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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der

Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-63122-4

How political organisations can become more attractive to young adults

by Philipp Köbe

*Abstract***:** *This article deals with the relationship between the attractiveness of political parties and the younger generation. A recent survey of the attitudes of 15 to 25 year-olds revealed that young people are both interested in political issues and willing to assume responsibility through participation. Due to the increasing individualisation in our society, the offers of political organisations must match the needs of the younger generation. Lesser options should be developed that offer a multitude of opportunities in different spheres of participation, and these options must be carried into the relevant media of young people with sufficient information. An instrument in the form of an evaluation model is offered to the political organisations to help them excercise control.*

Developments

The party landscape – not only in Germany, but also throughout Europe – is currently undergoing a major process of change. In the Handbook of German Political Parties (Decker 2017: 3-7), developments are constantly updated and analysed. It concludes that the popular parties are increasingly shrinking and that some voters are turning away from political parties as a whole, or at least turning to smaller collective movements at certain points. After the Second World War there was a phase of new formation (Niedermayer 2017b: 101-120); at the beginning of the 1950s, this was followed by a consolidation phase, which finally led to a three-party system that lasted for several decades. In the recent past, this has developed into a multi-party system. Today seven parties are represented in the German parliament. In the course of the development of parties, the alienation of citizens from the parties is often described, but this cannot be conclusively explained or confirmed. Although there has been a decline in the number of members since the 1980s, this criterion alone does not go far enough. For example, the 2009 party member study[1] shows a different picture, according to which citizens were not disengaged from the parties (Spier/Klein 2011: 33-39). The reasons given are, on the one hand, the arbitrary reference point of the 1970s as a reference value for the number of party members and, on the other hand, the less relevant focus on quantitative characteristics,

where the qualitative participation of the members to realise the interests of their own reference group in the political discourse would have been more to the point. In the light of the results of this study, the equation of fewer party members corresponding to less participation is wrong.[2]

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Voter turnout is also an important characteristic of the willingness to participate. The higher turnout (Federal Election Commissioner 2017) of 76.2% in the 2017 federal elections compared to 2013 (71.5%) and 2009 (70.8%) is diametrically opposed to the above-mentioned thesis of the alienation of citizens from politics. The role of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – a particularly controversial party classified as right-wing populist – was significant. The AfD was able to mobilise the majority of non-voters and has produced a new dynamic in the party system (Decker 2017: 29-31). This can be seen in particular in the movements among the parties. It could thus be assumed that new parties have a positive effect on participation and are conducive to democracy. The Greens (Bündnis 90/die Grünen) provided further evidence for this thesis with their entry into the Bundestag a few decades ago. Moreover, the Greens are the only party with a net increase in members over a longer period of time (Niedermayer 2017a: 41).

> According to [the life cycle theory], voter turnout is initially high among first-time voters (1), but then drops when young adults can vote for the second and third time (2). However, this trend is reversed over time (3) and only slowly falls again from around the age of 60 (4).

The question arises as to what role young people play in these developments. A great lack of interest of young people in politics and any associated topics is asserted in the media; particular focus is placed on a relatively low turnout compared to other population groups. The Shell Youth Study also largely found this (Albert et al. 2015: 5f.). With the help of the Allbus study, however, it was possible to refute this hysteria, which had been exaggerated by the media (Abendschön/Roßteutscher 2011: 70-75). The basis for this refutation is the life cycle theory, according to which voting behaviour changes over the course of a lifetime, as shown in
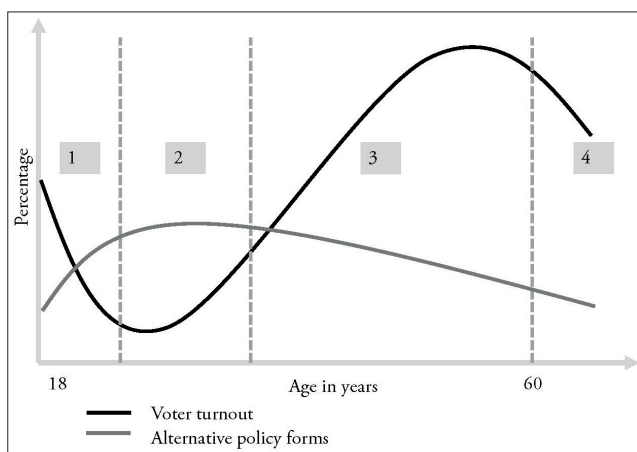

Figure 1: Life cycle model

Figure 1. According to this theory, voter turnout is initially high among first-time voters (1), but then drops when young adults can vote for the second and third time (2). However, this trend is reversed over time (3) and only slowly falls again from around the age of 60 (4).

The Allbus study shows that this behaviour can be observed across all ages in the comparison groups. According to this study, it is not a recent phenomenon, but has been taking place for decades following this pattern. Consequently, it cannot be said that young people today do not participate in political processes, which has always been the case in certain phases of life. In addition, there is another important aspect: alternative forms of politics. This is because alternative forms of politics increase significantly during the correspondingly low election turnout period (2) (Allbus 2008: ZA 4570). These alternative forms of politics include participation in demonstrations, support for petitions – especially online – and involvement in youth or citizens' initiatives. It is thus a form of participation that is not close to the traditional political arena, but is intended to influence political processes and decisions.

> [Y]oung adults at a certain age substitute political activities by giving less consideration to elections and giving higher priority to alternative forms of politics

Thus, it can be concluded that young adults[3] at a certain age substitute political activities by giving less consideration to elections and giving higher priority to alternative forms of politics. A related aspect is the strong individualisation and secularisation of society and its changing social milieus (Niehuis 2011: 7-11). This leads – and has led in the past – to a fragmentation of the party system and numerous new parties have been added in the last two decades. In the case of young adults, the individualisation process is already at a much more advanced stage than in the case of older groups (Calmbach et al. 2016: 459-463). This raises the question of whether the programmes of popular parties or long-established political organisations such as big trade unions still adequately cover the scope of the young population. Or whether, for organisations, a clearly fragmented structure with much more individual solutions could provide better answers for this target group. As the party member study has already shown, citizens are willing to get involved and also identify with their organisation if they can exert influence and have a say in the programme (Spier/Klein 2012: 50-59). In the end, however, it depends on the content of the programme and whether it can be representative. In a highly individualised society, the content must also fit young people, not the other way around. It is therefore the task of the political organisation to change itself programmatically in order to reach young citizens and encourage them to participate.

Future trends

The developments and challenges described above have numerous causes that are the subject of controversy in research. It is often stated, for example, that "politics" does not act in the interests of the citizens or that it is about an elite that is above the line and does not sufficiently know and understand the problems of the citizens – especially of the younger generations (Niehuis 2011: 7-11). Surveys show that citizens are increasingly reluctant to trust politics to solve future problems or notice a lack of clear vision for future issues in parties and organizations (Niedermayer 2017a: 118-123).

