The Media as Platform and Commentator of Political Self-Legitimations:
A Discourse Network Analytical Perspective

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Work in Progress – Comments Welcome

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The bulk of empirical legitimacy research is concerned with the *measurement* of legitimacy and, ultimately, with the testing of hypotheses related to its causes and effects (Gilley 2009). This body of literature tends to glean its indicators of regime support and legitimacy from public opinion research. However, reliance on the survey method appears ill-suited to capture the role of language, communication, and the media – as well as the interaction of political elites and the wider public – in (de-)legitimation processes. By contrast, our paper is grounded in the premise that legitimacy is *socially constructed* and that legitimation processes deserve to be examined in their own right. We further argue that individual evaluations of political orders with their regime principles, core institutions, and major actor groups are the crucial discursive practices associated with these processes. Various types of speakers – including governments and other political actors – may judge or posit the acceptability of regimes and their elements in such legitimacy assessments, and they may do so by drawing on a range of normative benchmarks – for instance, criteria of democratic quality. Finally, we assume that the media not only provide a crucial *platform* for legitimacy assessments, but also represent key *participants* in broader legitimation discourses.

Current research has begun to document and classify the range of (de-)legitimating arguments made in real-world political communication, as opposed to the academic literature (Hurrelmann et al. 2009; Schneider et al. 2010). However, standard discourse analytical methods reach their limits where the objective is an examination of complex, multi-actor forms of discursive interaction – notably between the media, civil society at large, and political elites. Extant studies of legitimation discourses tend to employ highly aggregated speaker categories or focus the analysis on particular discourse segments to cope with this challenge (Raufer 2005). Yet only genuinely relational forms of analysis permit a more encompassing consideration of speakers and their arguments (Adam 2008). Here we advocate the method of discourse network analysis to shed light on the structures and dynamics of legitimation discourses (Leifeld and Haunss 2010).

Our contribution examines legitimation discourses in the quality press of four Western democracies (Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, United States) between 1998 and 2007. We are primarily interested in the role and relationship of journalists, speakers associated with civil society, and political elites in legitimation discourses. How much "voice" does each speaker type have in public communication on the legitimacy of the democratic nation state? What is the thrust of legitimacy assessments contributed by different speakers? Which speakers join forces in discourse coalitions, drawing on a shared repertoire of arguments and justifications? Discourse network analysis enables us to study such coalitions, as well as shifts in the communicative (de-)legitimation of political orders, without *a priori* assumptions about cooperative relationships between specific actors, but rather based on the empirical consideration of arguments that are shared between groups of speakers over time.

We show that the greater or lesser discursive support enjoyed by the four examined political orders over time is the outcome of nationally specific interactions between actors

present in the public sphere and various normative benchmarks used to justify positive or negative legitimacy assessments. Across countries, the self-legitimation of political elites is prominent in legitimation discourses, and the media play their "watch-dog" role both by contributing their own (frequently critical) assessments of such claims and by giving voice to (also mostly critical) evaluations proffered by individual and collective actors associated with civil society. But there are also characteristic differences among the four cases and shifts over time with regard to the sets of arguments used by different speakers and with regard to the nature of discourse coalitions. While we make no more than a limited foray into the analysis of temporal dynamics in this exploratory paper, discourse network analysis holds the promise to provide a detailed picture of the communicative (re-)production, contestation, and transformation of legitimacy and its normative foundations in each case and to suggest explanations for the nationally specific dynamics of legitimation processes.

In the next two sections, we briefly sketch the rationale of a discourse analytical perspective on legitimation processes and then present the research design, data, and method of our empirical study. The remainder of the paper is devoted to the presentation and comparative discussion of the findings of our discourse network analysis for each of the four examined national public spheres. In conclusion, we suggest a few extensions of our approach.

(Re-)Producing Legitimacy and Its Normative Foundations: A Communicative Perspective

Indicators of empirical legitimacy may be gleaned from at least three dimensions. The two most prominent approaches measure the levels and foundations of legitimacy by way of public opinion research, thus focusing on political attitudes and legitimacy beliefs (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Dalton 2004; Torcal and Montero 2006), or they observe forms of (non-) conventional political behavior (acts of participation or protest) and (non-)compliance, interpreting them as expressions of regime support or its withdrawal (Haunss 2007). A third dimension – political communication – has so far been neglected (but see, e.g., Barbato 2005; Raufer 2005). Here we refrain from a detailed discussion of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of these methodological approaches and merely summarize the rationale for empirical research on *legitimation discourses* (Schneider, Nullmeier, and Hurrelmann 2007, 127-33; Schneider et al. 2010, chapter 2).

Our starting point is the normative and empirical role of language, communication, and public spheres for the functioning of democratic regimes in general and for the (re-) production, challenging, or transformation of legitimacy in particular (Peters 2005, 2007). The legitimacy of the democratic nation state and its normative foundations are socially – that is, discursively – constructed in a particular type of language game, using characteristic discursive practices (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Luckmann 2001; Mulligan 2007). The successful (re-)production of legitimacy in national public spheres may be viewed as an

interactive process, engaging political elites with their self-legitimating claims on the one hand, and citizens with more or less critical assessments of their political order on the other (Barker 1990, 2001, 2007; Beetham 1991). Thus a genuine *consensus* on the acceptability of a regime is neither empirically likely nor does it seem normatively desirable – after all, one function of (democratic) public spheres is to enable the criticism of rulers (but see, e.g., Steffek 2003, 2007). A certain amount of "critical citizenship" appears "normal" and even desirable both in an empirical and in a normative perspective (Sniderman 1981; Norris 1999). Thus we expect legitimation discourses to be typically kindled by political *conflicts and debates* – starting with everyday debates about policies or authorities, but then generalizing beyond conflicts about authorities and their decisions and turning into genuine debates about the legitimacy of an entire regime and its foundations (Easton 1965). In other words, an entire regime or some of its core institutions get politicized, and their legitimacy becomes an explicit issue. Therefore legitimation discourses should typically be characterized by the juxtaposition of legitimating and delegitimating speakers and assessments, but stable legitimacy may be diagnosed as long as legitimizers and the evaluation standards they privilege remain hegemonic. Challengers of a regime are forced to communicate their critical assessments and underlying normative standards, and such criticism must be publicly acknowledged and broadly accepted to usher in the erosion or transformation of a regime's legitimacy or of its normative foundations. On the other hand, given the "essential contestedness" of legitimacy and its proper normative foundations (Gallie 1956; Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006), the term – used in its empirical sense – refers to no more than a temporary and more or less precarious (Nullmeier et al. 2010) "equilibrium" between the legitimacy claims of rulers and the legitimacy assessments of their subjects or citizens.

The attitudinal, behavioural, and communicative dimensions are obviously connected – legitimacy-related attitudes are developed and formulated against the backdrop of legitimation discourses in which hegemonic and subversive collective representations of political reality, values and normative evaluations manifest themselves; similarly, legitimacy-related forms of behavior tend to be linked with – or to consist of – discursive practices. Thus we need a text-analytical approach to fully come to terms with the multi-dimensional nature of (de-) legitimation processes. A focus on legitimation discourses reveals what may be said in public debates on legitimacy and also has a fair chance of being heard and taken seriously, which positions and justifications are hegemonic in these debates, and ultimately, which rules there are for the formulation of acceptable legitimacy evaluations. The assessments that come to dominate such discourses, in turn, play a key role in the (re-)production of political legitimacy.

Research Design, Data, Method

Our empirical study compares legitimation discourses in the public spheres of four established Western democracies: Switzerland, Germany, Britain, and the United States.

These four countries represent major types of liberal democracy (Lijphart 1999), as well as being characterized by distinct political cultures (Almond and Verba 1963; Abromeit 1995) and media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004), all of which leads us to expect characteristic *differences* in the structures of the four national legitimation discourses and the arguments or strategies privileged by their respective participants (as well as *fluctuations* over time influenced by nationally specific political events).

There is no doubt that legitimation discourses unfold in different arenas of public spheres – in private conversations, in the parliamentary arena, or in the debates of political-science and legal scholars, to name but a few. In the present study, however, we concentrate on the mass media – and more precisely, the quality press – of the four countries examined, given its presumptive role in the constitution and development of public spheres in modern democratic societies (Habermas 2008; Vliegenthart et al. 2008; Wessler et al. 2008). For each national case, we identified legitimacy-related political communication in two opinion-leading papers of the (center-)left and right: *Tagesanzeiger* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *Guardian* and *Times* (Britain), *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (United States).

We treated individual propositions of an evaluative kind – *legitimation statements* – as basic units. These propositions or claims are identified and described with the help of a stylized legitimation "grammar" (Table 1, see Koopmans and Statham 1999; Franzosi 2004). Four key variables define a legitimation statement: the *legitimation object* that is assessed, the *legitimating (positive) or delegitimating (negative) thrust* of the evaluation, the normative benchmark (*legitimation criterion*) on which it is based, and the *speaker*.[1]

Table 1: Legitimation grammar and examples

Example 1: Rot-weiss ist hip (*Tagesanzeiger*, 7 December 2007).			
The Swiss pol. system/ community	is legitimate…	because…	(unspecific evaluation or ambiguous, "other" normative benchmark).
Example 2: Deutschland schläft. Seine Politiker erstarren in zynischer Einfallslosigkeit (SZ, 4 December 2002)			
The German pol. system/ community and its political elites…	are illegitimate…	because…	they are lethargic, show no leadership/proactivity and innovative capacity.
Example 3: Greedy, cynical, out-of-touch, the Political Class runs this country much as the Whig elite did in the 18th century, chiefly in pursuit of self-enrichment and the retention of office (*Guardian*, 3 November 2007).			
The British political elites…	are illegitimate…	because…	they neglect the popular will and do not contribute to the common good.
Example 4: The people and their representatives have been sent to the sidelines by the courts, and that's not right (*Washington Post*, 6 February 2004).			
The US judiciary…	is illegitimate…	because…	it undermines popular sovereignty.

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[1]   For the purposes of the present paper, we ignore the object dimension. While legitimation statements may assess entire regimes and political communities or merely one of their core institutions and major actor groups, and this distinction has been shown to be relevant elsewhere (Nullmeier et al. 2010; Schneider et al. 2010), here we consider evaluations of specific institutions and actor groups as *pars pro toto* legitimacy assessments of regimes as a whole.

