern: even if it sometimes takes a while for Germany to find its inner compass and take responsibility, it is then indeed willing and able to go the long haul (EU and euro stability, climate protection, security policy).

# Not a specification – and yet ...

But what's the purpose of such a multifaceted mosaic that in many respects remains nothing more than a snapshot? To what extent can this study provide orientation, possibly even be prescriptive? And for whom?

Firstly: the results of a study about people's perceptions should not be misunderstood as a political specification. Any perception study is coloured by the time and circumstances in which it was conceived. But because this study has been published in the middle of one of the world's biggest crises since the end of the Second World, it definitely does have a seismograph function – it reveals the tectonic shifts that are all too easy for the casual observer to overlook. And so in a nutshell – and in the interests of getting to the point – there are some lessons and conclusions to draw from this survey:

**While the institutions of liberal world order were increasingly subject to pressure over the past few years, Germany was perceived by many to be solid as a rock. Whether – from a French perspective – as an initiator of the “Alliance for Multilateralism” or as a force of mediation between the superpowers: Germany is a symbol and role model for multilateral balances of interest – a perception that is directly associated with the personality and leadership style of Angela Merkel. The fact that there is no alternative to this multilateral fundamental conviction for Germany though – in other words it is partly a case of well-meaning self-interest – should be added to an analytical overall image.**

**Admittedly the critical analysis of German society with its past is acknowledged, plus the fact that Germany has emerged from this atonement stronger and more mature; however there is increasing impatience that Germany is hiding behind a categorical pacifism that is strikingly historical in origin – even though the security context and threat level have radically changed. From the survey it is all too clear that Germany is increasingly finding itself in a moral dilemma with regard to security policy.**

**In a situation where the tectonic plates of world politics are shifting, the challenging middle ground occupied by Germany can be identified. At the same time the world is watching very attentively to see where Germany's emancipation from the USA will lead (North Stream II, cracks in the German-American friendship during the Trump era, NATO). On the other hand they are following with interest the continued progression of Germany's relationship with Russia and China – all the more critical the more the world splits up into spheres of interest and the old international order, or historical alliance groups need to be adapted to new requirements.**

**There is universal interest in the end of the Merkel era, and everyone has plenty to say on the subject. Yet the core message lies more in what isn't said. You see, if Angela Merkel's leadership style is associated above all with dependability, reliability, level-headedness, pragmatism (whilst adhering to principles) and finally stamina, then there is certainly a concerned subtext to be heard between the lines of the interviewees' responses – the fact that things could become different after the leadership change in Berlin. That isn't just significant with regard to Germany's central (economic and political) role in Europe and as an international crisis agent, it's also crucial to the inner stability of our country. In the opinion of the respondents, as well as the watershed of the Covid-19 pandemic with all its socio-economic consequences, there is additionally increasing uncertainty about Germany's role in the world – a prospect that causes more worry than curiosity to the observers.**

**The right-wing populist blip in our country is also being observed with much concern – a political lowering that not only takes the welcome culture of 2015/16 ad absurdum, but also raises questions about reliability with regard to foreign policy. But the concern of our interviewees is more directed at the social climate in Germany than at the consequences of these developments to foreign policy. The fact that people with a migration background – even foreign visitors and tourists – are walking through our city streets not feeling safe and experiencing noticeable rejection is not only an indication of the xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism that was thought to have been overcome long since. At the same time these developments show that the fear of social decline has reached Germany as well, and the much-cited “Deutsche Angst” is being reflected in the political climate of our country. It's specifically because Germany is one of the world's main immigration countries that this subject is attracting so much attention.**



**With something of an inner distance, our interviewees reflect observations that although they may seem familiar to us (if somewhat unpalatable), do acquire a whole different meaning when viewed from outside. That's especially relevant to the subject of digitalisation. The open mistrust with which broad swathes of German society face this technology revolution is something our interviewees view with a total lack of understanding. By this point, our observers feel, this hostility to technology has morphed into a fully-fledged innovation crisis that is endangering our "Made in Germany" prosperity model – and therefore in the medium term the social stability in Germany.**

