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179 Report by Anna Bindler and Hannah Walther

Social and Regional Inequalities in the Sense of Safety in Germany

- Fear of crime does not only correlate with actual crime, but can increase independently of it
- A north-south gap is visible, with people in the south feeling safer
- There is social inequality in the fear of crime; vulnerable groups tend to feel less safe



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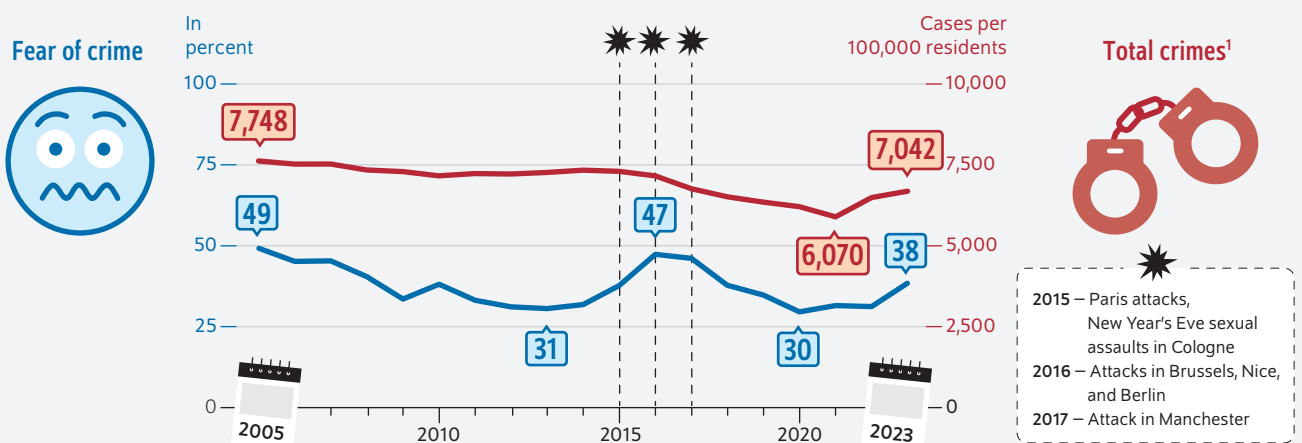
AT A GLANCE

Social and Regional Inequalities in the Sense of Safety in Germany

By Anna Bindler and Hannah Walther

- Sense of safety impacts individual behavior, quality of life, consumption behavior, and can even shape political opinions and government action
- Fear of crime does not only correlate with actual crime, but can even increase independently of it, especially in times of social change
- Older people, women, people without a university degree, and people with a low income are more concerned about the development of crime
- There is a clear north-south divide when it comes to crime and the sense of safety, with people in the south feeling safer
- The media and policymakers should inform the public in an objective manner to keep the public's perception of crime from straying too far from the actual state of crime

Fear of crime in Germany develops in parallel with, sometimes opposite from total crimes



Source: SOEP v40; PKS; authors' calculations.

1 Excluding violations against the Residence Act, Asylum Act, or Freedom of Movement Act.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“The years in which crime and the fear of crime developed in opposite directions coincided with many social changes: There was the influx of refugees in 2015/2016 as well as a period with many terrorist attacks in Europe. These factors certainly contributed to the decrease in the sense of safety among the population.”

— Anna Bindler —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with Anna Bindler (in German)
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Social and Regional Inequalities in the Sense of Safety in Germany

By Anna Bindler and Hannah Walther

ABSTRACT

The public's perceived sense of safety influences many domains in significant ways: It impacts individual behavior, life quality, consumption behavior, and even political views as well as government action. Using data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and the German Federal Government's 2024 *Gleichwertigkeitsbericht* (Equivalence Report), the development as well as the regional and social distribution of the sense of safety in Germany is analyzed. The results make it clear that not only does the fear of crime correlate with actual crime rates, but it can even increase independently of them. Such an increase can be seen during times of social upheaval. Regionally, there is a clear north-south divide: There is less crime in the south and people who live there feel safer than people living in the north. The fear of crime is distributed unevenly across society, particularly among vulnerable groups. People with a migration background tend to feel less safe. Young people, men, people with a university degree, or high-income earners are less concerned about crime trends. Responsible media coverage and a rational public discourse are important in order to prevent a growing gap between the public's subjective perception of crime and the objective crime situation. Policymakers and the media should focus on informing the public rather than amplifying fears.

Crime causes significant costs: International studies estimate the macroeconomic costs of crime to be up to 10 percent of GDP in the United States and up to four to seven percent of GDP in Europe.¹ The social costs of crime go beyond this: In addition to material damages and consequences for victims, crime impacts the public's subjective sense of safety.² Various surveys show that this sense of safety has declined in Germany over the past years.³ This development is also dominating the political discourse; in the 2025 *Bundestag* elections, crime and public security were important topics and continue to play a significant role, for example in the context of migration policy.

However, to what extent does the fear of crime reflect the actual state of safety and domestic security in Germany? DIW Berlin researchers tackled this question ten years ago,⁴ but were unable to confirm the hypothesis that the fear of crime is irrational in many regions and does not reflect the actual local crime rate. In their report, they documented a clear statistical correlation between the regional crime rate and the fear of crime. Since 2015, however, many social changes have occurred that could have impacted the public's perception of crime (and crime itself).