Our study of legitimation discourses in Britain, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States thus draws on a large corpus of newspaper articles that contain at least one such statement and therefore contribute to broader legitimation discourses. In each case, statements were identified in relatively narrow time windows (two weeks) around important "focusing" events of the political year, namely, the throne speeches and state of the union addresses in Britain and the US, as well parliamentary debates about the government agendas in Germany (*Regierungserklärungen* in the context of budget debates) and Switzerland (*Jahresziele*). These events, we argue, provide windows of opportunity both for affirmative legitimacy evaluations – notably including self-legitimating claims of governments – and for challengers of political orders and their incumbents.

Table 2: Time periods and number of statements

		CH			DE	
	Date	**Time period**	**N**	**Date**	**Time period**	**N**
1998	07/12	05/12-16/12	68	10/11	07/11-18/11	106
1999	13/12	11/12-22/12	45	24/11	20/11-01/12	90
2000	11/12	09/12-20/12	58	28/11	25/11-06/12	46
2001	03/12	01/12-12/12	36	28/11	24/11-05/12	53
2002	26/11	23/11-04/12	63	04/12	30/11-11/12	84
2003	01/12	29/11-10/12	74	26/11	22/11-03/12	102
2004	02/12	27/11-08/12	104	24/11	20/11-01/12	115
2005	28/11	26/11-07/12	23	30/11	26/11-07/12	82
2006	11/12	09/12-20/12	51	22/11	18/11-29/11	44
2007	03/12	01/12-12/12	81	28/11	24/11-05/12	30
Σ			*603*			*752*
		GB			**US**	
	Date	**Time period**	**N**	**Date**	**Time period**	**N**
1998	24/11	21/11-02/12	120	27/01	24/01-04/02	98
1999	17/11	13/11-24/11	145	19/01	16/01-27/01	184
2000	06/12	02/12-13/12	192	27/01	22/01-02/02	98
2001	20/06	16/06-27/06	158	27/01	27/01-07/02	30
2002	13/11	09/11-20/11	92	29/01	26/01-06/02	94
2003	26/11	22/11-03/12	87	28/01	25/01-05/02	200
2004	23/11	20/11-01/12	89	20/01	17/01-28/01	173
2005	17/05	14/05-25/05	90	02/02	29/01-09/02	124
2006	15/11	11/11-22/11	69	31/01	28/01-08/02	148
2007	06/11	03/11-14/11	91	23/01	20/01-31/01	84
Σ			*1133*			*1233*

To capture the complex interplay between actors and statements, we examine our date with tools of the *discourse network analysis* (Leifeld 2009; Leifeld and Haunss 2010); these enable us to reveal core structures of the discursive exchanges. A discourse network is a model that enables us to analyze discursive interaction over time. Generally speaking, every time an actor uses a concept, a connection is created between the actor and the concept. Figure 1 illustrates this basic model.

Figure 1: Illustration of the basic discourse network model
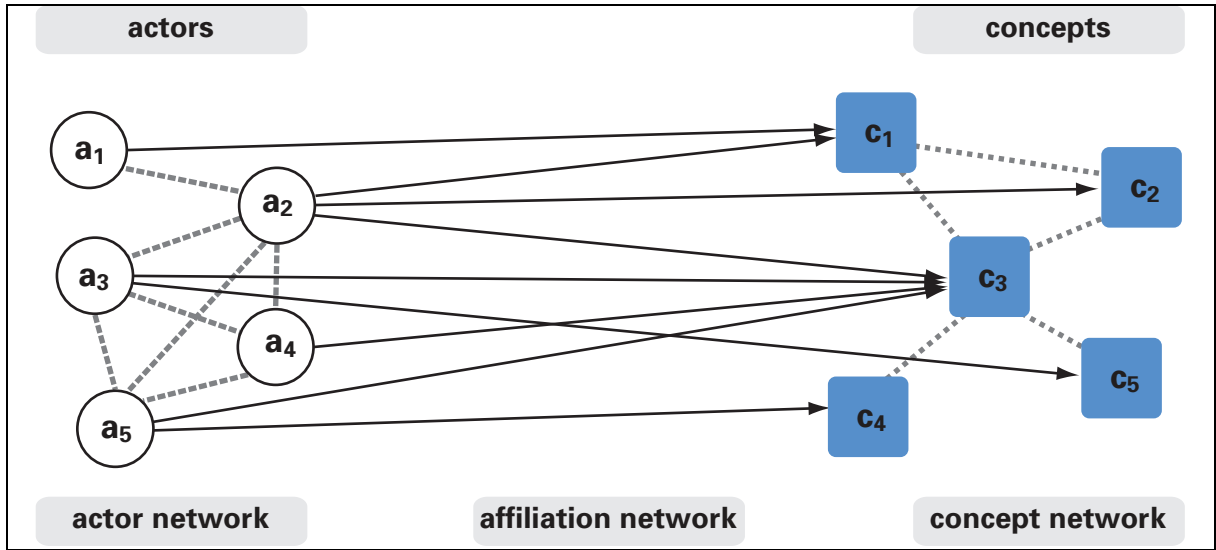
The affiliation network G^{aff} connects actors a_1, a_2, ... a_m (in our case speakers) with concepts c_1, c_2, ... c_n (in our case legitimation criteria), as indicated by the solid lines connecting actors and concepts in Figure 1. The lines are *directed* (arcs) because actors choose concepts. Moreover, since an actor uses a concept at a specific time t, for each point in time a specific affiliation network G_t^{aff} exists. Finally, actors can use a legitimation criterion to legitimate or to delegitimate a regime or one of its institutions. Actor a_1 may, for example, argue that the government is illegitimate because it disrespects popular sovereignty, while actor a_2 argues precisely the opposite, that the government strengthens popular sovereignty and therefore is legitimate. In the network model a negative or positive sign attached to the value of the arc connecting actor and concept indicates this piece of information. Such a discourse network is a directed temporal signed 2-mode network.

Two derivative 1-mode networks linked to this original network may be generated by connecting actors that share a concept or concepts that are used by the same actor. These *co-occurrence networks* are undirected; they are visualized by the dotted lines in Figure 1. By accounting for negative or positive arc values, six more specific actor and concept networks can be generated: a positive and a negative congruence network connecting actors that use the same concepts in the same way and a conflict network in which edges are formed if two actors disagree on a concept; and conversely, two congruence networks of concepts connected through like-minded actors and a conflict network of frames connected through disagreeing actors. Again, these derivative networks can be generated for each point in time t, making an analysis of the network evolution possible. For this paper, we only use the original 2-mode networks and actor congruence networks that illustrate discourse coalitions of like-minded actors using the same legitimation criteria.

Empirical Findings

In the following sub-sections, we show different discourse network analytical approaches to, or visualizations of, the Swiss, German, British, and US legitimation discourses. After a few additional technical explanations, we first present the aggregated affiliation networks representing key actors and legitimation criteria for each of the four national public spheres, 1998 through 2007. Four subsets of these affiliation networks, each containing only the legitimating and delegitimating statements put forward by the journalists of the respective two national newspapers, are briefly discussed next. Finally, we turn to actor and concept co-occurrence networks of actors, and to the analysis of temporal dynamics; here we restrict ourselves to the US and German cases.

Figure 2 shows the full network for the German public sphere. We use this – otherwise rather unwieldy – graph to provide some information required to interpret the simpler graphs in the next four sub-sections. Speakers are represented by white circles, legitimation criteria by blue squares in each of these graphs. The color of the arcs indicates whether an actor uses the connected concept to legitimate (green) or to delegitimate (orange) an element of the political order. The size of the nodes represents the relative number of statements made by an actor, the width of the arcs shows how often the respective actor has used the connected legitimation criterion. The relative centrality of an actor or a concept, i.e., the frequency of their appearance or use in our material, determines the position in the graph, with the most central concepts and actors in the center and the less central ones in the periphery.

In principle, the visualization of speakers could be as fine-grained as the underlying textual material permits. Thus we could depict individual and collective speakers (say, SZ journalist Heribert Prantl, German Chancellors Gerhard Schröder and Angela Merkel, and public intellectual Jürgen Habermas, or a statement associated with an NGO such as Amnesty International, etc.) if their names (as opposed to generic references to "a trade union representative", etc., as speakers) are indeed given in the newspaper articles. In the following exploration, however, we limit ourselves to the broader speaker types coded for the purpose of earlier, more traditionally content analytical presentations of our findings (Nullmeier et al. 2010; Schneider et al. 2010). Table 4 in the appendix illustrates the logic of this coding scheme.[2]

As for legitimation criteria, an attempt was made right from the beginning of the research project to identify and code as many individual standards as possible and not to exclude any of the criteria encountered in the text material, however idiosyncratic or irrelevant they may

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[2]   For the purposes of this paper, our primary interest was related to the domestic speaker column (which indeed comprises the bulk of all statements) and its sub-divisions. However, we decided to separate out non-domestic speakers (from one of the other three national spheres examined, or from the "rest of the world" combined) in order to create an interface, as it were, with the import body of literature probing the transnationalization of discourses in Europe and elsewhere (research that has some methodological and substantive affinity to ours, see, e.g., Wessler et al. 2008). In the graphs, the abbreviations CH, DE, GB, and US – and the term "other" attached to speaker types indicate such non-domestic speakers and their national origin.

appear to an academic observer. The partially inductive procedure used to derive categories led to a coding scheme with no less than 28 criteria (in addition to unspecific evaluations that do not offer an explicit normative benchmark). However, it seemed useful to group them in a way that enables us to discuss our findings in the light of the academic literature. We therefore distinguish between democratic and non-democratic standards on the one hand, and input v. output-related standards on the other, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Groups of legitimation criteria

	Democratic	**Non-democratic**
Input	Existence of a genuine political community (*demos*) Popular sovereignty Participation Deliberation Transparency Accountability Legality Credibility	Capable (charismatic, proactive, etc.) leadership Expertise Religious authority Traditional processes Moderation
Output	Protection of human and civil rights Empowerment Common good	Effectiveness Efficiency Distributive justice Stability Identity Morality Sovereignty International standing

The complexity of the network depicted in Figure 2 makes two things very clear: First, a broad range of individual and collective actors – and hence of speaker types – participates in public debates on the legitimacy of the German political order, its regime principles, core institutions, and major actor groups (and similarly, in debates on the other three regimes). There is, in other words, genuine discursive interaction that notably includes civil society, the media, and political elites. Secondly, most speaker types draw on a remarkable variety of normative criteria to evaluate their respective political order and to justify their (positive or negative) assessments.

