



## **Mind the gap: understanding public opinion and elite interpretations of EU concerns in Germany**

*Country case study for the project 'Nothing to fear but fear itself?'*

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## Summary

Germany has long been viewed as a country of Europhiles, but recently the country has been displaying signs of growing Euroscepticism. When asked to think about Europe, a sizeable minority of Germans expresses concern over a loss of social security or jobs, a loss of national identity and culture, or Germany's financial contributions to the European Union. German political elites across the left-right spectrum have left these concerns largely unaddressed and continue to advocate for the European project. This raises questions about a potential gap between public and elite conceptions of EU fears.

Our comparison of survey data on German public opinion with insights from elite interviews with political leaders reveals that there is indeed a gap between public opinion and elite interpretations of the EU. Political decision makers across the left-right spectrum perceive fears in Germany to be largely generalised, non-concrete and unrelated to evaluations of the EU. However, this is the case for a minority of Germans only. The majority show a pattern of concrete, distinguishable concerns, suggesting that we cannot speak about EU fears in the aggregate. Citizens' levels of concern are directly related to their evaluations of Germany's future strategy in the EU: those who are more concerned overall are more likely to want Germany to leave the EU or work towards reducing the EU's powers. While we find citizens' concerns to be dependent on both pragmatic economic evaluations and more emotive variables such as the degree of national and European identification, politicians focus on pragmatic economic evaluations. They underestimate the impact of emotional affiliations as expressed through identity on German public opinion.

Given German political elites' limited understanding of the public's concerns, it is not surprising to find that politicians have difficulties addressing these concerns. Although politicians recognise the importance of representation for citizens' evaluations of the legitimacy of the EU, the measures they suggest remain largely one-dimensional, centred upon explaining the EU's procedures and increasing identification with the EU. Politicians, it seems, struggle to think of measures that improve the EU's problem-solving capacity.

In order to close the gap between public and elite conceptions about the EU in Germany, it is crucial to support politicians in their task to understand and address citizens' concerns. This requires research and debate on EU-related concerns, strategies for the transfer of knowledge about their underlying drivers and instruments to facilitate public-elite interaction about the EU as well as a broader range of policy options to address EU concerns across several levels of governance.

**This report presents research d|part conducted as a part of a pan-European research project hosted the UK-based think tank, Demos.**

The project sought to capture how an emerging culture and politics of fear is gripping the European Union as a whole, and its unique manifestations within member states. d|part acted as one of six country-based partners. This report presents findings from research in Germany as a contribution to the project.



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## Introduction

Germany has long been viewed as a country of Europhiles. A recent survey conducted for the purpose of this project concludes that of the six European countries in the study (Germany, France, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), Germany has the least eurosceptic citizenry.<sup>1</sup> However, while perhaps less eurosceptic than other places in Europe, recurring crises in the European Union have left their mark on German society and public opinion towards the European Union (henceforth EU). The German public has recently shown signs of increasingly eurosceptic attitudes.

German public attitudes towards the EU seem paradoxical at first. On the one hand, more Germans than ever agree that membership in the EU is a good thing (71%) and that overall their country has benefited from EU membership (62%).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, after a first low during the Eurozone crisis in 2010-11, the EU's image in Germany is on the decline, and faster than before. In Spring 2016 only 29% of Germans said the EU conjured up an overall positive image. These latest Eurobarometer measurements attest to one of the sharpest drops in public perception of the EU's image (-16% points from Spring 2015 to Spring 2016). Few countries have a more negative perception of the EU: it fares worse only in the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Greece.<sup>3</sup>

Many have expressed surprise at the EU's negative image in Germany. Germany is deemed the most powerful and most trusted member state in the EU;<sup>4</sup> concerns are perceived to be much less material than those of many other eurosceptics around the continent. Economic indicators provide clear evidence of the German economy's outstandingly fast recovery after the financial and Eurozone crisis.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to many of its neighbours it is deemed an 'island of the fortunate'. Yet, the decline of the EU's image among German publics suggests that there may be a difference between pragmatic evaluations of Germany's structural position within the EU and more ideological or emotional evaluations of the EU as an institution itself. Public opinion surveys point towards fear as one of the underlying drivers of the EU's negative image in Germany: when asked to think about the EU, a sizeable minority of Germans expresses concerns about the loss of social security or jobs, the loss of national identity and culture, or increasing payments to the EU.

These concerns have remained largely unaddressed by political leaders in Germany. Over the past few decades German political elites across the left-right spectrum have carefully crafted an identity that is anchored in an integrated Europe. Most established political parties in Germany continue to advocate for the European project and pursue policies that are geared towards deeper European integration, focusing on the technical and pragmatic evaluations of the EU's benefits. Even the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – often portrayed as Germany's answer to right-wing eurosceptic populists such as the UK Independence Party or the French Front National – has not always been campaigning against the EU or European integration per se. It was initially set up as a platform opposing Germany's financial commitments to the

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<sup>1</sup> Demos (2016). [The Age of Fear: new polling reveals a gloomy, divided Europe. Survey](#) among 1661 GB/ 1001 French/ 2125 German/ 1011 Polish/ 1000 Spanish/ 1007 Swedish adults, conducted by YouGov between 23rd Aug – 7th Sep 2016.

<sup>2</sup> European Parliament Eurobarometer (EB/EP) 84.1 (2015). [Parlemeter 2015](#).

<sup>3</sup> Eurobarometer 85 (2016). [Public opinion in the European Union. Wave EB85.2](#).

<sup>4</sup> Hilmer, R. (2016). [The European Union facing massive challenges – what are citizens' expectations and concerns? A representative 8-country-survey](#). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> Erber, G. & Hagemann, H. (2013). [Growth and investment dynamics in Germany after the global financial crisis](#). DIW Economic Bulletin 2.2013.

EU in particular and has now turned towards advocating for conservative migration policy rather than against EU integration as its core issue.<sup>6</sup>

The paradox of the EU's declining image among German citizens while Germany is currently the EU's most influential, most prosperous and – at least in terms of political elites – most europhile member state raises the question of whether there is a gap between public and elite conceptions of the EU in Germany. What exactly drives fears about the EU among German citizens? Are EU-related fears in Germany a mere expression of a general culture of fear? Are political elites in Germany aware of these fears and if so, how do they interpret them?

In this report we present findings from a case study of concerns about the EU in Germany and their evaluation by German political elites. We combine analysis of public opinion data with insights derived from elite interviews with German politicians and political analysts to further the understanding of concerns and explore how political elites evaluate and address these concerns. Key insights presented in this report focus on the different types of concerns expressed by citizens, drivers of these concerns and how they can be addressed by political elites. Throughout the report we compare citizens' expressions of concern with how political decision makers evaluate them. Based on the understanding of concerns among German citizens and political elites we ultimately recommend strategies to approach these fears in the broader European context.

## Method

To further the understanding of concerns about the EU in Germany and determine whether there is a gap between citizens' EU fears and their evaluation by political elites in Germany we contrast the analysis of public opinion data about attitudes towards the EU with insights derived from elite interviews with German politicians and political analysts. The aim is to provide some explicit contrasts between elite and mass views and understand where public perceptions are adequately understood by decision makers and where gaps in understanding may exist that demand further exploration.

### *(I) Analysis of public opinion survey data on EU attitudes in Germany*

To gain an understanding of citizen's attitudes towards the EU in Germany, we analyse the German dataset of a comparative survey commissioned by Demos for the purpose of this project. A sample of 2,125 German adults (18+), representative in terms of age, gender, and region, was interviewed about their fears with regard to the EU as well as attitudes towards the EU and their representation in it.

In addition to capturing demographic data, education and income, the survey consisted of a total of twelve questions, of which eight questions were asked across all countries included in the study (Germany, France, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) and four were specific to the German case study. Where possible survey questions were adopted from existing standard surveys on political attitudes, such as the European Social Survey and the European Value Survey. The survey was conducted online by YouGov between 23rd August and 7th September 2016. Respondents were invited through YouGov's online panel and were included in the final data set if they answered all questions. The final data have been weighted, taking into account last political vote, education and political attention.

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<sup>6</sup> Lochocki, T. (2014). [The unstoppable far right? How established parties' communication and media reporting of European affairs affect the electoral advances of right-populist parties](#). The German Marshall Fund of the United States. Europe Policy Paper, 4/2014. Available at

## *(II) Elite interviews with political leaders*

To understand the extent to which we can speak of a gap between public and elite conceptions of the EU in Germany, we contrast data on public opinion with the views of political decision makers, as expressed in our interviews with them. In doing so, we employ a broad definition of political elites that comprises all those who act as key representatives, decision makers and gatekeepers or hold exclusive information about political processes. In this sense, political elites can include, among others, politicians at various levels of government or representation, staff at political institutions, political analysts and researchers as well as journalists.

In this report we present insights from a total of nine interviews with political elites in Germany. The sample includes politicians from several levels: regional, national and European. Regional party functionaries, members of the German Bundestag (henceforth MP) and members of the European parliament (henceforth MEP) have been interviewed. All four political parties constituting the current German parliament are represented in the sample. The sample further includes analysts from different political party think tanks and a journalist. The participants represent various regions in Germany (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Geographic spread of elite participants

Participants were recruited via d|part's network and at high-level workshops about current policy issues. With the exception of analysts from party think tanks, participants were selected such as to represent various areas of policy expertise, not specifically European affairs. The sample includes politicians focused on energy and transport policy, environmental policy, regional development, home and foreign affairs. In 45 minutes to one hour long conversations, the participants were asked about their conception of citizens' evaluations of the EU, the concrete concerns and fears of citizens in their constituency, and how they evaluate and plan to address these concerns. Interviews took place in person or via telephone and were conducted between 14th September and 17th October 2016.