This Weekly Report describes the social and personal sense of safety among the public in Germany. Using Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data and the German Federal Government's 2024 *Gleichwertigkeitsbericht* (Equivalence Report, GWB), it investigates the development of as well as regional differences in the sense of safety compared to the actual development

¹ David A. Anderson, "The Cost of Crime," *Foundations and Trends in Microeconomics* 7, no. 3 (2012): 209–265; Horst Entorf and Alexander Schulan, "Kosten-Nutzen-Analyse in der Kriminalprävention," in Maria Walsh et al. (eds.), *Evidenzorientierte Kriminalprävention in Deutschland: Ein Leitfaden für Politik und Praxis* in: (Wiesbaden: 2018) (in German; available online; accessed on June 28, 2025). This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise.

² Anna Bindler, Nadine Ketel, and Randi Hjalmarsson, "Costs of Victimization," in Dave Marcotte and Klaus Zimmermann (eds.), *Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics* (Springer: 2020).

³ Anna Bindler, "Mehr Sicherheit durch Prävention: Wie Bildung, Arbeit und soziale Stabilität Kriminalität verringern," *DIW aktuell* 108 (2025) (in German; available online).

⁴ Mathias Bug, Martin Kroh, and Kristina Meier, "Regionale Kriminalitätsbelastung und Kriminalitätsfurcht – Befunde der WISIND-Studie," *DIW Wochenbericht* no. 12 (2015): 259–269 (in German; available online). This report covers crime rates weighted according to the severity of the offense and adjusts for unreported crime.

Box 1

Data on sense of safety

Since 1994, the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), Germany's largest and longest running long-term panel study, began surveying concerns about crime in Germany. Social fear of crime is surveyed via the question "Are you concerned about any of the following areas?" with the selected response option of "About the development of crime in Germany." The respondents can answer with "seriously concerned," "somewhat concerned," or "not concerned." This Weekly Report investigates the share of respondents who are "seriously concerned."

The German federal government's 2024 *Gleichwertigkeitsbericht (GWB)*, published by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, BMWE*), investigates the equality of living conditions in the different regions of the country. It uses data from a representative survey of over 30,000 residents that was conducted in 2023. Personal fear of crime is determined via the question "How safe do you feel in your residential environment overall?" with response options of "very safe," "somewhat safe," "somewhat unsafe," "very unsafe," and "do not know." The responses are coded with values from 0 to 3; higher values imply feeling safer. The values are normalized on a scale of 0 to 1, meaning a value of 0 represents feeling completely unsafe and 1 represents feeling completely safe (Figures 3, 4, and 5). For Figures 3 and 4, regional means were calculated first. The *GWB* survey also included the question "When comparing the quality of life between the different regions in Germany, which of the following aspects are particularly important to you? You may name up to three aspects." "Safety from crime" was one of the response options. The responses were coded as 3-most important, 2-second most important, 1-third most important, 0-not selected. From the responses, a binary variable is coded that indicates if "safety from crime" was selected (Figure 6).

The *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen's Politbarometer* measures fear of crime by asking the question "Do you feel threatened by crime in Germany?" Respondents may answer with "yes" or "no." This question is not asked monthly and the number of observations per month is sometimes small. Thus, answers are weighted monthly and averaged annually.

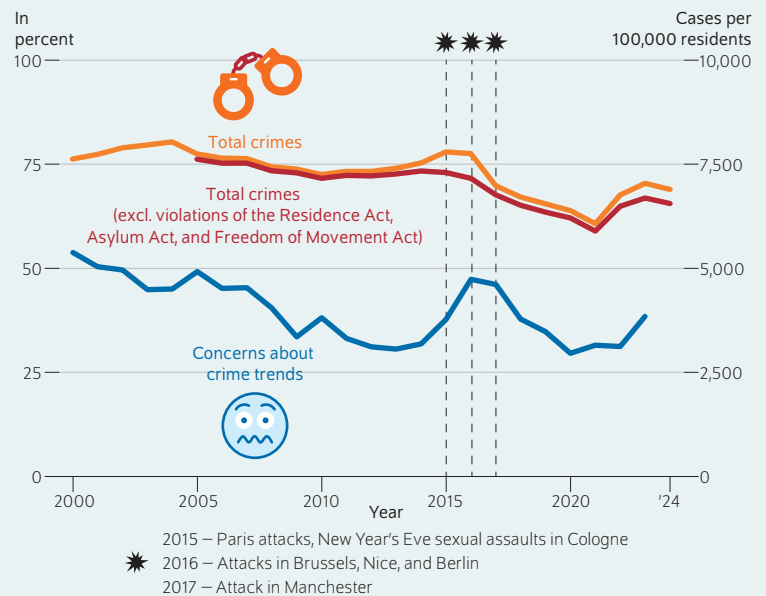
of crime. It reveals an unequal distribution in the sense of safety among the general public and discusses the social and economic implications of these results.