Secondly, however, it is also readily apparent, even through the maze of the full network, that a small number of core actors dominates the legitimation discourse in Germany (and elsewhere); journalists play a leading role by formulating their own statements about the political order and its core institutions. Another thing that immediately catches the eye is the centrality of unspecific legitimation statements, i.e., evaluations made without reference to an explicit normative benchmark. These unspecific statements – which may appear somewhat deficient in light of our legitimation "grammar", despite their conspicuous popularity – are more often used in an affirmative fashion (77 in Germany, 418 overall) than critically (58 in Germany, 314 overall) and so could be said to represent a legitimation resource, a characteristic practice for the affirmation of political orders, in each of the four national public spheres.

Figure 2: Discourse network Germany 1998-2007, all speaker types and concepts (N = 752)
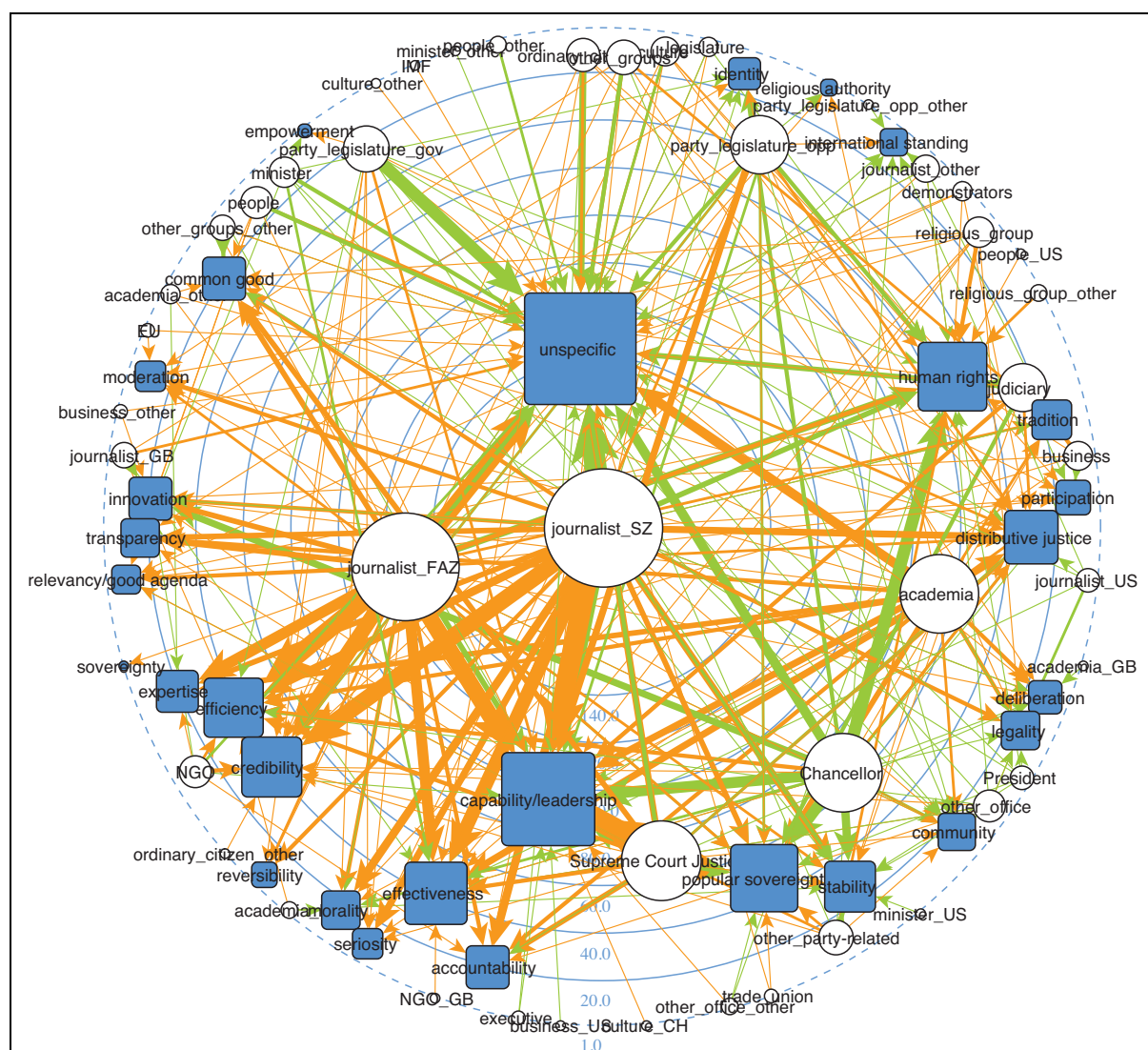
Note: Speakers are represented by white circles, legitimation criteria by blue squares; green lines indicate legitimating, orange lines delegitimating use of the connected concept. Node size represents the relative number of statements made by an actor, the width of the arcs shows how often the respective actor has used the connected legitimation criterion. Visualization using the centrality layout in *visone* (Brandes et al. 1999).

Thus while the overall picture shows a great number of actors participating in legitimation discourses, not all of them play an important role. Many speaker categories have, on average, contributed less than one statement per year. In each of our four countries, roughly half of the speaker types of the coding scheme have contributed less than five statements in our sample period. Since one can assume that the influence of these actors on national legitimation discourses is rather limited, we focus our subsequent comparison of the four national public spheres on the core networks that consist only of speaker categories with at least five legitimating or delegitimating statements, and similarly, on concepts that have been mentioned at least five times. To further reduce network complexity, we decided to restrict our analysis to those legitimation criteria that have been used at least twice by the same actor or actor category. Technically speaking, we restrict our analysis to the (5,2)-cores

of the four discourse networks. If a *k-core* is a maximal sub-network in which each vertex has at least degree *k* within the sub-network and if an *m-slice* is a maximal sub-network containing the lines with a value of at least *m* and the vertices incident with these lines (de Nooy, Mrvar, and Batagelj 2005: 70, 109), a *(k,m)-core* is a maximal sub-network in which each vertex has at least degree *k* and which contains the lines with a value of *m* and higher.[3]

The next series of graphs therefore shows (5,2)-cores of the four national networks. This visualization reveals the speaker types and normative benchmarks that dominate each discourse, and differences between the four countries emerge. These differences may, in turn, be related to variation in terms of institutional arrangements, political cultures and media systems, or journalistic styles (see also the concept of national discursive cultures propagated by Hepp and Wessler 2009 and used in Biegoń et al. 2010).

Switzerland

The Swiss graph (Figure 3) indicates, first, that the public discourse is remarkably concentrated in terms of participating speaker types – more precisely, speaker types whose legitimacy assessments are *cited*, or to whom such evaluations are *attributed*, in the two Swiss newspapers. The discourse is dominated by journalists, especially NZZ journalists, Swiss academic experts and politicians representing the Swiss government or government parties – including our separate categories of individual ministers (*Bundesräte*) and the Federal President (*Bundespräsident*). This seems in line with plausible expectations related to a consensus democracy with a broad government coalition and a collective executive (the opposition is marginal, the government is quite present in the discourse, but the Federal President as *primus inter pares* does not dominate it). Other speaker types associated with civil society – economic actors (business) and the Swiss people as a collective category (arguably an even more important reference point in Switzerland's [semi-]direct democracy than in the three other cases) – play a less central role. Finally, German academic experts, foreign journalists, and representatives of the EU also have contributed to the discourse, albeit marginally (so the Swiss legitimation discourse in German is characterized by a modicum of transnationalization, mostly driven by German speakers and EU representatives, as one might have expected).

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[3] Note that this measure produces different networks depending on the reduction sequence. To retain the maximal number of nodes, we first removed all vertices with a degree < 5, then all lines with a value < 2, and finally removed isolates produced in the second step.

