Fault Lines: Germany's Invisible Divides

Executive Summary

Laura-Kristine Krause
Jérémie Gagné

More in
Common
DEUTSCHLAND

Executive Summary

Fault Lines: Germany's Invisible Divides
(published in German as *Die andere deutsche Teilung*)

Many of the world's most established democracies are in a period of systemic disruption. Societies feel increasingly polarised and divided. The political landscape is changing, with the rise of insurgent parties while established parties are declining or undergoing a populist makeover.

Despite upheavals in domestic politics, Germany has in recent years been more stable than similar countries such as the United States, France and the United Kingdom. However, there are signs of changes ahead. Even now, with Germany's economy still the strongest major economy in Europe, 70 percent of Germans believe that the country is heading in the wrong direction. One in two is dissatisfied with democracy. In particular, most believe that the state of society has deteriorated in the last five years, and merely five percent expect things to improve in years to come.

Looking ahead to the 2020s, a key question is whether the instability that has become common in other Western democracies will also take hold in Germany. Until now, there have been signs of widening social fractures, but Germany also has demonstrated some exceptional characteristics: strong civil society institutions, a consensus-oriented political culture and a vigilance borne of a deeply painful past that is only now slipping from living memory. The question at hand is whether these characteristics will remain strong enough to protect the country against the forces of division.

More in Common is focused on strengthening social cohesion and countering the forces of polarisation. Our vision is to build more united and inclusive societies that are resilient against social fracturing, where people believe that they have more in common than that which divides them. We believe this is essential for sustaining a healthy democracy in a pluralistic society. The goal of this study is to provide fresh insights into the state of German society as we enter a new decade, with a focus on the core beliefs, values and sense of identity of Germans. This English language version executive summary provides insights into the larger findings of *Die andere deutsche Teilung*, with 17 diagrams drawn from the larger study.

Figure 1

The state of German democracy
Most Germans believe their country is heading in the wrong direction, and half are dissatisfied with their democracy.
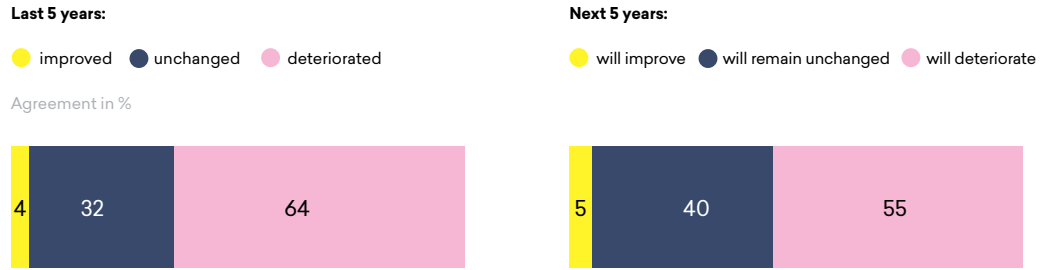

How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the Federal Republic of Germany?
Do you think that things in Germany are currently heading in the right or the wrong direction?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Figure 2

The state of German society
Germans feel rather pessimistic, with only 5 percent believing that things
are improving

Last 5 years:

🟡 improved 🔵 unchanged 🔴 deteriorated

Next 5 years:

🟡 will improve 🔵 will remain unchanged 🔴 will deteriorate

Agreement in %

4	32	64

5	40	55

When you think of the last / next five years, how do you think the state of society in Germany has changed / will change?
Source: More in Common (2019)

About this study

In order to map the landscape of public opinion in Germany today, we asked a wide range
of questions in a representative national survey of more than 4,000 German residents,
conducted in partnership with opinion research institute Kantar Public (formerly TNS
Infratest) in early 2019.

While we also asked about demographic information, we adopted a different approach
to the traditional method of grouping people by categories such as socioeconomic,
demographic or partisan identity. These have become less effective in explaining the
changes in public attitudes in recent years. Instead, insights into people's underlying
beliefs can be highly predictive of their views on social issues and their future political
behaviour. For example, knowing someone's perception of threat or insecurity can often
tell us more about them than their household income.

The study deployed an innovative set of research methodologies that were first developed
by More in Common in the US study *Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape.*
This methodology incorporates a range of recent insights from social psychology and
political science to help understand the social dynamics that are re-shaping democratic
societies. It involves grouping people on the basis of their perceptions of their identity
and involvement in society, their perspective on their country, and a set of core beliefs
drawn from research relating to:

- Moral Foundations
- Authoritarian tendencies
- Perception of threat
- Personal responsibility and ability to take action
- In-group and out-group identity

The statistical segmentation was based exclusively on questions regarding basic values
and fundamental beliefs; no demographic indicators or questions on current political
debates were included in the segmentation. The study concluded with a series of focus
group discussions with members of the key population segments identified.

The current state of our society

A cluster analysis of a fixed set of survey questions found that Germans group into six main population segments. Each is characterised by specific traits:

- **The Open** value self-expression, open-mindedness and critical thinking
- **The Involved** are civic-minded and active democrats, value togetherness, and are willing to defend progressive social achievements
- **The Established** value reliability and social harmony and are most likely to feel satisfied with the status quo
- **The Detached** value success and personal advancement, are less likely to think in abstract societal terms or to be interested in politics
- **The Disillusioned** have lost a sense of community and long for recognition and social justice
- **The Angry** value order and control in national life, are angry at the system, and have very low levels of trust

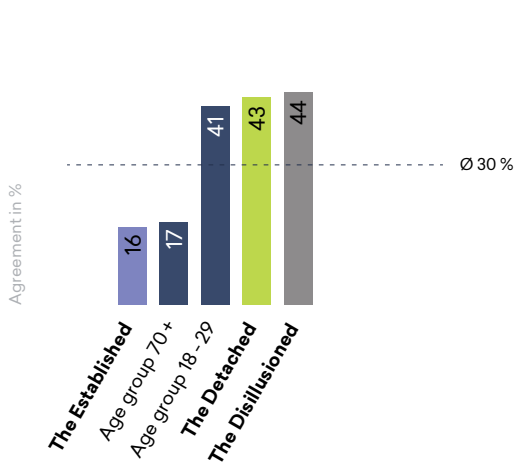**Figure 3**   **Germany's six segments**
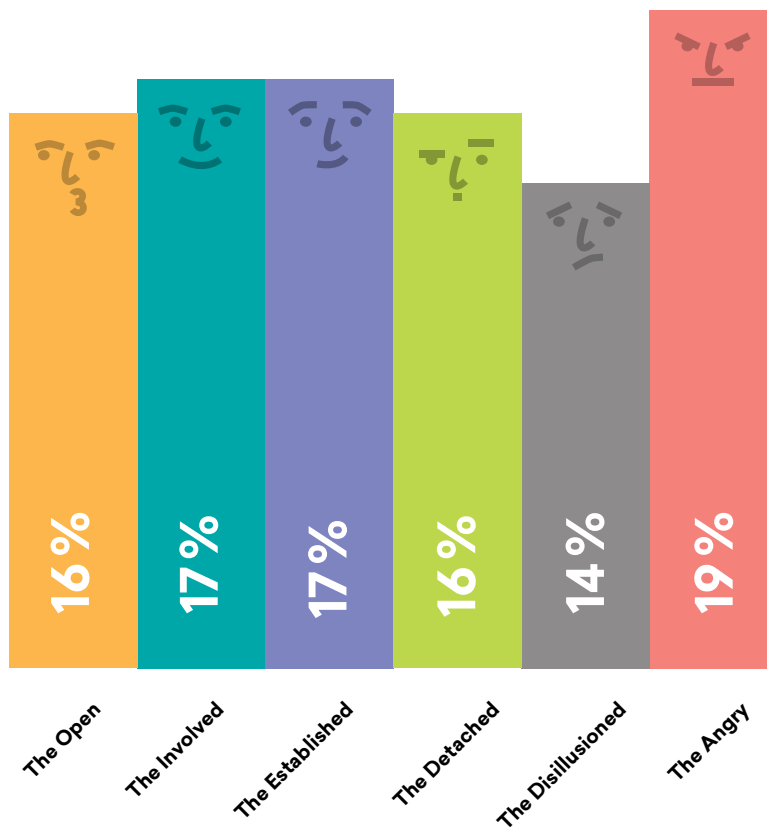
The differences in values and priorities between the segments are an underlying driver of social conflict. Understanding these differences can provide valuable insights into existing and potential social fractures, and can help shape efforts to reduce conflict, improve cohesion and build resilience against efforts to exploit differences in order to divide German society.
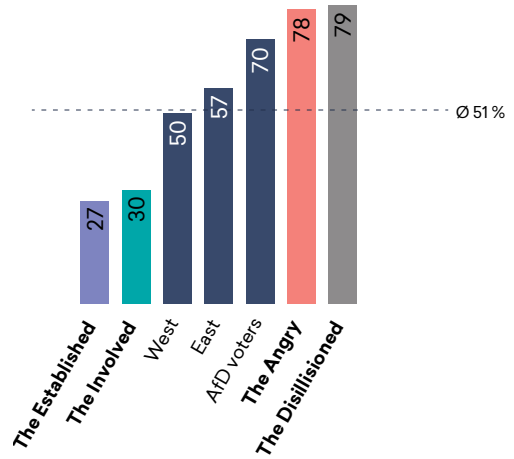
Figure 4

