

PISM REPORT

POLAND IN THE EYES OF GERMANS



JANUARY 2024

REPORT
SUMMARISING THE OPINION POLL CARRIED OUT IN GERMANY
FOR THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (PISM)

THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

POLAND IN THE EYES OF GERMANS

REPORT

SUMMARISING THE OPINION POLL CARRIED OUT IN GERMANY
FOR THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (PISM)

WARSAW, JANUARY 2024

© Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2024

Photo cover: Wojciech Wrzesien / Shutterstock, Inc

Questionnaire: Richard Hilmer, Łukasz Mazurkiewicz

Poll: PMG—policy matters GmbH

Survey reports: Richard Hilmer (PMG—policy matters GmbH),
Łukasz Mazurkiewicz, Grzegorz Sygnowski (ARC Rynek i Opinia)

Technical editor: Dorota Dołęgowska

Editor of the primary
publication in Polish Ryszarda Formuszewicz

ISBN 978-83-67487-49-8
e-ISBN 978-83-67487-50-4

Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych
ul. Warecka 1a, 00-950 Warszawa
tel. (+48) 22 556 80 00
pism@pism.pl, www.pism.pl

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Concept and Methodology.	5
Main Findings and Conclusions	8
Specific Findings.	11
Germans' Experience of Poland	11
Stay in Poland and Contacts with Poles	11
Sources of Knowledge about Poland	16
Political Perception of Poland	18
Importance of Polish-German Relations by International Comparison.	18
Assessment of the Attitude of Selected Countries towards Germany.	23
State of Polish-German Relations	27
Assessment of the Impact of Poland's Accession to NATO and the EU	29
Assessment of Cultural Proximity to Germany's Neighbours	35
Image of Poland Based on Selected Statements	37
Polish and German Foreign Policy	39
Approach toward History	43
Interest in Polish History	43
The Question of Responsibility for the Outbreak of the Second World War	44
Evaluation of German Occupation Policy	46
Attitudes toward the Demand for Reparations	48
Restitution of Cultural Property	50
Polish-German Reconciliation.	52
Annex.	55



CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY

The social foundations of Polish-German relations are one of the main components characterizing the Polish-German neighborhood. They interact not only in the socio-cultural sphere, but also in economic and political dimensions.

These issues have been, and continue to be, the focus of both academic scholarship and political consulting.¹ Various conceptual and methodological approaches are chosen to view and analyze them, applied both in parallel to both societies and to each one separately.² In the context of the dynamic changes taking place in recent years, there has been a growing need to illuminate as comprehensively as possible the perception of Poland in Germany. The overall goal of this project, the results of which are presented in this report, was to obtain an up-to-date picture of public attitudes and sentiments toward Poland and its people, as well as the level of familiarity with Polish history and the present state of affairs. At the same time, the research attempted to assess German public perceptions on the scale of convergence concerning Polish and German interests in the political, security and economic spheres.

When designing the survey, consideration was given to the observation that unlike in Poland, in Germany, less importance is placed when it comes to reflecting on the impact that the level of knowledge of historical burdens has on public attitudes toward neighbors and on expectations toward policymakers in shaping bilateral relations. The survey was designed to illustrate German perceptions of historical events and processes significant to mutual relations, as well as the issues of reparations and reconciliation.

¹ See, among others, H. Orłowski, *Polnische Wirtschaft. Nowoczesny niemiecki dyskurs o Polsce*, Olsztyn 1998; A. Sakson, *Stereotyp Polski i Polaków w Niemczech*, in: *idem* (ed.), *Polsko-niemieckie stosunki społeczne i kulturalne*, Poznań 2013; E. Dmitrów, *The role of myths and stereotypes in mutual perception*, in: A. Wolff-Powęska, D. Bingen (eds.), *Polacy–Niemcy. Sąsiedztwo z dystansu*, Poznań 2004; M. Tomala, *Poles and Germans—mutual perceptions*, Warsaw 1994.

² Recall, in particular, the research on mutual perceptions of Poles and Germans conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs in cooperation with partners that have changed over the years, starting with publications: X. Dolińska, M. Fałkowski, *Polaka-Niemcy. Wzajemny wizerunek w okresie rozszerzania Unii Europejskiej*, Warsaw 2001, to the latest report: J. Kucharczyk, A. Łada-Konefał, *Divided Germans, Podzieleni Niemcy, sceptyczni Polacy. Wzajemne postrzeganie w kontekście polskiej i niemieckiej polityki historycznej*, Poland-Germany Barometer, Warsaw 2023, part 2.

In addition, consideration has been given to the fact that arguments about history play an important role with regard to Germany's relations with other countries. An example of an "activist" approach is the demand, derived from historical experience, for comprehensive cooperation with France. The opposite is true of Russia, against which historical arguments are used as a call for self-limitation in the spectrum of German policy actions. In both cases, the question of not taking political action (against France) or taking it (against Russia) requires German decision-makers to calculate the reception of the decision made by the German public. In the case of Poland, an analogous occurrence impacting historical experience on the expectations of policymakers in the formation of bilateral relations cannot be observed. This circumstance argued for framing the historical issue in this project in the broader context of Poland's placement on the map of political and social ties in the imaginations of German respondents.

Of particular interest was the existence of possible regional variations in attitudes toward Poland in east and west Germany, especially in the Polish-German border area.

In developing the questionnaire, it was necessary to reconcile two challenges. On the one hand, the intention was to include not only a broad perspective, but also to delve deeper into specific issues affecting the relationship, in line with the research objectives. On the other hand, it was essential to maintain a form that would not discourage German respondents. Efforts were made to frame the questions in a way that was optimal from the perspective of the German audience. The wording and concepts used were adapted to the specifics of the German public debate and the canon of historical knowledge corresponding to German education. The intent being to eliminate respondents' uncertainty about the thematic scope of individual questions.

The survey was a quantitative measurement carried out through a self-completed technique by respondents who accessed the questionnaire through a web link (CAWI survey—computer-assisted interviewing using a website). A CAWI survey via web panel is widely used and has a good relationship between the quality of the data collected and the cost of acquiring it.

The interviews were conducted in Germany from June 20–28, 2023 with a total sample of 2,073 politically active respondents (i.e. regular voters). Coordination of the survey in

Germany, as well as preparation of the resulting data, was handled by a German project partner.

In designing the survey, special care was taken to ensure reliable findings on possible regional variations in attitudes toward Poland, particularly their possible occurrence in the case of the Polish-German borderland and eastern Germany more broadly. To this end, a so-called booster was used, i.e. during the implementation phase the representation of east German residents was increased (736 interviews with them out of a total of 2,073). Their share of the survey sample was therefore larger than the share of east Germans in the entire surveyed sample. In order to make the analyzed data more representative of the German population as a whole, at the stage of weighting the dataset, east German residents were assigned a weight of less than 1. As a result, in the weighted dataset used for further analysis, the number of east German residents was reduced to $n = 394$. Failure to do so would have resulted in an overrepresentation of these respondents, which would have distorted the whole picture. The analytical procedure used does not diminish the importance of all interviews completed in the eastern regions, but only gives them the right proportion in extrapolating the results of the entire German population.

The sample is representative of German society. In terms of gender, it was divided in a ratio of 49%—men and 51%—women. 55% of respondents declared their professional career. Information was also collected on declared political sympathies (Graphs 40 and 41). The so-called metric further included respondent assessments of their own prospects—optimistic or pessimistic.

This report uses calculations and analyses prepared by professional opinion pollsters cooperating with PISM on the project: in Germany PMG *Policy Matters* and in Poland ARC Rynek i Opinia.

In the graphs included in this report, there are some situations where the percentages expressed do not add up to 100%. This applies to questions in which more than one possible answer. In this case, the minimum deviations from 100% relate to rounding.

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The social basis for the development of Polish-German relations presents itself favorably in light of the obtained results. Direct experience and the acquisition of information and knowledge, as it were, first-hand, are key to positive attitudes toward Poland and mutual relations.

Based on the survey, it can be concluded that the attitude of the German public toward Poland is mostly positive, relatively neutral. The vast majority of respondents assess bilateral relations as correct. Every second German (49%) is convinced that Poland has a rather positive attitude toward their country.

In the completed survey, a significant percentage of responses of a neutral (“neither good nor bad”) or evasive (“I don’t know, it’s hard to say”) nature are repeatedly noted. Such a tendency has been observed before in public opinion polls on Poland and Poles in Germany.³ Giving an ambiguous answer stems from a number of reasons. It may reflect a weighing of rationales and a caution against overly explicit assessments. In addition, the issue under study may actually be evaluated in a neutral way. Finally, it may be difficult for the respondent to answer for a variety of reasons. These could include a general lack of orientation on the issue in question, a real lack of interest on the issues in question (and thus, in principle, its irrelevance), but also fear of giving a more critical answer; the overtones of which would be perceived as controversial.

A challenge is the perception of cultural distance between Germany and Poland, which is clearly visible in the survey. A sense of cultural separateness can be interpreted as an illustration of a continental mental map in which Germany is the imagined border of Western Europe. This way of thinking does not determine aversion or a petrification of stereotypes toward neighbors to the east, but it can hinder the formation of a conviction about shared interests, such as in the sphere of security or the direction of economic development. This aspect of bilateral relations deserves more research attention.⁴ It is worth mentioning here that the issue of the east-west border is currently being hotly debated in Germany in the context of continuing socio-political fissures between the federation’s eastern and western states.

³ See P. Cichocki, A. Lewandowska, M. Nowosielski, *Dynamika niemieckiej opinii publicznej. Wizerunek Polski i Polaków w Niemczech*, Poznań 2013.

⁴ In light of the CBOS survey, Germans were also perceived by Polish respondents as the culturally farthest away among neighboring nations, see *Self-portrait of Poles and Perceived Cultural Distance to Neighbors*, Research Announcement No. 126/2015.

The survey revealed interesting, if sometimes subtle, differences between the attitudes of Germans from the eastern and western parts of the country. Perhaps surprisingly, regional differences are apparent, but they are not as pronounced as one might infer from the immediate vicinity of the eastern states.

When it comes to noted regularities regarding respondents' party preferences, Green voters stand out slightly in favor. In contrast, a more critical and distanced attitude towards Poland characterizes AfD supporters.

Two main conclusions emerge in light of the obtained results. First, there is only a limited perception of mutual positive interdependence between the two countries in the political and economic dimensions. This state of affairs is reflected in particular in the respondents' assessment of Poland's accession to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in terms of benefits for Germany. Simplifying, one can risk saying that from the public perspective, Poland's importance for German prosperity and security is moderate. However, one should see the potential for change in the wake of evolving circumstances. This is evidenced by a slightly better judgement of benefits stemming from Poland's presence in NATO than in the EU, which can be taken as a signal of an arduous process of reevaluation with regard to the assessment of the security situation.

Second, results confirmed the limited knowledge in German society on issues concerning Poland in the context of World War II and its aftermath. Ignorance of these circumstances leads to a misunderstanding of Polish demands. This should be seen as the main reason determining the lack of understanding regarding Polish sensitivity on historical issues. At the same time, in Germany, the conviction is increasingly prevalent at the social level that the issues of war and occupation are already distant and that accounts have been settled. Less interest in history, combined with different sets of priorities in the education system, leads to indifferences or skepticism towards messages coming from Poland in this regard. In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that in Germany, the best way to better understand Polish positions and demands about the past leads through arousing interest in contemporary Poland.

Ryszarda Formuszewicz



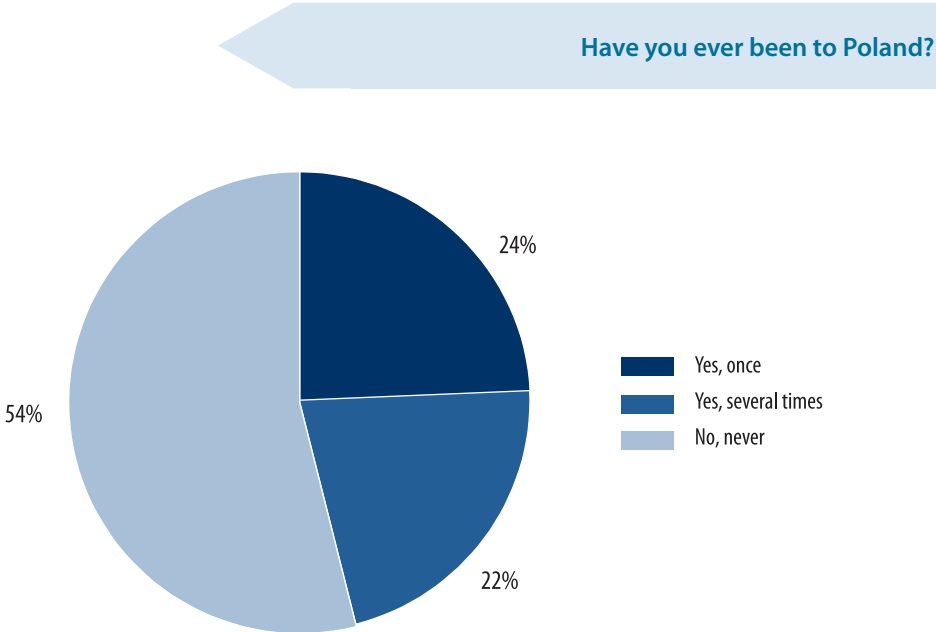
GERMANS' EXPERIENCE OF POLAND

STAY IN POLAND AND CONTACTS WITH POLES

Almost one out of every two Germans has been to Poland, but more than half of the respondents have never visited Poland. It is worth noting that the latter group is clearly dominated by residents from the western part of the country. More than half of them (57%) are over 55 years old.

More than a fifth of respondents have visited Poland several times. In addition, 20% of respondents say that they are currently in personal contact with Poland.

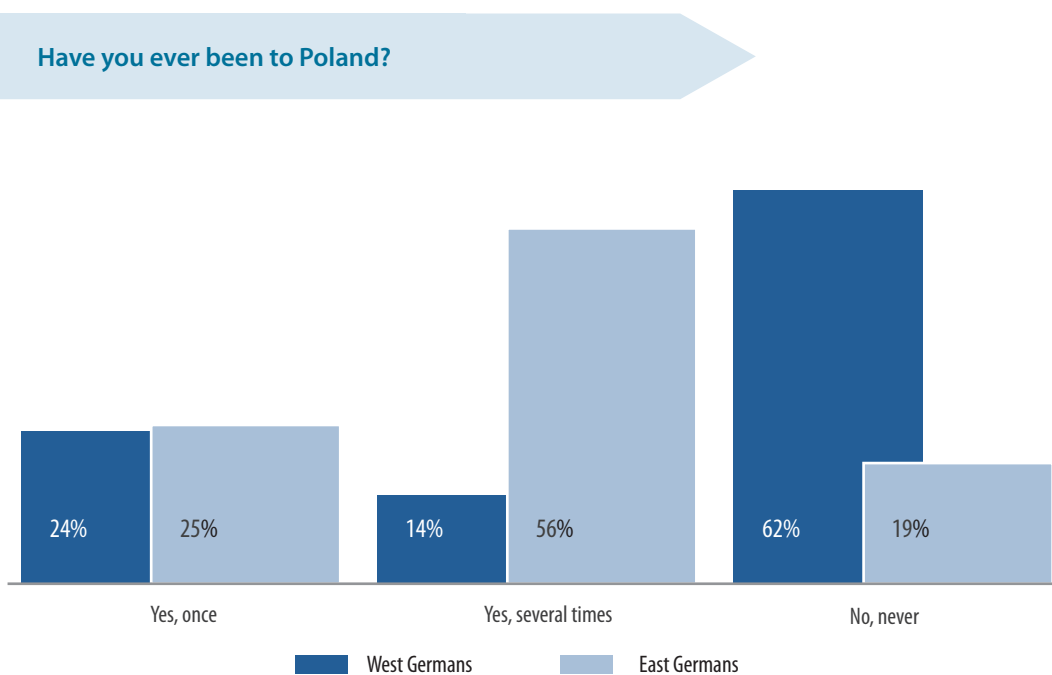
Graph 1. Stay in Poland



A higher propensity to visit Poland is observed among respondents with a higher education. As many as 58% of respondents in this group have visited Poland at least once.

