

# Germany



## Facts & Figures

Population

**83.2m**

Political system

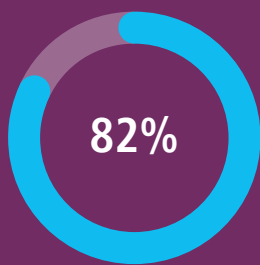
**Federal  
parliamentary  
republic**

Varieties of Democracy  
regime type

**Liberal  
democracy**

Varieties of Democracy  
Liberal Democracy Index  
ranking (2021)

**9**



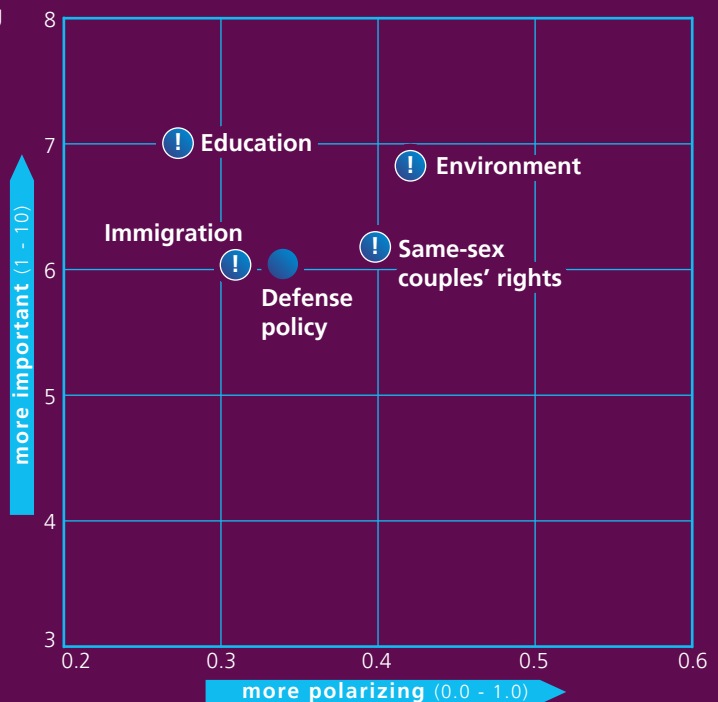
### Democratic competence of German respondents

Percentage of respondents who on average rate the four democratic items as more democratic than the ten undemocratic items in our survey

## Which issues let politicians get away with undemocratic behavior?

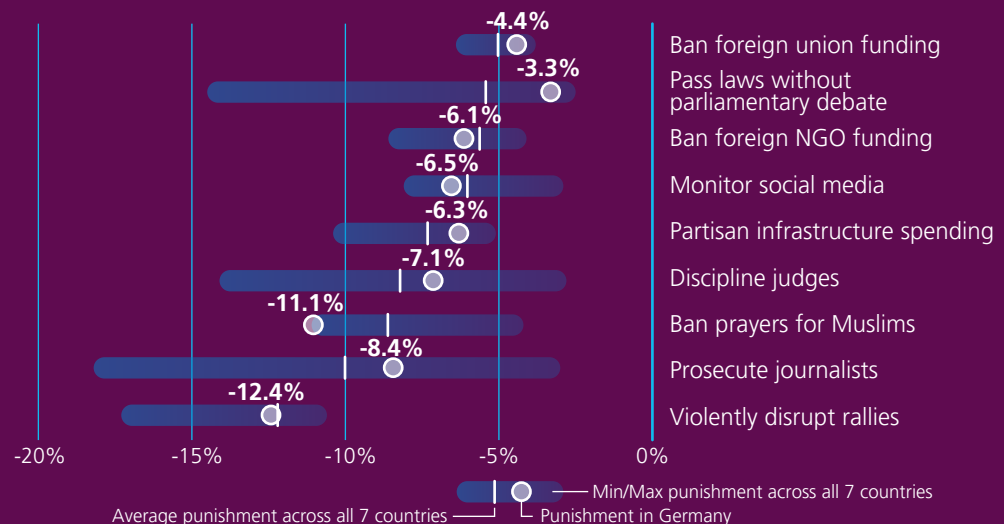
Issues displayed according to their importance to voters and degree of polarization

! Issues for which voters forgive undemocratic behavior



## How much are key elements of liberal democracy valued?

The higher the vote loss for an undemocratic policy proposed by a political candidate, the more a certain democratic element is valued.



