

Rhetoric in Scandinavia

Retoryka w Skandynawii

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A Rhetoric of Cooperation: How Swedish parties argued in parliament 2015 and 2016 after the migration agreement

Retoryka współpracy: jak w 2015 i 2016 roku szwedzkie partie spierały się w parlamencie po porozumieniu migracyjnym

Abstract

The aim of this topos analysis is to identify features of argumentation in Swedish parliamentary debates on asylum policy in 2015 and 2016 compared to German debates. Findings include a focus on procedural rather than substantive aspects and an adaptation of government-like argumentation by cooperating opposition parties. These can be attributed to the focus on consensus and cooperation in Sweden, governed by a minority government, and may be typical of minority governments, common in Scandinavia, in general.

W artykule przedstawiona jest analiza toposów występujących w debatach parlamentarnych z lat 2015–2016 w Szwecji i Niemczech, poświęconych polityce azylowej ww. państw. Celem tego badania porównawczego jest wyłonienie toposów oraz scharakteryzowanie argumentacji politycznej skupionej wokół kwestii migracyjnej. Tę argumentację cechuje w większym stopniu charakter proceduralny niż merytoryczny, co ma związek z kontekstem politycznym, a więc układem sił konkurencyjnych partii. Wydaje się, że szczególnie w przypadku Szwecji w debacie parlamentarnej strony kładą nacisk na konsensus i kooperację. Wynikać zaś to może z faktu, że w tym kraju – jak również ogólnie w krajach Skandynawii – rządy mają charakter mniejszościowy, co sprzyja retoryce współpracy.

Key words

Sweden, parliamentary debate, minority government, consensus, topoi
Szwecja, debata parlamentarna, rząd mniejszościowy, konsensus, toposy

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1. Introduction

Sweden is generally believed to have a high degree of consensus orientation. One recent example is the COVID-19 pandemic when Swedish consensus culture was highlighted internationally as an example of a different way of decision-making and communicating. A high amount of consensus orientation and cooperation is also attributed to the character of minority governments, which are the most common form of government in Sweden. With a tradition of minority governments, there have been various occasions when governing and opposing parties banded together and reached agreements on different issues in Sweden's history. One of these occasions was the so-called refugee crisis in Europe in 2015 when exceptionally large numbers of refugees sought protection in Europe. Sweden initially stood out as one of the countries taking in the most refugees. However, when numbers of asylum seekers in Sweden kept rising and a former, more general, agreement among six of the eight parties in the Swedish Riksdag was terminated, the same parties again banded together to determine migration policy. Very soon, surprisingly strict measures to reduce the number of asylum seekers were implemented and supported by different parties.

If this consensus orientation and cooperation is so special about Swedish – and maybe more generally Scandinavian – political culture, is that evident in debates regarding asylum policies? Are consensus orientation and cooperation just an external attribution or do parties actually draw on these principles? Are there differences in governing and opposition parties' argumentation and how do these manifest themselves in the context of diverging opposition roles in minority and majority governments?

To investigate how the decision-making process in minority governments is associated with specific argumentation patterns in parliamentary debates, I analyse parliamentary debates regarding migration policy in Sweden in 2015 and 2016

and compare these debates to parliamentary debates regarding the same topic and time period in Germany.¹

In Germany, as in many other countries, minority governments are not an acknowledged option and established majority governments often govern without regard to the opposition as cooperation is not required. When Germany, like Sweden, stood out in 2015 as a welcoming country in Europe by taking in many refugees and at a certain point abruptly implemented drastic measures, it was governed by a majority coalition. These parallels in asylum policy and differences in decision-making due to different government forms allow to investigate diverging argument patterns in parliamentary debates in both countries to analyse how minority governments shape parliamentary debate rhetoric.

The analysis focuses on *topoi* as argument patterns, based on Aristotle's understanding of *topoi* as resting upon *endoxa* (accepted opinions) (*Topics* 100a 19–20). I assume that *topoi* as commonly occurring argument schemes both reflect and shape social, cultural and political contexts and that it is possible to conclude from the used *topoi* the backgrounds, values and norms forming their basis.

In the following sections, Sweden's consensus orientation, characteristics of minority governments, parliamentary debates' functions and the 2015 and 2016 asylum situation are discussed. Subsequently, the method of the *topos* analysis and the results are presented.

2. Background

2.1. Sweden's consensus orientation

Sweden has traditionally been described as a country with a remarkably high consensus orientation and people and politicians able and willing to compromise and cooperate.² Contemporary international political scientists, too, describe Sweden's – and to some extent that of other Nordic countries as well – political culture as particularly consensus oriented (Arter 2004; Ilie 2007; Jochem 2010; Lindberg 2017), although this might be overestimated by external observers and underestimated by internal actors (Henningsson 1986, 317). Cornelia Ilie (2007, 101) describes consensus as follows, highlighting the connection between consensus and collaboration:

1. For the method and further results of this study, see also Kiderlen (2020, 2023).

2. Already in 1902, the Swedish member of parliament and later prime minister Hjalmar Branting noted that Sweden was “a compromise-ridden country” (Hjalmar Branting, *Tal och skrifter*, Stockholm 1927–1930, III, 214, as cited in Rustow [1955, 230], own translation) and in 1928 Florence Janson pointed to the parliamentary reform of 1866 as a reason why parties needed to learn to cooperate (Janson 1928, 408). In the 1930's the concept of *the middle way* became influential for Sweden's image with Marquis Childs' (1936) international bestseller *Sweden: The Middle Way* and, as a further example, in the 1950's Rustow (1955) drew a connection between Sweden's political achievements and on the one hand political and societal factors making compromise necessary and on the other hand the Swedish society's willingness and ability to compromise.

Achieving consensus requires serious treatment of every group member's considered opinion. [...] Consensus usually involves systematic and continued collaboration since it does not mean that one opinion is being adopted by a plurality, but that participants are brought together until a convergent decision is developed.

Consensus as a principle is acknowledged in Swedish politics. As Ilie (2007, 116) describes, in “the Swedish tradition of political negotiation, consensus is regarded as a prerequisite, an instrument and a goal” and “interlocutors are normally striving to both maintain and reach consensus when taking political decisions.” For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Sweden took a different path than most countries in dealing with the virus, it was highlighted quite frequently that the Swedish way was possible because of its consensus orientation and trust – people's trust in authorities and authorities' trust in people (Wodak 2021; Simons 2020). The last few years of political debate in Sweden might draw a different picture of polarization rather than consensus, but this analysis relates to the situation in 2015 and 2016, when these developments were not yet that prevalent.

