

# The Berlin Pulse

2024/2025

Reliably Unreliable?  
Germany's Struggle  
for Standing



With contributions by  
Boris Pistorius, Majed Al-Ansari  
Halyna Yanchenko, Hanno Pevkur



**D**ear readers,  
Welcome to the eight's edition of *The Berlin Pulse*! As every year, we compare international expectations of Germany with public opinion in Germany. But this year's edition is special, as it comes off the press with one part of our representative survey conducted right after the polls have closed in the United States and the German coalition collapsed.

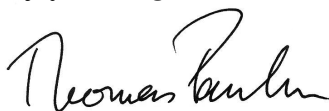
Thanks to our editors Julia Ganter and Jonathan Lehrer, this issue underlines that Germany must decide what image it wants to project and what international expectations it wants to meet. Bangladeshi analyst Shafqat Munir and Russian opposition politician Andrei Pivovarov want Germany to live up to its moral aspirations and support the revival of democratic values in their countries. Israeli journalist Mairav Zonszein argues that precisely Germany's reputation as a defender of democratic norms complicates its arms support to Israel, calling on Berlin to ensure its weapons are not used in human rights violations. Meanwhile, Ukrainian politician Halyna Yanchenko urges Germany to supply more arms to help end Russia's illegal war of aggression.

These expectations illustrate that Germany's international standing as a partner in upholding international law, human rights and democracy is currently at stake. Berlin faces a complex balancing act, striving to avoid perceptions of selectively applying international law. Estonia's Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur argues that half-hearted actions will not suffice – or as he puts it, 'Do we want Ukraine to survive, or do we want it to win?'

The German population has a strong opinion on many of these issues. While 57 per cent of German respondents still want Berlin to support Ukraine militarily only 25 per cent want military support for Israel. Despite these dilemmas, it is encouraging that 46 per cent of German respondents want their country to be more engaged on international crises. It is the highest level since we started surveying this in 2017 and it shows that, after three years of war in Ukraine and a year of war in the Middle East, Germans want change and want to see Germany driving change.

Thanks to our partner, the Pew Research Center, we know that Germans and Americans have trusted each other to make a change in international politics over the past four years. But our new figures, conducted after the US election, show that this partnership may be threatened: 79 per cent of Germans think President Donald Trump will damage transatlantic relations. But only 35 per cent of Germans think that Germany should step in to lead the West.

It is time to decide, Germany. What kind of international player do we want to be, in which areas do we want to go all in? The following pages can help us make difficult decisions in difficult times. Enjoy reading!



**Thomas Paulsen**  
November 2024



**Thomas Paulsen**  
is member of the  
Executive Board  
at Körber-Stiftung



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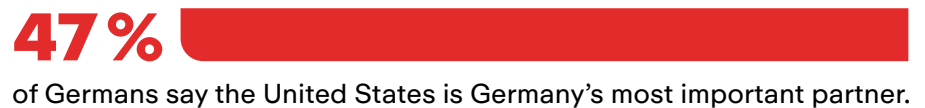
# The Berlin Pulse Survey 2024 / 2025

A representative survey on German and US attitudes to foreign policy

## German *Angst*?



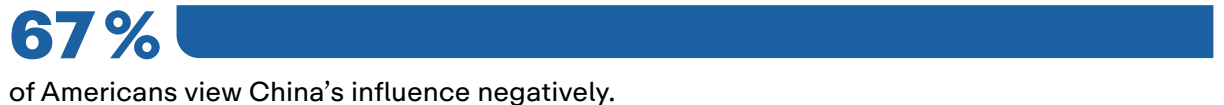
## Thank you, Joe



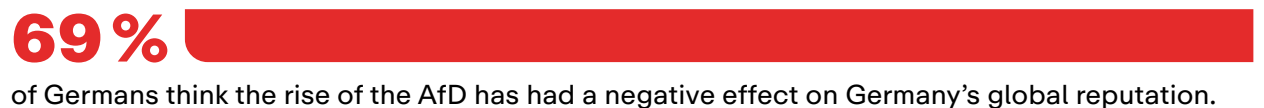
## Clear message



## No Belt, No Road Initiative



## Reputational damage



## Slava Ukraini





# ‘We know what Ukrainian families feel’

Defending against an aggressive neighbour requires more than just tanks, says Estonian Minister Hanno Pevkur.

**Körber-Stiftung:** Minister Pevkur, in 2022, shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, you performed the song ‘Brothers of Ukraine’ on Estonian television, expressing emotion and singing in Ukrainian – something rare for politicians. What inspired that?

**Minister Pevkur:** Some may not believe it, but politicians are human beings. We have friends, families, and we have emotions. When you see something as cruel as what is happening in Ukraine, it moves us. And we Estonians know what Ukrainian families feel. Estonians also have been deported, killed, and bombed by Russia. This appearance on the TV show was a case of spontaneous emotion and just a small token of appreciation for the Ukrainian fighters.

**Why is the war taking so much longer than we all expected?**

During the Kharkiv 2022 counter-offensive, the Ukrainians had real momentum. But unfortunately, they lacked equipment from us. Now we see that both sides have dug in deeply and it is very difficult to move. But remember that Russia was expecting to take Kyiv in a few days. The Ukrainians fought and President Volodymyr Zelensky and his team did not run away. They have shown that Russia will not succeed. And that shows us that we should do more.

**Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz does not want to allow Ukraine to use German-made long-range missiles that can reach deep into Russia. Why do you want this to be allowed?**

We are pushing to lift that restriction because the Ukrainians should be able to use the weapons they need to be successful. And to be successful Ukraine must be able to destroy the enemy’s supply lines and military objects inside Russia or inside Russian-controlled territories.

**It seems Chancellor Scholz fears this will increase the risk of war with Russia.**

Ukraine is already using long-range weapons; for example, drones and missiles that they produce themselves. But I do not see where this is somehow a new step bringing Western countries into war. What I see is that it helps Ukraine to defend itself.

**Germany is facing budgetary constraints, and we see the rise of pro-Russia parties on the right and the left. How reliable is Germany as a partner?**

I am sure that Germany is and will remain a very strong ally in NATO. Now it is up to every politician to explain to their society why it is important to invest in defence. Investing two or three per cent of GDP in defence now is much less than you’ll have

## Military assistance to Ukraine

### German respondents:

Germany should provide military assistance to Ukraine.



57 %

### US respondents:

The United States should provide military assistance to Ukraine.



41 %

German respondents: 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 2 to 4 per cent for all issues.

US respondents: 'not sure' ranged from 27 to 34 per cent for all issues.

to invest in the event of war. We see that in Ukraine, where half of the budget is spent on defence. So, the investment today is just an insurance tax for tomorrow.

**Estonia has stepped up its defence spending, military training, and responses to hybrid warfare. Your insurance seems very strong. Can't you sit back for a while?**

A saying from an Estonian legend goes: Tallinn will never be ready, and when it is, Lake Ülemiste ...

**... a large lake in Tallinn.**

... will flood the city. It's also true for defence. We will never be ready. Because the Russians do not respect the right of their neighbours to live in a free country and want to rebuild the Russian empire. This is why our defence spending will rise to 3.7 per cent of GDP in 2026. That is our message also to everyone in NATO.

**Estonia is also expanding its Defence League Kaitseliit, a voluntary defence organization of trained and armed civilians. Is your message to NATO also to involve civil society more in national defence?**

Each country will choose its own way. But every war affects the whole population. This means that society must be prepared. Our broad approach to defence is very important because everyone in society knows what to do in the event of a crisis. That crisis does not have to be war. It could also be a flood or a power cut.

**President Vladimir Putin thinks that wherever there are Russians, there is Russia. Over 20 per cent of Estonia's population is Russian. Do you expect Putin to use that logic against you?**

Following that logic, he should do the same for Germany, because in absolute terms there are more Russians living in Germany than in Estonia. We should not fall into this trap. There is an Estonian

state, which was occupied by the Soviet Union for 50 years, and we fought for our independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

**Talking about the future, what do you think European security architecture will look like in ten years?**

I do not want to do much speculation, but one thing I do know is that there is not a single European country that does not take the threat from Russia seriously. NATO has gone through crises, but we are still here. Today, NATO is stronger because Finland and Sweden have joined. A year ago, 12 members spent two per cent of their GDP on defence; now it is 23 members. I believe we will grow and we will be stronger.

**Will NATO be strong enough to give Ukraine everything it needs?**

I am more than confident of that. Look at NATO's firepower; then you understand that it is stronger than Russia and has the means to help Ukraine. But it is about political choices. We must decide whether we want Ukraine to fight or whether we want Ukraine to win. That is the difference. If we all agree that we want Ukraine to win this war, then we must make another push. ➡

This interview was conducted in October 2024.

**Hanno Pevkur**

is the minister of defence of Estonia.



# The Growing Divide

Military, society, politics: Israeli society is more divided than ever.

What does this mean for Germany?

By Mairav Zonszein

A large part of Israel's population is in a persistent state of trauma and uncertainty – from the victims of the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023 to the families of the hostages, to the reservist soldiers on the front lines, to the displaced residents in the south and north. Much of the country has lost trust in its military and political leadership. And opposition politicians have failed to articulate an alternative vision for Israel's future to that of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's.

**‘Before 7 October, the idea of a political track with the Palestinians was irrelevant for most Israelis. Now, it appears inconceivable.’**

This has several consequences. One is that Israel has become even more opposed to the idea of a Palestinian state or any withdrawal from the occupied territories. The two-state solution has never faced more opposition, as shown by an overwhelming vote in parliament in July 2024 against the establishment of a Palestinian state. Before 7 October,

the idea of a political track with the Palestinians was irrelevant for most Israelis. Now, it appears inconceivable.

But other factors are at play too. Many Israelis feel that the military response is justified but want the war to end so they can bring the hostages home. And they increasingly blame Netanyahu for failing to reach a deal with Hamas and to assume responsibility for 7 October by resigning. Polls in July 2024 showed that nearly three-quarters of Israelis want Netanyahu to quit politics. In addition, a June poll showed that many support the ceasefire-hostage deal that US President Joe Biden laid out. But with the hostages languishing and focus turned to Lebanon and Iran, Netanyahu has in recent weeks consolidated his grip on power, stabilizing his coalition and firing his defense minister.

Israel's security establishment has supported a ceasefire and has criticised Netanyahu's failure to articulate a day-after plan for Gaza. This is because it understands how precarious the situation is. Despite its military achievements against Hamas, Hezbollah and most recently Iran, Israel is in a

## No military support to Israel

How should Germany react to the war between Israel and Hamas? Germany should ...

Provide humanitarian aid for the people in Gaza



Act as a mediator between Israel and Hamas



Stay out of the war



Support Israel militarily in the war against Hamas



don't know 1%, no answer 1%

war of attrition on several fronts, and the military needs a break. The security establishment also understands that the current path has already led to a direct de-facto occupation of Gaza. The far-right elements in the government have been explicitly pushing for the rebuilding of Israeli settlements in Gaza. The military strongly opposes this because it requires even more resources while Israel is in an ongoing escalation not only with Hezbollah, but also with Iran. This is keeping the option of retaliating for Israel's latest targeting of military sites on October 26 open.

