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Marketizing Elections?
An Analysis of Audience Segmentation and Targeted
Messaging as Media Strategy in German Electoral
Campaigning

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Abstract

While the use of microtargeting and its potential democratic risks have been widely studied, existing work fails to adequately address the use of audience segmentation and targeted messaging beyond the digital realm as part of a broader marketization of electoral campaigning. Thus, this paper investigates whether and how political parties used segmentation and targeting strategies in traditional media during the 2021 German federal elections, what factors determined their choices, and whether the use has increased since the rise of digital and social media. Analyzing candidate interviews and articles in ten German newspapers by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to text analysis, I found that all four examined parties targeted their messaging to specific voter groups as readerships of newspaper outlets, with a systematic strategy on the frame and message levels for the two smaller opposition parties. These parties use key frames and messages to define their political 'brand' in all outlets and distinguish between position and valence frames or messages to blur their positions in outlets that ideologically diverge from the parties' positions. Comparing these findings with segmentation and targeting strategies adopted during the 2002 German federal elections reveals a clear trend towards a marketization of German electoral campaigning.

Key words

Audience segmentation, targeted messaging, microtargeting, marketization, political marketing, German federal elections 2021

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Index of Abbreviations

CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschland
cf.	confer
e.g.	exempli gratia
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei Deutschland
FR	Frankfurter Rundschau
Greens	Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen
H	Hypothesis
HB	Handelsblatt
i.e.	id est
p.	page
RE	renewable energies
SNS	social network services
SP	Der Spiegel
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SZ	Süddeutsche Zeitung
taz	Die Tageszeitung

Why Should I Read This Research?

What are reasons for a growing “democratic malaise” in Western democracies? Several scholars cite an increasing ‘marketization’ of electoral campaigning as opposition to public scrutiny, deliberation, and contestation as a possible determinant for political disengagement and a loss of trust in the democratic system (Hay, 2007; Löffler, 2021; Matthes et al., 2022). Across countries, there have been vigorous and at times dystopian public debates on how data-based microtargeting sounds out voters and manipulates them. While microtargeting and its potential need for regulatory action has already been widely discussed, previous research has not adequately addressed the use of these strategies beyond the digital realm. In addition, most of the existing literature relates to the United States’ two-party system, whereas studies in other political and media systems are lacking. In studying a European multi-party system, this paper analyses whether and how German parties are increasingly using segmentation and targeting strategies in traditional media as part of a broader marketization of electoral campaigning.

Using quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the editorial positions of German newspapers and correlate them to the parties’ frames and messages, the research shows that all four examined German parties use more or less distinct strategies to target their messaging to specific voter groups as readerships of newspaper outlets, whereby these strategies take effect on an actor level, frame level and/or message level.

The findings contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, analyzing the German context of a multi-party system responds to calls for studies within specific countries and over time to uncover trends in the use of marketing strategies in election campaigns besides the United States’ two-party system (cf. Falasca & Grandien, 2017). Second, research rarely combines media and political marketing considerations, neglecting either the parties’ strategies or the role of media. This paper’s results thus corroborate and enrich Stokes’ (1963) model of valence and position frames and messages by accounting for media as intermediaries through which parties communicate to voters. Third, Rovny (2012), by examining party manifestos, shows parties’ emphasizing and blurring of their positions. This paper finds the same mechanism when examining audience segmentation and targeting. Therefore, while Rovny focusses exclusively on presenting the parties’ own positions, the use of emphasizing and blurring also depends on the audience position when addressing voters. This paper thereby introduces a relationality previously unidentified.

As a practical contribution, several policy recommendations aim to address the potentially negative impact of the use of marketing strategies on political disengagement and a loss of trust in parties and the political system as discussed in the literature. While I argue that the extent to which German parties use segmentation and targeting strategies in traditional media during elections currently does not require further regulation, I provide three policy recommendations as boundary conditions to ensure that the use of marketing strategies by German parties does not cause negative externalities.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, mounting cynicism, political disenchantment, increasing polarization, and declining trust in parties and the political system have been observed across Western democracies (cf. Norris, 2011). Scholars thus shed light on the impact of supply-side factors emanating from the political system, institutions, and actors, which contribute to the growth of this "democratic malaise" (Hay, 2007; Savigny, 2011). Drawing on Downs' seminal work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), Hay (2007) delineates the growing trend of a marketization of inter-party electoral competition, whereby parties function as business rivals in the electoral market, competing for the largest market share. From this neo-liberal perspective, market efficiency is best achieved through the strategic allocation of resources (Salles-Djelic, 2006). In the political market, this entails using marketing strategies such as positioning, segmentation, and targeting to best accommodate voter preferences (Lees-Marshment, 2001). Hence, parties strategically position themselves, segment their potential electorate, and address these voter groups with targeted messaging (Lees-Marshment, 2001). Driven by the exclusive goal of maximizing votes, parties may thus adapt their positions to voter preferences rather than competing on political ideology and substantive differences.

However, such a marketing-driven approach to electoral competition may have profound implications for the democratic process and its outcomes. Policy choices become shielded from public scrutiny, deliberation, and contestation, resulting in the replacement of political differences with non-substantial differences in branding or images of trust and credibility (Flinders & Wood, 2017; Hay, 2007). As varying campaign promises inevitably fail to align with actual policy outputs, marketing strategies in electoral campaigning eventually lead to a loss of trust in parties (Löffler, 2021) and the democratic system (Matthes et al., 2022). If otherwise contestable policy agendas appear as given (Flinders & Wood, 2017), the perceived benefits of voting and engaging in politics appear lower than the costs of the act of voting and engaging, which is why rational voters lose political interest and disengage (Matthes et al., 2022).

To be able to empirically test the influence of a marketization of electoral campaigns on different variables of political dissatisfaction and disengagement, it is indispensable to determine first whether parties are actually deploying political marketing strategies. Several scholars have therefore assessed the market-orientation of parties' election campaign strategies through interviews with party representatives (Diermann, 2007; Jungherr et al., 2019; Löffler, 2021). While this intention is a first step in the causal chain from market-orientation to their effects and potential risks, it disregards whether parties also deploy these marketing strategies. This deployment can be understood as the output of the segmentation and targeting strategies based on the parties' market-orientation.

Following the Cambridge Analytica scandal during the 2016 US presidential elections, several scholars have examined the use of marketing strategies, such as online microtargeting, in elections (cf. Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021; Kruschinski & Haller, 2020; Murray & Scime, 2010). Their work has been accompanied by a vigorous and at times dystopian public debate on how data-based microtargeting sounds out voters, manipulates them, and turns them into externally controlled puppets. Based on existing research, these predictions are undoubtedly

exaggerated (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021). Nevertheless, how new technologies and big data enable parties to get detailed information on voter group preferences, and how electoral decisions can be influenced, has raised considerations on whether and how policymakers should regulate such techniques. However, both the previous research and the political debate solely focus on digital marketing strategies of parties. The question arises whether parties are utilizing segmentation and targeting strategies also beyond the digital realm as part of a broader marketization of the election campaign.

Even though addressing different groups of voters has always been one of the core tasks of strategic political communication (Dommett et al., 2022), it has gained increased attention in recent years. Two decades after the beginning of the popular use of the Internet and social media, it remains unclear whether there is an actual use of segmentation and targeting strategies in political campaigning outside the digital space and whether it is increasing. To what extent is this targeted messaging to segmented audiences thus a new phenomenon in the sense of a ‘marketization’ of electoral campaigning? And if it has negative consequences, is this a development that requires regulatory action?

Existing literature on segmentation and targeting strategies mostly neglects the channels through which these strategies are directed at voters. Beside street stalls, billboards, or party websites, party election campaigns are predominantly mediated, either through platforms such as social network services (SNS) or traditional media (Haßler & Kruschinski, 2019). The traditional media have an independent role as intermediary and influence the way parties can communicate and convey their messages to voters, affecting their effectiveness and visibility. Previous research, therefore, finds different media strategies that parties use to align their messages with voter preferences and make them visible, such as the strategic emphasizing or blurring of party positions or the appropriation of already salient issues (Brouard et al., 2012; Rovny, 2012). Additionally, the respective strategies may differ between parties depending on resources, size or position in government or opposition (Ansolabehere et al., 2016; Wagner & Meyer, 2014). However, there may be a tension between what parties intend and how the elections play out. It may thus be possible that even though parties tailor their messaging to the projected audience position of an outlet, in reality, the mediated communication diffuses.

Although there have been calls to systematically study the interdependencies between those who "introduce, reinforce, and sustain issues" in political communication (Jungherr, Posegga, and An, 2019, p. 406), to date, methods to study party strategies in traditional media have been developed but only partially applied (Soroka et al., 2012). Ridout (2012) argues that media strategies are less random and more targeted than literature suggests but calls for more research on these “macrotargeting” techniques. Moreover, while most political marketing literature relates to the American context, studies in other political and media systems are lacking. To examine whether the political marketing premises originating from Downs’ (1957) analysis of a two-party model are applicable in the context of a European multi-party system, Germany, as the most populous democratic country in Europe, serves as subject of investigation.

This leads to the two following research questions:

1. Do German parties effectively engage in audience segmentation and targeted messaging in traditional media during electoral campaigning and what are factors determining these choices?
2. Has the use of audience segmentation and targeted messaging in traditional media during electoral campaigning evolved since the rise of digital and social media?

I argue that German parties in electoral campaigning strategically adjust their messaging to the editorial positions of the respective media outlets. Parties are assumed to have certain key messages determining their product or ‘brand’, which are then strategically emphasized or marginalized in anticipation of the political position of the targeted voter groups. Furthermore, I posit that the parties' positions in the electoral market play a significant role in determining the extent to which they use marketing techniques in their campaigns. Also, due to the merging of online and offline communication strategies and trends towards transmedia storytelling in electoral campaigning (Chadwick, 2017), the use of audience segmentation and targeted messaging is expected to have increased with the rise of digital and social media in the past two decades.

To investigate the degree to which German political parties tailor their messaging to align with the editorial stances of traditional media outlets, this paper is structured as follows. Chapter 2 draws insights from multiple disciplines to present and discuss the existing literature and emerging research gaps, which sets the stage for the hypotheses presented in Chapter 3. The editorial positions of ten German newspapers on two policy topics – “tax and spendings” and “climate and environment” – are then analyzed. In addition, qualitative coding and analysis of newspaper interviews with chancellor candidates or party leaders of four parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP and Greens) are conducted on the level of framing and messaging during the 2021 German federal elections to assess how political parties respond to these topics in different outlets. The research methods and data are discussed in Chapter 4, followed by a detailed analysis of the newspapers' editorial stances and a qualitative content analysis per party per policy topic in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the findings are consolidated to verify the hypotheses. In Chapter 7, the conclusion and discussion of the results is presented along with policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

2. Interdisciplinary State of Knowledge

The following chapter aims to embed the two research questions within theoretical and empirical contributions at the intersection of political communication, marketing, media, and electoral research. Firstly, I examine under which conditions marketing can be applied to politics (2.1.1). Then, two major marketing tools, audience segmentation and targeted messaging are introduced (2.1.2). As segmentation and targeting strategies rely on the media as intermediary between parties and their voters, I discuss the role and impact of media during elections (2.2.1) and link it to differing campaign and media strategies of parties (2.2.2). Finally, I review how these strategies have evolved over time based on old and new media logics (2.2.3). In each subchapter, central theoretical concepts are combined with the current state of research and discussed how this paper can contribute to answer emerging research gaps.

2.1 Political Marketing in Electoral Campaigning

2.1.1 Applying Marketing to Politics

Understanding electoral competition from a market perspective, parties (as brands) and voters (as consumers) face each other on election day at an electoral market on which votes are exchanged for expected political achievements (Downs, 1957). Building on the Downsian rational choice voter model, the central goal of parties is to maximize votes in elections. From this perspective, the conceptualization of elections as a public debate and the substantive deliberation of contrasting party propositions is much less relevant than the behavior of the parties as political supplier (Savigny, 2011). The fundamental assumption of this paper is therefore that parties are aiming to maximize their vote share by trying to convince as many consumers as possible to buy their product. From a microeconomic rational choice perspective, this subsequently leads to the use of marketing strategies in electoral competition (Lees-Marshment, 2001).

The central objective of marketing is “to discover needs and wants in the target markets and to satisfy those needs more effectively and efficiently than competitors” (Slater & Narver, 1998, p. 1001). Consequently, political marketing refers to the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by individuals and organizations (Newman, 1999). However, the transfer of marketing premises to political competition is subject to several restrictions. A political ‘product’ is far less tangible and more difficult to design. The actual goals of political parties may differ, and their performance may be more difficult to measure than those of companies (Butler & Collins, 1994). Additionally, the political marketing approach is equivalent to Down’s voter model contested for its assumption that voters have fixed, identifiable preferences which are quantifiable and measurable. While Down’s model assumes a two-party system, its applicability to the German multiparty system is of theoretical interest. For the understanding of marketing strategies in German elections, political marketing can therefore serve this paper both as the explanans and the explanandum (cf. Henneberg & O’Shaughnessy, 2007).

When investigating political campaign strategies through a marketing lens, Lees-Marshment (2001) distinguishes between product-oriented, sales-oriented, and market-oriented party strategies. Market-oriented parties design their product to suit voter satisfaction following a political marketing approach. Strömbäck (2007) further elaborates on these party types by arguing that product-oriented parties advocate for their own ideas, assuming that voters will be convinced and vote for them. Sales-oriented parties believe in their own ideas but realize they need to be sold and thus try to make voters want what the party offers. In contrast, market-oriented parties try to meet the needs of the targeted voters by “identifying voter needs and demands and design policies, candidates and behavior to provide voter satisfaction” (p. 58). While orthodox market-based models have been challenged as being too short-term or with a too narrow focus on voters (cf. Ormrod, 2006), they are expected to play an important role in party strategies especially when investigating electoral campaigns with a clear short-term goal and voter focus.

The use of marketing strategies in elections often goes along with an increased professionalization of political campaigns, including the use of specialized expertise in

campaign-related activities, such as coordinating campaign messages, targeting groups, and stakeholders (Strömbäck, 2007). First empirical attempts to study these types of marketing strategies in electoral campaigning during the 2004 US elections show that the presence of several marketing instruments such as negative advertising, targeting or packaging can indeed serve as an explanation for electoral victory (O'Shaughnessy, 2007). Building on these findings, Diermann (2007) investigates for the 2005 North Rhine-Westphalian state elections to which extent German parties are guided by marketing premises. By qualitatively examining their electoral campaign strategies, they conclude that the CDU/CSU is strongly oriented toward the marketing concept, that such an orientation exists only in part for the FDP and SPD, while it does not apply for the Greens (Diermann, 2007). In a European cross-national comparison, Tenscher et al. (2012) build on these findings showing that larger parties and parties which suffered a recent electoral defeat are more structurally professionalized in their marketing strategies. While the study by Diermann (2007) was conducted on state-level elections, the market-orientation might differ on federal level. As for the Green party which significantly grew and evolved within the past 15 years, I expect market-orientation to be stronger nowadays and on federal level. Market-orientations of German parties have so far been only studied by their intended marketing strategies through qualitative interviews with party strategists (cf. Diermann, 2007; Löffler, 2021). However, there are no studies on the actual usage of these strategies as output of German parties' market-orientations and their potential determinants since then.

2.1.2 Audience Segmentation and Targeted Messaging

Positioning, segmentation, and targeting are considered as the three central marketing tools companies use in order to increase their market share (Dibb & Simkin, 1991). When applying these tools to electoral party strategies, parties start with positioning themselves strategically within the political spectrum and building their "political brand" (Schneider, 2004). Based on research and "intelligence about the state of the market" (Scammell, 1999, p. 732), the electorate as a market is then defined, segmented and targeted (Savigny, 2011). The process of audience segmentation is understood as "differentiating the customer base into segments in order to locate more precisely marketing opportunities" (Scammell, 1999, p. 732). After segmenting the electorate, targeted messaging as the process of "customizing messages to shared characteristics of population subgroups" (Schmid et al., 2008, p. 1) assumes that if group members possess enough similar characteristics or motivations, they will be influenced by the same message. Parties segment these population subgroups based on various criteria, such as geographic, behaviorist, psychographic, and demographic characteristics (Smith & Saunders, 1990). While Smith and Saunders emphasized in 1990 that segmentation at the individual level was "of course" (p. 300) impossible, technological advances nowadays also enable segmentation and targeting on the micro level. However, whereas tools have evolved significantly, the same four categories of segmentation criteria still find consistent application in research and practice (Lovett, 2019).

Investigating the choice and usage of segmentation and targeting strategies from a party perspective, parties with market-oriented strategies are expected to be more flexible in their messaging, while parties with sales-oriented strategies remain more coherent in their messages and parties with a strong product-orientation do not segment or target at all (Strömbäck, 2007).

Based on the votes gained at the last general election, Collins and Butler (1996) divide parties by their market share into market leaders, challengers, followers and niche parties. The market leader is defined as the party with the most votes and the biggest government party. Market leaders are expected to be less explicit in their messaging and to target specific audiences as they need to appeal to a broad range of voters. Challenger parties are those who have a chance to become the strongest party after the elections. Their segmentation strategies are thus similarly pronounced and often more aggressive. Hence, both party types clearly follow a market-oriented strategy. Follower parties rather imitate the leader on lower costs and concentrate on looking after the interests of existing customers. As a result, they segment to a much lesser extent than the first two categories. Niche parties are defined as market leaders in small subsegments of the electoral market and follow a clear product-oriented strategy. Being already highly specialized in serving the needs of the niche, they are not expected to segment their audience. (Collins & Butler, 1996)

Nevertheless, providing different voter groups with different messages might seem contradictory to building a political brand. It could thus be argued that parties rather define only a few key messages and slogans for a strong and distinct image statement on which they build their campaigns (Khatib, 2012). Hereby, the French analogy of an “*élément de langage*” describes a pre-established message or formula, coordinated within the party to remain more or less unchanged regardless of who uses it (Krieg-Planque, 2011). According to Krieg-Planque, this aims to ensure coherence between different actors or statements emanating from the same movement beyond an official leader or spokesperson. However, this tool is in no way inconsistent with the expected party usage of segmentation and targeting strategies discussed. Rather, I suggest that parties have certain *éléments de langage* determining their image or “brand”, which are then strategically emphasized and varied between different target groups (cf. Khatib, 2012).

2.2 The Role of Media in Electoral Campaigning

2.2.1 Media as an Intermediary

Given an ongoing mediatization of politics, political campaigning has become highly dependent on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). As most of the discussed political marketing strategies are mediated through media as a link between parties and voters, Savigny (2011) argues that electoral campaigns are in fact what is covered in media. Hence, a media perspective must necessarily be included when studying electoral campaign strategies (O’Shaughnessy, 2007).

Media outlets have an active role in gatekeeping and agenda-setting. During the process of reducing countless occurrences and ideas to a few messages offered in news media they are able to select and emphasize certain issues while dismissing others (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Media thus influence what voters care about (Grossman, 2022). Outlets are for example more likely to report on messages from parties which are favored by their readership (Haselmayer et al., 2017). Additionally, historical ties between certain media outlets and parties or societal factions often provide stable influence for parties on news coverage in these outlets (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For instance, the choice of candidates invited for interviews or talk shows tends to depend on the ownership or the political orientation of the outlet (Ekström et al., 2006).

Hence, incumbents have a stronger discursive power, i.e. “the ability to introduce, amplify, and maintain topics, frames, and speakers” (Jungherr et al., 2019, p.1).

