

# REPORT

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## THE AFD'S POLLING HIGH

**The WSI Labour Force Panel's current findings on  
willingness to vote for the AfD**

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### OVERVIEW

This report uses ten survey waves by the WSI Labour Force Panel to analyse the willingness to vote for the AfD against the backdrop of the AfD's current polling high.

In addition to voter migration, AfD voters are profiled in terms of their demographic and labour-related characteristics as well as their concerns, their confidence and their perspective on the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The report also analyses how new AfD voter groups differ from established regular voters on these points.

It is shown that the AfD has recently also appealed to voter groups that it was previously unable to reach and that differ from more established AfD voters. However, AfD voters are uniformly characterised as highly stressed, distrustful and highly concerned. Limiting immigration appears to be the unifying theme that also appeals to new groups of AfD voters who share other AfD positions less strongly and have not yet built up too much trust in the AfD.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The starting point for this report is the AfD's current survey high in the second half of 2023. Over the course of 2023, the AfD's popularity in the "Sonn-*tagsfrage*" (weekly poll) rose sharply and steadily. While its popularity was still just under 15 percent at the turn of the year, it rose to highs of over 20 percent by the summer (e.g., Tagesschau on 31/08/2023; ZDF heute on 14/07/2023). If only the eastern German federal states are considered, the AfD is clearly the strongest party there (see, e.g., Forsa survey in Handelsblatt on 7 June 2023). In surveys on state elections, the AfD even reaches shares of 30 percent or more in the eastern German states (see, e.g., infratest dimap 2023).

The causes are quickly identified in the media and are mostly sought in the dissatisfaction with the government work and communication of the parties in the "traffic light" coalition. Initial analyses by polling institutes on the AfD's high poll numbers showed that 35 percent of the new supporters who switched to the AfD in 2023 voted for one of the traffic light parties in the Bundestag elections (Forsa survey commissioned by RTL/ntv trend barometer, see Rheinische Post on 16/09/2023). Measured in terms of its lower share of the vote, the FDP's migration is the largest in relative terms in this survey. Compared to other parties, the FDP has therefore lost the largest share of its voters to the AfD. At the same time, the analysis showed that the CDU/CSU is the party from which most voters last switched to the AfD – 28 percent of new AfD voters stated that they had voted for the CDU/CSU in the Bundestag elections.

Voter migration to the AfD from the party spectrum, which is often referred to as the "*bürgerliches Lager*" (centre-right conservative camp), is often explained by greater political proximity, as significantly more respondents in the centre-right camp position themselves politically on the right than, for example, in the more "left-green camp". It also appears to be particularly relevant that leading politicians from the centre-right camp repeatedly pledge a political firewall against the AfD, but at the same time regularly share clearly right-wing populist positions, stylistic devices and vocabulary, such as when Friedrich Merz calls pupils of Arab origin "little pashas", accuses Ukrainian refugees of "social tourism" or indignantly complains that "German citizens" cannot get appointments at the dentist because rejected asylum seekers in Germany "sit at the doctor's and have their teeth re-done" (ZDF heute on 28/09/2023). However, studies show that the adoption of right-wing positions by established democratic parties does not weaken support for right-wing parties, but – on the contrary – actually benefits them (Krause et al. 2022; Dahlström/Sundell 2012; Mudde 2019). Radical right-wing and right-wing populist positions are thus upgraded and normalised. This is also referred to as

"mainstreaming" (e.g., Hainsworth 2000; Moffitt 2021; Brown et al. 2023), as right-wing positions are increasingly adopted by other political parties or integrated into the political mainstream, shifting the discourse further to the right. As voters then often prefer to vote for the original, right-wing parties benefit from this – in this case the AfD.

This report now uses data from the WSI Labour Force Panel to present further findings on the AfD's survey high in a largely exploratory manner. The WSI Labour Force Panel is particularly suitable for this purpose because, on the one hand, it has repeatedly surveyed the working population in Germany at ten points in time for over three years and can therefore track changes in respondents' attitudes. On the other hand, recent data are available here, which were last collected in July 2023, so that the AfD's recent gains in voter favour can also be included.

The underlying data from the WSI Labour Force Panel also show a significant increase in willingness to vote for the AfD.<sup>1</sup> While around two years ago, only eleven percent of respondents named the AfD as the party they would vote for if the Bundestag elections were held next Sunday, this figure has now risen to just under 23 percent. It should be noted that at no other time has the AfD received such a low level of support as at the time of the federal election in October 2021: approximately nine percent of respondents stated that they had voted for the AfD with their "Zweitstimme" – the vote relevant for the majorities in the Bundestag. The aim of this report, based on the data from the WSI Labour Force Panel, is to provide information about the AfD's rise in polls by contrasting AfD voters with voters of other parties and highlighting special features. The key question is: Who is disproportionately represented among AfD voters? Hence, the following topics were examined: socio-demographic and labour-related factors, trust in institutions, concerns and stress and, finally, how the pandemic and the war in Ukraine were viewed. The present panel dataset is particularly suitable for the latter topics, as the development of the attitudes of current AfD voters can be traced over time.

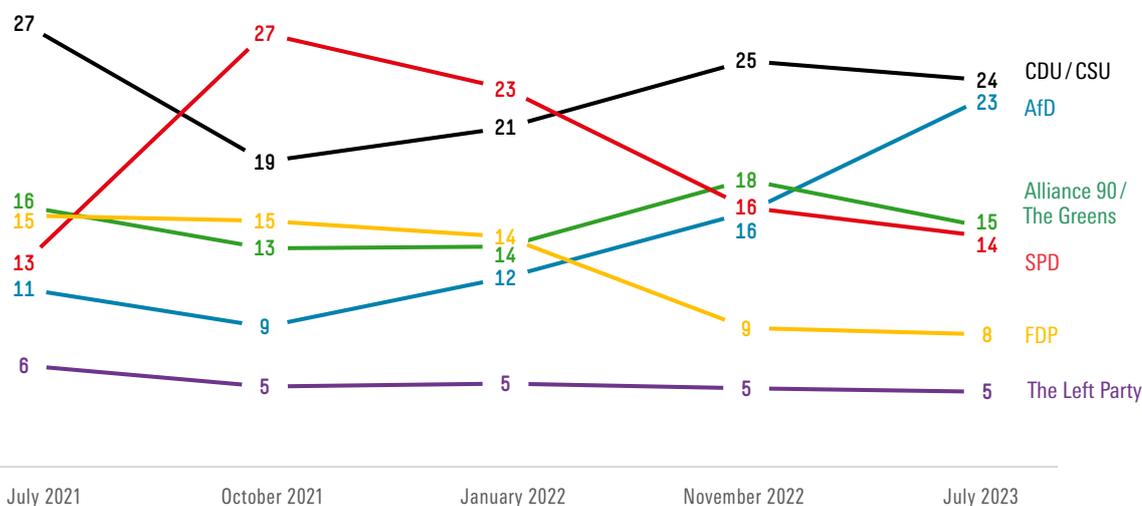
At the same time, the report goes one step further and attempts to find answers to the question as to what the recent growth in popularity among AfD voters can be attributed. A distinction is made between new AfD voters and more established AfD voter groups (including core AfD voters) on the ba-

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted here that the comparability between the actual electorate and the sample of the WSI Labour Force Panel is limited insofar as the WSI Labour Force Panel includes only people active in the labour force (i.e., employed and jobseekers) and therefore does not cover pensioners or students, for example. Nevertheless, the values are very close to those of survey institutes – based on the electorate (cf. averaged survey history of various survey institutes, dawum.de 2023).

### Distribution of votes in the Sonntagsfrage over time in the WSI Labour Force Panel

Figures in percent



**Notes:** Respondents who stated “abstention”, “n/a”, “not eligible to vote” or “don’t know” were not included; sample size: July 2021: 4,531, October 2021: 4,464, January 2022: 4,696, November 2022: 3,748, July 2023: 3,727.

In October 2021, the actual voting decision (second vote, i.e. “Zweitstimme” – the vote relevant for the majorities in the Bundestag in the Bundestag election) was surveyed; at the other time points, the intention to vote “if the Bundestag election were next Sunday” was surveyed.

Source: own calculation

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sis of the respondents’ voting preferences in previous survey waves. This raises the question of what current new AfD voters previously voted for and which parties they have now turned away from. Moreover, the report attempts to provide answers to the general core question of whether and how people who have recently switched to the AfD differ from more established AfD voter groups.

## 2 DATA: THE WSI LABOUR FORCE PANEL

The present analyses are based on a panel survey of the labour force in Germany conducted by VERIAN (formerly KANTAR) on behalf of the Institute of Economic and Social Research (WSI) of the Hans Böckler Foundation, which has now been conducted in ten survey waves in which (largely<sup>2</sup>) the same respondents were interviewed repeatedly (see Emmmler 2023; KANTAR 2022). The interviews were conducted as computer-assisted online interviews

(CAWI) with people in the labour force (i.e., employed and jobseekers) aged 16 and over.

The study started at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic with an initial survey in April 2020 with 7,677 respondents from the labour force. Two further survey waves followed in 2020, in June and November. The fourth and fifth waves were conducted in January/February 2021 and July 2021. A sixth wave took place in October 2021 and included a special set of questions about the Bundestag elections that had just taken place, including the question about the party chosen for the “Zweitstimme” – the vote relevant for the majorities in the Bundestag. A seventh survey wave was conducted in January 2022 – up to this point, the topic of the coronavirus pandemic, its effects and how to deal with it dominated the surveys.

In the eighth (April/May 2022) and ninth (November 2022) waves of the panel, the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine and the various associated consequences such as inflation, the energy crisis and the integration of refugees increasingly became the focus of the survey.

The tenth survey wave, the most relevant and most recent for the present analyses, took place between 29 June and 20 July 2023. Of the original 7,677 participants and the additional 1,142 self-employed persons who were drawn as part of a top-up sample for the fifth wave (see footnote 2), 5,029 respondents (57 percent) were recruited to participate again. Overall, the response rates in the WSI

<sup>2</sup> As self-employed workers were underrepresented in the initial sample, an additional “top-up sample” of 1,142 self-employed workers was drawn in the fifth survey wave to compensate for this. These respondents were contacted again in waves 7 to 10 (see Emmmler 2023).

Labour Force Panel can be classified as rather high, which is also evident from the participation of almost one in three (32 percent) of the initial sample. In addition, a rather low selectivity was recently determined for wave 9 – i.e., small deviations between target and actual specifications with regard to numerous characteristics of the respondents (Emmler 2023).

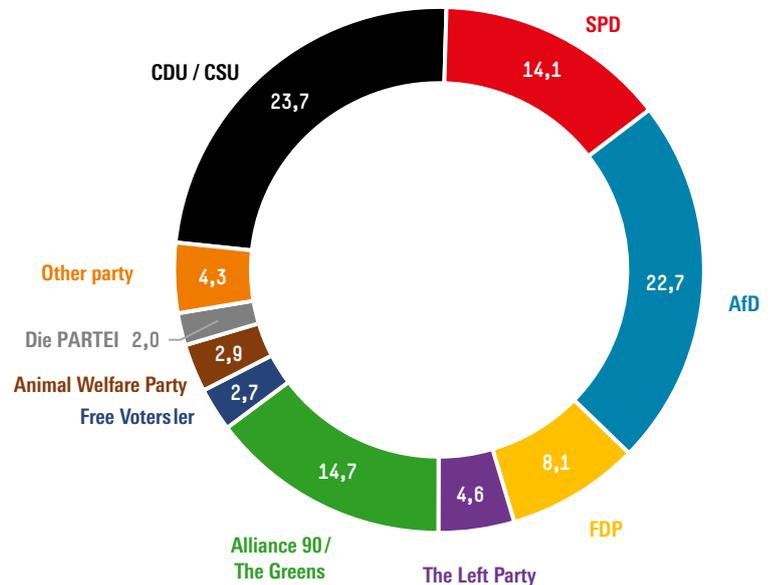
In order to make statements about the selection of respondents and ultimately about the coverage and representativeness of the sample, it is important in panel surveys to look at the initial sample of the first survey wave. This was based on a quota sample as part of an online access panel (see also KANTAR 2022). In all survey waves, the structural composition of the respondents was presented using fixed quotas according to the characteristics of age, gender, federal state (“Bundesland”) and education and additionally corrected retrospectively using weights. The quota specifications are based on target figures from official statistics so that the samples of the survey waves adequately represent the labour force according to these characteristics.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the Access Panel is not a random sample in the strict sense of the word, which is still considered the gold standard for collecting representative samples. The sample population includes only respondents who are members of the widespread Payback customer programme in the retail sector. However, as the number in this case is very large at around 31 million active Payback customers and more than one in two German households has a Payback card, the sample population is just as large as it is diverse. The Payback online access panel comprises around 130,000 active “panellists” who were recruited by mail. Due to the offline recruitment and the resulting very good coverage of central population structures at household level, detailed quotas can also be realised. Only the invited target persons can participate in the study; i.e., there is no possibility of self-recruitment. Multiple participation is also excluded (see Emmler 2023).

The recruitment method chosen has the advantage that certain population groups can be better represented and reached proportionally than is possible via telephone surveys due to the quota system. In addition, online surveys are much better suited to surveying dynamic situations such as the current crisis situations at short notice than lengthy and complex telephone samples. The majority of the respective survey waves could be carried out within a few days, meaning that the individual data from each survey wave is highly comparable and less dependent on daily political fluctuations. Furthermore, online samples achieve a high number of participants, which facilitates detailed analyses of certain subgroups, such as AfD voters in this case. In addition, the responses are checked for plausibility to ensure quality; i.e., only people with plausible responses are analysed.

### Vote distribution in the *Sonntagsfrage* for the current survey of the WSI Labour Force Panel

Figures in percent



**Notes:** Respondents who stated “would not vote”, “would vote invalidly”, “n/a”, “not eligible to vote” or “don’t know” were not included; sample size: July 2023: 3,727.

Source: own calculation

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## 3 AfD VOTING PREFERENCE

Voting preferences were surveyed in the WSI Labour Force Panel at five points in time. The so-called *Sonntagsfrage* was asked four times (in July 2021, January and November 2022 and July 2023): Which party would the respondents give their (second) vote to if there were a general election next Sunday? Shortly after the general election in October 2021, respondents were also asked about their actual voting behaviour by indicating to which party they had given their “Zweitstimme” – the vote relevant for the majorities in the Bundestag.

If we first take a look at how respondents answered the *Sonntagsfrage* in the most recent survey wave of the Labour Force Panel, the diagram shown in Figure 2 emerges:<sup>3</sup> The CDU/CSU would receive the most votes (23.7 percent), closely followed by the AfD (22.7 percent). The SPD and the Greens would each receive around 14 to 15 percent of votes; the FDP would receive 8.1 percent and the Left Party 4.6 percent.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that, in line with the procedure for a Bundestag election, the percentages shown are based on those respondents who also stated that they would vote for a party. Accordingly, respondents with the answer options “no answer”, “don’t know”, “would not vote” or “would vote invalidly” were not included in these analyses.

Figure 3

### AfD as voting preference over time, by East/West

Figures in percent



**Notes:** Respondents who stated “would not vote”, “would vote invalidly”, “n/a”, “not eligible to vote” or “don’t know” were not included, as well as respondents from Berlin due to unclear East/West allocation; sample size: July 2021: 4,531, October 2021: 4,464, January 2022: 4,696, November 2022: 3,748, July 2023: 3,727.

Source: own calculation

WSI

### 3.1 Development over time in East and West

As already shown in Figure 1, the percentage of respondents in the WSI Labour Force Panel who said they would vote for the AfD has also risen considerably in the last two years. Following a low of 8.6 percent for the 2021 federal election, almost 23 percent of respondents recently stated that they would vote for the AfD if the federal election were held on Sunday.

If this is broken down by east and west, as shown in Figure 3, it becomes clear that this increase has occurred to a similar extent for respondents in both eastern and western German states, but with different starting levels. While the percentage of AfD voters in eastern Germany rose from 17 percent two years ago to 36 percent today, the increase in western Germany was from nine percent to currently 21 percent.

### 3.2 New and more long-standing AfD voters

In the most recent survey wave (July 2023), 811 respondents in the WSI Labour Force Panel stated that they intended to vote for the AfD. These 811 respondents can be divided into new AfD voters, repeat AfD voters and core AfD voters based on their four previous answers to the *Sonntagsfrage* and their actual voting behaviour in the 2021 federal election (Figure 4). The focus of the report is on

new AfD voters, who are then analysed primarily in comparison to core AfD voters. New AfD voters are those who did not state in any of the four previous waves that they had voted or intended to vote for the AfD, i.e., those who have only recently started to state the AfD as their preferred party.<sup>4</sup> This applies to around one in four current AfD voters in the data. The group of repeat AfD voters listed below, mainly for reasons of comparison, includes those current AfD voters who have already voted for the AfD in one of the previous survey waves, but have also indicated a party different from their AfD choice in other waves.<sup>5</sup> At 38 percent of AfD voters, this is the largest group among current AfD voters. In addition, the group of core AfD voters<sup>6</sup> is considered, to which 28 percent of current AfD voters are assigned and which comprises those respondents who did not state anything other than AfD as their voting preference in any of the four previous survey waves.<sup>7</sup>

If we look at how this is broken down in the East and West, major differences become apparent, particularly in relation to the shares of new and regular voters, which are of particular interest here. In view of the fact that an AfD voting preference has been much more widespread in the East for some time now, it is obvious that the share of core AfD voters is higher there than in the West. In the East, 37 percent of current AfD voters stated that they had not voted for anything other than the AfD at any of the four previous survey dates. In the West, this share of core AfD voters is 25 percent. It is striking that a particularly large number of new AfD voters can be found among current AfD voters in the West (28 vs. 20 percent in the East). Among current AfD voters, the share of those who stated that they had never previously voted for the AfD is therefore higher in the West than in the East.<sup>8</sup>

4 At the same time, at least one valid value on voting preference from previous waves must be available in order to be considered a new AfD voter. Respondents who currently state their voting preference for the first time and indicate AfD are therefore not considered new voters, as their previous voting preference is completely unknown.

5 This includes non-voting, invalid voting as well as voting for a party other than the AfD.

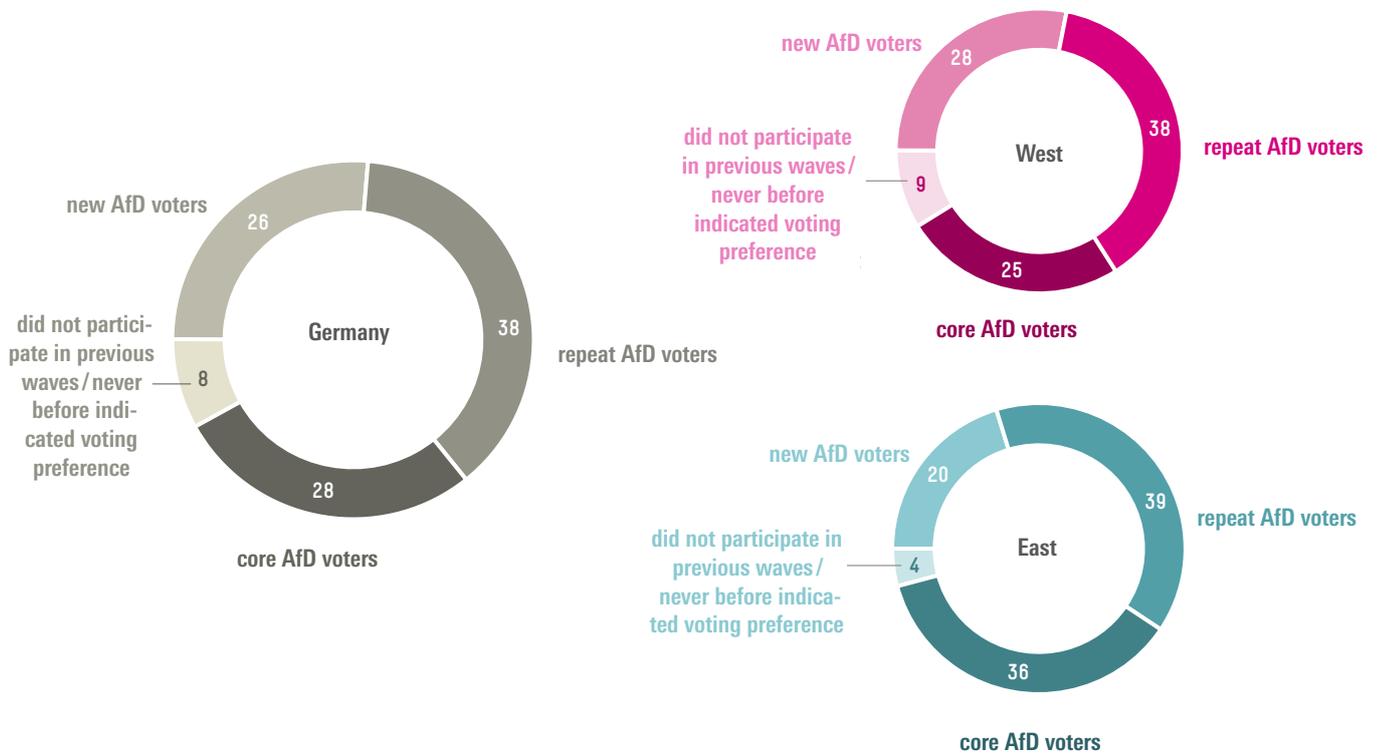
6 The AfD core voters are those who at no point in the survey gave a valid vote preference other than AfD. Including the most recent survey date, AfD must have been stated at least three times.

7 The fourth group shown in Figure 4 (eight percent of current AfD voters) comprises those working people who have currently indicated that they intend to vote for the AfD but have not previously given a valid indication of their voting preference. Accordingly, it is not possible to categorise them more precisely here, so this group is not considered further below.

8 It is important to bear in mind that if the overall AfD vote share is lower (as is the case in the West compared to the East), there is a greater chance that respondents have not previously voted for the AfD. In other words, the potential for new AfD voters is also greater in the West than in the East.

### Differentiation of current AfD voters according to previous AfD voting preference

Figures in percent



**Notes:** Berlin is not included in the west-east differentiation due to unclear allocation. Sample size (July 2023) Germany: 811, West: 583, East: 202.

