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## Article

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# Policy goals in the eyes of the public: preservation of the liberal democratic order remains most important

By Marco Giesselmann, Nico A. Siegel, Thorsten Spengler, and Gert G. Wagner

More than just a few politicians and scientists see an imbalance in policy's primary orientation toward economic goals, especially the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In view of scientific and public discourses on prosperity, this report analyzes how voting-eligible Germans, the electorate, rated the significance of different policy areas in 2013 and again at the beginning of 2017. It is based on two representative surveys conducted together with Kantar Public (formerly TNS Infratest), in which respondents were asked to rate the relevance of various policy areas. The areas included were based on the ten social indicators favored by the study commission, "Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life," and 20 out of the 46 indicators the German government uses in its "Living Well in Germany" Report to describe quality of life. This report shows that the majority of German citizens do indeed view the areas which are described by the indicators as important policy dimensions.

In both 2013 and 2017, "preserving democracy" had the highest relevance. In 2017, "improved care for old people" was number two, and a "more effective battle against crime" took (by a very small margin) third place, followed by "full employment." While there is a high consensus on the importance of these four goals, the assessment of the importance of further policy goals varies greatly across people, and there are also clear systematic differences in the relevance of policy areas among different social groups. The issue of refugees does not appear as a policy goal in the classifications of the commission and the government, which is why it was not included in the survey.

As an indicator for the scientific and public discourses on prosperity, GDP appears to be too narrow and outdated. The scientific community has started this discussion already in the early 1970s. The rise of post-materialistic movements and the Green Party brought it to the attention of the general public in Germany in the 1980s. Eventually, the report by Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi raised broad interest,<sup>1</sup> and, in 2011, the German Bundestag responded by constituting a study commission (Enquete Kommission) to study the issue. After two years of in-depth consultation, the majority of the commission proposed ten policy areas and indicators for their operationalization. Among them was GDP.<sup>2</sup>

The members of the study commission were unanimous in their opinion that one single alternative indicator, a type of "alternative GDP" or "anti-GDP," would not be useful for reasons of methodology and democratic theory. If we were to compress various aspects of growth, prosperity, and quality of life into one unique measured value, the specific areas of life and individual policy goals, respectively, would have to be weighted—an impossible task given the prevailing disparity among both the general population and the elites. This multi-dimensionality of views on quality of life as well as the variation in significance attributed to policy goals are also reflected on the supply side of the political process. As analyses of party agendas in recent years have shown, the significance of individual policy goals is not the only variable factor. Their contextual orientation, for example visible in the range of economic policy positions between the poles

<sup>1</sup> See Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (2010): *Mismeasuring Our Lives*. New York, London. This report launched a broad "beyond GDP" debate in the scientific community, among policymakers, and in the general public.

<sup>2</sup> See German Bundestag, "Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität – Wege zu nachhaltigem Wirtschaften und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt in der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft'," Drucksache 17/13300 (2013). One of the authors of this *Economic Bulletin*, Gert G. Wagner, was an expert member of the "Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität" study commission (2011–2013) and a scientific counsel for the German government's "Gut leben in Deutschland" Project from 2014 to 2016.

of regulation and liberalization, is another.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the study commission's ten proposed indicators function as points of reference that should prove to be alternative models for policy in the discourse on prosperity.

Subsequent to the commission's work, Chancellor Angela Merkel and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel initiated the government's project "Living Well in Germany" (*Gut leben in Deutschland*).<sup>4</sup> Organized by the government and, to a greater extent, associations and other social organizations, more than 200 "dialogs with citizens" (townhall meetings) were carried out to identify relevant areas of well-being. In addition, around 10,000 people answered the dialog's key questions ("What aspects of life are personally important to you?" and "What do you think are the main contributing factors to quality of life in Germany?") online or via postcard. Assisted by experts, the government derived twelve higher-level dimensions of the state and development of quality of life as measured by 46 statistical indicators from the dialogs and answers. Conceptually, the categories developed here differ from those of the study commission in two respects. First, they are not only the results of expert judgment but were also derived by interpreting dialogs between policy makers and heterogeneous (non-representative) groups of citizens. Second, the aspects of prosperity and well-being recorded in the dialogs with citizens were not explicitly formulated as *policy goals*. Therefore, they do not necessarily define mandates to policy makers to take specific actions. Nevertheless, in this report we place them side by side with the study commission's indicators, explicitly verifying their effectiveness as policy goals.

This approach highlights the crux of our concern: we intend to evaluate the relevance of the indicators as policy goals among voting-eligible German citizens, the electorate. For the present report, we took the 46 indicators proposed by the government and selected the 20 that we considered most important (Table 1). For instance, we did not select areas and indicators that are virtually unable to be influenced by policy in the short term, such as the so-called dependency ratio (number of old people divided by number of all adults). Based on this, we used a representative survey to find out in a direct manner the extent to which people in Germany attribute the status of political goal to each of the 20 areas.<sup>5</sup> And as

mentioned above, our list of policy goals also included the ten areas in the 2013 survey that the study commission considered key areas.<sup>6</sup> Because the sample design remained constant, replicating the indicators gave us the option to compare the perceived importance of different policy areas over time.

It is obvious that presenting a list of policy goals and weighting the answers afterward yields different results than asking open-ended questions—the approach the government used. The way questions are formulated also plays a role. Neither the study commission nor the government made the issue of refugees, and the overarching subject of migration, an explicit subject of discussion. Instead, they did so indirectly with regard to education and the job market. However, the subject obviously has great political significance right now. As part of the survey in 2017, we also asked which policy area is currently the most important one, without specifying any categories. Our initial rough categorization shows that many people put the subject of refugees at the top of the list of acute policy issues. Since the analysis at hand is explicitly targeted to evaluating the institutionally proposed indicator systems, we did not include the issue on the list of indicators in the survey.

We would like to repeat here that depending how the survey questions and the questionnaire are constructed, policy areas are weighted differently by respondents. In this respect, the following results highlight various aspects of the debate on the multiple dimensions of the quality of life—no more and no less.<sup>7</sup>

## Social indicators: an overview

Table 1 provides an overview of the indicators proposed by the study commission and the German government. In total, we list 55 indicators that were assigned to three dimensions according to the study commission's structural principle. For improved clarity, the dimensions were divided into nine subjects that are roughly based on the classification system used in the government report. Ten indicators are at the intersection of the two projects and consequently straddle the relevant columns. Both of our surveys referred to eight of the ten indicators. We

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Nicolas Merz and Sven Regel, "Die Programmatik der Parteien." In: Oskar Niedermayer (ed.), *Handbuch der Parteienforschung*, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), 211–238, and Sven Regel, "Data Entry and Access: Introducing the Manifesto Project Database (MPDB)." In: Andrea Volkens, Judith Bara, Ian Budge et al. (eds.), *Mapping Policy Preferences from Texts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195–209.