Megatrend: Sustainability

Sustainability plays an important role for young people as they want to be able to live on our planet many decades from now. In addition to an attractive environment to live in, this also affects our finances and the potential for strong social cohesion. These things can only be guaranteed if today's policies also provide for the next generation and take their concerns into account. The discrepancy that results from politics being more geared to short-term action is fundamentally contradictory to sustainable development. The fact that the remaining life expectancy of the younger generation is significantly higher than that of many politicians could also be seen as a negative factor. Nevertheless, the German government has recognised the problem and developed its own national sustainability strategy. The implications of the 63 indicators evaluated therein are at best sobering, even though the Chancellor sells the result of the sustainability strategy launched in 2002 as a success until 2016 (Federal Government 2016a: 35-40). So far, only one-third of the targets have been achieved and a further 10% are on the right track. A further third of the targets have fallen well short of fulfilment, and a further 14% are heading in the completely wrong direction. The German government's sustainability strategy is typical of the urgent future problems that are not being taken seriously, while new tasks are constantly being added. The refugee and migration issue, for example, was not a priority on the agenda in 2002 but now dominates much of the agenda. The causes of the refugee and migration crisis were already foreseeable in recent decades. The political parties and politicians will have to tackle these problems in a more focused way and will have to focus more on sustainability aspects – and they will be judged on this. The fight against the causes of emigration in the countries which refugees are fleeing also plays a decisive role, a fact that has been clearly underestimated in recent years.

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In the meantime, the Federal Government of Germany has changed the original course of its sustainability strategy (Federal Government 2018: 8-12). The indicators mentioned above are no longer relevant; instead the government is oriented towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations. A particular point of criticism here is that the indicators for intergenerational justice do not play a part in the 17 SDGs, suggesting that intergenerational justice has been dismissed as unimportant. But overall, past legislative periods have also shown that sustainability was not particularly important to the Federal Governments. This can be demonstrated, among other things, by the sluggish implementation of the energy transition, an increase in income inequality (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2017: 5-8) and an expansion of expensive pension benefits (Haerder 2018). Similarly, the consumption of resources must be adjusted in order not to further damage nature and the environment and thereby threaten the livelihoods of millions of people (Dröge 2015: 5f.). However, a programme of decarbonisation – a com-

plete abandonment of the use of fossil fuels – by the end of this century (Federal Ministry for the Environment 2016) is not sustainable. It makes a mockery of all subsequent generations to delay the completion of this process – as decided at the climate conference in Paris in 2015 – until the year 2100, in other words 82 years. The end of the Second World War was only 73 years ago and even this event is barely tangible for young people today. The generations to come will not look favourably upon this failure, which will further underline the shattering effect and urgency of the issue.

> What we know for certain is that digitisation will decisively change people's working lives and that global connectivity will make it even easier to carry out activities in other regions of the world.

Megatrend: Digitisation

The current controversial topic of industry 4.0 and the associated changes in the world of work are an issue that will affect the younger generation in particular on a massive scale. What we know for certain is that digitisation will decisively change people's working lives and that global connectivity will make it even easier to carry out activities in other regions of the world. It remains to be seen whether the loss of about 50% of all currently existing jobs (Frey/Osborne 2013: 44f.) or a dominance of the Chinese in the global economy (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016: 3) will occur. The transition must be made in the right direction as from today. The education system must be geared to the coming decades, and job profiles and which qualifications will be needed in 10 to 20 years' time are burning questions. Expenditure on research and development and the expansion of the digital infrastructure will also be central factors of success in the future.

Megatrend: Social Change

Demographic developments will change the population picture in Germany considerably in the coming years. With the retirement of baby boomers and further migration, Germany will become both older and more diversified. Appropriate framework conditions must be created for this. Is it a good idea to send people who are able to work into retirement at the age of 67, where they might spend more than 20 years of their old age? That was not the concept of the state pension insurance. And how can migrants and asylum seekers be integrated as well and as quickly as possible so that their skills can be put to meaningful use in the labour market? How often will people have to acquire a new qualification in the coming decades? These questions can only be answered with a wide range of educational opportunities and government support for qualification. Otherwise, the social systems will come under pressure under the demographic burdens currently forecast (Fugger 2016: 3f.). On the other hand, the labour market is developing into a supplier market. This means that companies must increasingly strive for a good workforce and offer ever better opportunities to reconcile work and leisure or family life. Due to the growing individualisation of young people, the demands on companies will continue to increase and alternative concepts, such as universal basic income, will continue to gain importance. How our society will work and live together in the future, and which life models and which working time models will prevail, must be given high priority in the political discussions of today.

Further topics

Urbanisation also poses enormous challenges for Germany's major cities. Young people are attracted to cities, while in rural regions, the infrastructure such as schools and hospitals is increasingly disappearing (Federal Government 2016b: 9-11).

And finally, the subject of Europe has also become more topical than it has been in recent years. Now that the UK has decided to withdraw from the European Union and many nationalistic governments in Southern and Eastern Europe are assuming government responsibility, the political actors must develop answers and a new vision for Europe (European Commission 2017: 8-10). The involvement of the younger generation is particularly important in this context from the perspective of democracy. The achievements of democracy and freedom could come under pressure after many decades of stability on account of this changed political situation. While in Europe major parties are more or less beginning to dissolve and new autocratic/nationalistic-oriented forms of government are gaining ground, parties, politicians and actors of political organisations should take countermeasures in the interest of a common community of values, which should also be preserved for future generations. To this end, the younger generations must be more actively and proactively involved in processes.

Theses

After taking a closer look at the developments and future trends, the question arises as to what influence these perspectives have on young people and how political actors can better integrate the next generation than before. Therefore, three theses have been formulated, which will be confirmed or refuted by the following survey.

Thesis 1: Young adults experiment with various political participation options in the initial phase and thus reduce their voter turnout.

Young people may initially turn away from conventional political parties after the first election in which they vote. This could be due to the fact that they have not yet gained sufficient experience – positive or negative – with parties and politicians and have a certain basic confidence in their ability to act. Thus, by extension, young adults do not see it as necessary to vote or become involved in party member organisations, as they do not have the necessary information to make a well-considered decision. Instead, this group of people tries out the alternative spectrum of Attac, Campact and Greenpeace. Potentially, however, they will later become more involved in the political environment of the conventional parties and voter turnout will rise again.

> While in Europe major parties are more or less beginning to dissolve and new autocratic/nationalistic-oriented forms of government are gaining ground, parties, politicians and actors of political organisations should take countermeasures in the interest of a common community of values, which should also be preserved for future generations. To this end, the younger generations must be more actively and proactively involved in processes.

Thesis 2: The need for individualisation of young citizens demands more opportunities for participation and diversity of content by political organisations.

As young people increasingly want to fulfil themselves and individual needs become more and more important, the offers of political organisations must match the expectations of young people. As a result, increasing fragmentation in the party landscape is to be expected and, if necessary, a target group-oriented specialisation of political organisations is also necessary. For example, young voters with environment-oriented liberal preferences may be more likely to place their crosses with the ecologically democratic party (ÖDP) than with the Greens if the programme is more suited to their attitudes. This could lead to many more parties entering parliaments in the coming years.

Thesis 3: Young people are only willing to participate if they can exert sufficient influence on developments through their commitment.

Today's young people are focused on using their time efficiently. Therefore, they will tend to weigh up exactly what engagement really brings them something, and what they can actually make a difference with. The opportunities for young people to participate must therefore be significantly improved so that their motivation is rewarded with success in the implementation of the concepts they have developed. If no such successes occur in the medium term, the commitment will quickly be adjusted in light of their evaluation of the activities. Conversely, quick successes in particular will have a binding character and motivate young adults to continue their commitment.

