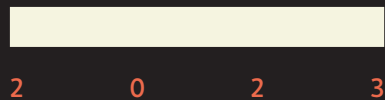




A REPORT ON THE PROJECT
POLITICAL CULTURE,
DEMOCRATIC VALUES
AND MISINFORMATION:
DETECTING DEMOCRATIC
FOOTHOLDS & WEAKNESSES



Democratic Trends in Central Europe

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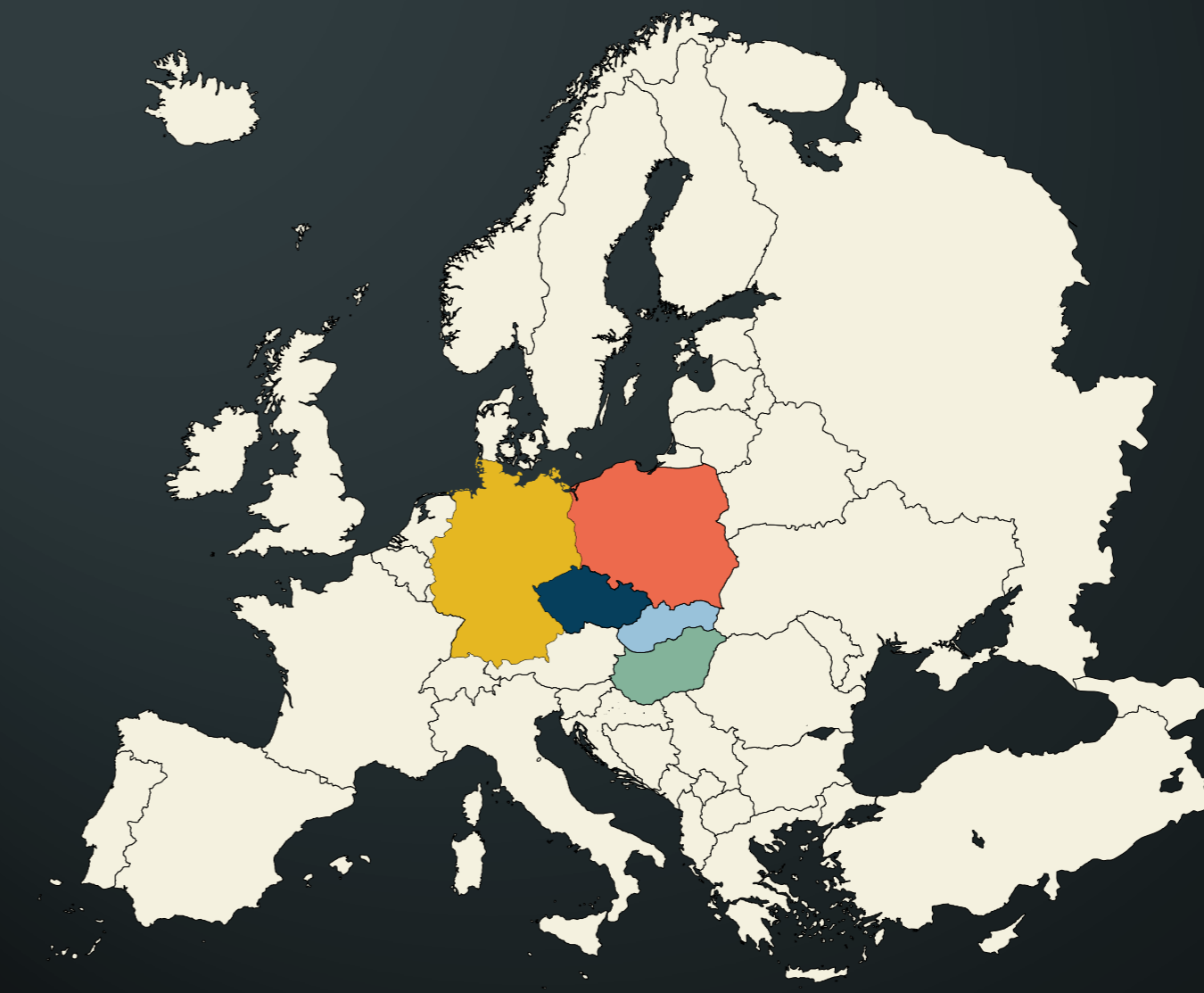
Political culture, democratic values and misinformation: Detecting democratic footholds & weaknesses

The current global landscape is witnessing a surge in democratic decline and populism, largely fuelled by the spread of misinformation. The Central European region, in particular, is susceptible to these trends. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, all Visegrad countries were in 2022 classified as "flawed democracies," with rankings ranging from 25th (Czechia) to 56th (Hungary) globally. In contrast, Germany was ranked 14th as a "full democracy". The 2022 Globsec Trends report revealed concerning trends, with more than a quarter of Poles, Hungarians and Czechs, and almost half of Slovaks, expressing a preference for an authoritarian leader over a liberal democracy and a significant portion of V4 citizens believing various conspiracy theories.

These statistics served as a critical warning and guided our project's focus: to identify not just the strengths but, more importantly, the weaknesses of democracy. Our research combined political and cognitive psychology, employing surveys of representative national samples and a unique methodology, including items from the Globsec or World Values Survey studies for comparison. We acknowledge the unique attributes of the Visegrad region, particularly its shared post-totalitarian experience, and the diver-

sity of its cultures and populations. Consequently, our approach includes Germany, a country that complements the regional context with its strong democratic record.

The crisis facing liberal democracy is alarming and the influence of conspiracy theories is troubling. To effectively counter these challenges, we recognize the need for a comprehensive understanding. Rather than using a single quantitative scale or a one-size-fits-all solution, our approach involves identifying diverse non-democratic socio-psychological profiles within the population and assessing their prevalence. We aimed to detect the types of citizens most vulnerable to misinformation, conspiracy theories, and hoaxes, as well as those susceptible to poor selection of information sources and simplified explanations of complex issues. We believe that despite national borders, there are democrats and individuals susceptible to misinformation everywhere. Our methodology aims to highlight both differences and shared concerns, fostering a cross-culturally sensitive perspective. Ultimately, our goal is to create a robust knowledge base and offer recommendations tailored to the Central European region's distinct needs and cultural nuances.



