

Title of dissertation: Political changes of position under public pressure - using the example of party donations in Austria

Problem Definition and Research Questions:

Do political positions change under public pressure? How does public opinion affect agenda setting?

This dissertation investigates the dynamic interplay between public pressure, political positions, and agenda setting in Austria. Despite initial hypotheses suggesting resistance from political parties to tighten party laws, recent instances of regulatory changes in party donations challenge this assumption. Drawing from three distinct contexts—namely, the aftermath of the Ibiza scandal in 2019, the ÖVP's tenure in 2022, and the emergence of the Frank Stronach political movement between 2012 and 2017—the research explores why parliamentary majorities yielded to public demands for increased regulation and transparency. Through a political science lens, the study delves into the evolution of party priorities and strategies under public scrutiny, analyzing communication tactics and media influences. Beyond donations, the study considers various forms of party financing, culminating in discussions on control and transparency. Methodologically, the research employs document and literature analysis alongside qualitative, semi-structured expert interviews. This abstract summarizes the ongoing literature review and refinement of research questions.

Moreover, the example of the development of party financing closely aligns with shifts in parliamentarism, as Konrath points out in his research¹. Parallel patterns of action and reactions to external expectations emerge in both domains.

Scientific Methodology

The scientific methodology employed in this research project encompasses interdisciplinary approaches to theoretical grounding and empirical investigation. Drawing from the fields of communication science and decision-making theory, the study utilizes McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting approach and Cohen's trash can model to provide theoretical frameworks for understanding the dynamics of political positions, public pressure, and agenda setting. Specifically, McCombs and Shaw's theory elucidates the role of media in shaping public opinion and influencing political agendas, while Cohen's model offers insights into decision-making processes within political contexts. Complementing these theoretical perspectives, the research incorporates document and literature analysis, as well as qualitative, semi-structured expert interviews, to enrich empirical understanding and validate theoretical constructs.

Status Quo

The current status of the research project involves the completion of literature review and the refinement of research questions. Through extensive literature research, relevant scholarly works were analyzed to identify key themes, theories, and empirical findings pertinent to the study's focus on political positions, public pressure, and agenda setting. Subsequently, the research questions were narrowed down to address specific aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. This phase marks a critical step in laying the groundwork for the empirical inquiry, providing a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge and informing the direction of the study.

¹ Zeitschrift für Parteienwissenschaften. (2023). Sonderausgabe "Parlamentsentscheidungen in eigener Sache" in Kooperation mit Verfassungsblog und Stiftung Wissenschaft & Demokratie. Zeitschrift für Parteienwissenschaften, [Volume](Nr. 2)