

Fears, Worries, and Anxieties in Contemporary Europe

Is There a Societal Climate Change and What
Are the Consequences for Quality of Life

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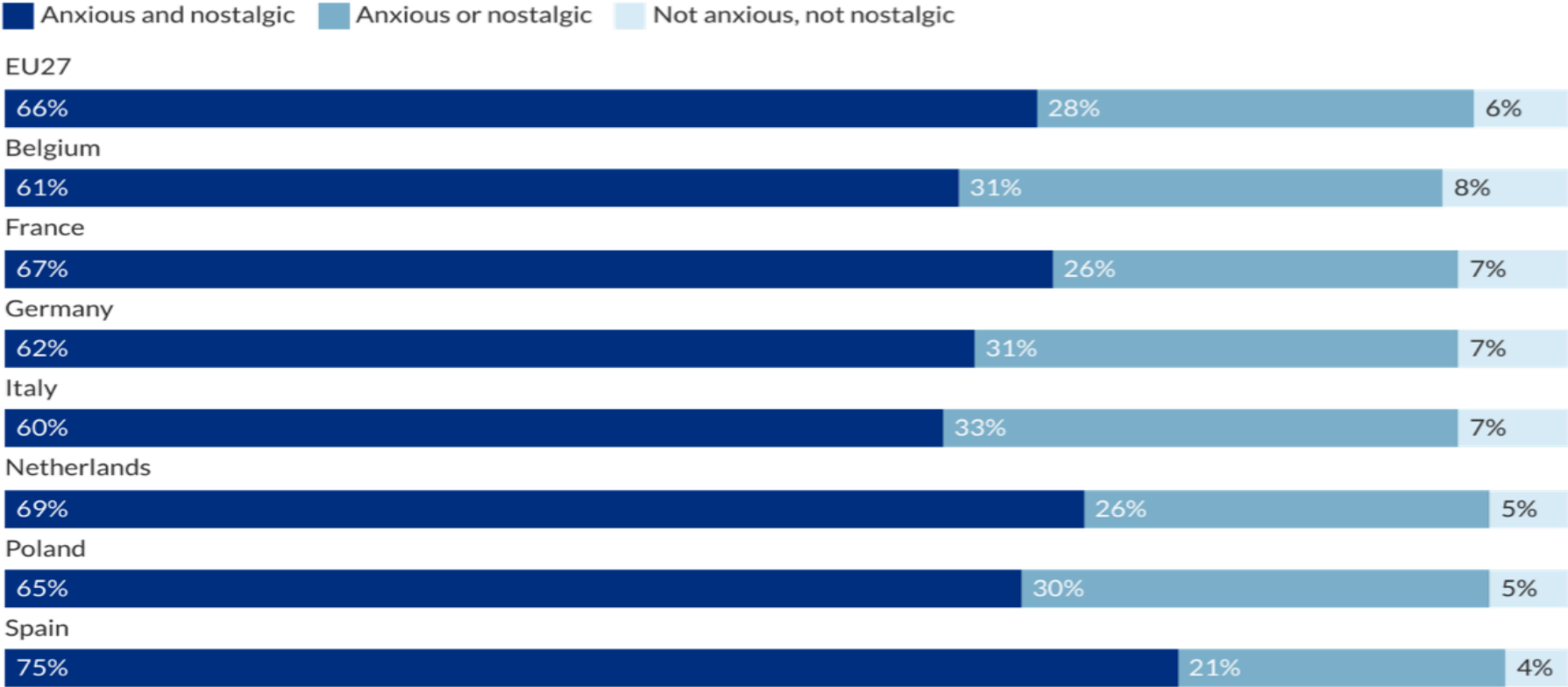
Introduction

- An atmosphere of widespread concerns, high uncertainty and insecurity, and a general climate of multiple crisis in Europe (and the Western world)
 - Rising costs of living crisis with a worsening of the financial situation
 - Return of territorial war to Europe
 - Migration and refugee crisis
 - COVID-19 pandemic
 - Environmental crisis and climate change
- A period of profound technological, social and political change
- Increasing interest in the topic of (rising) individual and collective fears/anxieties by academics, the media & politics
- Several recent diagnoses of contemporary (Western) societies as a “culture of fear” (Furedi 2006, Glassner 1999), “liquid fear” (Bauman 2006), or “society of fear” (Bude 2018)

Anxiety in European countries, 2022

(eupinions/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2023)