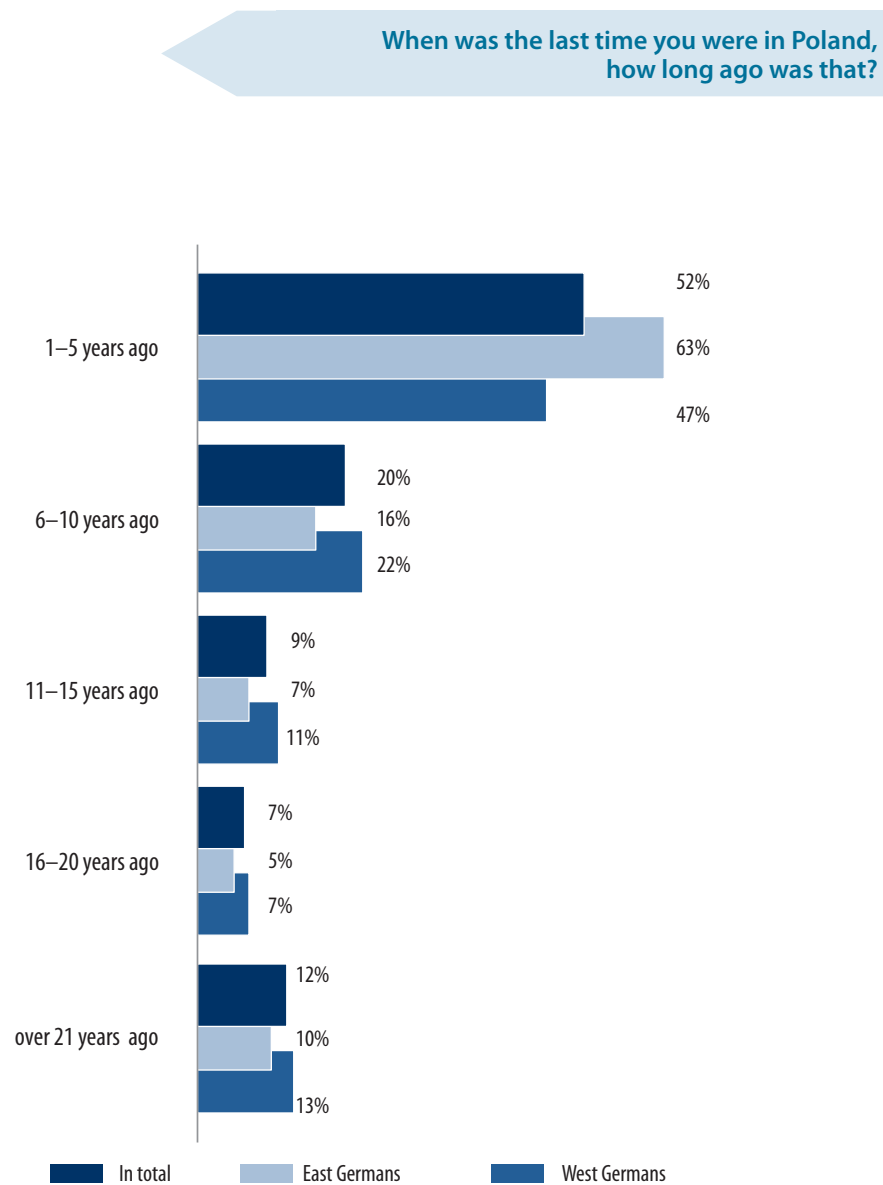
Among Germans from the western Länder, 38% have been to Poland, but mostly only once (24%). Respondents from eastern Germany are more likely than others to say that they have visited Poland at least once. Among East Germans, eight out of ten know Poland from personal experience, mainly through several visits (56%), with the frequency particularly high in Saxony, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, which directly border Poland. Respondents aged 50 and over in particular have frequently visited their eastern neighbour (61%), but almost one in two East Germans aged 18–39 has also visited Poland several times (45%).

Graph 2. Stays in Poland—regional differences



Slightly more than half of the respondents who have ever been to Poland date their last visit to Poland between one and five years ago (52%), 36% no more than 20 years ago. Those who have friends or acquaintances in Poland are the most likely to visit the country. Respondents in the youngest age group (18–29 years) were statistically significantly more likely than other respondents to have visited Poland in the last five years. Residents of Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern were more likely than others to have visited Poland in the last year, which is undoubtedly related to the geographical proximity of these Länder.

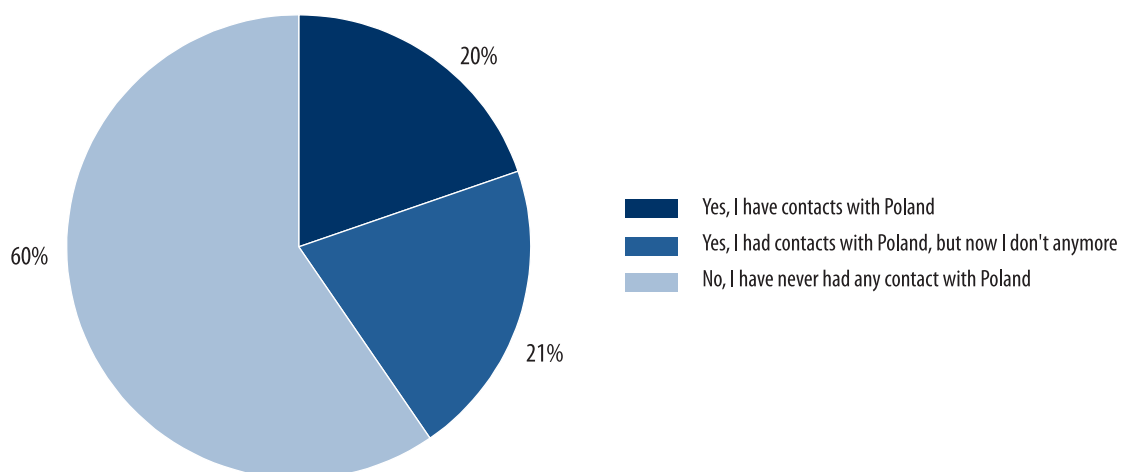
Graph 3. Most recent visit to Poland



One in five Germans claims to have personal contact with Polish citizens or Poles living in Germany. One in five also had contacts with Poles in the past that have since broken off. However, the majority of Germans (60%) have never had such personal contacts. Respondents with secondary and tertiary education are statistically significantly more likely than the other age groups to have ongoing personal relations with Poland. It is worth noting that respondents with primary or secondary education are statistically significantly more likely than others to have never had personal contact with Poland.

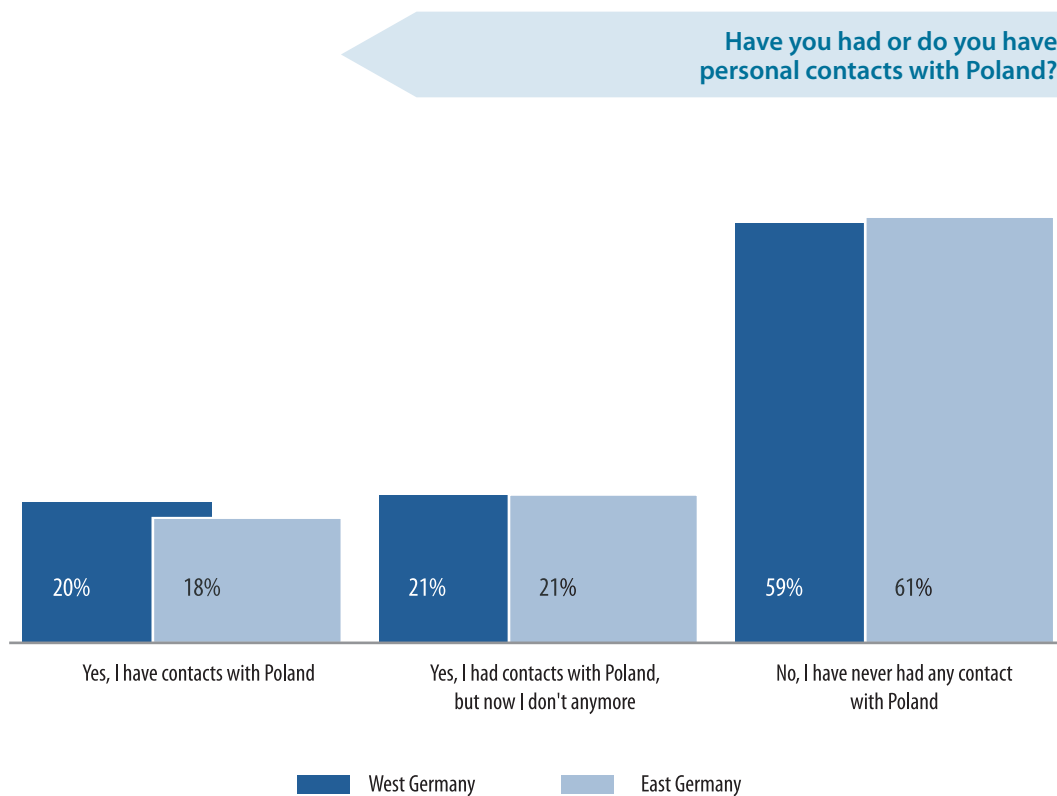
Graph 4. Maintaining contacts with Poland

Have you had or do you have personal contacts with Poland?



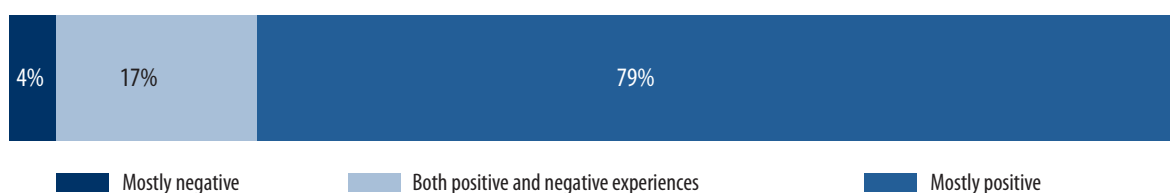
It is worth noting that there is no difference between eastern and western Germans, although citizens of the eastern Länder have visited Poland significantly more often. In addition, among eastern Germans, contacts go back further and in many cases are no longer maintained. Today, contacts with Poland are mainly maintained by the generation aged 30–49. Among West Germans, the older generations have had and still have relatively few contacts with Poles, but among those under 50, one in two say they have had personal contact with them at some time in the past, and half still maintain these relations. In general, respondents in the 18-49 age group are statistically significantly more likely to still have personal contact with Poland than those over 50.

Graph 5. Maintaining contacts with Poland by region



Those who have had contact with Poland tend to view them positively. According to German respondents, personal contacts with Poland and Poles were positive in eight out of ten cases. In 17% positive and negative experiences were balanced, and only in a few cases (4%) were they predominantly negative.

Graph 6. Evaluation of contacts with Poland



It is worth noting that Green voters are more likely than other respondents to say that their contacts with Poland have been positive. At the same time, the group in which these feelings are more negative are AfD voters. Berliners are the most likely to describe their personal experience of Poland as positive.

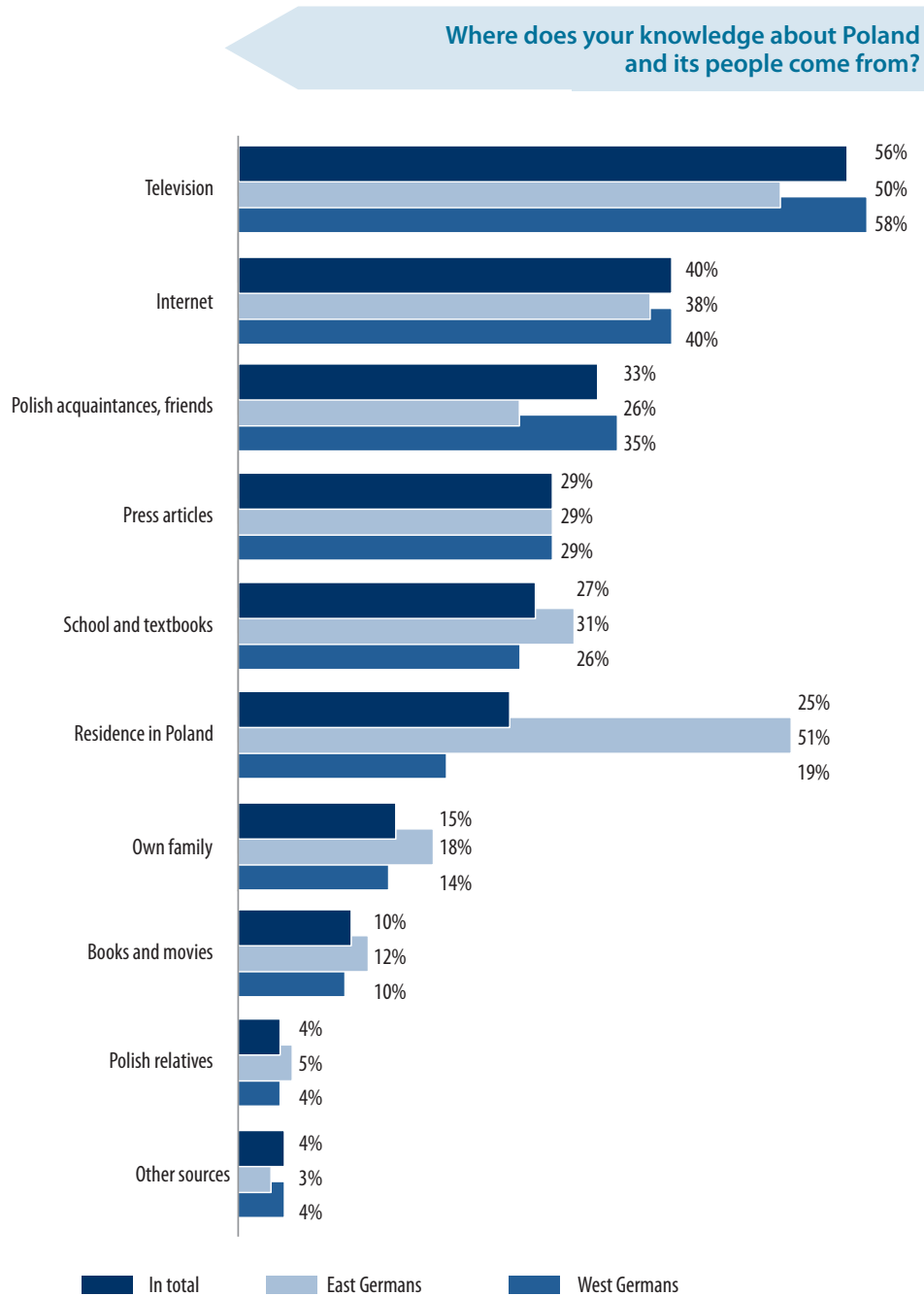
SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT POLAND

German respondents most often get their information about Poland from television (56%) and the Internet (40%). The opposite is true for those under 40, for whom the Internet is more important (53%) than television (45%). Newspapers and magazines are also important sources for many people, while books and films are important only for some. One in three receives more or less first-hand information from acquaintances, friends, or relatives from Poland, and one in four knows Poland from trips or visits there. For East Germans, such personal travel impressions are even as important as information from television (around 50% each). On the other hand, West Germans are more likely than East Germans to cite Polish friends and acquaintances as an important source of information (35%). For 15%, their own family is also an important source of information.

Less than 30% of respondents have learned about Poland from school and textbooks, with slightly more respondents from eastern Germany citing this source.

The higher the level of respondents education, the more likely they were to cite their own experience of visiting Poland or information from their family as a source of knowledge about Poland. This group of respondents was also significantly more likely to cite books and films as a source of knowledge.

Graph 7. Sources of knowledge about Poland



POLITICAL PERCEPTION OF POLAND

IMPORTANCE OF POLISH-GERMAN RELATIONS BY INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

Six out of ten Germans consider relations between Germany and Poland to be important (47%—important, 13%—very important). This puts Poland in the middle of the list of countries that are important for Germany.

