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(De-)Legitimating Discourse Networks: Smoke without Fire?

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The previous chapters have shown that the 2008 financial crisis has indeed left its imprint on the public spheres of Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Chapter 3 indicates that the debate on the legitimacy of the capitalist market economy has become more intense and the overall evaluation of the economic regime more negative in all four countries. But why has the declining legitimation of the regime not been the beginning of a process of institutional change leading to another Great Transformation (Blyth 2002)? Why has the more negative evaluation of the capitalist market economy in the wake of the crisis remained an ephemeral phenomenon that has left the institutions of the regime largely unchanged? Chapter 4 on responsibility attributions, Chapter 5 on the metaphors of delegitimating discourse and Chapter 6 on legitimating narratives

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before and after the financial crisis have already offered some explanations. Responsibility for the crisis is attributed mainly to individual economic actors (especially bankers) and national political actors, not to the economic regime as a whole. The legitimation narratives of the capitalist market economy have remained largely intact and have only been slightly adapted to allow for a stronger role of the state. And the metaphors employed in delegitimating discourse show no signs of emerging new ideas and interpretations that challenge the dominant ideational foundations of the economic regime.

Based on an analysis of discursive interactions in the public sphere, this chapter provides further explanation for the surprising fact that critics of capitalism were not able to seize the opportunity the crisis offered – especially considering the magnitude of the economic downturn, which was comparable to the Great Recession of the 1930s (Drezner 2014) and from which many European countries, among them the United Kingdom (Banks et al. 2014), are still struggling to recover. Why were radical and moderate critics of capitalism not able to use the post-2008 legitimation crisis to mobilize support for a more comprehensive institutional transformation of the capitalist regime? Why did they, to paraphrase Philip Mirowski (2013), let this crisis go to waste?

In order to answer these questions, I will systematically analyse the changing topography of legitimating and delegitimating discourse over time, looking at the *discursive connections* between individual speakers and the *relations* between actors and statements. This relational perspective considers individual actors to be always embedded in a web of relationships and interactions with other actors and is interested in the networks of interaction – here: *discursive* networks – among them (Jansen 2006; Hennig et al. 2012).

The network perspective builds on the same data as the statistical analysis in Chapter 3 and draws on the speaker and legitimation criteria variables to examine why a delegitimating actor coalition using a developed anticapitalist master frame has not emerged in the wake of the financial crisis. It examines first whether a coherent repertoire of arguments questioning the legitimacy of the economic regime has developed and then looks at the evolution of discourse coalitions after the crisis.

Discourse Networks

The following analysis of discursive interaction in the public sphere draws on the growing literature on policy and discourse networks (Sabatier and Weible 2007; Rhodes 2008; Schneider et al. 2009; McClurg and Young 2011; Leifeld 2013), especially on Maarten Hajer's (1993, 1995, 2002) concept of discourse coalitions. Hajer argues that political problems do not simply exist but are constructed as problems in a discursive process. The act of defining a problem takes place in a structured political space in which different actors fight for discursive hegemony. They do not act in isolation but form discourse coalitions, characterized by their joint use of frames, argumentative figures and practices (Hajer 1993: 46). Their shared ideas function as coalition-building resources (Blyth 2002: 39).

Discourse coalitions can, in principle, be examined in every public sphere. However, quality newspapers are an especially prominent arena of public discourse in which claims and opinions are usually substantiated with arguments. In this arena, various actors position themselves discursively (or are positioned by journalists) and interact with or respond to other actors' discursive interventions. This discursive interaction generates complex connections between actors who rely on the same pool of criteria to criticize or to legitimate the economic regime. Analysing the complexity of this discursive web requires a method that is able to deal with the relational nature of the discursive interaction. If there is only a small number of statements and actors, this can be done with a classical qualitative text-analytical approach. But for a large number of statements contributed by many actors over a long period of time, discourse network analysis offers a better tool to capture the changing patterns of discursive interaction.

I therefore conceptualize discourse on the legitimacy of the capitalist market economy in the four national publics as discourse *networks* (Leifeld and Haunss 2012; Leifeld 2013). The nodes of discourse networks are the actors involved and the arguments (legitimation criteria) they use. The resulting network contains two separate classes of nodes: actors and legitimation criteria (Fig. 7.1). Discourse networks thus

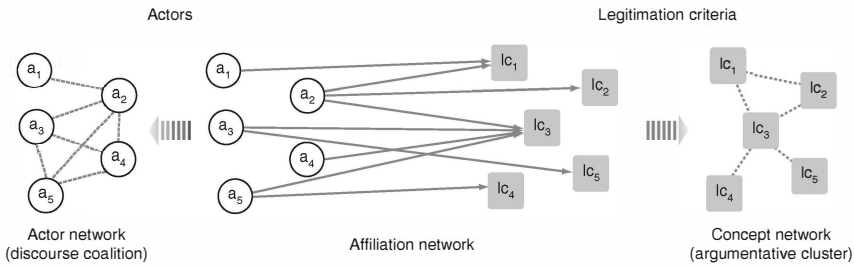

Fig. 7.1 Model of a discourse network

belong to the class of affiliation or bipartite networks (Borgatti and Everett 1997) where links (edges) can only exist between nodes of different classes. In discourse networks, an edge between two nodes in the network is formed when an actor uses a specific legitimation criterion in her evaluative statement.

Conceptualizing legitimation discourse as affiliation networks makes it possible to identify the discursive relationships between actors that emerge when different actors base their arguments on the same legitimation criteria. These indirect connections between actors should be interpreted as discourse coalitions, as conceptualized by Hajer. They are, in the conceptual frame of network analysis, tightly connected clusters of actors, linked to each other by several edges.

From a network analytical perspective, discourse coalitions are one of two possible co-occurrence networks, resulting from a projection of the original affiliation network onto one of the sides.[1] Projecting the affiliation network onto the side of actors produces links between actors whenever they share one or more legitimation criteria. An edge in the actor network thus refers to an overlap of arguments employed by the two actors it connects. If actors share more than one legitimation criterion, this is reflected in the weight of the edge, which is visualized in the network graphs as the thickness of an edge. Projecting the affiliation network onto the side of legitimation criteria creates concept networks in which edges are created between criteria whenever they are used by the same actor. In this case, a higher edge weight reflects the simultaneous use of two (or more) legitimation criteria by several actors.

Concept networks should thus be interpreted as repertoires or clusters of arguments used by one or more actors.

Conceptualizing the debates in the public sphere as affiliation networks, and thus considering only relationships between actors and legitimation criteria, is a methodological decision resulting from the present volume's overall focus on public discourse. While there are presumably other direct relationships between some of the actors involved in media discourse (e.g. two actors may be members of the same organization, be friends, relatives or have formal relations), these other relations cannot be systematically reconstructed based on the evaluation of newspaper articles, since the source material provides only sporadic information about possible direct relationships between the actors. Only relationships between actors and legitimation criteria can be reliably mapped based on our corpus of newspaper data.