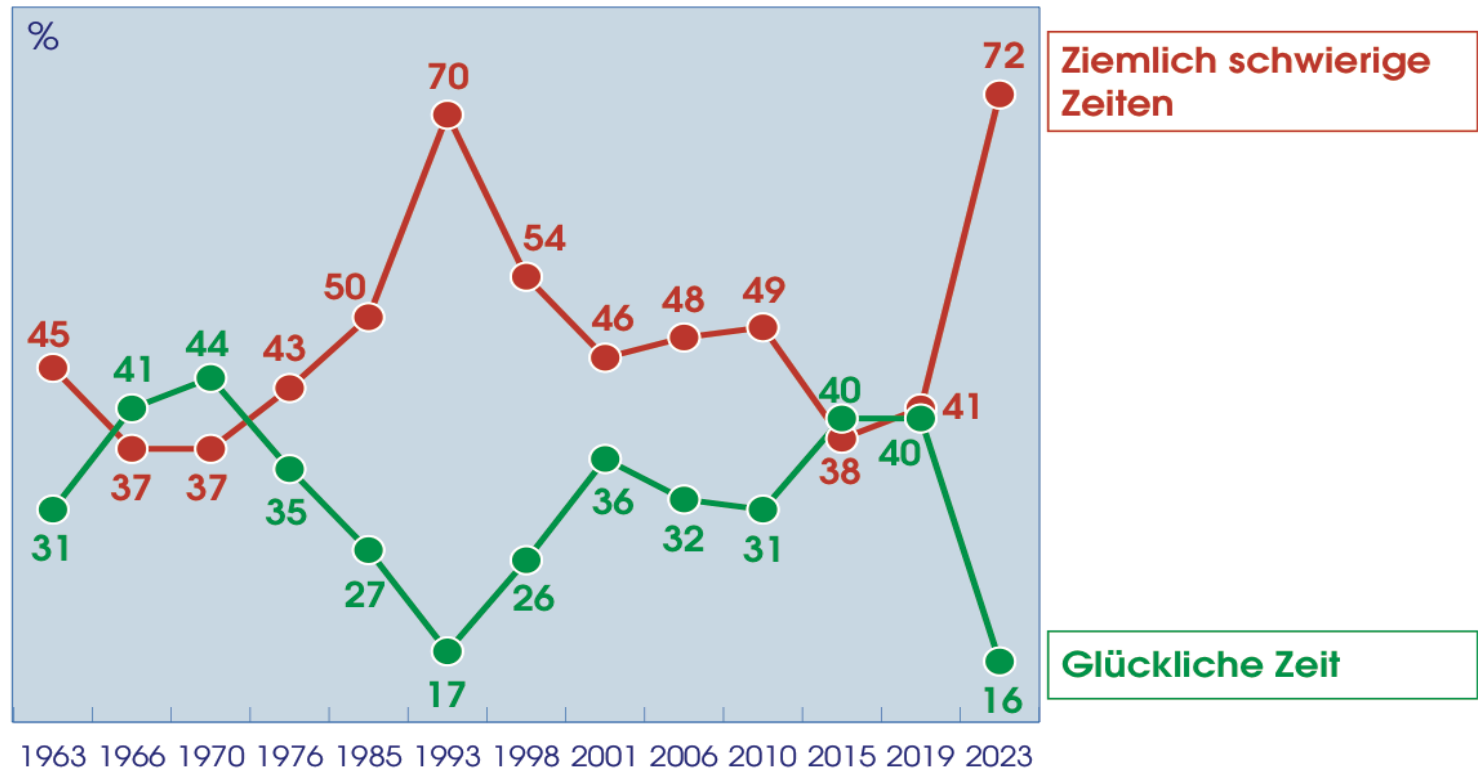
Who is highly anxious? Those who agreed that: The world used to be a better place AND the world is a dangerous place.



December 2022

“Happy times” vs “quite difficult times” in Germany, 1963-2023 (Petersen 2023)

Frage: "Würden Sie sagen, wir leben heute alles in allem in einer glücklichen Zeit, oder haben Sie das Gefühl, dass wir ziemlich schwierige Zeiten durchmachen?"