## German parties presented in the survey



English name	Social Democratic Party of Germany	Alliance 90 / The Greens	Free Democratic Party	CDU-CSU		Alternative for Germany	The Left
				Christian Democratic Union of Germany	Christian Social Union in Bavaria		
German name	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (GRÜNE)	Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP)	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU)	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU)	Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)	Die Linke
European affiliation	S&D	Greens/EFA	ALDE	EPP	EPP	ID	GUE/NGL
Currently governing							

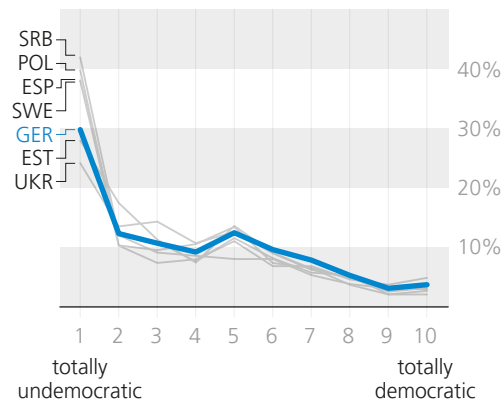
## KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Across the entire sample, Germans have a very good understanding of what democracy is and show a very high support for democracy, ranking just behind Sweden in both aspects.

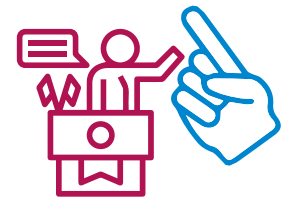
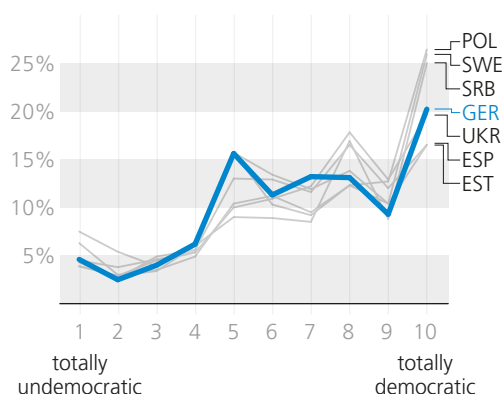
91.7% of Germans “agree” or “strongly agree” that “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.” More than half of all German respondents (56.8%) rate the statement “Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections” as “very bad.” Still, almost one-fifth of Germans think such a situation is either “fairly good” (14.9%) or “very good” (3.2%). A slight majority of Germans (38.4%) finds it “rather good” to have “experts, not the government, make decisions for the country.” The recent experience of the pandemic may have led people to accept to be governed by experts rather than an elected government. Germans and Swedes evaluate their countries as being the most democratic. However, on a scale from 1 to 10 both countries’ citizens were reluctant to give their countries absolute ratings: this resulted in a means of 6.5 for Germany and 6.8 for Sweden.

When respondents in Germany were asked to assess how democratic they find certain actions (democratic competence test), there were a few findings that stood out: Compared to the other countries under investigation, Germans trust their high court the most: the statement

**“How democratic do you find the practice of the country’s judiciary being staffed with individuals loyal to the governing party?”**



**“How democratic do you find the practice of journalists frequently disagreeing with the president’s policies?”**



# -7.5%

This is the average punishment corresponding to the share of German voters willing to defect from an otherwise favored candidate once they adopt an undemocratic position.