Figure 3: Legitimation discourse in Switzerland 1998-2007, (5,2)-core (N = 497 / 603)
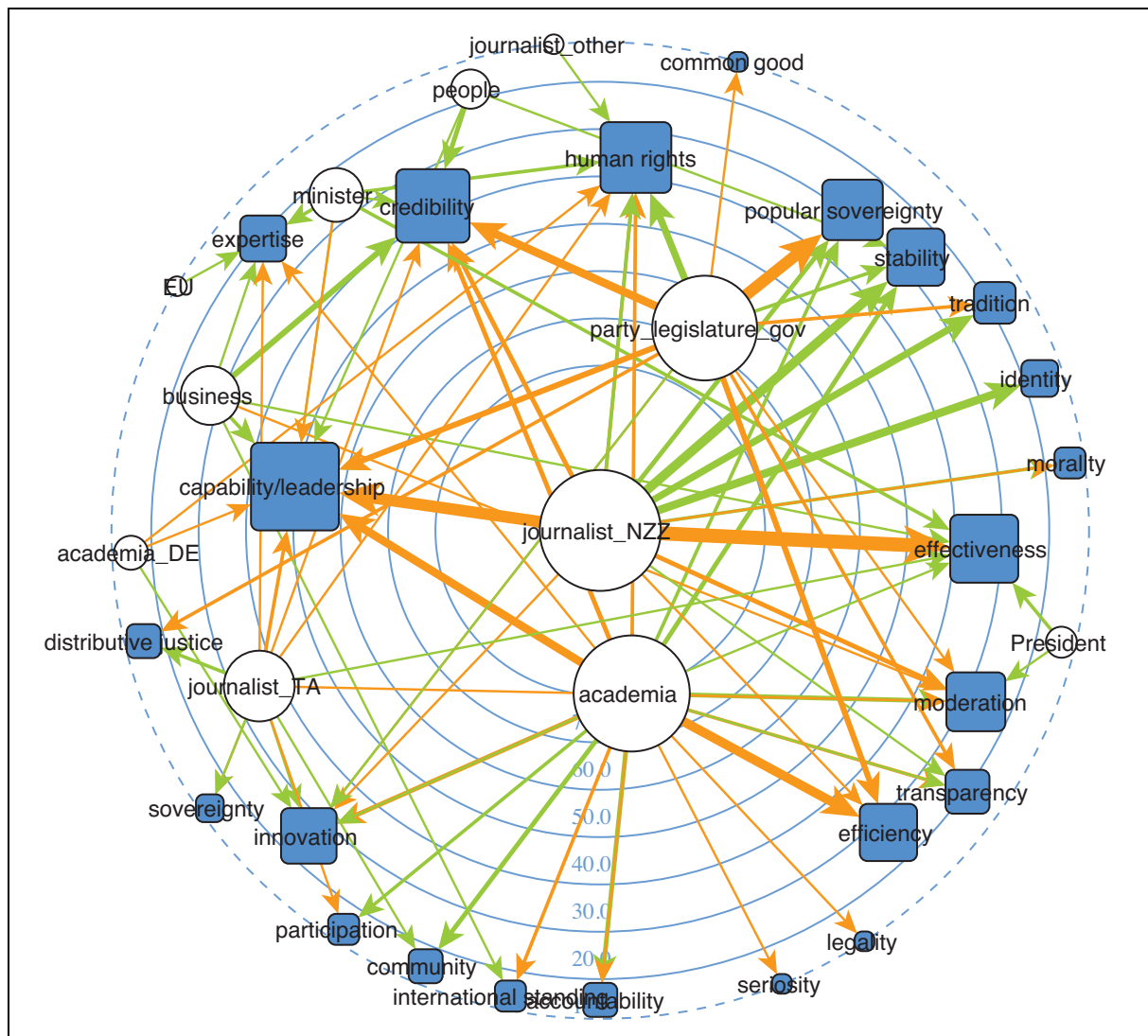
The discourse is much less concentrated with regard to the legitimation criteria used by the different speaker types. 23 criteria – and hence most of the 28 specific criteria distinguished by our coding scheme (in addition to unspecific evaluations) – were used with at least some frequency (at least five statements in the 1998-2007 period, as explained above). While our threshold for individual criteria is still rather low – and hence some of them remain quite marginal in the discourse – the normative benchmarks shown here represent each of our four broader groups of criteria, namely, democratic and non-democratic input and output standards. In the democratic input category, the standards of credibility and popular sovereignty stand out, but the criteria of transparency, participation, accountability, the existence of a genuine political community (a presumptive prerequisite of satisfactory and legitimate democratic governance), and legality play a certain role as well. Overall, then, the democratic input standards are clearly important, as one should expect in a political system whose (direct) democratic elements are as prominent as in Switzerland. In the democratic output category, the standards of effective human and civil rights protection and of common

good orientation stands out. But a plethora of non-democratic criteria is also frequently used. In the non-democratic input category, we find the criteria of capable (charismatic, proactive, etc.) leadership and moderation, expertise, and traditional processes. Finally, in the non-democratic output category, effectiveness and efficiency combined are most prominent, followed by the political system's contribution to stability and a common identity, distributive justice, morality, and national sovereignty. This broad range of criteria is associated with a genuine and sustained debate on the merits of the Swiss political system with direct and consensus democracy and federalism as its key aspects – a debate that usually contrasts positive evaluations in light of democratic input and output criteria with negative ones drawing on non-democratic output criteria such as effectiveness and efficiency.

In fact, visual inspection of the graph suggests a fairly balanced distribution both of primarily legitimating and mainly delegitimating speaker types, and of legitimation criteria with a positive or negative thrust (overall, roughly 54 per cent of all statements are positive). For instance, the delegitimating evaluations of both NZZ journalists and academia focus on input and output versions of a narrative about the political system's alleged immobility, status quo orientation, etc.: The regime or its representatives are qualified as lacking in leadership (input), and the regime's output therefore as ineffective or inefficient. Conversely, many of the strongest legitimation resources of dominant speaker types are in the democratic category (though not all: the moderation of decision-making processes and the regime's contribution to stability are also important, as are its traditional processes and contribution to a joint identity).
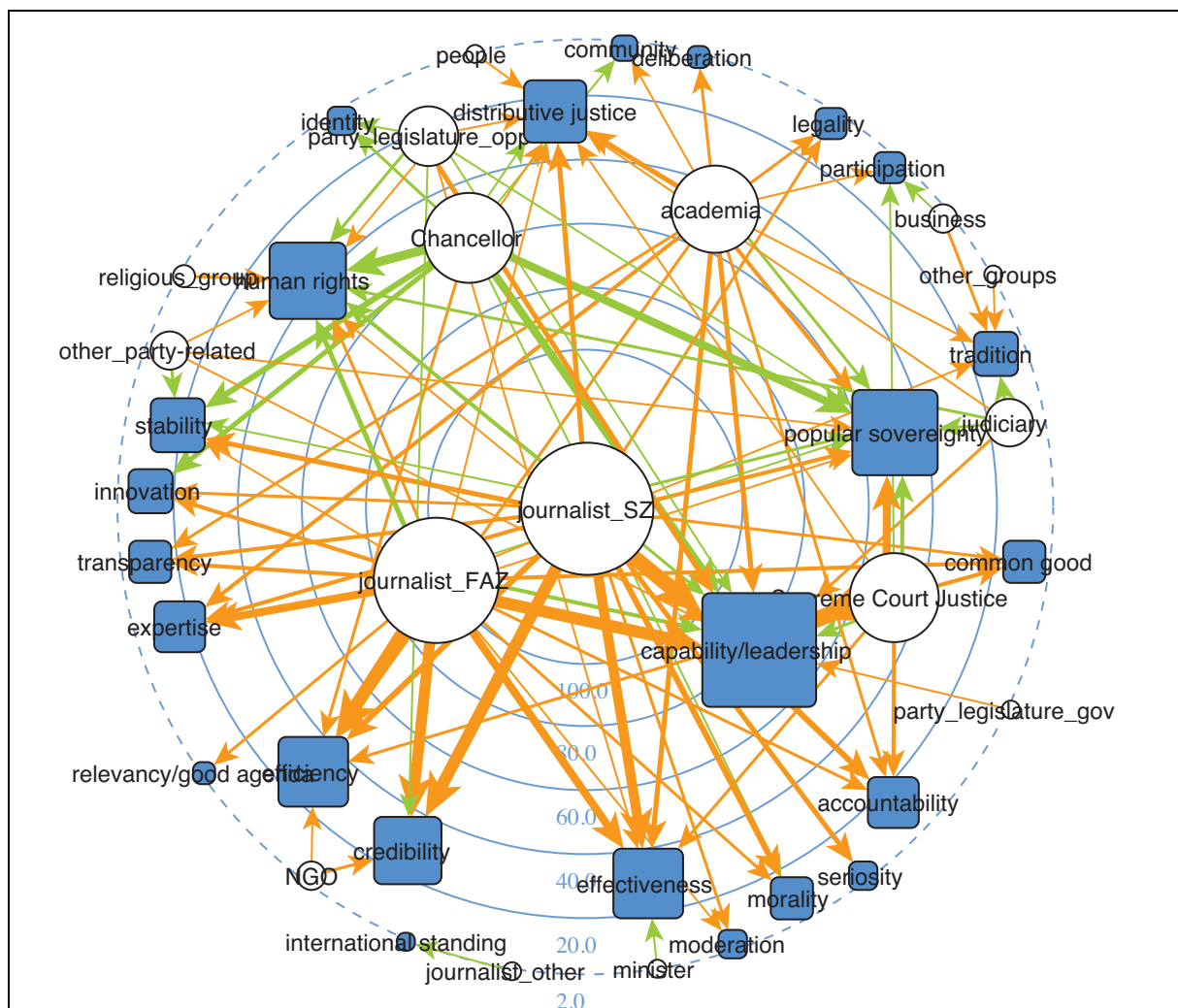
Germany

In the German legitimation discourse (Figure 4), journalists' own legitimacy assessments (both FAZ and SZ) are dominant (in addition to a few statements contributed by foreign journalists). As in Switzerland, politicians are prominent, but as one might expect in a parliamentary democracy with a more centralized and personalized executive, the Chancellor himself or herself (together with his or her cabinet ministers) is the source of most legitimation statements on the government side, while the opposition is represented by a greater range of individual speakers. In contrast with Switzerland, however, and arguably reflecting a major institutional difference between the two political systems, the judiciary and, especially, Supreme Court Justices are relatively important participants in the legitimation discourse, too. As for civil society, academic experts and public intellectuals are conspicuous, while there is only token representation for the German people, NGOs, religious, and other groups. Foreign speakers are virtually absent from the legitimation discourse.

Turning to legitimation criteria, even more individual standards (24) than in the Swiss discourse cross our threshold. In the democratic input category, all standards provided for by our coding scheme are present (popular sovereignty, credibility, accountability, transparency, legality, participation, community, deliberation). However, this is not the most widely or prominently used group of criteria. In the democratic output category, the standards of human

and civil rights protection and of common good orientation, again, stand out. In the non-democratic input category, we encounter one of the most prominent criteria – capable leadership – together with a number of more peripheral ones (expertise and traditional processes, moderation, and seriousness). Finally, in the non-democratic output category, effectiveness and efficiency, together with distributive justice, stand out, followed by criteria such as the German political system's contribution to stability, morality and identity, and its innovative capacity. The contours of the debate on the German system of cooperative federalism and (de facto) grand-coalition government are quite similar to the Swiss discourse – with much debate notably on the effectiveness and efficiency of the system.

Figure 4: Legitimation discourse in Germany 1998-2007, (5,2)-core (N = 651 / 752)

Unlike Switzerland, however, Germany is faced with a much greater number of evaluation standards with a clearly negative thrust emanating from major speaker types (only 36 per cent of all statements are legitimating). An alleged lack of leadership and effectiveness is, again, a prominent narrative, but much criticism is also directed at democratic (input) aspects of the German regime. And, moreover, positive evaluations are usually made by representatives of the political system itself, an important point to which we return below.