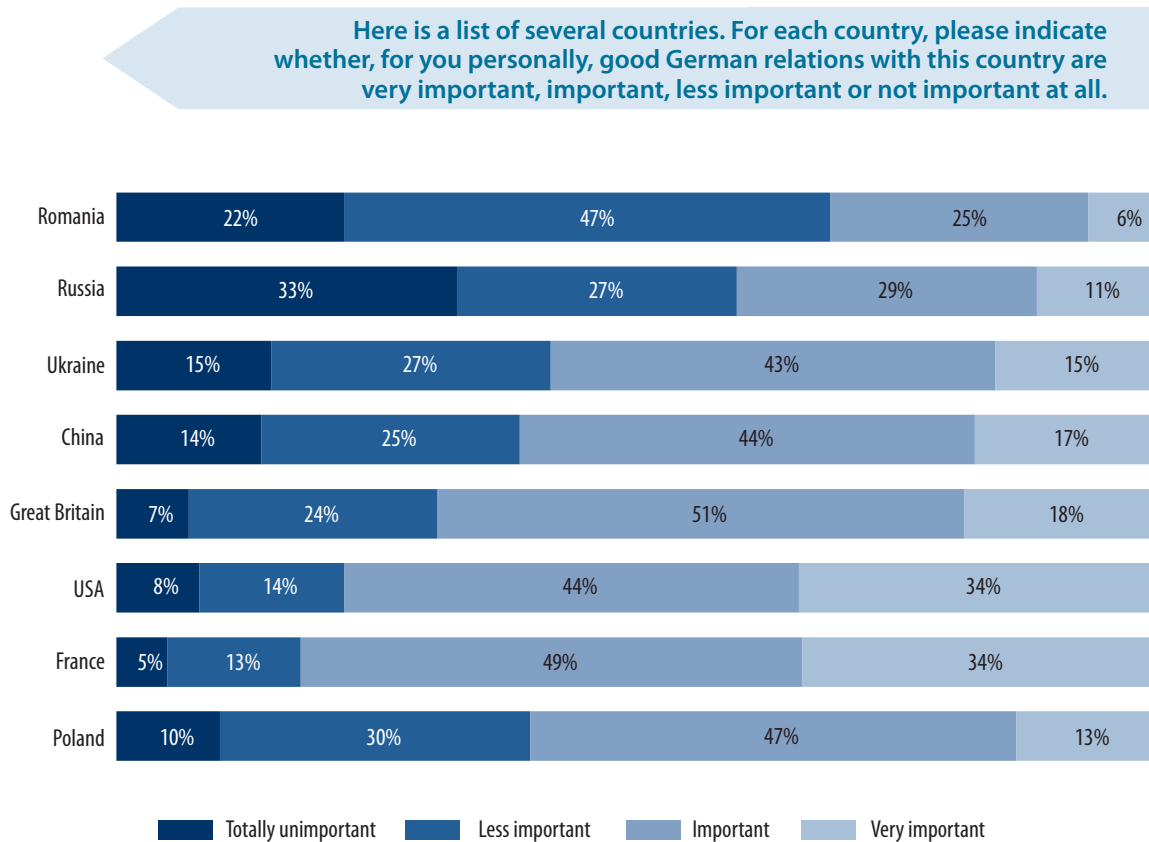
Traditionally, Germans consider relations with France and the United States to be the most important. Not surprisingly, 83% of respondents attach great importance to good relations with their western neighbour France (49% consider them important, 34% very important). Similarly, the importance of relations with the USA is recognised by around eight out of ten Germans (44%—important, 34%—very important). Good relations with the UK also continue to play an important role for Germany in the eyes of German citizens. Irrespective of the country's exit from the EU, almost 70% of respondents consider good relations with the UK to be important (51%—important, 18%—very important).

Respondents attach similar importance to good relations with Poland, China, and Ukraine.

The role of Russia, on the other hand, is seen as much less important for Germany from today's perspective, but 40% of Germans still consider good relations with Russia desirable, even after its invasion of Ukraine.

For the sake of comparison, among the countries on NATO's eastern flank, Romania was also included in the questionnaire. Only one in three respondents said it was important or very important to have good relations with Russia.

Graph 8. How important are Germany's relations with selected countries?



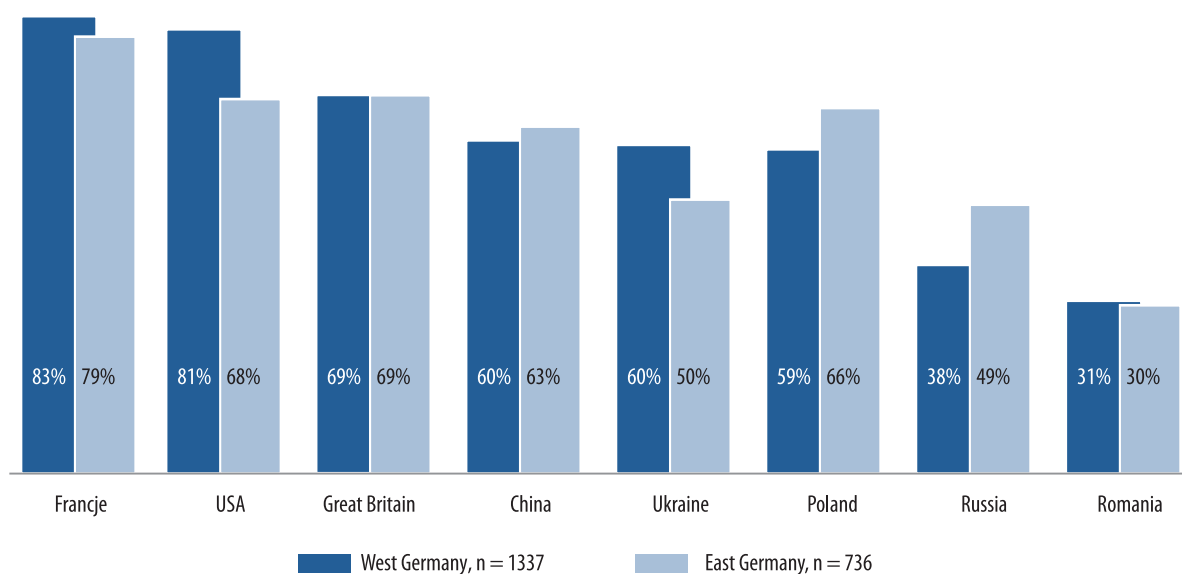
The importance of good German-Polish relations is rated slightly higher in eastern Germany (56%) than in western Germany (48%), bringing these figures closer to those for the USA or the UK. In the Länder close to the Polish border, such as Brandenburg, Berlin, and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the view that good relations with Poland are important or very important is much more widespread (around 75%).

By contrast, Germans in the West of the country consider relations with the US to be more important than those in the East (83% vs. 68%). People living in western Germany attach almost the same importance to relations with the USA as they do to relations with France. There are similar differences between eastern and western Germany when it comes to relations with Ukraine (difference of around ten percentage points). All respondents, regardless of region, broadly agree that France and the UK are of high importance to Germany, China is of medium importance, and Romania is of lower importance.

For East Germans, good relations with Russia are more important than for their counterparts in the West.

Graph 9. How important are Germany's relations with selected countries by region (answers 'important' and 'very important')

Here is a list of several countries. For each country, please indicate whether, for you personally, good German relations with this country are very important, important, less important or not important at all.

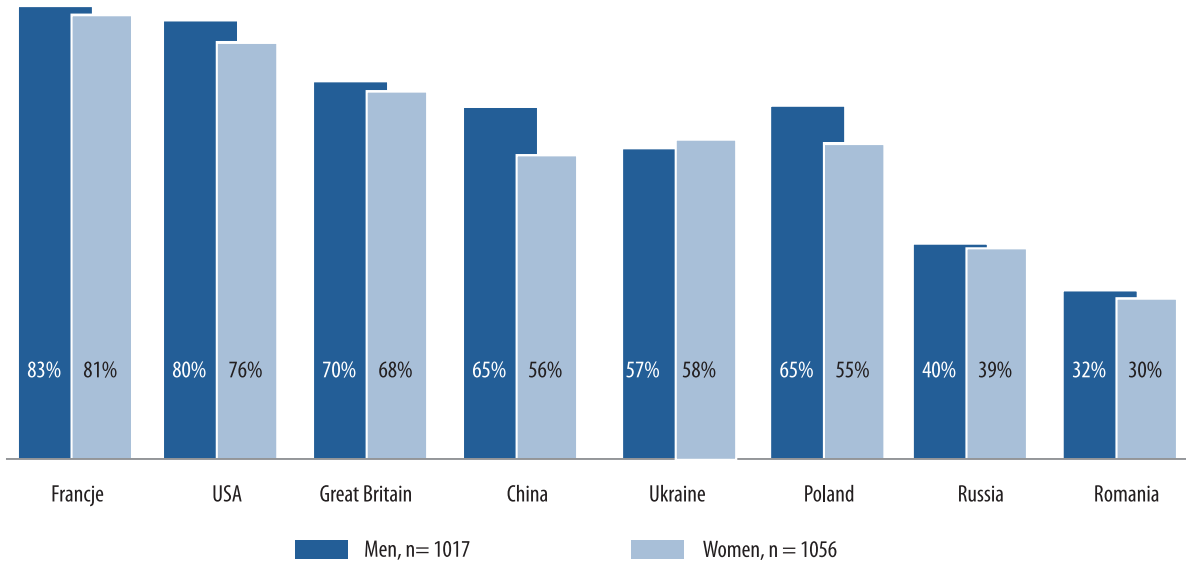


Supporters of good relations with Russia are much more likely than other respondents to be critical of the consequences of Poland’s accession to NATO. According to these respondents, Poland’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was unfavourable. Understandably, supporters of good relations with Russia are also the least likely to be critical of Germany’s policy towards Russia in recent years.

Looking at the importance of selected countries and their good relations with Germany by gender, it can be seen that maintaining good relations with individual countries is more important for men than for women. Good relations with Poland are important for 65% of men and 55% of women. Maintaining good relations with China is considered important by a similar proportion of men (65%) and women (56%).

Graph 10. Importance of Germany’s relations with selected countries by gender (responses ‘important’ and ‘very important’)

Here is a list of several countries. For each country, please indicate whether, for you personally, good German relations with this country are very important, important, less important or not important at all.

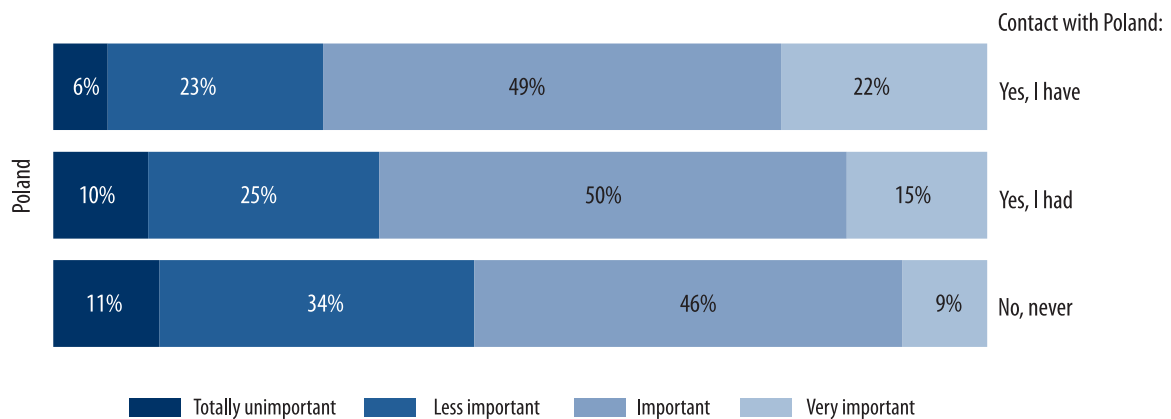


When analysing the respondent group by education, it can be seen that university graduates are significantly more likely than others to rate Germany’s good relations with Poland as important. It can be concluded that the higher the level of education, the greater the importance attached to positive Polish-German relations.

In terms of political preferences, there is a striking pattern in which voters of the Green Party are significantly more likely to rate the importance of Polish-German relations than voters of the CDU/CSU and the Left Party. Irrespective of this, however, voters of all major parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, FDP) consider Germany’s relations with Poland to be more important than AfD voters.

The assessment of the importance of Germany’s relations with Poland also depends on the respondent’s personal experience. For respondents who currently have some contact with Poland, relations with the eastern neighbour are significantly more important than for those who have never had such contact.

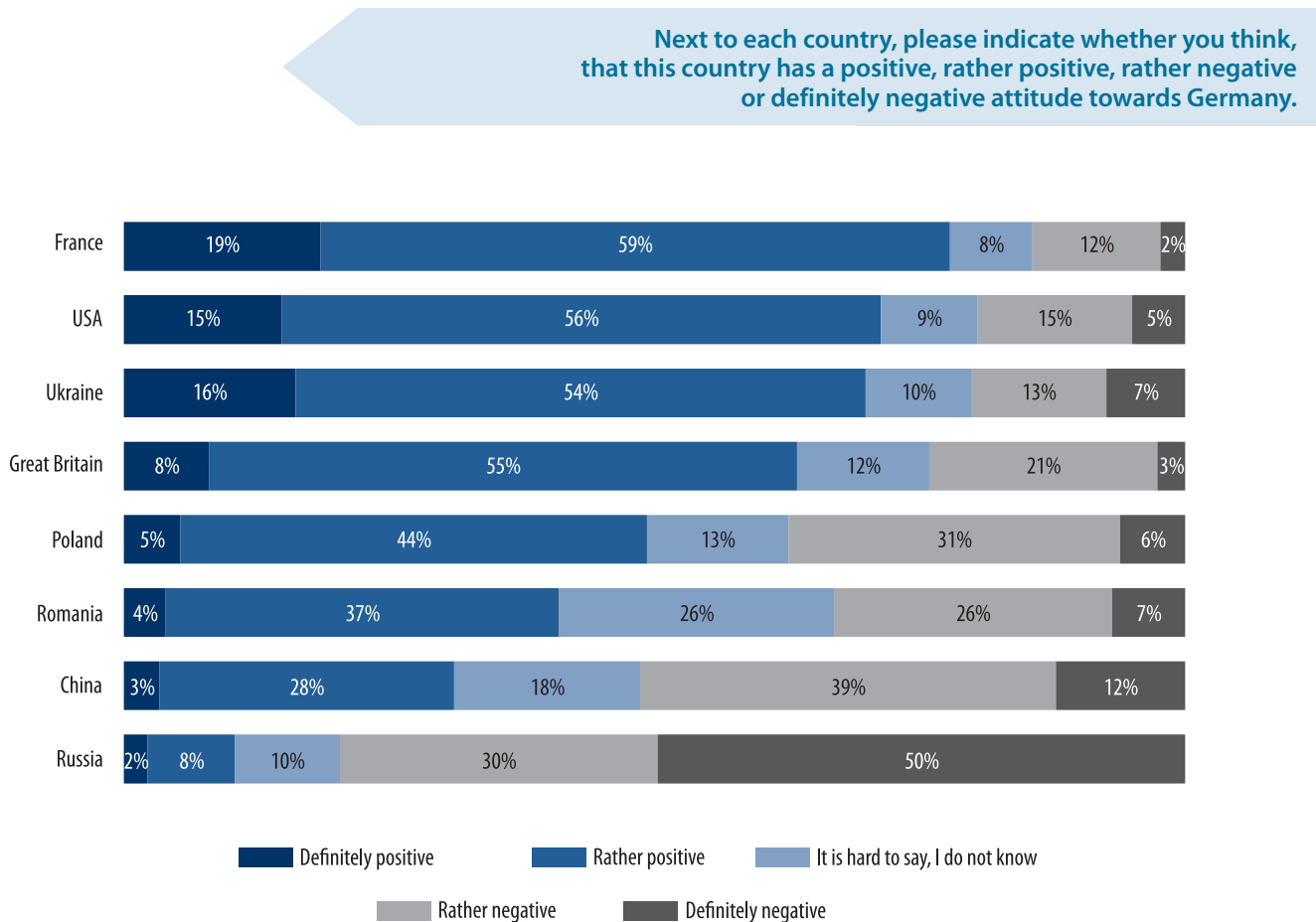
Graph 11. How important are Germany’s relations with Poland? (according to personal contacts with Poles)



ASSESSMENT OF THE ATTITUDE OF SELECTED COUNTRIES TOWARDS GERMANY

The respondents consider France (78% of people believe that France has a positive attitude towards Germany) and the USA (71%) to be the countries with the most positive attitude towards Germany—this image in the minds of German citizens is therefore in line with the expectation of maintaining good relations with these two countries and makes good relations more achievable in their perception. Respondents also rate Ukraine (54% somewhat positive, 16% very positive) and the United Kingdom (63%) highly and perceive a broadly positive attitude towards Germany. In contrast, they see Russia as the most hostile country—only 10% of respondents believe that Russia has a positive attitude towards Germany.

