

BACHELOR THESIS

The right-wing populism of the AfD party and its regional differences

A quantitative analysis on populist antagonisms within the
programmatic discourse

SUBMITTED BY

DIPL.-MATH. PAUL KEYDEL

Freie Universität Berlin, April 2024

1st supervisor: Dr. Julia Reuschenbach

2nd supervisor: Prof. Dr. Bruno Castanho Silva

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Populism as an ideology of democracy	4
2.1	What is an ideology?	4
2.2	Populism: the bridge between ›the people‹ and ›the politics‹	5
2.3	The role of antagonisms	5
3	The AfD party and its right-wing populism	6
3.1	Usage of right-wing antagonisms at the level of the federal states	6
3.2	Towards an analysis of the programmatic discourse	6
4	An analysis of antagonisms within AfD manifestos	8
4.1	A dictionary-based approach with <i>RPC-Lex</i>	8
4.2	Results for the last two state elections	8
4.3	Temporal changes between East and West Germany	8
5	Evaluation of the findings and validation	16
6	Conclusion and final comments	19

1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to bla bla

2 Populism as an ideology of democracy

2.1 What is an ideology?

In order to understand the connection between populism and ideology, this section will outline a theoretical framework behind ideologies. There are, in general, several approaches within political theory to define or describe ideologies. For example, one might take policies into account and consider ideologies as attributions of them in a one-dimensional left-right spectrum. Such a policy-based approach can be useful for descriptive analysis of party alignment or voting behavior. (Lembcke 2014, p. 154) But what is an ideology in itself?

The concept of attributing policies to ideologies suggests that ideologies are related to political issues and the way we think about politics. They originate from political thought, which is in turn expressed by a specific terminology and its meanings. With this, it opens up a discourse-analytical approach to ideologies that is particularly represented through the work of Michael Freeden. He claimed that the “study of ideology becomes the study of the nature of political thought: its building blocks and the clusters of meaning with which it shapes the political worlds we populate”. (Freeden 2006, p. 15) For him, the act of political thinking arises from real-world contexts and seeks interpretations of the political reality - within a specific terminological framework that is used to express and formulate these meaningful interpretations. Political thought is thus, too, a practice of building meanings and where individuals “attempt [...] to impose specific senses on repositories of political meaning that are by their semantic nature multivalent and contestable”. (Freeden 2006, p. 19) At this point, ideologies play a central role. They can structure the described process of political thought in the sense that ideologies both assign and fix specific meanings to political ideas or concepts. Freeden understands ideologies further as conceptual structures with which all political actors describe themselves, the relation between them and their relation to the surrounding world. Consequently, ideologies temporarily “define our understanding of the political” and they are thus dynamic, i.e. they change as political challenges of the society change. Within this dynamic alignment they also “compete with alternative configurations over political support and over the central control of the political”. (Freeden 2006, p. 14)

In his popular book *Ideologies and Political Theory* (1998) Freeden has developed a morphological approach to ideologies in order to explain and reconstruct the process of competition between conceptual elements and interpretations. His starting points are the already mentioned “political concepts” that stand for rather abstract ideas like “liberty, justice, power and rights”. (Freeden 1998, p. 54) These concepts are far from monolithic constructs, they rather consist of smaller *components* which can relate to each other and represent, through their specific configuration, the entire concept. Freeden distinguishes

here between “ineliminable” and non-ineliminable¹ components. Ineliminable components are logically necessary, i.e. without any such components, it is impossible to derive a reasonable meaning. Thus, the set of all ineliminable components might be seen as the *core* of the concept, whereas non-ineliminable components “cannot carry the concept on their own”. (Freeden 1998, p. 62)

An analogous topology can be transferred to ideologies and conceptual structures, respectively. An ideology obtains and fixes meanings from multiple concepts and a single concept is not only determined by its components but also by its position within a greater “idea-environment”. (Freeden 1998, p. 67) In this manner, *adjacent concepts* emerge that, for example, share certain components and equally are part of the same ideology. Based on these considerations, Freeden postulates a three-level formation of ideologies: The most central concepts define the *core of the ideology*, supplemented by the concepts from the *adjacency* and the *periphery*. The example of liberalism illustrates this morphology:

