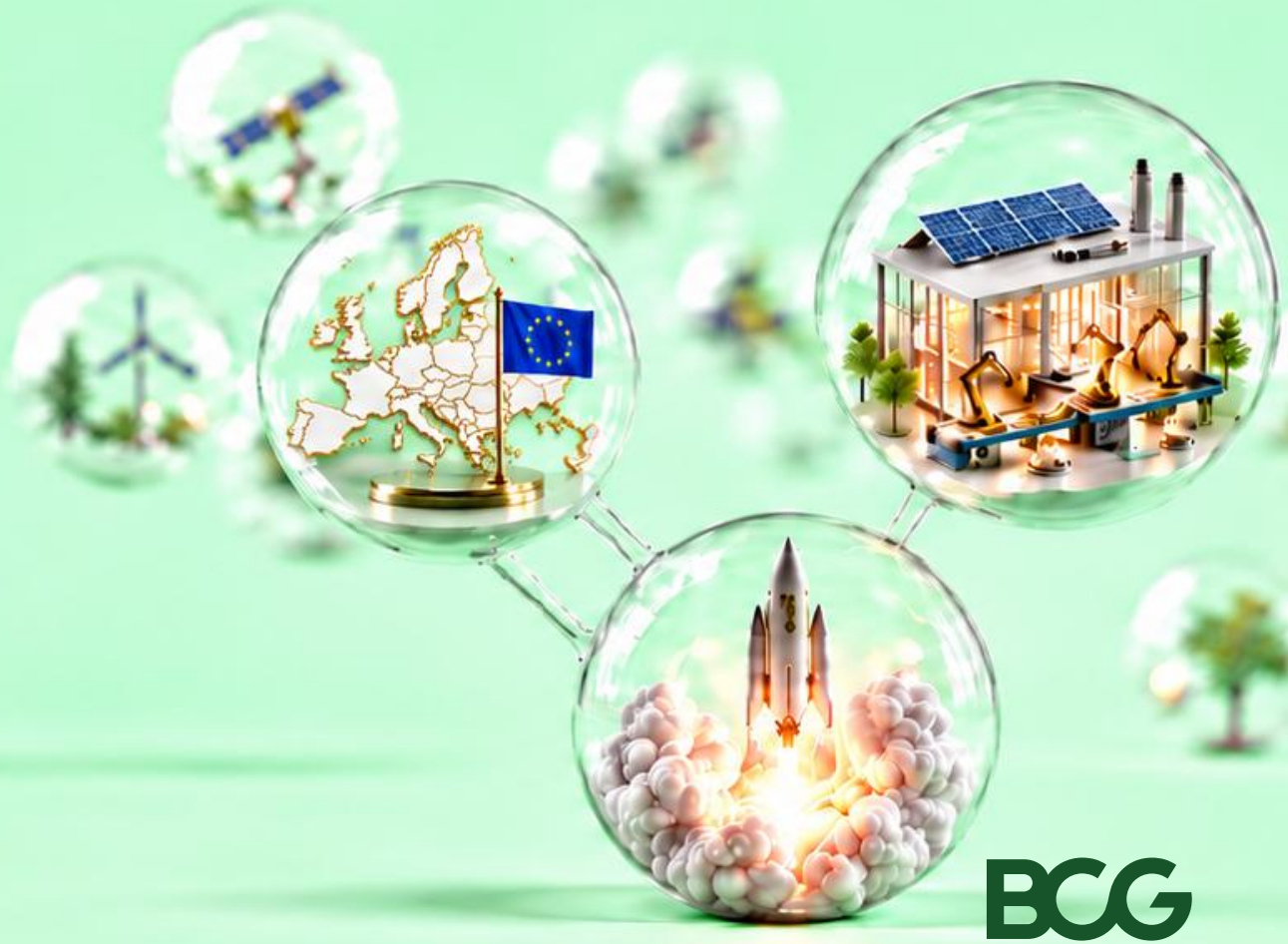
# Buy First, Scale Fast

## How Corporate Customers Can Help Europe's Tech Champions Scale

Authors: Michael Brigl, Jacob Schrot, Daniel Zepter, Tilman Buchner, Nils Philipp, Simona Gulich, Finja Stampa

November 2026



BCG

# **Summary** | Europe has the lever, but not yet the habit: more corporate buying from early-stage tech firms could help them scale

## Europe's tech position is seen as weak

**I** **Europe lacks momentum.** 72%[1] of all respondents see Europe's tech transformation stagnating or declining – yet 30% are confident of global leadership in ten years.

**II** **No clear stronghold.** No field[2] is rated competitive by more than 31%; AI & digital infrastructure ranks last (17%).

**III** **Germany slightly less pessimistic.** 64% see stagnation or decline, vs. 72% across Europe.

## Willing and experienced, but not yet committed

**IV** **Levers are known but rarely pulled.** 72% of business leaders expect more corporate buying to help startups scale – only 9% engage with them on an ongoing basis.

**V** **Trying is common, results vary.** 74% have tried partnering; positive experiences lead 2:1 (34% vs. 17%) – in Germany it is reversed (20% vs. 36%).

**VI** **Buyers would buy more.** 93% name at least one condition; proof that the technology works reliably leads (51%).

## What it takes to close the gap

### Unlock scale-up capital

Mobilize venture & growth capital to bridge the early commercialization phase

### Cut regulatory friction

Make regulation more innovation-friendly and simplify application and approval processes

### Make buying safer

Established companies to step up as lead customers for early-stage tech companies with pilots, references & risk-sharing

### Bridge lab to production

Companies & research institutions to jointly build shared pilot & test sites and strengthen tech transfer

Source: BCG & Statista 2026.

1. Survey n=370 respondents in ten European countries, of which n=185 business leaders (C-level and one level below, industrial sector companies) and n=185 academics (professors and academic staff in economics/business and STEM); data weighted. 2. Technology fields: biotechnology, fusion & climate-neutral energy, climate-neutral mobility, robotics, microelectronics, defense, space, quantum, AI & digital infrastructure.

# METHODOLOGY



**Methodology**

Computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI)

**Sample**

Business n=185 C-level & one level below C-level in industrial sector companies[1]

Academia n=185 professors & academic staff at universities and research institutions with a focus on economics/business sciences and STEM disciplines

**Region**

Germany (n=100)[2], Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic (n=30 each), Rest of Europe[3] (n=120)

**Fieldwork**

9 September – 16 October 2026

Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
1. Minimum company size varies by country to ensure sufficient sample size.
2. European figures include Germany, with its results down-weighted to account for the larger sample size and avoid bias.
3. Incl. United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy.
Note: Percentages in the text are sums of the rounded chart values and may differ slightly from unrounded results.



