



# **Diversity Barometer 2025**

On the state of living together in Germany

## Key findings in brief

Social diversity is the German reality, and yet the cohesion of this lived diversity is increasingly under pressure: A rapid succession of crises has worn down the population, in cases even leaving them entirely overwhelmed. The economic downturn is fueling fears of loss and popularizing protectionism, not least toward ‘foreigners’, while some are left feeling uncomfortable by the mounting individualization and visibility of some formerly marginalized groups.

All this is not without consequences. While diversity remains broadly accepted, said acceptance is declining while social polarization is on the up. Deeply entrenched divides are increasingly visible between different groups, particularly when it comes to the recognition of ethnic and religious diversity as well as different sexual orientations. Nonetheless, there are ways to interrupt this erosion of social cohesion, namely through coming together, dialogue, and shared learning. All these are the findings of the representative study Diversity Barometer 2025 carried out by the Robert Bosch Stiftung. The study surveyed 4,761 German residents aged 16 and older about their opinions on and acceptance of various dimensions of social diversity. By comparing the data with that from the Diversity Barometer 2019, it is also possible to trace how the landscape has changed between 2019 and 2025.

### **There is less acceptance for diversity in Germany in 2025 than in 2019**

According to the overall diversity index, which is based on a scale of 0 to 100, the mean value for the acceptance of diversity in Germany currently stands at 63 points, well above the scale’s midpoint of 50. At the same time, this value has fallen by five points compared to 2019, when the overall diversity index for Germany was 68 points.

### **The German federal states are converging in their acceptance of diversity**

In a comparison of the German federal states, Schleswig-Holstein scores highest with 65 points and forms the leading group together with North Rhine-Westphalia, Saarland, and Hamburg. Lower Saxony, Bremen, Berlin, Bavaria, Rhineland-Palatinate, Hesse, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, and Baden-Württemberg occupy the broad middle of the field and are all extremely close to each other, separated by a maximum of one point on the scale. Bringing up the rear are Thuringia, Saxony, and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with 59 points.

This is certainly a different picture from 2019, when the scores of some of the individual federal states were notably differentiated (by as much as 10 points) and there was a clear west-east divide. This is no longer the case, with the scores of the western German states converging with those in the east. That said, it is still possible to identify a geographical pattern for the dimensions of ethnic origin and religion, where there remains a clear west-east divide, with the eastern German states coming in at the bottom of the scale.

**Disability and gender score highly on acceptance, with ethnic origin and religion trailing behind**

Acceptance of diversity has dropped significantly across four of the seven dimensions taken into account in the study. Nationwide, the dimension of disability achieved the highest acceptance ratings in both 2019 and 2025, remaining stable over this period (2019: 83 points / 2025: 82 points). Similarly, the dimension of gender also enjoys strong social acceptance. Compared to 2019 (69 points), it has risen almost 6 points on the scale, now standing at 74. By contrast, the dimension of sexual orientation has dropped a full 8 points, slipping from second to fourth place (2019: 77 points / 2025: 69 points). The dimension of age has remained unchanged over this period and scores in third place (2019: 70 points / 2025: 71 points).

The most drastic fall in points was seen in the dimension of ethnic origin. It slipped from third to fifth place in the period under review and lost substantial approval with a drop of 17 points (2019: 73 points / 2025: 56 points). Both acceptance of low socio-economic standing (2019: 58 points / 2025: 52 points) and, above all, of religion and religious diversity (2019: 44 points / 2025: 34 points) remain weak throughout Germany. Compared to 2019, both dimensions have seen a significant reduction in the number of points scored.

**There is a link between the marked rejection of religion and Islamophobia in Germany**

The loss of support is particularly striking for the dimension of religion. Scoring an average of just 34 points across the country, the rating leaves little doubt that there is a lack of acceptance of religion among the population. While the dimension measures general attitudes toward all religion, it is not unreasonable to assume that Islam, in particular, is meant here. Analyses of the two studies suggest that rejection of Islam is present in Germany – even if hidden. The respondents reject practicing Muslims in their neighborhood and in their own family as vehemently as they do the topic of religion in general. However, this is not the case for practicing Christians or Jews.

### **Society is increasingly characterized by polarization and the divides between social groups are deepening**

Response analysis indicates three groups of respondents with similar answers. Around half of those surveyed are advocates for diversity (from here on: cosmopolitans). This group scores 73 points on the overall diversity index and is therefore more accepting of diversity than the average population and certainly than the other two groups. This group predominantly comprises women, both younger and older people, and those from western Germany; 27 percent come from a migrant background. Politically, this group tends to be left-wing and is characterized by a high level of empathy.

The remaining two groups together account for the other half of respondents and are (highly) critical of diversity in general. Protectionists make up 22 percent of respondents and score 56 points on the overall diversity index. This group is particularly unaccepting of those of low socio-economic status as well as ethnic and religious diversity. They include the lowest proportion of people with a migrant background and a higher than average number live in eastern Germany. The relative majority vote for the AfD party. Additionally, the group is characterized by a high level of wealth protectionism.

The final 27 percent of respondents can be described as diversity-skeptics, scoring 52 points on the overall diversity index. This group is largely comprised of young men, 43 percent of whom have a migrant background. They strongly reject all the dimensions of diversity with the exception of ethnic origin and religion. Almost half of this group describe themselves as religious and a good 30 percent of the group vote for the AfD.

Accordingly, the study reveals a gap of some 17 points between those who favor diversity and the two clusters who criticize or even reject diversity entirely. This indicates a clear polarization. This division between these different social groups is particularly striking for the dimensions of ethnic diversity, religion, and especially sexual orientation (where there is a 54-point difference between the cosmopolitans and the diversity-skeptics).