Nuancing these findings, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) argue that the media influence is significantly smaller in pre- and post-election times due to high efforts by various players to influence the media agenda. The agenda-setting power in election times lies therefore rather in the inclusion or exclusion of political actors than in their autonomous selection of issues (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

Besides the choice of the volume of coverage, media outlets can also exert influence on its substance. The question of "how" a topic is reported has been widely studied under the concept of framing. It describes the process in which actors choose, emphasize, and promote specific elements of reality with a particular interpretation (Entman et al., 2008). A different framing of the same issue impacts the way it is perceived and judged, and can therefore lead to differently perceived options for action, reactions and solutions (Scheufele, 1999). The media may thus transform from a communication channel to autonomous, major actors in the campaigning processes.

Overall, besides addressing voter issues, focusing on media positions and adapting accordingly plays an important role in the parties' campaign strategies. Party strategies can be strongly moderated by the media's ownerships and political orientations, potentially reducing their effectiveness and visibility. However, since the media influence is significantly smaller in pre- and post-election times, studying campaign strategies during elections appears to be yielding. How and to what extent parties reconcile their campaign strategies towards media is therefore discussed in the following.

2.2.2 Party Campaign Strategies in Media

From a political marketing perspective, the channels through which party messages are transmitted within campaigns can be divided into paid, owned or earned media (Haßler & Kruschinski, 2019). Whereas paid media include paid TV spots, radio airtime or political ads on social media, owned media focus rather on using party-owned channels such as websites, blogs, or social media profiles (Burton et al., 2015). When using these media types, parties can autonomously decide over the content and tone. Contrary, earned or free media are understood as news coverage for which “media outlets must be persuaded about the news value of one's message” (Burton et al., 2015, p. 54). Traditional marketing advocates for a combination of all three media types when promoting a brand (Burton et al., 2015). During elections, however, smaller parties with less financial resources apply marketing strategies rather in free media, being less able to afford advertisement, whereas parties with higher financial resources depend less on news coverage (Ansolabehere et al., 2016). As German party campaign strategists find free media besides election posters and social media to be the most relevant campaign tools (Haßler & Kruschinski, 2019), this paper solely focusses on earned or free media.

Regarding the party messages transmitted, parties are found to strategically select and emphasize specific policy issues during electoral campaigning. Ansolabehere et al. (2016) argue that parties should only focus on one or two issues and repeat a few basic themes instead of multiple messages which would “convey an image of talkativeness rather than effectiveness” (p.115). Whether parties actually ‘own’ issues is however highly contested. Many scholars

argue that parties rather tend to talk about issues that address concerns already important to media or to other parties, knowing that this attracts media coverage more than the parties' own issues (Meyer et al., 2020). Even when parties have stable and distinct thematic profiles, they rather appropriate political priorities of their rivals by modulating their attention to respective issues (Brouard et al., 2012). A more nuanced picture is provided by Wagner & Meyer (2014), suggesting potentially different strategies between parties. According to them, parties with smaller resources and higher policy-seeking motivation favor issues they have ownership over, while parties with higher resources and smaller policy-seeking but higher office-seeking motivation favor issues that concern voters (Wagner & Meyer, 2014). Rovny (2012) refines this distinction, arguing that all parties try to shift political focus on their strengths by emphasizing issues they are competent in and take a clear position towards the topic. In opposite, in topics in which they do not hold eccentric positions, they strategically blur by taking broad and vague positions on an issue or presenting a mixture of frames (Rovny, 2012). These findings indicate that party strategies differ not only in the choice of policy issues but also in terms of how policy issues are communicated.

While there has been extensive literature on the selection strategies of policy issues (Guinaudeau & Persico, 2014), less research has been conducted on the process of strategic frame building. As the media not only establish their own frames but also adopt existing frames from political actors, issue framing by political actors has a significant influence on how policy issues are perceived (Bennett et al., 2006; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010). In order to increase media coverage of their campaign, parties are found to increasingly use personalized, contesting and negative frames (Takens et al., 2013). Frames promoted by institutional actors and actors with higher power are thereby expected to meet higher response by media (Hänggli, 2012), showing that incumbents benefit from setting specific frames.

Since research is lacking on whether and how parties strategically select different frames for policy issues, this paper examines systematic differences between parties' media strategies in election campaigns. Analyzing how German parties strategically choose different messages and frames for different media outlets and how these campaign strategies differ between parties is therefore the subject of the first research question of this paper.

2.2.3 Old and New Media Logics in Electoral Campaigning

The emergence and proliferation of the Internet and social media over the past two decades has fundamentally changed the way news is consumed. The "old" media logic of traditional mass media such as newspapers, radio or television is contrasted with a "new" media logic of social and digital media. This has fundamentally changed the historical hierarchy in the previous media landscape by democratizing access to a mediated political public sphere (Grossman, 2022). The process of media convergence through the rise of digital technologies merges formerly separated communications and media fields (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021). This can for instance be seen in interconnections between political coverage in traditional media and twitter messages referring to politics, such as twitter debates during TV talk shows (Jungherr, 2015). Compiled in a hybrid media system, online and offline campaigning cannot be separated anymore but must be thought together (Chadwick, 2017). Hence, I argue that the rise of digital and social media does not necessarily imply a decreasing relevance of traditional media but rather changes the way it is used in electoral campaigning.

The determinants and consequences of media convergence towards a hybrid media system with old and new media logics are multifold and must be embedded in a broader context. According to Giddens' (1990) "modernization thesis", an increasing social complexity and the decline of traditional structures of social integration and aggregation are leading to a growing number of non-ideological "catch-all" parties (Kirchheimer, 1965). Thereby, an ideological convergence of parties as well as low party affiliation results in more volatile voting behavior and highly issue-based voting (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). In conjunction with an increasing complexity of the media landscape, political actors "may be tempted to resort to audience fragmentation and biased discourse to regain some of the lost control" (Grossman, 2022, p. 454). To gain political office, parties therefore increasingly rely on marketing techniques such as polls instead of mobilizing voters for specific goals (Scammell, 1999). This phenomenon is expected to be even accelerated by both an increasing depoliticization among the electorate and the rise of new media (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021).

An ever-increasing amount of available data enabling increased intelligence on the state of the electoral market as well as the growing importance of social and digital media, now allows parties to directly communicate with their voters, creating new possibilities for targeting strategies. Accordingly, recent research on segmentation and targeted messaging in German electoral campaigns predominantly examines and discusses the usage (cf. Haßler & Kruschinski, 2019; Jungherr, 2015; Kruschinski & Haller, 2020; Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2017), potential (cf. Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021), and possible risks (cf. Borgesius et al., 2018; Löffler, 2021) of 'data-driven campaigns' and 'microtargeting'. Analyzing online campaign strategies of German parties, Haßler and Kruschinski (2019) show that parties choose their online segmentation and targeting strategies mainly depending on personal and financial resources, their role in government or opposition, and their political position.

However, the increasing usage of data-driven targeted messaging does not only take place via social and digital media, but also within offline campaigns to improve the identification of voter needs and demands (Dommett et al., 2022). Parties for example strategically use different election posters in different districts or different arguments in door-to-door campaigning as seen in the 2008 Obama campaign (Löffler, 2021; Strömbäck, 2007). Hereby, it has been found that using a variety of substantive campaign messages tailored to the target group can significantly increase voter turnout (Gerber & Green, 2000) and is more successful in the mobilization via personal contacts (Löffler, 2021). Throughout multiple US elections, Ridout et al. (2012) demonstrate that Republican and Democratic candidates distribute their advertisement on different television shows, targeting the audience in traditional media with specific messages based on audience demographics. They refer to this form of targeting groups of people rather than specific individuals as "macrotargeting" (Ridout et al., 2012), a terminology which also applies to this paper's context of studying a possible adjustment of party messages to the readership of newspaper outlets.

While current political marketing research focuses predominantly on microtargeting in digital and social media, studies on "macrotargeting" as strategies for audience segmentation and targeted messaging in traditional media have not been adequately explored. Existing literature rarely combines media and political marketing approaches, neglecting either party strategies or the role of media. Additionally, little research has been done on how the rise of social and digital

media and the online campaign strategies impact traditional media strategies during electoral campaigning. Hence, studies within specific countries and over time are needed to uncover these trends (Falasca & Grandien, 2017). This paper aims to contribute to filling both gaps by first examining German parties' segmenting and targeting strategies in traditional media and secondly identifying potential trends in the deployment of these strategies since the rise of social and digital media.

3. Hypotheses

Based on the formulated research questions and the theoretical and empirical findings drawn from political marketing and media literature, three hypotheses are formulated that are to be reviewed for the German federal elections of 2002 and 2021. First, the alignment of parties' messaging to media outlet's positions is investigated. Second, differences between parties' targeting strategies are pointed out. Finally, a longitudinal perspective is included to identify changes in audience segmentation and targeted messaging strategies since the rise of digital and social media.

3.1 Targeted Messaging

Recapitulating this paper's premises, voters have from a micro-economic political marketing perspective fixed and identifiable policy preferences (Downs, 1957). To satisfy voters needs more effectively and efficiently than competitors and thus maximize their vote share (Slater & Narver, 1998), parties are customizing messages to shared policy preferences of voter subgroups in order for them to be influenced by the same message (Schmid et al., 2008). By aligning their strategic communication to marketing strategies (Löffler, 2021), most German party campaigns are guided by marketing premises (Diermann, 2007).

As media outlets within a highly competitive news production market are encouraged to adjust their editorial position to their readership (see chapter 2.2.1), the position of the readership as voter subgroup is assumed to correlate with the position of the media outlet (cf. Meyer et al., 2020). In anticipation of the preferences of a specific voter subgroup, I thus expect parties to deploy segmentation and targeting strategies by strategically adjusting their messaging to the editorial positions of the respective media outlets, leading to the following hypothesis:

H1: In anticipation of voter's preferences, parties adjust their messaging to media outlet's positions associated with different voter groups.

3.2 Party Differences in Targeted Messaging

Depending on personal and financial resources, their role in government or opposition, and their political position, parties may have different segmentation and targeting strategies (Haßler & Kruschinski, 2019). Dividing parties into market leader, challenger, follower and niche parties (Collins & Butler, 1996), market leader and challenger parties have greater personal and financial resources and less policy-seeking but more office-seeking motivation and thus emphasize issues which are important to their respective voter groups (Wagner & Meyer, 2014). Being in competition for the leading role in government, they depend on votes from a much broader electorate and are thus likely to address different voter groups with different messages (Tenscher et al., 2012). Contrary, follower and niche parties are campaigning with much less

resources. They are rather specialized in serving the needs of the niche or their respective electorate and have therefore little office-seeking but more policy-seeking motivation (Wagner & Meyer, 2014). Thus, these parties emphasize issues that they own and are less likely to engage in segmentation strategies:

H2: Market leader and challenger parties are more likely to adjust their messaging to media outlet's positions than follower and niche parties.

3.3 Longitudinal Perspective

As discussed in chapter 2.2.3, due to the declining party affiliation of voters and the associated increasingly volatile voting behavior and strongly issue-based voting, parties are increasingly becoming "catch-all parties" (Kirchheimer, 1965), that attempt to appeal through the use of marketing strategies to different voter groups in a highly heterogeneous electorate (Lees-Marshment, 2001). Within the past decades, this development has been accelerated by an increasing depoliticization among the electorate and the rise of new media (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021). Since the rise of digital and social media, German parties increasingly engage in data-based online segmenting strategies such as microtargeting as a response to these developments (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021; Kruschinski & Haller, 2020; Löffler, 2021).

As a result of media convergence, the merging of online and offline communication strategies, and trends towards transmedia storytelling in electoral campaigning (Chadwick, 2017), I assume that parties adopt these online campaign logics also in traditional media strategies. Parties are therefore expected to have enhanced their usage of audience segmentation and targeted messaging strategies as a form of "macrotargeting" in traditional media:

H3: Since the rise of digital and social media, parties have increasingly engaged in audience segmentation and targeted messaging by adjusting their messaging to the media outlet's position.

It is not possible to investigate to what extent digital and social media are actually decisive for a possible increase in the use of segmentation and targeting strategies. However, the party strategies during the 2021 German federal elections are compared with the strategies during the 2002 federal elections, i.e. at the beginning of a popular Internet use and shortly before the emergence of the first social networks in Germany. This allows a statement to be made about the extent to which the marketing strategies of the parties have changed over the last two decades since the rise of digital and social media.

4. Data and Methods

4.1 Data

4.1.1 Party Messaging

In order to analyze how German political parties adjust their messaging to the editorial position of media outlets, and whether their segmentation strategy has changed since the rise of digital and social media, newspaper interviews given by party representatives during the 2021 and 2002 German Federal elections served as unit of analysis. Unlike when citing quotes by party representatives within newspaper articles, they ensure a certain level of autonomy for the

interviewee and thus reduce media biases of choosing and reframing statements (Ekström et al., 2006).

To ensure comparability between the 2021 and 2002 elections, the analysis only included the four parties represented in the Bundestag or expected to enter the Bundestag based on survey results both in the 2021 and 2002 elections (i.e. CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, and the Greens) (cf. GLES, 2012, 2022). The right-populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD), founded in 2013, and the socialist party the Left, founded in 2007, only came into existence after the 2002 elections. Additionally, they both did not appoint their own chancellor candidate during the 2021 federal elections and their party leaders barely gave any interviews in the newspapers investigated. They were thus not included in this study.

Applying Collins and Butler's (1996) classification into market leader, challenger, follower and niche party to the four parties examined, the CDU/CSU constituted the market leader with the highest share of votes during the 2021 election campaign, the SPD as the second largest party the challenger, while the FDP as a small party tends to serve the needs of the niche. The classification of the Greens was more difficult due to major structural changes in recent decades. Having initially been a niche party, they have largely grown in recent decades. As they strongly focus on the interests of their electorate (e.g. follow a strong grassroots approach and focus on ecology as their core topic), the Greens were considered as follower party in the scope of this paper. However, with their claim to provide a chancellor, they also have characteristics of a challenger party.

To prevent intra-party differences affecting the choice of different messages between outlets, and to ensure that the interviews are representing the party strategy and dominating party position, only interviews by the chancellor candidates ("*Spitzenkandidaten*") were selected. As the Greens in 2002 and the FDP in 2002 and 2021 did not appoint a chancellor candidate, their respective party leader was chosen for the elections concerned. Seen as the CDU and CSU run a joint candidate in federal elections, they were examined together. Thus, for the 2021 elections, all interviews by the candidates or party leaders Armin Laschet (CDU/CSU), Olaf Scholz (SPD), Annalena Baerbock (Greens) and Christian Lindner (FDP) were selected. For the 2002 elections, the analysis included the party representatives Edmund Stoiber (CDU/CSU), Gerhard Schröder (SPD), Joschka Fischer (Greens) and Guido Westerwelle (FDP).

"Tax and spendings" and "climate and environment" were the two selected policy topics for analyzing the parties' segmentation and targeting strategies. Both issues are characterized by a diversity of party attitudes towards them. While "climate and environment" played a central role in the 2021 election debate in particular, the high relevance of the policy topic "tax and spendings" in both the 2021 and 2002 elections ensures comparability between both periods (GLES, 2012, 2022).

The 2021 and 2002 corpora thus include all interviews by the above-mentioned party leaders or chancellor candidates of the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP and Greens, conducted three months before the 2021 German Federal Elections (26/06/2021 to 26/09/2021) and the 2002 German Federal elections (22/06/2002 to 22/09/2002), in the ten German newspaper outlets with the highest circulation (IVW-Quartalsauflagenliste 3/2021, 2021). While data for the newspaper with the largest readership *BILD* is not available in any archives and was thus excluded from

the analysis, interviews within the seven national newspapers and dailies *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*, *Die Welt*, *Die ZEIT*, *Handelsblatt*, *Frankfurter Rundschau (FR)* and *die tageszeitung (taz)*), as well as the three most-read magazines *Der Spiegel*, *FOCUS* and *stern* were received through key word search in the data bases *Factiva*, *F.A.Z. Archiv* and *wiso*.

After excluding duplications and interviews which did not contain at least one of the two policy topics “tax and spendings” or “climate and environment”, a total of 23 candidate interviews were used for the analysis of the 2021 German Federal elections, including 7 interviews with the FDP, 7 interviews with the Greens, 5 interviews with the SPD and 4 interviews with CDU/CSU. During the 2002 German Federal elections, 14 interviews were examined including 4 interviews each with the candidates of the FDP and CDU/CSU and 3 interviews each with the candidates of the SPD and Greens (see Appendix A).

4.1.2 Editorial Baseline

For the analysis, it is assumed that the editorial baseline correlates with the political positions of the readership. Parties are therefore expected to adjust their messaging according to the media outlets’ positions associated with different voter groups. To measure the outlets’ editorial baselines regarding “tax and spendings” and “climate and environment”, a sample of 50 articles per policy topic for each media outlet was drawn.

To avoid bias from the outlets’ election coverage influencing the editorial positions, the newspapers were searched for articles on both policy topics one year before the 2021 and 2002 elections, over a three-months’ period (from 26/06/2020 to 25/09/2020 and 22/06/2001 to 22/09/2001), for terms under which both topics were most frequently discussed within the interviews. To ensure that all articles are policy-related, a systematic keyword search for the terms “climate” or “environment” and “tax” or “redistribution”, each in combination with the terms “law” or “politics” or “debate”, was carried out in the data bases *Factiva*, *F.A.Z. Archiv* and *wiso* (see search protocol in Appendix B). The search results were restricted to articles published nationally from the leading newspaper of each media outlet, i.e. without supplements or online versions. Certain article types, including comments, letters to the editor, reviews, and articles with less than 150 words were excluded from the outset. Overall, for the search criteria described and by also considering newspapers with less than 50 search results, the analysis contains 1947 newspaper articles.

4.2 Methods

This paper is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. After the outlets were clustered based on their quantitatively determined editorial baseline (4.2.1), the parties’ targeting strategies were qualitatively coded and analyzed (4.2.2).

4.2.1 Quantitative Media Analysis

To estimate the editorial positions regarding both policy topics, the ten media outlets were mapped along a one-dimensional scale for each topic and then clustered according to their position. Therefore, all calculations were carried out with R Version 4.1.2, the statistical software RStudio and the R packages required for the analyzes (R Development Core Team, 2021; RStudio Team, 2021).

Using the relative word frequencies of a document as data, the scaling algorithm *Wordfish* locates multiple documents within a single policy space (Proksch & Slapin, 2009). By assuming that word frequencies are drawn from a Poisson distribution, positions were estimated using an expectation-maximization algorithm (Slapin & Proksch, 2008). The German language is thus particularly well-suited for word-based analysis, as it allows the concatenating of nouns to form one long word which contains much more information than a single noun in English (Slapin & Proksch, 2009).

Firstly, all articles were grouped by outlet, the documents were tokenized, stop words were removed and the tokens were stemmed and lowercased to capture the same and similar words with different endings as one. Following the document processing, the *Wordfish* function was executed per topic per election.

The function recognizes the respective outlet corpora as one document. Thus, all documents were scaled according to their ideological position towards each policy topic investigated ('theta value'), depending on their relative word frequency within one aggregated document. The words with high positive and high negative word weights, according to which the outlets were discriminated, could be assessed by plotting the document features. Frequently used words have large fixed-effects and thus weights close to 0, less frequently used words that discriminate between ideological positions have smaller fixed effects but positive or negative values depending on their frequency of usage in each newspaper, allowing to position the newspapers (Slapin & Proksch 2008).