These issues are at the heart of the growing divide between the military and political echelons, which one former senior security official described to me as 'unprecedented.' The divide is also over the government's push to weaken the judiciary, politicise the police and undermine the remaining democratic norms regarding freedom of protest and speech. While the world is focused on the destruction of Gaza and the war in Lebanon, it is the battle over these issues that will define Israeli politics in the coming years.

What can Germany, a staunch ally of Israel, do amid this political strife that is taking place in parallel to the war in Gaza and in Lebanon? Even though the war undermines its foreign policy, Berlin has been reluctant to take punitive steps over Israeli actions that directly hinder the establishment of a Palestinian state, primarily the ongoing settlement actions in the West Bank. The International Court

of Justice has ruled that Israel's presence in occupied Palestinian territories is illegal and Germany's Foreign Office has affirmed that the 'unequal treatment of Palestinians and Israeli settlers in the occupied territories' is an explicit legal opinion of the highest court of the United Nations.

**'Germany must counter Israeli policies that work against its interests.'**

Germany should look at these issues through a different lens: that of its interest in upholding democratic norms and the rule of law. It must counter Israeli policies that work against its interests. Berlin should state that, when it violates principles of international human rights and humanitarian law and denigrates the institutions that enforce them, Israel also undermines the policies and values on which Germany's post-Second World War commitments and *Staatsraison* are based.

As the second-largest arms supplier to the country after the United States, Germany should also consider how it could better use its leverage to ensure that Israel does not use this equipment for human-rights violations. Berlin should ensure that it fully complies with the EU's arms-export policy. It would send a powerful message if Israel's strongest ally in Europe showed more caution in granting export licenses.

Even the United States under Biden has shown some movement, however modest, in its approach to certain Israeli policies. While it is not entirely clear how Trump will position himself on Israel's actions in Gaza or Lebanon, his record of recognizing Israel's illegal annexation of occupied territory in both the Golan Heights and Jerusalem and his general contempt for the rule of law and democratic norms should be a clarion call for Germany step up and take clear actions to restrain Israel, and in so doing, lead the West by example. ↗



**Mairav Zonszein**  
is an Israeli-American  
journalist and senior  
analyst at International  
Crisis Group.

# ‘We don’t mind bringing the Taliban and the US to the table’

Top diplomat Majed Al-Ansari on Qatar’s disputed mediation role and why Germany should accept a Palestinian state.



**Körber-Stiftung:** Mr Al-Ansari, after the Hamas attacks on Israel last year, you were hopeful that Israeli hostages would be released soon. Of the 250 hostages, over a hundred are still in Gaza. Why is it so difficult to free them?

**Majed Al-Ansari:** Immediately after 7 October, we were able to secure the release of 109 hostages. Mediation has been successful in returning hostages peacefully to their families. But mediation only works if the parties who come to the table have the political will to reach an agreement. Now, whenever we reach the last mile in the talks, somebody will come up with a curveball and introduces new elements that will take us back to square one.

**So, the negotiations between Hamas and Israel’s government have failed?**

I would not say that the mediations have failed completely, but certainly we are in a very difficult moment right now.

**US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that we are facing the last opportunity to continue mediation and to achieve a ceasefire. Is he right?**

I would not characterise the talks as a last chance because it’s an ongoing process. Up to now, there

are still people to talk to. But sadly, we are at the farthest possible point from a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian issue that we have ever been. Polling in Israel and Palestine shows that there is a lack of hope and belief in peace at an unprecedented level.

**How do you explain that?**

It is due to the fact that the Palestinian issue was slowly being degraded in the international community. This encourages the parties to be at each other’s throats and fuels the racial and religious divide in the region.

**What do you expect from the international community?**

The international community must drag the parties kicking and screaming to the negotiating table. We should not provide them with an umbrella under which they can carry on with business as usual. The message must be ‘enough is enough’. Targeting civilians will get you nowhere.

**What do we not understand about Qatar’s role in the world?**

One of the most unfounded accusations is that we play a double game, where we work with extremists while showing the face of mediation. The reality is

that we are ready to talk to anybody if it will bring peace. We do not mind bringing the Taliban and the United States to the table, or Israel and Hamas.

### Anything else?

Some people find it very difficult to accept that people from Qatar, who do not look and talk like them, can play the role of a peacemaker. They assume that this role can only be played by former imperial countries and Western liberal democracies. There is a notion of racism in there.

### **Qatar has been criticised for indirectly financing terror organizations, like Hamas, which is still holding over a hundred of hostages in Gaza. Are these just unfounded accusations?**

We are talking about money that's been used to rebuild Gaza and has been controlled by the Israelis. After Israel withdrew from Gaza and closed the border in 2005, that was the only way to send aid in. Half of it was fuel for the electricity to run hospitals, schools and government buildings. The other half was monthly stipends for the neediest families.

### **How would you describe Germany's current role?**

Germany is very important for the humanitarian aid that is desperately needed in Gaza. We also welcome statements made by the German government in support of a peaceful solution to the current situation in Gaza.

### **Germany does not support the formal recognition of Palestine as a state.**

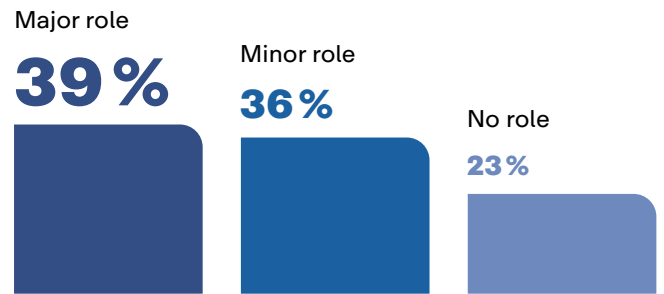
We can't tell Germany what to do. But, if you were a Palestinian today, why would you believe leaders who say they will accept a Palestinian state but only after negotiations? No Palestinian who has lived through all these years of wars would believe that. The Palestinian state can only happen if the international community recognizes it and then negotiates its implementation.

### **Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser visited Qatar during the football World Cup wearing an LGBTQ armband. At the same time, Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck signed important gas deals with Qatar. Does this contradictory behaviour bother you?**

The minister did not cause any diplomatic damage by wearing the armband. It were statements that even contradicted the position of the German government. Qatar is one of the biggest investors in Germany and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock signed an agreement to hold a strategic dialogue

### High expectations

What role should European countries play in diplomatically resolving the war between Israel and Hamas?



German respondents: don't know 1%, no answer 1%

with Qatar during her visit last year. We believe in the partnership with Germany, and we will not allow individuals, whoever they are, to affect it negatively.

### **Speaking of individuals, will it matter for Qatar whether Kamala Harris or Donald Trump is in the White House for the next four years?**

The Biden administration has designated Qatar as a major non-NATO ally. And we know that our relationship with US institutions trumps our relationship with individuals who come to power. In 2017, when the Trump administration did not have a very positive attitude towards us, the institutions proved within a few months how important the relationship with Qatar was, and the administration decided to work with Qatar to negotiate with the Taliban. Institutions remain, politicians change. ↩

This interview was conducted in September 2024.

#### **Majed Al-Ansari**

is advisor to the prime minister of the state of Qatar and official spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

# Our Victory Is Your Security

A quick peace may seem appealing, but it could mark the start of a prolonged nightmare, warns Ukrainian MP Halyna Yanchenko.



In 2024, we celebrated Independence Day during a full-scale war for the third time. The holiday passed calmly in Kyiv, but the very next day Ukraine faced the largest attack on its energy infrastructure since the war began. In one night, Russia launched hundreds of drones and missiles. Fifteen regions were hit, with targets including the Kyiv hydro-electric plant, thermal power stations and civilian buildings with innocent people inside. It was another war crime by Russia.

It has become clear that the only argument Russia understands is defeat. And we must be clear that Vladimir Putin's ambitions are not limited to Ukraine. He continues to pursue an aggressive policy in Europe and around the world, playing his game of creating tension and instability. This manifests itself in, for example, fomenting anti-migrant sentiment and spying on energy installations in the European Union. In Germany, Russian drones have been spotted over nuclear power stations and military bases.

**‘In Kursk, Ukraine’s armed forces demonstrated that they can catch Russia off guard.’**

In a year of intense fighting Ukraine has dedicated itself to building up its military strength, with the help of its partners. It has demonstrated that its armed forces can take the initiative on the battlefield and catch Russia off guard. The Kursk operation helped prevent another Russian offensive in the Sumy region.

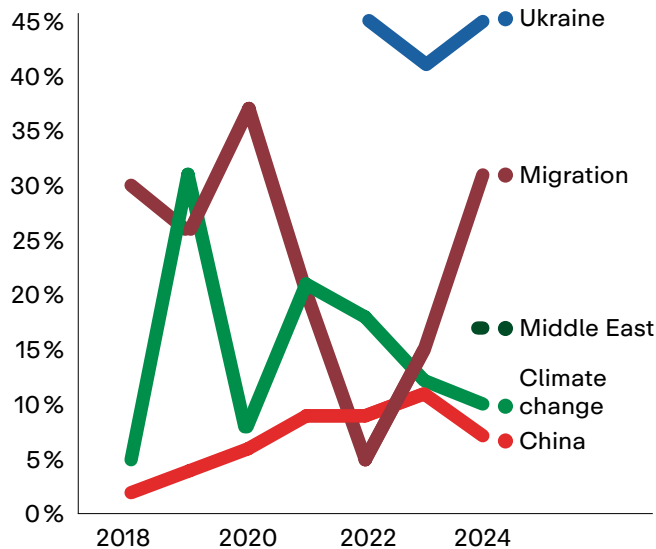
Ukrainians achieved military milestones. We downed Russian ballistic missiles such as the Kinzhal and sank the Russian missile cruiser Moskva. Ukrainian-made weapons are now striking deep into Russia, damaging the oil industry that is crucial to funding its war. Ukraine's investment to rebuild its defence industry has exceed 7 billion US\$ this year. Production capacity has increased six-fold compared to pre-war levels. The launch of several German-Ukrainian defence production ventures is particularly encouraging.

**‘Russia’s willingness to negotiate remains highly questionable.’**

The possibility of negotiations and a plan to end the war has been a major theme this year. But Russia's willingness to negotiate remains highly questionable. Since its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, it has participated in 200 rounds of high-level talks and broken every agreement it has signed, including more than 20 ceasefires. This must be considered when entering negotiations with Russia at this time.

## Biggest challenges: Ukraine and migration

What are the greatest challenges currently facing German foreign policy?



2024: don't know 11%, no answer 2%

We have heard various proposals to invite Russia to an upcoming peace summit, including from Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz. But for serious negotiations to take place, world leaders need to take a united and firm stance that will force Russia to engage. We need a united policy by democratic countries in support of Ukraine's peace plan, which demands the withdrawal of Russian troops, not just a freeze on the conflict.

### 'The Sino-Brazilian peace plan presents a scenario of Ukraine's capitulation.'

The war could end through negotiations if Ukraine's independence is preserved and its internationally recognized borders are inviolable. Our country's territory and people cannot be the subject of negotiations. Otherwise, these would be highly advantageous for Russia, which will have no incentive to stop its aggression against its neighbours. And then NATO countries like Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland will be the next targets.

The Sino-Brazilian peace plan unfortunately presents a scenario of Ukraine's capitulation. It assumes that Russia should be allowed to keep the territories it has occupied. In other words, Russia gets what it wants. Europe, on the other hand, will be faced with a frozen conflict that will

flare up again in a few years when Russia regroups and attacks again. All this will happen far from the borders of Brazil and China.

