

Casting Your Vote Is Hard, When You Don't Know Your Values

Politics is in every decision you make

I am writing this post while still at work. I have just finished a class in political science. One of the things that is constantly on my students' minds these days are the upcoming elections for the German parliament, which will happen this Sunday. Most of the youngsters have not decided on their vote yet, and they find it extremely difficult.

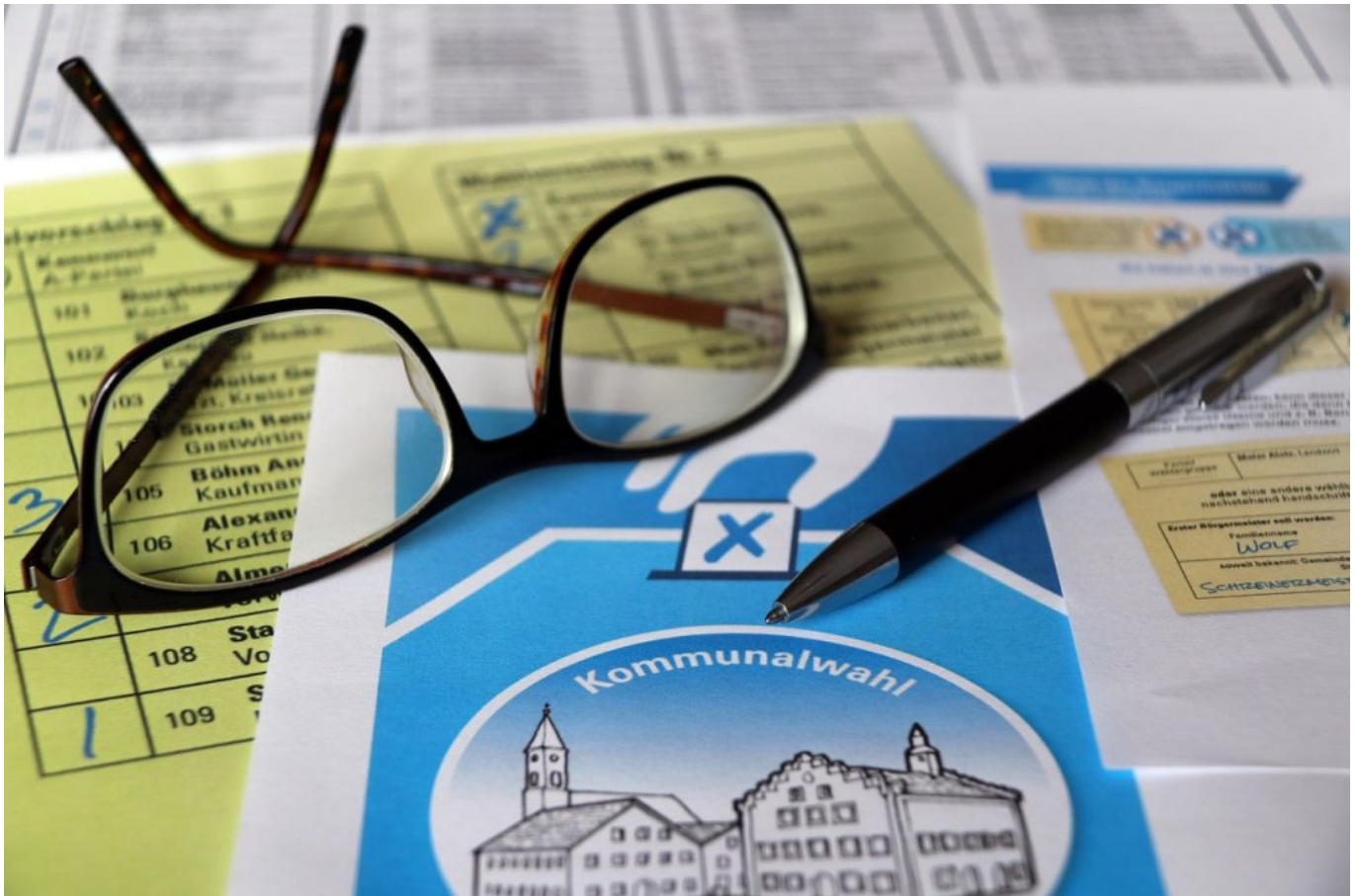


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But I had some insights, which I shared with them, and which I want to share with you, my dear readers.