“The country’s high court ruled that a government policy was unconstitutional” was ranked as more democratic than in other countries. On a scale from 1 (not at all democratic) to 10 (completely democratic), Germans gave this statement on average a 6.6. At the same time, Germans are comparatively uncritical if the judiciary were staffed with judges loyal to the governing party: similar to Ukrainians and Estonians, only about 30% of all German respondents consider this practice to be “not at all democratic.”

Germans are also the ones who most strongly agreed that losing an election can be an inherent part of a democracy, with the statement “The prime minister conceded a narrow election” receiving a mean score of 7.0. Journalists who frequently disagree with the president’s policies, however, are comparatively less appreciated in Germany than in other countries (6.4). If journalists were prosecuted for criticizing the government

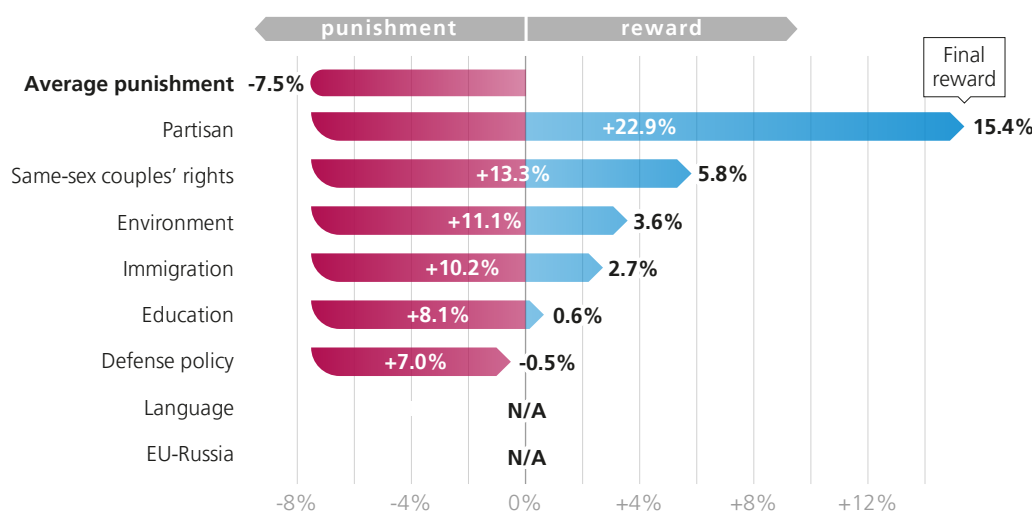
though, Germans view this as more undemocratic than respondents in most of the other countries (1.9). The most concerning finding is that 26% of Germans regard it as rather or completely democratic<sup>21</sup> if the military removed a corrupt president. With a mean score of 4.6, this statement is certainly viewed as less democratic than some other statements, but Germans also assess a military coup on a corrupt president more democratic than having unelected experts govern the country (2.9) or having the government cut spending in regions that voted for the opposition party (2.4). These results can of course also be an expression of how much Germans (similar to their European peers) dislike corruption.

### WHAT KIND OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR DO GERMANS PUNISH?

Germans are willing to punish candidates with undemocratic positions, as is confirmed by an average of a -7.5% loss for these candidates. This rate of vote loss is just below the average rate of punishment for the entire country sample (-7.8%). The issues that Germans find worth punishing most are a candidate’s encouragement of their supporters to violently disrupt campaign rallies of their political opponents (resulting in loss of vote share of -12.4%) and a candidate saying that Muslims should not be allowed to pray during their breaks at work (-11.1%). The undemocratic statement that Germans punish

the least at the ballot box is the suggestion to pass laws without parliamentary debate if criticized by the opposition (only -3.3%). Interestingly, other established Western democracies had a similar low punishing rate on this issue (Sweden -4.9 and Spain -2.5%). In Poland, on the other hand, this statement is punished with a -14.5% loss. Germans also do not punish much if a candidate wanted to ban foreign funding for labor unions (-4.4%) or foreign non-governmental organizations (-6.1%).