Core beliefs versus demographic indicators
Understanding German society through the lens of the six segments provides richer insights than looking at Germans only through the lens of party identification, or through the demographic indicators normally used to discuss social issues.
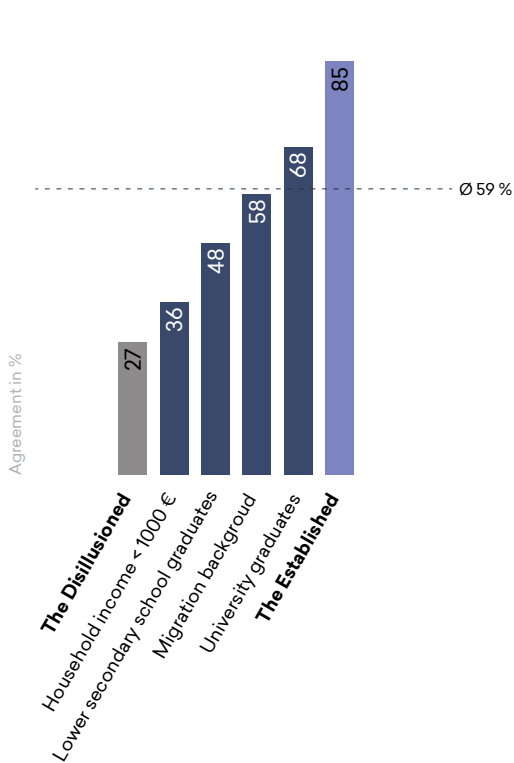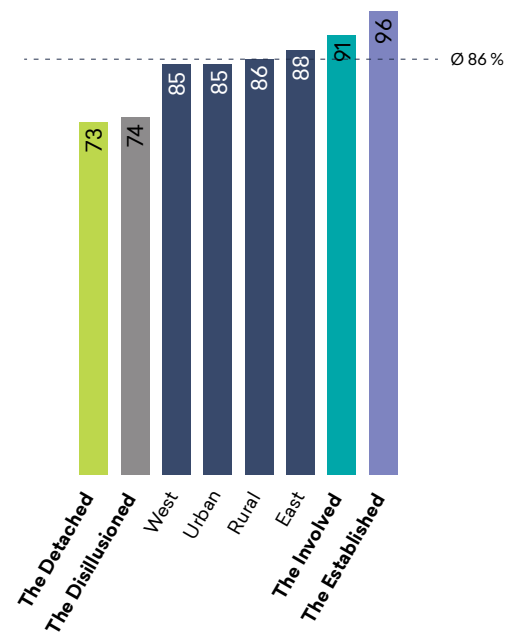

"I often feel lonely"

- The Established: 16
- Age group 70+: 17
- Age group 18 – 29: 41
- The Detached: 43
- The Disillusioned: 44

Ø 30 %

Agreement in %

"I often feel like a second-class citizen"

- The Established: 27
- The Involved: 30
- West: 50
- East: 57
- AfD voters: 70
- The Angry: 78
- The Disillisioned: 79

Ø 51 %

"I have enough opportunities to advance in life"

- The Disillusioned: 27
- Household income < 1000 €: 36
- Lower secondary school graduates: 48
- Migration backgroud: 58
- University graduates: 68
- The Established: 85

Ø 59 %

Agreement in %

"I know exactly where I feel at home and where I belong"

- The Detached: 73
- The Disillusioned: 74
- West: 85
- Urban: 85
- Rural: 86
- East: 88
- The Involved: 91
- The Established: 96

Ø 86 %

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
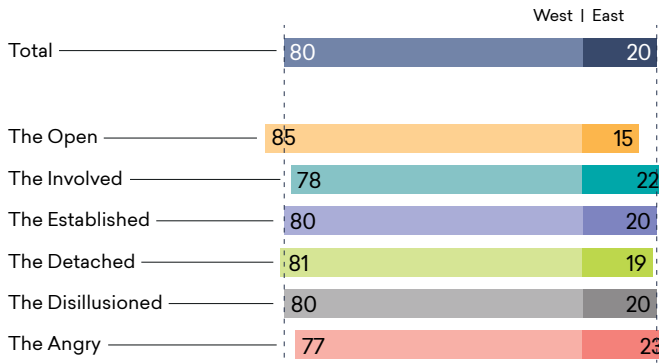Source: More in Common (2019)

Figure 5

East-West distribution of types
When we segment Germans according to their core beliefs, we do not find major differences between East and West – almost all six population segments are spread evenly across the country.

Region

Numbers in %

West | East

|	West	East
Total	80	20
The Open	85	15
The Involved	78	22
The Established	80	20
The Detached	81	19
The Disillusioned	80	20
The Angry	77	23

Source: More in Common (2019)

The segmentation also suggests that we miss important insights into the differences between Germans when we analyse only through demographic or partisan attributes. Core beliefs and in-group/out-group identities often distinguish Germans from each other in more meaningful ways than conventional attributes. For example, contrary to the conventional wisdom there is little evidence of a deep East-West fracture in Germans' core beliefs and perspectives on society. Four of the six segments are distributed evenly – that is, with the same proportions among East and West Germans – across the country. This finding is surprising, given the extent to which national conversations about German identity even 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall almost intuitively assume this to be a definitive boundary. Of course significant differences exist in people's lived experiences, income level and other circumstances in the East and West, but a deeper analysis suggests that there is far more in common between Germans than is often assumed.

