

Look Who's Confronting: Opposition Status, Gender, and the Far Right

Data Science Brown Bag Series, Fall 2025, Hertie School, Berlin

Andreas Küpfer (TU Darmstadt)
December 2nd, 2025

Political Interactions Shape Political Discourse

Politicians Talk to Others All the Time

- Parliamentary Speeches
- Political Advertisements
- Televised Debates
- Social Media Posts
- Digital Transparency Platforms



Politicians Talk to Others All the Time

- Parliamentary Speeches
- Political Advertisements
- Televised Debates
- Social Media Posts
- Digital Transparency Platforms



Interactions are the foundation of political communication—without exchange, there can't be any discourse.

Our World is Multimodal

Many interactions are composed of a combination of text, video, and audio:



Confrontation in Political Interactions

Confrontation helps politicians differentiate themselves and maintain ideological distinctiveness
(Dahl 1971; Martin & Nai 2024).

Confrontation helps politicians differentiate themselves and maintain ideological distinctiveness (*Dahl 1971; Martin & Nai 2024*).

- Evidence mostly from **non-directive**, non-continuous behaviour (e.g., roll-call votes or manifestos)
- Little research on **directed**, immediate confrontation
- Yet crucial because its much more interactive and nuanced

Talking to Competing Parties and Camps

H1a: Interactions with competing parties are associated with more confrontation than interactions within the same party.

H1b: Opposition party politicians seek confrontation with the government bench more often than government party politicians.

H2: Male politicians seek confrontation with politicians from other parties or the government bench more often than female politicians.

Confrontation of the Far Right

H3a: Mainstream politicians seek confrontation with the Far Right during immigration debates more often than on other issues, also compared to confronting the Socialists on housing.

H3b: Mainstream parties use more negative valence while confronting the Far Right than during confrontation with the Socialists.

Nonverbal Behaviour: Eye Contact in Social Psychology

- Eye contact is powerful yet ambiguous (*Burgoon et al. 2021*)
- Classified by duration, direction, and reciprocation (*Cranach & Ellgring 1973*)
- Signals closeness and honesty in everyday interaction (*Argyle & Dean 1965; Kendon 1967*)
- Signals confrontation and assertiveness in competitive contexts (*Exline 1963; Segrin 1993*)

Capturing Confrontation with Eye Contact

Eye contact has unique characteristics for confrontational political interactions:

- Political environments often highly competitive settings
- Directionality component
- Continuously available (politicians always communicate with their eyes)

Speeches in the German Bundestag

Legislative Debates

- 15,553 video recordings of speeches in the 19th German Bundestag (2017–2021) (*Arnold & Küpfer 2025*)
- First legislative period with the far-right AfD

Legislative Debates

- 15,553 video recordings of speeches in the 19th German Bundestag (2017–2021) (*Arnold & Küpfer 2025*)
- First legislative period with the far-right AfD

Feature Generation

- Audio: Word-level transcription (WishperX, *Bain et al. 2023*)
- Video: Head pose extraction (6DRepNet, *Hempel et al. 2024*)
- Text: Sentence-level valence score (*Rauh 2018*)

Method

Computationally capturing eye contact

- Extracting head pose = 3D orientation of the head (key proxy for gaze direction)
- Pitch, yaw, roll indicate looking down, sideways, or head tilt
- Cross-modal querying (*Arnold & Küpfer 2025*): Combining head pose (video modality) with information from other modalities