<sup>4</sup> See German government, "Bericht der Bundesregierung zur Lebensqualität in Deutschland," (2016) (available online. Accessed: February 12, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> We narrowed the field to 20 indicators in order to limit the time respondents would require to answer all the questions in the representative survey.

<sup>6</sup> See Marco Giesselmann, Richard Hilmer, Nico A. Siegel et al. (2013), *Measuring Well-Being: W3 Indicators to Complement GDP*. *DIW Economic Bulletin* 5: 10–19.

<sup>7</sup> We would like to note here that no single scientific method can record the "true" will of the people with respect to the importance of various areas of life without distortion or errors. For example, it is possible to ask open questions about what is important in life or quality of life during surveys, as the German government did in 2015. The results are comparable, although by no means identical. As the study commission and the government project were both targeting long-term trends, current issues were not paramount, and the policy area of "refugees and integration," which has been acute since the second half of 2015, was not made an explicit subject.

omitted *rate of continuing education* and *global nitrogen emissions*, which the study commission called second-tier indicators. *Democracy* was not mentioned directly in the government report, but instead was implied by a bundle of indicators. Importance of democracy was, however, part of our survey in 2013 and 2017. There are therefore nine indicators that can be used as a basis for carrying out analyses over time. They are printed in bold and indicated with an asterisk.

Six of the 55 indicators were mentioned by the study commission but did not appear in the government's report. We put them into the left column in Table 1. Apart from *democracy*, they are not key areas in the sense of the study commission. This is why we did not include them in our surveys.

The 34 indicators that are listed in the government's report but not on the study commission's proposed list are in the right column.<sup>8</sup> Eleven of these indicators were also included in our survey—however, only in the one conducted in 2017. These eleven indicators are printed in bold but do not have asterisks. *Nitrogen emissions (national)*, which was one of the study commission's key indicators, only appeared in our 2013 survey.

Of course our selection of social indicators, and the underlying policy areas, respectively, is open to debate. However, our report does not discuss the sense of the different indicators in comparison to alternative concepts and operationalizations—the reports of the study commission and the government we referred to offer detailed material for this type of discussion.<sup>9</sup> Instead, we empirically studied *a)* the extent to which German citizens considered the areas of life as important which the study commission and the government selected, *b)* the degree of dispersion in the weighting of those different areas, and *c)* the extent to which different weighting is linked to the socio-economic characteristics and political values of the electorate. For this purpose, DIW Berlin and TNS Infratest Sozialforschung (2013) and its successor, Kantar Public (2017), conducted one representative telephone survey (CATI) among the voting-eligible population in each year (Box 1).

Table 1

## Overview on social indicators of well-being

Dimensions	Subjects	Indicators of the study commission (2012)	Indicators of the government (2016)
Economic aspects	Distribution	<b>Distribution of income and wealth*</b> Poverty risk	
	Prosperity	<b>GDP (per-capita income)*</b> <b>Sovereign debt*</b> Net investments Financial sustainability Share of elderly population	
Social aspects	Employment	<b>Employment rate*</b> Rate of under-employment Unemployment rate <b>Job satisfaction</b> <b>Commuting time</b> <b>Public transportation</b> <b>Compatibility of family and work (Working hours, daycare rate)</b> Rate of regular jobs Wage level	
	Education	<b>Education rate*</b> Rate of continuing education Education drop-out rate Educational mobility	
	Health	<b>Life expectancy*</b> Healthy life years Membership in sports clubs Prevalence of obesity Supply with medical doctors <b>Quality of care for elderly</b> Ratio health/income	
	Participation and freedom	<b>Democracy*</b> <b>Voter turnout</b> <b>Volunteering work</b> Basic rights Influence on politics <b>Rent control</b> Broad band supply Family and lifestyles Help by others	
	Security	<b>Crime reduction</b> Fear of crime Hate crimes Trust in police	
Sustainability and ecological aspects	Global responsibility	<b>Development assistance</b> Global entrepreneurial responsibility Greenhouse gas emissions (global) Biodiversity (global) Nitrogen emissions (global)	
	Environmental protection	<b>Greenhouse gas emissions (national)*</b> <b>Biodiversity (national)*</b> Nitrogen emissions (national)* Air quality Energy productivity	

Note: bold=part of the survey in 2017, \*=part of the survey in 2013.

Source: Own illustration based on Bundesregierung (2016): Bericht der Bundesregierung zur Lebensqualität in Deutschland, Deutscher Bundestag (2013): Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission "Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität – Wege zu nachhaltigem Wirtschaften und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt in der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft".

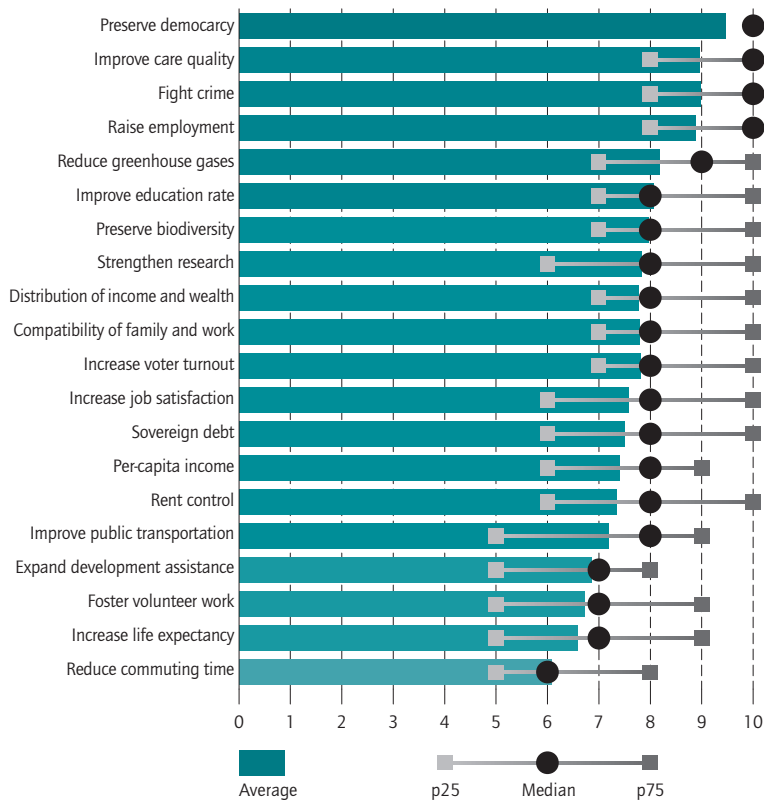
<sup>8</sup> The table consequently contains 44 indicators from the government's report because we combined several of the original 48 areas for the purposes of our survey.

