

WEIZENBAUM REPORT 2026

Political Participation in Germany

W Weizenbaum Report 2026

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The Weizenbaum Report 2026 'Political Participation in Germany' was funded by the by the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) and the State of Berlin (funding code 16DII141 – German Internet Institute). The data collection took place in collaboration with the Freie Universität Berlin.

Berlin, April 2026

DOI 10.34669/wi.wr/7.1

ISSN 2748-9302

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Design

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II Political participation in Germany 2025

The political climate in 2025 was marked by major international conflicts, such as the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza, which escalated following Donald Trump's second inauguration as president of the United States of America. With regard to German domestic politics, the year was influenced by new federal elections at the beginning of the year and the subsequent formation of a government by the CDU/CSU and SPD under the leadership of Chancellor Friedrich Merz, as well as the ensuing debates over numerous political reform initiatives in the areas of immigration, climate protection, transportation, health care, and the pension system.

This year, many political debates were linked to developments in digital media and artificial intelligence (AI). In the wake of the first radical policy measures introduced by the Trump administration in the U.S., there were intense discussions about Germany's and Europe's dependence on the U.S. and, to some extent, China in the field of digital technologies.

The annual surveys conducted by the Weizenbaum Panel focus on how people in Germany use and assess digital technologies, as well as the forms and contexts in which they engage socially and politically through these services and in real life. This longitudinal study aims to observe long-term trends in digital media use, civic engagement, and experiences with various phenomena of digitalization, to provide data for scientific analysis, and to serve as an early warning system for emerging trends. In doing so, it helps society safeguard civic self-determination in an environment increasingly shaped by digital technologies and AI, while also facilitating the development of solutions to these threats.

The seventh survey since 2019 focused on citizens' use of political media (pp. 6–7), their attitudes towards digitalization and their trust in the media (pp. 8–10), their ideas about civic engagement (pp. 10–13) and their political and social engagement. Participants' moral and civic courage in the digital sphere (pp. 14–21) was also assessed. In light of the ongoing debates surrounding physical and verbal violence against politicians, the report also examines the consequences of this phenomenon for political participation (pp. 21–23).

The annual Weizenbaum Report presents selected findings from the representative telephone survey. More information on the Weizenbaum Panel, the methodological details of the surveys as well as all previous reports and additional publications are available online at: <https://panel.weizenbaum-institut.de/en/>

\\ Main findings

1 *Social media is increasingly shaping news consumption*

- \ The internet is an established source of news and political content. In particular, the importance of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as video platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, continues to grow.
- \ The variety of media used regularly has been declining since 2021. This is due to the shrinking importance of print newspapers and magazines and an increasing tendency to avoid the news.

2 *Positive trend in attitudes toward AI, media trust remains stable*

- \ The proportion of people who view artificial intelligence positively continues to rise: from 27 percent in 2023 to 37 percent in 2025. This trend is particularly pronounced among demographic groups that were previously more skeptical of AI.
- \ After a noticeable decline between 2020 and 2023, trust in established media remains robust at 49 percent. This is evident from a comparison with earlier surveys conducted as part of the Long-term Study on Media Trust.

3 *Clear expectations regarding the behavior of citizens online*

- \ Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Germans' expectations of what constitutes good citizenship have waned. They have remained at a stable, albeit lower, level ever since.
- \ In addition to traditional citizenship norms, "discursive norms" for the internet have established. These include engaging in discourse, carefully selecting information, and expressing one's own political views.

4 *Civic engagement is on the rise—Digital divides persist*

- \ Citizens in Germany are more committed than ever to democratic coexistence: donations, volunteer work, political consumption, and the mobilization of others are on the rise.
- \ Online forms of participation are more popular among highly educated people and younger adults than among other citizens. Women tend to be more reserved when it comes to publicly visible forms of participation, such as commenting on political content.

5 *More citizens find themselves exposed to misinformation*

- \ More and more people are encountering misinformation online, but more people are also taking action against it. This suggests that the public is becoming increasingly aware of the issue in the age of generative AI and deepfakes.
- \ Online hate and misinformation are a daily reality, especially for younger people: nearly 90 percent of those under 30 reported experiencing this in 2025. Different generations respond to it differently: younger people are more likely to report hate and misinformation to the platforms, while older people tend to intervene.

6 *High levels of perceived violence against politicians and concerns about democracy*

- \ The majority of Germans believe that democracy in the country is under threat in light of violence against politicians.
- \ People who perceived violence against politicians as widespread in 2025 were more likely to have demonstrated, contacted politicians, and signed petitions.

II About this study

Since 2019, the Weizenbaum Institute, in collaboration with Freie Universität Berlin, conducts an annual scientific telephone survey of the population in Germany between October and December, covering topics such as internet use, democratic attitudes and political participation. The study is designed as a panel survey, i.e. the same people are interviewed each year, if possible. This approach allows for a detailed observation and description of the political attitudes and activities of people in Germany over time.

This survey was conducted for the seventh time in fall 2025. A total of 1,740¹ people were surveyed by telephone, around 73 percent of whom had already participated in the previous year. The newly recruited respondents were selected at random from the German-speaking population in Germany aged 16 and older.² During the telephone interviews, which lasted around 30 minutes on average, the participants were asked how they gather information about political issues, what they think about democracy, and how they engage politically.

In addition, this year's report pays special attention to threats and violence against politicians in Germany, a topic that was first included in the report the previous year. This part of the study was conducted in collaboration with Anna Hahnemann, Dr. Anne-Kathrin Kreft, and Dr. Farina Rühls from the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony in Hanover, who also wrote the corresponding chapter in this report. Of particular interest was how the general perception of violence against politicians and the related threat to democracy is linked to political participation in Germany.

The survey was conducted in the telephone studio of the Freie Universität Berlin. The following report provides a brief overview of the key findings of the 2025 survey and the changes compared to previous years, 2019 to 2024. Further information, all questionnaires and field reports, as well as a detailed explanation of the methodology, can be found here: <https://panel.weizenbaum-institut.de/en/ressources/>

1 All distributions reported here and below are weighted to account for sampling bias and ensure representative results for the German population. Data for all years since 2019 were weighted according to the highest level of education attained, in accordance with the Microcensus of the Federal Statistical Office. Additionally, in the data for 2024 and 2025, the proportions of the newly recruited respondents conducted to compensate for panel mortality are weighted (to a ratio of panelists to newly recruited respondents of 55 to 45). Since this weighting was introduced for the first time this year, there may be minor deviations from the figures of 2024 reported in the Weizenbaum Report 2025.

2 In surveys based on samples of the general population, conclusions about the population as a whole are subject to a certain degree of uncertainty due to random effects in sampling. In this case, the uncertainty averages approximately +/- 3 percentage points. Reading example: If the value determined in the sample is 85 percent, the actual value in the population as a whole (with a probability of 95 %) is between 82 and 88 percent.