4.2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

For analyzing party messaging on the policy topics "climate and environment" and "tax and spendings" during the 2002 and 2021 German federal elections, a qualitative content analysis of the newspaper interview data was conducted. This analysis assigns the text material on the unit of sentences to specific categories (Linström & Marais, 2012; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). Inductive categories were derived from the analysis and coding rules were determined in order to avoid difficulties in delimiting the categories and increase validity (Mayring, 2010). Both the coding process and the generation of the category system were carried out using the *MAXQDA* software (VERBI Software, 2021). To ensure completeness, the inductive coding process was conducted twice. Additionally, some structural adjustments within the category system were made after the quantitative media analysis to ensure later comparability. To demonstrate the reliability of the results, an intercoder reliability test was conducted to largely rule out subjectivity or biases in the coding. For this purpose, 5% of the 493 coded segments were coded by a second, independent person and the consistency of both codings was compared (Burla et al., 2008).

4.2.3 Adjacency Matrices and Visualization

Lastly, the interview documents were grouped along the quantitatively formed clusters and adjacency matrices built by marking per party which coded statement was found in which document group. As the relatively small number of 23 interviews in 2021 and 14 interviews in 2002 did not allow for a reliable quantitative analysis, the matrices do not represent the frequencies of each coded statement per outlet group but only binarily indicate their presence (1 for present and 0 for absent).

Measuring the presence of party messages in each document group and relating this to the media outlets' editorial baselines demonstrate whether and how the parties adjust their messaging to these baselines. Comparing the results for "tax and spendings" between the 2002 and 2021 elections then revealed whether these strategies have changed over time. After both policy topics were separately coded and analyzed, it was evaluated whether there were consistent patterns across the different policy topics, which would indicate a strategic usage of targeted messaging.

To visualize the segmentation and messaging strategies, networks representations were generated to illustrate which and how many frames or messages were chosen for which media outlet group. By using the network visualization program *visone*, two-mode affiliation networks were created out of the adjacency matrices retrieved from *MAXQDA*, in which two types of nodes represent the message and the respective newspaper groups (Brandes & Wagner, 2011). Both are connected by edges when a certain frame or messages is present in a newspaper group (cf. Leifeld, 2012).

5. Analysis

The following sections detail how both the quantitative categorization of media outlets via their editorial baseline (5.1) and the qualitative content analysis of party messaging (5.2) were conducted. Their results are then combined by using visualized adjacency matrices for analyzing the respective party strategies regarding the two policy topics "tax and spendings" (5.3.1) and "climate and environment" (5.3.2) during the 2021 German federal elections and the policy topic "tax and spendings" during the 2002 German federal elections (5.3.3). In a separate chapter 6, the findings are systematically merged and contrasted to review this papers' hypotheses.

5.1 Categorization of Media Outlets via their Editorial Baseline

In order to categorize the ten media outlets via their positions regarding "tax and spendings" and "climate and environment", the *Wordfish* function was executed per topic per election. However, no meaningful results were found at first for either policy topic. When plotting the document features, it became evident that the newspaper corpora were rather distinguished for extraneous reasons, such as topic-unrelated articles or paragraphs. As words appearing in only one document group have an unproportionally high weight (J. Slapin & Proksch, 2009), *Wordfish* may be stronger for measuring ideology within party programs or speeches than in newspaper articles which contain more 'noise'.

To only include topic-related parts of the articles, new corpora per outlet were created which by using the *kwic* function only entailed the 25 words before and after the keywords "climate" ("klim*") and "environment" ("umwelt*") for "climate and environment" and "tax" ("*steuer*"), "spending" ("*abgabe*") and "redistribution" ("umverteil*") for "tax and spendings". The *Wordfish* function was then run again for each policy topic and elections with the adjusted corpora.

Afterwards, for the 2021 "tax and spendings" corpora, a clear economic left-right dimension is found (see Appendix C1). While the differences between the newspapers' theta values can be seen as measures for the differences between their positions, the polarity and the absolute theta

values have no significant meaning here. Therefore, the correct left-right polarity is to be identified looking directly at the clustered words, while a separating line is chosen as to obtain same-sized clusters. Outlets on the one side of the scale ($\theta \leq 0.2$) were grouped by more ‘left words’ indicating the need for more redistribution with large negative word weights such as wealth levy, distribute, poverty or fair, while outlets on the other side of the scale ($\theta > 0.2$) are characterized by more ‘right words’ indicating the demand for less redistribution such as double taxation, tax consequences, depreciation, or expenses with large positive word weights. Within the policy topic “tax and spendings” in 2021, the ten investigated outlets were thus grouped by their editorial baseline as depicted in Table 1. To account for changes in editorial positions, the *Wordfish* function was executed again for the 2002 outlet corpora to categorize the same ten outlets regarding their position towards “tax and spendings”, with grouping all newspapers with $\theta > 0$ as left and $\theta \leq 0$ as right. Compared to 2021, the division into left and right words was slightly less distinct (see Appendix C2).

Outlet Group	Definition	Value	Example words	Newspapers
left	more redistribution	$\theta \leq 0.2$	wealth levy, distribute, rethink, poverty, fair, etc.	taz, stern, ZEIT, Spiegel, FR
right	less redistribution	$\theta > 0.2$	double taxation, tax consequences, depreciation, expenses, etc.	Welt, HB, FAZ, FOCUS, SZ

Table 1: One-dimensional categorization of outlets’ positions regarding “Tax and Spendings” (2021) with *Wordfish*.

Whereas *Wordfish* proves to be useful for scaling the newspaper outlets along the redistribution dimension, its one-dimensionality became a significant limitation when applying it to the corpora for “climate and environment”. Climate and environmental policy as a highly multi-dimensional policy topic led to no meaningful results after using the *Wordfish* function with multiple iterations for different filtering parameters (see Appendix C3 for non-results). Thus, existing literature on media frames and positions towards climate change was taken into account. Stecula and Merkley (2019) identify three in the news most frequently used general dimensions when reporting on climate change: “economic costs or benefits”, “conservative or free-market dimension” and “uncertainty” about its existence and its impact. As none of the investigated German parties neglects the existence of human-made climate change and its impact, only the first two dimensions were considered here.

When extracting policy positions from political texts, the left-right dimension is widely applicable throughout different policy fields (Laver et al., 2003). Hence, when reporting on climate change mitigation through the lens of a left-right ideological conflict, the media outlets were clustered according to the left-right dimension retrieved from the “tax and spendings” categorization. Therefore, I assume the left “more redistribution” to correspond with demands for more state-based solutions, while the right “less redistribution” corresponds to claims for more market-based solutions and little state regulation.

Regarding the second dimension of “economic costs or benefits”, articles were manually coded for whether having more direct references to socio-economic costs or socio-economic benefits when reporting on climate and environmental action (cf. Stecula & Merkley, 2019) (see Appendix D and E). The newspapers were thus categorized depending on their relative number

of references. As a result, the ten outlets were grouped regarding their position towards climate and environment via two dimensions as depicted in Table 2.

		market versus state (left-right dimension)	
		state regulation	free market/ innovation
socio-economic dimension	socio-economic costs	taz, stern	welt, HB, FOCUS
	socio-economic benefits	Zeit, Spiegel, FR	SZ, FAZ

Table 2: Two-dimensional categorization of outlets' positions regarding "Climate and Environment" (2021).

5.2 Party Messaging per Policy Topic

Based on a qualitative content analysis of the newspaper interviews conducted by the candidates or party leaders of CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, and FDP during the 2021 German Federal elections, a category system was inductively built from the coded party statements. All statements related to the policy-topics "tax and spendings" or "climate and environment" were coded as messages, which were then grouped into frames. Thus, the messages can be seen as argumentative "tools" for the respective frames. As each policy-topic has been discussed under different dimensions, different frames for each dimension were identified. The entirety of all categories built for each policy topic including the message level is found in Appendix F.

The policy topic "tax and spendings" was found to be discussed under two dimensions. The main "redistribution" dimension is divided into three frames "more redistribution", "less redistribution" and "no changes" and thus represents in total the same left-right dimension found quantitatively for the media outlets' positions. The respective frames consist of several subframes which each result from the use of different messages (see Table 3). The second "tax income" dimension includes statements on other forms of increasing the tax income which do not indicate more or less redistribution. In total, 41 messages concerning "tax and spending" were identified and assigned to the frames, the complete Table is shown in Appendix F1.

Topic	Dimension	Frame	Subframe
Tax & Spendings	Redistribution Dimension	More Redistribution (left)	societal relevance of higher taxing
			higher company taxes
			lower taxes for low and middle-income earners
			higher taxes for high-income earners
			higher social spendings
		Less Redistribution (right)	benefits of decreasing taxes
			lower company taxes
			lower all taxes
			lower taxes for high-income earners
			lower social spendings
		no changes	risks of increasing tax
			tax reform needed (but no clear message)
			no tax increases
			no tax decreases

	Tax Income Dimension		no changes in spendings
		fight tax fraud	
		tax by structural changes, lower bureaucracy and digitalization	
		economic growth increases tax	

Table 3: Category System “Tax and Spendings” (2021).

For the policy topic “climate and environment”, four different dimensions were identified. Corresponding to the two-dimensional categorization of editorial baseline, a “market versus state dimension (left/right)” was identified containing several subframes under the general frames “more state-based solutions” and “less state-based solutions”. Similarly, a “socio-economic dimension” was detected including frames regarding the “socio-economic costs” and “socio-economic benefits” of climate action as well as the “consideration of citizens interests”. Besides, within a “global dimension” two contrary frames emphasize whether there should be a “leading role of Germany in the world” or whether the “German role in climate change is globally limited”. Within the “energy dimension” consisting of two different frames, parties advocate for the “need for expansion of renewable energies” or the “consideration of energy security” (see Table 4). In total, 82 messages concerning “climate and environment” were identified and assigned to the frames, the complete Table is shown in Appendix F2.

Topic	Dimension	Frame	
Climate & Environment	Global Dimension	Leading role of Germany in the EU/world	
		German role in climate change globally limited (Global Solutions / European Integration)	
	Socio-Economic Dimension	Consideration of citizens interests	
		Socio-economic costs of climate action	
		Socio-economic benefits of climate action	
	Market versus State Dimension (left/right)	more regulation-based solutions	More state in climate action (regulation)
			Market-based with clear legal framework (regulation/market)
		more market-based solutions	Market-based with financial incentives for behavioral changes (market/regulation)
			Less state/more market in climate action (market)
			Technology/Innovation as solution (market)
	Energy Dimension	Consideration of Energy Security	
		Need for Expansion of RE	

Table 4: Category System “Climate and Environment” (2021).

To ensure reliability of the coding process, an intercoder reliability test was conducted, comparing the coding of a 5% sample of all statements coded. Of the 25 statements examined, 22 were coded identically, resulting in 88.0% agreement. The reliability test including a precise comparison of the coded concepts is presented in Appendix G, all differently coded segments were recoded, and the respective categories revised. Thus, significant systematic biases in the coding can be excluded (cf. Burla et al., 2008).

5.3 Targeted Party Messaging based on Editorial Baseline of Media Outlet Groups

Based on adjacency matrices, the following chapter examines whether and how the parties' messaging regarding specific policy-topics is adjusted to media outlets' editorial positions by analyzing the respective parties' use of the different frames, subframes and messages (as identified in 5.2) in the different outlet groups (as clustered in 5.1).

5.3.1 2021 German Federal Elections: Tax and Spendings

First, the segmentation and targeting strategies regarding the policy-topic "tax and spendings" were analyzed for each party on the frame level. Frames which were found to be present in all outlet groups were then also examined on the message level to account for potentially more nuanced differences in the messaging. The corresponding adjacency matrix including all four parties is found in Appendix H1. In the following network visualizations, frames and messages are represented by circles (○) in the considered parties' characteristic colors and assigned to the newspaper positions represented by diamonds (◆). For further differentiation, "valence frames" or "valence messages", referring to dimensions according to which the media outlets were not categorized, are represented by white circles. They indicate non-polarizing issues around which a broad consensus is expected as almost all voters are expected to have the same position (Stokes, 1963).

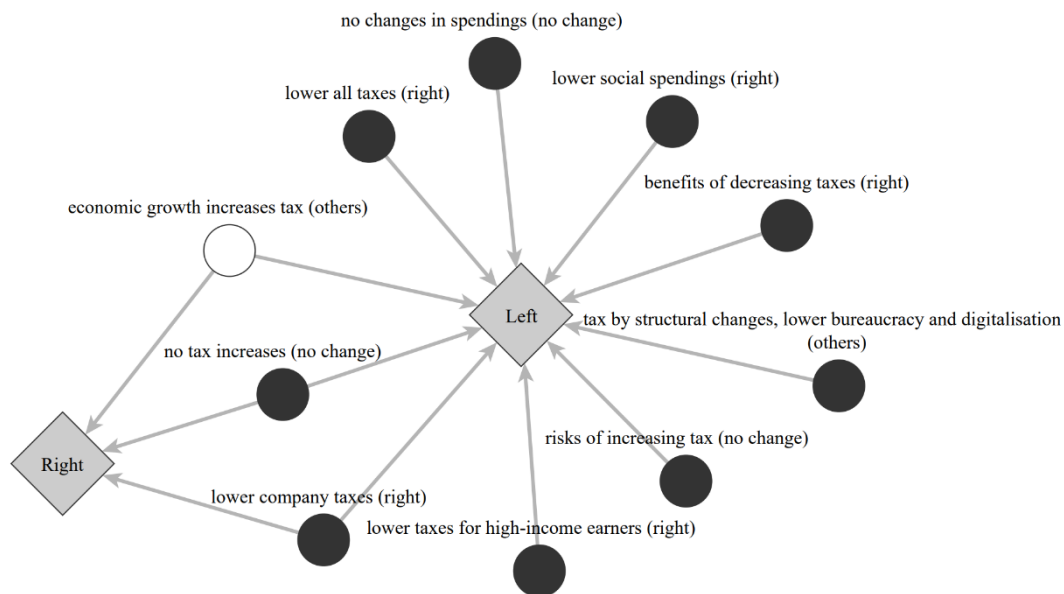


Figure 1: Frames and Subframes used by CDU/CSU regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right-leaning media outlet group (2021).

No clear segmentation strategy regarding the policy-topic "tax and spendings" was found for the *CDU/CSU* (see Figure 1). The party only uses "less redistribution" or "no changes" frames regardless of the media outlet's position by advocating for lower taxes and spendings and highlighting risks of higher taxes. These frames all align with their party position. The messaging is therefore clearly not targeted to an economically left-leaning audience. When examining the frames present in both outlets on a message level, slightly different aspects are highlighted. While the *CDU/CSU* emphasize the burden placed on companies by the pandemic and climate transition in the left-leaning outlet group, they emphasize how companies "need to

be trusted more by unleashing their potential through lowering taxes” (HB, 16/09/2022) in the right-leaning outlet group.

Despite these marginal differences, it is striking that much more subframes are present in the left-leaning outlet group which has a higher ideological distance to the CDU/CSU’s party position. There are two possible explanations: either the questions asked in the left-leaning outlets were more diverse and thus enabled or forced the candidate to elaborate on the party’s position towards “tax and spendings”, or it is possible that the CDU/CSU segment their audience already on an actor level. Based on the data mining process, it seems conceivable that to appeal to different voter groups, party representatives of the more conservative CSU target more conservative audiences while Armin Laschet who represents a more moderate part of CDU rather targets left-leaning audiences.

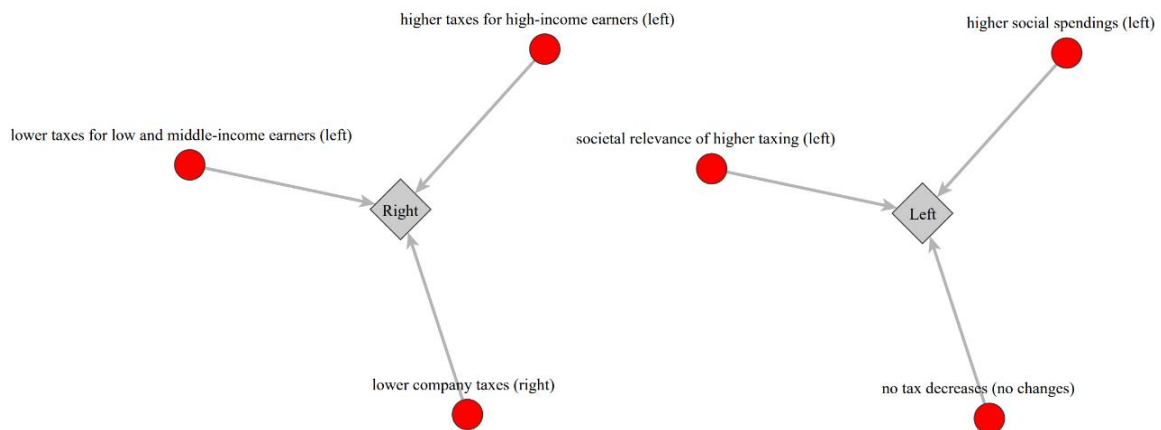


Figure 2: Frames and Subframes used by SPD regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right-leaning media outlet group (2021).

At first glance, the visualization of the use of subframes by the SPD in different outlets (Figure 2) does suggest a clear segmentation strategy. When taking a closer look, however, in both outlet groups the left “more redistribution” frame is predominantly used, in line with the parties’ ideological position. Even though the respective subframes differ, a consistent system is not recognizable. This suggests that the candidate Olaf Scholz does not strategically adjust his messaging to the outlets’ positions. Instead, the party seems to rather please its own electorate and distance itself from positions predominant in right-leaning outlets. The use of the “lower company taxes” subframe within right-leaning outlets, by demanding the opportunity to depreciate investments from company taxes, is the sole example of targeted messaging against the own ideological position. Besides that, no strong segmentation strategy is observed for the SPD regarding “tax and spendings”.

The *FDP* appears to have a much more systematic segmentation and targeting strategy (see Figure 3). Positioning themselves economically on the right, they clearly target the readership of right-leaning newspaper outlets by campaigning for “lower company taxes” and “lower taxes for high-income earners”. Subframes in both outlet groups represent the main positions and campaign messages of the FDP, such as “lowering all taxes”, “no tax increases” and “benefits of decreasing taxes”. These positions characterize the FDP as a brand but are less targeted towards specific audiences. In contrast, subframes used in left-leaning media outlets neither propose more or less redistribution but highlight other forms of tax increase through “structural changes, lower bureaucracy and digitalization” or through “economic growth”. Thus, it appears

that the FDP has a clear segmentation strategy by promoting their key messages throughout all outlets, targeting their own electorate with specific messages and blurring their party position and using non-polarizing “valence” subframes in outlets which are expected to not favor the party’s position.

