

PRESS RELEASE

The UN at 75: Germans call for international cooperation instead of national egoism

The United Nations (UN) is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. Two-thirds of Germans have a positive view of the UN. But the overwhelming majority also see an urgent need for action. They demand international cooperation in solving global problems.

Gütersloh, September 16, 2020. Germany is a country of multilateralists. In fact, according to a representative survey with 2,024 respondents conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, an overwhelming majority (80 percent) of Germans are calling for international cooperation in solving global problems, and roughly two-thirds (65 percent) support this cooperation even if it is sometimes necessary to accept short-term negative consequences. For Germans, international cooperation seems to make sense if it improves living conditions worldwide (48 percent) and if it fosters peaceful coexistence (37 percent). On the other hand, for a large majority of them, it doesn't matter whether Germany benefits from such international cooperation efforts. Only small groups of 8 percent respectively believe that it is important for their home country to enjoy a benefit from cooperating or for Germany to benefit politically or economically from doing so.

This attitude is also reflected in the Germans' view of the United Nations (UN). Seventy-five years after its founding, most Germans have a positive overall opinion of the UN: Almost two-thirds (67 percent) of survey respondents expressed a very or rather positive view of the UN. But since they don't see the organization as having any immediate relevance to their own lives, their image of the UN's work remains vague. "In their everyday life, Germans hardly have any points of reference to the UN, which makes it hard for them to grasp in concrete terms. Only few of them know who is working there on what and how," explains Christina Tillmann, an expert on democracy with the Bertelsmann Stiftung who authored the policy brief.

Four different types of multilateralists

Although the level of support for international cooperation and multilateralism are generally high in the overall population, digging deeper reveals some clear differences. From 48 qualitative interviews, the rheingold institute and the Bertelsmann Stiftung were able to identify four types of multilateralists:

- **Regional Isolationists** are characterized by individual self-interests. "Me first" (16% of Germany's population)
- **Assertive Nationalists** pay attention to the promotion of national self-interests. "Germany first" (10% of Germany's population)
- **International Equality Watchdogs** would like there to be more global equality. "Justice for all" (43% of Germany's population)
- **Global Cosmopolitans** want a world that is diverse but based on shared values. "Unity in diversity" (31% of Germany's population)

Their degree and motivations for supporting international cooperation vary widely. Almost three-quarters (74 percent) are found among the "International Equality Watchdogs" and the

“Global Cosmopolitans”. They care about the welfare of the entire world, and their frame of reference extends far beyond their own country’s borders. Their view of the UN is very positive, and they are big supporters of international cooperation. “The majority of them are convinced that the world needs the UN,” Tillmann says.

Demands for the future: Less national egoism, more global collective good

An overwhelming majority (91 percent) calls for less egoism on the part of individual countries and more cohesion within the UN. In their opinion, national self-interests should not stand in the way of the global collective good. Nine in ten would like to see more equality among the UN’s member countries. The veto power of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council is particularly unpopular, as 81 percent of respondents were opposed to having individual countries be able to block resolutions. “Germans are critical of the fact that member states have varying degrees of influence in the UN and try too often to advance their own national interests. They demand that the UN be able to overcome the blockade of individual member states,” Tillmann explains. “If the UN can succeed in becoming more visible and imposing more equality of rights among its member states, it will remain indispensable for the next 75 years.”

Additional Information

The UN is the central organization for international cooperation. Its 193 member countries work together to foster security and peace in the world and in suborganizations on specific global challenges, such as in the fields of health (WHO) and culture (UNESCO).

The data forming the basis of this “The United Nations. Indispensable, but invisible.” policy brief has two sources: The qualitative data on attitudes toward international cooperation and the United Nations are based on in-depth psychological interviews with 48 individuals in Germany, which were conducted by the rheingold institute on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung in February and March 2020. The survey data used originates from an online survey that YouGov conducted on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, which had 2,024 respondents (field time: June 26-29, 2020). The results have been weighted and are representative for Germany’s overall population of individuals age 18 and older.

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