

Actually European!? 2021

Citizen expectations of the next German government's EU policy

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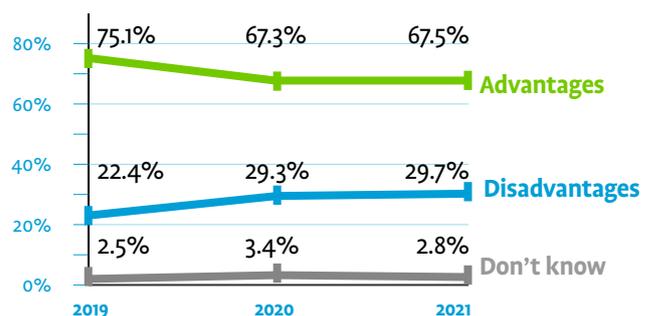
As the general elections in Germany draw nearer, Angela Merkel's time as Chancellor, and thus an era of German EU policy-making, is coming to an end. A new German government will step onto the EU policy stage – mere months after a united response to the Covid-19 crisis was found in the shape of the EU Recovery Fund, but also after criticism was levied at the EU for its vaccine procurement strategy. This year's "Actually European!?" study examines the expectations that citizens have of the next German government's EU policy. Moreover, the long-term study, now in its third year, surveys what Germans perceive to be the country's role within the EU.

THE MOST RELEVANT FINDINGS OF THE REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY¹

- EU approval during the Covid-19 crisis remains stable:** 67.5% of Germans regard EU membership to be more beneficial with 29.7% seeing it as more detrimental. The responses reveal that virtually nothing has changed compared to last year. Germans believe that the EU brings political and economic benefits: almost 60.0% of the respondents stated that Germany is more likely to achieve its policy goals through the EU. 53.3% are of the opinion that the benefits of EU membership outweigh the costs in purely economic terms. Compared with 2020, these percentages have dipped slightly, which may well be due to the issues surrounding the procurement of vaccines and the overall poorer economic situation among other factors.

¹ The opinion research company Civey conducted an online survey of 5,000 people for this study in May 2021. The findings are representative of the German population aged 18 and over. The questionnaire was developed, among other things, on the basis of feedback from focus groups held in 2019. The statistical error is 2.5%.

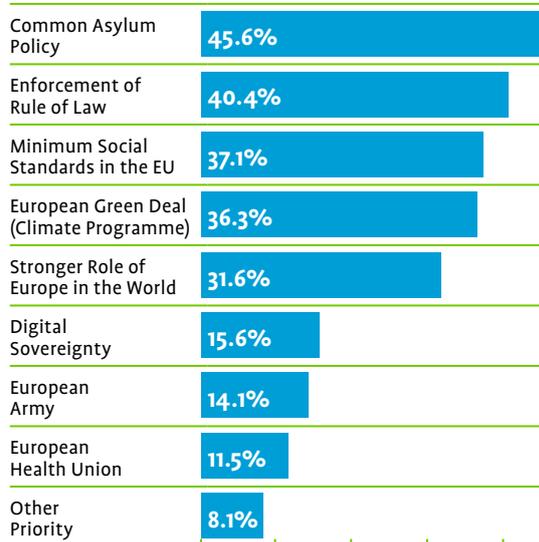
Does EU membership bring Germany more advantages or disadvantages?



- Germany's active and cooperative role:** 63.4% of respondents consider the recent actions of the German government within the EU to be cooperative and 53.3% to be active – these percentages have increased compared to last year. Two-thirds of Germans would like Germany to continue its active and cooperative role within the EU in the future.

- Discord on shared debts in the future:** 47.2% oppose the idea of collective borrowing among the EU member states in the future – 45.4% stated that this should be a theoretical option. Along party lines, the majority of Greens, SPD and Linke supporters said that they would be in favour of such an option, whilst the majority of those supporting the CDU/CSU, FDP and AfD oppose such a move. A narrow majority (52.0%) see Germany’s financial contribution to the EU budget as being too high. That being said, 94.3% are in favour of Germany and its EU partners jointly investing in specific areas, above all innovation/research (52.0%), climate and environmental protection (47.4%) as well as social safeguards (36.0%).
- Next German government’s EU policy priorities:** Respondents see the most urgent priorities of EU policy in the common asylum policy (45.6%), the enforcement of the rule of law within the EU (40.4%) and the introduction of minimum social standards across the EU (37.1%).

What should be the main priorities of the next German government’s EU policy? (Max. 3 answers)



- Broad support for majority decisions:** 81.2% of Germans are in favour of the European Council taking more decisions by majority vote instead of unanimity in the future, only 14.7% are against.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE NEXT GERMAN GOVERNMENT

The study frames the following three areas based on the input of those surveyed:

- Active and united EU policy also post-corona:** The Covid-19 crisis caused the German government to make the unique move of committing to supporting EU collective borrowing as a means of financing investments designed to lead Europe out of the crisis. The survey revealed that Germans welcome their government adopting and continuing this active and cooperative approach. Those surveyed hope that the German government will take on a formative role, especially on major issues including asylum policy, rule of law, and common social standards.
- Honest debate on fiscal union:** Last year, a majority of Germans endorsed collective borrowing as a means of overcoming the Covid-19 crisis. Respondents were divided when asked whether the option of collective borrowing should, in principle, remain on the table in the future. In light of the fact that – given the socio-ecological transformation – the need for investment will not end and that people perceive social cohesion within the EU as being a high priority, the next German government should initiate an honest, fact-based debate on fiscal policy free from any traditional distortions (“transfer union”) and myths (“Germany assumes liability for every other member state”).
- Agency through decision-making capacity:** The climate crisis, global migration, digitalisation and the next health crisis are challenges that Europe can only master if it retains agency. The European Council is frequently blocked due to vetoes from individual countries, given the principle of unanimity. Therefore, the German government should campaign for an expansion of majority voting. The principle of majority rule should be tied to the European Parliament’s co-decision procedure to ensure that European democracy as a whole is strengthened. This is also what the “Conference on the Future of Europe” is about, at which the German government should advocate broad and effective citizen participation.