Among all the possible discourse networks, some ideal-typical network topographies can be identified, corresponding to ideal-typical discursive constellations. Figure 7.2 shows three such network topographies. In the graphs, white circles denote actors and blue squares legitimation criteria. Green arrows represent the legitimating use of a legitimation criterion and orange arrows indicate delegitimating use. The network topography on the left-hand side is a classic case of an unconnected, scattered discourse, characterized by the actors' use of

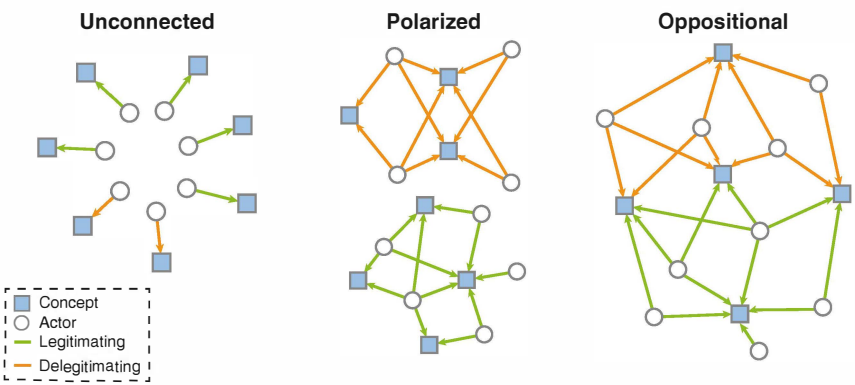

Fig. 7.2 Ideal-typical network topographies

separate legitimation criteria (concepts). As a result, there is no discursive connection between the actors; instead of a coherent discourse, only individual and scattered utterances exist which remain unconnected and do not reverberate in the public. Since the actors speak only for themselves, without referring to each other, I call this structure an *autistic* discourse constellation. If this constellation goes along with a network consisting of only a small number of actors and statements, it indicates an a-legitimacy scenario of the capitalist market economy, in which occasional and unconnected statements represent nothing more than the background noise of political discourse.

The network topography in the middle represents a polarized discourse, characterized by two clearly differentiated and separate discourse coalitions. In this constellation, connections exist only within each discourse coalition. Participating actors thus substantiate their legitimacy evaluations according to coalition-specific criteria, and as a result the two sides are effectively speaking about something different. An example of such a constellation is a delegitimating discourse coalition criticizing the capitalist economic regime as undemocratic and unjust, with a legitimating coalition praising it as efficient and promoting innovation. Whether such a *disjunction* of coalitions legitimating and delegitimating the capitalist market economy leads to a profound delegitimation of the economic regime and thus potentially to its institutional transformation depends primarily on the size and density of the two coalitions. A clear hegemony of densely connected anticapitalist positions, accompanied by an unwillingness or inability of proponents of the market economy to respond to the arguments of critics should clearly be interpreted as a constellation with transformative potential – at least when the anticapitalist coalition is 'large enough' in absolute terms.[2] If, on the other hand, both coalitions are approximately the same size, such a constellation should be interpreted as evidence for the weakness of the anticapitalists and their arguments, indicating relatively stable legitimacy of the capitalist market economy.

The network topography on the right-hand side depicts a discourse characterized by two opposing discourse coalitions with largely overlapping legitimation criteria. This constellation represents a political dispute that corresponds most closely to Habermas's ideal of a deliberative

democracy, one in which actors engage with the arguments of the opposite side. Such a constellation should be interpreted as an *integrated* political discourse about the economic regime. If there is a strong numerical imbalance between the two discourse coalitions, the network shown on the right in Fig. 7.2 may develop into a hegemonic constellation, with one side dominating the discourse and the other side playing only a marginal role. Such a constellation may destabilize the discursive legitimacy foundations of the capitalist market economy if critical evaluations dominate the discourse or even become hegemonic, and if the anti-capitalist coalition surpasses a certain threshold in terms of size and density.

Empirically observed discourse networks are usually combinations of these ideal types with additional factors affecting the substantive interpretation of the network topographies and thus also the interpretation of the transformative potential of the constellation. Network analysis enables the researcher not only to identify network topographies but also to determine the importance of an individual actor or an individual legitimation criterion within the overall discourse network. The importance of individual nodes can be measured by their centrality. In this study, Kleinberg's (1999) measure of hub centrality is used, because it focuses not only on individual nodes but also considers their respective neighbourhoods.[3] An actor has a particularly high hub centrality if the legitimation criteria used by this actor are also employed by other actors, whose criteria are again used by many other actors. Similarly, the hub centrality of a legitimation criterion depends on whether it is used by many actors who also draw on other criteria, which are in turn employed by many other actors. An actor with a high hub centrality value thus acts as a hub within the network and has relatively strong discursive authority. Legitimation criteria with high hub centrality values are core elements of a complex and coherent argumentation consisting of a range of densely connected concepts.

Discourse Networks over Time

Whereas descriptive statistical analysis of legitimacy communication provides a bird's eye view of developments over time and of differences between countries, discourse network analysis permits a closer and more

detailed look at those general dynamics. In the years 1998–2011, public communication about the legitimacy of the economic regime follows a broadly similar pattern in all four countries. Before the financial crisis, statements about the legitimacy of the economic regime tend to be only weakly connected. In some years, discourse even comes very close to the ideal type of an autistic constellation. In their evaluations of the economic regime, actors present in the media only seldom draw on the same legitimation criteria. The small size and disconnectedness of the networks thus suggest – at least in some of the years before the financial crisis – an a-legitimacy constellation of the economic regime. This is especially true for the United States and Switzerland, where public communication about the legitimacy of the capitalist market economy is very sparse over the whole period; in the United States, it disappears almost completely between 2001 and 2005.

In the wake of the financial crisis, the interconnectedness of legitimating or delegitimating statements has grown in all four countries. Nevertheless, in Switzerland and the United States in particular, public discourse on the legitimacy of the economic regime remains rather weak. In Switzerland, the public debate is clearly dominated by a small number of journalists – notably two journalists from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Gerhard Schwarz and Markus Spillmann. Between 2008 and 2011, only two politicians participate in the debate, both with an overall ambiguous evaluation of one delegitimating and one legitimating statement.