Figure 6

The three-fold division of society
Germans cluster around three distinct orientations to society.
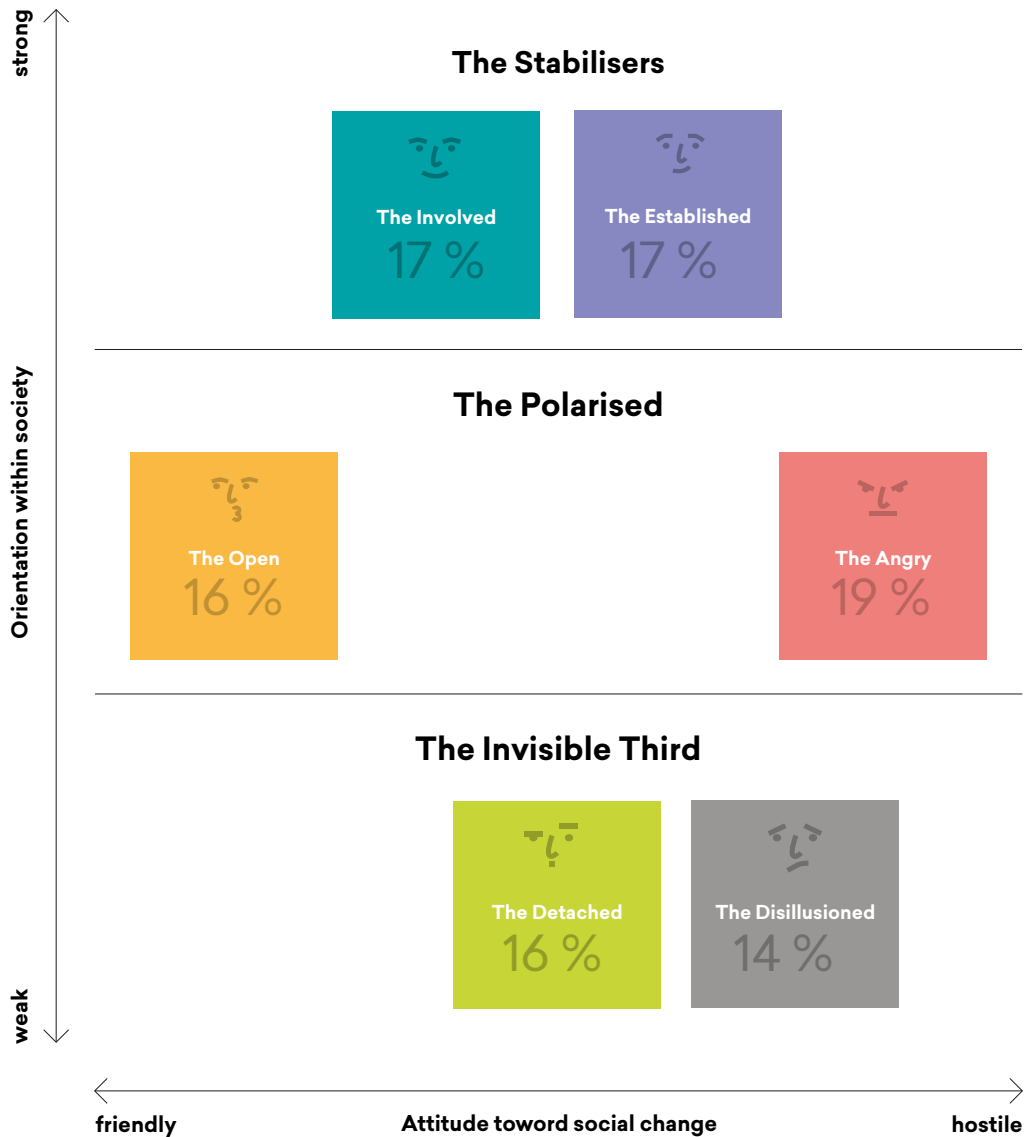
Instead, the study finds a deeper set of divisions in German society far more relevant to understanding current social dynamics and how we strengthen cohesion against the growing forces of division. We find that Germans cluster around three distinct orientations to society, each representing approximately one third of the total population:

- **The Stabilisers,** consisting of the Established and the Involved (a total of 34 percent)
- **The Polarised,** consisting of the Open and the Angry (a total of 35 percent)
- **The Invisible Third,** consisting of the Disillusioned and the Detached (a total of 30 percent)

The **Polarised** constitute the ends of the current ideological spectrum, in cultural matters in particular. The Open and the Angry are easiest to recognise because they are familiar: they have clear and strong views which they both actively advance, and stand in sharp opposition to each other (although there are real differences in their respective openness for compromise).

The **Stabilisers** are far less prominent, but they play a critically important role in communities. They care about civic and institutional life and want to preserve what they feel are the strengths of German society. Also, they have a more satisfied and optimistic outlook on society. They are grouped into a more socially conservative Established segment, and a more liberal Involved segment.

A first key finding of this study is the need for much greater efforts to integrate the Invisible Third into German politics and civil society. This group consists of the Detached and the Disillusioned. A society can only function effectively if all social groups feel a sense of belonging and engagement, and the Invisible Third is distinguished by being less visible, less engaged and less well integrated. Germans in this group are far more lonely, they feel less in control over their own lives, and are much less engaged as citizens in our democratic system (for example, identifying much less with the labels 'left-wing' and 'right-wing'). Indeed, more than half of Germany's non-voters are found among the Invisible Third.