Britain

As the graph (Figure 5) indicates, the British legitimation discourse is to a large extent a genuine *media* discourse in the sense that journalists themselves, and especially the more progressive *Guardian,* are the main instigators and producers of legitimacy debates and assessments. Other speaker types – including the government and political actors at large – are almost relegated to the sidelines of the discourse. Remarkably, neither politicians on the government and opposition side as a whole nor even the Prime Minister and his cabinet are very prominent. As for civil society, academic experts are relatively vocal, as in Switzerland and Germany, but the role of NGOs, (individual) ordinary citizens and the people, British and other speakers associated with the cultural sphere, and other groups is more peripheral (and so the transnationalization of the British discourse is almost as low as for Germany).

24 legitimation criteria are, again, used with some frequency – and hence there is considerable overlap with the standards used in Switzerland and Germany. The democratic input category, led by popular sovereignty and credibility, is rather prominent (the criteria of accountability, participation, transparency, legality, and deliberation are also present). The democratic output standard of human and civil rights protection is, again, among the more frequent ones (while the standards of common good orientation and, especially, empowerment are more marginal). In the non-democratic input category, capable leadership ranks first, with a more peripheral role for criteria such as traditional processes, seriousness, expertise, and moderation. Finally, in the non-democratic output category, we find, once again, effectiveness and efficiency, distributive justice, the British political system's relevant policy agenda and innovative capacity, as well as its contribution to morality, stability, and a national identity. Overall, however, this category is less prominent than in Switzerland and Germany. The British legitimation discourse, in other words, is very much a discourse about the democratic quality of the Westminster system.

And it looks bleak: Few major speakers, especially in the media and civil society, have much good to say about it (only 24 per cent of all statements). In the context of constitutional reform debates and actual reforms undertaken by the Blair government, the *Guardian* (less so the more conservative *Times*) was visibly at the center of a delegitimation campaign focusing on the democratic input quality of the British system – yet not exclusively: not even criteria such as human rights protection (elsewhere a strong legitimation resource) or non-democratic output criteria such as effectiveness (presumably a key advantage of Westminster-style government) shield the British regime against the wrath of its critics.

Figure 5: Legitimation discourse in Great Britain 1998-2007, (5,2)-core (N = 1032 / 1133)
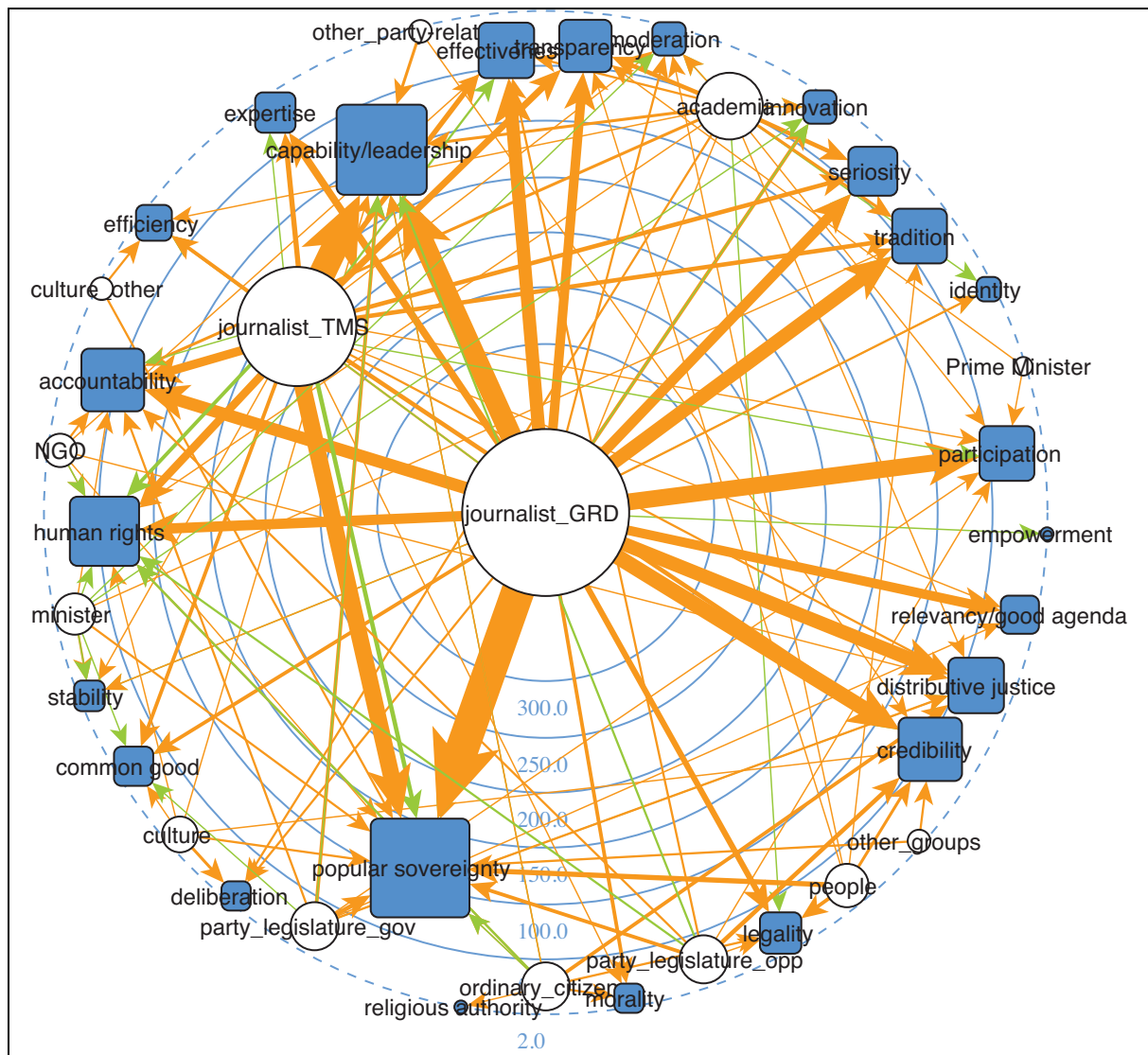

United States

Visualized in Figure 6, the American legitimation discourse stands out in that the key figure of that political system – the President – rather than journalists themselves is front and center. This finding seems to indicate a peculiarity of the US journalistic style – many of the statements are direct quotations made by journalists or taken from verbatim reprints of the Presidential state of the union addresses and other speeches of the President and Congress(wo)men. The finding is, moreover, very much in line with the broad literature describing the extent to which the Presidency has become the core institution of the US system of government, not least due to the President's communicative, rhetorical, or persuasive function, his role as the leading motivational speaker of Americans, as it were (Tulis 1988). As the graph makes abundantly clear, the President is also overwhelmingly, and unsurprisingly, a source of *good* news related to the legitimacy of the American political order and its institutions. Apart from the executive as a whole, individual secretaries and

administrative speakers, the other major political speaker type are opposition (i.e., non-Presidential) party members and legislators, also a finding that seems in line with expectations regarding the workings of US institutional arrangements and processes. Journalists play a somewhat more limited role in the American discourse (although they obviously determine which of the other speaker types and their assessments get more or less "voice" or "airtime" in the two papers). Finally, speaker types associated with civil society are, again, relatively marginal – academic experts are quite prominent, but ordinary citizens and the people at large, religious and cultural groups less so (and while some of the non-domestic speaker types cross our threshold, indicating the extent to which the American superpower is evaluated by foreign speakers, they remain marginal as well).

Figure 6: Legitimation discourse in the USA 1998-2007, (5,2)-core (N = 1165 / 1233)
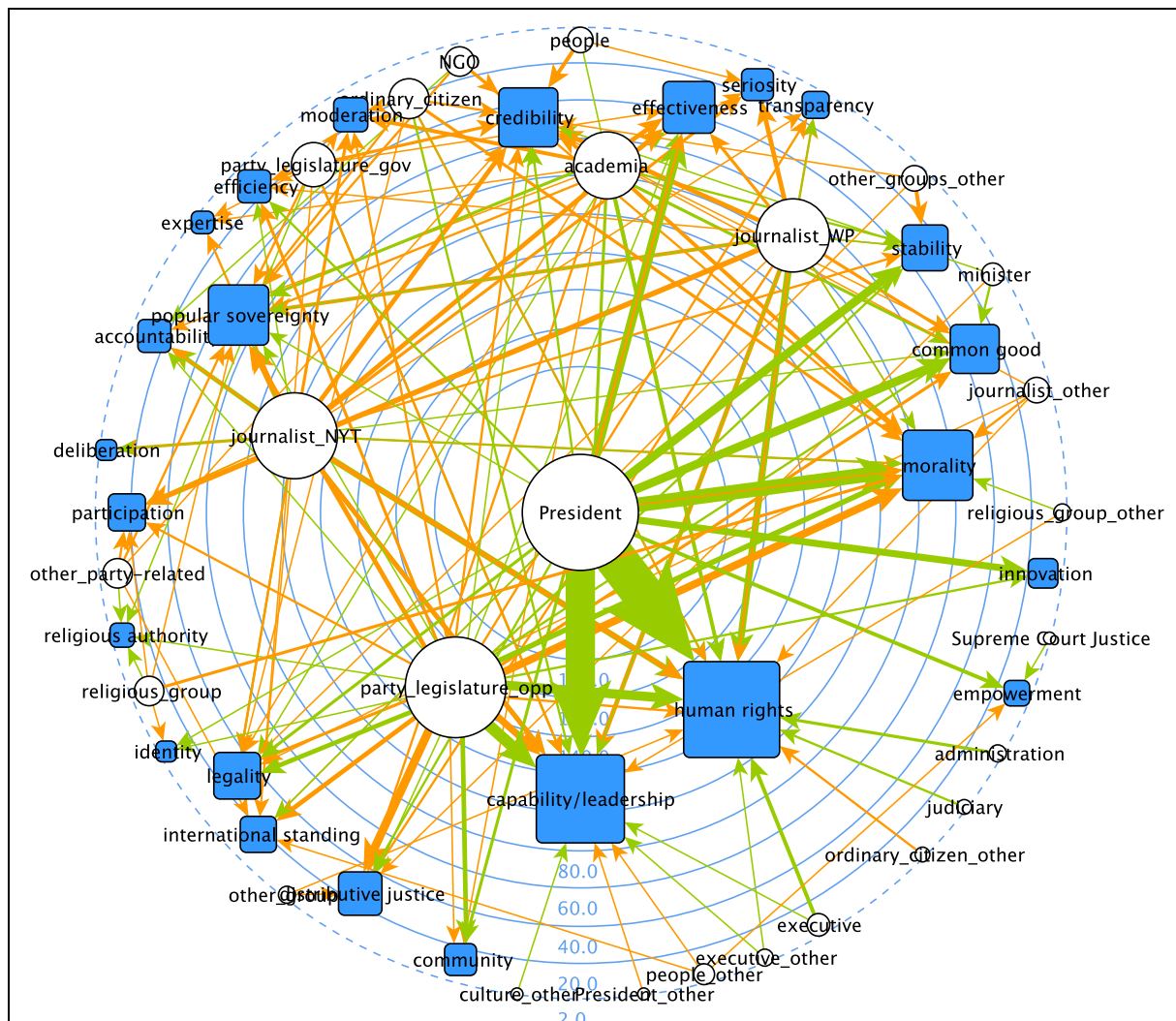
24 different legitimation criteria are above our threshold in the US case. Almost all democratic input criteria play a role, especially credibility and popular sovereignty (followed by legality, participation, accountability, community, deliberation, and transparency). The democratic output criterion of human and civil rights protection is especially prominent, but

common good orientation and empowerment also cross our threshold. In the non-democratic input category, capable leadership stands out (followed by moderation, expertise seriousness, and religious authority). Finally, effectiveness and efficiency, the political system's contribution to morality and stability, its international standing, innovative capacity and contribution to identity play a role in the non-democratic output category. A reflection of US exceptionalism may, then, for instance be seen in the relative prominence of religious authority and morality as legitimation criteria, but otherwise the range and distribution of evaluation standards is not too different from the other three public spheres.

