



# Pragmatism, not Dogmatism

What Germans think about Migration  
A Summary of the Study

**FOR A BETTER TOMORROW**

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**   
**STIFTUNG**

## FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

### A Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung project 2018–2020

Growing social inequality, societal polarisation, migration and integration, the climate crisis, digitalisation and globalisation, the uncertain future of the European Union – Germany faces profound challenges. Social Democracy must provide convincing, progressive and forward-looking answers to these questions. With the project “For a Better Tomorrow”, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is working on recommendations and positions in six central policy areas:

- Democracy
- Europe
- Digitalisation
- Sustainability
- Gender Equality
- Integration

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This paper presents the most significant findings of the study *Das pragmatische Einwanderungsland. Was die Deutschen über Migration denken (Pragmatism, not Dogmatism: What Germans think about migration)*, carried out by pollytix strategic research under the auspices of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Rainer Faus and Simon Storks of pollytix strategic research are responsible for the study's results and for the more detailed version of it. The latter is available online in German at

[www.fes.de/umfrage-migration-2019](http://www.fes.de/umfrage-migration-2019)

The authors responsible for the short version of this study are Johannes Damian, Felix Eikenberg and Sönke Hollenberg.

# WHAT GERMANS THINK ABOUT MIGRATION

Whether on talk shows, at party conferences, or in social media, the topic of migration continues to dominate the public debate. Since 2015, a large number of refugees have come to Germany, triggering heated discussion of what society should do about migration and integration. The tone tends to be highly emotional and positions seem entrenched. On one side we find those who advocate more immigration; on the other are those who radically oppose it.

But what do Germans really think about migration? Is the population really so polarised? What do people think about their government's integration policy?

The present study shows that the opinions of most of those surveyed are more nuanced. Views on immigration tend to be pragmatic and middle-of-the-road rather than dogmatic. Germans even consider immigration as an opportunity. However, there are also strong doubts about whether current policymaking will be able to cope with the ensuing challenges. Through its project »Für ein besseres Morgen« (For a Better Tomorrow), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung aims to contribute to the debate about what it will mean for Germany to be a country of immigration. This representative survey provides a good starting point.

What are the key findings?

## NUANCED OPINIONS RATHER THAN ENTRENCHED POSITIONS

In contrast to what the public debate might suggest, this study shows clearly that society is by no means split into two irreconcilable camps of vehement advocates and opponents of immigration. Only a quarter of those surveyed fall into each of these two categories respectively.

Around half of Germans belong to a broad »uncommitted center« with diverse attitudes. The majority favours accepting refugees, but is also aware of the challenges that such an influx of people brings with it.

## IMMIGRATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GERMANY

Germans are by and large open to immigration. More than half the population even regards immigration as an opportunity. Only a minority rejects it categorically. Immigration that can help to solve the shortage of skilled labour meets with particular approval (63 per cent). Finally, half of all Germans surveyed believe that immigration enriches the country not only economically, but also socially and culturally. The upshot is that the German populace now largely accepts the fact that Germany is a country of immigration.

## THOSE WHO INTEGRATE PROPERLY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO STAY

A large majority of Germans agree that people who have had to flee from war and persecution should be admitted. Seventy per cent believe that in the future Germany should take a number of refugees comparable to that which it accepts today or even more. However, most people are not very keen on letting in migrants coming to Germany »for economic reasons or fleeing poverty«. By contrast, most of those surveyed do not oppose refugees being housed in their neighbourhoods. And there is almost a general consensus that anyone who comes to Germany as a refugee, integrates properly, and gets a job should be permitted to stay, even if he or she is under an obligation to leave the country. Almost 80 per cent of the respondents take that view and, accordingly, are open to so-called »lane changing« (»Spurwechsel«).

## THE MAIN CONCERNS: RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM AND DIVISIONS IN SOCIETY

Concerns about the influx of refugees and migrants do exist. But they are not primarily those that tend to be highlighted in the media and politics. For instance, the biggest fears do not involve the costs of integration or competition between locals and immigrants for jobs. Crime and terror and the influence of Islam were ranked

only third and fourth on the list of concerns. Instead, the main worry relates to an increase in right-wing extremism and racist violence, followed by worries about increasing divisions in society.

## **TRUST, SOCIAL COHESION AND RESPECT – WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO NOW**

The belief that something is seriously amiss in society and that political solutions are urgently needed is also apparent in another area. Just under half of those surveyed believe that current policymakers are capable of meeting the challenges of the future. People neither see a political vision nor – especially in relation to refugee policy – a clear plan. Furthermore, more than three-quarters of the population feel that social cohesion is breaking down: »people only think about themselves«. A substantial proportion of those surveyed also feel that there is a lack of respect for people without academic degrees. More than 50 per cent of those surveyed think that they do not benefit personally from Germany's prosperity and are worried about their own futures. These views go hand in hand with a certain scepticism regarding refugees and migrants.

The findings show clearly that Germans are open towards immigration. Policymakers should not underestimate this basically positive attitude and should on no account undermine it with divisive policies and rhetoric.

However, it is also evident that people want a clear legal basis for Germany as a country of immigration: In other words, they prefer fair and orderly procedures for the admission of refugees and other migrants. Policymakers will only be able to maintain the general openness to immigration if they gain people's trust. And that will be possible only if they take a pragmatic approach to migration and integration, with a policy based on solidarity that reinforces social cohesion and fosters prosperity and esteem for everyone in Germany, regardless of his or her origins.