## Results

When asked to think about the EU, sizeable numbers of Germans express strong fears about the impact of the EU. There are majorities with strong concerns about the loss of social security (53%) and increasing payments to the EU (52%) and significant minorities with strong fears about the loss of jobs (45%) and the loss of national identity and culture in Germany (42%). We observe the lowest level of concern for the loss of power in the world, where only 24% of respondents can be classified as strongly concerned (see Figure 2).

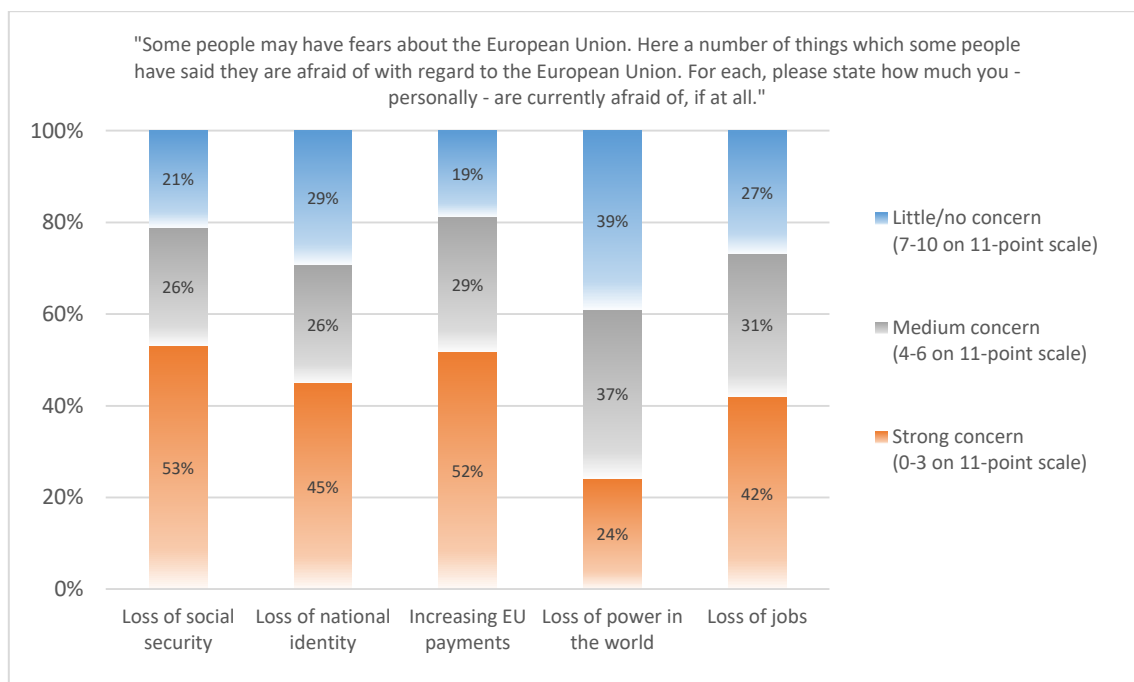


Figure 2. % of respondents expressing concern with regard to the European Union

Taking a closer look at these aggregate figures we find that the levels of concern vary significantly across the different issues. Someone who is very concerned about the loss of jobs may very well express little or no concern over other factors, suggesting that the driver of such concern is not a general sense of fear, but rather a more specific motivation.

What is more: the five areas of concern show distinct distributions of fear in the population. The loss of social security and increasing payments to the EU are of at least some concern for many citizens. When asked about the loss of national identity and the loss of jobs most citizens say they are not at all concerned, while a small group expresses strong concern.

These differences in distribution require further investigation. They allude to differences in the underlying drivers of fears: there are various motivations why citizens express distinct and specific concerns. In the following, we focus on the individual perspectives citizens and political decision makers take with regard to concerns about the EU in Germany. We investigate how far we can speak of similar drivers of concern across populations and how politicians perceive citizens' concerns.



## Insight 1: Diffuse, generalised perception of fear versus concrete concerns

Politicians in Germany believe there are no concrete, distinguishable fears or worries in relation to the EU. Four out of six politicians say that they have not heard of or talked to citizens in their constituency about concrete concerns in relation to the EU. Instead, they describe a latent feeling of general concern. Looking at the macroeconomic condition rather than at people's individual perceptions, politicians say that – in contrast to five or ten years ago when Germany was considered 'the sick man of Europe'<sup>7</sup> – the loss of social security or loss of jobs are not concrete fears of citizens in their constituency. If concrete concerns are mentioned at all, then only in relation to citizens who are perceived to hold extreme political opinions.

*"I have honestly never heard of anyone afraid about a loss of power in the world for Germany."*

- MP, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) -

*"The loss of jobs or social security is not an issue here at the moment. Whoever wants to work, can work in Germany at the moment."*

- MEP, Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU) -

*"I haven't heard anyone in my constituency be concerned about the loss of their national identity or German culture. Maybe this is more of a concern in Frauke Petry's constituency?"<sup>8</sup>*

- MP, CDU/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU) -

Instead, politicians theorise about non-concrete fear and insecurity amongst the German public. This general feeling of insecurity is believed to originate from recurring crises and global challenges, but also in particular from citizens' pragmatic evaluations of Germany's economic condition. According to politicians, citizens may fear that Germany's current economic prosperity is in danger and that social and economic decline are looming. Some mention that the recurring crises in the EU might lead citizens to project a general feeling of insecurity and precariousness onto the EU.

*"There is a general concern that stems from the constant crises that we are facing. They are mixed up somehow."*

- MP, SPD -

*"It is less of a concrete fear that you could personally be affected, but more a general emotional state."*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

*"There is an accumulation of many anxieties about the future piled up: What will happen to my future? How about my job, my pension?"*

- Analyst -

*"When looking at all the crises around us at the moment, I am not surprised when I hear people say 'How is this going to affect Germany?' The underlying question is of course whether we, too, will not do so well anymore in the future."*

- Analyst -

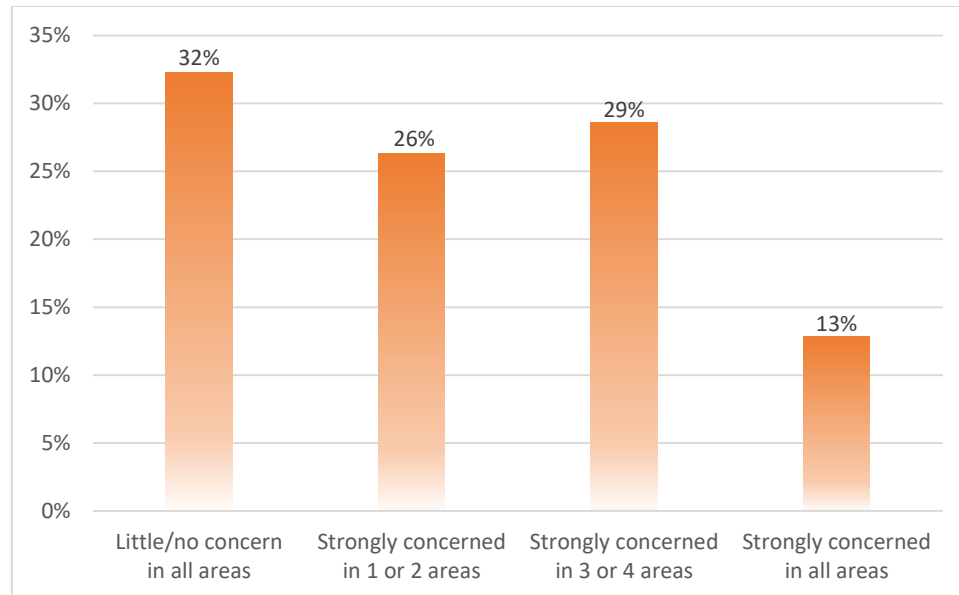
*"In particular the refugees impersonate the worries of citizens whether or not we will be able to keep our current level of prosperity."*

- Journalist -

<sup>7</sup> The Economist (1999, June 3<sup>rd</sup>). The sick man of the euro. Available at <http://www.economist.com/node/209559>.

<sup>8</sup> Frauke Petry is the leader of the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, or AfD).

If we were to assume that there is indeed a generalised, diffuse feeling of fear amongst the German public, we would expect to see the majority of citizens report generalised concerns across all or most areas included in the survey: social security, jobs, national identity, power in the world, and increasing EU payments. Yet, the survey data reveals that this is the case for a minority of Germans only: less than 15% of respondents express concerns across all areas included in the survey (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3. % of respondents who express strong concern (0-3 on 11-point scale) across the five areas included*

In other words, when we compare the concerns expressed by German citizens with political elites' perceptions of these fears, we find that there is indeed a gap between public opinion and elite interpretations in Germany. While political decision makers perceive fears and insecurities among German publics to be largely generalised, non-concrete or unrelated to the evaluation of the EU, citizens show a pattern of concrete, distinguishable fears that are relevant to their evaluation of the EU. There are various reasons why citizens express concerns across the five areas included in this survey. What is needed is to carefully distinguish between different types of concerns, to uncover the experiences and views that motivate them.

As figure 3 shows, a minority of Germans do express concern about the EU across the board. This group has a distinguishable profile: those who express similarly high levels of concern across all five dimensions are most likely to identify with the AfD (though closely followed by those who do not feel close to any party). They tend to be older, tend to identify as Germans only and feel least represented in the EU, especially by German political actors. Similarly 32% of respondents find very little to be afraid of in relation to the EU. Those who feel close to the Green Party are least likely to show fears regarding the EU overall, but at times they share that position with other parties. For instance, those identifying with the liberal FDP tend to share the Greens' low level of concern regarding potential social security losses, while they are significantly more concerned about other aspects of EU membership.