The American discourse has an equally positive thrust as the Swiss discourse (54 per cent legitimating statements). However, visual inspection suggests that a fairly small number of speaker types – notably the President – and criteria (such as human rights protection, often rather formulaic references to the "freedom" secured by the US system) account for much of this. The numbers of speaker types and legitimation criteria with a more balanced or even critical thrust is actually quite large.

Over the whole ten-year period, then, legitimating statements outweigh delegitimating statements in Switzerland and in the US, while delegitimating statements prevail in Germany and Britain. In all four countries, the democratic output criterion *human rights* is one of the most widely used legitimation criteria. Only in Britain, critical evaluations coming from journalists, academics, and the cultural sector dominate. This is largely due to Britain's role in George W. Bush's Iraq War, the Abu Ghraib scandal, and related issues. In the other three countries, *human rights* is one of the key criteria for affirmations of the political order, used by government actors, party official, and judges, but also by journalists and ordinary people. In contrast, *credibility* – a democratic input criterion –, is predominantly used to delegitimate the political order and its institutions in all countries. This is most pronounced in Germany and Britain, where the concept is used in roughly 80 per cent of the statements in a delegitimating fashion, and less pronounced in Switzerland, which is the only country where non-governmental actors (business actors and the people) use it in a supportive way.

Idiosyncrasies of the national political systems influence the use of legitimation criteria. This is most conspicuous in the strongly differing use of the criterion *capability/leadership* in the US and the other three countries. In the latter, journalists predominantly use this concept to criticize the government or elements of the political order. While this use is not completely absent in the US, the criterion represents the second strongest legitimating argument (behind human rights) used by the President and the non-Presidential party. In a similar way, *stability* is the core legitimation pattern in Switzerland and is used across the whole actor spectrum by journalists, office holders, party officials, academics, and others. In only one of 28 cases, it is drawn on to delegitimate the political order. In the other three countries, the concept is less central and used mainly by government and party actors (and academics in the US), whereas journalists and other actors often employ it critically in these countries.

The role of newspapers

Ever since researchers have started to use newspaper data, the reliability and the bias of the newspaper reports has been the subject of repeated academic debate (Franzosi 1987). The standard assumption is that liberal or left-wing newspapers give more room to critical evaluations of the political order than conservative newspapers, which might in turn be more critical about social-democratic or left-wing governments. According to the political position of the eight examined newspapers, one would therefore expect significant differences in terms of their evaluations of the respective political order and its representatives, and possibly also in terms of the legitimating or delegitimating concepts used.

In order to probe this issue, we computed four sub-networks consisting only of the two newspapers per country and statements made by their own journalists, together with the legitimation criteria used by them (Figure 7). At the 2-slice level, the overall pattern emerging from a glance at these networks is, for each national case, the remarkable similarity between the two papers in terms of concepts and evaluations. The only exception is the Swiss case, where *NZZ* and *Tagesanzeiger* draw on significantly differing sets of legitimation criteria and where the two newspapers use five of the seven shared concepts with a (partially) opposing thrust.

Figure 7: 2-slices of the sub-networks of journalists and legitimation criteria 1998-2007
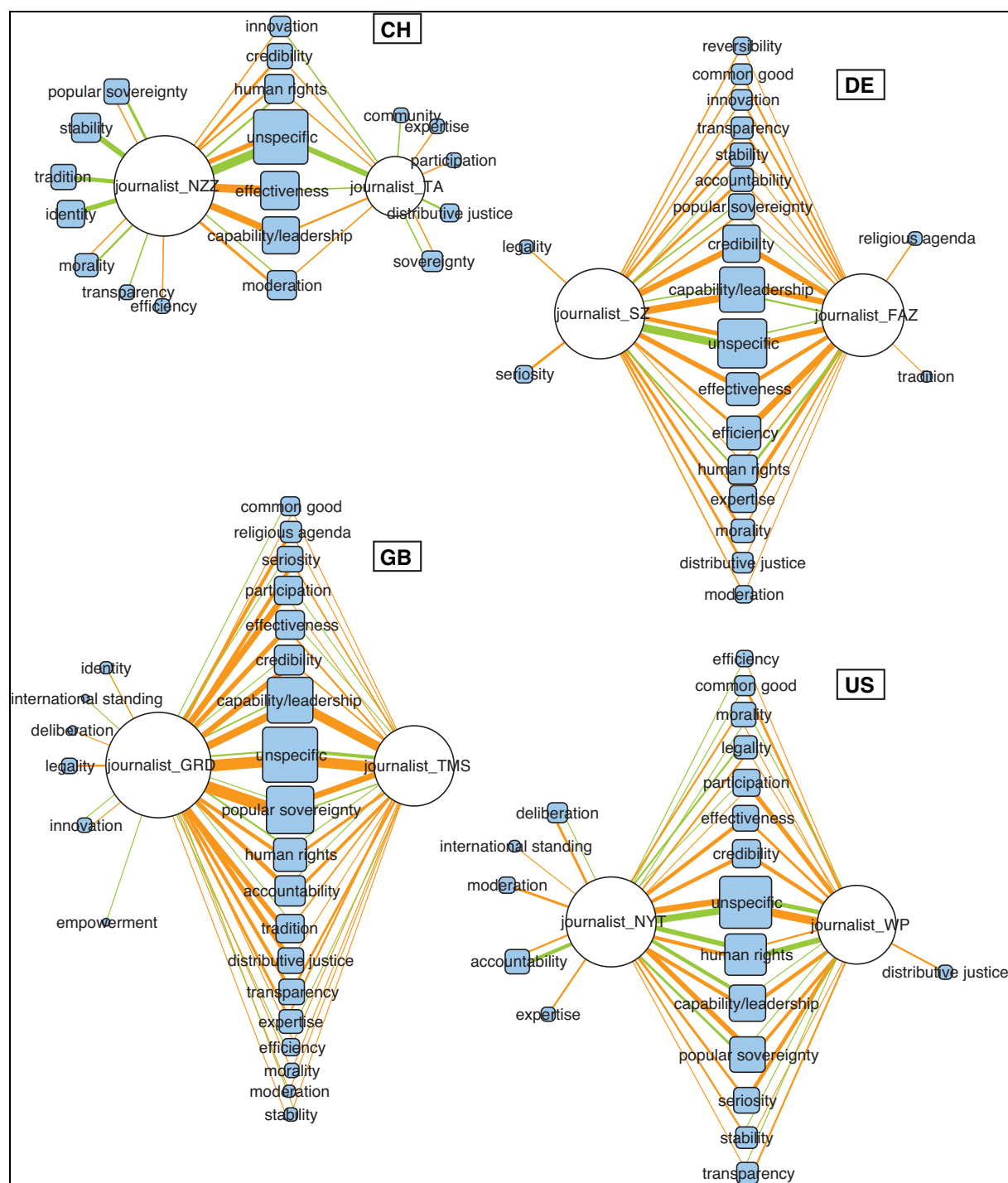
In Britain and the US, liberal newspapers seem to use a slightly greater variety of legitimation criteria – although this might also be an effect of the overall higher number of statements that were coded in these newspapers. Apart from unspecific evaluations, journalists in all four countries most often used references to human rights, capability/leadership, popular sovereignty, and credibility to (de-)legitimate the political order. Participation was an issue in all countries except Germany, innovation and tradition were only important in the European countries, whereas efficiency, expertise, and distributive justice were important only in Germany and Britain.

Discourse coalitions and temporal dynamics

Are the structures of the four national legitimation discourses based on the existence of different or similar national discourse coalitions? To identify such coalitions, we computed the network cores of the actor co-occurrence networks, in which actors are connected if they share a legitimation criterion. The stronger the link between two actors, the more legitimation criteria they share. To give an example (Figure 8): The Federal President and Chancellor of Germany are connected because they share four legitimation criteria (used in an affirmative sense), the Chancellor and Justices at the Federal Constitutional Court are connected because they share five delegitimating and five legitimating arguments.

