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# Democracy, Digitalization, Dissatisfaction?

Knowledge, attitudes and assessment  
in U.S. & German public opinion

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# Digitalization & Democracy in Public Opinion

- Rapid transformation processes shake up economies, put a strain on democracies and disrupt societies.
- Digitalization is a driver of transformation. Its effects on democracy have been debated over the past years.
- Against this backdrop, we asked:
  1. What people know about digitalization
  2. How people feel about digitalization
  3. And whether they believe digitalization is good for democracy

# 9/10 Germans are familiar with the term digitalization, compared to 5/10 Americans

## Do you know what digitalization is?

■ Yes ■ No

Germany



USA



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In a first step, we wanted to find out whether people are familiar with the term 'digitalization'.

91% of Germans claim to know what digitalization is. 50% of Americans do.

This is the largest gap we observe in the data.

To create a common understanding, we added a short definition. It read: Digitalization describes the process of converting from analog to digital: letter to E-Mail, landline to smartphone, newspaper stand to social media feed, supermarket to online shop.

## 2/3 of Americans and Germans think digitalization is an opportunity

### Do you think digitalization is a threat or an opportunity?

■ Opportunity ■ Threat

Germany



USA



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Here people are being asked to give us their general assessment of digitalization.

2/3 believe that digitalization is more of an opportunity than a threat.

The positive largely outweighs the negative in the minds of most Americans and Germans.

# Germans & Americans are more concerned when asked to assess the effects of digitalization on democracy

## Do you think digitalization is a threat or an opportunity for democracy?

■ Opportunity for democracy ■ Threat for democracy

Germany



USA



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Now we become more specific and enquire whether digitalization is good or bad for democracy.

Responses remain largely positive but drop: Slightly in Germany by 3% and more notably in the U.S. by 8%.

# Americans and Germans agree, digitalization has been positive for them personally

Now think of yourself, your opportunities, and prospects. For you personally, has digitalization been:

■ Good ■ Bad

Germany



USA



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Next, we move away from general assessments about systemic effects and get personal.

More specifically, we ask about personal experiences with digitalization.

Over 80% of Americans and Germans state that their personal experience with digitalization has been good.

# Germans and Americans are more wary when asked about the impact of social media on public debate

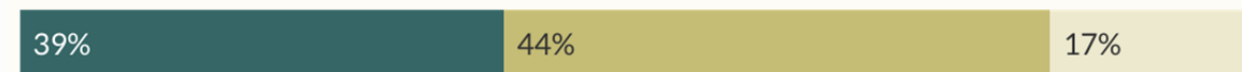
## Do you think social media has improved the public debate?

Yes No Don't know

Germany



USA



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However positive the personal experience may have been – when mentioning social media, enthusiasm stalls.

49% of Germans and 44% of Americans say social media has not improved the public debate.

31% of Germans and 39% of Americans say it has improved the public debate.

20% of Germans and 17% of Americans don't know what to think about the impact of social media.

# Privacy protection is now considered to be very important in both countries

## Do you think privacy protection should be a political priority?

Yes No Don't know

Germany



USA



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Another hot topic in the age of digitalization is the protection of privacy.

Interestingly, Americans and Germans are now aligned in their views.

Over 2/3s of Germans and Americans emphasize that privacy protection should be a priority.



# Germans and Americans are split when assessing their democracies

## How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country?

■ Satisfied ■ Not satisfied

Germany

54%

46%

USA

55%

45%

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Germans and Americans are equally divided with the way their democracies work.

This question enquires after satisfaction with the political system. It does not ask about political outcomes.

A slight majority is still satisfied with the way democracy works in Germany and the U.S.

A slight minority however is dissatisfied.

In Germany, satisfaction with democracy has dropped from 66% in March to 54% in September 2022.

# Fun fact: A clear correlation exists between attitudes towards digitalization and satisfaction with democracy

## Attitudes towards digitalization and satisfaction with democracy

■ Satisfied with democracy ■ Not satisfied with democracy

### Digitalization as opportunity

Germany



USA

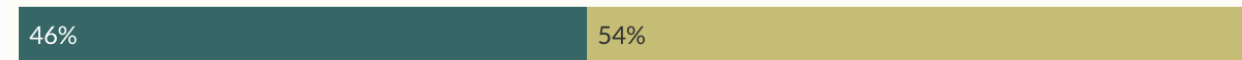


### Digitalization as thread

Germany



USA



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When correlating attitudes towards digitalization and satisfaction with democracy, a pattern emerges.

Those considering digitalization as an opportunity are more likely to be satisfied with the way their democracies work.

The effect is most visible in Germany with a 21% gap. 60% of those positive about digitalization say they are satisfied with their democracy. Whereas only 39% of those negative about digitalization are satisfied with democracy in their country.

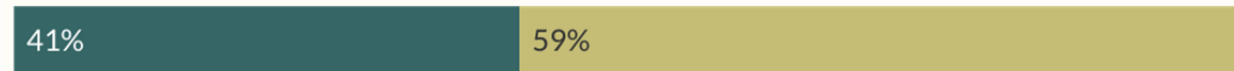
In the U.S. 58% of those positive about digitalization are satisfied with their democracy. Only 46% negative about digitalization are satisfied with their democracy.

# Most Americans are confident their country can deal with rapid technological change alone. The opposite is true for Germans.

## My country can deal with rapid technological change alone.

Agree Disagree

Germany



USA



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62% of Americans are convinced the U.S. is able to deal with rapid technological change alone. 38% disagree with this claim.

A different picture emerges in Germany. Only 41% believe their country can deal with rapid technological change alone. 59% of Germans disagree.

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# Conclusions

1. Aim of this data set: Overview of general knowledge, attitudes, assessment when it comes to democracy and digitalization
2. Attitudes and assessment in the U.S. and Germany are very similar.
3. Remarkable differences only appear when it comes to knowledge and self confidence. Germans are significantly more familiar with the term digitalization. Americans are clearly more confident that the U.S. can deal with technological change alone.
4. Majority of Americans and Germans see digitalization as an opportunity rather than a threat.
5. Germans and Americans are split when assessing their democracies. Small majority is satisfied. Large minority is dissatisfied.

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# Methodology

- The sample with a size of  $n=11,632$  was drawn by Dalia Research between 2022-09-02 and 2022-09-22 across all 27 EU Member States, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (16-70 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics.
- Any references to differences between countries in the report pertain only to the seven countries with sufficiently large sample sizes, namely: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland and Spain.
- Within the same time frame, an additional sample was drawn in the United States of America with a size of  $n= 1,109$ .
- Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be 1% at a confidence level of 95%.

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Thank you!

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