Democracy is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike

Plato

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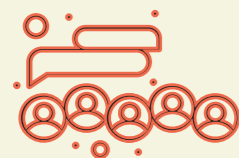
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V4...EU /sur.e

Key Findings

Key...Find ind nd /



Distinction between V4 countries and Germany

In most topics studied, be it in context of beliefs, trust, tolerance, or satisfaction, we observed a substantial difference between the responses of V4 citizens and Germany. This included Germans' higher satisfaction with the political system, higher trust in government and political parties, higher tolerance, and, on the other hand, lower belief in conspiracy theories in comparison with V4 citizens. But crucially, in certain regards, we also saw substantial similarities between V4 and Germany, such as when it came to the evaluation of the importance of democratic governance or seeing poverty and inflation as the biggest perceived problems.



Politics perceived as immoral and untrustworthy

More than half of the surveyed participants in Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia viewed politics in their country as an immoral farce that defies common sense. Less than a third of V4 citizens trust political parties or their government.



Voices for democracy, echoes of discontent

While for a vast majority of people in all surveyed countries, it is very important to live in a country that is governed democratically, large proportions of Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks are unsatisfied with the current state of democratic governance in their country. Despite voicing the importance of democratic governance, almost two-thirds of V4 citizens prefer simplified political messages from their leaders and almost half would be willing to trade their democratic freedoms for greater security and preservation of their country's traditional values.



Friend or foe: West or East as the biggest threat

Russia and China are generally perceived as a threat to the identity and values of people in V4 countries, but the perceptions also greatly varied – nine in ten Poles saw Russia as a threat but only half of Hungarians and Slovaks did so. On the other hand, anti-Western sentiments were quite common, especially in Slovakia. More than half of Slovaks see Western societies, the European Union, and the USA as threats to their identity and values.



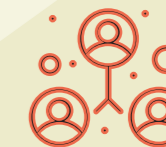
Conspiracy theories: Thriving in the shadows

Over four in ten people in V4 countries believe that the Western powers orchestrated the 1989 protests that led to the fall of the Soviet Union and considerable proportions see seemingly unconnected events as results of secret activities.



Limits of our tolerance: Know thy neighbor

Refugees from Ukraine, as well as immigrant workers, are still mostly welcomed by the citizens of V4 countries in sharp contrast to refugees from the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region. People from Germany and Poland are overall more welcoming of immigrants than those from other surveyed countries.



Grim prospects for future generations

The majority of people are pessimistic about whether today's generation has a good future in their country. Poverty and inflation are among the biggest perceived problems in all surveyed countries. While people in V4 countries are further concerned about corruption, politics or healthcare, Germans are worried about climate change.

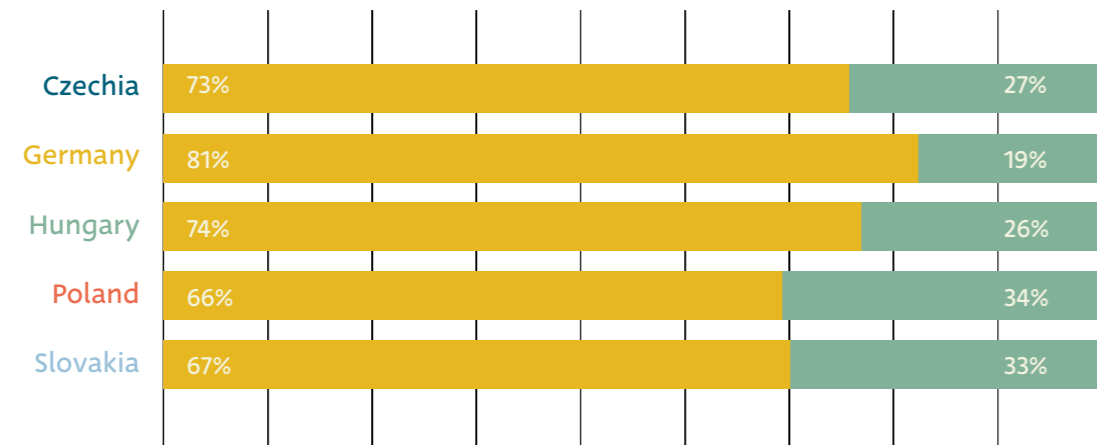
Democratic Trends

I. Preferred Form of Government

In each country examined, the overwhelming majority of participants preferred democracy to a one-person rule when asked in a direct form. Still, some differences remain in the ratio of pro-democracy voters.

Which of the following forms of government is, according to you, better for your country?

● Having liberal democracy with regular elections and multiparty system. ● Having a strong and decisive leader who does not have to bother with parliament.

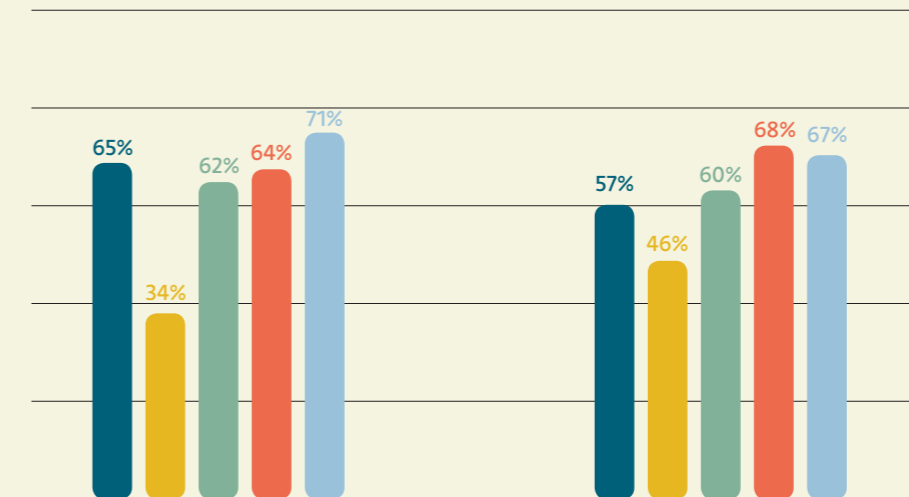


Political culture and populism

Politics in our country is an immoral farce that defies common sense.

I like politicians who say what is good or bad, black or white, and are not nuancing.

% Czechia
% Germany
% Hungary
% Poland
% Slovakia



Agreement rates were calculated as percentages of participants who chose options 5-7 on a 7-point scale or options 4-5 on a 5-point response scale where the higher numbers indicated stronger agreement.