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# FIRST CUSTOMERS, FUTURE UNICORNS

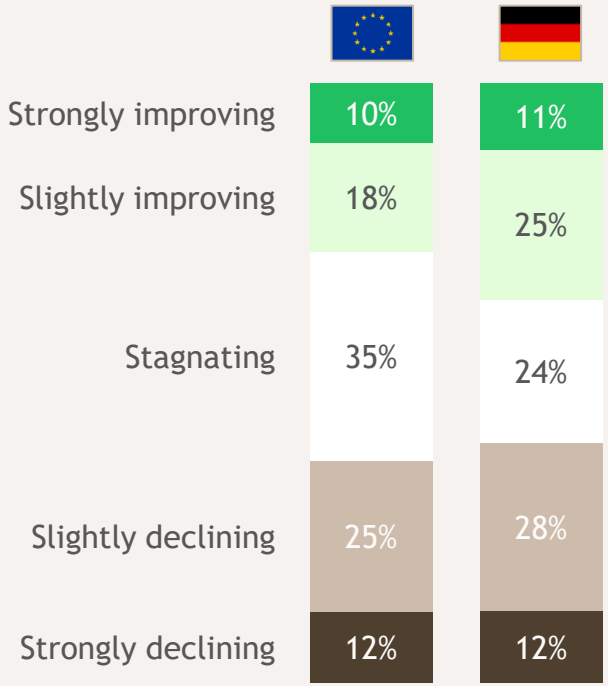
- **Competitiveness in Europe vs. Germany**
- Buying early-stage tech & commercializing research
- What it takes to close the gap



# 72% see Europe's transformation stagnating or declining; yet 30% are confident for 10 years ahead

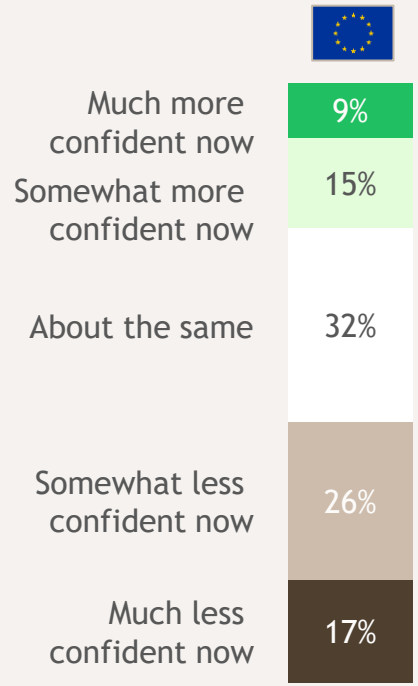
## Current momentum
in Europe's tech transformation

*How would you assess the current momentum of Europe's industrial and technological transformation?*



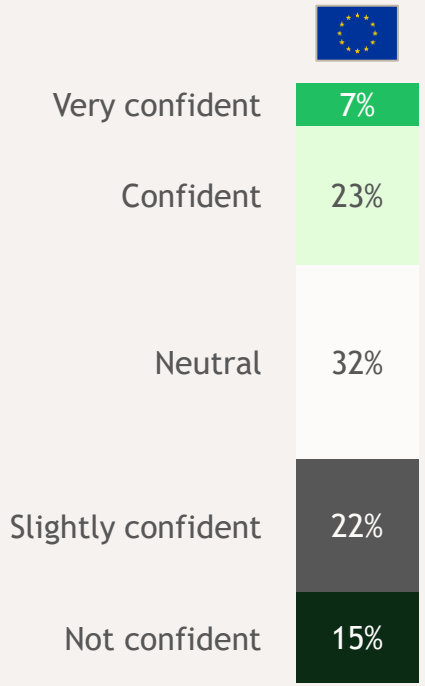

## Europe's tech competitiveness
compared to 2 years ago

*Compared to 2 years ago, how has your confidence in Europe's technological competitiveness changed?*




## Europe's tech leadership
in 10 years

*How confident are you that Europe will be a global technology leader in 10 years?*[1]




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
1. Ten-year outlook: scale 1-10 (9-10 very confident, 7-8 confident, 5-6 neutral, 3-4 slightly confident, 1-2 not confident)
Note: Europe data are weighted and based on n=370 interviews; Germany data include all German respondents (n=100).

## Key takeaways

Europe needs visible progress to rebuild confidence in its technological competitiveness:

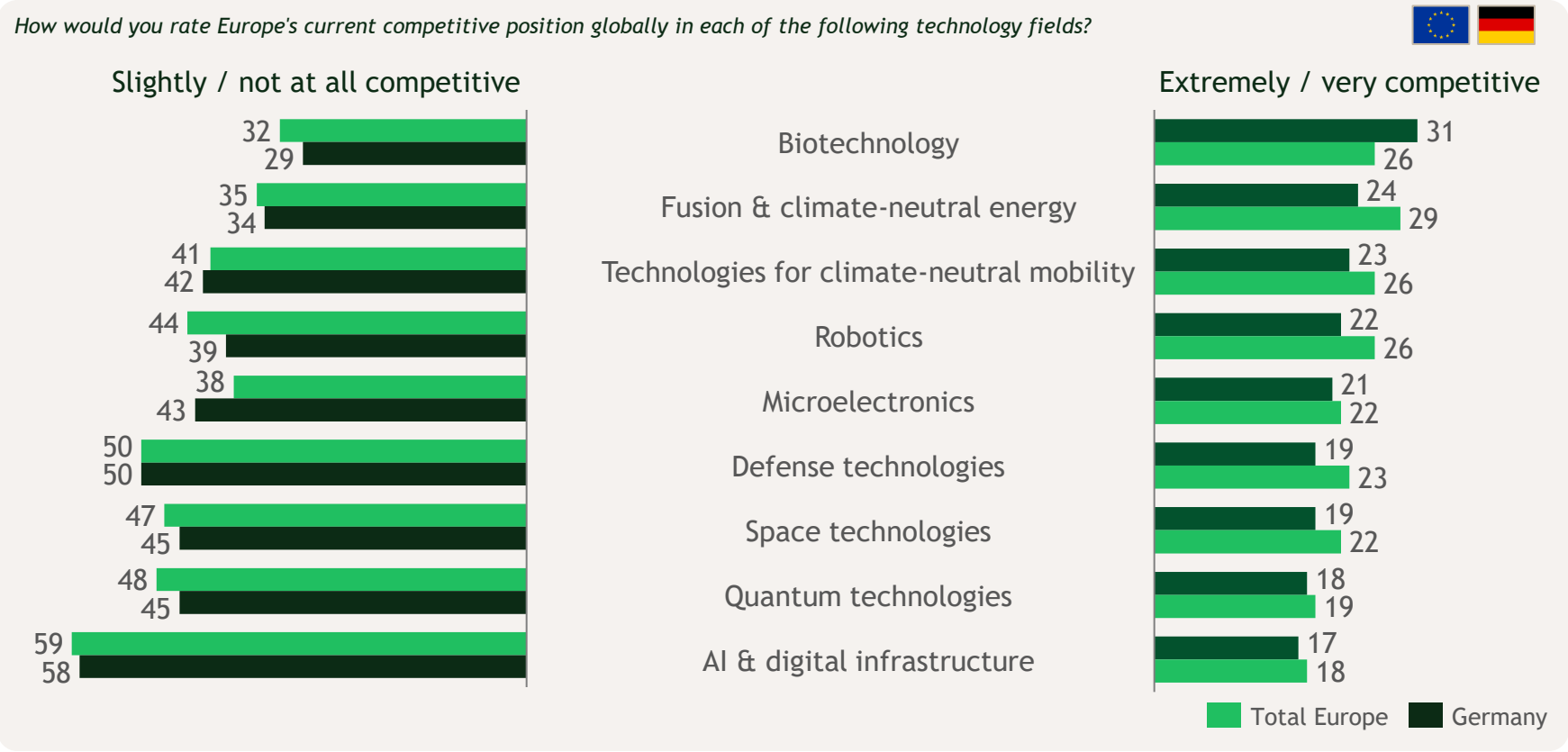
- 72% see Europe's industrial and technological **transformation stagnating or declining** (Germany: 64%), and 43% are **less confident** than two years ago.
- Looking 10 years ahead, **30% are confident** Europe will become a **global tech leader**, 37% are not or only slightly confident.

*"While innovation is abundant, both established companies and small start-ups face significant challenges in commercializing their technologies."*

# „AI & digital infrastructure is seen as Europe's least competitive tech field; Germany is slightly more optimistic

## Europe's competitive position across tech areas

German vs. Total Europe (in %)




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=370 interviews, incl. n=100 in Germany.

