Claudia Detsch

Climate Crunch Questions

How social barriers can be overcome and sceptical milieus brought on board in the social-ecological transformation

– Country Report Germany –

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About the author

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

There is no lack of interest, nor is there any lack of awareness. Climate is important; climate change is scary. But that alone is no guarantee for a good, widely accepted climate policy. *How* should the climate-neutral transition be shaped in concrete terms? *That* is the crucial question. What topics are meeting with resistance? Which concerns are shared in different milieus, which are running into opposition? Anyone who wants to understand climate-related conflicts needs to understand the drivers. Anyone who wants to back reforms that have a chance of gaining broad support needs to understand the underlying factors. Generally speaking, the choice of the means is decisive when it comes to forming possible alliances and obtaining social support. In other words: if the wrong tools are chosen, no majorities can be forged – and things are bound to get bumpy in the field of climate policy.

So, what can politicians and public actors do to successfully shape the climate transition and gain the approval of the population? Our study provides answers to this question.

The Competence Centre for Climate and Social Justice of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung commissioned the SINUS-Institute to conduct a population survey in 19 European and North American countries: Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA. The study design was based on quantitative surveys of a representative population with a sample size of at least 1,200 people between the ages of 18 and 69 per country per country (22,823 cases in total). What perceptions, interests, and fears do people associate with the social-ecological transformation? Where is there broad support, where are barriers lurking? This is what we determined to look into more closely.[1]

The aim of the survey was not just to map a wide array of climate policy attitudes along traditional socio-demographic criteria. Rather, the intent was also to analyse to what extent and under what conditions different social milieus are receptive to climate policy measures. To this end, the Sinus-Meta-Milieus target group model was integrated into the survey design. Hence 29 additional statements representing typical values mirroring different realities of life for respondents were surveyed.

Sinus-Milieus are to be understood as social groups that are similar in terms of their social-economic circumstances as well as their cultural values, everyday attitudes, ways of life and life goals. The milieu concept combines vertical (in-

come, education, occupation) and horizontal (values, everyday attitudes, way of life, life goals) differences that come to light in discussions about climate economics, therefore particularly lending themselves to a simultaneous analysis of distributional and value conflicts:[2] This analytical approach takes into account the values, life views and the way of life of different social milieus as well as their social status. On this basis it is possible to achieve a more comprehensive and differentiated view of the social challenges associated with a social-ecological transformation. The Sinus-Milieus can be represented in a coordinate system (Figure 1), whereby the milieus are categorised vertically along the "social status" dimension and horizontally along the "basic values" dimension:

This analysis is based on the following areas covered by the survey:

– Awareness of the importance and relevance of climate as a problematic topic

– Attitudes, motivators and barriers characterising climate and environmentally conscious behaviour

– Assessment of, and attitudes towards changing our way of life and doing business, including approval of, or opposition to, policies

– Interest in information and levels of knowledge about climate and policies

So how do Germans position themselves on climate change and corresponding reforms? What trends can be recognised? Where are the differences between different milieus within the country, what are the differences to other countries surveyed?

1   All results of the survey at: https://justclimate.fes.de/survey-attitudes-social-ecological-transformation

2   Reusswig, F. / Schleer, C. (2021): Auswirkungen von Klimaschutzmaßnahmen auf Akteursgruppen im Hinblick auf Veto- und Aneignungspositionen. Literaturstudie zur gesellschaftlichen Resonanzfähigkeit von Klimapolitik im Auftrag der Wissenschaftsplattform Klimaschutz [Effects of climate protection measures on stakeholder groups with regard to veto and appropriation positions. Literature study on the social resonance of climate policy on behalf of the Climate Protection Science Platform]. Berlin, Potsdam.

Figure 1
Coordinate system of the Sinus-Meta-Milieus along the dimensions of social status and basic values
(reorientation meaning an openness to changes in consumption and economic patterns, 18- to 69-year-olds)
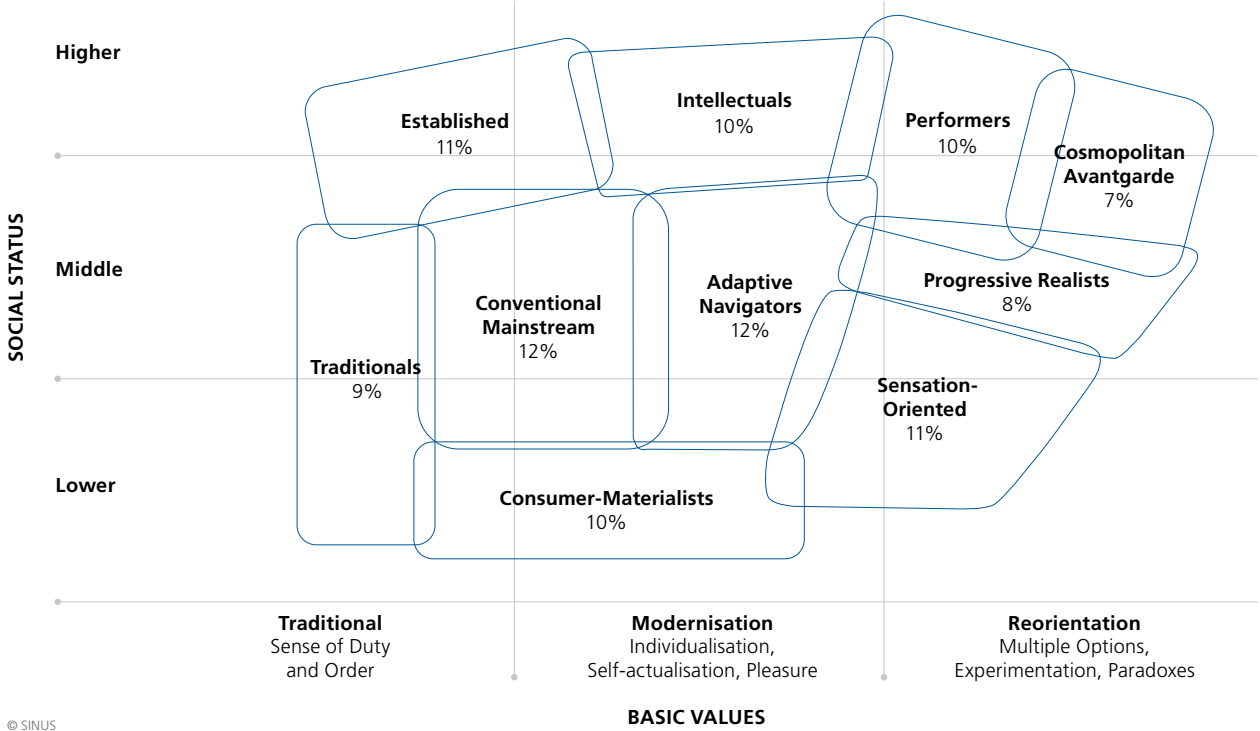

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Figure 2
Brief description of the "Sinus-Meta-Milieus in Established Markets"

Established	**Status-driven conservative elite:** High self-confidence, traditional responsibility and performance ethics, exclusivity and status claims, acceptance of social order
Intellectuals	**Academic elite with post-material beliefs:** High affinity for enjoyment, sensuality, art and culture, critical of globalisation, advocate for justice and public welfare, taking responsibility for oneself and others, affinity for education and high quality of life
Performers	**Efficiency- and progress-oriented modern elite:** Global economic and liberal thinking, affinity for higher consumption, modern design, early adopting, interest in technology and digital, competitive and careeroriented, networker, open to change
Cosmopolitan Avantgarde	**Ambitious and individualistic avant-garde:** Cosmopolitan, urban, mobile and flexible, digital nomads, way of living vanguards, pronounced self-expression, postmodern way of living elite, antimainstream, desire to stand out, joie de vivre, ambitious and successoriented
Progressive Realists	**Drivers of social transformation:** Sustainable way of living but without renunciation, driving the global social transformation, progressive, optimistic, ease of dealing with contradictions, party and protest, seriousness and entertainm
Adaptive Navigators	**Adapted, modern mainstream:** Flexible pragmatists, young modern middle class, high willingness to adapt and perform, modern way of living, digital affinity, reliable and loyal, open to new – but tested and verified – things
Sensation-Oriented	**Materialistic and entertainment-orientated (lower) middle class:** Hedonistic, with focus on today, conspicuous consumption, unconcerned, open to risks, anti-bourgeois yet materialistic way of living, rejection of political correctness and conventions, looking for fun, action, entertainment, stimulation
Conventional Mainstream	**Harmony-seeking older middle-class:** Desire for secure circumstances, fear of losing achievements, search for community, cohesion, social life, neighbourly support, distrust towards elites, feeling of being left out in favour of other groups, down to earth
Traditionals	**Order-seeking older generation:** Petty bourgeois world, traditional working-class culture, desire for social security, harmony, consistency, voluntarily disconnection from modern way of living and digital culture, desire for simple, safe, down to earth
Consumer-Materialists	**Lower class striving for validation:** Precarious living conditions, undemanding adaptation to necessities, desire for consumption standard of the middle class, defiant cohesion within their own community, fear of speed of change and being left behind

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COUNTRY REPORT GERMANY

WHO IS AFRAID OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND WHEN?

When asked about the five most important political topics in Germany, "inflation/decreasing purchasing power" came out on top with 47% (up to five responses are possible from a total of 15 suggested topics). "Environmental, nature and climate protection" ranks fourth with 40%, after "Secure energy supply and affordable energy prices" (46%) and "Fair pensions and old-age provision" (44%).

The topic of social justice is in seventh place with 34%, but its frequency of mention was above average for the lower income and lower education groups. Employment opportunities and fair wages (22%) and economic development and competitiveness (17%) are at the lower end of the scale. Furthermore, lower education and lower income groups received below-average responses here.

What do these scores mean for possible narratives relating to the topic of climate policy? **Wherever climate policy measures increase price pressure, they are likely to be met with criticism or even opposition. The argument of a secure and independent energy supply and price stabilisation through the expansion of renewables, on the other hand, can be useful.**

A clear majority of respondents consider climate change to be a (very) important topic for Germany: on a scale of 0 "completely irrelevant" to 10 "absolutely important", 59% of respondents assigned climate change an importance of 8 to 10, with a further 19% selecting 6 to 7. In contrast, only 7% of respondents selected 0 to 2 on the scale. The Average is 7.3.