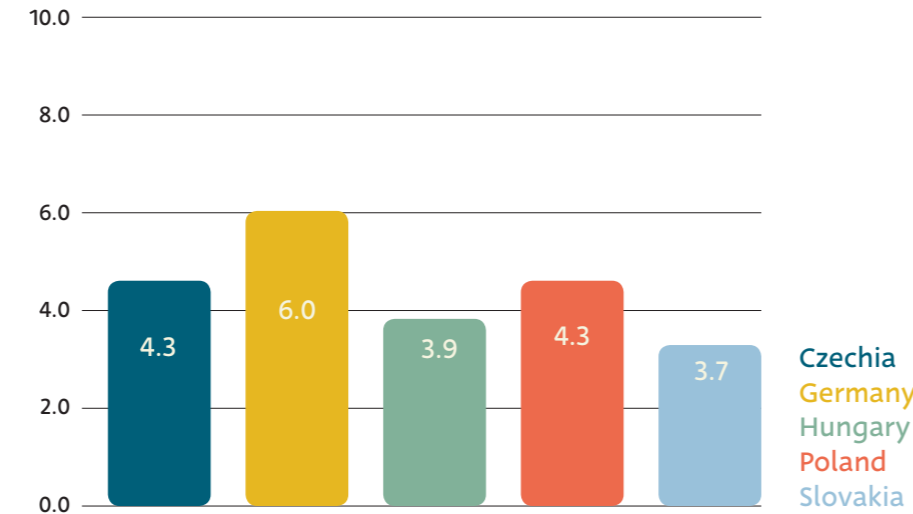
II. Political Culture and Populism

In contrast to Germans, the populations of V4 countries show high levels of scepticism and disgust towards politics and politicians. Over 60% of the surveyed participants in Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia agreed with the statement that politics in their country is an immoral farce that defies common sense. Although Slovaks agreed with the statement the most, differences between V4 are relatively small, especially when compared to Germans. Only one third of Germans had such a negative view of politicians and politics.

III. Dissatisfaction with the Political System

Citizens of V4 are mostly dissatisfied with the functioning of the political system in their countries, although they still prefer liberal democracy with a multiparty system over an authoritarian leader (roughly 70 to 30%), see section I on page 7.

How satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in your country these days?



Values were calculated as participants' mean response to the question using a scale from 1 ("Not satisfied at all") to 10 ("Completely satisfied").

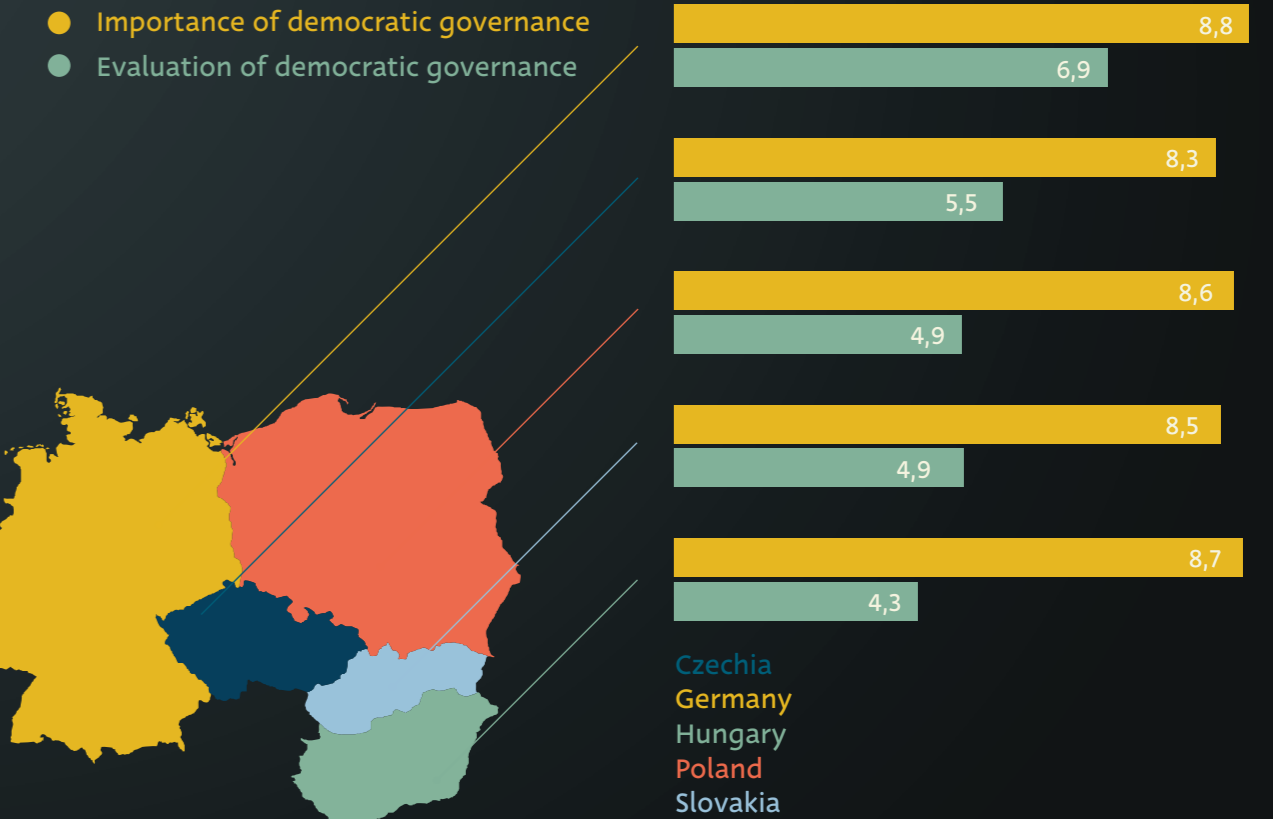
IV. Attitudes towards Democracy: Importance

Democracy is important to most citizens of V4, but they are mostly sceptical of how democratically their country is run at the moment. While for a vast majority in V4 and Germany, it is very important to live in a democracy, a majority of the people in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland doubt that their country is currently governed democratically.

Importance and Evaluation of Democratic Governance

Importance of democratic governance was calculated as a mean response to the question: "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?". Evaluation of democracy was calculated as a mean response to the question: "How democratically is this country being governed today?"

Responses to both questions were given on a scale: from 1 ("not at all") to 10 ("absolutely important/completely democratic").