## Key takeaways

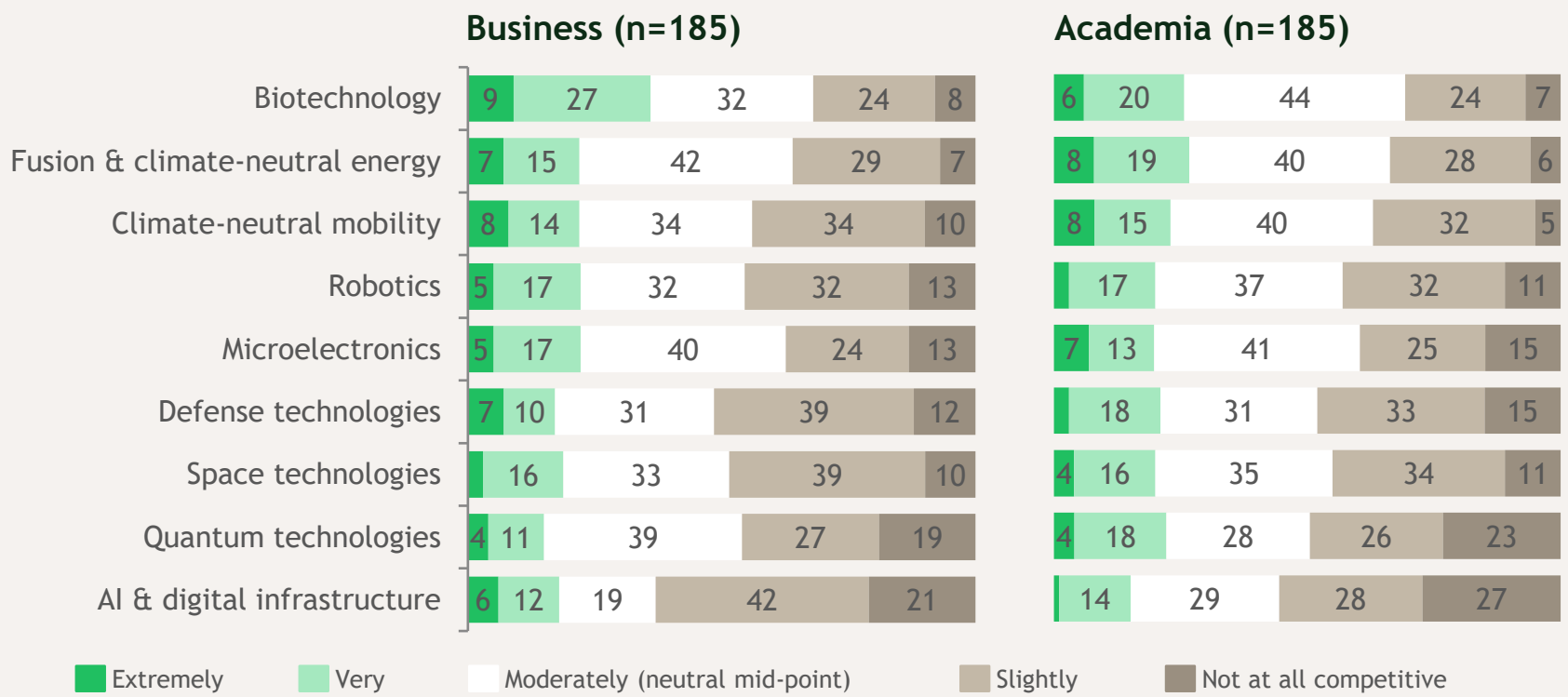
- **No field is rated competitive by more than 31% of respondents** (biotechnology); AI & digital infrastructure ranks last (17% competitive, 59% hardly competitive).
- Germany's view is **broadly in line with the total sample**, with a slightly more positive tendency in most fields (notably **robotics** and **fusion & climate-neutral energy).**
- However, Germany is less positive about **biotechnology** and more critical of **microelectronics**.
- Views on **AI & digital infrastructure** are nearly identical: Germany and Europe both see it as the least competitive field.

# Business and academia largely share views; biotechnology and fusion are rated most competitive

## Europe's competitive position across tech areas

Business vs. Academia (in %)

*How would you rate Europe's current competitive position globally in each of the following technology fields?*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: "Don't know" not displayed; Labels <4% not shown; Data weighted, n=370 interviews (Business n=185, Academia n=185).

## Key takeaways

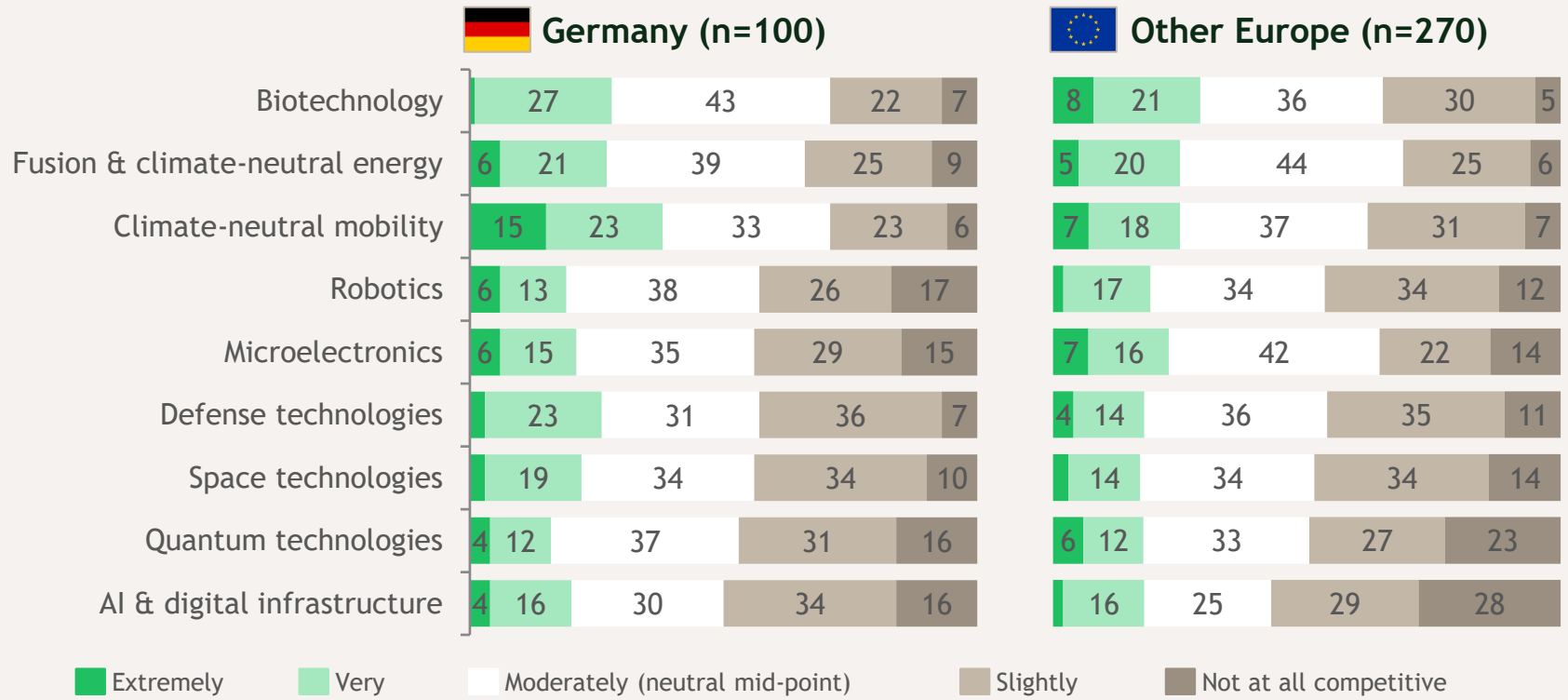
- While business and academia are overall aligned in their views, businesses rate Europe's competitiveness slightly more favorably in **biotechnology**.
- Academia is more positive about Europe's competitiveness in **fusion & climate-neutral energy** and **quantum technologies**.
- Businesses are more critical of Europe's competitiveness in **AI & digital infrastructure** and **technologies for climate-neutral mobility** than academia.