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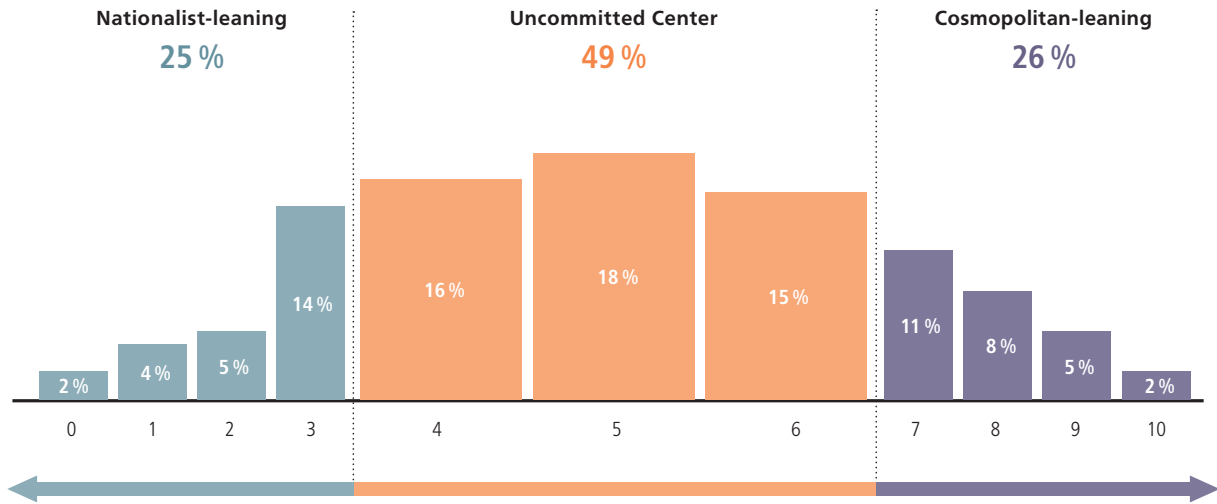
### **FELIX EIKENBERG**

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

### Composition of attitude groups

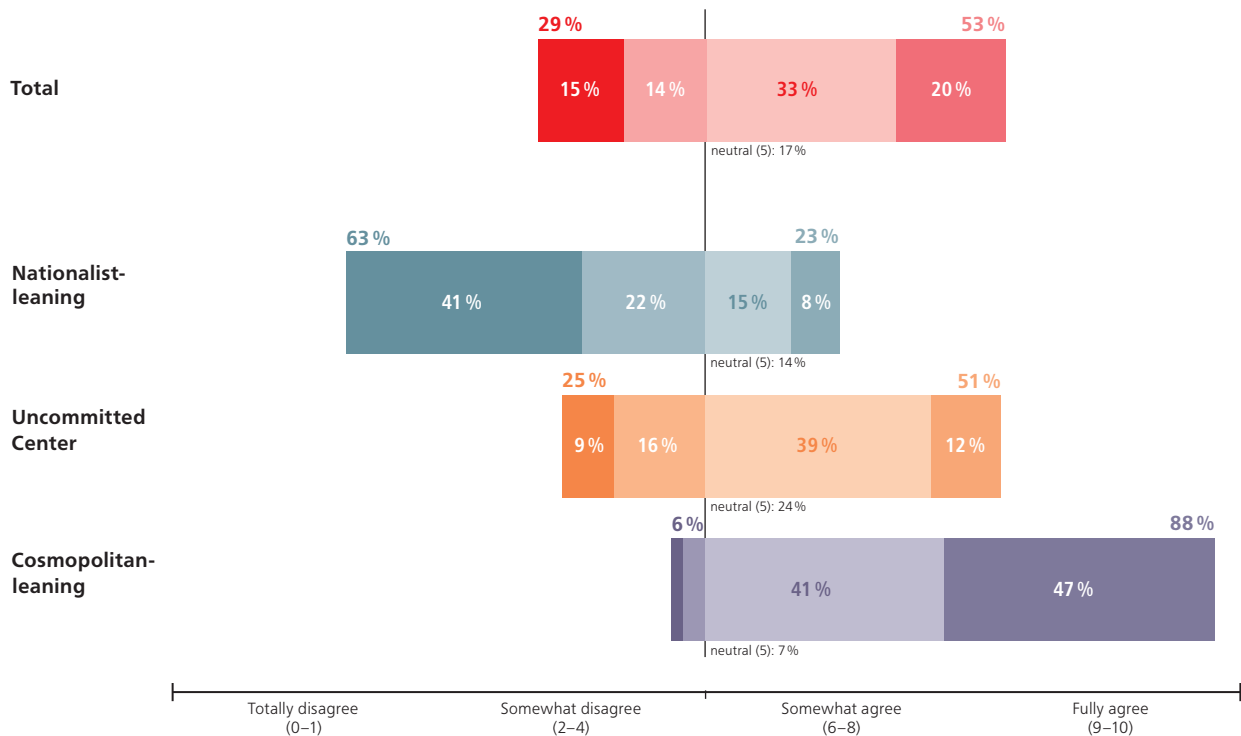


Basis: All eligible voters. Differences due to rounding up or down. Rounded average index, based on agreement with the following statements on an eleven-point scale: (1) 'Germany and the other EU countries should again be able to take more of their own decisions' (inverted), (2) 'Membership of the EU brings Germany more benefits than disadvantages', (3) 'Too much attention is paid to minorities in Germany instead of looking at the whole' (inverted), (4) 'The many foreigners make me feel like a stranger in my own country' (inverted).

Source: pollytix 2019.

