

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

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Political Interactions Shape Political Discourse

Politicians Talk to Others All the Time

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



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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

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- 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

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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

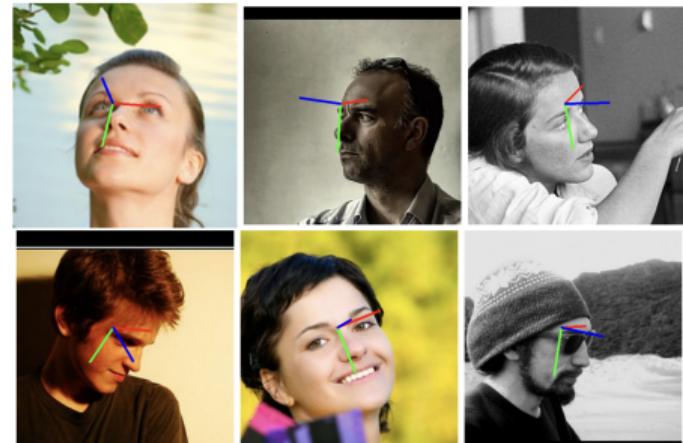
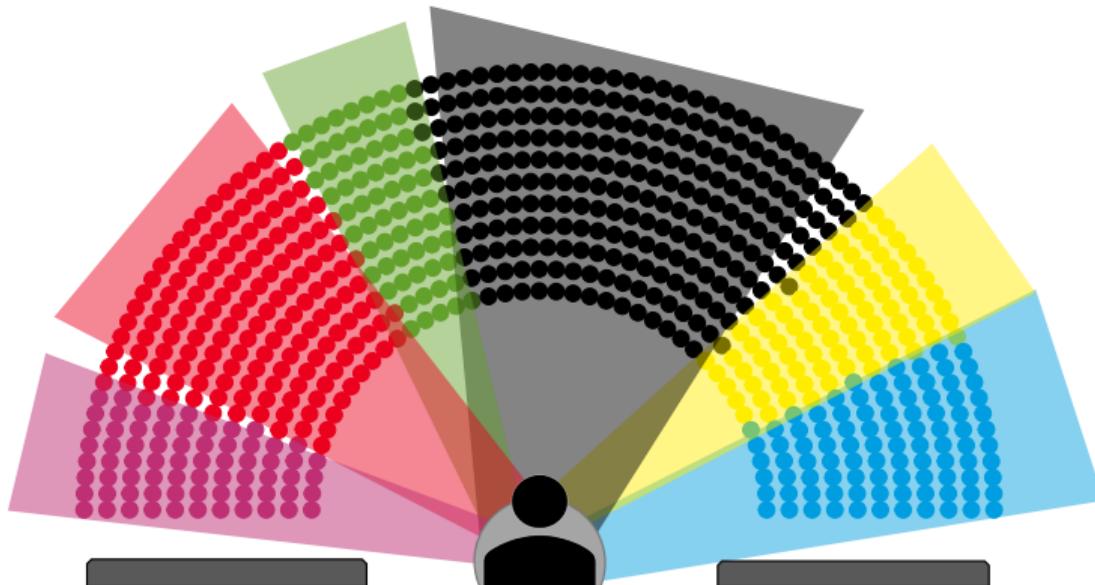


Fig. 2: Example images with converted Euler angle visualization from the AFLW2000 dataset.

