

HOW TO PREVENT GERMANY FROM BECOMING EUROSCEPTIC

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SUMMARY

- Fifteen months into the covid-19 pandemic, there has been a major collapse in Germans' trust in the European Union.
- German politicians need to react to the growing pressure on the consensus in German society for an outward-looking and pro-EU Germany.
- At the same time, Germany's traditional ways of thinking are increasingly unsuited to addressing new foreign policy challenges.
- To find a viable model for its economic, security, and EU policy, the next federal government needs to address some of the unsettling issues that its predecessors have often ignored.
- The key to building support for an outward-looking and pro-EU Germany lies, paradoxically, in anchoring German policy in a narrower focus on the national interest.
- To engage more confidently with a world that is changing, outward-looking Germans need to shape a progressive new national identity before it is defined by the forces of isolation and exclusion.
- If Germany does not shift its course, it will end up with an inadequate foreign policy that lacks public support.
- Policymakers need to better explain how Berlin uses the EU to increase its influence and thereby enhance the wealth, prosperity, and security of the German public.

Introduction

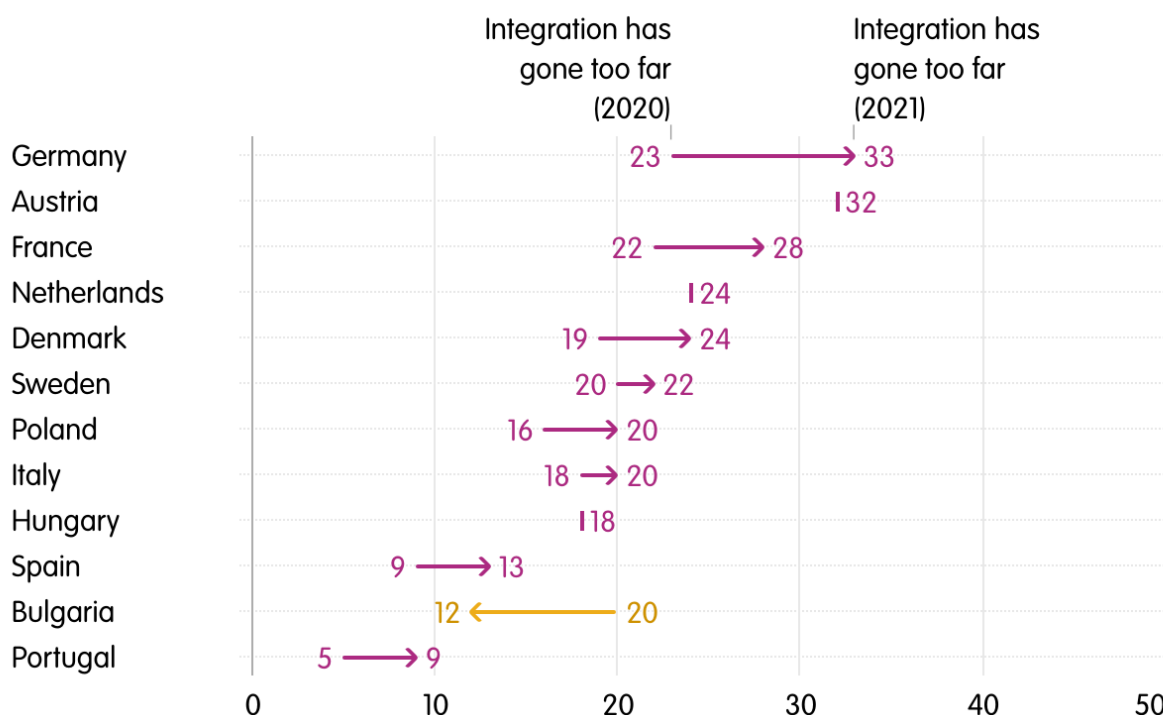
Germany may be on the cusp of a nationalist turn. The external building blocks of its outward-looking economy and foreign policy are under assault. As China and America increasingly use the global economy to compete with each other, the return of great power competition threatens to unravel globalisation. Washington is recalibrating the American security guarantee for Europe in the light of a new race for pre-eminence in the Pacific. The European Union is becoming more divided. And there are increasingly strong arguments in Europe about whether to socialise debt and public spending, which raise uncomfortable questions for Germany.

At the same time, public opinion is challenging the very foundations of German foreign policy. When covid-19 strikes an individual, it can have a short, acute phase and a set of longer-term pathologies. The same is true of its political effects. A series of opinion polls conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations shows that, while the onset of the covid-19 crisis strengthened Germans' support for European integration, there is a danger that political long covid could sap support for the EU in its most important member state.

There is nothing inevitable about a Eurosceptic turn in German politics. But ECFR's new data show the dangers of assuming that Germans will always support the EU. External and internal conditions are forcing Berlin to adjust. We argue that there is both a need and an opportunity to turn the situation around in the September 2021 German parliamentary election. In this paper, we look at the status quo and the prevailing consensus in the foreign policy debate in three areas: trade, security, and Europe. We identify the blind spots of the consensus in each of these areas that prevent Germany from meeting today's challenges, and show what an alternative approach could look like. We feel that German politicians need to react to the growing pressure on the consensus in German society for an outward-looking and pro-EU Germany. They need to radically change their approach to secure consent for a more internationalist politics, and to deliver for German citizens in a new era.

As well as changing many of the policies that have long defined Germany's engagement with the rest of the world, German leaders should fundamentally alter the way that they engage with the public on these issues. The strongest case for an outward-looking and pro-EU Germany lies, paradoxically, in anchoring German policy in a more overtly patriotic focus on the national interest.

Thinking about the European response so far to the covid-19 crisis, do you believe that EU integration has gone too far? In per cent.



Surveys conducted in April 2020 and April 2021. This question asked: "Thinking about the European response so far to the coronavirus crisis, which of the following statements best reflects your view?" Available options: (a) The coronavirus crisis has shown that there's a need for more cooperation at the EU level; (b) The coronavirus crisis has shown that EU integration has gone too far; (c) Don't know.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG)
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The dangers of presenting foreign policy as a sacrifice

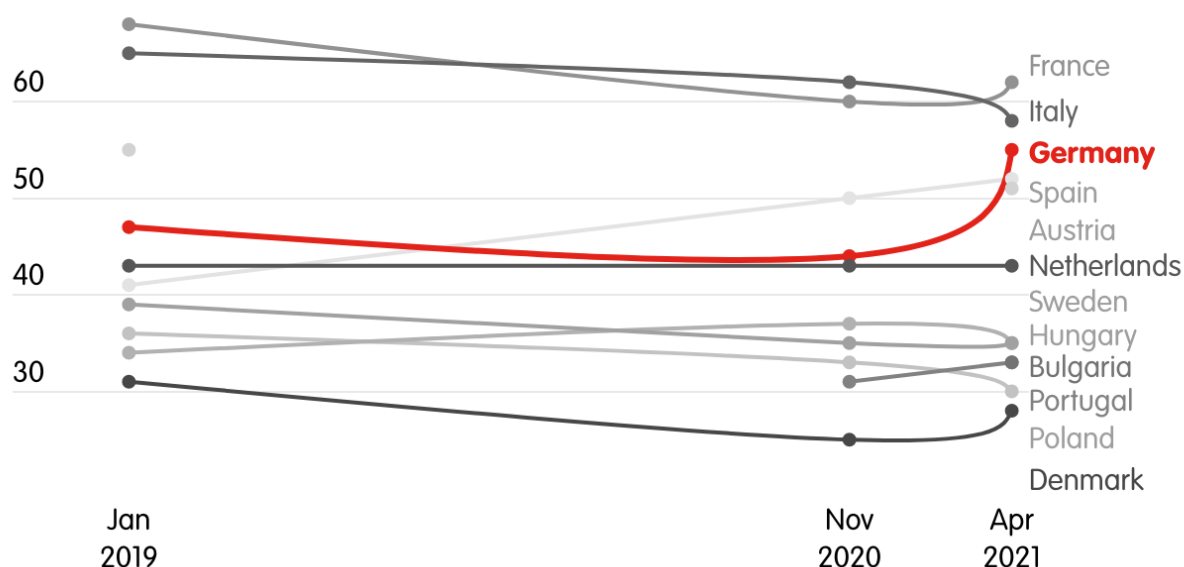
There is no danger of Germany leaving the EU or of a Eurosceptic party winning the chancellorship in this year's parliamentary election, but there has been a major collapse in Germans' trust in the union. For many years, political elites in Berlin took it for granted that the German public supports the EU. However, there are warning signs that, unless the political class finds a new way of engaging with citizens on European policy, the EU's most populous member state could eventually take a nationalist turn.