### Existence of trade-offs/compensation for undermining democracy



<sup>21</sup> Rating it with an 8, 9 or 10 on a scale from 1 to 10.

## PARTY LOYALTY AND POLICY INTERESTS: WHICH ISSUES ARE

### MORE IMPORTANT THAN UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS?

First and foremost, Germans accept a possible violation of democratic norms if that means their favorite party wins: the average loss in votes of -7.5% of a candidate who proposes an undemocratic action is compensated with an increase of +22.9% in votes if the candidate belongs to the party that the voter supports. All in all, this situation thus still results in a +15.4% win. Identity-based and socio-economic policy positions play a significantly less important role, but the voter's favorite position still compensates entirely for the undemocratic

position, resulting in a +5.8% win for the voter's favorite position on same-sex couples' rights, and in a +2.7% win for the voter's favorite immigration policy. The voter's favorite tax policy in combination with the voter's environmental policy leads to a +3.6% win – and in combination with the voter's favorite position on education spending to a win of +0.6%. The favorite defense policy cannot entirely compensate for an undemocratic position, as it results in a -0.5% vote loss.

## ARE SUPPORTERS OF A CERTAIN POLICY INTEREST<sup>22</sup> MORE FORGIVING OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THAN OTHERS?

Voters with a left-leaning position when it comes to economic issues punish more (-8.9%) than voters with a right-leaning position (-3.4%). When presented with their respective favorite position on taxes and education, we see that both camps become more tolerating of an undemocratic candidate: left-leaning voters even reward the undemocratic candidate with +0.4%, while the right-leaning voters reward them with +6.7% respectively, thus deviating slightly more than the left-leaning voters.

Green voters generally punish undemocratic behavior almost twice as much as conservative voters (-9.7% vs. -5.9%). But when presented with their favorite policy on renewable energies, both green and conservative voters in Germany reward that policy and forgive undemocratic behavior (+0.7% for green voters vs. +5.9% for conservative voters).

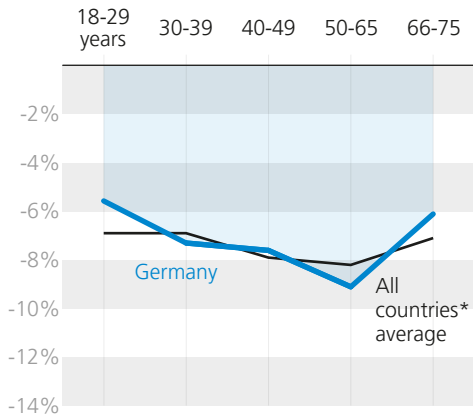
If we have a closer look at the voters' favorite position on sexual minorities we find the following interesting fact for Germany: Voters who are in favor of extending more rights to same-sex couples generally punish a candidate above average, with a loss of -9.6%, whereas people who have more conservative views punish below average, namely -4.5% (i.e., voters who are pro equal marriage rights but against adoption rights) and -3.6% respectively (i.e. voters who are against both marriage and adoption rights). When voters are confronted with a candidate that holds their favorite position on same-sex couples' rights and an undemocratic position at the same time, then the liberal voters punish much less (+7.1% vote share win) compared to voters who are only in favor of marriage equality and voters who are against any equal rights for same-sex couples (1.8% and +5.0% win respectively).

In general, left-leaning voters on the issue of immigration punish undemocratic behavior more with a -11.2% vote share loss; right-leaning voters only punish it with -3.1%, and thus also less than average. When voters are however presented with their favorite policy on immigration, those left-leaning suddenly reward the candidate with +3.0%, whereas right-wing voters end up punishing by just as much as center-left voters, -1.3% and -1.4% respectively. However, voters with a center-right position still reward the most when presented with their favorite position on immigration, namely with +4.8%.