In contrast to politicians' perceptions of a generalised feeling of insecurity, the majority of citizens show a pattern of concrete, distinguishable concern. More than 50% of respondents express significant concern about only a few topics. This suggests that we cannot speak about EU fears as an aggregate, generalised feeling, but need to distinguish between different types of concerns and their drivers.

It is difficult to make out a particular demographic profile for those who express different types of concern although some of the variation in levels of concern correlates with different demographic characteristics. On all five indicators, women are somewhat more likely to be fearful than men (see Figure 4). Younger people (aged 18-34 years) tend to be less concerned about the EU, but not to the same extent across all dimensions (see Figure 5). Eastern Germans are on the whole more worried about the EU than those who live in the West of the country (most pronounced for loss of social security and loss of national identity), but the differences are marginal (see Figure 7). We will take a closer look at Germany's history or re-unification and the particular age groups driving this East-West difference on page 16. The most consistent effect is found for education. Those who have enjoyed higher levels of education tend to be significantly less concerned about the EU. The strength of this relationship is mostly consistent across all five dimensions (see Figure 6).

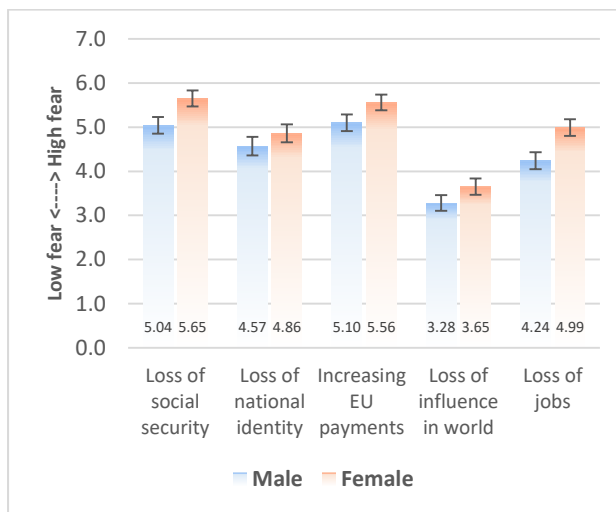


Figure 4. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals<sup>9</sup>) by sex

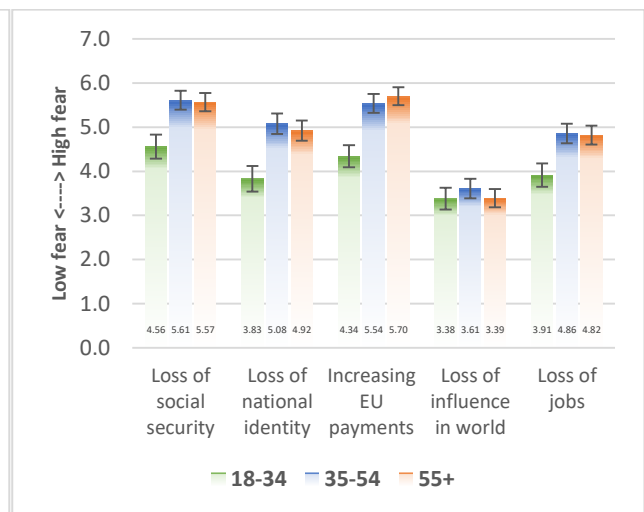


Figure 5. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals<sup>9</sup>) by age

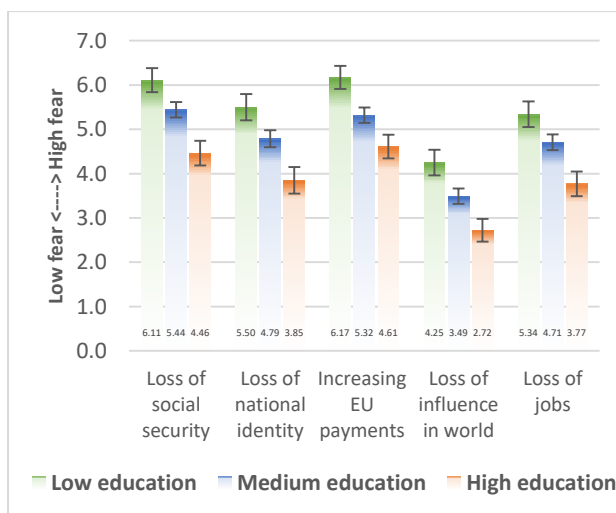


Figure 6. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals<sup>9</sup>) by education

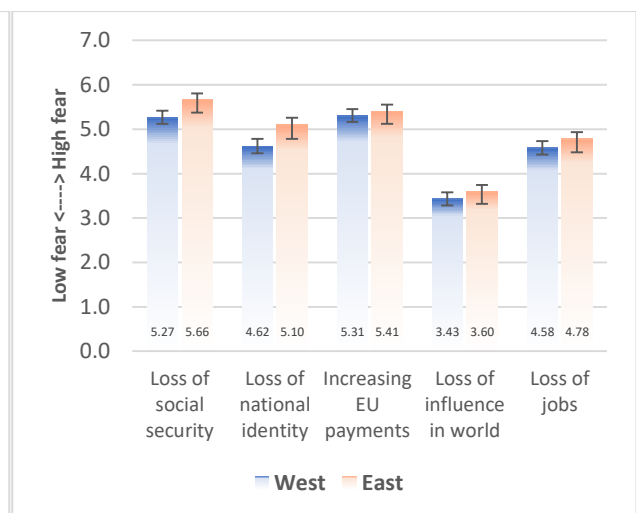


Figure 7. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals<sup>9</sup>) by old and new (East) federal states (West)

<sup>9</sup> Sample mean plus / minus 1.96 times its standard error

It is especially differences in party identification across the types of concern that illustrate how we cannot speak of a latent sentiment of fear across the German population. There are some parties whose supporters show distinct positions, but also clear differences between types of fears. Supporters of different political parties have different concerns (see Figure 8), suggesting that we should not talk about EU fears in the aggregate but distinguish between them carefully. Looking at the parties that form the current coalition government in Germany (CDU/CSU and SPD), CDU/CSU supporters are more worried about increasing payments from Germany to the EU and a loss of national identity than those supporting the Social Democrats. Yet, regarding fears of losing jobs, a loss of influence in the world and a loss of social security, SPD and CDU/CSU supporters appear to be equally concerned. Citizens who identify with Die LINKE (together with those who feel closest to the Greens) are least likely to show concern about a loss of influence in the world, while they are most concerned about a potential loss of social security. Citizens who identify with Die LINKE (together with those who feel closest to the Greens) are least likely to show concern about a loss of influence in the world, while they are most concerned about a potential loss of social security.

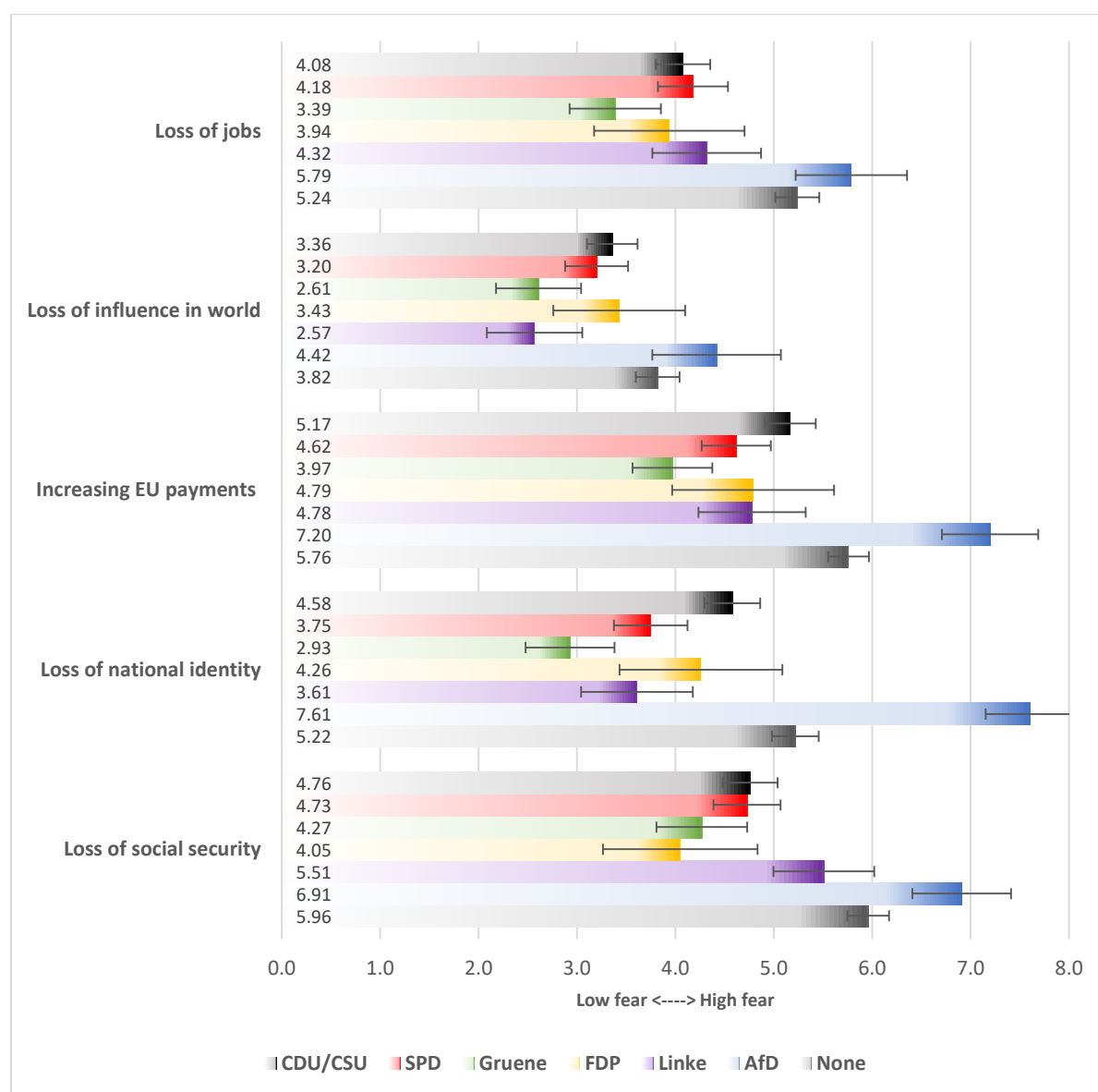


Figure 8. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals) by political party respondent feels an affinity for (excluding other parties with small sample sizes)

