

Quantitative content analysis of the coverage of political conflict

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Class Room: Bergheimer Str. 58, Room 02.034 Class Hours: Wednesdays, 10:15-11:45

Description

Political parties, social movements, and other actors engaged in political conflict actively compete for media coverage to gain visibility and present their demands to society. Over time, media reports serve as an archive of political mobilization, enabling social science research to analyze the dynamics of political conflict across countries and time periods. Yet, the availability of vast amounts of media coverage raises important methodological challenges: How can we systematically collect and analyze this data? What approaches allow researchers to extract meaningful patterns? What are the main datasets publicly available for analysis?

This seminar introduces students to the core methods of quantitative content analysis, providing a structured framework for studying political conflict through media data. More specifically, we will focus on three methodological approaches: protest event analysis, political claims analysis, and automated text analysis. For each, we will examine exemplary studies, discuss strategies for data collection, and explore both descriptive and inferential methods of analysis. Additionally, we will critically assess the limitations of these methods, including issues of bias, reliability, and interpretability. Special attention will be given to recent advances in computational social science, particularly how large language models are reshaping the field of quantitative content analysis.

The seminar incorporates hands-on data collection and analysis using R, allowing students to apply the discussed methods to real-world datasets. Therefore, students should have prior experience with either R or Stata. At a minimum, they should be comfortable with data manipulation and modeling techniques, including being able to specify and correctly interpret a linear regression model.

Course Objectives

By the end of the seminar, students will have created, presented, and received feedback on their empirical analysis. In the process, students will achieve several key learning outcomes:

1. They will be able to understand and evaluate techniques of quantitative content analysis of the media coverage of political conflict.
2. They will learn to conduct their own studies by applying protest event analysis, political claims analysis, or automated text analysis.

3. They will develop the ability to address research questions in political behavior using appropriate designs and quantitative methods.
4. They will be able to effectively work with R and RStudio.
5. They will improve their presentation skills, as well as their ability to work collaboratively, by providing feedback to their peers.

Course Requirements

Weekly attendance is mandatory. If you cannot attend, please email me before the respective session. In addition, active participation includes reading the assigned texts, engaging with in-class discussions, asking questions, contributing to debates, and providing constructive peer feedback.

Reading the texts is imperative for the success of the seminar; without having read the readings, the seminar will be very difficult to follow, and over time, the material will become overwhelming.

For 2 credit points	For 4 credit points	For 2 + 6 credit points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in class • Reading the literature • In-class presentation (10-15 mins) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in class • Reading the literature • In-class presentation (15 mins) • Research notes for 3 sessions (max. 1200 words each) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in class • Reading the literature • In-class presentation (15 mins) • Term paper (6000 words)

Office Hours

I offer office hours by appointment. Email me if you would like to meet.

We can meet on-site, in room 03.033 (Bergheimer Str. 58, 69115 Heidelberg) or online, using the Zoom link: <https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/my/eborbath>

Online Learning

I provide the course literature via Moodle (<https://moodle.uni-heidelberg.de/>) and also use the platform for general course information. Please contact me with any questions regarding the course literature, technical problems with Moodle, or other organizational issues.

Student Presentations, Research Notes, and Term Paper

Presentations

Every student receiving credit points for the seminar must give a presentation during one of the following sessions: Session 4 (Protest Event Analysis), Session 8 (Political Claim Analysis), or

Session 12 (Automated Text Analysis). Each presentation should focus specifically on **one of the suggested readings listed** for the chosen session.

The presentation should:

- Briefly summarize the substantive content of the study to contextualize the methodological choices.
- Clearly outline the methodological approach used in the study, highlighting innovative aspects.
- Relate the method discussed in the study to themes previously covered in the seminar.
- Explain how the methodology could benefit or inspire the research of other students in the class, providing clear takeaways.

Presentations should be around 10 minutes long and **no longer than 15 minutes**. **Slides must be submitted by email no later than Monday at 9 AM before your presentation**. All slides will be shared with the class via Moodle.

We will allocate presentation slots in the first session. Please note that in preparation for sessions 4, 8, and 12, all students are required to read the studies selected for presentations.

Research Notes

Students choosing the 4-credit option must submit three research notes, one for each of the three methods discussed during the seminar. Each research note must not exceed 1200 words and should be structured as a concise research proposal, including:

- A clearly formulated research question suitable for exploration using the methodological approach discussed in the respective block.
- Clearly stated theoretical expectations or hypotheses derived from existing literature.
- An outline of an appropriate research design, explicitly detailing data collection methods (or potential data sources), operationalization, and strategies for data analysis.