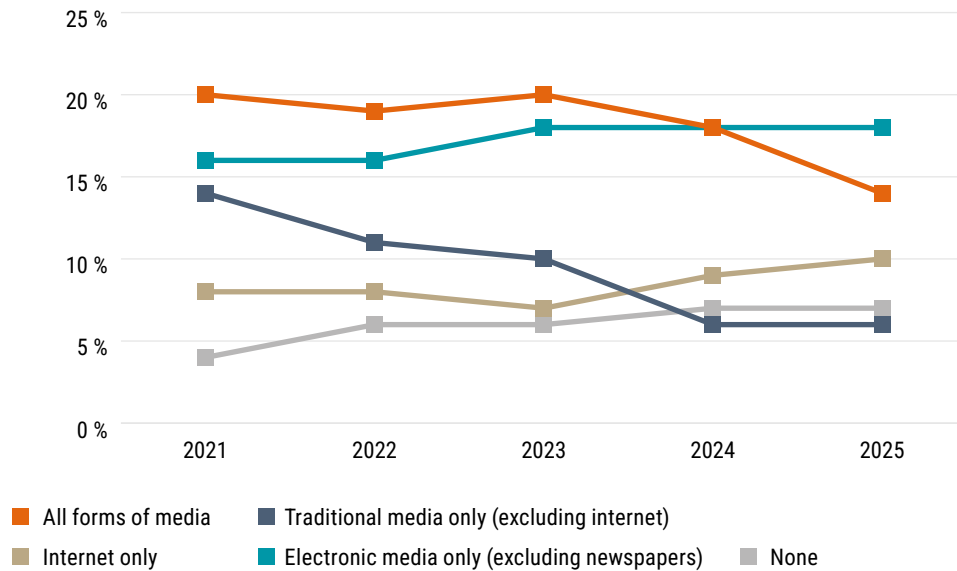
\ Video-based media increasingly important for political information

The internet has now become an established source of information for news and political content: Two thirds of the population regularly access information online—that is, daily or several times a week. The importance of social media continues to grow in people’s individual media repertoires: By 2025, social networks such as Instagram or Facebook are used regularly by 36 percent (2021: 31 %), and video platforms such as YouTube or TikTok by as many as 47 percent (2021: 41 %).

When looking not only at people’s use of individual media but at the overall range of media, it becomes clear that the variety of media in use is declining slightly: While in 2021, people in Germany used an average of 2.5 of the four media formats surveyed for political information—print, television, radio, and the internet—, that figure has dropped to 2.3 in 2025.

Nevertheless, the media repertoires from which people draw their information vary considerably: In 2025, 14 percent regularly obtained information from all available media types. This highlights the sharp decline in the importance of print media. Today, electronic media and internet sources primarily shape the media repertoires of people in Germany. Ten percent now rely exclusively on online sources for political information.

\ Repertoires of regularly used media for political information over time (2021–2025)

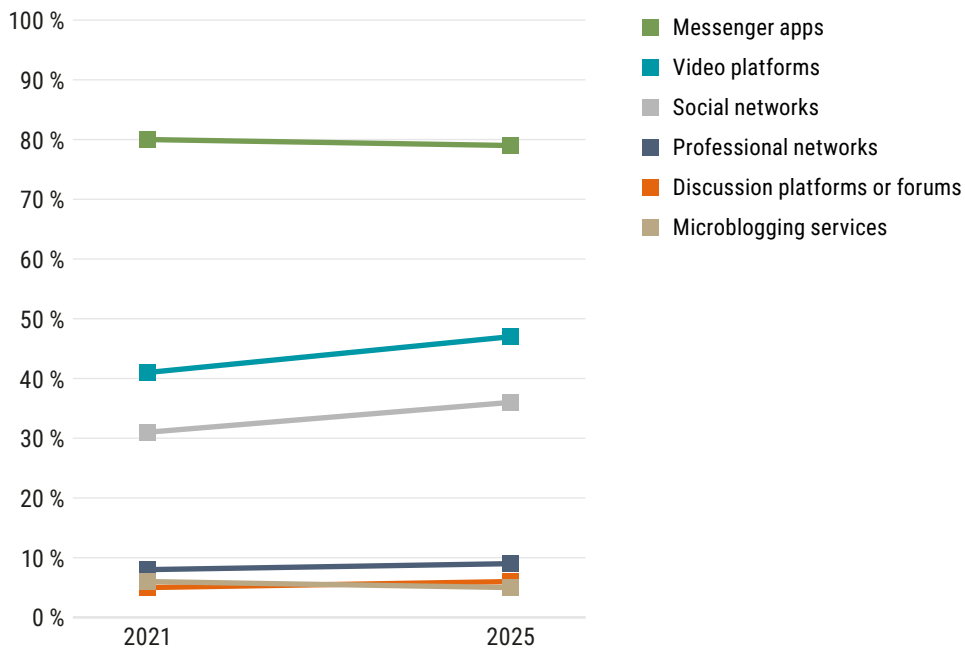


Basis: Media used for political information within the past 12 months, ‘daily’ and ‘several times a week’ combined, scale: ‘daily’, ‘several times a week’, ‘several times a month’, ‘less frequently’, ‘never’; rounded percentages, n=1,595 (2021), n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n=1,740 (2025)

At the same time, the phenomenon of news avoidance is on the rise. The proportion of people who no longer keep up with current events has nearly doubled, from four percent in 2021 to seven percent in 2025.

Behind these shifting patterns lie deeper processes of change that are also relevant to democracy. For instance, the importance of text-based content (e.g., in newspapers) is declining, while the growth of digital video platforms reflects an increasing focus on audiovisual content. This also changes how information is conveyed. An emotionalized portrayal of events is supported by easily accessible AI tools that allow for nearly unlimited manipulation of content.

\ \ Regular social media use over time (2021–2025)



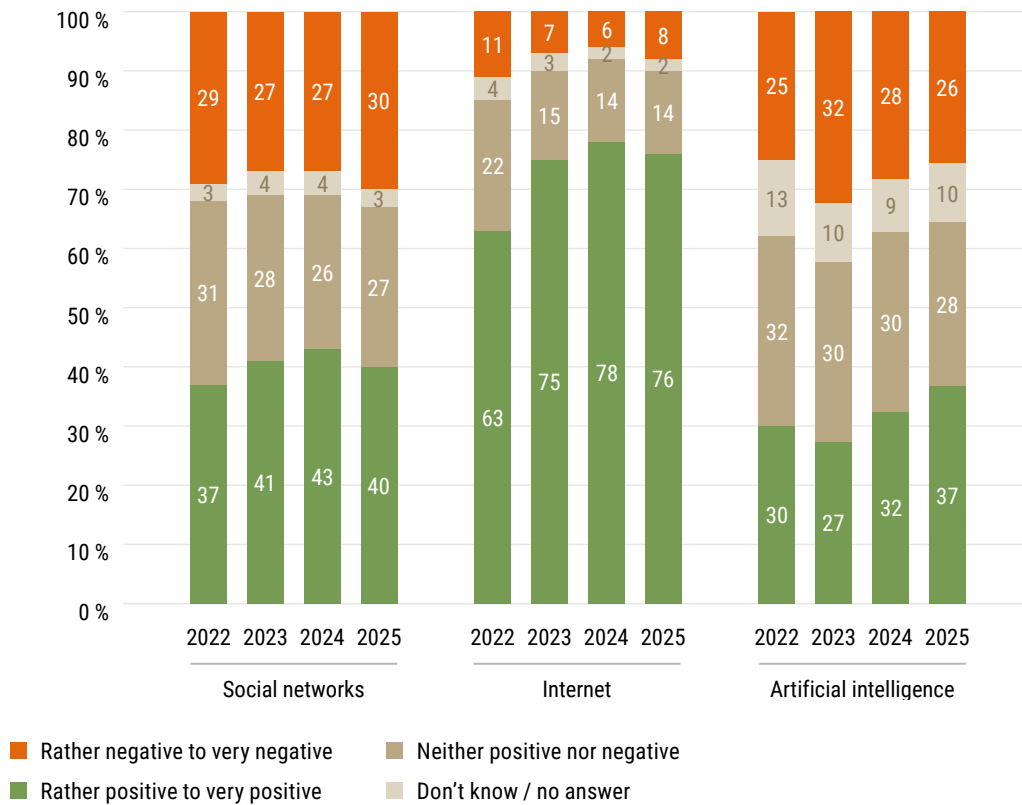
Basis: Social media used within the past 12 months, 'daily' and 'several times a week' combined, scale: 'daily', 'several times a week', 'several times a month', 'less frequently', 'never'; rounded percentages, n=1,595 (2021), n=1,740 (2025)

Positive trend in attitudes toward AI, particularly among groups that were previously more skeptical

Three years after the great success of ChatGPT and other generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications, the proportion of people with positive attitudes toward AI systems continues to rise. While 27 percent of the population had a rather to very positive view of AI in 2023, this figure has increased by a full ten percentage points to 37 percent in 2025.