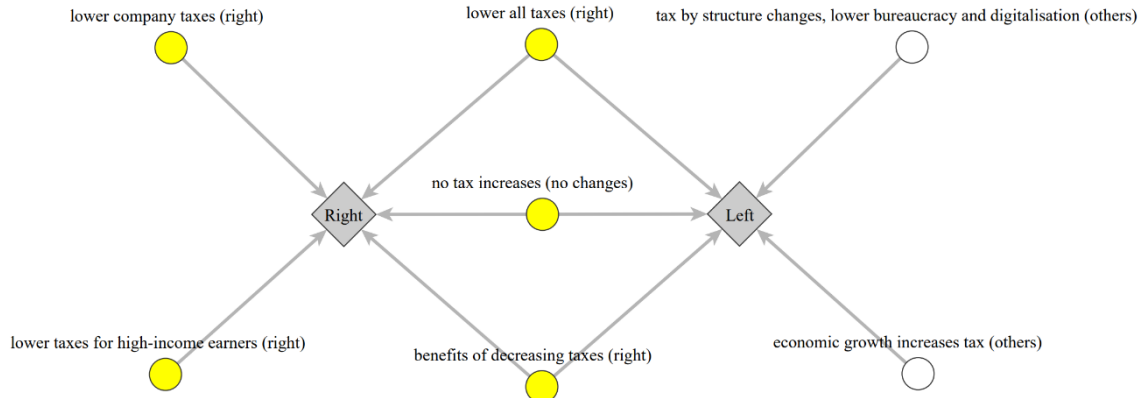


Figure 3: Frames and Subframes used by FDP regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right-leaning media outlet group (2021).

In comparison to the FDP, *the Greens* show a less pronounced segmentation strategy. In accordance with their ideological position, they do not use “less redistribution” framing regardless of the outlets’ positions and seem to have key messages such as “higher taxes for high-income earners” and non-polarizing valence frames such as “fight tax fraud” which they campaign to all outlets (see Figure 4). While they highlight the “societal relevance of higher taxing” in left-leaning outlets, they argue for “no tax decreases” in right-leaning outlets. However, the Greens seem to target the audience of right-leaning outlets on the message level. By stating that “the CDU/CSU wants to use ten billion to reduce taxes for top earners, I want to use them to combat child poverty and to introduce basic child security” (SZ, 14/09/2021), Annalena Baerbock presents her party as an alternative to the within the right-leaning readership more popular CDU/CSU. In addition, she uses a “valence” message with the argument of combatting child poverty, which is expected to reach consensus among different voter groups.

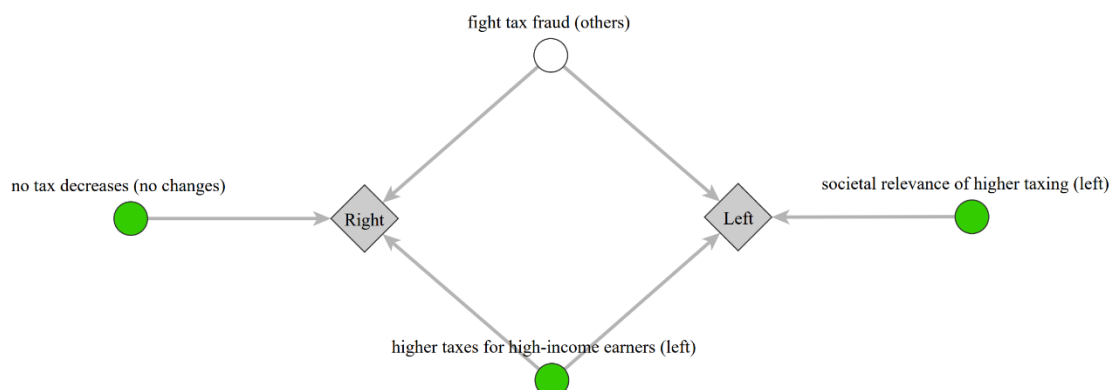


Figure 4: Frames and Subframes used by the Greens regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right-leaning media outlet group (2021).

Overall, when campaigning for the policy topic “tax and spendings”, parties have differently pronounced segmentation and targeting strategies. Several parties distinguish between “position” and “valence” issues and use them strategically to content different audiences. It has

been shown that several parties frame the policy topic in media outlets closer to their own electorate according to their own ideological position within the left-right dimension, while choosing frames outside of this dimension when targeting audiences who are further away from the own ideological position. In addition, the segmentation might take place on different levels. While all parties differentiate to a different extend on frame level, the Greens seem to use similar frames but different messages as arguments for different readerships. Furthermore, during the data mining process, it appears that the CDU/CSU already segment on an actor level by strategically selecting different party representatives for interviews in different media outlets.

5.3.2 2021 German Federal Elections: Climate and Environment

For the policy topic “climate and environment”, the newspaper outlets were clustered along two different dimensions. First, whether the outlets focus on the socio-economic costs or the socio-economic benefits of climate mitigation. Second, whether they expect regulation-based or market-based solutions to solve the climate crisis, which correspond to the left-right dimension for “tax and spendings”. Besides discussing the policy topic “climate and environment” along these two dimensions, the parties additionally discussed it along a “global dimension” and an “energy dimension”. In line with the preliminary findings in 5.3.1, I examine whether parties strategically use frames within these two dimensions as “valence” dimensions when targeting audiences further away from their ideological stances.

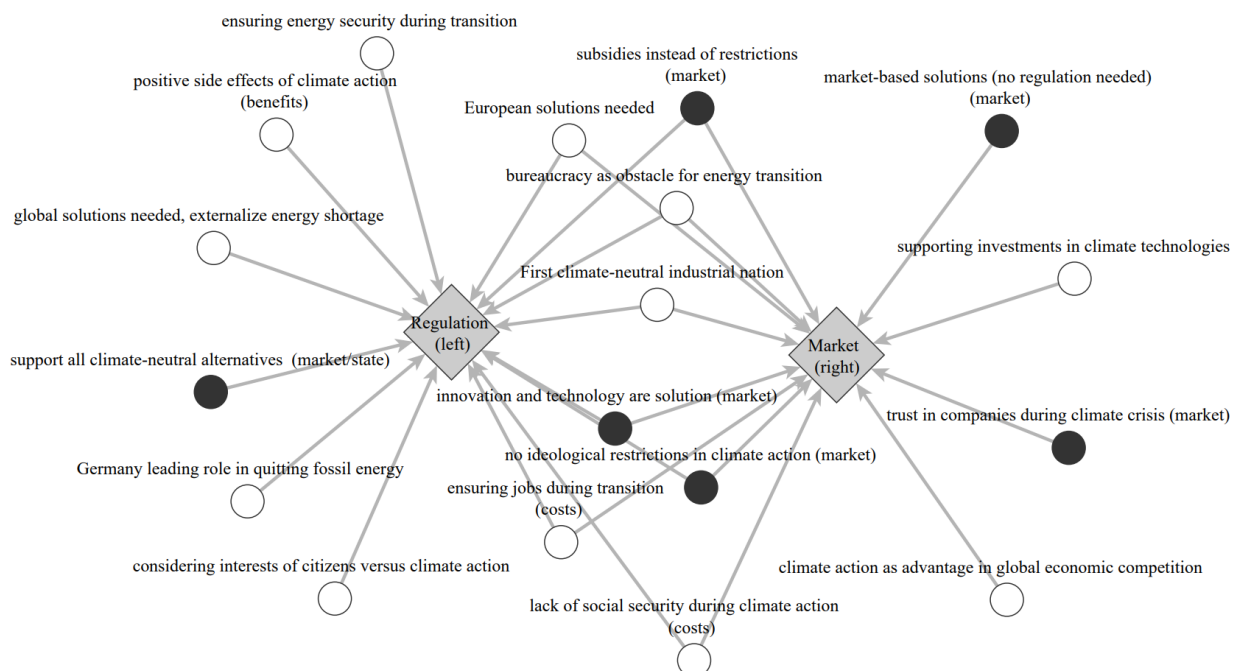


Figure 5: Messages used by CDU/CSU regarding "Climate and Environment" in regulation and/or market-oriented media outlet group (2021).

When analyzing the parties’ segmentation and targeting strategies it appeared that, due to the complexity of the policy topic, the parties rather segment on the message level than on the frame level. While the frame level is later discussed per party (networks can be found in Appendix I, the corresponding adjacency matrix in Appendix H2), the nodes in the following networks represent the parties’ statements on the message level.

In line with the findings for “tax and spendings”, no clear segmentation strategy could be identified for the *CDU/CSU* for “climate and environment” on the frame level (see Appendix I1). Regardless of the outlet groups, the party frames climate action with regards to their socio-economic costs and benefits and mainly highlights the usage of market-based solutions. However, the *CDU/CSU* may still adjust their messaging on the message level. Therefore, the networks also display the presence of specific messages in the respective outlet groups divided via their editorial position on a left-right scale (Figure 5) or by their emphasis on socio-economic costs or benefits of climate action (Figure 6). As already explained, to discriminate “valence” from “position” messages, nodes for all messages not related to the considered dimensions of the outlet groups are colored white.

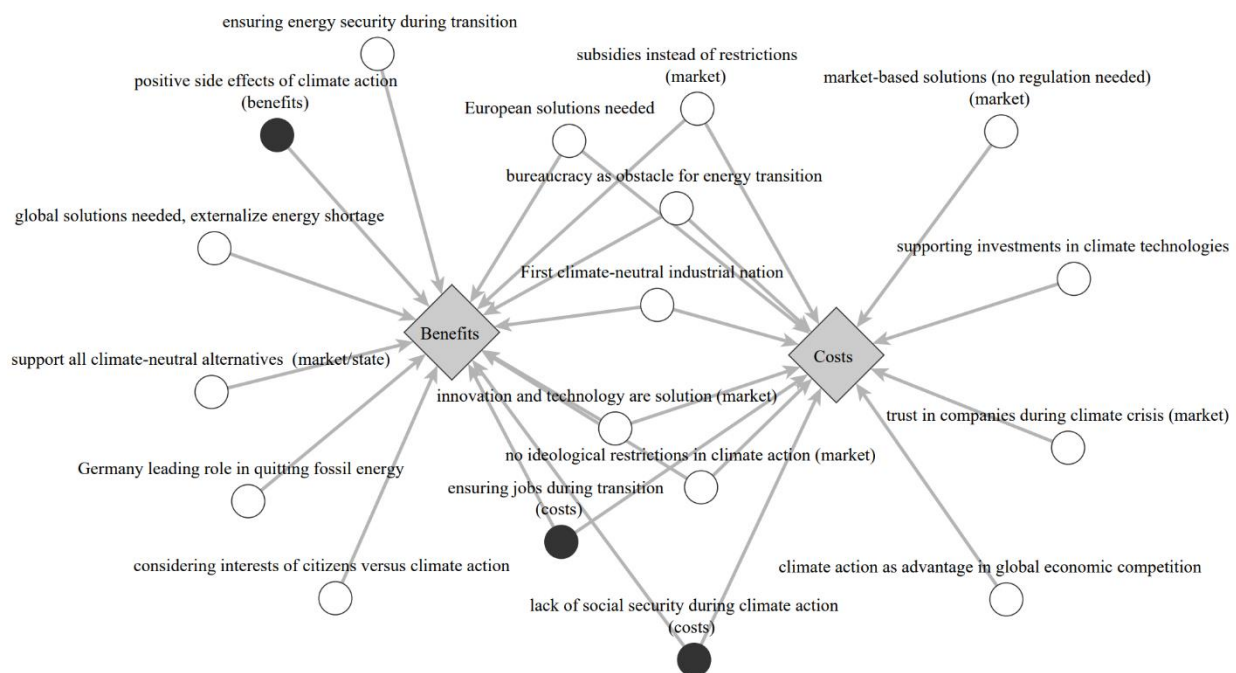


Figure 6: Messages used by CDU/CSU regarding "Climate and Environment" in socio-economic benefits and/or costs-oriented media outlet group (2021).

While the *CDU/CSU* advocate for more subsidies and technology-based solutions and less restrictions in both market-oriented and regulation-oriented outlet groups, they highlight that the state has a role in “supporting the development of climate-neutral alternatives” in regulation-oriented newspapers. Besides that, the party seems to focus on valence messages in left-leaning outlets. In the market-oriented newspaper group, the *CDU/CSU* campaigns for more “trust in companies to solve the climate crisis” (HB, 16/09/2021), which is clearly targeted to the respective readership. The *CDU/CSU* do not strongly differ their messaging between media outlets focusing on socio-economic costs or benefits of climate action. Key messages such as the risk of job loss and the lack of social security during climate action are mentioned in both outlet groups. However, they target “positive side effects of climate action” only to the outlet group which reports on the benefits of climate action. Overall, it seems that even though single messages are targeted to a specific audience, most messages represent the party’s position in all outlet groups.

thus asking more balanced questions during the interviews (cf. Lüter, 2004). However, it does not seem that the SPD has a clear segmentation and targeting strategy, neither along the socio-economic nor the market-regulation dimension.

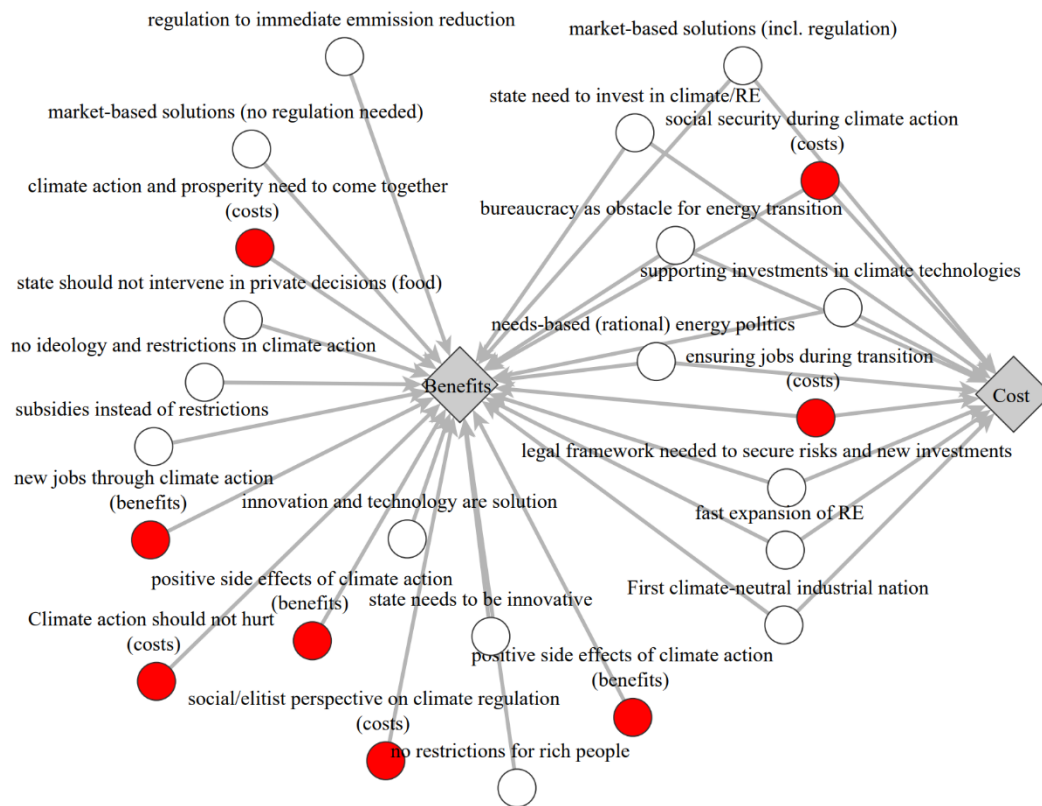


Figure 8: Messages used by SPD regarding "Climate and Environment" in socio-economic benefits and/or costs-oriented media outlet group (2021).

The *FDP* already showed systematic targeting strategy for “tax and spendings” by using “position” frames in ideologically closer outlets and “valence” or unrelated frames in ideologically further outlets. Hence, it is to be examined whether they apply a similar strategy for “climate and environment”. Indeed, on the frame level (see Appendix I3) the *FDP* seems to differentiate between market and regulation-oriented outlets. Again, it uses key positions for both outlets, but more regulation-oriented frames such as “more state in climate action” as well as “valence” frames such as the need for “expansion of renewable energies” or “consideration of citizens interests” in more left-leaning outlets. Yet, there is no clearly perceivable segmentation between newspapers that focus on the costs or on the benefits of climate action. These first findings on the frame level are thus further examined on message level. When dividing outlets along a market-regulation dimension, the previous assumptions are confirmed. The *FDP*’s key messages such as “market-based solutions”, “technological openness” or “too much regulation, restrictions and bureaucracy as obstacle for transition” are articulated in both outlet groups (see Figure 9). In market-oriented outlets which are close to the parties’ own ideological position, only market-oriented or dimension-unrelated messages are mentioned. In more regulation-oriented outlets, one can find specifically targeted messages regarding the need for “legal framework to preclude risks and secure new investments” or an emphasis on “monetary steering effects for behavioral change”.

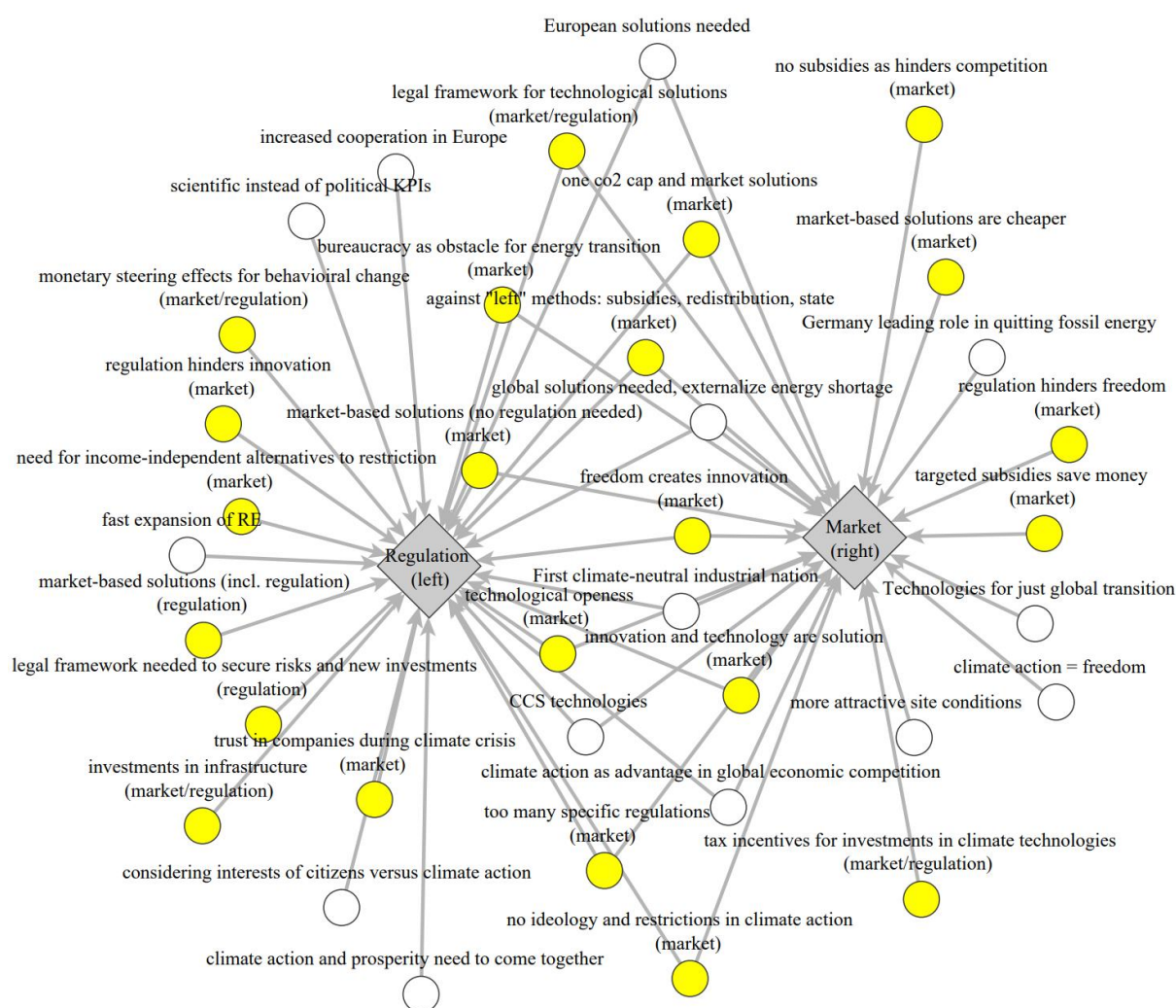


Figure 9: Messages used by FDP regarding "Climate and Environment" in regulation and/or market-oriented media outlet group (2021).