The results of ECFR's latest poll are striking. In 2019 and 2020, German citizens expressed much more faith in the EU's political system than people in France or Italy did. But the poor performance

around the European Commission's control of vaccine distribution seems to have changed Germans' views. Fifty-five per cent of Germans now think the EU's political system is broken – a jump of 11 percentage points since last year. Correspondingly, in November 2020, one in two Germans believed that the EU's political system was working; currently, only 36 per cent do.

Forty-nine per cent of Germans claim to have less or much less confidence in the EU as a result of its vaccines policy (the 28 per cent who say “much less” comprise the largest group in this measure). And 33 per cent of Germans now think that the coronavirus crisis shows that EU integration has gone too far, compared to 23 per cent in 2020.

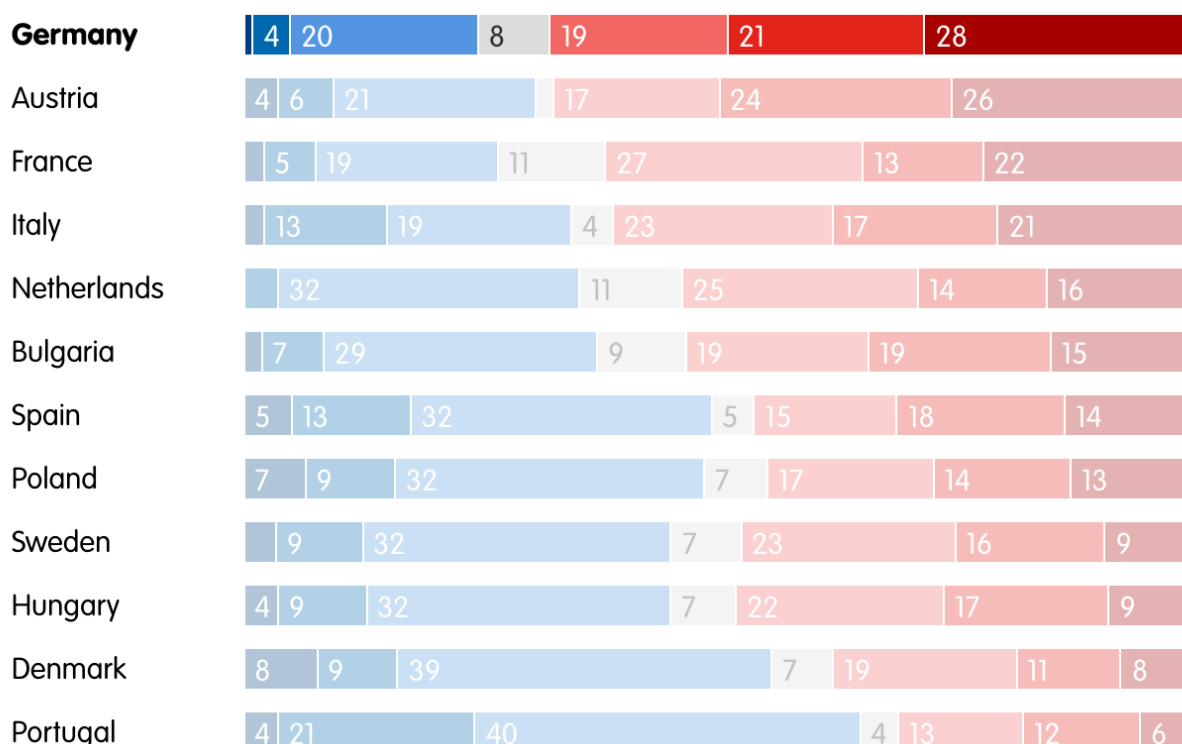
Do you think the political system of the EU is working well or is broken? Share of population who believe it is broken, in per cent.



Source: For the January 2019 and November 2020 surveys, Datapraxis and YouGov. For the April 2021 survey, Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG) 2021 © All rights reserved
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Do you have more or less confidence in the EU since the start of the covid-19 pandemic? In per cent.

■ Much more confidence
 ■ Slightly more confidence
 ■ No difference: I was confident before and still am
 ■ Don't know
 ■ No difference: I was not confident before and am still not
 ■ Slightly less confidence
 ■ Much less confidence



Survey conducted in April 2021.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG)
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In February 2020 (before the covid-19 lockdown), ECFR hosted Berlin's leading strategists for a discussion on German foreign policy. One participant in the event said that any policy worth having would need to involve a tangible sacrifice. And speaker after speaker lined up to lay out what that should be: spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence, scrapping the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, abandoning Germany's opposition to the socialisation of European debt, or agreeing to a budget for the eurozone. The foreign policy discourse became like an auction of competitive sacrifices.

When the discussion turned to the role that foreign policy would play in the upcoming German election, there was also a degree of consensus among the speakers: despite the growing importance of international issues to ordinary Germans, the election campaign would involve almost no discussion

of foreign policy. Some of the participants declared that this might be a blessing, because parties would not be tempted to follow the more regressive instincts of their supporters by questioning military spending, nuclear sharing, or support for Europe. The more ambitious speakers thought this would be a curse, because the new government would not have a mandate for radical change.

Listening to the exchange, it became hard not to see the themes of sacrifice and foreign policy as connected – and to fear what they would mean for Germany in the long term. If German foreign policy was all about sacrifice, it was unlikely to appeal to the German people. Elites would negotiate Germany's foreign policy programme among themselves, before presenting it to voters as the only reasonable course of action. As a consequence, there would never be a strong popular mandate for German foreign policy, and populist parties could present it as an elite conspiracy. The American experience in 2016 showed how dangerous this pattern could be when the foreign policy consensus lost its social base and was rapidly swept away by Donald Trump's counter-revolution, leaving the foreign policy community orphaned and directionless.

So, what is to be done?

The patriotic case for international engagement

Leaders in Berlin should start by turning the German consensus on its head. Rather than looking for ways that Germans can sacrifice themselves – to meet the expectations of allies and partners or because of the country's "special responsibility" – the political class should define and defend the German national interest more explicitly.

Germany's relationship with its history is one of the wonders of the modern world. Through a painful series of clashes between and within different generations, Germany crafted a new identity that transcends its past by facing up to it. There are various elements to this, the first of which is an attempt to replace ethnic nationalism with a civic *Verfassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism). Another element has been to directly confront German guilt through a *Politik der Aussöhnung* (policy of reconciliation), including a remarkable refashioning of Germany's bilateral relationships with France, Poland, Russia, and Israel. Thirdly, Germans wholeheartedly embraced the idea of a European rather than national identity, becoming 'model Europeans'.

It is not hard to understand why so many German elites conceive of Germany's foreign and Europe policy as an act of collective self-sacrifice. The country's domestic rehabilitation and reconstruction after the second world war was facilitated and legitimated by an international politics of sublimation and integration into alliances. The German strategy was to try to avoid being perceived as threatening

or dominant. To this end, German leaders framed German interests as “European interests”. This was a way of rebuilding the trust Germany lost in the first half of the twentieth century. The country did not want to be perceived as the gorilla in the room. ‘No experiments!’ has become a kind of core German brand. The result has been a broad elite consensus on support for European integration, Atlanticism, fiscally conservative macroeconomics, and a very narrow avenue for political competition in foreign policy.

In reality, this policy did not require much self-sacrifice, as it enabled Germany to experience unprecedented peace and prosperity. Germany has benefited massively from the status quo – often at the expense of others. Even the biggest ‘sacrifice’, the abandonment of the deutschmark for the euro, was a very good investment. The last three decades have been especially kind to Germany. As Thomas Bagger [explains](#), in 1989, history ‘ended’ for many Germans, and they found themselves on the right side of it for the first time. They prospered mightily as Europe and the world entered a period of integration, and as economics took precedence over geopolitics.

But it has been counterproductive to cloak the aggressive pursuit of German interests in a rhetoric of responsibility and selflessness. This approach has created suspicion in other European countries, which think that Germany is only pursuing its own interests and has no right to define European interests for them. And, more troublingly, the approach is sapping support for internationalism at home.

Germany will need to adapt its policy of self-abnegation if it is to turn the situation around. Moreover, changes in international politics make this a necessity.

German progressives are particularly wary of talking about the national interest. They are uneasy with the idea of German patriotism and national symbols such as the German flag. So far, the discourse on the national interest has been dominated and often instrumentalised by the far right. But the pressure on Germans to relate to their own national identity has grown steadily in recent years – especially in the aftermath of the refugee crisis of 2015. Therefore, a progressive German foreign policy for the twenty-first century needs to modernise Germanness – and to do so in ways that celebrate Germany’s achievements and defend its interests without alienating citizens domestically or stoking anti-German sentiment abroad.

