

# NEXT GENERATION

Germany  
May 2019  
Executive Summary





# > EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from mixed-method research exploring the contexts, attitudes and aspirations of German youth aged 18–30, on behalf of the British Council's Next Generation research programme. This series explores young people's needs, daily lives and outlooks in countries undergoing significant change, with the aim of ensuring their voices in relation to these changes are heard and put at the forefront of youth policy.

Our findings are drawn from an initial online qualitative 'language pilot', a nationally representative quantitative survey of more than 2,000 young people, online ethnography with 24 youth participants, and six in-depth interviews.

The quantitative portion of this research spoke to a nationally representative sample of respondents. We set quotas on age, gender and region, ensuring we captured a mixture of both urban and rural locations. We also captured a mixture of students and respondents in employment, speaking to those with differing educational backgrounds (see Appendix 1 for a full breakdown of demographics).

Our research was iterative in nature: the quantitative survey provided a representative overview of youth's attitudes, aspirations and concerns, and our qualitative research was used to understand these views in more depth, fill gaps in our existing understanding, and allow us to see the issues in the context of youth's own voices.

Research was conducted by independent expert youth research agency 2CV, with the input of the British Council's Next Generation team and the Advisory Board.

## Summary of findings

Overall, young people in Germany reported a high degree of positivity about their own lives and personal futures, regardless of where in the country they lived. They felt Germany has historically excelled at providing young people with the building blocks to build a good life for themselves: free and high-quality education, relatively low income inequality, and a strong social support system. Some 69 per cent reported feeling 'very positive' or 'positive' about the future, with slightly lower figures for participants from lower socio-economic groups (66 per cent) and students (67 per cent) – with no significant regional differences.

However, despite this overall positivity about their personal lives and contexts, young people felt less certain about the direction in which Germany is heading, and about whether Germany will be able to offer the continued security and stability that its youth desire. Young people reported concerns and anxiety about a range of perceived 'new challenges' emerging in recent years, including high levels of immigration, rising house prices, and a perceived less stable and/or changing economy. They reported feeling that the government has been slow and ineffective in responding to these challenges, taking a reactive rather than proactive approach. German youth also reported worries that Germany's historical strengths – a striving for excellence, and a focus on technological and engineering prowess – may lose relevance in the rapidly evolving global economy. Only 50 per cent of participants reported that they think these issues will improve in the future.

This ongoing tension between youth's general positivity about their personal lives and futures, and their concerns and anxieties about whether Germany will be able to provide them the lives they desire in the future, sits at the heart of our findings.

The report is structured according to the themes that emerged as most critical for young people in Germany, exploring:

- **their day-to-day worlds:** What is it like to be a young person in Germany today? What do they think the future holds? How do they view Germany and their place in it? What do they want from their personal futures?
- **their global outlook:** How do young people view Germany's place in the world? How do they view the EU and the UK? How do they see global trends and opportunities influencing their own identities and trajectories?

Below we summarise the key findings emerging within each theme.

## Identity and identification

German youth are not very nationalistic in how they identify – our quantitative sample were more likely to identify with their city (77 per cent) or local area (74 per cent) over Germany (68 per cent). Similarly, most of our qualitative participants cited personal, local or European identities before a German one. Only 40 per cent of participants reported feeling proud of Germany, even though they spoke with great pride about their local areas: the nightlife, neighbourhood bars, good universities and social networks that made their part of the country feel like home.

Some young people told us that, as Germans, they consciously de-emphasise national identities due in large part to the historical baggage

associated with pride in Germany. Some of these participants also raised wider hesitations about German-focused identification, telling us that for them, being highly nationalistic in today's world can be associated with political polarisation and potentially more extreme political views.

Despite this relatively low reported pride at a survey level, in our qualitative conversations young people listed ample things Germany excels at: praising its engineering prowess; its ability to offer its citizens relative stability and security; and its skill in building durable, high-quality products that last – the 'German way'.

However, youth were also aware that the global economy is changing rapidly – with digitisation, the rise of the innovation economy and globalisation demanding more creative, dynamic and adaptive thinking. While some welcomed this change, others felt anxiety that these demands might be out of pace with the 'German way' of doing things. Many participants in our qualitative sample expressed fear that Germany will fall behind other countries, that its focus on excellence and quality may not be what is called for in a global environment increasingly demanding pace, adaptability and innovation.