Source: own calculation

### 3.3 Voter migration – what AfD voters voted for previously?

In order to analyse how the voting preference of current AfD voters has developed, two points in time can be used for comparison. First, the survey wave in October 2021 is relevant, as this is when the actual voting behaviour for the 2021 Bundestag election was surveyed. Second, the penultimate survey wave (conducted in November 2022) appears to be particularly relevant, as it allows the most recent waves of migration to the AfD to be traced and analysed.

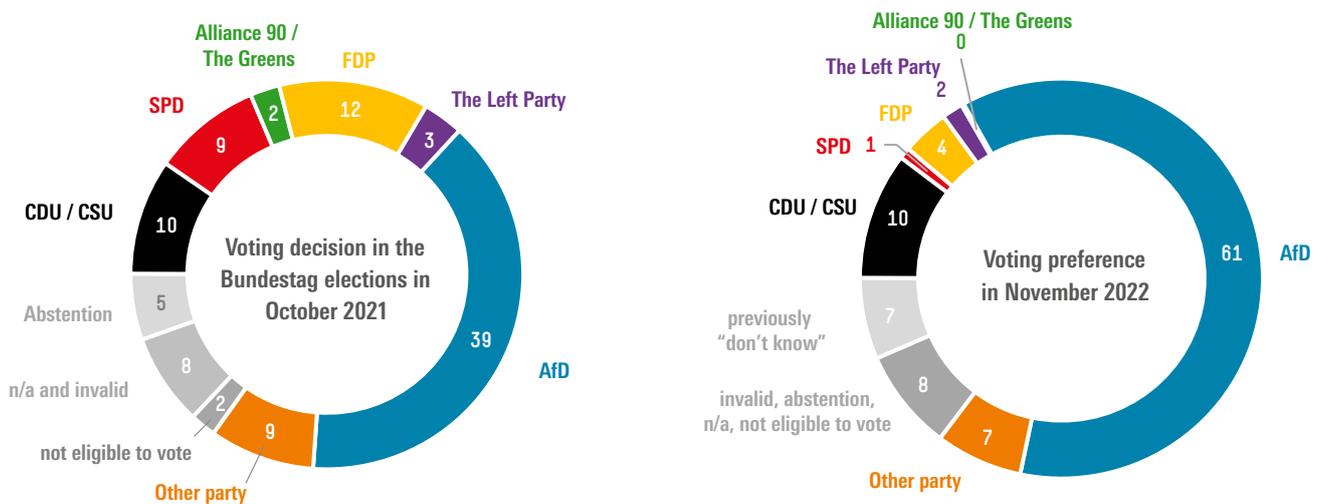
If we start with the information on the actual voting behaviour of current AfD voters in the 2021 federal election, we find the values shown in the left-hand ring diagram in Figure 5. It can be seen that just under 40 percent of respondents who have now stated that they will vote for the AfD have also done so in the 2021 federal election. Slightly less than half of current AfD voters (45 percent) stated shortly after the federal election that

they had voted for a party other than the AfD. The percentage of those who stated that they had not voted in the Bundestag election or had voted invalidly is much smaller in comparison. The AfD was therefore able to win over voters from other parties to a considerable extent. If we look at which parties the AfD has been able to gain supporters from since the 2021 federal election, the following picture emerges: current AfD voters come primarily from the FDP (twelve percent), the CDU/CSU (ten percent) and the SPD (nine percent), and less frequently from the Left or the Greens (three and two percent, respectively). These results are similar to the data presented at the beginning of a survey on voter migration, in which the CDU/CSU and FDP also showed the greatest migration to the AfD (Forsa survey commissioned by the RTL/ntv trend barometer, see Rheinische Post of 16/09/2023).

If we now take a look at the voting preferences expressed by current AfD voters in November 2022, we see that 61 percent already stated that they wanted to vote for the AfD (Figure 5, right dia-

## Previous voting decision and voting preference of current AfD voters

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Twelve percent of current AfD voters voted FDP in the 2021 federal election (left chart). Of current AfD voters, ten percent said they would vote CDU / CSU in November 2022 (right chart).

**Notes:** Only the cases that also took part in the two respective surveys were taken into account. Sample sizes: left: 585; right: 666.

Source: own calculation

WSI

gram). At the same time, it is clear that almost one in four current AfD voters today still stated in November 2022 that they would vote for a party other than the AfD. The largest share of these were the CDU/CSU (ten percent), followed by the FDP (four percent) – once again, the two parties that lost the largest share of their voters to the AfD compared to the 2021 federal election.<sup>9</sup>

In a second step, in order to learn more about recent voter migration to the AfD, Figure 6 focuses only on new AfD voters, i.e., respondents who only recently migrated to the AfD and did not previously vote for the AfD.<sup>10</sup> The ring diagram on the left shows that just under half of the respondents who recently switched to the AfD voted for one of the three traffic light parties in the 2021 federal election (FDP 21 percent, SPD 21 percent, Greens eight percent). However, the CDU/CSU is the par-

ty alliance that recently lost the largest number of voters to the AfD: 23 percent of current new AfD voters previously stated that they had voted for the CDU or CSU in the Bundestag election. If we add the eight percent of current new AfD voters who voted for the Left in the 2021 federal election, we see that four out of five of the respondents who recently switched to the AfD still voted for one of the five established democratic parties in the 2021 federal election.

In order to be able to better trace the development of migration, we now look at what the current new AfD voters have indicated as their voting preference in the interim between the Bundestag election and the current survey date (Figure 6, right diagram).<sup>11</sup> It turns out that almost one in three of them said they wanted to vote for the CDU or CSU in November 2022. A further 13 percent of new AfD voters previously stated that they intended to vote for the FDP. This makes it clear that a particularly large number of new AfD voters still wanted to vote for the CDU/CSU, and to a lesser extent for the FDP. However, this could also indicate that the CDU/CSU and, to a lesser extent, the FDP had

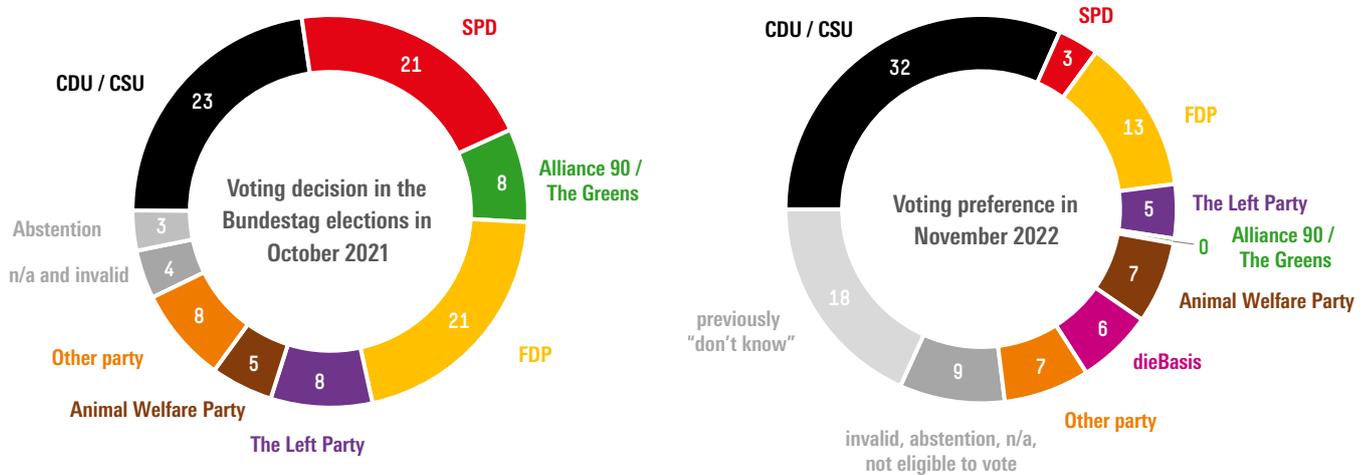
<sup>9</sup> It should be noted here that no statement can be made for a not inconsiderable percentage of current AfD voters with regard to their actual previous voting behaviour in October 2021 (N=226) and their voting preference in November 2022 (N=145), as they did not take part in the respective previous survey waves. These respondents were not included in Figure 5.

<sup>10</sup> The low number of cases must be taken into account here. With a total of 172 new AfD voters who took part in both waves relevant here, for example, the 23 percent of previous CDU/CSU voters stated are based on only 40 cases.

<sup>11</sup> It should also be borne in mind in these analyses that for a not inconsiderable percentage of respondents no information is available on their previous party preference. Those respondents who did not take part in the previous waves were excluded from this analysis (N=55 & 41).

### Previous voting decision and voting preference of current new AfD voters

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Of the current AfD voters, 21 percent voted SPD in the 2021 federal election (left chart). In November 2022, 32 percent of current AfD voters stated that they intended to vote for the CDU/CSU (right chart).

**Notes:** Only the cases that also took part in the two respective surveys were taken into account. Sample sizes: left chart: 172; right chart: 186.

Source: own calculation

to cope with their migration to the AfD, especially in recent months, as many of the recent AfD voters had apparently not yet turned away from the CDU/CSU or the FDP at the end of 2022. By contrast, the picture is different for SPD and Green voters, who appear to have lost their voters in the first year of the legislative period in particular, but hardly any more since November 2022.

The figures relating to the Greens appear to be particularly remarkable here. Approximately eight percent of new AfD voters are former Green voters – a figure that appears relatively low in comparison with other parties, but is worth mentioning in that former Green voters are otherwise hardly or not at all to be found among AfD voters (see Figure 5 left). In other words, the AfD has recently made inroads into a group of voters that it had previously barely reached, if at all. In addition, the analysis indicates that these respondents who switched from the Greens probably did not switch directly to the AfD, but indicated another party preference in the meantime, as in November 2022 none of the respondents who had recently switched to the AfD indicated that they wanted to vote for the Greens.

Taken together, this shows that the AfD was able to win over former CDU/CSU, SPD and FDP voters in particular relative to the 2021 federal election. However, if the voting intention in November 2022 is also taken into account, it is also striking that in recent months it is mainly the CDU/CSU (and to a

lesser extent the FDP) that has lost supporters to the AfD, while the SPD's migration losses probably date back farther and can be located in the last eight months since the previous survey wave only in the rarer cases.

## 4 A PROFILE OF CURRENT AFD VOTERS

In order to shed light on the AfD's current electorate, seven areas are discussed in more detail in separate sub-chapters: socio-demographic composition (4.1), work-related characteristics (4.2), trust in institutions (4.3), reported concerns and stressors (4.4), the relevance of issues expressed (4.5) and a look at the pandemic (4.6) and the war in Ukraine (4.7).

The findings are presented in two steps throughout: first, the findings are presented for the entire current AfD electorate in order to show how the characteristics are distributed among all AfD voters. Next, the distinction between AfD voter groups introduced at the beginning is taken up and a special focus is placed on new AfD voters in order to obtain information on the factors that make up the AfD's recent survey high. In particular, the differences between new voters and regular AfD voters are emphasised. Any differences that

arise are tested for statistical significance in three comparisons and reported under the respective figures: Do AfD voters differ from voters of other parties (1.), do new AfD voters differ from voters of other parties (2.) and do new AfD voters differ from core AfD voters (3.)<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1 Socio-demographics

Socio-demographic variables have shown different correlations and effects on AfD voting preference in previous studies. Some found them to be particularly prevalent among middle-aged people (Decker 2016; Dilling 2018; Arzheimer/Berning 2019), among men (Schmitt-Beck 2017; Dilling 2018; Goerres et al. 2018) or among people with higher educational qualifications (Berbair et al. 2015; Berning 2017; Lengfeld 2017). In contrast, other studies (Lux 2018; Rippl/Seipel 2018; Hambauer/Mays 2018) found AfD sympathisers more among the poorly educated and people on low incomes; such findings were often interpreted in connection with the “modernisation loser” thesis, which explains right-wing party preference as a reaction to a loss of status as a result of social modernisation (Spier 2010). It is not insignificant that these differences can also be attributed to the respective study designs and model specifications, for example, to the control and inclusion of various indicators. Other studies (Hansen/Olsen 2019, Wurthmann et al. 2021, Hansen/Olsen 2022, Adena/Huck in progress) found rather small influences of socio-demographic variables on AfD voting preference, especially when other attitudinal indicators are taken into account and controlled for in the models.

This study is limited to bivariate analyses without controlling for the effect of other variables. In other words, a comparison is made only as to whether the AfD voting preference is more widespread in one group than in another, without taking other indicators such as level of education, income or East/West place of residence into account at the same time. In order to analyse socio-demographic factors, gender, school-leaving qualification, age,

household income<sup>13</sup>, the presence of financial reserves and parenthood<sup>14</sup> are taken into account.

#### Who are the AfD voters?

Socio-demographic peculiarities can be observed in the current AfD electorate in the WSI Labour Force Panel (Figure 7). The percentage of men among current AfD voters is clearly and significantly higher and the percentage of respondents with a higher-level secondary school diploma (*Abitur*) is significantly lower. There is also an above-average percentage of middle-aged working people aged between 30 and 49 among AfD voters. It is also striking that parents with children in their own household are significantly more likely to be found among AfD voters than among voters of other parties; this applies equally to fathers and mothers.<sup>15</sup>

There are also relevant differences with regard to the financial situation of respondents: respondents in households with lower and middle incomes are more likely than average to vote for the AfD. The same applies to respondents who state that they currently have no financial cushion.

#### Who are the new AfD voters?

If one differentiates between the previous voting preferences of current AfD voters and adds the distinctions introduced in Section 3.2 between core AfD voters, repeat AfD voters and new AfD voters, the following conspicuous features emerge (Figure 8).

In terms of gender differences, it can be seen that the more established the AfD voting decision is, the greater is the share of men in the group. Specifically, this figure is 73 percent among regular AfD voters, while it is 61 percent among new AfD voters. The above-average percentage of men among AfD voters as a whole is therefore attributable in particular to more established voter groups and not to new voters; among the latter, the percentage of men is not significantly higher than among voters of other parties. Compared to more established AfD voter groups, new AfD voters are therefore relatively strongly female overall.

There are also peculiarities in the age composition of new AfD voters. While the more estab-

12 Group differences do not necessarily represent statistically significant differences; i. e. differences that are highly likely to exist not only in the sample, but also among the labour force in Germany as a whole. To test this, single-factor variance analyses with Duncan post-hoc tests are carried out. Differences with a probability of error of more than five percent are considered not statistically significant (“n.s.”) in the following. The exact significance level of the respective tests is indicated below the figures: probabilities of error below five percent are marked with an \*, below one percent with \*\* and below 0.1 percent with \*\*\*. For example, in the case of the gender comparison in Figure 7, the information “AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: Men > Women\*\*\*” means that men are significantly more represented among AfD voters than women compared to voters of other parties.

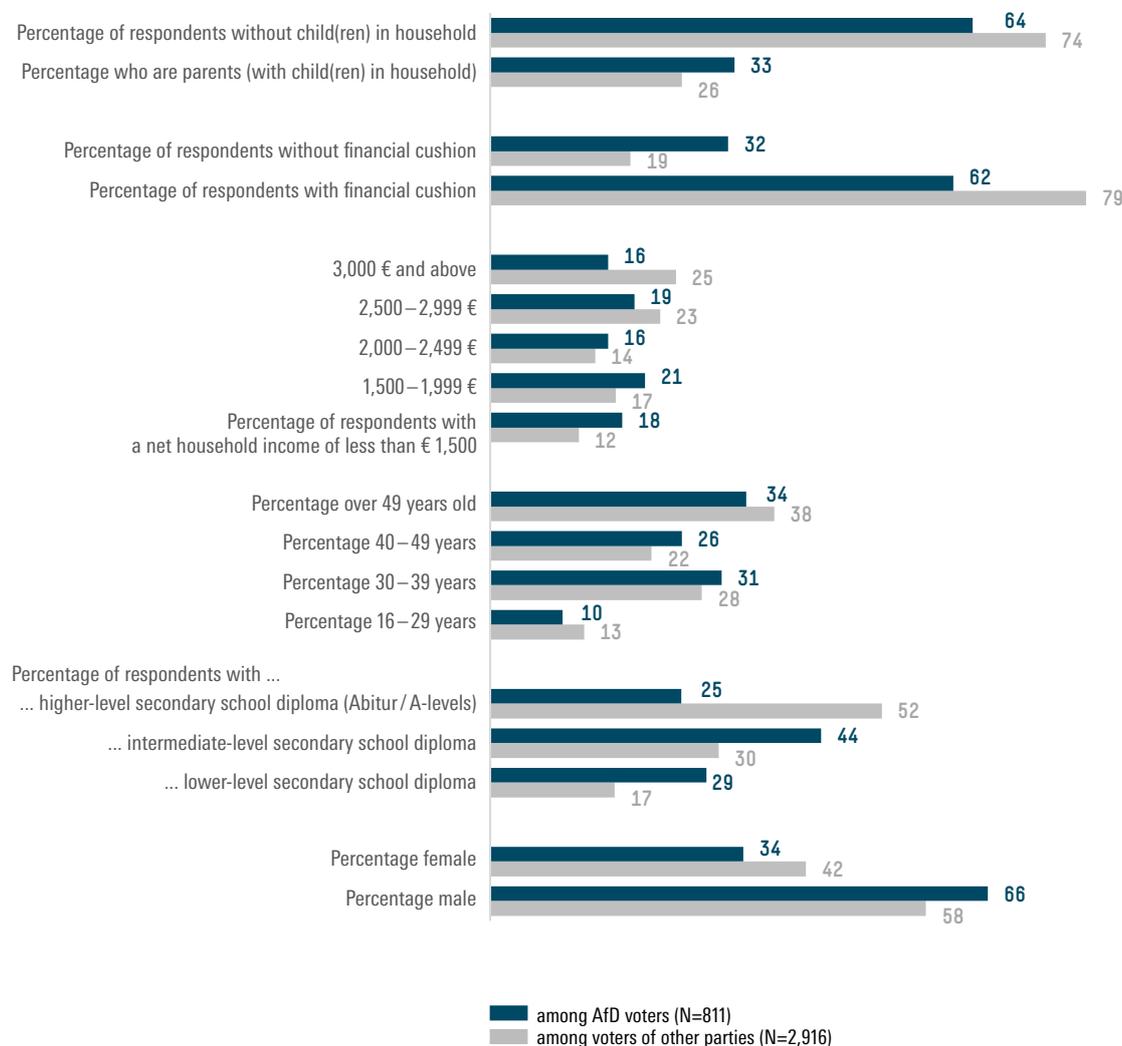
13 The household income was calculated as a needs-weighted monthly household net equivalent income in order to take the household size into account as well.

14 Parenthood was measured by asking whether the respondent lives with child(ren) in the same household.

15 The parent effect is also not due to the increased AfD voting preference in certain, for example younger, age groups, as it also occurs when age is statistically controlled for. Parents in several age groups state that they vote for the AfD more often than similarly aged respondents without children in the household. This applies, for example, in the age groups of 16–29-year-olds and 30–39-year-olds.

### Percentage of the respective socio-demographic group, by voting preference

Figures in percent



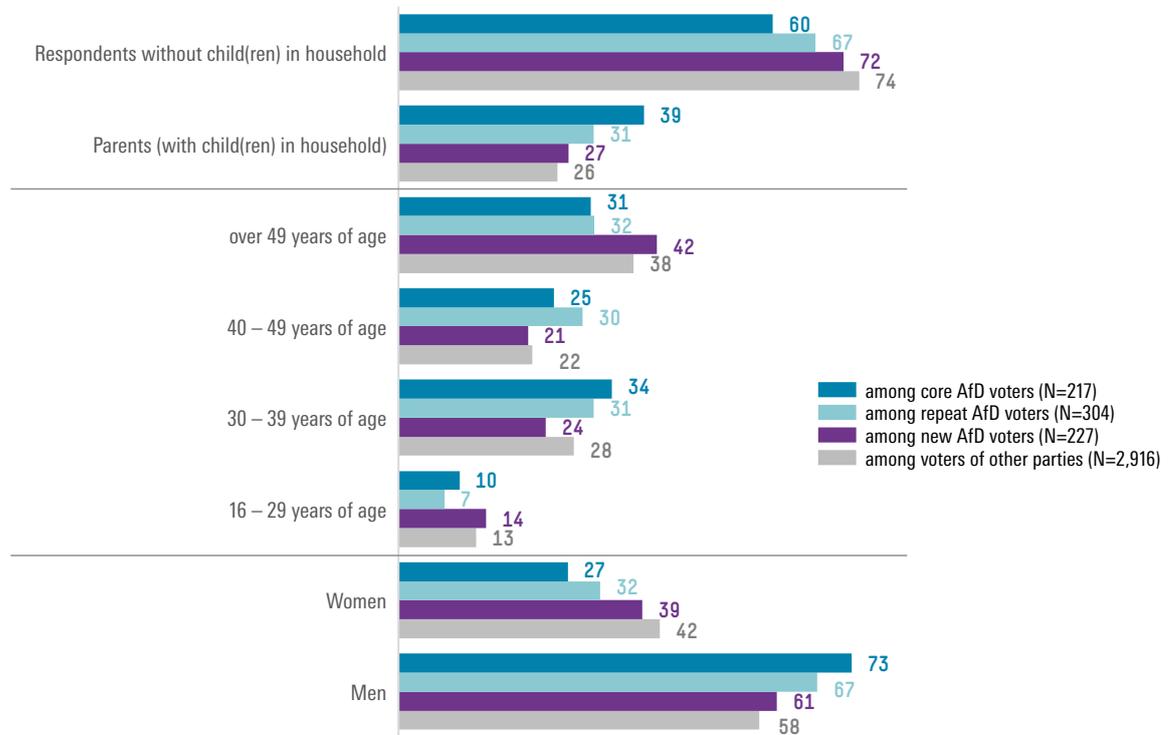
**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, the percentage that are male is 66 percent and the percentage that are female is 34 percent.