There are some factors in Swedish history, society and political system that point to Sweden's consensus orientation including the general acceptance and appreciation of the welfare state, the long-lasting dominance of the Social Democratic Party, the small step legislative process with the involvement of numerous – even non-parliamentary – actors and the exceptional frequency of minority governments. Consensus orientations' and minority governments' mutual conditionality will be described in the following.

2.2. Minority governments

Consensus orientation and minority government are mutually conditional as minority governments both require and promote consensus orientation.

Minority governments are governments of parties holding together less than half of all seats in parliament. Consequently, they require strongly consensus-oriented parliamentary work and thus collaboration and the opposition's involvement in decision-making, as the government alone does not have enough votes to pass laws against the will of the opposition (Sannerstedt 1996; Strøm 1990). The opposition thus “exert[s] influence without entering a government” (Christiansen and Damgaard 2008, 49). Therefore, the boundaries of government and opposition become blurred, as opposition parties cooperate with the government (Dahl 1967, 34; Pedersen 1967, 154). The opposition parties' support of the government differs and can be long term or *ad hoc*. Christiansen and Damgaard (2008, 47) presume “that opposition parties can be ‘support parties’, ‘legislative agreement parties’, *ad hoc* coalition partners, and perhaps ‘pure opposition’ parties.”

While minority governments are often seen as “suboptimal and unstable solutions, which are resorted to only when all else fails” (Strøm 1990, 16) or “considered unstable and temporary *ad hoc* solutions for situations where a majority government consisting of one or several parties could not be achieved” (Damgaard 2000, 360), there is evidence that minority governments are neither significantly less stable than majority governments (Arter 2008, 232; Damgaard 2000, 360–361; Lindvall et al. 2020, 486–490) nor “as rare and abnormal as hitherto assumed, but on the other hand they do appear to be concentrated in a limited number of West European countries, not least the three Scandinavian countries” (Damgaard 2000, 365). Following Arter (2006, 106), they work best where they are common and where there is no expectation that majority governments will be formed, as has been the case in Sweden for several decades.

In Sweden, minority governments are very common. Since the introduction of the unicameral system in 1971 there were only three majority governments, from 1976 to 1978, 1979 to 1981 and 2006 to 2010.³ All other governments were minority governments, for a long time mostly social democratic, one-party minority governments. In contrast, all coalitions with an absolute majority were centre-right coalitions (Bäck and Bergman 2016, 209–211). Reasons for frequent minority governments in Sweden might include the clear bloc political character until recently, the dominance of the Social Democratic Party and the negative parliamentarism, meaning that the government does not need a majority *for* itself to be elected to office, but only no majority *against* itself (Regeringsformen 6 kap. §3; Arter 2006, 101; Bäck and Bergman 2016). Another factor is the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats that were initially treated as pariahs by the mainstream parties and were excluded from negotiations between the parties (Lindvall et al. 2020). In recent years, however, both the clear-cut block political character and the exclusion of the Sweden Democrats ended. The next few years will show how these recent changes will affect the formation of minority and majority governments.

The legislation process in minority governments differs from majority governments as the government needs to negotiate with opposing parties to get a majority for its proposals or at least to prevent a majority against its proposals. Besides negotiations in party groups and committees, there are lots of informal conversations between members of parliament (MPs) (Sannerstedt 1996, 26–29). At the end of this process proposals are discussed in the plenary chamber before the MPs vote on them.

3. Earlier, minority governments were also formed regularly. Janson (1928) described developments in the Swedish parliamentary system from the parliamentary reform of 1866 to the beginning of the 20th century, which resulted in an “era of minority governments” as early as the 1920s (Janson 1928, 409).

2.3. Parliamentary debates

When parliamentary debates in the plenary chamber take place, often immediately before the vote, the decision has usually already been made and the MPs already know whether they will vote for or against a bill. Nevertheless, they play an important role in parliamentary democracies and are particularly interesting for rhetorical analyses. In addition to their formal function of deliberating and passing bills there are several functions like legitimation, documentation, encouraging deliberation and persuasion. Parliamentary debates play an important role for public relations by parliaments as institutions (Sarcinelli 2011, 247–262) and have internal functions like self-assurance of the parliament and the parliamentary groups, stocktaking and profiling of the MPs (Klein 1991, 296–272). They encourage citizens' deliberation (Kock 2018, 495–496) and transparency by summarizing how a decision was reached for the public, including which positions were held and which arguments were used by whom to justify them (Bäck and Larsson 2008, 82; Petersson 1994, 66; Zeh 2005, 485). A central function of parliamentary debates for parties and their speaking MPs is to persuade the public of their positions (Klein 2003, 586; Knappe and Kuhl 2015, 182).

These numerous and diverse functions with multiple audiences lead to an equally diverse addressing of the debates. Speakers do not only – and probably not even mainly – address their colleagues present during the debate but also the media and the voters, in research referred to as double (Burkhardt 1995, 78; Kalivoda 1986, 26; Knappe and Kuhs 2015, 181–182) or multiple addressing (Burkhardt 2003, 280, 319; Hitzler 1990, 625; Klein 1985, 381), or trialogical communication (Kock 2018, 494; Burkhardt 2012, 302–303; Dieckmann 1985, 54–55, 66–67). From a perspective based on classical rhetoric, the analysis described here focuses on the assumption that speakers in parliament primarily want to persuade the audience. As the other MPs are not to be persuaded anymore when parliamentary debates take place, speakers mainly imagine the public or parts of it as their audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958). Hence, I assume that the speakers strategically try to connect to perceptions and arguments of the voters as their expected audience.

Apart from conspicuous patterns of argumentation, which will be the focus of this study, there are some peculiarities of Swedish parliamentary debates which already indicate a higher importance of cooperation compared to other parliamentary democracies like proxemic regulations symbolizing an interest in collaboration. For example, the members of parliament are seated according to their constituencies and not along party lines as is the case in most parliamentary democracies (other exceptions are the Norwegian Stortinget where seating is determined by constituency, too, and Iceland where seats are allocated by lottery). Obviously, this results in a very different atmosphere when MPs sit next

to MPs from other parties. Another example is the possibility for dialogue-like communication after a speech, with MPs moving to two lecterns facing each like in case of *repliker* after a speech, while in other countries like Germany there is no possibility for dialogue-like communication.