# Germans see their country as more competitive than others, most in climate-neutral mobility

## Own country's competitive position across tech areas

Germany vs. Other Europe (in %)

*How would you rate your country's current competitive position globally in each of the following technology fields?*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: "Don't know" not displayed; each respondent rates their own country; Other Europe = nine countries without Germany (AT, CH, CZ, PL, HU, UK, FR, ES, IT), n=270 (≈30 per country, not shown individually); Germany n=100 (unweighted).

## Key takeaways

- **German respondents broadly mirrors other European respondents** but tend to rate its own country as more competitive in climate-neutral mobility (38% vs. 25%) and, less clearly, defense (26% vs. 18%).
- **Own-country competitiveness is rated low:** no technology field is rated competitive by more than 38% of respondents in Germany or 29% of other European respondents.
- **AI & digital infrastructure is rated least competitive:** 50% of German and 57% of other European respondents rate their country as hardly competitive, while biotechnology is rated best by other Europeans (29% competitive).

# FIRST CUSTOMERS, FUTURE UNICORNS

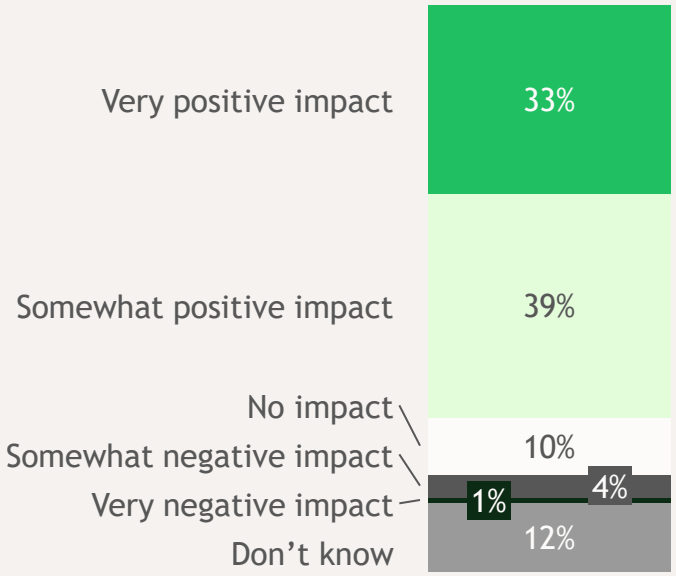
- Competitiveness in Europe vs. Germany
- **Buying early-stage tech & commercializing research**
- What it takes to close the gap



# Business sees procurement as a scaling driver for early-stage tech companies, but few engage

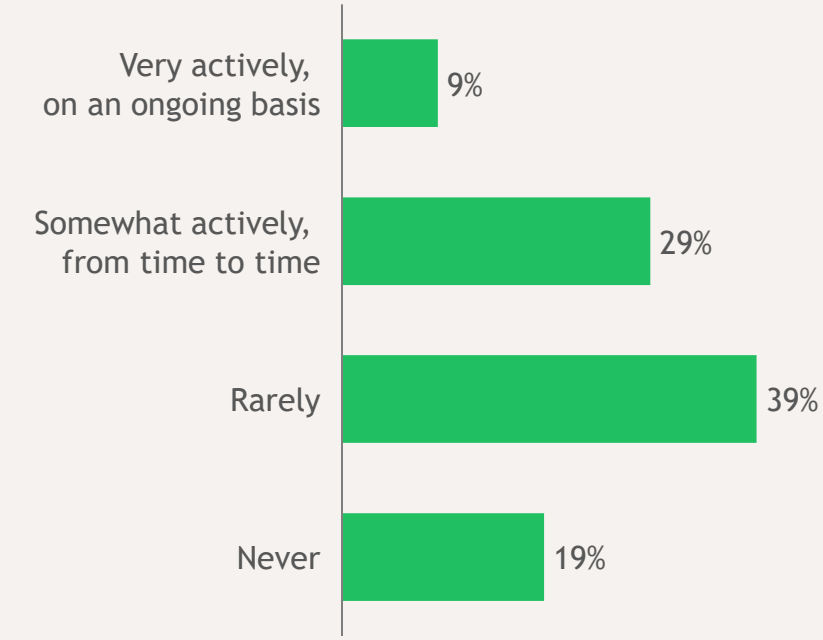
## Business view on potential scale-up impact on early-stage tech companies

*How do you assess the potential scale-up impact on young European tech companies if established companies systematically directed a larger share of their procurement toward them?*




## Business view on engagement with early-stage tech companies[1]

*How actively does your organization identify and engage with early-stage technology companies for procurement or partnership?*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
1. "Don't know" is not displayed. 2. How many months does a typical procurement decision for a new technology take in your organization, from first evaluation to signed contract? Business respondents (n=185); 71% = more than six months (39% 7–12 months, 24% 13–24 months, 8% more than 24 months).
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=185 interviews (Business Target Group).

## Key takeaways

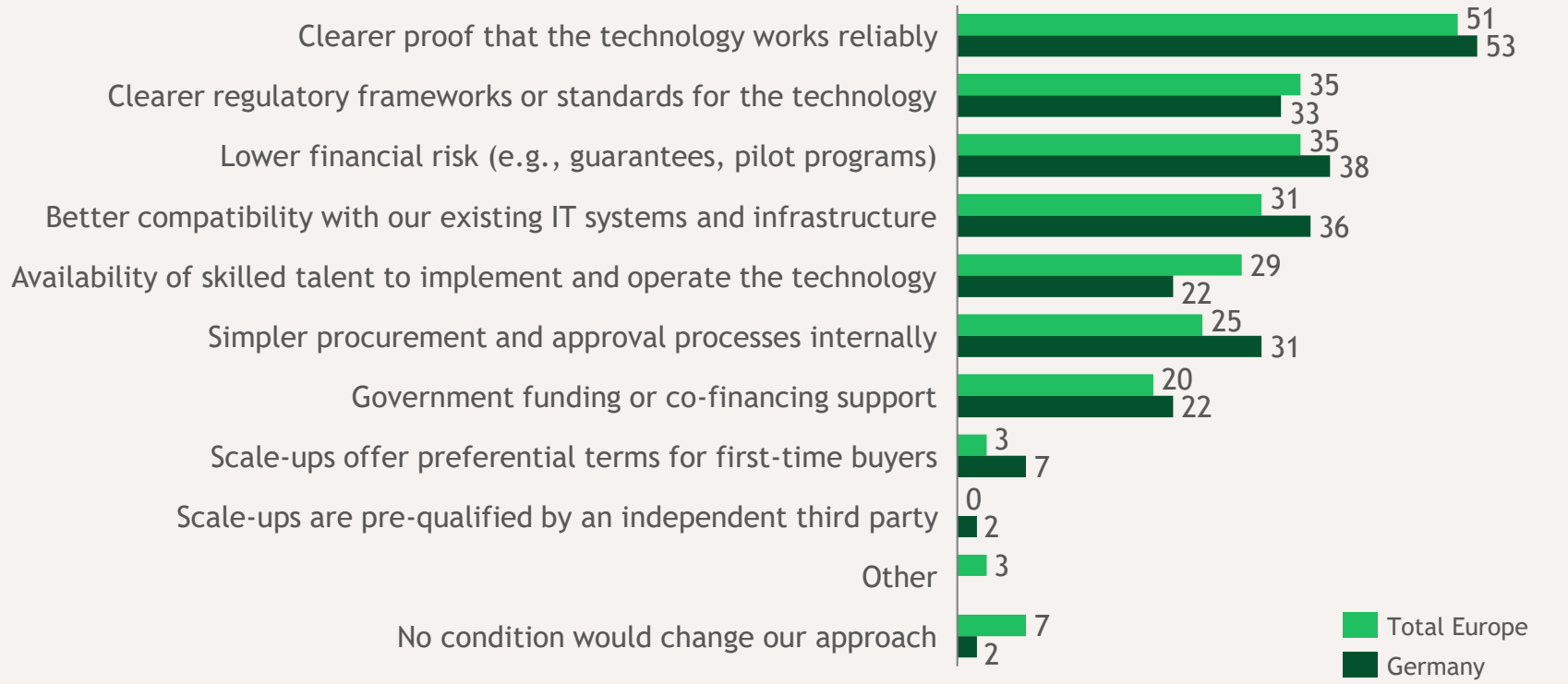
- **72% believe that more buying by companies would help early-stage tech companies scale**; only 15% see no impact or a negative one.
- Yet **only 38% engage with them at least occasionally** and just 9% on an ongoing basis; 58% rarely or never do.