The general pattern of growing intensity and interconnectedness of legitimation discourse is most evident in the network graph showing the discourse networks in the United Kingdom (Fig. 7.3). For each year, the graph depicts all statements in which an actor evaluates the economic regime negatively or positively. White circles represent actors, blue squares legitimation criteria. Orange lines indicate delegitimating, green lines legitimating use of the particular legitimation criterion. The graphs show at a glance that the networks have grown in size and cohesion since 2007. In the United Kingdom, prior to 2007, the largest connected component and thus the largest group of discursively connected actors never comprises more than seven actors, and the connection usually consists of

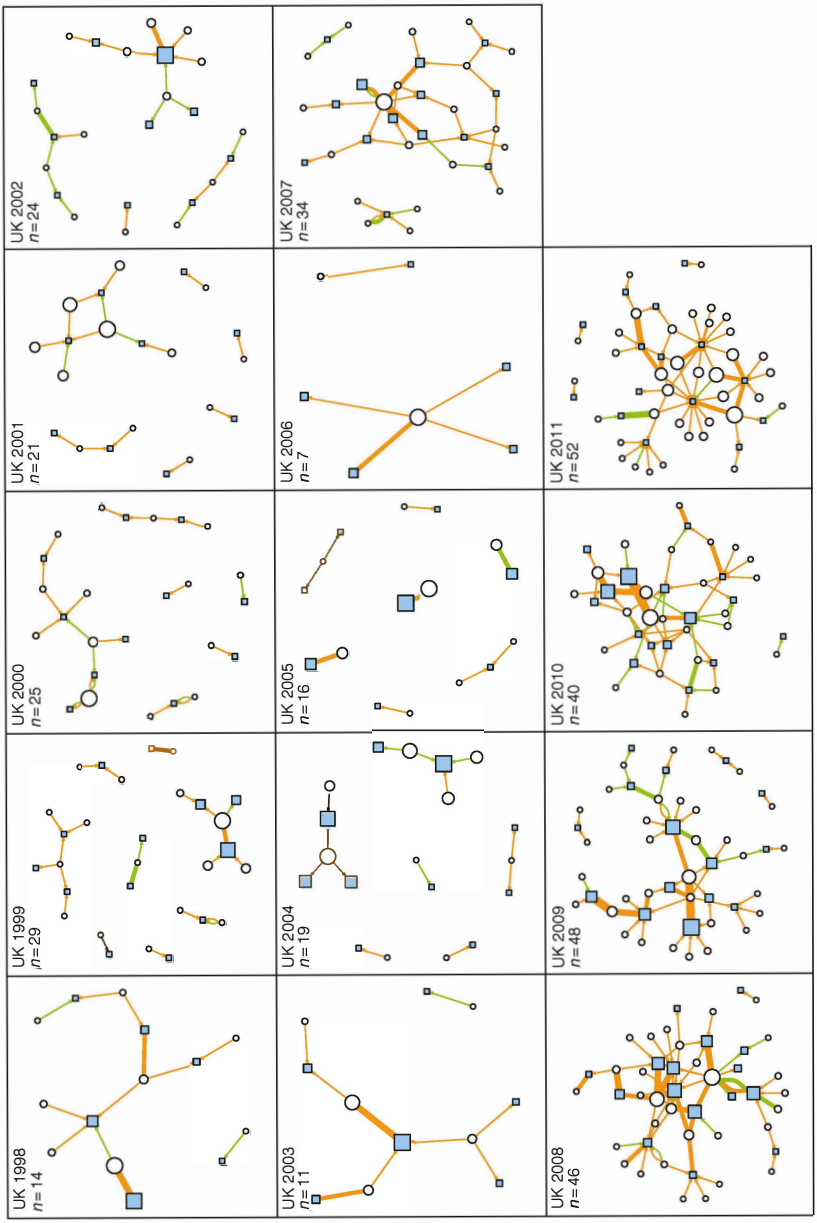

Fig. 7.3 Discourse networks in the United Kingdom, 1998–2011

exactly one shared legitimation criterion. These graphs illustrate that vivid legitimation discourse depends not only on the number of speakers but also on the number of statements each of them makes. Equally important, however, is the overall connectedness among speakers through shared arguments. For example, the size of the discourse networks for the years 1999 and 2007 increases only moderately from 29 to 34 nodes, but during the same time period the density of the network (measured as average degree centrality) increases from 1.5 to 2.2 – indicating a substantial increase of discursive links between actors.

Since 2008, the discourse networks in the United Kingdom have consisted of one contiguous main component and several isolated sub-networks, the latter consisting each of one single actor and the legitimation criteria they use. The discourse network analysis thus shows that the statistically observed increase in terms of discourse intensity during the financial crisis is accompanied by increasingly tight connections between the actors involved in the debate about the legitimacy of the economic regime and their arguments. Together, the growing intensity of the debate and the more densely connected discourse networks suggest a critical development with regard to the legitimacy of the capitalist market economy.

The discourse networks for the same period in Germany (Fig. 7.4) provide a similar picture. However, in contrast to the other countries, relatively large connected sub-networks can be detected even before 2008. This finding reflects intensive debates about the legitimacy of the economic regime triggered by and grouped around prominent politicians and their discursive interventions. In the years 1998 and 2000, these debates developed around contributions by Otto Graf Lambsdorff, a prominent member of the German Liberal Party (FDP), defending the capitalist market economy against anti-neoliberal critique (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 'Der Bürger entscheidet selbst', 4 April, 1998) and praising it as a system that promotes tolerance (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 'Standpunkte: Otto Graf Lambsdorff', 10 October, 2000). In 2005, Franz Müntefering (SPD) set off the 'Heuschreckendebatte', a political controversy in which he used the biblical metaphor of the