Graph 12. Assessment of the attitude of selected countries toward Germany

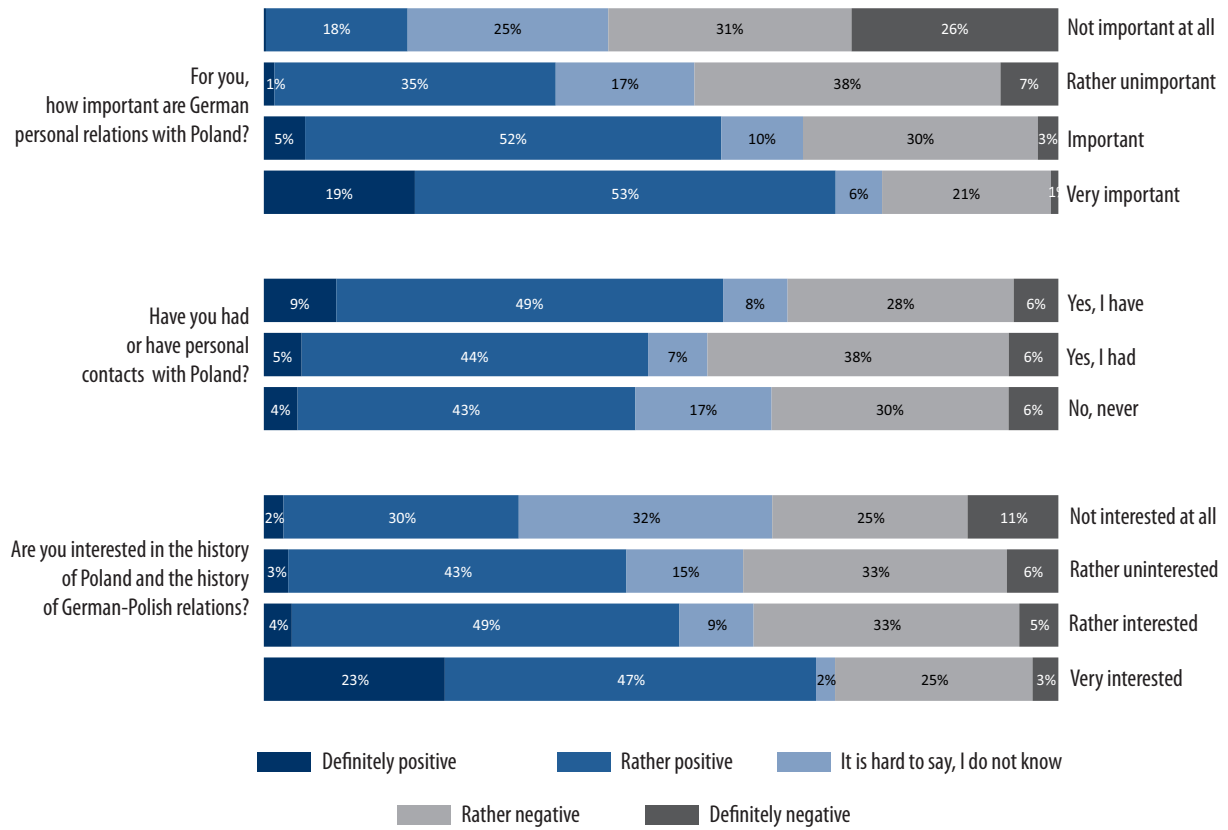


Eight out of ten Germans view Russia's attitude towards Germany negatively, and one in two very negatively. Only a minority now believe that Russia's attitude towards Germany is positive. China's attitude towards the Federal Republic of Germany is also perceived as not very friendly, with 39% viewing it as rather negative and 12% as very negative. Just under a third of Germans have a rather positive impression of German-Chinese relations. However, the proportion of those unable to form an opinion is higher for faraway China than for other countries (18%).

Poland again occupies a middle position. Attitudes towards Germany are neutral. One in two Germans (49%) is convinced that Poland has a rather positive attitude towards their country. Only just over a third think the opposite: 31% believe that their eastern neighbour's attitude towards Germany is rather negative, and 6% even very negative. 13% are unable to judge Poland's attitude towards Germany. Respondents who know Poland from personal experience or who have contact with Poles are slightly more positive about their neighbour's attitude towards their country: one in six thinks it is positive, but one in three has the opposite impression. The assessment of Poland's attitude towards Germany is also influenced by interest in Polish history and mutual relations. It can be assumed that the more interested respondents are in this history and the more direct contacts they have, the more often they say that Poland's attitude towards Germany is positive. From this, it can be concluded that the key to a positive assessment of Poland's attitude towards Germany and mutual relations is the acquisition of information and knowledge, as it were, first hand, as well as a certain degree of involvement and interest in their neighbour's history.

The group of people for whom good relations between Poland and Germany are particularly important is much more likely to assess Poland’s attitude towards Germany as positive.

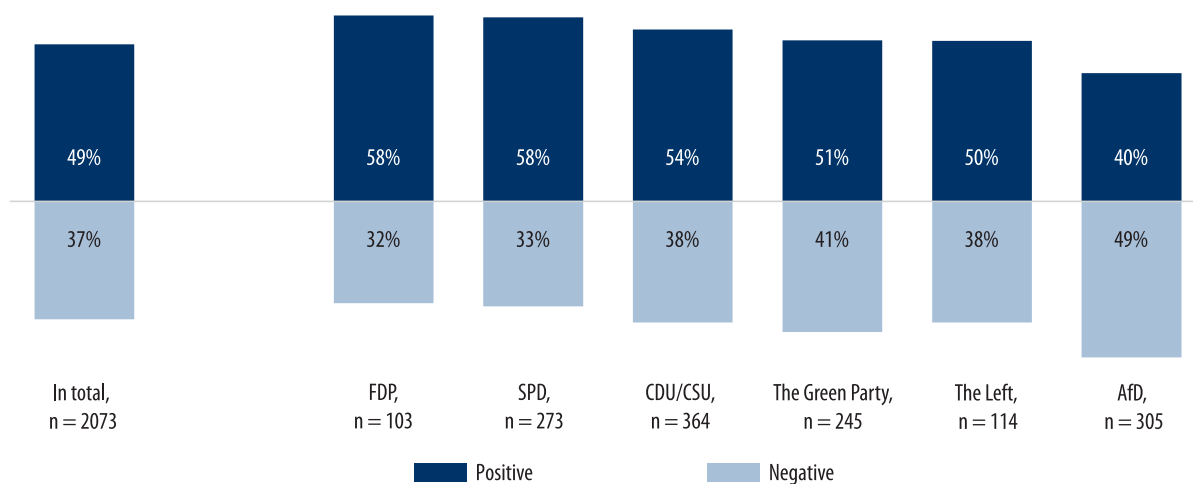
Graph 13. Assessment of Poland’s relations with Germany (according to the assessment of Germany’s relations with Poland, contacts with Poland and knowledge of Polish-German history)



There is no linear relationship with respect to age group, but the oldest group is characterised by more frequently recognising that Poland has a positive attitude towards Germany.

Poland's current attitude towards Germany is particularly criticised among potential AfD voters. This is the only group in which negative evaluations (49%) outweigh positive ones (40%).

Graph 14. Assessment of Poland's attitude towards Germany by party preference



STATE OF POLISH-GERMAN RELATIONS

A relative majority of respondents assess current Polish-German relations as neutral (neither good nor bad). When comparing positive and negative assessments, positive ones predominate (34%). Taking into account the fact that 14% of Germans assess these relations negatively, it can be concluded that the vast majority of respondents assess bilateral relations as correct. At the same time, 8% cannot or do not want to answer this question.

Once again, this shows the tendency of respondents to define their attitudes and judgements on various issues in the middle of the scale, thus adopting a neutral stance more often than explicitly advocating a particular option.

It is worth noting that respondents who derive their knowledge of Poland from personal experience (visits to Poland, information from their own family, friends from Poland) as well as from school and textbooks are statistically significantly more likely to assess Germany's relations with Poland as positive. The opposite is true for respondents who base their knowledge on reports from the internet and newspaper articles. Among those who have personal contacts with Poland, one in two assess Polish-German relations as good, and only one in ten as rather bad.

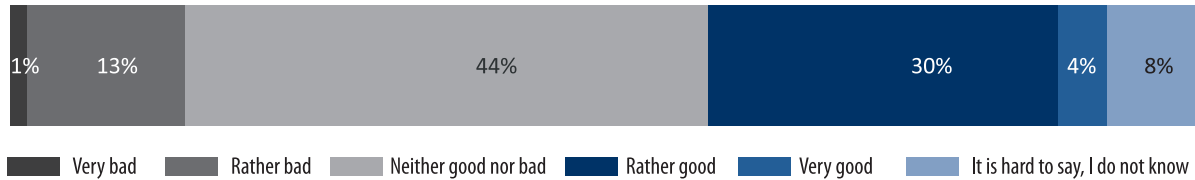
There are no significant differences in the assessment of bilateral relations between East and West Germans. There are no clear linear correlations between the assessment of Polish-German relations and the origin of respondents from the states bordering Poland.

There are differences between age groups: 44% of those aged 18–29 rate relations as good, while only 27% of those aged 60 and over share this view.

There are differences in the perception of Polish-German relations between groups with different levels of education. Those who have completed secondary education are more likely than those who have completed primary education to consider Polish-German relations to be good, while those who have completed university education are more likely than those who have completed secondary education and primary education to have a negative opinion of Polish-German relations, considering them to be bad.

Graph 15. Assessment of current German-Polish relations

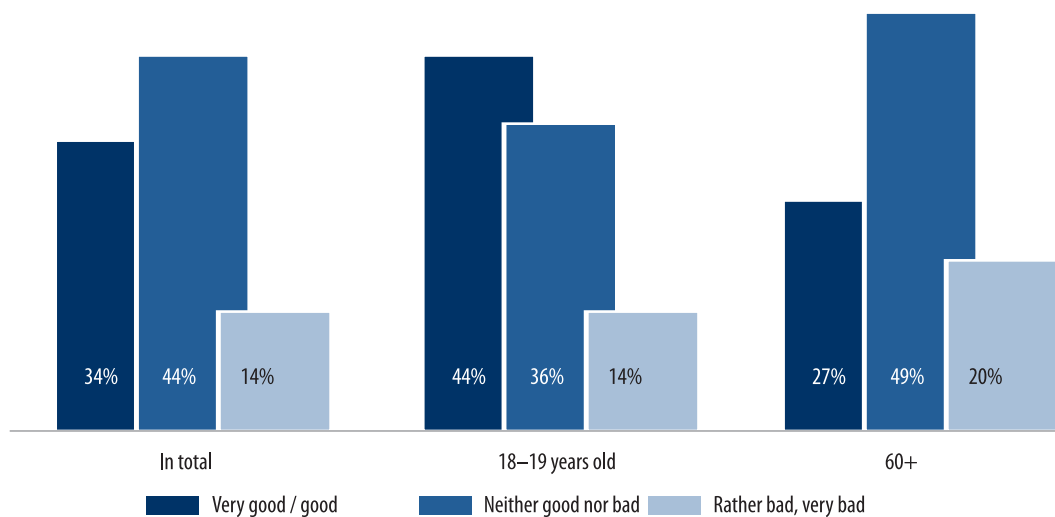
How would you describe the current relationship between Germany and Poland? As ...



Those who work are more likely than other respondents to see Polish-German relations in a positive light. Similarly, those who are characterised by greater optimism and certainty about their future are significantly more likely than other respondents to have a better view of Polish-German relations.

Graph 16. Assessment of current Polish-German relations by age

How would you describe the current relationship between Germany and Poland?



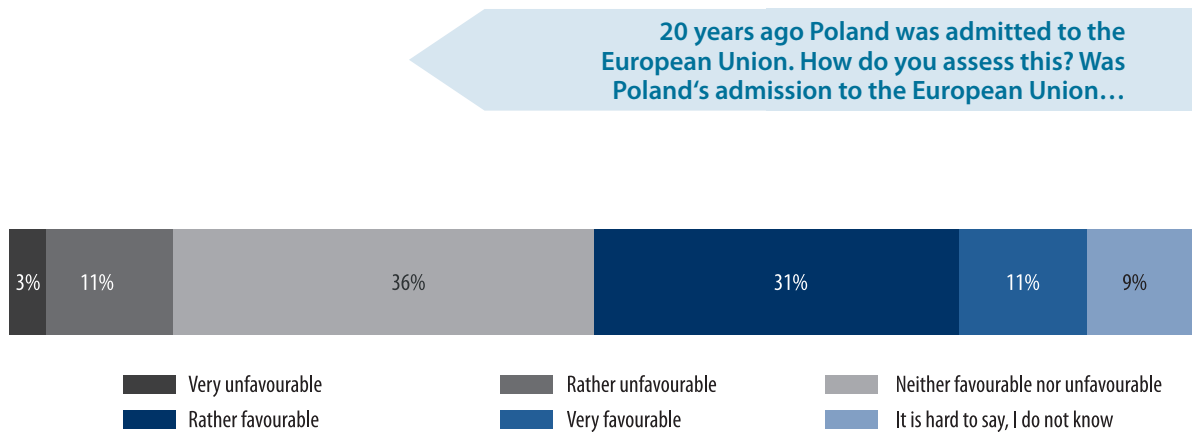
There are also slight differences between party supporters. FDP voters have the best opinion of Polish-German relations (47% have a positive opinion), while AfD voters have the worst (only 29% have a positive opinion, but even among them, only a minority—22%—assess these relations as bad).

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF POLAND'S ACCESSION TO NATO AND THE EU

A reluctance to formulate more expressive opinions can be seen in the case of the question on the assessment of Poland's accession to the EU or NATO from the point of view of benefits for Germany, where neutral answers were given almost as often.

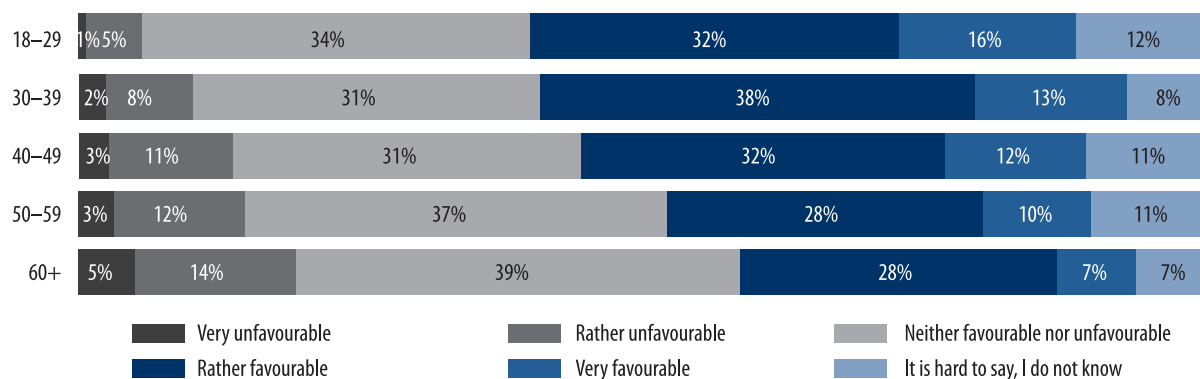
With regard to Poland's accession to the EU, while 42% of Germans see it as a positive event for their country, an even larger group of respondents (45%) say it was neither good nor bad or that it was difficult to define in terms of benefits for Germany. Only 14% see disadvantages in Poland's membership to the EU.

Graph 17. Assessment of Poland's accession to the EU in terms of benefits for Germany



Younger respondents (aged 18–39) are significantly more likely than older respondents (aged 50+) to see Poland’s accession to the EU as a positive event.

Graph 18. Assessment of Poland’s accession to the EU in terms of benefits for Germany (by age)



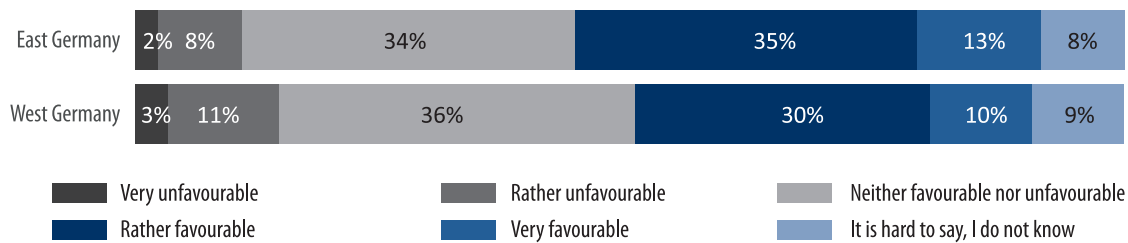
Those who have completed secondary or higher education are more likely than those who have completed vocational school to praise Poland’s accession to the EU in terms of its benefits for Germany.

Those who are economically active are more likely than those who are inactive to see Poland’s accession to the EU as positive for Germany. Respondents who are more confident about the future are more likely to see Poland’s accession to the EU as positive for Germany. Those who are more fearful are more likely to see it negatively.

It can also be seen that residents of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants are more likely than those from cities with between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants to have a positive view of Poland’s accession to the EU in terms of benefits for Germany.