<sup>9</sup> German Bundestag 2013; German government 2016.

Figure 1

**Relevance of policy areas (2017)<sup>1</sup>**

Survey results (ranging from 0, not important at all, to 10, very important)



1 Responses to the question: "How important is it to you for German policy-makers to address the following issues?"

Source: Kantar Public (January 2017), 1016 respondents, calculations of DIW Berlin.

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Maintaining democracy is the most important policy goal.

### Efforts to preserve democracy continue to receive highest average ratings

Figure 1 portrays the key statistical values for the distribution of responses to our survey from January 2017.<sup>10</sup> The bars display the arithmetic mean of the ratings. The dots represent the median that divides the respondents into two groups of equal size. The narrow horizontal bars show the range of the middle 50 percent of the ratings. The edges of these bars represent the range of the core respondents' answers, thus illustrating the survey response dispersion.

<sup>10</sup> The arrangement of the indicators within Figure 1 is mainly oriented toward the mean amount. If the means of two or more indicators are identical to the first decimal place, their order is based on the higher percentage of "more important" and higher ratings.

### High dispersion among the relevance of many policy areas for the voting-eligible

Our most significant finding: for most policy goals, there is anything but consensus when it comes to the population's assessment of their importance. As in 2013, the respondents' answers showed a high level of dispersion in 2017.<sup>11</sup> In most areas, only a few respondents gave low ratings (between zero and five), but as the middle 50 percent of the answers indicates, the majority of them were broadly distributed in the six-to-ten range. This leads to our first key conclusion: designing one single measure as an alternative to GDP does not do justice to the complexity of measuring prosperity. It could not hope to map the population's prioritization of policy areas equitably.

### Relevance of policy goals has changed little since 2013: preservation of democracy still ranked no. 1

At the same time, the prioritization of policy areas remained stable in the short term. Despite strong differences in the weights across persons, the mean values showed a high level of stability from survey year to survey year (Figure 2). Here, we display the year-specific means of the nine areas that were part of the survey in both 2013 and 2017. With an almost constant mean weight of 9.5, the *preservation of democracy and freedom* is at the top of the list. The government's dialogs and a representative survey also showed that, on average, no overarching goal is as important to the citizens of Germany as preserving a liberal democracy.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the note on the limited ability to generalize upon the prioritization formulated above does not necessarily apply here: more than 80 percent of the population agree that this policy goal is extremely important. In an era of populist currents with anti-democratic tendencies within Europe and without, this is especially worthy of attention.

### Employment, the environment, and education are viewed as more important than GDP and sovereign debt

The importance attributed to *employment* has fallen by a statistically significant amount since 2013. This is prob-

<sup>11</sup> See Giesselmann et al. (2013).

<sup>12</sup> See Gert G. Wagner, Nico A. Siegel, and Thorsten Spengler, "Froh zu sein bedarf es wenig," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, February 5, 2017; Gert G. Wagner, Martin Bruemmer, Axel Glemser et al., "Dimensions of Quality of Life in Germany: Measured by Plain Text Responses in a Representative Survey (SOEP)," *SOEPpapers* 893 (2017), and Julia M. Rohrer, Martin Brummer and Gert G. Wagner (2017), "Wen interessiert Europas Zukunft?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 27, 2017. The three articles show that based on open-ended survey questions of what people consider important in life, "peace" is ranked among the top answers. However, one-third of respondents explicitly emphasized "social peace" and another third a peaceful world." The remaining third did not further specify their statements on peace.



## Box 1

## Surveys of the electorate

DIW Berlin conducted representative surveys on the relevance of selected policy goals among eligible voters in Germany with TNS Infratest in 2013 and its successor, Kantar Public, in 2017. By the end of January 2013, a total of 1,012 respondents had assigned a rating between zero ("not important at all") and ten ("very important") to the ten indicators selected by the study commission of the Bundestag (Enquete Kommission). In the middle of January 2017, the survey was conducted among 1,016 persons. Eleven indicators (from the government report on the quality of life in Germany) had been added to it. Together with the indicators from 2013, the survey covered 19 of the 46 indicators in the government report.

This readily understandable text introduced the survey on these indicators: "Policy makers attend to many areas that directly affect people's personal situations as well as the general trends in the economy and society. I am going to mention ten/twenty areas, and I would like you to tell me if you think they should play an important role in Germany's policies or if they should not. To do this, please use a scale of 0 to 10. '0' means that the area is 'not important at all' for policy and should not play a special role. '10' means that the area is 'very important' for policy and should play a major role. With the values in between you can fine-tune your opinion."

If asked, the interviewers explained that they were only interested in relevance for policy and not the respondents' personal attitudes to the areas. In 2013 the following areas were specified:

1. Average per capita income in Germany
2. Distribution of income and wealth
3. Sovereign debt
4. As many people as possible have jobs
5. People's life expectancy should continue to rise
6. More students earn a higher or university degree<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There was an additional interviewer instruction here: "If you receive questions: 'higher' means that more young people receive degrees that are

7. Preservation of democracy and freedom in Germany
8. Reduction in the emission of harmful greenhouse gases
9. Reduction in the harmful excess nitrogen that we produce
10. Preservation of biodiversity and stopping extinction

In the first three areas a direction was not specified, since obviously not all people want more or less income (we considered per capita income easier to understand than GDP), equality in the distribution of income and wealth, and sovereign debt. In the other seven areas, it is clear what respondents would aspire to and the direction is contained in the question to make it easier to answer.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, the question on "excess nitrogen" was omitted. And we added the following areas:

10. Improving the quality of care for the elderly
11. More effective fight against crime
12. Better compatibility of family and work
13. Increase voter turnout
14. More support for scientific research
15. Increase in job satisfaction
16. Rent control
17. Improvement in public transportation
18. Higher level of development assistance
19. Increase in the number of people who do volunteer work
20. Reduction in commuting time

higher than the certificate for leaving school (the qualification to enroll in a university, for example). Either directly in school or through continuing education programs."