V. Attitudes towards Democracy: Freedoms

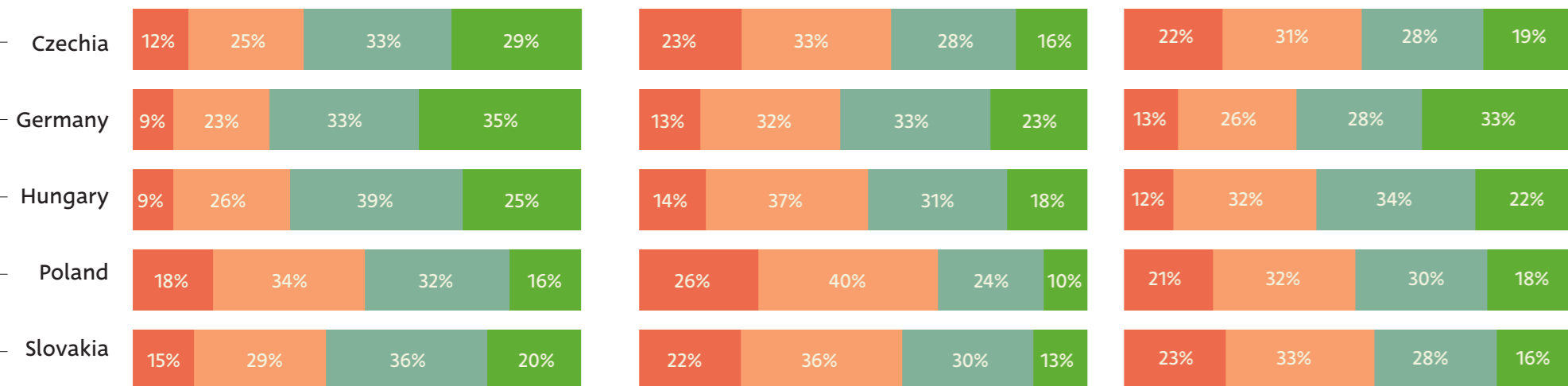
Almost one fourth of the citizens surveyed would trade their freedoms for higher security and conservation of their traditional values. Germans are the most satisfied with democracy in their country and are least willing to trade any democratic freedoms.

Would you be willing to trade some of your rights and freedoms for...

...for better financial situation of you and your household

...for greater security in our country

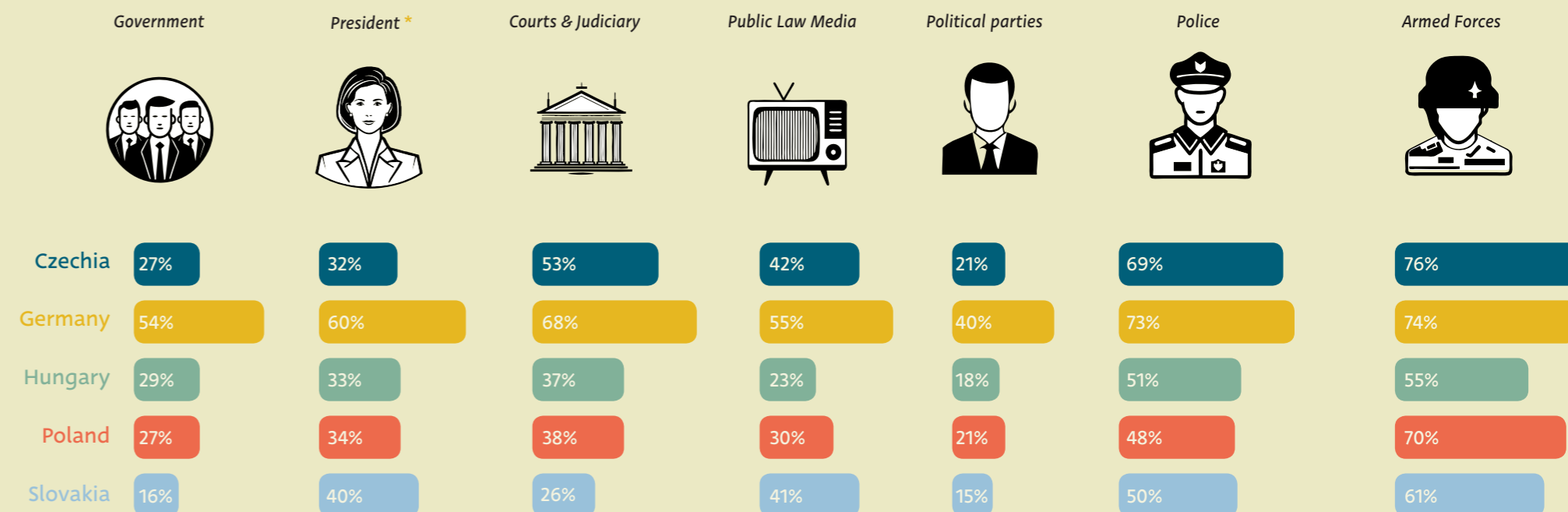
...for the preservation of your country's traditional values



- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Definitely not

Trust

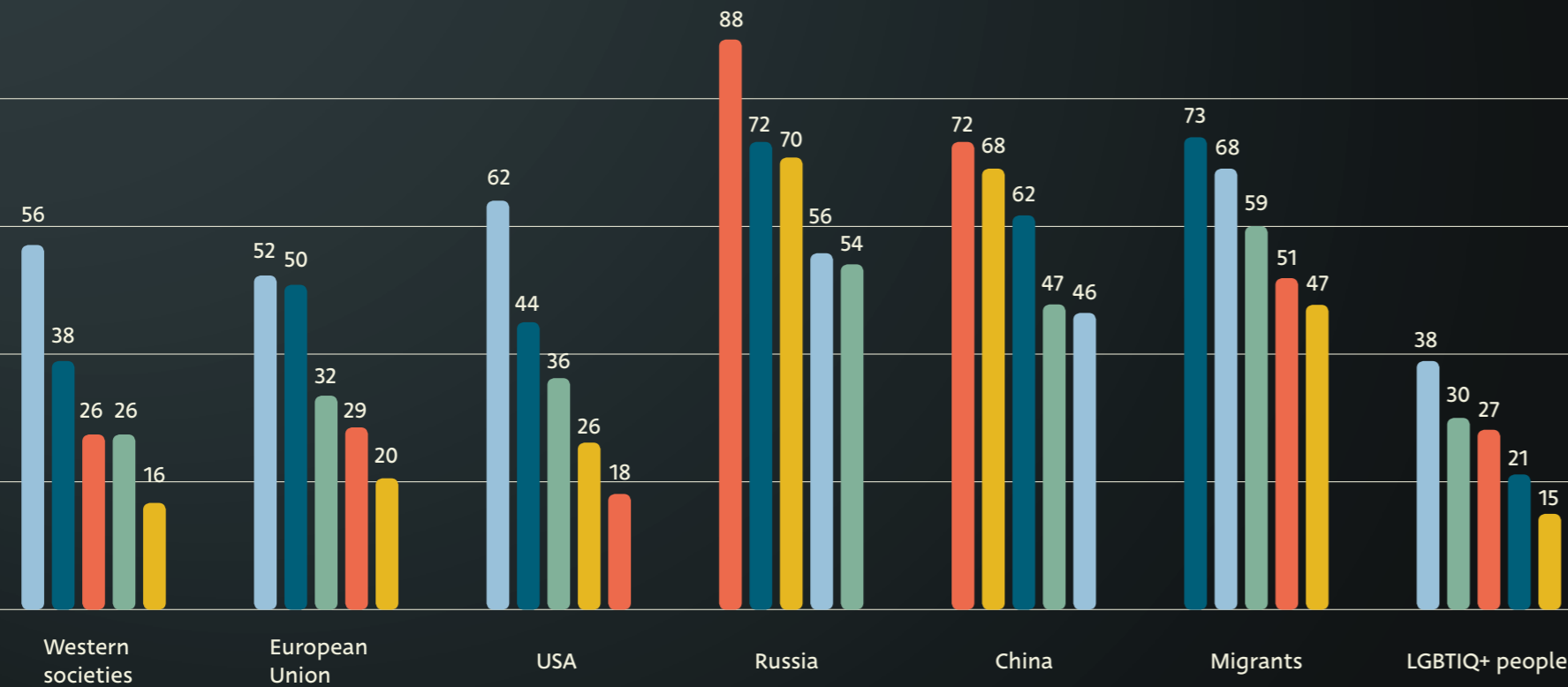
In general, there is more distrust than trust in institutions, with a few exceptions. The only institutions that have higher percentages of complete trust than complete distrust are the Army (exceptions Hungary and Slovakia, where slightly lower percentage of people show trust rather than distrust). The most distrusted institutions in all countries were: courts and judiciary (with the exception of Germany, where more people completely trust than distrust their judicial system), government, media, political parties, and the president.



* The data relate to President Miloš Zeman who ended his office in March 2023; the trust to the newly elected President Petr Pavel is at 58% as of September 2023 according to The Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM).

Do you personally think any of the groups or countries threaten your identity and values or not?

Values were calculated as percentages of participants who responded with „yes, they do threaten“ to the particular item.



Identity Threat

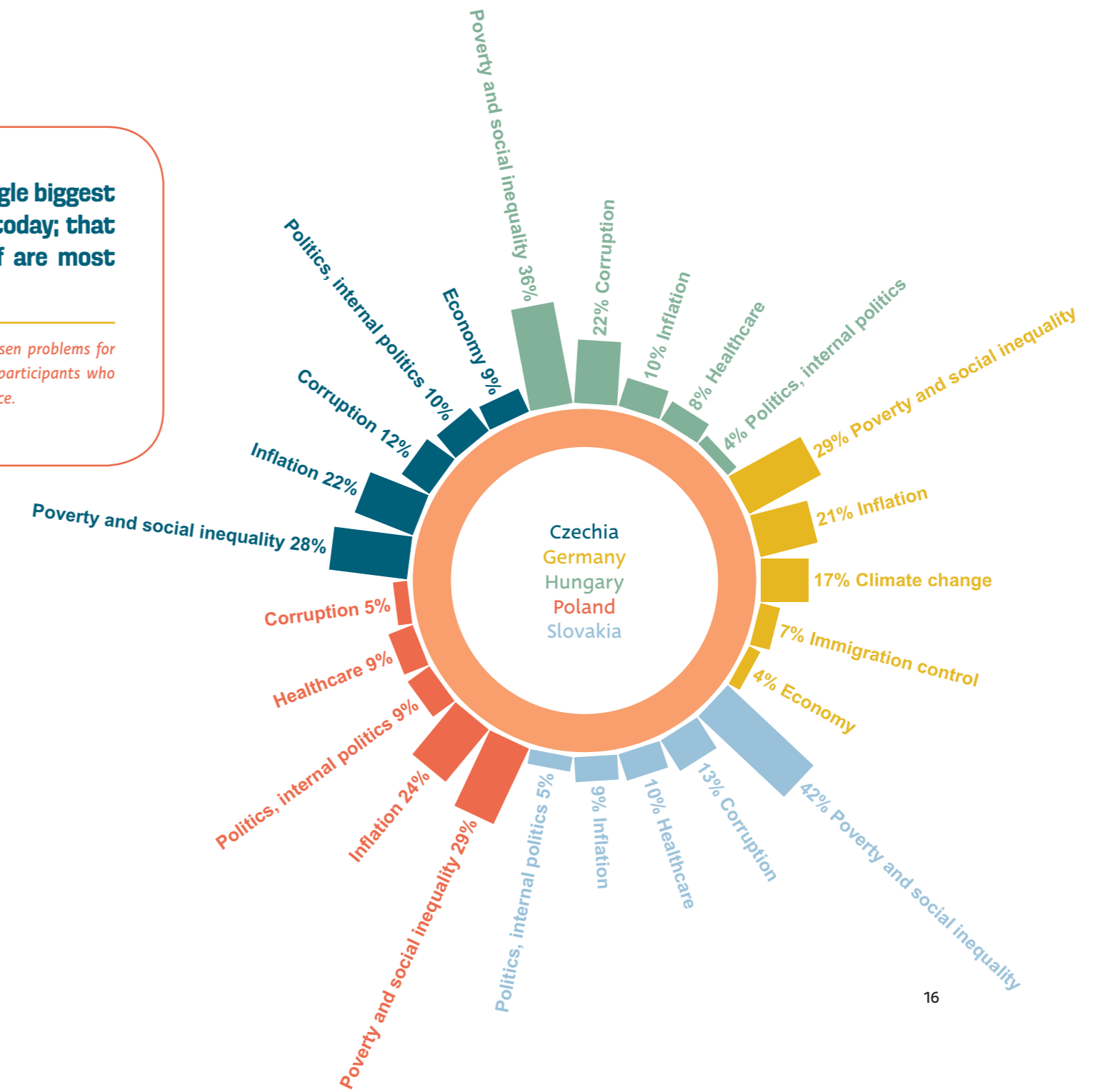
In general, **Russia, China, and migrants** were seen as posing the biggest threat to national identities, in all five countries. There was a notable exception, however, as in Slovakia, **USA, Western Societies** and even **EU** are perceived as bigger threat than China, and Slovaks fear US more even than Russia despite their border with Ukraine. Besides Slovaks, the strongest anti-Western sentiment, reflected by the perceived threat from Western societies and their way of living, EU and USA, was found among Czechs. Interestingly, however, while Czechs perceive Russia and China as somewhat bigger threats than Western societies (including EU and USA), Slovaks feel threatened mostly by the USA and migrants, and only then by Russia. Slovaks share with Hungarians their relatively positive view of Russia and China. Czechs and Germans share their relatively positive view of **LGBTIQ+ people** while Poles show the highest fear of Russia (they share a common border with Ukraine) and China (similarly to Germany).