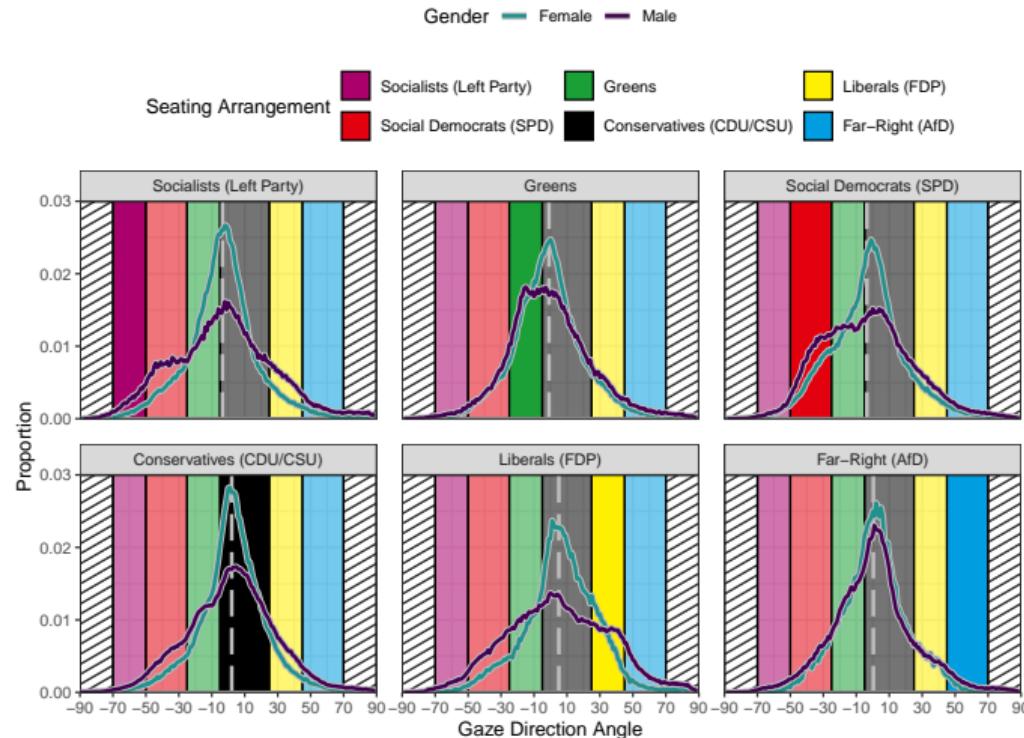
Seating Map

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

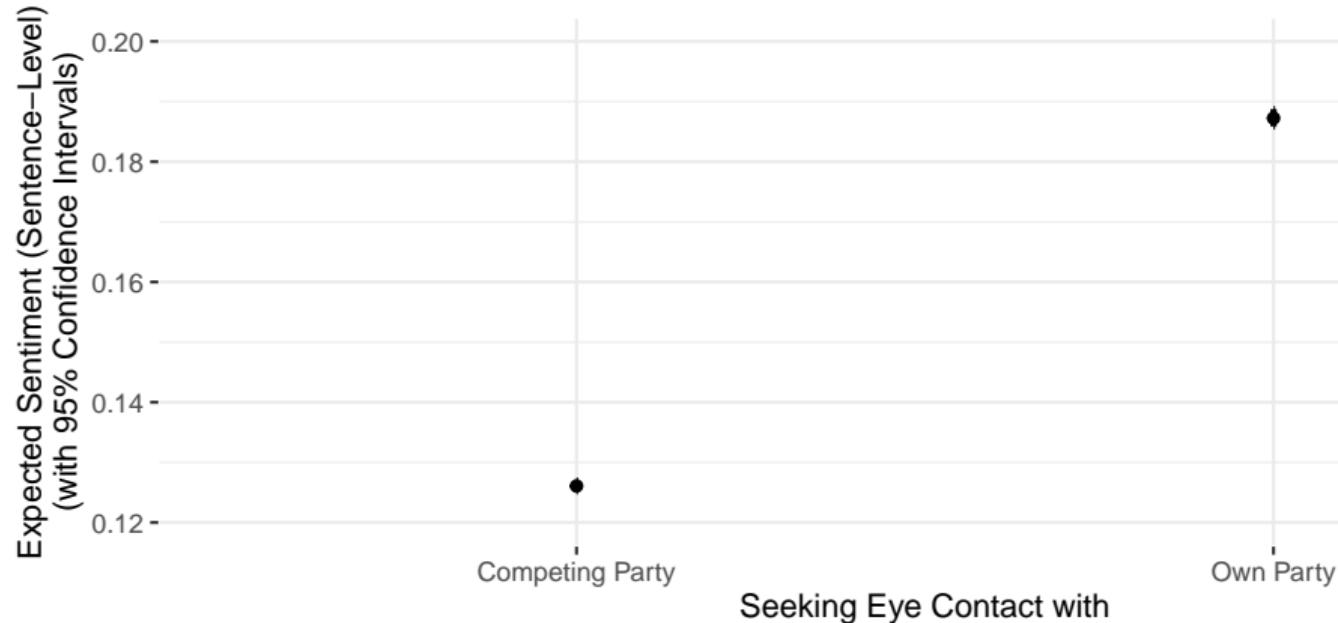


