

Abstracts

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„Top down“ or „bottom up“? The usage of collaborative online-platforms by parties

Facing severe linkage problems, parties have started to experiment with new channels for intra-party communication, such as collaborative online-platforms. According to the concept of “mediatization”, implementing internet-applications of this kind can change the intra-party processes of opinion-forming and decision making, either by strengthening the party management or by empowering the members of the party in a bottom-up direction. A case study on the implementation of an online-platform prior to the party convention of the German Social Democrats in December, 2011, reveals that the party management controlled the online-procedure as well as the processing of the results to a remarkable extent – thereby effectively constraining the participatory potential of the tool. At the same time, robust characteristics of the application emerge which might limit the instrumentalization of these platforms by the party elites in the long run, shifting power resources away from the party elites to the party’s ground.

Andreas Blätte

Boundaries of policy fields in parliamentary discourses. A corpus-assisted approach for measuring and exploring boundary-spanning policies

In policy analysis, it is usually assumed that the boundaries of “policy subsystems” (“policy sectors” etc.) can be specified. Yet empirically, contested, ill-defined and overlapping boundaries are to be observed. Is this a marginal phenomenon or an anomaly occurring so systematically that it calls for further theoretical reflection? To support the latter claim, I pursue a corpus-assisted approach. The resource used is a corpus of parliamentary debates that covers all debates in the regional parliament of Northrhine-Westfalia during the 14th and 15th electoral period (2005-2012). Based on the frequencies of fieldmarkers in subcorpora compiled according to a classification of debates, 24 policy fields can be compared based on a concentration measure and typified as being more or less concentrated. Time-series data can also be derived and facilitate the generation of hypothesis on trends of concentration or

decentration. The methodological claim of the article is that the toolbox of corpus-assisted research should be developed to enable us to cope with the masses of digital text we are confronted with in the digital era. For policy analysis, I conclude that empirical evidence suggests that further conceptual work is needed to overcome assumptions about the fixed meaning of boundaries of policy fields.

Jenny Preunkert

The European answer to the subprime- and financial market crisis

The European Union was significantly affected by the financial crises of 2007-2009. However, it is questionable, how sustainable and systemic the political consequences of the crises turned out. In this article an institutional approach of crises will be developed: Crises are hereinafter defined as exogenous shocks which in the actors' perception threaten the continuity of certain institutions. From the actors' perspective crises create a highly increased, yet rather short-termed pressure for political crises management. Yet, after overcoming the acute danger of a crisis, this pressure to act rapidly declines. Based on such an understanding of crises, it is argued that in the area of European financial regulation, even though far-reaching reforms were proposed, mainly path-dependent institutional changes have been realized in the aftermath of the subprime-crisis. The result: new structures were introduced, whilst the major spheres of competences remained largely unaffected. The political reaction to the financial crises will only be comprehensible, if the temporal dimensions of crises are taken into consideration.