Dividing the outlets along a cost-benefit dimension, the FDP focusses in its messaging little on socio-economic consequences of climate action. Thus, no clear segmentation strategy is observable along this dimension (see Figure 10). However, the FDP clearly seems to have a segmentation strategy between market-oriented and regulation-oriented newspapers. This indicates that segmenting via left-right may be much more widely applicable over several policy fields and thus be more intuitive for parties than the topic-related cost-benefit distinction.

Just as for "tax and spendings", the *Greens* were found to have a clear segmentation strategy on message level rather than on frame level when communicating their "climate and environment" positions. On the frame level, no clear segmentation and targeting strategy is found (see Appendix I4). The same frames are used in cost-oriented and benefits-oriented newspaper outlets and the frames are mostly identical between market-oriented and regulation-oriented outlets as well. However, solutions for climate mitigation are framed more market-oriented in regulation-oriented outlets. These unanticipated results are expected to be further differentiated by examining segmentation strategies on message level. For instance, the *Greens* use the frame "leading role of Germany in the world" in both outlet groups. In their messaging however, they focus on the need for supporting other countries to ensure global justice in left-leaning outlet groups and on economic competitiveness in right-leaning outlet groups.

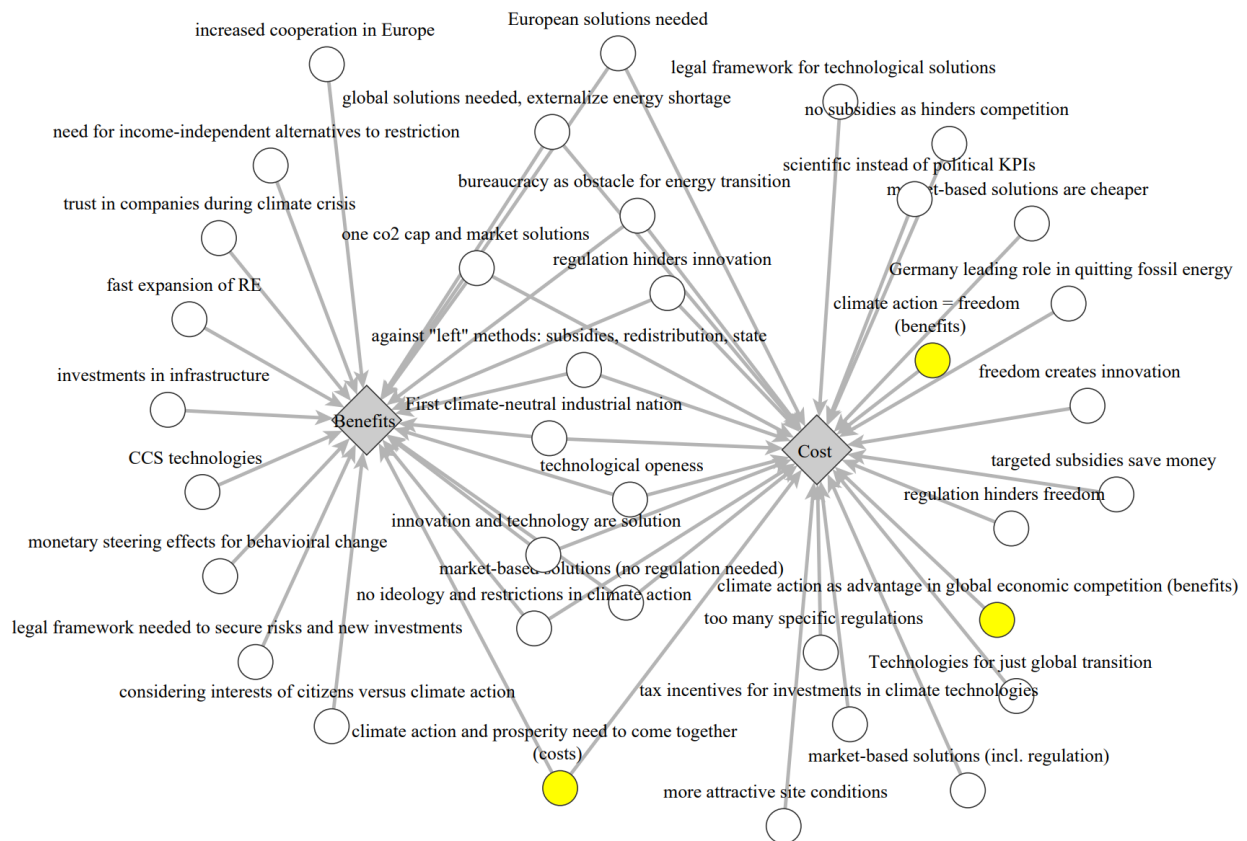


Figure 10: Messages used by FDP regarding "Climate and Environment" in socio-economic benefits and/or costs-oriented media outlet group (2021).

In comparison to the other parties, the Greens appear to use a large variety of messages. This may be explained by the centrality of the policy-topic "climate and environment" for the Green party's brand, which might also impact the volume and depth of questions they get asked in interviews on this topic. When investigating their segmentation strategy between regulation-oriented and market-oriented media outlets, clear key messages such as the demand for "regulation for immediate emission reduction", an "active role of state in industrial transition", and "support climate-neutral alternatives" are found in both outlet groups (see Figure 11). In market-oriented newspapers the party highlights that "no climate action is most expensive" and includes only messages which are strongly targeted towards the industry, such as emphasizing that "innovation and technology are solution". Even though they still use a regulation-oriented frame in these newspapers, they strongly adjusted to the readership on a message level. For example, they highlight that the "German industry wants transition and regulation" and that a "legal framework [is] needed to preclude risks and secure new investments". Additionally, the party targets market-oriented outlets with messages in the global dimension. By highlighting the responsibility of supranational decision-making such as "European solutions" or "transatlantic alliances" they may prescind from the national regulations they are demanding. To satisfy their own electorate, the messages in regulation-oriented outlets are much more regulation-based, highlighting "higher prices for climate-damaging rich" or that "exclusively market-based solutions are unjust". However, the Greens use several more ambiguous messages such as "market-based solutions with a clear legal framework" or "market-based solutions with monetary steering effects to behavioral change" and call for a "stakeholder dialogue with the industry". This increasing industry-orientation may also be due to recent changes in the Green

slightly different between 2002 and 2021 (see Appendix C2). The adjacency matrix underlying the following networks is provided in Appendix H3.

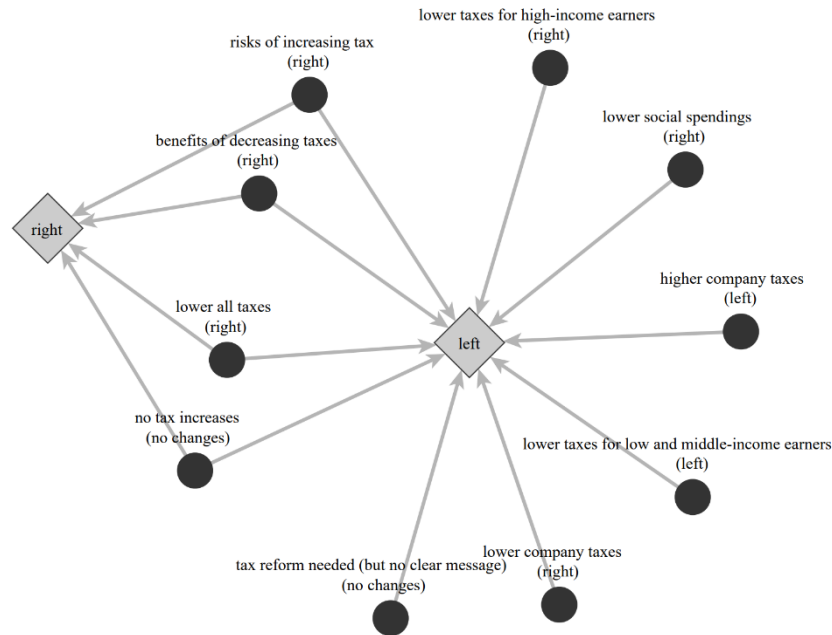


Figure 13: Frames and Subframes used by CDU/CSU regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right media outlet group (2002).

For the *CDU/CSU* as the challenger party in 2002, no clear segmentation strategy is found. More interviews are given in left-leaning outlets, which suggests an actor level segmentation similarly to the 2021 electoral strategy of *CDU* and *CSU* representatives. In accordance with Down's (1957) median voter theorem, this could also be an attempt to win votes from more left-leaning voter groups. However, the messaging both on frame and message level is very similar and corresponds to the *CDU/CSU*'s party positions. While single subframes such as "lower taxes for low and middle-income earners" or "higher company taxes" as part of the "more redistribution" frame is targeted to left-leaning outlets, the *CDU/CSU* also uses the contrary subframe "lower company taxes" in a different outlet from the same outlet group (see Figure 13). Thus, no clear targeting patterns prevail.

The 2002 market leader party *SPD* only gives interviews in left-leaning media outlets considered as closer to the party's position, indicating historical ties between the party and specific media outlets. Within the left-leaning media outlets, it only uses subframes and messages within the "more redistribution" or "no changes" frame, corresponding to both, the *SPD*'s and the outlets' positions (see Figure 14). However, this prevents the party from engaging in any form of segmentation and targeting strategies.

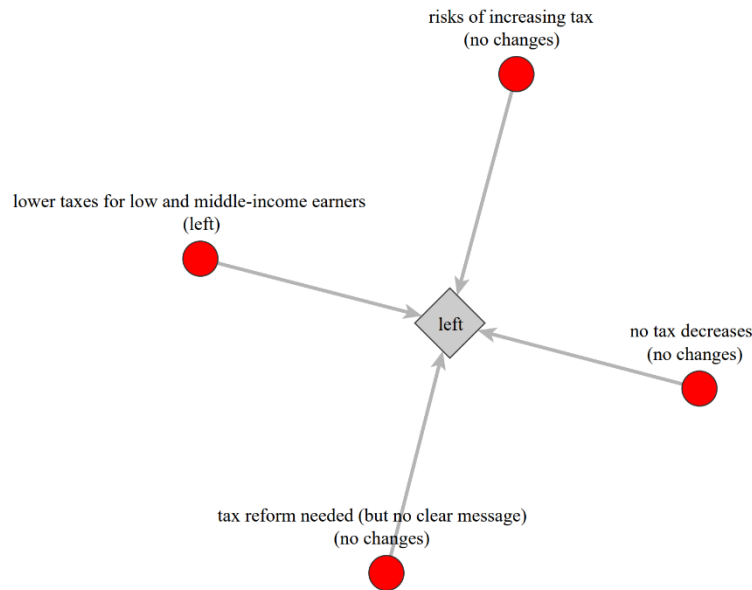


Figure 15: Frames and Subframes used by SPD regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right media outlet group (2002).

The *FDP* as a niche party predominantly gives interviews in right-leaning newspapers corresponding to its political position. On frame level, no clear strategy is found between both outlet groups (see Figure 15). It uses its key frame “lower all taxes” in both outlet groups while using for each outlet group frames which do not correspond to the outlets’ positions. On message level, the FDP emphasizes in more left-leaning newspapers how the existing tax system needs to be replaced in order to be “easier and more just” (SZ, 08/09/2002) while in right-leaning newspapers it highlights how “performance still must be worthwhile” (FOCUS, 16/09/2002), showing a few targeted messages but no comprehensive strategy.

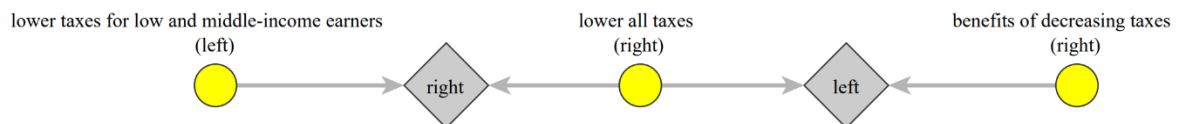


Figure 145: Frames and Subframes used by FDP regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right media outlet group (2002).

Like the other parties, the *Greens* as a niche party in 2002 give more interviews in left-leaning outlets corresponding to their own political position. On frame and message level, they use “societal relevance of higher taxing” and “no tax decreases” frames in left-leaning outlets, while they do not make any statements regarding tax policy in right-leaning outlets (see Figure 16). As they are asked less questions regarding “tax and spendings” in right-leaning outlets, it remains unclear whether this absence of frames and messages is also partly strategic.

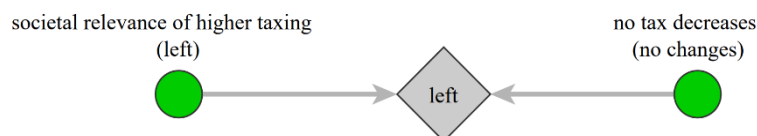


Figure 16: Frames and Subframes used by the Greens regarding "Tax and Spendings" in left and/or right media outlet group (2002).

Overall, in the 2002 elections none of the parties shows a distinct segmentation and targeting strategy on frame or message level. While some parties appear to have stronger ties to outlets closer to their political position by giving them exclusively or more interviews, others represent their party line in ideologically more distant outlets.

6. Findings

Building on the analysis by policy topic and by party in the preceding chapter, the findings are consolidated in the following chapter to identify and explain patterns in the parties' use of segmentation and targeting strategies and review this papers' hypotheses.

6.1 Segmentation and Targeting Strategies during the 2021 German Federal Elections

When comparing the use of segmentation and targeting strategies across parties and policy topics, specific key messages (*"éléments de langage"*) which characterize their political 'brand' were identified for all parties. Besides this coherence, the discourse is shown to be adapted to different outlets, leading to more segmentation especially in topics less central to the parties' brands. This is done to different extents by the analyzed parties. While the CDU/CSU and SPD only target a few of their messages to the outlets' positions, the FDP and Greens are found to use much more systematic segmentation strategies.

Across multiple parties, either non-polarizing "valence" messages or frames outside the anticipated outlet categorization are used in outlets which do not represent their topic positions. On the other hand, parties tend to use more explicit "position" messaging in accordance with their own ideological positions in outlets that are ideologically close to them.

Concerning the parties' discrimination between different outlets, the left-right dimension has clearly prevailed over policy-specific classifications as an instrument to segment the audience. In comparison to the cost-benefit scale for the assessment of climate change positions, for instance, the left-right dimension seems to be considered both highly intuitive and more applicable across several policy fields. All investigated parties seem to adopt this segmentation and targeting pattern across both policy-topics, clearly suggesting an intentional use of segmentation and targeting strategies.

Overall, all investigated German parties partly adjust their messaging in anticipation of voter's preferences to media outlet's positions associated with different voter groups. Thus, my first hypothesis is clearly confirmed.

However, parties seem to do so to a very different extent. Given the significant differences between the investigated parties, the following chapter may nuance these overall findings by distinguishing between different party types. It is thus to be examined whether the parties' market positions have an impact on the use of segmentation and targeting strategies (H2).

6.2 Market Positions as Determinants of Diverging Party Strategies

Regarding their targeting strategies, different levels were identified on which the parties segment: *actor level*, *frame level* and *message level*. At the actor level, parties strategically select a suitable party representative for the respective audience. At the frame level, parties

frame a topic or topic dimension differently depending on the audience. At the message level, much more nuanced differences are made, including differences at a linguistic level.

Building on theoretical and empirical literature, the parties' segmentation and targeting strategies are expected to differ depending on their market position. The market leader and challenger parties are expected to be more likely to adjust their messaging to media outlet's positions than follower and niche parties (H2). I thus contrast the segmentation and targeting strategies of CDU/CSU and SPD as market leader and challenger party with those of FDP and the Greens as follower and niche party via their different levels and different degrees of segmentation and targeting.

Interestingly, party differences were already observed regarding the candidates' visibility as measured by the number of interviews given by the candidates. The candidates of the FDP and the Greens each gave 7 interviews and thus more than the SPD with 5 and the CDU/CSU with 4 interviews. As smaller or opposition parties with smaller discursive power strive for more visibility, they may agree to a larger number of interviews. Depending on their newsworthiness, media outlets can also have a preference in interviewing new, less known, or more polarizing candidates from opposition parties over incumbents.

During the data collection it became clear that there are already differences between the parties at the *actor level*. It seemed that most parties (i.e. SPD, FDP and the Greens) rely primarily on one prominent personality such as the chancellor candidate or party leader, and on regional or policy topic-related representatives in regional or niche outlets. By contrast, for the market leader CDU/CSU, audience-based segmentation was already seen in the choice of interlocutors at the actor level. The more conservative party leader of the CSU, Markus Söder, speaks more often in conservative outlets, while the more progressive joint chancellor candidate Armin Laschet tends to give interviews in outlets that are to the left of the CDU/CSU party line. However, segmentation strategies on actor level are beyond the scope of this paper. As discussed in chapter 4.1.2, interviews with other party representatives are not included in the corpora, therefore reliable statements on their strategic contributions cannot be made here.

At the *frame level*, no clear segmentation strategy is visible for the market leader party CDU/CSU and challenger party SPD. Nevertheless, they tend to be less explicit in ideologically further outlets by using more frames outside the dimensions by which the outlets were distinguished. In contrast, the Greens as follower party and FDP as niche party clearly distinguish between 'key frames', 'position frames' and 'valence frames'. Distinct key frames characterizing their party position are used in all outlets. Explicit position frames in line with the parties' positions towards the specific topic are used to please the electorate in outlets closer to the parties' own positions. Besides, they use valence frames in outlets with dissenting positions towards policy topics, presumably not to deter the readership of these outlets. This segmentation strategy on frame level seems to be particularly strong for the niche party FDP, while the Greens seem to target more on message level.

At the *message level*, the Greens strategically communicate key messages to all outlets and strongly segment and target between left and right-leaning outlets. Similar but less profound is the FDP's strategy of blurring their party position and using non-polarizing 'valence messages' in more left-leaning outlets while using more explicit 'position messages' in right-leaning

outlets. In contrast, the findings again do not indicate distinct segmentation strategies for market leader CDU/CSU and challenger party SPD. While some messages are specifically targeted towards the readership of left or right-leaning outlets, most messages corresponding to the parties' position were either present in all outlet groups or did not appear to follow a systematic strategy.

Overall, little segmentation and targeting is found for market leader and challenger parties (i.e. CDU/CSU and SPD), while follower and niche parties (i.e. Greens and FDP) show distinct segmentation and targeting strategies. Parties thus either please their own electorate by using the same messaging in all outlets or please the readership of a specific outlet by adjusting their messaging. Based on these findings, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

6.3 Marketization of Electoral Campaigning? Comparing the 2002 and 2021 German Elections

The previous findings demonstrate how German political parties use different market-oriented segmentation and targeting strategies. However, these findings do not yet explain whether this is the result of an increased 'marketization' of electoral competition. While there may have always been approaches to marketing strategies in election campaigns, it is assumed that the use of target group segmentation and targeted messaging in traditional media during election campaigns has evolved and increased since the rise of digital and social media (H3).