### Immigration as an opportunity

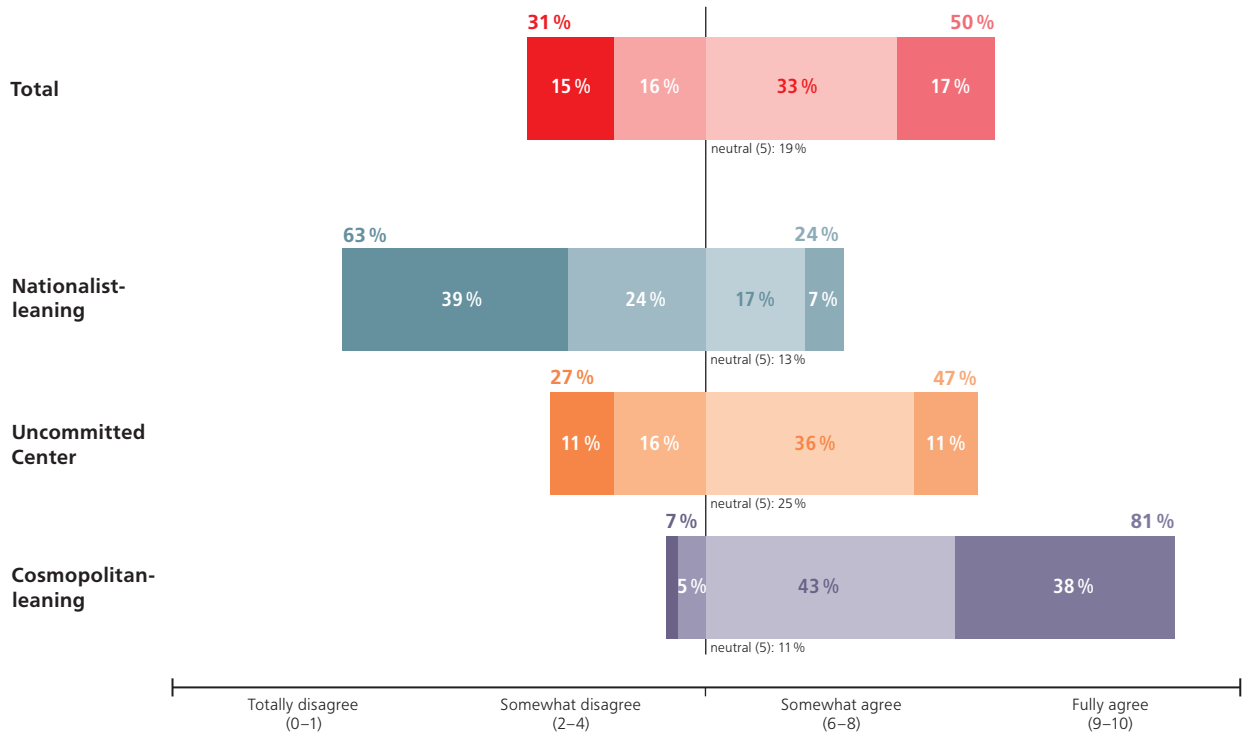
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement: Germany should take immigration as an opportunity.



Basis: All eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Immigration as enrichment

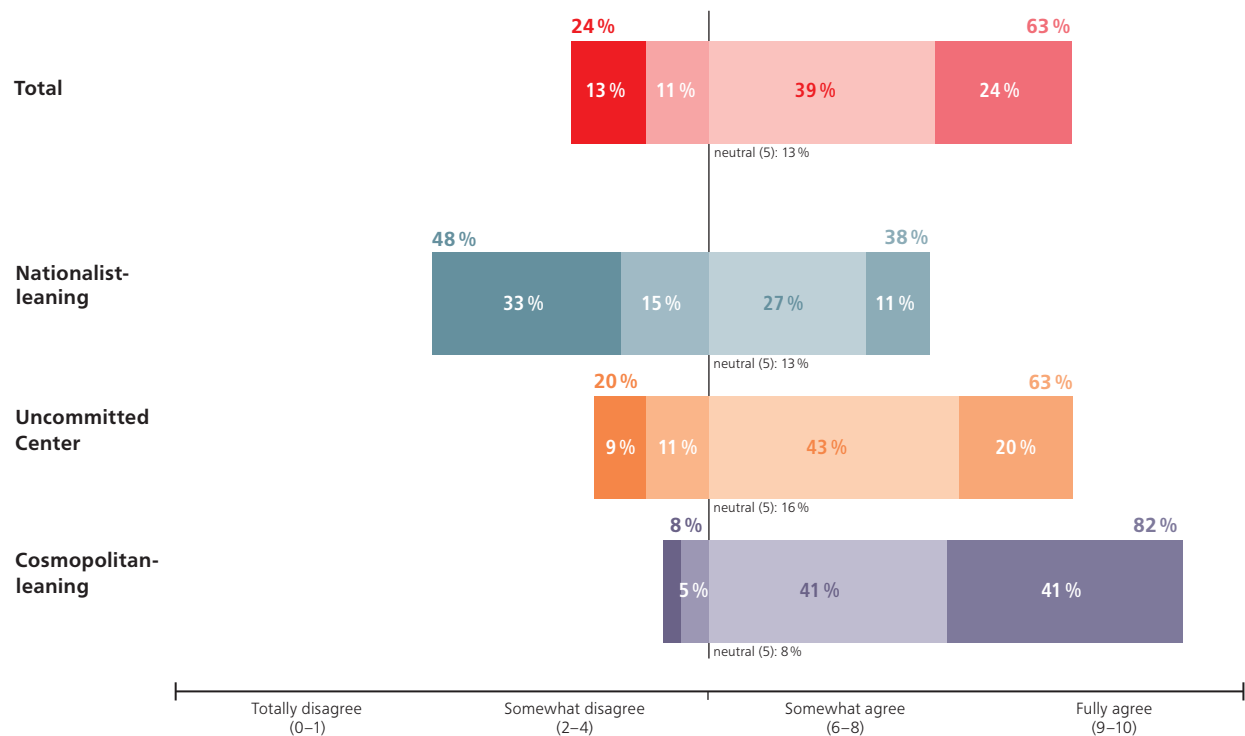
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement:  
Immigrants enrich cultural and social life in Germany.



Basis: All eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Immigration of skilled workers