<sup>2</sup> To minimize the influence of the question order on the answers, questions were asked in randomized order. In 2013, the questions were randomized by block, and in 2017 they rotated (virtually) freely across all positions. This allowed us to control for the effect of the question's position on response behavior – which the data indeed document. We were unable to control for other conceivable methodological effects. For example, the wording of questions and specifications and the scale for rating importance (for example, yes/no or the 11-point scale) could have also played a role.

ably due to the currently low level of unemployment in Germany. However, the value of 8.9 is still considerably higher than the values of 8.2 and 8.0 for *reduction of greenhouse gases* and *biodiversity*, respectively. *Improvement of educational possibilities* was attributed the same importance, which has fallen by 0.4 points on the scale, also a statistically significant amount.<sup>13</sup> With a mean value of

7.4, the importance of *GDP* (measured in the form of *per-capita income*) remained relatively low. And respondents valued the importance of the *distribution of income and wealth* at slightly under eight points (the change from 8.0 to 7.8 is not statistically significant). The attributed relevance of *sovereign debt* changed to a statistically signif-

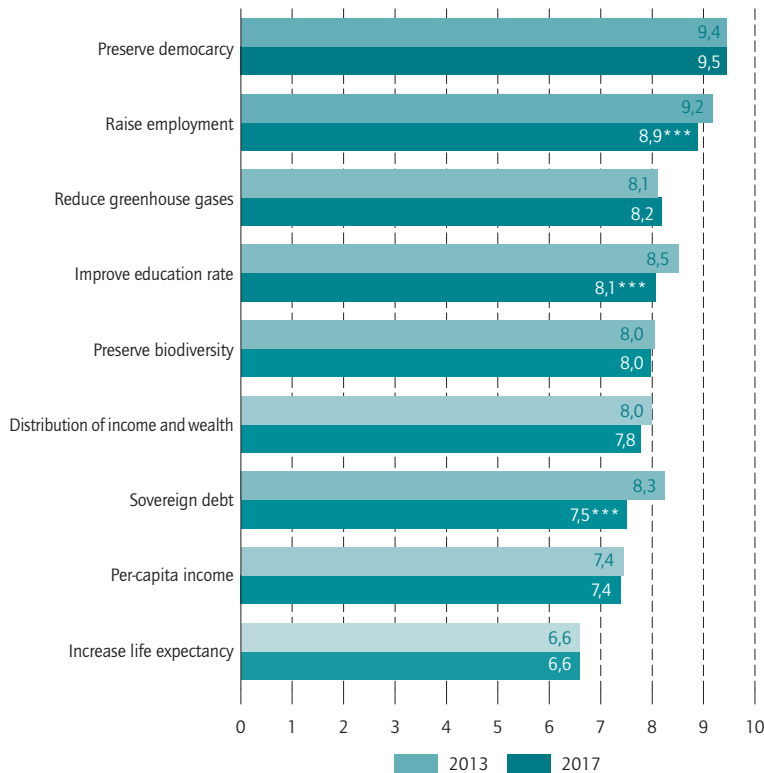
<sup>13</sup> Considering the current debate on migration policy, which allocates a key role to education initiatives in achieving integration, this result may be surprising.

It could be that the majority of the respondents did not associate the acute impressions made by migration with (educational) measures that could probably prevent social problems.

Figure 2

**Relevance of policy areas (2013 and 2017)<sup>1</sup>**

Survey results (ranging from 0, not important at all, to 10, very important)

\*\*\* Difference 2013 vs. 2017 is highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).<sup>1</sup> Responses to the question: "How important is it to you for German policy-makers to address the following issues?"

Source: Kantar Public (January 2017), 1016 respondents, calculations of DIW Berlin.

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Hardly any change in the rating of policy goals between 2013 and 2017.

icant extent, falling from 8.3 to 7.5 points. This is surely due to the favorable state of the federal budget. In the political debate, its robust condition is allowing for more vociferous calls for strengthening government investment with debt financing instead of clinging to the primacy of the zero lower bound.

**Proper care more important than higher life expectancy**

The recent survey confirmed the low significance attributed to increasing life expectancy in 2013—with a weight of 6.6, it held second to last place. At the same time, the very high weight that improving the quality of *care for the elderly* received (included for the first time in 2017 and ranked no. 2, see Figure 1) indicated that, within the area of health, people are much more interested in having a

satisfactory quality of life when they are old. Among the indicators originating in the government's report that were included in our survey for the first time in 2017, only the *fight against crime in Germany* received ratings as high as those of improving the care situation.

**Findings on other policy areas**

Among the eleven policy areas that were included in the survey for the first time in 2017, three appear in the top half of the ranking (Figure 1): *strengthen research*, *increase voter turnout*, and improving the *compatibility of family and work*. These indicators all showed mean weights of just under eight points.

At 6.9 points, improving *development assistance* had the fourth-lowest rank in the table, and *fostering volunteer work* was also in the lower range at 6.8 points. Encouraging volunteer work may be an important concern of German citizens and politicians but obviously is not perceived as being a policy-related task. The same may hold true for *reducing commuting time to work*, which is at the bottom of the ranking.

**Ratings vary according to demographic and social characteristics**

The electorate was virtually unanimous in its agreement that the four areas at the top of the ranking are very important political goals. However, the weights of the remaining indicators fluctuated markedly among persons. To some extent, these fluctuations showed a pattern that can be explained on the basis of various socio-economic and demographic characteristics: this is why we systematically analyzed which personal characteristics are decisive in yielding different prioritization results. For the nine indicators that we examined in both 2013 and 2017, we were also able to study the stability of socio-demographic influences.

