

English
summary

Climate Change, Diversity, Justice

How Values Determine Our Attitudes toward
the Social Issues Shaping Our Future

The Living Values program

The Living Values program explores issues relevant to social cohesion and the ways in which religion and values influence how we live together in diverse societies. We conduct research and publish studies on these topics in the framework of our Religion Monitor and Social Cohesion Radar. Our program works with various projects and approaches aimed at strengthening values in society and actively builds networks involving civil society actors committed to social cohesion.



If you are interested in learning more about our activities or would like to receive updates on recent research findings, studies and events, please use the QR code provided or click on the link below

<http://b-sti.org/lebendigewerte>

The full study
is available in German only:

Klimawandel, Vielfalt, Gerechtigkeit

Wie Werthaltungen unsere
Einstellungen zu gesellschaftlichen
Zukunftsfragen bestimmen

About the study

Current debates on social issues shaping our future suggest that the German public is increasingly polarized. Our study explores the idea of an increasingly polarized society through the prism of three key themes: climate change, diversity and social justice. It also examines the extent to which we can actually determine whether or not society is drifting apart on these deeply controversial issues. The study focuses in part on the question of the extent to which people's values shape their views on basic social issues.

The analysis draws on seven *Wertemilieus* ("value" milieus) which, together, function as an empirical instrument in describing the plurality of values in society and which also offer distinct portraits of the basic features of the values held in our society (El-Menouar 2021). Drawing on representative data collected in Germany, we identified the following *Wertemilieus* in German society:

1. Creative idealists;
2. Humble humanists;
3. Individualistic materialists;
4. Easy-going relationship-oriented collaborators;
5. Safety-oriented conservatives;
6. Achievement-oriented doers; and
7. Unconventional self-actualizers.

In Germany, these milieus or types are more or less equally represented across society in all age, education and income groups. However, if we draw on sociodemographic characteristics, we can describe *Wertemilieus* in greater detail (El-Menouar and Unzicker 2021).

Methodology

The *Wertemilieus* are calculated using 21 questions about personal values derived from Shalom Schwartz's (2012) Portrait Value Questionnaire and ten questions on personality traits following the Big Five model (Rammstedt et al. 2013). The answers to all 31 questions were examined as part of a multi-stage sampling procedure. This allowed us to identify empirically seven *Wertemilieus*. The data basis is a representative survey of the German population conducted in Germany during the last week of November 2020. This quantitative online survey of 1,012 people, was carried out by the Norstat Institute on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. This involved a non-randomized quota sampling that is representative of the German population aged 18 and over by age, gender and federal state. The sample was drawn using an online access panel.

Seven Wertemilieus* in Germany



| | Creative individualists | Humble humanists | Individualistic materialists | Easy-going relationship-oriented collaborators | Safety-oriented conservatives | Performance-oriented doers | Unconventional self-actualizers |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Values and associated attributes | Equality Plurality Environmental protection Hedonism | Equality Plurality Environmental protection | Consumption Prosperity Autonomy | Affiliation Security | Safety Loyalty Greater good | Power Influence Recognition | Self-realization Change |
| | Idealistic Opinionated Unconventional Creative | Modesty Moderate Self-effacing Conventional Pragmatic | Suspicious Pessimistic | Easy-going Willing to take risks | Conservative Caring | Conservative Traditional Optimistic | Unconventional Spiritual Critical of consumerism |
| Typical societal characteristics | 18-29 years old Female | 50+ Female | 40-49 years old Male | 18-29 years old | 50+ | under 40 years Male | 60+ |
| | University educated | University educated | Higher income level Self-employed Areligious | Low level of education | | High income level Religious | Low income level No religious affiliation |
| | No party affiliation | ALLIANCE 90/ THE GREENS | AfD | CDU, SPD, also AfD | SPD, THE LEFT, FDP | CDU | THE LEFT |
| | 15 % | 17 % | 9 % | 15 % | 16 % | 14 % | 14 % |

* Wertemilieus describe types of people in terms of their value orientations, and outline social groups which share similar values and life orientations. Percentages indicate the share of each milieu in our sample. Source: BSt Value Study 2021, Base: N=1.012

Key findings

1. To say German society is split into two camps oversimplifies the matter.

A range of positions can be identified in all three of the issues examined. Divisions shift depending on the question; in other words, it's not always the same people who hold opposing opinions. However, the materialists are an exception in this regard, as they almost universally differ from the majority in their views of existing challenges.