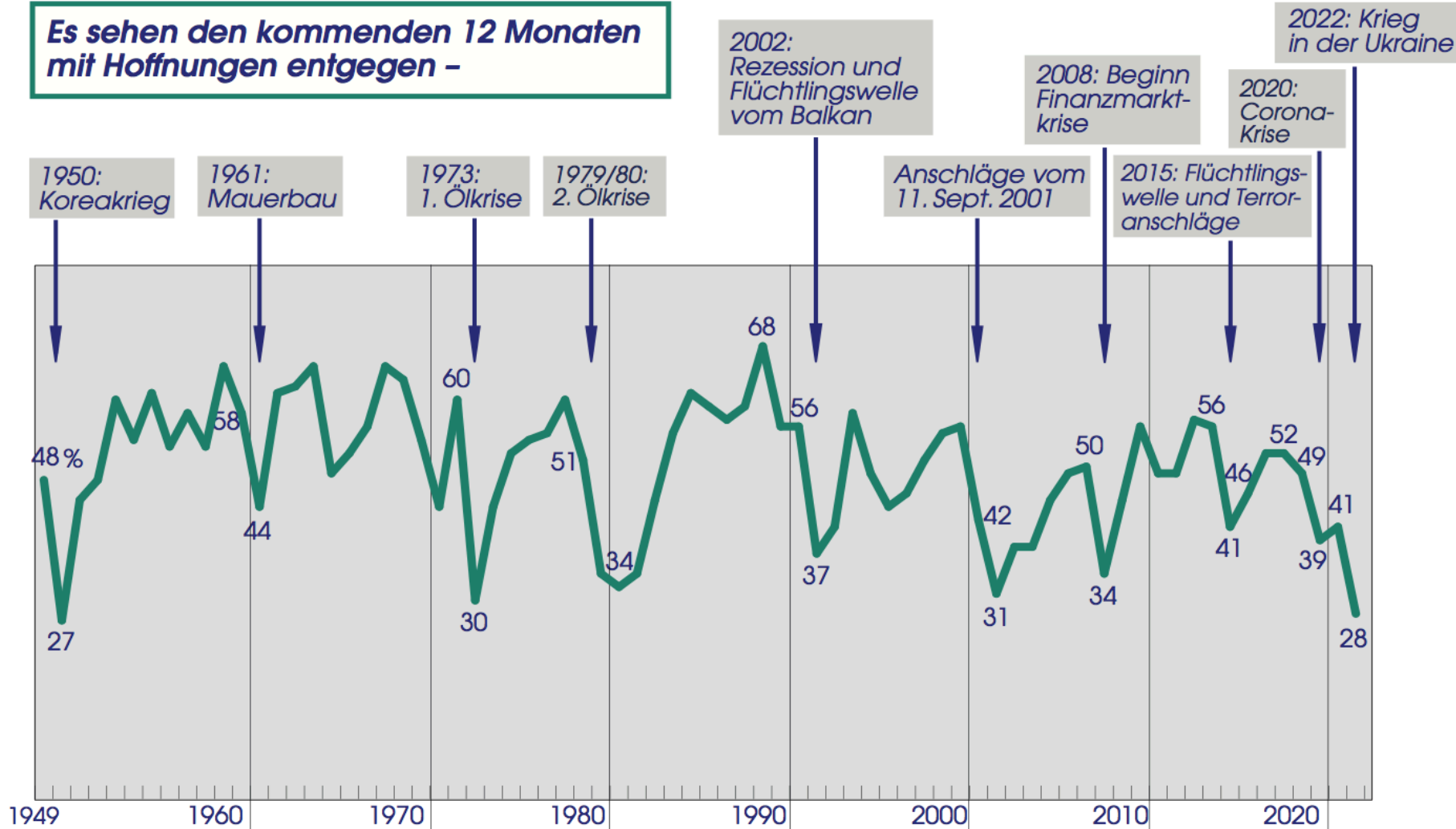


An 100 fehlende Prozent: unentschieden

Basis: Bundesrepublik Deutschland bzw. Westdeutschland (1963 bis 1985), Bevölkerung ab 16 Jahre
Quelle: Allensbacher Archiv, IfD-Umfragen, zuletzt 12079

Hope for next 12 months at the beginning of new year in Germany, 1949-2023 (Petersen 2023)