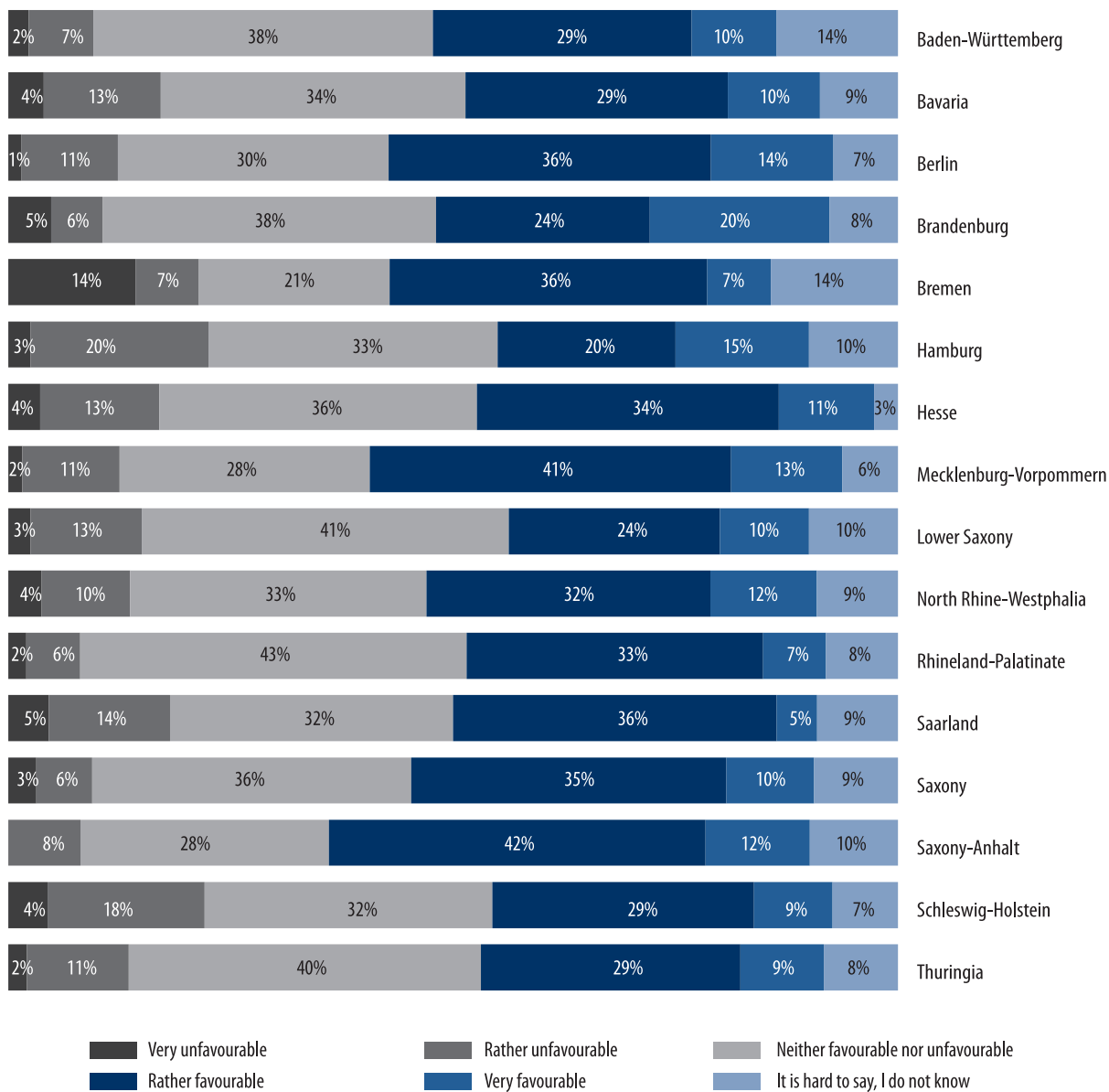
In addition, respondents from Western Germany are slightly more likely than those from Eastern Germany to be critical of Poland’s accession to the EU. Residents of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Berlin are statistically significantly more likely than other respondents to see Poland’s accession to the EU as a positive event for Germany.

Graph 19. Assessment of Poland’s accession to the European Union in terms of benefits for Germany (by region)



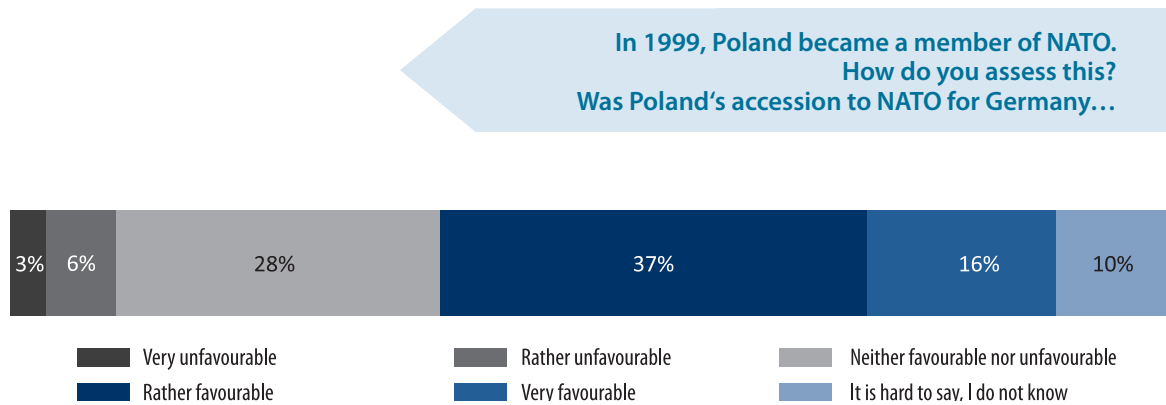
An analysis of respondents’ voting preferences in the context of their assessment of Polish-German relations reveals interesting correlations. Among Green and FDP voters, positive assessments of the consequences stemming from Poland’s accession to the EU for Germany clearly prevail. AfD voters, on the other hand, are the most critical in this respect (25%).

Graph 20. Assessment of Poland's accession to the EU in terms of benefits for Germany (by federal state)



In the case of NATO, a slight majority of Germans believe that Poland’s accession to NATO will be somewhat beneficial (37%) or very beneficial (16%) for Germany (53% overall). The positive assessment is slightly more pronounced than in the case of EU accession. Fewer respondents chose the neutral option, but still 38% are unable to take a clear position on the issue. Almost one respondent in ten thinks that Poland’s accession to NATO was even detrimental to Germany (9%). Views on this question are almost identical in both parts of Germany. The only difference is in respondent political orientations. While supporters of the SPD, the CDU/CSU, the Greens and the FDP do not question Poland’s accession, supporters of the Left Party (more critical of NATO) and the AfD have stronger reservations (17% and 22% respectively).

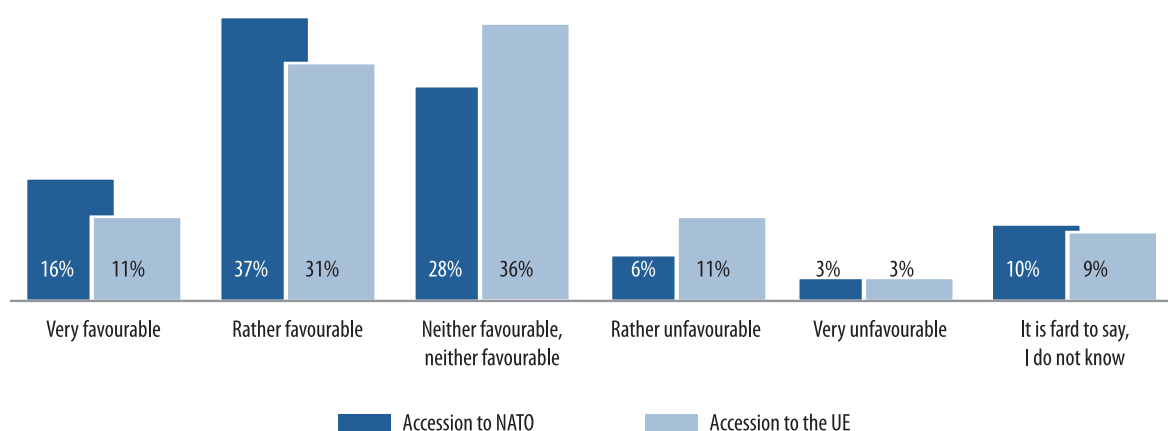
Graph 21. Assessment of the benefits of Poland’s accession to NATO for Germany



Taking into account the educational level of the respondents, those with secondary and higher education are more likely to express a positive opinion on this issue than those with vocational education.

Those who are worried about their future are more likely than those who are confident about their future to see Poland’s accession to NATO as a negative event for Germany—a difference of 11 percentage points.

Graph 22. Assessment of Polish accession to NATO and the EU in terms of benefits for Germany



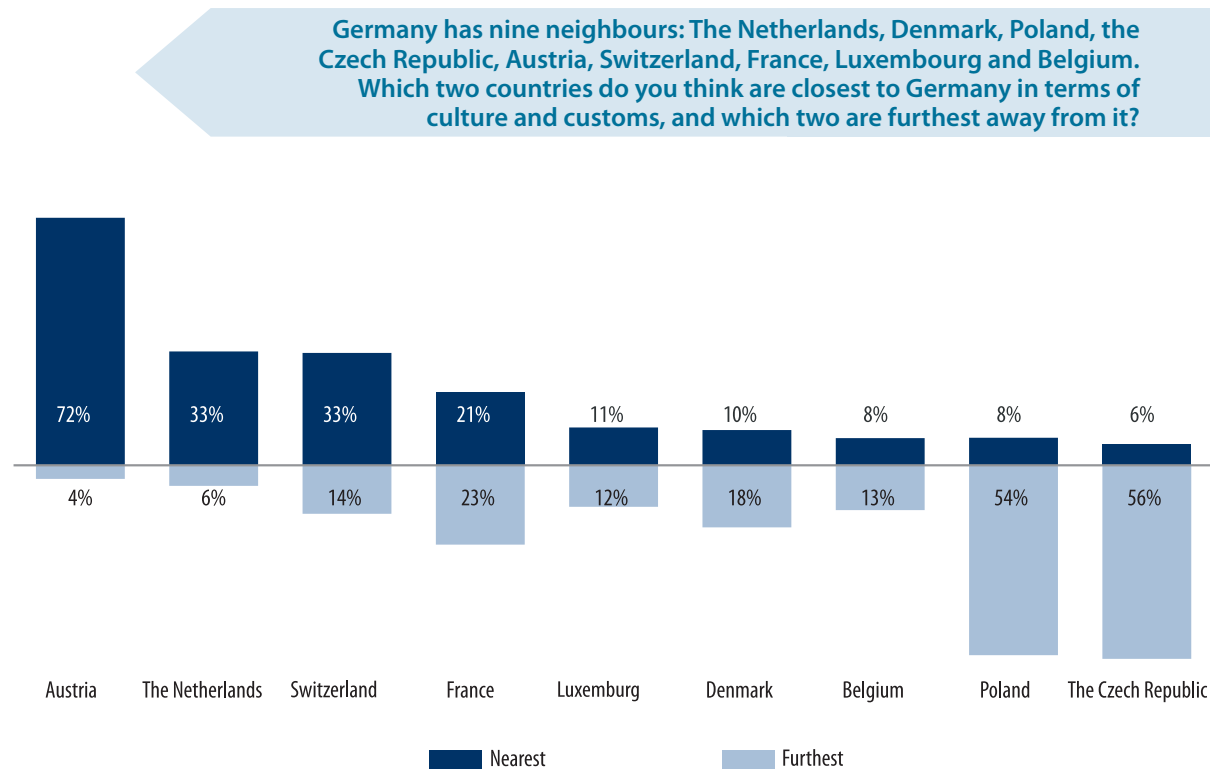
ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL PROXIMITY TO GERMANY'S NEIGHBOURS

Germany has nine neighbours. When asked to choose two neighbouring countries as the closest and the furthest in terms of culture and customs, respondents overwhelmingly considered Austria to be the closest. Such a choice by 72% of respondents is not surprising given the common language and historical and cultural ties.

In contrast, respondents identified Poland (54%) and the Czech Republic (56%) as the most culturally different countries. The length of the common border does not seem to matter: the German-Czech border is just as long as the one with Austria (818 km). The border with Poland is similar in length to that with France—469 and 455 km respectively. The Netherlands shares a slightly longer border with Germany—576 km.

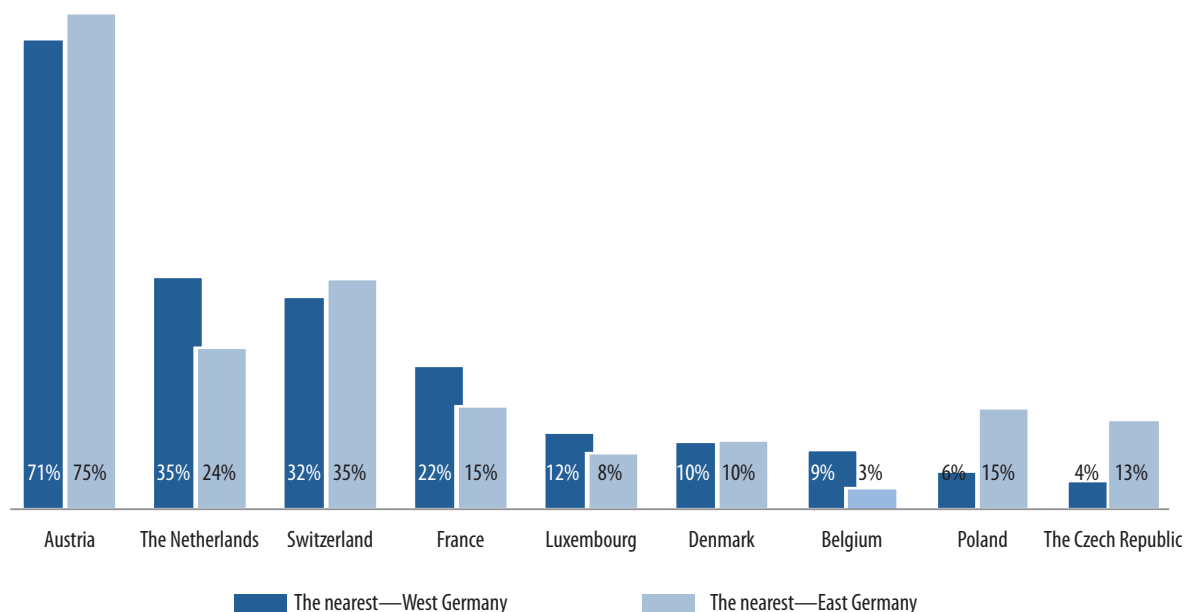
Respondents are undecided about France—21% consider it to be culturally similar to Germany, and 23% consider it to be the most distant of their cultures. The situation is similar for Luxembourg—the number of people who consider this country to be the closest to Germany (11%) is similar to the number who consider its culture and customs to be the most different (12%). The Netherlands and Switzerland are seen as the most culturally similar countries. In contrast, Denmark and Belgium are more likely to be seen as culturally distant.

Graph 23. Perception of cultural proximity with Germany's neighbours



Differences in the perception of selected countries as culturally closest or furthest away can be seen when Germany is divided into eastern and western parts. Poland and the Czech Republic are culturally closer to the inhabitants of the eastern Länder than to the inhabitants of the western Länder.

Graph 24. Perception of cultural proximity of Germany's neighbours by region

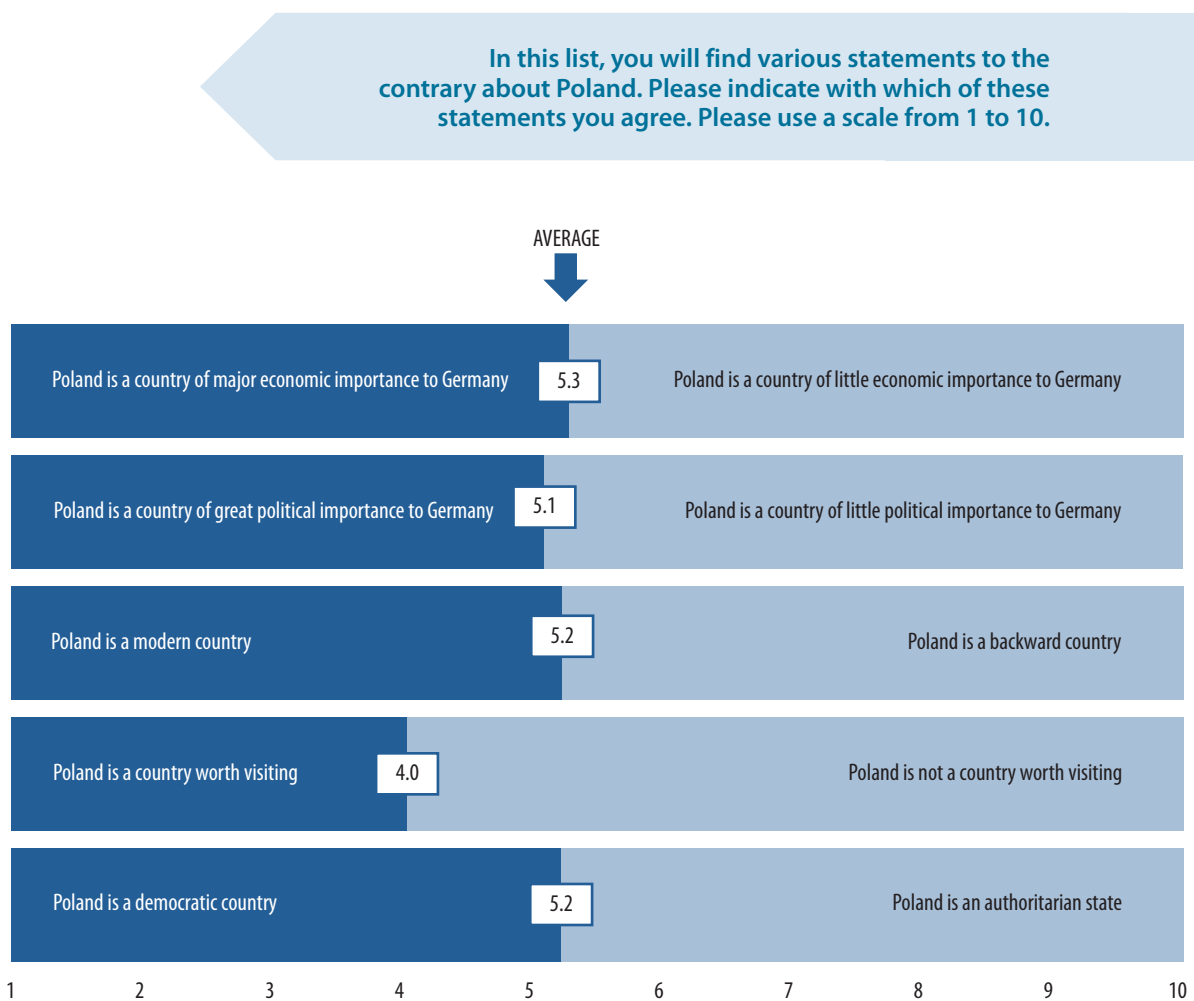


From the point of view of West Germans, the feeling of remoteness towards the Polish population seems understandable, as none of the West German states share a border with Poland. Surprisingly, one in two East Germans (47%) feels the same way. The Czechs are perceived as slightly less alien by East Germans (37%). East Germans feel closest to the Austrians (75%)—even slightly closer than West Germans (71%)—followed by the Swiss (35%) and the Dutch (24%).