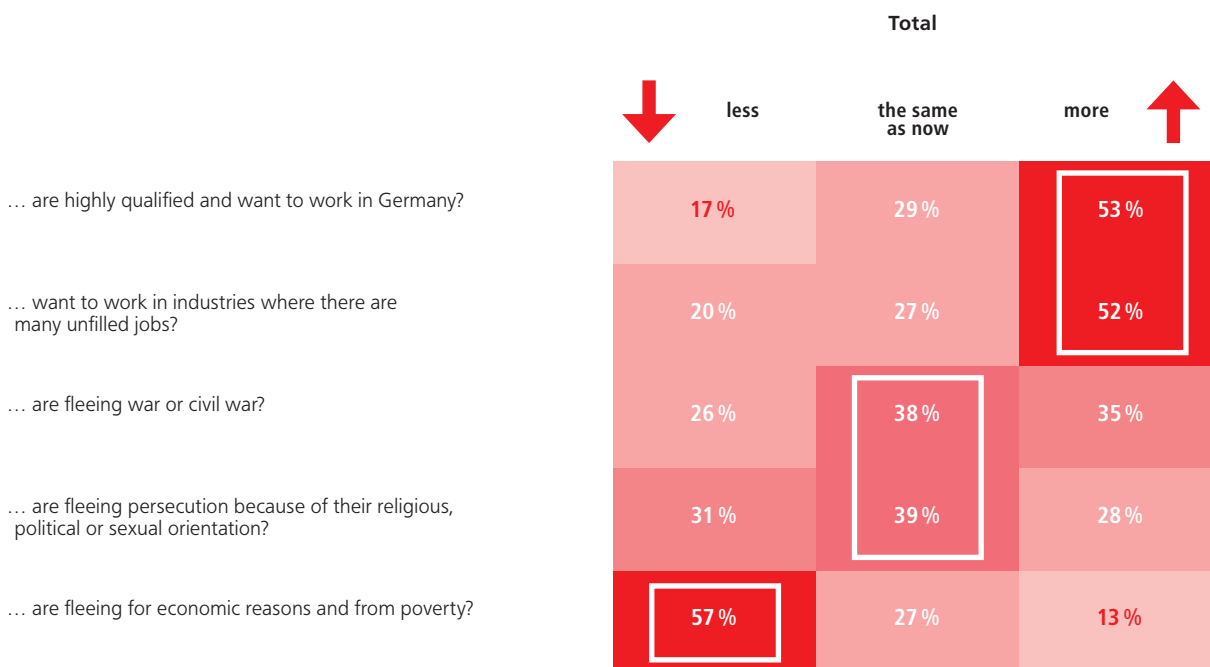
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement:  
Germany needs foreign workers in order to tackle skilled labour shortages.



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Receptiveness by group of immigrants

In your opinion, in the future Germany should take in more or fewer people who ...

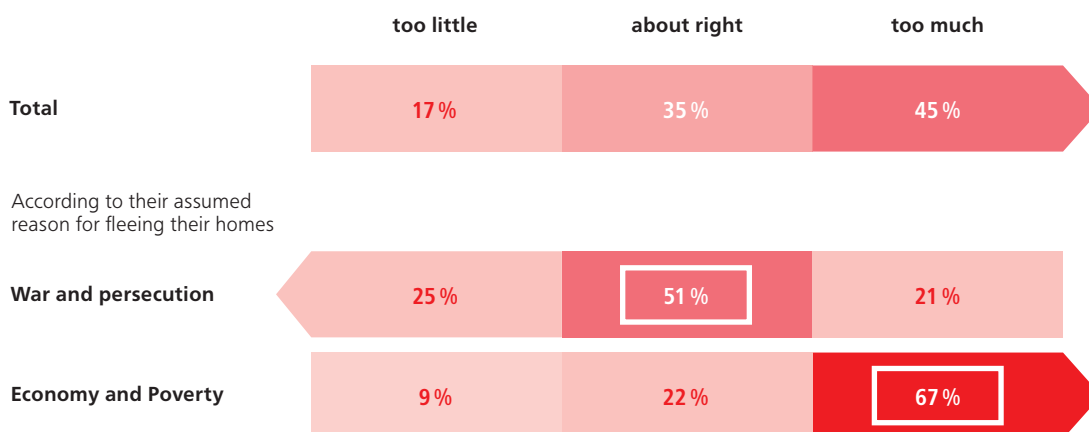


Basis: All eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Federal government's refugee policy

In your opinion, does the Federal government do ...

... too much for refugees who have come to Germany?  
 ... too little for refugees who have come to Germany?  
 or are its efforts to aid refugees just about right?



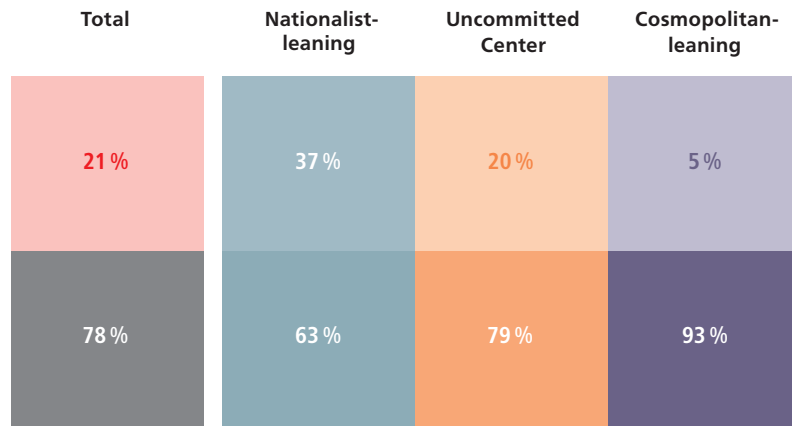
Basis: All eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Integration and 'lane changing' ("Spurwechsel")

Please tell me which point of view you agree with.

Foreigners who are under an obligation to leave the country should be **subject to compulsory deportation** even if they are well integrated and have a job or an apprenticeship.