For instance, an examination of observed liberalisms might establish that liberty is situated within their core, that human rights, democracy, and equality are adjacent to liberty, and that nationalism is to be found on their periphery. (Freeden 1998, p. 77)

The advantage of Freeden’s morphology is that any configuration of concepts and its components is not isolated from other configurations. An ideology characterized by connections of concepts next to each other implies, inevitably, a certain ambiguity or indeterminacy, which again enables various narratives within the political struggle of consent and support. (Lembcke 2014, p. 155)

2.2 Populism: the bridge between ›the people‹ and ›the politics‹

Both left-wing (Mouffe) and right-wing populism construct a version of “the people”.

right-wing populism: aims for a simplification of reality

left-wing populism (Mouffe): shall clarify structures of oppression and exploitation

quote Freeden: “it constitutes a significant sampling from the rich, but unmanageable and partly incompatible, variety of human thinking on politics, contained within and presented through a communicable and action-inspiring pattern” (Freeden 1998, p. 54)

2.3 The role of antagonisms

Antagonisms either help to reduce the whole world or to re-politicize society.

right-wing populism: Fight against immigrants, political and economic elites

left-wing populism (Mouffe): Fight against poverty, the capital, privileged classes

¹To be precise, non-ineliminable components are “quasi-contingent”.

3 The AfD party and its right-wing populism

3.1 Usage of right-wing antagonisms at the level of the federal states

The AfD party changed from Euroscepticism to (radical) right. Populist strategies against the government are common, also against immigration (Remigration).

Example of antagonistic speech: Telegram messages of the highest reaction rates!

Rating of the Verfassungsschutz concerning right-wing extremism is a potential East-West difference. The more extremist the more concentration on ethnic aspects.

With this in mind, one might ask the question of whether the AfD party creates region-dependent populist narratives or a unique overall narrative related to right-wing antagonisms.

3.2 Towards an analysis of the programmatic discourse

Limit the analysis to the four subdicts from RPC. Why are these antagonisms relevant to the question in section 3.1.?

How can we achieve regional information on programmatic development? Manifestos are in this sense very helpful because they are created within a democratic process and therefore offer a deeper view inside the party.

Is there other current research that uses AfD manifestos? UK comparison, etc...

Which manifestos had specifically been chosen for this analysis, and why?

Telegram: wordcloud of most feedbacked messages

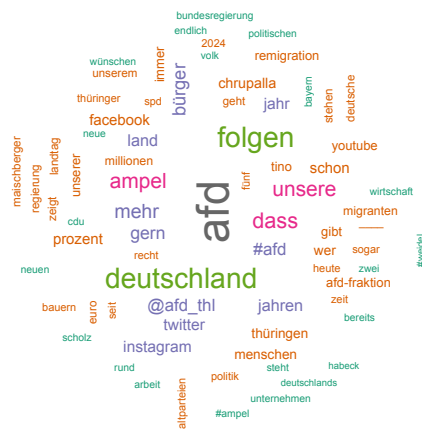


Figure 3.1: a nice plot

4 An analysis of antagonisms within AfD manifestos

4.1 A dictionary-based approach with *RPC-Lex*

What are dictionaries and how can they be used to measure populism?

What is the RPC-Lex and what is it used for? How was it constructed/collected?

Cite quanteda!