Survey

Methodology

In order to be able to answer the theses, a quantitative survey was conducted among young people aged 15 to 25 living in Germany. The aim of the survey was to obtain an overall picture of young people's attitudes to politics in general and to political organisations in particular. However, the focus was on a superficial rather than a more in-depth analysis. The insights gained in the survey can be used for further questions and provide an ideal basis for constructive research projects. The survey was structured in such a way that a distinction can be made between participants with political commitment and participants without political commitment. In addition, gender, age, educational attainment and place of residence (federal state) were surveyed. The latter structure is subdivided into various topic complexes in order to obtain information about the attitudes of the participants. The first step is to reveal the level of information, personal commitment and identification with the groups addressed. The second step involves asking questions about topics relevant to the future and the interest in helping to shape them. In the third step, the accessibility by which the participants were activated or can be reached by the respective actors is determined. There are four answer categories available for each answer, which are based on a unipolar rating scale. In order to simplify the answer by the participant, a verbalised rating scale was completely omitted, as this could not be used for all questions in the same way. Similarly, no numerical rating scale was used, to prevent incongruent answers. Instead, a simple character-based rating scale with the positively associated characters plus (+) and the negatively associated characters minus (-) is used. This was intended to make it easier for participants to answer the questionnaire by making it clear whether they agree or disagree with a statement. Finally, it had to be taken into account that some participants may have been answering such a questionnaire for the first time in their lives.[4]

The survey was conducted online via a survey portal.[5] The dura-

tion of the survey was one month in 2018.[6] The participants were mainly addressed via social media. A total of 198 people took part in the survey; 165 of them responded in full. With a total eligible population of 9.7 million potential target-age participants, the survey cannot be considered representative. 50.9% of the participants were male, while 49.1% were female. The real gender distribution of this age group in Germany is 52.6% male to 47.4% female citizens (Federal Office of Statistics 2018). The distribution of the participants according to old federal states (West Germany) and new federal states (East Germany) is 82.4% (West) to 17.6% (East) and thus almost reflects reality with a distribution of 82.6% (West) to 17.4% (East). The federal states indicated in the survey do not provide a representative picture in the detailed evaluation. The question of the current or highest educational attainment also does not meet the representative requirements and will therefore play no role in the evaluation.[7]

Results

The results of the various topics are presented below. The overall results of all participants are shown in a graph, while the individual results for the sub-groups of "engaged" (e) and "not engaged" (ne) are added in brackets. The subgroup "e" represents those participants who have indicated a corresponding commitment in the survey, and the subgroup "ne" therefore the participants without a commitment.[8] Figure 2 shows how well the survey participants are informed about policy issues. It is particularly striking that many questions were answered with a very high approval rate of over 80%. For example, 37.6% (e=82.1%; ne=23.8%) of the participants stated that they were strongly interested in political topics (++) and a total of 81.5% (e=100%; ne=75.4%) gave positive feedback on political interest (++; +). Only just under 5% of the participants stated that they had no interest at all in political topics (--). An extremely high level of positive approval (++; +) was also given to the question of the understanding of democracy with 95.8% (e=100%; ne=94.4%). It must be mentioned here that the concept of democracy had not been clearly defined. Thus, there could be a discrepancy between the perspective on knowledge about the functioning of democracy and the actual

level of knowledge. In addition, the high approval of the survey due to the above-average ratio of high school students and high school graduates could distort the picture. Furthermore, the question concerning regular information about current developments achieved broad approval (++; +) of 84.8% (e=100%; ne=80.2%). About one in five respondents who were not engaged expressed negative agreement (--; -) and were therefore not informed about current issues. It is also pleasing to see that about 50.3% (e=66.7%; ne=45.2%) inform themselves thoroughly (++) about the parties before an election. Overall, more than 80% (e=97.4%; ne=77.8%) also rate this question positively. It is interesting to note that among engaged participants, politics is much more often a topic (e=89.7%) at home than among non-engaged participants (ne=59.5%), so that a total of about two-thirds of participants answered this question positively (++; +).

Again, the higher level of education may overstate this. The question on policy in the school sector is answered equally by both groups. Also the question of accessibility via social media does not show a clear result that there is hardly any change across the participant groups. In fact, not even half of the young people are reached by political organisations or politicians via social media. The next block shows the engagement of young people themselves and related aspects – as shown in Figure 3. As a result, slightly more than half (e=74.4; ne=46.0) are volunteers (++; +) or engaged in some way. The interest in becoming more involved was positively answered by about three-quarters of the respondents (e=76.9%; ne=72.2%) across all groups. There is thus a great willingness to participate. This is also shown by the deeper question of commitment when there is more scope for shaping the future. A majority of 64.2% (e=74.4%; ne=61.1%) would actually become more involved if they could actively participate in shaping things. Strong group differences can be seen in the participation or attendance of political events. Only a minority of 22.4% (e=61.5%; ne=10.3%) take part. However, participation in events represents only a small part of political or democratic participation. For this reason, questions were also asked about democratic procedures, such as the election of a class spokesperson or family voting. In both groups, the answers to the office of class or student spokes-
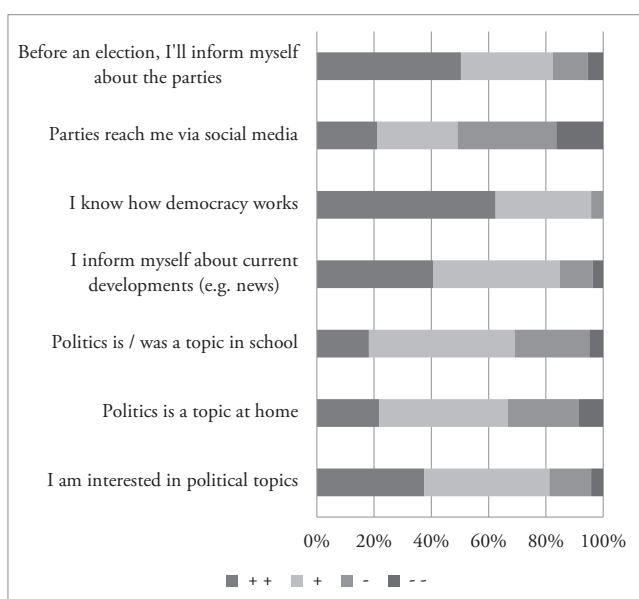

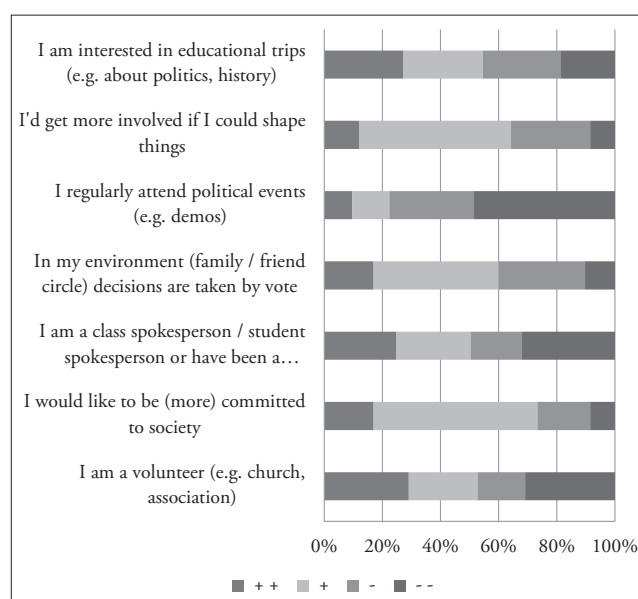*Figure 2: How well are you informed about political topics?*

Figure 3: How far do you engage yourself / would you like to engage yourself?

person are roughly the same at around 50%. This also applies to the question of voting among friends and relations. Also, there the question is answered positively across groups (++; +), with about 60% agreement. This shows that young people are quite familiar with democratic procedures and practice them to some extent. The possibility of participating in educational trips, such as those offered by the parties' youth organisations or by organisations close to trade unions within the framework of summer trips or winter camps, meets with a varying response. Only 27.3% (e=66.7%; ne=15.1%) of respondents have a strong interest (++). In contrast, 18.8% (e=0%; ne=24.6%) have no interest at all (--) in such an offer.