When it comes to the consequences of climate change, the increase in extreme weather events scares the population the most: 58% agree (once again, up to five responses were possible). At 45%, extinction of species in the animal and plant world is in second place, followed by water shortages in everyday life and military conflicts over raw materials and water (41% each). The increase in humanitarian crises (37%) was mentioned fifth most frequently. Significantly fewer respondents are afraid of falling yields in agriculture (21%).

65% of respondents say they are afraid of the consequences of climate change; a quarter fully agree. **However, 38% also believe that the consequences of climate change are greatly exaggerated;** 14% fully agree. **Half of the respondents see more important problems in Germany than climate change, while the other half disagree.** There is a similarly even split when it comes to the question of whether we should focus on adapting to the consequences of climate change instead of putting climate protection at the forefront: while 48% agree (full agreement: 13%), 52% disagree.

The differences between the milieus are considerable for the last three questions above. **In the *Adaptive Navigators* milieu, for example, three-quarters of respondents agree that there are more important problems** (the list of the most pressing problems mentioned above provides corresponding indications, see figure 3). **According to the SINUS-Institute, this milieu of the young modern middle class is of central importance.** This milieu is open-minded, determined, well-educated, flexible, willing to adapt and generally open to new ideas – and therefore actually receptive to the goal of a sustainable society. If we succeed in convincing the modern middle class (*Adaptive Navigators*) of concrete measures, this will also have an impact on neighbouring milieus (see also appendix on the milieu groups and their specific barriers and resonance potentials).[3] **The rise in temperature is therefore competing for importance with other issues. At the latest when it appears that climate policy measures are exacerbating problems that are perceived as more important, latent conflicts are likely to become open ones.**

PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED? LACK OF INFORMATION, EXPLANATIONS AND A MILIEU-SPECIFIC APPROACH

Around three-quarters of respondents (73%) expressed a fundamental interest in the topic of climate change. Of these, 27% are "very" interested. Less interest is expressed by 20%, and only 7% have no interest at all. 59% rate their level of knowledge about ecological interrelationships and environmental problems (e.g. forest dieback, biodiversity, etc.) as (rather) high. However, only 10%

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3 Schleer, C.; Wisniewski, N.; Reusswig, F. (2024): Shaping the socio-ecological transformation: How social barriers can be overcome and how resonance potentials can be utilised. SINUS-Institut. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/21136.pdf

Figure 3
The most important issues that politicians in Germany should take care of (naming up to five topics out of 15)

Issue	%
Inflation, declining purchasing power	47
Secure energy supply and affordable energy prices	46
Fair pensions and retirement provision	44
Environmental, nature and climate protection	40
Sufficient and affordable housing	40
Public health service and care	38
More social justice	34
Education, schools and universities	30
Criminality, internal security	27
Migration and integration of immigrants	25
Employment offer and fair wages	22
Peace policy and stable relations with other countries	21
Economic development and competitiveness	17
Digitalisation	15
Rule of law, fight against corruption	11

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

Figure 4
On a scale from 0 to 10, how important do you personally think the issue of climate change is for Germany?

absolutely important, more important than anything else

10
9   59%
8

7   19%
6

5   9%

4   6%
3

2
1   7%
0

completely irrelevant, can be forgotten

Average 7.3

7.3
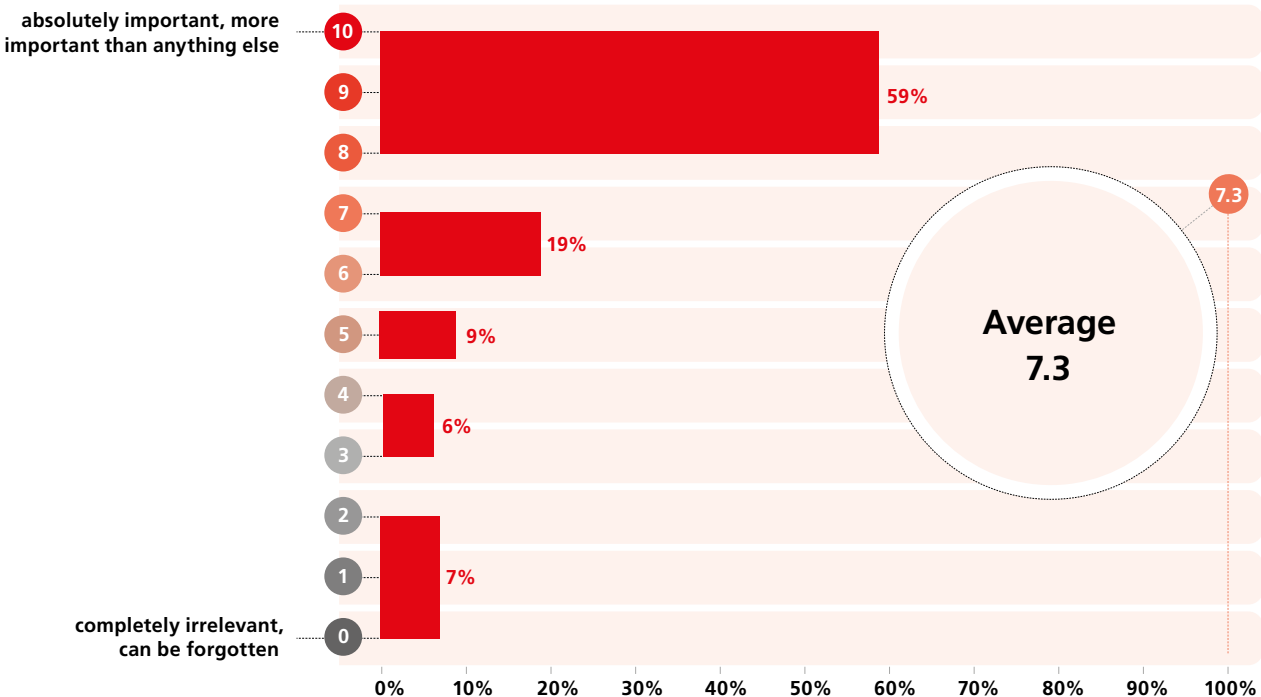
Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

rate their level of knowledge as "very high". A (rather) low level of knowledge is attested by 37%, with 5% saying they know very little.

Interest is above average in the milieus of the *Intellectuals* (93%), *Cosmopolitans* and *Progressive Realists* (90% each). At 80%, the figures are also above average among the youngest age cohort. It is below average among *Consumer Materialists* (50%) and *Conventional Mainstream* (56%). *Traditionalists, Sensation-Oriented* and *Adaptive Navigators* also only agree (61 to 63%). **Those who find the topic less interesting are likely to be less receptive to it and rather point out that they would then have to accept major changes in their everyday lives.**

At 67%, men rate their level of knowledge about ecological contexts and environmental problems (forest dieback, species extinction, pollution of the oceans, extreme weather, etc.) significantly higher than women at 50%. **At 45%, the lower education cohort had a lower score than the upper cohort (70%).**

At the same time, only 7% of respondents feel "very well" informed about policies for a change towards a more climate and environmentally friendly economy. 46% consider themselves "rather well" informed. This contrasts with 40% who feel "rather not well" informed and 7% who feel "not at all well" informed. *Progressive Realists* (55%) feel well informed; *Cosmopolitan Avantgarde* (29%) and *Conventional Mainstream* (33%) are below average. *Adaptive Navigators*, on the other hand, have an above-average score of 59%. 61% of men, but only 44% of women, feel well informed.

Obviously, the people who are already interested in the topic have so far been more effectively addressed than the sceptics. **However, in order to implement a climate policy reform agenda, it will also be necessary to better address those who are not convinced.** This cannot be done primarily by citing statistics and studies or tracing out future scenarios, as these seem to be interesting primarily for those who are already interested. **If one wants to get the more sceptical or uninterested groups on board, other approaches are needed.**

Around two-thirds of respondents (65%) think that policies for a change towards a more climate and environmentally friendly economy are not sufficiently explained and clarified. Only 35% disagree (policies are sufficiently explained: "yes": 6%, "rather agree": 29%. This question produces milieu-specific scores that are rather atypical. *Consumer Materialists* (14%), *Conventional Mainstream* (23%) together with *Intellectuals* (26%) are among the below-average scores – i.e. among those who feel the least informed. *Performers, Sensation-Oriented* and *Established*, on the other hand, feel much better informed with scores between 44% and 50%. At 43%, the younger age cohort feels better informed than average.

The results of this representative survey indicate a clear task for politicians to communicate climate policies more comprehensively, explain their practi-

cal consequences and then implement them with a reliable planning horizon and in comprehensible steps.

69% of respondents state that renewable energy sources (solar, wind, etc.) have become more important since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukraine conflict. The milieus having a higher social status and *Progressive Realists* are around 80% here, while those from the lower half of the milieu coordinate system have scores of 53% to 59%. Here, the question is obviously interpreted more politically than in terms of money. **On the one hand, this means that the narrative of greater independence through renewables falls on much more fertile ground with those who are already convinced. At the same time, however, this result also allows one to conclude that the argument of low and stable prices could not yet be sufficiently anchored among certain target groups.**

Only a third (33%) of respondents are convinced that science and technology will solve the problem of climate change without us having to fundamentally change our way of life and doing business (highest level of approval: 7%). The majority of respondents have no illusions regarding the scope of the challenge.