Fear of crime has different dimensions

When analyzing the fear of crime, one distinguishes between social and personal fear of crime. Social fear of crime describes the fear of crime as a social problem, but does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with the fear of being personally affected by crime. This can also include personal opinions

Figure 1

Concerns about crime trends and total crimes in Germany
In percent (concerns); in number of cases (crimes)



Notes: The figure shows the share of respondents who answered "Very concerned" when asked if they are concerned about crime trends in Germany. The correlation coefficients are: 2000–2013 $r=0,88$; 2014–2017 $r=-0,71$; 2018–2023 $r=0,67$.
Sources: SOEPv40; PKS, authors' calculations.

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The correlation between social fear of crime and crime rates fluctuates over time.

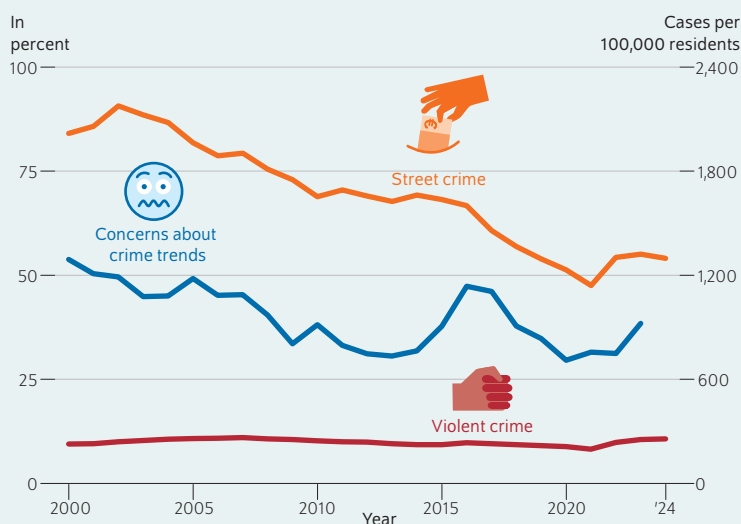
on police, law enforcement, or criminal justice.⁵ To measure social fear of crime, people are surveyed on their concerns about the development of crime and their opinions on safety, such as in the SOEP (Box 1). Personal fear of crime, in contrast, is the fear of becoming a victim of a crime:⁶ This is reflected in a person's fear of crime (affective level), in their estimation of their likelihood of becoming a victim (cognitive level), or in their behavior meant to reduce the risk of becoming a crime victim (conative level).⁷ Personal fear of crime is also measured using surveys, such as in the representative victimization survey by the Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt, BKA*) titled "Security and Crime in Germany" (SKiD)⁸ or the *GWB* survey (Box 1). In these surveys, respondents answered questions such as "How safe do you feel when walking around your neighborhood at night?" or "How safe do you feel in your residential environment overall?"

5 Christoph Birkel et al., *Sicherheit und Kriminalität in Deutschland – SKiD 2020. Bundesweite Kernbefunde des Viktimisierungssurvey des Bundeskriminalamts und der Polizeien der Länder* (Wiesbaden: 2022) (in German; available online).
6 Birkel et al., *Sicherheit und Kriminalität in Deutschland*.
7 Klaus Boers, "Kriminalität und Kriminalitätsfurcht im sozialen Umbruch," *Neue Kriminalpolitik* 6, no. 2 (1994): 27–31 (in German; available online).
8 Birkel et al., *Sicherheit und Kriminalität in Deutschland*.

Figure 2

Concerns about crime trends and street and violent crime in Germany

In percent (concerns); in number of cases (crimes)



Notes: The figure shows the share of respondents who answered "Very concerned" when asked if they are concerned about the development of crime in Germany. The correlation coefficients are: Violent crime: 2000–2013 $r=0,04$; 2014–2017 $r=-0,85$; 2018–2023 $r=0,57$. Street crime: 2000–2013 $r=0,86$; 2014–2017 $r=-0,70$; 2018–2023 $r=0,69$.

Sources: SOEPv40; PKS, authors' calculations.

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The correlation between social fear of crime and violent crime is consistently positive, but it fluctuates in magnitude and has been at a moderate level since 2018.

Fear of crime in Germany correlates partially with crime trends

To what extent do social fear of crime and personal fear of crime correlate with the number of crimes recorded by police?⁹ This question has two dimensions: trends over time and the regional distribution of the variables.

Correlation between social fear of crime and crime rates fluctuates

Since 2000, the number of crimes recorded in the police crime statistics has trended downward relative to the size of the population (Box 2). The crime rate increased slightly until 2004, then declined until 2010 and remained at that level until 2014 (Figure 1). It then rose in the short term during the period of increased refugee migration into Germany in 2015 and 2016. However, when removing violations of the Residence Act, Asylum Act, or Freedom of Movement Act (such as illegal residence), there was no increase in crime during this period. From 2017 to 2021, the rate declined further and reached its lowest rate of 6,070 cases per 100,000

⁹ There are no current figures from studies on unreported crime available for this report. The most recent figures are from 2019/2020. New figures from the BKA's study on unreported crimes are expected over the course of the rest of 2025. A comparison of methodological approaches that use weighting and adjust for unreported crimes comes to similar conclusions. Bug, Kroh, and Meier, "Regionale Kriminalitätsbelastung und Kriminalitätsfurcht."