IMAGE OF POLAND BASED ON SELECTED STATEMENTS

When respondents are presented with various statements about Poland and asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 10 (rating how much they agree with the statements), the conservatism of the German assessment becomes clear. The graph below shows the average ratings for each pair of contrasting statements. Overall respondents are very reluctant to take strong positions. They are mostly neutral about the importance of Poland for Germany in the economic and political context. They are also undecided as to whether Poland is a modern and democratic country. Based on the analysis of the answers, it can be concluded that the image of Poland in Germany is not well established and difficult to define unambiguously.

Graph 25. Image of Poland based on selected statements



For the vast majority of Germans (79%), Poland is a country worth visiting. This view is shared particularly by those who have already travelled to Poland (86%) but also by the vast majority of those who have never been there (77%).

Six out of ten Germans consider Poland to be a modern and democratic country. Those who know Poland better because they have travelled there several times or have acquaintances, friends or relatives there are even more positive. However, as many as 40% of Germans consider Poland to be a backward and authoritarian country. Poland is also seen by the majority as an important political (63%) and economic (60%) partner for Germany. However, a further 40% of Germans consider the political and economic importance of their neighbour to be rather low. The highest level of agreement with positive statements about Poland (scores 1 and 2) was given by 29% of respondents in relation to Poland's qualities as a tourist destination. In other cases, the figures were much lower (political importance for Germany—12%, modernity—9%, democracy—12%, economic importance—11%).

East and West Germans have similar views of Poland, with the exception of modernity, where East Germans are slightly more positive than their West German counterparts. However, it can be concluded that the image of Poland is rated less positively by West Germans with regard to all the image statements assessed in the survey.

It is noteworthy that Poland's modernity is rated worse by those who derive their knowledge of Poland mainly from newspaper articles. On the other hand, respondents who derive their knowledge mainly from their own experiences, such as a stay in Poland or contact with family or friends from Poland, have a more favourable opinion on this issue.

Respondents in the youngest age group are more critical than older respondents about Poland's economic and political importance, its modernity, and its tourist attractions. Interestingly, the oldest age group (over 60) gave the worst assessment of the state of Polish democracy.

The higher the level of education of the respondents, the worse the assessment of Poland's economic and political importance. Respondents with a primary school education were the most critical in their assessment of the state of Polish democracy and tourism.

POLISH AND GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

The war in Ukraine, which has been going on for almost two years, has certainly affected Germans' views on their relations with Russia. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents admit that Germany has underestimated the threat posed by Russia in its policy towards the country. Knowing how reticent German respondents can be when asked for their opinions on various issues, the value of the evidence in this case should be considered significant. Two-thirds of respondents share this view either completely (31%) or at least partially (36%). Only one in four disagrees with this assertion, with opposition much stronger among East Germans (33% compared with 19% in the West). One in ten does not know how to respond to this question.

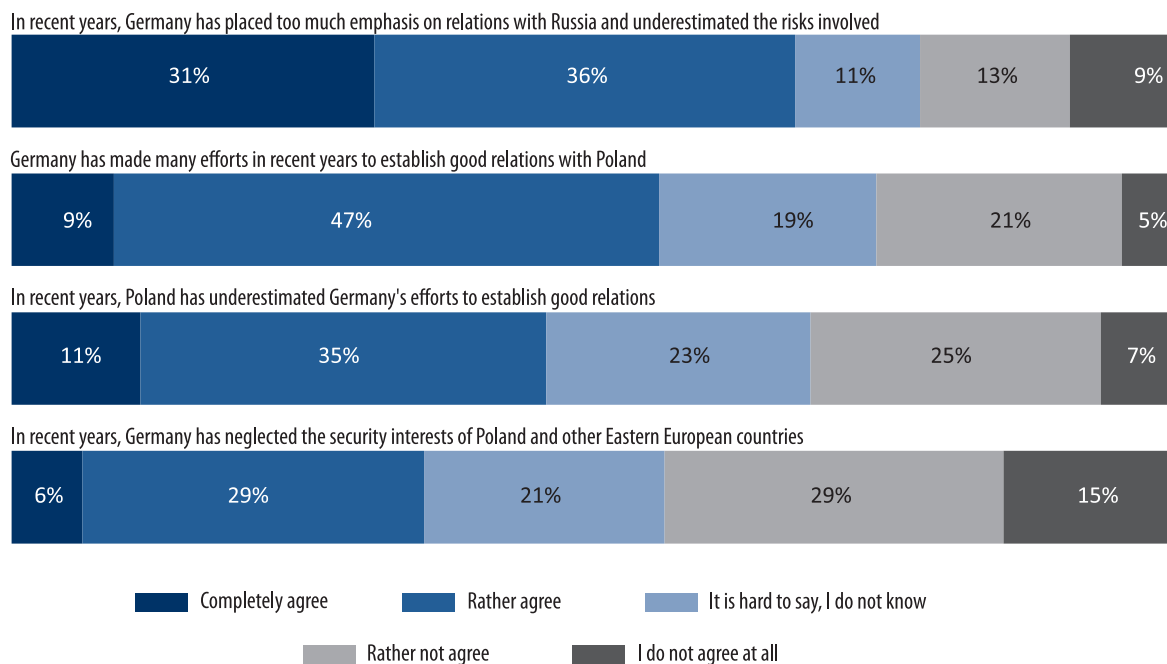
By contrast, respondents are much less likely to agree that Germany has neglected the security interests of Poland and other Eastern European countries in recent years. Just over one in three Germans fully (6%) or partly (29%) agree with the accusation that Germany has neglected the security interests of NATO's Eastern European allies, but a relative majority (44%) say the accusation is somewhat (29%) or completely (15%) unfounded.

More than half of Germans (56%) are convinced that their country has recently made a lot of efforts to establish good relations with Poland. 47% tend to agree with this assessment, and a further 9% strongly agree. Only one respondent in four questions used these efforts somewhat (21%) or not at all (9%). 18% are unable or unwilling to give an opinion.

In Poland, on the other hand, a relative majority of respondents (46%) believe that these efforts have been underestimated. A third of the respondents do not think that the Polish side underestimated German efforts. It is worth noting that almost a quarter (23%) are unable to give an opinion on this question.

Graph 26. Assessment of German foreign policy

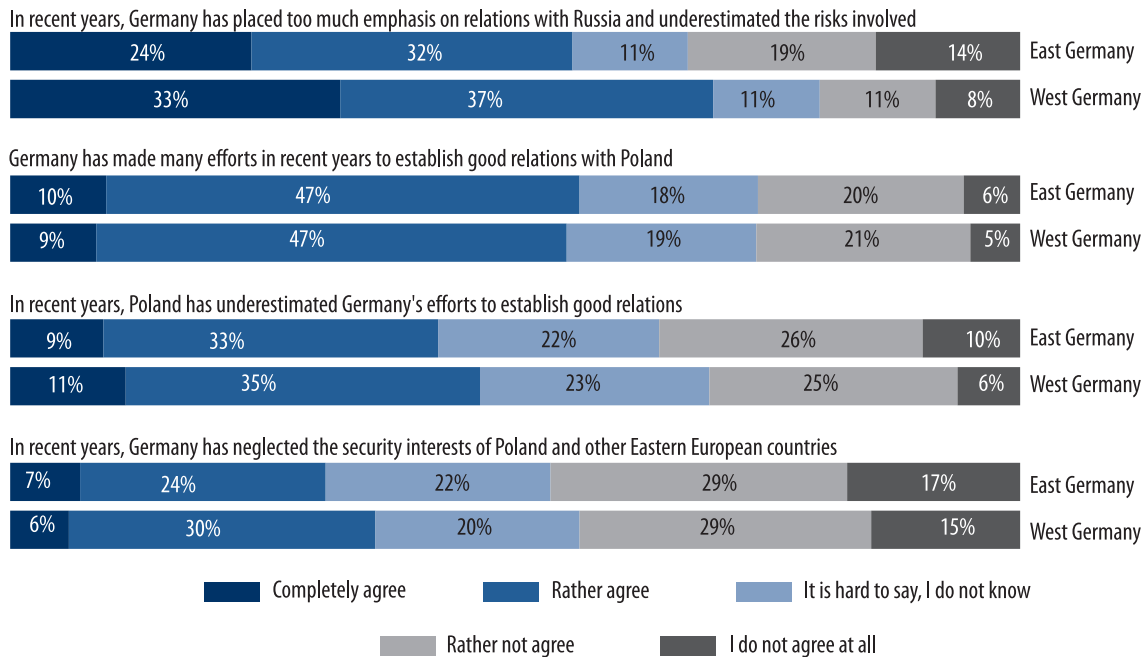
There are different opinions on German foreign policy. Here are some statements on the subject. Please indicate in each case, whether you completely agree, rather agree, rather disagree or do not agree at all with the statement.



An analysis of age groups reveals a rather complicated picture: the oldest age group (over 60) was most likely to agree with the statement that Poles underestimated Germany's efforts to establish good relations with them. In addition, the oldest respondents were more likely than those aged 18–49 to agree that Germany puts too much emphasis on relations with Russia and underestimates the dangers of doing so. Those aged 60 and over are more likely than those aged 18–29 and 40–59 to disagree that Germany has neglected the security of Eastern Europe.

Graph 27. Assessment of German foreign policy (by region)

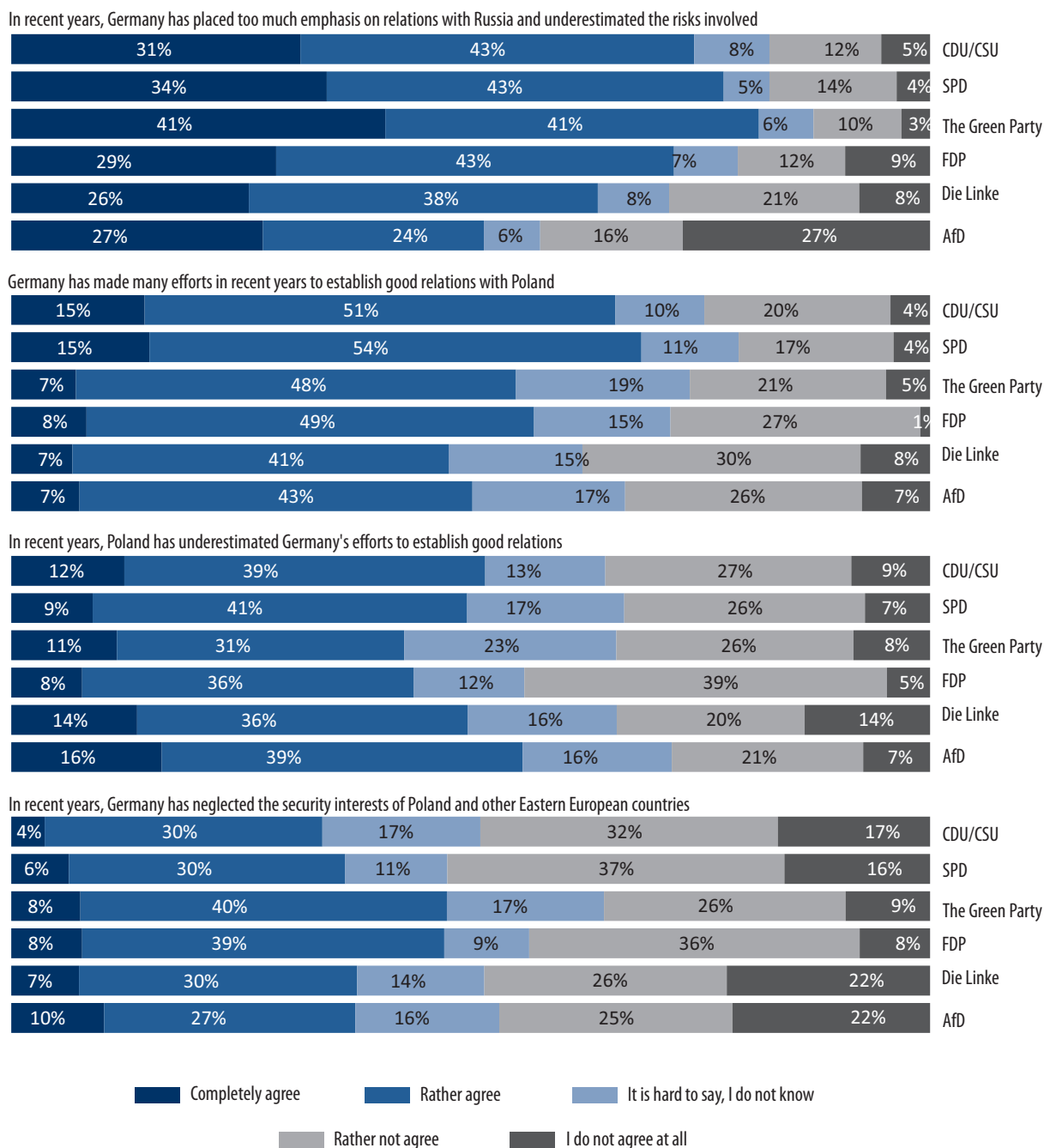
There are different opinions on German foreign policy. Here are some statements on the subject. Please indicate in each case, whether you fully agree, rather agree, rather disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.



In terms of political affiliation, AfD voters are less likely than supporters of other parties to agree that too much emphasis is placed on relations with Russia. On the other hand, Green voters are the most likely to agree that the security of Eastern Europe is being neglected. CDU/CSU and SPD voters are more likely than other respondents to think that Germany has recently made a lot of effort to have good relations with Poland, which may be the result of attributing these efforts to a long-term grand coalition government until 2021. AfD voters mostly agree with the statement that it is Poland that has underestimated Germany's efforts for good bilateral relations.

Graph 28. Assessment of German foreign policy (by preferred party)

There are different opinions on German foreign policy. Here are some statements on the subject. Please indicate in each case, whether you fully agree, rather agree, rather disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.



APPROACH TOWARD HISTORY

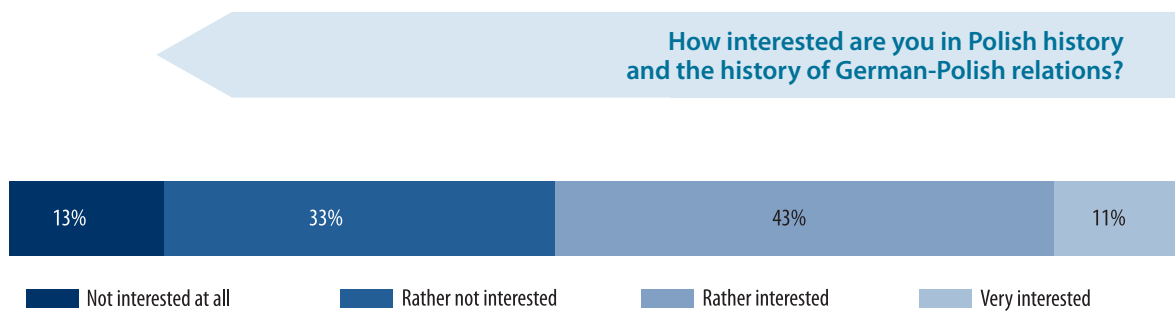
INTEREST IN POLISH HISTORY

The history of Poland and Polish-German relations are certainly not at the centre of the German public’s interest, but a slight majority of respondents (54%) express some interest in these topics.