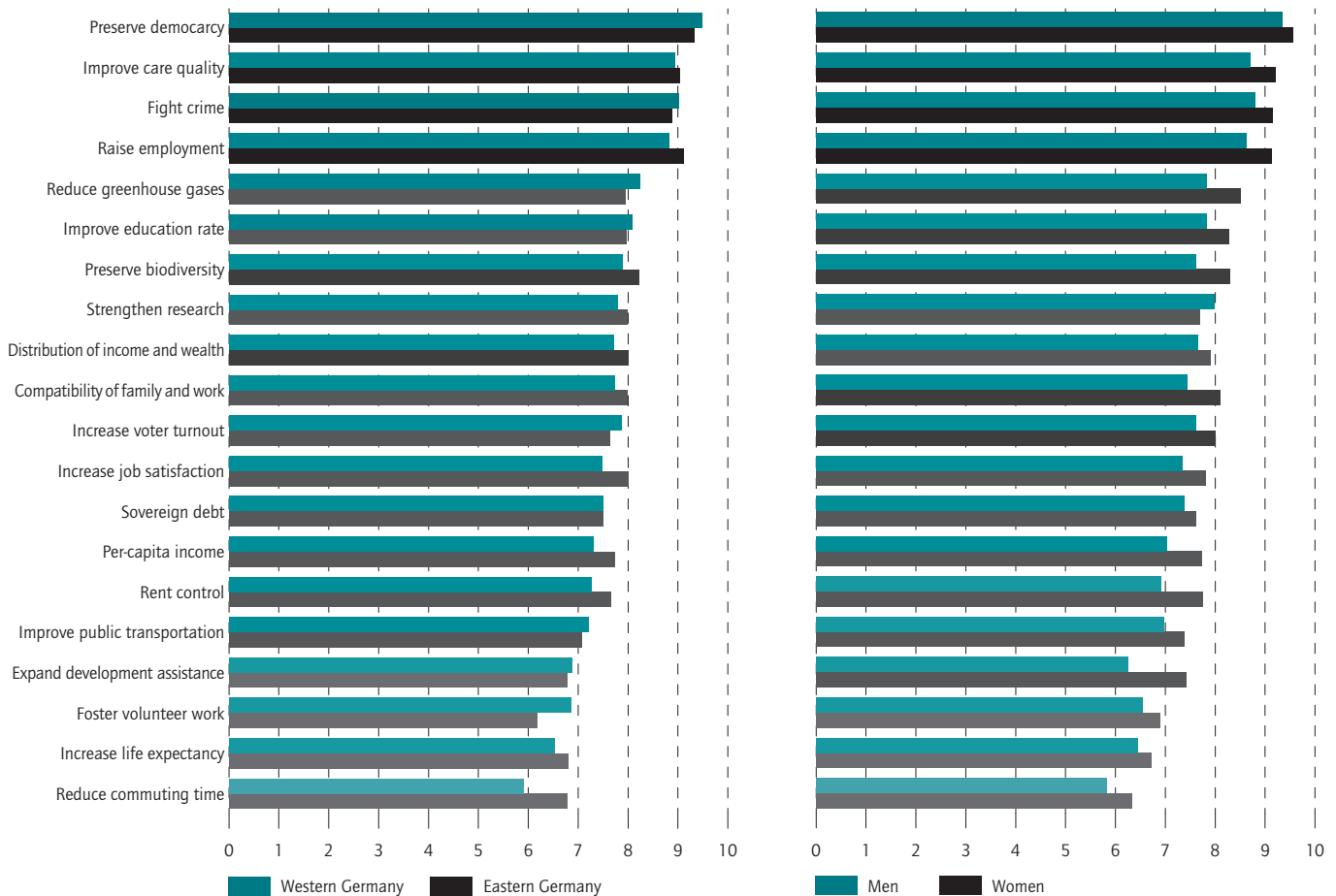
**Descriptive findings show significant differentiation by gender, region, age, and political party preference**

For eastern Germany, some attributions of importance are substantially higher than those of western Germany (Figure 3, left panel). This holds especially true for the policy goals of *commuting time reduction* (which is weighted higher in eastern Germany) and *job satisfaction* (see discussion below). In almost all areas, women tended to give higher ratings than men (Figure 3, right panel). This finding was apparent in the 2013 survey and has since established itself. The ecological and sustainability-related indicators of *biodiversity*, *greenhouse gases*, and *development assistance* are most strongly affected. A look at age groups revealed that older people were more likely

Figure 3

**Relevance of policy areas (2017) by region (left-hand panel)<sup>1</sup> and gender (right-hand panel)<sup>1</sup>**

Survey results (ranging from 0, not important at all, to 10, very important)

<sup>1</sup> Responses to the question: "How important is it to you for German policy-makers to address the following issues?"

Source: Kantar Public (January 2017), 1016 respondents, calculations of DIW Berlin.

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Especially indicators related to employment issues receive higher ratings in eastern Germany.

to give higher ratings to almost all policy goals (Figure 4). The correlation was the strongest in areas that play major roles in the lives of older people, such as *volunteer work*, *life expectancy*, and *public transportation*. However, it also holds true for some of the policy areas that are particularly relevant for younger people: *job*, *research*, and *commuting time reduction*. For this reason, the findings are not skewed to the self-centered valuation pattern of older persons.

Likewise, there were several noteworthy differences in the attributions of importance by party preference. In the following section, we present and statistically test these differences and those established on the basis of socio-

economic and demographic factors. With the help of regression analyses, we highlight which differences are statistically significant and those that are not.

### Regression analyses show statistically significant influences by gender and party preference

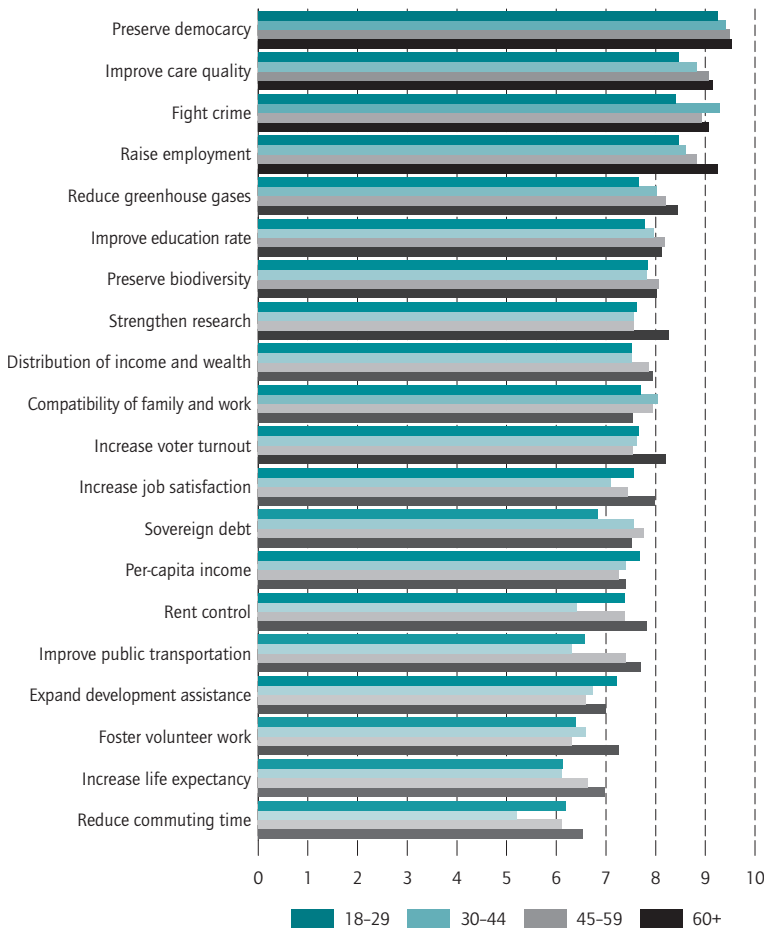
We calculated regression models for each of the 20 policy areas (Box 2). Table 2 includes the study commission indicators whose influencing factors we were able to compare over time. We present the results for the government's indicators, which were only surveyed in 2017, in Table 3.