Compared to the previous year, this positive trend is particularly pronounced among groups that have so far been relatively skeptical of AI, such as women (from 25 % in 2024 to 32 % in 2025), people aged 65 and older (from 25 % to 31 %), and people with lower levels of formal education (from 25 % to 33 %). These groups are slowly catching up with the rest of the population in their increasingly positive view of AI. One reason for this could be the widespread adoption of AI which is now reaching segments of the population that previously had little contact with this technology.

Attitudes of the German population towards digitalization over time (2022-2025)



Basis: 'I will name three areas of digitalization and you will tell me, how positive or negative you are evaluating these in general.', scale: 'very positive', 'rather positive', 'neither positive nor negative', 'rather negative', 'very negative'; rounded percentages, n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n=1,740 (2025)

Despite this trend, however, the existing differences between groups largely remain: As before, it is men (40 %), younger people aged 16 to 35 (46 %), as well as those with a high level of education (42 %) and high income (55 %) who view AI particularly positively.

In addition, a quarter (26 %) of the German population still views AI rather or very negatively. Another quarter (28 %) remains ambivalent toward the new technology—and one in ten respondents (10 %) was unable or unwilling to provide an assessment. Even though fairly clear trends toward a more positive view have emerged over the past few years, opinions on AI still vary significantly overall.

The situation is different when it comes to the internet, which continues to be viewed positively by the majority of the German population (76 %). The highest approval ratings are again found among people with high incomes (86 %) and high levels of education (83 %). Attitudes toward social media have hardly changed compared to last year.

Steady media trust in “truly important matters”

This year marked the first time that the Weizenbaum Panel surveyed general level of trust among the German population in the established media in Germany. To this end, the study drew on selected questions from the Long-term Study on Media Trust conducted by the Universities of Mainz and Düsseldorf³, which also collected data over the ten-year period from 2015 to 2024 using telephone surveys representative of the general population. The Weizenbaum Panel is continuing this time series for the year 2025.

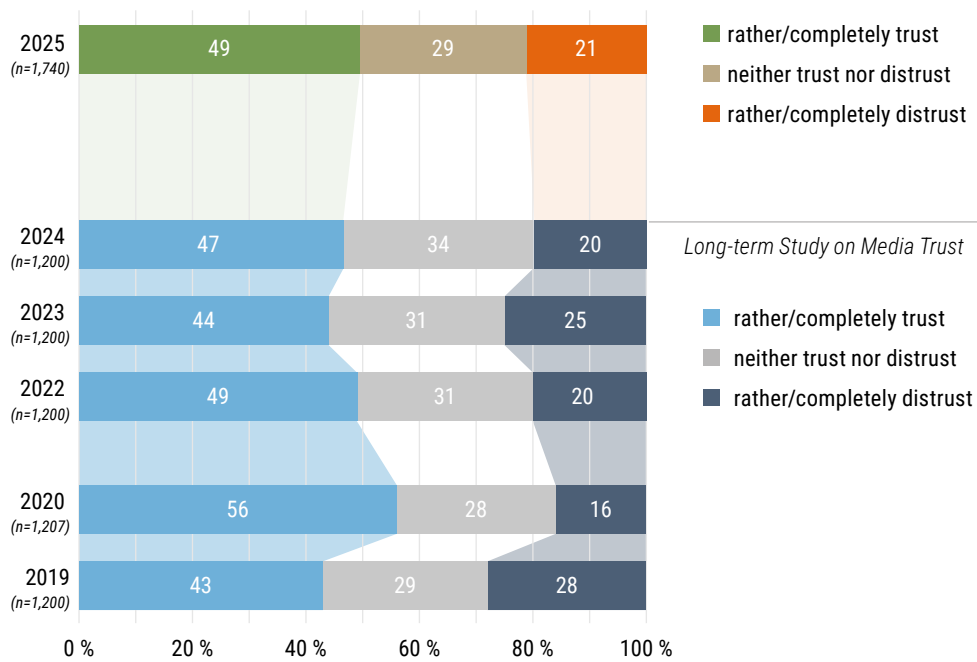
The new figures confirm the picture from last year⁴. Just under half (49 %) of the population trusts the media when it comes to “truly important issues—such as environmental problems, health risks, political scandals, and crises.” In contrast, about one fifth (21 %) stated that they do not trust the media in such matters, while 29 percent expressed ambivalence on this issue.

Although small changes between two years should be interpreted with caution due to statistical uncertainties, a slight recovery in confidence levels has been observed since 2023, following a noticeable decline in confidence between 2020 and 2023 (from 56 % to 44 %). The proportion of people who do not trust the media at all on important matters stands at six percent in 2025.

3 <https://medienvertrauen.uni-mainz.de>

4 Fawzi, N., Ziegele, M., Schultz, T., Jakob, N., Jakobs, I., Viehmann, C., Quiring, O., Schemer, C., & Stegmann, D. (2025). Stabiles Medienvertrauen auch in Zeiten politischer Umbrüche: Mainzer Langzeitstudie Medienvertrauen 2024 [Steady media trust even in times of political upheaval: The Mainz Long-Term Study on Media Trust 2024]. *Media Perspektiven*, (13), 1–20. https://www.media-perspektiven.de/fileadmin/user_upload/media-perspektiven/pdf/2025/MP_13_2025_Mainzer_Langzeitstudie_Medienvertrauen_2024.pdf

\ \ Media trust in important matters over time (2019–2025)



Basis: ‘Please think about the established media in Germany for a moment—that is, the major television networks or newspapers that most people are familiar with.’ Agreement with the statement ‘When it comes to truly important matters—such as environmental problems, health risks, political scandals, and crises—the media can be trusted’, scale: ‘strongly agree’, ‘rather agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘rather disagree’, ‘strongly disagree’; rounded percentages, 2019–2024: n=1,200–1,207 (Long-term Study on Media Trust), 2025: n=1,740 (Weizenbaum Panel); Percentages exclude ‘don’t know / no answer.’

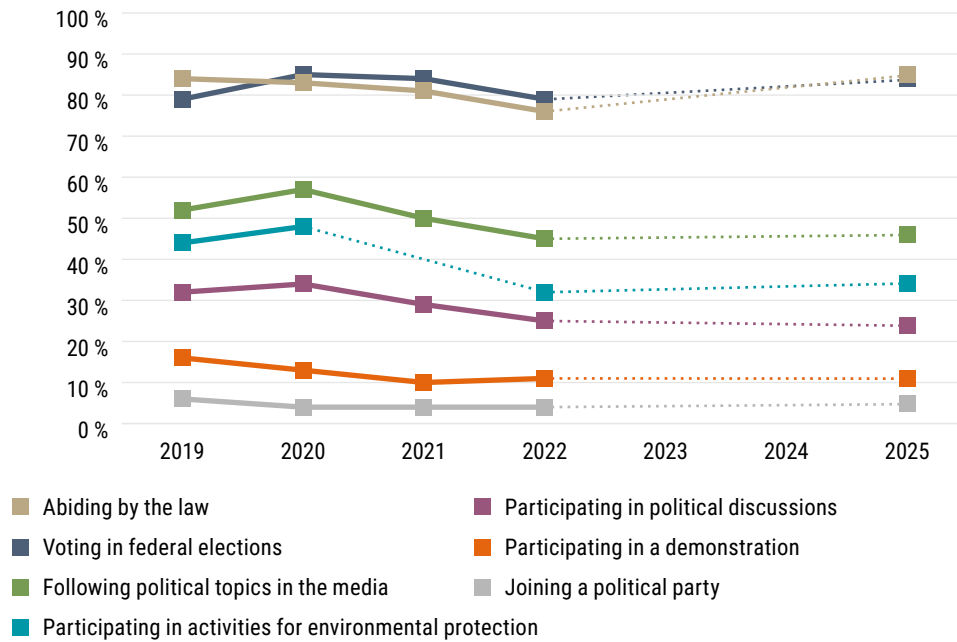
\ \ Clear expectations for citizens’ behavior in the digital space

Citizenship norms describe the prevailing ideas in society about how one should behave as a good citizen. With the rise of social media, people today have many new opportunities for civic and political engagement, which has also led to the development of new, so-called “discursive citizenship norms.”