Box 2

Data on crime

This Weekly Report uses data from the police crime statistics (*Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik*, PKS).¹ The crime categories "Total crime," "Total crime excluding violations against the Residence Act, Asylum Act, or Freedom of Movement Act," "Street crime" (such as car theft, pickpocketing), and "Violent crime" (robbery, assault).² Crime rates are used (number of crimes per 100,000 inhabitants). To improve the comparability of crime rates and the fear of crime, the crime rates are normalized to a scale of 0 (lowest amount of crime) to 1 (highest amount of crime). The crime rate refers to the cases reported to the police without any weighting of various crimes.³

- ¹ Bundeskriminalamt, *Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik* (PKS) (in German; available online).
- ² For more details on crime categories, see the overview in the 2024 *Sommerschlüssel* of the PKS (in German; available online).
- ³ For more on interpreting the PKS data, cf. Anna Bindler, "Polizeiliche Kriminalitätsstatistik muss mit Vorsicht gelesen werden," DIW Berlin Statement (2025) (in German; available online).

residents. Following this long decline, figures have been rising again since 2022.¹⁰

Using SOEP data, the overall long-term downward trend can be contrasted with the development of social fear of crime. While around 54 percent of respondents had serious concerns about crime in 2000, only 31 percent did in 2013. From 2014, social fear of crime increased markedly and nearly reached the 2000 level again, peaking at 27 percent in 2016. From 2017 it declined and then began to increase once more from 2021. In 2023, 38 percent of respondents had serious concerns about crime.

The development of social fear of crime runs partly parallel with and partly contrary to the trend in total crimes per 100,000 inhabitants (Figure 1). Both variables had a strong positive correlation until 2013. From 2014, the social fear of crime increased while the crime rate fell, meaning there was a strong negative correlation from 2014 to 2017.¹¹ Since 2018, the social fear of crime and crime rates have had a positive correlation again. The period of negative correlation coincided with a phase of major social upheaval, marked by the influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016 as well as several terrorist attacks in Europe. These events could have had a stronger impact on the sense of safety in Germany even if domestic crime rates did not rise, in part due to their prominence in the media.¹²

¹⁰ This increase is following the period of contact restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic and can be partially explained by temporal crime shifts (catch-up effects). Cf. Christoph Nägel and Clemens Kroneberg, "Zum Anstieg der Kinder- und Jugenddelinquenz nach Ende der COVID-19-Pandemie," *Kriminologie – Das Online-Journal* 3 (2023): 182–207 (in German; available online).

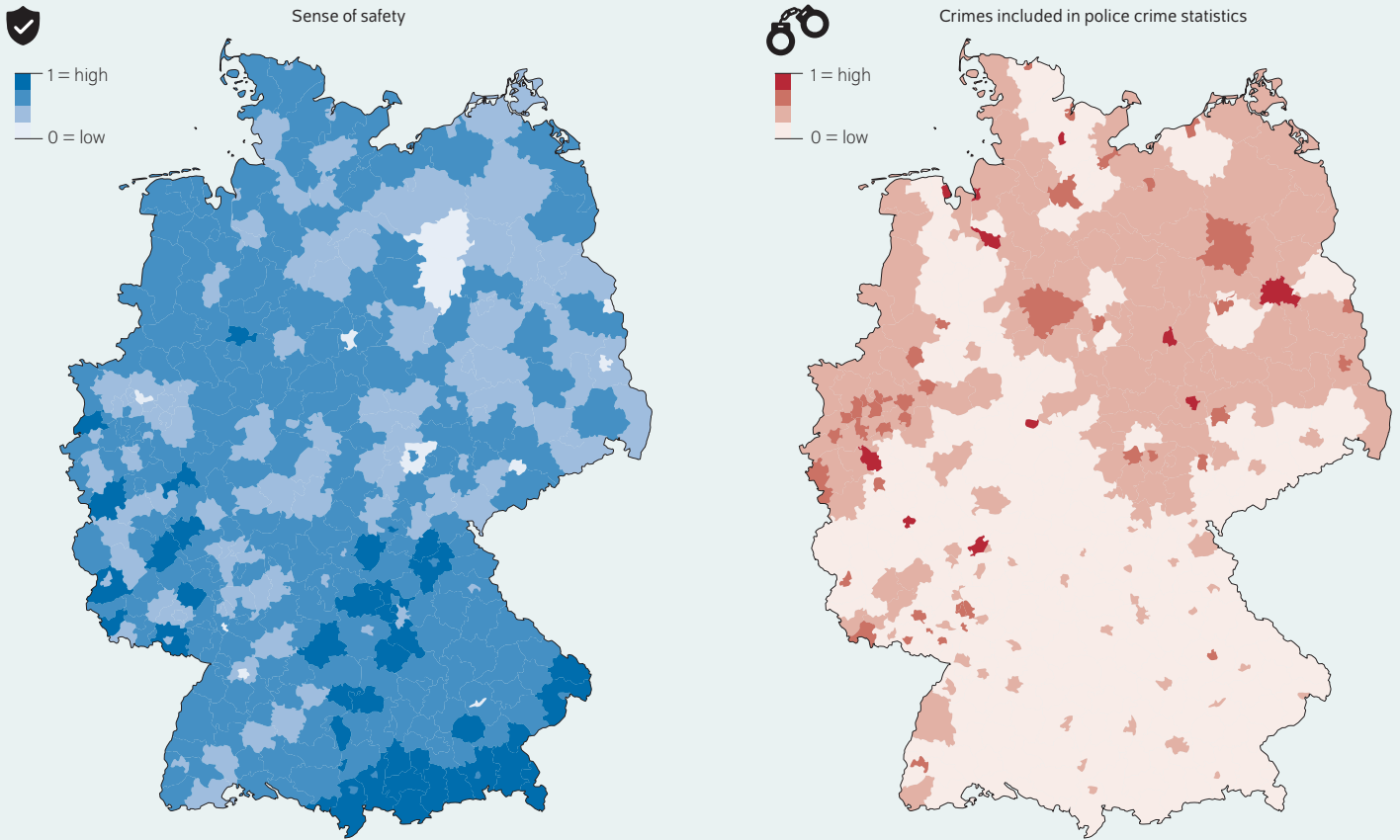
¹¹ The statement refers to total crimes without violations of immigration law, which normally do not pose a threat to individuals.