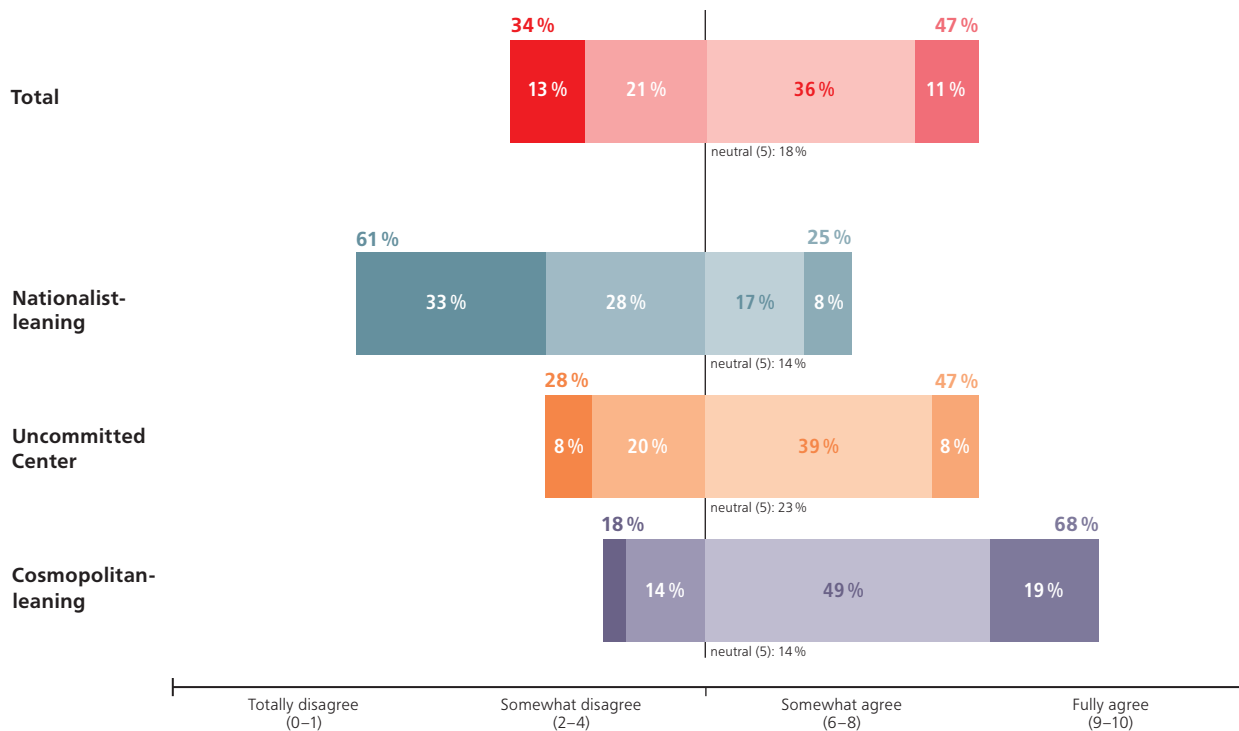
Foreigners who are under an obligation to leave the country, but who are well integrated and have a job or an apprenticeship should be permitted to **remain in Germany**.



Basis: all eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Politicians' ability to solve problems in general

Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement:  
Politicians are capable of dealing with the challenges of the future.

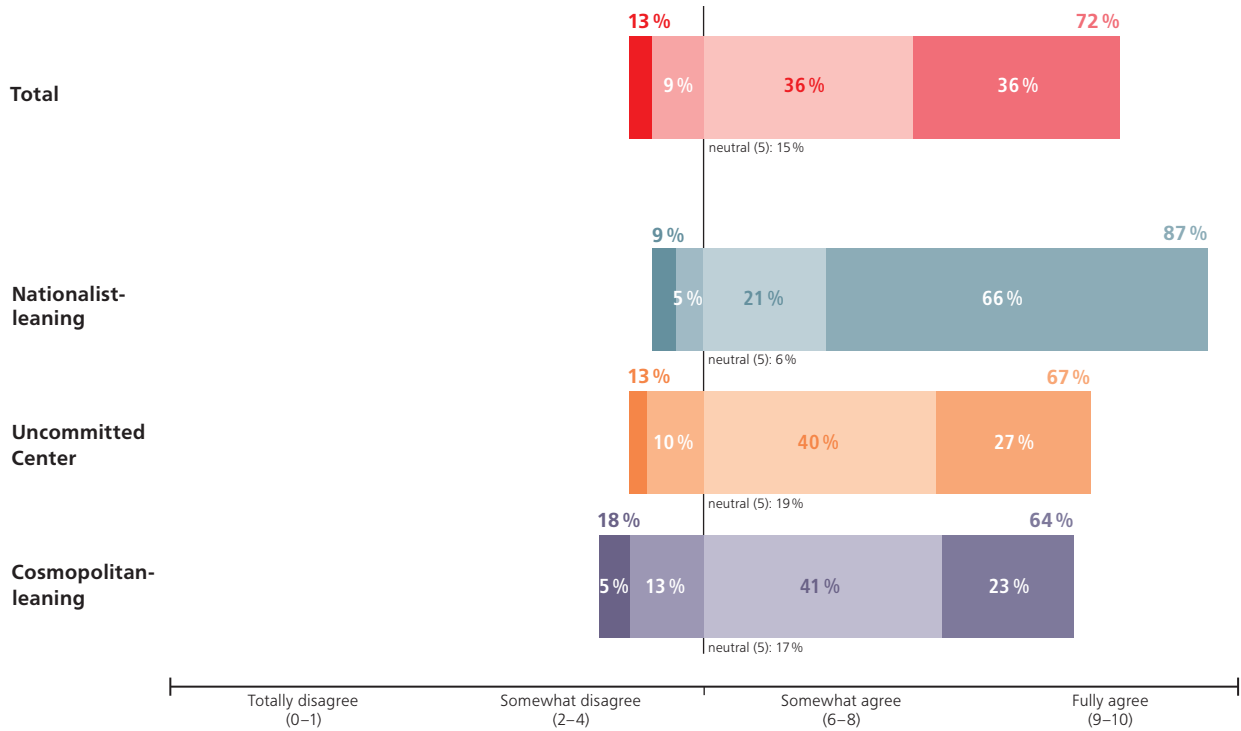


Basis: all eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.