Thus far, the results demonstrate that particular positions on the political spectrum are not so much associated with a general level of concern about the EU, but rather with concern about specific aspects of it. This suggests that if we can speak of a 'latent fear' at all, then only for a small part of the population. While we do find that high levels of general concern often coincide with support for the AfD or for no party at all, everything in between is quite complex. Based on this complexity we can refute claims that one party's supporters are clearly more or less positive in appraising the EU than others. The exception are those who identify with the AfD or no party at all: they are most likely to show a pattern of generalised concern. For the remainder, we need to distinguish between different types of fears and drivers of fear.

## **Insight 2: Citizens' concerns are related to their evaluations of the future of the EU**

Some politicians believe that citizens project their generalised feeling of insecurity onto the EU, suggesting attitudes to the EU bear little relation to concrete EU outputs. Recurring crises in the EU and a lack of legitimacy on the part of EU institutions are believed to forge a connection between generalised fears and criticism of the EU and Germany's long-term strategy in it:

*"I don't think there are concrete EU-related fears or worries. It is more a diffuse, abstract feeling of insecurity among citizens."*

- MP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*"For many people, the EU is the scapegoat for all sorts of problems."*

- Regional party functionary, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*"We have only talked about crises in Europe lately. No wonder citizens believe everything bad comes from the EU."*

- MP, SPD -

We find, however, that citizens' concerns are directly related to their evaluations of Germany's future strategy in the EU. Those respondents who say that Germany should leave the EU are significantly and substantially more likely to express fears across the different domains under investigation than any other group (see Figure 9). We also find that those who think that powers should be returned to the member states are significantly more likely to be concerned than those who want to maintain the status quo or increase the EU's powers (though the difference tends to be smaller than compared to those advocating for a full exit from the EU, except for increasing EU payments).

At the other end of the spectrum, however, there is no simple linear relationship between the degree of concern and Germany's long-term strategy in the EU. In other words, a step towards more pro-EU views is not necessarily associated with decreasing EU fears. For most domains of concern there are no significant differences between those who want to expand the powers of the EU, those who want a single European government and those who favour the status quo. Those who favour the status quo are in fact less worried about a loss in social security for example than those who want to see more governance at the EU level.

This suggests that the relationship between fears about the EU and constitutional preferences about Germany's relationship with the EU is not simple or linear; it is asymmetric. While those who want to see the powers of the EU reduced or Germany to leave the EU indeed express more concern with regard to the EU across the different areas under investigation, we do not find that

the same applies for those favouring the status quo or an enhancement of EU powers compared to the most europhile respondents. Taken together, those who favour the EU's status quo are the least concerned across areas. Those who want to either reduce or increase the EU's competencies express distinct concerns in at least some of the areas included in this survey. In the widest sense, this can be interpreted as a mandate for EU reform to alleviate individual concrete concerns about the EU in Germany.

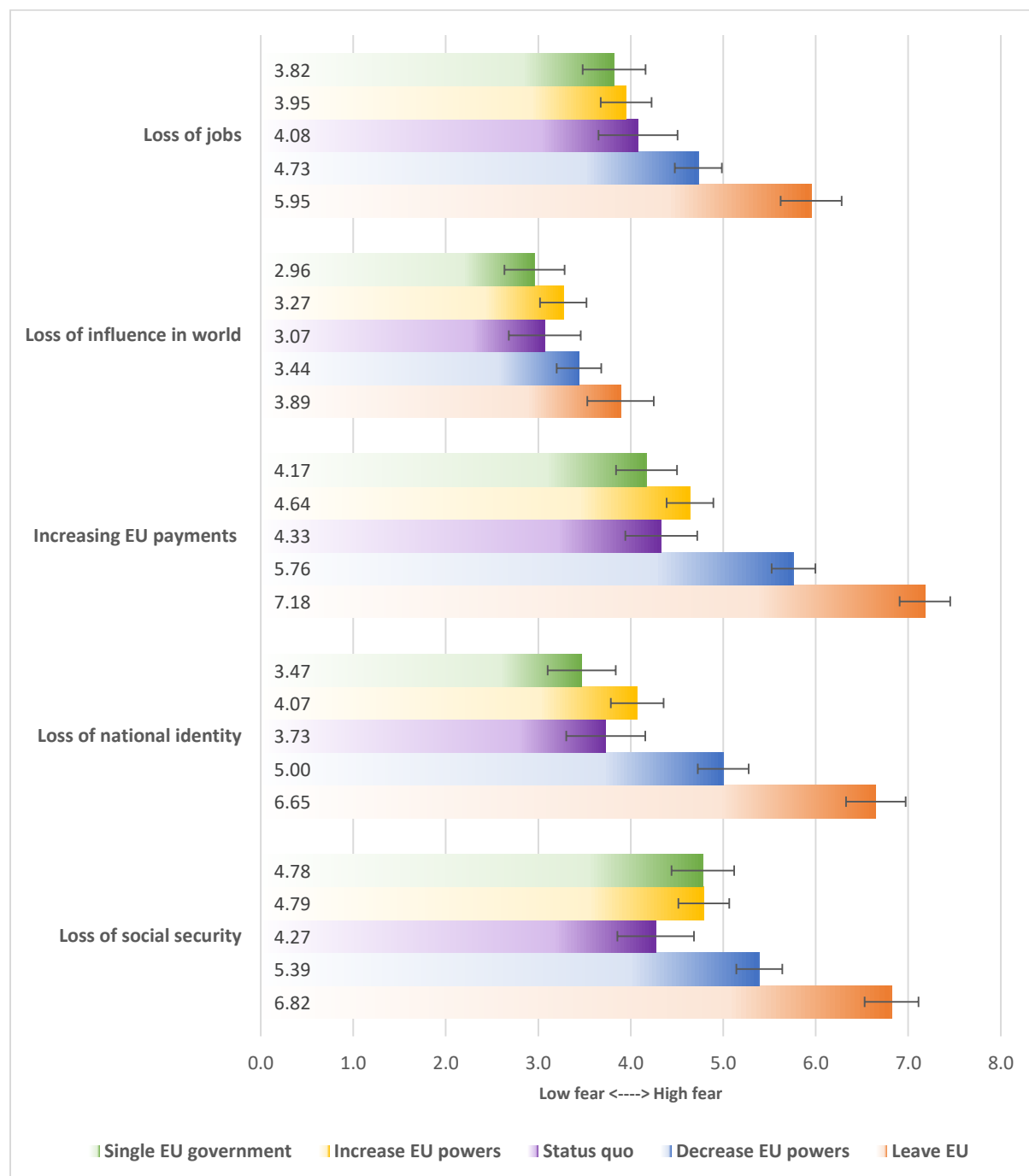


Figure 9. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals) by view of what Germany's long-term strategy towards the European Union should be

### Insight 3: Concerns about the EU are dependent on both pragmatic economic evaluations and emotive (latent) variables

What drives citizens' concerns about the EU? Based on the complexities in the distribution of concern, demographic patterns and party identification as well as the asymmetric relationship between fears about the EU and constitutional preferences about Germany's relationship with the EU we have seen so far, we assume that the underlying drivers of EU concern are not uniform either. We indeed find that citizens' concerns about the EU are dependent on two types of considerations: pragmatic economic concerns and emotive variables such as the degree of national and European identification.

#### A: Pragmatic economic evaluations as a driving force of EU concerns

We find a significant correlation between concerns about the EU and citizens' individual appraisal of their own economic prospects over the next 12 months. Those who have a negative outlook on their own position in the near future are also more concerned about the EU than those who have a positive outlook. Citizens who say that they have positive expectations for their own future are less likely to express concerns across all five dimensions included in this study.

However, the strength of the effect varies across the different domains of concern. It is least pronounced for the question of whether people fear a loss of influence in the world where there is no significant difference between those thinking their own situation will be better and those who think there will be no change. In all cases the negative effect is stronger than the positive effect: the difference between those who expect their situation to become less favourable (and have greater fears) compared to those who expect no change, is greater than the comparison with those expecting an improvement.