In a telephone interview with the authors, Cem Ozdemir, a former leader of the Green Party, highlighted the idea of engaging with debates about national identity. “With immigration and globalisation, we need to have a discussion [about] what it means to be German”, he argued. “What are the conditions? What could and what should be a republican understanding of modern citizenship in a European country? It was a mistake that progressives largely ignored the discussion during the

refugee crisis. It allowed others to take over the territory.”

Being clearer about what it means to be German will also make it easier to define and defend national interests. This is a debate that the foreign policy community should lead rather than resist. It will, however, be sensitive – because of three major challenges that Germany needs to overcome in relation to the debate about national identity to make a patriotic case for international engagement.

Firstly, there is a need to develop a broader German identity into which immigrants can be integrated. Germany is moving towards multiculturalism but has not transformed from a society of immigration into one of integration. By 2019, 26 per cent of Germans had a *Migrationshintergrund* (identified as having at least one parent who is not German by birth). And Germany’s carefully crafted national identity is not designed to mediate the conflicts that sometimes arise between Germans who fall into this category and those who do not. Constitutional patriotism is an important part of this new identity but, unless it broadens and gains more emotional content, it will leave a vacuum. The danger is that, unless Germany reimagines its identity as a set of values and aspirations, it could come to be defined by ethnicity and religion. This would lead to more polarisation, making it more likely that Germany would take a nationalist turn.

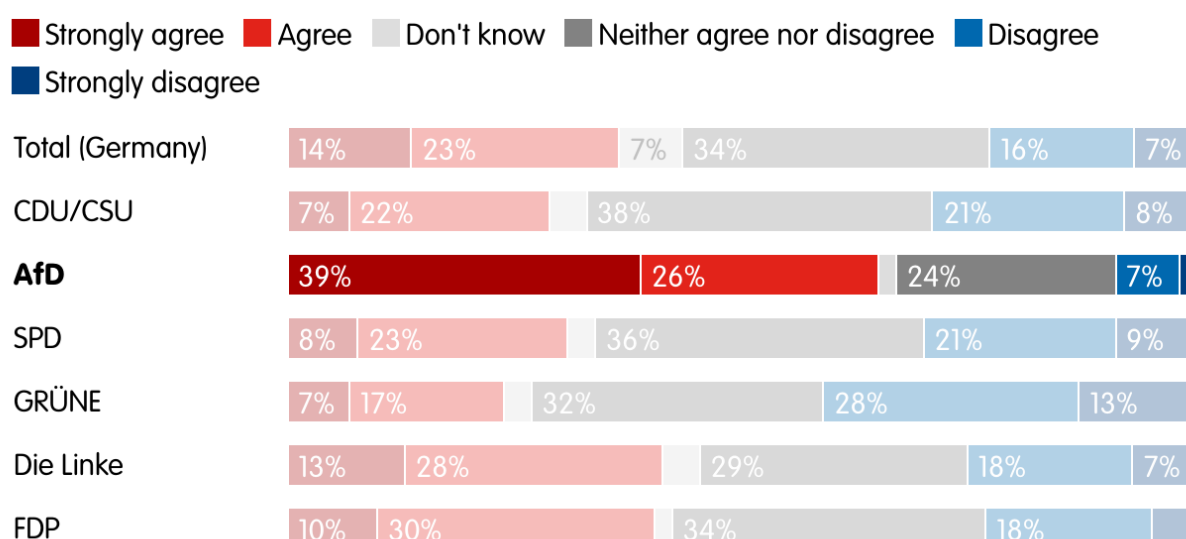
So far, attempts to define Germanness have often ended up being used to exclude rather than bind newcomers to the country. To facilitate integration, sociologist Bassam Tibi came up with the ideas of a European *Leitkultur* and ‘Euro-Islam’ – combining Islam with values of modern European culture. However, when Christian Democratic Union parliamentarian Friedrich Merz picked up the term in 2000, he talked about a German *Leitkultur* that immigrants would need to absorb – thereby setting the idea against that of a multicultural society. These topics came to the fore again in 2015, when polls showed that one-third of Germans were concerned that large numbers of migrants threatened Germany’s “societal and cultural values”. In 2017 then German minister of interior Thomas de Maizière wrote a ten-point plan on German *Leitkultur*, which was published in a German newspaper and included the example of shaking hands as a German characteristic, as well as the sentence “we are not burka”. As a consequence, many Germans with a *Migrationshintergrund* saw the debate about *Leitkultur* as simply expressing narrow cultural suspicion.

Secondly, there are important questions about dealing with the shift of Germany’s past from memory to history. How can a culture of remembrance survive when the last members of the perpetrator generation are dying? There are, of course, even challenges to its survival in a multicultural society in which the parents of many have nothing to do with German crimes of the past. This has implications for the relationship with Israel, for example. And there have often been discussions in Germany about antisemitism among migrants arriving in the country (some of whom see Israel mainly in the context

of its conflict with Palestine, not in the context of German history). Germany cannot tolerate antisemitism. At the same time, it needs to heavily invest in education and support immigrants in understanding how Germany's history fits with the history of their country of origin.

Thirdly, the rise of social media poses a major challenge to a national discussion about what it means to be German. This creates a gulf between heavily self-censored official public discourse and the internet, where anything goes. The situation also reinforces the idea that there is an elite conspiracy to prevent debates about identity – the environment in which the Alternative for Germany (AfD) flourishes. The internet holds many alternative narratives that might never find expression through official institutions. As a result, there is a real danger that the gulf between the censored tolerance of official Germany and the unbridled debate of social media Germany will bring about disruptive political changes like those in the United States in recent years.

Please say how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: I do not trust the mainstream media in my country. By voter intention.



Source: YouGov and Datapraxis, January 2019.
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Germany needs to come up with a version of German identity that guides its transformation into a multicultural society; supports a European foreign policy designed around the challenges of the future and an awareness of the past; and wins public support for investing the resources necessary for these tasks. It was a mistake for progressives to ignore the debate about what it means to be German – as it is important, even if *Leitkultur* might be the wrong framing. The debate should be as inclusive as

possible, and should be moderated by a public figure such as the German president.

In the process, Germans should discuss the relationship between German identity and European identity. In other words, rather than ask what Germany can do for Europe and the world, they should ask what Europe and the world can do for Germany. Reversing their perspective on these relationships would be the best way to win popular support for international engagement – and could allow Germany to reframe some of the core elements of its national outlook in ways that accelerate Germany's and Europe's development. This new framework could create an open discourse that helps Germany engage in some of the politically sensitive foreign policy debates that it has avoided for years.

Economics

For many Germans, there is another German identity that is even more important than *Verfassungspatriotismus*: the notion of their country as an *Exportweltmeister* (export champion). 'Made in Germany' and the country's high trade surplus are a central point of pride for Germans – one that still sets them apart from other global economic leaders. This premium on exports revolves around multinationals such as BMW, Daimler, and Volkswagen, as well as the *Mittelstand* (German small and medium-sized businesses) that specialise in advanced technology in areas such as robotics and healthcare. Underpinning Germany's status as an *Exportweltmeister* has been successive German governments' embrace of policies that lift barriers on trade, flows of capital, and investment, and that aim to uphold a rules-based economic order under the umbrella of American security guarantees. One of the big policies in support of this approach was the creation of the euro, which removed many non-tariff barriers to trade with other EU countries and artificially lowered the value of the domestic currency, making German exports even more competitive.

Germans are often unaware of the consequences that their beloved export surplus has for other countries – which, by definition, end up with trade deficits as well as the costs of the macroeconomic policies their governments are supporting. This often leads to conflicts between Germany and its European partners.

There is also the technological challenge – and, first and foremost, the move from the German *Verbrennungsmotor* (combustion engine) to electric cars. It was a major shock for Germans when Tesla overtook Volkswagen as the world's most valuable car manufacturer. Today, the market value of Tesla is more than eight times that of Volkswagen, despite the fact that the latter makes around 19 times as many vehicles and roughly seven times as much revenue.

Many Germans fear that Chinese companies will soon set the terms of the fourth industrial revolution

(if they are not already doing so) and that Europe will become increasingly dependent on China for crucial technology, not least the software that will run German hardware. While Germany is strong in the biotechnology and chemicals sectors, it has embraced the digital revolution and its innovations too late and too half-heartedly. The current economic fallout because of chip scarcity is just the latest sign of this.

China is already a leading manufacturer of solar panels and electric cars. And China seems poised to dominate the global production of battery cells for some time (although this outcome is far from certain, now that car companies such as Volkswagen have begun to massively invest in such technologies). German firms' capabilities and market power could allow them to maintain their leadership. But they will only do so if Germany shifts its focus to innovation and new technologies. Otherwise, the country will lose not only its competitive advantage in advanced technology but also the knowledge and skills that accompany this.