2.4. Migration policy in Sweden from 2015 to 2016

In the last decades Sweden has had one of the highest rates of immigration in Europe, a high protection rate and generous and ambitious migration and integration policies, which earned it a reputation and self-image as a *humanitarian superpower* (Parusel 2021, 397–406). In 2015 and 2016, exceptionally many asylum seekers arrived in Sweden. Sweden, like Germany and Austria, was initially among those European countries taking in the most refugees per capita. The new arrivals were welcomed at the stations, and as of September, 2015 Sweden's Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven, confirmed Sweden's humanitarian course with the much-quoted statement "My Europe doesn't build walls" ("Mitt Europa bygger inte murar")⁴ at a pro-refugee demonstration. However, the numbers of arriving asylum seekers kept rising, and in October almost 40,000 people applied for asylum in a single month. Among the asylum seekers were many children, nearly half of them unaccompanied (Migrationsverket 2016, 16–17; SOU 2017:12, 59–81). After having previously focused on receiving the arrivals without enacting any special measures, from October on, due to the high number of asylum seekers, policies enacted new changes. Initially, many of the measures focused on ensuring accommodation for all incoming refugees. However, they were soon followed by measures focusing on limiting and reducing the number of refugees entering the country, that marked a U-turn in Sweden's asylum policy (SOU 2017:12, 99; Hagelund 2020, 7–10; Parusel 2016, 406–410). On October 23, the minority government and the then alliance parties presented an agreement on asylum policy, the so-called *migration agreement (migrationsöverenskommelsen)*⁵. Only the Left Party and the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats were not part of the agreement. The agreement was preceded by the dissolution of the *December agreement (decemberöverenskommelsen)* of the same six parties two weeks earlier, which had been established in 2014 with the intention of excluding the Sweden Democrats from exerting influence on government formation and budget votes (Bäck and Hellström 2015; Bjereld, Eriksson, and Hinnfors 2016). The migration

4. Many newspapers reported on this speech, including Aftonbladet: <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/3jxQ5d/mitt-europa-bygger-inte-murar-vi-hjals-at> [last access July 18, 2023]; see also SOU 2017:12, 294.

5. The agreements full content could initially be accessed on the governments homepage: <https://www.regeringen.se/4aa54c/contentassets/6519e46a9780457f8f90e64aefed1b04/overenskommelsen-insatser-med-anledning-av-flyktingkrisen.pdf> [last access July 9, 2021]. Now only a copy of this document can be accessed for example here: <https://www.svtstatic.se/image-cms/svtse/1445779684/nyheter/article4404741.svt/BINARY/overenskommelsen-insatser-med-anledning-av-flyktingkrisen.pdf> [last access June 3, 2023].

agreement contained a 21-point action plan to ensure orderly reception, better integration and containment of cost increases. The implementation of the measures was to be pursued jointly. Many of the measures discussed in the analysed debates followed the agreement.⁶

Although not relevant for the analysis described here, it should be mentioned at this point that the current government in Sweden of the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, working together closely with the Sweden Democrats based on the Tidö Agreement,⁷ has now announced and is implementing a paradigm shift in migration policy intensifying efforts to reduce the number of migrants and going much further than the migration agreement.⁸

3. Method

3.1. Corpus of the analysis

In order to find out whether and how consensus orientation and cooperation manifest in Swedish parliamentary debates, I compared argumentation in these debates with argumentation in German parliamentary debates regarding migration policy during the same period. In Germany, which was continuously governed by majority governments in the last decades, a grand coalition of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany along with their sister party the Christian Social Union of Bavaria and the Social Democrats ruled from 2013 to 2017. Holding almost 80 percent of all seats in parliament, the governing parties put forward all the measures regarding migration and were able to decide on them largely independently of the opposition. No cooperation was necessary between governing and opposing parties, and the opposition consequently sharply criticised the plans and the government in the debates.

The corpus of the analysis consists of eight parliamentary debates, four from Sweden and four from Germany, in total comprising 98 speeches. From both parliaments I selected debates on the most decisive measures during the period in question. The Swedish debates of December 17, 2015 (Debate 2015/16:48, 5–74), January 27, 2016 (Debate 2015/16:59, 3–32), April 27, 2016 (Debate 2016/16:99, 3–7) and June 20, 2016 (Debate 2015/16:123, 3–49) dealt with proposals on the introduction of border ID controls, mandatory distribution of new arrivals to all

6. The selected debates thus are situated in the context of a crisis where most parties in Sweden agreed that asylum policy needed to be changed. Hence, they might not give a representative picture of parliamentary debates in general. However, even in unity due to a crisis awareness, MPs seek to argue controversially and to appear as though they disagree although they generally in fact agree on the issue (see section 2.3).

7. See the news from October 2022 on the Liberals' homepage: <https://www.liberalerna.se/nyheter/overenskommelse-for-sverige-tidoavtalet> [last access July 18, 2023].

8. See the governments homepage: <https://www.government.se/government-policy/swedens-new-migration-policy/> [last access July 18, 2023].

municipalities, abolition of benefits after the decline for voluntary departure, introduction of temporary residence permits and restriction of the right to family reunification. The German debates on October 1, 2015 (Debate 18/127, 12267–12292), October 15, 2015 (Debate 18/130, 12576–12612), February 19, 2016 (Debate 18/156, 15343–15371) and February 25, 2016 (Debate 18/158, 15465–15493) dealt with the extension of the so-called *safe countries of origin*, longer stays in reception facilities, the suspension of family reunification for subsidiary protected and restrictions on benefits.

3.2. Topos analysis

I investigate the question of how speakers try to persuade people of their positions from a rhetorical perspective. This investigation assumes that MPs argue strategically in their speeches and, in the sense of an anticipatory addressee calculus (Knappe 2000, 55–58; Knappe and Kuhs 2015, 181–182), use those arguments which they assume to be persuasive for their desired addressees. By adapting to those expectations, the argumentation is made accessible, and a persuasive potential is created (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958).

The search for argumentations capable to persuade a majority by settling on common opinions is also the basis of the theory of topics, as described by Aristotle in his works *Topics* and *Rhetoric*. The category of *topoi* characterized by being based on *endoxa* is a suitable starting point to analyse debates with the aim to look for argument patterns revealing underlying principles and norms.