Donald Trump is returning to the White House. He has already declared his intent to 'end all wars.' Trump's team is considering two scenarios for the Russia-Ukraine war: one with increased support for Ukraine, and a negative one with full cuts. Many Republicans are aware of the risks, but Europe must be prepared for either outcome. This means investing in defense, and Germany is well-positioned to lead.

### 'Right-wing and left-wing politicians push Europe towards Putin.'

Meanwhile, Germany's coalition breakup in early November led to possible early elections, with populist parties on both sides gaining traction. These forces share a favorable stance toward the Kremlin and promote ideas like a quick 'peace' at Ukraine's expense. Such proposals may appeal to voters, but without security guarantees and accountability, a 'quick peace' risks letting Putin destabilize Europe from within by freezing the conflict.

We often hear from our partners about red lines concerning Ukraine. Meanwhile, Putin is waving more red flags in front of the European Union every day. How many more does he have to show Europe and the United States before he meets real resistance? Now is the time to give Putin a firm response and to restore peace in Europe. ➡



**Halyna Yanchenko**  
is a member of the  
Ukrainian parliament.

# Count on Us

Amid global crises, Berlin is contributing to security the world can rely on.

By Boris Pistorius



Recent years have seen profound changes in Europe's security environment. Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, profound geopolitical shifts, the climate crisis, technological changes, the COVID-19 pandemic – this unprecedented combination of threats and challenges has led to a widespread feeling of insecurity.

These are uncertain times, but this is not the time to surrender to pessimism and fear. Now is the time to defend our freedom and our democracy, to strengthen our resilience and to enhance our capabilities.

**‘Russia will continue to be the greatest threat to our security.’**

Russia's war in Ukraine is Europe's most decisive challenge today. It is about much more than Russia and Ukraine. It is about whether or not we allow an imperialist power to invade a sovereign state in Europe and to annex its territories in violation of international law, effectively taking away the freedom of its people. Russia is, and for the foreseeable future will continue to be, the greatest threat to international order and to our security. That is why it will remain one of Germany's priorities to support our Ukrainian friends in restoring their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have joined forces with partners from Europe, the United States and across the world to provide Ukraine with the necessary assistance so that it can defend itself – and ultimately our shared security architecture.

**‘We are increasing the presence of the Bundeswehr by permanently deploying a robust and combat-ready brigade in Lithuania.’**

From the High North to the Balkans and from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean, Germany is dedicating substantial assets to the security of its allies and of NATO as a whole. Our commitment to the security of our allies is ironclad because we know that collective security is what makes us strong. Therefore, national and collective defence is the core task of the *Bundeswehr*. By next year, a majority of our troops will have been placed under NATO command. Germany's role is that of a central logistics hub for NATO allies and partners, responsible for ensuring the unhindered and swift movement of troops. At the same time, our main focus will remain on NATO's eastern flank. We are increasing the presence of the *Bundeswehr* in the region, most prominently by permanently deploying a

robust and combat-ready brigade in Lithuania. This decision was a big step for Germany, and it is a lighthouse project of the *Zeitenwende*.

**‘From new F126 frigates to Patriot air-defence systems and to communication satellites: We are spending more on defence than ever in the history of the Bundeswehr.’**

With a view to potential threats, we are preparing our armed forces for the challenges of tomorrow. This includes restructuring them as well as rethinking and improving the recruitment and retention of its members. It also means increasing defence spending and making sure that our investments will continue to rise. This year, we are spending more on defence than ever before in the history of the *Bundeswehr*. We have increased our defence spending to more than two per cent of GDP and have launched significant new investments in military equipment, from new F126 frigates to Patriot air-defence systems and communication satellites. The days of the ‘peace dividend’ are long gone and Germany wants to pay its fair share for our common security.

This is also why we have increased our presence in the Indo-Pacific over the past years, one example being our annual Indo-Pacific Deployments. This year, we are deploying a frigate, a combat support ship and an air force detachment to the region. The objective is to demonstrate that we are prepared to stand up for the rules-based international order and that we support stability, prosperity, cooperation

#### Fit for war

Defence Minister Pistorius proposed raising Germany's defence spending to 3–3.5% of GDP. Is this target ...

Too high



Just right



Too low



2024: don't know 3%, no answer 1%

## Budgetary constraints

### Of those who favour higher defence spending:

Would you approve cutting social, environmental, cultural and development budgets to increase defence spending in Germany?

Yes, definitely



Rather yes



Rather no



No, by no means



2024: don't know 1%, no answer 0%

and freedom in the Indo-Pacific. While the Indo-Pacific and Europe may be geographically distant, the security of the two regions is inextricably linked: The changes taking place in the Indo-Pacific affect Europe, too – in terms of trade and in terms of security policy.

**‘We need a robust and resilient society that understands what is at stake and is ready to respond to potential security risks.’**

Germany also needs to strengthen its resilience. This includes not only a strong German defence industry but also a strong European one, as well as a robust and resilient society that understands what is at stake and is ready to respond to potential security risks. We need a more comprehensive approach to security in which all stakeholders – from government agencies to the business sector to civil society – work hand in hand. That is one of the reasons why we need some form of military conscription. All of this will not happen overnight, but we are working at full steam to establish procedures and processes, and to assign responsibilities in order to combine the central military elements of national and collective defence with the competent civilian support services in our country.

Germany has taken on more responsibility and is playing a central role in keeping Europe united, free and at peace. Together with our partners in Europe, across the Atlantic and on other continents, we will continue to work ambitiously on delivering security, building resilience and enhancing cooperation. This is the task of our time! ➡



**Boris Pistorius**  
is the federal minister  
of defence of Germany.

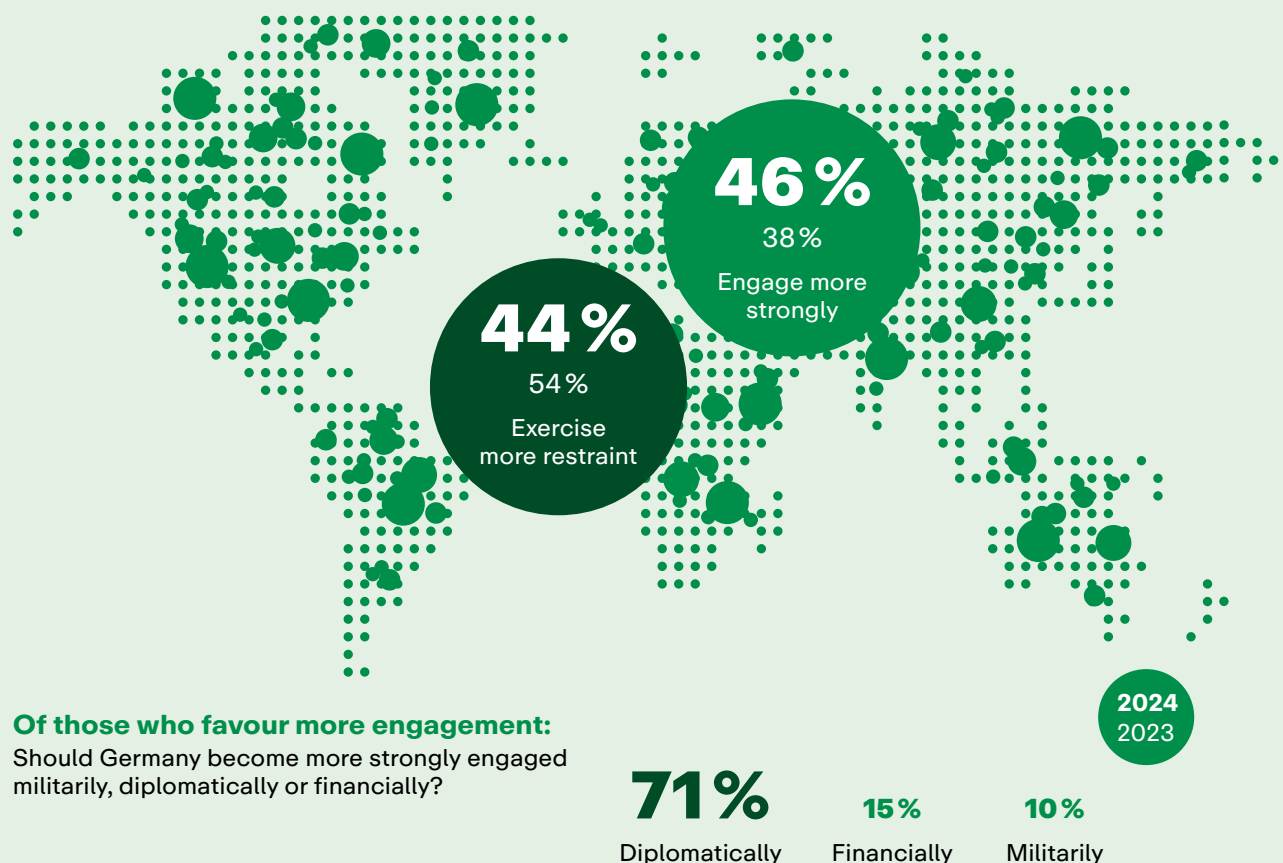
# The Berlin Pulse Survey 2024/2025

A representative survey on German attitudes to foreign policy commissioned by Körber-Stiftung

All US results by Pew Research Center   
September and November 2024

## Divided on engagement

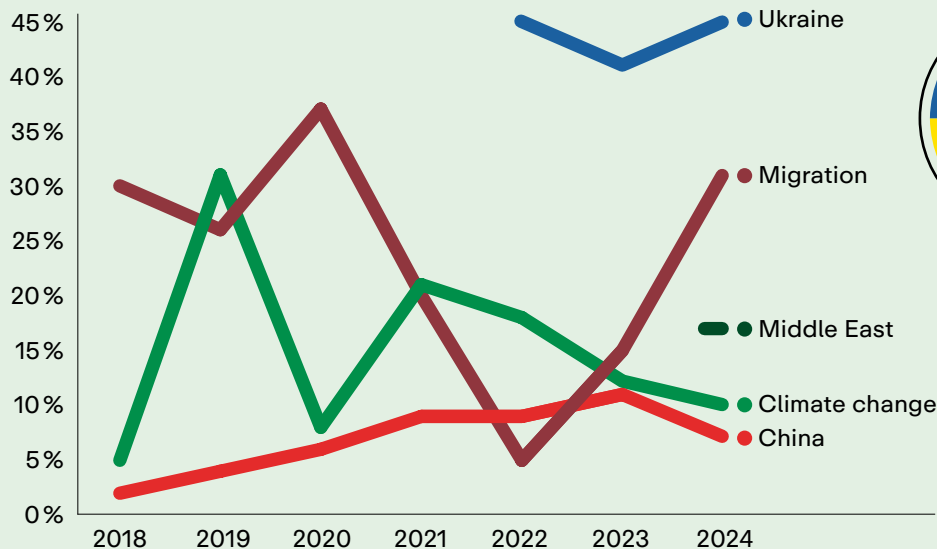
Should Germany engage more strongly on international crises or exercise more restraint?



2024: spontaneously: none of the above 6%, don't know 3%, no answer 1% | 2024: don't know 3%, no answer 1%

## Biggest challenges: Ukraine and migration

What are the greatest challenges currently facing German foreign policy?