Traditional standards of good citizenship, such as participating in activities to protect the environment (34 %) or following political issues in the media (46 %), remain important in 2025, as does participating in political discussions and demonstrations. With five percent approval, Germans consider party membership to be the least important. This suggests that one can still be a good citizen even if they are not members of a political party.

According to respondents, by far the most important behaviors are abiding by the law (85 %) and voting in federal elections (84 %). These are also the only traditional citizenship norms that have regained importance following a decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. By contrast, other notions of good citizenship have since lost some of their relevance.

\ Traditional citizenship norms over time (2019–2025)



Basis: A range of activities considered very important for good citizenship; scale: 'very important', 'rather important', 'neither important nor unimportant', 'rather unimportant', 'not important at all'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=1,194 (2022), n=1,740 (2025)

The dashed lines indicate that the citizenship norms were not surveyed in 2023 and 2024.

The citizenship norm 'Participating in activities for environmental protection' was not surveyed in 2021.

Discursive citizenship norms

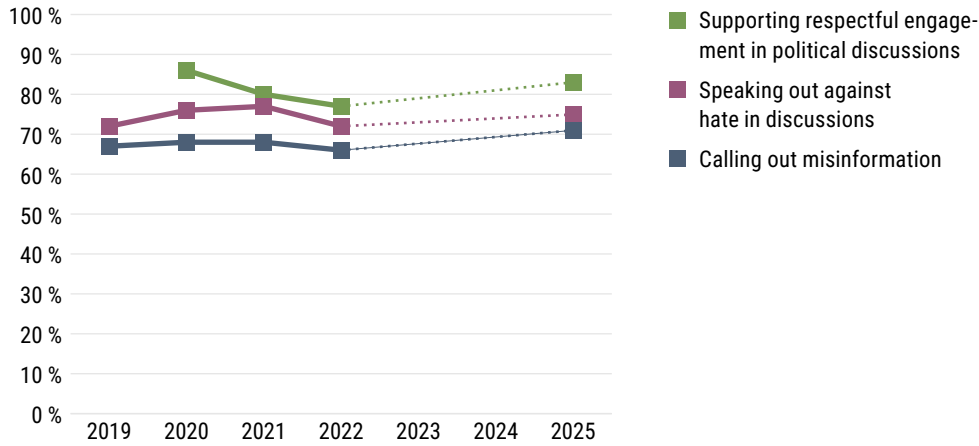
Since 2019, the Weizenbaum Panel has been investigating what good citizenship on the internet looks like from the perspective of people in Germany.⁵ Three basic types of norms can be distinguished:

Since 2022, Germans have generally placed greater importance on the *citizenship norm of discourse care*. This includes, for example, the expectation that people should call out misinformation—which 71 percent of citizens consider very important—as well as taking a stand against hate speech (75 %) and advocating for respectful interaction in discussions (83 %). A similar decline was observed previously during the COVID-19 pandemic, although it was less pronounced than in the case of traditional citizenship norms.

A comparable pattern can be observed when it comes to the *citizenship norm of individual information care*—that is, the idea that, as a good citizen, one should only obtain information from reputable sources (76 %), verify news sources (62 %), and use a variety of (reputable) sources for information (69 %).

5 Gagrčin, E., Porten-Cheé, P., Leißner, L., Emmer, M., & Jørring, L. (2022). What makes a good citizen online? The emergence of discursive citizenship norms in social media environments. *Social Media + Society*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221084297>

\ \ Discourse care norm over time (2019–2025)

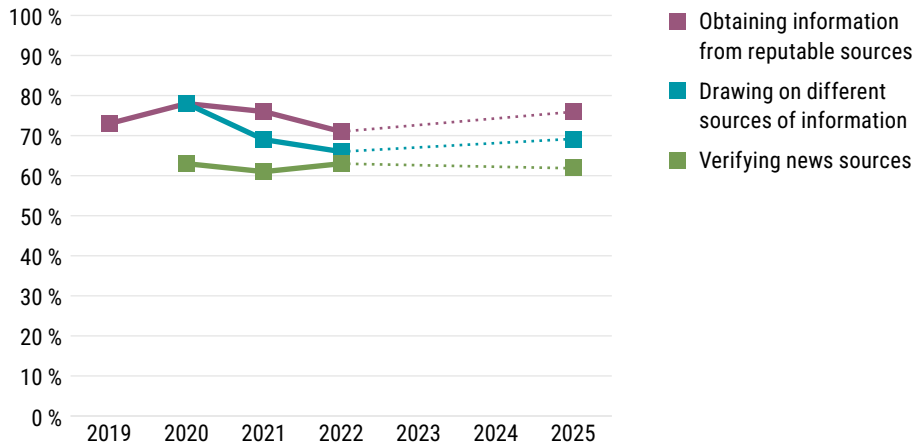


Basis: A range of activities that are considered very important for good citizenship; scale: 'very important', 'rather important', 'neither important nor unimportant', 'rather unimportant', 'not important at all'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=1,194 (2022), n=1,740 (2025)

The dashed lines indicate that the citizenship norms were not surveyed in 2023 and 2024.

The citizenship norm 'Support respectful engagement in political discussions' has only been surveyed since 2020.

\ \ Individual information care norm over time (2019–2025)

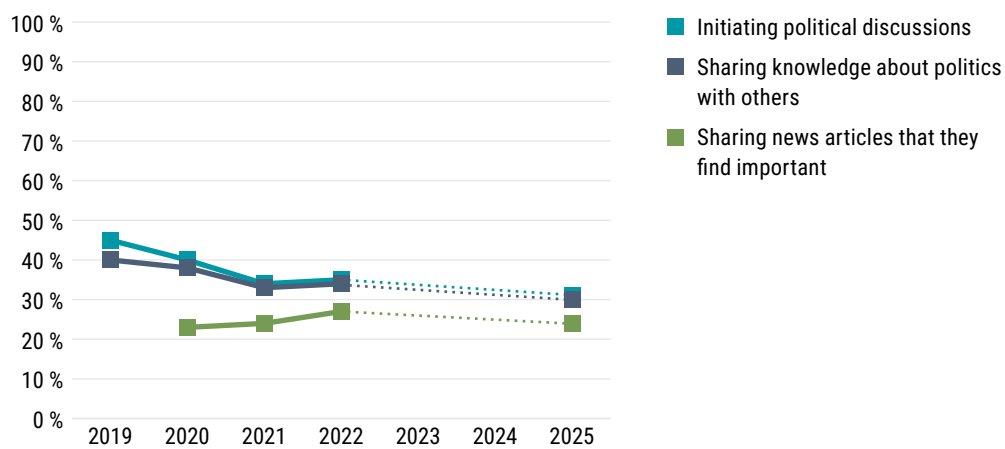


Basis: A range of activities that are considered very important for good citizenship; scale: 'very important', 'rather important', 'neither important nor unimportant', 'rather unimportant', 'not important at all'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=1,194 (2022), n=1,740 (2025)

The dashed lines indicate that the citizenship norms were not surveyed in 2023 and 2024. The citizenship norm 'Check news sources' and 'Draw on different sources of information' have only been tracked since 2020.

The *considered contribution norm* is another concept that has emerged with digital transformation. It refers to the expectation that a good citizen should actively engage in political debates and social affairs, for example by sharing political knowledge or valuable media content. With 20 to 30 percent approval among the population, this expectation is somewhat less widespread than the norms of discourse care or individual information care. Over time, it has also become apparent that, in contrast to the other two norms, the considered contribution norm tends to be regarded as less important than it was in 2022.