Results

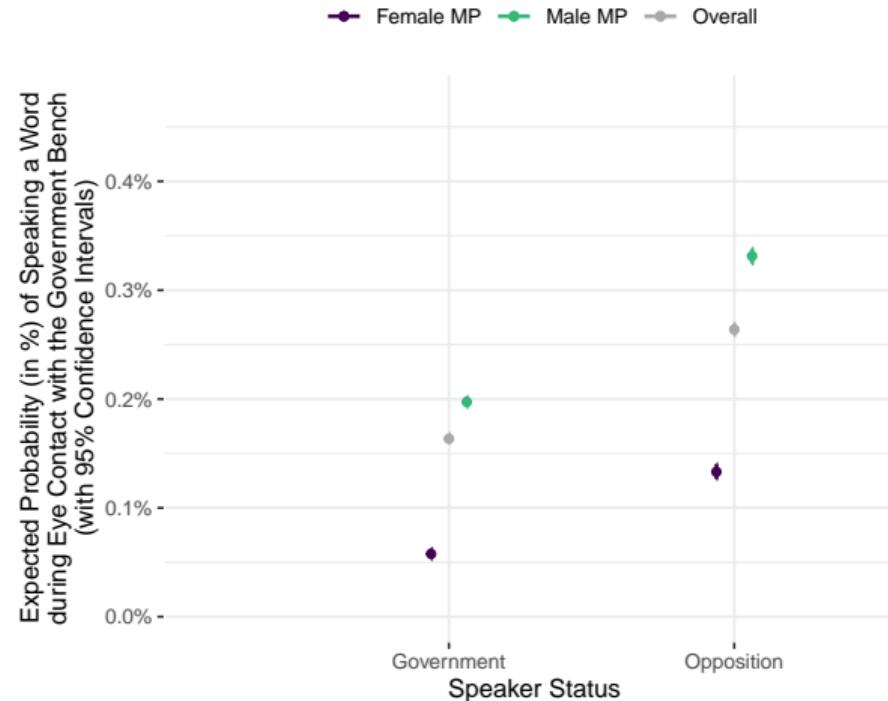
Descriptive Patterns



When Does Eye Contact Mark Confrontation?