2024: don't know 11%, no answer 2%

## Fit for war

Defence Minister Pistorius proposed raising Germany's defence spending to 3–3.5% of GDP. Is this target ...

Too high



Just right



Too low



## Of those who favour higher defence spending:

Would you approve cutting social, environmental, cultural and development budgets to increase defence spending in Germany?

Yes, definitely



Rather yes



Rather no



No, by no means

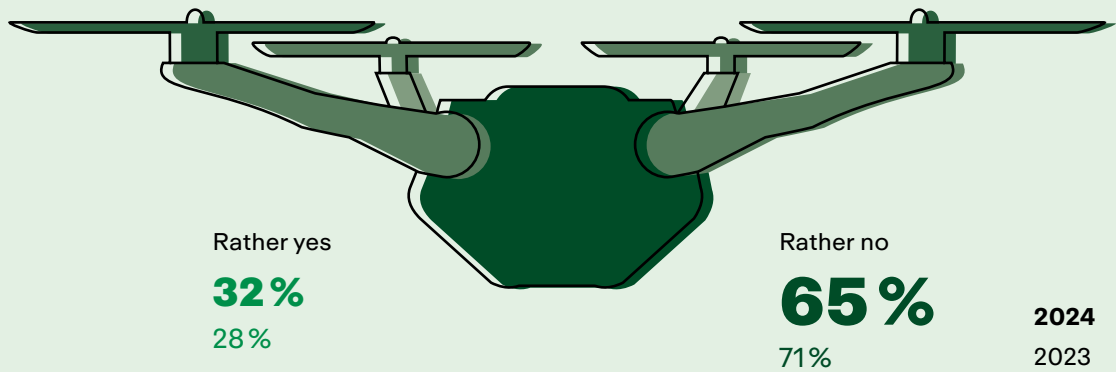


2024: don't know 3%, no answer 1%

2024: don't know 1%, no answer 0%

## No military leadership

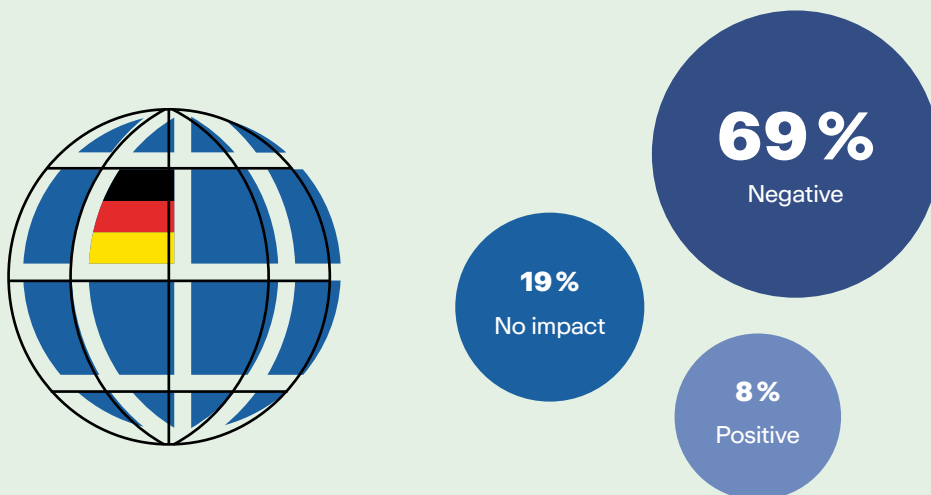
Should Germany play a military leadership role in Europe?



2024: don't know 2%, no answer 1%

## Reputational risk

How does the AfD's growing support affect Germany's global reputation?

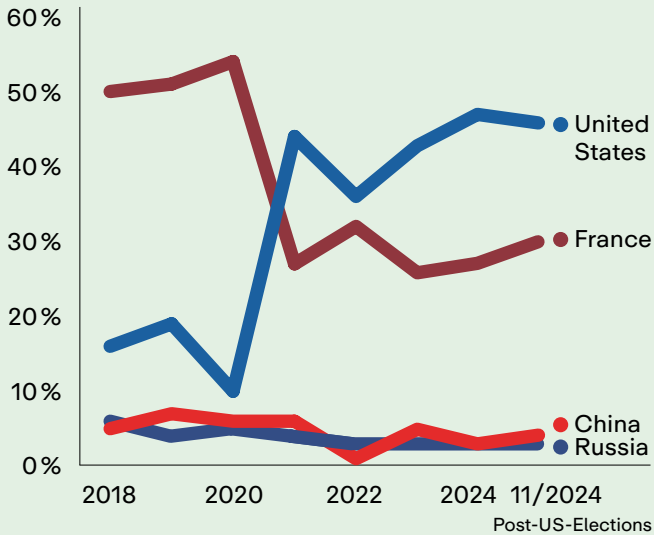


don't know 3%, no answer 1%

## Four good years

### German respondents:

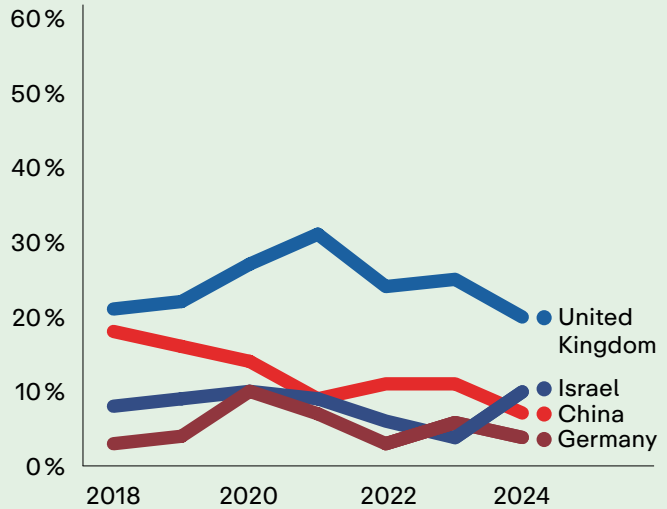
Which country is currently the most important partner for Germany?



German respondents, 2024: don't know 13–14%, no answer 2%

### US respondents:

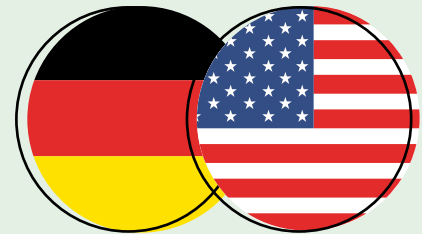
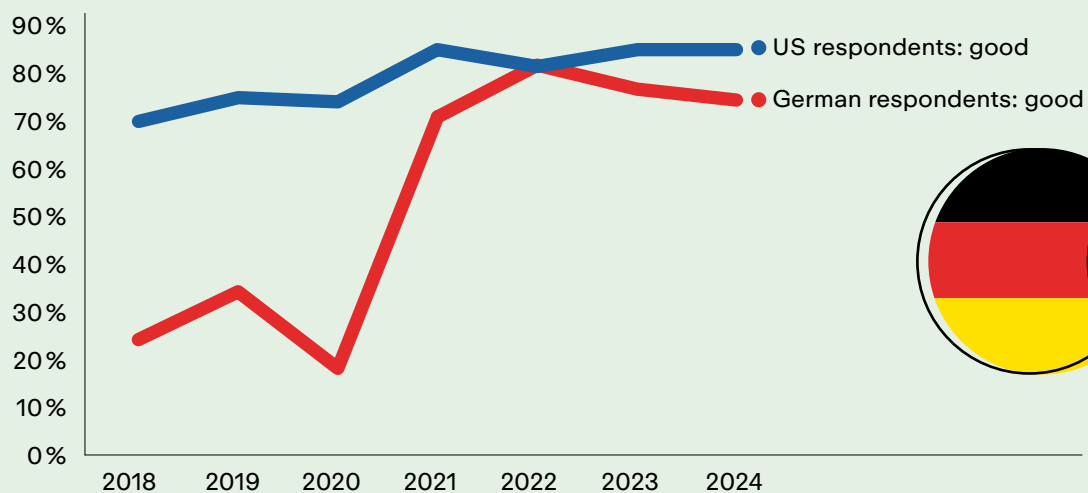
Which country is currently the most important partner for the United States?



US respondents, 2024: don't know/no answer 37%

## Best friends across the Atlantic

How would you rate the current relations between Germany and the United States?



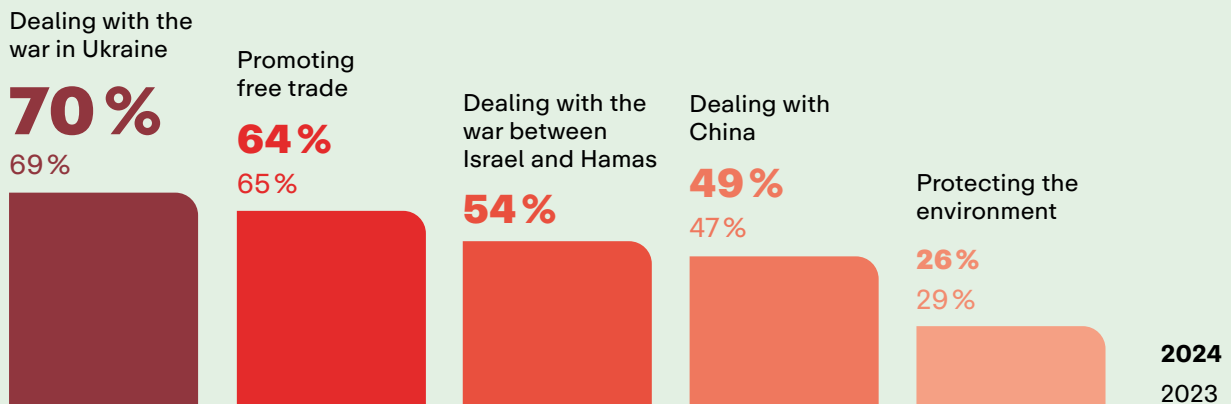
German respondents, 2024: bad 22%, don't know 3%, no answer 1%

US respondents, 2024: bad 9%, don't know/no answer 6%

## Partnership for Ukraine and free trade

### German respondents:

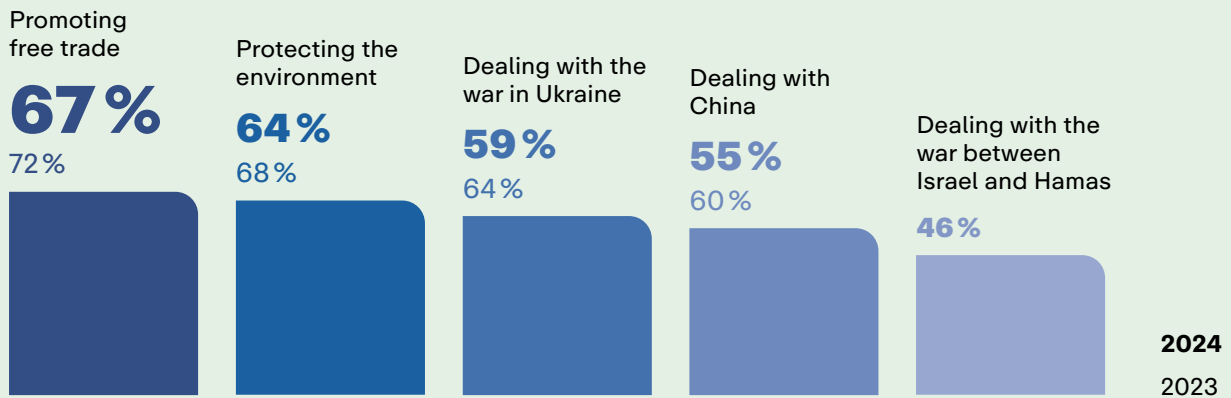
Do you see the United States as a partner on these issues?



answer 'neither' ranged from 0 to 2 per cent for all issues

### US respondents:

Do you see Germany as a partner on these issues?



answer 'neither' ranged from 11 to 12 per cent for all issues

# Transatlantic Relations After the US Elections and the German Coalition Break-up

The following questions were posed to the German public between 7 and 8 November 2024

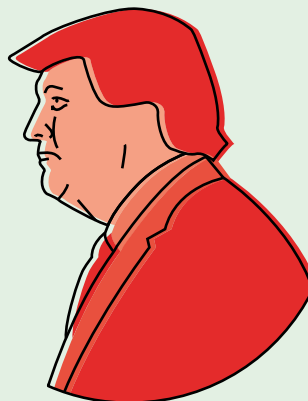
## Transatlantic wrecking ball

How do you assess the impact of Donald Trump's re-election on German-US relations?