The Biggest Problem !!!!!

What are our biggest worries? There were two biggest worries that were the same for all surveyed countries: poverty & social inequality, and inflation. Citizens of each country then showed a distinct pattern of what they see as the biggest problem. Biggest problems according to Germans (but not other V4 countries) were climate change and immigration control. Biggest problems for Hungarians, Poles and Slovaks were corruption and health care. Czechs worried about corruption, internal politics and economy.

What would you say is the single biggest problem facing your country today; that is, the one that you yourself are most concerned about?

The graph represents the five most often chosen problems for each country and reports the percentage of participants who chose the particular problem as their first choice.

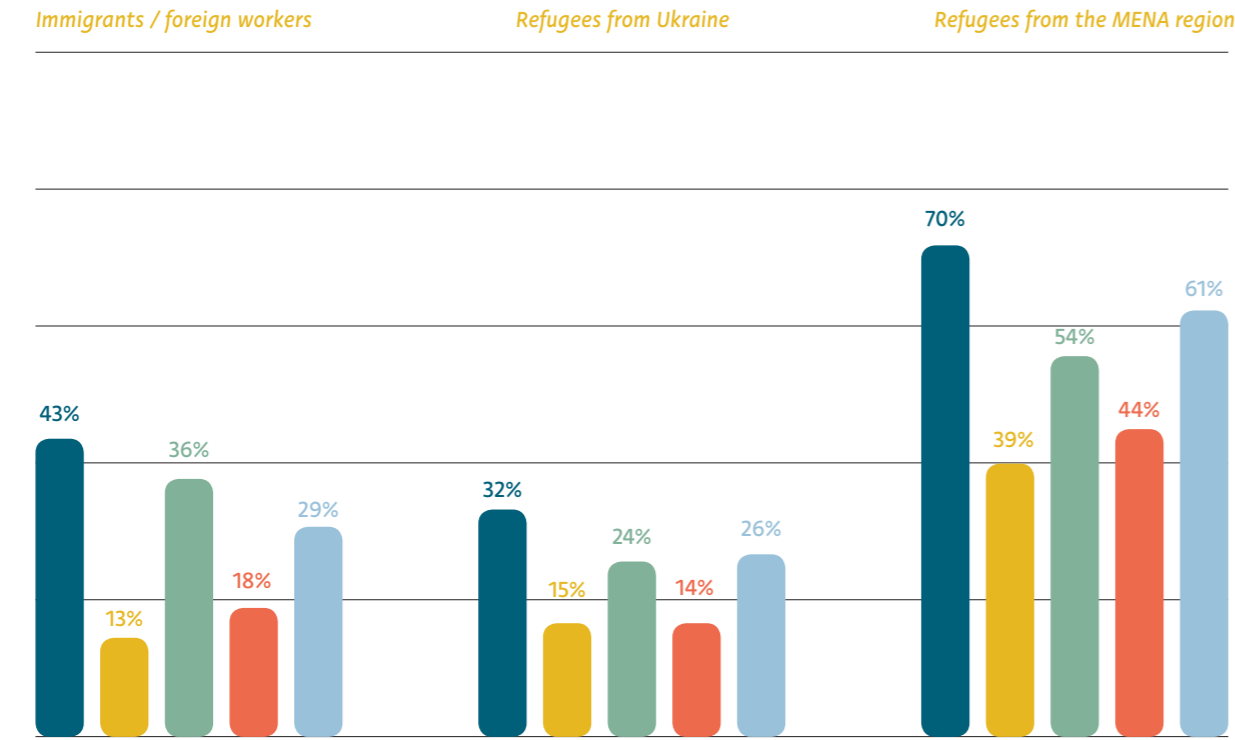


Tolerance

Do we tolerate otherness or perceive it as a threat? Who would you dislike as a neighbor? In general, participants from Poland and Germany show higher acceptance of immigrants/foreign workers and refugees as neighbors when compared with Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians. All populations are more tolerant of Ukrainian refugees, but very intolerant of immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) regions.

On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbors?

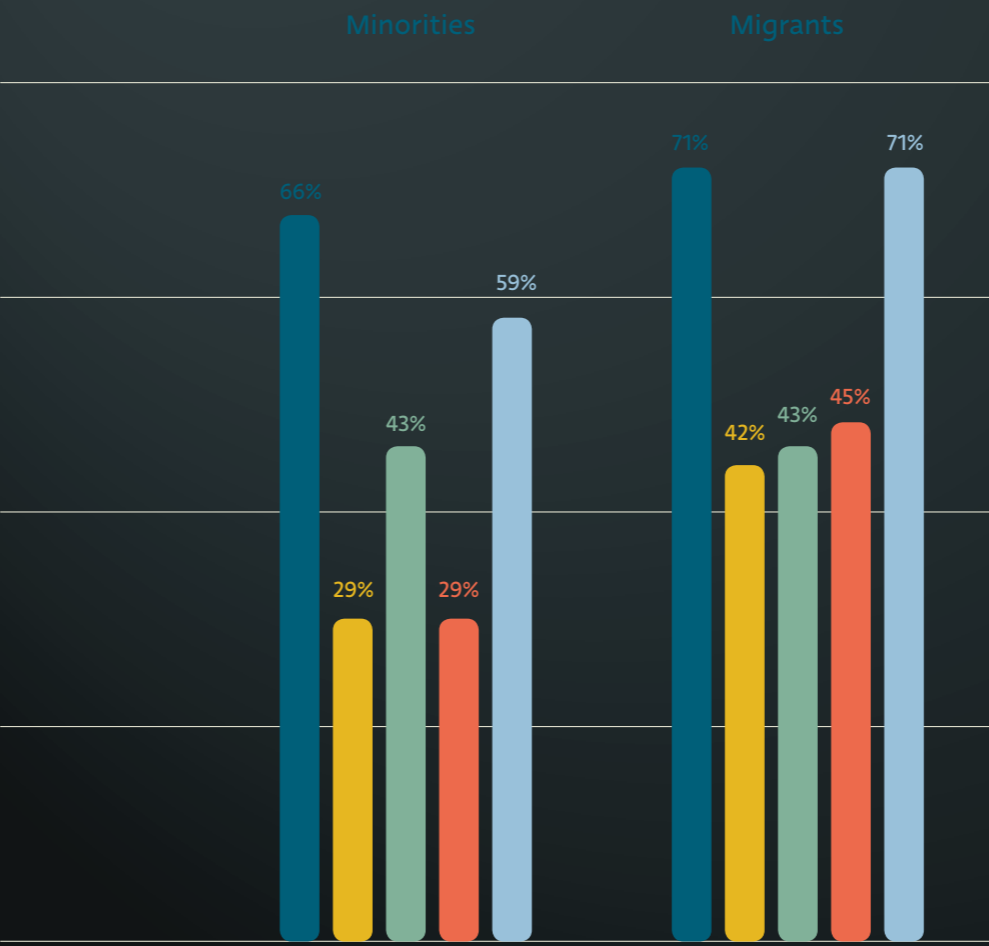
Values were calculated as percentages of participants who selected the particular category.