Figure 7

The Invisible Third
30 percent of people in Germany are not socially or politically integrated.
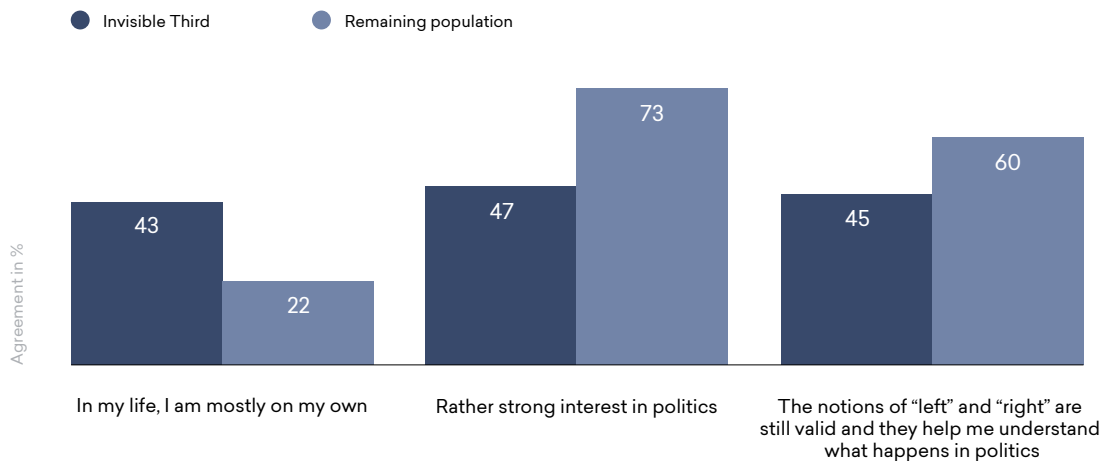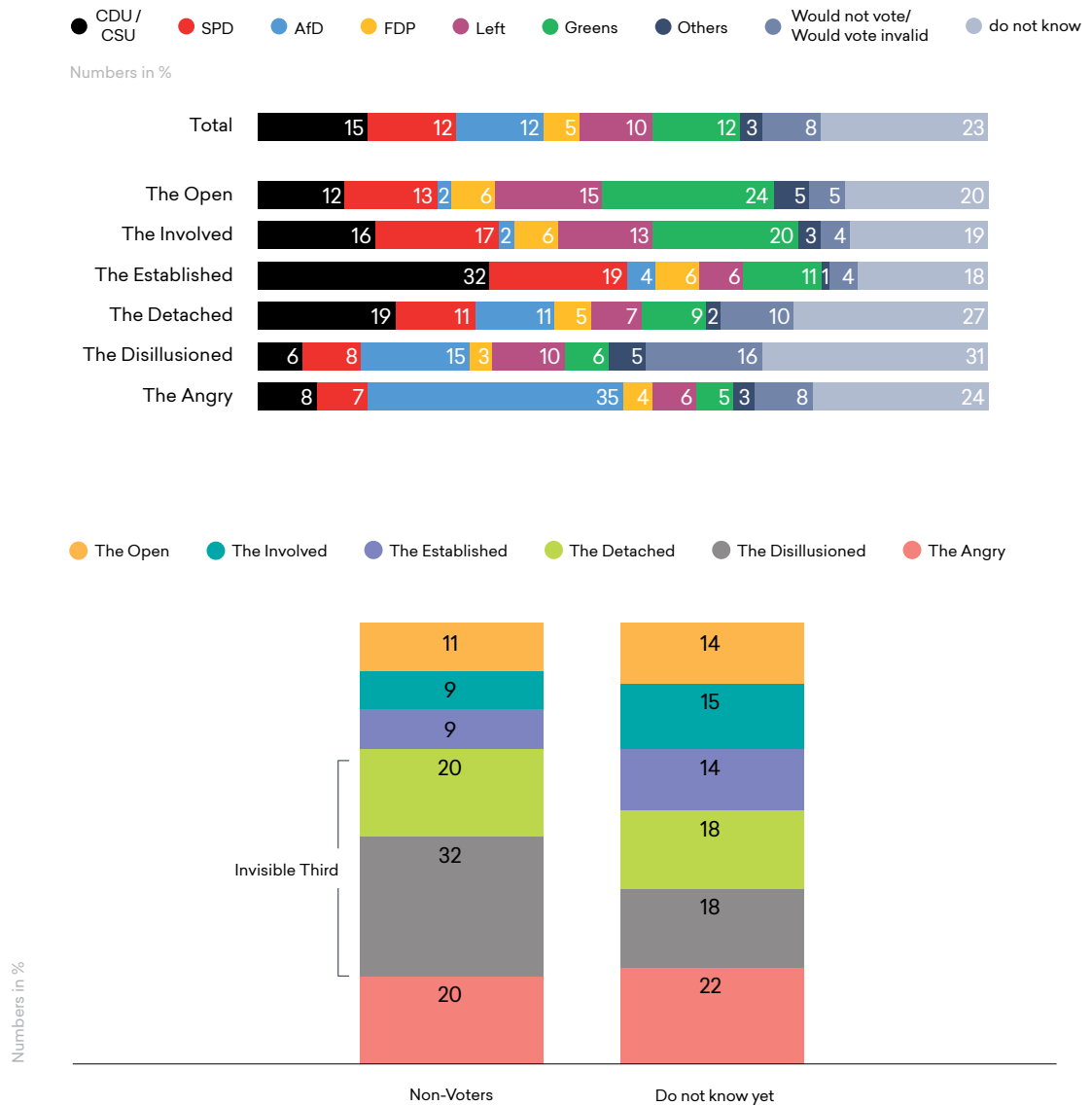

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
How strong is your interest in politics?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Figure 8

Voting intentions
Many non-voters can be found in the Invisible Third.

Legend	
● CDU / CSU	● SPD	● AfD	● FDP	● Left	● Greens	● Others	● Would not vote/ Would vote invalid	● do not know

Numbers in %

	CDU/CSU	SPD	AfD	FDP	Left	Greens	Others	Would not vote	do not know
Total	15	12	12	5	10	12	3	8	23
The Open	12	13	2	6	15	24	5	5	20
The Involved	16	17	2	6	13	20	3	4	19
The Established	32	19	4	6	6	11	1	4	18
The Detached	19	11	11	5	7	9	2	10	27
The Disillusioned	6	8	15	3	10	6	5	16	31
The Angry	8	7	35	4	6	5	3	8	24

Legend	
● The Open	● The Involved	● The Established	● The Detached	● The Disillusioned	● The Angry

Numbers in %

	Non-Voters	Do not know yet
The Open	11	14
The Involved	9	15
The Established	9	14
The Detached	20	18
The Disillusioned	32	18
The Angry	20	22

Invisible Third (The Detached + The Disillusioned, Non-Voters)

Which party would you vote for if national parliamentary elections were held this Sunday?
Source: More in Common (2019)

A second key finding of the study is that – like other societies – Germany is experiencing a growing polarisation between two groups that often drive public debates, especially due to their above-average presence in social media debates. The two Polarised groups – the Open and the Angry – have clearly defined and sharply contrasting values and visions for German society. However, while the Open people are willing to compromise, the Angry are especially uncompromising in their views, and tend to hold the most extreme or negative views across a wide range of issues.
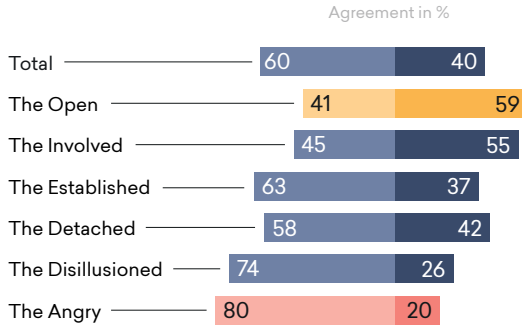
Figure 9

The Polarised
The Open and Angry segments have clearly-held beliefs which they both strongly assert, but differ in their willingness to compromise.
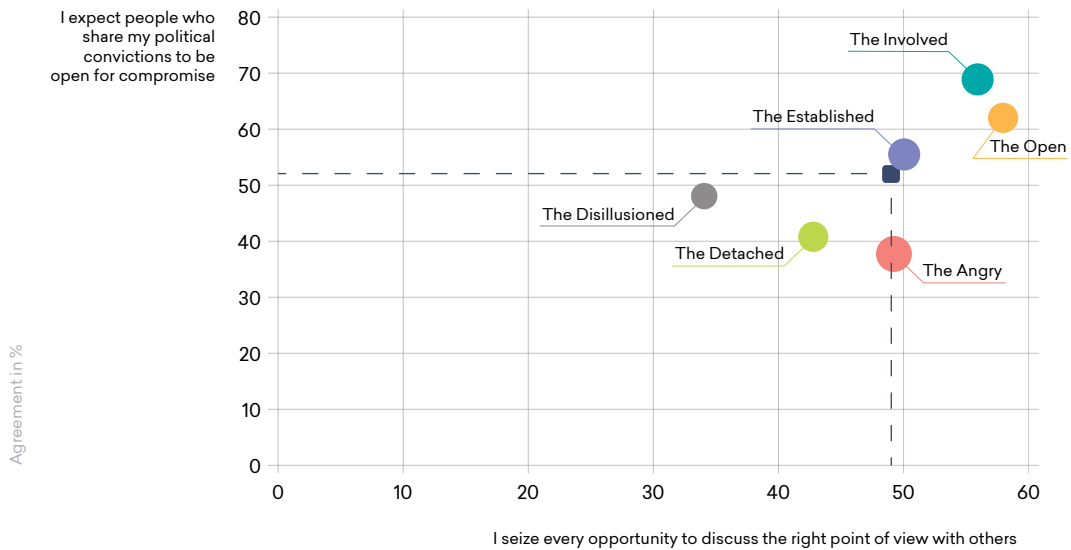
Attitudes toward social change

