

ANTI-CORRUPTION HELPDESK

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METHODOLOGIES FOR THE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL PARTY PROGRAMMES

QUERY

Is there any methodology you would recommend for analysing party programmes for themes such as anti-corruption, transparency or (mis)use of public funds? Are there any benchmark pieces of research in this field, best practices for party programmes and so on?

CONTENT

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SUMMARY

There are four main aspects to consider for the analysis of political party programmes: the function of the political programme, the context in which it is created, the drafting process, and ultimately its content. There are several research methodologies used to analyse party programmes in terms of a particular policy area, but two of the main approaches are content analysis and discourse analysis.

Content analysis seeks to quantify patterns within a text in an objective, replicable and systematic manner. It entails the codification of a text into smaller components in order to analyse textual passages and identify a political party's position on a given issue as well as the relative emphasis the party places on it. The codification of the text can either be done manually or with computer-aided tools. Discourse analysis is a qualitative methodology that provides a framework for a richer understanding of how meaning is constructed and construed in political debate.

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Best practices on anti-corruption for party programmes depend very much on the party and the context. Nevertheless, there are universal recommendations and measures to ensure parties' commitment with internal accountability and transparency, especially regarding party financing. Finally, several studies are considered which have applied these techniques to study party programmes.

1. POLITICAL PARTY PROGRAMMES: ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS

Political party programmes communicate the values and concerns of a political party, as well as the ideas, the policies it advocates, and demands the party wishes to see enacted. Party programmes play a key role in democratic political systems as they shape voters' decisions during elections, serve as reference points to evaluate the performance of political parties, set policy agendas and propose solutions to address societal challenges. Moreover, they structure interactions between political forces and can significantly shape government policy (Van der Does and Statsch, 2016). There are four important aspects to consider when analysing political manifestos: their function, the context in which they are designed and exist, how they are created, and their content.

Function

Political programmes have two main types of functions: improving electoral success and managing relations both within the party and outside the party with other political forces.

Electoral manifestos are designed to improve party performance during elections and their content is the outcome of a calculation intended to win votes. Manifestos generally cover a wide variety of policy issues, strategically described, interpreted and emphasised by the party to express its distinctive ideological position on which a party competes in elections (Downs, 1957). Along these lines, Eder, Jenny and Müller (2016) distinguish between three functions that a manifesto can serve:

- provide a party position;
- establish supremacy over other policy positions of the same party and thereby streamline the party's campaign;
- inform voters.

According to some authors, parties do not tend to see to increase their vote share by changing their position on issues, but rather by shifting the focus and emphasis they place on various issues (Klingemann et al., 1994). In this view, the interests of a party's core constituency and voter base could affect the will of a party to overhaul the content of its programme and political agenda. In addition, a party's programme can

act as a constraint, becoming the benchmark by which a party is assessed should that party be elected to government (Hofferbert and Budge, 1992).

In addition, political programmes can play an important role in structuring processes of government formation after an election (inter-party function), in the sense that they provide the basis for negotiations with other parties to build a governing coalition (Van der Does and Statsch, 2016). They might also serve as a means to reach agreement within a party or safeguard party cohesion through the party's commitment to the initiatives included in their programmes (intra-party function) (Van der Does and Statsch, 2016; Thomson 2001).

Context

Political programmes are written and disseminated in specific contexts, which naturally have concomitant effects on their content. Of the many contextual factors with influence over the content and objectives of political programmes, a particularly potent one is past experience, notably in the form of the last election results. Parties' expectations for the future might also shape manifestos' content, which might rely in survey polls and public opinion research (Van der Does and Statsch, 2016).

The external political environment at the national and international level, including the programmes of other political forces, the strengths and weakness of the ruling political party, political and corruption scandals, political, social and economic crisis, and foreign policy, are likely to exert influence over political proposals made in the manifesto.

Discord within the political party such as internal goal-conflicts and leadership struggles, as well as the decision to bet on continuity or change (Adams, 2012) can also determine the function and content of the political programme. Finally, the social landscape and trends among the constituents political parties want to win over are likely to be reflected in the topics covered in and language of manifestos.