The third block of questions deals with the identification of respondents with political organisations. Generally, political parties or politicians are widely known among young people. 87.9% (e=94.9%; ne=85.7%) answered this question positively (++; +). A majority of at least two-thirds (e=89.7%; ne=58.7%) can also identify with the political content of the parties. Only about every twentieth (e=2.6%; ne=4.8%) cannot identify at all (--) with the political content of parties. Accordingly, a considerable proportion of 80.6% have already elected or would vote for corresponding parties or politicians (++; +). The proportion of engaged respondents is as high as 92.3%. When asked about the actual support of a party or organisation in a discussion, 94.9% of the respondents would represent it in debates. In the case of the non-engaged, this is 64.3% (++; + in each case). Because of the broad identification with certain political actors or organisations, the negatively formulated questions do not meet with broad positive approval. Only about one in five (e=12.8%; ne=21.5%) answered that no party represents its own interests (++; +). And only about a third of those questioned (++; +) share the question of the distancing and untrustworthiness of politicians. The engaged give a slightly better testimony to the actors here. The approval ratings for untrustworthiness and dissociation are about 15% (++; +). Overall, it can thus be stated that identification with political organisations, parties or politicians is relatively high. Because of the proportion of people with higher education, there could, however, also be a slight overestimation of approval here.
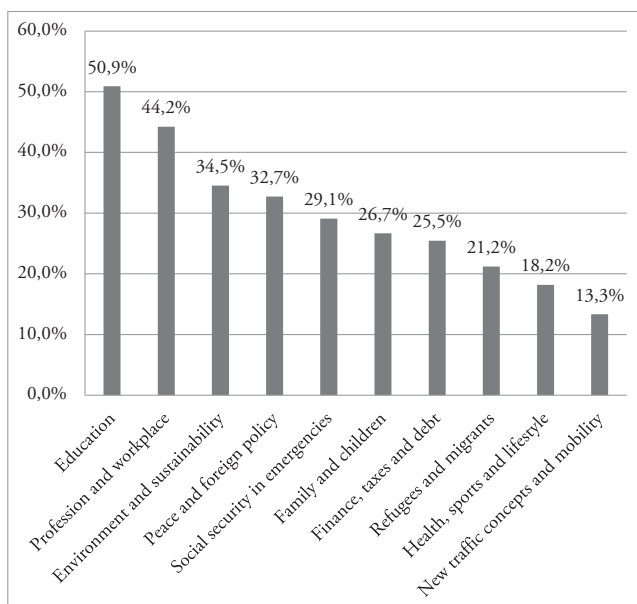
As the survey progressed, the topics that young people are currently most interested in and that they would like to help shape were raised. In the survey, three topics could be selected on an equal footing without any rank. Figure 4 summarises the results. According to this, "education" is the most important topic for the 15 to 25 year-olds with about 51%. Second place goes to the topic "profession and workplace" with 44.2%. It is possible that these topics are particularly in focus, among other things, because they are very present in the current life situation of the target group. For example, they have just finished school or are about to graduate and will soon be entering working life or have recently done so. Third place is not surprisingly taken by the topic "environment and sustainability". The less prioritised topics are "new traffic and mobility concepts" ranked last (13.3%) and "health, sports and lifestyle" second last (18.2%). This could be related to the fact that illness and mobility are not paramount issues for young people.

The picture between East and West Germany is slightly different. Accordingly "profession and workplace" (48.3%) as well as " environment and sustainability" (44.8%) are the top themes for young East Germans, while for young West Germans the topic "education" dominates very strongly (54.4%). The topic of "finances, taxes and debts" is also much more important to the young West Germans (28.7%) than to the young East Germans (10.3%). It is also particularly surprising that the problem of "refugees and migrants" is given higher priority in West Germany than in East Germany, which is in diametrical contrast to surveys and media reports. The result could be attributable to the age group or to the above-average level of education.

In order to deepen the setting of topics, the willingness to participate in shaping the respective topics was also asked. Even across groups, there are essentially only minimal differences in the willingness to participate between the engaged and the not engaged. Of particular interest is also the reason why young people get involved or under what circumstances they might get more involved. For this purpose, the motives were asked in the survey, separately according to existing or non-existing commitment. Figure 5 shows the results of the young engaged. Analogous to the preferences already established above, the participants are par-
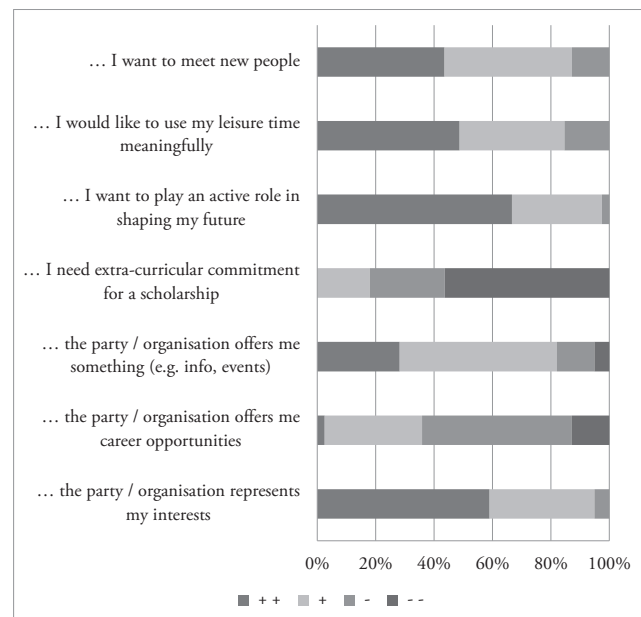

Figure 4: Topics ranked by importance

Figure 5: I am in a political party / organisation because ...

ticularly engaged (++) when 59% of their interests are represented in the organisation. Influencing future-oriented actions and decisions also plays a central role with a very high approval rate of 66.7% (++). The social aspects are also very important to the respondents (++). For example, 43.6% use their engagement to get to know new people and 48.7% want to spend their free time meaningfully. On the other hand, the offers of the parties do not play a decisive role with regard to scholarship opportunities or career opportunities. On the contrary, far more than half (56.4%) vehemently reject a commitment to scholarships (--) and 12.8% decisively rule out a commitment to career opportunities (--).

On the other hand, the motives of the not engaged were also asked about, and what could bring them into a political organisation. The question of interest representation is answered in a similarly positive way here as with the engaged, with an overall positive approval (++; +) of more than 80%. Analogous to the above-mentioned question of shaping the future, the answers were also positive overall with 84.1% (++; +) in relation to the genuine opportunities for participation. An important criterion for those who are not engaged is the time factor. Three-quarters of the respondents would sometimes be willing to get involved if they had more time. Only 7.9% would not aspire to commitment even with more free time (--). The statements on more money, scholarship opportunities, career opportunities and special offers do not reveal any clear tendencies. They were each answered about half positively and half negatively. However, 27.8% would never (--) commit themselves to a scholarship and 13.5% to career opportunities. The tendencies between the groups of engaged and not engaged thus go in a similar direction.