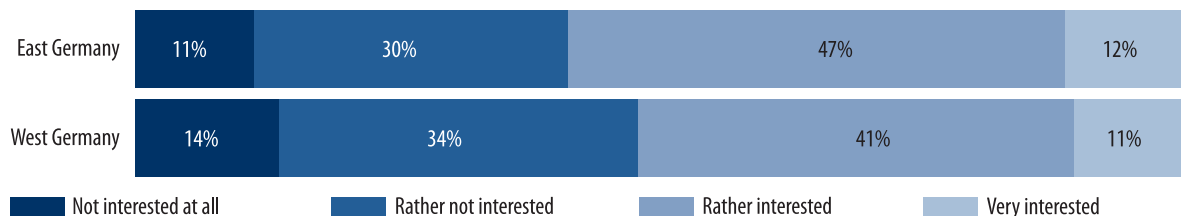
Taking into account socio-demographic characteristics, it should be noted that the historical aspect of shared history is of greatest interest to those with a university education (64%).

The greatest interest in this topic is expressed by Germans who have travelled a lot (72%) or who have personal relations with Polish citizens (71%). Interest in Polish-German history is also slightly higher among eastern Germans (59%) than among their western counterparts (52%).

Graph 29. Interest in Polish history and history of German-Polish relations



Graph 30. Interest in Polish history and history of Polish-German relations (by regions)



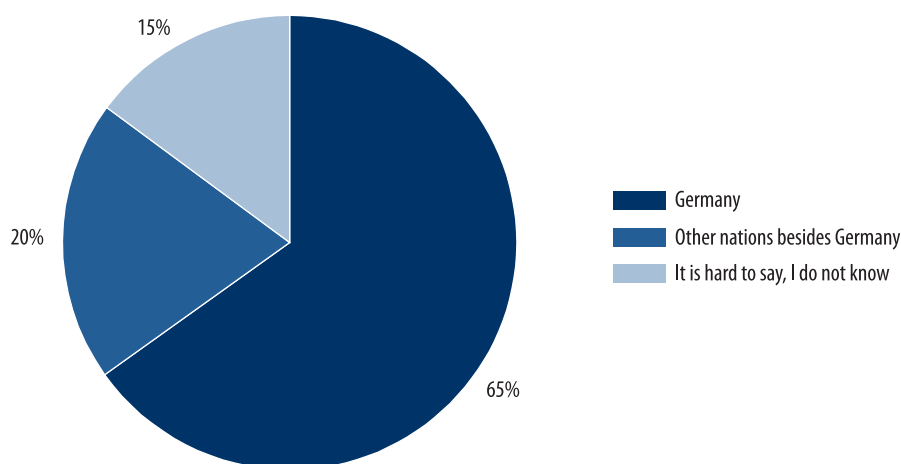
THE QUESTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

For the interpretation of German attitudes towards contemporary issues in the aftermath and consequences of the war, the basic question asked in the survey under discussion here turns out to be important: Who bears the main responsibility for the outbreak of the war?

The statement that this responsibility lies with Germany itself is supported by 65% of respondents. The remaining 35% of respondents think that other countries are also to blame for the outbreak of the war (20%) or find it difficult to answer (15% chose the option “don’t know, difficult to say”). Thus, two out of three Germans do not doubt that Germany bears sole responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War. However, one in five think that other countries were also partly responsible, and a relatively large group are unable to express an opinion.

Graph 31. Shared responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War

In 1939, the Second World War began with the invasion of Poland by German troops. What do you think, who was responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War?



The percentage of respondents who are convinced of Germany’s responsibility increases with age, with the oldest group of respondents (over 60) more likely to hold this view than the others.

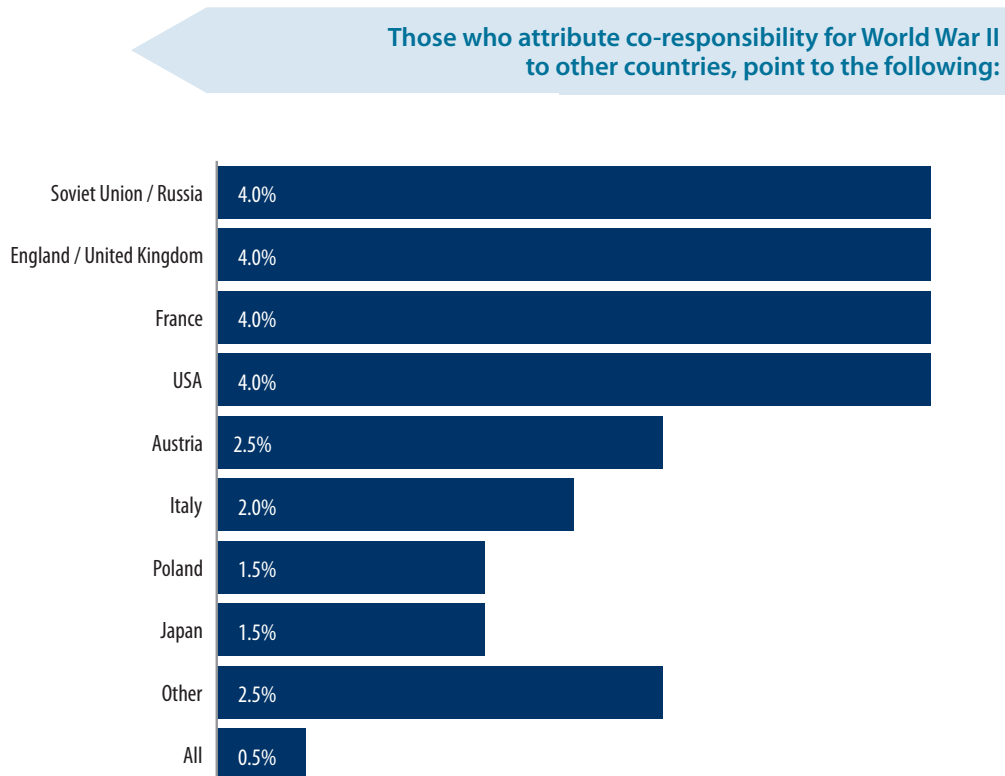
The better-educated respondents are, the more likely they are to point to Germany’s responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War. Respondents with a secondary school or university degree are significantly more likely to blame Nazi Germany for the Second World War (70% and 72%, respectively), compared with only 58% of those with only a secondary school education. In this category, one person in four is unable to answer the question.

Residents of the eastern Länder are much more likely than residents of the western Länder to shift the burden of co-responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War onto other countries.

It is worth noting that there is one group of respondents in which the belief that Germany was clearly responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War falls below 50%—only 47% of those who say they will vote for the AfD in the next election blame Germany alone for starting the war.

The list of countries cited by those who extend responsibility for the Second World War is extensive. The Soviet Union is named most often (5%). Overall, however, it is the Western Allies, i.e., Great Britain, France, and the USA (4% each), who are seen as sharing responsibility. Additional comments, which are sometimes added, suggest different reasons for this assessment of co-responsibility. According to some, the appeasement policy of the Western powers contributed to the outbreak of the war, while others see a connection with the treatment of a defeated Germany by the victorious powers after the First World War. In addition to Austria, Italy, Japan, and others, Poland, Hitler’s first target, was also mentioned as a country that contributed to the outbreak of war—but only by 1.5% of respondents.

Graph 32. Responsibility for the outbreak of Second World War—countries named

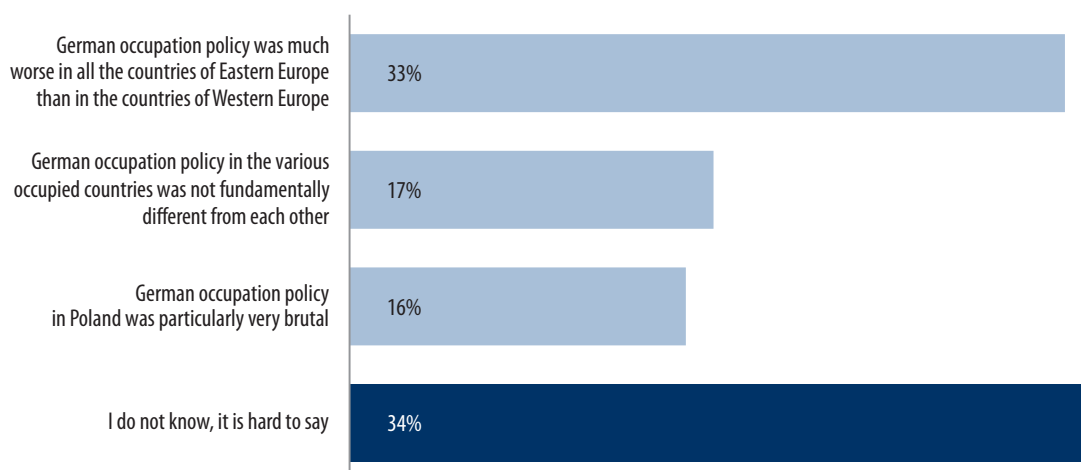


EVALUATION OF GERMAN OCCUPATION POLICY

Contemporary Germans find it difficult to give a clear assessment of the policy pursued by the German occupation authorities in various countries. A third of respondents (33%) note a difference between the intensity of repression in Eastern and Western Europe. Only 16% of Germans know that the occupation of Poland was particularly brutal and that Poland suffered the highest number of victims in relation to its population. Taken together, these figures suggest that one in two Germans (49%) is at least aware that German occupation policy was much worse in Eastern European countries than in the West. However, the question of the differences between the individual states in the eastern part of the continent is already too abstract. 17% assume that the actions of the occupying forces were generally not fundamentally different in the occupied countries. It is worth noting the high percentage of those who are unable to give an opinion—34%. If the latter two figures are added together, we arrive at a total of 51%, which means that for half of today’s Germans, issues relating to the course of the Second World War are already a matter of debate.

Graph 33. Assessment of German occupation policy

During the Second World War, Germany occupied, in addition to Poland, many other countries of Eastern and Western Europe. There are different opinions about how the German occupation authorities dealt with local populations. Which of the following statements do you think is closest to reality?



Here too, education plays a decisive role, as every second respondent with a diploma feels unable to make an assessment, compared with every fourth respondent with a university degree.

On the other hand, neither current contacts with Poles nor experiences from stays in Poland have much influence on the evaluation of occupation policy, which would be closer to the facts. However, respondents who can boast of contacts with Poland are more likely than others to think that the occupation was more brutal in Eastern Europe than in the West.

Very few Germans are aware of the scale of Polish losses in the Second World War. In response to an open-ended question about the estimated number of civilian casualties in Poland, the vast majority give too low a figure. The most common figure given was 1 million. More than 25% of the estimates are below 500,000, 17% between 500,000 and 1 million, 23% between 1 million and 3 million, and 16% between 3 million and 5 million. Only one in ten Germans believe that there were more than 5 million. A marginal number (3%) overestimates the number of victims at more than 10 million. Differences in knowledge according to age, education, or background are minimal. Even in the group of people with experience of living in Poland and personal contacts with Poles, there is no evidence of a significantly closer assessment of the facts.

Graph 34. Estimated number of Polish civilian victims

France recorded 350,000 civilian casualties in World War II, Germany 2.2 million. How many victims do you think Poland had in total in World War II? If you do not know, please estimate the number of victims.

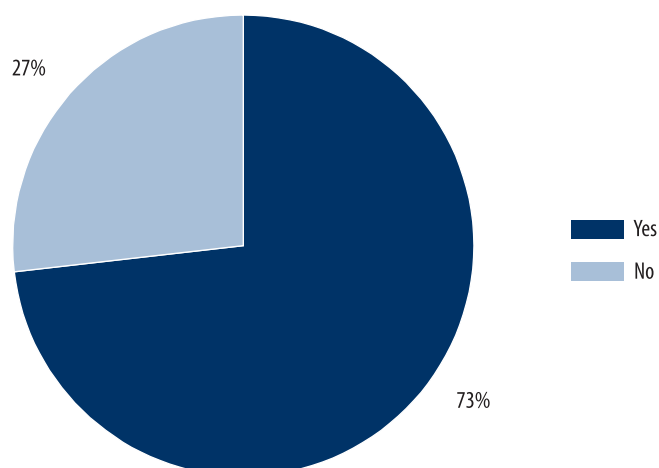


ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DEMAND FOR REPARATIONS

Three out of four respondents are aware that the Polish government demands reparations for damage and losses caused by the Germans in Poland during the Second World War. Awareness of this issue varies among different socio-demographic groups but always reaches at least 60%. Among the oldest people and those with higher education, the percentage reaches 80%. Only one in four Germans has not heard of it, including an above-average number of citizens with less formal education.

Graph 35. Awareness of the demand for reparations

The Polish government has asked the German government for payment of compensation for damage and losses caused by the Germans during the Second World War. Have you heard or read about this?

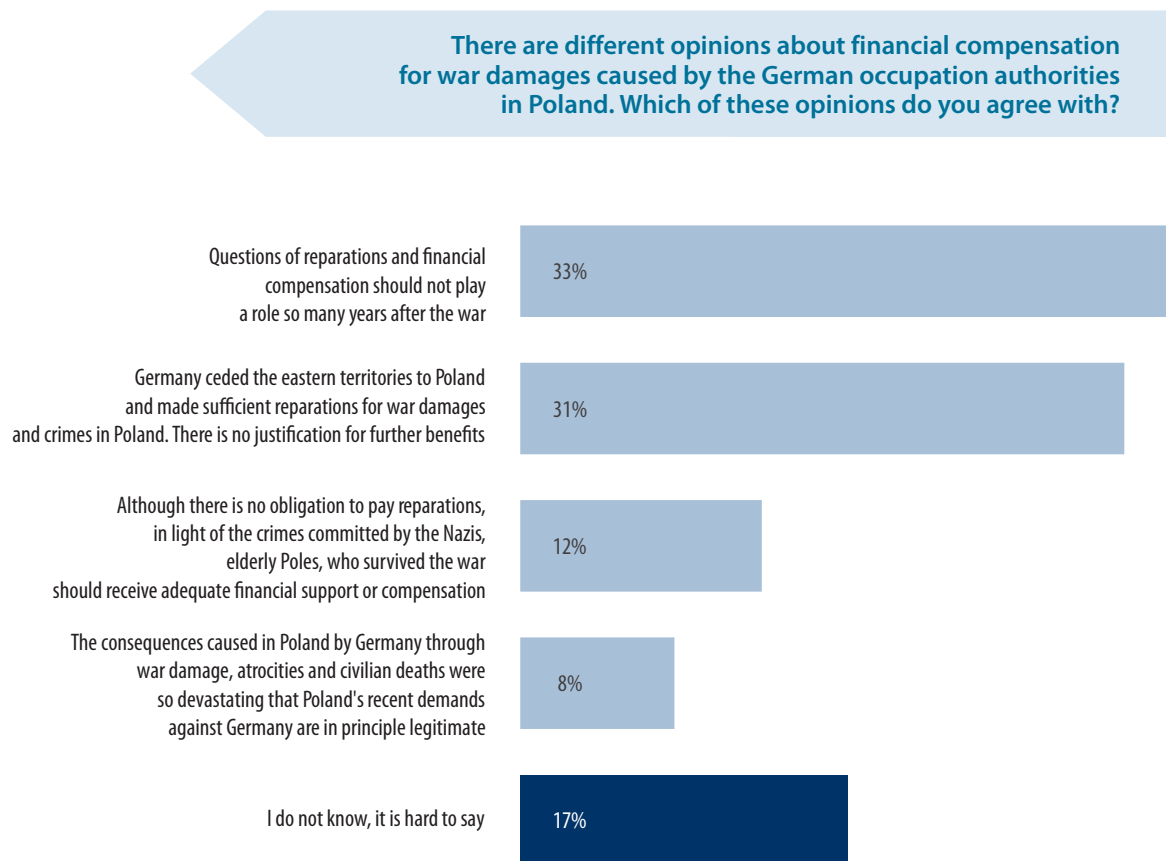


Only a minority of respondents (8%) consider the Polish demand to be justified in view of the crimes and material damage caused by Germany in Poland. Two out of three respondents reject the demand for reparations, some (31%) on the basis of the argument that there is sufficient compensation in the form of former eastern territories, others in the belief that so many years after the end of the war the question of reparations and compensation should no longer play a role (35%). A further 12% believe there is no obligation for reparations but

that the brutality of the occupation justifies compensation for older survivors. Again, the proportion of those unable to take a position is significant—17%.

A certain openness to dialogue on Polish demands can, therefore, be seen in about a fifth of respondents. On the other hand, 64% of Germans see no room for such a discussion, either because of the passage of time or because they believe that the loss of German territory to Poland is sufficient compensation.