Today our society is changing too fast, much is being lost	In order to keep pace with the times, our society needs to constantly change and adapt

Agreement in %

Total	60	40
The Open	41	59
The Involved	45	55
The Established	63	37
The Detached	58	42
The Disillusioned	74	26
The Angry	80	20

Which of the following statements do you agree with more?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Openness for compromise

I expect people who share my political convictions to be open for compromise

Agreement in %

I seize every opportunity to discuss the right point of view with others

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Figure 10

The Stabilisers
The Established and the Involved provide stability to German politics and society.
Their levels of satisfaction and trust are more than double those of other Germans.

● Stabilisers   ● Remaining population
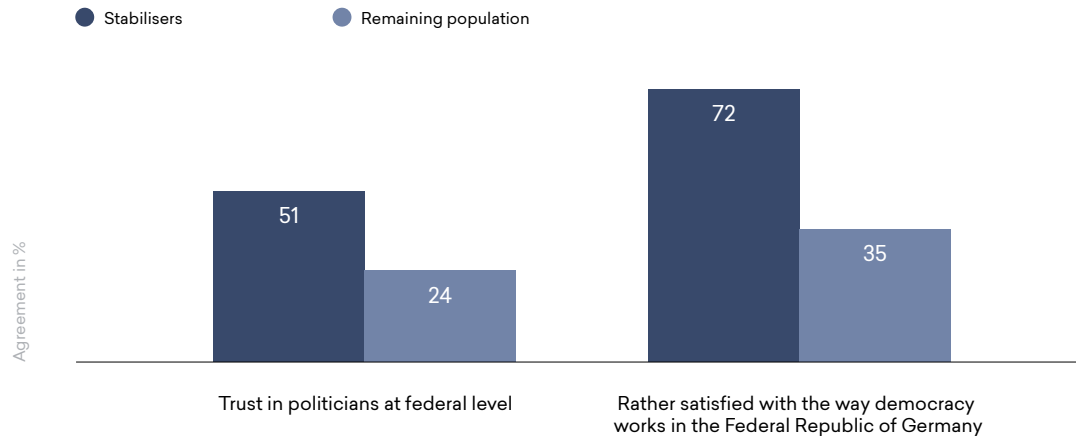
Please indicate the extent to which you trust the following persons or groups of persons.
How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the Federal Republic of Germany?
Source: More in Common (2019)

A third key finding of the study is that **Germany's political stability compared to other western democracies may in large part owe itself to the Stabilisers (the Established and the Involved)**. These groups are well integrated into society, significantly more satisfied with democracy than the other groups and – unlike other groups – still largely willing to trust politicians. Their political identity continues to be shaped by the traditional left/right spectrum, where the two segments do indeed position themselves differently. Functionally, however, their high level of orientation in society and their shared stabilising role is more significant than these ideological differences – highlighting the importance of the markers of social psychology used in this study.
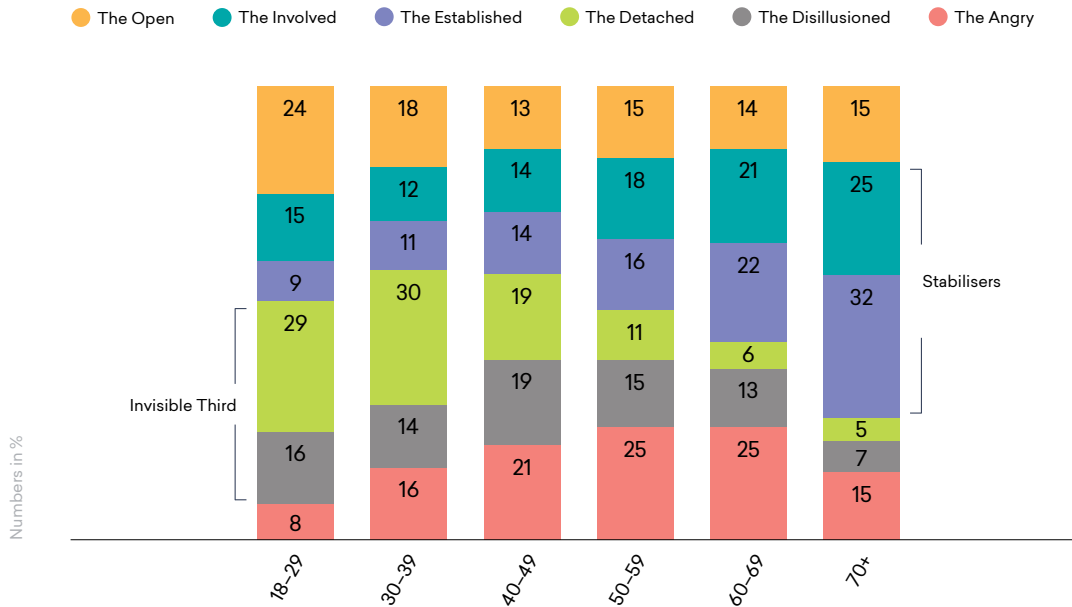
A fourth key finding is that the ageing of the population is likely to result in a dwindling in the role of the Stabilisers in coming years. The average age of Stabilisers is higher than any other group, and they are under-represented in younger age groups. It is of course possible that other age cohorts become stabilisers in the future – similar segmentation studies have shown that small numbers of people move between segments over time as their circumstances change – but with 46 per cent of Stabilisers aged over 60 (compared to 33 per cent of the adult population overall) this is unlikely to prevent a decline in the size of the Stabiliser groups.

The study also provides insights that challenge common perceptions from the high-profile Fridays-for-Future protests that most young Germans are progressive and engaged in political issues. Although the 18-29 years age group has the highest proportion of Germans in the Open segment (24 per cent) and the fewest in the Angry segment (8 per cent), overall less than one in four young Germans belongs to the most progressive Open segment. A much larger proportion – 45 per cent, or almost half of all Germans aged 18-29 – belong to the Invisible Third groups. A similar proportion (44 per cent) among the 30-39 year olds are also in the Invisible Third. In a time of growing social fractures, improving the integration of Germans under 40s into society and political engagement is critical for the long-term health of our democracy.

Figure 11

Distribution by age group
Almost half of the youngest age group are in the Invisible Third category,
while well over half of the oldest group are Stabilisers.