### Lack of a long-term political vision

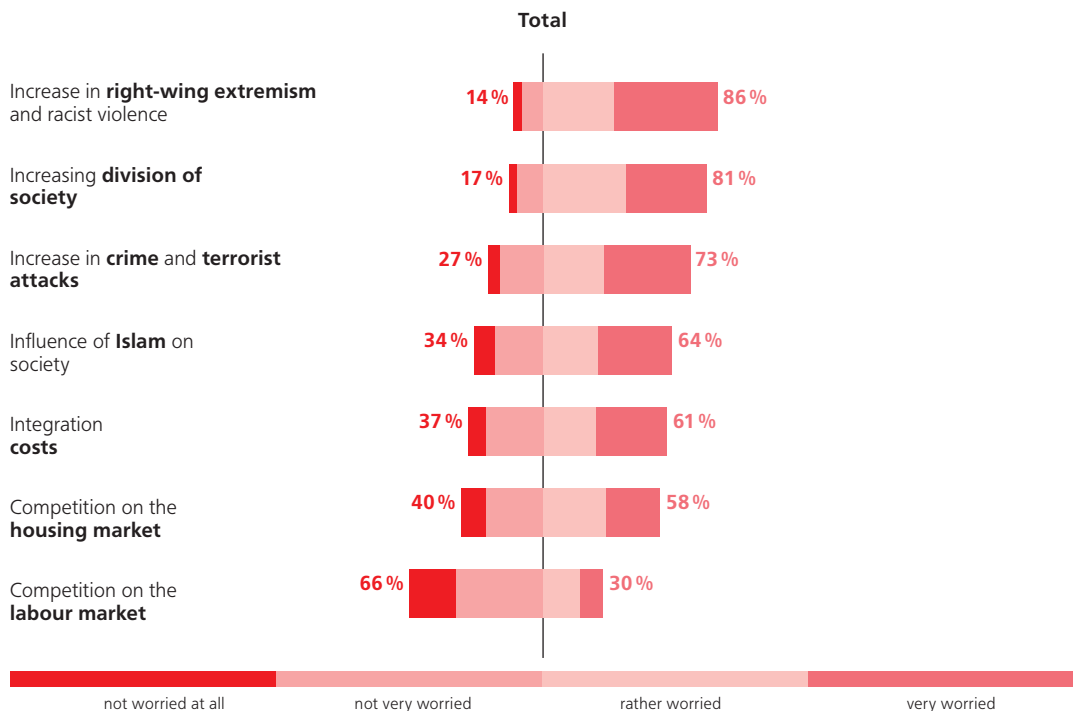
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement: Politicians lack a vision for Germany's long-term future.



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: polityix 2019.

### Concerns about immigration I

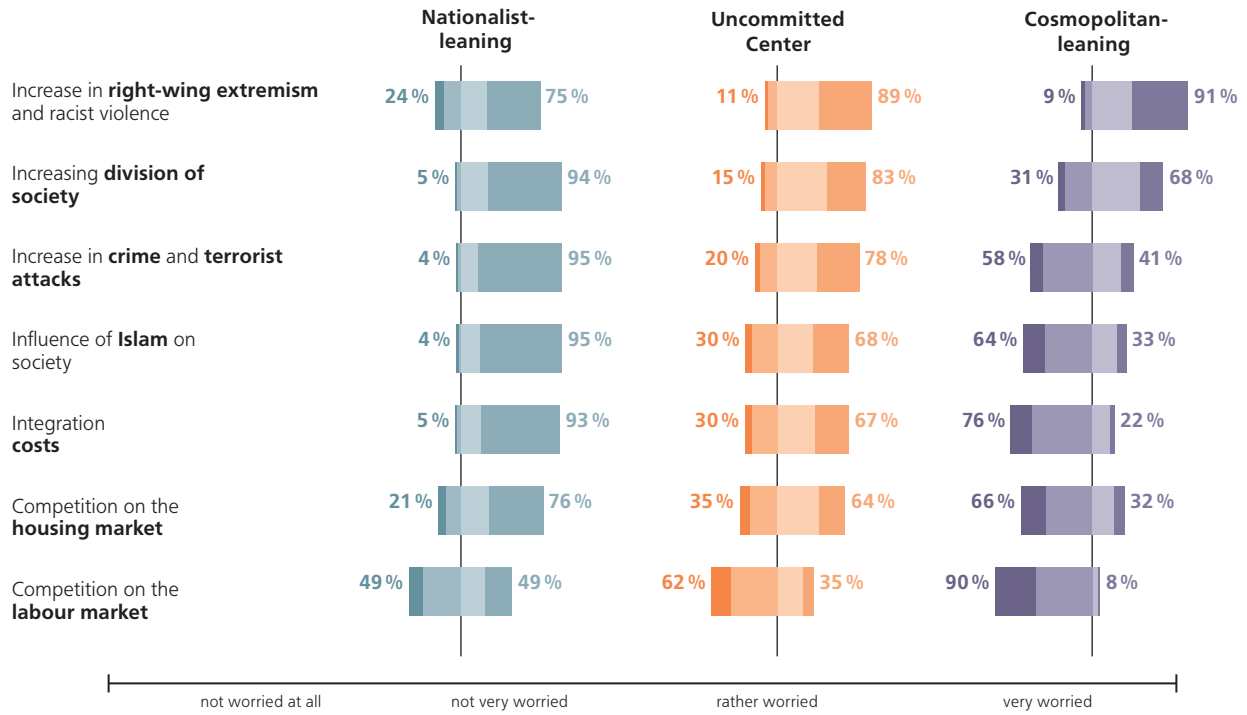
When you think about the consequences of the influx of refugees and migrants, are you: very worried, somewhat worried, not very worried, or not worried at all about the following issues?



Basis: all eligible voters. Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: polityix 2019.