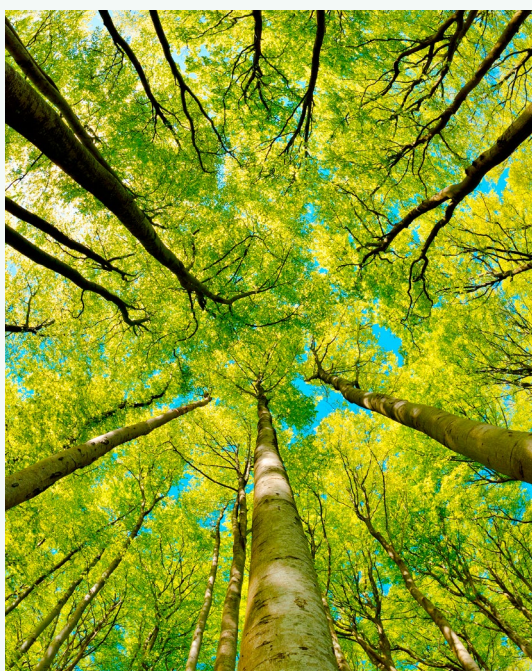
2. There is considerable support for change aimed at advancing climate protection.

Overall, most respondents (72%) believe that we need profound societal and social changes to address climate change; this view cuts across most *Wertemilieus*. Opinions differ more on the measures needed to achieve these goals. While some – in particular the performance-oriented doers with a share of 43% – place greater emphasis on technological progress,

others assume that effective climate protection is not feasible without making palpable changes to our everyday behavior. Among materialists, however, only a minority (43%) is willing to change; in this milieu, a large share (39%) assumes that climate change is a natural phenomenon and that nature will take care of itself.

3. When it comes to living together in a diverse society, the limits of openness is the key issue.

Idealists (63%) and humanists (64%) in particular take a broad view of the extent to which cultural and religious diversity can be accepted in German society and see the country's Basic Law as providing the necessary framework. Those who are performance-oriented (55%) are more in favor of setting more narrow limits having to do with Western European standards. Once again, the materialists stand out in this regard. Among them, a total of 80% either consider only a more "familiar" spectrum of diversity in a Western European context to be tenable or expect





those with a different cultural background to adapt to the German *Leitkultur* (leading or guiding culture). Diversity as such is rejected overall by only a very small minority of respondents (2%). When it comes to wearing a headscarf in civil servant positions, however, we see polarization on this issue across all *Wertemilieus*.

4. Most respondents attach importance to having a social market economy anchored in principles of justice.

At 85% and 86% respectively, the overwhelming majority of respondents attach importance to both the merit principle (i.e., the idea that hard-working people should earn more than others) and the need principle (i.e., society takes care of those in need, regardless of their performance). These principles are also supported by the majority of materialists, even if they express lower levels of support for the principle of need (63%). Greater differences can be seen when it comes to the belief in a “just world.” While 55% of the achievement-oriented assume that everyone gets what he or she is entitled to, only 24% of the materialists share this opinion.

5. People are open to dialogue despite heated controversies.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents believe that public debates are conducted with less respect than they used to be. However, only 20% feel that a less respectful tone is taken in discussions in their private lives. Most respondents feel that these discussions are just as respectful as they have been in the past. In principle, the respondents are for the most part open to hearing other opinions and even like to engage in debate (43%) or find a plurality of positions to be a good thing (36%). Only the easy-going relationship-oriented collaborators are less often interested in engaging with different positions (25%) or have basically no interest in social or political topics (17%). Despite the prevalence of controversies, the majority of respondents believe that most people they know (around 60%), but also in Germany as a whole (around 60%), share values similar to their own. The materialists are an exception here, as they not only see themselves as outsiders within Germany, but also experience considerable headwind in their personal life.

These *Wertemilieus*, which elaborate and visualize the spectrum of attitudes identified, help us move beyond the simple black-and-white image of polarization in which we see ourselves vis-à-vis those of the “opposite” opinion and look instead for subtle but relevant differences within the debate on democracy. This kind of approach opens rather than closes doors, also for those who perceive themselves to be on the outside. Political leaders and policymakers thus have the opportunity to integrate more firmly such positions into public dialogue and to expand the arenas of public debate to include situations and events that are not orchestrated for emotional impact. New formats such as citizen dialogues and digital platforms for dialogue mark a step in the right direction. But the media must also do more to meet their responsibilities and communicate the spectrum of views on the debates affecting society rather than focusing on and thus inflating the more shrill outlier opinions. As we face the massive challenges to our pluralistic and open society, we must seek to include as many people as possible along the way. This includes, of course, the materialists. Developing formats that lend an equal measure of space and respect to their views as well

those opposing them is sure to prove challenging. But we clearly can no longer afford to kick the can of contentious debate further down the road. Constructive debate is always more fruitful than putative harmony.

References

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