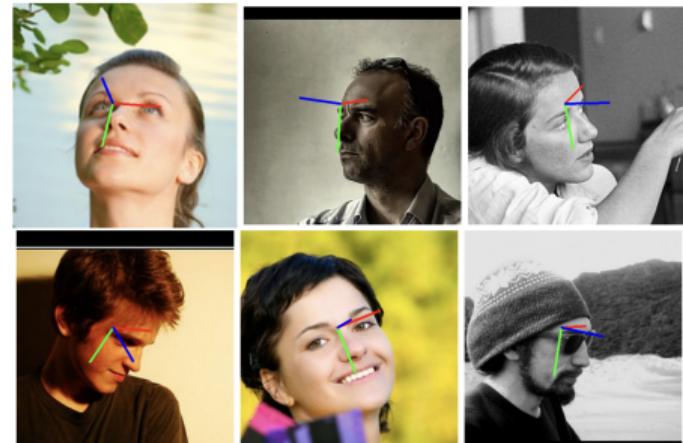
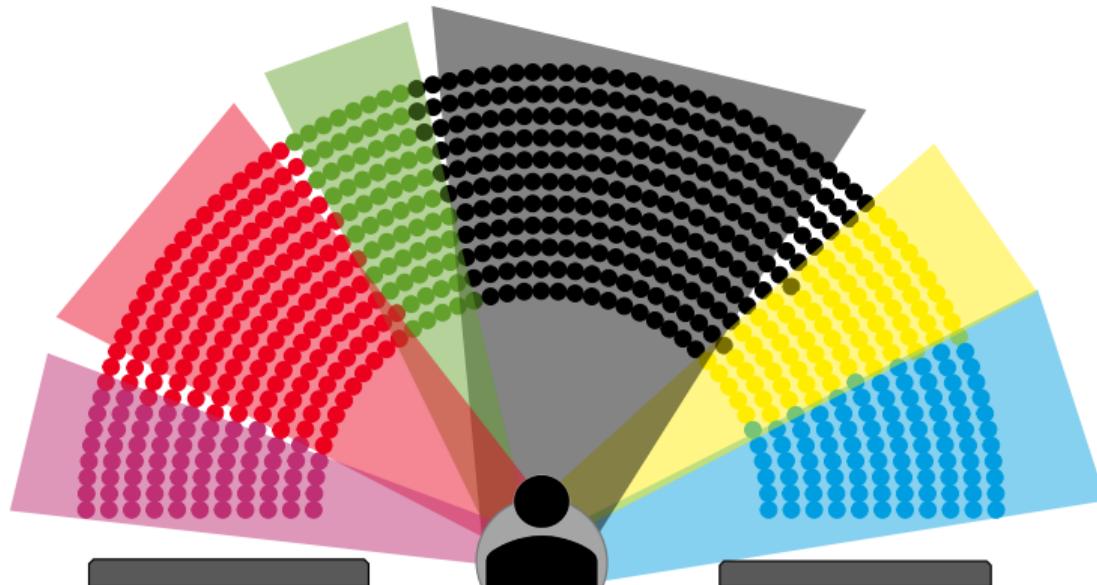


Fig. 2: Example images with converted Euler angle visualization from the AFLW2000 dataset.