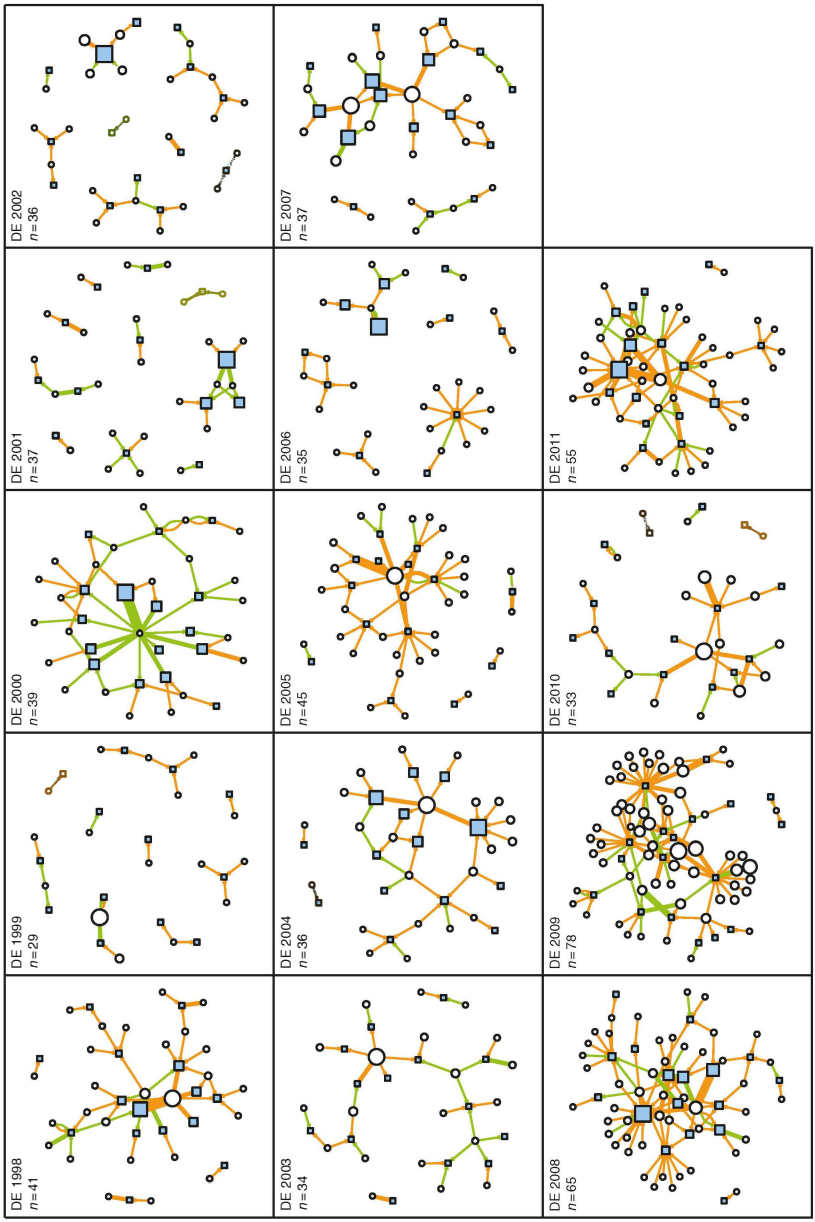

Fig. 7.4 Discourse networks in Germany, 1998–2011

'plague of locusts' to denounce the irresponsible profit maximization strategies of international investors (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 'Balsam für die linke Seele', 14 April, 2005). While these were lively debates, German discourse nevertheless changed significantly with the onset of the financial crisis. Between 1998 and 2007, the analysis reveals some years with largely unconnected discourse networks, consisting of many individual components, and some years with densely connected networks, mainly composed of one principal element and some individual unconnected sub-networks. Since the financial crisis, however, the discourse networks have always consisted of one large main component that includes all stakeholders, with the exception of a small number (one to four) of unconnected actors. Within the main component, many actors are connected through more than one shared legitimation criterion, leading to a densely connected discourse.

Overall, in two of the four countries, Germany and the United Kingdom, the financial crisis did not only lead to a higher intensity of legitimation communication but also to an intensification of the conflict as expressed in stronger discursive links between actors. In the United States and Switzerland, the salience of the issue has remained so low that discourse network analysis is not able to identify clear trends.

How should the more intense and more tightly connected discourse in Germany and the United Kingdom be interpreted? In general, both countries move from an a-legitimacy or weak-delegitimation scenario to a more integrated political discourse on the legitimacy of the capitalist market economy, in which critical evaluations outweigh support even more strongly than before 2008. Thus, at least for Germany and the United Kingdom, the first results from the discourse network analysis support the findings of the statistical analysis in Chapter 3 and suggest a scenario in which the legitimation crisis *might* have developed into an institutional transformation of the capitalist market economy. However, looking only at the topographies of the discourse networks is not enough. To understand why this transformative potential was not mobilized despite the growing density of delegitimating discourse, a closer look at the structure of arguments and at the actors is necessary.

What Is Being Said? The Structure of Arguments

Which repertoires of arguments are used in the public debate? Do we see the emergence of new repertoires that represent a shifting interpretation of the legitimacy of the economic regime, a new set of ideas with the potential to initiate institutional change? In order to answer this question, the analysis now turns to the concept networks that represent the repertoires of arguments used by actors involved in legitimacy communication.

A discursive constellation in which the legitimacy of the economic regime is fundamentally challenged would be characterized by the emergence and stabilization of an argumentative core of anticapitalist criticism built around several tightly connected legitimation criteria. In such an argumentative core, shared legitimation criteria link groups of actors. These legitimation criteria function as frame bridges between varying interpretive frames held by different actor groups (Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). Ideally, a repertoire of arguments used by a strong discourse coalition comprises only a limited number of closely linked legitimation criteria, with the criteria that are most important for the shared argumentation at the centre of the concept network. In addition, one would also expect the shared and thus connected criteria to be coherent at a substantive level, since otherwise a coherent and consistent argumentation would be hard to develop. In other words, in a transformative scenario, an anticapitalist coalition effectively produces a delegitimating master frame that is able to bridge actors' more specific frames and to fundamentally question the legitimacy of the economic regime.

The following analysis of the changing structures of argumentation is based on the 3-slices of the concept networks, that is, the networks of legitimation criteria that are shared by at least three actors in the same way. The analysis focuses here on network cores (3-slices) because they represent the relatively stable underlying structures of the networks. Focusing on the network cores also reduces the effect of missing observations resulting from our sampling strategy.[4] In the graph, the size of

the nodes corresponds to their hub centrality in the original affiliation network. Nodes are colour-coded according to the following pattern: Blue nodes represent legitimation criteria that address the functional core of the capitalist market economy and thus focus primarily on its economic performance. These criteria belong to the clusters of classical justification or criticism introduced in Chapter 2. Green nodes represent legitimation criteria that focus on aspects outside the core of classical justifications of the economic regime and address, for example, issues of (distributive) justice or moral values.

In Germany, both before and after the financial crisis, the networks show a set of connected legitimation criteria and thus a coherent repertoire of arguments (Fig. 7.5). However, the legitimation criteria are not very strongly connected, particularly in the period leading up to the financial crisis. The maximum normalized edge weight, that is, the edge weight divided by the number of years for each observation period, is 0.5 in Germany before the financial crisis. This means that the two most strongly connected concepts are on average shared by 0.5 actors per year, or more intuitively: Once every four years, two actors agree on more than one legitimation criterion. After the crisis, this value rises to 2.75, indicating that on average less than three actors have used two or more legitimation

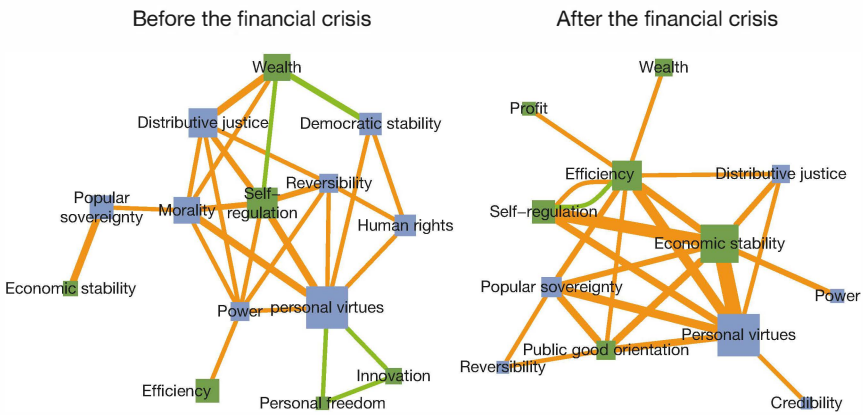

Fig. 7.5 Germany, concept networks pre-/post-financial crisis, 3-slice

criteria concurrently in one and the same year between 2008 and 2011. While we see more coherent criticism of the capitalist market economy in Germany after the financial crisis, the absolute level of discursive cohesion remains very low.

In the United Kingdom, the cluster of densely connected legitimation criteria before the financial crisis is much smaller than in Germany (Fig. 7.6). Between 1998 and 2007, only five criteria are connected by three or more actors sharing at least two of them, with the criticism of insufficient provision of public goods having the highest hub centrality value (1.0). As in Germany, with a value of 0.6 the maximum normalized edge weight is very low. On average, we have to aggregate data over more than three years before two actors agree on at least two legitimation criteria. After the financial crisis, the bundle of strongly connected legitimation criteria grows significantly in the United Kingdom, and the maximum normalized edge weight increases to 2.0. Again, this is a very low value as it means that on average in any given year no more than two actors agree on more than one legitimation criterion. This hardly indicates a strongly connected emerging repertoire of arguments on which powerful criticism of the capitalist market economy might be based.