### Education and employment

Our youth sample provided somewhat contradictory views about education and employment, in keeping with the core tensions outlined above.

On the one hand, young Germans expressed pride in their high-quality, free and accessible education system – and expressed positivity about their current employment opportunities and job experiences. Some 68 per cent of the young people we spoke to who were in employment were satisfied in their current roles.

On the other hand, young people also expressed anxieties: 41 per cent of young people we surveyed felt that there was room for improvement in the way their education had prepared them for work – a finding that tallies with other Next Generation countries.<sup>1</sup> Despite levels of relative satisfaction right now, young people feared for their education and employment outcomes in the future – with a rising cost of living causing worry about maintaining job satisfaction and the work–life balance they desire moving forward. Young people in our qualitative sample were also eager to see Germany taking a leading role to integrate technology, more innovative learning approaches and practical skills (such as financial literacy) into its curriculum.

### Financial security

Our youth sample viewed financial security as a critical component of a good life. They characterised financial security as the gateway to attaining the things that matter to them most in life: spending ample time with friends and family; enjoying the entertainment and culture their local area offers; and having a nice home to come back to and perhaps starting a family.

In an economic and sociopolitical environment increasingly tinged with uncertainty, financial security emerged as a key and highly emotive priority for young people; 59 per cent of our quantitative sample selected financial security as a current challenge facing young people, the second highest challenge after affordable housing.

They also told us that they view the government as playing an important enabling role in helping them prosper and achieve their goals. While our youth participants recognised that the German government offers a considerable amount of support to young people,

including in comparison to other countries, they felt more can and should be done to help young people thrive in uncertain times.

They were particularly eager to see more proactive policy action to solve perceived issues in relation to ensuring affordable housing provision for the next generation – an area of increasing concern for young Germans. The majority of young people who felt owning a property was important for their future remain positive that they will achieve this. However, around 27 per cent of them stated that owning a property was not achievable for them in the future – a big barrier to feeling financially secure.

### Immigration

Across all regions included in this research, German youth expressed complex and emotionally charged views on the topic of immigration. Age, life stage and nationality played more of a factor in attitudes than geographical region: younger people (18–24) were more open to immigration than the older people we spoke to (25–30). In line with this, so were students (versus employed people) and those with dual nationality.<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative findings suggested that people in this research were broadly welcoming of *immigrants* as individuals, but that many nonetheless worried about how the country will cope with *immigration* as a perceived driver of population growth and change. Given the uncertainty many young Germans are feeling about the economy and potential negative impact on their own futures, some are worrying that recent newcomers to Germany have put considerable strain on the German system, which they worry will lead to instability and uncertainty. Specifically, many young people in our qualitative sample felt immigration has increased

1 > Including the UK, Colombia and Turkey.

2 > Dual nationality was self-defined, captured using the following question: 'Which of the below statements best describe your nationality?' Respondents could select one of two responses: 'I only have German nationality' or 'I have dual nationality'.

competition for housing, thereby increasing house prices and making it harder for young people to find an affordable place to live. This was perceived as an issue across the regions explored in this research, with minimal geographic differences.

Many in our qualitative sample also reported feeling that the German government has not done enough to aid integration into German society and listed examples of when a lack of integration has affected them on a personal level. Most did not blame immigrants for this directly; rather, they saw it as a failure on the part of the German government to support effective transition of new people into the country.

Finally, for some young people in our qualitative sample there was a strong feeling that the number of immigrants that came into Germany compared to other European nations is unfair. They told us that they feel that Germany sometimes acts like the 'martyr' or 'Samaritan' for all of Europe and that Germany's stance on immigration is presenting challenges for its own citizens. Young people would like to see Germany present a clear and visible plan on how it will ensure the lives of young people are not negatively affected in the future.

### Perceptions of violence and safety

When spontaneously asked to identify the challenges that are most pressing for German youth, violence and safety were not commonly raised issues. Youth also told us that in their own lives, they continue to feel that Germany is a very safe and comfortable place to live; our participants only very rarely reported any direct lived experience of violence or concerns about their personal security.

However, when asked to rank challenges that they see Germany potentially facing in the future, violence and safety were prominent issues as ranked by our quantitative sample. Many young Germans also told us that they felt violence in Germany has risen in recent years. Given the disconnect between current lived experience and this rating of concern for the future, these views may largely be driven by media reporting on relatively isolated events and wider fears about change and unrest, rather than a sense that youth's own neighbourhoods and environments are becoming less safe.