Among voters of other parties, 58 percent are men and 42 percent are women.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: men > women\*\*\*; other > Abitur\*\*\*; lower-level secondary school > intermediate-level secondary school\*; 16–29Y < 30–49Y\*\*, over 49Y < 40–49Y\*; 2,500- € > 3,000+ €\*\*\*, 1,500- € > 2,500-2,999 €\*\*\*, 2,000- € > 2,500+ €\*\*; without cushion > with cushion\*\*\*; parents > without children\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

### Percentage of the respective socio-demographic group, by voting preference

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among core AfD voters, the percentage who are male is 73 percent, while it is 61 percent among new AfD voters and 58 percent among voters of other parties.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all n.s.; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: Women\*\*, 16–29Y and over 49Y > 306–39Y\*; respondents without children\*\*, \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

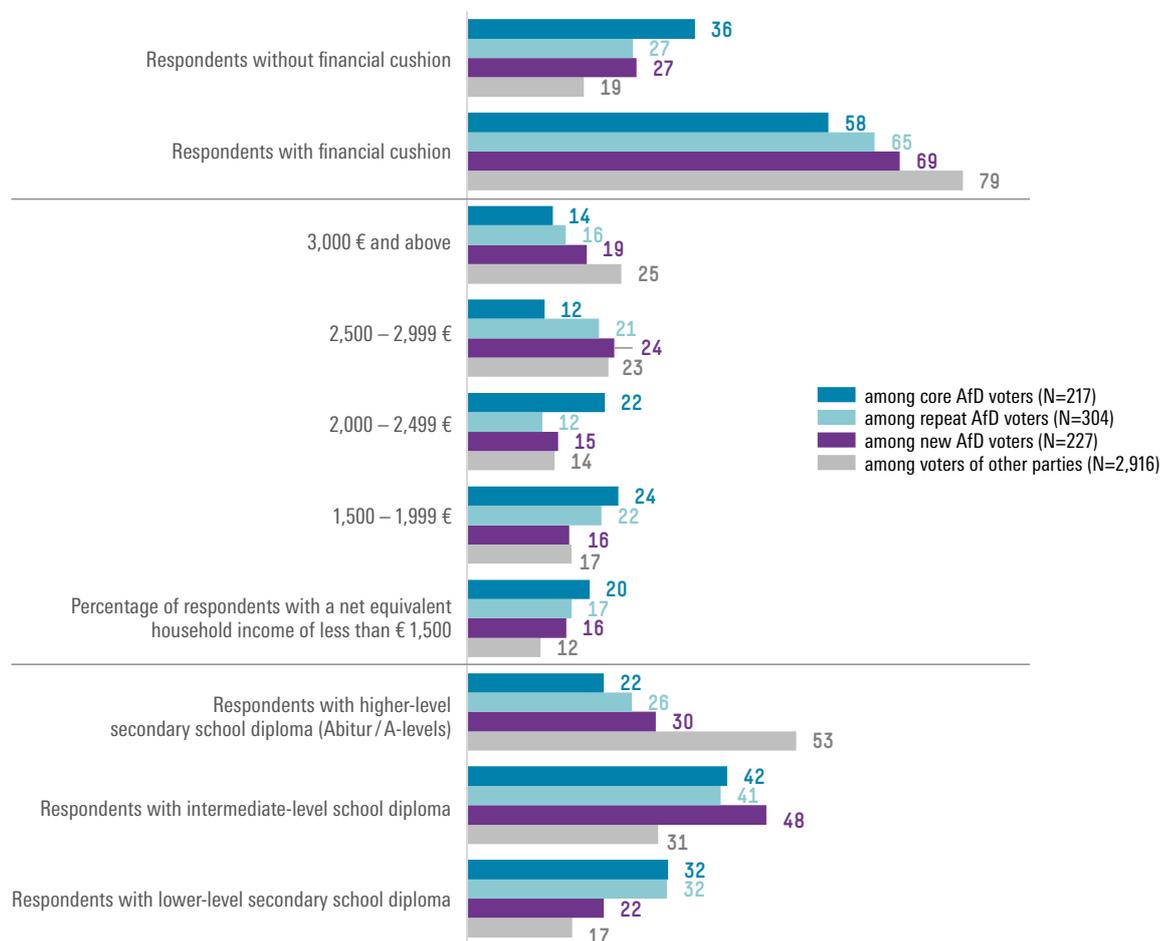
lished AfD voter groups stand out with age compositions that differ significantly from the overall average (repeat AfD voters mainly 40–49-year-olds; core AfD voters mainly 30–39 years), the age composition of new AfD voters is in many respects more similar to the age composition of the entire labour force. Compared to regular AfD voters, this means that new AfD voters are significantly more likely to be made up of the oldest (> 49 years) and the youngest (16–29 years) members of the labour force. The current and recently published Mitte study (Zick et al. 2023) also pointed to the strikingly high approval ratings for right-wing extremist and Group-focused Enmity attitudes in the youngest age group. In the available data, the percentage of the youngest age group among new AfD voters is

not higher than among voters of other parties, but new AfD voters are significantly more likely to be in the youngest age group than core AfD voters. In addition, it can be seen that the increased voting preference for the AfD among parents reported above is not attributable to the group of new AfD voters. Unlike among core AfD voters, for example, parents are not found in above-average numbers among new AfD voters.

Looking at school diplomas, we can see that new AfD voters are more frequently made up of respondents with higher-level diplomas than is the case for more established AfD voter groups (Figure 9): Most recently, an above-average number of respondents (in relation to more established AfD voter groups, but also to the rest of the labour

### Percentage of the respective socio-demographic group, by voting preference

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among core AfD voters, 22 percent have achieved a high-level secondary school diploma (Abitur / A-levels), while 30 percent of new AfD voters have and 53 percent of voters from other parties have.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: other degrees > higher-level secondary school (Abitur)\*\*\*; 1,500- € > 3,000+ €\*; without cushion > with cushion\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: higher degrees > lower-level secondary school diploma\*; 2,500+ € > 1,500-2,500 €\*, with financial cushion\*; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

force) with an intermediate-level secondary school diploma (or polytechnic secondary school diploma) switched to the AfD, while the percentage of respondents with a lower-level secondary school diploma is lower among new voters than among more established AfD voter groups. The percentage of higher-level secondary school graduates among all AfD voter groups is significantly below average compared to voters of other parties.

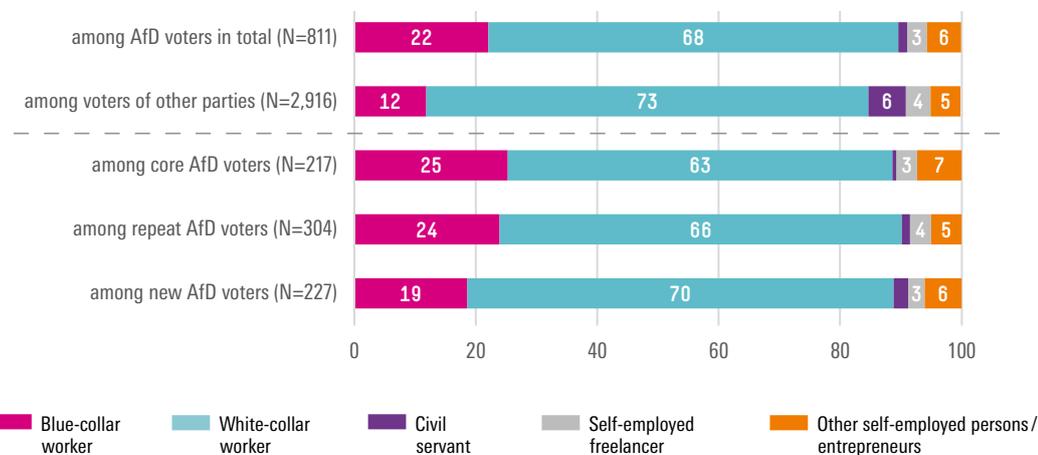
There is also a tendency to recognise that new AfD voters also differ from more established AfD

voter groups in terms of their financial resources. This can be seen in the fact that respondents with higher middle and high incomes and respondents with a financial cushion are also more likely to be found among new AfD voters than among more established AfD voter groups, which are more often made up of respondents with lower and lower-middle income groups.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the percentage of respondents with a financial cushion is significantly higher among voters of oth-

### Percentage of respondents per occupation, by voting preference

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, 22 percent describe themselves as blue-collar workers, while the share among voters of other parties is 12 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: blue-collar worker > civil servant, white-collar worker, self-employed freelancer\*\*\*, white-collar worker > civil servant\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: blue-collar worker > civil servant\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: ns.; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

er parties than among new AfD voters; in other words, the AfD recently appealed to slightly more affluent groups only relative to its previous electorate, but not relative to people who vote for other parties.

## 4.2 Labour and voting preference for AfD

The fact that work is an important place of democratic integration and that working conditions play an important role in this has recently been empirically demonstrated once again by looking at the spread of illiberal, right-wing authoritarian, anti-democratic attitudes (Hövermann et al. 2022, Zhirnov et al. 2023). In the following, we take a closer look at a voting preference for the AfD in light of the question: How and under what conditions do the labour force who vote for the AfD work? Both the structural and the personally perceived working conditions of the respondents are analysed.

### Structural working conditions

Looking first at how the activities are distributed among the different voting preferences (Figure 10), one activity group in particular is represented with above-average frequency among AfD voters com-

pared to voters of other parties, as in other previous studies (e.g., Kroh/Fetz 2016, Hertel/Esche 2019): Blue-collar workers (22 vs. twelve percent). The percentage of civil servants among AfD voters is significantly below average. Compared to voters of other parties, AfD voters are also significantly more likely to be unemployed than employed (Figure 11).

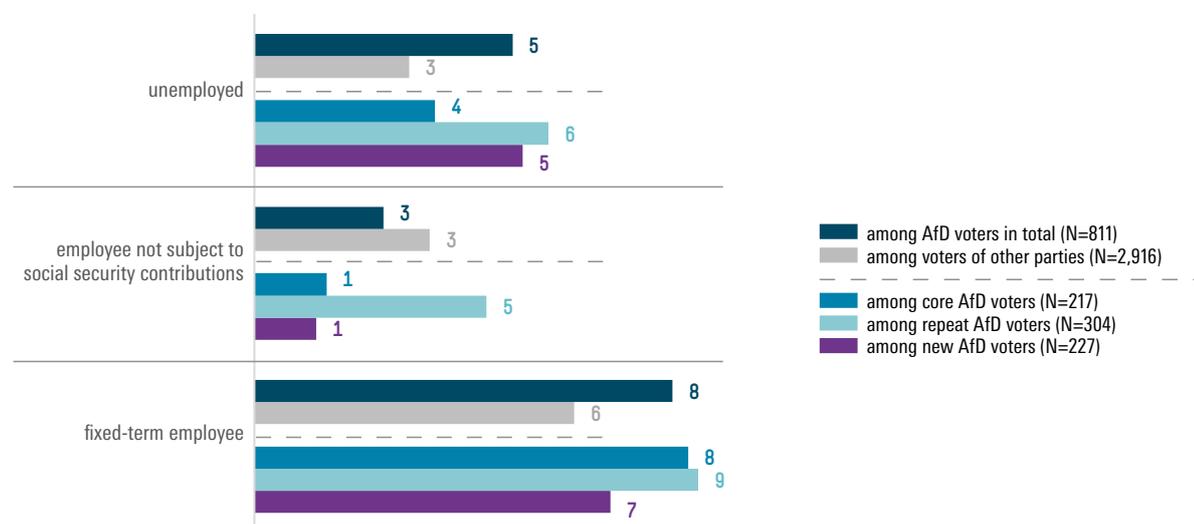
If one differentiates between the AfD voter groups, it becomes clear that there are also more workers among new AfD voters than among voters of other parties. New AfD voters are also similar to more established AfD voter groups in terms of other structural working conditions such as fixed-term contracts or social security status.

A similar number of AfD voters have a works council as voters of other parties (Figure 12).<sup>16</sup> However, a staff council is significantly less common

<sup>16</sup> With regard to the findings presented below on the prevalence of works councils/staff councils and collective agreements, it must be taken into account that so-called composition effects are particularly relevant here and cannot be ruled out: i.e., that a finding can be attributed to a specific composition of a group that is also associated with an increased voting preference for the AfD. For example, composition effects would be present if an increased percentage of AfD voters among respondents with a works council could be attributed in particular to the fact that respondents with a works council differ in important aspects of voting preference from respondents without a works council. The higher percentage of blue-collar workers, for example, should be mentioned here.

**Percentage of unemployed, employees not subject to social security contributions and fixed-term employees, by voting preference**

Figures in percent



**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: unemployed\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: ns.; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: ns.; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

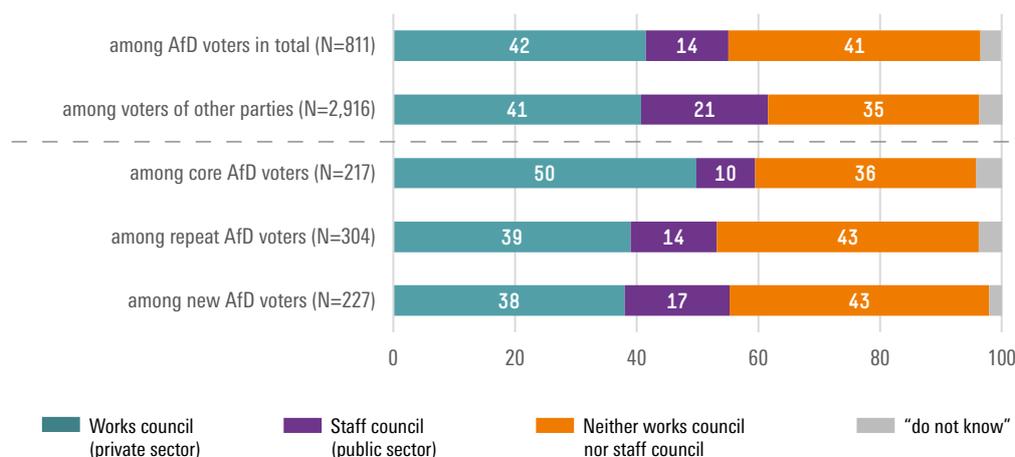
Source: own calculation



Figure 12

**Prevalence of works council/staff council among respondents, by voting preference**

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, 41 percent state that they have neither a works council nor a staff council; among voters of other parties, the figure is 35 percent.

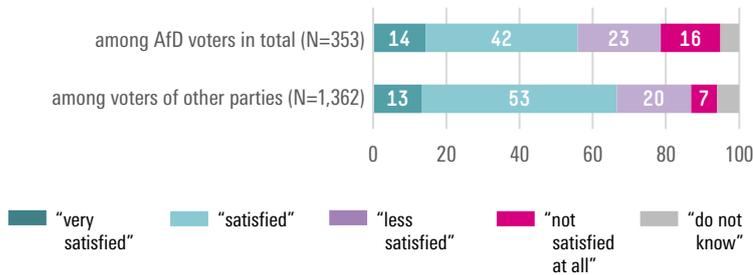
**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: no works council or staff council > works council or staff council\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: no works council or staff council > works council or staff council\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: staff council > works council\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



Figure 13

**Satisfaction with the work of the works council / staff council, by voting preference**  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters with works / staff councils, 16 percent say they are “not at all” satisfied with the work of their works / staff council; among voters of other parties with works / staff councils, the figure is 7 percent.

**Notes:** Only respondents with works council / staff council; wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: not at all satisfied with works council / staff council > other answers\*\*\*, \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



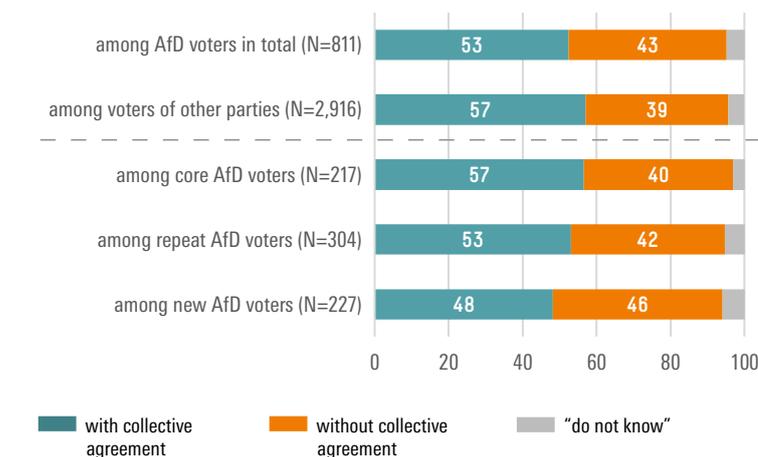
among AfD voters. Overall, the share of the labour force who have no access to a works council or staff council is therefore significantly higher among AfD voters. If we look at new AfD voters, the share of labour force members who do not have access to works or staff councils is also higher among them than among voters of other parties. It is also striking that new AfD voters differ from core voters in that they are significantly more likely to be respondents with a staff council and less likely to have a works council. This is due to the high percentage of workers with a works council among core AfD voters.

If, in a further step, we focus only on those employees with a works or staff council and look at their satisfaction with the work of the works or staff council (Figure 13), it is noticeable that AfD voters were dissatisfied more frequently than average (39 vs. 27 percent among voters of other parties).<sup>17</sup> In particular, the percentage of those who state that they are “not at all” satisfied with the work of the works council is more than twice as high among AfD voters as among voters of other parties.

Among AfD voters, works and staff councils are therefore slightly less common, but there is a more widespread dissatisfaction with their work among them. A further interpretation of the cause of dissatisfaction appears difficult. First, the dissatisfaction could be due to the fact that works and staff councils do not fulfil their function of representing the interests of the workforce and shaping and implementing real changes well, possibly also due to a lack of rights and opportunities to shape the works council / staff council or due to obstructions of the work of the works council / staff council. Second, the findings may also indicate that the works councils and staff councils in these cases are doing their job and are committed to the interests of the workforce, but that this is not necessarily in the interests of AfD voters, who are dissatisfied with the potentially AfD-critical political orientation of the works councils and staff councils. Irrespective of this, however, AfD voters are more likely than voters of other parties to have to do without a works or staff council that represents their interests.

The prevalence of collective agreements among the labour force provides a similar picture (Figure 14): AfD voters are significantly less likely to have access to a collective labour agreement than voters of other parties. This also applies to new voters of the party, but not to its core voters.<sup>18</sup>

**Prevalence of collective agreements among respondents, by voting preference**  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, 43 percent state that they do not have a collective agreement; among voters of other parties, the figure is 39 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: without collective agreement > with collective agreement\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: without collective agreement > with collective agreement\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: n. s.; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation

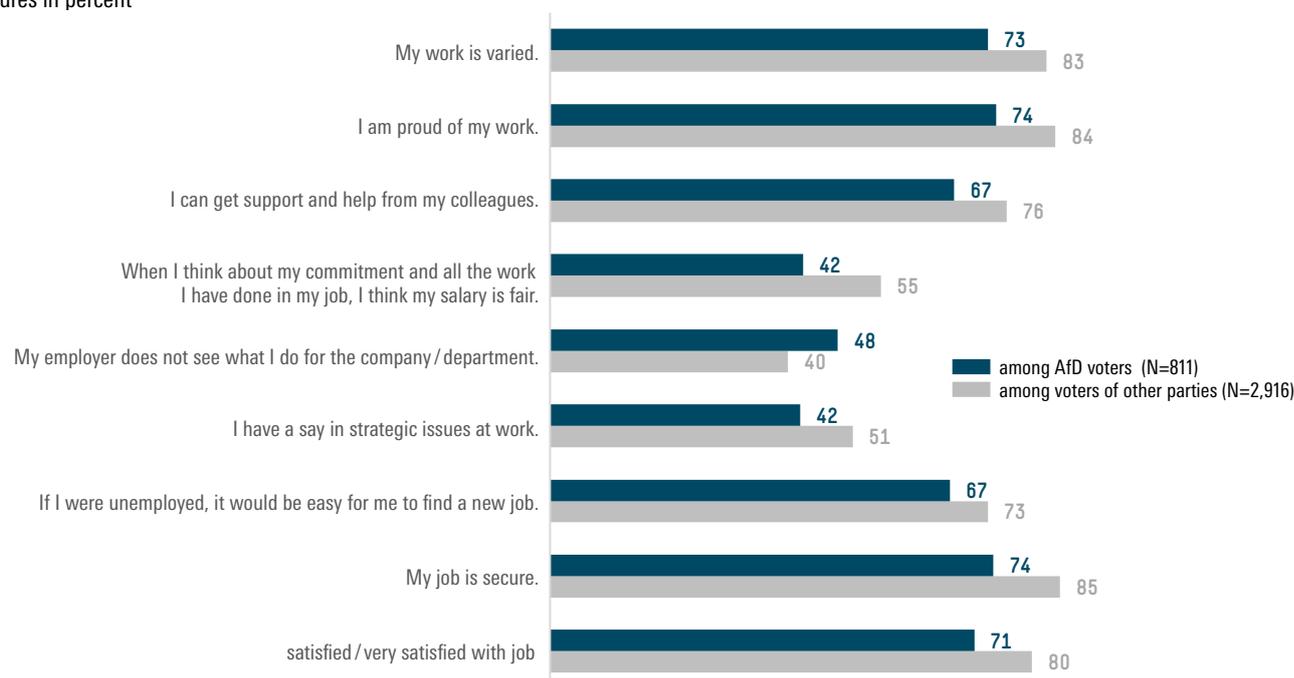


<sup>17</sup> A breakdown by AfD voter groups is not meaningful here, as the restriction of the consideration of respondents with a works council / staff council leads to very small sample size in this case (N<100).

<sup>18</sup> As with the works council finding among AfD voters, this is due to the relatively high percentage of blue-collar workers among core AfD voters, who are also more likely to have a collective agreement.

### Agreement with statements on working conditions, by voting preference

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, 71 percent say they are satisfied or very satisfied with their work; among voters of other parties, the figure is 80 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: dissatisfied with job\*\*\*; job insecure\*\*\*; difficult to find new job\*; no opportunities to have a say\*\*\*; employer does not see performance\*\*\*; salary not adequate\*\*\*; no support from colleagues\*\*\*; not proud\*\*\*; not varied\*\*\*; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

### Subjectively perceived working conditions and recognition

In addition to the objective working conditions, the latest survey wave of the WSI Labour Force Panel also asked respondents to make several statements on subjectively perceived working conditions. Aspects such as recognition, dignity and pride, but also variety, employee voice and security were addressed. Earlier studies had already shown a connection between a lack of dignity and poor working conditions to a voting preference for the AfD and the occurrence of right-wing populist, anti-democratic attitudes (Schwuchow 2023; Hövermann et al. 2022).