Research notes must be uploaded to Moodle by Monday at 9 AM before session 6 for protest event analysis (19.05.2025), session 10 for political claim analysis (16.06.2025), and session 14 for automated text analysis (14.07.2025). Late submissions will not be considered and will count as 5 toward your final grade. You cannot submit multiple research notes for the same method, so ensure your notes are submitted on time. Each research note represents 33% of the final grade and is evaluated separately.

Term Paper

The term paper, required for the 2+6 credit option, should be approximately 6000 words, including references and footnotes, and is due by **30th September 2025**. The paper must demonstrate original empirical research employing one of the methodological approaches discussed in the seminar (protest event analysis, political claim analysis, or automated text analysis).

The term paper should:

- Clearly formulate and embed a research question within relevant literature.
- Utilize one of the seminar's methods to conduct original empirical research.
- Include explicit details on methodology, data collection (original or existing datasets), data analysis, and interpretation of findings.

You are strongly encouraged to discuss your paper topic and methodological approach with me beforehand to ensure alignment with the seminar's expectations.

Academic Writing and Reading

On writing research papers:

Minkoff, Scott L. 2012. "A Guide to Developing and Writing Research Papers in Political Science," https://kevinlyles.digital.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/minkoff_researchpaper_guide_v4.pdf.

On writing a good abstract:

Gilardi, Fabrizio. 2021. "Good Abstracts: A Template," <https://www.fabriziogilardi.org/resources/papers/good-abstracts.pdf>.

Templates for writing:

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. 2018. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Fourth edition. New York: W. W. Norton. ISBN: 0-393-63167-2. <https://tinyurl.com/bdec4eex>.

On reading efficiently:

Pacheco-Vega, Raul. 2020. "Reading Strategies," <http://www.raulpacheco.org/resources/reading-strategies>.

Note: Raul Pacheco-Vega's blog is a valuable resource for academic writing in general!

Software Recommendation:

I use Google Scholar and Zotero (both freely available) for literature search. For note-taking, I use Obsidian (also freely available). I recommend that you learn how to use these software tools (or their alternatives), as the investment pays off later during your studies. YouTube has many tutorial videos, and I am also happy to help if you have questions.

Academic Integrity and Mental Health

Plagiarism

Students must comply with the university policy on academic integrity found at <https://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/en/service/detecting-plagiarism>. In addition, please also familiarize yourself with the Study Guide https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/politikwissenschaften/master_recht_en.html. Not knowing the rules is no excuse for plagiarism!

Use of AI

If you use AI (ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) to write your term paper, you are required to be transparent about it. More specifically, list the prompts or if possible, generate links to share the conversations, in a separate appendix at the end of the term paper. This appendix does not count towards the word count. You are allowed to use AI for coding, data analysis, and programming, but remember to critically evaluate AI-generated content and use it as a supportive tool rather than as a primary author. Please remember always to respect the rules of academic integrity and honesty.

Mental Health

Many students feel overwhelmed by the tasks and responsibilities during their studies, especially if they are new to Germany and Heidelberg. This is normal! If you feel that you are not able to cope alone, please consider approaching the psychosocial counselling service offered free of charge by the student services at <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/en/study/advisory-services/psychosocial-counselling-for-students-pcs>. If you are having difficulties, e.g., with the term paper, please do not hesitate to approach me.

Schedule and Readings

Block I: Introduction

Session 1, 16.04.2025 – Introducing the seminar: what is quantitative content analysis and why it matters?

- Introduce the syllabus
- Clarify expectations
- Divide up the presentations

Block II: Protest event analysis

Session 2, 23.04.2025 – What is protest event analysis? Theory and concepts

Required Readings:

Hutter, Swen. 2014. "Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring." In *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, edited by Donatella della Porta, 335–367. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-871957-1.

Carvalho, Tiago. 2024. "Analysing protest events: a quantitative and systematic approach." In *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications for Social Movements*, edited by Laurence Cox, Anna Szolucha, Alberto Arribas Lozano, and Sutapa Chattopadhyay, 257–270. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-80392-202-7.

Session 3, 30.04.2025 – Lab session: data collection, sources, and biases in PEA

Required Readings:

Earl, Jennifer, Andrew Martin, John D. McCarthy, and Sarah A. Soule. 2004. "The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (Volume 30, 2004): 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110603>.

Wood, Lesley J., and Dyllan Goldstein. 2023. "Cataloging Protest: Newspapers, Nexis Uni, Or Twitter?" *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 28 (3): 343–358. <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-28-3-343>.

Session 4, 07.05.2025 – Applications of PEA: examples from published studies

- Please remember to read the texts that are being presented, since we will discuss these together in class.