Substantially, the legitimation criteria used have changed less in Germany than in the United Kingdom. In Germany, both before and after the financial crisis, the most central legitimation criterion is the lack

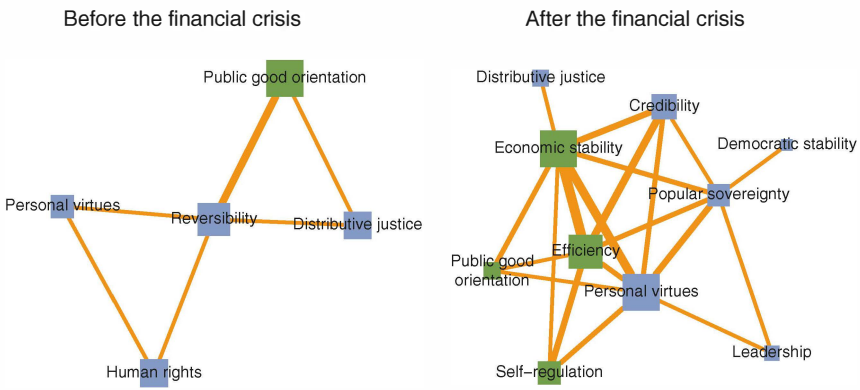

Fig. 7.6 United Kingdom, concept networks pre-/post-financial crisis, 3-slice

of personal virtues of economic agents (hub centrality 1.0 in both periods).[5] Before the crisis, other central concepts are criticism of the deficient provision of wealth (0.61), distributive justice (0.55), democratic stability (0.41) and human rights (0.38). The most central arguments before the crisis thus draw mainly on non-classical legitimation criteria, relying on culture-, justice- and democracy-centred criticism of the market economy. After the crisis, classical criteria addressing the functional core of the capitalist market economy move to the centre of the repertoire of arguments. The economic regime is now criticized for its failure to ensure economic stability (hub centrality 0.88) and the provision of common goods (0.32), and for its deficits in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (0.63).

In the United Kingdom, the negative impact of the market on the personal virtues of economic actors only takes centre stage after the crisis (hub centrality before the crisis 0.33, after the crisis 1.0), followed by lack of economic stability (0.99), effectiveness/efficiency (0.89), credibility (0.60), self-regulation (0.53) and popular control (0.51). At a substantial level, the anticapitalist line of argument in Britain since 2008 has thus become remarkably similar to discourse in Germany at the same time.

Figure 7.7 shows this comparison of hub centrality values in the original affiliation networks containing the complete set of legitimation criteria and not just those present in the concept network cores discussed above. In this graph, we clearly see that discourse in Germany has indeed changed only moderately in the wake of the financial crisis. Many legitimation criteria more or less keep their position in relation to the other criteria. Only legitimation criteria that address a lack of stability and efficiency see a steep increase in their centrality and thus their importance within the discourse. Before the financial crisis, arguments focus on culture-centred arguments about personal virtues and morality combined with justice- and democracy-centred criticism of distributive injustice, lacking democratic control of economic processes and the negative impact of the economy on democracy in general. After the financial crisis, personal virtues and culture-centred criticism of the economic regime have retained their central role for the argumentation, but they are now joined by legitimation criteria that focus on the

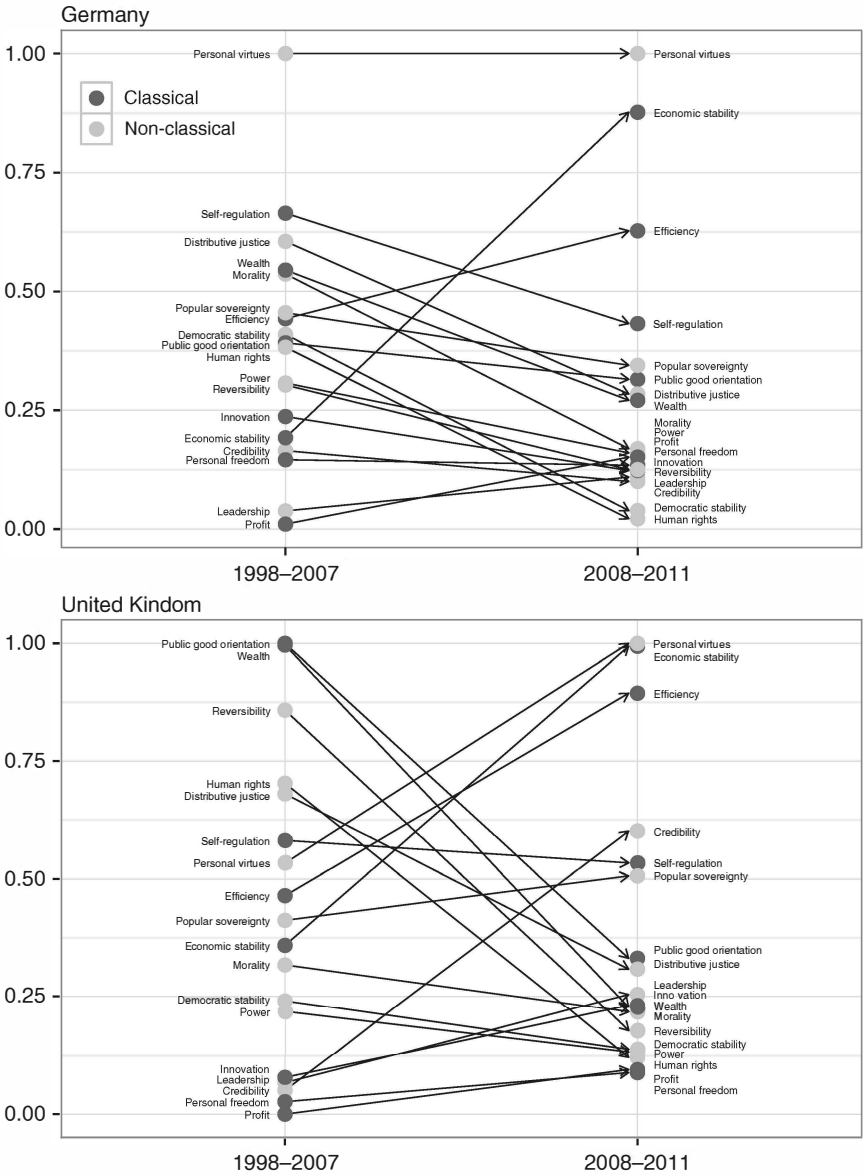

Fig. 7.7 Hub centrality values pre-/post-financial crisis

economic stability of the capitalist market economy, thus indicating a loss of confidence in its proper functioning.