Drafting

The relevance of political programmes is not merely a reflection of the political statements and topics included in the final version. In fact, the processes and

actors involved in drafting manifestos are not only constitutive of a manifesto's content but also reveal a lot about the political agenda behind a party programme and that party's stance on issues covered – and omitted – from the manifesto itself. Van der Does and Statsch (2016) identify five key components of drafting procedures: inclusiveness, centralisation, deliberativeness, structure and participation. For instance, the number of people involved in drafting a political programme might determine its length, since the more authors the greater the chances of disagreement and the more likely that additional topics will be included to satisfy the diverse interests. The degree to which the drafting process is centralised (e.g. coordinated from the national level) or decentralised (e.g. involvement of the general electorate) can also have significant implications in the topics and priorities included in manifestos. How extensive any such deliberation is, the diversity of participants and the form of their participation can also shape and transform party's initial preferences.

Content

The content of political manifestos can vary depending on the emphasis, type and formulation of different principles and policies. For example, not all the statements in a manifesto might be of the same value to the political party; some statements might represent firm commitments to a particular policy whereas others might be rhetorical in nature (Royed, 1996).

This differentiated weighting implies that not all contents in a political programme communicate necessarily a policy position, and that often political commitments are complemented with other types of text (Van der Does and Statsch, 2016). Those complementary texts can be the description of party's achievements, financial statements, detailed information of party's candidates, and so on. The way the content of manifestos is formulated, for instance in terms of how they address potential voters or their different audiences, can also be informative.

In sum, considering these four factors when researching party programmes will provide a more complete picture of the origin, nature and commitment of any pledges or policy prescriptions made in them.

2. METHODS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL PROGRAMMES

The analysis of anti-corruption measures included in political programmes can be performed in at least two ways: first, by looking at the political party's overt emphasis, position and prescriptions on the issue, and second, how political parties construct specific meanings of corruption and anti-corruption and use these meanings as instruments to further their objectives in political discourse.

Two research methods offer tools to undertake these two levels of analysis respectively: content analysis and discourse analysis. The use of one method over the other depends on the objective of the analysis. For example, content analysis allows one to compare the position on anti-corruption of different political parties or track the evolution of that position over time. Discourse analysis provides the necessary depth to understand how political parties use the language of "anti-corruption" as an instrument to shape political reality and position themselves in the political system.

Content analysis

The most common method to assess parties' policy positions is the analysis of their written programmatic statements using content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique used to quantify patterns within a text or other form of communication in an objective, replicable and systematic manner. To conduct content analysis the text is broken down into smaller components (words, phrases, themes), which are quantified and analysed in order to make inferences about the messages, authors and purpose of the text. Thus, it entails two phases: 1) the reduction of the text to a smaller set of coded data, and 2) the manipulation and analysis of that data.

Codification

The codification of the text requires three steps: the design of a coding scheme, the definition of a text unit to be coded (political programmes, speeches, interviews, etc), and the actual coding of the units (Laver and Garry, 2000). One of the first considerations in coding is how fine-grained a coding scheme should be. According to Laver and Garry (2000), a fine-grained coding scheme –in other words, with specific and detailed categories- is more useful and allows more flexibility for the analysis of the data.

Another consideration is the types of categories, being the most used types of categories unipolar, bipolar or tripolar. An example of unipolar category would be 'transparency'. The same category as bipolar would be 'transparency: positive' and 'transparency: negative'. A tripolar code for transparency could be 'transparency: pro', 'transparency: con' and 'transparency: neutral'. Unipolar coding provides information about the emphasis of an issue like transparency by showing the number of times in which 'transparency' appears in the political programme. Bipolar and tripolar coding offer information on the position of a political party regarding that specific category.

Coding schemes can be plain, in which all categories are equally important, or hierarchically structured, in which at the highest level there is a broad domain (for example, anti-corruption) and in the lower levels there are more concrete categories presenting different positions around the broad domain. For instance, inspired by the model presented by Laver and Garry (2000), within the broad domain of 'anti-corruption' there could be four branches: to increase anti-corruption measures, to reduce anti-corruption measures, to be neutral about anti-corruption measures, to display a general concern about corruption. Within each of those branches, other categories can be displayed. For example, 'to increase anti-corruption measures' can be divided in four more branches: legal, institutions, transparency and accountability. And within 'legal' there can be options such as 'reinforcement of laws', 'implementation of laws', 'creation of new laws', and so on. The advantages of a hierarchical coding scheme is that it provides more detailed information to infer the position of a party over an issue, it allows for comparisons between parties, and it is flexible to adapt to real circumstances by adding and deleting categories if necessary.