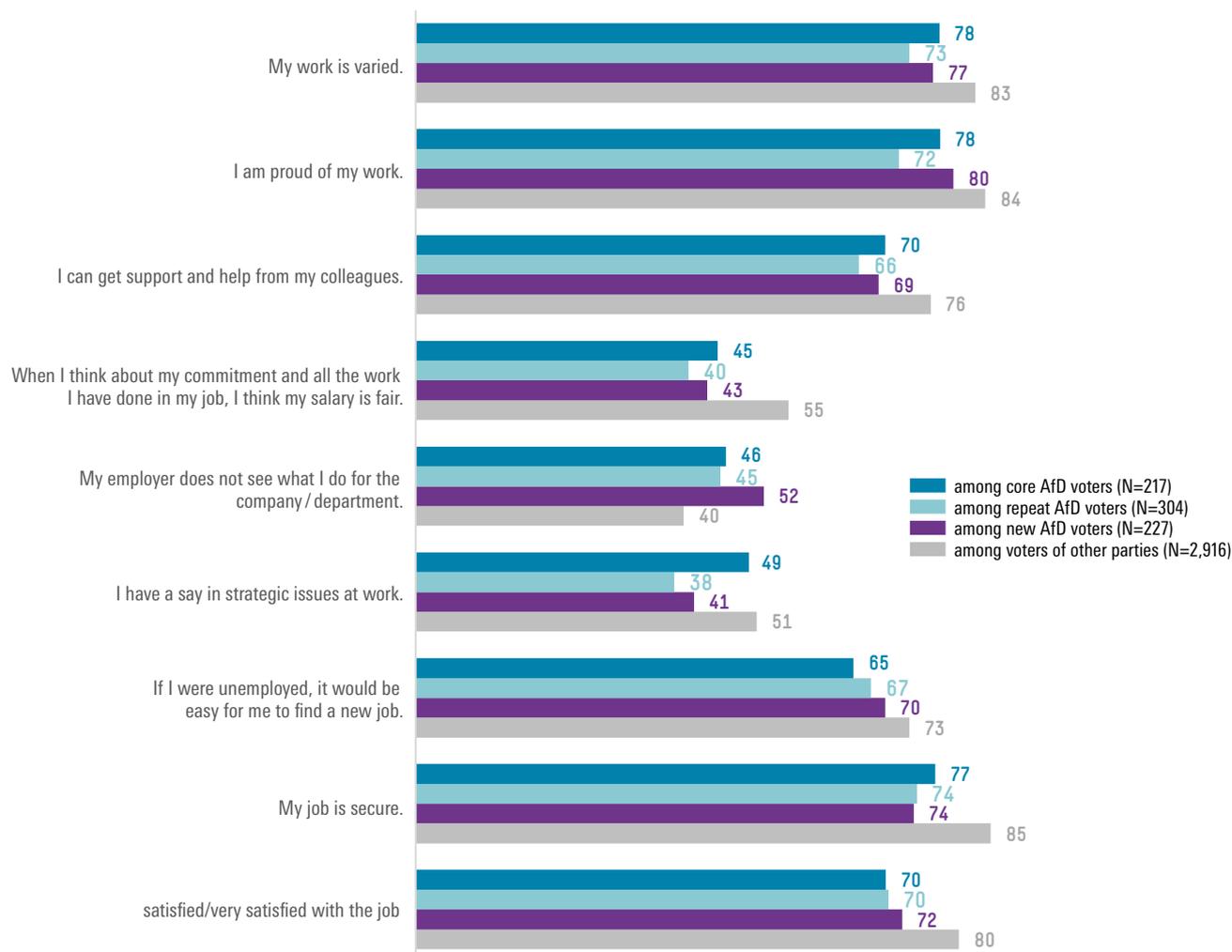
In this study, AfD voters are now more likely than average to indicate that their working conditions are perceived as inadequate. All aspects of good working conditions surveyed are stated significantly less frequently by AfD voters than by voters of other parties (Figure 15): They are almost twice as likely as voters from other parties to describe their job as insecure (18 vs. 10 percent) and almost twice as likely to feel no pride in their work (18 vs. 11 percent). In the event of unemployment, they rate their chances on the labour market

as worse and are less likely than voters from other parties to report that their work is varied, that they have a say in strategic issues at work or that they can get support and help from colleagues. The differences are also particularly striking when it comes to recognition: AfD voters are significantly more likely to believe that their achievements are not recognised (48 vs. 40 percent among voters of other parties). They are also significantly less likely to feel that their pay is commensurate with their achievements (42 vs. 55 percent). All in all, one in four AfD voters report that they are only “slightly” or “not at all” satisfied with their job; among voters of other parties, this figure is only one in six.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Although it cannot be completely ruled out that these reported differences are due to structural causes in the composition of AfD voters – for example, that AfD voters work particularly frequently in certain professions or economic sectors that are also more frequently associated with certain working conditions – this does not tend to be evident in the data. For example, the widespread prevalence of poorer working conditions among AfD voters can be seen even when only workers are considered – i. e., when workers who vote for the AfD are compared with workers who say they vote for another party.

### Agreement with statements on working conditions, by AfD voter group

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among core AfD voters, 70 percent say they are satisfied or very satisfied with their job; among new AfD voters the figure is 72 percent and among voters of other parties 80 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: dissatisfied with job\*\*; job insecure\*\*\*; no opportunities to have a say\*; employer does not see performance\*\*\*; salary not adequate\*\*\*; no support from colleagues\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: all n.s.; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

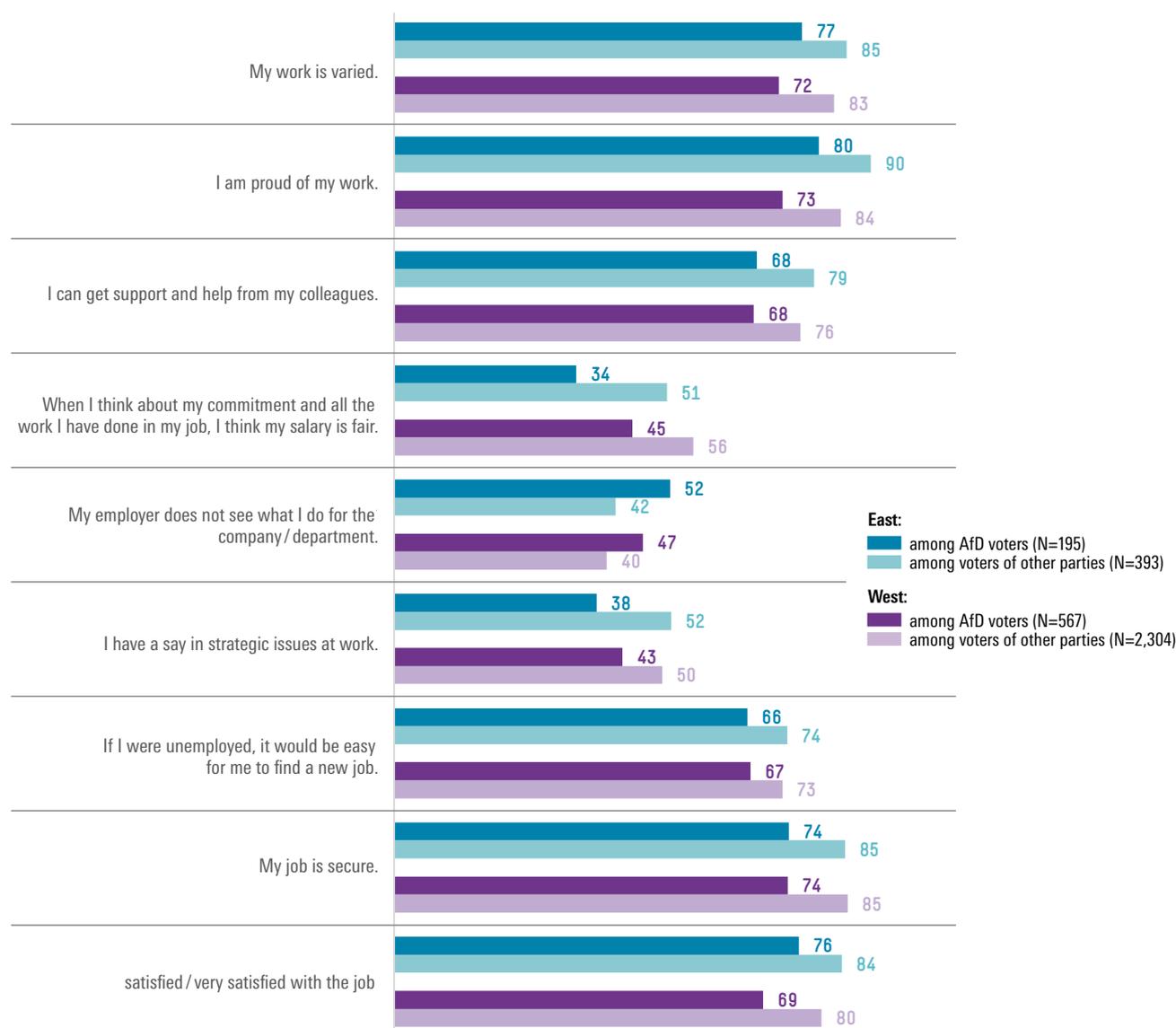
If we now differentiate within the AfD electorate (Figure 16), we can see that new AfD voters are similar to the more established AfD voter groups in many respects with regard to (poor) working conditions. They are significantly less likely than voters from other parties to have a say in their workplace and less likely to receive help from their colleagues, and they are more likely to perceive their workplace as unsafe and to be dissatisfied with it. What also stands out for new AfD voters is that, at just under 52 percent, they report with a significantly above-average frequency that their employer does not see their commitment and performance. Finally, the finding that – regardless of whether core AfD voters or new voters – only a minority consider their

own salary to be appropriate in view of the work they have done is striking in its consistency.

It is also worth taking a look at east-west differences (Figure 17). Although AfD voters in both East and West report poor working conditions more frequently than voters of other parties, there are differences in terms of what is reported as poor. In the West, for example, AfD voters are significantly less likely to be satisfied with their job and significantly less likely to be proud of their own work. In the East, however, AfD voters are significantly more likely than in the West to report that their salary is too low. There are no differences between East and West when it comes to job security, support options or labour market opportunities.

### Agreement with statements on working conditions in East and West, by voting preference

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** 77 percent of AfD voters in eastern Germany describe their work as varied, compared to 72 percent of AfD voters in western Germany.

**Notes:** Berlin excluded; wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: dissatisfied with job: West\*\*\*, East ns.; job insecure: West\*\*\*, East\*; difficult to find new job: West\*, East n. s.; no opportunities to have a say: West\*, East\*\*; employer does not see performance: West\*\*\*, East\*\*; salary not appropriate: West\*\*\*, East\*\*\*; no support from colleagues: West\*\*\*, East\*\*; not proud: West\*\*\*, East\*; not varied: West\*\*\*, East n. s.; significant differences between East and West among AfD voters from an Eastern perspective: more often satisfied with job\*, salary is less often described as appropriate\*, more often proud of work\*, \*= p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation

It is also interesting to see in which aspects of working conditions AfD voters in East and West show a particularly large difference to voters of other parties. A uniform picture for East and West does not emerge here either. While in the West it is rather the aspects of low job satisfaction, lack of pride and lack of variety where AfD voters stand out with a particularly large difference to voters of other parties, in the East it is more the lack of opportunities to have a say in the workplace.

To summarise, the issue of work appears to be quite relevant when differentiating between voter groups. AfD voters report unemployment more frequently than voters of other parties. They are less likely to perceive their job as secure and more likely to rate their labour market prospects as poor if they lose their job. They are less likely to have a say in the workplace, less likely to report variety in work and less likely to have access to support from colleagues. It is also particularly striking that

they often report a lack of dignity and recognition, whether due to inadequate pay or a lack of appreciation from superiors and the employer. What is remarkable here is that the AfD voter groups are very much in agreement regarding their statements on this last point, but also on many other aspects of poor working conditions.

### 4.3 How much do they trust institutions?

Numerous studies have already identified a low level of trust in institutions as a significant characteristic of AfD voters (e.g., Hansen/Olsen 2018; Kohlrausch et al. 2023 using the Labour Force Panel). The trust of AfD voters in various social institutions is therefore analysed below. A particular focus is placed on trust in the federal government and the public service media, as AfD voters were particularly averse to these institutions in previous studies. In addition, trust in the preferred party – i.e. trust in the AfD among AfD voters – is analysed separately.

### Current trust in institutions

In the current wave of the survey, respondents were first asked to indicate how much trust they have in eight different institutions. They were able to select their answers on a five-point scale: from “very great” and “great” to “moderate”, “only a little” and “no trust at all”. Figure 18 shows the extent to which the distribution of trust in the various institutions differs between AfD voters and voters of other parties.

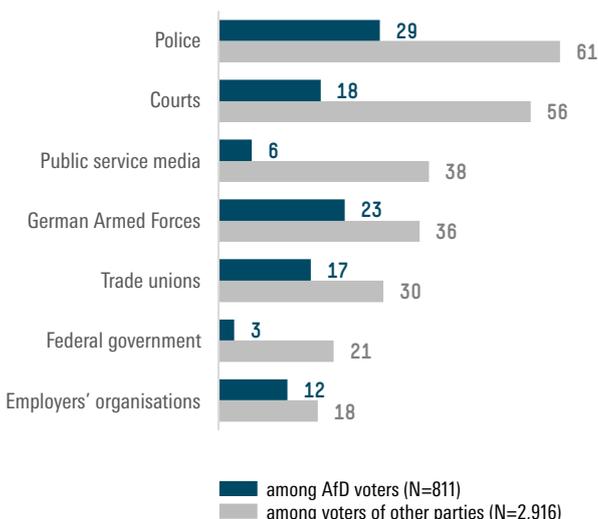
It is striking that AfD voters express considerably less trust than voters of other parties – be it in the police, the courts, the German armed forces or trade unions. The difference is particularly pronounced when it comes to trust in public media and the federal government. Here, hardly any AfD voters indicated great or very great trust (public media: six percent vs. 38 percent among voters of other parties; federal government: 2.8 percent vs. 21 percent among voters of other parties). The difference between AfD voters and voters of other parties is least pronounced when it comes to trust in employers’ organisations; however, here too, trust is expressed significantly more often among voters of other parties than among AfD voters.

An additional look at East-West differences shows that trust in all the institutions surveyed is greater in the West than in the East (see Kohlrausch et al. 2023). AfD voters in the East are the least likely to express trust: for example, great or very great trust in the courts is expressed by only twelve percent, in public media by 1.6 percent and in the federal government by 0.5 percent (ibid.).

Figure 18

#### Percentage of respondents with “great”/“very great” trust in the respective institution, by voting preference

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, 29 percent express great or very great trust in the police; among voters of other parties, the figure is 61 percent.

**Notes:** 5-point scale, further response options: “moderate”, “only a little” and “none at all”; wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: for all institutions\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

### Development of institutional trust among new AfD voters

It is also worth taking a look at the development of trust in institutions over time. The following section focuses on trust in the federal government and public media. Since the Bundestag elections in October 2021, the trust of the labour force has been surveyed at four points in time.

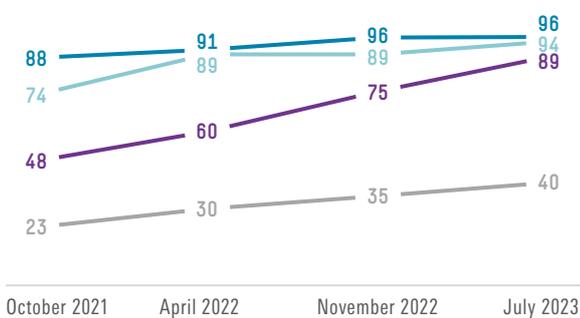
Figure 19 shows how the share of respondents who have “only a little” or “no” trust in the federal government has developed over time. As among all respondents in the sample, a steady erosion of trust in the federal government has also been observed among AfD voters since the 2021 federal election. However, it is interesting to note how established AfD voter groups differ from the party’s current new voters. As early as the 2021 federal election, the overwhelming majority of both regular AfD voters and repeat voters expressed little or no trust in the federal government, and this very high percentage has risen even further over time, so that almost no one in these groups now has “moderate” or “great” trust in the federal government.

The line of new AfD voters in the figure is different: among them, the lack of trust in the fed-

Figure 19

**Percentage of respondents with “only little” / “no” trust in the federal government over time, by AfD voter group**

Figures in percent



— among core AfD voters (N=166–217)  
 — among repeat AfD voters (N=231–304)  
 — among new AfD voters (N=176–227)  
 — among voters of other parties (N=2,140–2,916)

**Interpretation aid:** Among new AfD voters, the percentage with low trust in the federal government rose from 48 percent in October 2021 to 89 percent most recently.

**Notes:** Waves 6, 8, 9, 10.

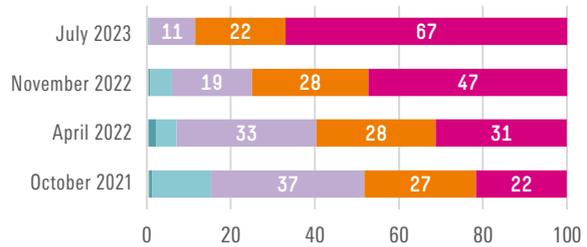
Source: own calculation



Figure 20

**Distribution of trust in the federal government over time among new AfD voters**

Figures in percent



■ “very great”      ■ “only a little”  
 ■ “great”          ■ “none at all”  
 ■ “moderate”      ■ “don’t know”

**Interpretation aid:** In October 2021, 22 percent of current new AfD voters said they had “no trust at all” in the federal government, while the most recent figure was 67 percent.

**Notes:** Waves 6, 8, 9, 10; N=176–227.

Source: own calculation



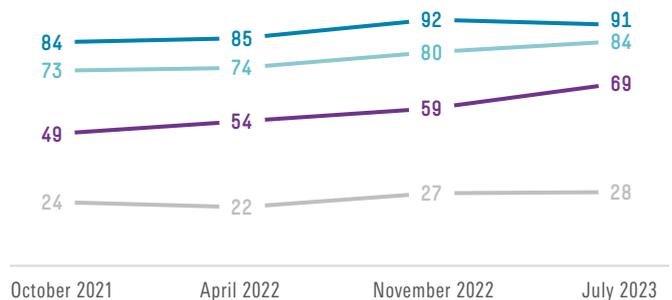
eral government at the 2021 federal election was still significantly lower at 48 percent than among more established AfD voters (74 and 88 percent respectively). Over the following 21 months, the percentage of those without trust in the federal government also increased significantly in this group, reaching 89 percent, which is comparable to the more established AfD voters. New AfD voters therefore currently share the widespread distrust in the federal government with more established AfD voters. Although many of the current new AfD voters were already more sceptical than current voters of other parties at the time of the Bundestag elections, around half of the new AfD voters at that time still indicated at least “moderate” trust in the federal government, as shown in Figure 20. The figure also clearly shows that the majority of current new AfD voters (two out of three) most recently selected the extreme category of “no trust at all” in the federal government.

A similar picture, albeit to a lesser extent, can be seen for trust in public service media (Figure 21). AfD voters also stand out here with significantly below-average levels of trust. Among more established AfD voters, the level of mistrust is enormous: 73 to 92 percent expressed “only little” or “no” trust in public service media at the various survey points in the last two years. Among voters of other parties, the figure was between 22 and 28 percent in the same period. It is interesting to

Figure 21

**Percentage of respondents with “only little” / “no” trust in public service media over time, by AfD voter group**

Angaben in Prozent



— among core AfD voters (N=166–217)  
 — among repeat AfD voters (N=231–304)  
 — among new AfD voters (N=176–227)  
 — among voters of other parties (N=2,140–2,916)

**Interpretation aid:** Among new AfD voters, the percentage with low trust in public service media rose from 49 percent in October 2021 to 69 percent most recently.

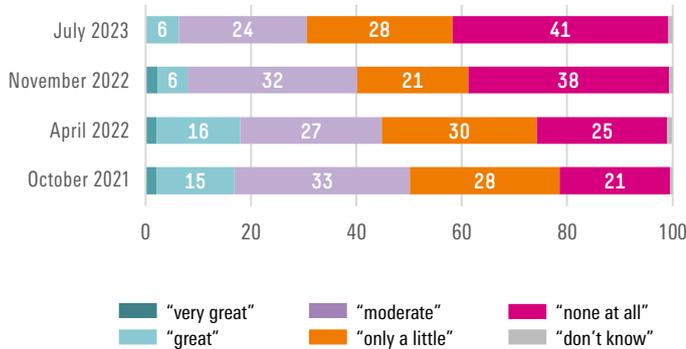
**Notes:** Waves 6, 8, 9, 10.

Source: own calculation



Figure 22

**Distribution of trust in public service media over time among new AfD voters**  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** In October 2021, 21 percent of current new AfD voters said they had “no trust at all” in public service media, compared to 41 percent recently.

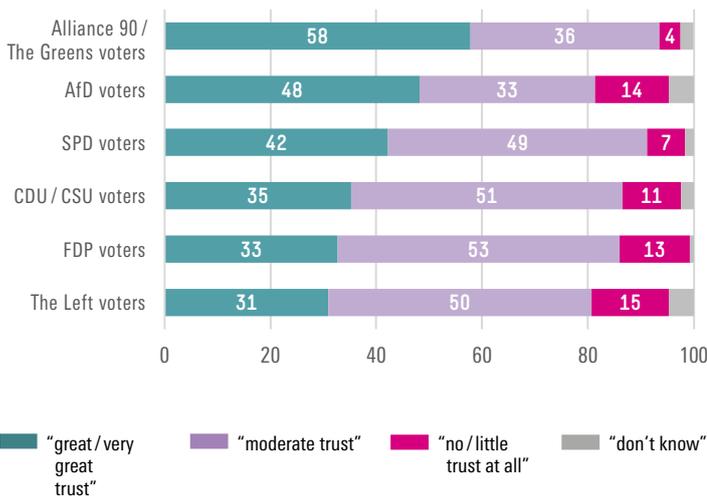
**Notes:** Waves 6, 8, 9, 10; N=176–227.