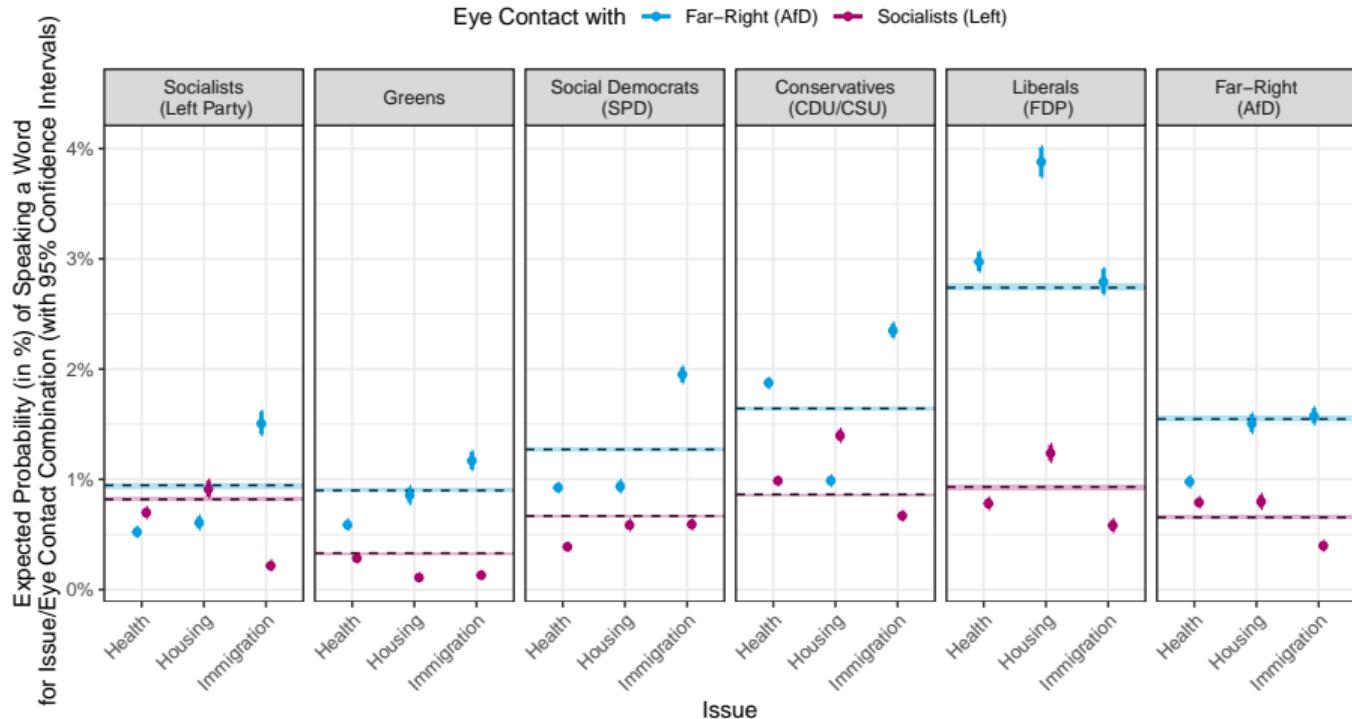
Government-Opposition Conflict



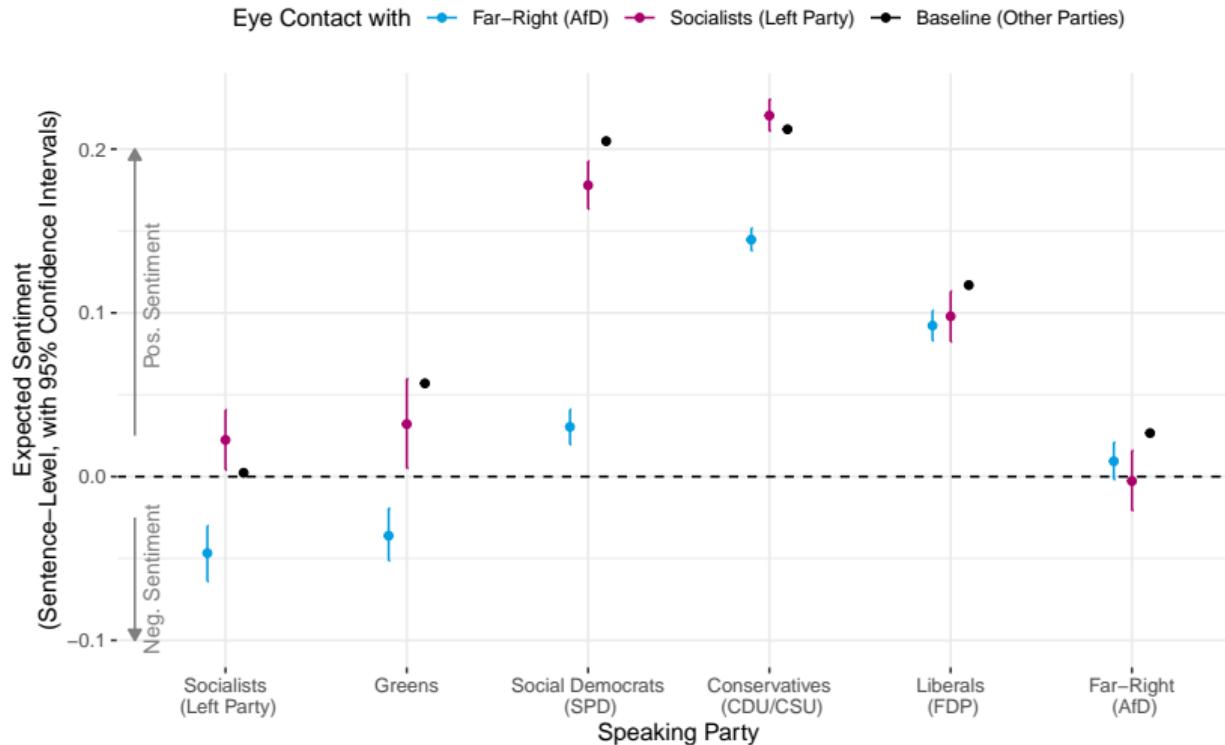
Gendered Patterns of Confrontation



The Far Right and Issue Ownership



Negative Valence Toward the Far Right



Conclusion

Confrontation is Multi-Faceted

