

Environmental Awareness in Germany 2004

Summary

Methods

In February, March and April, 2004, 2018 randomly selected citizens of all parts of Germany were interviewed. Basic population of the sample were all persons over 18 years of age living in private households in the Federal Republic of Germany. As sampling-system, Master-Sample of the ADM (Arbeitskreis Deutscher Marktforschungsinstitute e.V.) was used. The TNS-EMNID-Institut (Bielefeld) carried through the collecting of the data. For this survey a structured questionnaire was used, whereby the same one was used in the West as in the East.

Results of the Study

The environment is still considered an important issue

Environmental protection is still seen as a significant issue in Germany: 92% of the population views the protection of the environment as important. In comparison to the surveys in 2002 and 2000, the estimation of the relevance of environmental protection remains stable.

Environmental awareness remains at a high level

The majority of the population believes that the limits of growth have been reached. In 12 of the 17 statements, which cover the general attitudes towards environmental protection, the percentage of those with pro-environmental attitudes has actually risen slightly in since 2002.

Lower environmental awareness in younger age groups

Among 18- 24 year-olds environmental awareness is the lowest; in the age group of 30 to 39 years it is the highest.

Concern is on the rise

The Germans are more worried about the environment in 2004 than 2 years ago. 58% of those surveyed this year believe that if we continue as we have up until now, we will be heading towards an environmental catastrophe. Two-thirds are concerned when they think about the conditions under which future generations will live, an increase of 4% in comparison to the survey 2002.

Positive judgment of the environmental quality in Germany

The percentage of those who view the quality of the environment as very good or rather good remains stable at 82% in comparison to the survey in 2002. The view of the environmental conditions in East Germany continues to improve.

But: increasing critical assessment of environmental risks

The awareness environmental dangers has risen in comparison to 2002. The majority of those surveyed (53%) now estimate the personal risks of a global change in climate as extremely dangerous or very dangerous. Only 16% classify the climate change as hardly or not at all dangerous for themselves and their families, compared to 21% in 2002.

Nuclear power regarded as dangerous

Today, as in the past, nuclear power is the cause of the biggest fears. 59% of those surveyed classified power plants and the resulting radioactive waste as extremely dangerous or very dangerous, 6% more as in the survey 2002.

Disapproval of genetically-engineered foods increases

Almost half of those surveyed stated that they would never buy genetically-engineered foods. The number of those who are strongly opposed has risen in comparison to the surveys in 2002 and 2000.

Environmental problems endanger health

22% of citizens today feel strongly or very strongly that environmental problems are having a negative affect on their health. The number of those who believe that the environment will strongly or very strongly endanger the health of our children and grandchildren in 25 years has risen sharply. Three-quarters of those surveyed are convinced of this.

Badly-informed about healthiness and environmental-friendliness of foods and products

A majority (62%) of those surveyed felt badly-informed about the healthiness and environmental-friendliness of food and products. Only 2% felt very well informed, and a good one-third felt well-informed.

Allergies continue to increase

In 2000 51% stated that they didn't personally know anyone who suffered from allergies; today it is only 39%.

Cars are the undisputed number-one mode of transportation

The car continues to take the lead as the most-used mode of transportation in local traffic. While in the previous study 38% stated that they very frequently used their car when traveling locally, now 45% do. The dominance of the use of cars for day trips and short-distance travel cannot be overlooked either.

The train is not perceived as an alternative in leisure travel

On their last vacation trip only 6% used the train, while 12% did on their last short trip. As the mode transportation for day-trip travelers, the train only reached a percentage of 6% - the same percentage as those who traveled by bike.

Increasing majority supports the reduction of automobile traffic

Despite the increasing use of cars in local transportation, a growing majority favors urban-planning measures aiming to decrease automobile traffic. In our survey we asked about several different urban-planning measures in cities and residential areas. The approval rating for almost all of them has risen between three and six percentage points since 2002..

Majority wants more environmental protection

The environmental activities of the national government are judged by 34% of the population as exactly right at the present moment. This is a small increase of 2% in comparison to 2002, and in comparison to 2000, an increase of 9%. The majority of those surveyed, 63% to be exact, are of the opinion that the federal government should do more for the environment.