In the United Kingdom, where discourse changed more dramatically than in Germany, personal virtues and culture-centred aspects did not play such a prominent role before the financial crisis. Instead, before 2008, criticism of the consequences of capitalism was based in its core on democracy- and justice-centred arguments. After the crisis, the rank order of legitimation criteria based on their hub centrality values changed much more than in Germany, resulting in structurally similar delegitimating discourse in both countries. Since 2008, criticism of the capitalist market economy's lacking personal virtues, diminishing economic stability and efficiency has moved to the centre stage of discourse in the United Kingdom. As in Germany, aspects of democratic control and distributive justice have lost their central role in the debate.

This is remarkable especially for the aspect of (distributive) justice, which has traditionally formed the centre of anticapitalist critique voiced by the labour movement and its organizations and parties. The current framing in Germany and the United Kingdom thus breaks with a tradition that Boltanski and Chiapello have called 'social critique' and which denounces the 'egoism of private interests [. . .] and the growing poverty of the popular classes in a society of unprecedented wealth' (2007: 38). As this line of argument has become less integrated into delegitimating discourse after the financial crisis, an important bridging frame between political and cultural actors is now missing. As I will show in the next section, this paradoxically goes along with a very pronounced shift towards actors from the cultural sphere in the centre of the discourse coalitions criticizing the capitalist market economy.

Who Speaks? Networks of Actors and Discourse Coalitions

The final step of the analysis provides the strongest clues on why the financial crisis only provoked an ephemeral legitimation crisis that did not lead to institutional change of the capitalist market economy. Going

back to the diagnosis of a discursive legitimation crisis (see Chapter 3), we need to answer the following question: Under what circumstances should more intense debate with a more negative tone, and hence with stronger and more integrated delegitimating discourse coalitions, have been able to push the critical juncture of the financial crisis towards institutional change of the capitalist market economy?

In principle, higher density of discourse networks can be driven by two mechanisms: It can be the result of a differentiation of arguments, where a small number of central actors use a large number of legitimation criteria concurrently. Or it can be the result of a large number of actors agreeing on multiple points. In both cases, it is only appropriate to classify this as a development with transformative potential if the judgements are clearly negative and if the discourse coalition also becomes politically relevant. To be politically relevant, members of the delegitimating discourse coalition should either control important power resources, for instance, as representatives of the state or large business organizations, or represent major societal stakeholders such as unions or churches (Korpi 1985). A discourse coalition may also be regarded as politically relevant if it represents a broad social base and includes members from the societal elite, thus creating an opportunity for broad and contentious mobilization (Kriesi 2004).

In order to check whether such a development can actually be observed, I now analyse the discourse coalitions in more detail and examine the actor networks consisting of actors connected through their shared use of the same legitimation criteria. As already mentioned, only in Germany and the United Kingdom can discourse coalitions of a sufficient size be identified in our evaluation of quality newspapers, and therefore a closer inspection of the actor networks is limited to comparing these two countries. This first result already indicates that anti-capitalist positions have not significantly gained traction in the wake of the financial crisis in the United States and Switzerland. Even though the intensity and negative tone of the legitimacy evaluations of the economic regime have also grown in these countries, the emergence of only weak discursive connections between actors and a discourse heavily dominated by very few core speakers without relevant power resources may explain why the legitimation crisis never developed into a serious

danger for the economic regime and remained without lasting consequences.

Figure 7.8 shows the cores (2-slice) of the two actor networks in Germany for the periods before and after the financial crisis. Aggregation over several years and the fact that there was already a comparatively lively debate before 2008 resulted in relatively dense discourse coalitions

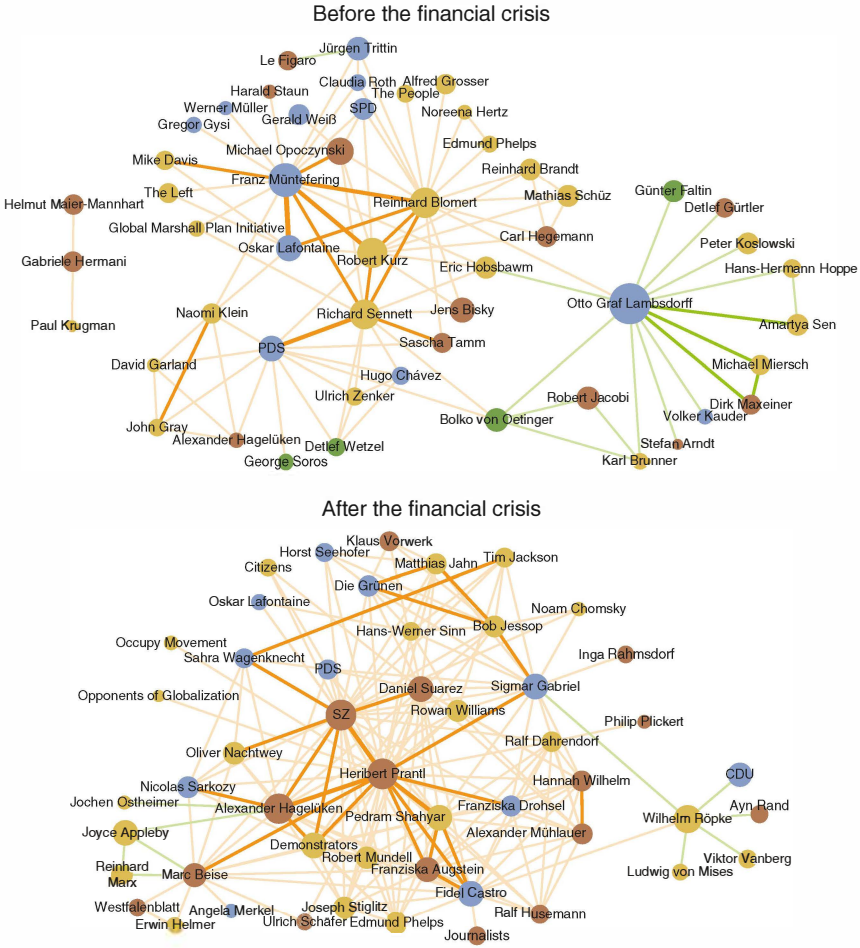

Fig. 7.8 Germany, discourse coalitions pre-/post-financial crisis, 2-slice

whose members shared at least two legitimation criteria in the respective period. For example, before the financial crisis, Oskar Lafontaine and Robert Kurz both criticized capitalism using the legitimation criteria 'personal virtues' and 'democratic stability'. They are therefore connected by an edge with the edge weight 2.

In the period before the financial crisis, two clearly distinct camps can be observed: a legitimating discourse coalition around FDP politician Otto Graf Lambsdorff and a delegitimating discourse coalition comprising several subgroups of politicians from the SPD, the Greens and the Leftist Party together with a number of intellectuals and journalists. Individual economic actors also participate in the debate, both legitimating and delegitimating the economic regime.

Since the financial crisis, the discourse coalitions have changed significantly. Although the actor networks before and after the financial crisis include approximately the same number of actors connected through shared arguments (52 before and 50 after the financial crisis), it should be noted that the earlier network is the result of an aggregation of discourse data over ten years (1998–2007) while the second network aggregates statements from only four years (2008–11).

