

PRESS RELEASE

Germany's younger generation is more optimistic about the future of society

“Shaping the Future”: Bertelsmann Stiftung conducts research on the situation and needs of young people – Studies show what matters to the next generation in politics and business

- The younger generation has a more positive outlook on the future; they have more confidence in the direction society is taking than their parents' and grandparents' generations. Young people want political decisions to be guided by the needs of future generations. They are less dissatisfied with democracy. These are the findings of the new study *Demokratie braucht Zukunft* (Democracy Needs a Future), which the Bertelsmann Stiftung presented at its annual press conference. The study shows that young people are strong allies of a sustainable democracy.
- The Bertelsmann Stiftung has also examined the situation of the younger generation in other studies, which paint a clear overall picture: Young people want to get involved and are looking to the future.

Gütersloh – July 14, 2026. Sixty-eight percent of people in Germany lack a positive vision for society's future. They criticize the fact that political decisions today rarely reflect long-term ideas (60 percent). Added to this is widespread pessimism: 52 percent believe that future generations in Germany will be worse off than those living there today. These are the findings of a representative survey conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung for the study *Demokratie braucht Zukunft* (Democracy Needs a Future), which the nonprofit foundation carried out in collaboration with YouGov.

However, when we look at the younger generation, a different, more positive picture emerges: Young people are less dissatisfied with democracy and significantly more optimistic than many older people. Only one-third (31 percent) of 18- to 29-year-olds are dissatisfied with how the political system works, while among 40- to 49-year-olds, the figure is nearly half (44 percent). Above all, young people are willing to align political decisions more closely with the needs of future generations.

“In the spirit of intergenerational justice, we must provide young people in Germany and Europe today with the conditions and opportunities they need to participate – along with a clear, sustainable vision of the future,” said Brigitte Mohn, chairwoman of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board, commenting on the foundation's research on the younger generation. “Only when young people assume responsibility early on, contribute their ideas and experience a sense of self-efficacy will they be able to take an active role in developing our democratic and social systems in the coming decades. This is precisely where we want to support the younger generation. We want to shape a better future.”

Link to the study: [Demokratie braucht Zukunft](#)

“We can clearly see that young people are committed to improving the future prospects of our society and economy,” said Andreas Pinkwart, former Deputy Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia and a member of the foundation’s Executive Board since July 1, 2026. “And they are doing so not only through their support for democracy, but also by focusing on sustainability in the economy. Young people are one of the biggest drivers of the sustainability transformation, and they endorse the model of the social market economy.”

A key finding of the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s **Young Economy Tracker** is that young people view merit and solidarity as inseparable. In Germany, 16- to 25-year-olds support the model of the social market economy: A large majority of them believe that a just society must both reward merit and ensure equal opportunities.

Link to the study: [Für junge Menschen gehören Leistungsprinzip und Solidarität zusammen](#)

The Bertelsmann Stiftung’s **Sustainability Transformation Monitor**, which tracks the progress the German economy is making towards sustainability, shows that the younger generation is one of the main drivers of this transition, which has recently slowed down.

Link to the study: [Nachhaltigkeit bleibt in Unternehmen Chefsache – doch die Dynamik ist dahin](#)

To understand how young people are participating in the current political discourse, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has already examined in two widely acclaimed studies the next generation’s social media behavior and how it is being influenced. The study **How to Sell Democracy Online (Fast)** clearly shows that the majority of young people get their information about political events from social media, such as Instagram and TikTok. In doing so, they trust political influencers more than political organizations, institutions or politicians themselves.

Link to the study: [Social Media sind essenziell, um junge Menschen mit politischen Themen zu erreichen](#)

But what kind of content do younger people see there? The answer is provided by the study **Digitalisiert, politisiert, polarisiert?** (Digitized, Politicized, Polarized?), which examined young people’s social media feeds on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and X in the run-up to Germany’s 2025 national election. The study shows that videos from parties on the political fringes appear more frequently in users’ feeds, while posts from the political center can be found less often. Even if centrist parties post more frequently relatively speaking, they are less visible in the feeds of younger users.

Link to study: [Algorithms in Election Campaigns](#)

It is striking that while the younger generation is less dissatisfied with democracy, older people participate more actively in elections. The study *Hürdenlauf zur Wahlurne* (Obstacle Race to the Ballot Box) explains what policymakers, government officials and civil society can do now to increase voter turnout among young people. After all, the participation of young people in political discourse is crucial to democracy's ongoing legitimacy. And it ensures that policymaking decisions take a long-term perspective and are sustainable.

Link to study: [Warum junge Menschen seltener wählen – und was dagegen hilft](#)

“The Bertelsmann Stiftung has always been committed to shaping the future and, as part of its 50th anniversary in 2027, it will focus even more on the younger generation,” explains Wilhelm-Friedrich Uhr, member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board. “It is important to us to create new opportunities for young people, since empowering them will provide society with the forward-looking leaders it needs to shape its future.”

Since its inception in 1977, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has made approximately €2.1 billion available for nonprofit activities. Its expenditures on its project work totaled €76.2 million in 2025. The foundation employs 337 people at its offices in Gütersloh and Berlin. It also has affiliated organizations in Washington and Barcelona.

Contact: Jochen Arntz, Vice President Media Relations
Phone: +49 52 41 81 81 129
E-Mail: jochen.arntz@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

About the Bertelsmann Stiftung: Inspiring people. Shaping the future.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is committed to enabling social participation for everyone – politically, economically and culturally. Our programs include Education and the Next Generation, Democracy and Social Cohesion, Digitalization and the Common Good, Europe's Future, Health, and Sustainable Social Market Economies. In our work, we focus on people, since only they can change the world and make it better. We share knowledge, promote expertise and develop solutions. A nonprofit foundation, the Bertelsmann Stiftung was established in 1977 by Reinhard Mohn. **For more information, please visit:** www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