However, today, there are two even more profound challenges to the German economic consensus. The increasing fragmentation of globalisation poses a major risk to the German economy, which flourishes in a rules-based and globalised economic order. Germany's biggest non-EU economic partners, the US and China, are increasingly developing their foreign and economic policy through the prism of competition with each other. In the process, they are fundamentally changing globalisation and the rules-based order.

The first challenge is in Beijing's new economic vision of 'dual circulation', which is designed to make China more self-reliant in terms of consumption, technology, and regulations – partly through the use of entity lists and restrictions on exports to protect its market. In this context, China is increasingly assertive in multilateral organisations; trying to set the global rules for new technologies; using infrastructure and strategic investment to spread its influence; and shutting others out of its domestic markets. China is also using its military to intimidate countries and to gain control over trade routes in places such as the East China Sea and the South China Sea. In the Arctic – where new trade routes are emerging – Russia and China are trying to get the upper hand.

China is implementing dual circulation at a moment when the future of the America First strategy – which dominated US foreign policy under Trump – remains uncertain. President Joe Biden has made clear that he will recalibrate rather than abandon the United States’ tough approach to China. Biden has changed the rhetoric coming out of the White House and aims to build a broad coalition against Beijing. Yet his administration is using many of the same approaches as China does, such as a strong industrial policy and an attempt to reshore supply chains. And it continues to advance Trump’s Clean Network initiative to exclude Chinese technology from US critical infrastructure.

There is much scope for European governments to work with Washington on these issues, but the reality for many German companies will be one of decoupling internally to continue to serve both the Chinese and American markets. They will have to learn to operate in very different regulatory spheres. Some German industrial champions are already taking steps to reinforce their presence in Chinese markets by investing in local plants or research and development centres. The challenge is in how to separate the business of one enterprise between two markets – where they could face punishment or barriers in one market for their dealings in the other.

The second major challenge to the German economic consensus is China’s and the United States’ increasing willingness to weaponise economic relations. This profoundly challenges Germans’ key assumptions about economics generally, their own economy, and even politics. Many Germans have long believed that producing high-quality products is enough for economic success. But, in today’s world, economic statecraft is an increasingly important determinant of that success. Germany is currently incapable of backing up its trading relations with the necessary power politics – and is unwilling to do so, for the understandable reasons of avoiding protectionism and keeping economics separate from geopolitics. At the same time, this has meant that German trade and German policies lack the resilience they need to survive in today’s world – potentially casting doubt on Germany’s economic model, and profoundly affecting its foreign and domestic policies.

Beijing is willing to use its market, medical supplies, and control of critical materials such as rare earths to pressure other countries on foreign policy issues. Moreover, China and the US are increasingly exploring ways to use economic networks to extract political concessions from other countries. These sorts of policies were taken to a new level by the Trump administration, which showed a willingness to leverage the centrality of the dollar and US technology to advance its political goals. The administration used secondary sanctions against companies that were involved in the Nord Stream 2 project and that did business with Iran. As the Biden administration recently showed in relation to Nord Stream 2, the change in the White House does not mean that the US will stop using these tools – even if Biden has eased the pressure on German companies in an attempt to repair

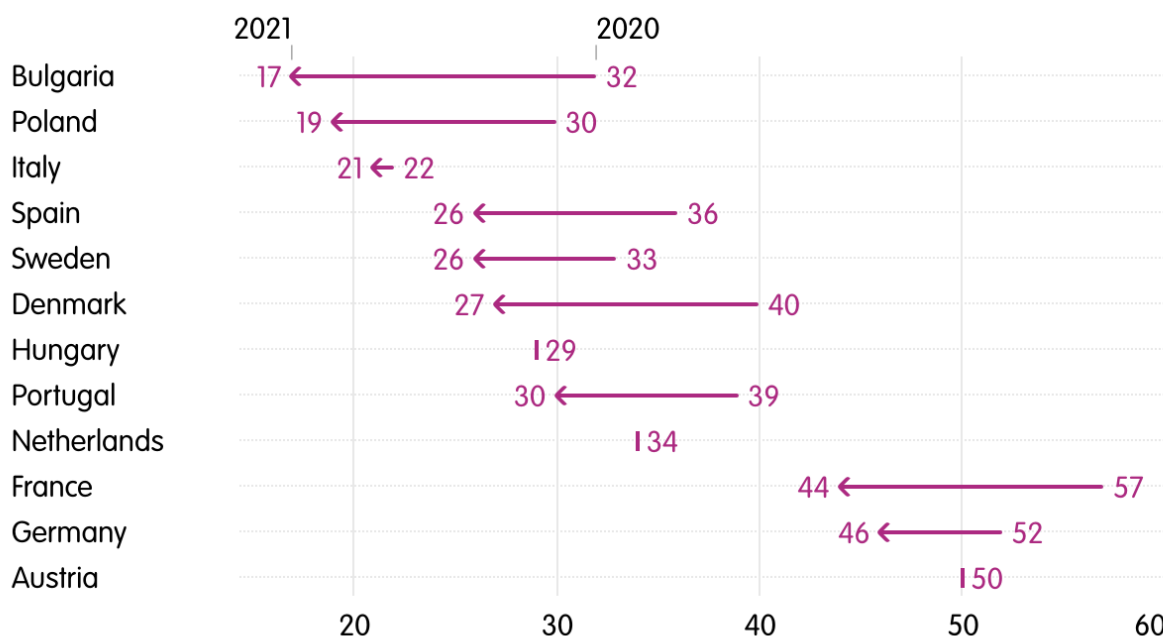
relations with Germany.

All this shows that being an *Exportweltmeister* is a source of not just great wealth but also great vulnerability. Germany cannot continue to pretend that it can handle economics and politics separately. The first step for Germany is to accept that geo-economics will play an increasingly important role. This partly means pushing for greater German sovereignty. But Germany will only be able to face up to great powers such as China by equipping the EU with the tools to bargain effectively within an interdependent system, such as credible counter-threats against attempts to weaponise the global economy or other hostile actions.

If a Sino-American trade and technology war has jeopardised globalisation, greater European unity offers the best hope of safeguarding the German economy and European values. It is, therefore, in Germany's core interest to develop the European market and boost domestic consumption – collectively, the other 26 EU member states are still Germany's leading trade partners by far – as well as to invest in building European sovereignty.

There is public support in Germany for strengthening European sovereignty. Forty-seven per cent of Germans, a plurality, still think that the coronavirus crisis has shown that there is a need for more cooperation on the European level (although this share has declined since last year). Many Germans – 52 per cent in 2020 and 46 per cent in 2021 – are in favour of encouraging companies to produce more medical supplies in the EU even if this means higher prices (when it comes to non-medical goods, the level of support is slightly lower). And ECFR's November 2020 poll shows that 38 per cent of Germans want to be tougher with the US on economic issues, while 26 per cent think the current level of toughness is about right, and only 16 per cent want to be more relaxed.

Once the covid-19 crisis is over, do you think that businesses should be pushed to produce more medical supplies in the EU, even if it means higher prices? In per cent.

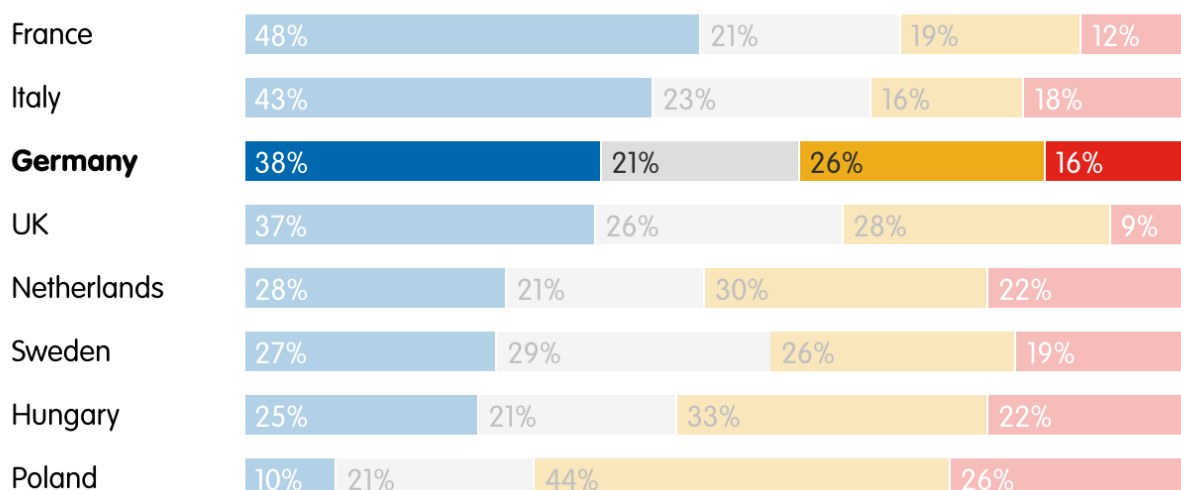


Survey conducted in April 2020 and April 2021. Hungary, Netherlands, and Austria were not included in the 2020 poll. The graph shows the share of the population agreeing with the statement: "Businesses should be pushed to produce more medical supplies in the EU, even if this means higher prices". This question read: "Once the covid-19 crisis is over, which, if any, of the following best reflect how you think things should change in Europe?"