# Less uncertainty and risk would increase purchases; proof of reliability comes first

## Business conditions for increasing purchases from early-stage tech companies

Europe vs. Germany (in %)

*Under which of the following conditions would your organization increase its purchases from early-stage technology companies?*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=185 interviews (Business Target Group), incl. n=45 in Germany, differences from Europe are indicative only.

## Key takeaways

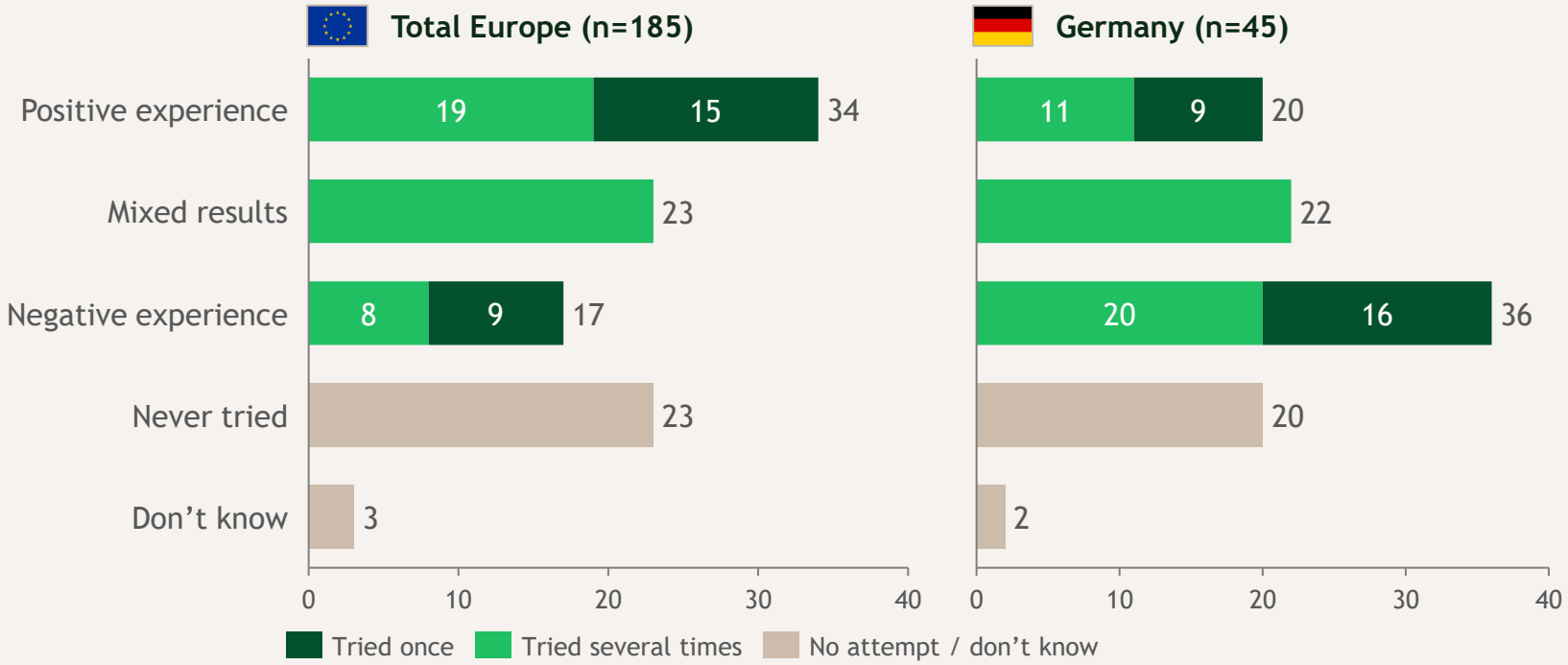
- **93% name at least one condition for buying more:** clearer proof that the technology works reliably leads (51%), followed by clearer regulatory frameworks and lower financial risk (35% each).
- **Practical readiness follows:** compatibility with existing IT (31%), skilled talent (29%) and simpler internal procurement (25%).
- **Germany looks directionally similar:** reliability also leads (53%).

# Business leaders have mostly positive experiences with early-stage tech companies; Germany is a clear outlier

## Experience with partnering with early-stage tech companies

Total Europe vs. Germany, % of respondents

*Which of the following best describes your organization's experience with sourcing, piloting, and partnering with start-ups or other early-stage technology companies? Answer options structured around (a) how often collaboration has been attempted (never/once/several times) and (b) outcome (successful/unsuccessful/mixed)*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=185 interviews (Business Target Group), incl. n=45 in Germany (indicative due to small sample); Europe includes Germany; Positive = tried once with successful outcome or several times, mostly successful; Negative = tried once without success or several times, mostly without success.

## Key takeaways

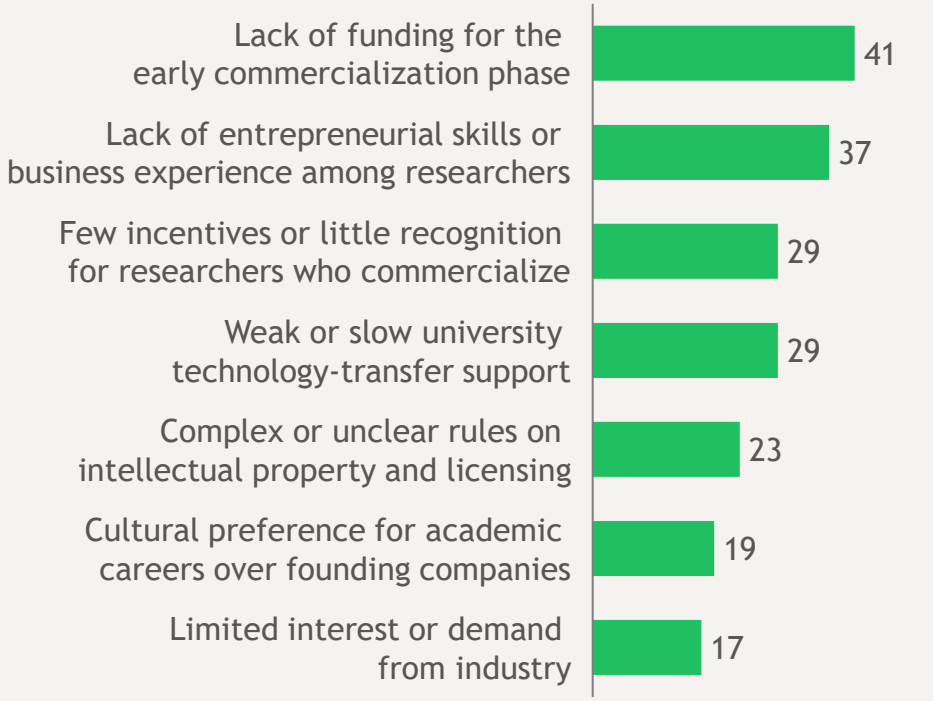
- **Overall, positive experiences are twice as common as negative ones.** 34% report mostly positive and 17% mostly negative experiences; 23% report mixed results.
- **Germany looks different:** 36% report negative vs. 20% positive experiences (n=45). Reach is similar: 78% have already tried partnering with early-stage tech companies (overall: 74%).
- **German respondents report less favorable outcomes after repeated attempts:** 20% tried several times with mostly negative results (overall: 8%); only 11% with mostly positive results (overall: 19%).

