

PRESS RELEASE, Heidelberg / Berlin, July 28th, 2022

For one in five Germans, COVID controversies have put friendships to the test

To mark the International Day of Friendship on July 30th, SINUS-Institut and YouGov conducted a survey on the status of friendship in Germany

"Friends are the family we choose for ourselves," actor Sir Peter Ustinov is supposed to have said. But what is most important to Germans when it comes to friendship, in these uncertain times? Is it really that difficult for women and men to be friends? And with which countries should Germany build closer friendships? SINUS-Institut and YouGov explored these and other questions in a joint representative online survey on the occasion of the International Friendship Day on July 30th.

Germans have about four close friends on average - Most meet their friends through work, school, and hobbies

Around two out of three Germans (64%) currently have a "best friend". This means that every third person lives without such a close social bond outside the family, which corresponds to around 20 million people between the ages of 18 and 69. On average, Germans have four close friends and count twelve people among their extended circle of friends. The average German's total circle of acquaintances consists of around 50 people on average.

Germans usually make friends where they spend most of their time: for example, at work (41%), at secondary school or during training (19% each), at elementary school (17%), or when pursuing hobbies (16%).

Polarization over COVID has strained friendships for one in five Germans

For Germans, the interpersonal impacts of the COVID were significant: 62% missed their friends a lot, while 27% even defied contact restrictions to see their friends and loved ones. Technology was a saving grace, with 38% of Germans saying that some friendships only survived the COVID pandemic because it was possible to keep in touch online.

Our study also revealed that not only the pandemic, but also its social and cultural fallout have been consequential for friendship. One in five Germans (20%) profess to having lost friends because they have different opinions on COVID measures or vaccinations. The situation is similar for climate change as a topic of political dispute: 18% state that differing opinions on this topic put strain on their friendships. Friendships are even more clearly affected by differences of opinion on the invasion of Ukraine (27%).

"The big issues of our time - climate change, the COVID crisis, and the war in Ukraine - are not only provoking controversial discussions in politics or on social media. Differing views on these topics also put some friendly relationships to the test, as our data show", says Philipp Schneider, Head of Marketing DACH at YouGov.

Good friendships are defined by showing care and open communication

But what makes a good friendship? 64% of Germans measure a friendship by the fact that you are there for the other person when you are needed. It is equally important that the friend is there for you when you need him or her (63%). Also important: that you can talk to each other about everything (63%), that you are honest with each other (62%) and that you can confide secrets to each other (48%).

Accordingly, the central reason for friendships breaking up is that people lie to each other or are not honest (56%). For just as many (56%), friendships end because people have grown apart or no longer share the same "wavelength". Another 53% of Germans terminate a friendship if they are taken advantage of. The passing-on of secrets (46%) and backbiting (44%) are also among the most frequently cited reasons why friendships break up.

Germans cultivate diverse friendships

Shared values and beliefs play an important role in a good friendship for only 40%. The fact that many Germans are willing to accept different opinions among friends is also reflected in other findings: 65% have friends with different political views, and 59% are close friends with people with different religious beliefs.

Differences between friends may also extend to other characteristics. For example, 61% have friends with a lower level of education than their own. 52% are also friends with people with different heritage; this statement decreases with age (62% of 18- to 29-year-olds vs. 45% of 60- to 69-year-olds). In addition, 45% of all respondents have friends with a different sexual identity, with younger people saying this more often than older people (59% of 18- to 29-year-olds vs. 35% of 60- to 69-year-olds). Among all Germans, 38% have friends with a skin color different from their own, and the same number count people with disabilities among their close circle of friends.

The definition of "friendship" is related to basic personal beliefs

Despite widespread tolerance for social and ideological diversity among friends, different population groups do tend to imagine different relationship patterns under the heading of "friendship". This is shown by the analysis based on the Sinus-Milieus social model, which categorizes the German population into ten groups of like-minded people against the background of their values and lifestyles.