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG)
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Do you think your country should be tougher or more relaxed with the US when it comes to economic issues?

■ Should be tougher ■ Don't know ■ Current level is about right ■ Should be more relaxed



Question read: "Generally speaking, do you think your country should be tougher or more relaxed with the US when it comes to economic issues or do you think the current level is about right?"

Source: YouGov and Datapraxis, November 2020.
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Together with its European partners, Germany can develop the ability to fight back against economic coercion and sanctions, be they from the US, China, or other countries. Some of the ideas discussed in [ECFR's economic coercion task force](#) include a public European Export Bank to facilitate trade with certain regions, an anti-coercion instrument, an EU Resilience Office, and an initiative to rebalance the market-distorting effect of economic coercion through penalties on third-country companies in the EU market.

The EU also needs to introduce further geopolitical considerations into its competition policy instruments; ensure that foreign investment screening is effective in all member states; and adopt the regulation on foreign subsidies that distort the internal market. In the longer term, the EU needs to bolster the euro's international role by fostering deep and integrated capital and banking markets – as well as by working to make the euro more attractive, promoting the currency's use in more sectors, and establishing a digital euro. Germany, as an economic powerhouse, will be central to all these issues. If the country is too reluctant to think geopolitically – out of traditional hesitation or negligence – the EU could fall behind in the global competition and be vulnerable to geo-economic attacks.

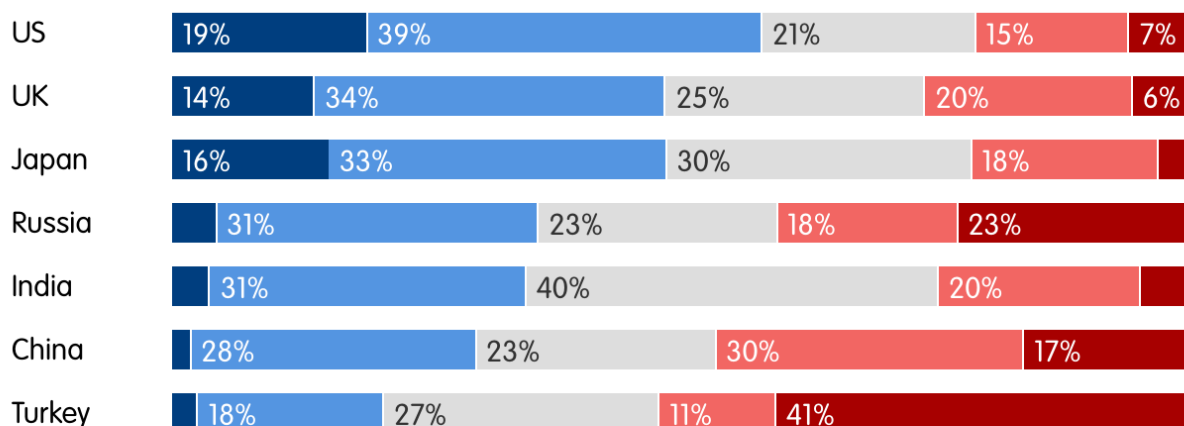
It is also in Germany's core interest to work on the European level to deal with the green and digital transformations. Rather than preaching the merits of a greener economy, Europe can set a price for carbon and use border-adjustment taxes to persuade others to meet its standards or absorb the costs. Likewise, the EU's digital agenda and plans for a digital-services tax may yet force global tech giants to abide by European rules.

At the same time, Germany and Europe will need to reinvent their core relationships with countries such as the US, deepen existing relationships, and try to build new ones. The EU will not be able to rely on a single 'alliance of multilateralists'. Instead, Germany and Europe will need to work out a flexible set of relationships with a shifting cast of other powers on various issues. For example, the EU-Asia connectivity strategy presented by the European Commission in September 2018 is a good way to deepen and diversify relationships with partners in the region, but it needs to be properly financed, promoted, and coordinated. (A recent publication by the Asia-Pacific Committee of German Business discusses how this could be done.)

As ECFR's polls show, Germans understand that Europe needs such relationships; they regard the United Kingdom, Japan, India, and Russia as "necessary partners" with which the EU should cooperate strategically. In contrast, they generally describe China as a "rival" – a country with which Europe needs to compete – and Turkey as an "adversary". Germans are also less pragmatic in their thinking on foreign policy than one may assume, given their focus on economics. When asked about their preferred approach to China and Turkey, they stand out as being even more principled than the EU average.

What are your views on the following countries' relationships with Europe? Total for all German respondents.

■ An ally – a country that shares our interests and values
 ■ A necessary partner – a country we must strategically cooperate with
 ■ Don't know
 ■ A rival – a country with which we need to compete
 ■ An adversary – a country we are in conflict with

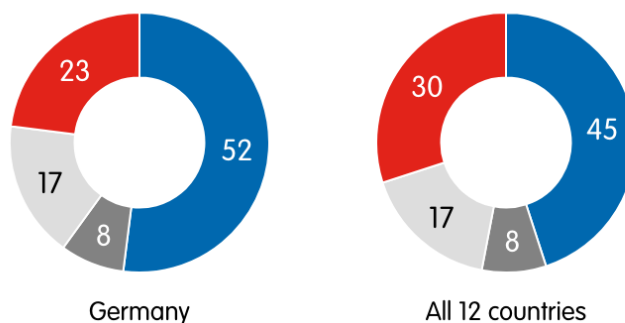


Survey conducted in April 2021. The graph shows the responses in Germany. Question read: "Generally speaking, thinking about the countries below, which of the following best reflects your view on who they are to Europe?"

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG) 2021 © All rights reserved
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Thinking about relations between the EU and China, which of the following statements do you agree with more? In per cent.

- The EU should strongly criticise China when it violates human rights, democratic values, or the rule of law
- Neither
- Don't know
- The EU should avoid conflict with China over internal affairs, and prioritise the EU's trade and security relationship with China.



Survey conducted in April 2021.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG) 2021 © All rights reserved
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Security and defence

By the time of the 2014 Munich Security Conference, there seemed to be a broad consensus among Germany's mainstream parties and foreign policy elites that the country needed to take more responsibility for international affairs, in line with its economic and political weight. However, after a short period of new initiatives and increased engagement, it became clear that this 'Munich Consensus' was hollow.

To this day, there is no common understanding of what "more responsibility" should mean in a practical sense or of how it should guide a new strategic culture. Left-leaning Germans fear that the idea is a fig leaf for the militarisation of Germany, and warn against an arms race. German conservatives want the Bundeswehr to play a bigger role in European security – but, after 16 years in which members of the Christian Democratic Union or the Christian Social Union held the chancellery and the defence ministry, the German armed forces are still suffering from a lack of personnel and equipment, as well as operational shortcomings. More importantly, neither side has a vision of what kind of military player Germany should become. Instead, the conservatives and their partners in the ruling coalition, the Social Democrats, have turned security and defence policy into an area for trench warfare against one another.

Germany's established political structures and ways of thinking are increasingly unsuited to addressing the new security challenges the country faces. To find a viable model for its security and defence policy, the next federal government needs to address some of the unsettling issues that its predecessors have often ignored.

Firstly, Germany needs to broaden the debate about security. For years, there has been a heated discussion about the use of force and whether Germany should spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence. At the same time, there is very little talk about the changing nature of security and the way that the German government uses the remainder of its budget. As discussed in the previous section of this paper, the battlefields of the twenty-first century are the infrastructure and institutions of globalisation. German policymakers need to understand that economic security is national security. Deepening economic dependencies on authoritarian powers limits Germany's political room for manoeuvre and makes the country vulnerable to blackmail.

Another aspect of this challenge is that the German export economy can only prosper because the US guarantees the security of international trade routes. German policymakers tend to take for granted the smooth operation of maritime routes, through which more than 80 per cent of world trade passes. But Washington will no longer be willing to bear the main burden of this – to be the 'world's

policeman'. In future, Berlin must become more involved in the process, to protect the German economy.