Positive



Negative

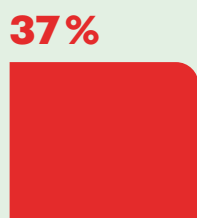


spontaneously: none of the above 1%, don't know 2%, no answer 1%

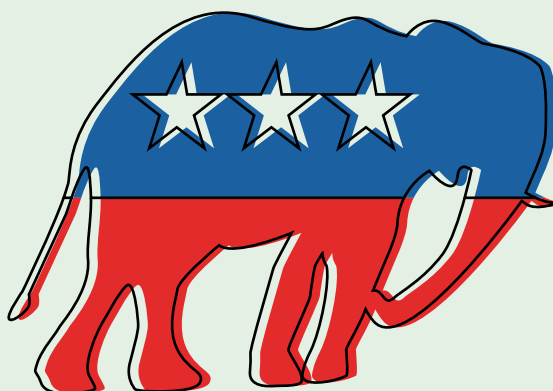
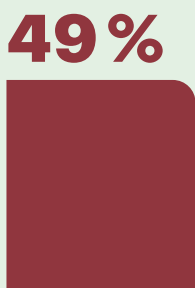
## American decline?

How will the the United States' global importance change over the next four years under Donald Trump?

Increase



Decrease



spontaneously: none of the above 8%, don't know 5%, no answer 1%

## Focus on Europe

Do you agree that ... ?

Germany should prioritize cooperation with European partners.



Germany should invest more money in European security.



Germany should strengthen partnerships in Asia, Africa and Latin America.



The US elections threaten Europe's political stability.



If the United States withdraws as the leader of the West, Germany will have to take over.



'don't know/no answer' ranged from 1 to 6 per cent for all issues

## Conservative competence

Which potential candidate for chancellor would you rate to be most competent as regards foreign policy?

Friedrich Merz

**28%**

Robert Habeck

**18%**

Olaf Scholz

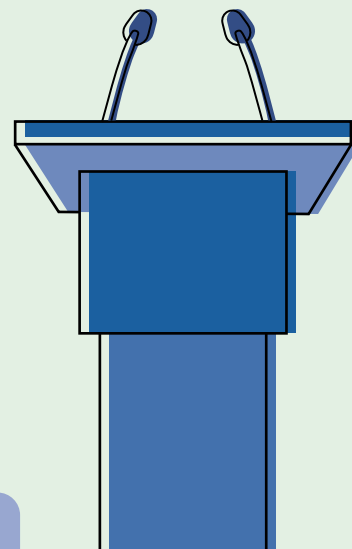
**15%**

Sahra Wagenknecht

**9%**

Alice Weidel

**8%**

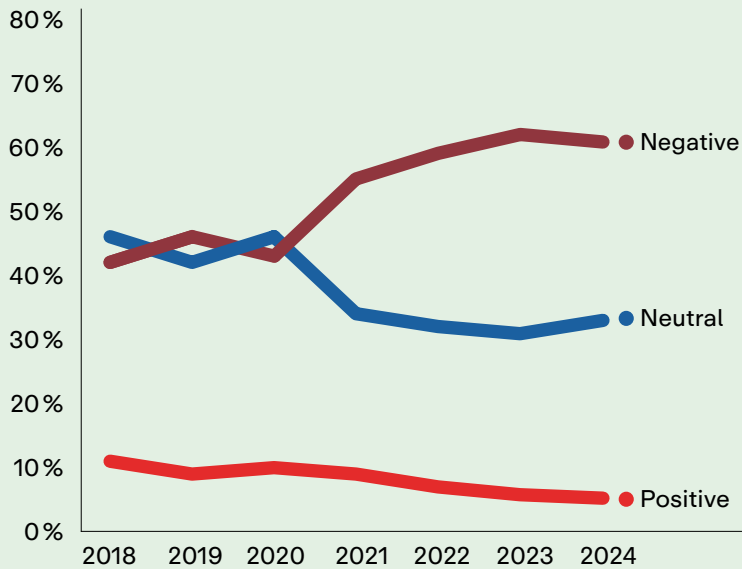


spontaneously: none of the above 15%, don't know 6%, no answer 1%

## China scepticism remains

### German respondents:

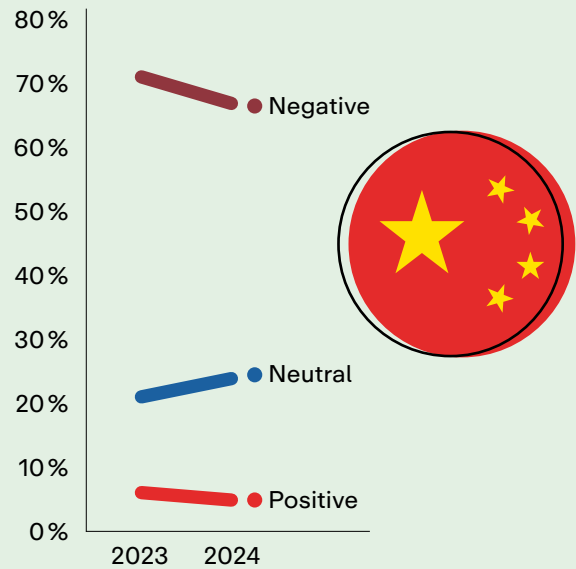
How do you see China's rising influence?



German respondents, 2024: don't know 1%, no answer 0%

### US respondents:

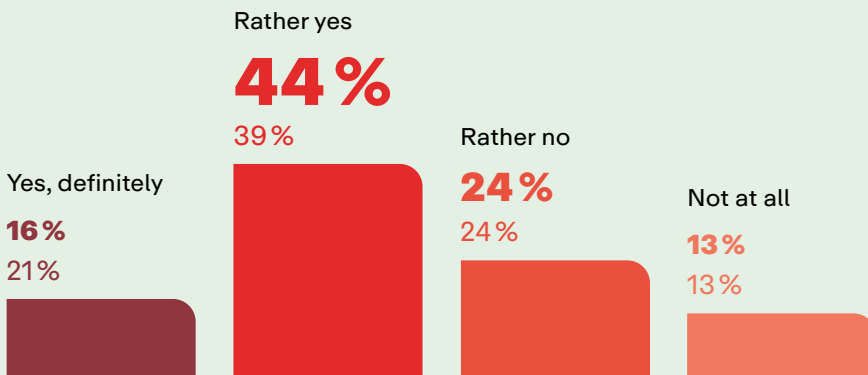
How do you see China's rising influence?



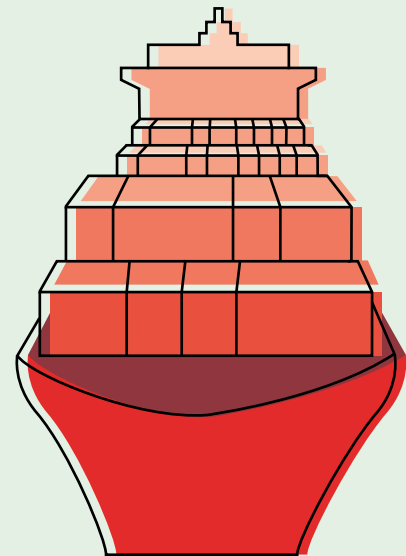
US respondents, 2024: don't know/no answer 4%

## Let's de-risk!

Should German companies reduce their dependency on China, even if it leads to economic loss?



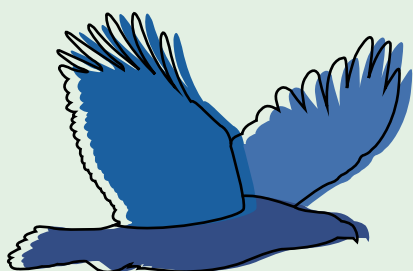
2024: don't know 2%, no answer 1%



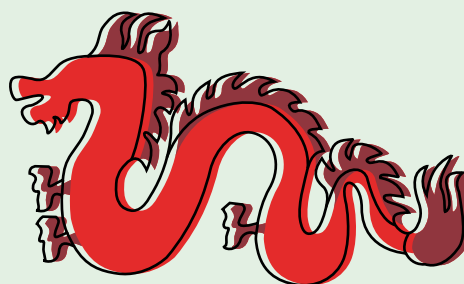
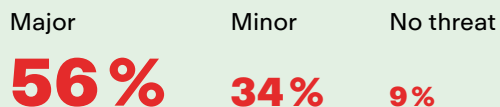
## China's economy seen as a threat

Do the following countries represent a major, a minor or no threat to Germany's economy? (German respondents):

United States



China



Does China represent a major, a minor or no threat to the American economy? (US respondents):



German and US respondents, 2024: 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 1 to 5 per cent for all issues

## Only to Ukraine

German respondents:  
Germany should provide  
military assistance ...

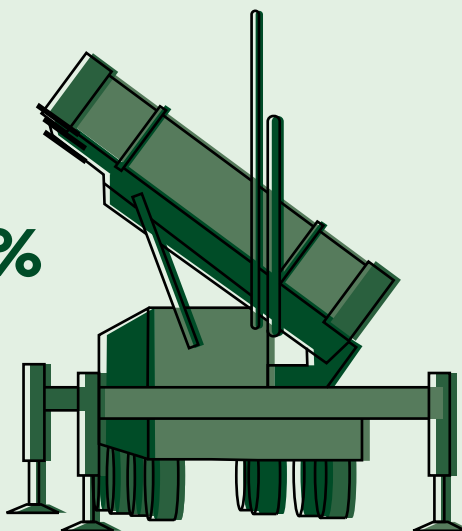
To Ukraine



To Taiwan



To Israel



US respondents:  
The United States should provide  
military assistance ...