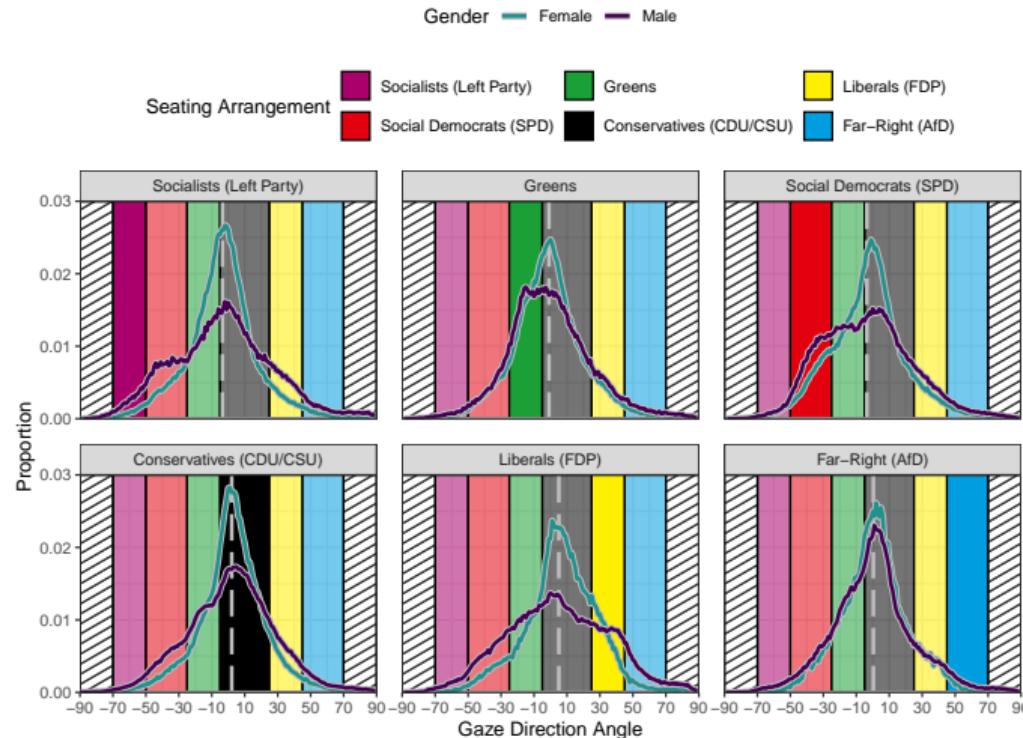
Seating Map

- Socialists (Left)
- Greens
- Liberals (FDP)
- Social Democrats (SPD)
- Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU)
- Far Right (AfD)