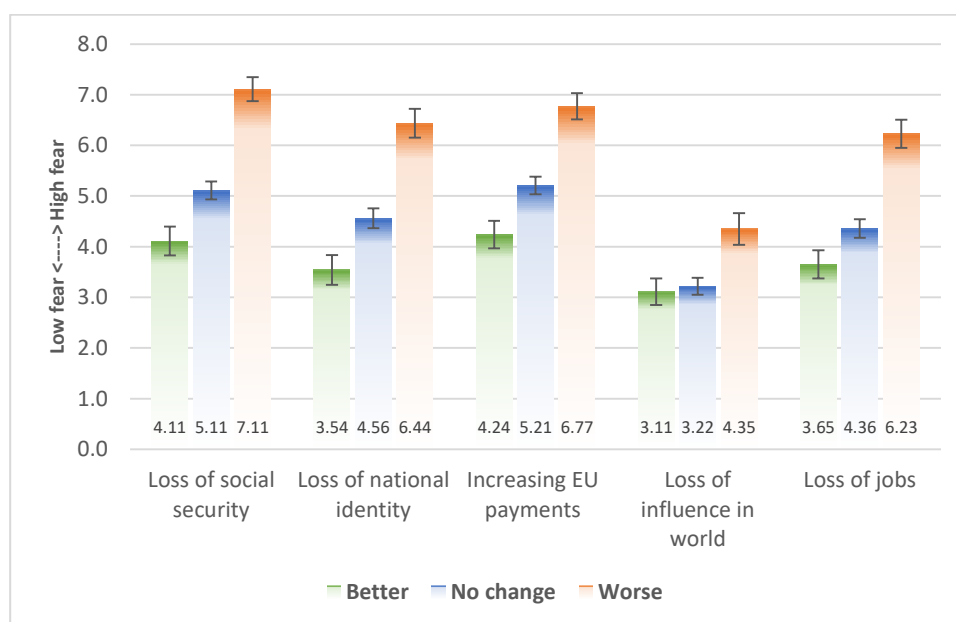


Figure 10. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals) by expectations about how one's own personal situation will develop over the next 12 months



In their analysis, politicians and political analysts acknowledge that pragmatic economic considerations are the main driver of public concern. However, many focus on macroeconomic conditions. Looking at Germany's outstanding economic indicators, they believe that citizens understand how the country's current economic development is *"completely different from that in the rest of Europe"* (MP, SPD) and how Germany is *"an island of the fortunate"* (MP, SPD). Citizens are thought to understand how *"Germany is only doing well [economically] when others [in the EU] are doing well"* (Analyst). According to politicians, citizens' pragmatic evaluations of Germany's export-oriented economy and its prospects in a crisis-ridden EU give rise to general insecurity and an overall *"gloomy outlook"*. Concerns about Germany's economic prosperity are ultimately related to a feeling of relative economic precariousness and an (unfounded) fear of social and economic decline.

Few politicians differentiate between macroeconomic and individual evaluations of the economic situation: only two of the politicians interviewed for this study admit that the economic evaluations are very different depending on who they speak to.

*"If someone has just lost their job, it doesn't really help to gush about the macroeconomic benefits we gain from being a member of the EU."*

- MP, SPD -

They recognise that there are big discrepancies between, for example, citizens in different types of work relations, economically advantaged and disadvantaged groups, citizens in Eastern and Western Germany as well as in urban and rural regions in Germany.

### **DEEP DIVE: Where the East-West divide continues to exist**

25 years after German reunification, differences between East and West Germany are still apparent in some areas of public opinion. While in most domains investigated for the purpose of this case study East-West differences are marginal, they persist especially in the evaluation one's personal (economic) situation and outlook on the future. One reason is that our evaluation of our personal situation is relative – relative to the situation of others as well as relative to earlier life experience. The older we are the further we can look back: we compare whether our current situation is better or worse than previous experiences over the life course. This makes differences in evaluations of the personal (economic) situation especially sticky.

Three interviewees (two political analysts and one politician whose constituency is in one of the new federal states) mention that it is the older generations of East Germans for whom evaluations of one's personal economic situation matter the most. Particularly the generation of today's 50-65 year olds, who grew up and started their careers in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), went through several major transformations over the course of their working lives (reunification during the 1990s, digitalisation, social and welfare reform during the 2000s, financial crisis during the 2010s).

*"What we have seen are repeated devaluations of living conditions since 1989: first there was reunification, then the Hartz-Reforms, the financial crisis and now a refugee crisis. Naturally, this presented recurring challenges to identity."*

- Analyst -

*“90% of these people do a completely different job today than they did in 1990.”*

- MEP, CDU -

These transformations brought challenges, significant hardships and left a number of people behind, especially in the new federal states of the former East. Even for those who successfully adapted to the changing environment of their working lives, the experience of knowing at least one family member or friend who failed to adapt to the many changes in state, labour market and economic conditions creates the perception that Germany's current economic success is hard-earned and not to be taken for granted. As a consequence, this generation of (Eastern) Germans is especially wary of potential economic or social decline, the loss of social security (in particular with regard to pensions) and potential increases in tax rates caused by ever-larger payments to the EU. In simple terms, nobody has any interest in going through further hardships:

*“It is almost a reflex that many people now have zero interest in going through similar transformations or to have to take similar risks yet again.”*

- MEP, CDU -

Accordingly, when we look at the expectations about how one's own personal situation will develop over the next 12 months for both East and West Germany across different age groups, we find that it is especially the middle-aged group of Eastern Germans (those who underwent most transformation in their working lives) who are most likely to have a pessimistic outlook. Differences between age groups are more pronounced in the East than in West Germany.

This difference is also apparent in the levels of concern about the EU: while the overall effect of pragmatic economic evaluations as a driver of different types of concern exists in both East and Western Germans, it is more pronounced in East Germany, especially for fears of a loss of social security and increasing payments to the EU (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals) by expectations about how one's own personal situation will develop over the next 12 months (West vs. East Germany)

## B: Identity as a driving force of EU concerns

However not everything is determined by pragmatic evaluations of the economic situation. There are also more emotive factors that we find to be connected to the fears people have about the EU. There is a clear association between national identity and concern about the EU (see Figure 12). Those who identify as solely German are significantly more likely to be concerned about the EU, but even those who say that they are more German than European are more concerned than those who say they are more European than German. However, the strength of the relationship varies greatly. Unsurprisingly it is most strongly correlated to fears about losing one's national identity, but also quite a lot to a more pragmatic dimension, namely the fear of increasing payments to the EU.

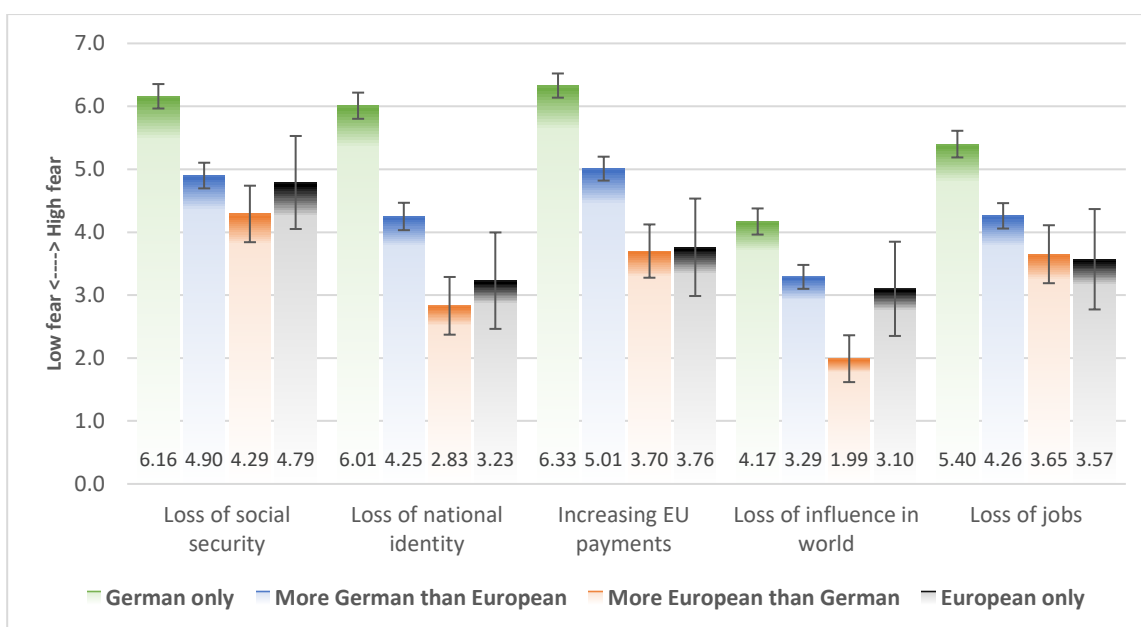


Figure 12. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals) by identity

It is a widely accepted myth that matters of national identity and culture have little impact on German public opinion. While it is true that compared to other EU member states German public opinion is less impacted by national identity,<sup>10</sup> this does not mean it plays no role at all. It is therefore not surprising that politicians largely underestimate the impact of identity when assessing what drives EU-related concerns.

Some claim that citizens in their constituency have not mentioned concerns about a loss of national identity and culture. Others argue fears over a loss of German culture are important only in relation to objections to international trade agreements. If at all, it is at the extreme margins of public opinion that politicians believe evaluations of identity and culture can be a driver of insecurity and fear. Calls for 'Germanisation' and a heightened awareness for German national identity are perceived to be extreme view of a few members of the citizenry only.

<sup>10</sup> Eichhorn, J., Hübner, C., and Kenealy, D. (2016). The view from the continent: What people in other member states think about the UK's EU referendum.

*"I haven't heard anyone in my constituency be concerned about the loss of their national identity or German culture."*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

*"Nobody in my constituency would say something as extreme as 'Germany is not German enough anymore!' But there are worries about the future of our cultural assets. For example, people are worried what will happen to our Franconian Bratwurst when things like CETA or TTIP come into place."*

- MP, SPD -

*"This [national identity and culture] is a topic that is addressed by few people with radical opinions only. The general public is less concerned about this."*

- MEP, CDU -

#### **Insight 4: Citizens' perceptions of their representation in the EU matter**

When it comes to addressing citizens' concerns, all politicians acknowledge that this is mainly their responsibility. Civil society organisations, public administration, the media, and German industry and businesses (in their role as employers) are expected to contribute, but politicians as representatives of the people in their constituency carry most of the responsibility to address (and ideally offer solutions to) citizens' concerns:

*"That's our role as representatives. And I don't want to shy away from it."*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

*"If citizens come to me to complain about the EU, that's my role as an MP – to solve their problems."*

- MP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*"Politicians are responsible for crafting a positive vision of Europe."*

- Regional party functionary, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

Those politicians who perceive fears to largely be latent, non-concrete and (somewhat unfoundedly) projected onto the EU suggest the best way to restore trust in the EU among German publics is to explain the advantages of the EU to citizens.