# Research attracts industry interest, but a lack of funding and entrepreneurial skills slows its path to market

## Barriers in commercializing research

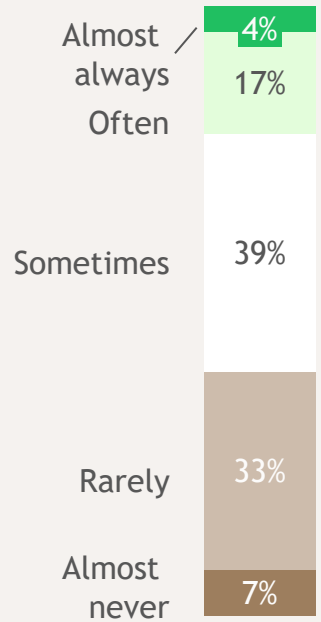
Academia, Europe, % of respondents (max. 2 answers)

*In your experience, what most prevents promising research in your field from being commercialized or turned into a company?*



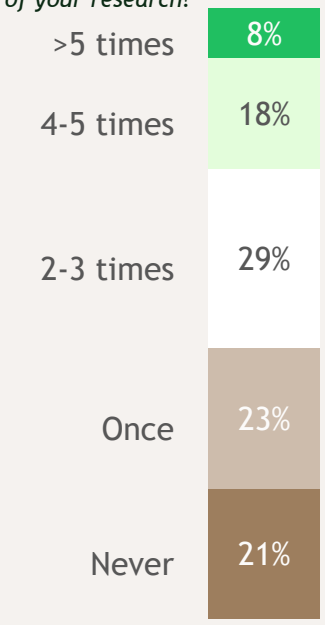

## Commercial viability of research within 5 years

*Based on your experience, how often does technology developed in your field reach commercial viability within 5 years of publication?*




## Approached by firms for use of research

*In the past three years, how many times has an established company approached you about potential commercial use of your research?*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=185 interviews (Academia Target Group); "Don't know" in the chart on "Commercial viability of research within 5 years" removed (4%).

## Key takeaways

- **Early-stage funding** and **entrepreneurial skills** are cited more often as barriers than limited industry demand.
- **Industry interest is high: 78% of** researchers have been approached by companies about commercial use of their research in the past three years.
- **Commercialization takes time:** 40% of researchers with an opinion say technologies in their field rarely or almost never become commercially viable within five years of publication; only 21% say often or almost always.

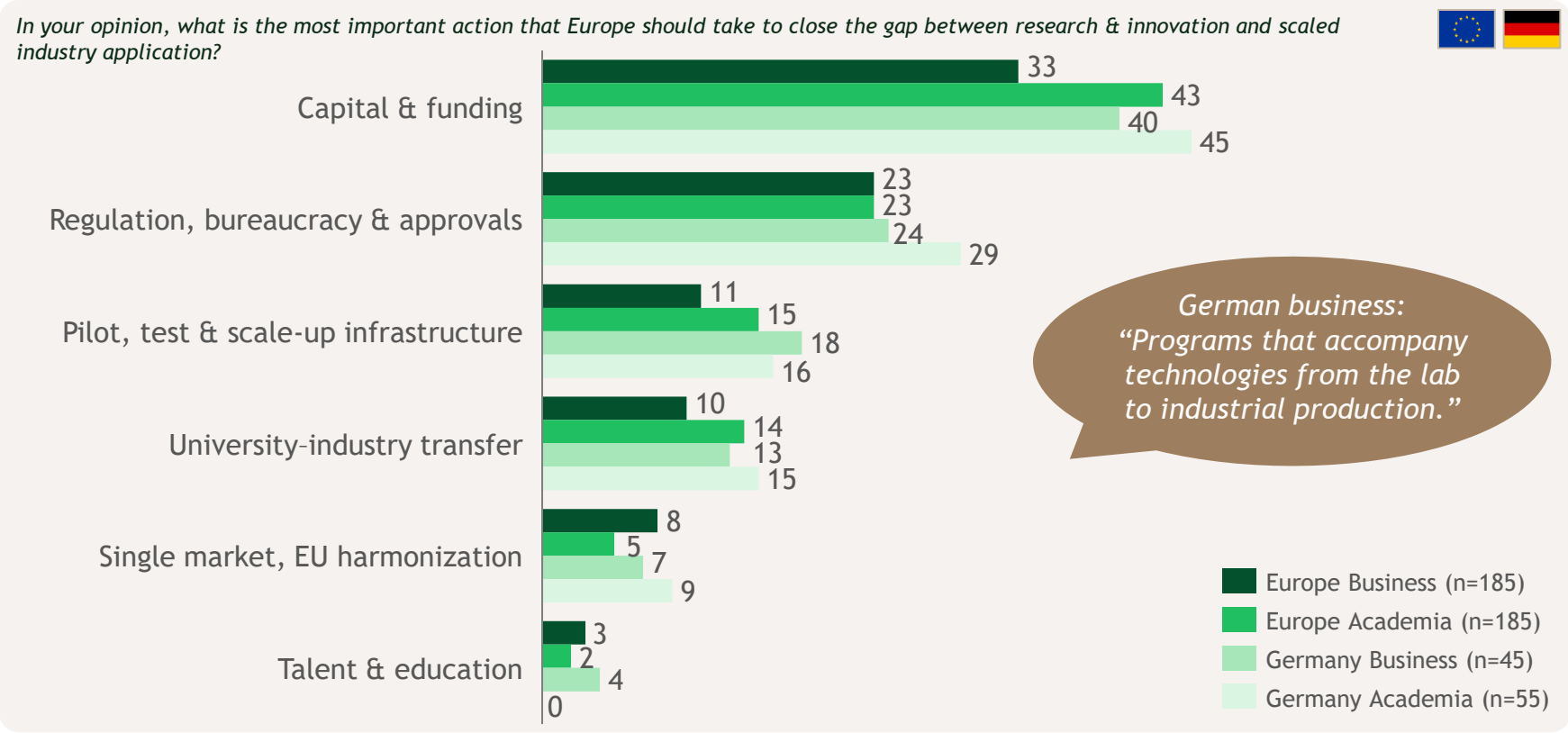
# FIRST CUSTOMERS, FUTURE UNICORNS

- Competitiveness in Europe vs. Germany
- Buying early-stage tech & commercializing research
- **What it takes to close the gap**



# Capital & funding is the most named action to scale industry, followed by simpler regulation and less bureaucracy

## Most important action to close the gap to scaled industry application
(in %)




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Europe includes Germany; Open answers (data unweighted); Quotes translated from German; Keyword-based coding, several themes per answer possible; Business n=185 (Germany n=45). Academia n=185 (Germany n=55).