ROLE MODELS MOTIVATE, PROHIBITIONS ARE A TURN-OFF

More than three-quarters of respondents (78%) believe that we should be willing to change our way of life for the benefit of the environment (highest level of agreement: 33%). However, 52% (also) say that they themselves are only willing to do something to protect the environment if this does not affect their own standard of living (highest level of agreement: 16%). **Willingness to change yes, willingness to make personal sacrifices no, would be putting it in a nutshell for a narrow majority of the population.**

At 70%, two-thirds of the population state that they are annoyed when others try to tell them how to live (highest level of approval: 30%). **This type of perceived paternalism is the number one barrier to climate-conscious behaviour.** In addition, 49% complain that it will soon be impossible to do anything at all if there are even more regulations relating to climate and environmental protection (highest approval rating: 20%). Around a quarter (26%) state that they cannot see the point of changing their own behaviour for something that may happen in the future (highest level of approval: 7%). In addition, 37% do not believe that their own behaviour can make a significant contribution to environmental protection (highest level of agreement: 11%). 31% say that others should take the first step before they themselves contribute to climate protection (highest level of agreement: 9%).

When it comes to these barriers to climate and environmentally conscious behaviour, the differences in milieu are again considerable. *Intellectuals*, for example,

Figure 5
How well informed do you feel? Are political measures sufficiently explained?

How well informed
do you personally feel
in general about policies
for a shift towards a more
climate and environmentally
friendly economy?

Not informed at all **7%**
Very well informed **7%**
Not well **47%**
Well **53%**
Not very well infomed **40%**
Somewhat informed **46%**

In your opinion,
are policies for a change
towards a more climate and
environmentally friendly
economy sufficiently
explained and clarified?

No, policies are insufficiently explained and clarified **16%**
Yes, policies are sufficiently explained and clarified **6%**
No **65%**
Yes **35%**
Somewhat, yes **29%**
Rather no **49%**

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

Figure 6
Increase in relevance of renewable energies for respondents since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukraine conflict

Has renewable energy
(solar, wind, etc.) become
more important for you
since the outbreak of the
Russia-Ukraine conflict?

No, renewable energy has not become more important **15%**
Yes, renewable energy has become more important **36%**
No **31%**
Yes **69%**
Rather no **16%**
Rather yes **33%**

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.
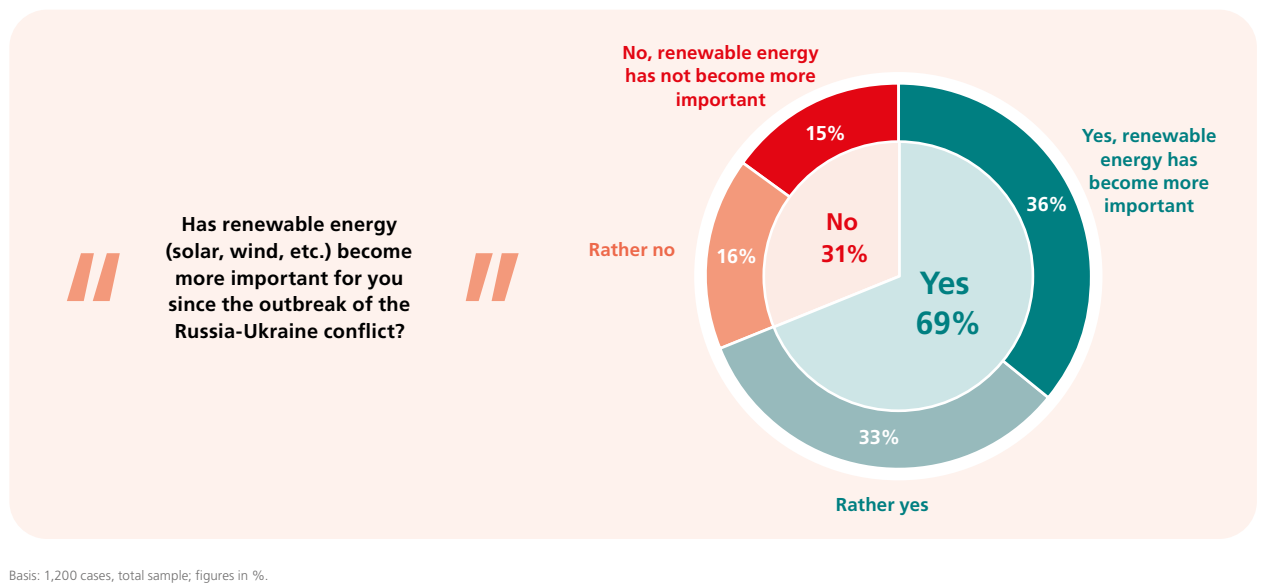
significantly respond below-average to those barriers (this also applies to *Progressive Realists*); in contrast *Adaptive Navigators, Conventional Mainstream* and *Consumer Materialists* agree to an above-average extent.

People are more motivated to engage in climate-friendly behaviour by seeing what others do. 69% would be prepared to do more to protect the environment if everyone acted this way (highest level of approval: 20%). Communication research has shown that positive examples and social norms are far more effective than simple prohibitions or moral appeals.[4] The survey results corroborate this.

Almost one in two respondents (47%) find it difficult to shape their own lives in an environmentally and climate-friendly way (highest level of approval: 11%). In addition, 62% say that the lack of infrastructure makes it impossible to live without a car (highest level of approval: 28%).

BOOM OR BUST FOR BUSINESSES?

Both **barriers** and **motivators** for a climate-neutral transformation can be found in the assumed effects on businesses – critics among the respondents point to possible negative consequences for companies, for example due to cost increases and structural changes, while supporters emphasise the growing competitiveness resulting from ecological modernisation. This topical area was also surveyed along the same lines.

44% believe that businesses know best how to implement the necessary change (highest approval rating: 10%). 58% are concerned that companies that require a lot of energy for their production cannot implement strict climate protection requirements (highest approval rating: 17%). There is a need to show more clearly how viable solutions are envisaged for these industries and what the specific consequences would be in practice.

38% think that **combating climate change harms the economy** (highest level of agreement: 12%). At the same time, 78% of respondents believe that **the economy must become more climate-friendly, as otherwise there is a threat of economic harm** (highest level of agreement: 36%)**.** 67% believe that **a consistent policy to protect the environment will have a positive effect on the competitiveness of the economy in the future** (highest approval rating: 21%).

72% of respondents believe that **switching to environmentally and climate-friendly products and production processes offers great employment opportunities** (highest approval rating: 23%). Furthermore, 46% say that

preserving jobs is more important than climate and environmental protection (highest level of agreement: 15%). However, significantly fewer people with a low level of education (63%) agree than those with a high level (80%).

53% believe that structural change measures should be implemented even if jobs are lost as a result (highest approval rating: 14%). However, 74% say that **jobs affected by structural change should be preserved as long as possible if there are no suitable alternatives** (highest approval rating: 22%).

These results, which at first glance appear contradictory, make it clear that people are not opposed in principle to structural change, but that concerns about their jobs are far more salient. At the same time, this is probably a key to these sensitive issues of ecological modernisation: **sustainable local perspectives and trust in social security systems are needed, on this basis the restructuring of the economy will be less likely to generate fears and trepidation.**

86% support training or further education (or retraining) for employees in jobs that will no longer be needed in the future. 84% want to improve school education in the field of environmental and climate protection. 93% of respondents agree that employees negatively affected (e. g. in the event of job loss) should be supported in retraining for alternative jobs (50% highest agreement). 87% state that employees negatively affected (e. g. in the event of loss of their jobs) should receive financial support such as compensation payments, severance pay, etc. (39%).
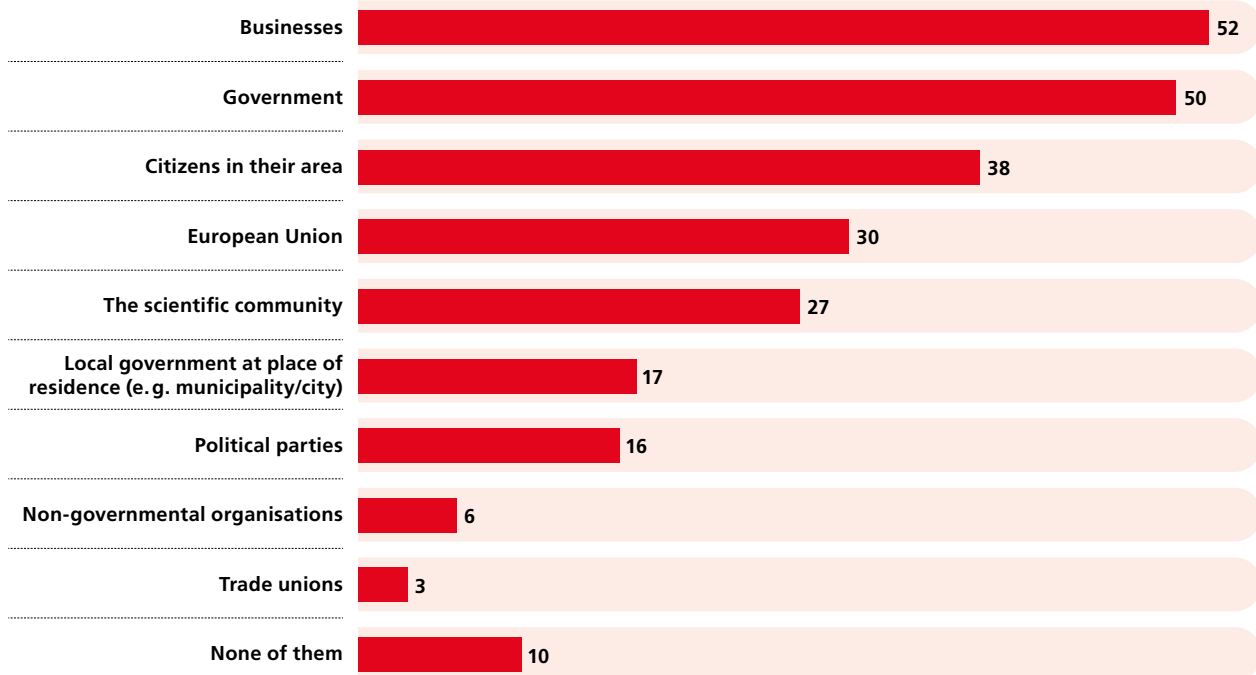
The survey results indicate an appeal for an ambitious and coherent industrial and structural policy that is backed by the necessary investments and offers appropriate framework conditions: 83% are in favour of support programmes that help businesses switch to climate-friendly production processes and products (highest level of approval: 32%). 85% are in favour of affected regions and communities (e. g. coal mining, natural gas, oil regions) receiving financial support (34%). 83% are in favour of actively locating new industries in these affected regions and communities (31%).