¹² Cf. Olivier Marie and Paolo Pinotti, "Immigration and Crime: An International Perspective," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (2024): 181–200 (available online).

Figure 3

Sense of safety and normalized crime rates in Germany in 2023

On a normalized scale from 0 to 1



Note: The sense of safety is determined using the question "How safe do you feel in your residential environment overall?" The normalized crime rate is determined using the number of total crimes, excluding violations of the Residence Act, Asylum Act, and Freedom of Movement Act.

Sources: German Federal Government's 2024 Gleichwertigkeitsbericht; police crime statistics (PKS); authors' calculations.

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Crime and concerns about crime differ by region, although a north-south divide exists for both.

Total crime includes a variety of crimes of various degrees, some of which are more relevant to the sense of safety than others; particularly relevant are street and violent crime (Box 2). Street crime has declined significantly since 2000 (Figure 2) and it also had a strong negative correlation with the social fear of crime between 2014 and 2017. Violent crime, in contrast, has increased over the past years. Its correlation with social fear of crime remained consistently positive, although the strength of the correlation has fluctuated and has remained at a moderate level since 2018. Although only 3.7 percent of crimes were violent crimes, violent crime is a prominent topic of public discourse and results in high crime costs.¹³

Crime and sense of safety vary by region

In addition to the correlation between fear of crime and actual crime over time, we investigate its regional distribution. The regional distribution is particularly relevant for the personal fear of crime, which is based on a personal sense of safety locally more than nationwide developments. The sense of safety in a person's residential environment, calculated using GWB data, differs significantly by region (Figure 3). A north-south divide is noticeable: People in southern Germany feel safer than people in northern Germany. A similar gap can be found in the regional distribution of crime, measured in terms of total crime excluding violations of immigration law. This north-south divide was already visible ten years ago.¹⁴

As with the temporal development of the social fear of crime, personal sense of safety correlates partially with regional crime

¹³ Bindler, Hjalmarsson, and Ketel, "Costs of Victimization."

¹⁴ Bug, Kroh, and Meier, "Regionale Kriminalitätsbelastung und Kriminalitätsfurcht."

Figure 4

Sense of safety and distribution of crime in Germany
On a normalized scale from 0 to 1



Note: The sense of safety is determined using the question "How safe do you feel in your residential environment overall?" The normalized crime rate is determined using total crimes, excluding violations of the Residence Act, Asylum Act, and Freedom of Movement Act.

Sources: German Federal Government's 2024 Gleichwertigkeitsbericht; police crime statistics (PKS); authors' calculations.

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Despite higher crime rates in many major German cities, the sense of safety ranges within the middle of the distribution.

rates. Overall, there is a negative correlation, meaning that the public tends to feel safer in regions with less crime. However, this correlation is only moderate. There are regional differences as well (Figure 4): Many districts with a high sense of safety also have a low crime rate. However, one striking pattern relates to large cities where crime rates are higher, but the sense of safety remains moderate. This suggests that while the fear of crime and crime rates correlate, crime rates alone do not determine how safe and secure the public feels.¹⁵

Social distribution of fear of crime is unequal

Not all people are equally affected by crime; the risk of becoming a crime victim depends on demographic and socio-economic characteristics.¹⁶ In addition to the objective probability of becoming a crime victim, a person's subjective perception of fear of crime correlates with these socio-economic

¹⁵ For more on the issue of unreported crimes, see footnote 9.

¹⁶ Bindler, Hjalmarsson, and Ketel, "Costs of Victimization;" Anna Bindler et al., "Discontinuities in the age-victimisation profile and the determinants of victimization," *Economic Journal* 134, no. 657 (2020): 95–134 (available online).