## Key takeaways

- **Capital & funding is the most frequently named action** across all groups (38% of all open answers; 33–45% by group).
- **Simpler regulation** ranks second in every group; German academia names it somewhat more often (29% vs. 23%, indicative).
- **German business names pilot, test & scale-up infrastructure somewhat more** often than European business (18% vs. 11%, indicative).

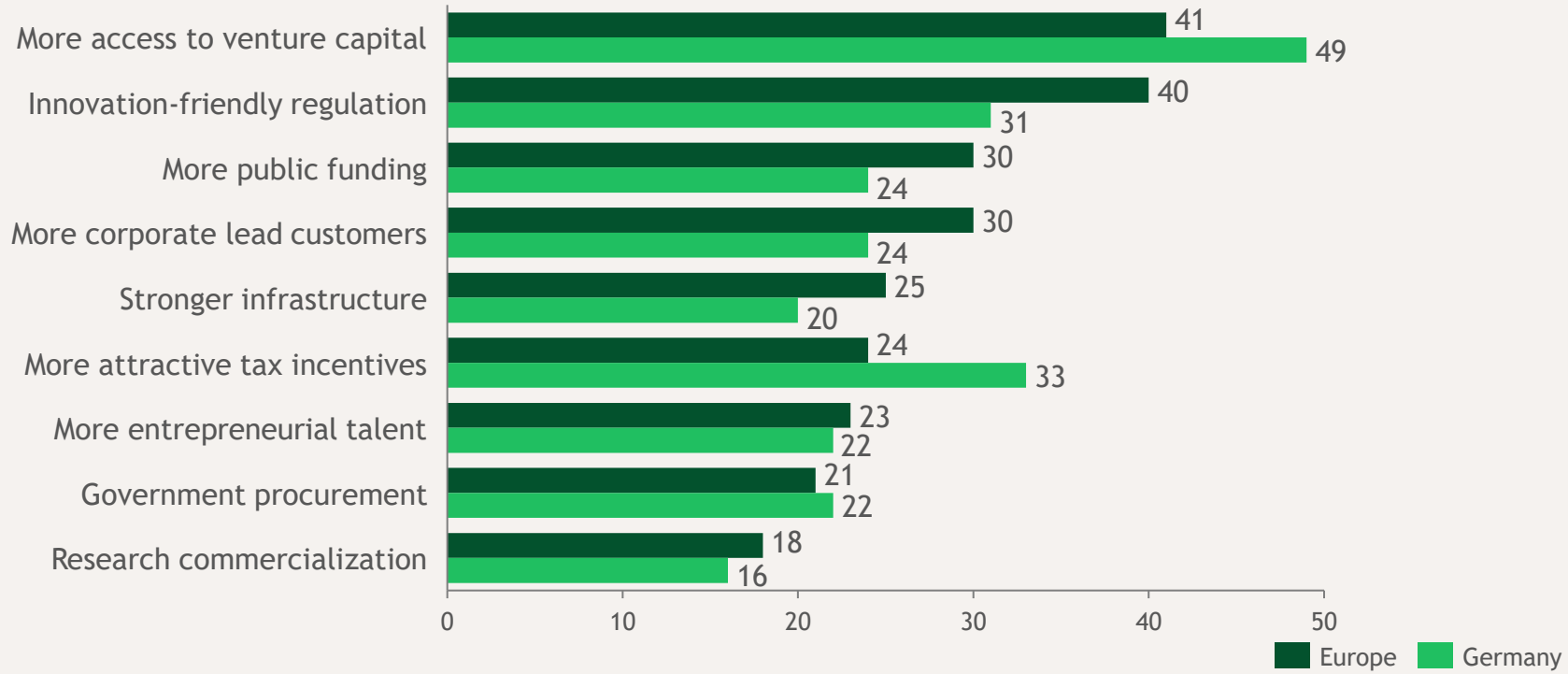
*German academia: "Europe should fund a network of publicly accessible facilities where start-ups can rent production lines to test their technology."*

# Business sees a wide range of levers; capital and improved regulation are key

## Levers for increasing successful European tech companies

Business, Europe vs. Germany, % (max. 3 answers)

*Which of the following would have the greatest impact on increasing the number of globally successful European technology companies? (max. 3 answers)*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=185 interviews (Business Target Group), incl. n=45 in Germany; Europe includes Germany; German values are exploratory.

## Key takeaways

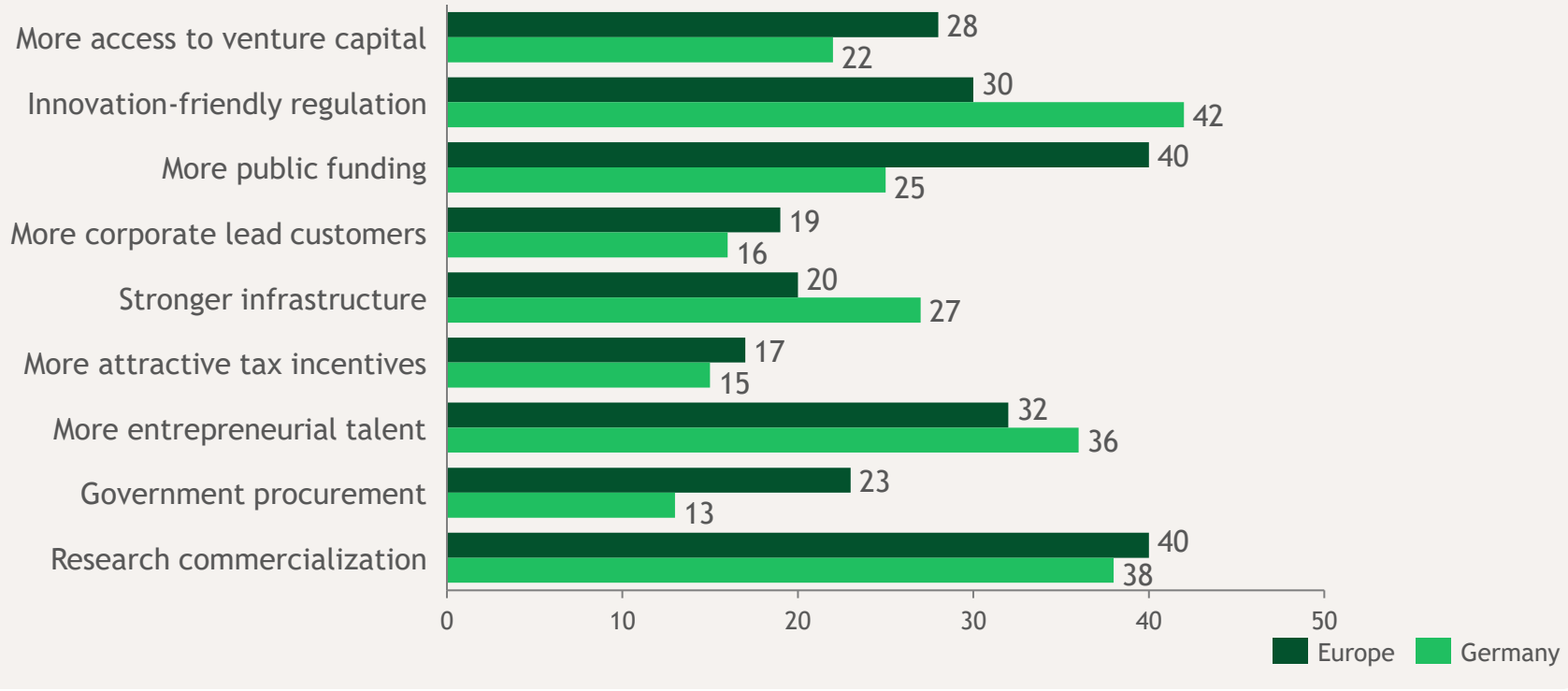
- **Access to venture capital (41%)** and **innovation-friendly regulation (40%)** are the levers business leaders name most often for globally successful tech companies, followed by more **public funding** and **corporate lead customers** (30% each).
- Nearly half of German businesses prioritize **access to venture capital (49%),** while **attractive tax incentives** also play an important role **(33%).**
- **Research commercialization** ranks **last** (18%) for businesses**.**