Suggested readings for student presentations:

- Borbáth, Endre, and Swen Hutter. 2021. “Protesting Parties in Europe.” *Party Politics* 27 (5): 896–908. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820908023>.
- Císař, Ondřej, and Kateřina Vráblíková. 2019. “National protest agenda and the dimensionality of party politics: Evidence from four East-Central European democracies.” *European Journal of Political Research* 58 (4): 1152–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12328>.
- Jansson, Jenny, and Katrin Uba. 2023. “Cycles of labour protests: public and private sector unions’ contentious actions.” *Employee Relations: The International Journal* 45 (4): 840–856. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-11-2021-0520>.
- Koopmans, Ruud, and Susan Olzak. 2004. “Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in Germany.” *American Journal of Sociology* 110 (1): 198–230. <https://doi.org/10.1086/386271>.
- Leuschner, Elena, and Sebastian Hellmeier. 2024. “State Concessions and Protest Mobilization in Authoritarian Regimes.” *Comparative Political Studies* 57 (1): 3–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140231169022>.
- Oana, Ioana-Elena, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Argyrios Altiparmakis. 2024. “Dynamics of protest mobilisation in the European poly-crisis.” *Journal of European Public Policy* online first. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2366388>.
- Pirro, Andrea, Elena Pavan, Adam Fagan, and David Gazsi. 2021. “Close ever, distant never? Integrating protest event and social network approaches into the transformation of the Hungarian far right.” *Party Politics* 27 (1): 22–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068819863624>.
- Portos, Martín, and Tiago Carvalho. 2022. “Alliance building and eventful protests: comparing Spanish and Portuguese trajectories under the Great Recession.” *Social Movement Studies* 21 (1–2): 42–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1681957>.

Session 5, 14.05.2025 – Lab session: analyzing PEA datasets

- We will replicate part of the empirical analysis of Borbáth and Hutter (2024).
- Therefore, please read the paper carefully!

Required:

- Borbáth, Endre, and Swen Hutter. 2024. “Environmental protests in Europe.” *Journal of European Public Policy* online first. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2390701>.

Block III: Political claim analysis**Session 6, 21.05.2025 – What is political claim analysis (PCA)? Theory and concepts****Required:**

- Koopmans, Ruud, and Paul Statham. 1999. “Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 4 (2): 203–221. <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.4.2.d759337060716756>.
- De Wilde, Pieter. 2014. “Representative claims analysis: theory meets method.” In *The Representative Turn in EU Studies*, edited by Sandra Kröger and Dawid Friedrich, 124–140. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-315-54011-5.

Session 7, 28.05.2025 – Lab session: Data collection, sources, and biases in PCA**Required:**

Dolezal, Martin, Swen Hutter, and Bruno Wüest. 2012. “Exploring the new cleavage across arenas and public debates: design and methods.” In *Political Conflict in Western Europe*, edited by Hanspeter Kriesi, Edgar Grande, Martin Dolezal, Marc Helbling, Dominic Höglinger, Swen Hutter, and Bruno Wüest, 36–63. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-107-62594-5.

Session 8, 04.06.2025 – Applications of PCA: examples from published studies

- Please remember to read the texts that are being presented, since we will discuss these together in class.

Suggested readings for student presentations:

Borbáth, Endre. 2021. “Two faces of party system stability: Programmatic change and party replacement.” *Party Politics* 27 (5): 996–1008. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820917628>.

Brandenberger, Laurence, Karin Ingold, Manuel Fischer, Isabelle Schläpfer, and Philip Leifeld. 2022. “Boundary Spanning Through Engagement of Policy Actors in Multiple Issues.” *Policy Studies Journal* 50 (1): 35–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12404>.

Bremer, Björn. 2018. “The missing left? Economic crisis and the programmatic response of social democratic parties in Europe.” *Party Politics* 24 (1): 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817740745>.

Helbling, Marc, Dominic Hoeglinger, and Bruno Wüest. 2010. “How political parties frame European integration.” *European Journal of Political Research* 49 (4): 495–521. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01908.x>.

Kinski, Lucy. 2018. “Whom to represent? National parliamentary representation during the eurozone crisis.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 25 (3): 346–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1253764>.

Kriesi, Hanspeter, Edgar Grande, Romain Lachat, Martin Dolezal, Simon Bornschieer, and Timotheos Frey. 2006. “Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared.” *European Journal of Political Research* 45 (6): 921–956. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00644.x>.

Koopmans, Ruud. 2007. “Who inhabits the European public sphere? Winners and losers, supporters and opponents in Europeanised political debates.” *European Journal of Political Research* 46 (2): 183–210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00691.x>.

Völker, Teresa. 2024. “How terrorist attacks distort public debates: a comparative study of right-wing and Islamist extremism.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 31 (11): 3487–3514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2269194>.