\\ Considered contribution norm over time (2019–2025)



Basis: A range of activities that are considered very important for good citizenship; scale: 'very important', 'rather important', 'neither important nor unimportant', 'rather unimportant', 'not important at all'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=1,194 (2022), n=1,740 (2025)

The dashed lines indicate that the citizenship norms were not surveyed in 2023 and 2024.

The citizenship norm 'Share news articles that they find important' has only been surveyed since 2020.

Overall, it is clear that traditional notions of good citizenship are now consistently complemented by expectations stemming from the experiences of digital transformation. Accordingly, a good citizen today is characterized not only by their adherence to the law and commitment to protecting the environment, but also by their efforts to combat misinformation and online hate, as well as by the careful curation of their media consumption. In addition, citizens in Germany view participation in political debates as highly desirable behavior despite it being time consuming, as it is considered valuable for a vibrant democracy and is significantly facilitated by social media.

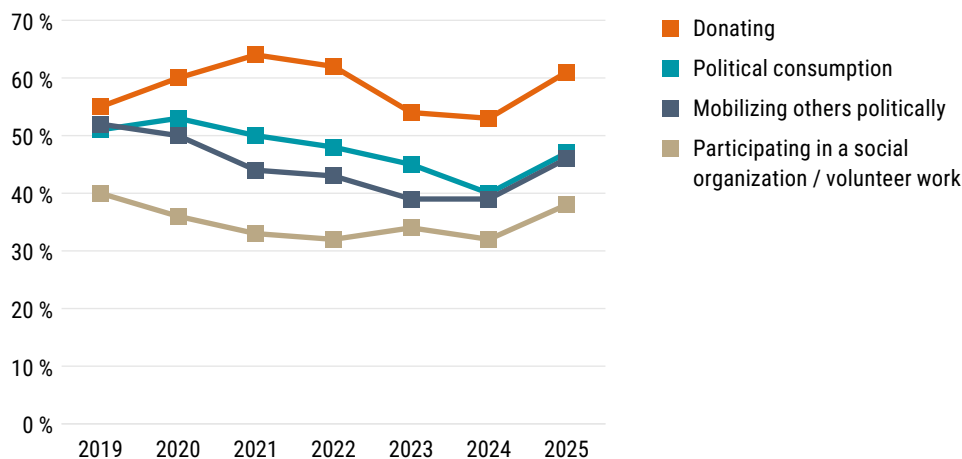
\\ Changes in political participation in Germany from 2019 to 2025

2025 was a year of civic engagement. In particular, donating money to social, political, and charitable organizations as well as volunteer work increased significantly. At 61 percent, the willingness to donate money has returned to the level before the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Volunteer work, which had declined sharply, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions on public life, has returned to a level of 38 percent.

Less conventional forms of civic engagement, such as the deliberate purchase or avoidance of certain products for political or ethical reasons (boycott and "buycott"), have also become more popular again (47 % vs. 40 % in 2024). Overall, citizens appear to be returning to a more politically engaged everyday life and social interactions. For example, there has also been an increase in the willingness to encourage fellow citizens to participate in politics (46 % vs. 39 %).

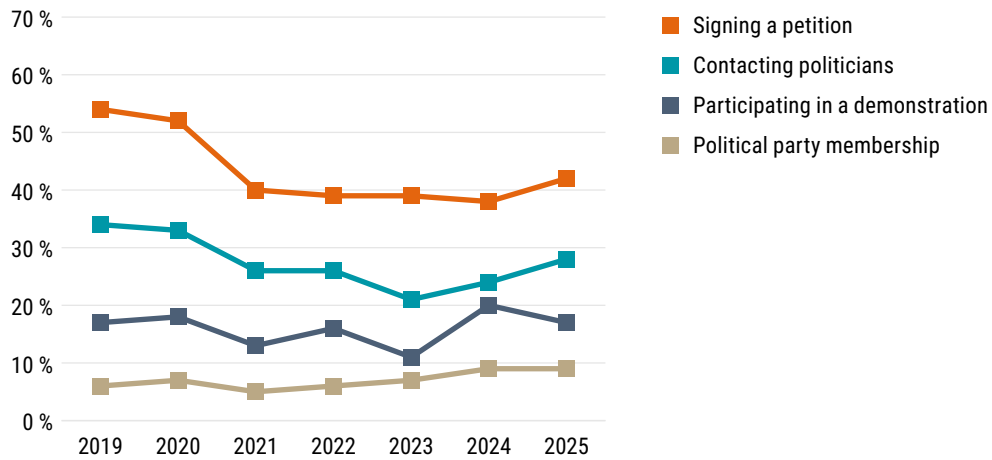
When it comes to traditional forms of political participation, the picture has remained stable over time: signing petitions (42 % vs. 24 %) and contacting politicians (28 % vs. 24 %) have been on a slight upward trend in recent years, following declines during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, party membership and participation in demonstrations have remained roughly the same.

\\ Civic engagement over time (2019–2025)



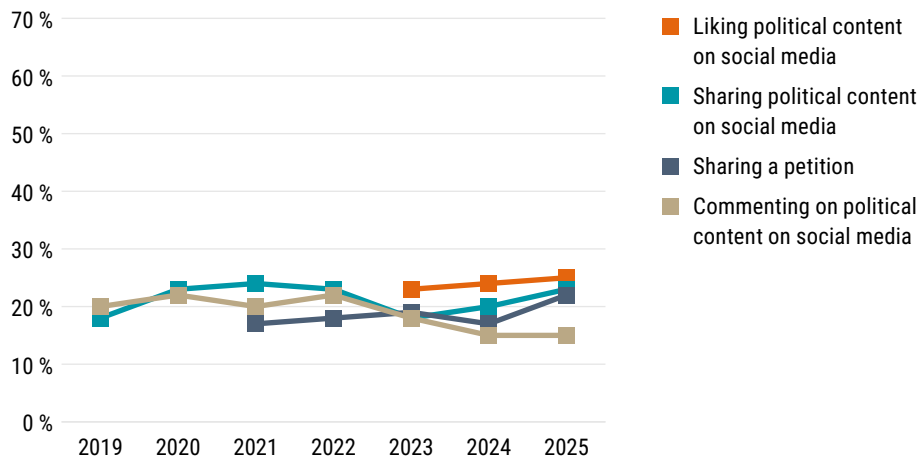
Basis: Engaged in one of the political activities within the past 12 months, scale: 'yes', 'no'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n=1,740 (2025)

\ Traditional political participation over time (2019–2025)



Basis: Engaged in one of the political activities within the past 12 months, scale: 'yes', 'no'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n=1,740 (2025)

\ Digitally networked participation over time (2019–2025)



Basis: Engaged in one of the political activities within the past 12 months, scale: 'yes', 'no'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n=1,740 (2025)

Sharing a petition has only been surveyed since 2021.

Liking politics has only been surveyed since 2023.

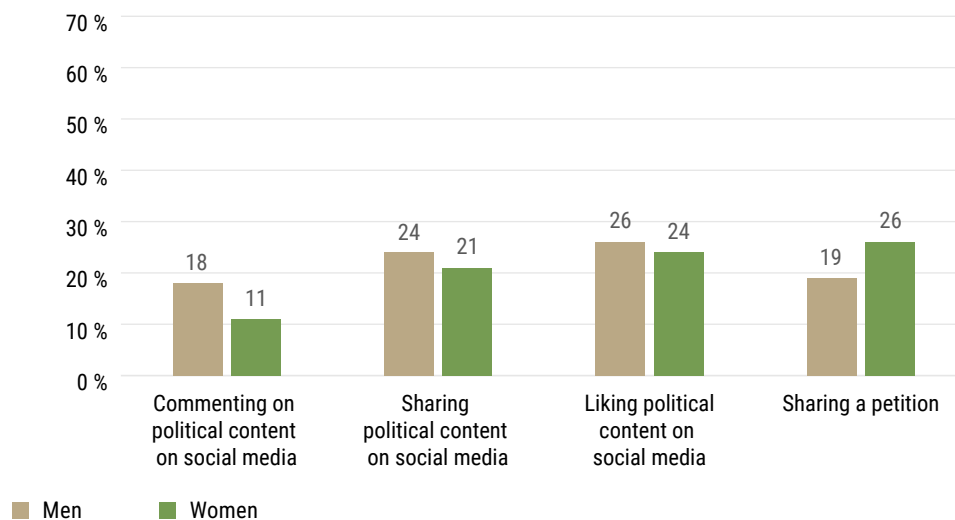
Digitally connected forms of political participation complement traditional forms of civic engagement, but remain stable at a relatively low level. These include activities such as sharing (23 %) and commenting on (15 %) political content on social media, circulating petitions (22 %), and “liking” political posts (25 %).