78% think that the economy needs clear guidelines from the state in order to become climate-neutral (highest approval rating: 35%). 72% state that politics should exert much more pressure on the economy to bring about climate-friendly production methods (highest approval rating: 32%). In addition, 70% believe that politics does the bidding of industry and businesses on an excessive scale (highest level of agreement: 28%). The milieu of *Intellectuals* agrees disproportionately with these questions, the *Sensation-Oriented* disproportionately less.

Both politicians and businesses are clearly tasked with the need to present their own transformation efforts in a more credible way and to explain possible hurdles in a broad, comprehensible manner – otherwise a suspicion of lobbying will be quickly surmised

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4 Endres, Alexandra (2023): Kommunaler Klimaschutz zwischen Populismus, Polarisierung und Parteienstreit – ein Praxisbericht [Climate protection at municipal level between populism, polarisation and party disputes – a field report]. https://www.klimafakten.de/kommunikation/kommunaler-klimaschutz-zwischen-populismus-polarisierung-und-parteienstreit-ein

Figure 7
Attribution of responsibility - which actors can contribute most to crisis management?

Actor	Value
Businesses	52
Government	50
Citizens in their area	38
European Union	30
The scientific community	27
Local government at place of residence (e.g. municipality/city)	17
Political parties	16
Non-governmental organisations	6
Trade unions	3
None of them	10

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

and tend to linger, which could undermine the willingness of the population to make efforts of their own, not to mention the impact this may have on democratic convictions. The trade unions also have a key role to play here in better explaining the tasks, opportunities and risks facing companies and economic sectors in the climate-neutral transition to the public and taking a position.

WHO HAS THE DUTY TO ACT? COMPANIES BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT

When it comes to tackling the climate and environmental crisis, businesses and the German government are by far seen as the three most influential actors (52% and 50%, respectively). Of the 19 countries surveyed, only in Germany are businesses mentioned in first place; this figure is 36% on average across the 19 countries. A narrative approach could be taken here and businesses themselves could be cited as advocates for change, as in Germany they are largely striving for climate-neutral modernisation themselves.

In third place are local citizens (38%; only 29% among 18-29 year olds). The European Union is attributed an influential role by 30% (41% among 18-29 year olds). At the same time, 62% agree with the statement "It annoys me that climate policy is controlled by the EU because it does not sufficiently take into account the special features of our country" (highest level of agreement: 25%).

In the ranking of the most influential actors this is then followed by scientists and the scientific community (27%), local governments in the place of residence (17% – this figure is

the second lowest in Germany), political parties (16%), NGOs (6% – the lowest of all countries in Germany) and trade unions (3% – although this figure is 9% among 18-29 year olds).

The fact that these actors are seen as having a great deal of influence in the effort to cope with the crisis does not equate to a high level of satisfaction regarding their actual actions. **According to the surveyed population, it is primarily companies that should do more to tackle climate change**: 65% of respondents say that businesses are (far) from being committed enough (although this is below average compared to other countries). **59% believe that the German government is doing (way) too little to tackle climate change**; however, this figure is also well below the international average of 71%. 18% think that the government is doing too much (the average is 10%).

59% see more responsibility on the part of political parties – this is the lowest figure after the USA, with an average of 74%. 55% would like to see more responsibility on the part of the European Union, and 52% think that local governments (e.g. municipality/city) should do more. 55% of respondents say that local citizens make (much) too little effort (a below-average figure). 49% think that the trade unions do (much) too little (this figure is below average and is only lower in the USA and Denmark). 22% consider the trade unions' efforts to be just right; this figure is above average. 21% state that they cannot judge this; apparently they do not perceive trade unions' efforts enough.

The scientific community is less likely to be expected to increase efforts (39%). Non-governmental organisations are seen as having the least obligation (far too little/too little: 26%).

FROM CHANGE TO DETERIORATION? THE FOCUS MUST BE ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

There are major concerns about the impact on the social balance. "**Climate and environmental protection measures are socially unjust, as they burden low-income earners in particular**" – around two-thirds (67%) agree with this statement, 29% even fully agree. **Three-quarters of respondents (77%) fear that a fundamental change in our way of life and doing business is associated with high personal costs** (highest level of agreement: 30%). 59% say that they personally lack the financial means to do something for climate protection (highest level of agreement: 23%). This figure is well above average for the milieus of *Consumer Materialists* (84%), *Adaptive Navigators* (77%), and *Conventional Mainstream* (72%). In order to gain sufficient support, these concerns will have to be addressed in practice.

Overall, almost 84% of all respondents say they would be prepared to do more if the costs were distributed fairly. This figure is even lower in the milieus with a lower social status, while *Progressive Realists* and *Intellectuals* have approval ratings of between 92% and 96%. So, it cannot be said that these more affluent milieus are simply trying to get away with it; taking their approval for a fair distribution of costs seriously they, would have to shoulder quite a share of the costs. For the climate agenda to be successful, it will be crucial that these groups follow up this expressed attitude with action or that such steps are demanded of them.

87% of respondents in Germany are in favour of providing more financial support to people with low incomes if costs of electricity, heating or mobility increase due to climate protection measures (almost half, 48%, fully agree). **Another 87% are of the opinion that politics should be much more concerned with a socially just design of the change in our way of living and doing business** (highest level of agreement: 39%). At the same time, 65% feel uneasy about the idea of a fundamental change in our economic and living conditions, as they know from experience that many people will be worse off afterwards than before (highest level of agreement: 22%).

According to 91% of respondents, private households that want to use renewable energy, e.g. solar power, solar heating or heat pumps, should receive financial support (49% fully in favour).

89% support state subsidies for the renovation of buildings for thermal insulation. Likewise, 89% are in favour of state support for private households if they use renewable energy (for heating, electricity generation); 88% advocate financial support for cost-efficient heating and heating systems (e.g. heat pumps). **Sufficient funding for corresponding support programmes is essential for broad social acceptance and thus the success of the climate-neutral reform agenda.**

CLIMATE POLICY – SURE, BUT HOW?

71% believe that, above all, strict and coherent laws and regulations are needed to preserve an environment worth living in for us and future generations (highest approval rating: 27%). However, 68% (also) say that there are already enough guidelines for a fundamental change in our way of life and doing business – if these were also implemented, we would be on the right track (highest approval rating: 17%).

In a nutshell: Approval ratings for various measures to promote climate and environmental protection are highest where there is state funding or the respondents themselves do not have to fear any additional direct costs:

Mobility: 91% of respondents are in favour of reducing the price of local public transport (highest approval rating: 60%). 89% are in favour of expanding the transport network and the frequency of local public transport (highest approval rating: 50%). More charging stations for electric or hybrid vehicles are supported by 74% (highest approval rating: 34%), a carbon tax on airline tickets by 65% (highest approval rating: 32%), the promotion of electric vehicles by 64% (highest approval rating: 26%) and the introduction of a vehicle toll (so that people who drive a lot also have to pay more) by 44% (highest approval rating: 20%).
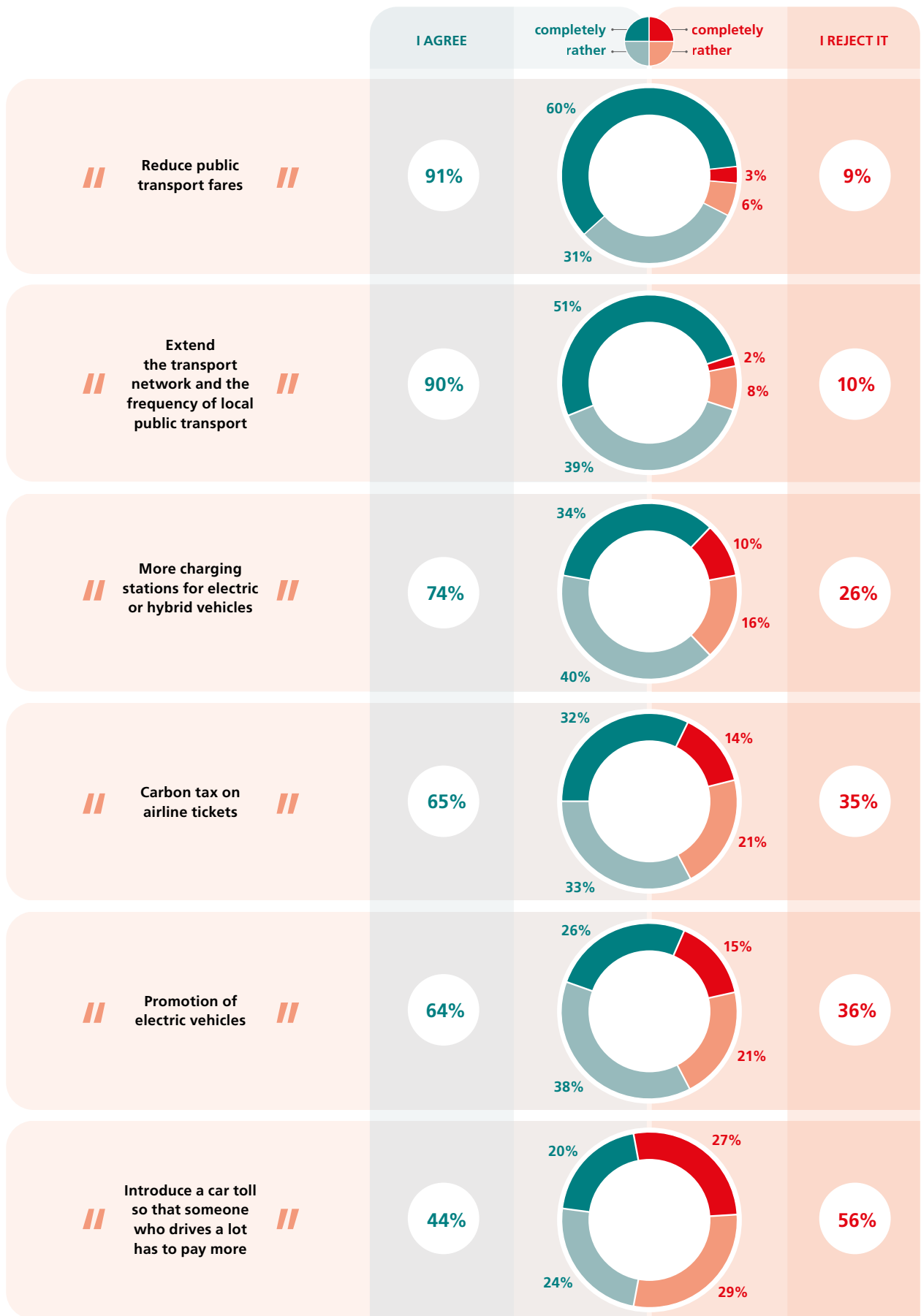
The milieus of the *Sensation-Oriented* and *Consumer Materialists* are below average in favouring these measures, while *Intellectuals* are above average. The 18-29 year age group has the lowest scores for the vehicle toll; the same applies to the carbon tax on airline tickets. This age cohort is disproportionately in favour of promoting electric vehicles. It is therefore difficult to discern a broad rejection of driving and flying among younger people.