### Concerns about immigration II

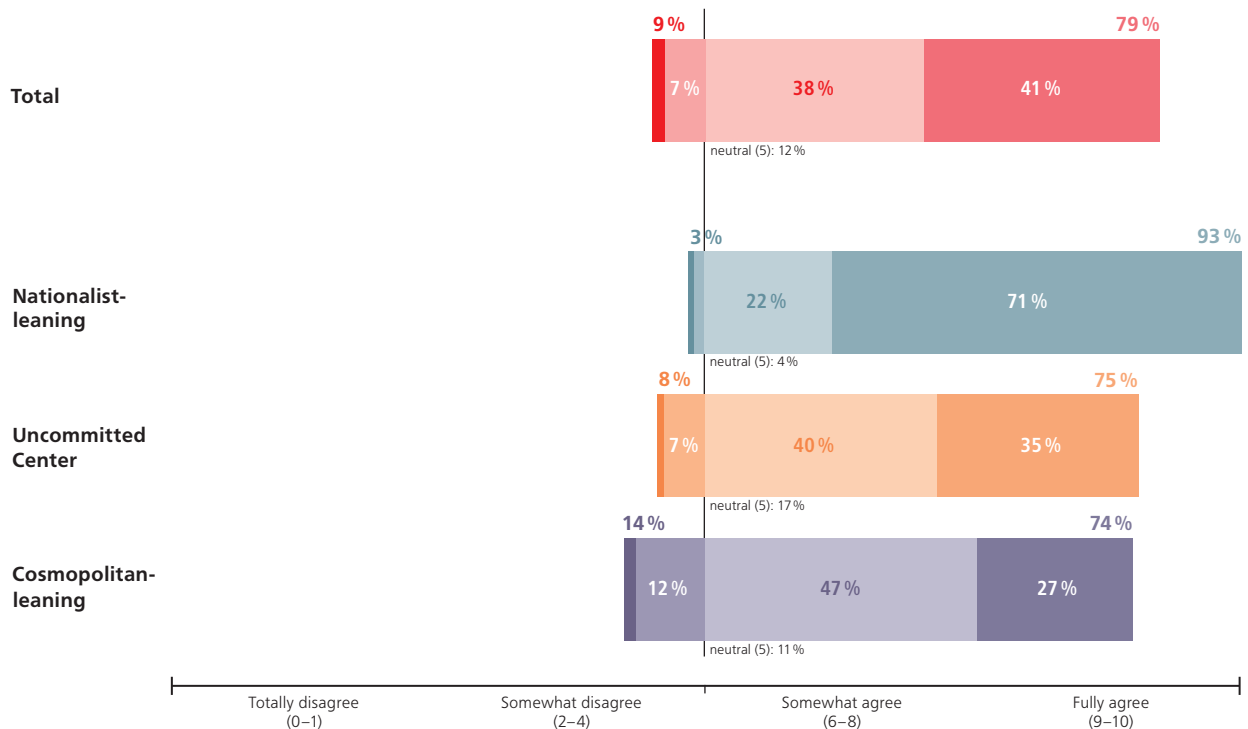
When you think of the consequences of the influx of refugees and migrants, are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned about the following things?



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Concerns about social cohesion

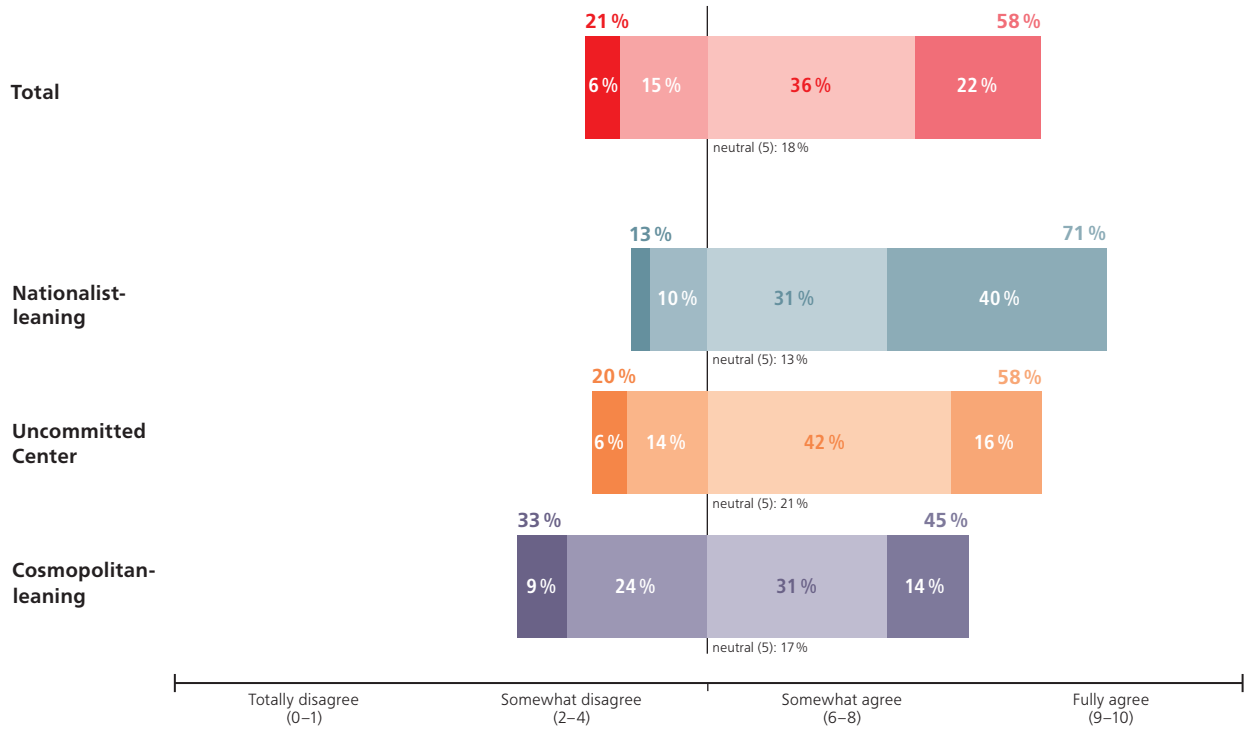
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement: Cohesion in society is increasingly being lost, people are only thinking about themselves now.



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Respect for educational credentials

