The full study is available only in German:
Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt in Baden-Württemberg

English Summary
Social Cohesion in Baden-Württemberg

Summary

Societal trends and current status

We are today undergoing a comprehensive and fundamental societal transformation – a transformation that is leading to fundamental changes in all areas of life, in a very short period of time. As yet, there is no end in sight to this process. One current consequence is a general mood of uncertainty and worry with regard to social cohesion. A number of megatrends driving this course of events overlap with one another. Economic globalization has picked up speed in recent years, and is expected to continue to accelerate in the near future. Digitalization is on the one hand the driving force behind these economic developments, and on the other is prompting fundamental changes in all areas of life, from the working world to education, from healthcare, the media and politics to leisure-time activities and family life. The world is shrinking as a consequence, with migration often becoming one of the most visible signs; it is increasing on a worldwide scale, and Germany will continue in the future to be a country of immigration. This is largely due to the progressive aging of the population (thanks to demographic change), which is generating an ongoing need for workers that can only be met through immigration. The interaction of these developments is producing ever-greater diversity within society, which manifests in the form of different lifestyles, cultures, traditions and even religions. At the same time, there is a risk that opportunities for social participation through education, work and political participation may become increasingly inequitably distributed, because for some segments of the population, the above-outlined developments primarily offer opportunities, while for others they present new challenges and risks.

Strengthening cohesion at the local level

One key question of our time is the following: How can social cohesion be preserved or even strengthened in times of such fundamental change? The issue concerns policymakers, civil society and the public in equal measure. The perceived uncertainty has given rise to a need for effective measures promising to enhance stability and create confidence. This is especially true given that the uncertainties about the state of society and its cohesion have led to a radicalization of politics, a more disinhibited public discourse and the success of populist actors who can contribute little to shaping the future in a positive direction, and who indeed spark fears that our society could collapse under the burdens of the current process of transformation.

Since 2013, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has in numerous studies repeatedly examined the state of social cohesion, while seeking to determine which factors influence it. These efforts have included studies with a cross-national comparative focus, at the national level in Germany and in selected individual cities. The present study focuses for the first time on a single federal German state. Its guiding assumption, derived from the results of previous studies, was that the most visible signs of cohesion can be found at the local level, in people's daily lives – and that this is where it can be strengthened. Political interventions intended to enhance cohesion must therefore focus on that level. However, local measures must be used to strengthen cohesion throughout society as a whole, rather than operating solely within the local context. This

implies the use of systematic interventions that each have a local impact, but whose influence leads to a nationwide improvement in living conditions and cohesion.

A variety of starting points are conceivable for efforts to strengthen cohesion at the local level. Based both on past studies and the results of the present study, it appears that the most promising approaches come from the field of social policy – measures that serve to give various population groups greater opportunity to participate within social life.

Key study questions and methodology

With this in mind, the present study has a three-part focus of inquiry. The first goal is to measure the development and current state of social cohesion in Baden-Württemberg. The second aim is to identify the population groups that are most likely to slip between society's cracks, or which show a low level of integration into the community. The third objective is to examine how social policy measures in selected fields of activity are linked to social cohesion. This includes areas relating to volunteer activity, children and the family, women, senior citizens, long-term care, healthcare, poverty and the integration of refugees.

Two representative population surveys were used to answer these questions. In January and February 2019, the infratest dimap opinion-research institute, working on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, conducted a telephone survey of 1,398 people aged 16 or older living in Baden-Württemberg. In order to examine changes over time, the study also references data from a survey conducted in 2017. At that time, the infas Institute for Applied Social Sciences, again on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, surveyed a representative sample of 508 people in Baden-Württemberg (as part of a nationwide survey of 5,041 individuals).

Both surveys collected data referencing 36 indicators of social cohesion, among numerous other questions. These indicators allow measurement of a multi-dimensional model of cohesion, consisting of nine dimensions that can be grouped into three broad areas. According to this model, cohesion consists of the following dimensions:

1. **Social relations**
   - 1.1. Social networks
   - 1.2. Trust in people
   - 1.3. Acceptance of diversity

2. **Connectedness with the community**
   - 2.1. Identification
   - 2.2. Trust in institutions
   - 2.3. Perception of fairness

3. **Focus on the common good**
   - 3.1. Solidarity and helpfulness
   - 3.2. Respect for social rules
   - 3.3. Civic participation

For each of the nine sub-dimensions, as well as for social cohesion overall, the study uses the individual indicators to calculate index scores, each of which range from a value of 0 (no cohesion) to 100 (maximum cohesion).

Key findings of this study

Stability in social cohesion in Baden-Württemberg since 2017

In the 2017 study, Baden-Württemberg recorded the second-highest score (63 points) of all federal states for social cohesion. The more recent survey conducted in spring 2019 showed only a marginal change in cohesion for the state of 0.8 points to 63.8. This finding points not only to the fundamental stability of cohesion in Baden-Württemberg but also to the solid foundations of community in the state – despite the persistent sense of that dramatic change is underway.

Regional differences have narrowed

Both the 2017 and 2019 surveys delivered individual values for cohesion in each of Baden-Württemberg's eleven regions, as defined by the state's land-use planning administration. The marked gaps registered among the regions in 2017 have since narrowed. This is maily due mainly to the fact that the values for social cohesion in the region around Baden-Baden, as well as in the northwest around Heidelberg, Mannheim and the Rhine-Neckar district, have risen significantly (+4.2 and +5.1 points, respectively). Today, the regions in Baden-Württemberg lie closer together in terms of social cohesion than they did in the 2017 survey.