Source: own calculation



Figure 23

**Distribution of current trust in “the party you vote for”, by voting preference**  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among Green voters, 58 percent say they have great or very great confidence in the party they vote for, compared to 48 percent among AfD voters.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences percentage with high/very high trust: AfD voters > voters of other parties \*\*\*; AfD > Union, FDP, The Left\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



observe how trust in public service media has also gradually declined among new AfD voters, with more than two out of three new AfD voters now expressing hardly any trust in public service media; as with trust in the federal government, a large percentage responded with “no trust at all” (Figure 22). However, the considerable level of distrust in public service media among more established AfD voters is not quite matched by new AfD voters either.

Based on these timelines, it is possible to gradually trace how new AfD voters have lost trust, not only in the federal government, but also – albeit not to the same overwhelming extent – in public service media.

**Trust in the AfD**

In addition, the WSI Labour Force Panel asked about trust “in the party you vote for”. Broken down by the respective parties, the AfD has a relatively high level of trust among its voters in the labour force (Figure 23): 48 percent of current AfD voters say they have “great” or “very great” trust in the party they vote for – in their case, the AfD. This figure is higher only among Green voters (58 percent). When we look only at the extreme “have very great trust” (not shown explicitly), no other voter group has such a high level of trust as the AfD: almost 18 percent of its voters say they have “very great trust” (compared to eight percent for the Greens). At 14 percent, the share of AfD voters who have little trust in the party they vote for is roughly on a par with other parties. This is presumably where the frequently cited protest voters are to be found: people who cast their vote primarily out of political dissatisfaction without (necessarily) agreeing with the content of the chosen party. However, if we look at their relative share of all AfD voters, we can assume that this is a rather small group; the share of those who have confidence in the AfD and presumably support the party’s positions accordingly is significantly higher at the aforementioned 48 percent.

When we look at the differences in trust in the AfD between East and West, it can be seen that trust among AfD voters in the East is slightly greater than among AfD voters in the West. In the East, 51 percent of AfD voters expressed “great” or “very great” trust in the AfD (in the West: 47 percent), while only seven percent of AfD voters in the East expressed “little” or “no” trust in the AfD – in the West, this figure is more than twice as high at 16 percent. These findings indicate that there are slightly more convinced AfD voters in the East, while more people in the West vote for the AfD despite having little confidence in the party.

It is also interesting to look at the different AfD voter groups (Figure 24). The relatively high trust of AfD voters in their party, as reported above, is largely due to more established voters. Among repeat voters, 49 percent and even 71 percent of

regular voters state that they have “great” or “very great” trust in the AfD. However, at just 20 percent, this share is significantly lower among new AfD voters and is also significantly lower than among voters of other parties. The share of those who have “no” or “only little” trust in the AfD is also well above average at 30 percent. Among new AfD voters, there are therefore a relatively large number who are not very convinced by the party and accordingly have little confidence in it.

#### 4.4 How high are their worries and stressors?

In order to make statements about subjective concerns, stressors and problem situations, the following section will first report comparatively on concerns about various social developments before looking at the stressors indicated in various areas of life. The special stressors and attitudes towards the relief packages surveyed at the beginning of the high inflation phase in spring 2022 are then used.

#### Concerned citizens?

The percentage of respondents in the WSI Labour Force Panel who report major concerns has risen significantly in recent surveys (see Kohlrausch et al. 2023). While concerns about social issues such as social cohesion or the development of social inequality have risen almost continuously since the start of the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the prevalence of financial concerns, particularly since the start of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the associated consequences such as the rise in inflation.

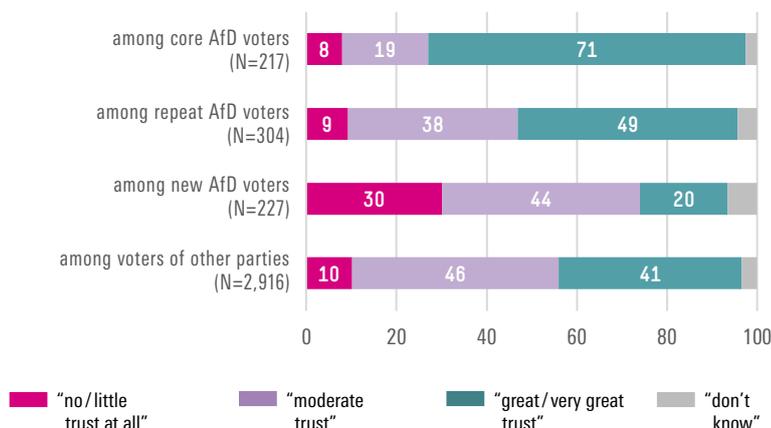
The image of concerned citizens is often used in the media when talking about AfD voters. In the context of the aforementioned modernisation loser thesis, self-related and society-related concerns also prove to be significant in explaining AfD voting preferences (e.g., Hertel/Esche 2019). Figure 25 shows the extent to which AfD voters also stand out with particularly widespread concerns in the WSI Labour Force Panel.

It can be seen that concerns in almost all areas surveyed are significantly more widespread among AfD voters than among voters of other parties. The differences are particularly pronounced when it comes to financial concerns: 47 percent of AfD voters express great concern that they will not be able to maintain their standard of living (23 percent among voters of other parties). 71 percent of AfD voters express great concern about rising prices (42 percent among voters of other parties) and 38 percent express great concern about their own economic situation (19 percent among voters of other parties).

The only concern surveyed here that is not shared more frequently by AfD voters than by vot-

Distribution of current trust in “the party you vote for”, by AfD voter group

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among core AfD voters, 71 percent express great or very great trust in the AfD; among new AfD voters, the figure is 20 percent.

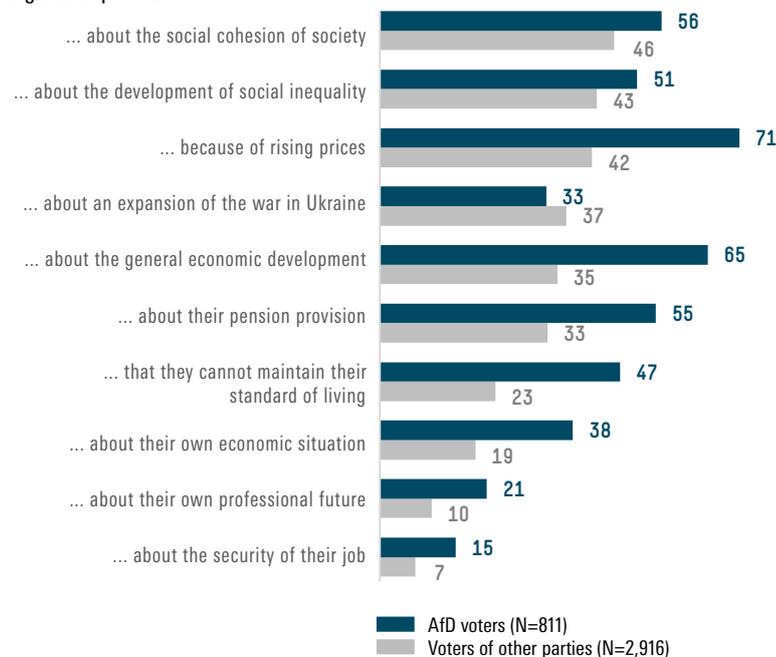
**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences percentage with high/very high trust: AfD voters > voters of other parties\*\*\*; new AfD voters < voters of other parties\*\*\*; new AfD voters < core AfD voters\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation

Figure 25

Current percentage with “major concerns” in the respective area, by voting preference

Figures in percent

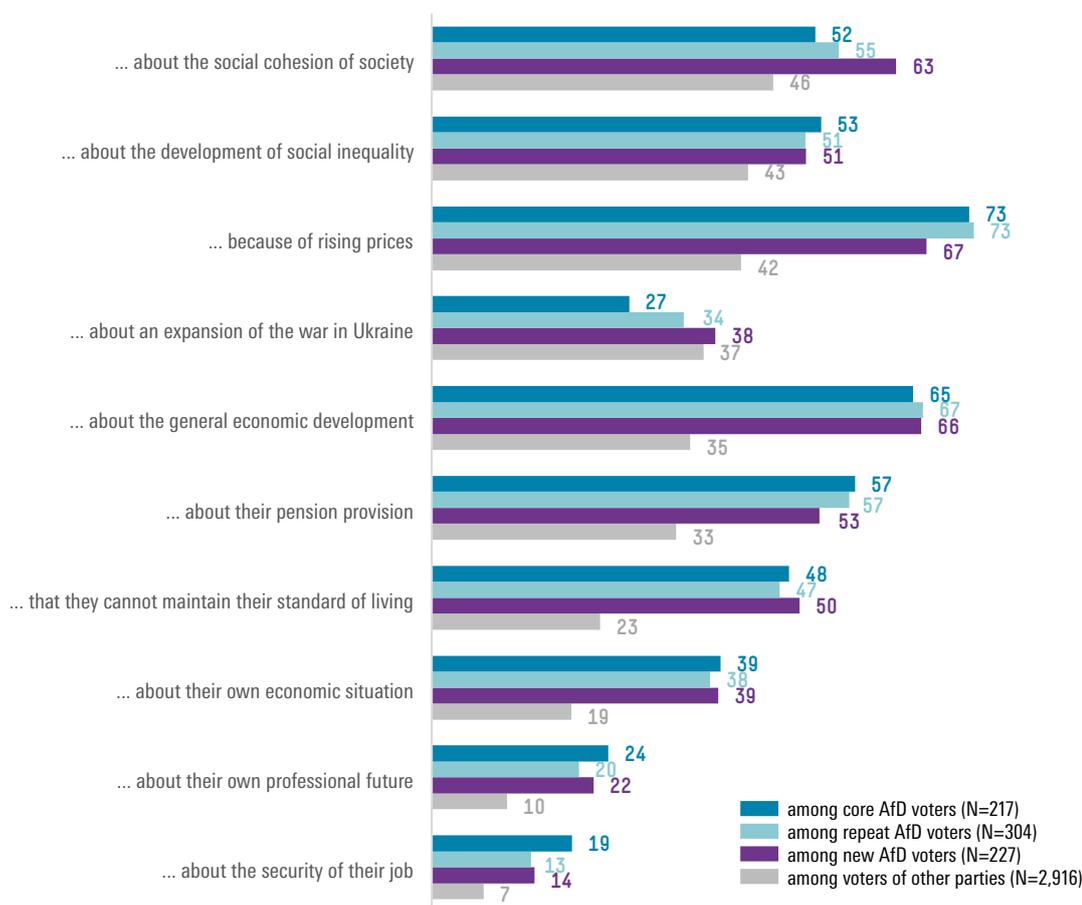


**Interpretation aid:** 71 percent of AfD voters express great concern about rising prices; among voters of other parties, the figure is 42 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: professional future\*\*\*, personal economic situation\*\*\*, cohesion\*\*\*, inequality\*\*\*, general economic situation\*\*\*, job security\*\*\*, old-age security\*\*\*, rising prices\*\*\*, Ukraine war expansion\*, standard of living\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation

**Current percentage with “major concerns” in the respective area, by AfD voter group**  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** 73 percent of core AfD voters express great concern about rising prices; among new AfD voters, the figure is 67 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: professional future\*\*\*; personal economic situation\*\*\*; cohesion\*\*\*; inequality\*; general economic situation\*\*\*; standard of living\*\*\*; security of job\*\*\*; old-age security\*\*\*; rising prices\*\*\*; Significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: cohesion\*; war expansion\*\*; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

ers of other parties is concern about an expansion of the war in Ukraine. At 33 percent, this is even shared significantly less often among AfD voters than among voters of other parties (37 percent).

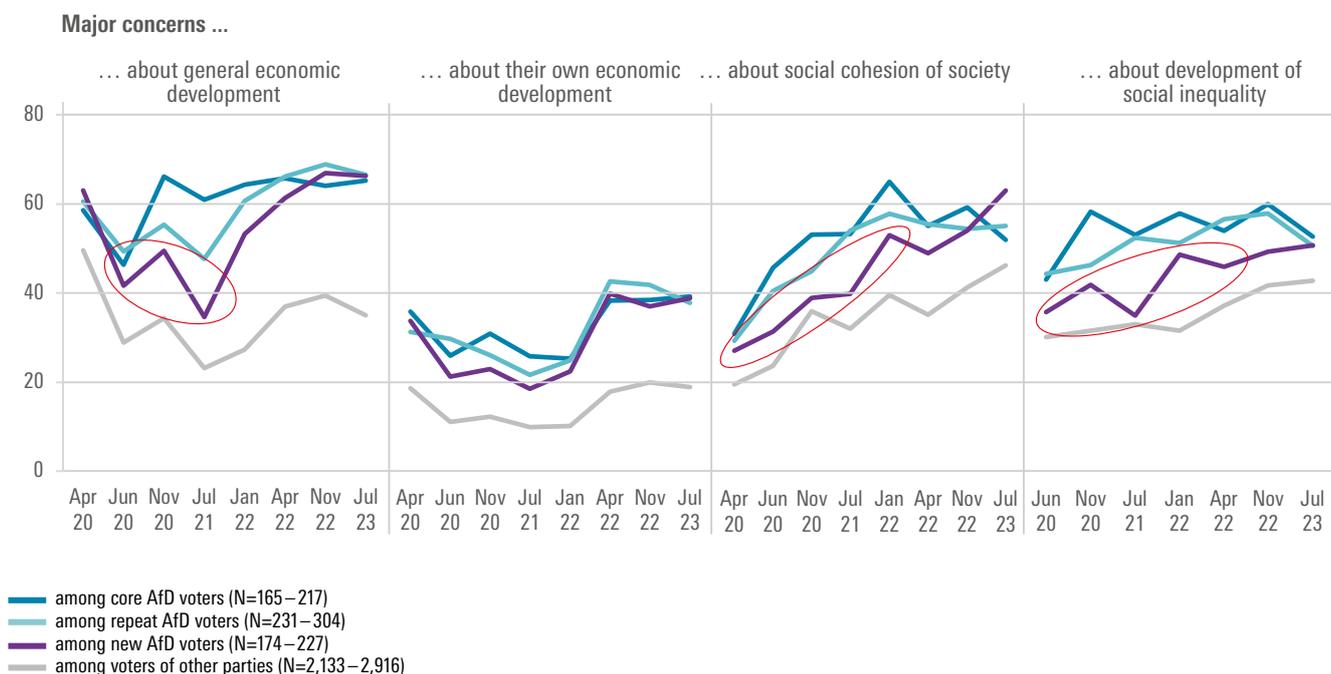
It is also worth mentioning here that financial worries, such as not being able to maintain their standard of living or their own economic situation, are no more widespread among AfD voters in the East than among AfD voters in the West (standard of living: West 48 percent, East 46 percent; their own economic situation: West 40 percent, East 35 percent). Financial worries among AfD voters therefore play a similar role in the East and West.

If we now look at whether the AfD voter groups differ in their concerns (Figure 26), there is a rela-

tively high degree of unity. In particular, there is little to no difference between new AfD voters and more established AfD voters when it comes to concerns about financial issues such as not being able to maintain their standard of living, rising prices or worries about their own economic situation; relatively widespread concerns are reported among the various AfD voter groups. Among new AfD voters, concerns about the social cohesion of society are particularly widespread. Current new AfD voters are here significantly more likely to express major concerns (63 percent) than core AfD voters and voters of other parties (52 and 46 percent respectively). The differences in concerns about an expansion of the war in Ukraine are also remarka-

### Percentage with “major concerns” in the respective area over time, by current AfD voter group

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Around 60 percent of new AfD voters expressed great concern at the beginning of the pandemic about the general economic development. Afterwards this figure declined to under 40 percent in July 2021, before it rose again above 60 percent most recently.

**Notes:** Waves 1–10.

Source: own calculation

ble. The breakdown of the AfD voter groups shows that the finding that AfD voters are less concerned than voters of other parties is particularly attributable to core AfD voters. Among them, only around one in four are worried about an expansion of the war in Ukraine. However, among new AfD voters, the prevalence of concern does not differ from voters of other parties (38 vs. 37 percent).

In order to gain an indication of the extent to which the finding of particularly concerned AfD voters described above is not a short-term phenomenon, Figure 27 shows the development of concerns for four topics that have been surveyed since the first waves of the survey: Three concerns focus on the social view of the respondents (social cohesion, social inequality, general economic development) while one addresses personal economic concerns.

First, it is generally clear that current AfD voters have reported major concerns much more frequently than voters of other parties since the start of the pandemic. At all survey points in time, the levels of concern of all current AfD voter groups were higher than those of voters of other parties.

Second, differentiating between the current AfD voter groups allows a detailed look at the de-

velopment of their concerns. It can be seen that although they were largely similar in their concerns at the time of the initial survey at the beginning of the pandemic, current new AfD voters expressed fewer concerns about society and the economy in general than more established AfD voters (see red ellipses in Figure 27). Since spring 2022, however, the concerns of new AfD voters have increased significantly and recently reached the levels of more established AfD voters. The relevant period here, spring 2022, coincides with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the associated energy crisis as well as the sharp rise in the inflation rate to double-digit figures.

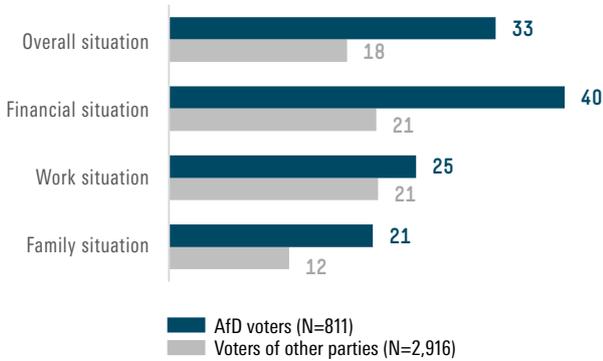
If we look at the most recent changes, it becomes clear that the social concerns of new AfD voters have recently developed rather contrary to those of more established AfD voter groups: while the latter are less concerned about cohesion or inequality, the prevalence of these concerns continues to rise among new AfD voters.

It is also worth noting here that current new AfD voters do not differ significantly from other more established AfD voters over time in the extent to which they are concerned about their individual

Figure 28

**Percentage with “severe” or “extreme” stressors in the respective area, by voting preference**

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among AfD voters, 33 percent describe their overall situation as very or extremely stressful; among voters of other parties, the figure is 18 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: Family\*\*\*, Finances\*\*\*, Work\*\*, Overall \*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



situation – in this case their own economic situation. In other words, the difference between current new AfD voters and more established AfD voters does not lie in the level of concern about their own situation, which was already at a similar, relatively high level at an early stage of the pandemic. Rather, it shows that those who only recently switched to the AfD did not have quite as negative a view of society and economic development for a long time as they do now and as more established AfD voter groups did already back then.

**Development of stressors**

In addition to the worries just reported, the WSI Labour Force Panel also explicitly asked about stress. As with the worries, it is important to emphasise that these are subjectively perceived and reported stressors, which would certainly correlate to a large extent with objective values, but are not necessarily identical to them. In other words: people subjectively evaluate stress differently: what is already a high level of stress for one person may not be for another.

The following section first reports on the stress levels in various areas of life for which numerous observation points are available, before going on to discuss special stress levels that were surveyed at individual points in time.

When we look first at the current reported level of stress among AfD voters, it is noticeable that they report “severe” or even “extreme” stress significantly more often than voters of other parties in all four areas we surveyed, including the overall situation (Figure 28). In the areas of financial and overall situation, the percentage of those who report particularly high levels of stress among AfD voters is almost twice as high as among voters of other parties.

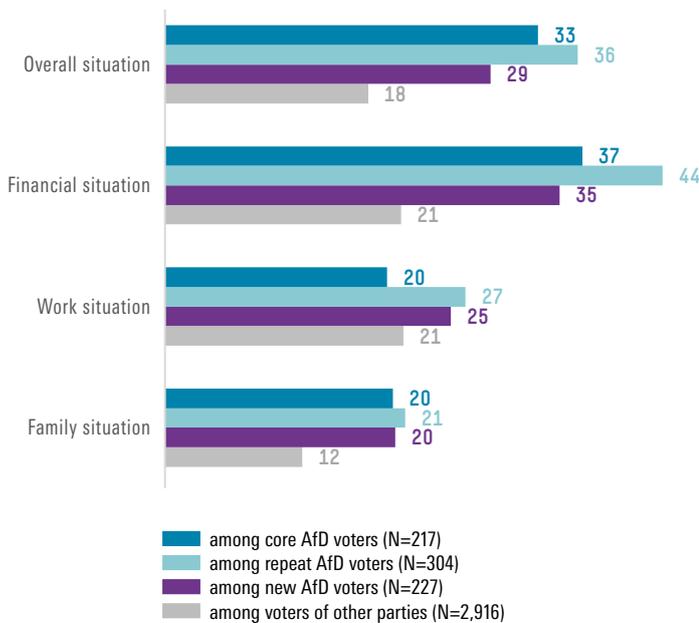
A detailed breakdown by AfD voter group (Figure 29) shows some differences in the extent of stress. Among new AfD voters, a consistently high level of stress is noticeable, which hardly differs in its extent from the level of established voter groups and is usually significantly higher than among voters of other parties. On the issue of personal finances, for example, more than one in three new AfD voters report “severe” or “extreme” stress (around one in five among voters of other parties). What is also striking is the relatively low level of stress in the work situation among core AfD voters, which is at a similar level to voters of other parties.