Increasingly convinced of climate change

A clear majority of the population believes in the existence of a climate change. 85% are completely or rather convinced of this. In the survey 2002 it was 77%. Most of all the number of those completely convinced has risen, from 27% to 34%. Only 15% are skeptical of the existence of a climate change. When asked if the climate change can still be remedied, the opinions- just as in the previous studies- are split: 52% are confident, 48% are skeptical.

Satisfied with the German climate protection policies

The number of the supporters of Germany as a environmental pioneer in the

European Union rose from 47% in 2002 to 56% this year. The percentage of the population which is satisfied with the role of Germany in conferences on climate change has increased.

Spreading Skepticism of EU-Expansion

As to what consequences the expansion of the European Union has for the protection of the environment, those surveyed judged very differently: A majority, 39%, fears a change for the worse. 30% expect an improvement, for example through stricter environmental laws in neighboring countries. 19% believe that everything will remain the way it is now.

For the improvement of renewable energy

The improvement of wind energy meets with extensive approval. With a good two-thirds (70%) majority supporting the further construction of wind power installations, 30 % are against the construction of more wind turbines; of those, 12% are strong opponents. When asked about the disadvantages, the population was divided: 49% of those asked were of the opinion that the windmills visually disturb the landscape, and 51% disagreed.

Increasing criticism of ecological tax reform

The acceptance of the ecological tax reform continues to decrease; it is disapproved of with a 58% majority; in 2002 it was 52%. The number of supporters has fallen from 29% to 26%. A clear majority, almost three-fourths of those asked, see the ecological tax reform as socially unjust.

Environmental associations and citizen action groups: lawyers for the environment

Environmental associations and citizen action groups enjoy great confidence in their environmental protection competence. Over 60% of those surveyed display much trust with regard to environmental issues.

Businesses, trade unions, churches, and political parties continue to lose trust

Only 18% trust the church in questions of the environment, 9% the trade unions, and 8% the industry. The failure of the trade union is especially great. A large loss of trust is also shown in regards to the judgment of the various parties' environmental competence. With the exception of the Green Party, all parties have suffered a loss of trust. Especially bitter is the loss in the SPD: While in the 2002 survey 25% showed trust in matters concerning the environment, at the present only 14% do. The FDP sank from 10% to 6% and the CDU/CSU from 23% to 17%.

Increasingly unhappy: the media reports too little on environmental topics

The dissatisfaction with the extent of the media's coverage of environmental issues has grown. Half of the population is of the opinion that the media reports too little about environmental problems.

Principles of sustainability are popular

The basic principles of sustainability (careful use of resources, justice between the generations, fair trade) are very popular. The approval rates have risen several percentage points in comparison to 2002, lying between 82% and 88%.

However: concept of the sustainable development remains difficult to communicate

The term "sustainable development" has not become any more well-known in the last two years. Only 22% report that they are familiar with this term. The Local Agenda 21-Initiatives are also not well-known: merely 16% have heard that there is a Local Agenda 21-Process in their city or community.

Involvement potential for protection of the environment and wildlife exists

The potential for involvement in the protection of the environment and wildlife is rather considerable. A third of those surveyed can imagine themselves becoming active in environmental protection, for example as volunteers in an environmental or wildlife-protection group or through involvement in individual activities and projects. Lack of time is the main reason given for not becoming involved.

Additionally, the internal structures in associations and organizations deter a good half from becoming active.

“Bio-Stamp” and “Blue Angel” are well-known

A large majority of the population recognizes the product labels “Bio-Stamp” (74%) and “Blue Angel” (83%). Both labels influence the purchase decisions as well, because half of those surveyed state that while shopping, they look for these particular symbols. After the continuous decline since 1994 in number of people stating that they looked for the Blue Angel, there has been a clear jump upwards from the survey in 2002, 39% to 49% to be exact.

Consumers pay attention to energy use

For 88% of consumers low energy use remains an important criterion when making purchase decisions, a percentage which has continued to rise since 1996. Furthermore 42% of those surveyed always make sure they completely turn off electrical appliances, meaning that they don't leave them in stand-by mode. However, the number of users of renewable energy has not changed since 2002.

Environmentally-involved: a modern lifestyle for environmental protection

Approximately every fifth German is closely connected with environmental protection. This group of environmentally active citizens is characterized by a relatively high level of education and at least an above-average income. They live more often in the western states of Germany, more often in big cities of over 500,000 inhabitants, and more often in good neighborhoods. Post-material values such as self-initiative, solidarity, creativity, and tolerance are very important to them.