**More even than we do ourselves, our observers believe in the positive effect of German "soft power". Whether through research, science, art, literature or film – Germany is not fully exploiting this potential by a long way. And the intercultural exchange, particularly in times of general uncertainty, does not just perform a bridging function in this context; it's also an instrument of public diplomacy to consolidate and where necessary restructure confidence in times of growing mistrust and increasing tensions in the world.**

**And finally: something that really irritates our interviewees is the cracks in the squeaky clean image of German economy and politics: the VW scandal, the Wirecard fraud, the mask affairs. And because none of these incidents are trivial offences, the scandals shake the credibility of a whole society – figurative equity that our participants felt should not be offered up unless absolutely necessary.**

# **Initiative and responsibility**

**If you try to sum all this up into a neat formula, maybe it can be expressed like this: Germany is granted a right of initiative in many issues of world politics. However it's plain to see that the expectation of taking responsibility increases at the same time – whether that means in a financial sense, in terms of presenting a clear edge to autocratic systems or system competition – or in regard to willingness to take last-resort decisions.**

**It's obvious that in Germany it is necessary to correlate such expectations in relation to their vital interests, performance and actual political scope. But something else is clear – that these categories need to be redefined and evaluated on a regular basis.**

**And that's the true value of this perception study of Germany's role in the world during the Covid-19 pandemic. It's a navigation aid through the unknown territories of an increasingly complex world – a world in which the position of Germany needs to be redefined and adjusted all the time. Maybe this guidance is all the more valuable because the study has been published at a point when our country's domestic politics are in a phase of upheaval as well.**



# Mixed methods design of the study

The study “Außenblick – International perspectives on Germany in times of the Covid-19 pandemic” addresses the question of how Germany is seen in the world using an unusual approach – by analysing “Fremdbilder”: the way others see us.

We’d like to find out what images people have of us (perceptions and realities) when they view Germany from the outside.

These images of others firstly contain information about those images of Germany that we as Germans are already familiar with. It also includes – like the Johari Window in interpersonal psychology – information about blind spots, in other words new and unknown perspectives on Germany, or perspectives with alternative connotations. These German images in some cases feature reinforcing contributions, but other opinions can also be irritating, and both are equally valid as external feedback to help us calibrate our self-images of Germany.

To collect these images, we decided on a two-tier, mixed method approach – a combination of a structured online survey and semi-narrative interviews, with a definite bias towards the interview series, which used a qualitative, explorative format.

# Structured online survey

For the online survey at least 30 suitable participants were identified in each of 37 selected countries. Selection of both countries and individuals was conducted according to specific criteria (see below). A total of 1,255 people were invited to the survey, of whom 622 (50 per cent) completed the survey in full. Having the survey at the start serves several purposes: first of all it was a way of identifying topical thematic focuses and therefore defining fields of observation for the interview series. Furthermore specific questions could be asked – for instance relating to the Covid-19 pandemic – without them dominating the interviews too much. The online survey also helped to select the countries for the interviews. And finally we were able to apply a differentiated description to survey participants thanks to the preselection process.

# Semi-narrative in-depth interviews

For the qualitative interview series the focus was on 24 countries, with two interviews conducted for each country (48 interviews altogether). The in-depth interviews each took 60 to 90 minutes and were organised into an open section and a semi-structured section. While the open part comprised largely open-ended questions, in other words they were asked about freely associated perceptions of Germany, in the second part, participants were asked to choose around four to six broad topics from twelve.