Changes between the networks before and after the financial crisis are expressed in the significant increase of network density (measured as average degree centrality of the nodes) from 21.76 to 30.88.[6] In the post-crisis observation period, much stronger discursive links between actors can be observed, with more actors in the delegitimating discourse coalition sharing a higher number of legitimation criteria.

A very important change with regard to discourse participants has also taken place since the financial crisis: Politicians are no longer at the centre of the close-knit delegitimating discourse coalition, but journalists and intellectuals, especially Heribert Prantl and Alexander Hagelüken from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. At the same time, the legitimating discourse coalition has become fragmented and no longer includes political actors. Only the Christian-Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democrat Sigmar Gabriel appear as being ambivalent (legitimating and delegitimating), therefore bridging the two actor coalitions. Economic actors have completely vanished from the much more critical debate.

The colour intensity of the edges in Fig. 7.8 reflects the number of shared legitimation criteria through which actors are connected. Lightly coloured edges represent two shared legitimation criteria, while dark-coloured edges indicate more than two shared criteria. Taking into account this information about tie strength, we can identify cores of strongly connected actors for both periods. In Germany, there are three strongly connected discourse coalitions before the financial crisis: two delegitimating coalitions with nine and two members, respectively, and a legitimating discourse coalition consisting of five actors. In the period after the financial crisis, the legitimating coalition disappears and one strongly connected delegitimating discourse coalition with 18 actors emerges.[7] In this relatively large sub-network, journalists from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* occupy the most central positions.

The development in the United Kingdom (Fig. 7.9) is similar, although a strongly connected legitimating discourse coalition does not exist either before or after the financial crisis; the actor network grows from 24 to 37 actors and density goes up from 13.35 to 20.16. Before the financial crisis, the larger one of the two strongly connected delegitimating discourse coalitions comprises only five actors; afterwards, the sub-network of strongly connected actors has grown to 15 in the United Kingdom. Even more conspicuously than in Germany, journalists are at the centre of the actor network, whereas politicians play only a marginal role.

Thus, both in Germany and the United Kingdom, the most vocal critics of the economic regime – especially after the financial crisis – are journalists and intellectuals. Only a small number of politicians participate in the debate. Economic actors are only marginally involved since they apparently see no need to defend the legitimacy of capitalism against its critics. What is striking is the absence of representatives of large social interest groups, especially of trade unions, which would have been obvious candidates for critical evaluations of the capitalist economic regime in a time of crisis. While unions did participate in the public debate about economic policy during the crisis, they limited their criticism to the policy level without questioning the legitimacy of the capitalist economic regime as such, even against the backdrop of the collapse of the financial sector and of entire economies (Bieling 2013: 434–41). Moreover, civil society actors usually

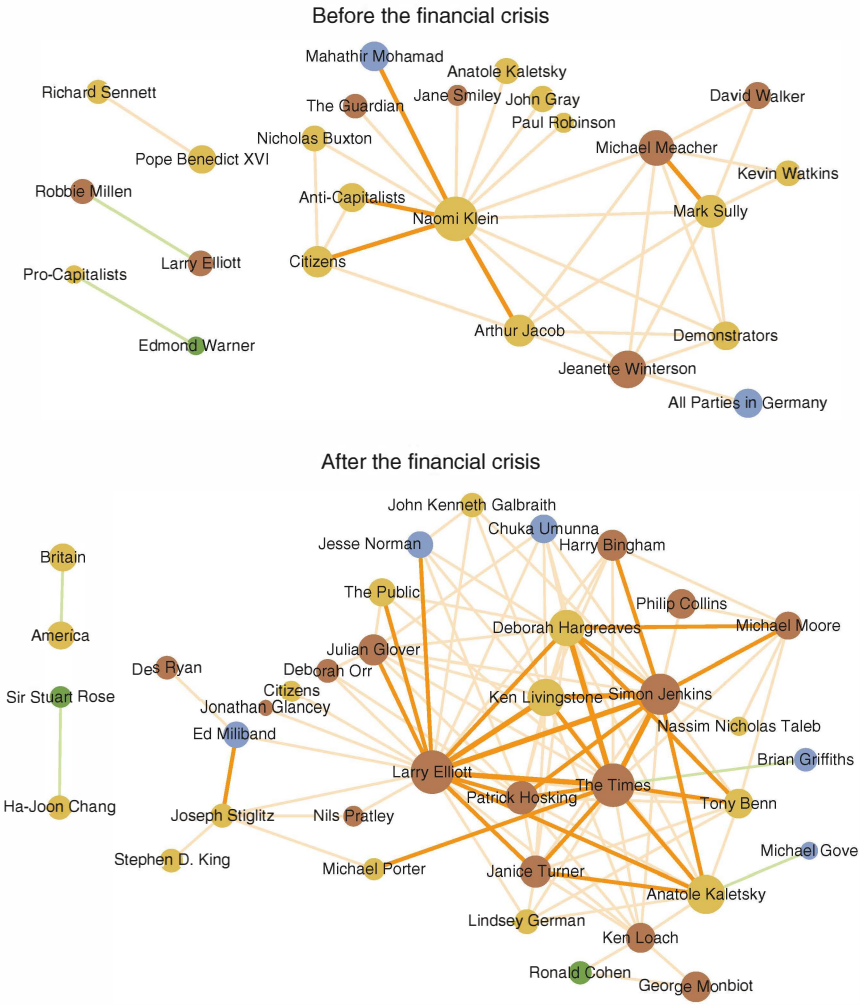

Fig. 7.9 United Kingdom, discourse coalitions pre-/post-financial crisis, 2-slice

speak as individual intellectuals and not as representatives of member organizations or NGOs in our material. The structure of the legitimation discourse in Germany and the United Kingdom thus corresponds to the

only sporadic and weak protest mobilizations in these countries during the crisis (della Porta 2015).

To sum up, after the financial crisis, there are no strongly connected discourse coalitions delegitimating the economic regime in the United States and Switzerland. In contrast, in Germany and the United Kingdom, we clearly observe the emergence of strongly connected discourse coalitions criticizing the economic regime. Compared to the period before the financial crisis, the cohesion of critical assessments of the economic regime increases, but at the same time the social diversity of the anticapitalist discourse coalition remains very low (the United Kingdom) or even decreases in comparison to the pre-crisis period (Germany). Members of the delegitimating discourse coalition are predominantly recruited from the media, culture and academia. In the post-crisis observation period, intellectual critics of capitalism and the market economy rise to speak, but the debate rarely extends beyond these intellectual circles and finds little echo and manifest support in the broader society.

The analysis of the actor networks helps to explain why even in the two countries with the most intense debate, Germany and the United Kingdom, the initial impulse of the legitimation crisis dissolved without leaving fundamental traces in the economic regime. In the wake of the financial crisis, an integrated political discourse about the legitimacy of the capitalist market economy has emerged, but it is supported neither by powerful individual actors nor by a broad coalition of societal actors. Therefore, the weak presence of economic actors should be interpreted as discursive restraint rather than as marginalization: Apparently, protagonists of the economic regime have so far not found it necessary to intervene in the debate in order to defend the capitalist market economy against its critics.