In Aristotle's conception, *topoi* were used as a heuristic to find suitable and persuasive arguments. Aristotle described the *Topics* purpose as "to find a method with which we shall be able to construct deductions from acceptable premisses [endoxa] concerning any problem that is proposed" (*Topics* 100a 19-20). Aristotle's *topoi* thus rest on *endoxa* and are not persuasive because of finite knowledge but because of knowledge about what is correct in most of the cases or believed by most people or by the wisest people. To be sufficient for "any problem that is supposed", there is need for an inherent openness of every *topos*. *Topoi* are not specific and ready-to-use arguments but rather aspects or points of view from where suitable arguments can be developed (Bornscheuer 1976, 28–29). Aristotle distinguishes between general or common *topoi* on the one hand and specific *topoi* on the other hand (*Rhetoric* 1258a2–34). General or common *topoi* are abstract and can be used within different species of rhetoric like deliberative, epideictic and juridical speech. Specific *topoi* belong to specific contexts or species of rhetoric.

I also base my topos analysis on Lothar Bornscheuer's four structural features of *topoi*, introduced in his work *Topik. Zur Struktur der gesellschaftlichen Einbildungskraft* (1976). Bornscheuer, a literary scholar, elaborates on the disparate

nature of the historical material regarding an understanding of *topoi*. Assuming that a definition of *topos* is not possible, his aim is not to introduce another subject-specific topos-term, but to work out aspects of a meta-scientific understanding of the topic. Bornscheuer wants to determine different dimensions within which each *topos* is to be located by identifying four aspects that are inherent to every *topos*. These structural features help to systemize the topos-term.

The structural features can be translated as *habituality*, *potentiality*, *intentionality* and *symbolicity*. The first structural feature *habituality* refers to Aristotle's description of *topoi* as based on common opinions and describes *topoi* as "based on common social opinion-, language- and behaviour-standards"⁹ (Bornscheuer 1976, 94). Following Bornscheuer, collective-habitual preconceptions are inherent in every *topos*. These standards can be moral-social standards of value, worldview-shaping convictions and knowledge content. *Topoi* thus mirror internalized patterns, thoughts and perceptions. Based on this structural feature, I assume that a topos analysis can achieve insights not only in argumentative structures but also in ideas and values that lie behind them.

Potentiality as the *topoi*'s second structural feature connects habit and creative power. A *topos* is "a substantive or formal aspect that is usable in many concrete problem discussions and that enables a wide variety of arguments or amplificatory explications" (Bornscheuer 1976, 99). *Topoi* do not only provide arguments for every problem due to the wide variety of different *topoi* but also because of their flexibility within themselves. *Potentiality* means that every *topos* must be applicable for both parties of a discussion, for different conclusions, for different and even opposite goals – the so-called 'in utramque partem'-principle. The *potentiality* can thus be an important aspect of a topos analysis: on the one hand for the method to be considered when defining *topoi* and on the other hand to ask the question whether the same or different *topoi* are used for different argumentation goals.

The third structural feature *intentionality* highlights the *topoi*'s rhetorical impact intention. A *topos* always needs to be made concrete in a specific situation with a specific impact intention. The habitual and flexible *topos* is used in a specific way to persuade. Because of this situation-dependence, a *topos* is not an empty cliché or random usable aspect but always a concrete variation of a more abstract aspect. A topos analysis must hence always look at *topoi* in their situational impact intention.

The *symbolicity* as the *topoi*'s last structural feature developed by Bornscheuer concerns the different formulations in which a *topos* can be implemented in a text. It can be found in brief rules, short sentences, compound expressions and keywords but also in longer passages. The same *topos* can take on different levels of verbal and semantic concentration, even as a metaphor. Hence, there is no rule on how to

9. All translations of quotes from Bornscheuer and from parliamentary debates are mine.

use topoi but only a rough frame within which a choice and specification has to be made for every individual or group specific use. In the same way, that means for a topos analysis, the analyst must be aware of the different formulations a topos can take and that topoi are not always easy to identify.

For my analysis the structural features of habituality and potentiality are particularly interesting. I assume, firstly, that topoi as commonly occurring argument schemes reflect and shape social, cultural and political contexts and that it is possible to deduce backgrounds, values and norms from the argument schemes. By comparing topoi in parliamentary debates in Germany and Sweden, I investigate which arguments are used in which country and what this tells us about prevailing norms and values of the speakers or their expected audience and if these point to concepts like consensus or cooperation in Sweden. By assuming, secondly, that different parties can use similar topoi for different argumentation goals, I investigate if and how the use of topoi differs between governing and opposing parties and how this relates to cooperating opposition parties.

In order to analyse the speeches with a topos analysis, I first developed a topos catalogue. For this aim I built categories on a sub-corpus by identifying and extracting all argumentative text segments and paraphrasing them in the form of a warrant in Toulmin's schema (Toulmin 2003). I sorted them based on their material and provided each category with a title and a more abstract warrant-like definition, which is also in line with many of Aristotle's examples.¹⁰ Most of the defined topoi were material topoi but still abstract enough to be filled with different content in concrete use. One example is the *humanity topos* with the definition: *If specific decisions / actions or their consequences are required / are to be rejected for humanitarian reasons, the decisions / actions should (not) be supported / rejected / carried out.*

After sorting and defining the topoi I applied and examined them on a second sub-corpus and modified them if necessary. Thereafter about 40 final topos categories built my topos catalogue. These categories were then applied to the whole corpus by allocating all arguments to the *topoi* and evaluating their frequency.

4. Results

By analysing arguments in the debates regarding migration policy in Germany and Sweden in 2015 and 2016, it became obvious that parties used a wide variety of *topoi*, ranging from *topoi* used by all parties in both parliaments to *topoi* used only by some or seldom used in general and from rather material topoi like

10. See, for example, the topos from the more and less: "If something is not the fact where it would be more [expected], it is clear that it is not a fact where it would be less." (*Rhetoric* 1397b 13–15).

the *humanity topos* to more formal *topoi* like the *authority topos* (see figure 1). The description of the results here focuses on material *topoi* as they are specific for the given discourse and setting, respectively. Almost all *topoi* identified were used in both parliaments. All the most frequently used *topoi* were used regularly in both countries. Some *topoi* were hardly used and are not shown in figure 1. These findings suggest that the discourse at a broad scale was structured in a similar manner. However, there are noticeable differences that can be attributed, at least in part, to the different relations of power in minority and majority governments.