Energy: 74% are in favour of a more resolute switch to renewable energy (highest approval rating: 36%). 77% of respondents are in favour of building more wind turbines (highest approval rating: 37%). 72% are in favour of membership in an energy cooperative (highest approval rating: 23%) and 70% are in favour of an obligation to put photovoltaic systems on public buildings and new private buildings (highest approval rating: 36%).

Technology/innovation/economy: 89% of respondents are in favour of more support for the development of climate-friendly products and technologies (highest level of approval: 47%). 83% are in favour of labelling climate-friendly products (highest approval rating: 40%). Helping consumers to make purchasing decisions through appealing labelling is therefore apparently an accepted regulatory approach. 64% are in favour of reducing subsidies that are harmful to the climate (highest approval rating: 30%) and 63% are in favour of making products that are harmful to the climate more expensive (highest approval rating: 26%).

The milieus of the *Intellectuals* and some *Progressive Realists* are more in favour of such measures than average; *Consumer Materialists*, *Sensation-Oriented* and, for some

Figure 8
Acceptance of various climate protection measures in the area of mobility

	I AGREE	completely / rather ... completely / rather	I REJECT IT

Reduce public transport fares
I AGREE: **91%**
completely 60%, rather 31%, rather 6%, completely 3%
I REJECT IT: **9%**

Extend the transport network and the frequency of local public transport
I AGREE: **90%**
completely 51%, rather 39%, rather 8%, completely 2%
I REJECT IT: **10%**

More charging stations for electric or hybrid vehicles
I AGREE: **74%**
completely 34%, rather 40%, rather 16%, completely 10%
I REJECT IT: **26%**

Carbon tax on airline tickets
I AGREE: **65%**
completely 32%, rather 33%, rather 21%, completely 14%
I REJECT IT: **35%**

Promotion of electric vehicles
I AGREE: **64%**
completely 26%, rather 38%, rather 21%, completely 15%
I REJECT IT: **36%**

Introduce a car toll so that someone who drives a lot has to pay more
I AGREE: **44%**
completely 20%, rather 24%, rather 29%, completely 27%
I REJECT IT: **56%**

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

points, *Adaptive Navigators* and *Conventional Mainstream* are below average. **Almost half of respondents from the low-income group (45%) and the lower and middle education groups (43% each) oppose making products that are harmful to the climate more expensive, while three-quarters of the high income and education groups (75% and 73% respectively) are in favour.**

Here, practice has shown that "subsidy cuts" are not the same as "subsidy cuts for individuals" – people perceive the commuter allowance differently to subsidies for industry, for example. The question of the social impact and countermeasures remains relevant here, too.

Scores in favour of legal regulations applying to the energy efficiency of electrical household appliances (e.g. energy classes for refrigerators) are slightly lower; however, at 73% there is still a clear majority. *Intellectuals* and *Progressive Realists* are above average here, *Sensation Oriented* below.

BE IN IT TO WIN IT – PEOPLE WANT TO PARTICIPATE AND BE INVOLVED

The direct involvement of the population in the climate-neutral transition, whether at company level or in local energy generation, is generally regarded as an important prerequisite for broad social approval. We also asked about this accordingly. In fact, approval is high when it comes to issues that involve co-determination.

83% believe that citizens should participate in public and political life (e.g. in citizens' forums, planning councils) in order to help shape the community (29% absolute agreement). In the milieu of the *Sensation Oriented*, these values are below average (only between 72% and 79%), but a majority is still clearly in favour.

55% could imagine taking an active part in shaping their community's energy supply (14% "definitely"). **79% of respondents could imagine generating their own energy** (including 10% who already do so and 46% who are fully in favour of this). **88% agree that the development of energy communities[5] should be supported by the government** (36% absolute agreement).

93% of respondents would be in favour of constructing a solar park and 84% would agree to the construction of a wind park in their municipality if the resulting profits would benefit the municipality (high approval "I think it would be good" 63% and 48% each; "I would accept" 30% and 36% each).

However, there are **considerable differences** between the individual groups almost **everywhere**, be it in terms of milieu, age, gender, education or income. While 75% of the *Established* and 72% of the *Cosmopolitan Avantgarde*

can imagine taking an active part in shaping the energy supply of their community, only 30% of *Consumer Materialists* and 35% of the *Conventional Mainstream* agree. 64% of male respondents agree, but only 47% of female respondents. At 66%, the figure is highest among the youngest age cohort (scores decrease with increasing age). **People with a high level of education or income are more interested than average, while people with a low level of education and income are less interested than average.** This also reflects the current situation with membership in cooperatives, for example, but should not be viewed statically. For example, deposits of several thousand euros are often required to participate in an energy cooperative. The associated costs are also high, and the bureaucratic and time requirements are not exactly straightforward. Barriers need to be removed in order to get more social groups interested.

Progressive Realists score 83% in favour of generating their own energy, while for *Consumer Materialists* and *Conventional Mainstream* this figure is only 54% and 58%, respectively. **Adaptive Navigators are more critical than average of solar and wind farms (only 40% and 29%, respectively, would be in favour of building one in their community, even if the revenue went to it)**. Among *Progressive Realists*, *Intellectuals* and *Performers*, on the other hand, more than two-thirds are in favour of solar parks and at least well over half are in favour of wind parks.
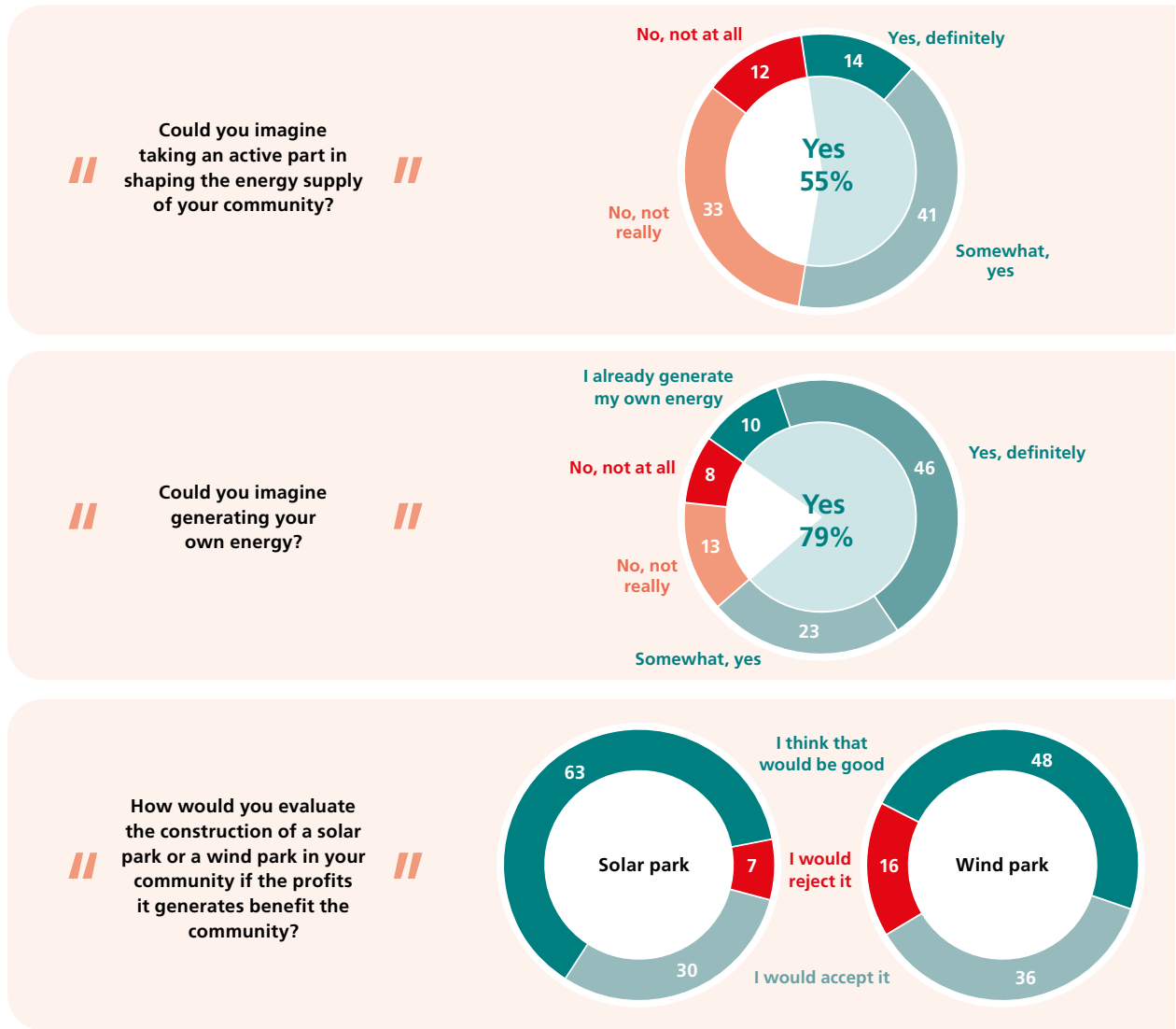
CARROT OR STICK?