Czechia
Germany
Hungary
Poland
Slovakia

Which group or groups are, according to your opinion, favoured in your society?

Values were calculated as percentages of participants who responded with "are favored" to the particular category.



Czechia
Germany
Hungary
Poland
Slovakia

Groups perceived as favored

The majority of Czechs and Slovaks feel that there is favoritism toward some minorities in their countries. Interestingly, above 70% of Poles and Germans consider minorities as groups that are not experiencing any advantages in the society.

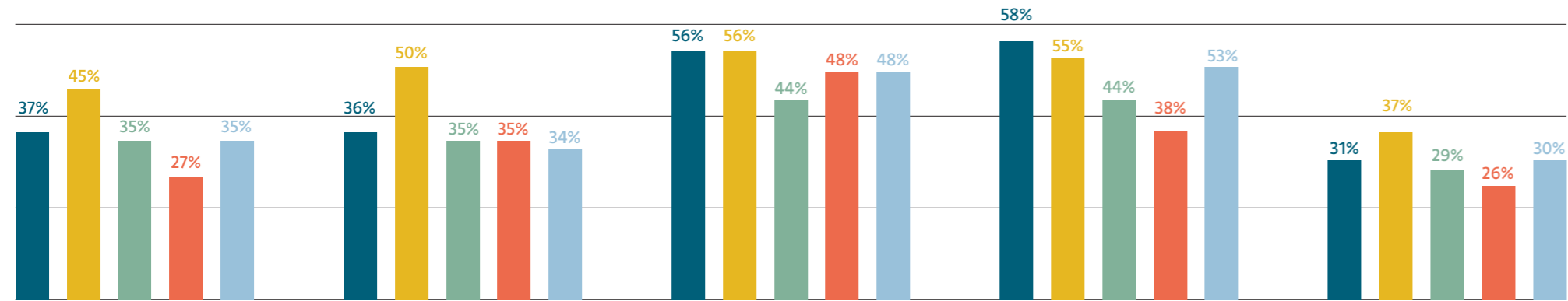
Perception of migrants as a favored group in society shows another distinction between Czechs, Slovaks and the other three populations that - by majority of their participants - do not consider migrants as a favored group, unlike their neighbors from former Czechoslovakia.

Satisfaction with Life

In all surveyed countries most respondents marked their life satisfaction as medium high, however, people from Hungary and Poland appear to be the least satisfied with various conditions in their lives, while those from Germany express the highest satisfaction. Czechs and Slovaks closely follow the Germans. Germans, Czechs, and Slovaks seem to have achieved more of the important things they desire in their lives compared to Hungarians and Poles.

- Czechia
- Germany
- Hungary
- Poland
- Slovakia

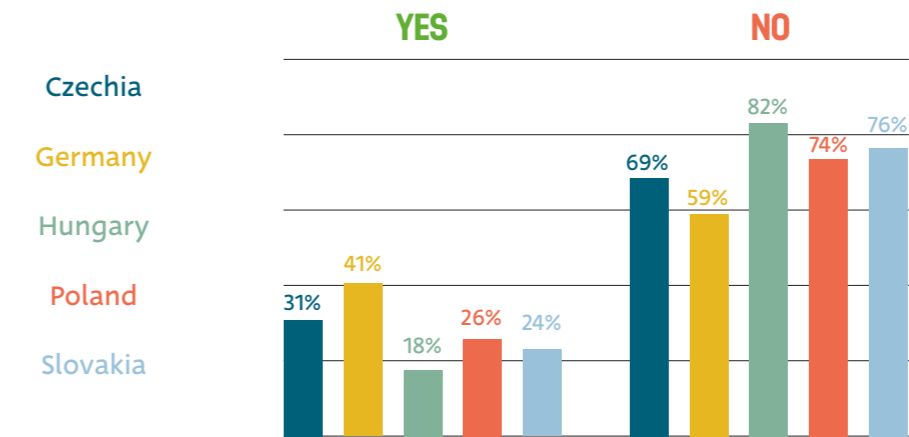
In most ways my life is close to my ideal. The conditions of my life are excellent. I am satisfied with my life. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.



Agreement rates were calculated as percentages of participants who chose options 5 - 7 on a scale from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree").

Populations of all surveyed countries seemed to have rather bleak outlook for the next generation. Hungarians appear to be the most skeptical about the future prospects for the next generation, while Germans seem to be the most optimistic. However, even in Germany, the majority of people believe that their country may not be capable of providing a better future for the next generations.

Do you think that today's generation of young people has a good future in your country?



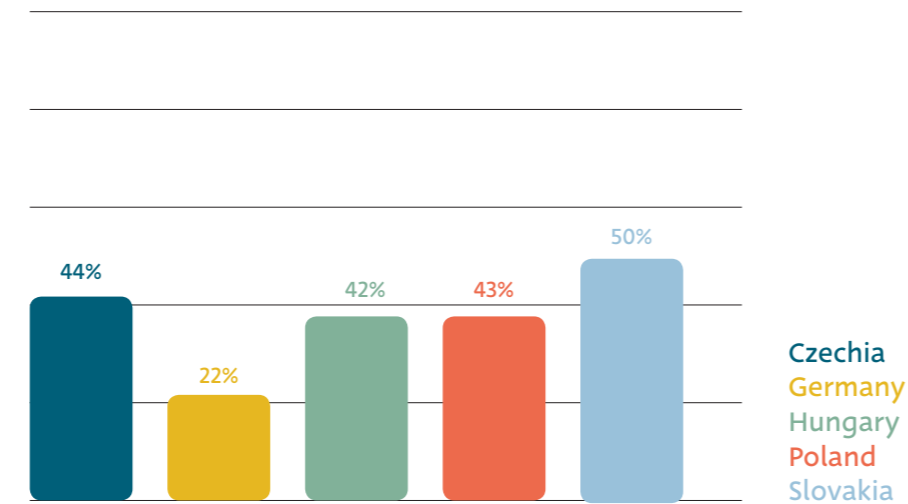
Conspiracy Beliefs

Overall, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks and Czechs are more suspicious that the political decisions and social events are orchestrated by secret organisations than Germans. From among V4 countries, Hungarians seem to be most suspicious of secret conspiracies taking place.

