

Update 2015

# Involvement or Restraint?

Findings of a representative survey  
commissioned by the Körber Foundation  
on German attitudes to foreign policy

In May 2014, the Körber Foundation published a representative survey on German attitudes towards foreign policy entitled „Involvement or Restraint?“. At the Munich Security Conference, three months earlier, Federal President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen had called for more German involvement in foreign policy.

Currently, an increasing number of international crises and conflicts are posing challenges to German and European foreign policy. In many cases, these are questioning the cohesion of the European Union.

But are Germans more willing today to assume international responsibility than they were in May 2014? What do they view as the most important foreign policy challenges? Finally, which measures do Germans believe would be effective in countering the refugee crisis?

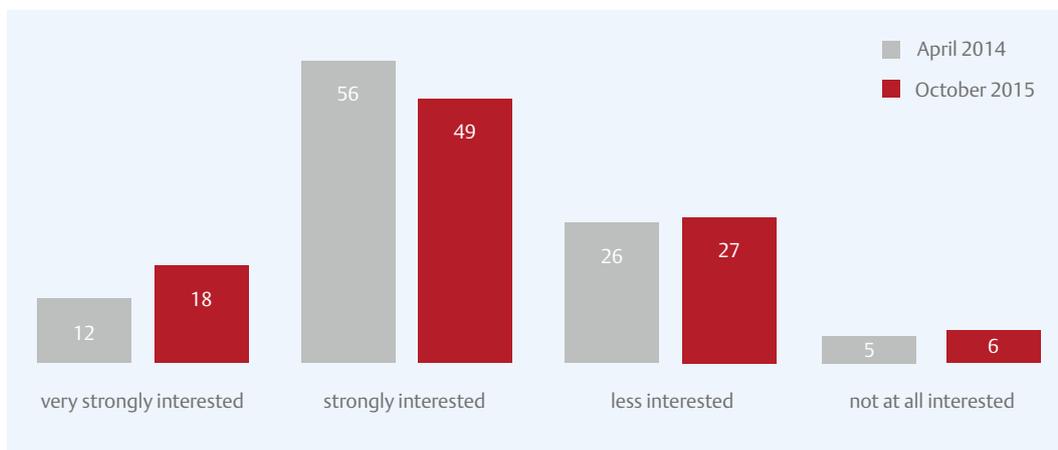
In order to find out, in mid-October 2015 the Körber Foundation asked TNS Infratest Policy Research to conduct a representative survey of 1,020 people over the age of 18. The detailed results are available at [www.koerber-stiftung.de/umfrage-aussenpolitik](http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/umfrage-aussenpolitik) (in German).

## 1. Continued High Levels of Interest in Foreign Policy

Germans are still very interested in foreign policy issues. This is clear from the 67% of respondents who stated that they were either very strongly (18%) or strongly interested (49%) in foreign policy. In particular, older and highly educated people stated an interest in foreign policy. The younger the respondents were, and the lower their level of education, the weaker the level of interest they showed.

There was a notable difference compared to 2014 in this study: the number of people who stated that they had a very strong interest in foreign policy rose from 12% to 18%. However, the ratio of people who are very strongly interested or strongly interested in foreign policy to those who are less interested or not at all interested remained almost unchanged (2014: 68% to 31%; 2015: 67% to 33%).

### Levels of Interest in Foreign Policy



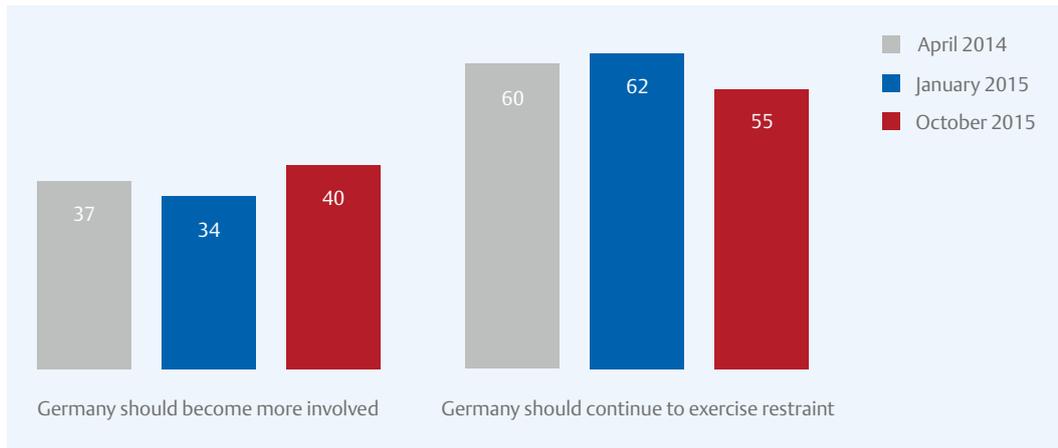
Expressed as a percentage

## 2. More Readiness for Foreign Policy Involvement

The respondents were more ready to support foreign policy involvement this time compared to the 2014 study and the survey undertaken in January 2015 for the Munich Security Report. Whereas 40% favor stronger German foreign policy commitment, 55% of respondents believe that Germany should maintain restraint in foreign policy.

In particular, young people, those with high levels of education and respondents from western Germany showed more readiness to support stronger foreign policy involvement. The older the respondents were, and the lower their levels of education, the greater their call for foreign-policy restraint.