Interestingly, a look at the development of financial stressors over time (Figure 30) shows that these were already well above average among current new AfD voters in 2020 and 2021 and were at the level of more established AfD voters. With regard to financial burdens, it can be seen here, analogous to the findings on concerns about one’s own economic situation, that those who most recently switched to the AfD were already financially

Figure 29

**Percentage with “severe” or “extreme” stressors in the respective area, by AfD voter group**

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among core AfD voters, 33 percent describe their overall situation as very or extremely stressful; among new AfD voters, the figure is 29 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 10, July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: Family\*\*\*, Finances\*\*\*, Overall\*\*\*; Significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: all n. s.; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



stressed above average before the sharp rise in inflation in 2022, only they did not yet decide to vote for the AfD at that time.

### Special burdens and relief packages

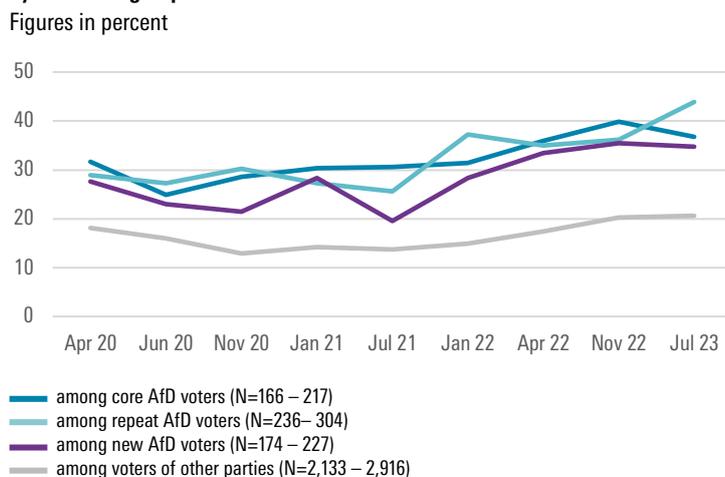
In 2022, the WSI Labour Force Panel was asked about further current stressors and reliefs on the labour force at two points in time. In April 2022 – in the middle of the high inflation phase – the financial stress caused by current developments in the areas of petrol, energy and food were surveyed (Figure 31). The previously described picture of AfD voters who are particularly stressed is also confirmed here: among them, the percentage reporting “severe” or “extreme” financial stress in these areas was clearly and significantly higher at 66 to 74 percent (among voters of other parties: 44 to 52 percent). The previous picture is also largely confirmed for new AfD voters: here too, they reported significantly more frequently (compared to voters of other parties) major financial stress; however, these were less widespread at the time compared to more established AfD voter groups.

In November 2022 in wave 9, respondents were also asked about the personal relief provided by the relief packages adopted by the federal government. It should be emphasised again that the survey explicitly asked about the perceived relief. In other words, respondents were not asked whether they had received support, but whether their own household had been relieved. Two questions were used: one was aimed at the previous relief (retrospective) and a second at the relief still to be expected (prospective). The findings paint a clear picture: current AfD voters stated less than half as often as voters of other parties that their household had been relieved or that they still expect relief (Figure 32). Furthermore, the more established the AfD voters, the less often they perceived or expected relief. However, even for new AfD voters, the perception of relief, both retrospectively and prospectively, is significantly lower than that of voters of other parties.

It was also calculated whether the labour force has suffered a loss of income compared to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>20</sup> Although this indicator is also based on information provided by respondents, it is in some respects more objective and less susceptible to being influenced by subjective perceptions than, for example, the question of how much the respondents have been relieved. However, the findings show that current AfD voters were

<sup>20</sup> In this regard, the respondents’ stated current net equivalent household income was compared with the stated net equivalent household income of the respondents before the pandemic. If the latter was higher than the current one, there was a loss of income. Important: the pre-crisis net equalized household income was surveyed ex post in July 2021 (wave 5).

Percentage with “severe” or “extreme” financial stress over time, by AfD voter group



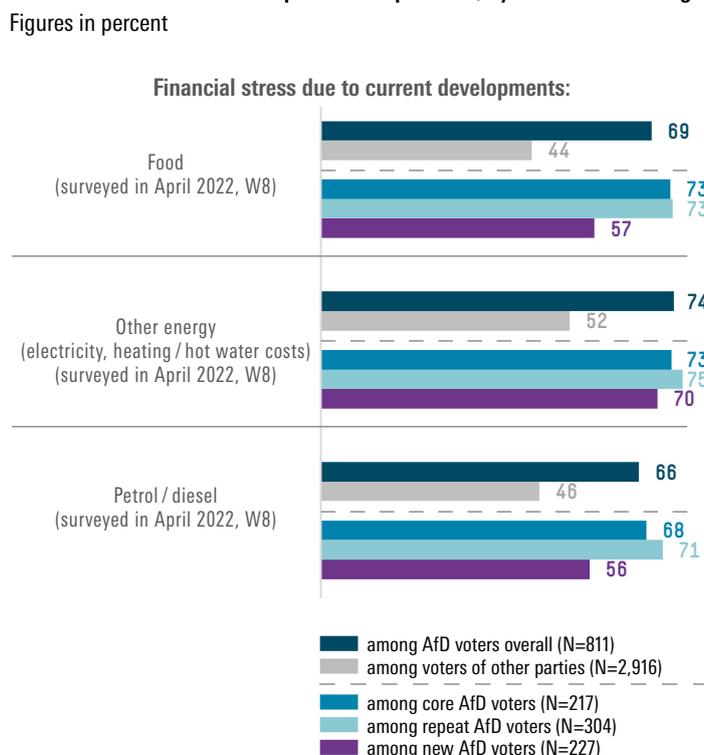
**Interpretation aid:** At the start of the pandemic, around 30 percent of new AfD voters expressed severe or extreme financial stress. After temporary declines to 20 percent in summer 2021, the current figure in this group rose to 35 percent.

**Notes:** Waves 1 – 10.

Source: own calculation

Figure 31

Percentage of the labour force who reported “severe” and “extreme” financial burdens due to current developments in April 2022, by current AfD voter group

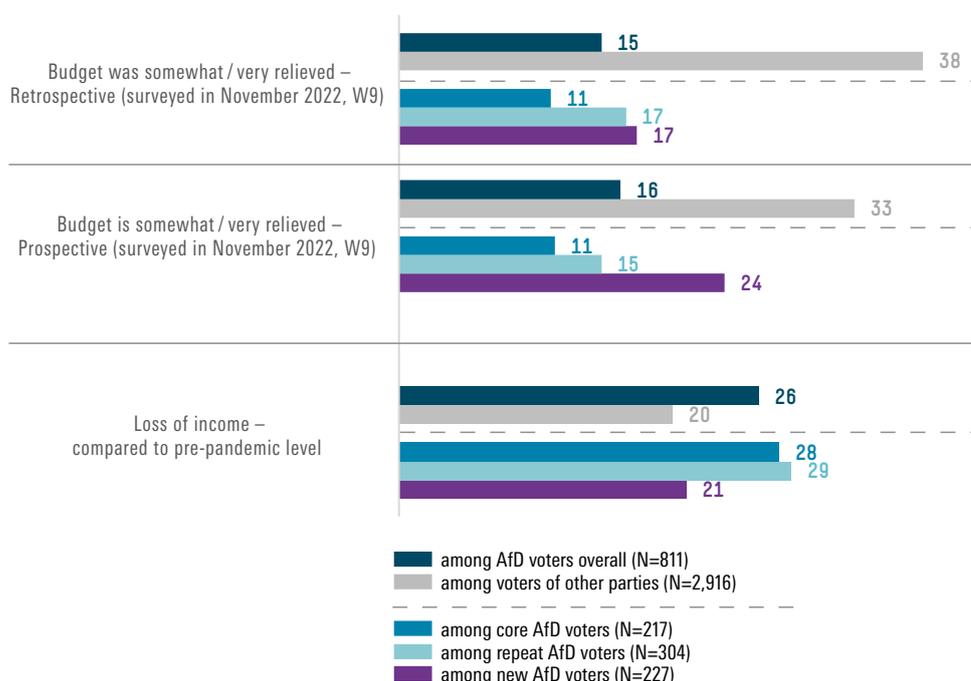


**Interpretation aid:** In April 2022, 69 percent of current AfD voters stated that food was a heavy or extreme financial stressor. Among current voters of other parties, the figure was 44 percent.

**Notes:** Waves 8 and 10, April 2022 and July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: petrol/diesel\*\*\*, energy\*\*\*, food\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: petrol/diesel\*\*, energy\*\*\*, food\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: petrol/diesel\*\*, food\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation

**Percentage of the labour force who report income losses and relief through relief packages, by current voting preference**  
 Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** In November 2022, 15 percent of current AfD voters stated that their budget had been relieved by relief packages. Among voters of other parties, 38 percent stated this.

**Notes:** Waves 9 and 10, November 2022 and July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: relief prospective\*\*\*, retrospective\*\*\*; loss of income\*\*, significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: relief prospective\*\*\*, retrospective\*\*, significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: relief retrospective\*\*, prospective \*, \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

WSI

also significantly more likely to experience a loss of income than voters of other parties (26 vs. 20 percent; Figure 32). However, this does not apply to new AfD voters, for whom income losses were similarly frequent as for voters of other parties.

Taken together, the findings reported here emphasise the picture of a particularly worried and stressed AfD electorate. New AfD voters are also generally characterised by high levels of concern and stress. Among them, the recently particularly widespread concern about social cohesion appears to be striking. With regard to financial burdens and concerns, it is clear that these already existed among new voters at earlier points in time – at times when these respondents did not yet state that they wanted to vote for the AfD. At the same time, new AfD voters do not show a noticeably high prevalence of suffered income losses, as is the case for more established AfD voters.

#### 4.5 Which issues were particularly important to them in the 2021 Bundestag election?

Section 3.3 already reported on whom the current AfD voters gave their second vote (“Zweitstimme” – the vote relevant for the majorities in the Bundestag) to in the 2021 Bundestag election. Just under 40 percent said they would vote for the AfD (Figure 5, left), while a further 45 percent voted for another party – including the FDP, the CDU/CSU and the SPD in particular.

Shortly after the 2021 federal election, the WSI Labour Force Panel was also asked which issues should be particularly important for the new federal government. Once again, the following section looks at how current AfD voters differ from voters who vote for other parties. It is important to emphasise here that we are looking at current AfD voters – and not those who voted for the AfD at the time. Although many of the current AfD voters also voted for the AfD in the Bundestag elections (see Figure 5), the majority of them decided differently when casting their votes at the time.

The findings show almost no differences for some issues: for example, AfD voters rate the importance of investing in infrastructure, reducing public debt, creating and securing jobs, affordable housing, strengthening collective bargaining or raising the minimum wage to 12 euros similarly to voters of other parties. When we look at the issues for which the assessment of importance is similar, job creation and security, improving the care situation, investing in infrastructure, fighting crime and maintaining and advancing Germany as an industrial location are particularly important, both among AfD voters and voters of other parties.

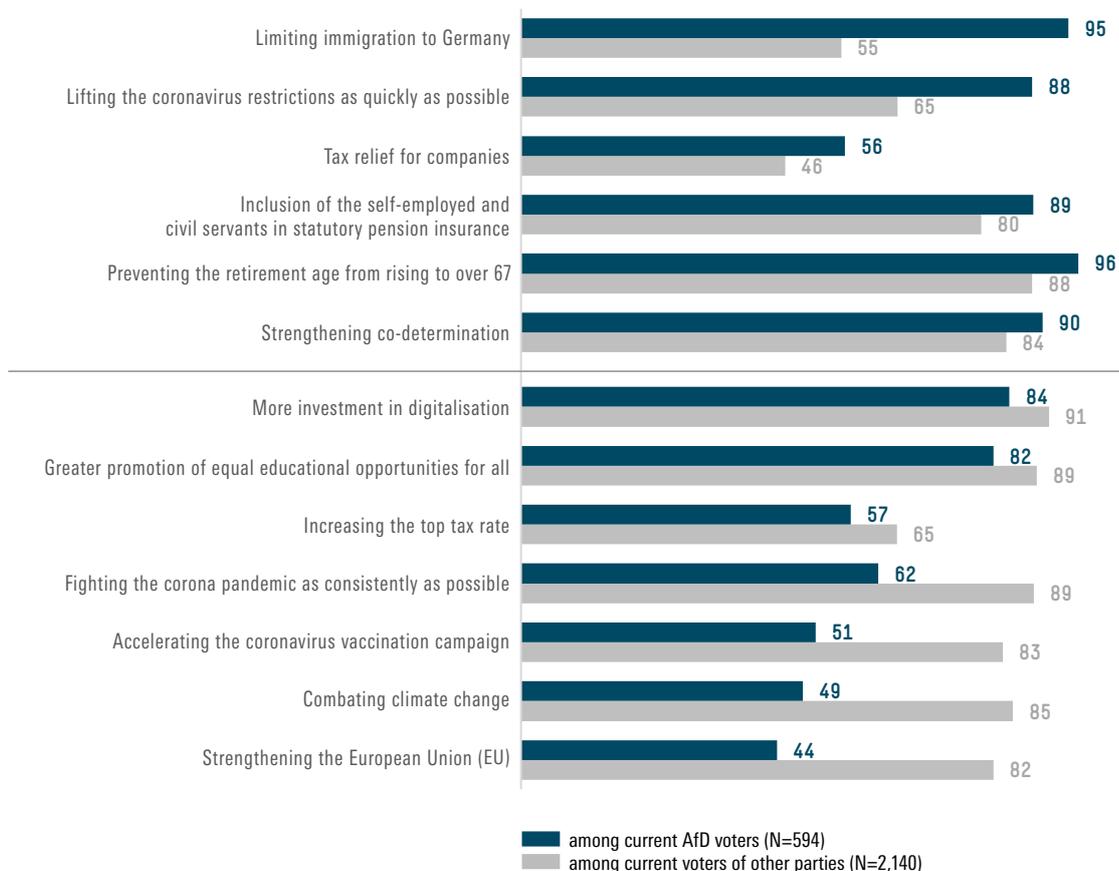
However, there are major differences for numerous issues (Figure 33). One issue that was significantly more important to current AfD voters at the time of the 2021 federal election than voters of other parties stands out in particular: limiting immigration to Germany. 95 percent of current AfD

voters cited this as an important issue; among voters of other parties, the figure was 55 percent. AfD voters at that time also differed from voters of other parties in their assessment of the importance of lifting coronavirus restrictions as quickly as possible (88 vs. 65 percent). Other issues that were more important to current AfD voters than voters of other parties are tax relief for companies, preventing the retirement age from rising, including the self-employed and civil servants in statutory pension insurance and strengthening co-determination.

At the same time, the issues that were significantly less important to current AfD voters in the 2021 federal election than to other voters included strengthening the EU, combating climate change and two pandemic-related issues: accelerating the vaccination campaign and fighting the pandemic as consistently as possible. Other issues that were

Figure 33

Percentages for whom the listed topics were important at the start of the new federal government in October 2021, by current voting preference  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** 95 percent of current AfD voters cited limiting immigration to Germany as an important issue shortly after the 2021 federal election; among current voters of other parties, 55 percent said this was the case.

**Notes:** **Upper block:** Issues that were more important to current AfD voters than voters of other parties; **lower block:** Issues that were less important to current AfD voters than voters of other parties; shown are values 1 to 3 on a 7-point scale with extreme values 1 = "very important" and 7 = "not at all important"; waves 6 and 10, October 2021 and July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all shown\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

less important to AfD voters included promoting equal educational opportunities for all and increasing the top tax rate.

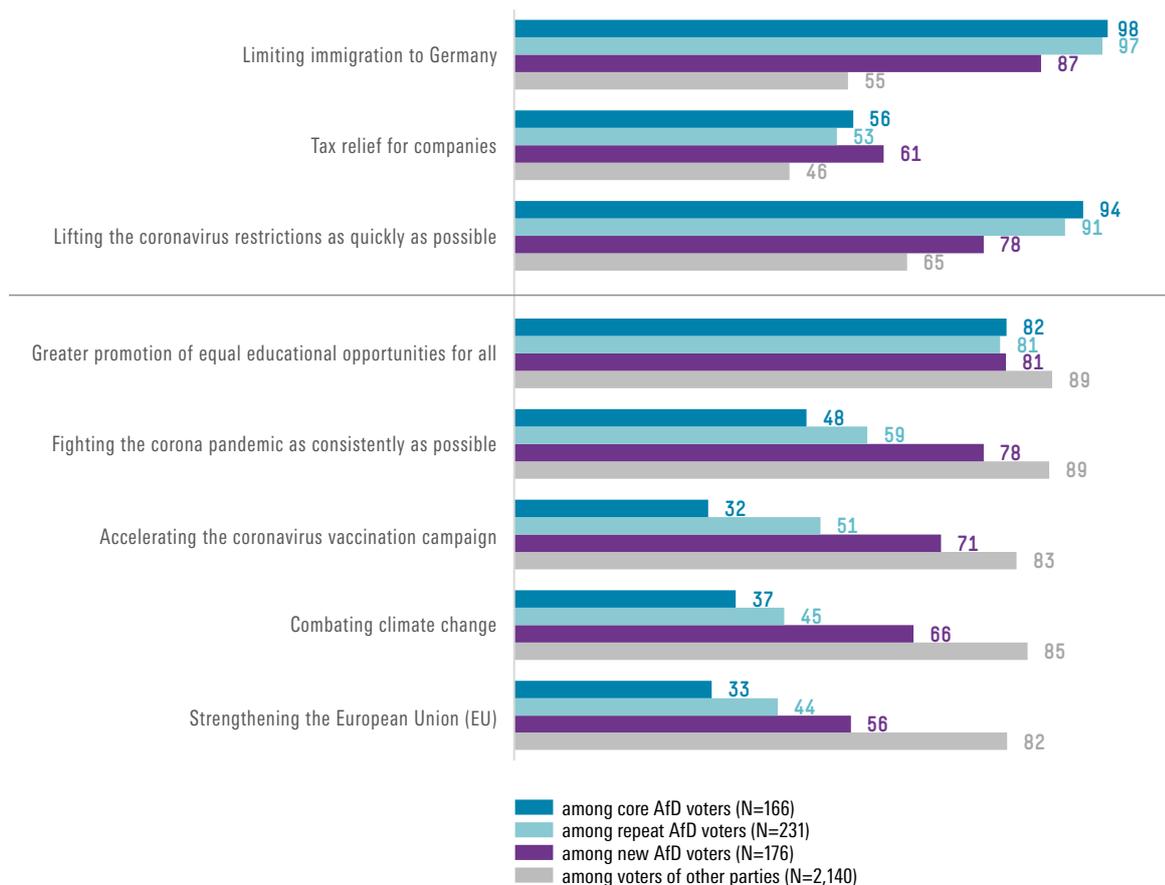
If the various current AfD voter groups are differentiated, similar patterns emerge for new AfD voters, although the extremes are not as pronounced as among the more established AfD voter groups (Figure 34). The issue of limiting immigration is also assigned a very high level of importance among new AfD voters: 87 percent of current new AfD voters (seven out of eight) cited this as an important issue (voters of other parties: 55 percent). To be sure, they cited this as an important issue when they were not yet voting for the AfD. New AfD vot-

ers are also much more similar to the more established AfD voter groups than to voters of other parties when it comes to the above-average rating of the importance of tax relief for companies and the below-average rating of the importance of greater support for equal educational opportunities for all.

Of particular interest is the assessment of the issues of combating climate change and strengthening the EU, to which current AfD voters attributed significantly below-average importance overall. This shows that although new AfD voters also assign below-average importance to these issues, they are still well above the sometimes extremely low values of the more established and, above

Figure 34

Percentages for whom the listed issues were important at the start of the new federal government in October 2021, by current AfD voter group  
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** 98 percent of core AfD voters cited limiting immigration to Germany as an important issue shortly after the 2021 federal election; among new AfD voters, 87 percent cited this.

**Notes:** Upper block: issues that were more important to current new AfD voters than voters of other parties; lower block: issues that were less important to current new AfD voters than voters of other parties; shown are values 1 to 3 on a 7-point scale with extreme values 1 = "very important" and 7 = "not important at all"; waves 6 and 10, October 2021 and July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all shown\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: immigration\*\*\*, lifting corona restrictions\*\*\*, combating the pandemic\*\*\*, accelerating vaccination campaigns\*\*\*, combating climate change\*\*\*, strengthening the EU\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

all, the AfD's core voters. The same can be said of the importance of pandemic issues: The great importance of lifting all restrictions as quickly as possible and the low prioritisation of accelerating the vaccination campaign or consistently combating the pandemic, as shown among AfD core voters, was not present to the same extent for current new AfD voters.

While a consensus among AfD voters can therefore be established quite quickly and clearly on the issue of immigration restrictions, the extreme positions on the issues of the EU, combating climate change and fighting the pandemic seem to resonate much better with the more established AfD core voters than with the new AfD voters who have recently joined the party. On the one hand, it is also possible that the new voters in the latter areas have also adapted their opinions to the AfD's positions in the meantime; on the other hand, the relatively low trust of new AfD voters in the AfD (see Section 4.3) could also be an indication that the overlap in positions still does not apply to many areas, but primarily to the issue of limiting immigration.

#### 4.6 What was their view of the pandemic?

To answer the question of how today's AfD voters viewed the pandemic during earlier phases of the pandemic, we will first look specifically at the assessment of the German government's crisis management and the protective measures, before moving on to aspects of doubt, scepticism and conspiracy myths in connection with the virus (see also Hövermann 2021, 2022). Finally, the aspects of concern about infection, solidarity-based compliance with the rules in relation to protective measures and, finally, vaccination behaviour are considered.