Figure 4

**Relevance of policy areas (2017), by age<sup>1</sup>**

Survey results (ranging from 0, not important at all, to 10, very important)



<sup>1</sup> Responses to the question: "How important is it to you for German policy-makers to address the following issues?"

Source: Kantar Public (January 2017), 1016 respondents, calculations of DIW Berlin.

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Older persons assign higher ratings not only to policy areas that directly affect them.

The number of observations in each model varies, since not all of the respondents answered every question.

The first rows of Tables 2 and 3 show differences by specific region and for the most part, confirm the tendencies of the unadjusted disparities between eastern and western Germany (Figure 3, right panel). Although the descriptive findings clearly suggest differences in the relevance of *job satisfaction* between eastern and west-

ern Germany, the regression analyses showed that this effect is probably due to the lower level of income in eastern Germany. On the contrary, the findings with regard to *biodiversity*, *reduction in commuting time*, and *volunteer work* remained unchanged. The mean differences are particularly large (and statistically significant) for *commuting time reduction* (0.7 points on the scale). We can take this difference as an indication that structural problems in eastern Germany may have led to specific, individual burdens in the form of longer commutes to work. As a consequence, the concrete awareness that there is a problem has grown and taken the form of a mandate to the political system.

Women tended to attribute above-average relevance across the board. This tendency has become stronger for many indicators since 2013, as shown by the arrows in Table 2. Specifically, weights of subjects with a reference to sustainability show strong gender differences (compare also Figure 3, right panel). On average, women rated the importance of preserving *biodiversity* and reducing *greenhouse gases* significantly higher than men by one-half of a point. For *development assistance*, the average difference is more than one point on the scale.

In general, the relationship of the ratings with age has fallen substantially since 2013. If the mean rating of a person over 45 was around 0.6 points above that of a person under 30 in 2013, the gap between the mean ratings was less than 0.3 points on the scale in 2017. As the arrows on Table 2 show, alongside the reduction of *greenhouse gases*, the importance of *per capita income* is especially affected by this change. We will have to wait for the results of future surveys to find out if this is a stable trend.

Holding demographic and economic characteristics constant, persons with a university entrance qualification (Abitur) gave all social indicators below-average importance—just as they did in 2013. People with a university entrance qualification therefore appear to be somewhat more relaxed than people without it. The same applies to income effects. Striking here is that especially the indicators on the lower end of the ranking show the strongest differences across income groups; people with more wealth are possibly not affected by increases in *rents for housing* since they may rather own property or are themselves landlords. They may also not be dependent on *public transportation* to the same extent either—both of which are policy goals that were lower on the scale for high-income respondents than people with lower incomes by more than one-half of a point. It is also striking that the rating for *preserving democracy* as a policy goal was (clearly and statistically significantly) below average—as it also was in 2013.

## Box 2

**Multivariate analyses**

Multivariate analyses ("regression analyses") show the extent to which the attributions of importance in the study differ along socio-economic characteristics (*eastern/western Germany, gender, age, education, household income, party preference*) when all other influences are held constant. For each indicator, the coefficients in Tables 2 and 3 show the average mean deviation of the ratings in comparison to those in the reference category. For example, in the *job* analysis, the coefficient of 0.54 for the characteristic *female* showed that on average, women rate the importance of the *increase employment* policy goal around one-half of a point higher (on the scale of 0 to 10) than men do. The arrow pointing upward indicates a significant increase in the difference since 2013.

In comparison to a simple presentation of differences in mean values, the regression analyses offer two practical advantages. First, group-specific differences can be directly tested for *statistical significance*. The coefficients that indicate a non-random relationship are marked with either one asterisk ( $p < 5$  percent, *significant*), two asterisks ( $p < 1$  percent, *very significant*), or three asterisks ( $p < 0.1$  percent, *highly significant*). Further, the regression coefficients control for the influence of other structural characteristics and may therefore be interpreted as effects of the underlying characteristics, unlike simple descriptive comparisons of group specific mean values. For example, if more

people with low household incomes live in eastern Germany and household income has an effect on attribution of importance, the importance of place of residence is overestimated descriptively while the regression analysis yields an adjusted coefficient for eastern Germany.<sup>1</sup>

The regression model's explanatory power is described using the coefficient of determination,  $R^2$ . It captures the proportion of total variation of the dependent variable the model can statistically explain by means of the independent variables in the regression. In the present analyses, the  $R^2$  was between five and 13 percent. In the context of social sciences, this is a solid share of explained variance that indicates the relevance of the personal characteristics involved. However, it also showed that the characteristics studied did not capture the major share of the variation in ratings. Alongside the socio-economic factors analyzed, we therefore suspect that characteristics like individual psycho-emotional disposition, leisure time behavior, and media consumption are further important rating determinants.

<sup>1</sup> Since the significance of the study commission's indicators was already surveyed in 2013, we were able to make cross-comparisons between influencing factors in 2013 and 2017 using these indicators. If the change between 2013 and 2017 is statistically significant ( $p < 5$  percent), an arrow in the relevant cell indicates the direction of the change.

Our analysis of the supporters of the various parties shows meaningful and statistically significant differences.<sup>14</sup> Many of the differences are logical, given the background of the parties' fundamental political agendas and current areas of prioritization. For example, supporters of the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) and the Left Party (*Die Linke*) give especially high ratings to the *distribution of income and wealth*. Even when statistically controlling for place of residence and income, in comparison to the supporters of the two Union parties (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU and *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*, CSU), on average they rated this goal higher by more than one point (Left Party) and 0.6 points (SPD) respectively. For supporters of the Green Party (*Die Grünen*),

reducing greenhouse gases stood out as a relevant policy goal. In comparison to people who intend to vote for other parties, the difference was significant, amounting to 1.3 (in comparison to the populist Alternative for Germany Party, *Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD), 0.7 (CDU/CSU), and 0.4 (SPD) points on the scale.