Thus, in the wake of the financial crisis, a discourse coalition consisting of key actors from the media, science and culture has emerged and developed a strongly connected discourse delegitimating the economic regime. However, this discourse is not picked up by politicians, unions or a broad coalition of social actors nor does it develop sufficient strength to force members of the business elite to respond and to defend the economic regime against its critics. In sum, after the financial crisis, the discourse has remained limited to the feature pages of the quality press

and has failed to create bridges to political debates and mobilization efforts elsewhere in society.

Conclusion

Discourse network analysis provides a detailed picture of legitimation statements on the economic regime in German, Swiss, UK and US quality newspapers between 1998 and 2011. It allows us to judge the dynamics and the scope of the post-2008 legitimation crisis of the capitalist market economy. And it enables us to understand why, in the four countries examined, the critical juncture of the financial crisis and the ensuing delegitimation of the capitalist market economy did not lead to a fundamental transformation of the regime. Overall, three aspects characterize the development of public debates about the legitimacy of the economic regime in the context of the financial crisis.

Firstly, the financial crisis has left its mark in all four countries, both materially and discursively. The intensity of debates and the connectedness of arguments about the legitimacy of the capitalist economic regime have increased in all four countries. However, in the United States, the country in which the financial crisis originated, both the intensity of the debate and the density of the discourse networks have remained the lowest. Here, the regime was not seriously challenged in the public either before or after the financial crisis, and the anticapitalist discourse coalition never comprised more than a handful of actors. At the same time, statements by individual actors remained scattered and links between the arguments of different actors are observed only occasionally. Even in Switzerland, a country that was only mildly impacted by the financial crisis, a more strongly connected discourse about the legitimacy of the economic regime has developed, although it was sustained to a large degree by only a small group of journalists. As a consequence, a broad political discourse about the legitimacy of the regime did not emerge in Switzerland, neither before nor after the financial crisis. Overall, our data indicate that in Switzerland and the United States, despite the increase of critical statements, the situation remains close to the a-legitimacy scenario, where the economic regime's

core principles are broadly accepted and its legitimacy is, therefore, not even explicitly discussed.

In Germany and the United Kingdom, the discourse network analysis presents a different picture, with a strongly connected and predominantly critical discourse emerging between 2008 and 2011. Tightly integrated political discourse about the capitalist market economy develops and, because of its predominantly negative tone and the high number of actors involved, a development from legitimation crisis to institutional change of the regime seems possible at first. Nevertheless, the other results help to understand why this transformative impulse has quickly disappeared.

Secondly, the analysis of discursive connections between individual legitimation criteria does not point to a strongly connected and integrated discourse. Even in the two countries with the most intense debates, sets of arguments are only seldom shared by different speakers. Aggregated over the whole crisis period, a larger repertoire of arguments emerges that may well form the basis for a critical discourse coalition. Disaggregated by year, however, two actors almost never share more than two criteria to delegitimate the capitalist market economy. This observation points to a marked weakness of the regime's critics: They are unable to develop an overarching master frame that might bridge the perspectives of different actor groups.

Thirdly, in Germany and the United Kingdom, the two countries in which relatively large discourse coalitions are visible, their emergence has been accompanied by a decrease in the social diversity of discourse participants. In both countries, anticapitalist discourse since the financial crisis has been dominated by journalists, artists and academics. In the core networks, politicians participate only at the periphery, with economic actors as well as representatives of large civil society groups and unions completely absent; pronounced journalistic dominance can be found in both countries. The network analysis thus shows the emergence of critical discourse with a not very strongly connected argumentative core which is dominated by actors from the cultural sector and whose criticism does not reverberate beyond the media sphere. The actors of the delegitimating discourse coalition tend to come from the cultural sector and do not update their artistic critique focusing on alienation, disenchantment and the suppression of

individual expression and creativity, which is characteristic of the new social movements (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 170). Instead, we see the emergence of a discourse that combines criticism of the collapse of the capitalist market economy's operating principles with discontent about the lack of virtues of the system and its economic leaders. This combination of elements from a classical critique drawing on free market and growth-centred legitimation criteria with culture-centred arguments focusing on the lack of personal virtues and greed fails to resonate beyond the cultural sphere. The framing falls short of bridging the artistic critique of the new social movements and the social critique of the unions and social democrats. It lacks a clear injustice frame and downplays democracy-centred criticism.

As a consequence, critical discourse in both Germany and the United Kingdom is not accompanied by significant protest mobilization addressing the societal consequences of the financial crisis. Anticapitalist criticism does not extend beyond the cultural sector and thus remains smoke without fire – visible in national public spheres but largely without material consequences.

Notes

1. More technically speaking, an affiliation network G^{aff} connects the actors a_1, $a_2, \ldots, a_m$ with the legitimation criteria $lc_1, lc_2, \ldots, lc_n$. If the data contain – as in our case – information about legitimation statements at different points of time, then there is an affiliation network G_t^{aff} for any time t. The projection of the original bipartite network is the result of multiplication of the (non-symmetric) affiliation matrix X with its transposed matrix X^T. The result of the projection is a symmetric co-occurrence matrix, which – depending on the order of the multiplicands – represents either the actor network or the concept network (of connected legitimation criteria). Accounting for the positive (legitimating) and negative (delegitimating) use of the legitimation criteria, the image networks are actually multiplex matrices: The projection for the positive and negative use of the criteria is done separately.
2. What is considered 'large enough' cannot be determined *a priori*. Obviously, an anticapitalist discourse coalition consisting of only ten actors should not be interpreted as a sign for the serious delegitimation of the economic regime even if the legitimating coalition is still smaller.

3. Since discourse networks are bipartite networks, degree centrality reflects only the number of statements each actor makes or the number of times a concept is mentioned by an actor. In the literature, various centrality measures for bipartite networks have been discussed (Borgatti and Everett 1997). A particularly suitable centrality measure is hub or authority centrality (Kleinberg 1999; Brandes and Wagner 2004), which takes into account, with decreasing weight, the degree centrality of all other (indirectly) connected nodes.
4. In an exploratory network analysis, basic structures of the network are often easier to detect by considering the strongly connected cores rather than the complete networks. Network cores are maximal sub-networks where nodes have at least a certain number of connections (n-cores) or where all edges are above a certain weight, thus representing stronger connections between adjacent nodes (m-slices). An n-core refers to the maximal sub-network in which all nodes have at least a degree centrality of n, an m-slice is the maximal sub-network in which all edges have at least a weight of m (de Nooy et al. 2005: 70, 109).
5. Hub centrality values are normalized and can take values between 1 and 0 where the node with the maximal hub centrality in each network has always a hub centrality value of 1.
6. The simple density measure that calculates the proportion of existing ties in relation to the maximum possible number of ties strongly depends on the size of the network and cannot be compared between networks of different sizes. We therefore measure the density of the network as the average degree centrality of all nodes, as suggested by de Nooy et al. (2011: 75).
7. The second strongly connected network, consisting of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* journalists Hannah Wilhelm and Alexander Mühlauer, is the result of one jointly written article, and is thus more an artefact of the coding procedure than a meaningful core discourse coalition.

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