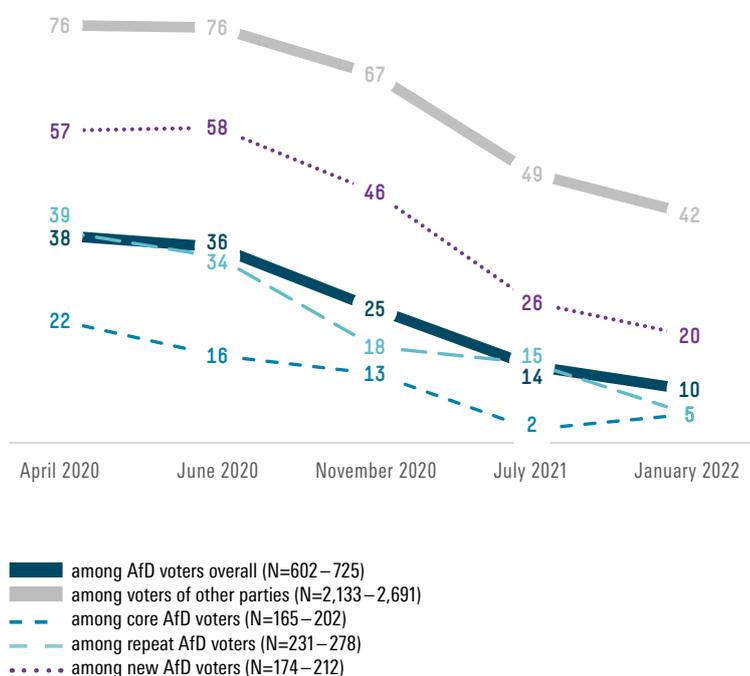
This report has already provided some indications of AfD voters' reactions to the pandemic elsewhere. In the previous section, for example, it was shown that AfD voters in the 2021 federal election attached particularly high priority to the issue of lifting coronavirus restrictions as quickly as possible, while the issues of accelerating vaccination campaigns and consistently combating the pandemic were given particularly low priority. Corresponding attitudes can therefore also be expected in the following more detailed analyses.

#### Assessment of crisis management and protective measures

If we look at the assessment of the German government's pandemic crisis management in the first two years of the pandemic, a large majority of voters from other parties were still satisfied with the German government's crisis management in the first year of the pandemic, after which only less

#### Percentages of "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the federal government's pandemic crisis management, by current AfD voter group

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** At the start of the pandemic, 38 percent of current AfD voters stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the German government's crisis management during the pandemic. This figure subsequently fell to just 10 percent in January 2022.

**Notes:** Waves 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 10.

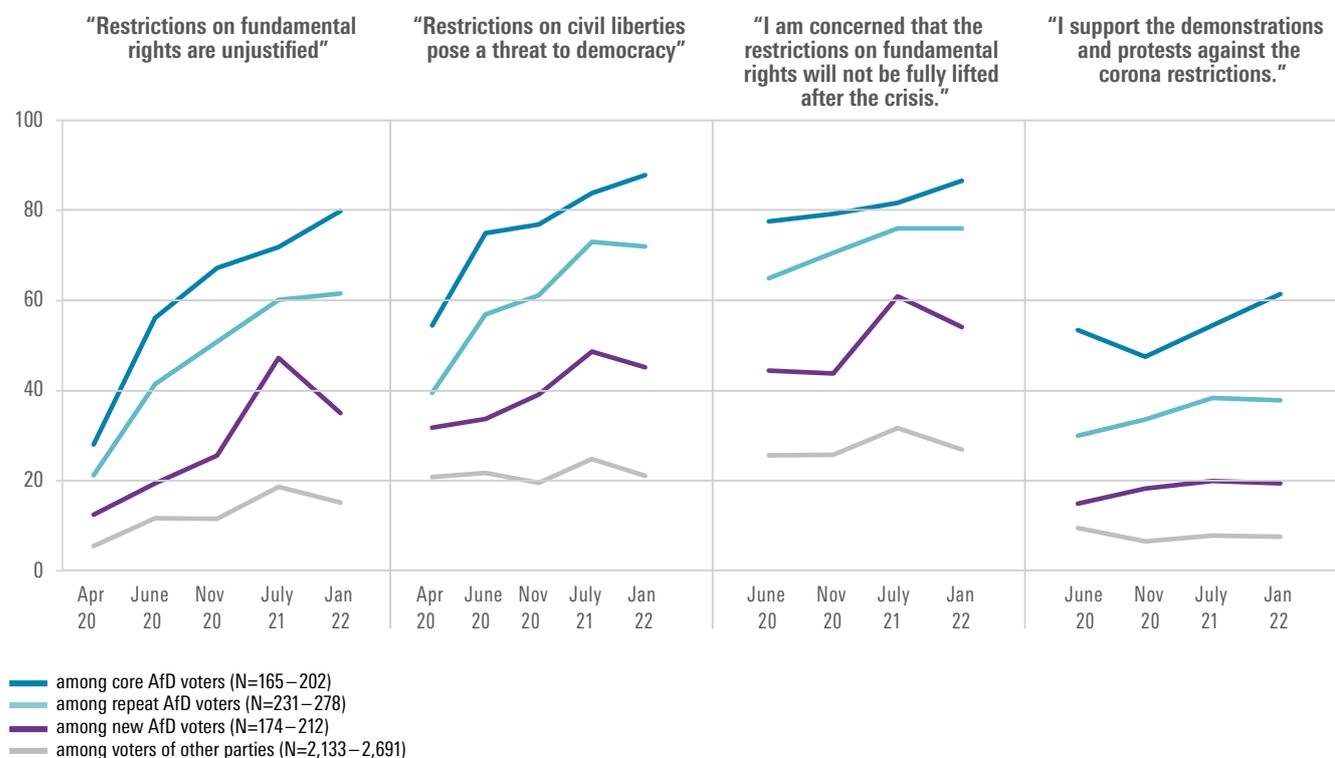
Source: own calculation

than half of voters from other parties expressed satisfaction from 2021 onwards (Figure 35). When we consider current AfD voters, although they were significantly less likely to express satisfaction than voters of other parties at the beginning of the pandemic, the share of satisfied respondents among them was still 36 to 38 percent (voters of other parties: 76 percent). Just under two years later, at the beginning of 2022, more than nine in ten current AfD voters expressed dissatisfaction with the German government's management of the pandemic crisis.

As expected, not only was satisfaction among regular AfD voters clearly the lowest, but dissatisfaction also dominated among them from the beginning of the pandemic. The assessment of current new AfD voters at the beginning of the pandemic was much more positive: in April and June 2020, a majority of them still expressed satisfaction; in November 2020, 46 percent still did. At the

### Change in agreement with statements on the restriction of fundamental rights during the pandemic, by current AfD voter group

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among core AfD voters, just under 30 percent described the restrictions on fundamental rights as unjustified at the start of the pandemic. This figure rose to 80 percent in this group by January 2022.

**Notes:** An 11-point scale was used to determine how justified the restrictions on fundamental rights were considered to be. Values 0 – 4 are shown here as "unjustified"; waves 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 10.

Source: own calculation

WSI

beginning of 2022, satisfaction also fell significantly to just one in five.

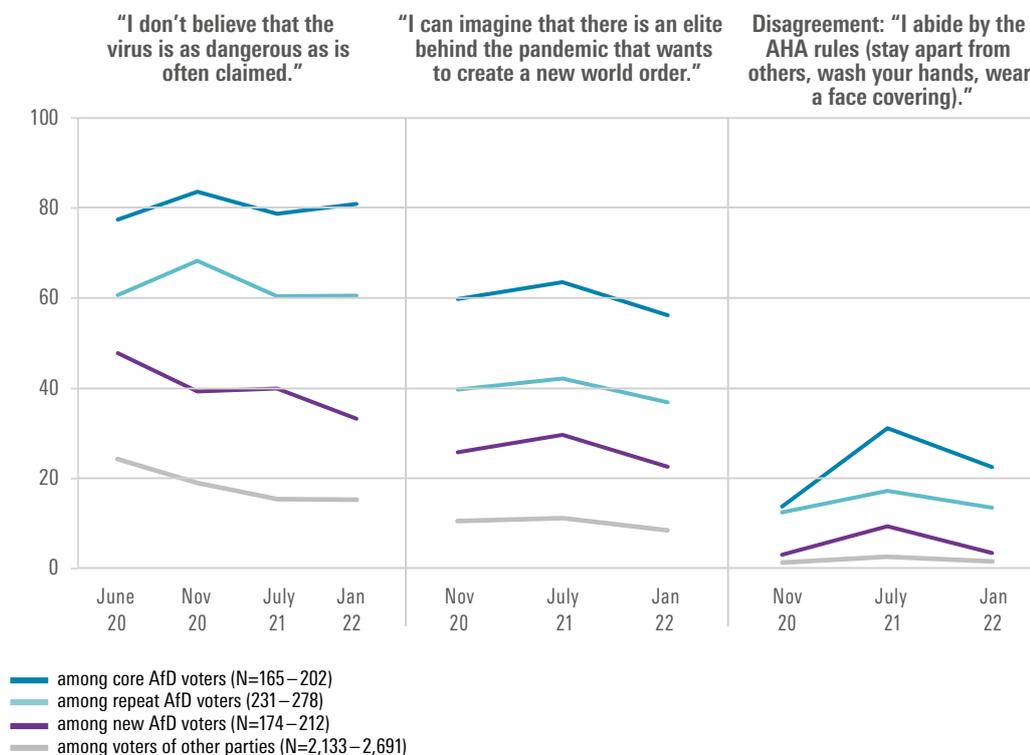
During the first two years of the pandemic, respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the restrictions on fundamental rights as a result of the protective measures, e.g., how justified or unjustified they consider them to be, to what extent they perceive them as a threat to democracy or whether they support the demonstrations and protests against them (Figure 36). The general picture is consistent: soon after the outbreak of the pandemic, the majority of current AfD voters felt that the restrictions were unjustified and posed a threat to democracy. Initially, two out of three, and later even three out of four, agreed with the concern that the restrictions on fundamental rights would not be fully reversed. Support for the demonstrations and protests against the restric-

tions also appears to be exceptionally high. While this figure was around seven to ten percent among voters of other parties, among AfD voters is between 32 and 39 percent.

It is also interesting to take another look at the current new AfD voters. Although they also rated the restrictions on fundamental rights as unjustified and a threat to democracy with above-average frequency, these assessments were significantly less common than among more established AfD voters. This confirms the picture that some of the current new AfD voters in the years 2020 to 2022 were already showing some resistance to the government's course on the issue of the coronavirus, but that the course was not nearly as clearly rejected as by groups that were already voting for the AfD at the time. This is particularly evident in the fact that 15 to 20 percent of current new AfD

### Change in agreement with doubts, conspiracy myths and behaviour in the context of the pandemic, by current AfD voter group

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Between June 2020 and January 2022, approximately 80 percent of AfD voters stated that they did not believe that "the virus is as dangerous as is often claimed".

**Notes:** Waves 3, 5, 7 and 10.

Source: own calculation

WSI

voters supported the demonstrations and protests against the restrictions, while this figure was around three times higher among core voters.

#### Doubts, conspiracy myths and protective behaviour in solidarity

An identical picture also emerges with regard to doubts and conspiracy myths in the context of the pandemic. Not only did current AfD voters explicitly express "no worries" about infection much more frequently at the beginning of the pandemic than voters of other parties (not shown), the majority of them also did not believe "that the virus is as dangerous as is often claimed" (Figure 37). Among voters of other parties, agreement here was between 15 and 24 percent. Approximately 40 percent of current AfD voters even went so far as to

agree with the following conspiracy myth: "I can imagine that there is an elite behind the pandemic that wants to create a new world order" (among voters of other parties: eight to eleven percent).<sup>21</sup>

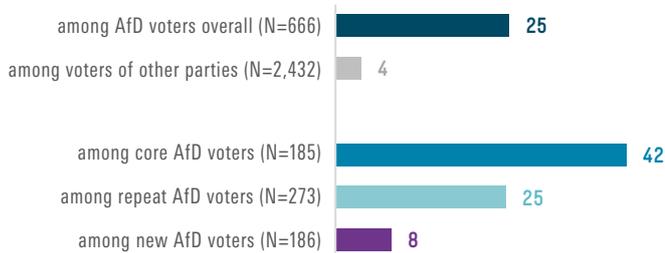
These attitudes towards the pandemic and the virus were also reflected in reported behaviour with regard to protective measures: AfD voters were significantly more likely than average to state that they did not adhere to the AHA rules (keeping their distance, hand hygiene, everyday masks) (twelve to 20 percent vs. two to three percent among voters of other parties). This also had an

<sup>21</sup> Due to the claim that the pandemic may have been deliberately brought about by an elite in order to assert power interests, this interpretation can clearly be categorised as a conspiratorial conspiracy myth.

Figure 38

**Percentages of respondents not vaccinated against coronavirus in November 2022 (wave 9), by current AfD voter group**

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among current AfD voters, 25 percent stated in November 2022 that they had not been vaccinated against the coronavirus; among voters of other parties, the figure was 4 percent.

**Notes:** Original wording of the question "Have you been vaccinated against the coronavirus (yes/no/no answer)?" Waves 9 and 10; significant difference AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: \*\*\*; significant difference between new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: \*\*; significant difference between new AfD voters vs. core voters: \*\*\*, \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



impact on vaccination behaviour, as the following figures from November 2022 show, almost two years after the start of vaccinations in Germany: among current AfD voters, one in four stated that they had not been vaccinated against the coronavirus (Figure 38); among voters of other parties, this figure was four percent.

If we look at current new AfD voters, the picture outlined earlier in this section is confirmed once again. Although they also share doubts or conspiracy myths with above-average frequency, this is not the case for the majority, as it is among more established AfD voter groups. The fact that they largely supported the government's course of action to combat the pandemic (or at least did not actively oppose it) is particularly evident in the action-related statements: 90 to 95 percent of current new AfD voters stated that they abided by the AHA rules (among core AfD voters: 68 to 84 percent). There are also significantly fewer respondents among new voters who have not been vaccinated against the coronavirus than among core AfD voters (eight vs. 42 percent; Figure 38).

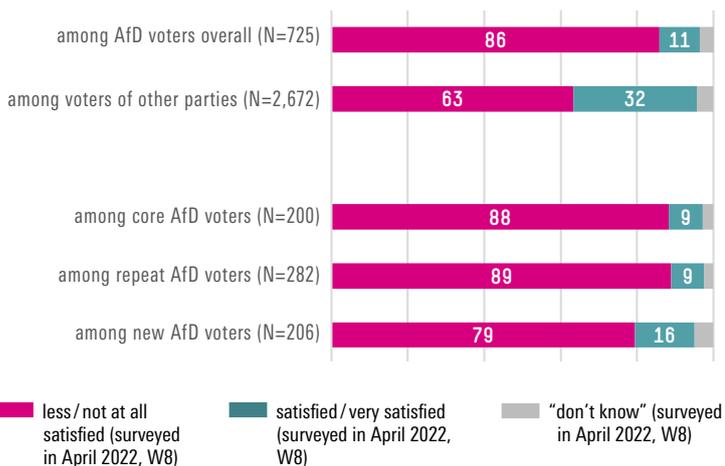
**4.7 What was their view of the war in Ukraine?**

Figure 39

**Satisfaction with the German government's crisis management**

**Topic: Ukraine, by current AfD voter group**

Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** In April 2022, 86 percent of current AfD voters expressed dissatisfaction with the German government's crisis management regarding the war in Ukraine; among voters of other parties, the figure was 63 percent.

**Notes:** Wave 8 and 10, April 2022 and July 2023; significant difference AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: \*\*\*; significant difference new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: \*\*\*; significant difference new AfD voters vs. core voters: \*, \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

Source: own calculation



In 2022, attitudes in connection with the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine were surveyed at two points in time in the WSI Labour Force Panel (see Hövermann 2022): once in April shortly after the start of the Russian attack and once in November when concerns about the energy supply became increasingly present in the public debate. In the following two steps, the attitudes of AfD voters are compared with those of voters of other parties by first analysing the view of crisis management and then focusing on attitudes towards refugees and conspiracy thinking in relation to the war in Ukraine.

**Crises management**

When asked about specific satisfaction with the German government's crisis management related to the war in Ukraine shortly after the start of the Russian war of aggression (Figure 39), a similar picture emerged in April 2022 to that of trust in the German government (Section 4.3): even though there was also widespread dissatisfaction with the crisis management among voters of other parties (almost two thirds), this was even more widespread among AfD voters (six out of seven). It is also worth noting, however, that respondents who had only recently switched to the AfD were already expressing dissatisfaction with the German government's Ukraine policy at a significantly above-average rate (79 percent) at that time – i.e. around 15 months before and at a time when they had not yet voted for the AfD).

## Attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine and conspiracy thinking

In addition, in 2022, after the start of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, respondents were asked at two points in time how the labour force in Germany felt about the refugees from Ukraine (Figure 40). It was observed that attitudes became significantly more negative, dismissive and pessimistic between the survey dates in April and November 2022 – six months later.

A closer look at the attitudes of current AfD voters reveals particularly large differences to voters of other parties. In November 2022, just over half of AfD voters still felt sympathy for the fate of the Ukrainian refugees (84 percent of voters of other parties). At the time, there was broad agreement among current AfD voters (83 percent) that “we cannot take in any more refugees in Germany” and that Germany should not be generous in accepting refugees from Ukraine (73 percent), while minorities (41 and 36 percent) stated this among voters of other parties. There was also widespread pessimism among current AfD voters regarding the question of whether the integration of refugees will be successful: Only one in five was optimistic in November 2022; in contrast, among voters of other parties just under two in three respondents were still optimistic. Finally, the desire that “refugees from Ukraine should take a back seat here in Germany for the time being” became increasingly widespread among current AfD voters over the course of 2022. While approval among voters of other parties was 19 percent (April 2022) and 31 percent (November 2022), it was around two and a half times higher among AfD voters (55 and 76 percent respectively).

If we differentiate between the various AfD voter groups (Figure 41), the most negative, critical and pessimistic view of refugees from Ukraine can be seen among core AfD voters: in November 2022, only 38 percent of them feel sympathy for the fate of the refugees, not even one in ten of them are optimistic about integration and seven out of eight think that refugees should “take a back seat here in Germany for now”.

When we look at new AfD voters, a group that had not yet voted for the AfD at that timepoint, but is doing so now, we see a view of refugees from Ukraine that is not quite as extreme, but still largely negative and dismissive. All of the agreement ratings of current AfD voters analysed here differ significantly from those of voters of other parties. This means that a large percentage of current AfD voters already agreed with the AfD’s critical to negative attitudes towards refugees more than a year ago.

Finally, a look at conspiracy ideology and pro-Russia statements on the question of blame for the war of aggression against Ukraine (Figure 42), which were also surveyed in April and Novem-

ber 2022 as part of the WSI Labour Force Panel. With reference to the subsiding pandemic at the beginning of 2022, respondents were asked to agree with statements that contain conspiratorial thinking (see also analyses with the same statements: COSMO 2022; Lamberty et al. 2022).<sup>22</sup> At both survey dates, there were fewer changes in approval than with the statements on refugees from Ukraine. Only the statement that the war in Ukraine is being “just as artificially dramatized as the pandemic” received more agreement in November 2022 than in April of the same year.

Overall, current AfD voters are also characterised by significantly above-average agreement with these statements: specifically, they agree with the two statements around three to five times as often as voters from other parties. The statement that the war in Ukraine is being “just as artificially dramatized as the pandemic” was last agreed to by more than half of AfD voters in November 2022 (16 percent among voters of other parties). The Russia-friendly interpretation of the question of blame, that NATO provoked Russia into war, is also popular among around half of AfD voters (14 percent among voters of other parties).

If the differences between the AfD voter groups are considered, the picture already drawn for attitudes towards refugees is confirmed: conspiracy ideology and pro-Russia statements are clearly the most popular among core AfD voters. Even if the approval ratings among current new AfD voters are lower in comparison, they are still well above average and were already so in April 2022.

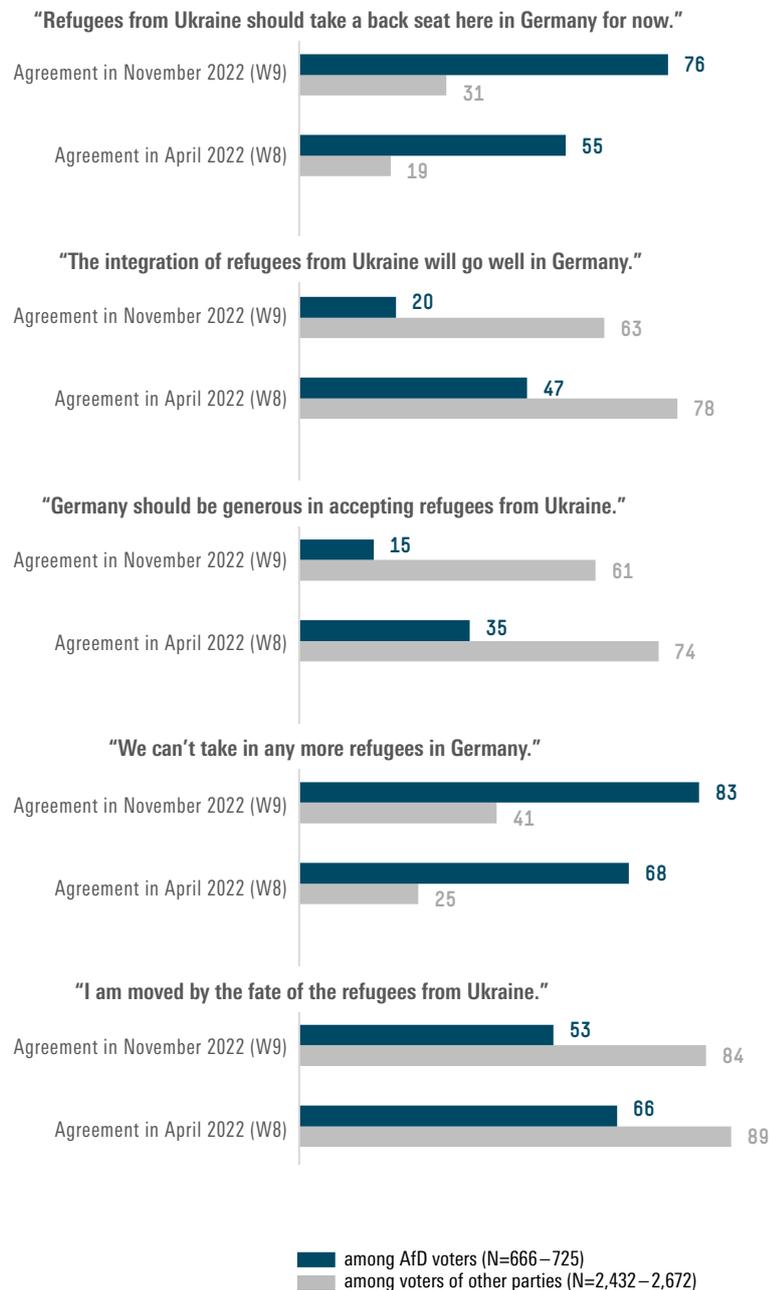
To summarise, it is clear how the AfD has been able to score points with its voters since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine with the issue of refugees and its interpretations of the war in Ukraine. AfD voters stand out here due to their extraordinarily high level of support for negative attitudes towards refugees and conspiracy thinking. It is also clear that a large percentage of current new AfD voters already agreed with AfD positions over a year ago, for example on the question of blame, even if they did not state that they were voting for the AfD at the time.