Equally, Trump introduced fundamental doubts about the American security guarantee into the transatlantic alliance. This is another reason to rethink Europe's dependence on the US. Even if Biden emphasises America's claim to international leadership and commitment to Europe, it would be negligent to count on Washington forever. The 2016 presidential election may not have been a historical accident, an American aberration.

Therefore, to protect its core interests, Germany needs to prepare for a scenario in which the US no longer regards involvement in Europe as a core American interest. German politicians should no longer retreat to the argument that 'we cannot defend Europe without the US' – even if that will remain true for at least the next few decades.

The election of Biden as US president should not lull Europeans into a false sense of security. Instead, they should pursue a two-level strategy. They should increase their contribution to the transatlantic partnership through measures that simultaneously strengthen their own independence. From an American perspective, Europe may be moving to the geopolitical periphery. But the US still has a long-term interest in a stable Europe. And it is in Germany's interest to try and keep the US militarily engaged with Europe. This is especially important for the nuclear umbrella, which would be the hardest element of the American security guarantee to replace.

Accordingly, Berlin should invest in becoming a better partner to Washington. That primarily means investing in European capabilities that would also be available within NATO and would enhance the operational readiness of the Bundeswehr. Germans and other Europeans should ease the military burden on the US, especially in deterring Russia.

Many German policymakers refuse to publicly discuss a plan for defending Europe without the US. They fear that such a discussion would drive the US away even more and would alienate central and eastern Europeans. However, ECFR's November 2020 survey shows that EU citizens are well aware that Europe cannot always rely on the US, and that it needs to look after its own defence capabilities. As ECFR's April 2021 survey shows, only 19 per cent of Germans regard the US as an ally – a country that shares their interests and values. They see the US merely as a 'necessary partner' and a country that Europe needs to cooperate with strategically. Therefore, a German debate about a second Trump presidency could be beneficial: it could help convince the German public that investment in defence is necessary – which would, in turn, make the US happy.

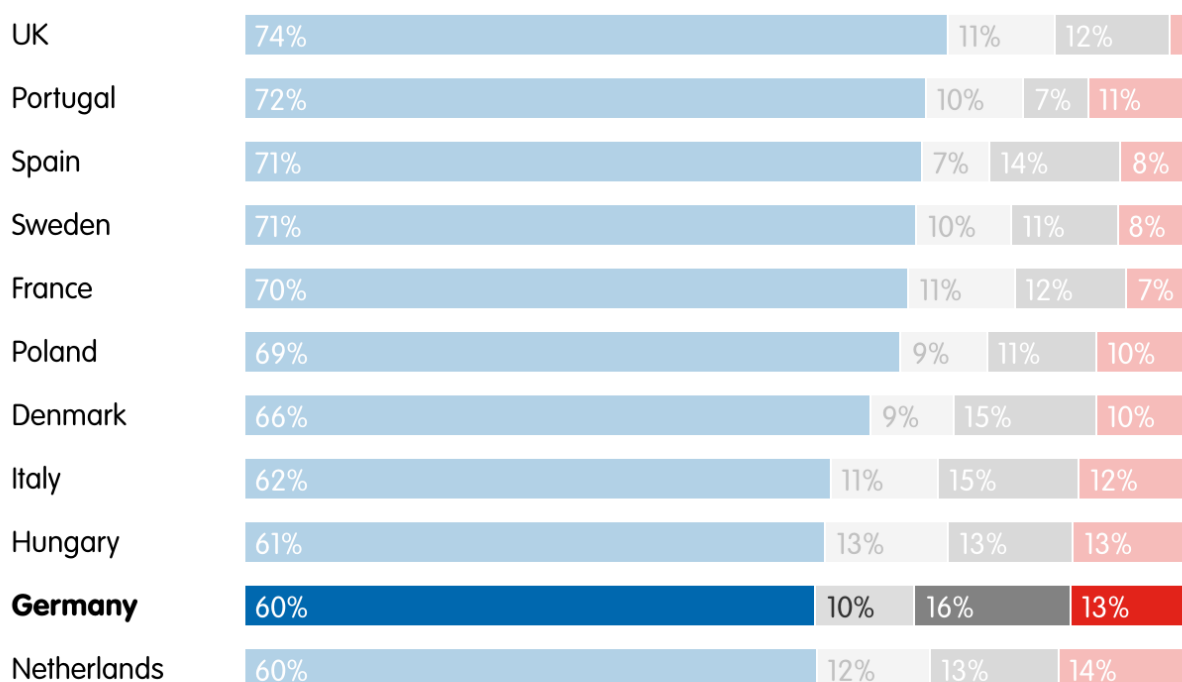
As ECFR's November 2020 poll shows, only 10 per cent of Germans think that they need the

American security guarantee a great deal, while 33 per cent believe that it is not important. So, it is not a selling point to emphasise that the US wants Germany to spend more on defence. The next German government should frame the question about defence spending differently – and make it about a stronger and better-equipped Europe (not limited to the EU) that should be less reliant on others.

The European framework makes increased investment and military engagement more acceptable to German parties and voters, even those on the left. Instead of being afraid of a German gorilla, the discussion should concentrate on the question of how Germany can better use its power to protect its neighbours. Indeed, ECFR's November 2020 data show that many Europeans see Berlin as their 'go-to' capital. Respondents in France, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Hungary were especially likely to identify Germany as the most important country with which to build a good relationship. Berlin should act on this vote of confidence.

Should Europe look after its own defence capabilities or can it always rely on the US to protect it instead?

■ Europe can't always rely on the US; we need to look after our own defence capabilities.
 ■ Don't know ■ Neither ■ At the end of the day, the US will always protect Europe so we don't have to worry so much about our own defence capabilities



Question read: "Which of the following statements best reflects your view?"

Source: YouGov and Datapraxis, November 2020.

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If Germans want their country to take on a growing role as a security provider in a European framework, they will need to address some particularly controversial issues. For the Greens, which seem very likely to form part of the next ruling coalition, joint armament projects with Germany's European partners may be a major point of contention. The Greens support the idea of a European security and defence union, as well as the consolidation of the European defence industry. Yet they have repeatedly advocated stricter regulations on defence exports; this is part of their party's core identity.

Some European countries, especially France, are fundamentally less restrictive than Germany when it comes to arms exports. However, other European governments will only join forces with Berlin in the development of military equipment if they can trust their partner to provide the necessary components to export customers. To allow for greater European defence cooperation, Germany needs

to come to terms with the fact that there will have to be a stable compromise between its own requirements and those of its partners.

Moreover, Germany cannot separate questions about how to deal with autonomous weapons systems from the broader issue of European defence cooperation. In their endless debate about armed drones, German political elites have shown how difficult they find it to deal with new security and defence technologies. For moral reasons, many Germans prefer the Bundeswehr to pursue technically unambitious solutions rather than the most effective and advanced technology. In contrast, French strategists identify artificial intelligence – especially in the military realm – as an important area of geopolitical competition. If Germany wants to cooperate with France to develop advanced weapons technologies such as the Future Combat Air System, the countries must find a compromise on such issues. Germany should make military artificial intelligence part of its public debate on security.

Germany and France will almost certainly continue to have different attitudes to many security and defence policy issues. There is simply no will among either political elites or voters in Germany to become a military actor like France or the UK.

Nevertheless, the next federal government will need to address the pressing issues discussed above if it is to protect Germany's security, economy, and democracy. Germans need a new concept of their security – a post-dependent Atlanticism that has a strong European angle. On security, Germany's investment in Europe is not a sacrifice but part of the solution. It is only by working together that Europeans can hold their own in a world that, increasingly, functions less according to the rule of law and more according to the law of the jungle. German citizens' support for the European framework takes the edge off many of the most controversial security and defence issues.

Europe policy

German politics' orientation towards the status quo is more ingrained and more unsustainable in Europe policy than in any other area. Unlike many European countries, Germany emerged from the crises of the past decade relatively unscathed. The country was spared the political and economic problems other parts of Europe faced: the economy was booming, unemployment was at a record low, and the budget was balanced. There was no fundamental erosion of the political party system as occurred in France or Italy. Therefore, Germans had little motivation to push for radical change. They were among the biggest beneficiaries of the bloc's single market and the eurozone.