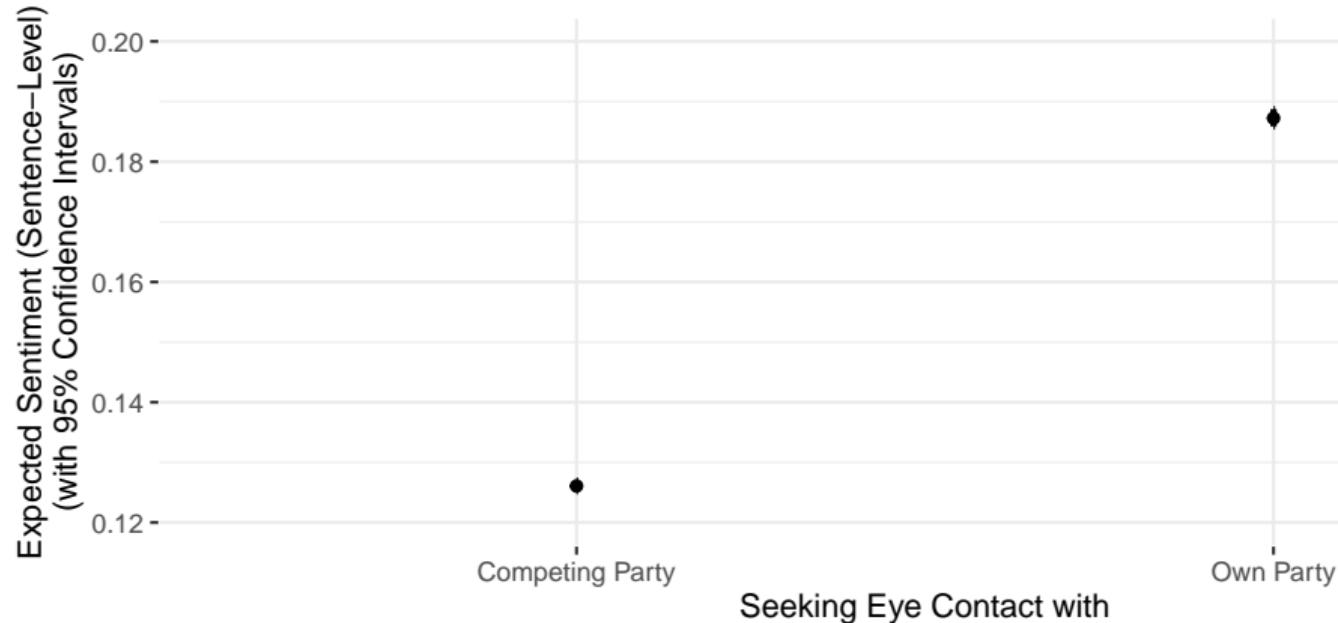


Results

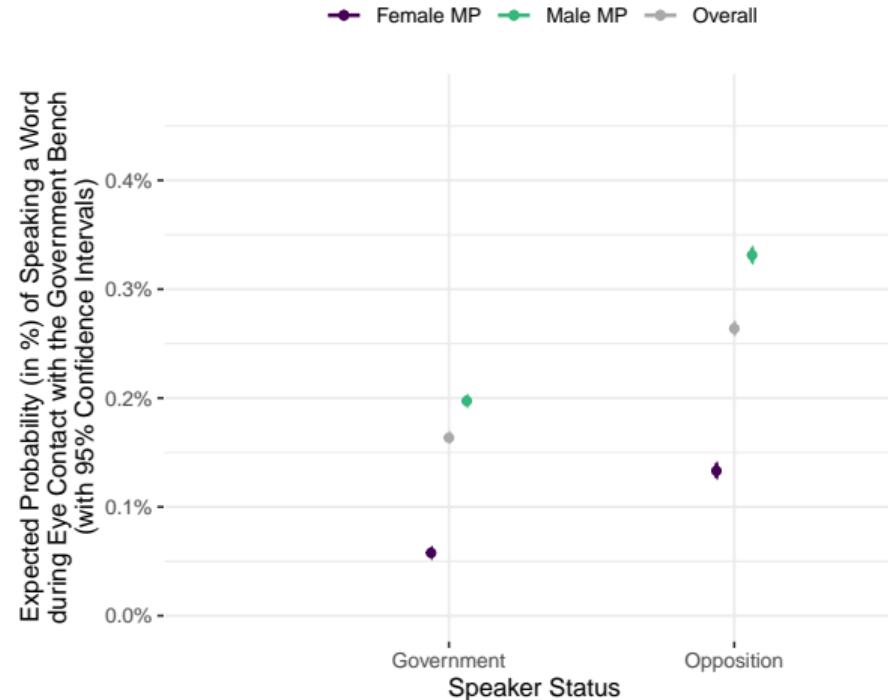
Descriptive Patterns



When does Eye Contact Mark Confrontation?