### **Potential action points for policymakers, civil society, and the media**

Against such a backdrop, it is all the more urgent that policymakers, civil society, and the media work together to bridge social divisions and strengthen cohesion in a diverse society. Rather than an end in itself, this is a fundamental prerequisite for building a resilient society capable of withstanding crisis. In light of the results of the study, the Robert Bosch Stiftung proposes the following measures as necessary to achieve this:

### **Facilitating coming together and dialogue, and sharing knowledge**

The Diversity Barometer 2025 essentially confirms the contact hypothesis, which suggests that people are more open to other groups when they have already come into contact with them. This makes it vital to create spaces for these people to come together, even if this is time-consuming and costly. This is because coming together fosters both a sense of solidarity and greater acceptance of diversity. Neighborhoods or districts are ideally situated for this, as places where very different people meet every day and acceptance of diversity can be lived and learned.

There is a particular need for both interfaith dialogue as well as exchange between religious and non-religious people. The study indicates widespread rejection of religion more generally in society, a phenomenon likely grounded, at least in part, in ignorance and the resulting stereotypes surrounding different religions and their followers. Furthermore, in the eastern German federal states at least, non-religious socialization continues to play an impactful role to this day. As such, any instances of different people coming together in dialogue should also include reliable information on religious and cultural traditions. This kind of educational and awareness-raising work requires the appropriate local contacts and experts, a task for both local government administration and civil society.

### **Strengthening democracy and defending values**

The study not only reveals social stratification, particularly with regard to the acceptance of different sexual orientations and ethnic and religious diversity, but it also evidences bias in favor of illiberal attitudes in some sections of the population. These attitudes conflict with some of the rights guaranteed in the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, such as the right to free development of personality, to equality and freedom of religion, but also freedom of movement and asylum.

Against this backdrop, it is absolutely essential that society as a whole stands up for democratic values, promotes tolerance, and steps up efforts to combat all types of discrimination, whether racial, islamophobic, homophobic, or transphobic. Empathy has a central role to play here; it is important to recognize that empathy is not necessarily innate and can instead be learned.

Where calls to action alone fail to hit the mark, the state has a duty to use the means at its disposal to defend democracy and the rule of law. Those who show themselves to be intolerant and reject general social values should not be allowed to rest on their naively constructed laurels of self-tolerance.

### **Recognizing and valuing individual circumstances and achievements**

The Diversity Barometer 2025 reveals that a significant proportion of the population takes a protectionist approach to wealth. To attribute this unwillingness to share economic success to a lack of empathy alone, however, falls short of the mark, with the data instead pointing to concerns about economic and social decline. This, in turn, results in a defensiveness in the face of social groups who appear to be in competition for limited resources, namely those of low socio-economic status, refugees, and immigrants.

It seems hardly coincidental that this feeling is particularly widespread in eastern Germany. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germans from the former East have experienced loss, fundamental upheaval, and a new beginning at an undeniably personal level. At the same time, this transition has rarely been afforded the recognition it deserves. For people to coexist in a diverse society, it is therefore essential first to acknowledge such individual life circumstances and achievements, and second to value these more highly. It is not enough for politicians to remember this fact conveniently for their soapbox speeches: It should be widely expressed. Similarly, (western) German citizens should more critically examine their own biases and opinions. This is the only way to circumvent debates fueled by envy and struggles for (perceived) scarce resources, which both inevitably lead only to the further erosion of cohesion.

### **Taking responsibility and bringing people together instead of fueling division**

For some time now, the discussion of diversity has been polarized, with some politicians and media outlets only fanning the flames. Whether this is done in an attempt to raise their profile or is a matter of true conviction is not always clear. What is clear, however, is that their rhetoric, their simplifications, generalizations, and prejudices against individual groups are seeing them catalyze social division.

Their role should in fact be the opposite: to bring people together. That is achieved by dialing down the rhetoric and stopping this habit of lumping entire groups together in sweeping generalizations – like the narratives that paint those in receipt of state benefits as ‘lazy’ and ‘work-shy’. Politicians and the media have a responsibility to use their mandate and their reach to explain, de-escalate, and differentiate.

### **About the study**

The Robert Bosch Stiftung’s Diversity Barometer is a representative survey on the topics of social diversity and coexistence in Germany. It provides data on respondents’ attitudes to different dimensions of diversity, such

as age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, low socio-economic standing, ethnic origin, and religion. The data collected as part of the Diversity Barometer is also compiled into an overall diversity index, which provides information on the degree to which diversity meets with acceptance at both national level and in the individual federal states.

This study uses data from two nationwide surveys. The most recent survey dates from 2025, when 4,761 German-speaking people aged 16 and older were surveyed online in May of that year. Of this number, 1,074 had a migrant background. These results were compared with those from the Diversity Barometer 2019, which saw a total of 2,937 people take part in a representative telephone survey in early summer 2018. The authors carried out a weighting process to ensure comparability between the datasets from both years.

Diversity is a fact of our society. At the same time, the public discourse about the importance of increasing diversity for social processes and social cohesion is mostly based on conjecture. This project from the Robert Bosch Stiftung therefore aims to de-emotionalize the debate on cohesion in a diverse society and to contribute to the discussion with data-based findings.

**Published by**

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**About the Robert Bosch Stiftung**

The Robert Bosch Stiftung is active in the areas of health, education, and global issues. Through its funding, the Foundation works for a just and sustainable future. It is non-profit, independent and non-partisan and is rooted in the legacy of Robert Bosch. In his legacy, the entrepreneur and founder formulated the dual mission of securing the company's future and continuing his social commitment. The Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH maintains its own facilities, develops innovative projects, and provides support at both the international and local level. The Foundation contributes findings from these projects to the professional world and public debate.