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

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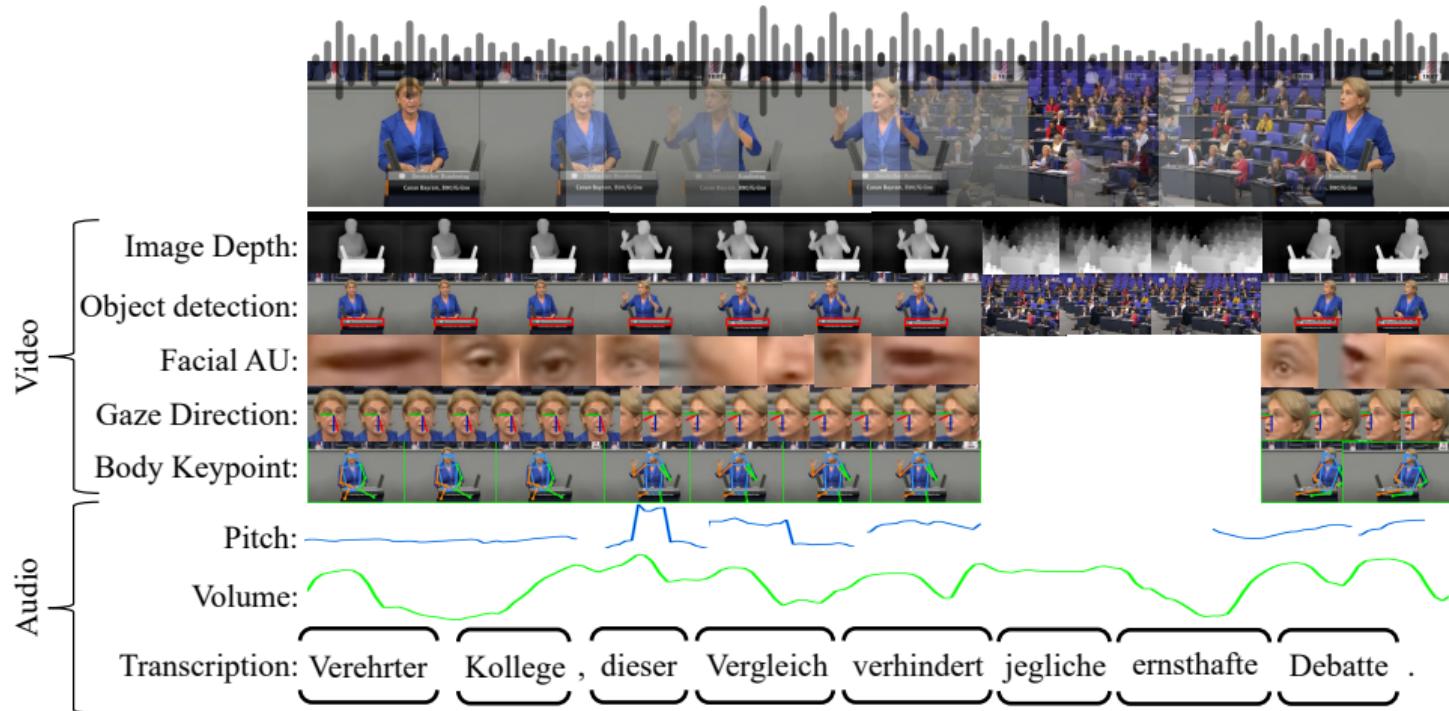
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Selected Working Papers:

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