Finally, the accessibility of the respective survey group was asked about, i.e. how they can best be addressed by the actors of political organisations. Unfortunately the "Other" option was chosen most frequently, which does not allow any conclusions to be drawn. Respondents may not have remembered the exact situation, so none of the multiple choices were certain. In second and third place were "friends" (23.1%) and "direct contact" (15.4%). Not only schools (2.1%), but also clubs and associations (10.3%) played a less influential role in commitment.
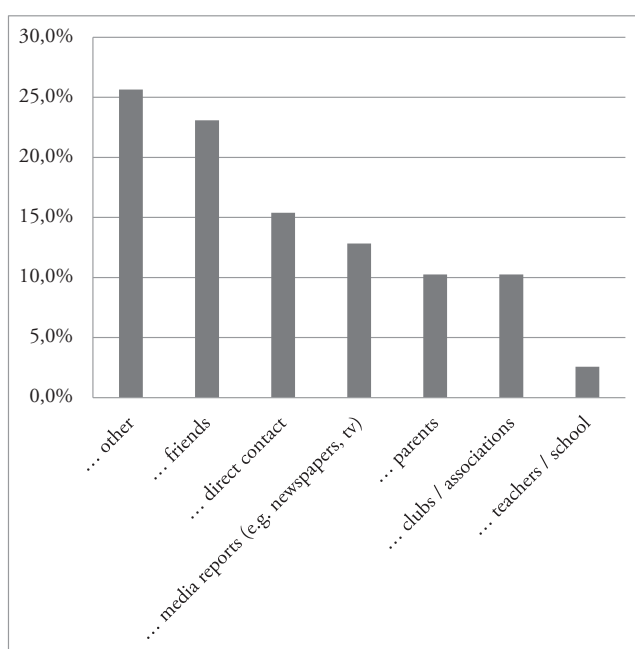

Figure 6: I became active in a political party through …

Also the not engaged were asked about their reachability. The church, parents or associations would normally only be able to address those under 21 years of age. However, these various sources do not have very promising results due to the low preferred accessibility. On the other hand, "direct contact" (20.6%), "media reports" (19%) or "friends" (17.5%) are regarded as more suitable channels. Thus it can be shown that in both groups direct contact and contact by friends would most probably lead to commitment.

Considerations and conclusions

In the preceding analysis, conclusions were already hinted at, which are to be further examined here. In the following some correlations are explained; they show a high correlation coefficient according to statistical standards.[9] There is a positive correlation (0.722) between the general interest in politics and the observation of current developments, for example in the media. There is also a positive correlation between those interested in politics and knowledge of politicians or political organisations (0.571) and their identification with the contents of these (0.520). In contrast, there is a high negative correlation among those interested in politics with regard to their untrustworthiness (-0.228) or with the statement that no party represents their interests (-0.216). Thus, it can be shown that those interested in politics obtain appropriate information and gain a differentiated picture of parties and political organisations. Less surprising is the positive correlation that respondents who are informed about current developments also know how democracy works (0.511) and that they also know corresponding actors (0.549). Overall, this shows that the information factor plays a major role. The more information available to respondents, for example about a party's programmes, the greater their commitment in the next step. The survey shows that very high numbers of young adults are indeed of the opinion that there are political organisations in favour of their own interests. Given the broad spectrum of political parties in Germany, it can be assumed that there is something for everyone. There is a positive correlation in particular with regard to identification with an organisation if it represents the interests of the participant (0.540). This continues with the statement that the corresponding party was also elected (0.408) and that the positions of the organisation would be represented in a discussion (0.565). This makes it very clear that a distinct identification can take place among young people if the offer of the party or political organisation fits the needs and questions of the surveyed person. There is also a high positive correlation between the organisations' offerings, for example in the form of events, and participation in such offerings (0.566). This proves that young people actually perceive one when the appropriate offers are made to them. The process leading to identification is thus opened up by a good information basis, and by a customised range of participation opportunities to bind an organisation, which is then also loyally represented to the outside world. The thesis of young people's lack of interest in politics or political organisations could thus be refuted once again. The right offers and topics are decisive for the success of winning over these people. The focus is on topics that affect the everyday lives and living conditions of young people, such as education, career entry, the labour market and sustainable development. New transport concepts or health care play a subordinate role. After all, the affected group of people is less frequently affected by illness and nowadays is less likely to have their own car. Ultimately, it is

important to be able to reach the target group with your messages. The best way to do this is to contact them directly or to recruit them through friendly contacts. An approach via social networks or video podcasts was not classified as particularly target-oriented.

> The survey shows that very high numbers of young adults are indeed of the opinion that there are political organisations in favour of their own interests.

Recommendations for action

On the basis of the available survey results, the three theses can now be examined and solutions formulated. The previous developments and theoretical aspects are also included. First of all, it can be said that the image of parties and politicians held by the interviewees is significantly better than can be heard in the media discussion. There is broad confidence in the capacity of political organisations to act. In addition, young adults are well informed about current developments and a large part of them are also involved with political issues and the parties before an election. Similarly, the majority of respondents have already voted once. The survey was unable to clarify whether the young generation is substituting political engagement with alternative political formats. Nor is it clear whether the interviewees intend to expand their commitment in the future. It can, however, be assumed that, on the basis of life cycle theory, this expansion of participation will automatically occur in the coming years among the group of people surveyed. The time factor plays a decisive role here. A not inconsiderable proportion of respondents stated that they would increase their commitment if more time was available. If the current situation in life does not permit open time windows for a corresponding commitment, this could change as a result of a change in the life situation in old age. The thesis that young adults try out various political participation options in the initial phase and thus reduce their voter turnout could thus not be fully confirmed.

Recommendation for action 1: Provide precisely fitting information
Good access to information is crucial for participation. Young adults want to inform themselves and do so. A high degree of transparency and information suitable for young people, for example via the relevant channels for young people or through influencers, is a key success factor in conveying the information credibly.

The respondents indicated that in any case there is a political organisation representing their interests. Very few said that they did not have a mouthpiece for their interests. As a result, the offer is already broad enough and there is a party, organisation or platform for everyone. A further path to fragmentation will therefore not necessarily be essential. However, the offers of the political organisation are not sufficiently available or are not sufficiently used. There may be some catching up to do here. For this reason, political parties, for example, should focus more on what activities appeal to the younger generation and how they can use their time in a meaningful and participatory way. The party system has already expanded due to the election successes of the Greens in the 1980s, the Left in the 2000s and the AfD in the recent past. It is quite possible that other parties will be added in the coming years if young people turn more to those parties that best represent their interests. In the European Parliament, for example, the

Piratenpartei (Pirate Party), die PARTEI and the NPD, among others, were able to move in because the electoral threshold of the European Parliament is only 3%[10], which means that smaller parties can also move in. This result shows that other parties can also achieve a high number of votes.