When it comes to the most suitable means, a clear majority are in favour of state subsidies. When asked for how the heating transition should take place, 66% are in favour of more public subsidies for climate-neutral technologies and the replacement of the heating system. 7% favour higher prices for oil, gas and coal; 6% bans. 21% are not in favour of any of the options mentioned, as there are other possibilities.

Accordingly, there is an urgent need for measures to accompany the rise in the price of CO2 emissions in order to achieve public support for the heating transition and implement it successfully.

Only in the milieu of the *Sensation-Orientated* is approval of government support measures below 50%. In the youngest age cohort, the approval ratings for higher prices and bans are higher, but still in the low range at 13% and 10%, respectively. Almost a third of the lower education level favours other options, including a continuation of the status quo as it seems. An above-average number of respondents from the *Consumer Materialists* (43%), *Conventional Mainstream* (36%) and *Adaptive Navigators* (32%) milieus also prefer that other options are used. What is needed here is better communication that takes greater account of the interests of these milieus and a convincing presentation of the benefits that a heat transition would mean for these milieus in their everyday lives.
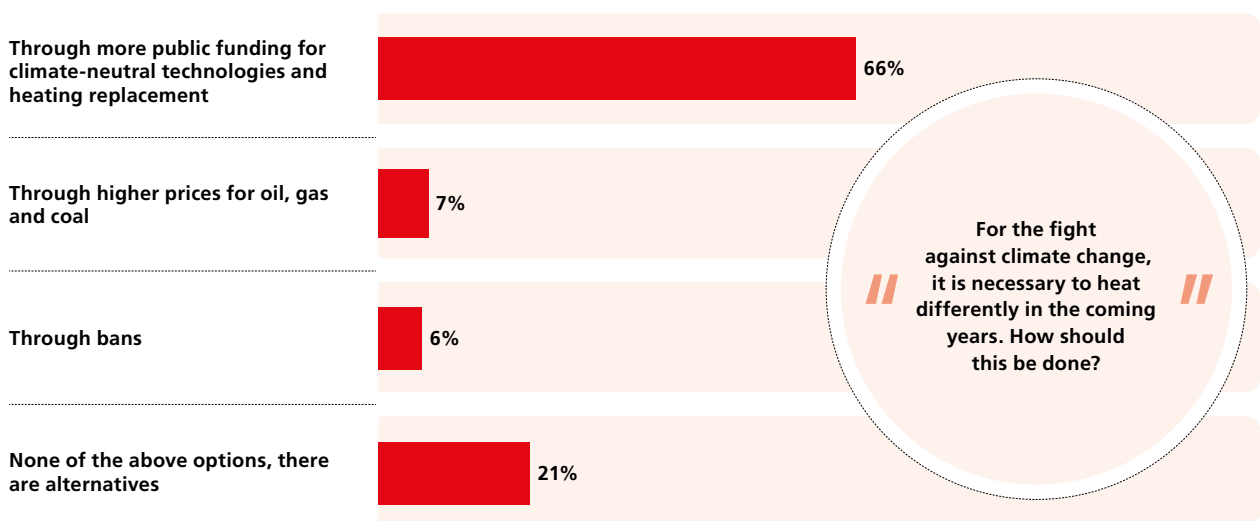
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5 Energy communities are communities that organise themselves at the local level to shape their energy supply more sustainably and independently, for example in a cooperative.

Figure 9
Attitudes towards the energy and heating transition – energy generation

Could you imagine taking an active part in shaping the energy supply of your community?

No, not at all — 12
Yes, definitely — 14
No, not really — 33
Somewhat, yes — 41

Yes 55%

Could you imagine generating your own energy?

I already generate my own energy — 10
Yes, definitely — 46
No, not at all — 8
No, not really — 13
Somewhat, yes — 23

Yes 79%

How would you evaluate the construction of a solar park or a wind park in your community if the profits it generates benefit the community?

I think that would be good

Solar park
63
I would reject it — 7
I would accept it — 30

Wind park
48
16
36

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

Figure 10
Attitudes towards the heating transition – subsidies, prices and bans

Through more public funding for climate-neutral technologies and heating replacement — **66%**

Through higher prices for oil, gas and coal — **7%**

Through bans — **6%**

None of the above options, there are alternatives — **21%**

For the fight against climate change, it is necessary to heat differently in the coming years. How should this be done?

Basis: 1,200 cases, total sample; figures in %.

WHICH NARRATIVES ARE CONVINCING?

A coherent narrative surrounding these measures is needed for the public debate and to obtain the broadest possible social support for an ambitious climate policy. Accordingly, common narratives and derivations were also surveyed.

81% see the industrialised countries as having a special responsibility for climate protection, as they have been the main cause of climate change (highest approval rating: 35%). In addition, 73% say they feel better when they buy products that have less impact on the environment and climate (highest approval rating: 28%).

Here, too, we see significant differences between the milieus. *Intellectuals* and *Progressive Realists* (and to a lesser extent the *Established*) agree more than average; *Sensation-Oriented*, *Adaptive Navigators*, *Consumer-Materialists* and to a lesser extent *Conventional Mainstream* agree less than average.

86% of respondents believe that we all need to take action ourselves and start changing our way of life in order to preserve the foundations of life for ourselves and future generations; the highest level of approval is 42%. In addition, **84% of respondents would be willing to do more for environmental and climate protection if the resulting costs were distributed in a socially just manner** (highest approval rating: 30%). Significantly more than half (61%) are willing to actively contribute to changing society themselves (highest level of approval: 17%).

It becomes clear that attempting to convince those who are not already convinced with the usual narratives is not a sure-fire road to success. Accordingly, future narratives on a climate policy transition should be more strongly aligned with the lifeworld of these milieus.

II

CONCLUSIONS FOR THE CLIMATE-NEUTRAL REFORM AGENDA AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Despite the urgent need for climate change to be recognised and perceived by the majority of the population, practical implementation of social-ecological change triggers a wide range of emotions, doubts and protests. These extend from general unease when it comes to change, fears surrounding increasing paternalism and personal financial burdens, as well as concerns about economic downturns and social upheaval, to fundamental doubts about the feasibility of climate-neutral transformation and growing fears about the future.

How should politicians and the public react to this?

SHAPING CHANGE IN A SOCIALLY JUST WAY

In some milieus, the ecological issue is perceived as a threat to the standard of living that has been achieved. Many people are currently experiencing a general sense of crisis, as the future seems increasingly unpredictable. The climate-neutral transformation fuels this further. This feeling dovetails with concerns about the loss of traditional ways of life and the fear of not being able to maintain one's own hard-earned prosperity. There is a great fear of ending up worse off than before. This is why the notion of a fundamental change in our way of life and doing business goes hand in hand with mounting trepidation and fears of social decline.

Accordingly, the question of costs cannot be avoided if sceptical or even opposition groups are to be included or at least their impact on the centre of society is to be limited. Incidentally, this is not only about lower social status milieus; even in middle social milieus, the reorientation of society and economy is widely perceived as a threat to the standard of living achieved. This is all the more true wherever inequalities or unfavourable framework conditions cluster and converge. For example, for people with low or average income living in rural areas in poorly insulated houses with oil or gas heating, the question of costs quickly takes on existential dimensions. Resistance to change grows commensurately, offering fertile ground for populist forces to exploit. **There is no way around the issue of fair distribution of the burdens and costs of the transition. Shaping a socially just climate policy is key to overcoming social barriers and minimising social conflicts.**

Equally important in this context is the differentiated and varying call for individual effort and sacrifice. It should be noted once again that well-off milieus generally cause significantly more emissions. Milieus with a lower social status are well aware of this fact. A carbon tax for frequent flyers is one way of addressing this. The expansion of renewable energy should also be promoted in urban regions in order to prevent the impression that rural areas are supposed to unilaterally shoulder the consequences and costs of the energy transition.

PROMOTING THE COMMON GOOD, SOCIAL COHESION AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The dominant climate policy narrative is that emissions must be reduced because otherwise the world will become increasingly uninhabitable. In practice, climate policy is primarily associated with sacrifice and the loss of familiar ways of life that are perceived as positive. This narrative is risky, as it fosters fears and resistance. **Politicians can only counter this by emphasising the social benefits of a social-ecological transformation and the positive consequences for the common good. What is needed is a narrative emphasising the benefits of a climate-neutral society.[6]** Approaches to this can also be identified on a milieu-specific basis: clean, green and more liveable city centres, higher quality of life through less traffic, better health through less air pollution, or more mobility infrastructure for the elderly are only a few examples. But the list is longer: better quality of locally produced food, intact nature available for local recreation, serving as a cultural asset and as an opportunity to identify with one's home town or region, inner-city green spaces as a contribution to climate adaptation and upgrading of urban real estate, etc. **Furthermore, climate policies are also supported by more sceptical milieus if they are compatible with life in a modern consumer society and offer direct additional personal benefits.** If sustainability is possible at no additional cost and increases one's own quality of life instead of diminishing it, these milieus will also be more receptive. Positive effects will also be derived if these new products are associated with a gain in prestige, for example in the case of ecological high-tech products and sustainable jewellery.

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6 Reusswig, A. / Schleer, C. (2021). p. 60.

Similarly, such an approach leaves room for individual improvements. Milieus with lower social status are generally strongly orientated towards the question of what concrete measures benefit them. Effective arguments for energy-saving behaviour, or the purchase of environmentally friendly appliances, for example, translate into cost savings, modernity and efficiency (e.g. lower utility costs through thermal insulation). This is all the more true when financial investments pay for themselves after a short period of time. Perception of trade-offs (e.g. "climate protection leads to economic damage and jeopardises jobs") must be allayed, doubts about the feasibility of necessary measures must be dispelled and – in addition to public welfare aspects (see above) – direct additional personal benefits also need to be emphasised.[7]

ACTIVELY INVOLVING CITZIZENS, REDUCING ELITIST PERCEPTIONS

Material issues are central – but these are by no means the sole decisive factors when it comes to the acceptance or blocking of climate measures. The debate over social-ecological restructuring is also very much about recognising different ways of life and a feeling of injustice when individual achievements are denied recognition. Cultural changes called for and promoted by the so-called educated elite are often perceived as invasive by other milieus. Furthermore, many people feel that their own life experiences and everyday challenges are simply being ignored. **Anger and fatigue in the face of change are perceived much more strongly by lower social milieus. This must be addressed politically: The opportunities and benefits of ecological modernisation need to be distributed in such a way that they can achieve majorities.**[8] This is possible, for example, by expanding opportunities for co-determination and participation – for example in the form of citizens' councils or transformation councils at the company level as well as involvement in value-creation. For example, in energy parks or through cooperative models.