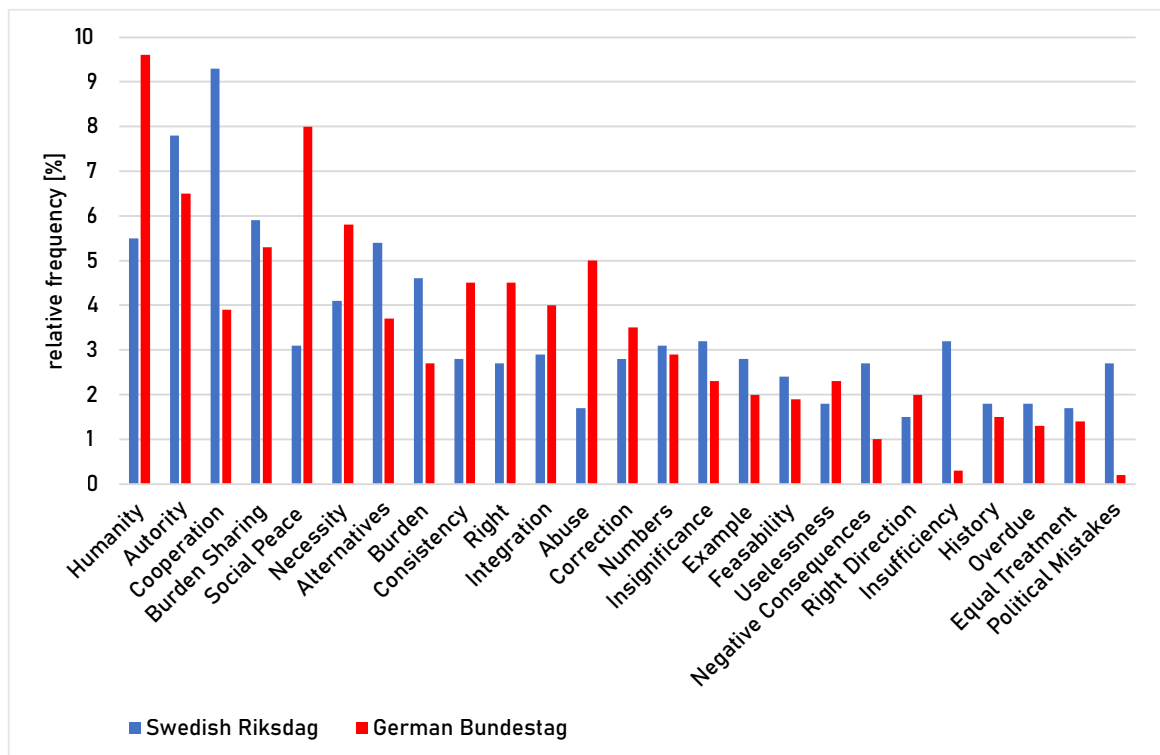


Figure 1: Frequently used topoi in debates on asylum policy during 2015 and 2016 in the Swedish Riksdag and the German Bundestag. Shown is the frequency of used topoi relative to the total of identified topoi used by speakers in the respective parliament. Topoi are sorted by average frequency. Not shown are the topoi with the lowest frequency.

4.1. Cooperation topos

In Sweden, the most used topos was the *cooperation topos* (*If an action has (not) been developed jointly, it should (not) be taken.*), while in Germany this topos was much less important. Every tenth argumentation in the Swedish Riksdag was allocated to this topos. This topos assesses, justifies or criticizes the measures based on the degree of cooperation in their creation. The MPs of the Swedish governing parties, for example, used this topos to highlight joint decision-making and therefore present the measures as the right measures. Ylva Johansson, minister of the Social Democrats, for example, said:

I would like to thank for the constructive cooperation with all the decent parties that now support the proposal. I know that the parties have somewhat different approaches to this. It is a give and take. It is a strength for Sweden that we can do this in a situation where we take great responsibility and have great challenges, but also have a bright future

[Jag vill tacka för konstruktivt samarbete med samtliga de anständiga partier som nu står bakom propositionen. Jag vet att partier har lite olika in-gångar i detta. Det är ett givande och tagande. Det är en styrka för Sverige att vi kan göra detta i ett läge där vi tar stort ansvar och har stora utmaningar men också har en ljus framtid.] (RD 2015/16:59, 26)

Johansson's argument proceeds on the assumption of cooperation as having a high value and that decisions made together are to be valued positively. By basing her argument on cooperation as a principle, she draws on the expected perceptions of her expected audience and makes the argument accessible.

The opposition parties used the *cooperation topos*, too, to demonstrate their cooperativeness. For example, Hanif Bali of the Moderate Party stated:

It is no secret that my party has had views on this legislation, but in the six-party agreement that exists this was part of the compromise to ensure to get a better reception and less pressure on the Swedish asylum system.

[Det är ingen hemlighet att mitt parti har haft synpunkter på denna lagstiftning, men i den sexpartiöverenskommelse som finns var detta en del av kompromissen för att se till att få ett bättre mottagande och ett lägre tryck på svenskt asylsystem.] (RD 2015/16:59, 11)

The opposition parties often explained their support for the measures with the fact that they had been part of the measures' creation. In other cases, the opposition parties used this topos to criticize the government for not sticking to agreements:

The proposals were presented just a few weeks after we in the Alliance had agreed with the government on a number of measures to try to improve the situation. The government has now chosen to go much further than what we agreed on and has removed all the important exceptions, among others for families with children, that we had negotiated. Therefore, the Centre Party will vote against this bill, and we also urge the government to return to the Riksdag with a bill that is in line with what we have agreed on.

[Förslagen presenterades bara några veckor efter att vi i Alliansen hade enats med regeringen om en rad åtgärder för att försöka förbättra situationen. Regeringen har nu valt att gå betydligt längre än vad vi kom överens om och har tagit bort alla de viktiga undantag, bland annat för barnfamiljer, som vi hade förhandlat fram. Därför kommer Centerpartiet att rösta nej till denna proposition, och vi uppmanar samtidigt regeringen att återkomma till riksdagen med en proposition som går i linje med det vi har kommit överens om.] (Jönsson, Centre Party: RD 2015/16:123, 8)

The importance of the *cooperation topos* shows clearly that arguing about the process of joint decision-making was important to the parties in Sweden and that the parties expected the public as audience of the debates to attach importance to cooperation between the parties as well. However, although all parties in Sweden

used the cooperation *topos* at least sometimes, it is very evident in the material that especially those parties that argued with cooperation were part of the migration agreement – namely the governing parties and some of the opposition parties. The parties not involved in the migration agreement, the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats, hardly used this *topos*. If they used it, they used it to criticize the government for not cooperating with all parties like the following example from Oscar Sjöstedt of the Sweden Democrats shows:

Let me briefly reflect on the fact that the bill is based on an agreement between the government and the four alliance parties. That is good. I have no comment whatsoever on that procedure. Parties of course cooperate with each other as long as they perceive that it benefits their own cause and as long as the mutual will exists. But I still have to ask the question: What are you so afraid of? Let's assume, hypothetically, that I or another representative of my party had been involved in the negotiations that led to this proposal. [...] But what had been the best case scenario? Obviously that we had reached an agreement. Then we might have had a completely united Riksdag that supports this bill. Believe me! This is an enormous strength to our clients, that is to say the Swedish voters.