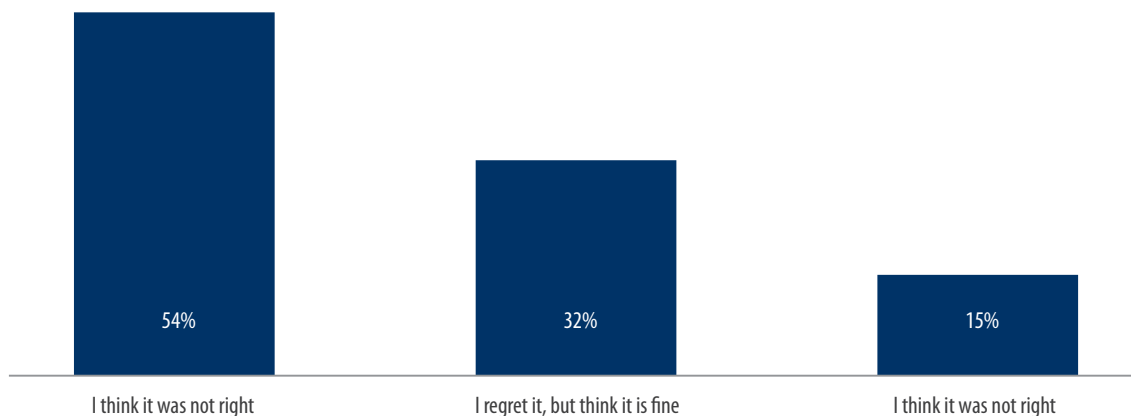
Graph 36. Attitudes towards reparations



Respondents were also asked about their attitude to Germany’s renunciation of its claims to former German eastern territories. The vast majority of Germans accept this political decision, although almost a third of respondents regret it. 15% think that the loss of some territory to Poland was wrong.

Graph 37. The question of Germany's former eastern territories

With reunification, Germany relinquished all claims to the former German eastern territories. How do you assess this decision?



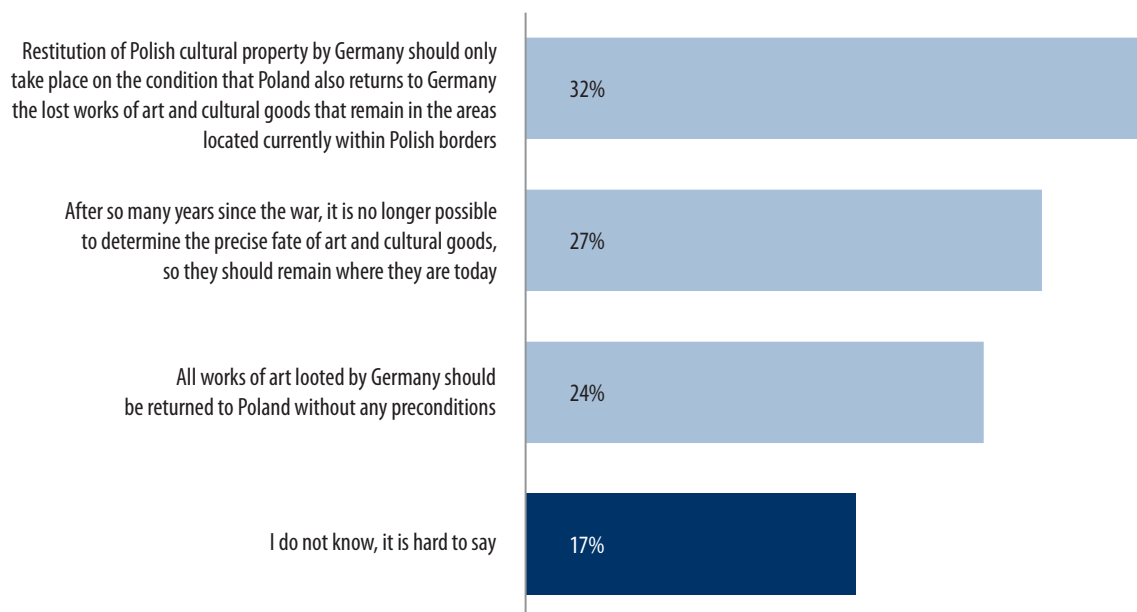
In general, the conclusiveness of the territorial settlement is widely supported in both East and West Germany, in all population groups, and among almost all party supporters. The exception is among AfD supporters, 31% of whom are reluctant to accept post-war territorial changes.

RESTITUTION OF CULTURAL PROPERTY

In the context of the post-war settlement, the problem of the restitution of Polish cultural property is a separate issue. For only a quarter of respondents, the issue is simple and clear: all art looted by Germany should be returned to Poland without any preconditions. Almost half of the respondents (44%) think that now, so many years after the end of the war, this issue should no longer be raised, or simply have no opinion on the matter. On the other hand, a third of Germans accept the possibility of restitution of Polish cultural property only on condition that, at the same time, Poland returns to the Germans their lost works of art and cultural property, which remained in the territories incorporated within Poland's borders. Again, this is the option most frequently mentioned by AfD voters.

Graph 38. Attitudes toward the restitution of Polish cultural property

During the Second World War, many works of art and cultural property from Poland were destroyed or taken to Germany. On the other hand, many German cultural assets remained in the areas that were annexed to Poland after the war. There are different views on how the federal government should approach this. Which view do you agree with the most?



The fragmentation on this issue applies to all categories of respondents. However, it can be noted that the two oldest groups of respondents (over 60 and 50–59) are more likely to believe that cultural objects should not be transferred.

There is no linear relationship for education. In the largest urban centres, the demand for the unconditional return of all works has more support than in smaller municipalities/cities.

POLISH-GERMAN RECONCILIATION

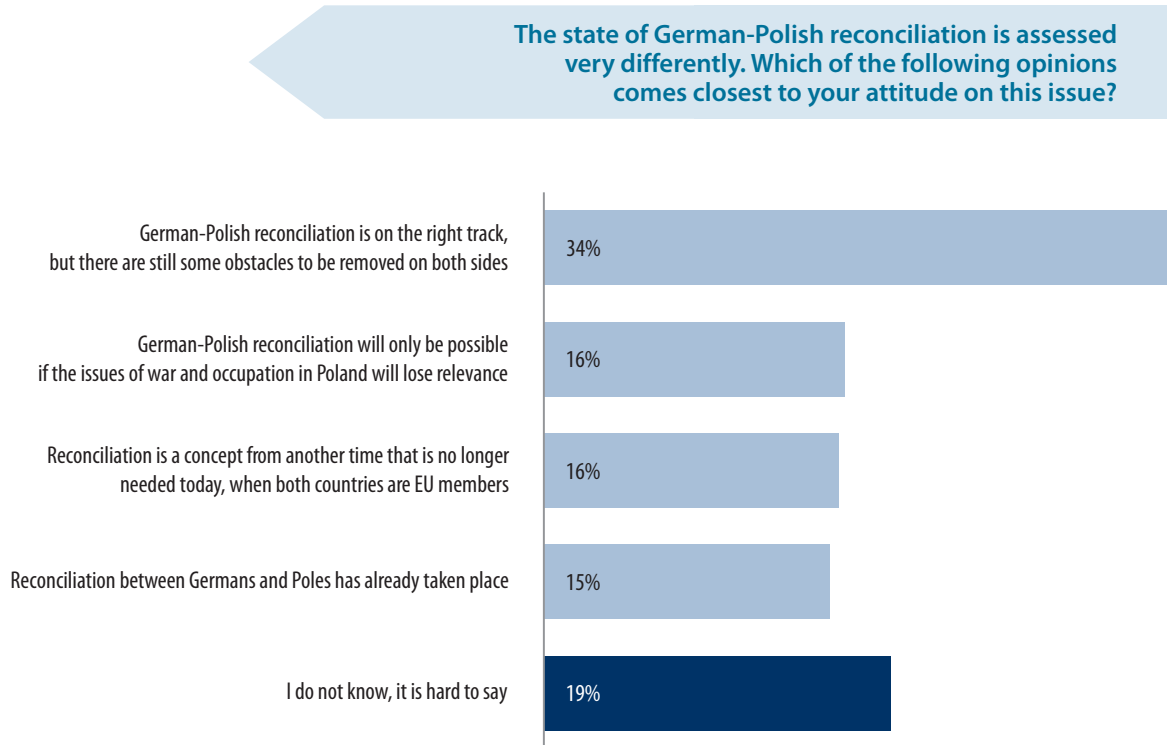
About half of the respondents believe that Polish-German reconciliation has either already taken place (15%) or is on the right track, but there are still some obstacles to be removed on both sides (34%). On the other hand, 16% of respondents believe that reconciliation is not in the hands of the Germans and that the possibility for full reconciliation depends on the eradication of war and occupation issues from the Polish debate. For an equally large group of respondents, reconciliation is a concept from another time and lost its importance when Poland became a member of the European Union alongside Germany. Again, the percentage of respondents who could not answer the question is high (19%).

Older people (60+) are more likely than other groups to believe that the concept of reconciliation is no longer valid. People in the 30-39 age group are more convinced than other groups that reconciliation has already taken place.

The more educated respondents are, the more likely they are to think that Polish-German reconciliation is on the right track, although there are still some obstacles to overcome.

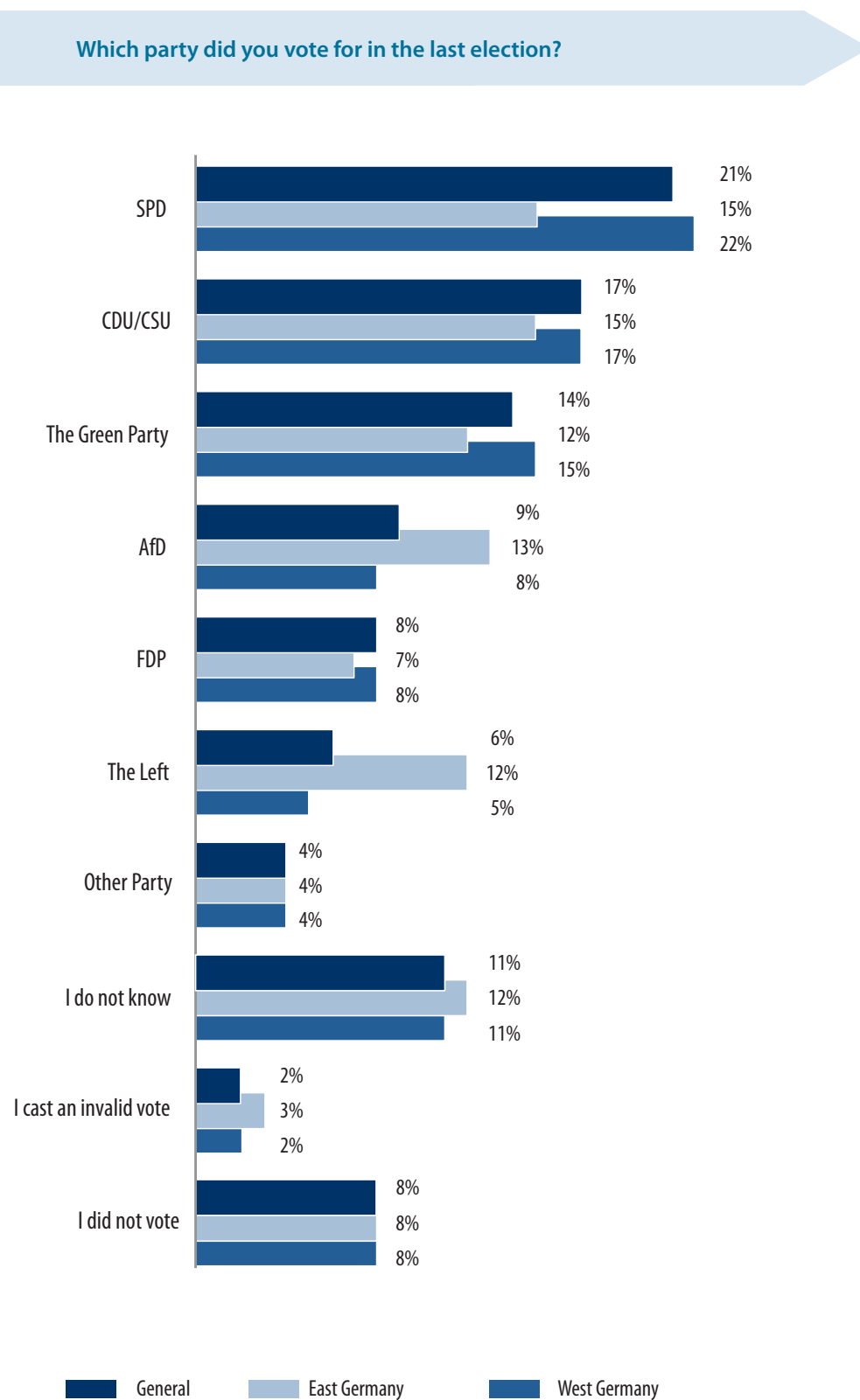
Supporters of the AfD party are more likely than supporters of other parties to be convinced that the idea of reconciliation has already taken place.

Graph 39. Attitudes toward German-Polish reconciliation

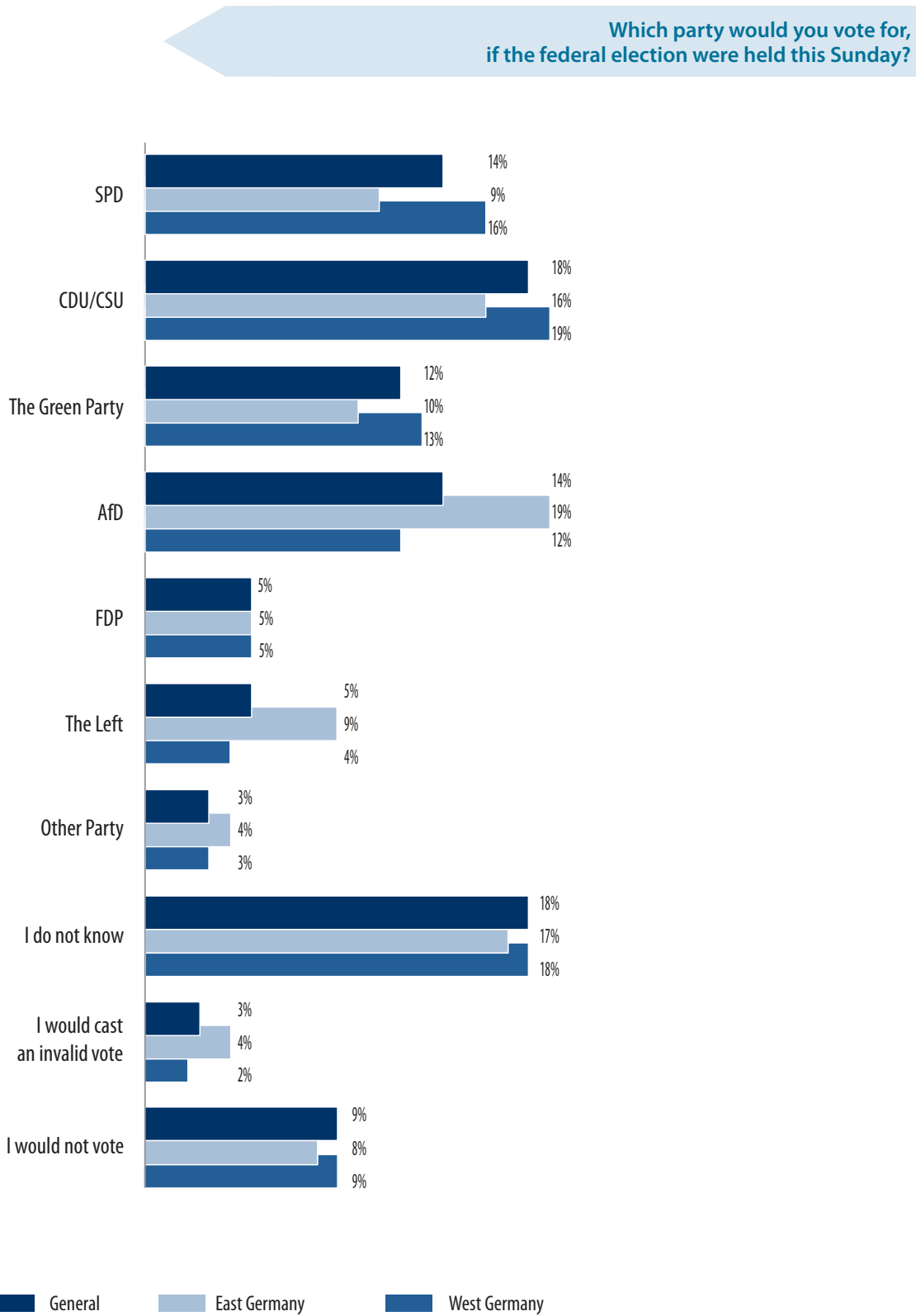




Graph 40. Party preferences expressed in recent elections



Graph 41. Party preference—declared party preference at the next election





PISM

POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) is a leading Central European think tank that positions itself between the world of politics and independent analysis. PISM provides analytical support to decision-makers and diplomats, initiates public debate and disseminates expert knowledge about contemporary international relations. The work of PISM is guided by the conviction that the decision-making process in international relations should be based on knowledge that comes from reliable and valid research.

POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
UL. WARECKA 1A, 00-950 WARSZAWA
TEL. (+48) 22 556 80 00
FAKS (+48) 22 556 80 99
PISM@PISM.PL
WWW.PISM.PL

ISBN 978-83-67487-49-8