**Education**

**Science/academia**

**Innovation**

**Political organisation**

**International cooperation**

**Security**

**Culture(s)**

**Identity(ies)**

**Digitalisation**

**Finance/economics**

**Health**

**Environment**

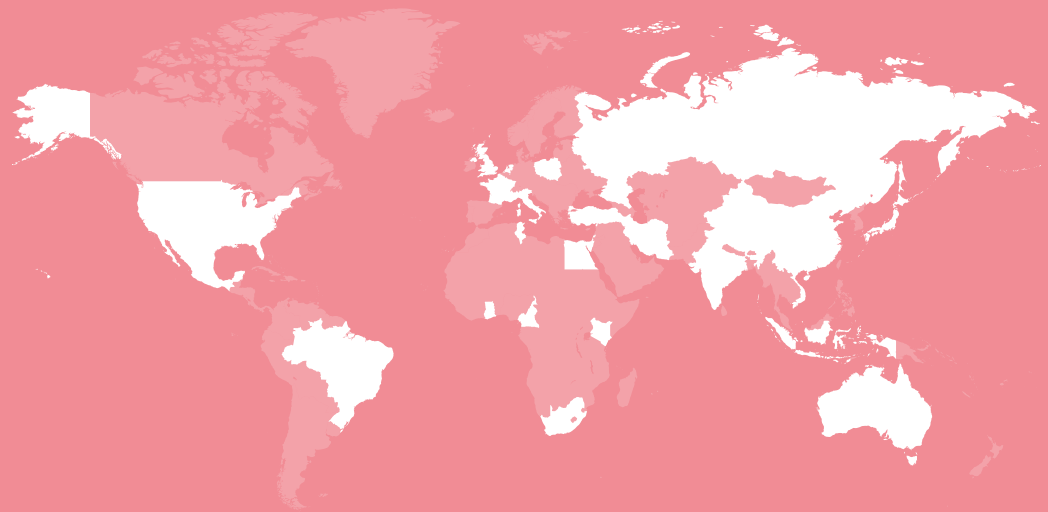
To support this, a few more general guiding questions were used to give structure to the discussion. The combination of these two approaches made it possible to explore and validate any responses from the online survey that were unclear or lacked detail in more depth in the interviews.

Fig. 15

# Mixed methods design



**37 countries**  
**622 participants**



**24 countries**  
**48 interviews**

# Criteria-led selection of countries

The challenge of this study was to pick an optimum range of locations so that respondents would be able to describe Germany from a variety of perspectives. That's why a well-considered selection of countries and participants was especially important.

First of all, perspectives from countries that are relevant for Germany and at the same time as different as possible should be taken into account. Criteria for country selection were historical relations and/or economic involvement with Germany, as well as the importance of the countries for bilateral and multilateral processes with Germany and the project partner organisations – DAAD, GIZ and Goethe-Institut. Beyond that the significance of each country in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic also played a role.

While it was possible for us to include 37 countries in the online survey (see annex), 24 of those countries were selected for the interview series.





# Experts with experience relevant to Germany

The unique feature of this study is the particular selection of experts questioned. They are experts from abroad with experience relevant to Germany.

To be in a position to judge Germany from outside, they need to have had intensive private or professional contact over a long period. That's exactly why we were looking for experts with experience relevant to Germany – people with the capacity to observe and therefore express an opinion about Germany. The 1,255 people identified come from 37 countries of the world, and particular care was taken to ensure a heterogeneous composition comprising different professions and age groups, as well as an approximately balanced gender spread (the exact composition of the group is detailed in the annex).

This makes the survey group more than the experts of the study. They represent a reference group, whose perceptions can be used for a comparison with the image of Germany we have ourselves.

**“If I’m in Germany I view everything critically, I discuss, question and don’t notice what really works well and is positive. If I’m abroad looking towards Germany, suddenly it all looks very different, positive and sometimes almost like paradise on Earth. It’s vital to keep bringing this inner conflict back into balance again.”**

This hand-picked selection of people came about through personal recommendations from the worldwide network of the three partner organisations. The network of the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK) also supported the process.

Further details on their personal relationship to Germany, time spent in Germany and the information sources used were provided by our reference group:



Fig. 16

## Relationship to Germany

What is the nature of your connection to Germany and the Germans? (January 2021)



Multiple answers were possible.

How much time have you spent in Germany? (January 2021)



Multiple answers were possible.

## What are your current sources of information about Germany? (January 2021)

54% Local media in my own country

39% Deutsche Welle

50% German broadcasting media, daily newspapers  
and journals (radio, TV, printed media, online)

76% German contacts / German organisations

59% Social media

48% Other internet sources

27% Other information sources

0% I don't have a source of information on Germany

Multiple answers were possible.



The individual descriptions offered in response to the question about personal relationship to Germany and the Germans, which was answered in a free text field, were at least equally informative. 237 people out of 602 participants, which is about 40 per cent, answered in German as well. 116 people (around 19%) revealed in their descriptions that they view Germany as their second home.