Expressed fears about violence and safety typically revolved around two separate but interrelated concerns, both of which are largely fuelled by the media:

- a perception that the added pressure an influx of immigrants has put on the German system has led to more crime, sexual harassment and general unease on Germany's streets
- a perception that a rise in right-wing ideology, largely fuelled by anti-immigrant rhetoric, is 'destabilising' Germany, causing uncertainty and leading to political polarisation and widespread unrest.

Regardless of how pressing violence and safety are for youth in their daily lives at present, our youth sample told us that they would like to see the government address these issues head-on, recognising the concerns that its young citizens have, and clearly outlining a plan to ensure that Germany continues to be a safe and secure place to live.

### Voice and representation

Overall, our findings suggest that more can be done to encourage civic and political engagement among German youth – and there is a need to show them that politics is welcoming of them and represents their interests. Women particularly feel less engaged currently: slightly more than half (53 per cent) of men feel 'somewhat engaged' or 'very engaged', compared to just over a third (32 per cent) of women.

Lack of engagement seemed to be driven by a variety of factors. Only a third (31 per cent) reported believing that the German political system is effective, with a similar proportion (35 per cent) citing its ineffectiveness. Less than a quarter reported trust (24 per cent) or faith (22 per cent) in the German government, with nearly half having little or no trust (41 per cent) or faith (46 per cent). Furthermore, 22 per cent reported feeling the government represents 'none' of what matters to them, with 51 per cent stating it reflects only some of the things that matter to them. Attitudes were somewhat more negative in East than West Germany, and for women versus men.

When we asked our qualitative sample what they wished the government would focus on more, issues like housing affordability, immigration and a plan for the changing economy came out as top priorities. In our qualitative data, associations of the government as 'older and male' among some female participants suggests that associations about who is represented in the political sphere may not be particularly inclusive.

When asked why they are not engaged currently, there was a sense that platforms and opportunities – both on a local and national level – are limited. Few young people we spoke to knew *how* to engage and many felt that their concerns are not a priority for the current government. When asked what would encourage them to become more engaged, young people reported that it would help if German politics more closely mirrored what matters to them (45 per cent); if political engagement was encouraged at school to a greater extent (35 per cent) and if politics were easier to understand (35 per cent).

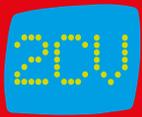
### **Germany and the rest of the world**

Young Germans reported feeling that the rest of the world still links German identity with the Second World War, which limits the role that Germany can play on the world stage. There is a sense that Germany has to seek consensus before it can give its opinion for fear of being accused of trying to dominate.

Perceptions of the UK were quite limited and largely driven by stereotypes rather than deep cultural relationships or associations: bad weather, bad food, driving on the left, the Royal Family and a love of tea dominated how young Germans view the UK.

Brexit is something almost all young Germans were aware of (91 per cent) and was largely seen as a disappointment and a mistake for the UK. In our sample, 82 per cent believed it would have an impact on Germany, and of those who felt it would have an impact, 62 per cent believed it would be negative. However, young people found it hard to articulate exactly how this impact would manifest or impact their lives – they loosely referenced decreased trade with the UK and diminished travel opportunities to the UK, but outside of these, Brexit was not seen to have an impact on the daily lives of young people in Germany. In fact, among our qualitative sample, the consequences of Brexit were seen to weigh more heavily on the UK, in that it will isolate itself from Europe and from trade. Brexit has not dampened most young Germans' faith in the EU – and the young people in our qualitative sample reported continuing to see Germany as a strong driving force in Europe.





2CV is a research agency that gives people a voice so they can influence the world around them. 2CV designs research to help change happen; using innovative, immersive methodologies, and sensitivity for people and cultures, to uncover inspiring truths. 2CV works with NGO, public and private organisations to explore opportunities for change. For more information, please visit [www.2cv.com](http://www.2cv.com)



The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

The Next Generation series is part of the British Council's commitment to exploring youth voice and choice. It aims to understand youth attitudes and aspirations, amplify youth voice and support better youth policymaking. The reports focus on young people in countries experiencing a period of significant change, to ensure that young people's voices are heard and their interests represented in decisions that will have lasting implications for their lives.

[www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/next-generation](http://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/next-generation)

Cover image © pio3/Shutterstock

© British Council 2019/K016

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.