For the first time in two decades, the social divide in voter turnout for an election of Germany's federal parliament, the Bundestag, noticeably decreased. However, the election results simultaneously reveal a new line of conflict: between skeptics and supporters of modernization. This divide could also influence political debate and election results in the future.
precarious voting districts that usually record the lowest voter participation. As a result, voter turnout there rose at an above-average rate. Revealed at the same time is a new line of conflict in Germany’s democracy that runs straight through the electorate between skeptics and supporters of modernization. In addition, the established parties in the Modern Mainstream milieu are losing voters and hardly winning anybody’s vote in the socially Precarious milieu. These are the results of our study, which is the first to ever analyze the voting behavior of the social milieus for a Bundestag election.

The social divide in voter participation depicts just how strongly voter turnout depends on the social profile of a voting district. If voter participation is simultaneously very high in the economically and socially strong residential areas and very low in the economically weak areas, it is an expression of a high degree of social divide in voter participation. Compared to the prior Bundestag election, in 2013, this divide decreased in 2017 from 29.5 to 26.7 percentage points. "The last time we witnessed this kind of decrease in the social divide was when the SPD won the election in 1998," says Robert Vehrkamp, our democracy expert and a co-author of the study. "In 2017, it was mainly the AfD which managed to mobilize non-voters and voters from the socially precarious voting districts on a large scale."

The battle for the Modern Mainstream

In the battle for the Modern Mainstream, the AfD is primarily competing against the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU). In this milieu, the AfD won 20 percent of the votes, representing an increase of nearly 15 percentage points over its 2013 result. The CDU/CSU lost votes to the same extent here, thereby suffering the largest loss of all parties in a single milieu. In total, roughly 40 percent of all eligible voters in the Modern Mainstream either didn't vote at all or voted for the AfD.

This also impacts the arithmetic of how coalition majorities can be formed: A so-called Grand Coalition, made up of the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the CDU/CSU, would only represent about 42 percent of all eligible voters from the Modern Mainstream. On the other hand, a so-called Jamaica Coalition, made up of the CDU/CSU, the business-friendly Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Greens (Die Grüne) – whose respective party colors (black, yellow and green) are the same as those of the Jamaican flag – would only represent 39 percent of them.

"The established parties are losing a lot of ground in the Modern Mainstream. The battle over the middle has
In the so-called milieu of the Precarious, a milieu of the lower stratum of society, the mainstream parties are rapidly losing support these days. Estimated voter turnout in this milieu only stood at about 58 percent and thereby almost 20 percentage points below the overall turnout rate. At the same time, the AfD enjoyed its best results in the Precarious milieu, with 28 percent of the votes. Thus, just over 63 percent of all eligible voters in this milieu either didn't vote at all or voted for the AfD or one of the other minor parties. "Indeed, the process of erosion of the established parties and the dominance of the non- and protest voters has made more progress in the Precarious milieu than in any other," says Klaudia Wegschaider, our democracy expert and co-author of the study.

The democracy's new line of conflict

The results also show that the divide in the electorate now runs between the sceptics and supporters of social and cultural modernization, and that it also decisively influenced voter's voting behavior during the 2017 Bundestag election. People in the milieus skeptical of modernization identify themselves using terms like "tradition" or "preserving the status quo". For modernization-friendly milieus, in contrast, the defining terms are "overcoming limits" and "acceleration". Nearly two-thirds of all AfD voters come from milieus that are rather skeptical of modernization. As such, the AfD has a unique characteristic within the spectrum of political parties. Indeed, a majority of the people who vote for all the other parties represented in the Bundestag belong to milieus that support modernization. The majority is slimmest with the CDU/CSU and largest with voters for the Greens (52 and 72 percent, respectively).

According to these results, with a Grand Coalition, 53 percent of its voters would come from milieus supportive of modernization and the remaining 47 percent from milieus skeptical of modernization. With a Jamaica Coalition, at a respective 57 and 43 percent, the ratio would be clearly in favor of the modernization-friendly milieus. Whether this will lead to a conflict between the AfD and the established party system, as well as how severe this conflict could be, remain completely open questions. In any case, Vehrkamp says, many of the existing political controversies could run and be played out along this line of conflict.
This study analyzes the voter participation and voting behavior of the Sinus-milieus during the 2017 election of Germany's federal parliament, the Bundestag. To do so, it combines an aggregate analysis based on small-scale voting districts with the results of a representative survey conducted after the election. The aggregate analysis is based on a random sampling of 621 representative voting districts across Germany that was conducted by the polling firm infratest dimap. For the post-election survey, 10,271 individuals were asked via the YouGov online panel about their voting behavior for the 2017 Bundestag election in the week after it was held. The milieus described in the study denote the so-called "Sinus-milieus" defined by the SINUS institute for psychological and social science research and consulting. All survey results used in the study are representative.
Similar Articles

**STUDY**

Before the election: Majority of Germans reject populist views

› read more

**EUPINIONS**

Globalisation fears weigh heavily on European vote

› read more