To Ukraine



To Taiwan



To Israel

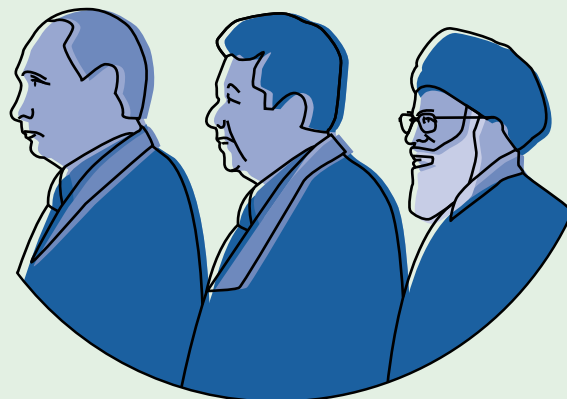


German respondents: 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 2 to 4 per cent for all issues.

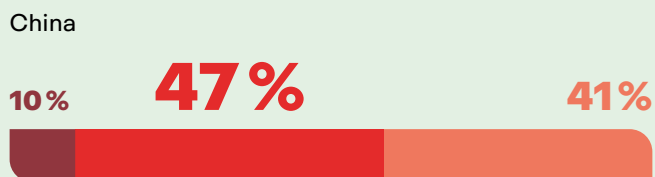
US respondents: 'not sure' ranged from 27 to 34 per cent for all issues.

## Russia threatens Germany's security

Do the following countries represent a military threat to ...?



... Germany's security? (German respondents):



- Major military threat
- Minor military threat
- No military threat

... security in the United States? (US respondents):



- Major military threat
- Minor military threat
- No military threat

German and US respondents: 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 0 to 7 per cent for all issues

## Fear of an arms race

How will the stationing of US medium-range missiles in Germany from 2026 affect the risk of war with Russia? It will ...

Increases the risk



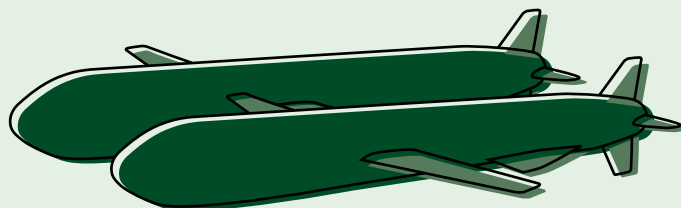
Reduces the risk



No significant impact



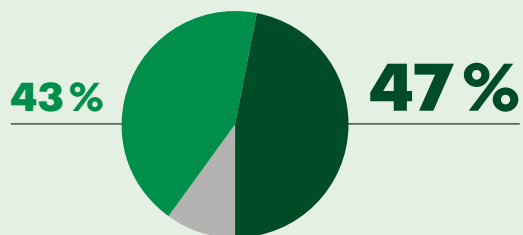
don't know 2%, no answer 2%



## No shortcut to peace

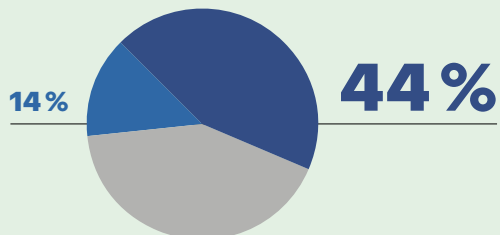
Which of the following actions by Ukraine would you support?

German respondents:



- Ukraine fights to recapture all Russian-occupied territory
- Ukraine cedes parts of its territory to Russia in an attempt to end the war
- don't know 6%, no answer 4%

US respondents:



- Ukraine fights to recapture all Russian-occupied territory
- Ukraine cedes parts of its territory to Russia in an attempt to end the war
- not sure 39%, don't know/no answer 3%



## No military support to Israel

How should Germany react to the war between Israel and Hamas? Germany should ...

Provide humanitarian aid for the people in Gaza

87%

Act as a mediator between Israel and Hamas

64%

Stay out of the war

56%

Support Israel militarily in the war against Hamas

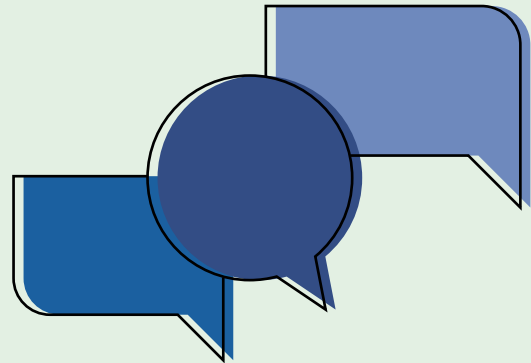
19%



don't know 1%, no answer 1%

## High expectations

What role should European countries play in diplomatically resolving the war between Israel and Hamas?



German respondents:

Major role

39%

Minor role

36%

No role

23%

US respondents:

Major role

34%

Minor role

20%

No role

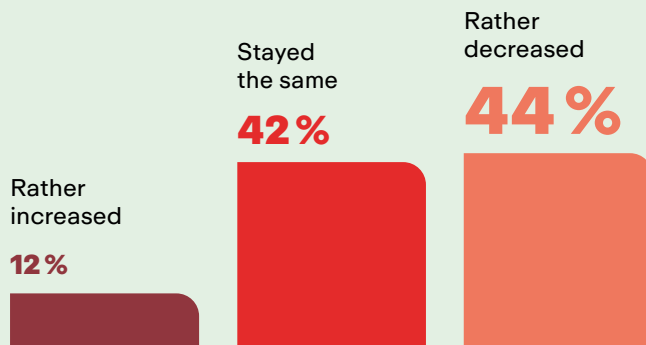
8%

German respondents: don't know 1%, no answer 1% | US respondents: don't know/no answer 34%

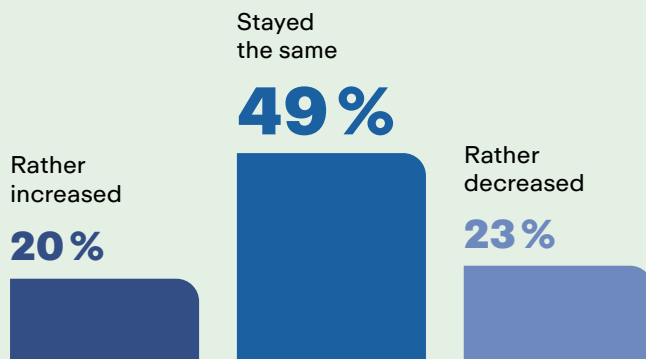
## Loss of influence

Has the European Union's influence in the world in recent years ... ?

German respondents:



US respondents:



German respondents: don't know 2%, no answer 0% | US respondents: don't know/no answer 8%

## Tighter regulation, more integration

In 2023, asylum applications in EU countries have risen significantly. How should the European Union respond?

Stricter repatriation for rejected asylum seekers



Improving economic conditions in countries of origin



Stricter controls at the European Union borders



Improved integration of approved asylum seekers



Expansion of legal migration channels



don't know 1%, no answer 1%



The survey for Germany was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and carried out by Verian, September 11–20, 2024. Telephone interviews conducted with a representative random sample of 1,010 participants in September (Margin of error: < 1.4 per cent for unit values of 5 per cent; < 3.1 per cent for unit values of 50 per cent). German data and results available at [www.theberlinpulse.org](http://www.theberlinpulse.org).

The survey 'Transatlantic Relations After the US Elections and the German Coalition Break-up' was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and carried out by Verian. Telephone interviews were conducted with a representative random sample of 1,000 participants in October 7–9, 2024 (Margin of error: < 1.4 per cent for unit values of 5 per cent; < 3.1 per cent for unit values of 50 per cent). German data and results available at [www.theberlinpulse.org](http://www.theberlinpulse.org).

The survey for the United States was conducted by Ipsos for Pew Research Center in September 2024. Online interviews were conducted with a representative random sample of 1,021 participants, September 20–29, 2024 (Margin of error: +/- 3.1 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level).

The 2024 US survey was conducted on the Ipsos Knowledge Panel G&A Omnibus. Many questions have been asked in previous surveys on the phone and Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel. The extent of the mode differences varies across questions; while there are negligible differences on some questions, others have more pronounced differences. Caution should be taken when evaluating online and phone estimates as well as ad hoc survey after US elections.

# ‘Maybe I can become the voice of the Russians’

Andrei Pivovarov was jailed by Putin’s regime; now he plans to fight back from Europe.



**Körber-Stiftung:** Mr Pivovarov, in August, you and 15 other political prisoners were brought to Germany as part of a prisoner exchange between Germany and the United States and Russia. You have spent more than three years in a Russian prison. What has it been like for you to live in Berlin these last weeks?

**Andrei Pivovarov:** I am very thankful to Chancellor Olaf Scholz for getting me out of Putin’s prison. However, I consider my stay here only temporary. I want to work inside Russia again and change the situation within the country. Now, I am trying to recruit a new team and to gather resources for my work. I meet with many of the Russian diaspora here in Berlin, but also in other European cities. I am dedicated to making a difference in Russia, despite having to do it from the outside. I hope that soon Putin will consider regretting this exchange.

**What is your impression of the Russian opposition activists, many of whom live in the European Union and London now?**

It seems that people are depressed. Almost all of the Russian activists want to go back to Russia, because they want to make real change. When they do something here in Europe, it seems that nothing happens. While I was imprisoned in Karelia ...

**... in the Northeast of Russia ...**

They put me in a single cell. I had a lot of time to think. I found that there are only two political ideas. One goes like ‘Let’s wait until Putin dies.’ But that’s not politics; it is just waiting. The other idea is that all Russians must go out on the streets, attack the police and fight for Russian freedom. That is a nice idea, but you cannot discuss it when you are sitting in the comfort zone in Berlin. There must be a third option.

**What could be such a third option?**

Let me give you one example. In my prison there was a guard. He has a young family and he was dependent on his salary. I try to ask myself what this guy can do against the regime. My idea is to provide a sophisticated system of information to people like him that gives him examples of what he can do without risking his job or safety.

**Please explain that.**

In the face of severe repression and harsher penalties for dissent, many Russians are unsure how to express their views. Fear of persecution silences many, even though they oppose the war and Putin’s policies. However, silence does not mean indifference. People want to act but do not see a safe way to

## Russia threatens Germany's security

Do the following countries represent a military threat to Germany's security?

Russia



China



Iran



- Major military threat
- Minor military threat
- No military threat

'don't know/no answer' ranged from 0 to 7 per cent for all issues

do so. I want to offer safe and collective forms of protest for those who are against the war and regime but are afraid of directly participating in active opposition. We aim to help Russians express their stance without risking persecution, while fostering a sense of solidarity. Our goal is to unite people through simple, safe but effective forms of 'non-participation', which will show the authorities that there is protest, and it is widespread.

### What is exactly the effect?

It will not mean that Putin vanishes and the war stops. But it can bring some kind of change, because a lot of money will not go for tanks, the police and Putin's propaganda. My idea is to gradually expand the methods of non-participation, involving more and more people and building an active civil society ready for more meaningful action against the regime.

### But with this very incremental approach it will take years to change something, won't it?

No, I do not think so. We have social media in Russia, which is still not blocked. Remember that under Soviet rule, you had only the independent radio from abroad that could barely be tuned. Now, almost everyone has a smartphone. You can reach millions of people in rural Russia within seconds. Just look at what happened in Belarus in 2020 through the platform Nexta and Telegram. Nobody believed Belarusians would go out on the street. In the end, those platforms sparked and coordinated the biggest mass protests that country has ever seen.