## Assumption of Responsibility in International Crises



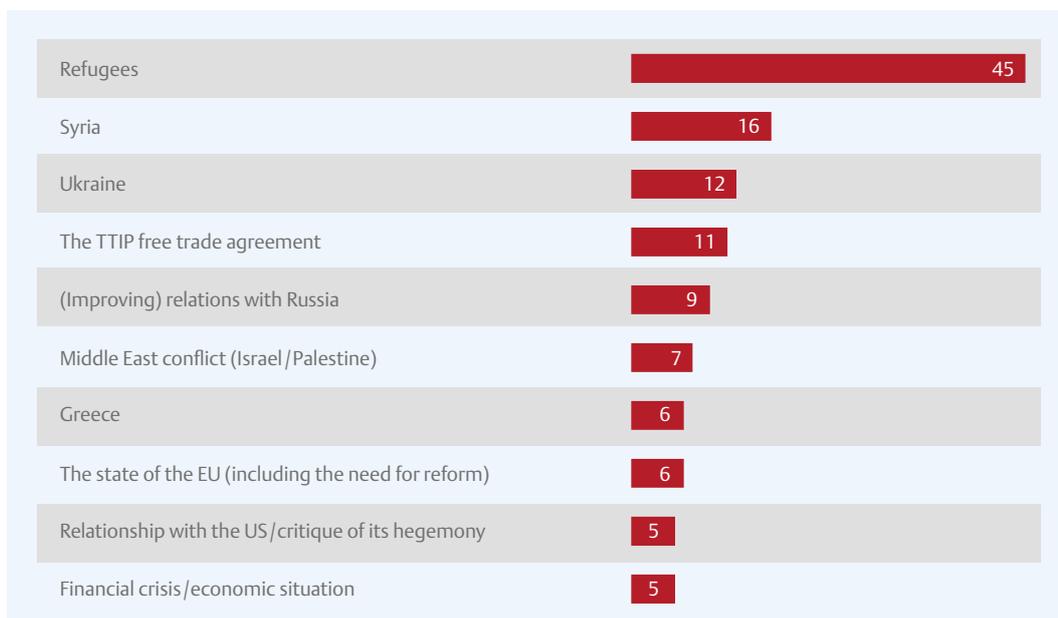
Expressed as a percentage

### 3. The Clear Priority for German Foreign Policy: the Refugee Crisis

When asked about the most important foreign policy issue faced by Germany, the majority of Germans highlight the issue of refugees (45%). Around 7% of respondents named related issues as important, and these included European cooperation and stronger involvement in refugees' countries of origin. However, these issues were not among the top 10 mentioned by the respondents, and they are only included in the detailed evaluation. This means that 48% of respondents did not mention the issues of refugees at all.

The respondents cited the Syrian civil war (16%) as the next most important issue – although it occupies a distant second place – followed by the situation in Ukraine (12%). Regardless of the situation in Ukraine, a further 9% of respondents viewed improving relations with Russia as Germany's foreign policy priority. Just 6% of respondents believe the situation in Greece poses a great challenge facing German foreign policy, whereas almost twice as many view the transatlantic free trade agreement TTIP in these terms (11%).

#### Challenges Facing German Foreign Policy: the Top 10



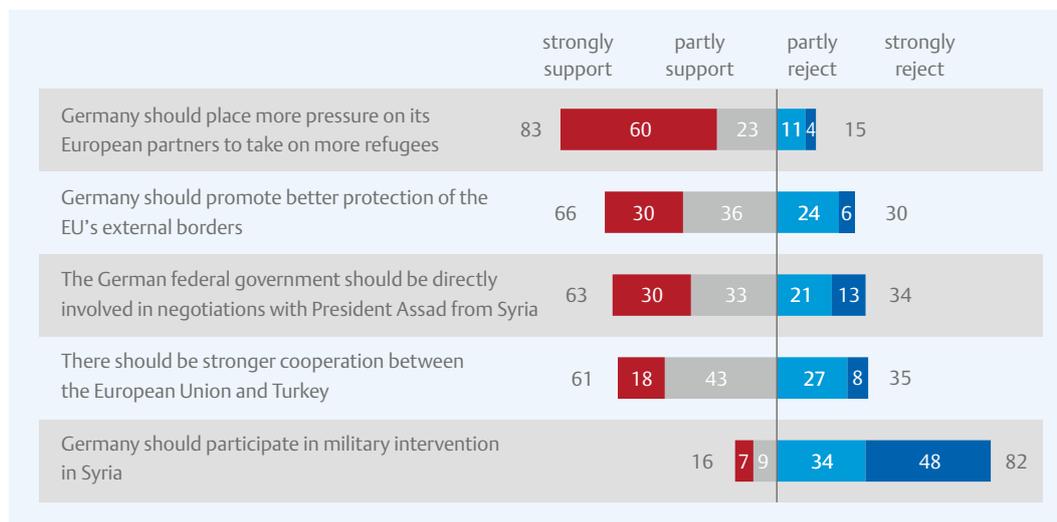
Expressed as a percentage

## 4. Refugee Crisis: Political Solutions Instead of Military Intervention

Lastly, the respondents were asked about their views on five foreign policy measures that are currently being discussed with respect to dealing with the refugee crisis. The majority of respondents were open to four of the proposed measures.

A large majority (83%) believe that Germany should put more pressure on its European neighbors to ensure they take on higher numbers of refugees. Greater promotion of stronger EU external borders (66%), the federal government's participation in direct negotiations with President Assad of Syria (63%), as well as stronger cooperation between the EU and Turkey (61%) also gained the support of a majority of the respondents. In contrast, only a minority (16%) supported German participation in military intervention in Syria; the vast majority (82%) rejected it.

### Possible Measures to Tackle the Refugee Crisis



Expressed as a percentage

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#### IMPRESSUM

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