First, during the 2002 German federal elections, significantly less interviews were given by the respective candidates or party leaders in different newspapers than in 2021. While the candidates of the two opposition parties, FDP and CDU/CSU gave 4 interviews each, the two candidates of the governing parties, SPD and Greens, only gave 3 interviews. In line with findings for the 2021 elections, the opposition parties thus gave slightly more interviews than the governing parties. However, during the data collection process it appeared that in 2002 much more interviews were given by other party representatives according to their topic specialization, while in 2021 most interviews were given by the chancellor candidates or party leaders. This concentration of the election campaign on single personalities supports the thesis of an increasing personalization during elections, which has been critically discussed in recent literature (Haßler & Kruschinski, 2019).

Overall, in the 2002 elections none of the parties show a distinct segmentation and targeting strategy on frame or message level. Nevertheless, in comparison to 2021, parties seem to already select the outlets they speak to in accordance with their respective party positions. These historical ties between political parties and newspaper outlets seem to have increasingly dissolved over the past 20 years. The choice of outlets has become more balanced and possibly more strategic over this period. For the 2002 elections, no clear segmentation and targeted messaging strategy can be found for any party. In some cases, the results suggest a segmentation at the actor level, and the Greens and the FDP are occasionally targeting specific reader groups with specific messaging. Since the Greens would also be considered a niche party 20 years ago, the niche parties FDP and Greens seem to be segmenting more than the market leader and challenger parties SPD and CDU/CSU, just as they do in 2021.

The results show an increasing market-orientation in party strategies and, thus, a 'marketization' of German election campaigns in recent years. All parties differed between

voter groups stronger in 2021 than in 2002, with particularly striking differences evident for the FDP and the Greens. Thus, hypothesis 3 is confirmed. As described in Chapter 2, it is reasonable to assume that the appearance and growth of social and digital media over the past 20 years is decisive for this trend. However, this causality cannot be proven conclusively by these results since other factors such as the increased availability and capability to process voter data may also play a significant role in the increasing use of segmentation and targeting strategies.

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This paper's objective was to examine whether and how German parties engage in audience segmentation and targeted messaging in traditional media. Based on the parties' positions in the electoral market, it aimed to identify factors determining these choices. As a final step, it analyzed whether the parties' usage of marketing strategies in electoral campaigns, specifically audience segmentation and targeted messaging in traditional media, has evolved since the rise of digital and social media. In other words, the paper sought to determine whether German parties increasingly apply new media microtargeting techniques to traditional media as a form of macrotargeting.

The presented results reveal that all four examined parties segment and target voter groups as readerships of newspaper outlets. Two out of the four parties seem to have a systematic segmentation and targeting strategy, thus, applying a market-orientation during electoral campaigning. Additionally, this appears to be an evolving phenomenon. While erratic targeted messaging was found during the 2002 elections, no systematic segmentation and targeting strategy was observed for any party. Parties rather seemed to target specific voter groups via their choice of newspaper outlets they give interviews to. However, these historical ties between political parties and outlets seem to have gradually dissolved over the past 20 years. Today, parties appear to choose newspaper outlets in a more balanced and strategic manner. In identifying determinants for different degrees of segmentation, it was found that only the follower and niche parties Greens and FDP as smaller-sized opposition parties use segmentation and targeting techniques strategically.

Segmentation and targeting strategies were found on three different levels. On the *actor level*, parties may choose different party representatives for different audiences as was seen especially for the CDU/CSU. Regarding the messaging, which was the focus of this study, parties such as the FDP frame a topic differently between different outlets (*frame level*) while others, such as the Greens, mainly adjust their messaging on a sentence level according to the respective readership (*message level*). On both frame and message level, certain key messages ("*éléments de langage*") that characterize their political 'brand' are used in all outlets. Besides this structural coherence, the discourse is adapted to different outlets, whereby frames and messages are strategically emphasized and varied between different audiences. Distinguishing between valence and position issues, parties use position frames or messages in outlets close to their own electorate, while using valence frames or messages in outlets that ideologically distinguish themselves from the party's position. Thus, parties are more explicit and stronger in

communicating their political position in outlets read by their own electorate and tend to blur their position in other outlets by using more general or less explicit frames or messages.

These findings make several contributions to the existing literature. First, Stokes' (1963) model of valence and position messages was corroborated and enriched by accounting for media as intermediaries through which parties communicate to voters. Parties were found to emphasize and marginalize specific dimensions of a particular policy topic depending on the position of a media outlet. Which dimension of a multidimensional topic is used was found to be reminiscent of the dimension manipulation of Riker's "*heresthetic*", according to which the dimensionality of policy topics is tactically adjusted in the party messaging in order to attract the largest possible electorate (Riker, 1986). Both concepts are supplemented in this work by using dimensions, frames (partially also subframes), and messages to differentiate between different discursive levels of a policy topic. This enables a refined analysis yielding results that would have been overlooked at a solely dimensional level. While Rovny (2012) detects position emphasizing and blurring in parties' positioning by examining party manifestos, the same mechanism was found when examining audience segmentation and targeting. However, while the mechanisms described by Rovny refer exclusively to the formulation of the parties' own positions, the results introduce a relationality: When addressing voters, the use of emphasizing and blurring strategies thus also depends on the audience's position.

In identifying determinants for different degrees of segmentation, existing literature argues that due to higher personal and financial campaign resources, and a more diverse electorate which needs to be served when competing for office, larger parties such as the market leader and challenger parties exert more audience segmentation strategies (cf. Tenscher et al., 2012; Wagner & Meyer, 2014). By contrast, in this analysis it was found that only the smaller-sized follower and niche parties FDP and the Greens use segmentation techniques strategically. These findings do not necessarily contradict each other, and they may even be combined to give a more nuanced picture: smaller parties with less financial resources may choose to deploy marketing strategies in free media as they are less able to afford advertising, whereas parties with higher financial resources depend less on news coverage (Ansolabehere et al., 2016).

7.2 Policy Recommendations

German parties increasingly use marketing strategies in electoral campaigning, both in traditional media and in digital and social media, a trend that may be further accelerated by the growth of digital, social media and data-driven campaigns. Several scholars critically argue that applying a market-orientation makes politics a "commodity sold for consumption" (Hay, 2007, p.157), which is only based on the "preferences to be identified and the satisfaction of the preferences to be attempted" (Savigny & Temple, 2010, p. 1057) without accounting for the source of these preferences or broader context. As the marketization of election campaigns thus bears several societal and democratic risks, the findings serve as basis for policy recommendations.

The findings reveal a segmentation and targeting strategy of using key messages in all outlets, explicit statements in outlets close to parties' own ideological positions and blurring by using valence messages in outlets further from parties' own positions. This form of targeted messaging can lead to a misperception of the parties' actual political agendas and their priority

issues, as certain issues are overemphasized or marginalized. If the perceived party agenda is not aligned with the actual policy output, this contributes to political disenchantment and a loss of trust in parties and the political system as a whole. (cf. Löffler, 2021; Matthes et al., 2022)

In addition, elections and electoral competition serve not only as the selection process of political personnel. They also have the function of politicizing and mobilizing voters, and legitimizing the political system. By strategically adjusting party messaging to specific voter groups, a part of the political discourse and exchange of opinions is replaced by the self-affirmation of prevailing preferences. As seen in the analysis, voters engaging with their chosen media are rarely confronted with opinions they reject. The opinion-forming process through discourse, i.e. the endorsement and rejection of political ideas, is thus replaced by stimuli. This may either lead to polarization through the continuous confirmation of one's own ideas or to disengagement and depoliticization. (cf. Borgesius et al., 2018; Savigny, 2011)

While these consequences have a strong significance in theory, they must of course be contextualized. Today, voters hardly consume news only through one channel and exchange their positions either in their social environment or via social networks (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). Additionally, targeted messaging is by no means only perceived negatively. For instance, adjusting their messaging to different voter groups may enable parties to reach and politically engage marginalized groups in an increasingly heterogeneous society. While there is an ongoing debate on the regulation of data-based microtargeting on national and EU level, the scope of the 'macrotargeting' found in the German election campaign does not indicate a need for regulation. However, three recommendations targeted at German media executives and policymakers are intended to inspire boundary conditions for marketing strategies by German parties to thus eliminate any negative externalities:

I.) Ensure public service broadcasting fulfills its corrective function as a balancer.

While fact blurring and fake news by parties in election campaigns in other countries are much more pronounced (Humprecht, 2020), an increasing application of targeted messaging, blurring and the omission of party positions in media was found over the past 20 years in German party campaigning. The media have an important responsibility to prevent and refute such tendencies through objective reporting and the classification of false reports, e.g. by 'fact checkers', and thereby counteracting the spread of false or misleading information (Heiberger et al., 2022). The German public service broadcasting ("*öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk (ÖRR)*") in particular is required by law to act as a free and independent public opinion-former and to meet the democratic and social needs of the society. By strengthening public service broadcasting and making it more appealing to a broad audience above party lines rather than representing a particular voter group, they should aim to serve as "neutral, nonpartisan arbiters of truth" (Humprecht, 2020, p. 322). Thus, being aware of the discovered party strategies, public service broadcasting authorities are prompted to fulfil their role as a balancing corrective.

II.) Strengthen political education and information through the federal and state centers for political education. Democratic institutions cannot function without an accurately informed citizenry (Humprecht, 2020). Complementing the first recommendation targeted towards media executives and public service broadcasting,

the federal and state centers for political education (*“Bundes- und Landeszentralen für politische Bildung”*) should function as platforms to ensure the provision of universal information on party positions and topics discussed during elections. With an increasing use of marketing strategies in German electoral campaigning, both their platforms and projects on critical media consumerism and political education should be financially strengthened and promoted.

III.) Enhance and institutionalize deliberative democracy. Since targeting voter groups with messages that reinforce existing positions sets up stimuli rather than engages citizens in the political discourse (Borgesius et al., 2018), parties’ marketing strategies are to be contrasted with a political agora that provides voters with a venue for further political exchange. Establishing, for instance, citizens’ councils by drawing random samples of citizens and collectively deliberating on policy issues contributes to a very transparent opinion-forming process and thus limits the influence of segmentation and targeting by enhancing political engagement and exchange. While in elections deliberation appears to be replaced by principles of equality in the voting (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005), deliberative approaches also aim to participate and engage citizens beyond elections. Even though it is welcomed that the German Bundestag is expected to organize its first citizens’ council in 2023, deliberative structures need to be regular and institutionalized to be effective and impactful.

To conclude this paper’s recommendations, the trend towards an increasing audience segmentation and targeted messaging in German electoral campaigning must be counter-balanced by several actors and measures: By public and private media providing complementary and neutral information, by the political educational centers strengthening media literacy, and by public facilities and forums providing venues for political exchange.

7.3 Limitations and Further Research

This paper has several conceptual and methodological limitations, which create openings for further research. Several theoretical premises were made to conduct this study. First, the vote-seeking thesis of Downs' (1957) rational choice voter model is fundamental in explaining the use of marketing strategies but strongly simplifies electoral competition and may neglect other policy-seeking motivations. Second, it is assumed that the editorial position of the newspaper outlets reflects the political position of its readership. As all outlets investigated cover a wide variety of policy issues, this may also be oversimplified. Lastly, the parties were categorized by their vote share into market leader, challenger, follower, and niche parties (cf. Collins & Butler, 1996). This categorization was found to be ambiguous for the Green party, and its link to the use of marketing strategies in electoral campaigning was found to be rather inaccurate in the examined case. Further research should thus review this classification across different media and party systems to evaluate its validity and develop its propositions further.

Also, additional determinants of marketing strategies and their usage may exist and could not be investigated here. As a "grand coalition" consisting of CDU/CSU and SPD was in government during the 2021 German elections, it could not be observed whether the use of marketing strategies may have also depended on the party’s position in government or opposition. Furthermore, other characteristics, such as the degree of party establishment or their

ideological position, may have an impact on the segmentation strategies. Segmentation strategies may also be shaped by more situational and individual circumstances. The Greens, for instance, appeared to choose different (non-)segmentation strategies depending on their positioning and the relevance of the respective policy topic for their brand. Further research with larger samples could thus compare parties in different media and political systems to systematically identify other determinants for the use of political marketing strategies.

As segmentation criteria the editorial positions of the outlets have been examined here. Parties could also segment their messaging using other characteristics of the outlet's readership, such as age, gender, level of education, or region of residence, and further studies could, for instance, include more regional outlets or publicly available readership information and use quantitative methods to estimate the complexity of statements via their lexical variety or readability.

During the interview analysis, parties were found not only to adjust their messaging on policy topics to different voter groups, but to additionally adjust the extend and target of negative campaigning. Depending on the ideological position of both, the party and the anticipated readership of a media outlet, parties either criticized or distanced themselves from parties close to the readership. Thereby, they either presented themselves as an alternative or criticized parties ideologically further away from the respective readership, as attacking a 'common enemy' may please the readership. Further research could build on these preliminary patterns.

A methodical limitation arises from media bias. To reduce media bias in strategically selecting and adjusting party statements, interviews were used instead of direct quotes of politicians within newspaper articles, as direct interviews can be expected to be less modified and ensure the interviewee a certain degree of sovereignty. However, interviews are also not simply a device for information gathering, and questions are not neutral (Ekström, 2013). It seems likely that journalists adjust their questions regarding the same policy topic to different parties. The party strategy may then be limited by the media strategy. Further research must account for this when examining media and party strategies in their interaction.

In investigating parties' marketing strategies in traditional media, newspapers are easily accessible and processable for text analysis. However, their impact decreases with declining circulation. Similar research designs could thus be applied to video or online formats. By distinguishing between old and new media logics, it may also be interesting to compare how online and offline spaces provide different affordances for segmentation strategies and thus shape electoral campaigning. Their interdependence within a hybrid media system (cf. Chadwick, 2017) in particular must be further examined. Newspaper interviews may, for instance, be translated into new media logics when quotes or extracts of interviews are picked up, reframed, and used in different contexts by other political actors, media outlets, or platform users. These feedback effects could increase the salience of the message but decrease the effectiveness of segmenting and targeting specific audiences.

Finally, while this paper contributed to existing research by analyzing the process and output of political marketing strategies, further research should focus on their actual societal consequences. In understanding political marketing strategies as explanans, there is a necessity for original research designs to assess the concrete impact of the identified marketization of electoral campaigning on individual voter behavior and 'democratic malaise'.

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Appendix A: Candidate Interviews during 2021 and 2002 German Federal Elections

2021			2002		
Candidate (Party)	Outlet	Date	Candidate (Party)	Outlet	Date
Christian Lindner (FDP)	taz	15/09/2021	Guido Westerwelle (FDP)	FOCUS	16/09/2002
	Handelsblatt	17/09/2021		FAZ	08/09/2002
	FR	16/08/2021		Welt	11/08/2002
	Welt	01/08/2021		Welt	23/06/2002
	FAZ	19/07/2021			
	ZEIT	10/07/2021			
	FOCUS	23/09/2021			
Annalena Baerbock (Greens)	Handelsblatt	19/09/2021	Joschka Fischer (Greens)	Spiegel	19/08/2002
	SZ	14/09/2021		taz	19/09/2002
	stern	26/08/2021		Handelsblatt	09/09/2002
	FAZ	14/08/2021			
	FR	05/09/2021			
	taz	11/09/2021			
	ZEIT	08/07/2021			
Olaf Scholz (SPD)	Handelsblatt	16/09/2021	Gerhard Schröder (SPD)	Spiegel	16/09/2002
	FR	09/09/2021		Spiegel	22/07/2002
	SZ	27/08/2021		stern	12/09/2002
	Spiegel	14/08/2021			
	FAZ	28/08/2021			
Armin Laschet (CDU)	Handelsblatt	16/09/2021	Edmund Stoiber (CDU)	ZEIT	25/07/2002
	ZEIT	08/07/2021		Spiegel	02/09/2002
	FR	05/07/2021		stern	05/09/2002
	FOCUS	22/09/2021		Welt	25/08/2002

Appendix B: Search Protocol – Editorial Baseline

Data Base	Newspapers	Time Period	Topic	Search Queries	Number of Articles
Factiva, wiso, F.A.Z. Archiv	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ), Die Welt, Die ZEIT, Handelsblatt, Frankfurter Rundschau (FR), die tageszeitung (taz)), Der Spiegel, FOCUS, stern	26/06/2020 - 25/09/2020	Tax and Spendings	("*steuer*" OR "*umverteil*") AND ("gesetz*" OR "polit*" OR "debatte*")	493
			Climate and Environment	("*klima*" OR "*umwelt*") AND ("gesetz*" OR "polit*" OR "debatte*")	500
		22/06/2001 - 22/09/2001	Tax and Spendings	("*steuer*" OR "*umverteil*") AND ("gesetz*" OR "polit*" OR "debatte*")	486
			Climate and Environment	("*klima*" OR "*umwelt*") AND ("gesetz*" OR "polit*" OR "debatte*")	468

Appendix C: Wordfish Results

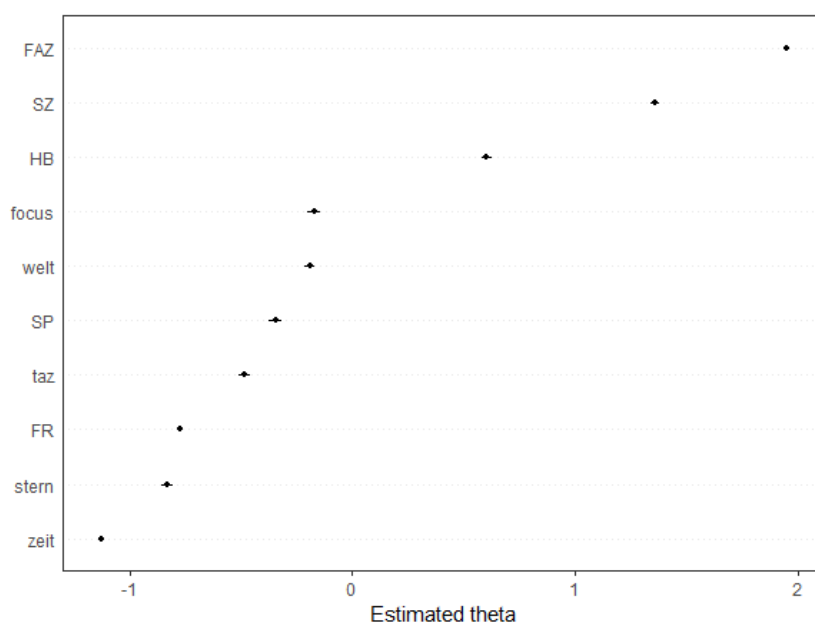
Appendix C1: Wordfish Output “Tax and Spendings” (2021)

Estimated Document Positions (via θ) :