Recommendation for action 2: Lowering of the electoral threshold in the German parliament
It could therefore make sense to lower the blocking electoral threshold for national parliaments as well, in order to offer more room for other parties. This could lead to an enormous gain in participation if parties with minority opinions are also integrated into political processes. Furthermore, for a young citizen, the question could arise as to why, for example, they should give their vote to the Tierschutzpartei (animal protection party), which then does not count anyway. If, however, the voter only feels represented by this party, his willingness to vote could fall as a result. For the established parties this scenario is likely to be a catastrophe, since a further increase in the number of parties in the parliaments – even if their successes are still too small – is likely to exacerbate the difficulties of forming a government.

> A high degree of transparency and information suitable for young people, for example via the relevant channels for young people or through influencers, is a key success factor in conveying the information credibly.

The Federal Constitutional Court has also had to deal with the electoral threshold several times in the context of the elections to the European Parliament (BVerfG, judgement of the Second Senate of 26 February 2014 – 2 BvE 2/13 – recitals 1-116). This essentially involved weighing up the principle of equality of voting rights (Article 3 I GG) and equal opportunities for political parties (Article 21 I GG). The concerns lie in the fact that the formation of a stable government can be jeopardised by a low electoral threshold. This is because new parliamentary groups could form in the European Parliament, resulting in greater fragmentation. This development is partly welcomed by the judges. After all, it could improve political discourse. However, it is questioned whether the constitutional principles benefit everyone who stands for election in the same way. In their judgement, the judges argue that the 3% electoral threshold does not intervene as intensively in the equality of voting rights and the equal opportunities of the parties as the former 5% electoral threshold. However, it does not follow from this that the interference in equality of voting rights also associated with the 3% electoral threshold would be negligible and would not require any justification. A seat in the European Parliament can already be obtained with about 1% of the votes cast, so that the electoral threshold becomes effective in practice. Since an electoral threshold is not currently required in German European electoral law, i.e. such justification is already fundamentally lacking, it is not a question of the appropriateness of the 3% clause.

The thesis that the individualisation of young citizens demands more opportunities for participation and diversity of content from the political organisation could not be explicitly confirmed. However, there are serious indications that the creation of additional options does justice to the individualisation principle of the young generation. Accordingly, the options and offers for participation should be expanded rather than limited.

Recommendation for action 3: Expansion of youth-friendly provision and participation opportunities

Young adults today use different tools to the ones that the established political organisations have used for a long time. They also want to use their communication methods in their activities in political parties. More decentralised opportunities should also be created. Many parties have already introduced interactive video conferences and use social media to communicate and share information. These activities are going in the right direction. However, they need to be constantly reviewed and expanded. Services must keep pace with digitisation. In addition, it should be constantly questioned what appropriate measures create added value for young people. Simplicity and efficiency are important keywords. Long paper applications are not an adequate way of increasing participation.

Respondents clearly stated that they would like to get more involved. This statement is closely linked to the demand that they actually want to make a difference. Many respondents can also identify with political organisations, especially those that are already involved. It can be assumed that their existing commitment has led to a commitment to the organisation and identification. Accordingly, the thesis that young people are only willing to participate if they can exert sufficient influence on developments through their commitment can be clearly proven. It also coincides with the results of the party member study. As already mentioned above, the amount of time spent plays an important role. Since young people have a wealth of leisure activities on offer and want to spend their time sensibly in addition to school and work, their commitment must have a very high degree of effectiveness.

Recommendation for action 4: Real involvement in shaping processes

Time is very valuable for young people, especially in the 15–25 year-old age group, who are in a decisive phase of change in their lives. They want to help shape this process and invest time in it. But this investment must also pay off. In the medium term, endless decision-making processes and lengthy discussions will prevent young people from becoming involved in a participatory
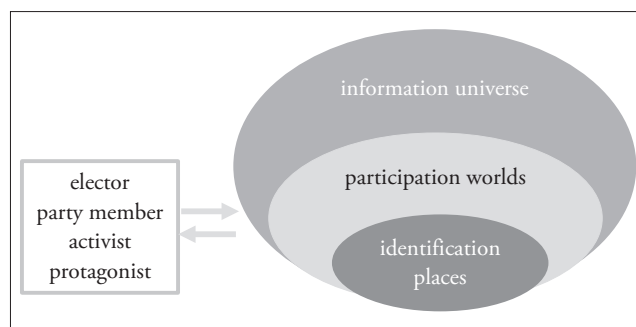

Figure 7: The three dimensions of engagement-binding

way. On the one hand, speed must be increased. On the other hand, the effects of an activity must be measurable.

The information obtained from the two previous chapters allows a division into three dimensions, as shown in Figure 7. On the one hand, information is very important. Only with this can young people make decisions about whether, when and how they want to participate. In addition, the information is absolutely necessary in order to find out which political organisation represents their own interests or meets their needs. This dimension can be called an information universe. The next level offers opportunities for participation. These should be provided by the respective organisations about which the young adults have informed themselves extensively. The added value of these participation options must be correspondingly high. This dimension can be described as participation worlds. The third dimension is the places of identification. They are fixed points in the coordinate system with which young adults can identify. They are the result of a successful participation process. Once a strong connection to these places has been established, the young generation will stay with them and will not leave so quickly. The places of identification are the result of their work in the political organisation.

Steering instrument

The following section describes how to achieve success step by step. The young generation, as voters, party members, activists or actors, is in constant exchange with political organisations. This
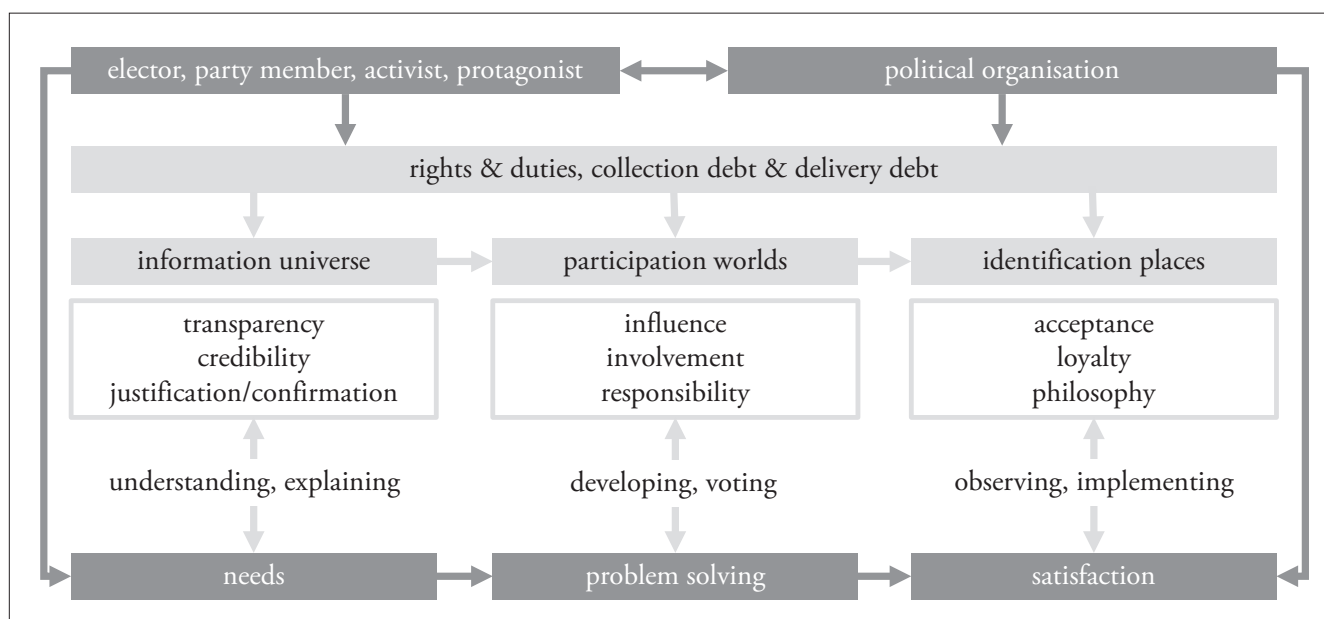