Moreover, the below-average importance that Green Party supporters attributed to the political goal of *reducing crime* is also noteworthy. The differences between the Greens and the AfD and Union parties happened to be statistically significant. The below average rating in this area could be interpreted as a reaction to the way the subject has been co-opted by conservative or right-leaning parties and movements. At the same time, we should mention the caveat that people who preferred the Green Party also ranked *fighting crime* as one of the five most important policy goals.

As expected, the ratings of AfD supporters were the highest on the subject of crime. Controlling for demographic and socio-economic factors, on average they attributed higher (and statistically significant) importance to the pol-

<sup>14</sup> In our survey, party preference was measured based on the well-known "Sunday question": "Which party would you vote for if federal elections were held this Sunday?" Due to the relatively small percentage of people who preferred the Free Democratic Party (*Freie Demokraten*, FDP) and the populist "Alternative for Germany" (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) in our sample, the number of analyzable cases in the two categories was below 100. This qualifies the robustness of the results in the relevant categories and explains why even marked deviations of numbers are often not statistically significant.

Table 2

**Determinants of the importance of policy areas: indicators of the study commission**

OLS regression results

	Democracy	Employment	Education	Sovereign debt	Greenhouse gases	Biodiversity	Equality of income and wealth	Per-capita income	Life expectancy
<b>Place of residence</b> (Reference: western Germany)									
Eastern Germany	-0.23	0.23	-0.22	0.07	-0.38*	0.40*	0.16	0.32	-0.02↓
<b>Gender</b> (Reference: male)									
Female	0.29**	0.54***↑	0.57***	0.32	0.77***	0.82***↑	0.26	0.63***↑	0.26
<b>Age group</b> (Reference: 18 to 29 years)									
30 to 44 years	0.02	0.03	-0.41	0.57	-0.04↓	-0.01	-0.25	-0.70*↓	-0.14
45 to 59 years	0.25	0.04↓	-0.32	0.62*	0.05	-0.03	0.02	-1.04***↓	-0.05↓
Above 60 years	0.29	0.55**	-0.28	0.39	0.36↓	0.11	0.23	-0.85***↓	0.28
<b>Education</b> (Reference: no Abitur)									
Abitur	-0.20	-0.59***	-0.55**	-0.72***	-0.22	-0.19↑	-0.38*	-0.74***	-0.82***
<b>Household income</b> (Reference: 0 to 1500 Euro)									
1500–3000 Euro	0.29*	0.21	-0.21	0.15	0.33	0.35	-0.17↓	-0.40↓	-0.71**
3000 Euro and above	0.37*	0.25	0.06	0.35	0.36	0.25	-0.15	-0.37	-0.90**
<b>Voting intention</b> (Reference: CDU/CSU)									
SPD	-0.17	-0.09	0.17	-0.40	0.35	0.63*	0.66**	0.62*	0.26
Bündnis 90/The Greens	-0.05	0.03	-0.05	-0.19	0.70*	0.62	0.19	-0.24	-0.25
FDP	0.09	-0.26	-0.61	0.41	-0.13↑	-0.07↑	0.10	-0.18	-0.62
Left Party	0.17	0.55*	0.36	-0.10	0.49	1.02*	1.04**	0.79*	0.64
AfD	-1.01***	0.31	-0.17	0.07	-0.63*	0.86*	0.79*	0.33	-0.11
Non-voters	-0.83***	0.20	0.29	0.39	-0.29	0.09	0.68*	1.24***	-0.73
Others	-0.33*	0.01	-0.11	0.21	-0.01	0.24	0.44*	0.24	-0.18
<b>Constant</b>	9.17***	8.30***	8.33***	6.79***	7.49***	6.88***	7.37***	7.98***	7.35***
<b>Observations</b>	860	859	856	852	864	864	856	849	848
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.068	0.090	0.045	0.045	0.070	0.055	0.045	0.102	0.058

\*  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0,01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0,001$ .Upward/downward arrow: Significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) increase/decrease of coefficient compared to 2013.

Source: Kantar Public (January 2017), 1016 respondents, calculations of DIW Berlin.

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**Socio-demographic factors are substantial and significant determinants of ratings of policy goals.**

icy goal of *reducing crime* by more than 0.5 scale points than people who preferred the CDU/CSU, SPD, and the Green Party. At the same time, the rating for *development assistance* was clearly below average. The (statistically significant) average difference to supporters of the Union parties and SPD was approximately 1.5 points. The clearly below-average rating of the *preserving democracy* policy goal among persons who intend to vote for the AfD was also striking. However, just under 75 percent of persons who prefer the AfD still gave the policy goal of preserving democracy the highest rating. It would therefore be unfair to make a blanket statement that AfD supporters

basically reject democracy. Nevertheless, those people who gave preserving democracy low ratings as a policy goal appear to be gathered under the AfD banner<sup>15</sup>—a phenomenon that does not have its counterpart on the left pole of the political spectrum.

<sup>15</sup> These findings are basically in agreement with broader studies on the composition and value systems of AfD voters. See Oskar Neidermayer and Jürgen Hofrichter, "Die Wählerschaft der AfD: Wer ist sie, woher kommt sie und wie weit rechts steht sie?" *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 47 (2) (2016): 267–85, as well as Martin Kroh and Karolina Fetz, "Das Profil der AfD-AnhängerInnen hat sich seit Gründung der Partei deutlich verändert." *DIW Wochenbericht* 34/2016: 711–719.