### It looks like Putin is more stable than ever.

#### Do you really think that you can challenge him?

Again, times have changed. We now have YouTube, Telegram and the Russian network VKontakte. We are in touch with the people. I hope I can keep the connection to Russia and maybe I can become the voice of the Russians. There are brave people who set fire to some buildings as protest against the war. But that is only for heroes. Heroes are great, but we need to reach ordinary people.

### Is there any civil society left in Russia that you can reach?

We still have a civil society. Of course, it is not as big as it used to be. There are no structures anymore. Opposition groups had to close; activists had to flee. But many Russians understand that the future does not look good. These people probably never go to demonstrations, but they post on social media, and most people do not want the war to continue.

### That does not sound like Russians are very empathetic with Ukrainians.

This may sound tough, because in Ukraine people are dying. But when we talk about ordinary Russians, that is important. Because Putin usually tells them that he will guarantee stability. Now, that promise does not work anymore. He guarantees war.

### Following that logic, is it a problem that Western sanctions also impact ordinary Russians?

The sanctions are working and they are good. The problem is that many sanctions hit anti-war Russians. For example, it has become almost impossible for students to get an education abroad. Apple blocks VPNs (virtual private networks, editor's note) from its store, making it even more difficult to access independent media. Still, the West must be stronger in enforcing sanctions against military forces.

**Your friend and colleague opposition activist Mikhael Khodorkovsky thinks the West and Germany should grant more visas to Russians who oppose Putin. Do you agree?**

Yes. When I spoke to the German ambassador in Russia about visas, I suggested that giving visas to talented Russian students and young scientists. This would show that Europe is not fighting with the Russian people but with the Russian authorities.

**This idea is not very popular with many Ukrainians. They say the Russian opposition activists do not really care about Ukraine.**

Some Ukrainians ask me: 'Why do not you talk about Ukraine?' I do talk about Ukraine, but in the end I want to involve Russians in the anti-war movement. That helps Ukraine much more than if I gave money to the Ukrainian army or held a Ukrainian flag.

**So, what is your position on the full-scale invasion of Ukraine?**

The war must stop. The 1991 border must be restored and only the Ukrainian authorities can decide when and how to stop the war. I feel devastated for Ukrainians. They are being bombed and killed. And I am also sad for civil society in Russia. Do not get me wrong; it is not the same thing. But Russian citizens are also victims of Putin's regime.

**Do you think that Germany and other European countries should help Ukraine by providing long-range missiles that also reach Russian territory?**

You must support all the ideas of Ukrainians to defend their country. I do not specialize in military matters, but the West and Germany must do everything and must do more to support Ukraine. Of course, it is wrong when these long-range missiles hit civilian objects. But I understand that it is war.

**Since July 2024, Ukrainian forces have been occupying Russian territory in the Kursk region. Does this help Putin's propaganda by allowing him to say that the West is at war with Russia?**

No, I think the Ukrainian invasion of Kursk is a big problem for Putin's propaganda. It is the first time in 80 years that a foreign army has invaded Russia. The Ukrainian army has been in Kursk for three months now. Putin always claimed that if this happened, he would start a nuclear war and punish everyone from Berlin to Washington. What happened in the end? Nothing happened! ➡

This interview was conducted in October 2024.

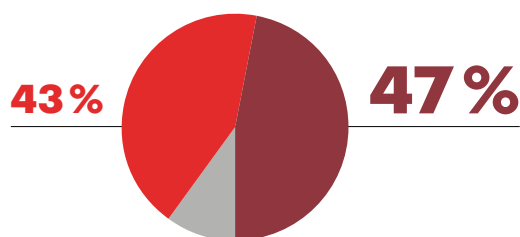
**Andrei Pivovarov**

is a Russian activist and politician.

**No shortcut to peace**

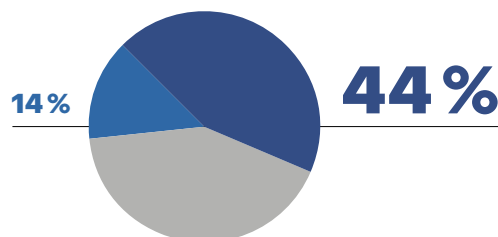
Which of the following actions by Ukraine would you support?

German respondents:



- Ukraine fights to recapture all Russian-occupied territory
- Ukraine cedes parts of its territory to Russia in an attempt to end the war
- don't know 6%, no answer 4%

US respondents:



- Ukraine fights to recapture all Russian-occupied territory
- Ukraine cedes parts of its territory to Russia in an attempt to end the war
- not sure 39%, don't know/no answer 3%

# The Monsoon Revolution

How Generation Z overthrew an autocratic regime in Bangladesh. And what it means for Germany. By Shafqat Munir

Over 36 days in July, Bangladesh underwent a revolution. What started as a movement for quotas in government jobs turned into a demand for the ruler's removal. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had just won disputed elections in January, while opposition parties and civil society were silenced. It was hard then to imagine that she would soon have to flee the country. Yet, for many in Bangladesh it was not that surprising, given that such a large population had been suppressed for so long.

Sheikh Hasina is now in India, facing an uncertain future. Her voluntary return to Bangladesh is close to impossible, given an arrest warrant and a large number of murder charges against her. Hasina's government's lack of will is evident, as over 1,500 people were killed and more than 20,000 injured during the 36-day revolution. There is a strong possibility that the authorities will file an extradition request so she can face trial. Her loyalists have either fled the country or are being arrested.

Multiple drivers led to our Monsoon Revolution but three stand out: corruption, suppression of freedom of speech, and the brutality of the regime. Tensions had simmered due to a slowing economy, rising unemployment and higher prices. As the middle class suffered, people used social media to highlight wealth displays, misuse of government funds and corruption. Demands grew for the end to the reservation of a large number of government jobs for the descendants of veterans of the 1971 liberation war.

**‘I would have never written such an essay under that government as I would be deeply fearful of the consequences.’**

Despite the government's assurances and declarations, nothing concrete had been done to tackle corruption and abuses of power. People were also disillusioned and angry at growing autocracy,

including the use of secret prisons like the Aynaghar (House of mirrors, editor's note) internment centre where detainees were kept in dire conditions. Civil society, once the pillar of Bangladesh's democratic emergence, had been coerced, humiliated and in some cases tortured into silence.

Perhaps I would have never written such an essay under that government as I would be deeply fearful of the consequences. Still, the dam broke and people from all walks of life came out to demand her resignation and a return to democracy. Bangladesh's Monsoon Revolution was the first successful Gen Z revolution. It was led by students who refused to cower down in the face of violence. It was these young people's spirit of sacrifice that ultimately brought everyone, including the elderly, out onto the streets.

**‘Smartphones became a powerful tool of dissent opposed to the government’s firearms.’**

Bangladesh's Gen Z showed how technology can be the ultimate force multiplier in a revolution. When the regime shut down the internet for a week, protesters used innovative methods like Bluetooth apps to communicate. Tens of thousands were mobilized through social media, with smartphones becoming powerful tools of dissent opposed to the government's firearms. But the protests were not just about fighting against the use of brutal force. The capital, Dhaka, also saw protest through art, graffiti and music. The sight of tens of thousands of young people singing a patriotic Bangla song is still etched in everyone's memory.

The revolution showed that, no matter how much force a government uses, people that rise *en masse* can never be defeated. Ultimately, all autocrats must bow down to the will of the people, no matter how powerful they are and no matter how brutal they are willing to be.

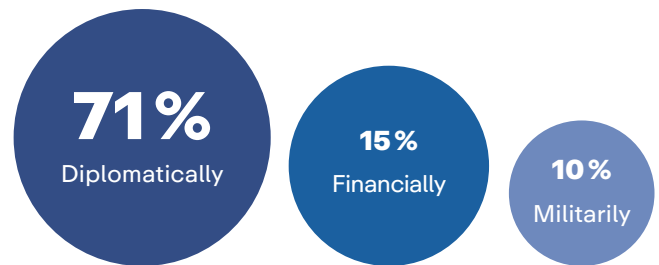
**‘The government always told us that less democracy meant more development.’**

In this context, Germany is a vital partner for Bangladesh, not only for our economy as one of our largest trading partners in Europe but also in our democratic journey. German support for our democratic reforms will be crucial. Germany promotes values such as human rights and the rule of law, which are very important for Bangladesh. This dual role is particularly relevant because, to justify its authoritarianism, the previous government always told us that less democracy

## Pivot to diplomacy

### Of those who favour more engagement on international crises:

Should Germany become more strongly engaged militarily, diplomatically or financially?



2024: don't know 3%, no answer 1%

meant more development. The revolution reaffirmed that the argument of development as a substitute for democracy is a major fallacy.

The task ahead for Bangladesh is onerous. The interim government needs to focus on three priorities: reforming the electoral system, ending endemic corruption, and beginning the process of security-sector reform, which must include restoring the public's trust in the police and security services. After 16 years of systemic repression, the Bangladeshi people are finally speaking out, but while protecting our right to do so, we also need to ensure freedom, dignity and empathy for all. Many recent revolutions have been false dawns; let the Monsoon Revolution mark a true change. ↗



**Shafqat Munir**  
is senior research fellow  
at the Bangladesh  
Institute of Peace and  
Security Studies.

# ‘India’s Influence Has Grown Enormously’

Is India’s democracy in danger? No reason to worry, says Vijay Chauthaiwale.



**Körber-Stiftung:** India held elections earlier this year. Why did the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lose so many votes? Was it because it fanned Hindu-Muslim polarization too much?

**Vijay Chauthaiwale:** If there were anti-BJP sentiments all over India, we would have lost across the country. But that did not happen. We have enhanced our vote share in southern states and won the legislative assembly of the eastern coastal state Odisha for the first time.

**So why did the BJP lose voters?**

In some cases, the caste situation worked against us. In some cases, the narrative of the opposition parties went against us. There is a lot of reflection going on now, but I have no doubt that we will win in the next elections as well.

**In a recent survey by Pew Research, 85 per cent of Indian respondents said that rule by a strong leader or the military would be good to govern their country. Where does this come from?**

India is a democracy and whoever leads it will be democratically elected. But yes, Indians like

stronger leaders, especially when the challenges are big. Because Indians want policies to be implemented.

**So, President Modi is an answer to this desire for strong leadership?**

Before Narendra Modi came, there was a lack of decision-making. There was Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who had constitutional authority and Mrs Sonia Gandhi, who ran her own parallel cabinet. The results were huge corruption and inefficiencies. That is why people chose Mr Modi as an alternative.

**There has been concern about India’s democratic decline, especially after the arrest of some key opposition leaders in the run-up to the elections. How do you respond to that?**

Very few leaders were arrested, and their cases have been going on for about a year. We have independent courts and an election commission, and they decide. There has been a lot of talk in Western media that went like: ‘If the BJP wins, it will be because of some kind of rigging. If the opposition gets more seats, then everything is fine’. This is hypocrisy.

**Last years *The Berlin Pulse* survey showed that most Germans feel that Germany lost international influence. What about Indians?**

India's overall global influence has grown enormously. Indians now travel around the world and feel that people treat them differently compared to 15 years ago. The fact that India has remained non-confrontational in almost every part of the world has helped its image to grow.