Box 3

Methodology: Regression analysis

We use regression analyses to determine the correlation between the sense of safety and different socio-economic variables. The respective degree of the sense of safety was regressed on corresponding variables. The estimated coefficient reflects the difference in the sense of safety compared to the reference group. The variables (and reference groups) are: below 30 or over 60 (30 to 60-year-olds), men (women), university degree (no university degree), SOEP: income \geq median net labor income (income < median), GWB: net household income \geq 3,000 euros/month (<3,000 euros/month), entrepreneurs (non-entrepreneurs), migration background (no migration background). A person has a migration background if they or at least one of their parents was not born with German citizenship. The coefficients of the GWB regressions were adjusted for regional differences using fixed effects at the district level. This means that the correlation between the socio-economic characteristics and the sense of safety were investigated within a district. In this way, differences in e.g. income and age structure between the districts could be kept constant.

characteristics. Using regression models, the correlation between individual socio-economic characteristics and a person's sense of safety, the importance placed on safety from crime, and the social fear of crime can be investigated (Box 3). While the results do not allow us to draw any causal conclusions, they are informative about the distribution of the sense of safety in the population.

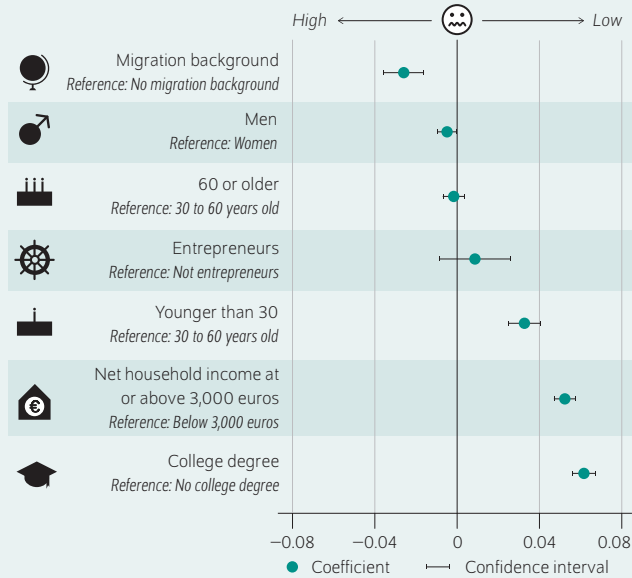
While people under 30 have a higher risk of becoming a crime victim on average, they feel safer in their residential environment than 30 to 60-year-olds do. People over 60 and under 30 list safety from crime as one of the three most important regional factors significantly less often compared to other factors than people in middle age do (Figure 6). "Good health care and long-term care insurance," for instance, is the most important issue for people over 60. The gender difference in the sense of safety is small (Figure 5). However, men list "safety from crime" as an important regional factor more often compared to women. People with a migration background feel less safe in their residential environment and place more importance on safety than people without a migration background.¹⁷

Socio-economic characteristics also play a role: People with a university degree feel safer and place less importance on safety than people without a university degree. Entrepreneurs, in contrast, place importance on safety more frequently than the rest of the population. People in households with a high net income report feeling safer than people

¹⁷ These findings are consistent with earlier results. In the 2020 SKiD, a significantly higher affective fear of crime was found among people with migration background in relation to many crimes. For example, people with a migration background are significantly more afraid of hate crimes, cf. Birkel et al., *Sicherheit und Kriminalität in Deutschland*.

Figure 5

Personal fear of crime
In scale points from 0 to 1



Notes: In a regression analysis, the differences in feelings of safety between groups are estimated, adjusted for regional differences. The dependent variable is the normalized feeling of safety. The results refer to a model with one factor. Reference value: The average normalized feeling of safety is around 0.72 scale points. The 95 percent confidence interval means that in 95 percent of cases, the unknown actual value lies within this interval. Thus, the probability of error is five percent. The narrower the interval, the more accurate the estimated effect. If the lower limit of the confidence interval is below zero and the upper limit is above zero, the estimated effect is not significant.

Legend: On average, people with a migration background feel less safe by -0.026 points (on a scale from 0 to 1) compared to people without a migration background.

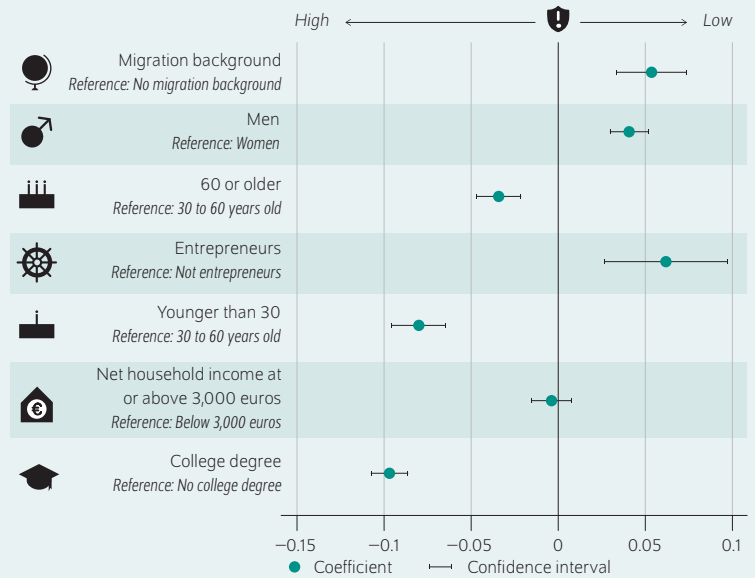
Sources: German Federal Government's 2024 Gleichwertigkeitsbericht; authors' calculations.

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People with a migration background feel less safe on average, while people with higher income and a higher level of education feel safer.