[Låt mig kort reflektera över det faktum att propositionen bygger på en överenskommelse mellan regeringen och de fyra allianspartierna. Gott så. Jag har ingen som helst synpunkt på det förfarandet. Partier samverkar givetvis med varandra så länge de upplever att det gynnar ens egen sak och så länge den ömsesidiga viljan finns. Men jag måste ändå få ställa frågan: Vad är ni så rädda för? Låt oss anta, rent hypotetiskt, att jag själv eller någon annan representant för mitt parti hade suttit med i de förhandlingar som ledde fram till detta förslag. [...] Men vad hade varit best case scenario? Givetvis att vi hade blivit överens. Då hade vi möjligen haft en helt enig riksdag som ställer sig bakom denna proposition. Tro mig! Det är en enorm styrka gentemot våra uppdragsgivare, det vill säga den svenska väljarkåren.] (RD 2015/16:99, 4)

Compared to the frequent use in Sweden, in Germany the *cooperation topos* was relatively insignificant. In Germany, where the grand coalition decided on the measures on its own without cooperation between governing and opposing parties, the *topos* was used either in terms of cooperation between the state and federal governments or by the opposition to criticize that they were not involved in decision-making. The insignificance of the *cooperation topos* in Germany, where there was no cooperation between governing and opposing parties, is consistent with its insignificance for non-cooperating parties in Sweden.

4.2. *Humanity topos*

In Germany, the *topos* of highest relevance was the *humanity topos*, described above. This *topos* was much less relevant in Sweden. The *humanity topos* can obviously be used in arguments emphasizing the need to help asylum seekers and to give them a safe home and to criticize stricter asylum laws as not being in line with humanitarian values, as an example by Katja Dörner of the opposition party

The Greens shows:

Dear colleagues, it cannot be that the concern about the number of refugees coming to us leads us to throw the principles of humanity overboard.

[Liebe Kolleginnen, liebe Kollegen, es darf doch nicht sein, dass die Sorge über die Anzahl der Flüchtlinge, die zu uns kommen, dazu führt, dass wir die Grundsätze der Menschlichkeit über Bord werfen.] (BT 18/158, 15479)

Dörner thus takes up the value of *humanity* and places it as the highest premise for all action. Irrespective of concerns about the numbers of refugees arriving, humanitarian action should always be maintained. Thus, she draws on her own and/or the expected moral values of her addressees to argue against measures that would not be in line with the principles of humanity. Criticizing others for not upholding humanitarian principles is a fairly fundamental critique. Obviously, the governing parties wanted to avoid being perceived as anti-humanity parties and used this *topos* quite frequently, too – either by emphasizing humanity's importance to themselves at the beginning of their speeches and expressing regret for unfortunately required pragmatic solutions or by justifying the measures themselves as humanitarian. For example, they argued that the restriction of family reunification would be required for humanitarian reasons, as this restriction would prevent parents from sending their children on the dangerous flight to be able to join them later in the host country. Therefore, the suspension of family reunification would be necessary for humanitarian reasons because it would avert dangers for the children. Nina Warken of the governing Christian Democratic Union said:

The demand that we make an exception for unaccompanied minors with subsidiary protection in the case of family reunification and that they all can bring their families with them would, however, be a disastrous signal and irresponsible. We would be setting the wrong incentives, which would lead to even more children and young people being sent on a dangerous journey alone so that they can then let their parents join them.

[Die Forderung, dass wir beim Familiennachzug für unbegleitete Minderjährige mit subsidiärem Schutz eine Ausnahme machen und sie alle ihre Familien nachholen können, wäre aber ein verheerendes Signal und unverantwortlich. Wir würden die falschen Anreize setzen, die dazu führen, dass künftig noch mehr Kinder und Jugendliche alleine auf eine gefährliche Reise geschickt werden, damit sie dann ihre Eltern nachholen können.] (BT 18/156, 15367)

This argument was sometimes even made by explicitly expressing *humanity* or explicitly denying the parents' humanity, respectively, as an example by Andrea Lindholz of the governing Christian Social Union shows:

No one can explain to me what it has to do with 'humane' when parents send their underage children alone on the flight to Germany. I will not understand that.

[Mir kann niemand erklären, was es mit ‚human‘ zu tun hat, wenn Eltern ihre minderjährigen Kinder allein auf die Flucht nach Deutschland schicken. Ich werde das nicht verstehen.] (BT 18/158, 15481)

Hence, in Germany even the introduction of stricter asylum laws was justified with the *humanity topos* arguing (allegedly) in favour of the refugees.

The *humanity topos* was the most used *topos* in Germany and more than every eighth argument of the opposition and nearly every twelfth argument of the government was identified as a *humanity topos*. Although being slightly more important for the opposition parties than for the governing parties, it was the most frequently used *topos* for both. This reveals that *humanity* seems to have been an important and not to be disregarded principle to refer to for all parties in the German Bundestag. This indicates the intention of all parties to connect to the common value consensus (see Bornscheuer's structural feature *habituality*) in order to persuade the public of one's position, party or person.

In Sweden, in contrast, the *humanity topos* played a minor role. This might be surprising considering Sweden's image as a *humanitarian superpower*. However, this does not necessarily mean that *humanity* was less important to Swedish parties, but that there were reasons for focusing on other arguments, as I will show later. In Sweden, parties used the *humanity topos* less frequently and in other ways. Mainly the opposition parties the Left Party, the Centre Party and the Liberals, criticizing the measures, brought humanitarian values into the discourse. Johanna Jönsson of the Centre Party, for example, in a debate regarding restrictions for residence permits denied the measures' humanity and even the possibility of measures to reduce the amount of asylum seekers in a humanitarian way:

To believe that there is a humane way to reduce the number of those seeking protection in Sweden in the current situation is naïve.