4.2 Results for the last two state elections

4.3 Temporal changes between East and West Germany

Anti-gender-/anti-feminism

Anti-elitism

Anti-immigration/islamophobia

Antisemitism

9

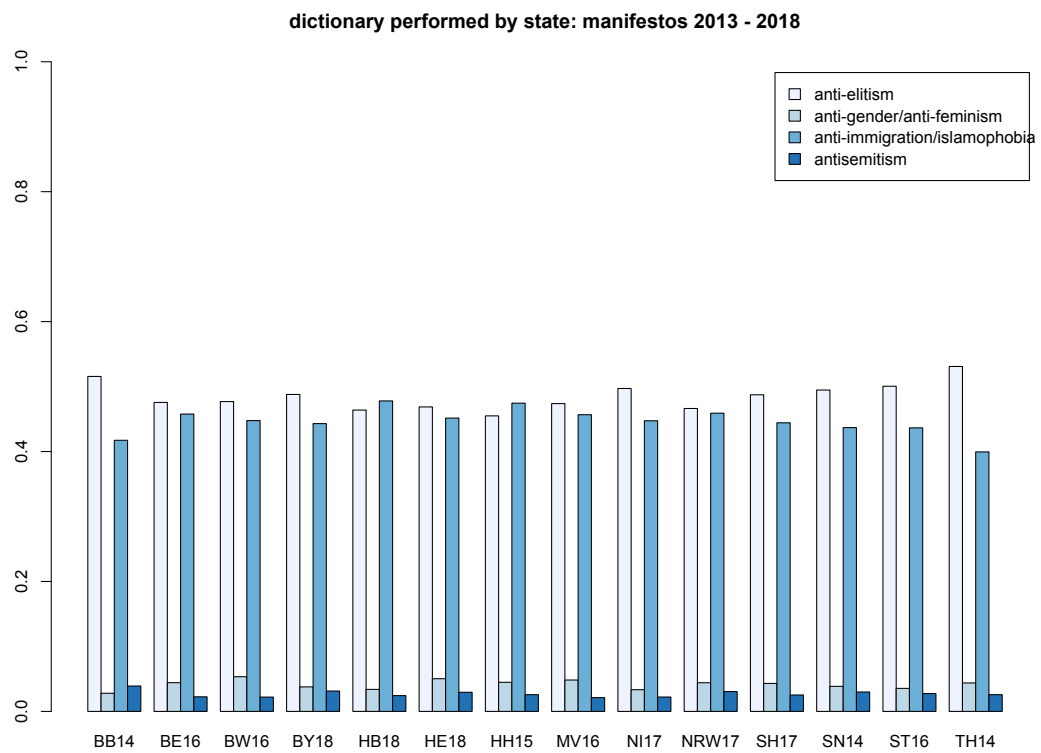


Figure 4.2: a nice plot

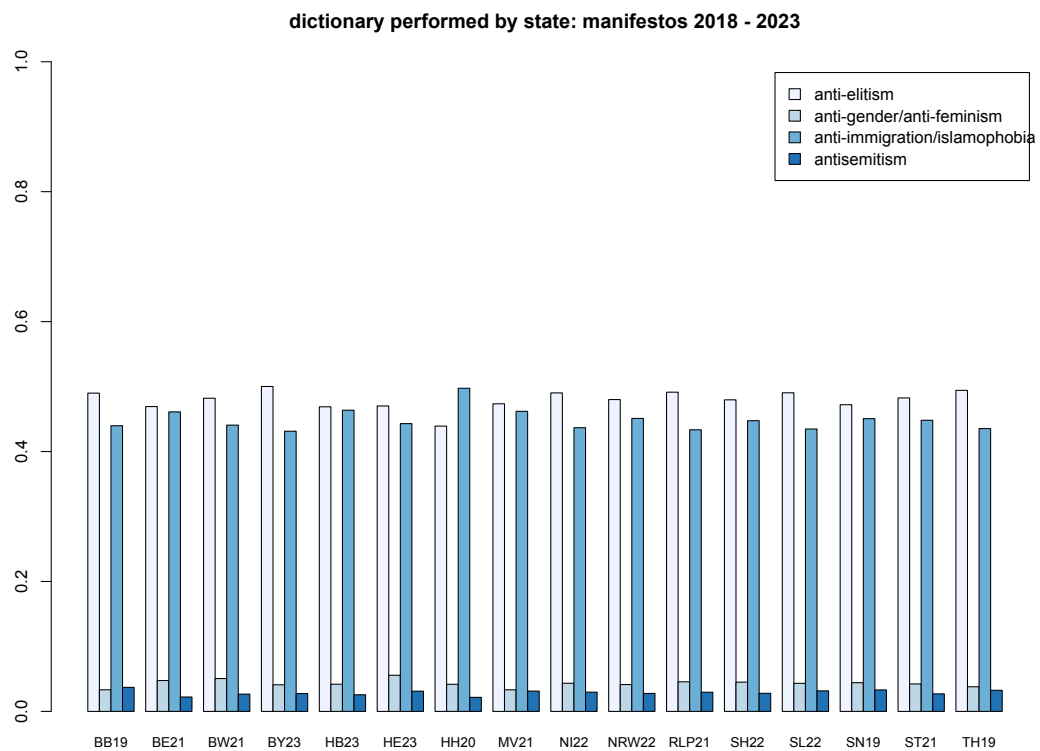


Figure 4.3: a nice plot

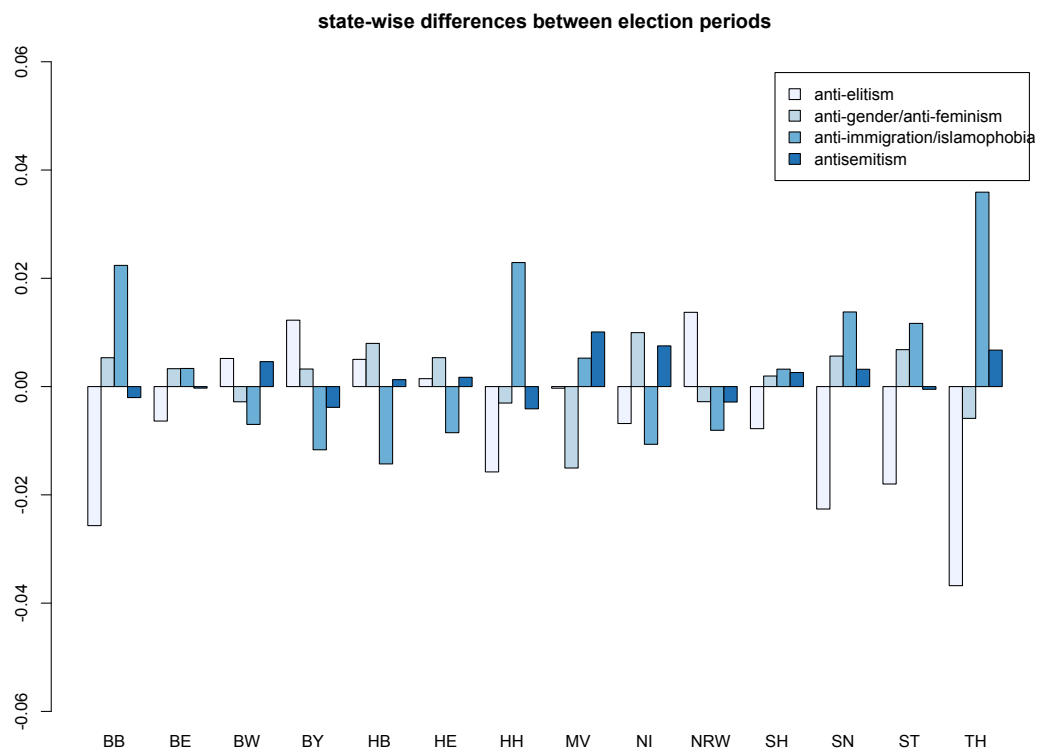


Figure 4.4: a nice plot