● The Open   ● The Involved   ● The Established   ● The Detached   ● The Disillusioned   ● The Angry

Numbers in %

	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
The Open	24	18	13	15	14	15
The Involved	15	12	14	18	21	25
The Established	9	11	14	16	22	32
The Detached	29	30	19	11	6	5
The Disillusioned	16	14	19	15	13	7
The Angry	8	16	21	25	25	15

Invisible Third

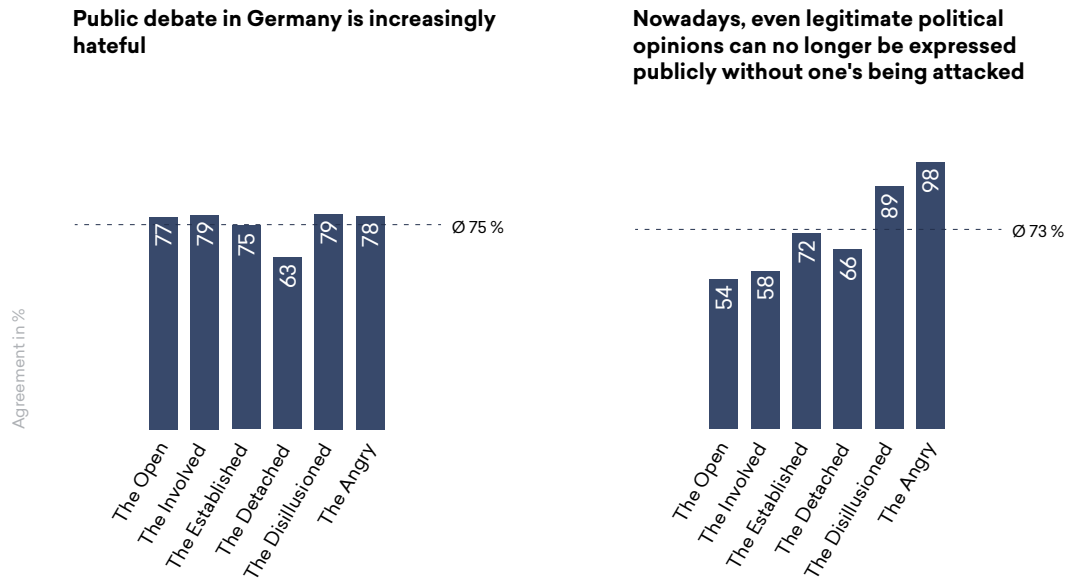Stabilisers

Mean: 49.5 years
Source: More in Common (2019)

**A fifth key insight is that the pressures on German democracy are likely to grow,
with people increasingly living in different worlds within the same society.** The
fracturing of the media environment means that fewer Germans share the same news
and information sources. But the findings of this study point to something deeper than
just habits around media consumption. Germans agree that the political environment
has changed, with 75 per cent of Germans feeling that public debate has become
increasingly hateful. A similar proportion feel that it is increasingly difficult to speak
openly without being attacked, even when your opinions are justified. But beyond this
agreement about the nature of debate, the study reveals widely differing perspectives
on society and politics. While, for instance, 59 percent of the Open favour ongoing social
change, a full 80 percent of the Angry and 74 percent of the Disillusioned oppose it.

These findings highlight a serious challenge. For its legitimacy in the eyes of the
community, democracy relies on engagement and a widespread sense of being part of
the one society. But the study highlights deepening fractures and a weakening sense
of belonging for a large part of German society. Bridge-builders and new approaches
by civil society are needed to address the three-part division revealed in the study and
to ensure that all segments of society have a part in negotiating our future. Resolving
issues on which communities disagree requires a shared social and political capital that
creates willingness to compromise and a foundation of social cooperation, respect and
trust. An increasingly toxic environment of 'us versus them' would erode this capital
and is not compatible with a healthy democracy.

Figure 12

Public debate in Germany
It is getting increasingly difficult to communicate across divides.

Public debate in Germany is increasingly hateful

Nowadays, even legitimate political opinions can no longer be expressed publicly without one's being attacked

Agreement in %

	The Open	The Involved	The Established	The Detached	The Disillusioned	The Angry
Left chart (Ø 75 %)	77	79	75	63	79	78
Right chart (Ø 73 %)	54	58	72	66	89	98

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
Source: More in Common (2019)

A sixth key finding is that a large majority of Germans across all segments believe that neither the political system nor the economy is working for them. Despite Germany's relatively strong economic performance and historically low unemployment during the past decade, 65 per cent of Germans say that Germany's economic success does not trickle down enough to them personally. 76 per cent believe that politicians do not address the important problems in Germany, with 95 per cent of the Angry and 89 per cent of the Disillusioned holding this view. These sentiments were reflected in the conversations among focus groups conducted for the study in four German cities. Many feel as if the country is on standby and not preparing for the future, citing key areas such as digitalisation and the future of the pensions system.

> **"They're full-time professional politicians. But right now I don't believe they have the answers for the issues of the future. There's a lack of fresh air and bright ideas. If you don't do anything, then nothing can happen."**
> **Detached focus group**

Furthermore, many people do not believe that politics is listening to them – a common thread across all types as well as across the three-fold division of society.

Figure 13
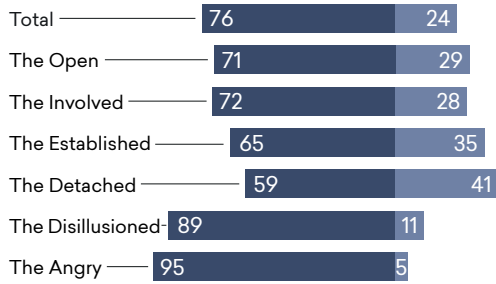
Perception of politics
Most people believe that Germany is not well prepared for the future, and they blame politics; they also feel left out of the benefits of economic success.

Political problem-solving

Political responsivity

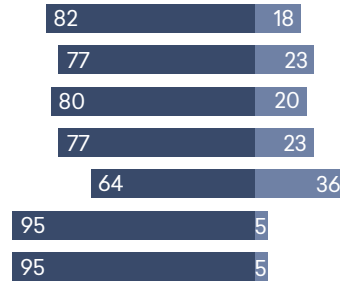|	Politicians do not care about the important problems in Germany	Politicians are tackling the important problems in Germany resolutely	Most politicians do not care about what people like me think	Most politicians are interested in what people like me think
	Agreement in %		Agreement in %	
Total	76	24	82	18
The Open	71	29	77	23
The Involved	72	28	80	20
The Established	65	35	77	23
The Detached	59	41	64	36
The Disillusioned	89	11	95	5
The Angry	95	5	95	5

Which of the following statements do you agree with more?
Source: More in Common (2019)

People like me do not benefit enough from Germany's economic success.