[Att tro att det i dagsläget finns ett humant sätt att minska antalet som söker skydd i Sverige, det är naivt.] (RD 2015/16:123, 9)

Parties supporting the measures like governing parties and some opposition parties often combined the *humanity topos* with the *burden topos*, which states that if a load or overload is imminent, action should be taken to mitigate it. This argumentation condensed in the keyword *andrum* (breathing space) implying that there were too many people having arrived or arriving in Sweden. Accordingly, a break was necessary to provide care for those who had already arrived and to build up reception capacity to be able to help more people again.

4.3. Content-related *topoi* in Germany and procedure-related *topoi* in Sweden

The diverging importance of the *cooperation topos* and the *humanity topos* in Germany and Sweden is part of a pattern that becomes evident when taking the totality of the *topoi* into focus. While in Sweden the debates were oriented more around discussing the procedure of developing the measures, in Germany the measures' content was the focus of the discussion.¹¹ In the following, some further examples will illustrate this observation.

Most of the *topoi* related to the measures' content like the *humanity topos*, the *social peace topos*, the *integration topos* or the *abuse topos* were used more frequently in Germany. *The social peace topos (If consent and social peace in society are endangered, specific measures should [not] be taken to maintain these)*, for example, was almost as important as the *humanity topos*. It was used equally frequently by governing and opposing parties either to argue that social peace would be threatened if the measures were not enacted or to argue that the measures themselves threatened social peace. Common expressions of this *topos* included warnings of xenophobia and racism being prevented or increased by the measures. In the analysed debates in Sweden, this *topos* was used very seldom and only by opposition parties rejecting the measures to point out to the dangers caused by the measures.

A further example for a content-related *topos* frequently used in Germany, but very rarely in Sweden, is the *abuse topos (If a right or aid is abused, it should be changed/withdrawn)* which the governing Christian Democrats used often to argue for restrictions on the grounds that the existing rules like cash payments or protection from deportation in case of severe illness were abused by asylum seekers. In Sweden this *topos* was used seldom and, if at all, by the right-wing opposition parties.

As these examples of *topoi* and the analysis in total show, the parties in the German Bundestag discussed the measures very fundamentally, using content-related and often value-based *topoi* and making values an important issue regarding the measures. This was the case both for the governing and the opposition parties. This reliance on values is likely because the governing parties developed the measures on their own and were able to pass the measures without regard to the opposition. Thus, the measures were more controversial in Germany than in Sweden. The opposition attacked the measures harshly and fundamentally using powerful value-based *topoi* like the *humanity topos*. The governing parties used these *topoi*, too. On the one hand, they might have taken them up, since the

11. The distinction between content- and procedure-related *topoi* is not to be confused with Rigotti and Greco's (2019, 208–217) distinction between material-contextual and procedural components. Both categories are material – the distinction is about the material reference either to the content of the measures or to the parliamentary procedure.

opposition built on these central values and inserted them into the discourse and thus they were more or less forced to justify the measures more fundamentally. On the other hand, these values were presumably also considered socially accepted and upheld by governing parties. Thus, from a rhetorical perspective presuming strategies to the actors, it can be concluded that all parties in Germany expected these values to be important and persuasive to their addressees.

In Sweden, where all but the Left Party supported at least parts of the measures, there seems to have been less interest in discussing values, social or other fundamental aspects of the measures. The reason for this might not be that these values are not perceived as important in Sweden, but rather the fact that there was broad consensus on the measures to be taken, which were presented as a necessary evil by almost all parties (see also Hagelund 2020, 9). Therefore, in Sweden, not only for governing parties but also for most opposition parties, there was neither a necessity nor an interest to refer to fundamental values such as *humanity*. Citing these values could have led to a discussion in which finally the humanity of their jointly decided measures would have become a bigger issue in public discourse. And, if those rejecting the measures and arguing with these values play a minor role in public perception, the majority does not need to adapt to the views of those few objecting. However, the parties in Sweden still had an interest in criticizing each other and making their mark. The analysis shows that they did so by mainly applying procedure-related *topoi* and thus criticizing or justifying the way the measures were developed. This does not contradict the reference to values. The values were merely different. Thus, *cooperation*, for example, was indeed used in the sense of a value or principle as well.

Besides the *cooperation topos* described before, other examples for important *topoi* regarding the procedure are the *alternatives topos*, the *necessity topos* and the *insufficiency topos*. While the *alternatives topos* (*If other actions would solve a problem better/worse, other actions should [not] be taken*) was used in Germany mainly by the opposition to criticize the measures by stating that other measures would solve the problems better, in Sweden it was mainly used by governing parties and opposing parties supporting the measures to justify the measures by stating that other measures would be even worse. This suggests that in Sweden the measures were communicated as a stopgap solution or the lesser of all evils, while in Germany the governing parties were more convinced of their measures and thus criticized by the opposition.

A procedure-related *topos* that was used frequently in Sweden but hardly ever in Germany is the *insufficiency topos* (*If the measures are [not] prepared thoroughly enough/defined clearly enough, they [do not] need to be revised*). In Sweden, this *topos* was never used by the governing parties, but conspicuously

often by opposing parties, especially by opposing parties supporting the measures. Thus, they argued that they were supporting the measures in principle, but that the governing parties would have done a bad job in preparing them and that they would be needed to be worked out more thoroughly. The following examples show this argument:

I fully understand the need for urgency in this matter. But that does not give the government a free pass to present a poorly prepared proposal like this – a slapdash job. I, who *de facto* am in favour of the introduction of ID checks, can say that.

[Jag har full förståelse för behovet av skyndsamhet i denna fråga. Men det ger inte regeringen ett frikort till att presentera ett undermåligt berett förslag som detta – ett hafsverk. Det kan jag, som *de facto* ställer mig positiv till införandet av id-kontroller, säga.] (Hansson, Moderate Party: RD 2015/16:48, 60)

We Christian Democrats have full respect for that in an emergency situation it may be necessary to take measures faster than when the situation is normal. But even in an emergency situation, there must be a minimum requirement for how a preparation process should proceed. If the government thinks it has fulfilled that with this proposal, it is frightening.

[Vi kristdemokrater har full respekt för att det i ett akut läge kan behöva vidtas åtgärder snabbare än när läget är normalt. Men även i ett akut läge måste det finnas ett minimikrav på hur en berednings process ska gå till. Om regeringen menar att man har uppfyllt det med detta förslag är det skrämmande.] (Henriksson, Christian Democrats: RD 2015/16:48, 57)

In Germany, where all opposition parties rejected the measures, they hardly used this topos which is not surprising as it is not necessary to criticize details of preparing measures when one rejects the measures entirely.