Social disparities in more visible forms of online political participation

Across different forms of online political participation, passive and less time-consuming activities have been more popular over the past three years than more active and visible forms. For instance, “liking” and sharing political content or petitions has remained relatively stable, while commenting on political content has declined. Commenting on political content means exposing oneself politically and becoming potentially vulnerable by expressing one’s own opinion. This particular visibility poses a hurdle that not all citizens are equally able or willing to overcome.

More men (18 %) than women (11 %) comment on political content on social media. Similarly, people with higher education qualifications (including those with a university entrance qualification) find it easier to actively participate in online political discourse than citizens with lower formal educational attainment (22 % vs. 12 %). Age also plays a role: younger people up to age 35 are more likely to comment on political content on social media than older generations (28 % vs. 13 %).

\ \ Gender differences in networked participation (2025)

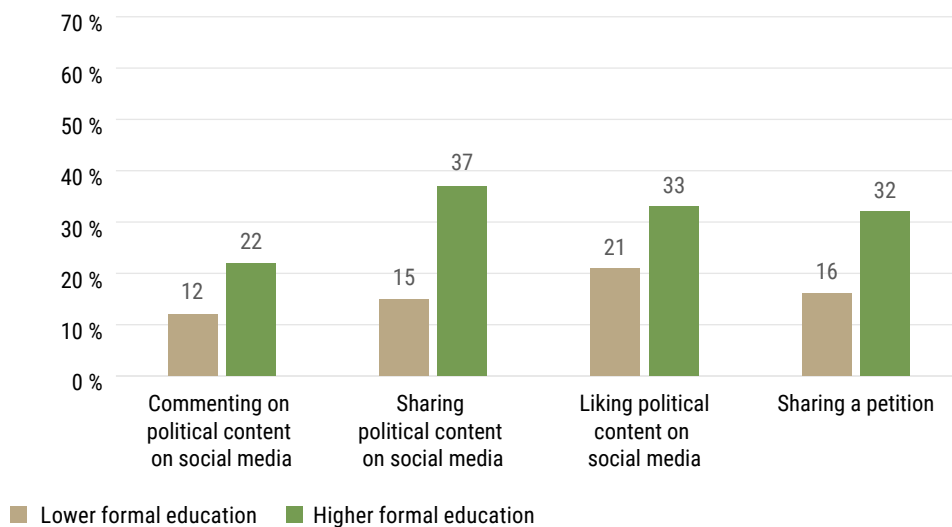


Basis: Engagement in the specified political activity within the past 12 months (scale: ‘yes’, ‘no’) as well as indication of gender (scale: ‘female’, ‘male’⁶), rounded percentages, n=1,740

While educational and age differences are evident in almost all forms of online political participation, the gender gap varies depending on the form of participation. In less visible activities such as “liking” (26 % of men, 26 % of women) or sharing political content (24 % of men, 21 % of women), gender differences are less pronounced than in more visible forms of participation such as commenting. When it comes to sharing petitions, the gender gap actually shifts in favor of women (19 % of men, 26 % of women).

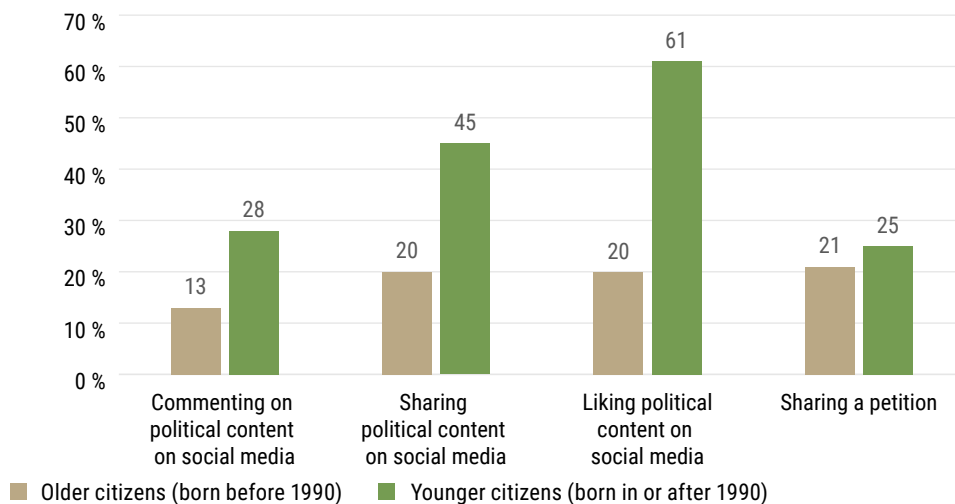
⁶ Individuals who identified their gender as “diverse” (n=5) or who did not wish to specify their gender (n=1) are not included in the analysis, which treats gender as binary.

\ Education differences in networked participation (2025)



Basis: Engagement in the specified political activity within the past 12 months (scale: 'yes', 'no') and information on the highest level of education attained (scale: 'Higher education' (university entrance qualification), 'Lower education' (students, individuals without a diploma, individuals with a secondary school diploma or equivalent qualification); rounded percentages, n=1,740 (2025)

\ Age differences in networked participation (2025)



Basis: Engagement in the specified political activity within the past 12 months (scale: 'yes', 'no') and indication of year of birth; rounded percentages, n=1,740 (2025)

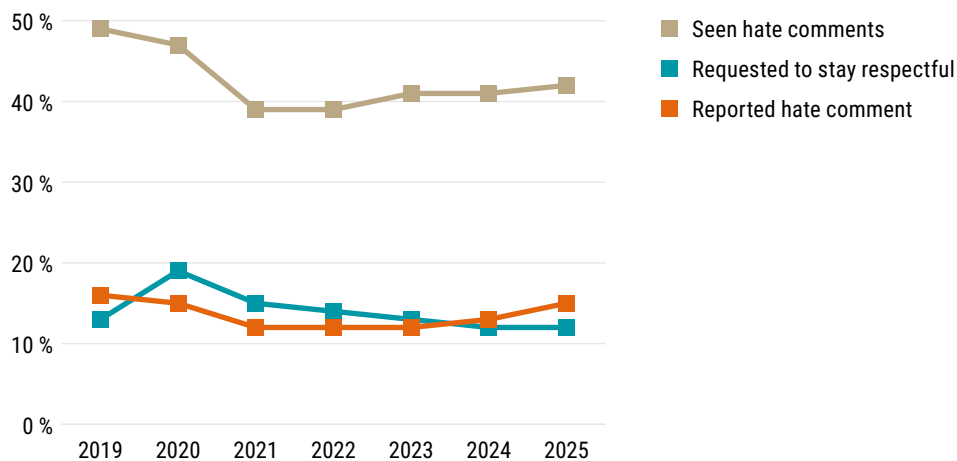
These findings suggest that traditional factors such as education and age-related (digital) socialization are substantial determinants of political participation online. The fact that gender differences vary across different forms of online activism, how-

ever, appears to be primarily linked to the factor of visibility, as other studies have also shown.⁷

\\ More people are encountering misinformation

Hate speech and misinformation online continue to be a concern for Germans: the proportion of citizens who have faced hate speech in at least one instance in 2025 remains high at 42 percent. However, this year, for the first time, hate speech was surpassed by misinformation, with 47 percent of respondents reporting exposure.