*"We have only talked about crises lately. We need to talk more about success stories in Europe."*

- MP, SPD -

*"We need to explain better what Europe is all about."*

- MP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*"We need to take time to explain once more what it is that the EU offers."*

- MEP, CDU -

*"Citizens are taking the EU's successes for granted and only pay attention to the problems. We need to make them aware of the true achievements again."*

- MP, SPD -

If explaining the benefits of the EU to German citizens were enough to restore trust in the EU, we would not expect a strong link between citizens' evaluations of representation and fears about the EU. With a mere lack of understanding of the EU as a driver of concerns, we would have no ground to expect that representation at either level – local, national or European – mattered in a distinct way, unless it was in some way related to citizens' understanding of EU institutions. Instead, we would expect to find concerned citizens who feel well represented and those who feel less well represented.

By contrast, however, we find that perceptions of political representation matter a lot. There is a clear association between evaluations of representation at the national and European level and concerns about the EU in Germany. The better citizens feel that Germany is represented, the lower are their levels of fear across the five different domains (see Figure 13). The relationship is least pronounced for worries about a loss of influence in the world, but still significant. Again, we find that positive effects are less pronounced than negative ones: compared to those who think Germany's representation is neither better nor worse than that of other countries, those who think it is better show somewhat lower levels of fear, but those who consider the representation worse are much more fearful. There is a clear imperative for politics: it is not ultimately important to make people feel that Germany is in a better situation than others, but at least not worse.

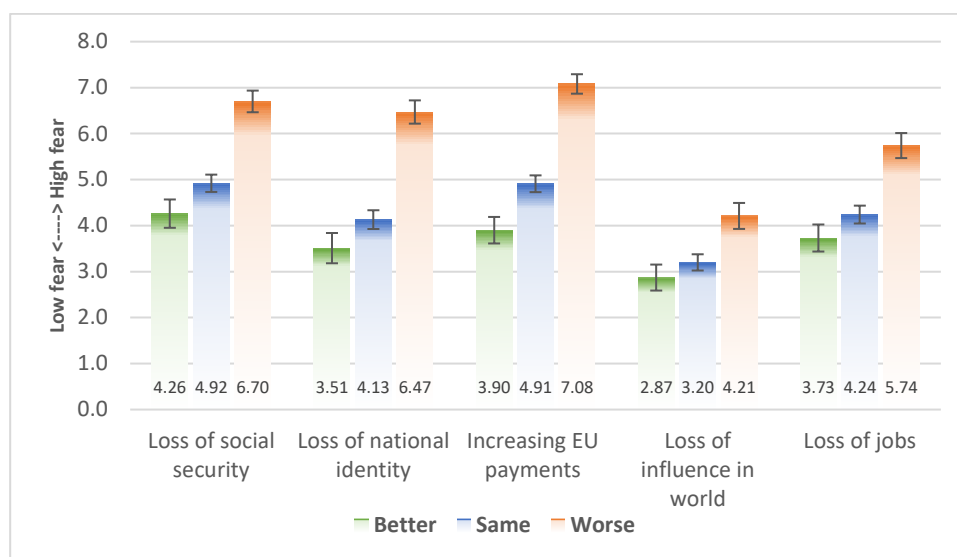


Figure 13. Fears (mean scores with 95% confidence intervals) by how well people see Germany represented in the EU compared to most other member states

Citizens' evaluations of representation and government depend on assessments of legitimacy. Fritz Scharpf provides a helpful distinction when thinking about evaluations of legitimacy. He distinguishes input-oriented and output-oriented legitimizing beliefs.<sup>11</sup> Input legitimacy, according to Scharpf, refers to the institutional settings that enable citizens to have their voices heard and justify the existence of institutions even if those may not serve to further one's individual preferences. Output legitimacy, by contrast, arises from substantive problem-solving capacity of governing institutions. Studies on legitimacy in the EU find that there is generally an emphasis on output legitimacy to justify EU governance.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Scharpf, F. (2009). Legitimacy in the multilevel European polity. MPIfG Working Paper 09(01). Available at: <http://www.mpifg.de/pu/workpap/wp09-1.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Eichhorn, Jan, Hensing, Jakob & Hübner, Christine. 2016. Economic crisis and political legitimacy. In Voicu, Malina, Ingwill C. Mochmann, and Hermann Dülmer (Eds). *Values, economic crisis and democracy*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

Most politicians recognise these two dimensions of legitimacy. Input legitimacy is believed to be lacking, in the sense that citizens perceive the EU to be distant and feel they have no say in it. According to politicians in Germany, the EU is an undefined political entity, far away from citizens' daily lives. It is complicated for both citizens as well as politicians to understand what is going on at the level of the EU. A weak European Parliament and an EU that is perceived as a political community without a face to citizens are deemed to further contribute to the impression of a lack of transparency and democratic control. The argument that an unreasonable piece of legislation "comes from Brussels" or "from the EU" is considered conclusive in itself when citizens question political decisions.

*"Nobody really knows who the leader of the Commission or the Parliament is really."*

- Regional party functionary, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*"The EU is perceived as a bureaucratic monster."*

- MP, SPD -

*"This comes from Brussels' has become a legitimate excuse that no one [in Germany] questions any further."*

- MP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*"Even as a member of parliament, I sometimes don't understand what's going on at the EU level."*

- MP, SPD - <sup>13</sup>

Output legitimacy is also perceived to be lacking, because citizens see an EU that does not offer solutions to global challenges. According to politicians, citizens perceive the EU to be incapable of solving especially those issues that are the EU's ascribed core competency: migration and border security; preserving peace and economic prosperity and a joint environmental policy. The recurring crises in the EU have made the shortcomings of EU governance clear to many citizens in Germany: there is no common ground for joint solutions.

*"The crises of the last couple of years showed that the EU has reached its limits as a political system."*

- Analyst -

*"All European success stories are worth nothing if EU cannot find solutions to problems in imminent crises."*

- Journalist -

However, when asked how to specifically address citizens' concerns, politicians focus on measures of input legitimacy only by explaining the EU's procedures and increasing identification with the EU. Education about the EU and its institutions (e.g. in schools) and explaining the advantages of the EU better are first steps to address the EU's legitimacy issues, according to some politicians.

Politicians mention a range of concrete measures: city partnerships across the EU, an Interrail-pass for young Europeans, school visits to Brussels, education about the EU in school curricula, a continuation and extension of the Erasmus programme. Some grasp that it is only a combination of these that can manage to address citizens' concerns about their voice in the EU.

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<sup>13</sup> mentioned in similar words by two other politicians: MEP/CDU, MP/Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

*"[An Interrail-pass for young Europeans] might sound ridiculous at first, but if you think about it that's exactly the kind of positive sign that creates the sense for cooperation that we called for."*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

*"This [an Interrail-pass for young Europeans] is something concrete at least. That's worth looking into."*

- Regional party functionary, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

Politicians focus on measures to increase input legitimacy in the EU to the neglect of measures to increase the EU's problem-solving capacities. Only one politician specifically points out that soft measures to explain the EU are probably not enough to address concrete fears among dissatisfied citizens. Instead, the EU needs to offer solutions to concrete issues in order to improve its perception among the public. Another politician seems to feel similarly, stating that a joint refugee policy in the EU would be perceived as a real success and could potentially change citizens' evaluations of the EU.

By contrast, all political analysts in the sample mention that the EU's capacity to offer solutions to current crises and future challenges is key to addressing citizens' concerns and alleviating the growing culture of fear.

*"Explaining more [about the EU] would probably help little. Those who are disgruntled already, are also not coming to any of our events, not listening to us anyway."*

- MP, SPD -

*"Europe needs to be able to offer solutions to concrete issues, such as the refugee crisis."*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

*"If the EU managed to craft a picture of all member states acting in concert, this would be a real boost to citizens' evaluations of the EU."*

- Analyst -

*"[Our party] has a major strategic problem: that there is no strategy with regard to EU reform. (...) There are several avenues for reform available, however, and they would make a big difference for how our supporters view the EU."*

- Analyst -

We can only speculate as to why this view is so much more prevalent among political analysts than among politicians. While the sample of participants for our qualitative interviews is small and by no means representative of the entire political elite in Germany, one reason could be that political analysts are able to draw on comparative information. The political analysts interviewed for the purpose of this project referred to a range of empirical data, both of German public opinion and public opinion across Europe. This allowed them to compare the variety of views expressed by German publics to dominant views in other EU member states. On this basis, political analysts assign a key role to German political elites in the reform of EU institutions and policy:

*"Germany's role in the EU has changed drastically; it is no longer the junior partner to France. But this new position doesn't come without problems: Germany is obviously challenged to lead the way in finding joint solutions at the European level."*

- Analyst -



*“The German [representation] carries a lot of responsibility in Europe. It has to play a big role in restructuring how we look at the EU and its structure. Otherwise our entire party will just sink into insignificance in Europe.”*

- Analyst -

Politicians, on the other hand, focus on the views of citizens in their constituency as that is their main task: to solve their problems. A number of politicians mention that they find it difficult to create opportunities to talk to citizens about the EU: it is the citizens in their constituency who largely determine which events representatives are supposed to visit and what kind of topics they are supposed to speak about. If the EU is brought up as a topic by citizens, then mostly in connection with complaints about specific pieces of regulation that affect local industry or citizens.