"There are two milieus that will play an increasingly important role in our society in the future: the Expeditive Milieu, which is society's digital and creative elite, and the Neo-Ecological Milieu, the drivers of social transformation," explains Manfred Tautscher, Managing Director of SINUS-Institut. "Their ideas of friendship could not be more different. Expeditives tend to think of friendship in terms of experiential or project communities - exciting experiences with interesting people are important, by all means also virtual and not necessarily designed to last. For the Neo-Ecological, on the other hand, shared, progressive values and a desire to improve the world are an important foundation of social relationships." More information on these social groups can be found on the [SINUS-Institut's website](#).

Sexual relations between friends? Possible, says every third person

Can friendships between women and men really work? Yes, says a clear majority of 73% of Germans. Women (75%) and men (70%) hardly differ in their attitudes here. Conversely, sexual relationships between friends ("friends with benefits") are considered okay by only 36%, with men (43%) being significantly more likely to hold this opinion than women (28%). Two-thirds of Germans (66%)

believe that a good romantic relationship can develop from a friendship, and half (52%) are convinced that it is possible to maintain a good friendship with an ex-partner even after a breakup.

Strongest country friendship with Austria desired

On the occasion of the International Day of Friendship, the bonds between countries and cultures were also highlighted. To this end, respondents were presented with a list of 22 countries, including the US, China, and European countries. From the respondents' point of view, Germany should cultivate stronger friendships with our neighbors Austria (40%), Denmark (38%), the Netherlands (38%), France (37%) and Switzerland (36%), as well as with Sweden (39%). More intensive friendships with Belarus and Iran (8% each), China (9%), and Russia and Turkey (13% each) are rarely desired.

As SINUS partner INTEGRAL Marktforschung found out for Austria, our Austrian neighbors seek even closer ties with Germany: 48% in Austria believe their country should cultivate a more friendly relationship with Germany. In Austria, however, personal friendships are also defined more broadly in principle, because Austrians tend to count significantly more people among their circle of friends and acquaintances than Germans.

Methodological information

The data used are based on an online survey conducted by YouGov Deutschland GmbH, in which 2,004 people participated between June 22nd and June 30th, 2022. The results were weighted and are representative of the German population aged 18 to 69.

About SINUS-Institut

SINUS Markt- und Sozialforschung GmbH, with offices in Heidelberg and Berlin, has specialised in psychological and social science research and consulting for over 40 years. SINUS develops strategies for companies and institutions that use socio-cultural change as a success factor.

A key tool is the [Sinus-Milieus model](#) - a model of society and target groups that summarises people according to their lifestyles in "groups of like-minded people". For decades, the Sinus-Milieus have been one of the best-known and most influential segmentation approaches in the German-speaking market and are available for over 48 countries.

SINUS cooperates closely with its sister companies INTEGRAL Markt- und Meinungsforschung in Vienna, Austria, and OPINION Market Research & Consulting, Nuremberg, Germany (INTEGRAL-SINUS-OPINION Group).

More information on SINUS-Institut at www.sinus-institut.de.

Press contact

SINUS Markt- und Sozialforschung GmbH

Tim Gensheimer

Phone: +49 (0)6221 - 80 89 - 60

E-Mail: presse@sinus-institut.de

About YouGov

YouGov is an international online research data and analytics technology group. Our mission is to offer unparalleled insight into what the world thinks. Our innovative solutions help the world's most recognised brands, media owners and agencies to plan, activate and track their marketing activities better.

With operations in the UK, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, India and Asia Pacific, we have one of the world's largest research networks.

At the core of our platform is an ever-growing source of consumer data that has been amassed over our twenty years of operation. We call it Living Data. All of our products and services draw upon this detailed understanding of our 20 million registered panel members to deliver accurate, actionable consumer insights.

As innovators and pioneers of online market research, we have a strong reputation as a trusted source of accurate data and insights. Testament to this, YouGov data is regularly referenced by the global press, and we are the second most quoted market research source in the world.

YouGov. Living Consumer Intelligence.

More information on YouGov at yougov.de

Press contact

YouGov Deutschland GmbH

Anne-Kathrin Sonnenberg, PR Manager

Phone: +49 (0) 221 420 61 - 444

E-Mail: presse@yougov.de