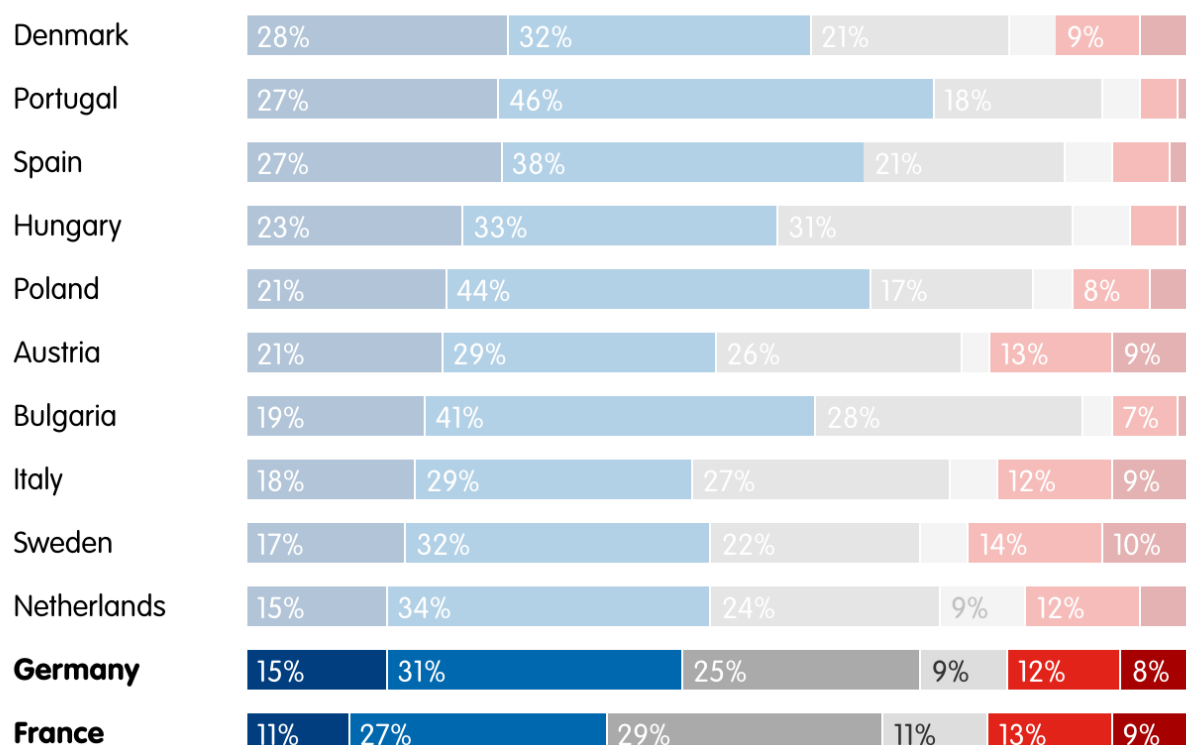
At the same time, Euroscepticism has steadily grown in many other member states. And, following Brexit, there has been widespread fear of the EU falling apart. Berlin sees itself as being in a dilemma:

political measures that could reduce scepticism of the EU in southern Europe, such as the further mutualisation of debt, would fuel such scepticism in the north, including in Germany – and vice versa. Berlin's answer to this has been to prevent the EU from falling apart, but never with a clear idea of how to move forward. It has followed a policy of adapting to external conditions instead of shaping them.

The coronavirus crisis has strengthened these centrifugal forces. The pandemic has contributed to a significant loss of confidence in the EU among Germans, many of whom now doubt that membership of the bloc is in their interest.

In general, do you think that it is a good thing or a bad thing for your country to be a member of the EU?

■ Very good thing ■ Good thing ■ Neither good thing nor bad thing ■ Don't know ■ Bad thing ■ Very bad thing



Survey conducted in April 2021.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG)
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The EU's poor performance in the vaccine roll-out risks transforming Brexit from a cautionary tale about Euroscepticism into a story of liberation from the sluggish bureaucracy of Brussels institutions.

However, the pandemic has also shaken Germany out of its complacency. What had been an absolute taboo in German politics up to that point – namely, the idea of EU member states taking on debt together – became a political necessity.

Preserving the status quo or ‘failing forward’ are no longer viable political options for mastering the major challenges the EU faces: the pandemic, climate change, and growing geopolitical competition call for not just cosmetic changes but more radical solutions, which will require political support. The German government must break free of its paralysis by engaging with four central – and, from its perspective, particularly painful – issues. If Berlin continues to be reactive and to cling to the status quo, changes in the domestic and international environment will increasingly limit Germany’s scope for action on Europe policy.

The first of these issues is the belief that the cohesion of the EU27 should take precedence over Europe’s capacity to act. Berlin’s deep-rooted credo of making every political move as inclusive as possible has held the EU together over the past decade. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s greatest strength has been her ability to seek workable compromises between all EU capitals – as she most recently did in the EU’s adoption of its 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework and recovery fund.

However, the costs of cohesion were slow decision-making processes and progress limited to the lowest common denominator. The consequences of ‘too little, too late’ will become ever more severe in view of the challenges ahead. If the EU cannot make progress quickly enough without treaty changes (for which there is currently no majority), Germany should move forward with a group of willing partners. As the negotiations on the EU budget package and its rule of law conditionality have shown, countries such as Hungary and Poland have enormous opportunities for blackmail when they know that Germany would rather have them on board than push through a political decision that risks losing them. During the negotiations, some participants floated the idea of simply adopting the recovery fund within the framework of the so-called ‘enhanced cooperation’ provided for in the EU treaties. Member states could use this provision more deliberately in the future.

Sometimes, however, flexible cooperation is unachievable within the EU framework. Germany is, for example, fixated on overcoming the lack of an effective European foreign policy by introducing qualified majority voting – but some countries’ veto makes this impossible for now. A more promising way to push EU foreign policy forward seems to be informal coalitions of smaller groups of states, which take the lead in certain areas and seek ways to make this beneficial for the union’s overall foreign policy. One option could be to ensure that a representative of an EU institution sits at the table, as Catherine Ashton and Federica Mogherini did in the negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Germany finds it especially difficult to enter these ad hoc coalitions outside the EU framework. The country fears that this could damage the EU as a whole, as small member states might feel disadvantaged – thereby strengthening the centrifugal forces within the bloc. However, if it is a choice between paralysis as 27 countries or productive cooperation as a smaller group of member states, unity may not always be the best option. If these select coalitions produced tangible results, more EU citizens could come to see the value of European cooperation and the dangers of nationalist impulses.

The second central issue concerns the glorification of the Franco-German engine. In the German debate on Europe, this relationship is the holy grail. Without Paris and Berlin pulling in the same direction, European integration seems to be unthinkable. As a result, there is no other European country with which German policymakers exchange more information or meet more frequently. However, the idea of a Franco-German engine is toxic in many EU countries and fuels their Euroscepticism.

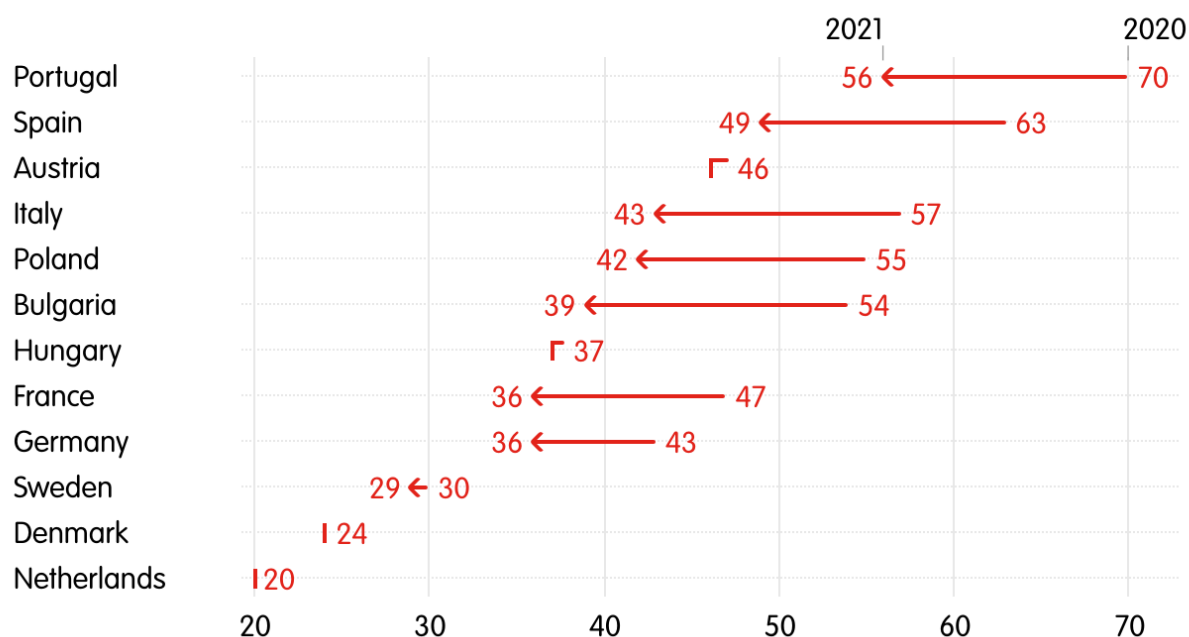
It is no longer enough for Germany and France to reach an agreement alone. Instead of always stressing that there is no alternative to close Franco-German cooperation, Germany should try to form coalitions with other European states, bringing them into discussions with France and sometimes even moving forward without France. French President Emmanuel Macron demonstrated this principle in reverse when he formed a close alliance with Spain and Italy in spring 2020 to pressure Germany to support the issuance of ‘coronabonds’.