Session 9, 11.06.2025 – Lab session: analyzing PCA datasets

- We will replicate part of the empirical analysis of Hutter, Kriesi and Vidal (2018).
- Therefore, please read the paper carefully!

Required:

Hutter, Swen, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Guillem Vidal. 2018. “Old versus new politics: The political spaces in Southern Europe in times of crises.” *Party Politics* 24 (1): 10–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817694503>.

Block IV: Automated text analysis

Session 10, 18.06.2025 – Automated text analysis: Theory, concepts, and computational methods

Required:

Grimmer, Justin, and Brandon M. Stewart. 2013. "Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts." *Political Analysis* 21 (3): 267–297. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mps028>.

Wilkerson, John, and Andreu Casas. 2017. "Large-Scale Computerized Text Analysis in Political Science: Opportunities and Challenges." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20:529–544. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052615-025542>.

Session 11, 25.06.2025 – Lab session: data collection, preprocessing, and biases in automated text methods

Required:

Wickham, Hadley, Mine Çetinkaya-Rundel, and Garrett Golemund. 2023. "24 Web scraping." In *R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data*. Beijing Boston Farnham Sebastopol Tokyo: O'Reilly Media. ISBN: 978-1-4920-9740-2. <https://r4ds.hadley.nz/webscraping.html>.

Denny, Matthew J., and Arthur Spirling. 2018. "Text Preprocessing For Unsupervised Learning: Why It Matters, When It Misleads, And What To Do About It." *Political Analysis* 26 (2): 168–189. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2017.44>.

Session 12, 02.07.2025 – Applications of automated text analysis: examples from published studies

- Please remember to read the texts that are being presented, since we will discuss these together in class.

Suggested readings for student presentations:

Barberá, Pablo, Andreu Casas, Jonathan Nagler, Patrick J. Egan, Richard Bonneau, John T. Jost, and Joshua A. Tucker. 2019. "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data." *American Political Science Review* 113 (4): 883–901. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000352>.

Borbáth, Endre, and Theresa Gessler. 2023. "How Do Populist Radical Right Parties Differentiate their Appeal? Evidence from the Media Strategy of the Hungarian Jobbik Party." *Government and Opposition* 58 (1): 84–105. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.28>.

Fischer-Pfeßler, Diana, Carsten Schwemmer, and Kai Fischbach. 2019. "Collective sense-making in times of crisis: Connecting terror management theory with Twitter user reactions to the Berlin terrorist attack." *Computers in Human Behavior* 100:138–151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.05.012>.

Geese, Lucas, Chantal Sullivan-Thomsett, Andrew J. Jordan, John Kenny, and Irene Lorenzoni. 2024. "Measuring climate mitigation policy content in text-as-data: navigating the conceptual challenges." *Political Research Exchange* 6 (1): 2387120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2024.2387120>.

Grossman, Guy, William Dinneen, and Carolina Torreblanca. 2025. "The Evolving Landscape of Political Science: Two Decades of Scholarship in a Growing Discipline," https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/tmy37_v2.

- Kittel, Rebecca C. 2025. “Simply Speaking? Language Complexity among (Non-)Populist Actors in Parliamentary Debates.” *Government and Opposition* online first. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2025.4>.
- Müller, Stefan, and Sven-Oliver Proksch. 2024. “Nostalgia in European Party Politics: A Text-Based Measurement Approach.” *British Journal of Political Science* 54 (3): 993–1005. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123423000571>.
- Rauh, Christian, and Michal Parizek. 2024. “Converging on Europe? The European Union in mediated debates during the COVID-19 and Ukraine shocks.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 31 (10): 3036–3065. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2344849>.

Session 13, 09.07.2025 – Lab session: dictionary methods, topic models, sentiment analysis

- We will replicate part of the empirical analysis of Zollinger (2024).
- Therefore, please read the paper carefully!

Required:

Zollinger, Delia. 2024. “Cleavage Identities in Voters’ Own Words: Harnessing Open-Ended Survey Responses.” *American Journal of Political Science* 68 (1): 139–159. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12743>.

Block V: Outlook and conclusion

Session 14, 16.07.2025 – New Frontiers: Large Language Models in Text-as-Data Analysis

Required:

- Le Mens, Gaël, and Aina Gallego. 2025. “Positioning Political Texts with Large Language Models by Asking and Averaging.” *Political Analysis* online first. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2024.29>.
- Heseltine, Michael, and Bernhard Clemm von Hohenberg. 2024. “Large language models as a substitute for human experts in annotating political text.” *Research & Politics* 11 (1): 20531680241236239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680241236239>.

Session 15, 23.07.2025 – Concluding session: Comparing methods, critical reflections, and feedback round

- What have we learned from this seminar?
- Feedback session on the content and organization of the seminar.