Ø 65 %

Agreement in %

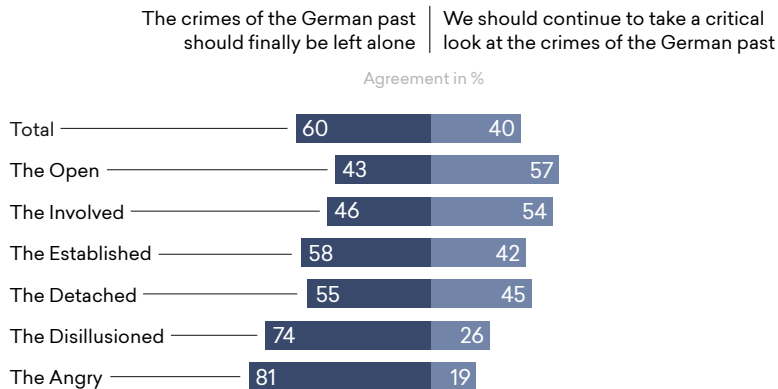| The Open	The Involved	The Established	The Detached	The Disillusioned	The Angry
53	54	65	58	78	83
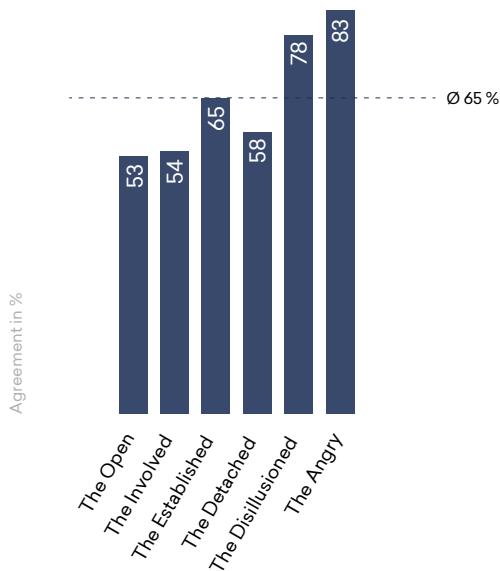
To what extent do you agree with the following statement?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Finally, **the seventh finding** is that significant changes are taking place in people's sense of German identity. As Germany enters the 2020s, almost a century since the rise of the Nazis, there is a growing sense of wanting to draw a line under the legacy of that era. Some 60 per cent say that the crimes of Germany's past should finally be left alone, in contrast to 40 per cent saying that we should continue to take a critical look at the crimes of Germany's past. Only two groups – the Open and the Involved – have a majority in support of the latter view. This represents a significant change from how German national identity was officially constructed over the course of the post-war era.

Figure 14

Crumbling certainties in Germany
60 percent of people in Germany believe that it is time to draw a line under the debate about Germany's crimes during the Nazi era.

The crimes of the German past should finally be left alone | We should continue to take a critical look at the crimes of the German past

Agreement in %

	Left alone	Critical look
Total	60	40
The Open	43	57
The Involved	46	54
The Established	58	42
The Detached	55	45
The Disillusioned	74	26
The Angry	81	19

Which of the following two statements do you agree with more?
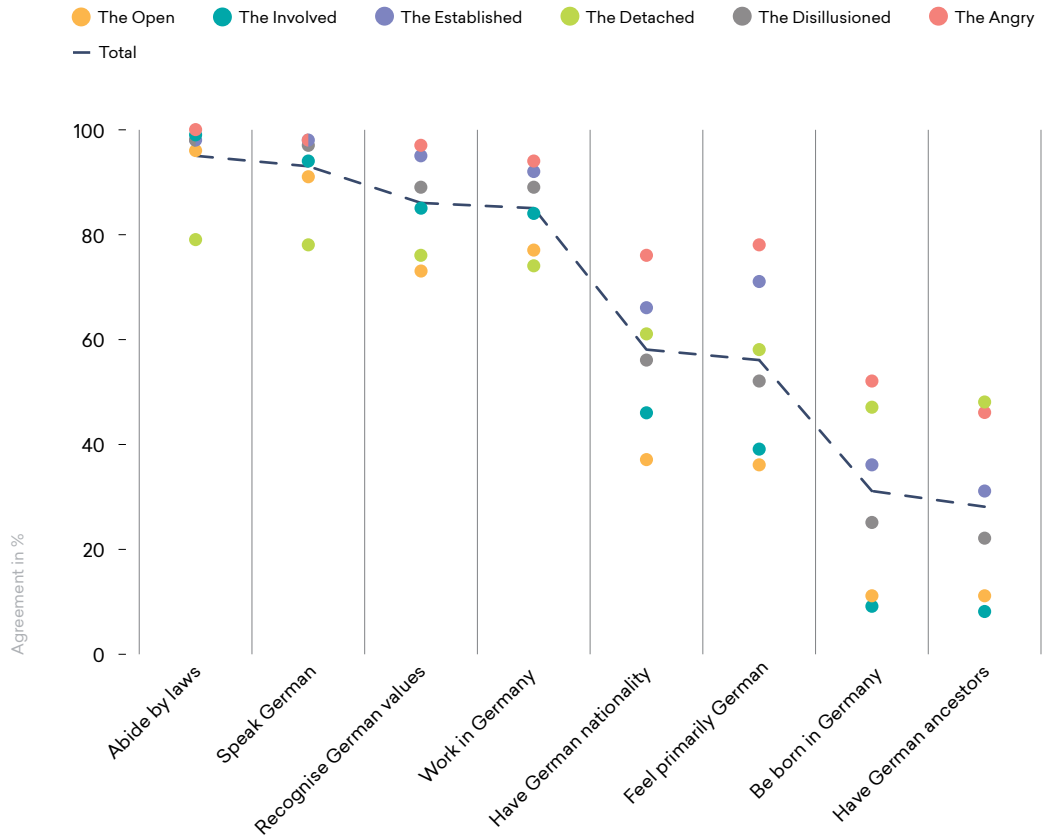Source: More in Common (2019)

The traditional notions that have characterised German national identity seem out of step with contemporary realities in other respects as well, such as the role of ethnic background or place of birth in predominantly allowing you to belong to German society. Germans today actually think of their national identity more inclusively. There is a strong social consensus that integration through obeying laws, speaking German, recognising German values and working in Germany are the key constituents of belonging. Only around one third believe that having German ancestors or being born in Germany is important, although around half of those in the Angry and Detached segments hold these views more strongly. In contrast, only around one in ten Germans in the Open and the Involved segments share this narrower view of German identity. Similarly, asked about their own sense of identity on a spectrum from German to European, 38 per cent of Germans say "both", and a further 26 per cent "rather German". Only 26 per cent say they feel "only German", though this view is much more common among the Angry and Disillusioned.

Figure 15

Changing German identity
Most Germans believe that being born outside of Germany or having different cultural heritage should not prevent someone from fully belonging to Germany society.

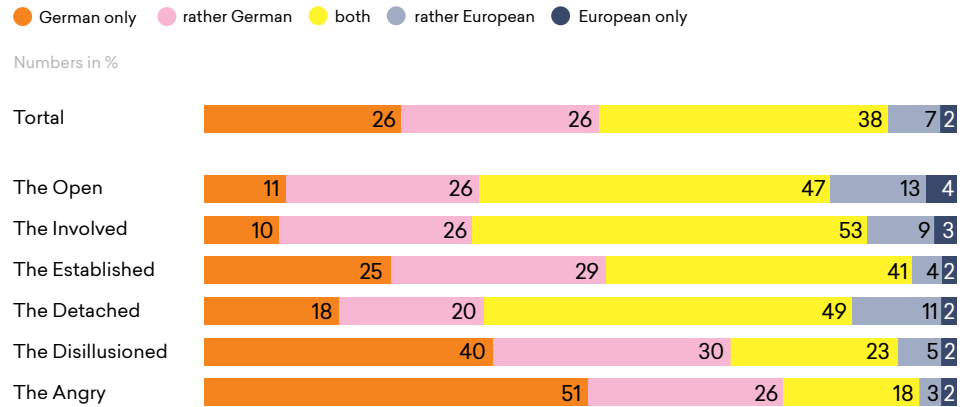**In order to belong to German society, it is indispensable to...**

● The Open ● The Involved ● The Established ● The Detached ● The Disillusioned ● The Angry
— Total

To what extent do you think the following conditions have to be met for someone to belong to German society?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Figure 16

European and German identity are not mutually exclusive for many people
Many think it is normal to feel both German and European at the same time, although people identify more strongly with German than European identity.

