



Karlstad Applied Analysis Seminar (2021)

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October 20, Wednesday, 10:30

Political spaces from texts - the rise of populism and the reconfiguration of the German political space.

Abstract

In this talk I will explore the notion of a reconfiguration of political space in the context of the rise of populism and its effects on the political system. I will focus on Germany and the appearance of the new right wing party "Alternative for Germany" (AfD). The idea of a political space is closely connected to the ubiquitous use of spatial metaphors in political talk. The idea of a political space is closely connected to the ubiquitous use of spatial metaphors in political talk. In particular the idea of a "distance" between "political positions" would suggest that political actors are situated in a metric space. Using the electoral manifestos from the Manifesto project database we investigate to which extent the spatial metaphors so common in political talk can be brought to mathematical rigor. Many scholars of politics discuss the rise of the new populism in Western Europe and the US with respect to a new political cleavage related to globalization, which is assumed to mainly affect the cultural dimension of the political space. As such, it might replace the older economic cleavage based on class divisions in defining the dominant dimension of political conflict. An explanation along these lines suggests a reconfiguration of the political space in the sense that (1) the main cleavage within the political space changes its direction from the economic axis towards the cultural axis, but (2) also the semantics

of the cultural axis itself is changing towards globalization related topics. In this paper, we empirically address this reconfiguration of the political space by comparing political spaces for Germany built using topic modeling with the spaces based on the content analysis of the Manifesto project and the corresponding categories of political goals. We find that both spaces have a similar structure and that the AfD appears on a new dimension. In order to characterize this new dimension we employ a novel technique, inter-issue consistency networks (IICN) that allow to analyze the evolution of the correlations between the political positions on different issues over several elections. We find that the new dimension introduced by the AfD can be related to the split off of a new "cultural right" issue bundle from the previously existing center-right bundle.