There are two ways of doing the codification of a text: manual coding and computer-coding. In the first case, the text is broken down into smaller pieces and re-classified into new categories by a human coder. Manual coding involves a great deal of human interpretation of the meaning of a text to make inferences on positions (Bräuninger, Debus and Müller, 2013). In computer-coding the codification of a text is made automatically based on either a

combination of previously manually designed 'dictionary' signalling key words with machine-coding of texts, or transforming texts fully automatically into matrices of words or phrases analysed using statistical methods (Bräuninger, Debus and Müller, 2013).

There are two techniques for fully computer-aided content analysis: 'wordscores' (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003) and 'wordfish' (Slapin and Proksch, 2008). Both techniques aim to compare the frequency of words from different texts and to estimate the policy position of a text based on the differences in the share of used words. The difference between these two techniques is that 'wordscores' compares the frequency of words of the texts at hand with the frequency of words in reference texts with a known position, and assign scores based on the similarity to these reference texts (Bräuninger, Debus and Müller, 2013).

In order to obtain valid results, the reference texts should be of the same character as the one whose position is unknown (Bräuninger, Debus and Müller, 2013). So, if the analysis is on a political programme, it would be advised to use as reference texts party programmes since they have similar structure and language. Validity risks would increase, however, if the estimation of a position in a political programme is obtained using political speeches as reference texts since the use of words in both text might be less homogenous (Bräuninger, Debus and Müller, 2013). 'Wordfish' estimates document positions by implementing a statistical model based on word frequencies and it does not require the use of anchoring texts to perform the analysis. In both cases, the political party estimation is done using computer algorithms, which prevents subjectivity issues involved in human coding.

In addition, manual coding raises issues of validity and reliability when used to make comparative analysis. For example, it is not unlikely that human coders in different countries might attach different meanings to the same words resulting in different classifications that cannot be compared with any validity (Bräuninger, Debus and Müller, 2013). The reliability of content analysis also refers to the stability in coding the same text at different times. Computer coding is considered more reliable since it allocates text units according to mechanical criteria (Laver and Garry, 2000).

Another criterion for choosing manual or computer coding is the objective of the content analysis at hand. Some authors distinguish between two functions of doing content-analysis of political programmes, to identify policy emphasis on one hand and to identify policy positions on the other. According to Laver and Garry (2000), two parties may have different positions on the same issue but emphasise the issue to the same extent in their respective manifestos. In principle, it would seem that computer coding would be more appropriate to assess policy emphasis through the counting of a term, for example anti-corruption, and it would struggle to accurately capture the nuances of a party position on the topic.

Nevertheless, Laver and Garry (2000) argue that computer-coding techniques are more appropriate to extract information about policy positions from political texts, whereas hand-coding deals more with policy emphasis. This is because, they argue, parties' policy positions are not solely reflected in their manifestos; a party's true stance on an issue may be more accurately accounted for by studying a range of additional documentation, such as policy papers, speeches and party conferences. It also requires consideration of potentially contradictory policy positions of various figures within the same party and the development of those positions over time and between elections (Laver and Garry, 2000). The scale of the task of manually coding this volume of documentation is a challenge, and implies that manual coding is more appropriate for studies of the emphasis parties' place on a particular topic in their manifesto.

Analysis

There are two approaches to analysing a text: deductive and inductive. In a deductive approach, the dimensions on which the estimation of the political positions are made are defined *a priori* (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003). In other words, the political programme is approached knowing in advance the categories to look at, being those categories decided based on previous knowledge and not based on the program. An example of this approach are surveys that ask experts to place parties' positions on a scale with predefined categories. In an inductive approach, on the other hand, the analyst extracts from the original text the patterns and analytical categories. In this case, the dimensions that form the basis of subsequent interpretations of policy positions are

made *a posteriori* (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003). For example, when looking at how a political manifesto addresses anti-corruption, instead of doing it from a predefinition of what anti-corruption involves (e.g. accountability, transparency), an inductive approach would look at how the party defines corruption and get an estimation according to the anti-corruption components defined by the party.