If citizens are involved in decision-making regarding the design of climate policies and have the opportunity to help shape change processes, this increases acceptance of climate protection as well as trust and confidence in the political system. The journey is the reward. The basic opportunity to contribute one's own opinion means that decisions often obtain support even if one's own interests are not fully satisfied in the end. While not everyone actually has the aim of becoming active in a citizens' council or a cooperative, the sheer possibility of having a say gives people the efficacious feeling that their own interests are being heard.

Therefore, solutions often lie at the local level. An electricity supply based on renewables is much more decentralised and small-scale than fossil fuels. This makes it more independent and encourages more widespread use. However, this also enables or requires the involvement of many individuals in the generation and smart use of electricity. Citizens can generate electricity themselves, for example, either on their own roofs or through membership in an energy cooperative or energy community. The income produced can be used locally or distributed to the members.

This individual participation creates practical solutions. Furthermore, it offers a powerful image of democratic participation by the population. The role of progressive actors is to ensure that such models are also open to financially weaker strata of the population and not just reserved for the upper middle class. Lower social status milieus in particular need offers that effectively combine social justice, climate protection and the opportunity to utilise their own abilities. A certain hands-on mentality is typical of the *Sensation Oriented* milieu, for example. If members of this milieu feel directly affected, they want to have a say and be involved and also make a name for themselves. Many could imagine playing an active role in their community's energy supply, e.g. by becoming a member of an energy cooperative – provided that they (also) meet like-minded people there and feel welcome and accepted. This is about practical action instead of abstract discussions with elites who are perceived as aloof and disconnected.[9]

COMMUNICATE BETTER, AROUSE POSITIVE EMOTIONS, STRENGTHEN SOCIAL NORMS

The results of our multi-country survey indicate that many people would like more and, above all, more comprehensible information regarding climate policies. **Clear, honest and appealingly packaged communication is essential for the success of the climate-neutral reform agenda. Politicians should not play down the challenges posed by climate-neutral transformation, but communicate the magnitude and duration of the task in an honest manner.** This cannot be based solely on scientific findings and statistical data. Right-wing populists appeal to emotions, which is what makes them so successful. The emotions of the population must also play a greater role in the climate communication of progressive parties. This is not about creating emotions like in advertising; these are already in play. Fears and frustrations, anger and doubts must be addressed. The potential target groups for progressive parties are very large – and the field of emotions is commensurately wide-ranging. One cannot simply brush these aside by denying their right to be expressed. They can be disarmed by drawing attention to practical solutions that inspire hope, in which everyone is involved and of which we can be proud.

Both the challenge and the solution lie on our own doorstep – and that is where they need to be displayed and discussed. **Surveys show that many people rate their own cli-**

7 Schleer, C. / Wisniewski, N. / Reusswig, F. (2024).

8 Mau, S. / Lux, T. / Westheuser, L. (2023): Trigger Points / Triggerpunkte Consensus and Conflict in Contemporary Society. Suhrkamp Verlag.

9 Schleer, C. / Wisniewski, N. / Reusswig, F. (2024). p. 27.

mate-related willingness to change quite highly, but that of their neighbours much lower.[10] This presumed lack of initiative on the part of their neighbours can be expected to inhibit their own efforts as a result. Positive examples from one's own region, the local business sector, on the other hand, bring it closer to home that something is happening. This reduces the feeling of helplessness that often prevails among many people when it comes to the topic of climate change.

Politicians should not leverage the narrative of "radical" change, as this fuels fears of loss given the level of prosperity attained in industrialised countries.

Furthermore, there needs to be a better medium to long-term plan with clear goals and intermediate stages as well as reliable implementation in manageable steps. Reservations and fears among the population arise above all when the impression prevails that there is a lack of concepts and strategies for tackling problems. If this is compounded by the impression that changes are being made as a result of erratic decision-making under high external pressure or without a well-founded strategy, i. e. "from one day to the next", and seemingly without regard for the demands of everyday life, anxiety and resistance grow. In order to eliminate information deficits and avoid uncertainty, climate policy measures need to be explained in an understandable way, purposes and objectives need to be communicated and both effects and successes need to be demonstrated.

Citizens must not see themselves as passive victims of the ambitious climate-neutral transformation. Furthermore, they do not want to be lectured to; positive examples from their own peer group are more effective. People with similar interests, similar attitudes and similar living conditions have changed their behaviour and are succeeding with it. This message is much more effective than a raised finger. Appeals scare people off; social etiquette, on the other hand, catches on. People follow socially recognised norms; they want to belong.

SHAPING STRUCTURAL CHANGE THROUGH ACTIVE INDUSTRIAL AND LABOUR MARKET POLICY

In particular, the survey results obtained in the area of economy and jobs would appear to be downright contradictory at first glance. On the one hand, there is a conviction that businesses cannot ignore ecological modernisation if they want to maintain their competitiveness, or that they will even benefit from it. At the same time, there is also a strong fear of the impact of rising energy prices and ambitious production standards on the domestic economy in general and

jobs in particular. **It is clear here that the population is not critical or openly opposed to structural change itself, but rather to its potential negative side effects for local companies and the labour market.** Just as social cushioning of the transformation is indispensable for private households if social acceptance is to be gained for the reform agenda, there is also no way around a strong supportive role of the state for the economy. This involves both reliable framework conditions that are planned and communicated well in advance, as well as the necessary financial security and funding for structural change together with appropriate training and further education for employees. At the same time, aspects such as clear communication and sufficient involvement of the local population as well as social partners with businesses, trade unions and the workforce play a key role.

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10 See for example European Investment Bank (2022). The EIB climate survey – Citizens call for green recovery – Calls for a green recovery. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/414948; or Leviston, Z. / Uren, H. V. (2020). Overestimating one's "green" behavior: Better-than-average bias may function to reduce perceived personal threat from climate change. Journal of Social Issues, 76(1), 70–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12365

ANNEX: MILIEU GROUPS, THEIR SPECIFIC BARRIERS AND RESONANCE POTENTIALS
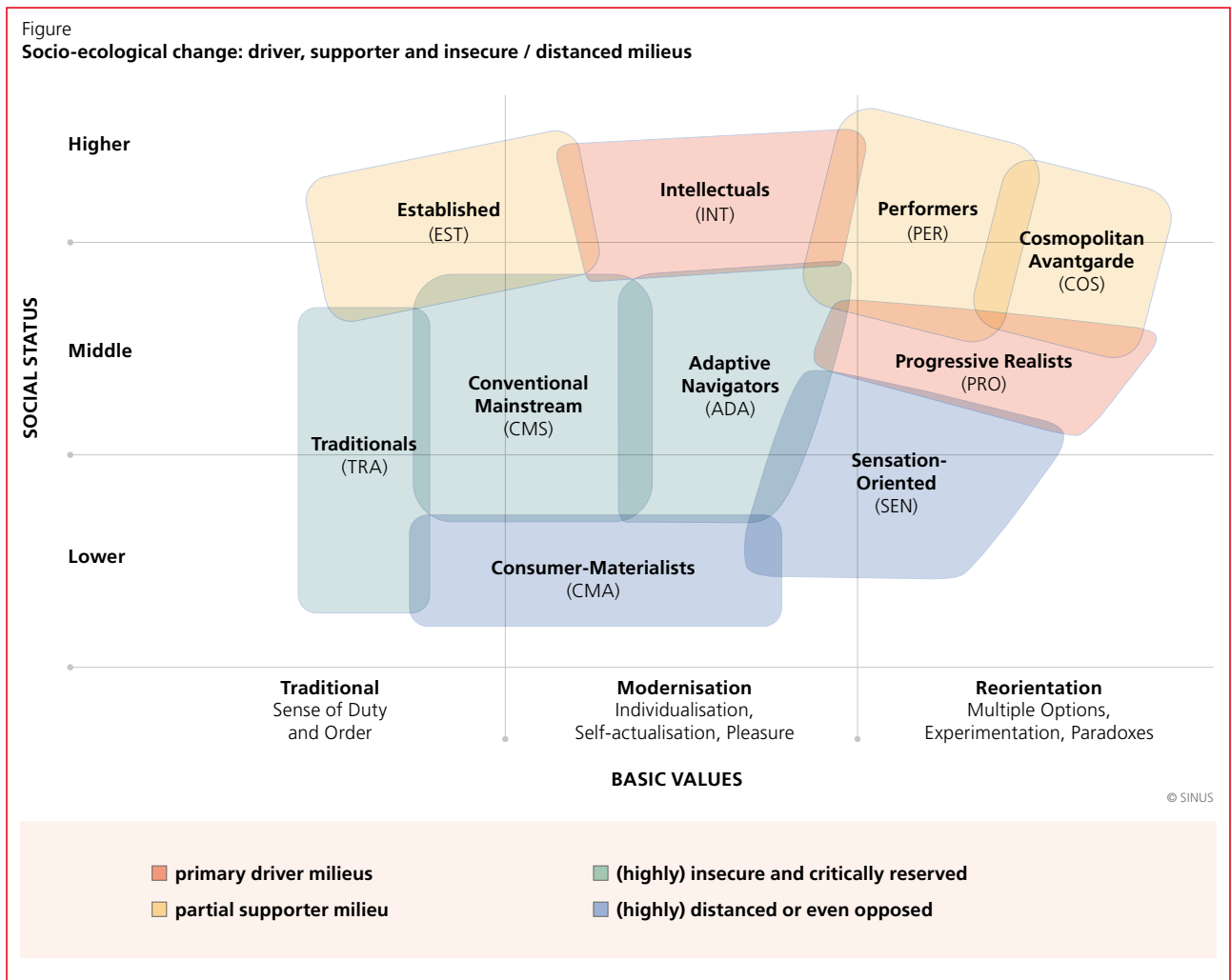
The following overview and text passages are a compilation of direct quotations from the SINUS-Institute's final report on this population survey commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.[11] According to the authors, four milieu groups can be categorised as follows with regard to social-ecological transformation:

– The daily lives of the post-materialist *Intellectuals* and the mission-conscious *Progressive Realists* can be seen as the **primary driver milieus**. Both milieus are characterised by a particularly strong sensitisation to the risks of climate change. In their view, social-ecological transformation is a basic prerequisite for overcoming the climate crisis. In view of the pressing time, they are

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[11] Schleer, C.; Wisniewski, N.; Reusswig, F. (2024): Shaping the socio-ecological transformation: How social barriers can be overcome and how resonance potentials can be utilised. SINUS-Institut. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/21136.pdf

calling on politicians to push ahead more consistently with nature conservation, environmental protection and climate action (the *Progressive Realists* are particularly "vocal" in this regard). They explicitly agree with distributing the costs and burdens of change fairly. At the same time, there is a high level of willingness to shape one's own way of living more sustainably in favour of the environment. This does not rule out inconsistent behaviour in some cases, but the members of these milieus also self-critically acknowledge inconsistencies – and see them as an incentive for further improvements.