Figure 8: Actor co-occurrence network Germany 1998–2007, 3-slice
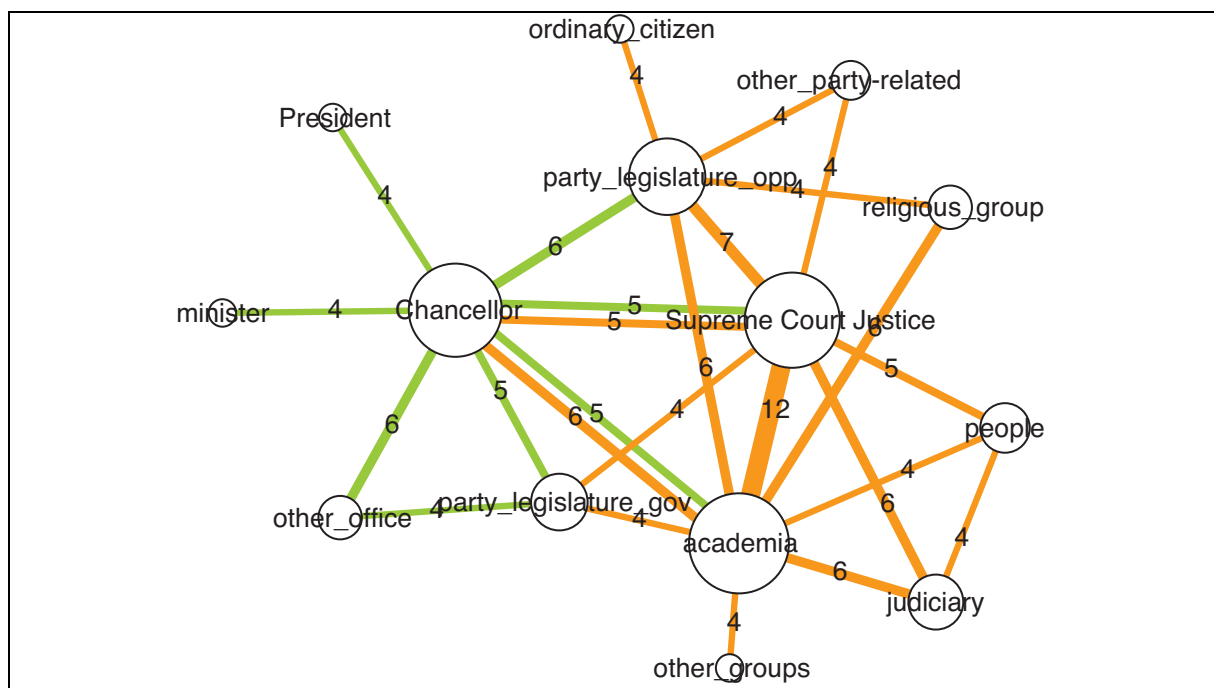

Figure 8 shows the 3-slice of the German actor co-occurrence network. Journalists have been omitted from this network because with our current dataset, we can only disaggregate them at the level of newspapers, which is too broad a category for an analysis of discourse coalitions. The network reveals two distinct discourse coalitions: The first is centered around the Chancellor; it contains office holders (Federal President, government ministers) and party representatives. It is a legitimating coalition that is held together by the shared use of criteria that are employed to legitimate specific institutions or the political order as a whole (green lines in the graph). The other coalition is a delegitimating coalition (orange lines in the graph) centered around the Federal Constitutional Court and around academics. This coalition is strongly connected through directly shared delegitimation criteria. Both coalitions are directly connected trough their central actors, who share legitimating as well as delegitimating arguments.

A very similar pattern is visible in Figure 9, where we computed the 5-slice of the US actor co-occurrence network. Again, two coalitions are visible. The first, centered around the President, is connected through the legitimating use of criteria; in the second, densely connected delegitimating coalition, the non-Presidential party and academics play the most central role, but this coalition also shares many delegitimating arguments with members of the Presidential party (Democrats and, starting in 2001, Republicans).

Figure 9: Actor co-occurrence network USA 1998–2007, 5-slice
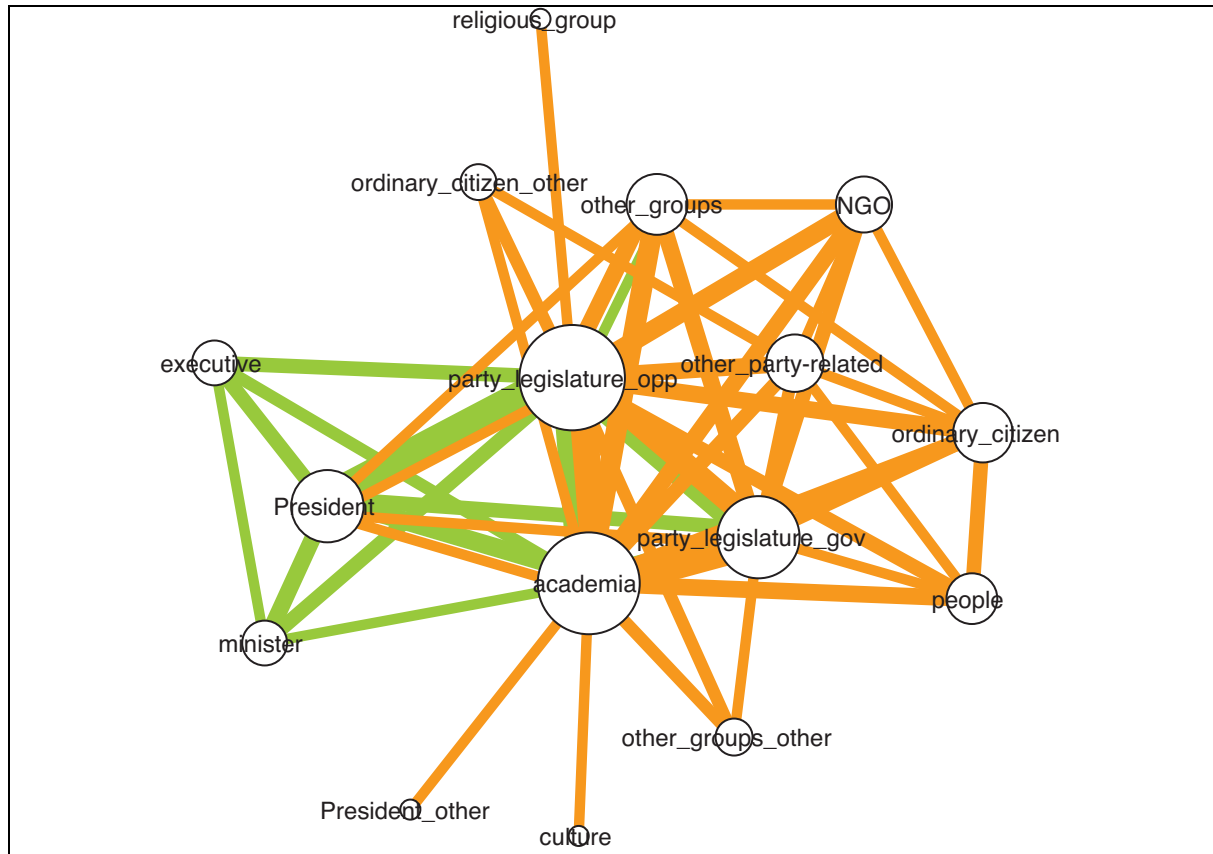

The core structures in the US and Germany show remarkable similarities. Office holders are in both cases the main actors of the legitimating coalitions. Academics and political parties connect the legitimating and delegitimating discourse coalitions, as they share legitimating arguments with government actors and delegitimating arguments with other political actors. The most notable difference between the two discourse coalition networks is the central role of the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany, which is not mirrored by a similar role of the US Supreme Court, and the presence of NGOs in the core US delegitimating discourse coalition, which conforms with the general notion of the pluralist character of the US political system.

The basic structure of this system is remarkably stable in the US, for which we have computed 2-slices of the actor co-occurrence network for the five two-year periods between 1998 and 2007. Figure 10 illustrates that government actors and office holders are the core

legitimating actors, assisted by party officials and academics, which usually act as legitimating and delegitimating actors at the same time. The core delegitimating actors are always non-governmental actors, i.e., NGOs, ordinary people, religious groups, and business representatives. Apart from this relatively constant core structure, the actor co-occurrence networks clearly show a surge of legitimating arguments during the build-up of the Second Gulf War (a debate on the war itself gave way to much "patriotic" discourse and rallying behind the flag, helped by the favorable contrast between the American system and Saddam Hussein's Iraq) and the rapid loss of legitimacy that sets in as early as one year after the US invasion in Iraq and is accelerated in the post-election year 2005 (evaluations of the US regime appear more and more strongly "contaminated" by the shrinking popularity of the incumbent administration).

Figure 10: Actor co-occurrence networks in the USA, five 2-year periods between 1998–2007, 2-slices
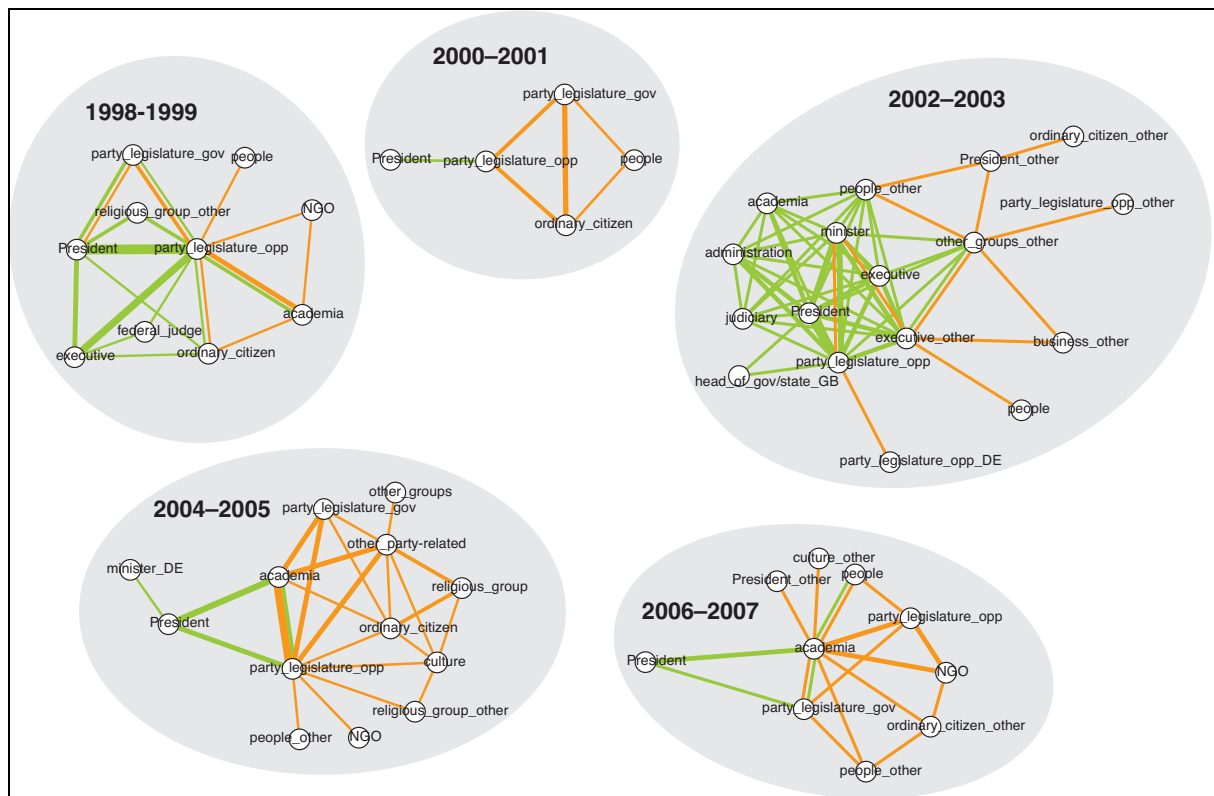
Interestingly, the relatively stable structure of the actor coalitions does not go along with similarly stable patterns of arguments. Considering the concept co-occurrence networks for the same five periods in the US, we notice strong variations in terms of the legitimation criteria used. One very remarkable insight afforded by this analysis is that in four of the five time periods – already at the 2-slice level, where concepts are connected if they are used concurrently by at least two actors – legitimating and delegitimating arguments form distinct sub-networks. This indicates that different actor groups share legitimating and delegitimating arguments and corroborates the key finding of our analysis of the actor co-occurrence

