

Public Perceptions of Germany's Sustainability Transition

Key Findings 2026

Germany's transition to a more sustainable society is increasingly shaping the country's public policy, economy and everyday life. This systemic shift has taken on additional urgency in light of the goal of achieving climate neutrality, which requires far-reaching changes, particularly in the energy, transportation and heating sectors. In a democracy, however, this can succeed only if the public's expectations and concerns are taken into account and the transformation enjoys broad public support. The **Social Sustainability Barometer** addresses precisely this issue. It examines how people in Germany perceive the ongoing transition, identifies the expectations and concerns shaping their views, and highlights potential approaches to improving the design and implementation of public policy. The findings are based on a recurring, nationally representative panel survey of approximately 6,500 respondents that provides a comprehensive assessment of public attitudes toward the sustainability transition.

This year's findings reveal growing tensions. On the one hand, **broad consensus on environmental issues remains intact**. On the other hand, support for the specific design and implementation of the sustainability transition is coming under increasing pressure.

1. Strong public support for climate action persists, but support and perceived urgency are declining

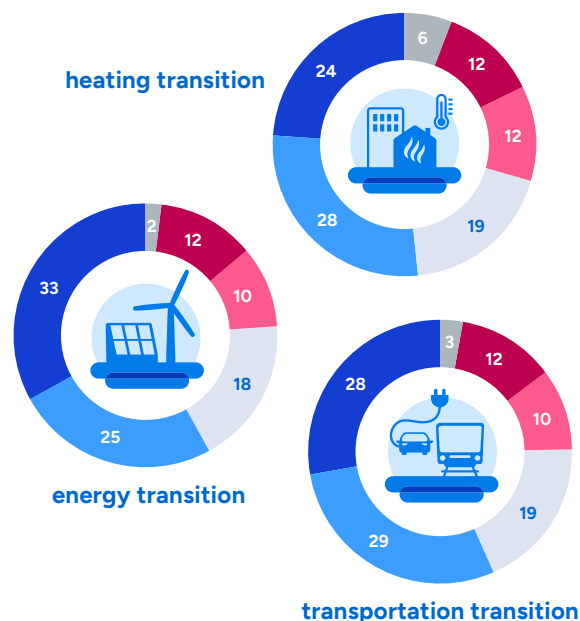
Clear majorities continue to recognize both the harmful effects of human-driven climate change and the need for a climate policy that delivers impact. This support has remained resilient despite subdued economic prospects and multiple ongoing crises. Eighty percent of people polled in Germany are concerned about the consequences of climate change, while only about one in ten (11%) questions whether climate change is caused by human activity. More than half (54%) support increased public spending on climate protection. At the same time, however, concern about climate change, as well as support for specific climate goals and policy measures, has gradually declined across many areas in recent years.*

2. The transformation is increasingly viewed through the lens of financial concerns

The findings point to a nuanced assessment of the sustainability transition and its implementation, with the public weighing its costs, benefits, and risks against one another. As a result, concerns about personal financial burdens (53%), broader economic prosperity (39%), and growing social divisions (50%) are becoming increasingly important. Financial and economic concerns are associated with lower

Public demand for additional climate policy measures

The German government should take additional measures to advance the ...



Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree Strongly agree Don't know/No response

Social Sustainability Barometer (2026) | Energy transition: n = 3,145; transportation transition: n = 3,421; heating transition: n = 3,421 | Values are reported as percentages | Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

* In cases where overall support, approval, or opposition is reported, the response categories "somewhat" and "strongly" have been combined.

willingness to change individual behavior and lower acceptance of climate policy measures. For example, among people in Germany for whom installing a climate-neutral heating system is not or is only somewhat an option, four in ten (41%) cite financial constraints as the primary barrier. For energy-efficient building renovations, the share rises to more than half (52%).

3. The public expects government investment and an effective policy framework

The public views the sustainability transition as a shared societal responsibility in which climate action is not seen primarily as an individual obligation but as an area requiring active government leadership. This is reflected in support for increased public spending on climate protection (54%), broad recognition of the need for climate-neutral infrastructure (79%), widespread acceptance of price-based policy incentives (61%), and, although to a lesser extent, support for government regulations and standards (49%). Four in five people polled in Germany (79%) believe that households cannot successfully transition to climate-friendly technologies without government support. At the same time, many people are willing to take action themselves. One-third of homeowners (33%) report that they have already installed rooftop solar panels, while another one-third (35%) say they would consider doing so. By contrast, nearly half of people polled in Germany (47%) say purchasing an electric vehicle is not, or is only somewhat, an option for them. A key condition for broader uptake is the availability of affordable alternatives, supported by reliable, income-based financial incentives that make investments more predictable and accessible to as many people as possible.

4. Key challenges stem from low levels of trust and dissatisfaction with policy implementation

The implementation of the sustainability transition is increasingly viewed by the public as difficult to understand (56%) and disconnected from citizens (63%). These perceptions undermine trust in political institutions and threaten the success of the transition. Reflecting this, public confidence that the federal government is managing the sustainability transition in the public interest remains low: More than half of people polled in Germany (55%) report little or no trust in the government. Likewise, roughly three-quarters of the public rate the transparency of climate policy decisions, opportunities for meaningful public participation, and the extent to which policymakers take citizens' interests into account as poor or very poor.

These perceptions are also reflected in attitudes toward specific policy measures. Where trust is low and people feel insufficiently informed, government initiatives tend to receive more critical evaluations. For example, people in Germany with low trust in the federal government or who feel poorly informed view the Special Fund for Infrastructure and Climate Neutrality particularly negatively. Overall, the overwhelming majority of the public (85%) report feeling poorly informed, or somewhat poorly informed, about the fund.

5. Pathways forward: Tangible benefits, a fair distribution of costs, stronger public participation, and greater emphasis on economic opportunities

The findings also point to several potential levers for countering growing public skepticism. One promising approach is to strengthen public participation in the energy transition. Local renewable energy projects already enjoy majority support: More than half of people polled in Germany (58%) support the construction of wind turbines near residential areas, while more than two-thirds (69%) support ground-mounted solar installations. Among those who currently oppose nearby wind turbines, about one-third say they could be persuaded to support them if local residents were offered meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making or share in the financial benefits. Another promising strategy is to place greater emphasis on the economic opportunities associated with the transition. When asked about the impact of the energy transition on their own jobs, people in Germany are evenly divided, with roughly one-third expecting positive effects and one-third expecting negative effects (30% each). The findings suggest that successful transformation policies must integrate meaningful opportunities for procedural and financial participation with economically viable solutions. Doing so can help ensure that the costs and benefits of the transition are distributed more fairly and strengthen public support for the changes ahead.

Publishing Information

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Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Phone +49 5241 81-0
www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

A collaboration between

| BertelsmannStiftung

Anne Meisiek
Luisa Schulze Marquarding
Miriam Körfer



Jean-Henri Huttarsch
Benita Ebersbach
Dr. Franziska Mey

Contact

team@soziales-nachhaltigkeitsbarometer.de



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Barometer



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