*“It is difficult to deliver a message about the EU to my constituency. If I just randomly started talking about the EU when I was meant to report back from Berlin, voters would probably say ‘Well, he didn’t get the problem, this is not of interest to us.’”*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

*“It doesn’t happen often that citizens approach me with questions about the EU. If at all, then just as a torrent of complaints about bureaucracy and over-regulation.”*

- MP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen -

*“Recently I was invited to speak at a local business and the employees were invited to ask questions. Someone asked about the advantages of the EU. That was a rare opportunity for me to say something positive about the EU – this doesn’t usually happen.”*

- MP, CDU/CSU -

Comparative perspectives, access to empirical data and the opportunity to take a step back from the daily business of representation are all possible factors allowing political analysts to take a more holistic look at the current culture of fear in Europe, compared to politicians themselves.

## Conclusions

Based on latest assessments of public opinion in Germany, in particular the contradiction between positive pragmatic evaluations of Germany’s membership in the EU and the drastic decline in the image of EU as an institution, we can speculate on what might happen to German public opinion in the coming months. Among a range of possibilities, two alternative scenarios stand out:

Scenario 1: The EU’s image will bounce back to match the previous, rather low levels of Euroscepticism. This would suggest that the recent drastic decline in the EU’s perception among German publics was merely a temporary dip that could have been caused by, for example, citizens’ projections of generalized fear and insecurity onto the EU, which were particularly pronounced at this time.

Scenario 2: German publics will become more eurosceptic, also in their pragmatic evaluations of the country's structural position within the EU, or make more vehement demands for German politicians to drive EU reform. The former would involve some citizens changing their views on Germany's long-term strategy in the EU (i.e. advocating for Germany to leave the EU or to work towards reducing the EU's power). The latter would put significant pressure on German politicians to put forth concrete ideas for EU reform.

Our analysis indicates that there are concrete and distinct reasons why citizens in Germany hold a negative image of the EU: we find no evidence for a generalized, abstract feeling of fear among German publics. Overall, the majority of citizens hold distinguishable concerns, suggesting that we cannot speak about EU fears in the aggregate. What is more: we find that citizens' concerns are directly related to perceptions of Germany's future strategy in the EU. This is reason to believe that German publics do not simply project a generalised feeling of insecurity onto the EU as an institutional scapegoat. Instead, they hold genuine concerns, which – if these remain unaddressed by politicians – may induce German publics to become more eurosceptic or to demand concrete measures for EU reform.

In contrast to this understanding of German public opinion, political elites perceive fears in Germany to be largely generalised, abstract or unrelated to evaluations of the EU. While we find citizens' concerns to be dependent on both pragmatic economic considerations and emotive (latent) variables such as the degree of national and European identification, politicians focus on pragmatic economic aspects. They underestimate the impact of identity for German public opinion. Given this gap in the understanding of fears between publics and political elites in Germany, it is not surprising to find that politicians have difficulties when it comes to addressing citizens' concerns with regard to the EU.

Although all politicians recognise their particular responsibility to address citizens' concerns, the measures they suggest to alleviate EU-related concerns remain largely one-dimensional. Politicians realize that representation is crucial for the EU's legitimacy and they acknowledge that for many citizens the EU is currently lacking both input as well as output legitimacy. However, politicians struggle to think of measures that address specifically output legitimacy and that make use of the various different ways available to improve the EU's problem-solving capacity (through reform of the EU or through national political institutions). Concrete suggestions remain at the level of increasing input legitimacy directly at the EU level: they typically revolve around explaining the EU's procedures and encouraging identification with the EU. Suggestions for EU reform are rarely mentioned.

Should German publics indeed become more eurosceptic overall and should German politicians come under pressure to offer concrete measures for EU reform over the next months, their difficulty with exactly this task poses a major problem for German political institutions as well as the EU as a whole. The EU's capacity to offer solutions to current crises and future challenges is key to addressing citizens' concerns and alleviating the emergent culture of fear. With Germany currently being the EU's most influential member state, political analysts assign an important role to German political elites in the reform of EU institutions and policy. In order to fulfil this role, it will be crucial for political decision makers to understand and address citizens' concerns as concrete, distinct and directly related to the EU.

We can only speculate as to why it is so difficult for political elites in Germany to understand and address citizens' concrete concerns with regard to the EU. Comparative perspectives, access to

empirical data from across Germany and the opportunity to take a step back from the daily business of political representation are all possible factors allowing political analysts to take a more holistic look at the current culture of fear in Europe. In their daily work, MPs and MEPs, in contrast, zoom in on the views of citizens in their constituency. It is the citizens who largely dictate their agenda. Unless they are asked to address concrete concerns about the EU, politicians find it difficult to create opportunities to talk to citizens about the EU.

## Recommendations

In order to close the gap between elite and public opinions on the EU in Germany, it is crucial to contest perceptions of a generalised, non-concrete feeling of fear among German publics. Instead, politicians need to be supported in their task of understanding and addressing citizens' concrete concerns. It has been shown in different contexts that engaging and interacting with citizens about their various concerns is often more effective in contesting a culture of fear than ignoring or opposing such views.<sup>14</sup> The following suggestions are aimed at four overarching goals: that we

1. Further the understanding of EU-related fears among political elites in Germany;
2. Shape the discourse about EU-related concerns in Germany;
3. Provide opportunities for public-elite dialogues about concerns;
4. Support politicians in addressing concerns about both types of legitimacy.

It is important to enable politicians to understand and address the variety of citizens' fears about the EU as well as the underlying drivers, both now and in the future. This requires a broader understanding of specific concerns, an ongoing discourse about future concerns and opportunities for public-elite dialogue. Ultimately, a broad understanding of distinguishable and concrete concerns will enable politicians to adequately address citizens' concerns and phrase concrete measures that improve the EU's capacity to offer solutions to current crises and future challenges.

The following measures can contribute to achieving these goals:

- Providing avenues for knowledge transfer from analysts to politicians:  
To further the understanding of EU fears among political elites in Germany, political institutions, analysts and third party organisations that hold knowledge about public opinion need to actively provide avenues for knowledge transfer to allow politicians to draw on this knowledge. This includes the transfer of knowledge from analysts within political party think tanks, but also the transfer of knowledge held by external organisations (such as independent think tanks, research institutions, and commercial research organisations). In particular, third party organisations which hold knowledge about the drivers of public opinion need to work more closely with political party foundations and staff of political representatives to develop explicit strategies for knowledge transfer.

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<sup>14</sup> Reher, S. (2015). [Explaining cross-national variation in the relationship between priority congruence and satisfaction with democracy](#). European Journal of Political Research, 54 (1), 160–181.

- Making insights publicly accessible to shape discourses about EU concerns:  
Politicians need to be made aware of citizens' views on a regular basis, as these views evolve and change. To this end, we need to actively and continuously shape discourses about the EU. It is key that those who hold and generate knowledge about public opinion work with political institutions, civil society organisations, and the media to make insights accessible and allow for broader engagement with these insights. Work with media professionals can play a particularly important role. Setting up good online information that makes insights accessible and easy to interact with is equally important to allow for general engagement.
- Developing instruments that facilitate mass-elite interaction about the EU:  
As politicians report that they find it difficult to create opportunities to talk to citizens about the EU, developing instruments to facilitate interactions with citizens about the EU and their concrete concerns will further politicians' ability to understand and address citizens' concerns. Political institutions, but also third-party organisations (for example, civil society organisations, associations, cultural institutions, local businesses or the churches) play a key role in this: they can offer (physical and virtual) spaces for politicians and citizens to come together, identify and address communities that have distinct views on the EU and act as credible and neutral hosts for mass-elite dialogues. It is crucial to facilitate public-elite interactions at various levels: it is not necessarily the big national stage dialogue, but rather small-scale community-level interaction between citizens and local elites that can make all the difference for a better understanding of concrete concerns.
- Increasing range of suggestions to address EU concerns across levels of governance:  
With a better understanding of citizens' concerns, we also need a broader range of potential measures to address these. It is crucial to work with political elites and citizens on increasing the range of suggested measures along different pathways of legitimacy. Instead of focusing on the EU level only, we need to also develop policy options that address citizens' concerns about the EU at the national, regional and local level. Measures to amplify citizens' voices within EU institutions are just as important as policy options aimed at increasing the EU's problem-solving capacity.
- Further research on mass-elite comparisons that involves publics and elites:  
To counter the dominant narrative of a generalised feeling of insecurity, it is important to conduct further research that provides insights into some of the questions we raise in this preliminary analysis: What exactly drives individual concerns? Can we identify patterns of concern? Why do politicians have such difficulty in understanding the variety of citizens' concerns? How can they adequately address them? To answer some of these questions, further research and explicit public-elite comparisons are necessary. Ideally, future studies are designed in such a way that they involve political decision makers and citizens in their roles as both informants and audiences from early on in the research process. This offers the opportunity that research in itself creates inroads for actual change by bringing citizens and political

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## Appendix

- Appendix 1: Survey Questions – Comparative and Germany-specific
- Appendix 2: Discussion Guide Elite Interviews



## Appendix 1: Survey Questions – Comparative and Germany-specific

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### NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR ITSELF?