Figure 8: Systematics of the development stages for the realisation of success

gives them rights and duties as well as a debt to collect and bring to the table. Young citizens have the right, but also the duty, to participate in the democratic processes of their country. To do this, they must obtain information and tell the actors what concerns them. Conversely, the actors have the right and the duty to carry out the corresponding actions as requested by of the citizen, for example as a result of an election. Within this framework, they must provide information and ask about the needs of (young) citizens. It is particularly important for the information to be transparent, for the actors to maintain their credibility and to justify their actions, and themselves to be committed to values and ideologies. In case of doubt, the actors must explain certain information in more detail, while the young citizens must question the facts. Stakeholders must understand the needs of young people. In the sphere of participation, there must be scope for influence, real participation and the option of taking responsibility. Solutions to problems must be developed jointly so that individual actors or elite working groups do not alone decide on concepts or programmes. Rather, it matters all the more that there is real coordination and not just a superficial possibility of influence. Due to today's technical possibilities, for example, many votes can be carried out quickly and cost-effectively among many members. In order to reach an appropriate level of identification, a high degree of acceptance is necessary. Only when the processes of participation function satisfactorily will the young person develop a bond with his or her organisation and remain loyal to it. At first, this loyalty will be questioned again and again, until finally a sustainable commitment will emerge, if the previous prerequisites are satisfactorily fulfilled. The political organisation must always defend this bond by keeping its promises and implementing the concepts it has developed. Figure 8 shows the systematics of these development stages.

In order to be able to control this system as a political organisation in a target-oriented way, an instrument is necessary. This can be in the form of an evaluation model, based on the Balanced

Scorecard. A Balanced Scorecard is a control instrument of strategic management (Kaplan/Norton 1996: 44-46). It was developed in order to be able to steer different entrepreneurial areas with a relatively small number of key figures. For this purpose, four perspectives are taken, which belong to the decisive success factors. The basis of entrepreneurial success are the employees. Through them the company can learn and grow, because the employees are the knowledge carriers and their qualifications strongly influence the success. This is presented as an internal process perspective. Here it is important that quality and efficiency reach an appropriate level. From the customer's perspective, these characteristics are particularly important in order to strengthen or improve customer loyalty. This means that the desired key figures can also be achieved from a financial perspective, such as a certain return on sales. The Balanced Scorecard model can be adapted very well for a political organisation.

The role of employees is played by the members of the organisation – whether it is a party, a trade union or another initiative. The focus here is on understanding the needs of the members and developing concepts. The development stages mentioned above take their course. The implementation of the concepts and a good organisational structure, from which all members benefit, creates strong member loyalty. This is continued externally. The members behave loyally and loyalty can also be transferred to other voters or new trade union members due to the needs-based concepts. Loyalty also develops in external relations. This gives rise to political power that can be translated into a large factional strength or government participation in the case of a party. Trade unions could have a better bargaining position if there is support and pressure from many loyal members. Finally, these prospects need to be assessed conclusively. The evaluation model modified in Figure 9 is intended for this purpose. It shows the relationships between the individual perspectives and provides information on the success factors. The dimensions of the engagement commitment, the de-
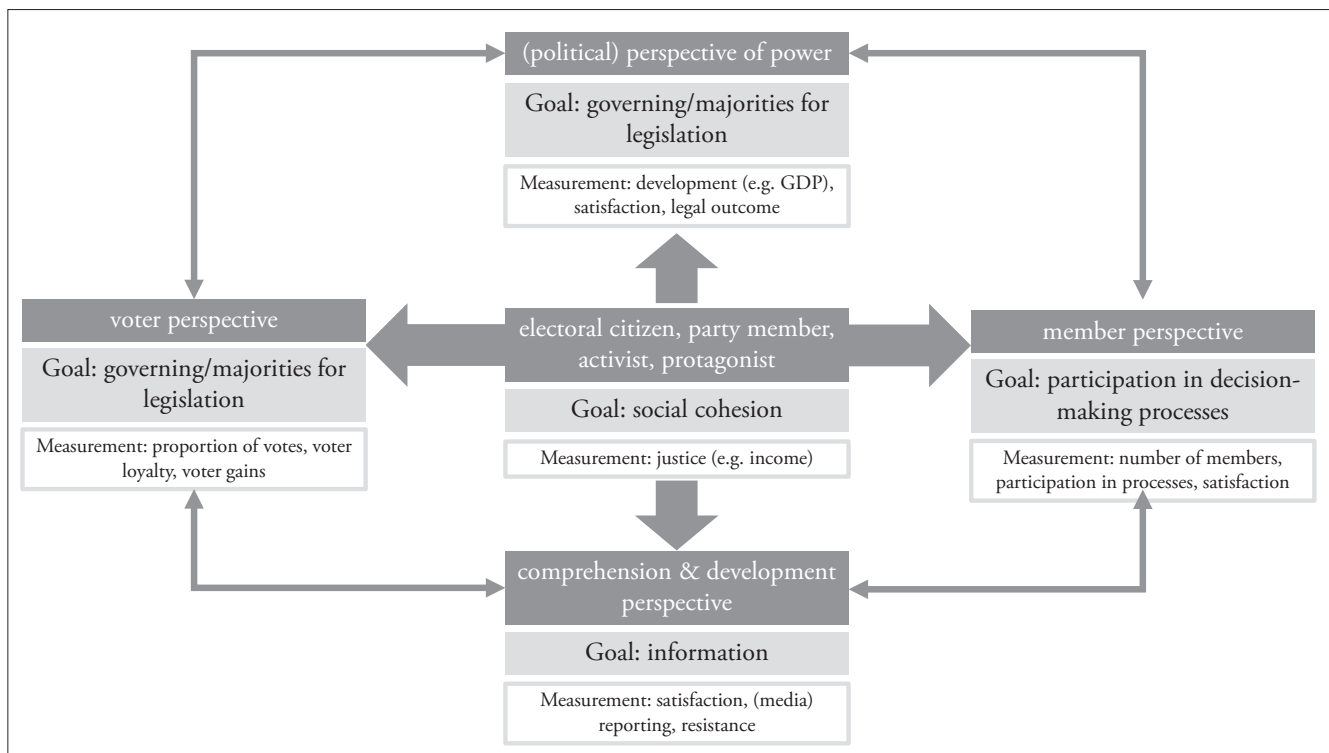

Figure 9: Evaluation model of political success factors

velopment stages of the realisation of success and the evaluation must not be regarded as individual parts, but as a system that accesses all these elements and connects them with each other. The valuation model in Figure 9 shows in detail the interrelationships for one party. However, the model can also be applied to any other political organisation. Likewise, the goals and measurement criteria are only given as examples.