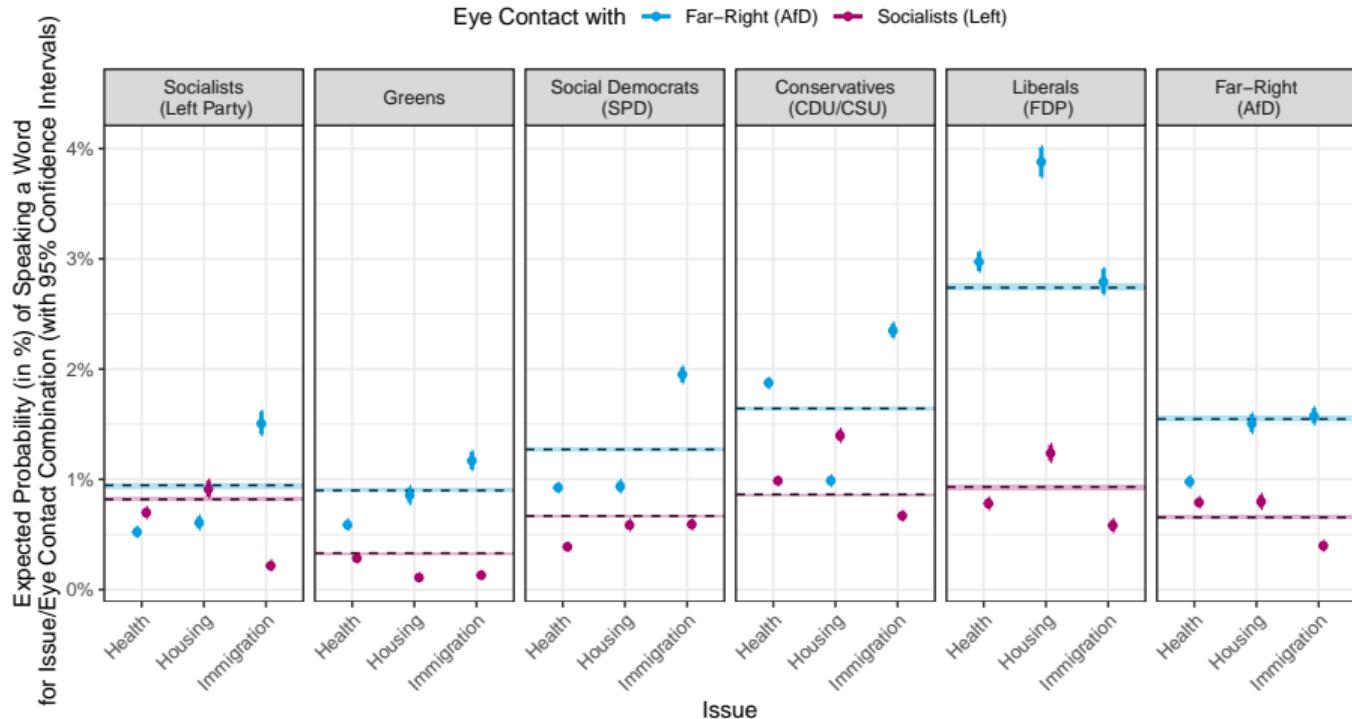
Government-Opposition Conflict



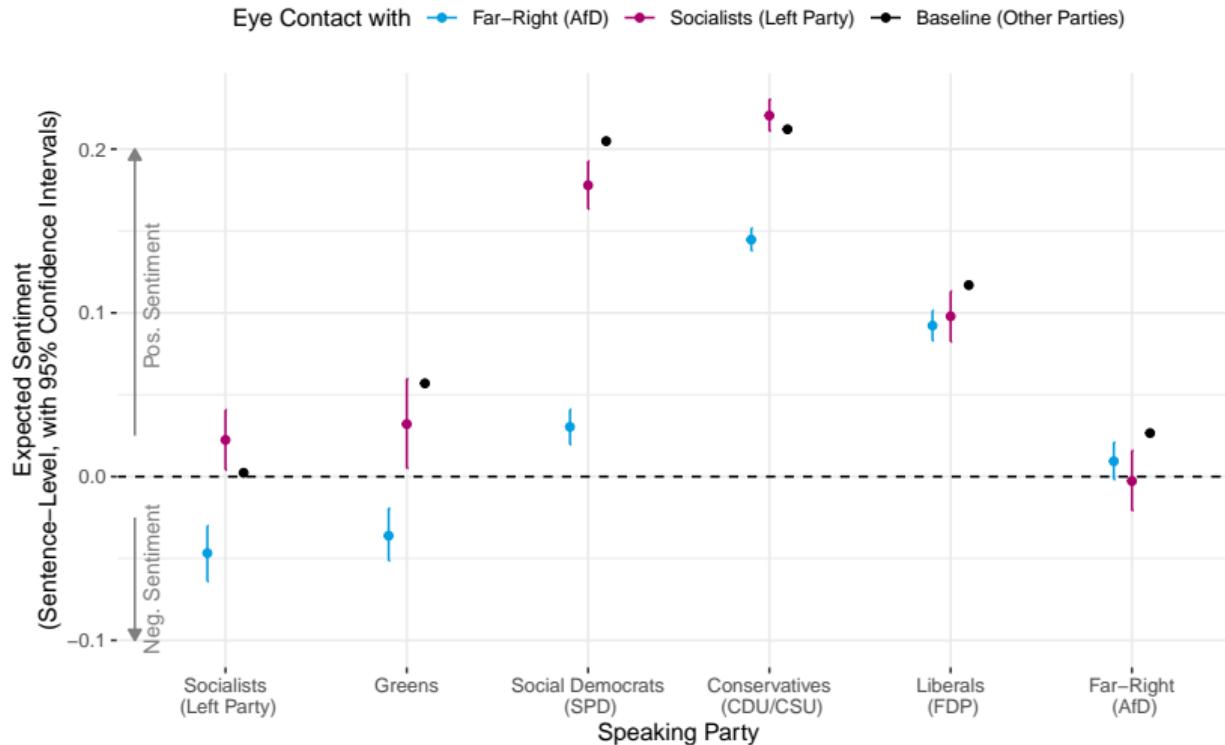
Gendered Patterns of Confrontation



The Far Right and Issue Ownership



Negative Valence Toward the Far Right



Conclusion

Confrontation has many Shapes

Much Political communication is multimodal. Eye contact is a powerful, directed indicator of political confrontation. It opens new avenues for studying more interactive and nuanced political interaction.