The personal experiences of Germany reflect the diversity of the people selected. The men and women who provided information about their image of Germany included history professors as well as German scholars and journalists, a holder of the Federal Cross of Merit, postgraduates, German teachers, artists and a member of a Bavarian shooting club, as well as descendants of Holocaust victims.

And one thing has become clear from the personal stories, some of which are poignant: the people we spoke to are overwhelmingly well-wishers in regard to their feelings towards Germany. That has a definite advantage. If a friend criticises aspects of our personality, attitudes or behaviours, then they rarely do it without good reason, and it's usually very constructive. The criticism provided, the warnings given, serve to inspire in-depth reflection.

## **Objectivised data evaluation processes**

In order to ensure maximum process objectivity and transparency, the interviews were each conducted by two people. A total of 17 people led the 48 interviews operating in rotation. Care was taken that the panel included a good mix of interviewers with regard to age, gender and organisation membership, in order to counteract a potential bias. The data documentation took the form of core statements, which were coded according to content-related observation areas that had been defined in advance.

All the data collected was then read by members of the project team and coding information was identified for emerging phenomena. The project team sorted the core statements in the data collection into around 70 categories corresponding to the phenomena identified, using an online coding tool for databases. Multiple allocations of one statement to different codes was explicitly permitted.

They worked in small groups in a two-day evaluation workshop to create outlines for each category on the basis of around 70 identified phenomena. These brief descriptions, each around one page long, are created around a particularly representative core statement as a starting point, with seven further statements to underpin the phenomenon or highlight subordinate aspects. The small groups brought all these outlines before a full meeting to present and discuss them, and check content.



# Annex

## List of figures

<b>Figure 1</b>	Criteria-led selection of countries and survey participants	12
<b>Figure 2</b>	Image change during the COVID-19 pandemic	17
<b>Figure 3</b>	Perception of international responsibility	19
<b>Figure 4</b>	Estimated duration of dealing with COVID-19	28
<b>Figure 5</b>	Perception of Germany	33
<b>Figure 6</b>	Image change over the past five years	38
<b>Figure 7</b>	Changed access conditions over the past five years	55
<b>Figure 8</b>	Image of Germany as a safe place	56
<b>Figure 9</b>	Challenges in the next few years for international cooperation	70
<b>Figure 10</b>	Image of German as a foreign language	72
<b>Figure 11</b>	Inspiration from art and culture	78
<b>Figure 12</b>	A country in which to study and research	80
<b>Figure 13</b>	Partner for international cooperation	81
<b>Figure 14</b>	Focuses in German politics	87
<b>Figure 15</b>	Mixed methods design	101
<b>Figure 16</b>	Relationship to Germany	104

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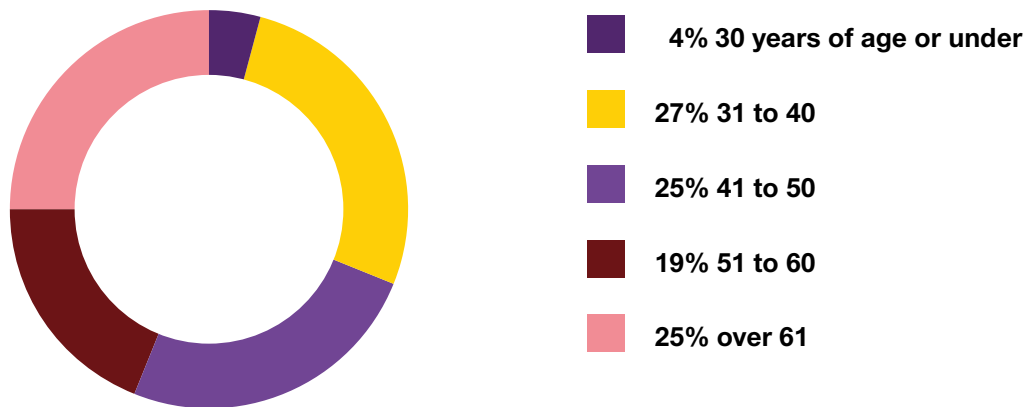
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# Statistical data for the 48 interviewees in the qualitative interview series