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networks, namely, that we can identify distinct groups of actors that mainly legitimate or mainly delegitimate the political order.

Figure 11: Concept co-occurrence networks in the USA, five 2-year periods between 1998–2007, 2-slices
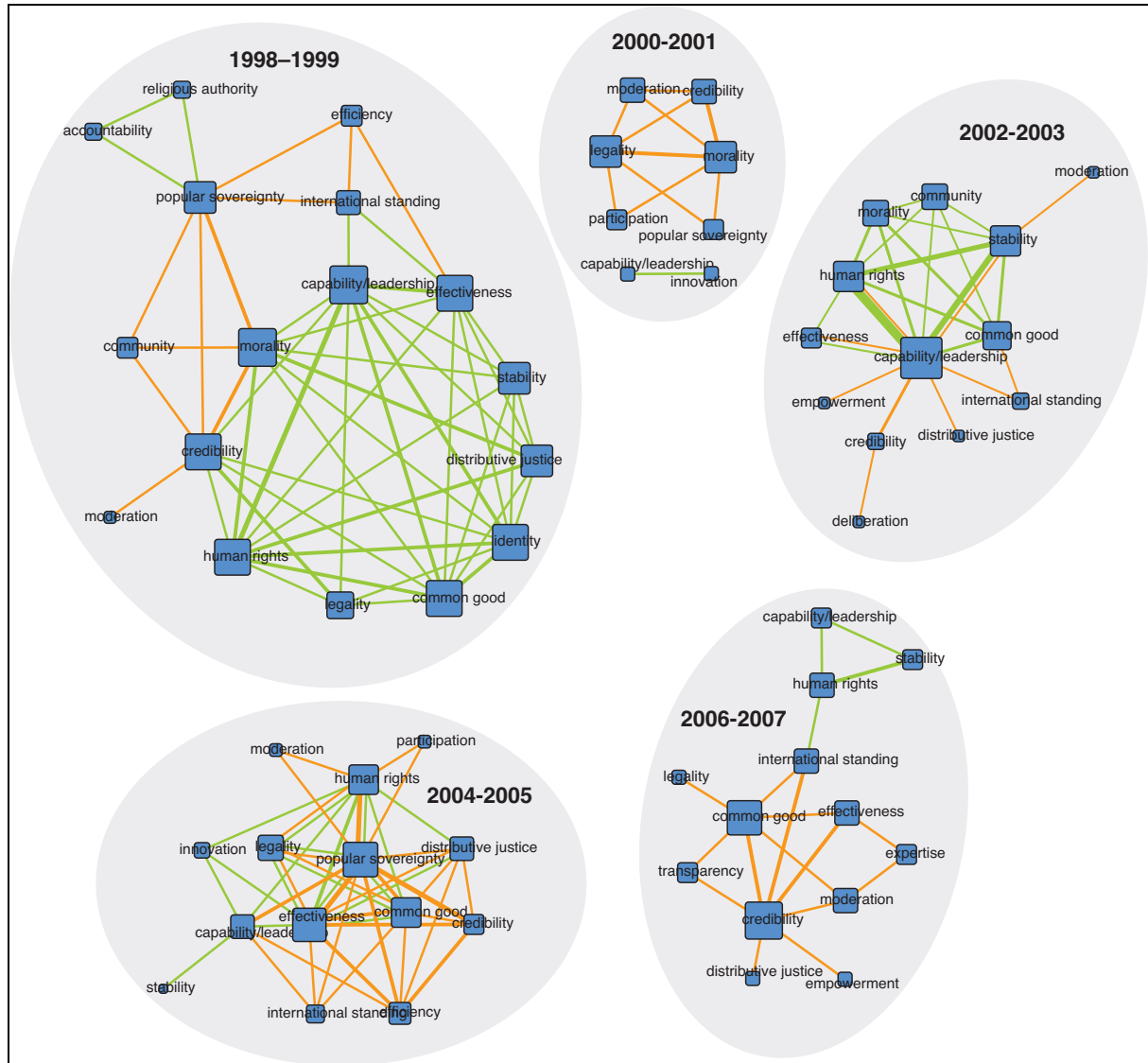
The notable exception is the period between 2004 and 2005, in which legitimating and delegitimating arguments strongly overlap. In this period, we witness a political discourse in which delegitimating and legitimating actors genuinely engage with the other side and fight for discursive dominance over the same concepts. In the period between 2006 and 2007, only the legitimation pattern *international standing* is used both to legitimate and to delegitimate the political order, and in 2000–2001 the two argumentative worlds do not overlap at all.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate, in an exploratory fashion, the value added of discourse network analysis for research on legitimacy-related public communication. The

text corpus and data set of a project comparing legitimation discourses in four Western democracies was tentatively re-analyzed for that purpose. We provided examples of the various types of networks that may be gleaned from our data, and of the kinds of structural features that may be revealed by the visual representations of these networks. The key advantage of this method is undoubtedly that it enables us to depict and examine three core elements of the legitimation "grammar" in a truly relational fashion – speakers and their arguments, together with the affirmative or critical use made of these arguments. While a more traditional representation of our data (in tables, bar charts, etc.) has its limits in that respect and also tends to unduly highlight often rather small and arguably irrelevant differences (between national public spheres, speaker types, etc.), the network analytical graphs highlight major structural similarities or features.

Substantively, we identified some differences among the four public spheres in terms of legitimacy levels (the shares of positive evaluations), and the greater or lesser prominence of various speaker types and legitimation criteria. These arguably reflect institutional arrangements, political cultures, and journalistic styles. For instance, the Federal President as the (nominal) top executive of Switzerland is a rather marginal speaker, while the German Chancellor and the US President are much more prominent. In Switzerland and Germany, the link between key legitimation criteria (such as effectiveness), their positive or negative use, and prominent media and academic debates in recent years is quite obvious. Likewise, in Britain and the US, political events and developments such as the Iraq War and its fall-out have a rather conspicuous impact on the discourse. Interestingly (and in contrast with the notion of an Anglo-Saxon media system), the British and US discourses deal rather differently with a (partially) shared political environment and its legitimacy challenges. Part of the explanation for the much higher legitimacy levels of the US, for instance, has simply to do with the fact that American papers give considerably more "voice" to political elites – and these, unsurprisingly, tend to be pillars of the legitimating discourse coalition in each of our cases, albeit not to the extent as is the case for the American President.

Apart from a more systematic and detailed examination and interpretation of the various network types presented here for all four countries, our next steps will include a more sustained analysis of temporal dynamics, both with the data presented here and a similar data set constructed for the year 2004 (Hurrelmann et al. 2009). The latter will enable us to move from a (small) series of snap-shots to a genuine analysis of fluctuations (and underlying actor strategies) on a day-by-day basis. Finally, the fourth variable of our legitimation "grammar" – legitimation *objects* – must be considered, because prior (conventional) analysis indicates that different types or hierarchical levels of these objects are more or less robust, and hence may serve as legitimation "anchors" of entire regimes or become "scapegoats" in critical discourses. Most importantly, regimes or political communities as a whole tend to have this "anchor" function, while specific institutions and actor groups such as the political class writ

large are more vulnerable, and hence at the same time have a strong incentive to participate in legitimation discourses in defense of their respective political order.

Appendix

Table 4: Speaker types

Domestic speakers	**Non-domestic speakers from CH, DE, GB, or US**	**Non-domestic speakers from all other national public spheres combined**
Media		
Newspaper 1 (NZZ, FAZ, TMS, WP)	Swiss (CH), German (DE), British (GB), or US journalists cited in the respective national discourse	All "rest-of-world" journalists cited ("other")
Newspaper 2 (TA, SZ, GRD, NYT)		
Political actors		
Executive (as a whole)	(as above, *mutatis mutandis*)	(as above, *mutatis mutandis*)
Head of state	(…)	(…)
Head of government	(…)	(…)
Individual minister	(…)	(…)
Administration	(…)	(…)
Military	(…)	(…)
Legislature (as a whole)	(…)	(…)
Legislators and party members (government side)	(…)	(…)
Legislators and party members (opposition side)	(…)	(…)
Other party-related speakers (sub-national)	(…)	(…)
Judiciary (as a whole)	(…)	(…)
Federal/national-level judge	(…)	(…)
Supreme Court Justice (or equivalent)	(…)	(…)
Other (national) office	(…)	(…)
International regimes		
EU	---	---
UN	---	---
Other international regimes	---	---
Civil society		
Individual "ordinary citizen"	(…)	(…)
… "the people"	(…)	(…)
Demonstrators/protesters	(…)	(…)
Interest group, NGO	(…)	(…)
Business	(…)	(…)
Trade union	(…)	(…)
Academia	(…)	(…)
Cultural sphere	(…)	(…)
Religious group	(…)	(…)
Other groups	(…)	(…)

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