Figure 6

Importance of safety
Changes in probability on a scale of 0 to 1



Notes: In a regression analysis, the differences in the perceived importance of safety between groups are estimated, adjusted for regional differences. The dependent variable is a binary variable that indicates if safety from crime is perceived as one of the three most important regional factors. The results refer to a model with one factor. The 95 percent confidence interval means that in 95 percent of cases, the unknown actual value lies within this interval. Thus, the probability of error is five percent. The narrower the interval, the more accurate the estimated effect. If the lower limit of the confidence interval is below zero and the upper limit is above zero, the estimated effect is not significant.

Legend: Compared to women, men are on average 4.1 percentage points (0.041*100) more likely to name safety from crime as an important regional factor.

Sources: German Federal Government's 2024 Gleichwertigkeitsbericht; authors' calculations.

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On average, people with a migration background, men, and entrepreneurs are more likely to perceive safety as important.

living in low-income households. This can correlate with various life circumstances, but also with the actual local crime risk.

Using the SOEP data, we can also investigate the distribution of the social fear of crime (Box 3). Men, people under 30, people with a migration background, people with a university degree, and people with a high net income are significantly less concerned about crime trends (Figure 7). In contrast, people over 60 have considerably higher levels of social fear of crime. Despite men and younger people having a greater risk of becoming crime victims, women and older people have a much more pronounced social fear of crime.¹⁸ These two groups' greater vulnerability can explain this apparent contradiction. A fear of crime can also lead to avoidance behaviors that decrease a person's risk of becoming a crime victim.

¹⁸ This phenomenon is also known as the fear of crime paradox. Cf. information on the website *SozTheo.de – Soziologie & Kriminologie* (in German). Since the first SOEP survey in 1994, women's social fear of crime has been higher than that of men. Cf. Theresa M. Entringer and Laura Buchinger, *Subjektives Wohlbefinden und Sorgen. Sozialbericht 2024: Ein Datenreport für Deutschland* (2024) (in German; available online).

Sense of safety is economically and politically relevant

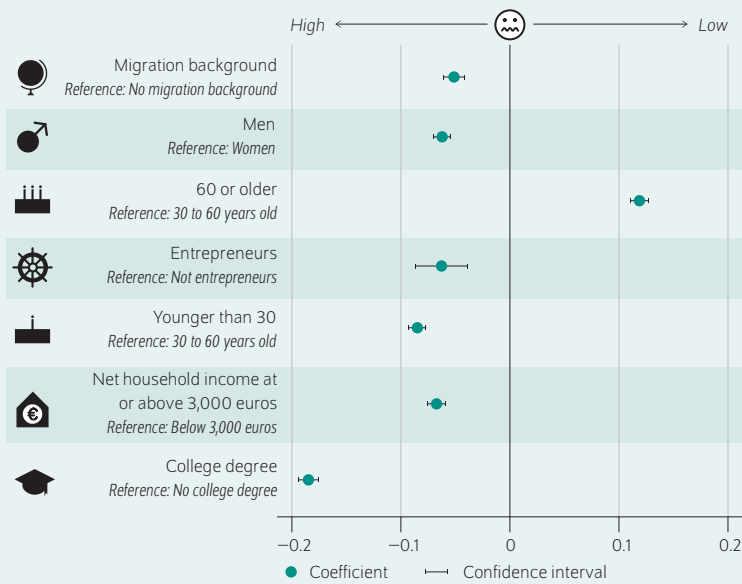
Studies have documented the social relevance of the fear of crime. In the private sphere, it can reduce a person's quality of life, increase their safety-related spending, and lead to changes in their routines and activities that can impact labor market participation.¹⁹ In the public sphere, a low sense of safety among the population can lead to higher public sector expenditure to counteract this, weaken social cohesion, and influence the public's political opinions.²⁰ The social and economic relevance of safety and their public perception are reflected in the data analyzed here: In the GWB, around 13 percent of respondents listed safety from crime as one of the top three important factors for quality of life in Germany; only affordable housing and good health and long-term care

¹⁹ Existing studies have shown, for example in a US context, that people adjust their labor market behavior to local crime by working evenings and nights less. The resulting economic costs were estimated to be between four and ten billion USD. Daniel S. Hamermesh, "Crime and Timing of Work," *Journal of Urban Economics* 45, no. 2 (1999): 311-330 (available online).

²⁰ Bindler, Hjalmarsson, and Ketel, "Costs of Victimization."

Figure 7

Probability of having serious concerns about crime developments in Germany
Changes in probability on a scale of 0 to 1



Notes: In a regression analysis, the differences in the social fear of crime between different groups are estimated. The dependent variable is a binary variable that indicates whether one has serious concerns about the crime development in Germany. The result refers to a model with one factor. The 95 percent confidence interval means that in 95 percent of cases, the unknown actual value lies within this interval. Thus, the probability of error is five percent. The narrower the interval, the more accurate the estimated effect. If the lower limit of the confidence interval is below zero and the upper limit is above zero, the estimated effect is not significant.

Legend: In contrast to women, men are on average 6.2 percentage points (0.062*100) less likely to be very concerned about crime development in Germany.

Sources: SOEPv40, authors' calculations.

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Vulnerable population groups show a higher social fear of crime.