#### *Survey Questions – Comparative and Germany-specific*

#### **Demographic and background variables captured**

- Sex (male / female)
- Age group (18-24 years / 25-34 years / 35-44 years / 45-54 years / 55 years and older)
- Region
  - Nielsen 1: Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein
  - Nielsen 2: North Rhine-Westphalia
  - Nielsen 3a: Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland
  - Nielsen 3b: Baden-Württemberg
  - Nielsen 4: Bavaria
  - Nielsen 5: Berlin
  - Nielsen 6: Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony-Anhalt
  - Nielsen 7: Saxony, Thuringia
  - Not living in Germany
- Education (low / medium / high)
- Monthly household income (net after tax)
  - 0-980€
  - 981-1350€
  - 1351-1660€
  - 1661-1990€
  - 1991-2340€
  - 2341-2730€
  - 2731-3200€
  - 3201-3820€
  - 3821-4840€
  - 4841€+
  - Do not want to say
- Voting behaviour in last parliamentary election, 2013
  - CDU/CSU
  - SPD
  - Die Linke
  - Bündnis 90/Die Grünen
  - FDP
  - AfD
  - Other

- Did not vote
- N/A
  
- Long-term party affiliation
  - CDU/CSU
  - SPD
  - Die Linke
  - Bündnis 90/Die Grünen
  - FDP
  - AfD
  - NPD
  - Piratenpartei
  - Freie Wähler
  - Other
  - No party

### Comparative questions across countries

Q2. Do you think [COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT]'s long-term policy should be...

*<Single Select>*

- 1 ... to leave the European Union,
- 2 to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU's powers,
- 3 to leave things as they are,
- 4 to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU's powers,
- 5 or, to work for the formation of a single European government?
- 6 Don't know

Q3. Over recent decades the world has become more interconnected. There is greater free trade between countries and easier communication across the globe. Money, people, cultures, jobs and industries all move more easily between countries.

Generally speaking, do you think this has had a positive or negative effect on...

*<Single Select per each of these items>*

- a. Europe as a whole
- b. [COUNTRY] as a whole
- c. Your local area
- d. Your own life

- 1 Very positive
- 2 Fairly positive
- 3 Fairly negative
- 4 Very negative
- 5 Don't know

Q4. Generally speaking, do you think things will get better or worse for the following over the next twelve months?

*<Single Select per each of these items>*

- a. Europe as a whole
- b. [COUNTRY] as a whole
- c. Your local area
- d. You and your family

- 1 Much better
- 2 A little better
- 3 Neither better nor worse
- 4 A little worse
- 5 Much worse
- 6 Don't know

Q5. Which of the following best reflects your view?

*<Single Select>*

- 1 The best leaders have strong principles and carry them out without worrying what other people think, even if that means losing support
- 2 The best leaders listen to other people and try to win the backing of as many people as possible, even if that means making some compromises
- 3 Neither
- 4 Don't know

Q6. Below are some ways that society has changed over recent decades. In each case, please say whether you think this has changed society for the better, or for the worse?

*<Single Select per each of these items>*

- a. A greater acceptance of same-sex relationships
- b. A larger proportion of women going to work
- c. Our society becoming more ethnically and religiously diverse

- 1 Has changed society for the better
- 2 Has changed society for the worse
- 3 Neither
- 4 Don't know

Q7. The next question is about how much trust you have in certain institutions. On a scale from 0 ('No trust at all') to 10 ('Completely trust'), how much, if at all, do you trust each of the following institutions.

*<Single Select per each of these items>*

- a. The (NATIONALITY) Government
- b. The (NATIONALITY) Parliament
- c. The European Parliament
- d. The European Commission

- 1 No trust at all
- ...
- 10 Completely trust
- 88 Don't know

### **Germany-specific questions**

DE1. Do you see yourself as...?

*<Single Select>*

- 1 (NATIONALITY) only
- 2 (NATIONALITY) and somewhat European
- 3 European and somewhat (NATIONALITY )
- 4 European only
- 5 (Skip)

DE2. Some people may have fears about the European Union. Here a number of things which some people have said they are afraid of with regard to the European Union. For each, please state how much you - personally - are currently afraid of, if at all:

*<Single Select>*

*<Randomize a-e>*

- a. The loss of social security
- b. The loss of national identity and culture
- c. [COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT] paying more and more to the European Union
- d. A loss of power in the world for [COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT]
- e. The loss of jobs in [COUNTRY OF RESPONDENT]

*<Scale 1-10, Don't Know mutually exclusive with answer>*

1 Very much afraid

...

10 Not afraid at all

88 Don't know

DE3. There are different people and organizations working to represent Germany in the European Union. For each of these, can you please tell me how well you think they represent Germany in the EU?

*<Single select per item>*

- a. Angela Merkel
- b. The German government
- c. German members of the European Parliament
- d. Lobby groups of German industry
- e. German NGOs [in German, please use: Deutsche Verbände und Stiftungen]

1 Very well represented

2 Rather well represented

3 Neither well nor badly represented

4 Rather badly represented

5 Very badly represented

6 Don't know

DE4. Compared to the interests of other countries, how well do you think Germany's interests are represented in the European Union?

*<Single Select>*

- 1 Better than the interests of most other countries
- 2 Neither better nor worse than the interests of most other countries
- 3 Worse than the interests of most other countries
- 4 (Skip)

## Appendix 2: Discussion Guide Elite Interviews

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### DISCUSSION GUIDE

#### *Fear or No Fear? Mass and Elite Interpretations of EU Fears in Germany*

**Method:** Elite interviews, 45-60 minutes, with political leaders in Germany

**Research question:** Do political elites in Germany perceive citizens' EU fears and if so, how?

#### **A. Introduction**

##### *Aims of this section:*

- *Introductions by the interviewer and participant consent*
- *Introducing the participant (current role, political grounding, in how far in contact with citizens)*
- *Gauge participant's opinions towards issues of European integration*

##### **A1. Introduction by the interviewer**

*[INTERVIEWER: explain depending on previous exchange with participant]*

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this interview. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and the aim of this conversation is for me to learn from your experience as a \_\_\_\_\_. I am particularly interested in understanding what you hear from citizens about the EU and issues around European integration and what you think about these yourself.

Our conversation will last about 45 minutes. Is this still a good time for you?

Before we start, let me briefly explain a couple of things about the interview:

1. For this project, I am speaking with a number of people. I will audio record our conversation, so I have a record of what is said, not who says what. I will destroy the recording after finishing my analysis.
2. All information and opinions you provide are completely anonymous and confidential, your identity will not be revealed.
3. This information will be used for research purposes only and will not be passed on to any third parties beyond the research team and the commissioning organisation.
4. The purpose of this research is not to influence you or your behaviour in any way but just to have your honest feedback.
5. You can withdraw from the research at anytime



Are you happy to proceed on this basis?

*[Record oral consent]*

A2. As previously agreed I want to learn about your exchange with citizens concerning the EU and issues of European integration. Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

*[ask about the role in political organisation(s), keep brief, just to have on audio recording]*

A3. As \_\_\_\_\_ *[repeat stated role]*, what is your opinion of the EU and issues of European integration?

## **B. Perception of EU fears**

*Aims of this section:*

- *Learn whether participant perceives opinions towards the EU among the general population, first in general in Germany, then specifically in his/her region or constituency*
- *Ask specifically how far participant perceives EU fears, in particular the five fears gauged in survey research (if not mentioned by participant)*
- *Evaluate what participant sees as potential drivers of EU fears, ask specifically for the role of the media*

B1. How do you think citizens in Germany think about the EU, in particular questions of European integration?

B2. There are various opinions about the EU and European integration. What do you personally hear from citizens in your region / constituency about the EU and questions of European integration?

*[Probe if necessary: fear, optimism, positive/negative evaluations, questions, no opinion]*

B3. What do you think citizens in your region / constituency worry about when it comes to questions of European integration?

*[Probe if necessary:*

- *loss of social security*
- *loss of jobs*
- *loss of national identity and culture*
- *financial contribution*
- *loss of power in the world]*

B4. In your opinion, what kinds of reasons can you imagine citizens in your region / constituency could have when they worry about ...?

*[Ask specifically for issues named in B3]*

B5. In your opinion, what is the role of how the media covers the EU for how citizens perceive questions of European integration?

### **C. Evaluation of EU fears**

*Aims of this section:*

- *learn how the participant evaluates citizens' perceptions of the EU*
- *explore whether the participant perceives or can think of reasons for EU fears*

C1. In surveys we often ask citizens about specific fears or worries concerning the EU and European integration they may have. May I ask you to rank the following fears or worries, from the least urgent or important to those that you consider most urgent or important?

*[Give out cards to rank / if by phone, name all items]:*

- *Loss of social security in Germany*
- *Loss of jobs in Germany*
- *Loss of national identity and culture*
- *That Germany pays more and more to the EU*
- *That Germany loses powers in the world]*

C2. Please explain briefly why you chose this ranking: Why do you think \_\_\_\_\_ is more urgent or important to citizens than \_\_\_\_\_?

C3. Can you think of any reasons for why citizens could perceive these fears about questions of European integration?

### **D. Addressing EU fears**

*Aims of this section:*

- *Learn how far participant considers politicians to have a responsibility to address citizens' fears*
- *Explore who participant sees to carry this responsibility specifically*
- *If relevant, learn how the participant him-/herself reacts to citizens' EU fears or opinions*

D1. To what extent do you think political or social organisations have a responsibility to address the concerns some citizens may have about the EU?

D2. Which organisations do you think have a responsibility to address such worries or fears?

D3. What do you talk about with citizens with regard to questions concerning European integration?

*[Only if relevant, ask to give an example if difficult]*

D4. In which context do you have such conversations with citizens?

*[Only if relevant]*

D5. Can you think of a time when you changed your position after hearing and reacting to what citizens said to you in a conversation? And specifically in the context of European politics or questions concerning European integration?

*[Probe: in the context of European politics or questions concerning European integration?]*

## **E. Closing**

E1. What have we not talked about concerning the EU and questions of European integration that you think would be important for me to know?

**Thank & close**