Table 3

**Determinants of the importance of policy areas: indicators of the government**

OLS regression results

	Elderly care	Crime reduction	Research support	Compatibility of family and work	Voter turnout	Job satisfaction	Rent control	Public transportation	Development assistance	Volunteer work	Commuting reduction
<b>Place of residence</b> (Reference: western Germany)											
Eastern Germany	-0.03	-0.10	0.13	0.21	-0.28	0.41	0.08	-0.21	-0.17	-0.63*	0.63*
<b>Gender</b> (Reference: male)											
Female	0.47**	0.42**	-0.24	0.56**	0.57**	0.44*	0.68**	0.33*	1.12**	0.25	0.39*
<b>Age group</b> (Reference: 18 to 29 years)											
30 to 44 years	0.19	0.83**	-0.30	0.36	-0.47	-0.50	-1.11**	-0.21	-0.84*	-0.04	-1.18**
45 to 59 years	0.25	0.33	-0.28	-0.02	-0.45	-0.34	-0.43	1.09**	-1.03**	-0.08	-0.83*
Above 60 years	0.32	0.47*	0.60*	-0.29	0.27	0.38	-0.02	1.36**	-0.65*	0.71*	-0.12
<b>Education</b> (Reference: no Abitur)											
Abitur	-0.57**	-0.79**	0.29	-0.23	-0.36	-0.42*	-0.46*	0.11	-0.34	-0.24	-0.45*
<b>Household income</b> (Reference: 0 to 1500 Euro)											
1500-3000 Euro	-0.11	0.00	-0.20	-0.28	0.10	-0.28	-0.02	-0.25	-0.09	-0.33	-0.18
3000 Euro and above	-0.24	-0.08	-0.17	-0.30	0.23	0.17	-0.78*	-0.57*	-0.13	-0.59*	-0.36
<b>Voting intention</b> (Reference: CDU/CSU)											
SPD	0.03	-0.13	-0.34	0.63*	0.62*	-0.15	0.09	0.31	0.25	-0.01	0.61
Bündnis 90/The Greens	-0.22	-0.55*	-0.31	0.59	0.14	-0.32	0.18	0.57	0.07	-0.31	0.25
FDP	0.02	-0.04	0.04	0.11	0.28	-0.78	0.10	-0.78	-0.71	-1.01*	-0.52
Left Party	0.21	-0.46	-0.01	0.97*	0.76	0.39	1.23*	0.18	-0.15	-0.74	1.01*
AfD	-0.18	0.48*	-0.12	1.18**	-0.09	0.42	-0.38	-0.33	-1.61**	-0.47	1.58**
Non-voters	-0.57*	0.07	-0.17	0.81*	-1.62**	0.90*	0.40	0.73	-0.34	0.21	0.40
Others	0.10	-0.13	-0.30	0.72**	-0.14	0.36	0.44*	0.10	-0.38	0.04	0.81*
<b>Constant</b>	8.79**	8.66**	8.05**	7.19**	7.70**	7.32**	7.52**	6.33**	7.45**	6.98**	6.06**
<b>Observations</b>	862	862	858	860	858	858	850	856	852	855	845
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.094	0.104	0.063	0.062	0.086	0.063	0.134	0.115	0.119	0.066	0.091

\*  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0,01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0,001$ .

Source: Kantar Public (January 2017), 1016 respondents, calculations of DIW Berlin.

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**Socio-demographic factors are substantial and significant determinants of ratings of policy goals.**

The answer profile of CDU/CSU supporters was dominated by their primarily below-average ratings. For purposes of comparison: across all indicators, the average attribution of relevance by a person who prefers the CDU/CSU was 0.3 points below a SPD supporter (and was even lower among FDP supporters). This finding can be understood as a basic preference for restrained government intervention policies on the part of people who prefer the Union (and particularly, the FDP). However, at second glance the conservative profile of CDU/CSU supporters also becomes apparent. They clearly, although not statistically significantly, rated the policy area of *sovereign debt*

higher (by one-half of a point on the scale) than SPD voters did. And the policy goal of an improved *compatibility of family and work*, which targets higher participation of mothers in the job market, also showed the gap between them and the SPD (as well as the other parties). On average, people who prefer the CDU/CSU parties rated it more than one-half of a point (and statistically significantly) lower than SPD, Green Party, and Left Party voters did.

Election research has provided several models for explaining the high level of agreement between party agendas and voter policy preferences. First, parties use

their mission statements to attract people with congruent political preferences. Conversely, the “classical representation thesis” of systemic political thought assumes that parties know their voters’ potential and preferences and factor them in when setting their thematic priorities.<sup>16</sup> Based on socio-psychological explanatory models, it seems plausible that people with specific party policy preferences anchor their own prioritization to their parties’ prioritization and guidelines, that is, they experience “positive reinforcement” by reducing cognitive dissonance.<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, regardless of all the contextual and statistically important differences revealed in the present study, the analysis also showed a relatively large consensus in the rating of policy goals among various socio-economic groups. Virtually none of the characteristic dispersions examined showed differences in ratings that exceed a full point on the scale on average. Even with regard to party preferences, we only observed this for AfD and Left Party supporters. Accordingly, the ranking of the goals in all subgroups of society was relatively similar. However, *within* the groups the dispersion of the attribution

of importance was high, especially when the most important four indicators were excluded. This dispersion once again underlines the methodological impossibility of calculating an aggregated overall indicator as an alternative to GDP in a way that does justice to the preferences of *all* the people in Germany.

## Conclusions

In the eyes of the electorate in Germany, per capita income and therefore, GDP, is not tremendously important. On the contrary, the results of two representative surveys of over 1,000 voting-eligible persons in Germany conducted in 2013 and 2017 respectively show that *GDP* has a significantly lower priority than that of the *preservation of democracy*. Safeguarding the *quality of care for old people*, *fighting crime*, and *raising employment* receive ratings similar to those of preserving democracy. Across regions, gender, age and political party affiliation, these four policy areas were recognized as important policy goals. As policy areas, they are by far the most important and clearly set apart from the other areas which were surveyed. However, since many of the areas are, to a certain extent, also associated with GDP and economic growth, the public debate will continue accordingly.

Despite the heterogeneity of individual rating patterns, the ranking resulting from the survey delivers clear reference points for judging the competitiveness of various political agendas. Based on our results, big parties can be successful in the democratic competition only if they proactively advocate the preservation of democracy, address the increasing need for care in an aging society, and present transparent profiles in the areas of public safety and employment policy.

**16** For an overview of the interaction between party policy agendas and voter preferences, see Russell J. Dalton, “Political Parties and Political Representation: Party Supporters and Party Elites in Nine Nations,” *Comparative Political Studies* 18 (1985): 267–99.

**17** The motif of dissonance reduction established in social psychology is delineated substantially in Leon Festinger, *Theorie der Kognitiven Dissonanz*, 2nd ed. (Bern: Hogrefe Verlag, 2012). The high mean AfD rating for workfamily balance is seemingly atypical. Controlling for structural characteristics, it is higher than for all the other parties. The differences to the CDU and FDP are statistically significant and on average, are greater than one point on the scale. This could be explained by the fact that AfD supporters do not want to improve the work-life balance with improved daycare facilities, but instead by supporting mothers’ non-participation in the job market.

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