\\ Observation of and reaction to hate comments over time (2019–2025)



Basis: Observation of at least one hate comment within the past 12 months, requested to stay respectful, and reported hateful comments to the platform; scale: 'yes', 'no'; rounded percentages, n=1,298 (2019), n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n= 1,740 (2025)

The fight against hate speech and misinformation online can be seen as a new, yet well-established form of civic engagement. Citizens are also advocating online for fundamental democratic values such as the right to freedom of expression and the importance of a fact-based democratic discourse.

The significance of these new forms of digitally networked political participation is evident in their growing comparability with traditional forms of political participation. For example, one in eight respondents (12 %) reported speaking out against hateful comments (“requested to stay respectful”) in the past twelve months, and

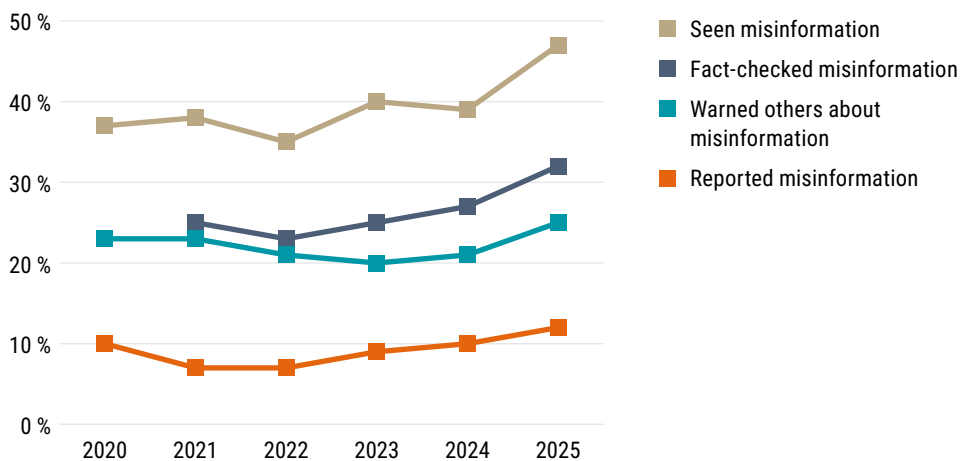
7 Bode, L. (2017). Closing the gap: Gender parity in political engagement on social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(4), 587–603. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1202302>

Coffé, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2010). Same game, different rules? Gender differences in political participation. *Sex Roles*, 62(5-6), 318–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9729-y>

one in six (15 %) reported hateful comments to platform providers. These figures are similar to those from the previous years, 2019 to 2024; only in the first year of the pandemic, 2020, was the proportion of those speaking out slightly higher at 19 per cent.

Efforts to combat misinformation online are more widespread than responses to hateful comments. At 47 percent, significantly more citizens than in previous years report having seen misinformation in the past twelve months. The increasing spread of content produced by generative AI (e.g., so-called “deepfakes”) may be contributing to citizens becoming more sensitive to this issue. At the same time, the proportion of people who actively combat the spread of misinformation by verifying the accuracy of reports (32 %), warning others about false news content (25 %), or reporting misinformation to platform providers (12 %) has also risen.

\ \ Observation of and reaction to misinformation over time (2020–2025)



Basis: Observation of at least one false message within the past 12 months, fact-checked misinformation, warned other users about misinformation, reported misinformation to the platform; scale: ‘yes’, ‘no’; rounded percentages, n=964 (2020), n=1,595 (2021), n=2,023 (2022), n=2,170 (2023), n=2,658 (2024), n=1,740 (2025)

*Misinformation and the responses to it was only surveyed since 2020..
The fact-checking of misinformation was surveyed since 2021..*

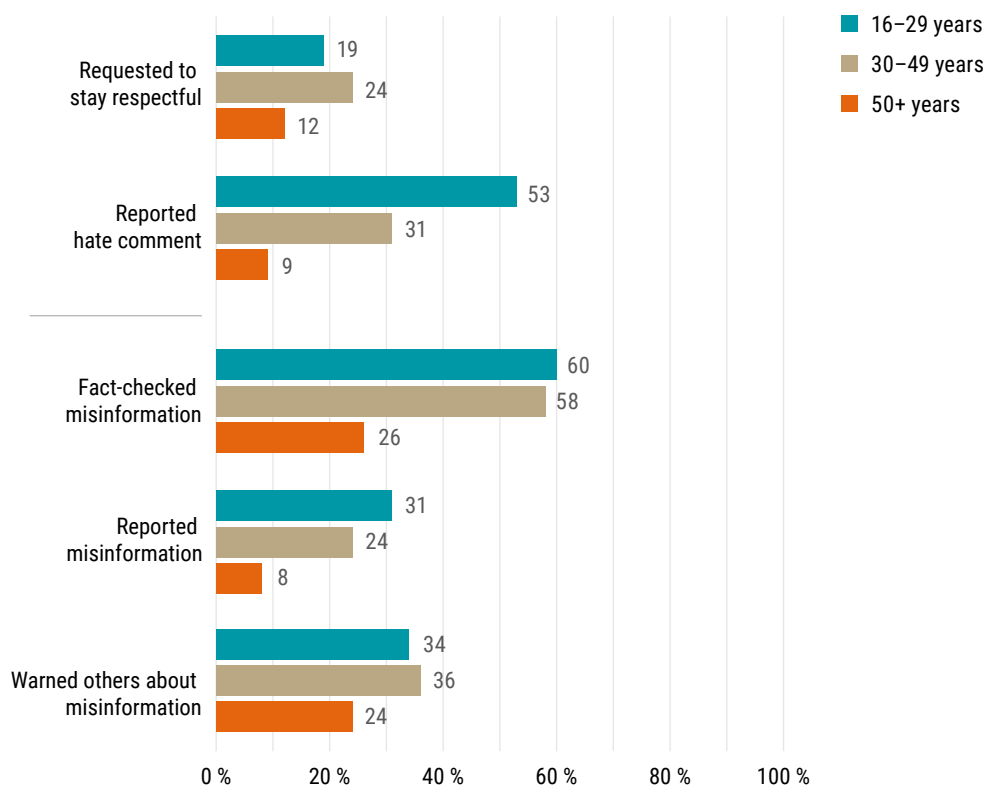
Age differences in the perception of hate and misinformation on the internet

Younger people, in particular, are confronted with hateful comments and misinformation online. In 2025, nearly 90 percent of 16- to 29-year-olds reported having seen hateful comments, and up to 80 percent said they had encountered misinformation. In this regard, they differ significantly from their older fellow citizens, and this pattern has remained relatively stable over time.

When dealing with hateful comments and misinformation online, citizens employ various forms of online civic intervention. Those aged 16 to 29 hold platform operators more accountable for such content than older citizens do. Checking the veracity of alleged fake news is also somewhat more common among younger generations than among those over 50. However, age differences are less pronounced when it comes to other forms of online civic intervention, such as urging respectful interaction in response to hate speech or warning other users about misinformation.

Older adults thus tend to prefer direct forms of online civic intervention that reflect familiar offline practices, such as intervening in conflict situations.

\\ Combating hate speech and misinformation online by age groups (2025)



Basis: Reactions to hate comments or misinformation within the past 12 months (scale: 'yes', 'no') and indication of year of birth; rounded percentages, n=1,740

Overall, the results show that hateful comments and misinformation are part of everyday digital use for younger people. Their approach to these issues differs significantly from that of older people. In particular, the “reporting” feature for problematic content which is integrated into some platforms is used significantly more by younger people than by older ones. Part of this is likely due to their greater familiarity with the interactive online features. Whether this also reflects broader assumptions about the varying effectiveness of different measures or a tendency to delegate their own civic responsibility to the platforms remains a question for future research. One argument against the latter is that younger citizens, like older ones, also engage in more socially interactive forms of online civic intervention, such as counter-speech or warning other users about misinformation.