# A different perspective: Academia sees public funding and research commercialization as top levers

## Levers for increasing successful European tech companies

Academia, Europe vs. Germany, % (max. 3 answers)

*Which of the following would have the greatest impact on increasing the number of globally successful European technology companies? (max. 3 answers)*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Data is weighted and based on n=185 interviews (Academia Target Group), incl. n=55 in Germany; Europe includes Germany; German values are exploratory.

## Key takeaways

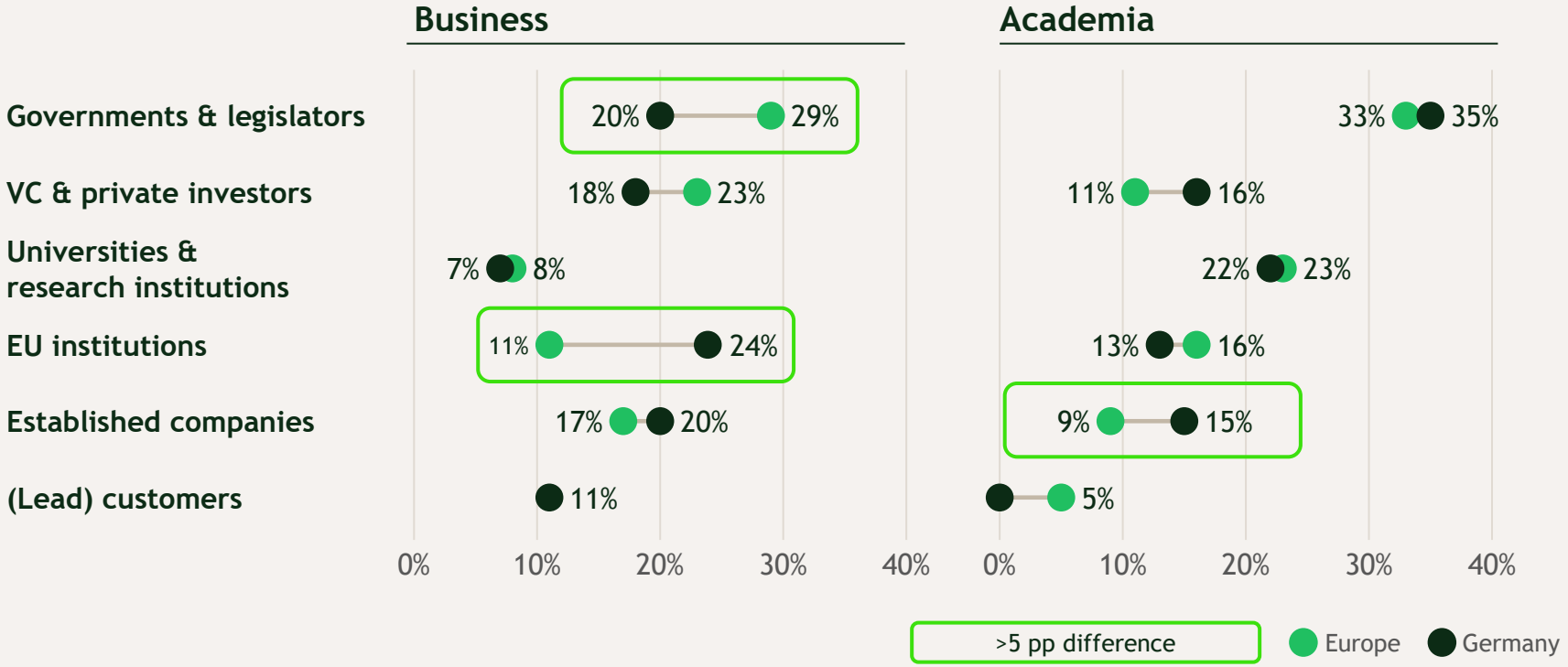
- **Research commercialization is a top academic priority:** 40% name it as a key lever for globally successful tech companies, tied for first place with public funding
- **Entrepreneurial talent follows:** 32% name it, ahead of regulation (30%) and venture capital (28%).
- **German academia leans toward regulation:** 42% name it as a lever (Europe: 30%), while public funding is named less often (25% vs. 40%).

# Governments lead on responsibility for scaling; German business looks to the EU twice as often

## Primary responsibility for helping early-stage tech companies scale

Europe vs. Germany, by group (in %)

*Who should take primary responsibility for helping European technology start-ups scale successfully? (single answer)*




Source: BCG & Statista 2026.
Note: Single answer; "Other" not displayed; Data weighted; Europe incl. Germany; Germany Business n=45, Academia n=55 (unweighted), differences indicative.

## Key takeaways

- **Governments lead the list:** ~30% across Europe see governments and legislators as primarily responsible.
- **German business** assigns more **responsibility to EU institutions** than European business overall (24% vs. 11%).
- **Business and academia have different priorities:** business also names venture capital (23%) and established companies (17%), academia universities (23%).

# Call to Action | Four moves to close Europe's scale-up gap



**Europe's research draws industry interest and buyers see the potential, but the scale-up engine is missing.** 72% of business leaders believe that buying more from early-stage tech companies would help them scale, yet only 9% engage with them on an ongoing basis. Only about one in five researchers say technology from their field is often or almost always commercially viable within five years.

## I Unlock scale-up capital

Mobilize venture & growth capital and bridge the early commercialization phase with targeted co-funding.

**Why:** 38% name capital & funding as the most important action; lack of early-stage funding is the top barrier for researchers (41%).

**Who leads:** Governments, EU institutions, investors

## II Cut regulatory friction

Make rules more innovation-friendly and simplify approvals, so early-stage tech companies can scale across Europe.

**Why:** Regulation & bureaucracy rank second among actions; 40% of business leaders name innovation-friendly regulation as a top lever.

**Who leads:** Governments, EU institutions

## III Make buying safer

Established companies to step up as lead customers – with pilots, references and risk-sharing that prove reliability.

**Why:** 51% of business leaders want clearer proof of reliability; 35% want lower financial risk.

**Who leads:** Early-stage tech companies, established companies

## IV Bridge lab to production

Build shared pilot & test lines for scaling up production; strengthen tech transfer and entrepreneurial skills in research.[1]

**Why:** 11% of business leaders name pilot and test infrastructure as the most important action; 37% of researchers cite missing entrepreneurial skills.

**Who leads:** Research institutions, companies

**No single actor can close the gap alone.** Governments are seen as most responsible (~30%), but scaling Europe's early-stage tech companies needs capital, regulation, buyers and research to move together – starting now.

Source: BCG & Statista 2026.

1. Joint responsibility: business leaders point to pilot & test infrastructure, researchers to entrepreneurial skills and technology transfer. Both groups also look to governments, named most often as primarily responsible.



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