Evidence from the German Bundestag:

- **Competing Parties and Government-Opposition patterns:** Stronger negativity toward other parties, especially government vs. opposition
- **Gendered patterns:** Male MPs confront other parties more frequently than female MPs
- **Far-Right patterns:** Mainstream parties seek eye contact with the far right more often for immigration and use more negative valence

Look Who's Confronting: Opposition Status, Gender, and the Far Right

Andreas Küpfer (TU Darmstadt)

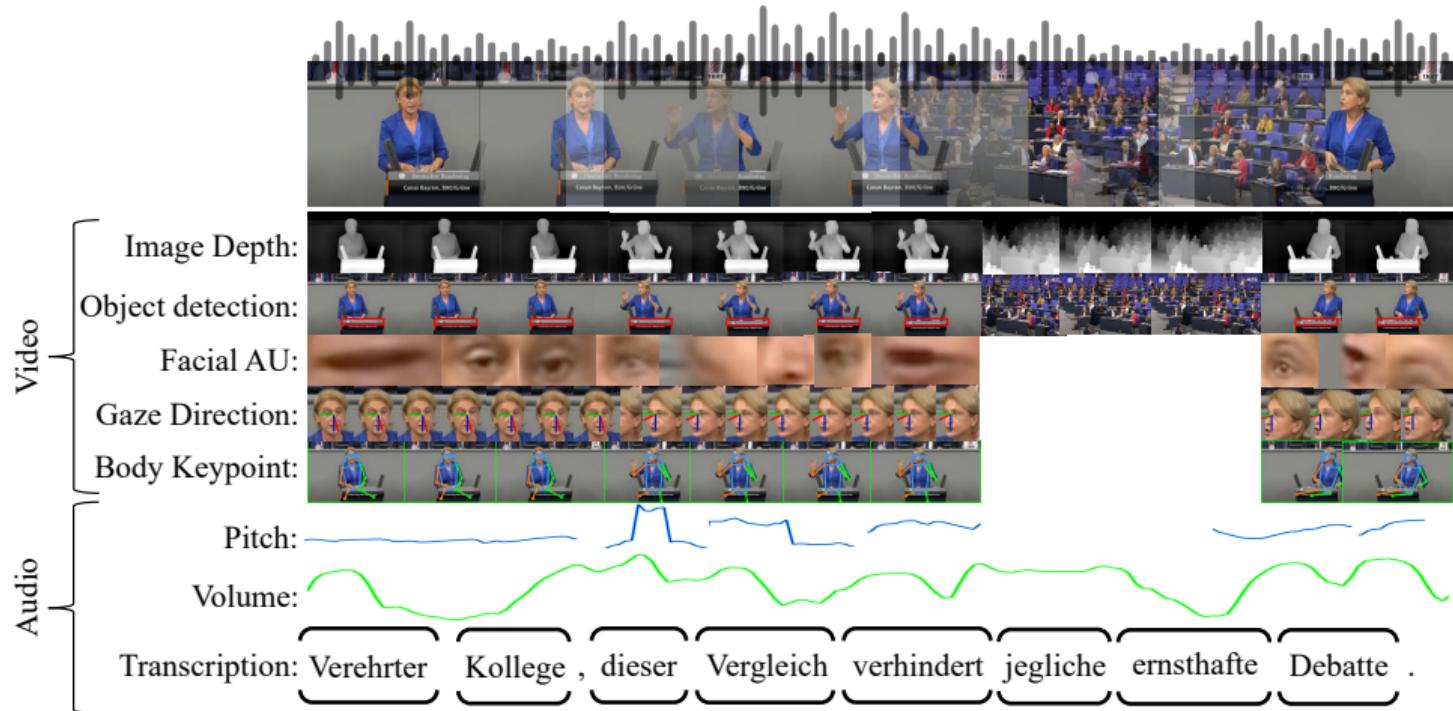
 andreas.kuepfer@tu-darmstadt.de //  andreaskuepfer.github.io //  ankuepfer.bsky.social

Selected Working Papers:

Measuring Media Slant through Image Analysis (with *Christian Arnold, Michelle Torres, and Oliver Rittmann*)

A Pipeline for Extracting Data from Videos of Complex Political Events (with *Miryam Holman and Tyler Simko*)

Multimodal Feature Extraction



The Power of Eye Contact