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<sup>22</sup> The statements can be categorised as conspiratorial thinking insofar as one statement speaks of “distraction from the pandemic” and implies that this makes it easier to keep certain activities of the conspirators in connection with the pandemic hidden and less attention is paid to them. More drastically, it can even be understood in the sense that it contains the implicit and conspiratorial accusation that the actual and true reason for the war lies in the pandemic itself. The second statement captures conspiratorial thinking in that the recent crises are perceived as only seemingly problematic and dangerous, and the crises are seen as deliberately and consciously made worse. In addition, a parallel is drawn between the pandemic and the Ukraine war in that these crises repeatedly provide a potential pretext for different behaviour.

**Change in agreement between April and November 2022 with statements on refugees from Ukraine, by current voting preference**

Figures in percent



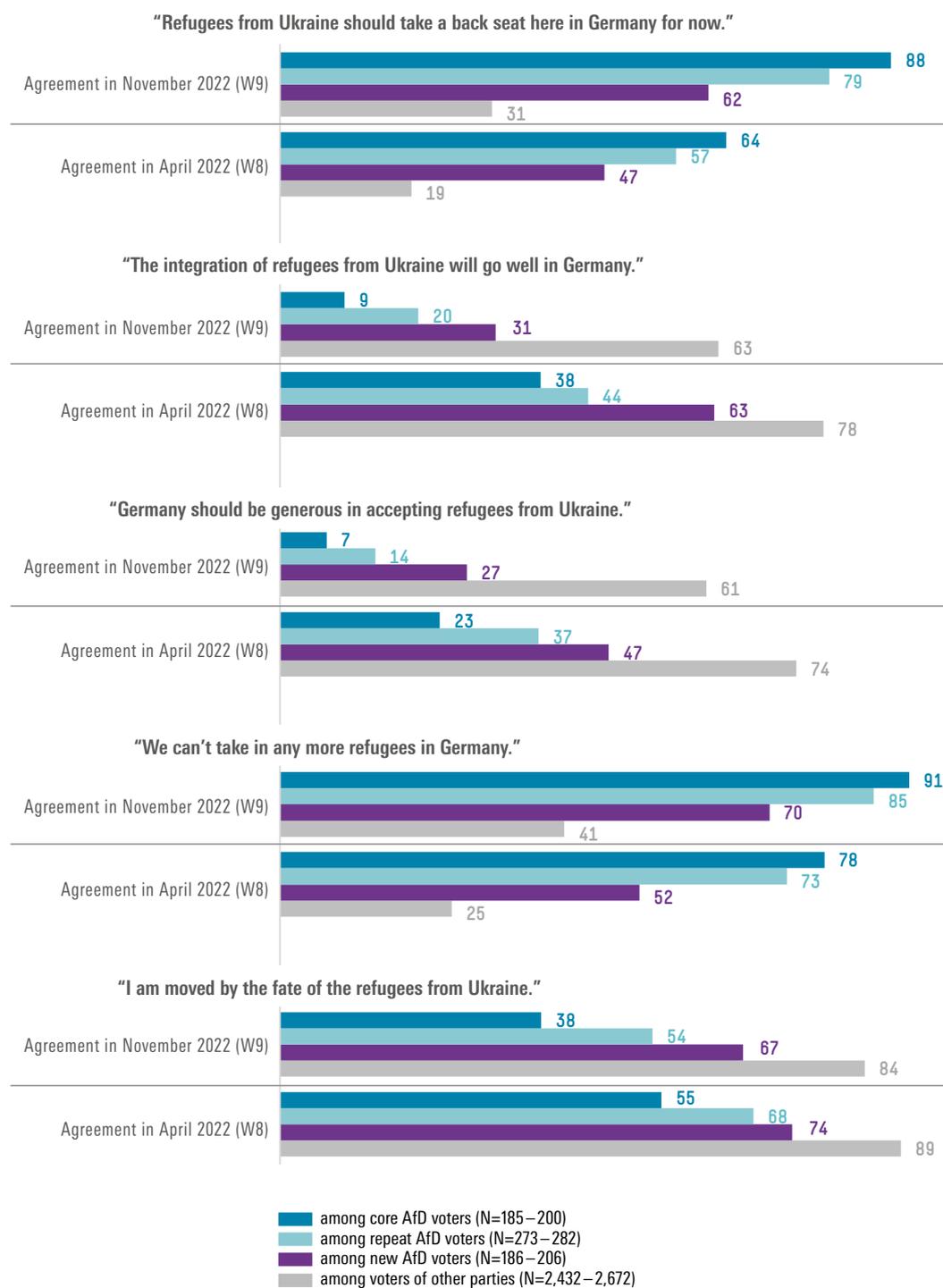
**Interpretation aid:** 55 percent of current AfD voters agreed with the statement "Refugees from Ukraine should take a back seat here in Germany for now" in April 2022. Seven months later, agreement with the statement rose to 76 percent in this group.

**Notes:** Waves 8-10, April and November 2022 and July 2023; significant difference AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all in W8 and W9\*\*\*; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Source: own calculation

## Change in agreement between April and November 2022 with statements on refugees from Ukraine, by current AfD voter group

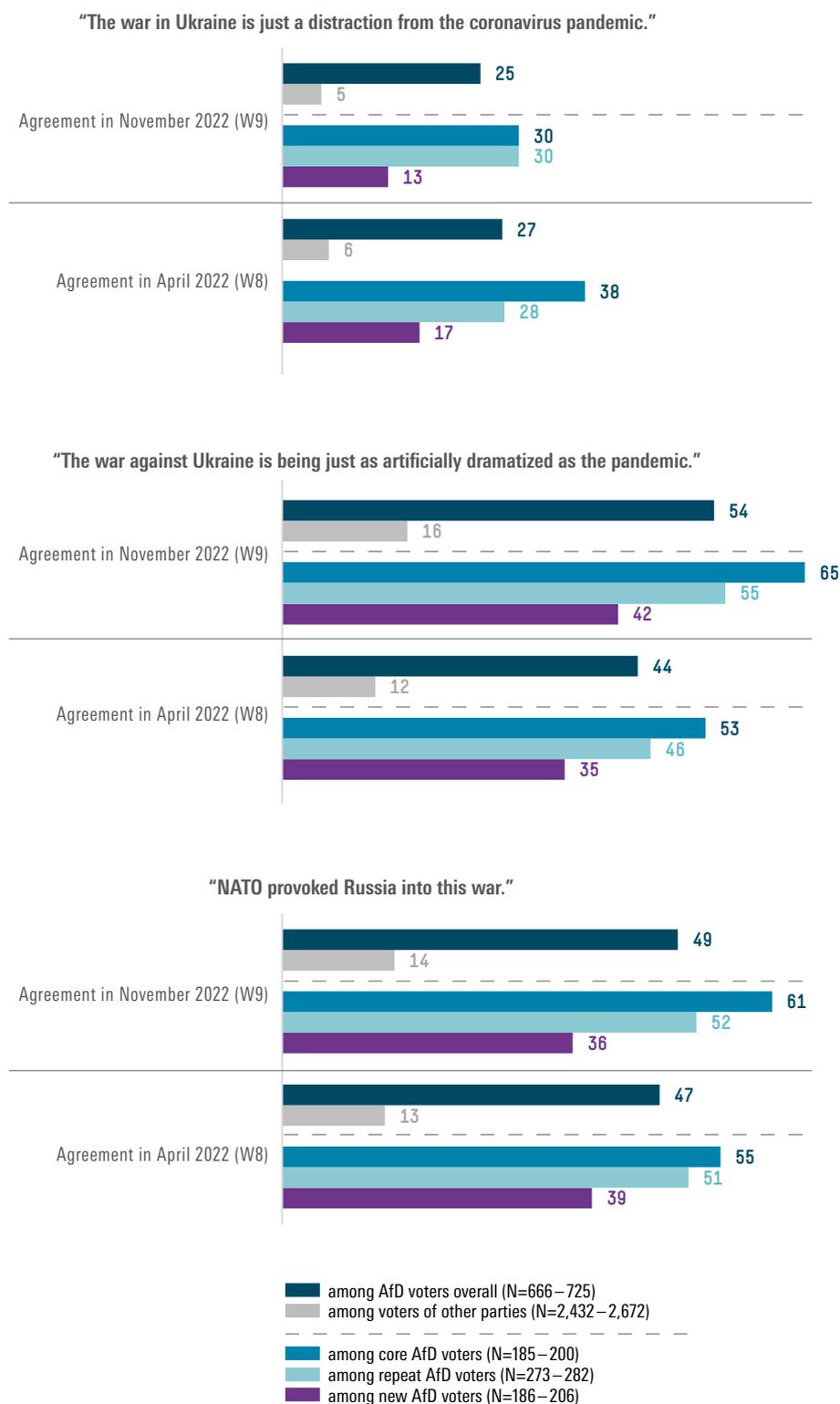
Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** In April 2022, 64 percent of core AfD voters agreed with the statement "Refugees from Ukraine should take a back seat here in Germany". Seven months later, agreement with the statement rose to 88 percent in this group.

**Notes:** Waves 8–10, April and November 2022 and July 2023; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all for W8 and W9\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: all for W8 and W9\*\*\*; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

**Change in agreement between April and November 2022 with statements on the war in Ukraine, by current AfD voting preference**  
 Figures in percent



**Interpretation aid:** Among current AfD voters, just under half agreed in April and November 2022 with the statement that NATO “provoked Russia into this war”. Among voters of other parties, agreement was 13 and 14 percent, respectively.

**Notes:** Waves 8–10, April and November 2022 and July 2023; significant differences AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all in W8 and W9\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. voters of other parties: all in W8 and W9\*\*\*; significant differences new AfD voters vs. core voters: all in W8 and W9\*\*\*; \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The analyses presented here, based on the WSI Labour Force Panel, produce numerous findings on current AfD voters and reveal some remarkable developments in the period under consideration between 2020 and 2023. They are summarised and discussed again in four steps below.

### 5.1 Who are the AfD voters?

The findings presented show some distinct trends among AfD voters. Socio-demographically, AfD voters are more often male than female, more often East Germans than West Germans, more often people without a high school diploma and with low to medium household incomes. In addition, an above-average number of people between the ages of 30 and 49 state that they vote for the AfD.

The high percentage of blue-collar workers among AfD voters is also striking, as is the finding that AfD voters report poorer working conditions in numerous areas compared to voters of other parties. The difference appears to be particularly pronounced when it comes to recognition, both in the form of wages that are perceived as inadequate and performance that is often not valued by superiors and the employer. As in previous studies, this confirms that the conditions under which people work and the recognition that they can (or cannot) gain from this are not insignificant for turning away from democratic ideals, processes and parties.

One of the key characteristics among AfD voters is their extremely low level of trust in institutions. There is not only an extremely low level of trust in the federal government and public media, but trust in other institutions is also significantly below average. Only their trust in the party they voted for is relatively high compared to voters of other parties, meaning that many can be described as convinced AfD voters.

The consistently very high level of worry and stress that AfD voters have indicated over the last three years is also remarkable. In nine out of ten areas surveyed, AfD voters were significantly more likely than voters of other parties to report major concerns, both with regard to financial and professional issues as well as social issues.

If we look at the issues that current AfD voters considered important shortly after the 2021 federal election, there is a considerable difference compared to voters of other parties, particularly with regard to the extremely high level of support for immigration restrictions. The three issues surveyed that otherwise stood out with significant differences to other voters were the low importance of combating climate change and strengthening the EU as well as dealing with the pandemic.

Detailed analyses of attitudes during the pandemic clearly show how differently current AfD

voters viewed the pandemic. Not only were they largely dissatisfied with the German government's crisis management, the majority of them also considered the restrictions to be unjustified and a threat to democracy. For quite a few of them, this resulted in considerable resistance, which manifested itself both in supporting the protests against the restrictions and in sharing conspiratorial views about the virus and its origin or in disregarding the rules of behaviour to contain the virus.

Their view of the war in Ukraine appears to be similarly divergent. The overwhelming majority (six out of seven AfD voters) expressed dissatisfaction with the German government's crisis management in this regard. Almost half of AfD voters think that NATO "provoked" Russia into war with Ukraine and conspiracy narratives in relation to the war in Ukraine are also much more popular among them than among voters of other parties. Finally, it is clear what pessimistic to negative views and attitudes AfD voters harbour towards refugees from Ukraine. These were already pronounced at the beginning of the war of aggression against Ukraine and have subsequently intensified. Most recently, three out of four AfD voters agreed that refugees from Ukraine should "take a back seat" here in Germany for the time being.

### 5.2 What do the voter migrations to the AfD show?

In order to obtain information to answer this question, voter migration was first analysed in detail. It was noticeable that the parties that have lost the most voters to the AfD since the 2021 federal election include the FDP (12 percent) and the SPD (9 percent), both parties in the coalition government, and the CDU/CSU (10 percent). A total of 23 percent of current AfD voters stated that they had voted for one of the three traffic light parties in the Bundestag elections. This indicates that the AfD was able to win over a not inconsiderable number of voters who were disappointed and turned away from one of the three traffic light parties. What is striking is that the SPD, unlike the FDP, lost most of these voters in the first year after the federal election and has probably suffered almost no losses to the AfD since November 2022. At the same time, when we look at new AfD voters, it becomes clear that the AfD has recently been able to record migration gains from the CDU/CSU parties in particular. Close to one in three current new AfD voters previously stated that they wanted to vote for the CDU/CSU.

In short, the findings on voter migration in this report indicate that the SPD and the FDP have lost disappointed voters to the AfD to a not inconsiderable extent since the Bundestag elections and that this migration from the SPD has hardly taken place recently. However, the migration from the

CDU/CSU appears to be much more relevant in explaining the AfD's large gains in recent months. This can certainly be interpreted as confirmation of the upgrading and normalisation processes of "mainstreaming" explained at the beginning and shown in other studies (e.g., Krause et al. 2022), from which, however, the established democratic parties (in this case the CDU/CSU) do not benefit.

With regard to the question of where the respondents who have recently switched to the AfD come from politically, two findings are also worth mentioning: first, former Green voters, who have otherwise hardly or not at all been among AfD voters, can also be found among them, meaning that the AfD has apparently recently won over new voters from groups that it previously did not reach. Second, it is striking that the AfD wins its new voters largely from respondents who still voted for one of the five established democratic parties in the 2021 federal election and not to a large extent from respondents who have not voted for a democratic party in a long time.

### **5.3 Who are the voters who have recently switched to the AfD?**

In the results presented, the group of new AfD voters was focussed on in particular, that is, those who stated for the first time that they intended to vote for the AfD in the most recent survey. Socio-demographically, these respondents who only recently switched to the AfD stand out on account of a number of special features. Compared to the party's more established voter groups, new AfD voters are more likely to be women and less likely to be parents or middle-aged respondents. It is also noticeable that, in terms of their educational level and income situation, they are more similar to voters of other parties than regular AfD voters, who are made up more of respondents without a high level of education and with medium and low incomes.

With regard to the labour situation, there are many overlaps between new and established AfD voters. For example, both groups are made up of an above-average number of blue-collar workers and, similar to more established AfD voters, new voters also report below-average working conditions, in particular job security or recognition. However, unlike among core AfD voters, the percentage of respondents without a collective agreement is above average among new AfD voters.

With regard to mistrust in the federal government, it is clear that new AfD voters are in no way different from the more established AfD voter groups, as the overwhelming majority of them (nine out of ten) also express little to no trust in the coalition government. The situation is somewhat better for trust in other institutions, such as the public media, which are also mistrusted by a

large majority of new AfD voters, but not to the same extent as among core AfD voters, for example. However, there are major differences when it comes to trust in the AfD: this is significantly below average among new AfD voters. Among new voters, there are more respondents who express low trust than respondents who express high trust in the AfD. This may certainly also be due to the fact that these respondents have only recently switched to the AfD. At the same time, this relatively high percentage of respondents who are not very convinced by the party is possibly a reason to hope that some respondents will find their way back to democratic parties.

In terms of worries and stress, new AfD voters are very similar to more established AfD voters, as they are also highly concerned and highly stressed, especially with regard to finances. What is also striking among new AfD voters is the extraordinarily high level of concern about social cohesion. The latent feeling of a society that is drifting further and further apart seems to have gripped them and worries them. Immigration seems to be a particularly relevant cause for concern in this context, which they believe must be limited at all costs. In this extremely united rejection of further immigration, there is a great deal of agreement with more established AfD voters and at the same time a great divergence from many voters of other parties. Interestingly, the thematic similarities between the many new AfD voters and other AfD positions are not nearly as pronounced. For example, strengthening the EU or combating climate change were cited much more frequently as important political goals among new AfD voters than among core AfD voters.

### **5.4 What could have fuelled the switch to the AfD? An attempt at a chronological reconstruction**

In order to find answers to this question, the developments over time were analysed and traced using the panel structure of the data. With regard to the enormous distrust in the federal government and public media among AfD voters, it is possible to trace how more and more respondents who have recently switched to the AfD have lost trust over the last 20 months.

Analyses of the development of the level of concern also reveal some insights. They show that current new AfD voters already expressed an above-average level of concern at the beginning of the pandemic, which was at a very comparable level to groups that were already voting for the AfD at the time. In the following year and a half or so of the pandemic, their level of concern about social issues remained above that of voters from other parties, but well below that of established AfD voters. In other words: in the early stages of the

pandemic, current new AfD voters were not yet as highly concerned about many issues. It was only in spring 2022, in the wake of the Russian attack on Ukraine and its repercussions, that the concern levels of current AfD voters shot up to those of more established AfD voters. Those who only recently switched to the AfD therefore did not have quite as negative a view of society and economic development for a long time as they do now and as more established AfD voters did back then already. It is important to note that this applies above all to social concerns; their worries about their own individual situation have been just as pronounced in the last three years as among more established AfD voters. Even before the sharp rise in inflation in 2022, those who recently switched to the AfD reported an above-average frequency of being financially stressed – only they did not yet decide to vote for the AfD at that time. However, this does not mean that their own financial stress does not have to play a role in their party vote. It is very possible that the enormous increase in and the very high level of financial worries, including among AfD voters, played a part in many people turning away from established democratic parties.

Finally, a look at the two major issues of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine helps to trace the departure of voters who recently switched to the AfD. With regard to the pandemic, it is very clear that this appears to be less of a trigger for a drift to the right, at least not in the first year and a half of the pandemic. Most of the current AfD voters were still in agreement and largely followed the proposed path in solidarity, as can be seen, for example, from the low rate of vaccination refusal or the low percentage of those who stated that they did not adhere to the rules of conduct. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that at a later point in the pandemic, at the beginning of 2022, the view of the pandemic crisis management among current new AfD voters clouded significantly in the course of dissatisfaction with other political issues.

A look at the war in Ukraine reveals more divergent attitudes among current AfD voters compared to voters of other parties. The Russia-friendly interpretation of war guilt and conspiracy narratives about the war are shared with above-average frequency, and a great deal of dissatisfaction with the German government's crisis management is expressed. At the same time, it is evident that agreement with the negative attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine is large and increasing. This confirms the great importance of the issue of limiting immigration among AfD voters overall, but also only slightly less among those who only recently switched to the AfD.

In conclusion, it can therefore be said that this report also clearly highlights one result: those who vote for the AfD do not do so despite their anti-immigration positions, but because of them. AfD

voters who are disappointed and turn away from more established democratic parties and at the same time do not share the AfD's right-wing positions on migration issues can hardly be found in the data. This is particularly evident in the fact that 95 percent of current AfD voters cited limiting immigration to Germany as an important issue in the 2021 federal election. The same applies to current new AfD voters, as they also overwhelmingly prioritise limiting immigration, and this was the case almost two years ago. The data therefore clearly indicate that the newly acquired voters do not differ significantly from their more established, often xenophobic voters when it comes to immigration. It can be assumed that the widespread concern about social cohesion among AfD voters is probably based on a very homogeneous and exclusionary image of society.

However, the not uncommon assertion that the AfD is voted for only out of protest, without much agreement on content, also appears to be rather rare in light of another finding: AfD voters express a remarkably high level of trust in the party they vote for (46 percent); this figure is surpassed only by supporters of the Greens. This is also confirmed by the findings on the percentage of those who have only a low level of trust in the party. A low level of trust in one's own party could be interpreted as an indication that these are protest voters who actually agree very little with the party's substantive positions. However, the percentage of AfD voters who have little trust in the party is hardly higher than for most other parties.

Only the finding that trust in the party is significantly below average among new AfD voters indicates, at least in this group, that there are still some voters here who are not yet completely convinced by the AfD. It is important to appeal to these voters with positions other than anti-immigration ones; positions that are able to alleviate their social and financial concerns must be reinforced. Good policies that address and solve problems and perceived injustices can ensure that people regain trust in politics. However, if public infrastructure often does not work or (affordable) housing is extremely scarce in many regions and actual competition with immigrants arises, if insufficient money is made available to successfully integrate incoming people, all of this is grist to the mill of political actors who want to fuel further mistrust in democratic institutions and pit local people against refugees. Against this backdrop and in times of such political and social challenges, austerity policies, such as those currently being pursued by the Federal Minister of Finance, appear to be a very dangerous path to take.

However, the austerity measures threaten to have a destructive effect in another area: the significant savings plans announced in the area of political and democratic education appear to be a fatal sign at a time when more and more peo-

ple are turning away from democracy. Democracy requires understanding; democratic practices and competences must be practised. It requires commitment and participation; this requires not only

people who are given the opportunity to participate, but also people who want to participate. A functioning and vibrant democracy needs responsible democrats who stand up for it.

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