None of the 2500 survey respondents chose the right-leaning position that "Defense policy for Germany should be decided by German institutions alone." Respondents with the view that defense policy should be a shared task between Germany and the EU generally tolerate undemocratic behavior less than respondents who prefer sole EU responsibility for defense (-6.4% punishment rate vs. -3.4%). However, when presented with their preferred policy on defense policy, respondents with a cooperative view become significantly more forgiving of undemocratic behavior (rewarding it with +4.4%) than respondents who want to see defense policy in the hands of the EU alone (-1.8%). This could indicate that defense policy is a less important topic for the pure supra-nationalists.

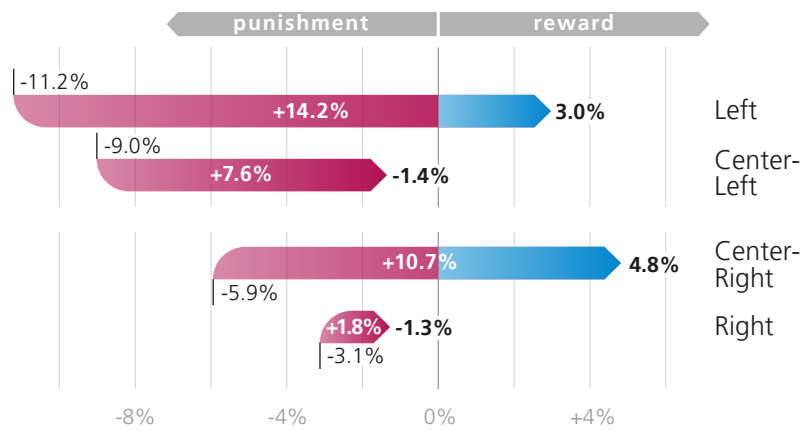
<sup>22</sup> Please find an overview of all tested policy positions on pg. 13.

## Average electoral punishment by respondents' age groups



\*No data was collected for age group 66-75 in Serbia and Ukraine.

## Immigration: shift in punishment when presented with favored policy



### WHAT ROLE DOES POLARIZATION PLAY?

In Germany, the most polarizing issue is how to tax renewable energies. As we have seen above, this is also an issue that voters would disregard undemocratic behavior for. Moreover, we find a similar correlation for the policy on same-sex couples' rights. Although it is slightly less polarizing than the environmental issue, Germans are readier to tolerate undemocratic behavior for it. Hence, for these two issues we can observe a

correlation between an increased polarization and the willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior.

Interestingly, we found that the issue of immigration, which also leads to a greater tolerance of undemocratic behavior, is not that polarizing in Germany. The same holds for issue revolving around education.

## Non-partisans

Germans who do not favor any of the six parliamentary parties showed the greatest willingness to punish undemocratic behavior.

### WHO ARE THE MAIN 'DEFENDERS OF DEMOCRACY' IN GERMANY?

As in most of the other countries under investigation, women punish undemocratic behavior more than men. The same holds true for those who showed more interest in politics, those who are democratically competent, those who are less religious, those who are more trusting of other people and those who lack an authoritarian personality.

When it comes to education, the more educated punish slightly more, but just like in Spain and Sweden, the level of education does not have a great effect on the degree of punishing undemocratic behavior, especially not when comparing the results for voters with a medium and high level of education.

The youngest voter group (18-29 years of age) in Germany punishes undemocratic behavior distinctly less than the same age group in all other EU countries under investigation. Germany's 50 to 65-year-olds however are the strongest group when it comes to defending democracy,

both within Germany but also when compared to that age-group's average among all countries under investigation.

Also, the voters' economic situation does have a slight influence on how strongly people defend democracy: Voters who assess their country's economic situation better punish undemocratic behavior more than Germans with a worse assessment on Germany's economy and also more than people with a similarly positive assessment of their country's economy in all other countries. The same correlation can also be found for voters' behavior and the assessment of their own family's economic situation in Germany.