The third issue for the German government is the development of economic and monetary union after the launch of the EU’s recovery fund. As it stands, covid-19 is likely to widen some pre-existing gaps between EU economies. Countries in southern Europe, which depend heavily on tourism, have suffered disproportionate economic losses. Croatia, Bulgaria, and Greece receive the largest share of the fund relative to GDP, while Italy and Spain are by far the biggest beneficiaries in absolute terms. However, southern European countries lack the fiscal capacity of northern states to cushion the shock by helping either employees (through temporary unemployment payments) or companies (through

state aid). Depending on how long the crisis lasts, the recovery fund may not be enough in itself to prevent further economic divergence.

Meanwhile, as discussed, the trend toward deglobalisation makes the strength of the European economy – the eurozone and single market – much more vital to Germany's economic future. It is in Germany's direct interest to prevent southern EU countries from slipping deeper into an economic crisis. It will be a great challenge for the new German government to explain to voters at home why the recovery fund may not be a one-off. ECFR's April 2021 survey shows that public support for jointly shouldering the financial burden of the covid-19 pandemic is already waning in Germany and other European countries.

Once the covid-19 crisis is over, do you think the EU states should be more prepared to share the financial burden of a crisis? In per cent.



Surveys conducted in April 2020 and April 2021. The Netherlands, Austria and Hungary were not included in the 2020 poll. The graph shows the share of the population agreeing with the statement: "EU states should be more prepared to share the financial burden of a crisis." Question asked: "Once the coronavirus crisis is over, which, if any, of the following best reflect how you think things should change in Europe? Please tick all that apply."

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG)
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Many Germans fear that EU member states might misuse their shares of the fund to address long-standing deficits that have nothing to do with the pandemic, from ailing social security systems and

infrastructure to other underdeveloped areas. To maintain support from voters in Germany and the so-called ‘frugal states’, the EU needs to closely monitor projects backed by the recovery fund.

Which of the following statements about the covid-19 recovery fund are correct, in your understanding? In per cent.



Source: Datapraxis and Dynata, October 2020.
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Europeans need to see that the recovery fund is helping the EU achieve its sustainability, climate, and digital goals. The fund should make a positive and visible difference, to prove to citizens that it is a good investment in their future and not a subsidy to cover for past mistakes. Instead of talking about Germany as the European paymaster, German politicians should emphasise much more often why it is in Germany’s enlightened self-interest to have a strong eurozone. And this is not only because of Germany’s dependence on the single market, but also because a greater international role for the euro makes Europe more resilient and more capable of acting internationally.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how the challenges of today's world are undermining the current German foreign policy consensus. If Germany does not shift its course, it will end up with an inadequate foreign policy that lacks public support. Nevertheless, as ECFR's April 2021 survey demonstrates, Germany still has the opportunity to take an outward-looking and pro-EU path.

German political elites should be aware that this support is dwindling and that they cannot take it for granted. More than 15 months after the coronavirus crisis hit, many Germans have started asking themselves if they would be better off bowling alone.

Germany needs to build a new social consensus around its foreign policy. Otherwise, there is likely to be growing mistrust of elites and a backlash against the institutions and practices on which Germany built its prosperity and success. The election of Trump in 2016 is an extreme example of what happens when one takes the support of the public for granted and ignores the views of growing parts of the population for too long. This might not be an immediate threat for Germany – especially given the inability of the AfD to capture many of the votes of citizens who feel neglected. However, with German elites mostly ignoring the concerns of many Germans in the euro, migration, and covid-19 crises, it is not impossible to imagine that Germany will experience a similar increase in polarisation.

To prevent that from happening, the next German government should turn the debate on its head. Instead of putting forward a foreign policy focused on the sacrifices Germany needs to make, the government should begin with a patriotic account of how Germany can thrive in the next few decades. The first part of the paper describes how German parties need to engage in a more upfront manner with German identity. The second part shows how greater European sovereignty is vital to a German economic model capable of enduring the triple shock of climate, technological, and geopolitical changes. The third part spells out how a broader conception of security in the twenty-first century, and a partial US withdrawal from Europe, could help Germany overcome its post-cold war paralysis and take on a greater role in European security and defence. And, as the fourth part outlines, all this should lead to a major shift in Germany's policy on Europe.

Brexit has revealed that ever-deeper European integration is not the natural order of events, and that EU citizens need to see where the benefits of membership lie. The good news is that Merkel has convinced Germans that they are in the driving seat in the EU. ECFR's surveys show that – in contrast to their counterparts in frugal countries – most Germans feel that their country's influence in the bloc is increasing.

Do you think that your country's influence within the EU has increased or decreased in the last 2-3 years? In per cent.



Source: Datapraxis and Dynata, October 2020.
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This belief can help unlock public support for ambitious projects within flexible European coalitions. German policymakers and politicians should talk less often about the fact that Germany has a 'special responsibility' in Europe because of its history, size, and location. They should explain how Berlin uses the EU level to increase its influence to enhance the wealth, prosperity, and security of the German public. A German investment in Europe is not a sacrifice but a down-payment on Germany's economic prosperity and political capacity to shape its future. In many ways, Germans already have more advanced views of the future direction of their country's foreign policy than elites in Berlin might think.

Methodology

This paper is based on a public opinion poll in 12 EU countries that the European Council on Foreign Relations commissioned from Datapraxis and YouGov (France, Germany), Dynata (Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), AnalitiQs (Netherlands), and Alpha (Bulgaria). The survey was conducted in April 2021, with an overall sample of 17,231 respondents.

This was an online survey conducted in Austria (n = 1,027), Denmark (n = 1,012), France (n = 3,026), Germany (n = 3,080), Hungary (n = 1,001), Italy (n = 1,003), the Netherlands (n = 1,008), Poland (n = 1,012), Portugal (n = 1,011), Spain (n = 2,036), and Sweden (n = 1,015). In Bulgaria (n = 1,000), the survey was conducted online and through telephone interviews. The results are nationally representative on basic demographics and past votes in each country.

The general margin of error is $\pm 3\%$ for a sample of 1,000 and $\pm 2\%$ for 2,000 and 3,000. In France and Germany, YouGov used purposive active sampling for this poll.

The exact dates of polling are: Austria (14-29 April), Bulgaria (8-13 April), Denmark (13-30 April), France (31 March-7 April), Germany (31 March-8 April), Hungary (14-30 April), Italy (14-23 April), Netherlands (1-9 April), Poland (14-29 April), Portugal (13-30 April), Spain (14-30 April), and Sweden (14-30 April).

Previous ECFR surveys mentioned in this paper include:

- An online survey ECFR commissioned from Datapraxis and YouGov, conducted in January and February 2019 in 16 countries: Austria (n = 2,081), Belgium (n = 2,102), Czech Republic (n = 1,016), Denmark (n = 2,540), Finland (n = 2,055), France (n = 5,019), Germany (n = 4,799), Greece (n = 505), Hungary (n = 4,013), Italy (n = 4,994), Netherlands (n = 2,001), Poland (n = 5,098), Romania (n = 1,051), Slovakia (n = 506), Spain (n = 4,703), and Sweden (n = 4,007).
- An online survey ECFR commissioned from Datapraxis and YouGov, conducted in April 2020 in nine countries: Bulgaria (n = 1,000), Denmark (n = 1,013), France, (n = 2,040), Germany (n = 2,014), Italy (n = 1,009), Poland (n = 1,004), Portugal (n = 1,000), Spain (n = 1,005), and Sweden (n = 1,009).

- An online survey ECFR commissioned from Datapraxis and Dynata, conducted in late October 2020 in eight countries: Austria (n = 1,000), Denmark (n = 996), Finland (n = 1,000), France (n = 1,000), Germany (n = 1,001), Netherlands (n = 1,000), Poland (n = 1,001), and Sweden (n = 1,000).
- An online survey ECFR commissioned from Datapraxis and YouGov, conducted in late November and early December 2020 in eleven countries: Denmark (n = 1,037), France (n = 2,013), Germany (n = 2,060), Hungary (n = 1,001), Italy (n = 2,017), Netherlands (n = 1,005), Poland (n = 1,002), Portugal (n = 1,004), Spain (n = 1,017), Sweden (n = 1,010), and the United Kingdom (n = 2,031).

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Despite these many and varied contributions, any mistakes remain the authors' own.

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