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Mannheim, 19 June 2024

Press Release

Only One in Three People Enjoy Talking about Politics - The Reasons Are More Social than Political

The current issue of the “MZES Focus” series, published by the Mannheim Center for European Social Research (MZES), is dedicated to attitudes towards political conversations - both in general and in the case of differences in opinion.

One of the cornerstones of liberal democracies is the political debate on how to shape society. However, discussions about politics often lead to frustration or result in a long-term strain on social relationships. “Our results suggest that citizens are aware of the potential social consequences of political discussions, as only 30 percent of all respondents generally like to talk about politics,” explains political scientist Manuel Neumann, who worked on the study at the chair of Professor Dr. Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck. “Only ten percent of all respondents have very positive attitudes towards political discussions when differences in opinion are to be expected or when discussing politics with acquaintances.” The results are based on surveys of 1,600 eligible voters from the city of Mannheim in the run-up to the 2017 federal election.

Personality has a greater influence than political views

The results show that citizens with a high level of interest in politics in particular enjoy political discussions. By contrast, affiliations to a political party and strong ideological positioning have no influence. Personality traits proved to be much more significant. Four factors play a role here: Generally, citizens with a low need for social affiliation, high social trust, high self-rated communication skills and a positive attitude towards conflict enjoy political discussions more. From this, the researchers conclude that the social dimension plays a more important role than the political dimension in explaining attitudes towards political conversations.

“Political discussions are first and foremost social situations in which interpersonal contacts need to be cultivated,” says Manuel Neumann. “When it comes to the question of whether we like to have political conversations or not, how we treat each other plays a greater role than our political views.”

The “MZES Focus” series is published at irregular intervals. You can subscribe to the series at fokus@mzes.uni-mannheim.de. The latest issue is available [here](#).

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