Using such a model, the individual objectives can be defined for the various perspectives and adjusted at regular intervals. The targets are measured using criteria that are regularly reviewed and aligned in a similar way to the German government's sustainability strategy. This results in a steering instrument that enables political organisations to steer their own interests in the desired direction and to achieve the higher goal of retaining power – for whatever purpose. It is a general instrument that is not explicitly tailored to young people. However it could be used by the youth organisations of political parties and trade unions to start with the younger generation. It is precisely through such an instrument that political organisations have the opportunity to ideally control the participation of young people and to better understand their needs. The exchange is simplified and a quick countermeasure in the detection of misconduct is possible. In order to incorporate the points mentioned in the theses into the organisational process in the future, the evaluation model offers the opportunity for all political actors to bring about the involvement of the younger generation in an appropriate way.

Discussion

The first part of this paper shows how it was possible to briefly review the main developments on the basis of which a survey was then carried out among young people aged 15 to 25 in Germany, as described in second part. The non-representative survey provides information on young people's attitudes towards political issues. The statements partially reflected the findings from the first part of the paper. The confirmation of the theses was partially successful. However, further research is necessary to examine the facts in more detail. The results of the survey must be critically questioned at this point. As already mentioned, the representativeness of the sample is not sufficient to make a conclusive statement about the behaviour and attitudes of the target group. Rather, the survey represents only a small part of the target group. In this case, the high proportion of young adults with a higher level of education should be mentioned. A generalisation of the results cannot therefore be fully affirmed. There is undoubtedly a risk that the results will be distorted by the uneven distribution of the sample. Therefore, the results can only be used as reference points. However, it can again be said that many statements had a clearly positive or negative tendency and that certain conclusions can be drawn from them. These could be used to answer the theses. It can be said quite clearly that a general rejection or a general disinterest of the target group in the political discourse is not applicable.

The survey has shown that the megatrends mentioned have a significant share in the issues of young adults. The main focus is on the future world of work and the training perspective. This topic is particularly important for young people, both in East and West Germany. Since no concrete answers to digitisation and globalisation are currently being given by political parties and trade unions, this point must come into focus even more than today in order to give answers to the next generation. Those who are about to decide on a training place or a course of study must be given an orientation as to how the country will be positioned in relation to the labour market in the future. In particular, it should be possible to involve young people in the identification process, since they will be the ones who will secure future prosperity in Germany and pay into the social security systems. In addition, the topic of education was explicitly mentioned as one of the most important topics in the survey. This also goes hand in hand with the megatrends that will require people to change their flexibility at different stages of their lives. Here, too, the next generation will demand concrete answers on how to deal with the changes and the deepening of lifelong learning in our society.

Finally, the megatrend of sustainability was also named as the third most important topic with regard to environmental issues. The megatrends can thus be found in the results of the survey as a whole. The environment was one of the most important aspects of sustainability, before peace and migration. To what extent the complexity of sustainability in relation to refugee movements and crises in other regions of the world is known among the respondents cannot be answered here in more detail. However, current developments and commitment to environmental causes show that sustainability is particularly important to young people. This aspect shows that young people do not wait for governments to act on the issue of sustainability, but instead get involved themselves or take part in demonstrations. The Greens have been experiencing a gradual increase in approval at federal and state level for about a year now. It remains to be seen whether this effect will persist in the long term and whether the Greens – especially through the voices of the young – will play a greater role in the political spectrum in the long term. However, the megatrend will continue to occupy the next generation, as the survey also showed.

> Numerous options are available to the organisations to involve young people in their structures with activities, projects, debates or broad information offerings, thus increasing their own attractiveness for this target group. Under no circumstances can we continue to proceed in the same way as in the past. The young generation will insist on new approaches and the political organisations must give them platforms to develop.

Some aspects can only be answered in retrospect. In any case, courageous steps should be taken to increase the willingness to participate – which undoubtedly exists on a large scale. It has been shown how young people can be motivated to participate step by step, up to and including commitment to an organisation. Numerous options are available to the organisations to involve young people in their structures with activities, projects, debates or broad information offerings, thus increasing their own attractiveness for this target group. Under no circumstances can we continue to proceed in the same way as in the past. The young generation will insist on new approaches and the political organisations must give them platforms to develop. These possibilities can also be controlled. It must be clear to the political organisations that the target group will always be active and that new initiatives and movements may emerge which could not work in favour of the established parties and organisations and pursue their own interests. This may lead to further fragmentation of the party spectrum. Such a development could cause further major

problems for the established parties. Current developments in some European countries already show these tendencies. In Italy, for example, a government fed by former marginal parties was installed in 2018. If the political organisations in Germany want to oppose such a development, the proposals submitted should be taken into account. On the other hand, the question of lowering the threshold from 5% to 3% in the German parliament could be an adequate way to increase participation in political parties. This would give more consideration to participation in smaller organisational units and would also create more diversity of opinion in parliament. Young people would be able to better fulfil their individual will to develop through involvement. This would, however, increase the fragmentation of the parties and probably make it even more difficult to form a government in the future. Accordingly, such a scenario is not to be expected.

In view of this fact, the Recommendation for Action deals primarily with an instrument for governance in established organisations. An evaluation model as a steering instrument was derived from a proven management method and tailored to the needs of a political organisation. With the help of the measures mentioned it is possible to sustainably increase the attractiveness of political organisations for the younger generation. Management instruments have the advantage that they provide a quick overview of current situations with standardised key figures and can be used to derive options for action. An instrument based on a Balanced Scorecard could thus provide the organisations with an adequate control tool with which a sustainable development of the organisation can also be promoted over a longer period of time. It is recommended that the concept should be implemented as quickly as possible.

Notes

1 For the party member study of 2009, around 17,000 members from all six parties represented in the German Parliament were interviewed in a representative postal survey and an accompanying telephone population survey was conducted. The party member survey was repeated in 2017. In the study, 17,000 members of the CDU, CSU, SPD, DIE LINKE, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and the FDP were interviewed in writing, and 1,000 party members, 1,000 former party members and 1,000 non-party members were interviewed in in a telephone population survey. No publications were available at the time of preparation of the paper.

2 No definite accruals or reductions are made. In the study, the terms are classified in the same way as in standard literature (definitions are not discussed in detail).

3 The terms young adults, young people, the younger generation and youth are used synonymously in this paper and refer in each case to the group of people between 15 and 25 years of age affected here. An exact classification into certain generation classes has not been undertaken here.

4 cf. Menold/Bogner 2015: 3-5.

5 The survey was carried out on the website of the portal www.umfrageonline.de.

6 The survey took place from 1 May to 31 May 2018.

7 Age groups (per year), federal states, educational qualifications were not included in the evaluation due to the lack of representativeness of the individual data. The federal states were aggregated to East and West Germany. Two age groups were formed for the age groups (under 21 years; over 21 years). Both are only taken into account to a limited extent in the evaluation.

8 Various other studies have dealt with the inclusion of young people in politics. In 2015, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung conducted a study on the political and social participation of young people. The results were taken up in various articles – among others, from the Gille/De Rijke/Gaiser (2017). In addition, the Tremmel/Rutsche collection (2016) provides numerous insights into the political participation of young people.

9 A selection of relevant statements was made whose correlation coefficient has a high significance. The correlation coefficients in brackets show a significance level with p-values smaller than 0.05. The calculated values shown are larger than the critical value of a t-distribution with a significance level of (α = 0.05). It should be noted that significance is not easily detectable due to the relatively small sample size. However, the corresponding level of significance was achieved for the statements mentioned above.

10 In the 2019 European elections, Germany did not apply an electoral threshold.

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