– The conservative *Established* elite can be seen as a **partial supporter milieu**. The members of this milieu have an open attitude towards necessary changes, but fear economic damage if climate protection targets are too ambitious. They are also reluctant to change their own sometimes exclusive lifestyle (privileged liv-

Figure
Socio-ecological change: driver, supporter and insecure / distanced milieus

SOCIAL STATUS

Higher

Middle

Lower

Established (EST)

Intellectuals (INT)

Performers (PER)

Cosmopolitan Avantgarde (COS)

Conventional Mainstream (CMS)

Adaptive Navigators (ADA)

Progressive Realists (PRO)

Traditionals (TRA)

Sensation-Oriented (SEN)

Consumer-Materialists (CMA)

Traditional
Sense of Duty and Order

Modernisation
Individualisation, Self-actualisation, Pleasure

Reorientation
Multiple Options, Experimentation, Paradoxes

BASIC VALUES

© SINUS

■ primary driver milieus

■ partial supporter milieu

■ (highly) insecure and critically reserved

■ (highly) distanced or even opposed

ing conditions, long-distance travelling, etc.). The modern economic elite of the *Performers* also agree with the goal of climate neutrality. However, they are less convinced – especially in comparison to the driver milieus – that strict and consistent laws are needed to preserve nature and the environment. Instead, they favour technology and progress – and the voluntary nature of climate policies. Although the lifestyle-affine *Cosmopolitan Avantgarde* milieu is strongly individualistic and anti-ideological, it can still be considered a supporter milieu – due to its urban cosmopolitanism, its interest in green trends (vintage fashion, upcycling, etc.) and its general appreciation of sustainability, which is also translated to some extent into political positioning and professional orientations. In everyday life, sustainable behaviour is supported above all where ecological rethinking promises an increase in quality of life (e. g. sustainable nutrition, environmentally friendly mobility).

– The (highly) **insecure and critically reserved milieus** include the stability-seeking older generation of *Traditionals*, the harmony-seeking *Conventional Mainstream* and the young, modern middle class of *Adaptive Navigators*. Uncertainty is increasingly spreading in these milieus in view of the perceived intensification of the crisis and the associated calls for change, which are perceived as diffuse. The need to adapt to changing times may be undisputed here, but awareness of the urgency of the climate problem is rather low. Although people express fear of the consequences of climate change, many also believe that there are more important problems in their own country (e. g. pension provision/elderly poverty, inflation/falling purchasing power, fair and well-paid jobs). As people believe that they will be worse off afterwards than before, the idea of a "great transformation" creates growing fears of social decline and the future. People are disappointed by politicians and the government, no longer feel that their interests are (sufficiently) represented and are annoyed regarding "wealthy elites" who want to tell others how they should live in the future in the wake of the climate crisis.

– While the middle-class milieus (*Conventional Mainstream*, *Adaptive Navigators*) and the *Traditionals* are certainly sensitised to the issue of climate neutrality, this is where the boundary runs to those groups that are (strongly) **distanced or even opposed** to the ecological issue: In the materialistic and entertainment-orientated milieu of the *Sensation Oriented*, the envisaged climate neutrality is primarily seen as an imposition that is associated with sacrifice, personal restrictions and a loss of joie de vivre. The members of this milieu live in the "here and now" – this strong focus on the present runs counter to the principles of sustainability. Although environmental threats cannot simply be ignored, little thought is given to the risks and consequences. The *Consumer Materialists*, who are concerned about participation, also regard climate change as a subordinate problem. Many live in precar-

ious circumstances (e. g. unemployment, health problems, difficult family circumstances), feel "left behind" and socially disadvantaged. In view of this, climate policy measures are perceived as unfair and as an additional threat to their own social situation. As a result, they feel abandoned by the state and fear that they will be left even further behind.

The grouping made here according to the degree of support for the necessary transformation must not obscure the fact that we are dealing with topic- and situation-specific approval and opposition in each milieu, which can be addressed. Even lifestyle factors and value orientations that initially stand in the way of a transformation towards climate neutrality can be used to bring about climate-friendly changes.

[…]

REACHING THE MODERN MIDDLE CLASS OF SOCIETY

People live in social collectives that can strongly influence and change their attitudes and behaviour: By copying and comparing, imitating and identifying, individuals develop certain patterns of behaviour that express a personal connection with the community. This creates a sense of togetherness, a feeling of commitment to shared values.[12]

However, majorities in the population are not required to set social change processes in motion. For the "tipping point", a committed, large subgroup that is credible and, above all, visibly in favour of change is sufficient.[13] Accordingly, the success of the transformation towards climate-neutral societies depends largely on winning over the driver and supporter milieus for concrete climate policies. Although there is broad consensus among these groups on fundamental issues, opinions regarding the pace and concrete measures can differ widely […]. Depending on the (interest) situation, criticism is voiced, for example regarding deficits in implementation and a lack of consistency (e. g. insufficient consideration of nature conservation issues). However, people often act on their own initiative, e. g. through personal, corporate or municipal initiatives. The driver milieus of the *Intellectuals* and *Progressive Realists* are particularly willing to change. With their activities, both in the private and public sphere, they have the potential to influence the supporter milieus, as they have in common the desire to take on a pioneering role in society – the *Established* as a responsible

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12 Schleer, C. (2014): Corporate Social Responsibility und die Kaufentscheidung der Konsumenten. Wann und warum berücksichtigen Konsumenten CSR-Kriterien bei ihren Kaufentscheidungen? [Corporate social responsibility and consumers' purchasing decisions. When and why do consumers take CSR criteria into account when making purchasing decisions?] Berlin: Springer Gabler. p. 58.

13 Centola, D. et al. (2018). Experimental evidence for tipping points in social convention. Science, 360 (6393), pp. 1116–1119; Gladwell, M. (2006): The Tipping Point. How little things can make a big difference. Hachette Book Group USA.

performance elite, the *Performers* as progress-oriented "early adopters" and the *Cosmopolitan Avantgarde* as ambitious creative trendsetters.[14]

Nevertheless, the transformation cannot be successful as an "elite project". To minimise resistance and counterreactions, it needs more comprehensive support in society. The Adaptive Navigator milieu has a central role to play here.[15] This milieu is open-minded, determined, well-educated, flexible, willing to adapt, modern and generally open to new things – and therefore "usually" easy to reach for the goal of a sustainable society. If we succeed in convincing the modern middle class of concrete measures, this will also have an impact on the adjacent milieus (especially the *Conventional Mainstream*, for whom the *Adaptive Navigators* are important sources of orientation). However, despite being fundamentally open to climate issues, the young modern middle class currently sees less the social advantages of a sustainable society and more the personal disadvantages of the impending change. For climate policy, this means: trade-off perceptions (e.g. "climate protection leads to economic damage and jeopardises jobs") must be reduced, doubts about the feasibility of necessary measures must be dispelled and – in addition to the public welfare aspects (see above) – direct additional personal benefits must also be emphasised (efficiency, modernisation and cost arguments such as bonus points for using public transport or inexpensive rental bikes).

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14 Nonetheless, in the end there will be no getting around the need to address the large ecological footprints of high-status social milieus; they cannot be approached solely in terms of their positive ecological aspects without becoming untrustworthy. If the transition to climate neutrality inevitably involves a moment of renunciation (see Lepenies, P. (2022): Verbot und Verzicht. Politik aus dem Geiste des Unterlassens [Prohibition and restraint. Politics through omission]. Berlin: Suhrkamp), then it is precisely the high-status milieus that will have to do without. It will therefore also be important to develop a civil culture of conflict and debate. This must be wrested from populism, which in reality undermines it.

15 See also Barth, B. / Molina, C. (2023): Transformation und Beharren. Aktuelle Einstellungen zu Umwelt- und Klimaschutz, differenziert nach den Sinus-Milieus [Transformation and resistance. Current attitudes towards environmental and climate protection, differentiated according to the Sinus-Milieus]. In: Fritz. J. and Tomaschek, N. (eds.): Partizipation. Das Zusammenwirken der Vielen für Demokratie, Wirtschaft und Umwelt [Participation. The cooperation of the many for democracy, the economy and the environment]. Volume 12, p. 147–158; and Borgstedt, S. (2023): Die Sinus-Milieus als Instrument für Transformationsforschung und evidenzbasierte Politikberatung [The Sinus-Milieus as a tool for transformation research and evidence-based policy advice]. In: Barth et al. (eds.): Praxis der Sinus-Milieus. Gegenwart und Zukunft eines modernen Gesellschafts- und Zielgruppenmodells [The practice of Sinus-Milieus. The present and future of a modern social and target group model]. 2nd edition. p. 305–316.