Growing acceptance of diversity and identification with the community

Overall, cohesion in Baden-Württemberg has remained stable, though changes have been recorded in certain dimensions. Five dimensions show higher values over time, three lower values and two values have remained constant. However, only the increases in the dimensions "acceptance of diversity" (+3.5) and "identification" (+3.7) are statistically relevant. Both topics have drawn considerable attention in recent years due to issues associated with immigration, refugees and a renaissance in the concept of a homeland, or "Heimat." The higher values recorded suggest that citizens have engaged in productive debates over rather controversial subjects.

Concerns regarding cohesion more broadly are growing, while local cohesion is perceived as gaining in strength

Despite the considerable stability of social cohesion in Baden-Württemberg as a whole, there is growing concern among the population about cohesion. While in 2017 only 38 percent of those surveyed felt that cohesion in Germany was at risk, this figure increased to 42 percent by 2019. The share of respondents who see cohesion in the country as being somewhat at risk has remained constant (38% for both years). However, when it comes to assessing cohesion in one's local community, we see a countervailing trend: In 2017, roughly 70 percent of those surveyed felt cohesion in their community to be "good" or even "very good." Two years later, this figure increased to 80 percent. So, whereas broader concerns about cohesion in Germany are growing, more and more people are reporting positive experiences with stronger cohesion in their own communities. This finding underscores the importance of measuring social cohesion as realistically as possible.

Certain at-risk groups experience weaker social cohesion, a fact that demands greater attention as we move forward.

People with chronic illnesses: Respondents who suffer from a chronic illness experience seven out of nine dimensions of social cohesion to be weaker than do respondents without health issues. The same is true with regard to their experience of social cohesion more broadly. People with chronic conditions have smaller social networks, report less trust in others and in institutions, identify less with the community, are themselves less likely to help others, see more problems in society and, overall, are more likely to believe that society is unjust. Making up about one-third of all respondents, this group is strongly represented in the survey. It includes women, older people, single parents, people with a medium level of education and those with relatively low incomes, the latter of whom are somewhat more strongly represented in the group than in the overall sample.

People with a migration background: Roughly 25 percent of those surveyed have a migration background. Figures for six of the nine dimensions of social cohesion are lower among this group. They thus report a weaker experience with all aspects of things such as "social relations" and "focus on the common good," as well as cohesion overall.

Women and single parents: Women perceive social cohesion to be weaker than do men. They also have a heightened sense of society being less just and are aware of more social problems in their surroundings (respect for social rules). In addition, they face social exclusion more frequently. Unsurprisingly, single parents (the majority of whom are women) also experience less cohesion. They generally have less-developed social networks and identify less strongly with the community around them, which plays a role in how they experience cohesion.

People with low income levels: People with low income levels make up around 12 percent of those surveyed and overall experience less social cohesion. Respondents in this group also have less developed social networks and are less likely to embrace diversity. In addition, they are more likely to be subject to insecurity in their daily life and face greater social exclusion.

People in metropolitan areas: In the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, people who live in large cities in particular experience significantly less cohesion than those residing in rural communities or small and medium-sized towns. People in urban areas have smaller social networks, show a lower acceptance of diversity, experience society as less just and are subject to greater insecurity in their daily life (respect for social rules). We also see commitment to communal life (solidarity and helpfulness) among respondents in this group.

Strong correlation between cohesion and awareness of social policies

Overall, awareness of the eight policy action areas surveyed (volunteer work, children and family, women, senior citizens, long-term care, medical care, poverty and refugees) correlates strongly with the degree of social cohesion within a region. This means that social cohesion is stronger in those regions where people are aware of and in agreemennt with the social policy measures taken. This clearly suggests that successful social policies with palpable outcomes affect more than the specific issue targeted and thus have a positive impact on social cohesion more broadly.

Three action areas in particular are strongly linked with cohesion

Not all eight action areas show a clear statistical correlation with the level of cohesion. Clear and statistically significant effects can be seen above all in support measures for families, the poor and the integration of refugees. Wherever the public is aware of such measures and views them positively, social cohesion is also stronger.

No major fault lines across society with regard to policy fields

Whereas certain at-risk groups can be clearly identified with regard to social cohesion, this is not the case with regard to social policy action areas. Most older citizens (65+) have a positive view of social policy measures, while respondents with chronic conditions express greater skepticism. People with a migration background are somewhat more critical of the support provided by volunteer organizations and the offerings made available for families, and women are more skeptical of gender equality measures than men. People in rural areas view the lack of specialist physicians critically, while people in urban areas express concerns regarding the institutional framework for long-term care. In short, we see isolated findings specific to an issue rather than fault lines across society as a whole.

Recommended actions

A targeted and effective social policy fosters social cohesion. Strengthening cohesion involves taking the appropriate actions and applying all available resources in targeting those at-risk groups who currently face considerable barriers to participation in society. These are first and foremost people with chronic illnesses, people with a migration background, the poor, and single parents.

Discrimination against women is also clearly a problem demanding greater effort to counteract it. Cohesion in Baden-Württemberg is strong, overall, and there are only limited differences registered among the regions. However, we see a certain cluster of problems developing in large cities. Addressing this might involve providing targeted support (including funding) for neighborhoods, establishing neighborhood councils to promote civic agency and stepping up community work efforts. Given the ways in which social policy has already affected cohesion, it seems clear that an effective family policy, the promotion of social inclusion opportunities for low-income individuals and strong integration measures (including those targeting refugees) offer especially promising pathways forward.

The Living Values program

In the Living Values program, we examine social cohesion and especially the role played by religion and values for living together in diverse societies. We regularly research and publish new studies on these topics in the Religion Monitor and the Social Cohesion Radar. In addition, we actively seek to strengthen values through practical projects and methodologies, and work to build networks between civil society actors engaged in our field.

If you would like to learn more about our work, or receive regular information about new research results, studies and events, please use the QR code provided or visit the link below.

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