Discourse analysis

Discourse is commonly understood as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena" (Gephart, 2012: 7). According to discourse theory, the purpose of discourse is to fix the meaning of the concepts, identities, and actions in a system (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). It is through the process of fixing meaning that social reality is created. Hence, discourse analysis tries to understand how meanings are constructed in a particular social context (Howarth, 2000).

For discourse theorists, the significance and meaning of an issue such as anti-corruption is not fixed or given, but it is the result of the interactions and power struggles between political actors. Indeed, within any given discourse, like that on corruption, there are multiple rival and antagonistic narratives seeking discursive hegemony (Gephart, 2012). The relational constellations of these narratives in a "field of discursivity", variously nurtured or hindered by shifting social, ideational and material forces, change over time (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

This idea suggests interdependence in the sense that no element or practice in a society is completely immune from the effects of others. For example, the hegemonic narrative on anti-corruption in society or in the international community influences the way a political party addresses corruption in its manifesto; parties can choose to either position themselves in line with the dominant narrative or contest it by propagating an alternative meaning. Thus, the actors in a society formulate their demands in response to others' narratives about corruption. In this sense, discourse constitutes and organises social relations and modifies reality, and a hegemonic discourse presents meanings that creates a certain reality that benefits one group of the society and excludes another (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

Within this understanding of how reality is socially and politically constructed through discourse, discourse analysis offers the following analytical categories:

- *The construction of meaning.* In the case of anti-corruption, discourse theory would imply analysis of how a political party uses its manifesto to bolster a particular interpretation of corruption. Does the party view corruption as the result of personal moral failure, perverse systemic incentives or something else entirely? How does a party relate corruption to other topics, such as economic growth, human rights or the environment?
- *What exclusions or inclusions does this particular meaning produce?* Discourse theorists would look at what is included and excluded in how a party defines corruption and anti-corruption by considering who is held responsible for corruption as well as who is expected to lead efforts to curb it.
- *Related concepts.* Are related concepts such as transparency and accountability imbued with new connotations when a political party articulates them in connection with a specific understanding of corruption? For example, do parties mobilise definitions of accountability rooted primarily in the local context and adapted to local forms of corruption, or do they adopt standard definitions borrowed from international conventions?
- *Articulation.* How does a party's narrative about corruption relate to competing understandings of the phenomenon? Is the party manifesto concerned with corruption primarily in reaction to exogenous factors such as scandals? Does it seek to mobilise narratives of corruption solely to discredit other parties? Or does the manifesto include proactive and considered proposals to reduce corruption?
- *Creation of identity.* Is corruption a core consideration of the party, does the manifesto speak of good governance as a core consideration of the party's programme for government?

3. BENCHMARK RESEARCH AND DATASETS

The Manifesto Project Database

The Manifesto Project is the largest hand-annotated dataset of electoral programmes available. It provides parties' policy positions from the application of content analysis to political manifestos of 1000 political parties from over 50 countries, on five continents, and covering the period from 1945 until the present. The dataset is updated twice a year and provides access to manifestos text and content-analytical data. The main objectives are to analyse the role of parties at different stages of the political process, the quality of programmatic representation, the programmatic supply of parties, the relationship between parties and voters, the role of parties in parliament, and the translation of the programmes in policy outputs. 'Political corruption' is included as unipolar category, meaning that manifestos are assessed in terms of the proportion of their length they dedicate to emphasising political corruption.

The Manifesto Corpus (Merz, Regel and Lewandowski, 2016).

The Manifesto Corpus is a free resource for research on political parties and quantitative text analysis that offers a digital, open access, annotated corpus of electoral programmes. It is based on the Manifesto Project and it offers 1800 readable documents from 40 countries. The corpus is the result of the digitization of the infrastructure and coding processes of the Manifesto Project, which included the conversion of the documents to a machine-readable format and the implementation of a digitized document coding procedure. The Manifesto Corpus can be browsed online or accessed with an open- source package for the statistical software R called *manifestoR*.