While over 40% of Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Poles mostly agree that the protests in 1989 that led to the fall of the communist regime in their countries were orchestrated and paid by Western powers, only 22% of Germans agreed with the same statement. Similarly, populations of V4 countries were very suspicious about vaccines against COVID-19, as reflected with more than 20% of populations strongly agreeing with the statement that vaccines against COVID-19 were an irresponsible experiment conducted on humans, while only 12.7% of Germans held the same view. While the percentage of Germans who strongly agreed that COVID-19 vaccines primarily served pharmaceutical business was not so different from the percentage of Czechs, Poles, Hungarians and Slovaks strongly agreeing with this statement, 40.7% of Germans strongly disagreed, which was more than double in comparison with Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and Slovaks strongly disagreeing with this statement.

The protests in 1989 that led to the fall of the communist rule were orchestrated and paid by Western powers.

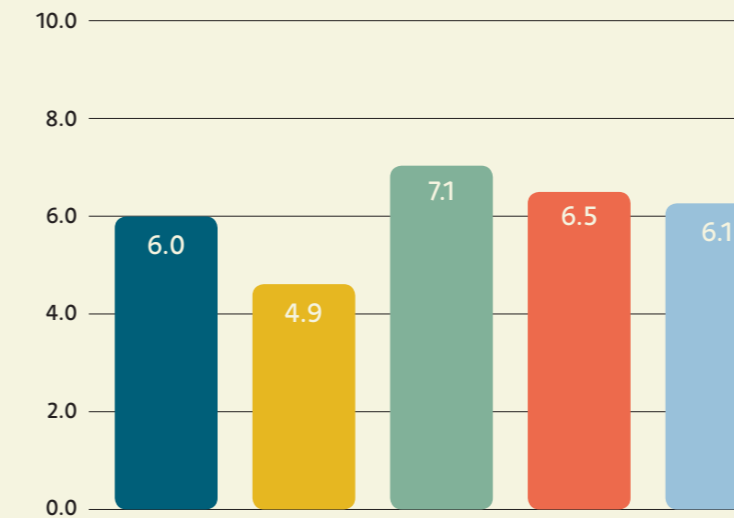
Values were calculated as percentages of people who responded with either "agree" or "strongly agree" to this item.



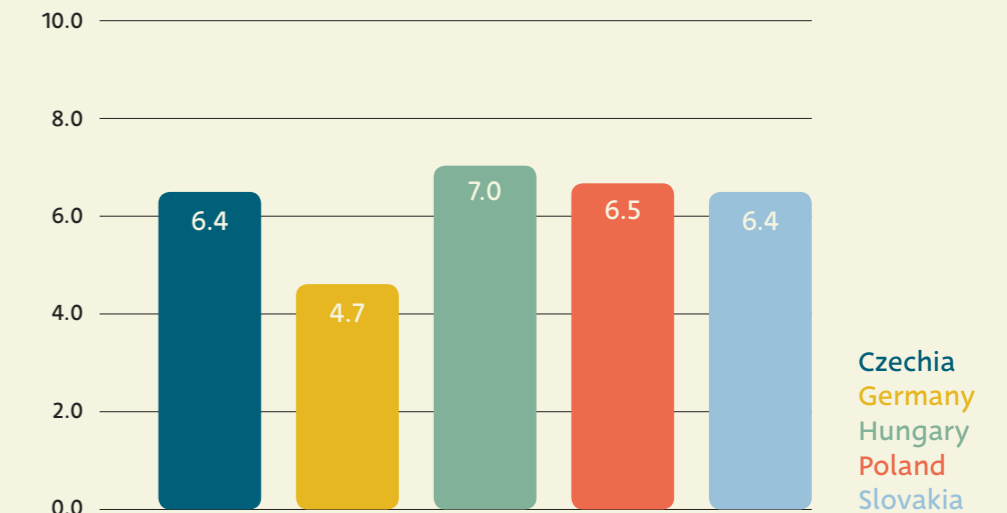
Conspiracy mentality

I think that events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities.

Values were calculated as participants' mean response to the particular question using a scale from 0 ("Certainly not") to 10 ("Certainly").



I think that there are secret organizations that greatly influence political decisions.



Political Culture, Democratic Values, and Misinformation: Detecting Democratic Footholds & Weaknesses

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All data were collected by Talk Online Panel GmbH

key words:

democratic values, political culture, misinformation, cognitive strategies, attitudes

Methodology

The outcomes and findings presented in this booklet stem from public opinion poll surveys conducted in November and December 2022. These surveys were administered to a diverse and representative cross-section of the populations in the V4 countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and Germany. In total, 5,344 respondents participated in these surveys, with specific breakdowns as follows: 1,063 in the Czech Republic, 1,074 in Germany, 1,082 in Hungary, 1,078 in Poland, and 1,045 in Slovakia. To ensure the accuracy and representativeness of the data, respondents in all countries were selected based on various demographic factors, including gender, age, education, and place of residence. For simpler graphical data visualization, most of the responses in closed-ended questions featuring a scale were condensed. For instance, questions offering options such as 'strongly agree,' 'rather agree,' 'rather disagree,' and 'strongly disagree' were combined into 'agree' and 'disagree.' All numerical data presented in the report are expressed in percentages or mean ratings for a particular item and were rounded either to full numbers (in case of percentage points) or one decimal place (in case of mean ratings).

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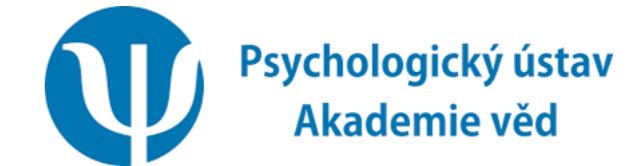
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