German vs. European

● German only   ● rather German   ● both   ● rather European   ● European only

Numbers in %

	German only	rather German	both	rather European	European only
Tortal	26	26	38	7	2
The Open	11	26	47	13	4
The Involved	10	26	53	9	3
The Established	25	29	41	4	2
The Detached	18	20	49	11	2
The Disillusioned	40	30	23	5	2
The Angry	51	26	18	3	2

Do you personally feel...?
Source: More in Common (2019)

National identity is often constructed as much around an 'out-group' as around the characteristics of an 'in-group'. A set of questions about Germans' attitude to different social groups provides valuable insights into these dynamics. Significant variability exists: The groups most likely to be regarded as an 'other' or 'out-group' are refugees and practising Muslims. Those regarded most warmly are ordinary workers and Germans without a migration background. The variations in the judgments of the different segments are telling: the Angry tend to hold stronger positive or negative feelings about different groups, while the Detached are least likely to make strong judgements about groups.

Figure 17

Attitudes towards specific societal groups
The survey provides valuable insights into the 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'
in German society, and how they differ among segments

The Open   The Involved   The Established   The Detached   The Disillusioned   The Angry
— Total
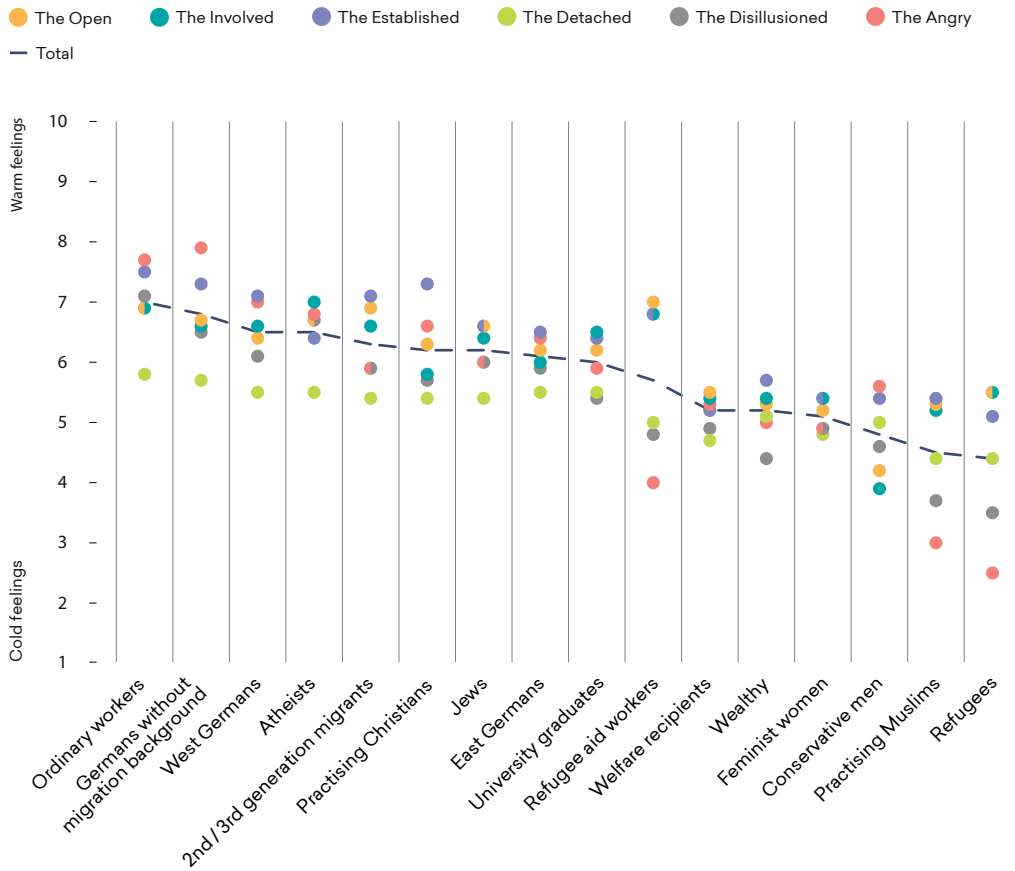
Please indicate your attitude / your feelings toward different groups of people.
Source: More in Common (2019)

Conclusion: Future priorities

Our findings suggest that beneath the seemingly stable surface of German society there
is a disequilibrium. Germans are deeply dissatisfied with politics, the country's direction,
their share of the nation's economic success and the state of public debate. They also
expect things to get worse. Many are lonely and alienated, and question the extent to
which others in their society truly belong.

Yet despite this sense of social disintegration, most Germans still have a longing for
greater social cohesion: **70 percent of Germans want us to come together despite our
differences.**

**Cohesion is not only important for improving people's wellbeing and sense of
satisfaction with society; it is ultimately vital to the success of liberal democracy.** A
society that feels it is disintegrating is not only more susceptible to the false promises of

divise populists. It also becomes unable to tackle difficult collective challenges – such as climate change, the integration of diverse populations, the impact of automation on workers and regional economies, and many other systemic challenges. Higher levels of social and institutional trust make a society better able to productively resolve complex issues and navigate conflicts. This is why it is so important to reinforce Germany's social foundations and strengthen the parts of Germany's social fabric that remain intact.

The purpose of this study is not to deliver a blueprint for all the efforts required to address Germany's increasingly fractured landscape, but to point towards the need for this blueprint. It is also intended to provide insights that can deepen understanding of German society today, identify further lines of investigation and spur new initiatives that address the challenges and opportunities ahead. More in Common is one of many organisations that can help galvanise the larger ecosystem of local and national solutions to counter the forces of fragmentation and make German society more resilient. We identify three key priorities for action from this study, and look forward to partnering with others on these issues over the medium term.

First, we should deploy the new categories based on Germans' core beliefs and underlying psychology to better understand our society. The segmentation provided in this study opens up fresh insights into the reasons for a growing sense of fracture, and the courses of action that can be most effective in response. When we look at things differently, we see different things. The conventional wisdom that the country is divided into East and West, old and young or left and right does not provide us with answers or move us forward. We need to better understand the values that are important to Germans, the kind of country Germans want for the future, and where there is common ground than can bring us together.

Second, we must address the social and political integration of the Invisible Third. This includes better understanding the everyday social realities of the large number of Germans in these two groups, who do not share many of the assumptions of Germans in the Stabiliser and Polarised groups. The Disillusioned and Detached tend to be disconnected from formal structures for social participation. New approaches are needed to improve engagement and address their concerns. The Disillusioned perceive profound injustices in Germany, and it is clear from the survey that broader questions about social justice concern them more than the issue of migration, but those larger issues are neither being discussed nor resolved.

Third, leadership is needed to build a vision for a German democracy that works for all, and in which everyone has a chance to speak and be heard. Active measures are needed to rebuild trust between citizens and institutions. Political and civil society leaders need to engage this task actively and no longer assume that the population accepts their authority or their institution's relevance or legitimacy. The same is also true for Germany's media, which may have many strengths compared to the media of many neighbouring countries, but which has lost the confidence of many members of the public. Finally, in an age when change is often driven from bottom-up 'new power' movements, we need to call forth the initiative, creativity and practicality of Germans of all ages and backgrounds in communities across the country to play their role in restoring a stronger sense of community, trust and optimism.

ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

More in Common is an international initiative set up in 2017 to build societies and communities that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division. We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media and government to connect people across lines of division. More in Common's teams across the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany work closely together and share a commitment to advancing our mission.

AUTHORS

Laura-Kristine Krause
Jérémie Gagné

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