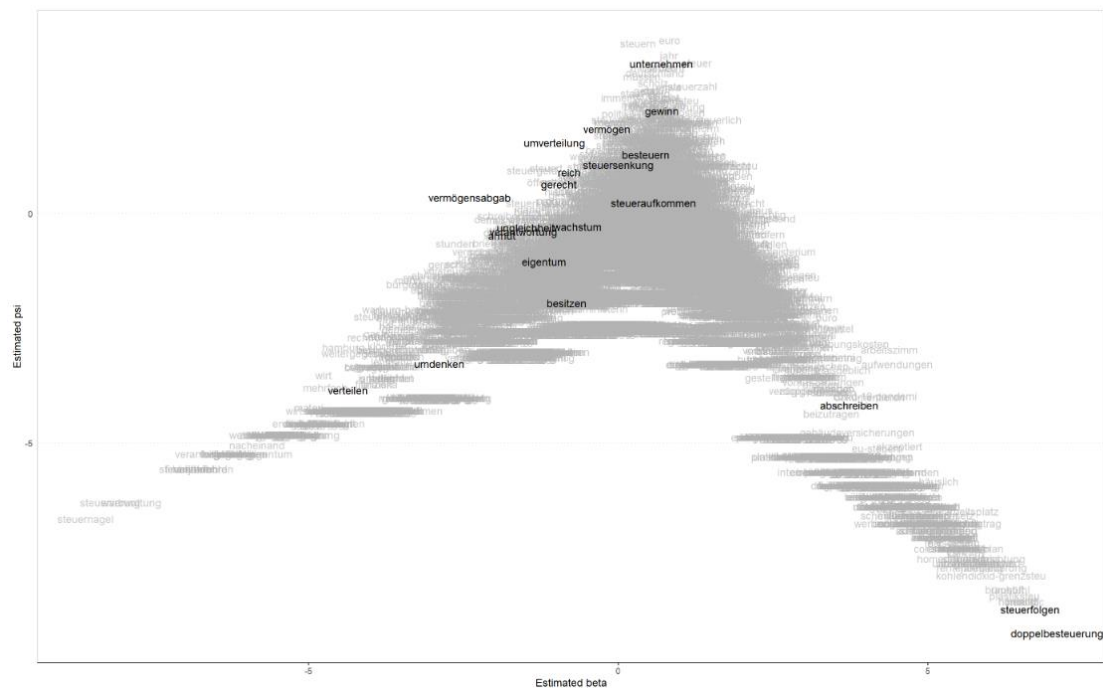
<i>Estimated Document Positions:</i>		
	theta	se
FAZ	1.949	0.006
FOCUS	-0.171	0.015
FR	-0.773	0.008
HB	0.612	0.012
Spiegel	-0.344	0.014
Stern	-0.830	0.012
SZ	1.359	0.010
Taz	-0.482	0.013
Welt	-0.189	0.012
Zeit	-1.131	0.007

$dir = (4,5)$

Plot of the Wordfish fitted scaling model (document parameters):



Plot of the estimated word positions via *Wordfish* (features parameters):



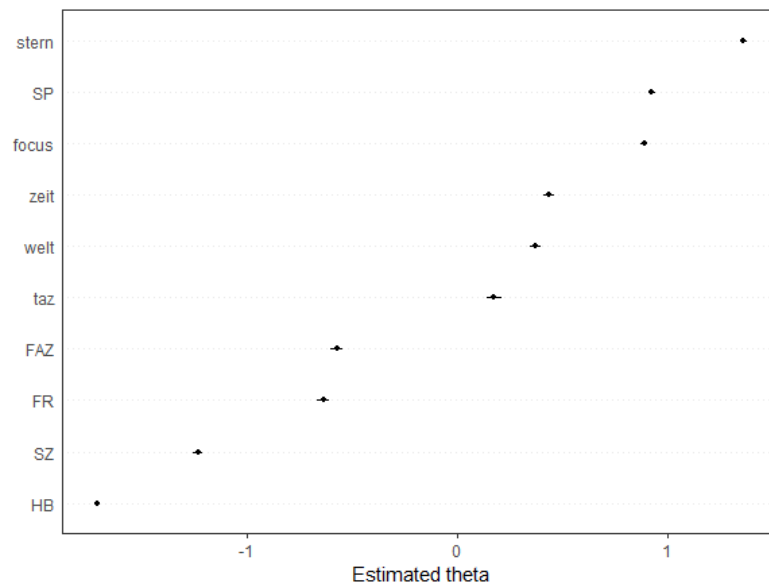
Appendix C2: Wordfish Output and Outlet Categorization “Tax and Spendings” (2002)

Estimated Document Positions (via θ) :

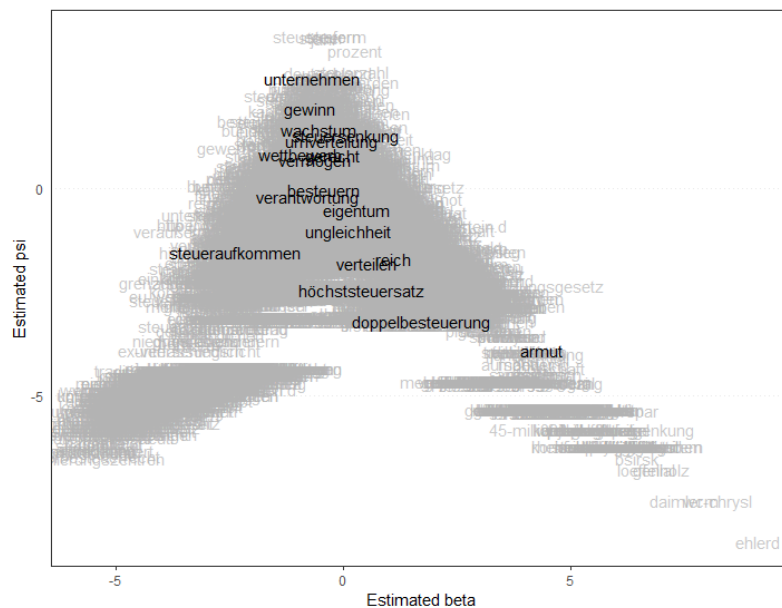
<i>Estimated Document Positions:</i>		
	theta	se
FAZ	-0.554	0.016
FOCUS	0.859	0.009
FR	-0.645	0.015
HB	-1.708	0.005
Spiegel	0.944	0.008
Stern	1.356	0.009
SZ	-1.236	0.011
Taz	0.167	0.019
Welt	0.381	0.012
Zeit	0.436	0.013

$$dir = (4,5)$$

Plot of the *Wordfish* fitted scaling model (document parameters):



Plot of the estimated word positions via *Wordfish* (features parameters):



Categorization of Newspaper Outlets via “Tax and Spending” (2002):

Category	Definition	Value	Example words	Newspapers
left	more redistribution	$\theta > 0$	poverty, unfair, etc.	stern, Spiegel, focus, Zeit, taz,
right	less redistribution	$\theta \leq 0$	branches, trade, tax revenue, companies, etc.	HB, SZ, FR, FAZ, welt*

*added to the “right” category in accordance with literature (Lüter, 2004) to obtain same-sized clusters.

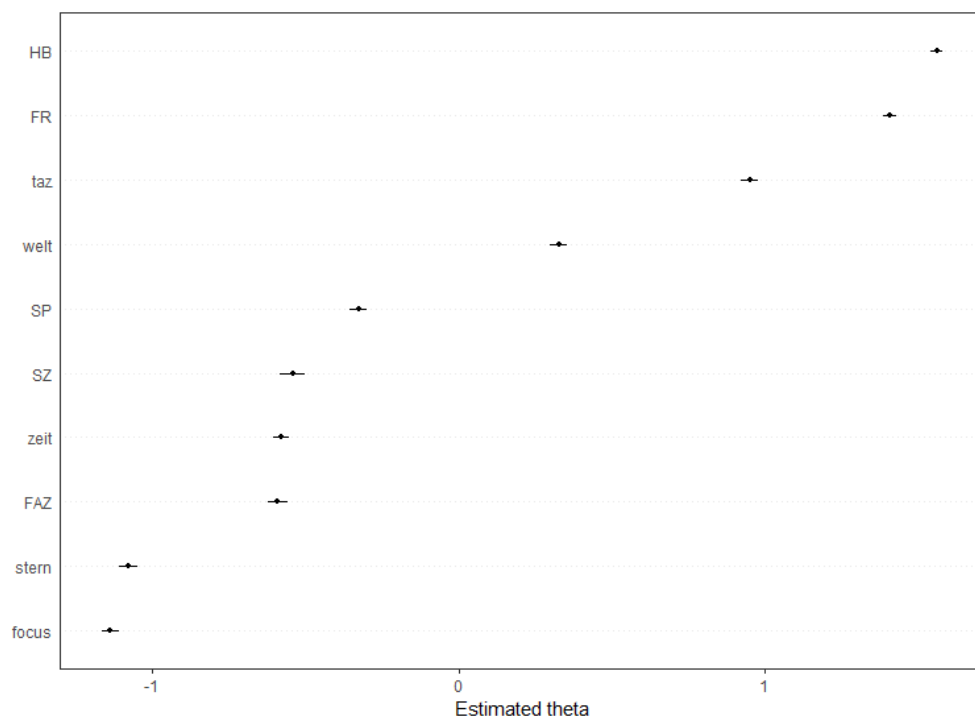
Appendix C3: Wordfish Output “Climate and Environment” (2021)

Estimated Document Positions (via θ) :

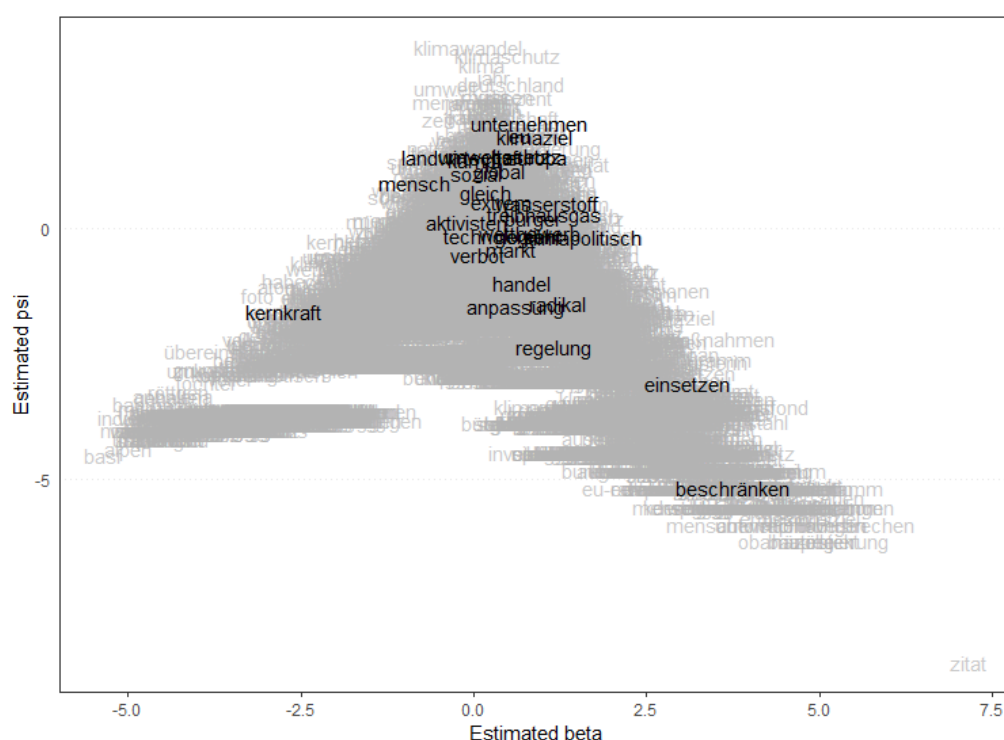
<i>Estimated Document Positions:</i>		
	theta	se
FAZ	-0.589	0.017
FOCUS	-1.098	0.014
FR	1.421	0.013
HB	1.557	0.011
Spiegel	-0.317	0.015
Stern	-1.121	0.015
SZ	-0.544	0.020
Taz	0.949	0.013
Welt	0.328	0.014
Zeit	-0.586	0.013

$dir = (4,8)$

Plot of the *Wordfish* fitted scaling model (document parameters):



Plot of the estimated word positions via *Wordfish* (features parameters):



Appendix D: Dimensions and Key Words for *Kwic* Analysis “Climate and Environment” (2021)

Dimension	Category	Definition	Keywords	Example
socio-economic dimension	socio-economic costs	Climate action is associated with social and economic risks.	"Arbeitsplätze", "Job*", "Wettbewerbsfähigkeit", "wettbewerbsfähig*", "Wachstum*", "Wirtschaftswachstum*", "Wohlstand*", "wehtun", "schmerz*", "Sicherheit", "sozial*", "ärmer*", "Lasten", "Belastung", "teurer*", "teuer", "günstig*", "leisten", "finanziell*", "Einkommen*", "einkommen"	"The government has to think of the less well-off, they lose their jobs first" (taz)
	socio-economic benefits	Climate action is associated with social and economic benefits.		"We need climate protection to secure our prosperity in the long term" (Zeit)
market versus state (left/ right dimension)	state regulation	The climate crisis needs to be tackled with stronger state interventions and regulation.	<i>Drawn from left-right dimension found for “tax and spendings” (2021)</i>	
	free market/ innovation	The climate crisis needs to be tackled with a free market, technology, and innovation.		

Dimensions based on Stecula and Merkley (2019)

Appendix E: Results *Kwic* Analysis for “Climate and Environment” (2021)

	Costs	Benefits	Unclear	NA	Total
taz	22 (29,3%)	4 (5,3%)	9 (12,0%)	40 (53,3%)	75
zeit	41 (19,4%)	49 (23,2%)	26 (12,3%)	95 (45,0%)	211
SP	19 (11,7%)	44 (27,2%)	17 (10,5%)	82 (50,6%)	162
SZ	6 (20,7%)	13 (44,8%)	3 (10,3%)	7 (24,1%)	29
FAZ	17 (20,0%)	25 (29,4%)	12 (14,1%)	31 (36,5%)	85
FOCUS	31 (25,4%)	9 (7,3%)	25 (20,5%)	57 (46,7%)	122
HB	63 (37,8%)	21 (12,5%)	34 (20,4%)	49 (29,3%)	167
welt	38 (39,2%)	8 (8,2%)	12 (12,4%)	39 (40,2%)	97
stern	38 (27,5%)	11 (8,0%)	16 (4,3%)	73 (52,9%)	138
FR	9 (19,1%)	15 (31,9%)	8 (17,0%)	15 (10,7%)	47

In bold: assignment to respective category via relative majority of articles

Appendix F: Category System for Newspaper Interviews (2021 and 2002)

Appendix F1: Category System “Tax and Spendings”

Topic	Dimension	Frames		Messages
TAX & SPENDINGS	REDISTRIBUTION DIMENSION	More redistribution (left)	societal relevance of higher taxing	tax increase does not harm jobs and market
				increase tax for behavioral changes
				avoid social divide between high- and low-income earners
				equality to prevent populism
			higher company taxes	tax increases for companies
			lower taxes for low and middle-income earners	tax decrease for majority of people
			higher taxes for high-income earners	tax increase for highest income earners
				property tax for high income earners
		higher social spendings	higher tax share for pensions	
		Less redistribution (right)	benefits of decreasing taxes	tax decreases increase tax income
				ensuring jobs through low company taxes
				tax reduction for economic growth
				tax decreases create jobs
			lower company taxes	lower company tax as high burden through climate transition
				lower company tax as high burden through pandemic
				trust in companies and market regarding tax
				investments considered in taxes
				tax decrease for companies
			lower all taxes	no redistribution
				change in long-term trend towards less taxes
				tax decrease
				tax reduction for everyone
			lower taxes for high-income earners	abolish soli tax
				tax decreases for high income earners
			lower social spendings	pensions depend on job intensity (worker)
				decrease spendings for jobless
			No changes	risks of increasing tax
		increasing company taxes risks economic competitiveness		
		tax burdens for companies decrease tax income		
		tax increases do not increase tax income		
		tax increases slow growth and boom		
		no tax increases		no tax increases
				no new taxes for workers
		no tax decreases		keep soli for social investments
				no tax decreases for high income earners
				no tax decreases given high spendings
		no changes in spendings	economic dimension of pensions	
			already high social spendings	
		TAX INCOME DIMENSION	fight tax fraud	
	tax by structure changes, lower bureaucracy and digitalization			

	economic growth increases tax
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Appendix F2: Category System “Climate and Environment”

Topic	Dimension	Frames		Messages
CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT	GLOBAL DIMENSION	Leading role of Germany in the EU/world		state should not wait for EU regulation
				Technologies for just global transition
				Germany leading role in quitting fossil energy
				First climate-neutral industrial nation
		German role in climate change globally limited (Global Solutions / European Integration)		global solutions needed, externalize energy shortage
				transatlantic alliance for climate neutrality
				environmental tax rather on EU level
				Support EU border tax
				one co2 cap and market solutions
				European solutions needed
				increased cooperation in Europe
	SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSION	Consideration of citizens interests		citizens interests > climate action
				citizens interests < climate action
				including citizens in climate decision making
				participate citizens in RE revenue
				give higher CO2- tax back to citizens
				including rural perspectives in climate action
		Socio-economic costs of climate action (costs)		climate action and prosperity need to come together
				climate action as elitist
				prevent social divide with just climate action
				Climate action should not hurt
				ensuring jobs during transition
				Risk of social security due to climate action
		Socio-economic benefits of climate action (benefits)		positive side effects of climate action
				climate action as intergenerational justice
				climate action = freedom
				climate action as advantage in global economic competition
				new jobs through climate action
				danger of no climate action: floodings
				no climate action is most expensive
				change necessary to ensure prosperity and well-being
	MARKET VERSUS STATE (LEFT/RIGHT DIMENSION)	more state-based solutions	More state in climate action (regulation)	investments in infrastructure
				regulation for immediate emission reduction
				German industry wants transition and regulation
				regulation necessary
				deal with industry, regulation versus subsidies
				regulation mean progress
				only market-based mechanisms are unjust
				active role of state in industrial transition
			Market-based with clear legal framework (regulation/market)	stakeholder dialogue for industrial transition
				more attractive site conditions
				market-based solutions (incl. regulation)

				legal framework for technological solutions	
				legal framework needed to preclude risks and secure new investments	
				stop subsidies for fossil/climate-damaging technologies	
		more market-based solutions	Market-based with financial incentives for behavioral changes (market/regulation)	higher price for fossils	
				social reallocation car tax and e-car subsidies	
				short-term (no long-term) subsidies	
				targeted subsidies save money	
				subsidies instead of restrictions	
				higher price for climate-damaging rich	
				tax reduction for green investments	
				tax incentives for investments in climate technologies	
				monetary steering effects for behavioral change	
				Less state/more market in climate action (market)	no subsidies as hinders competition
					no higher prices for fossil fuels (eco tax)
					bureaucracy as obstacle for energy transition
			no restrictions for rich people		
			market-based solutions (no regulation needed)		
			market-based solutions are cheaper		
			against "left" methods: subsidies, redistribution, state		
			need for income-independent alternatives to restriction		
			trust in companies during climate crisis		
			scientific instead of political KPIs		
			no ideological restrictions in climate action		
			too many specific regulations		
			freedom creates innovation		
		state should not intervene in private decisions (food)			
		regulation hinders freedom			
		regulation hinders innovation			
		Technology/Innovation as solution (market)	support climate-neutral alternatives		
			state needs to be innovative		
			supporting investments in climate technologies		
			supporting CCS technologies		
			innovation and technology are solution		
			technological openness		
ENERGY DIMENSION	Energy Security needs to be considered	needs-based (rational) energy politics			
		ensuring energy security during transition			
	Expansion of RE is needed	fast expansion of RE			
		state need to invest in climate/RE			
		expansion of RE for industrial transition			