Es sehen den kommenden 12 Monaten mit Hoffnungen entgegen -

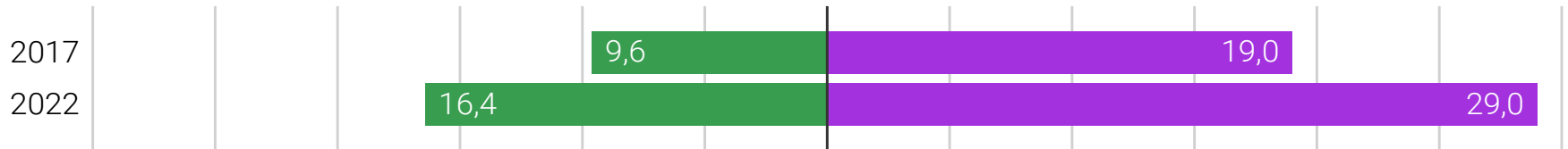


Basis: Umfragen jeweils am Jahresende, 1949-1989: Westdeutschland, ab 1990 Gesamtdeutschland

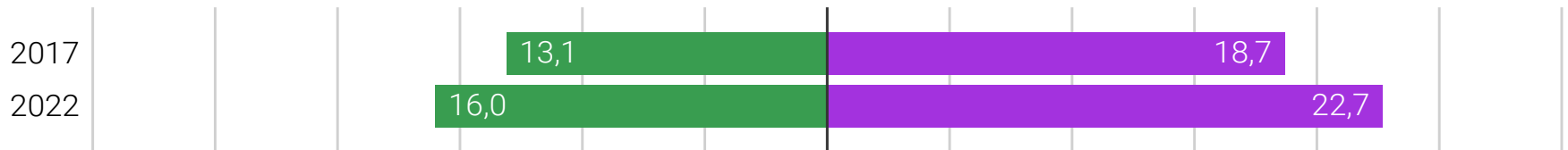
Quelle: Allensbacher Archiv, zuletzt IfD-Umfrage 12079

Middle and high degree of psychological stress in Switzerland, 2017–2022 (SFOS 2023)

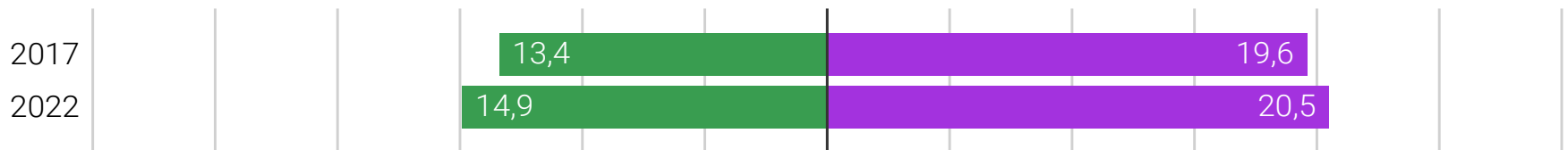
15–24 Jahre



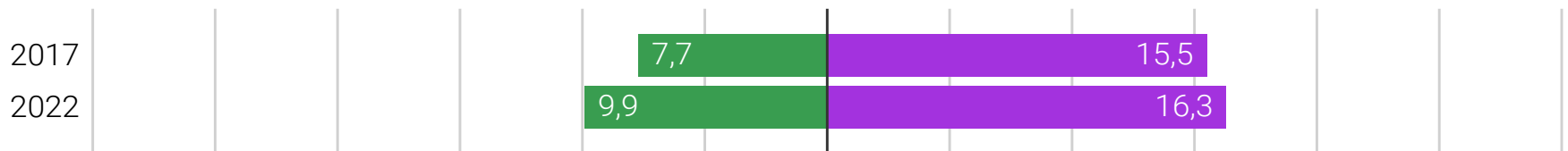
25–44 Jahre



45–64 Jahre



65+ Jahre



30% 25% 20% 15% 10% 5% 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30%

■ Männer ■ Frauen

An Age of Anxiety?

- Several (mostly US) studies identified increasing anxiety, depressive symptoms, and mental health issues in the US across time and over generations, and in particular for young people (e.g. Twenge 2000)
- Evidence on societal factors associated with potentially increasing anxiety: economic/financial conditions, job safety/unemployment, general feelings of insecurity, criminality, rate of divorce, social connectedness, social media.
- Empirical evidence regarding a secular trend is not conclusive
- Cultural frame of anxiety (and emotions in general) and importance of cross-cultural validation
- A meta-analysis of 130 studies on the U.K. and German-speaking countries between 1964 and 2015 shows no increase but rather a decrease for some measures. Societal factors impacting on the course of anxiety are unemployment rate and age at marriage (Schürmann and Margraf 2018)
- How exactly (rising) worries and anxiety are linked to quality of life and subjective well-being is not clear. Petersen 2023 for instance does not find any (negative) impact of rising concerns and hopelessness on happiness in the case of Germany.

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