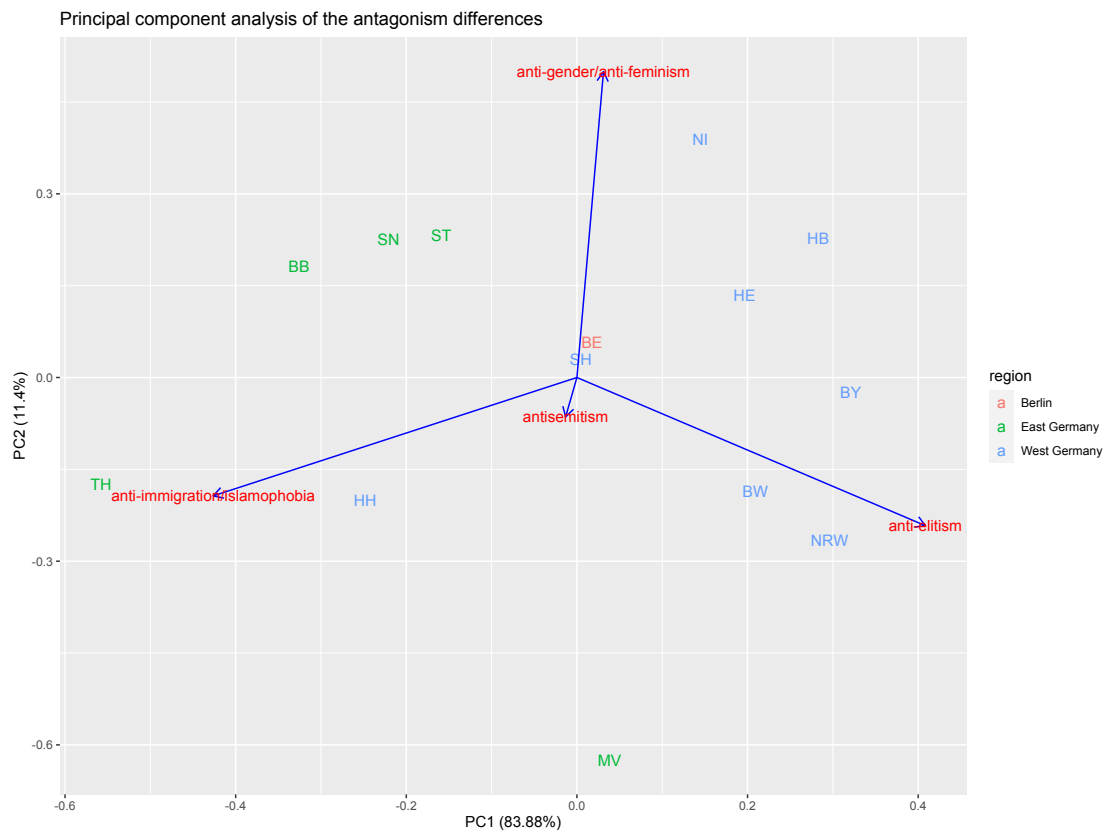


Figure 4.5: a nice plot

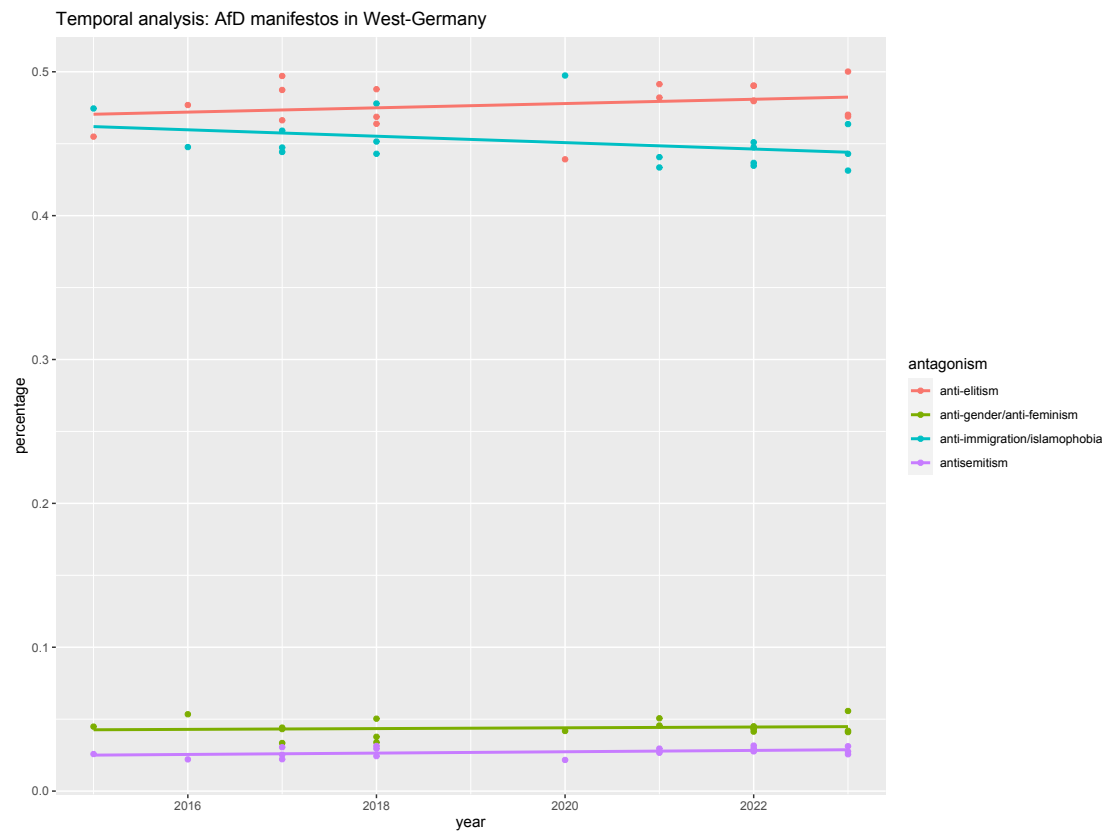


Figure 4.6: a nice plot

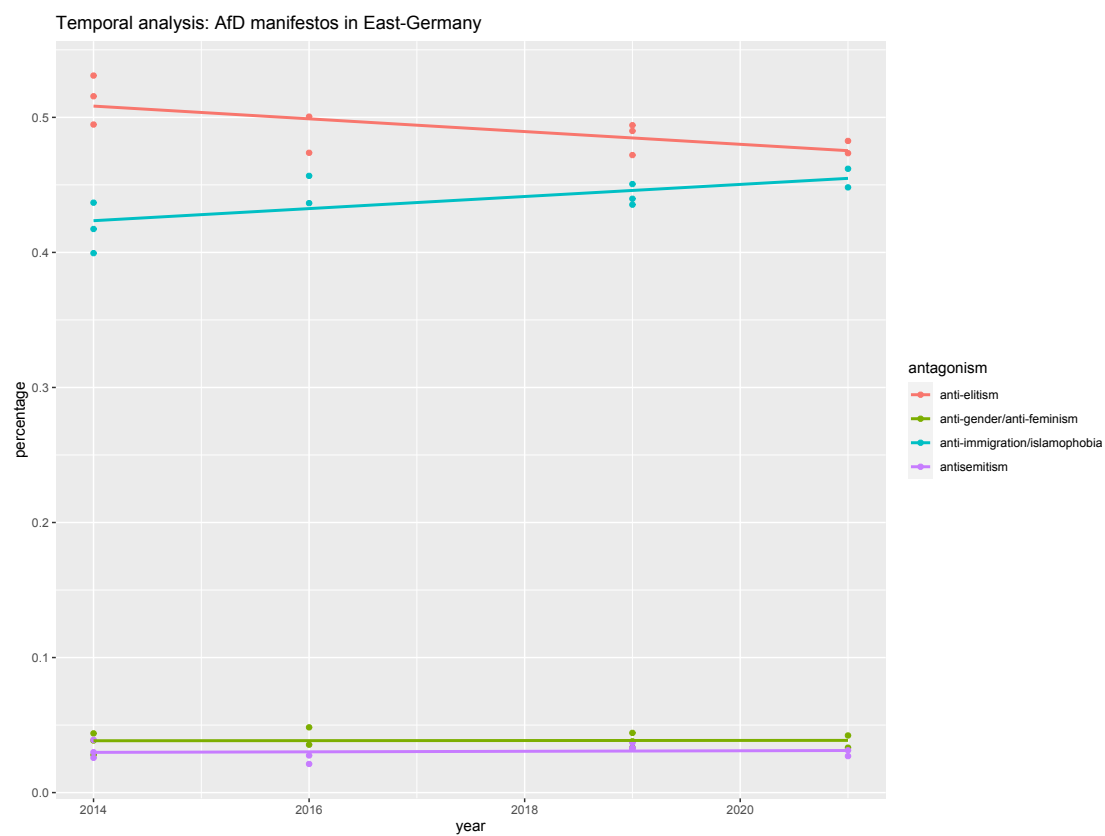


Figure 4.7: a nice plot

5 Evaluation of the findings and validation

Anti-elite antagonism in West-Germany: differences to the election before



Figure 5.1: a nice plot

Anti-immigrant antagonism in East-Germany: differences to the election before



Figure 5.2: a nice plot

6 Conclusion and final comments

Let's start citing (Canovan 2002, p. 22)

Bibliography

Canovan, M. (2002), Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy, *in* Y. Mény & Y. Surel, eds, 'Democracies and the Populist Challenge', Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 25–44.

Freeden, M. (1998), *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford University Press.

Freeden, M. (2006), 'Ideology and political theory', *Journal of Political Ideologies* **11**(1), 3–22.

Lembcke, O. (2014), 'Kein Ende in Sicht. Zur Rolle der Ideologie in der Politik - aus Sicht der Politischen Theorie', *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* **24**, 147–159.