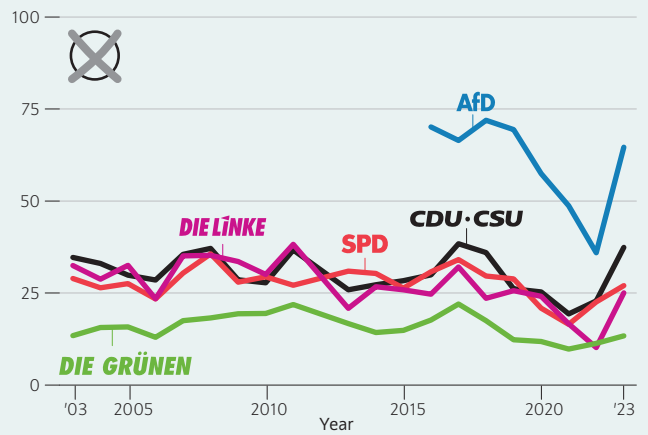
insurance were listed as more important. Safety from crime was the most frequently named factor among entrepreneurs at 16 percent. This figure suggests that the sense of safety is relevant as a factor for business locations.²¹

Crime also plays a role in shaping the public's political opinions. Data from the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen's Politbarometer* illustrate this: The feeling of being threatened by crime depends strongly on the political party the respondents intend on voting for (Figure 8). Generally, the share of respondents among those voting for the CDU/CSU, SPD, and die Linke (The Left) who are concerned about crime has fluctuated between 20 and 40 percent over the past 20 years, but follows a similar trend. Noticeably, two parties deviate from this trend: Fear of crime is less pronounced among voters for die Grünen (Green Party) and is below 20 percent with few exceptions. In contrast, the fear of crime among AfD voters is much more pronounced: In 2023, over 60 percent of AfD voters were concerned about crime. Although we cannot draw

²¹ Cf. Anna Bindler et al., "Sondervermögen allein reichen nicht – Fünf dringende Maßnahmen für den Standort Deutschland," *DIW aktuell* 112 (2025) (in German; available online).

Figure 8

Perceived threat from crime by voting intention
In percent



Notes: The figure shows the share of respondents who feel threatened by crime in Germany by their reported voting intention. Due to too few observations until 2015, the values for people planning to vote for the AfD are only shown from 2016. Moreover, feeling threatened by crime was not surveyed in every month of the year and the number of observations per month is sometimes small. Thus, responses were weighted monthly and averaged annually.

Sources: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, authors' calculations.

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The share of respondents who indicate they feel threatened by crime depends strongly on political affiliation.

any conclusions from these figures as to whether political opinions are causally linked to a fear of crime, they do illustrate the topic's political relevance and the different perceptions of crime among the population.

Conclusion: Policymakers and media need to take fear of crime seriously and inform the public in an objective manner

The data show that the correlation between the social fear of crime and crime rates fluctuates over time. Our findings strengthen the conclusions of a DIW Berlin study from 10 years ago: In some years, the fear of crime positively correlated with crime.²² However, they also show that the fear of crime can increase independent of actual crime rates, in particular in times of social upheaval. Moreover, there is regional inequality regarding the sense of safety. This correlates with the distribution of crime, although not perfectly. The fear of crime is distributed unequally throughout society, primarily affecting vulnerable groups in many regards.

The analyses in this Weekly Report reveal correlations and descriptive relationships. Future research should investigate causal correlations to make evidence-based action possible. This would require better data, for example through an annual survey on unreported crime, as is done in other

²² Bug, Kroh, and Meier, "Regionale Kriminalitätsbelastung und Kriminalitätsfurcht."

European countries.²³ This would make it possible to systematically analyze crime trends (including unknown and unreported cases) and the sense of safety in Germany over time. This is important in light of the economic and political relevance of the topic. However, we can draw some conclusions even without this data: Objective and transparent communication is needed to prevent the public's subjective perception of crime straying too far from the reality of the state of crime and security in Germany. On the one hand, the media plays an important role here: Studies show, for example, that the media reports on violent or sexual crimes disproportionately more often and that the public's perception

of crime is shaped by the type of reporting on it.²⁴ On the other hand, policymakers should strive for objective discourse based on facts and information that does not trigger unnecessary fears and insecurities. When doing so, it is important to communicate and discuss short-term crime trends. However, this should be done transparently and in the context of long-term trends. In the end, a comprehensive crime and security policy is essential that combines prevention and effective law enforcement to sustainably reduce crime and to reinforce the public's sense of safety.

23 The nationwide survey on unreported crimes, "Safety and Crime in Germany" (SKiD) has been conducted since 2020. In the long term, it should be conducted every two years. See the project description of the BKA's SKiD survey (in German; available online).

24 Eric van Um, Michael Huch, and Mathias Bug, "Lokale Kriminalitätsberichterstattung: Abbild oder Zerrspiegel von Kriminalität?" *DIW Wochenbericht* no. 12 (2015): 288–294 (in German; available online); Sekou Keita, Thomas Renault, and Jérôme Valette, "The Usual Suspects: Offender Origin, Media Reporting and Natives' Attitudes Towards Immigration," *The Economic Journal* 134, no. 657 (2024): 322–362 (available online).