Appendix G: Intercoder Reliability Test

ID	Own Coding	Second Coding	Congruence?
333	ensuring jobs through low company taxes	ensuring jobs through low company taxes	Yes
363	increasing company taxes risks economic competitiveness	tax increases harm job market	No
43	supporting investments in climate technologies	supporting investments in climate technologies	Yes
232	avoid social divide between high- and low-income earners	avoid social divide between high- and low-income earners	Yes
318	property tax for high income earners	property tax for high income earners	Yes
271	no redistribution	no redistribution	Yes
297	participate citizens in RE revenue	participate citizens in RE revenue	Yes
150	stop subsidies for fossil/climate-damaging technologies	stop subsidies for fossil/climate-damaging technologies	Yes
238	supporting investments in climate technologies	supporting investments in climate technologies	Yes
195	keep soli for social investments	keep soli for social investments	Yes
3	tax incentives for investments in climate technologies	tax reduction for green investments	No
133	tax increase does not harm jobs and market	tax increase does not harm jobs and market	Yes
51	Technologies for just global transition	Technologies for just global transition	Yes
182	scientific instead of political KPIs	scientific instead of political KPIs	Yes
4	state should not intervene in private decisions (food)	state should not intervene in private decisions (food)	Yes
245	legal framework needed to preclude risks and secure new investments	legal framework needed to preclude risks and secure new investments	Yes
85	higher tax share for pensions	higher tax share for pensions	Yes
381	tax increase does not harm jobs and market	tax increase does not harm jobs and market	Yes
352	tax decrease for majority of people	tax decrease for majority of people	Yes
8	stop subsidies for fossil/climate-damaging technologies	stop subsidies for fossil/climate-damaging technologies	Yes
191	expansion of RE for industrial transition	expansion of RE for industrial transition	Yes
423	climate action and prosperity need to come together	climate action and prosperity need to come together	Yes
64	fight tax fraud	fight tax fraud	Yes

401	European solutions needed	Support EU border tax	No
178	danger of no climate action: floodings	danger of no climate action: floodings	Yes

Calculation of Intercoder Reliability: $23/25 = 0.88 = \mathbf{88.0\%}$

Appendix H: Adjacency Matrices

Appendix H1: Adjacency Matrix “Tax and Spendings” (2021)

		CDU/CSU		SPD		FDP		Greens	
		left	right	left	right	left	right	left	right
TAX AND SPENDING	MORE REDISTRIBUTION (LEFT)	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
	societal relevance of higher taxing	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
	higher company taxes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	lower taxes for low and middle-income earners	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	higher taxes for high-income earners	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	higher social spendings	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	LESS REDISTRIBUTION (RIGHT)	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
	benefits of decreasing taxes	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
	lower company taxes	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
	lower all taxes	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
	lower taxes for high-income earners	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
	lower social spendings	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	NO CHANGES	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
	risks of increasing tax	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	tax reform needed (but no clear message)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	no tax increases	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
	no tax decreases	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	no changes in spendings	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OTHER WAYS TO INCREASE TAX INCOME	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
	fight tax fraud	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	tax by structure changes, lower bureaucracy and digitalisation	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	economic growth increases tax	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0

Appendix H2: Adjacency Matrix “Climate and Environment” (2021)

		SPD				FDP				Greens				CDU/CSU			
		mar	reg	cost	ben	mar	reg	cost	ben	mar	reg	cost	ben	mar	reg	cost	ben
Global Dimension	Leading role of Germany in the EU/world	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	German role in climate change globally limited: cooperation	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Socio-Economic Benefits of climate action	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Consideration of citizens interests	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Socio-Economic Dimension	Socio-Economic Costs of Climate Action	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	MORE STATE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
	More state in climate action	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Market-based with clear legal framework	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Market versus State Dimension	MORE MARKET	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Market-based with financial incentives for behavioral changes	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Less state/more market in climate action	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Technology/Innovation as solution	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Energy Dimension	Energy Security needs to be considered	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Expansion of RE is needed	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

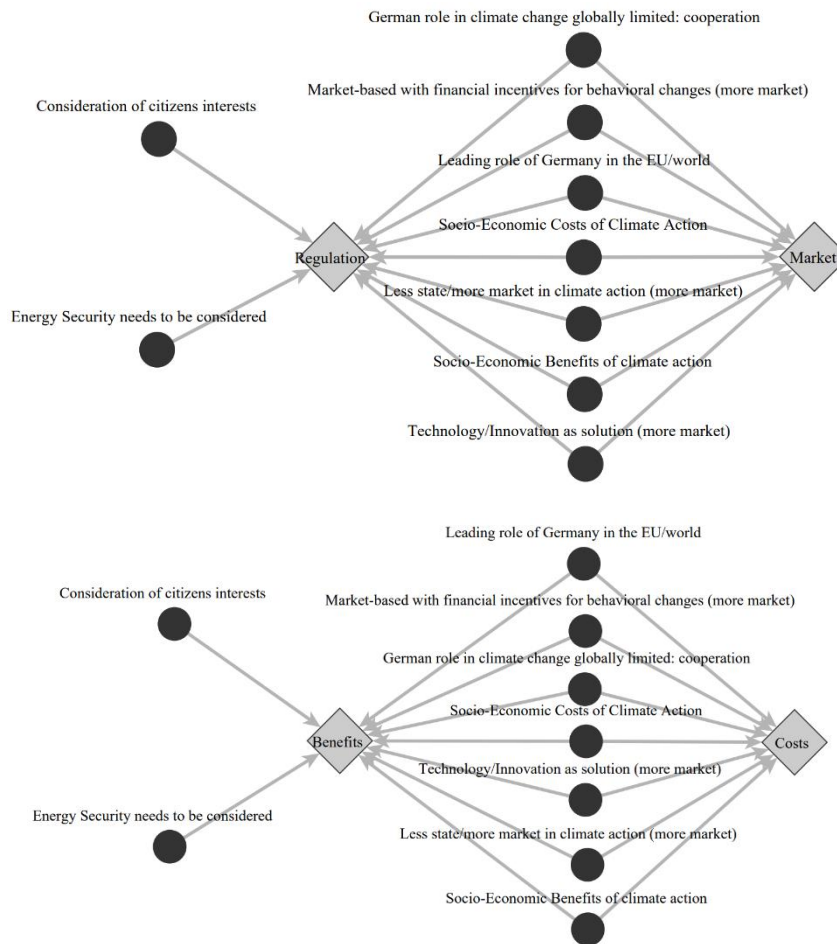
Appendix H3: Adjacency Matrix “Tax and Spendings” (2002)

		CDU		SPD		FDP		Greens	
		left	right	left	right	left	right	left	right
TAX AND SPENDINGS	MORE REDISTRIBUTION (LEFT)	1	0	1	/*	0	1	1	0
	societal relevance of higher taxing	0	0	0	/	0	0	1	0
	higher company taxes	1	0	0	/	0	0	0	0
	lower taxes for low and middle-income earners	1	0	1	/	0	1	0	0
	LESS REDISTRIBUTION (RIGHT)	1	1	0	/	1	1	0	0
	benefits of decreasing taxes	1	1	0	/	1	0	0	0
	lower company taxes	1	0	0	/	0	0	0	0
	lower all taxes	1	1	0	/	1	1	0	0
	lower taxes for high-income earners	1	0	0	/	0	0	0	0
	lower social spendings	1	0	0	/	0	0	0	0
	NO CHANGES	1	1	1	/	0	0	1	0
	risks of increasing tax	1	1	1	/	0	0	0	0
	tax reform needed (but no clear message)	1	0	1	/	0	0	0	0
	no tax increases	1	1	0	/	0	0	0	0
	no tax decreases	0	0	1	/	0	0	1	0

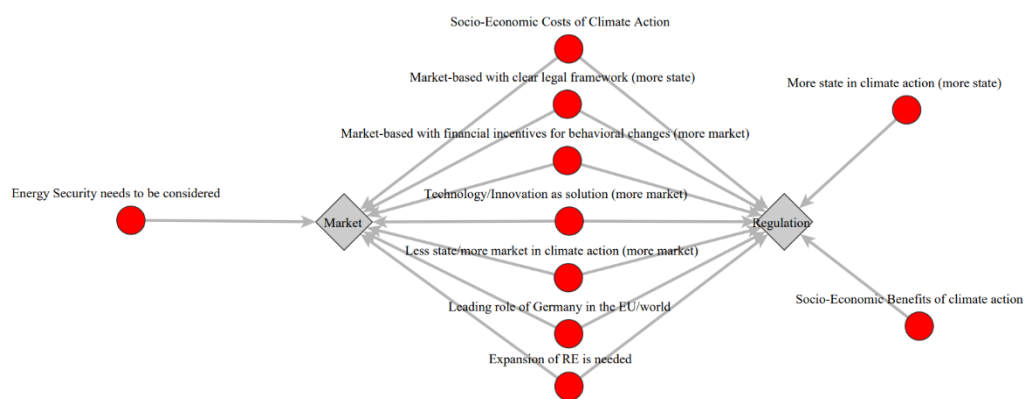
*no interviews given in newspapers within the right-leaning outlet group.

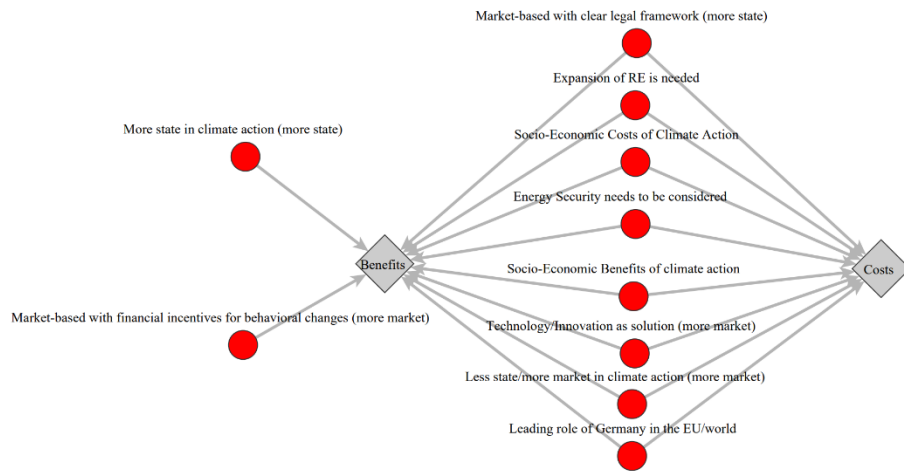
Appendix I: Networks for Parties' Use of Segmentation Strategies on Frame (and Subframe) Level for “Climate and Environment”

Appendix I1: Networks for the CDU/CSU's Use of Segmentation Strategies on Frame Level for “Climate and Environment”

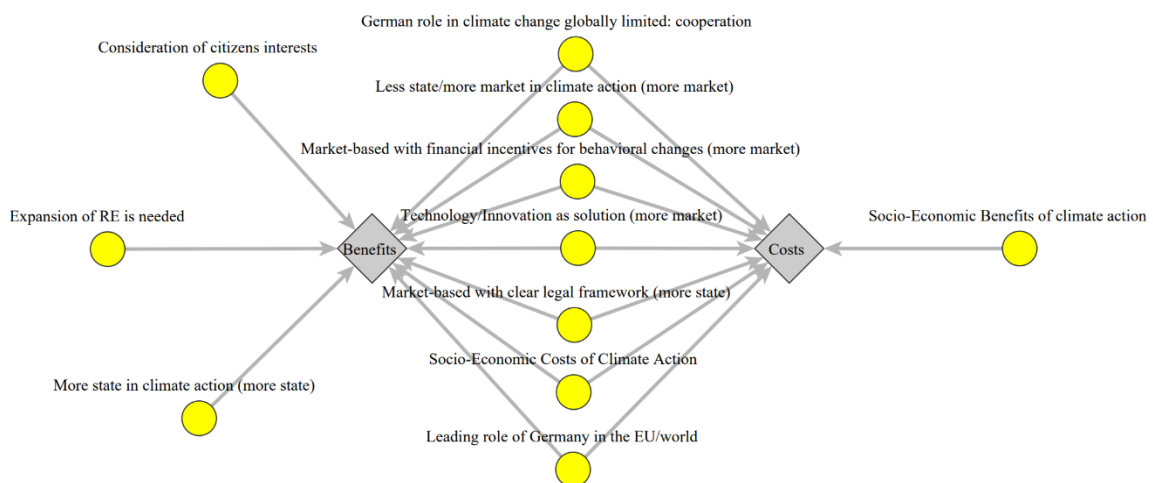
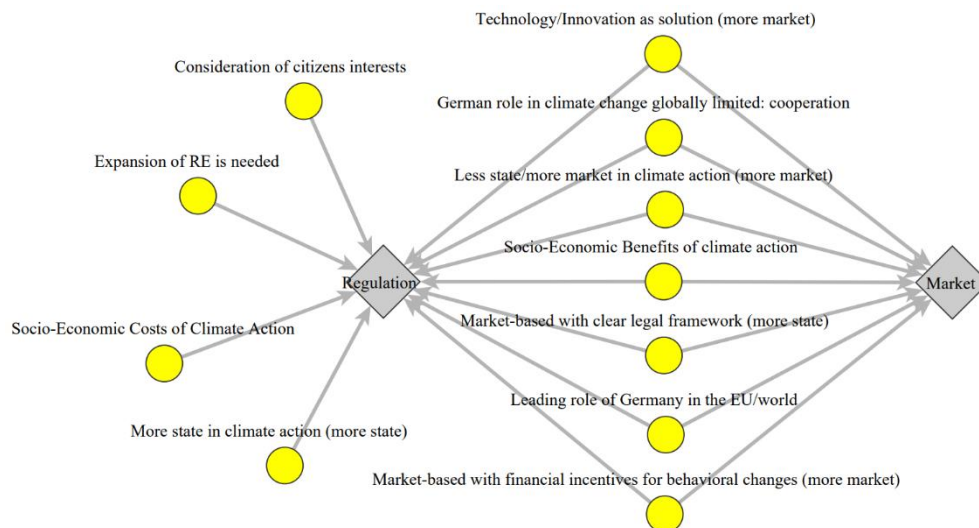


Appendix I2: Networks for the SPD's Use of Segmentation Strategies on Frame Level for “Climate and Environment”

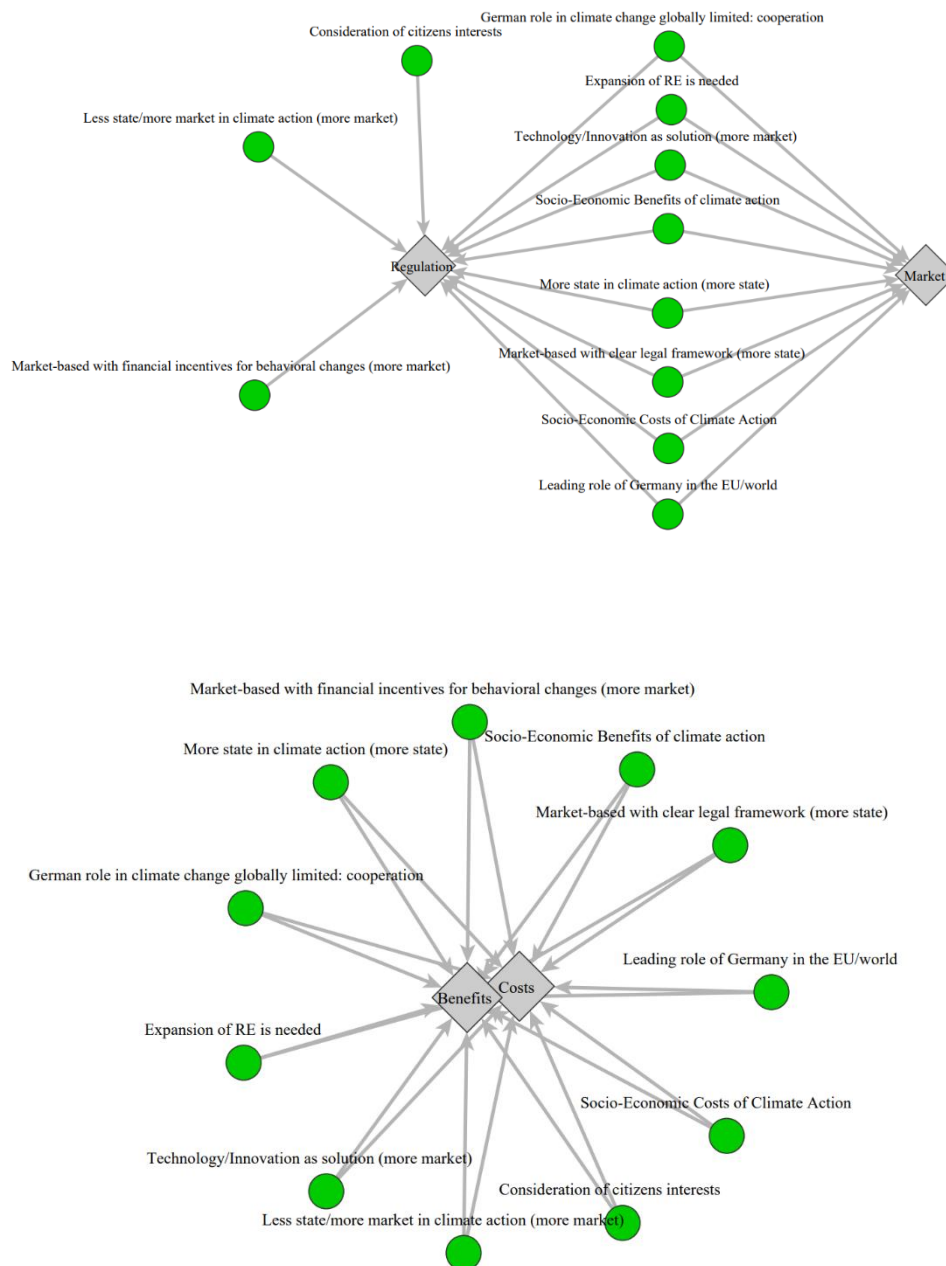




Appendix I3: Networks for the FDP's Use of Segmentation Strategies on Frame Level for "Climate and Environment"



Appendix I4: Networks for the Greens' Use of Segmentation Strategies on Frame Level for "Climate and Environment"



Public Policy Master's Thesis Series

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Marketizing Elections? An Analysis of Audience Segmentation and Targeted Messaging as Media Strategy in German Electoral Campaigning

Clara Ruthardt

Abstract

While the use of microtargeting and its potential democratic risks have been widely studied, existing work fails to adequately address the use of audience segmentation and targeted messaging beyond the digital realm as part of a broader marketization of electoral campaigning. Thus, this paper investigates whether and how political parties used segmentation and targeting strategies in traditional media during the 2021 German federal elections, what factors determined their choices, and whether the use has increased since the rise of digital and social media. Analyzing candidate interviews and articles in ten German newspapers by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to text analysis, I found that all four examined parties targeted messaging to specific voter groups as readerships of newspaper outlets, with a systematic strategy on the framing and message levels for the two smaller opposition parties. These parties use key frames and messages to define their political “brand” in all outlets and distinguish between position and valence frames or messages to blur their positions in outlets that ideologically diverge from the parties’ positions. Comparing these findings with segmentation and targeting strategies adopted during the 2002 German federal elections reveals a clear trend towards a marketization of German electoral campaigning.

Key words

Audience segmentation, targeted messaging, microtargeting, marketization, political marketing, German federal elections 2021