**In July, Prime Minister Modi hugged President Vladimir Putin just after a Russian attack hit a Ukrainian children's hospital. At least in Europe this certainly did not help India's image to grow.**

Look, the Soviet Union stood with us in the Indo-Pakistani war 1971, when no one else did. Today, much of our defence equipment comes from Russia and the India-Russia partnership has helped us economically by controlling the price of oil. At the same time, Prime Minister Modi has made clear that this is not an era of war. He said it directly to Mr. Putin. And he also went to Ukraine and repeated the same message.

**Can we expect India to be a mediator between Russia and Ukraine?**

India is ready to play any role, but it is a political decision and all the stakeholders must agree. Ukraine, the Western countries plus the United States and China.

**In August, student protests toppled Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh. Why did New Delhi grant asylum to Hasina, who took an authoritarian turn during her time in office?**

We have not yet formally granted her asylum, but we value her friendship. And it does not mean we are going to break off relations with Bangladesh. We are just concerned about the safety of minorities, particularly Hindus, in Bangladesh. There are hundreds of reports of Hindus' properties being damaged.

**Critics feel that Prime Minister Modi is just prioritizing the safety of Hindus.**

That is because they are the most vulnerable. The Western governments should ask the new Bangladeshi government what it is doing to protect minorities. If we see jihadi elements emerging in Bangladesh, it will be a huge challenge. It is not only our responsibility but also the responsibility of the whole world to prevent that.

**New alliances – new strength**

Do you agree that ... ?

Germany should strengthen partnerships in Asia, Africa and South America.

**71%**

Conducted after the US elections don't know 5%, no answer 1%

**India wants to reach the status of a developed nation by 2047. Is this also an opportunity for the Indian-German relationship?**

Germany is a close friend, especially when it comes to technology and skilled education. There are more than 34,000 Indian students in Germany, which is becoming an increasingly attractive destination, especially for engineering and IT students. That is a very good sign! Besides that, the small and medium-sized industrial sector in Germany is an ideal model for India. We can learn a lot from Germany. [↗](#)

The interview was conducted in September 2024 as part of *The Berlin Pulse Express Edition*.

**Vijay Chauthaiwale.**

is in-charge of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Bharatiya Janata Party.



# ‘Don’t rely on polls to define what is right and wrong’

Naz Durakoğlu and Jacob Poushter on why opinion polls are both a curse and a blessing.

**Ms Durakoğlu, be honest, do politicians and their staff in Washington care about public opinion polling?**

**Durakoğlu:** Yes, very much so. Polling is incredibly important for us in democracies because it gives a better sense of where public opinion stands. And it guides decision-making, especially in a hyper-media environment. Let me give you one example. Polling helped shape the Affordable Care Act in 2017. It was polling data that helped lawmakers writing the legislation understand what shape the bill should take. Including Medicare for all, for example, had limited support, and that guided the structure of the bill.

**But why is opinion polling especially important for democracies?**

**Durakoğlu:** Because there are always the ones who have an opinion and say it’s the opinion of a larger whole, when in fact it may be the opinion of a very narrow subset. In the US political context, we tend to have candidates, especially in presidential elections, who say everyone thinks their way.

Polling can get to the heart of an issue and maybe do away with this charade that we sometimes see with political candidates.

**Mr Poushter, you conduct opinion polls at Pew Research Center. What do you think?**

**Poushter:** Even if citizens vote for representatives rather than directly on issues, elected officials need to understand public views on specific issues. Of course, polls reduce opinions to numbers, but they capture complex, nuanced views shaped by media and personal experiences, offering a vital tool for understanding public sentiment.

**But public support does not always shape legislation. In this year’s *The Berlin Pulse* survey, 41 per cent of American respondents support US military assistance to Ukraine while 29 per cent oppose it. Why is it so difficult to support Ukraine when there is public backing?**

**Poushter:** Support for Ukraine varies by party, with 59 per cent of Democrats backing it and just 28 per

cent of Republicans. In a polarised landscape, these partisan differences shape legislative outcomes more than the general public sentiment.

**Durakoğlu:** The political landscape in Washington has shifted, with narrow majorities in both the Senate and the House. This gives individual voices, especially those opposing aid to Ukraine, greater influence in legislative debates. Still, both parties have continued to pass significant financial support for Ukraine, staying aligned with public opinion.

**You mentioned the polarised landscape. Germany and the United States are highly polarised societies where opinions on certain issues diverge widely. Do opinion polls reproduce polarisation?**

**Poushter:** Polarisation is on the rise globally, driven in part by a fragmented media landscape. But polls reflect these divisions; they do not cause them.

**Is there any issue on which the American public is not polarised?**

**Poushter:** Views of China have become more negative over time, but across the political spectrum. Polls show that one party has become more critical of China for seemingly taking manufacturing jobs and the other for its human rights record.

**In 2003, 71 per cent of Americans supported the war in Iraq. By 2019, 62 per cent thought the war was a mistake. How should politicians use polls to make decisions?**

**Durakoğlu:** It is risky to rely on polls to define what is right and wrong. Polls simply show how people feel at any given time. In the case of the Iraq war, the US government acted in accordance with public opinion, feeding into a cycle driven by the heightened emotional state. It was right after the attacks of 9/11. Polls served the government by reflecting public sentiment, but they did not necessarily indicate the right course of action.

**Poushter:** At the time, polls accurately captured American opinion, regardless of how that opinion was formed. If 70 per cent had opposed the war in Iraq, the situation might have been different. Measuring public opinion on things like war is complex because certain events often boost the popularity of leaders, as was the case with President George W. Bush. But this changes over time, and polls have ensured that citizens' voices have been heard.

**So do you poll facts or do you poll feelings?**

**Poushter:** You can ask people how they feel or you can ask people what they think. In the end, it is really a combination of the two. But the advantage of survey research is that you get hard numbers.

**Hard numbers that represent a snapshot in time...**

**Poushter:** If you add several snapshots together, you can see trends and how things change over time. That is sometimes much more interesting than the numbers themselves. Because you can then understand the underlying reasons.

**Durakoğlu:** I agree. Especially in foreign policy, it is really interesting to look at sentiment towards the United States and look at trends over time. If we have a particular foreign policy or something that the country is involved in, it is important to see if there is a popular view of the United States, if it is going down over time or if it is going up. The people I am working with now at the State Department are very interested in these trends and what might be driving them. ↗

This interview was conducted in October 2024.



**Naz Durakoğlu** is assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs, US Department of State.



**Jacob Poushter** is associate director at Pew Research Center.



# Still on the Learning Curve

Xiao Qian explains how China is balancing its national interests with the responsibilities that come with rising power.

It has taken China a long time to admit that it is a global power. It was only in 2014, six years after the Beijing Olympics and four years after it became the world's second-largest economy, that it began to talk about 'major-country diplomacy'. Since then, China has been playing an active and even a leading role in areas where it excels, such as tackling climate change, new energy technologies and artificial intelligence (AI).

In Africa, China has invested in renewable-energy infrastructure, such as solar and wind projects, that provides clean energy solutions to countries with limited access to electricity. Cooperation also extends to disaster preparedness and climate-smart agriculture to improve food security. Moreover, China has partnered with countries in Southeast Asia to advance ecosystem restoration and reforestation, in line with its global commitment to plant and protect 70 billion trees by 2030.

With a GDP per capita of around US\$12,000, China considers itself a member of the developing world, and it focuses its attention on global development. In September 2021, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Development Initiative (GDI).

He called on the world to continue to prioritize development and the GDI shows that China is doing just that. Beijing has thus upgraded its South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund to the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, adding US\$1 billion to the already committed US\$3 billion.

**‘China considers itself a member of the developing world, and it focuses its attention on global development.’**

The fund will be used for technological assistance and poverty alleviation in developing countries. In cooperation with the United Nations, for example, China has implemented the Enhancing Sustainable Soil Management Capacity project in Uganda. Through providing equipment and databases, demonstrating new technologies and online courses, the project has improved the soil-management capacity of local farmers. More than 40,000 people from developing countries have completed training through the GDI, which aims to provide 100,000 training opportunities to support the economic and social progress of developing countries.

## ‘China understands that developing countries have yet to truly access, use and benefit from AI.’

As one of the leading countries in AI, China is beginning to play a leading role in capacity-building in this field. This is because it understands that developing countries have yet to truly access, use and benefit from AI. The problem is that the global digital divide continues to widen. This is why in September 2024 China announced the AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All. This promotes AI and digital infrastructure connectivity, cooperation in research and the development and application of models and language resources, better synergizing AI strategies and strengthening policy exchanges, and sharing technical practices.

In addition, China mediates between parties in international and regional crises by adhering to the stance of justice and equity. Regarding the war in Ukraine, for example, China’s special representative for Eurasian affairs, Li Hui, has conducted four rounds of shuttle diplomacy. Recently, China and Brazil, proposed a six-point consensus for the political settlement of the war and invited other countries and international organizations to join them. China has also attached great importance to the peace summit in Switzerland in June 2024. But it has repeatedly stressed that the summit should have three key elements: recognition by both Russia and Ukraine, equal participation of all parties, and fair discussion of all peace proposals. China and the international community are working hard to find an appropriate solution, but it is not an easy task.

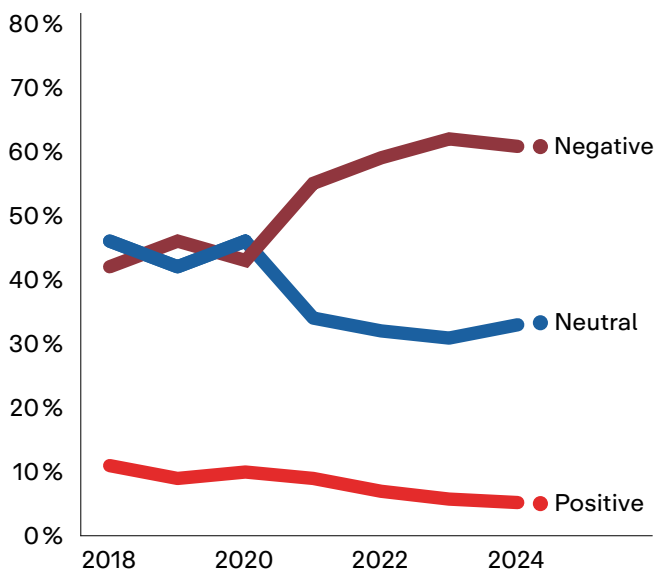
## ‘China believes that the international system needs to be centred around the United Nations.’

In China, it is widely expected that China and Germany, as the world’s second and third largest economies, should work together to reduce geopolitical tensions, safeguard the multilateral international order, bring the world back on the path of peace and development, and find solutions to global challenges such as climate change.

China believes that the international system and governance needs to be centred around the United Nations and based on international law. For China there is only one set of rules: the basic norms of international relations based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. It is true that United Nations has an efficiency problem, and China supports efforts to reform the Security Council, which should focus on enhancing the

## China scepticism remains

How do you see China’s rising influence?



2024: don't know 1%, no answer 0%

representation and influence of developing countries, particularly from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Nonetheless, the United Nations remains the most universal, representative and authoritative intergovernmental organization, especially as the world has been fragmented into different alliances.

As a late-comer on the international stage, China is still on a learning curve when it comes to international governance. It is working very hard to balance its national interests with the responsibilities that come with its growing global influence. It may look clumsy in this, but its efforts to make this world a safer, greener and better place should be applauded and encouraged. ➡



**Xiao Qian**

is the deputy director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University.

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