The Party Change Project

The Party Change Project, led by Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, aimed to extract policy positions and party organisational characteristics from 1950 to 1990. The study covers 19 parties in four countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark. The information is classified in four categories: issue orientation, organisation complexity variables, organisational power variables, and coherence variables. Issue orientation measures the party's position on thirteen issues and each issue receives a score indicating if the position of the party on that issue is weak, moderate or strong. The study established a framework to determine pro and con positions for each issue linking the pro position with greater governmental activity in the issue (+5) or

opposed to greater governmental activity in the issue (-5). The study does not include corruption as one of the issues.

Examples of similar studies on anti-corruption

In April 2015, just before the 2015 General Election in the United Kingdom, TI UK published an analysis of the manifestos of the seven major political parties competing in the elections called [Manifestos: Where do the UK's parties stand on corruption?](#) There is not available information about the methodology used in this analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to identify where the parties stood on various corruption related issues within the following themes: politics, business property and economy, external relations, media, and policy and justice.

There are some examples of the implementation of content analysis and discourse analysis to study anti-corruption. For instance, Kearns (2015) uses discourse analysis and content analysis to study Transparency International's role in the anti-corruption industry. Torois, Jepleting and Tanui (2016) uses content analysis to analyse Anti-Corruption Quarterly Reports from 2003 to 2013 in Kenya. Beyond content and discourse analysis methodologies, Curini and Martelli (2015) present a statistical model to analyse parties incentives to emphasise corruption issues on their manifestos. The authors find that the more parties resemble each ideologically, the greater is their incentive to use shared values – such as corruption – as a competitive strategy, since the possibility of obtaining larger vote-shares through a successful valence campaign increases with the proximity between party's ideological positions.

4. ANTI-CORRUPTION BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTY PROGRAMMES

Political parties' stances on anti-corruption reforms depend very much on the party and the context. Nevertheless, there are universal measures and good practices to ensure integrity and anti-corruption at party's internal level, particularly with regards to party financing.

The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (2004) highlights the importance of adopting appropriate legislative and administrative measures 'to enhance transparency in the funding of

candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties.'

Regarding transparency measures, United Nations (2014) addresses issues such as the definition of a donation or a contribution, restrictions on the source of funding contributions, value limits on contributions, public contributions to political parties and electoral campaigns, limitation on expenditure during electoral campaigns, and transparency in relation to funding and expenditure during electoral campaigns.

Civil organizations such as Transparency International (2009) and IDEA (2001), among others, have also highlighted best practices of accountability of campaign and political party financing, including the establishment of (TI, 2012):

1. parameters for the limits, purpose and time periods of campaign expenditures;
2. limits on contributions;
3. identification of donors, including whether or not anonymous, international and third-party donations or loans are permissible, restricted or prohibited;
4. what types of in-kind contributions are permissible;
5. the form and timing of submission and the publication of accounts and expenditure by party organisations;
6. means to verify income and expenditure disclosure by an independent and autonomous oversight body;
7. whether tax relief is allowed on donations or loans;
8. means to dissuade governments from using public resources for electoral purposes;
9. how government subsidies for elections and parties are calculated and awarded and how the development of new parties is encouraged (while the creation of parties whose prime purpose is to access funding is avoided)

Even where not required by law, parties and individual candidates running for elected office could voluntarily disclose financial statements for their campaigns detailing itemised income and expenditure, as well as individual donors to their campaign finances.

For further information on campaign and political party financing, see:

- Global Integrity/Sunlight Foundation: Money Politics and Transparency, country assessments (<https://data.moneypoliticstransparency.org>)
- Council of Europe: GRECO evaluation reports (round 3 and follow-up reports), (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/greco/evaluations>)
- International IDEA political finance database (currently being updated, <http://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/political-finance-database>)
- TI Policy Position 01/2009: Standards on Political Funding and Favours (https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/policy_position_no_01_2009_standards_on_political_funding_and_favours)
- IFES: TIDE Political Finance Oversight Handbook (<http://www.ifes.org/publications/tide-political-finance-oversight-handbook>)

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