Deciding who to vote for seems incredibly difficult on the surface. In Germany, there is a smorgasbord of political parties that want our attention. There are the obvious big parties, such as the Social Democrats that have been around for a long time. And there are small niche-parties like Volt. And then there are obvious neoliberal right-wing ideology parties. Like the AFD, that rely on populism and simple phrases to stir up debate. Which platform should you follow?

What makes it even more difficult is the fact, that all parties disappoint,

once the election is over. Some, like the green party and the social democrats will abandon core ideals. For instance, their stance on [social justice](#) and pacifism to get to power. Others bow down every time, when it comes to negotiating new legislation. There are also parties, who are extremely uncompromising. So much so, they always fail to get any of their issues through parliament.

To be fair, these traits do not always belong to any one party in particular. We can accuse most parties of doing either of these at times. Nonetheless, it makes their platforms less trustworthy and confuses a lot of voters. I am one of them and have been firmly in the non-voting camp for many election cycles. Not this time, though.

But there is one thing, that makes it even more tricky to cut through the election-talk bullshit. It is something that you always should know when you decide who to vote for.

You Don't Really Know Your Values

Most people think, that politics is all about elections and politicians. This is why they tune out, when they even hear the word politics. They think it's all boring stuff about legislation and bureaucracy. That all that stuff has nothing to do with them and their loved ones. But this is a false perception. Because politics is in everything we do. We show our political values by how we act on a deeply personal level.

But the thing is, that most of us just do things and seldom reflect on why we do what we do. Our brain loves to tell us narratives to let us keep doing things in certain ways. Take a simple example. Say you are a tenant in a housing unit with 20 families. One of your neighbours decides to throw a barbecue party. Would you attend, or not? But before you make a gut decision, ask yourselves the following questions:

- What would the consequences of my decision be for me, personally?
- What would the consequences of my decision be for the community of the housing unit?

You may not feel like going, and you have every right to do so. But if you stay away, it could mean that you miss out on an opportunity to get to know your neighbors better. You may even become friends with some of them. It could happen, that nobody feels like going. The host is disappointed and decides not to make the effort of hosting another party. Now, the community has lost some important social glue that keeps it together.

You see, that tiny decision does have political implications. Politics is in everything we do. But if we don't ask ourselves these kinds of questions in our daily lives. We don't know what kind of society we value and want. That makes us easy pray to the whims of media campaigns, advertisers, and populists.

We must not listen to, what our politicians preach, but how they act. And if you know, what matters to you, it is easy to filter through the election talk.

Let Your Core Values Guide You in Your Vote

So, instead of asking who you should vote for this time, try asking a different question. What are my core values? What is something that I am not willing to compromise on? Don't hang it up on some minor media frenzy.

- Do I believe that all humans are created equal and deserve dignity and respect?
- Do I think that the declaration of human rights should be upheld and taken seriously?
- Do I think that all people deserve a decent standard of living?

You can continue your list, if you want. In my case, I answer yes to all the above. This means I can already filter out many parties from the list.

The next step is to understand, that on a national level, politics is sometimes messy. Compromises have to be made to find middle ground. But you can still judge parties by their actions. Ask yourself this: Which party or representative has represented my values? Which of them has shown up consistently in defending those values? Even when they were under political pressure?

Talk is cheap. Actions are, where the true values show themselves. This counts both for individuals and for larger entities alike. If you find that none of the established players fit the mold, then that newcomer party might be worth your vote. Sure, they will not have as much say. But that is not important in the long run. What matters is, that your values have a voice. Eventually, that voice will prevail. History has shown this on more than one occasion.

So, do you really know what your core values are? Why do you do what you do?