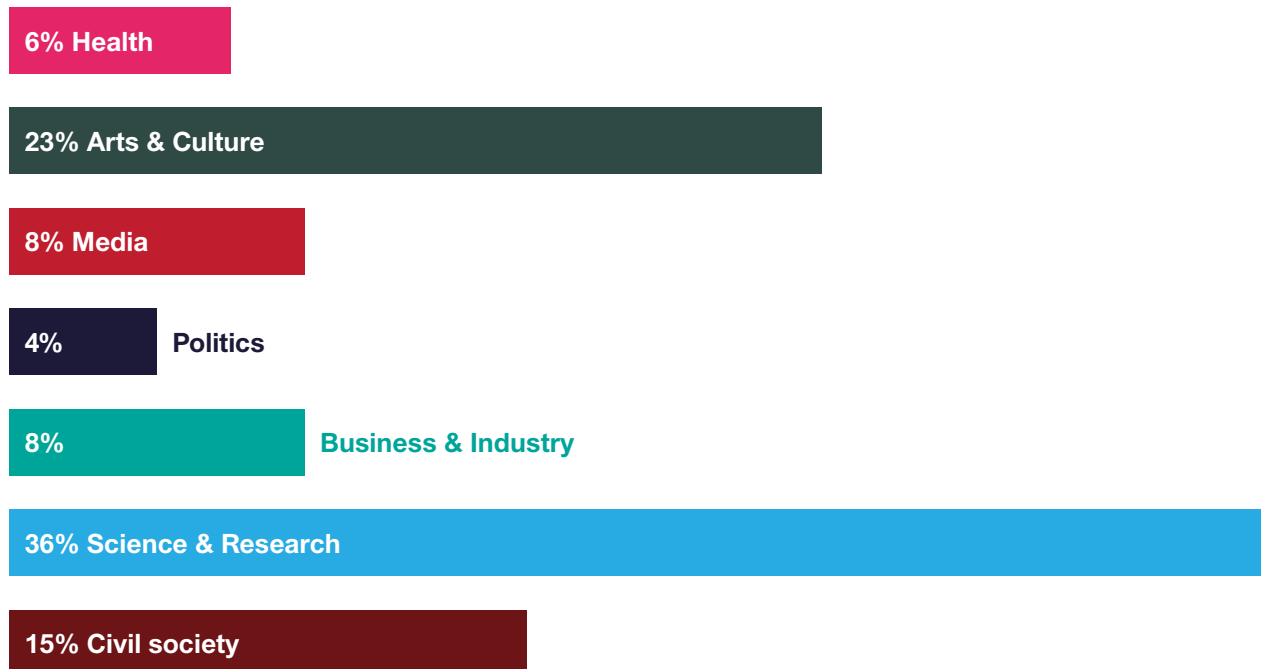
## Breakdown by gender



## Breakdown by age group



## Breakdown by social area

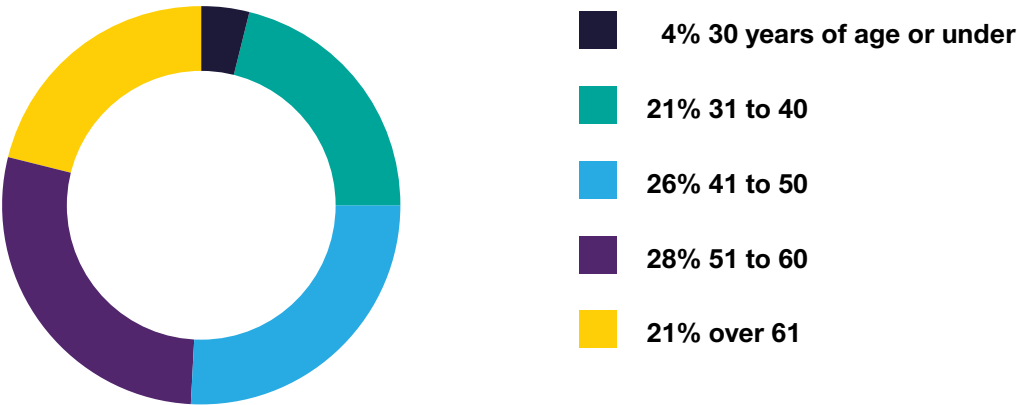


# Statistical data for the 622 participants in the quantitative online survey

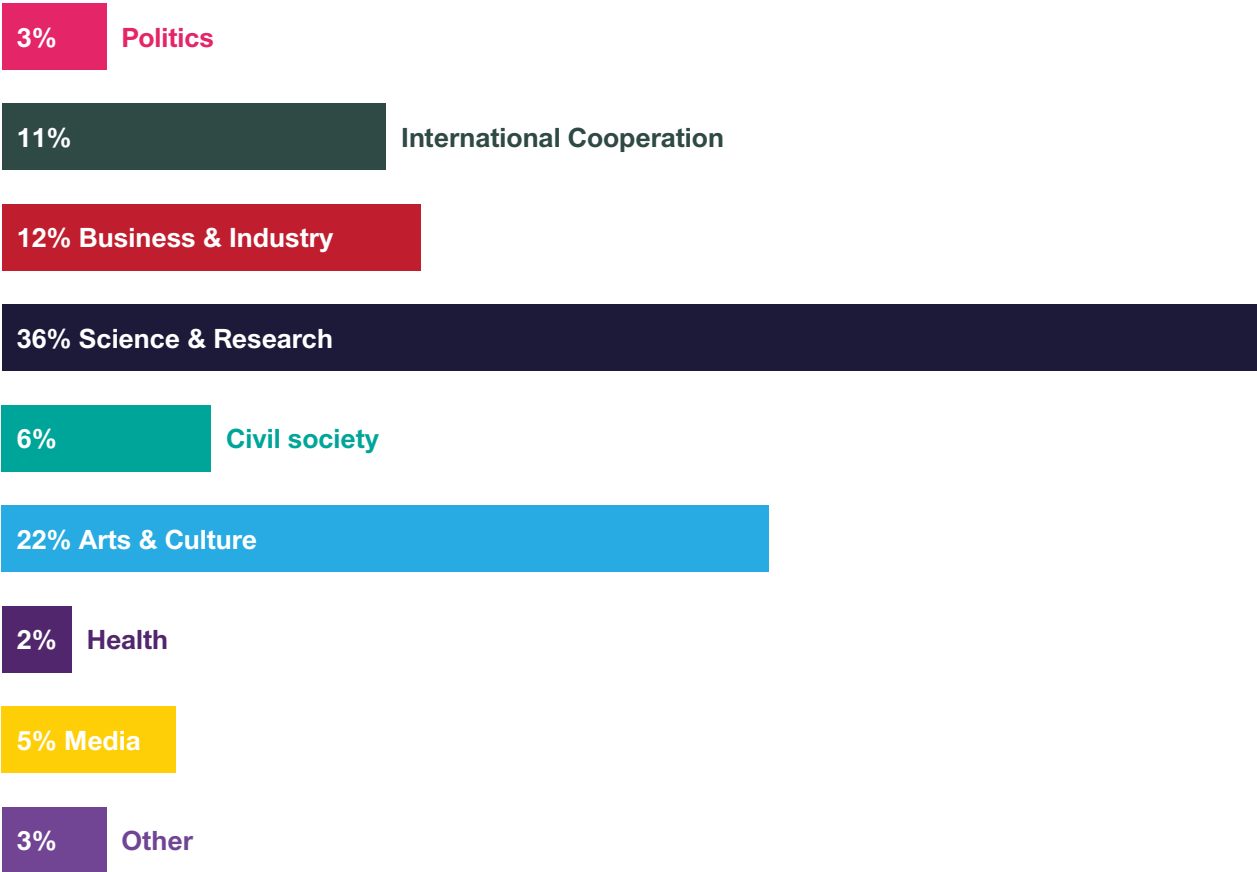
## Breakdown by gender



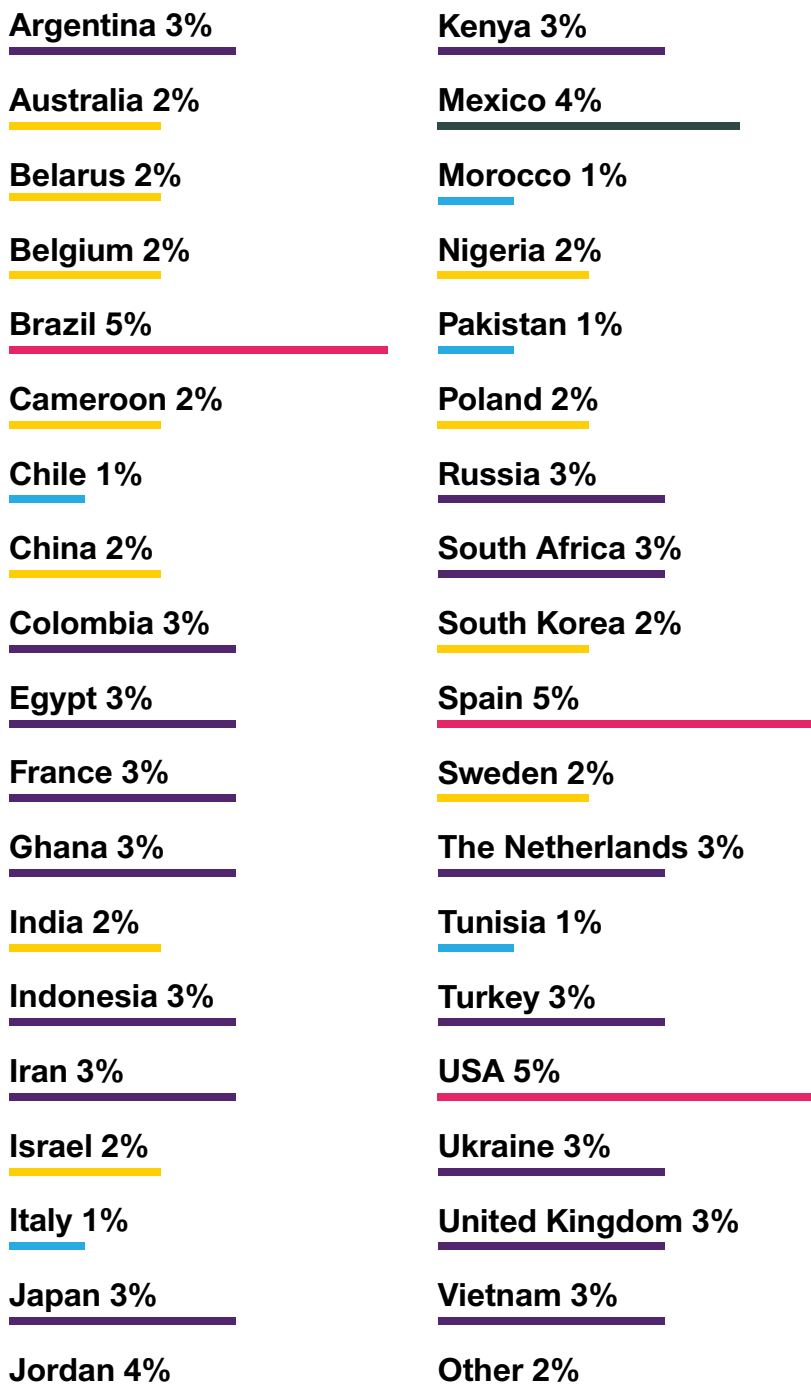
## Breakdown by age group



## Breakdown by social area



## Breakdown by countries





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The DAAD is the world's largest funding organisation for the international exchange of students and researchers. The most important responsibilities of the DAAD include granting scholarships, promoting the internationalisation activities of German universities and research organisations, strengthening German cultural and language studies abroad and helping developing countries establish productive higher education institutions. The DAAD is also the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation.



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As the Federal Republic of Germany's internationally active cultural institute, the Goethe-Institut promotes access to the German language, encourages international cultural cooperation and provides up-to-date information about Germany. The Goethe-Institut offers language, culture and education programmes to support the development of non-governmental structures and foster international discourse on key themes relevant to an increasingly globalised society. With 158 institutes in 98 countries, as well as cooperative arrangements with partner establishments, the Goethe-Institut global network offers around 1,100 points of contact around the world.

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## **Außenblick**

International perspectives  
on Germany in times of the  
Covid-19 pandemic

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