¶ Violence against politicians is considered a threat to democracy

Anna Hahnemann, Anne-Kathrin Kreft & Farina Rühls

Crimes against public officials and elected representatives regularly attract media attention. The number of such crimes reported in 2025 increased by approximately 12 percent compared to the previous year.⁸ Against the backdrop of current debates regarding threats to democracy, the question arises as to whether the perception of aggression and violence against politicians could affect citizens’ political participation. In particular, a declining willingness to participate in politics as a result of such violent incidents is a topic of public discussion. To investigate these assumptions, the perceived prevalence of violence against politicians and the impact of such incidents on the perceived threat to democracy were surveyed in 2025.

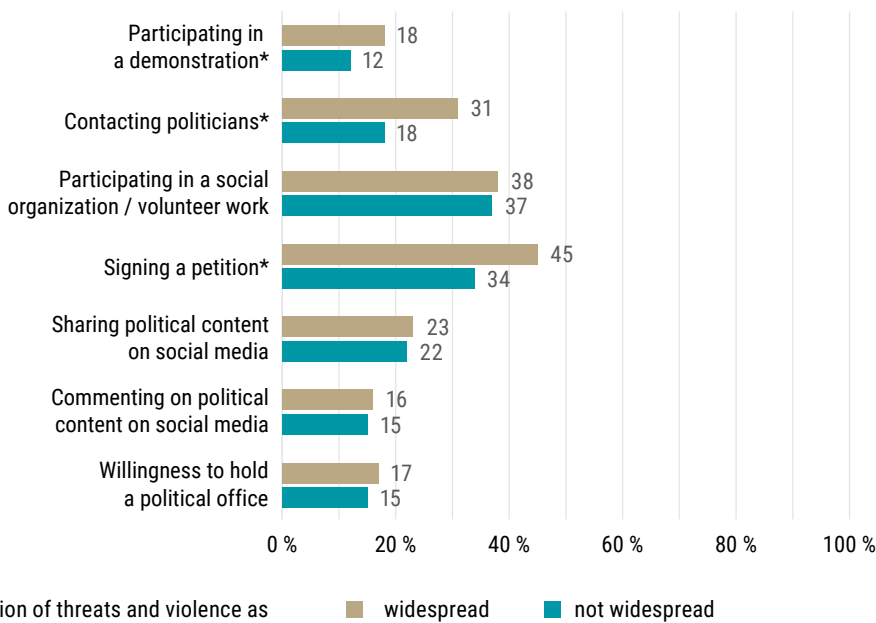
⁸ Bundeskriminalamt. (2025). Factsheet: Bundesweite Fallzahlen 2024—Politisch motivierte Kriminalität. Bundeskriminalamt [Fact Sheet: National Crime Statistics for 2024—Politically Motivated Crime]. https://www.bka.de/DE/UnsereAufgaben/Deliktsbereiche/PMK/PMKZahlen2024/PMKZahlen2024_node.html

Perceived prevalence of violence against politicians and political participation

The perceived prevalence of violence against politicians remains high. Around 81 percent of citizens consider violence against politicians to be very or rather widespread. In 2024, the figure was 79 percent.

This perception is significantly linked to forms of political participation. People who perceive threats and violence against politicians as very or rather widespread are more likely to have taken part in demonstrations, contacted politicians and signed petitions in the past twelve months than those who consider threats and violence against politicians to not be widespread. The perception of threats and violence against politicians therefore does not appear to be linked to lower levels of political participation but rather to higher levels of participation. However, only further data analysis can reveal whether this relationship represents a causal mobilizing effect of the perception of violence against politicians.

\\ Perceived prevalence of violence against politicians and political participation (2025)



Basis: Engagement in the specified political activity within the past 12 months, and assessment of the prevalence of threats and violence against politicians; scale: 'very widespread', 'rather widespread', 'rather not widespread', 'not widespread at all', grouped accordingly; rounded percentages, n=1,740

The percentages refer to the proportion of individuals within the response group (widespread/not widespread) who reported the respective political activity (Example: Of those who view threats and violence as widespread, 18 % have demonstrated within the past 12 months; of those who view them as not widespread, only 12 %).

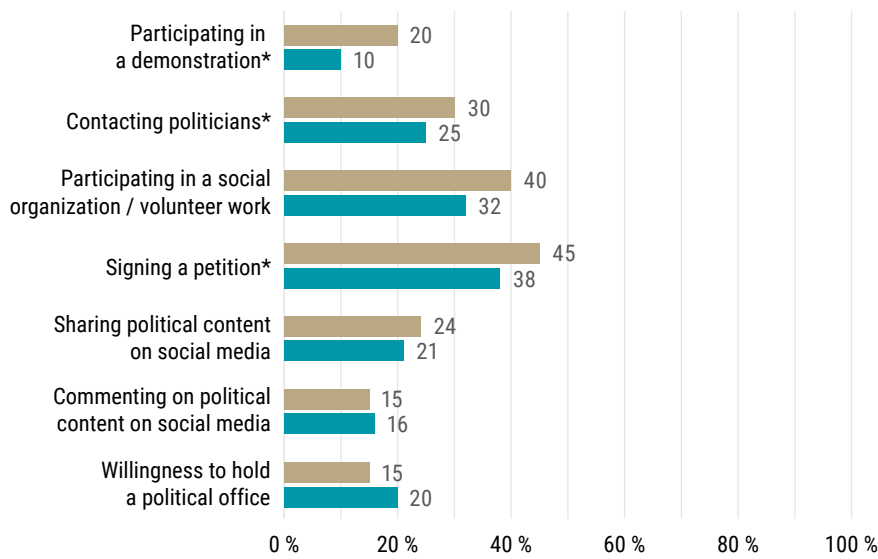
*Significant correlations are marked with *.*

Perceived threat to democracy due to violence against politicians and political participation

It is reasonable to assume that violence against politicians is associated with a threat to democracy. This perception could help explain the link between the perceived prevalence of violence against politicians and political participation.

As in 2024, over two-thirds (69 %) of citizens believe that democracy is very much or rather under threat as a result of violence against politicians. Over the past twelve months, these people have been more likely to participate in demonstrations, contact politicians, perform voluntary work and sign petitions than those who do not see democracy as being under threat. However, the pattern differs when it comes to willingness to hold a political office. Those who perceive democracy as being under threat are less likely to see themselves taking on such a position.

\\ Perceived threat to democracy due to violence against politicians and political participation (2025)



Perception of democracy as: ■ threatened ■ not threatened

Basis: Engagement in the specified political activity within the past 12 months, and assessment of the threat to democracy posed by violence against politicians; scale: 'very threatened', 'rather threatened', 'rather not threatened', 'not threatened at all', grouped accordingly; rounded percentages, n=1,740

The percentages refer to the proportion of individuals within the response group (threatened/not threatened) who reported the respective political activity (Example: Of those who view democracy as threatened, 20 % have demonstrated within the past 12 months; of those who view it as not threatened, only 10%).

*Significant correlations are marked with *.*

|| About the Weizenbaum Institute

The Weizenbaum Institute conducts excellent, independent, interdisciplinary and fundamental digitalization research. We provide politics, business and civil society with well-founded findings and value-based recommendations for action and help to ensure that digitalization is not only better understood, but can also be shaped in a sustainable, self-determined and responsible manner.

The Weizenbaum Institute is supported by seven partner institutions in Berlin and Brandenburg: Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, Universität der Künste Berlin, the University of Potsdam, as well as the Fraunhofer Institute for Open Communication Systems (FOKUS) and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. Coordination and legal representation are handled by Weizenbaum-Institut e.V.

Founded in 2017, the institute is funded by the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space and the State of Berlin.

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