

## Perceptions of economic insecurity: The case of the German middle classes.

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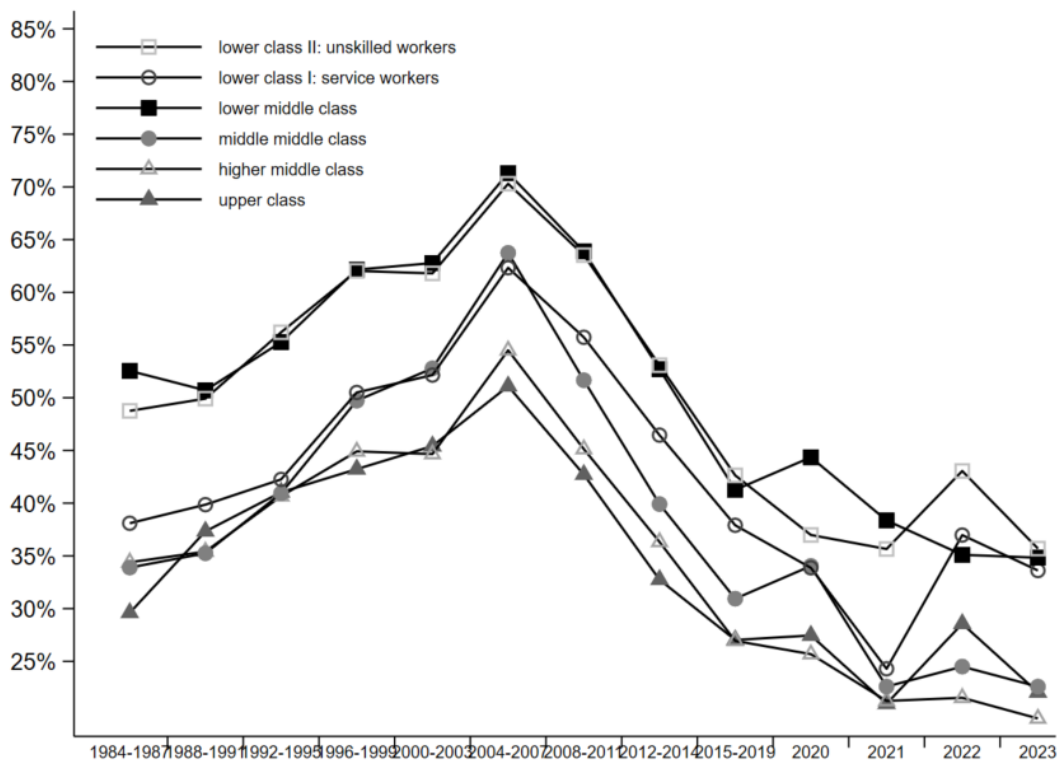
Contemporary societies such as Germany are characterized by persistent crisis and profound structural transformations. Since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the country has faced significant economic disruptions, beginning with a sharp contraction of GDP during the pandemic, followed by inflationary pressures and an energy crisis in 2022/23. These developments have contributed to a stagnation of real incomes, and a widespread perception that previously secure living standards are increasingly at risk. At the same time, the German labor market is undergoing rapid change driven by industrial restructuring, digitalization, and the accelerating impact of artificial intelligence. These developments have initiated the question of *whether perceptions of economic insecurity have increased since 2020, and if yes, to what extent the middle classes have been affected by it.*

Building on the notion of the “sensitivity of the middle class” argument we examine the development of the individuals’ worries towards job loss by social class from 1984 – 2023 to assess whether the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a significantly stronger increase in personal economic insecurity within the various segments of the middle class compared to other groups. We draw on prior research (Lengfeld & Hirschle, 2009; Lengfeld & Ordemann, 2017; Lengfeld, Holger & Ordemann, 2020) that has proven effective in several studies using data from the Socio-Economic Panel Study, SOEP (Goebel et al., 2023). Extending our original research design, we furthermore analyze the shifts in the worries towards the respondent’s own economic situation and the worries towards the country’s situation, controlled for additional socio-demographic and attitudinal factors.

Preliminary findings show similar overall trends in the perception of status insecurity but with slight variations since the pandemic (see Fig. 1). They indicate that status insecurities have become more heterogeneous by social class – except for the middle classes.

Words: 289

**Fig. 1:** Status insecurity in Germany's classes



Source: SOEP v40, own calculations.

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