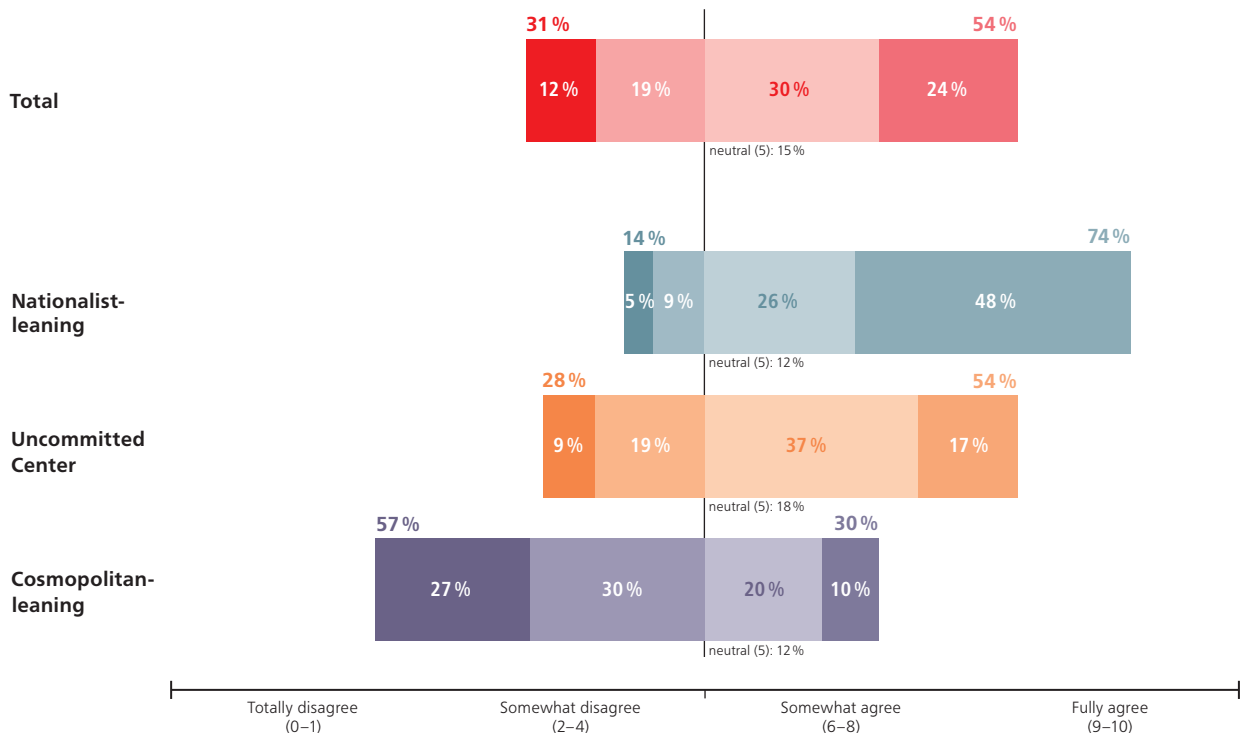
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement:  
Those who have not completed an academic degree are not appreciated enough in Germany.



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

### Economic development

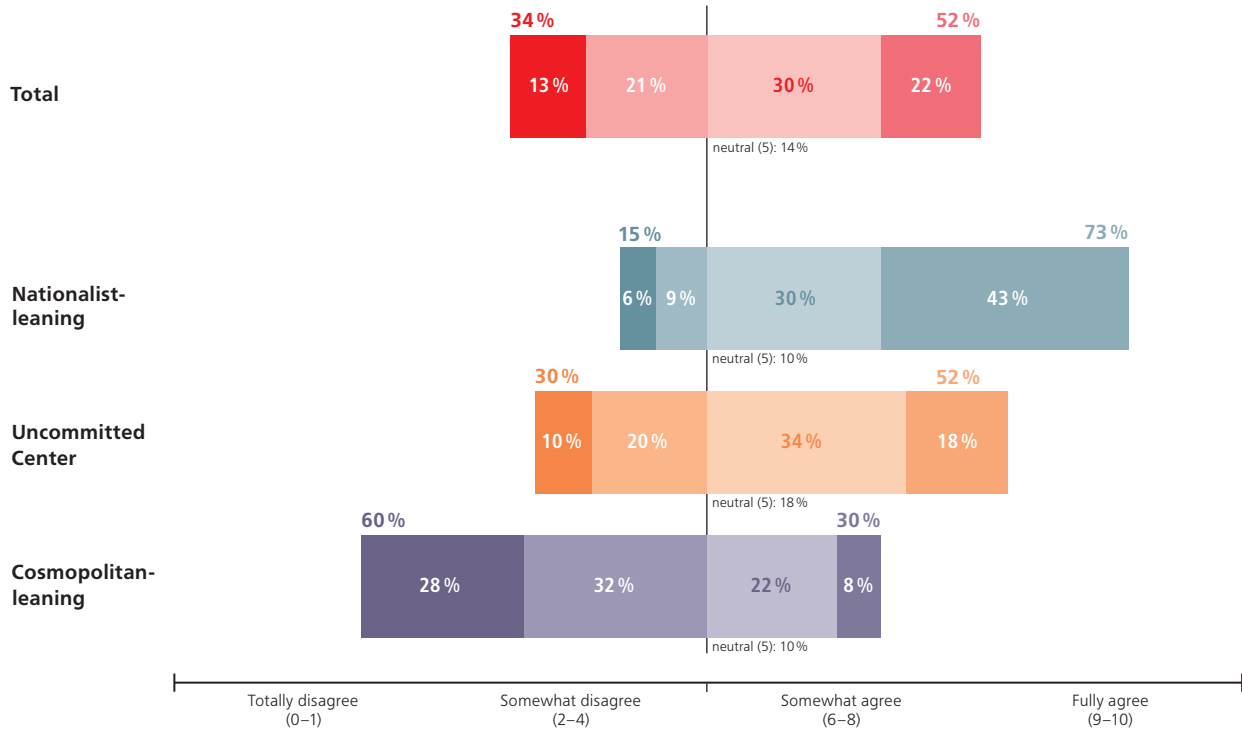
Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, how much you agree with this statement:  
It is often said that Germany is doing well economically, but I personally do not benefit from this development.



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

**Concerns about the future**

Please tell me, based on a scale of 0 to 10, whether and how much the following statement applies to you: Thinking about my future worries me.



Basis: All eligible voters (half sample). Missing values: Don't know/not specified. Differences due to rounding up or down. Source: pollytix 2019.

**COMMENTS ON METHODS**

This study is based on a quantitative public opinion survey carried out by pollytix strategic research between November 13 and December 11, 2018. The quantitative data were collected through a telephone survey relying on a dual-frame approach involving both landlines and a cell phone network and using computer-supported polling software.

The universe of the sample of n-3,000 consists of the segment of the German population eligible to vote. To guarantee that the sample would be representative, the data were evaluated in light of official statistics. The maximum margin of error for the sample of n-3,000 came to +/- 1.7% assuming a confidence interval of 95%.

## The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition dating back to its foundation in 1925. Today, it remains loyal to the legacy of its namesake and campaigns for the core ideas and values of social democracy: freedom, justice and solidarity. It has a close connection to social democracy and free trade unions.

FES promotes the advancement of social democracy, in particular by:

- political educational work to strengthen civil society;
- think tanks;
- international cooperation with our international network of offices in more than 100 countries;
- support for talented young people;
- maintaining the collective memory of Social Democracy with archives, libraries and more.

## IMPRESSUM

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