Like in other countries, students punish undemocratic behavior the most, but in Germany full-time employed and unemployed people punish to an equal degree, while part-time employees and the retired punish slightly more.

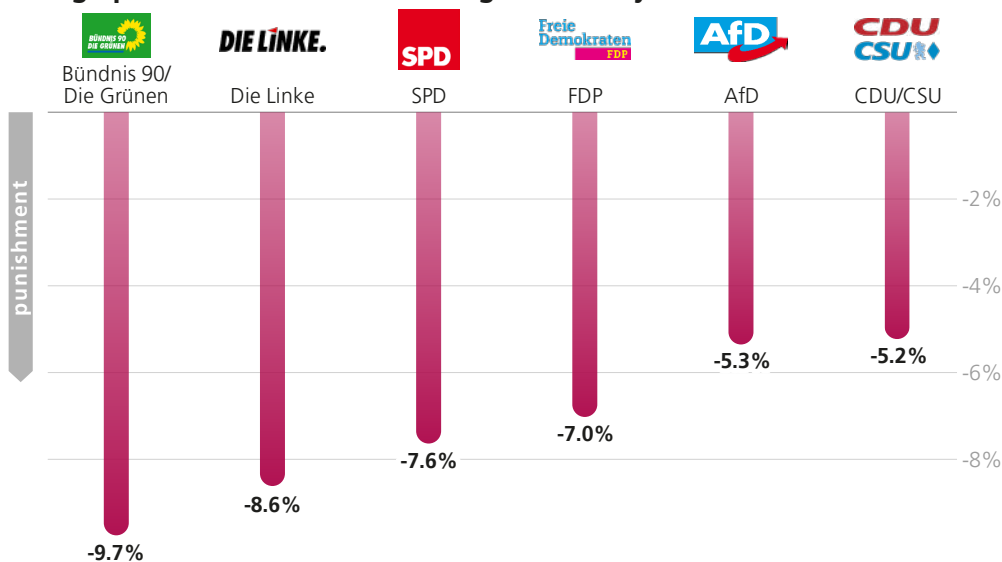
## WHICH PARTY'S VOTERS PUNISH

## UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THE MOST?

Voters of all parties represented in the German national parliament punish undemocratic behavior of a candidate to a certain extent, however, the punishing rates among the parties differ quite a bit. A candidate with an undemocratic position would lose -9.7% of votes from Green voters and -8.6% from Left party voters. Among voters of the FDP and SPD, that candidate loses -7% and -7.6% respectively, while AfD voters

punish the candidate with a -5.3% loss and CDU/CSU voters with a -5.2% loss. The latter voter group also rewards passing laws without parliamentary debate with a +12.1% vote share increase. Interestingly, voters who vote for "other" parties punish the strongest: -11.1% of the vote share. And even non-voters punish with -4.4% of the vote share.

### Average punishment for undermining democracy



## Environment & taxes

German voters reward the highest across the sample when a candidate proposes their respective favorite policy on the environment and taxes, thereby neglecting undemocratic behavior.

## Summary for Germany

A large majority of respondents in Germany support democratic standards and the rule of law. However, we also see some ambivalences in our findings: Germans are comparatively trustful of the judicial system, however, also find it comparatively acceptable if judges are appointed according to partisan interests. When it comes to defending democratic standards in our experiment at the ballot box, Germans score slightly below average. They are most likely to defend religious freedom, the right of assembly and electoral fairness.

As for all other countries under observation, however, party loyalty is the most important determinant of voting behavior. Germans completely forgive a candidate their undemocratic behavior if they are from their favorite party. But group loyalty and identity issues also play an important role when it comes to voting decisions in Germany: a preferred position on rights for same-sex couples as well as on immigration are prioritized at the ballot box over rejecting undemocratic positions. Polarization for certain issues appears to play only a partial role in punishing undemocratic behavior. In Germany, there are some issues that are not polarizing but are rated as important enough to compensate for the loss of votes for undemocratic behavior.