These examples and the results in total thus show that in the Swedish Riksdag the discussion focused on procedural aspects of the measures. The measures were less controversial than in Germany, hence the procedure of decision-making was subject to discussions. Especially the parties cooperating and having agreed on the migration agreement used topoi resting on principles regarding cooperation and preparation. Reasons for this can be, on a more general scale, the consensus tradition and less controversy around government policy, and, related to these very measures, the agreement of most of the parties based on and at the same time leading to content-related unity.

A content-related topos that was used frequently both in Germany and Sweden, albeit in different forms, is the *burden sharing topos* (*If some persons/institutions/countries bear a heavier burden than others, measures should be taken to equalize the effort*). In both parliaments this topos was mainly used by governing parties and, in Sweden, also by opposing parties supporting the measures, while it was hardly used by opposition parties rejecting the measures. However, this topos' expressions

diverged in a very interesting aspect when looking at the general migration discourse in 2015 and 2016.

In Germany, the *burden sharing topos* was used principally to state that loads should be shared between Germany's federal states. In Sweden, where this *topos* was the governing parties' most used *topos*, it was mainly used to claim that burden sharing between the European countries was needed and that Sweden needed to close its border in order to force other countries to contribute more.¹² This corresponds with the general discourse in both countries. In Germany, the topic was discussed more on a national level and the reception of refugees was questioned due to vested interests within the country. In Sweden, in contrast, the reception of refugees was – at that time – questioned less in principle but more in relation to the European level, coupled with a question of justice, whether other European countries should have to contribute as much as Sweden.

4.4 Opposition *topoi*

In the observations described so far, I have already addressed some differences in the use of *topoi* by governing and opposing parties. The opposition's differing role in Germany and Sweden calls for a closer analysis of the opposition's *topoi* use in both parliaments. In both parliaments all of the *topoi* were used by both the governing and the opposing parties making Bornscheuer's structural feature potentiality evident. However, there are *topoi* that were used mainly – meaning more frequently – by opposition parties like the *consistency topos*, the *correction topos*, the *uselessness topos*, the *topos of negative consequences*, the *insufficiency topos*, and the *overdue topos*. All these *topoi* were typical for the opposition both in Germany and Sweden. Hence, there were typical opposition *topoi* across both parliaments, and although the opposition in Sweden partly worked together with the government and in part agreed with the measures, there was an intersection of *topoi* that are often used to criticize the government.

However, not all opposing parties in Sweden supported the measures and cooperated with the government in the same way. Thus, there were different roles in the opposition depending on their level of support. To take a closer look at the *topoi* used by opposition parties, I distinguished between cooperating and non-cooperating opposition parties. This couldn't be done in a single general step as no opposing party rejected all measures, but individually for each debate depending on the party's voting behaviour regarding the proposals in question. Parties were counted as cooperating opposition parties if a majority of their MPs voted for the government proposal or abstained in the respective vote following the debate.

12. Hagelund (2020, 9) also describes this argument as one of the central arguments in the Swedish discourse on asylum policy in 2015 and 2016.

Parties voting in majority against the proposals were counted as non-cooperating opposition parties.

Figure 2 shows the most frequently used *topoi* in the Swedish Riksdag, divided into governing, cooperating opposition and non-cooperating opposition parties.

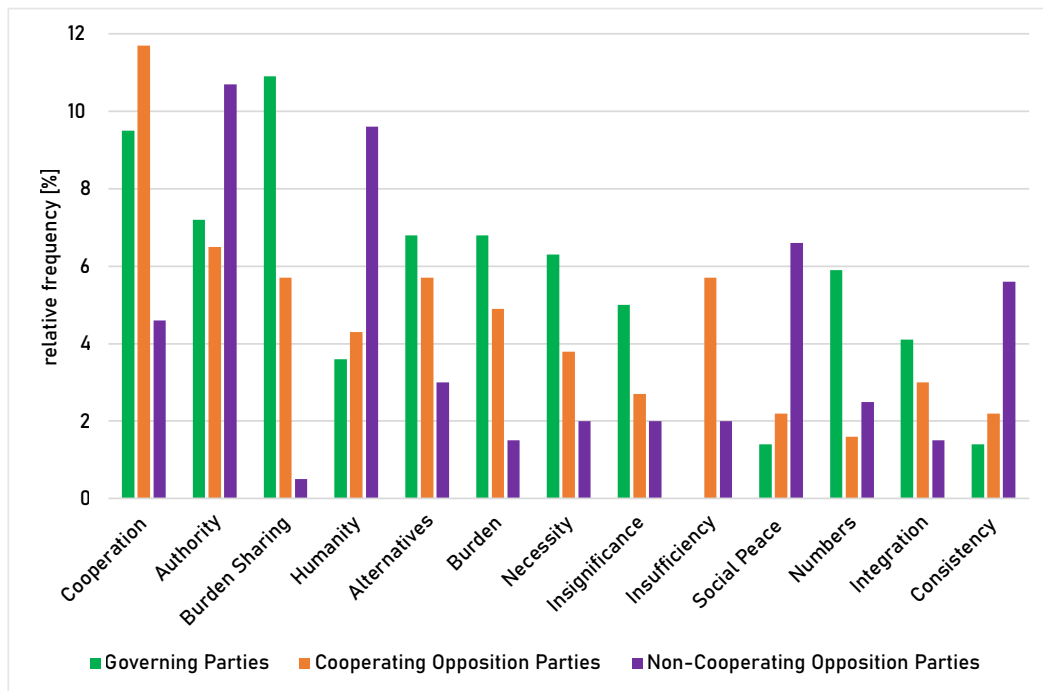


Figure 2: Most frequently used *topoi* in the Swedish Riksdag by governing, cooperating opposition and non-cooperating opposition parties. Shown is the frequency of *topoi* used by governing, cooperating and non-cooperating opposition parties relative to the total of identified *topoi* used by speakers of the respective parties.

As becomes obvious here, the governing, the cooperating opposition and the non-cooperating opposition parties diverged clearly in their *topoi* usage. However, the opposition parties did not form a unity but also differed clearly between cooperating and non-cooperating opposition parties. The percentage frequency of the cooperating opposition parties' *topoi* in many cases lay between the governing and the non-cooperating opposition parties, often even closer to the governing parties. The governing and the non-cooperating opposition parties diverged in most cases much more in their *topoi* usage. For example, the *burden sharing topos* that was described before and the *burden topos* were used very frequently by the governing parties and hardly ever by the non-cooperating opposition parties. The cooperating opposition parties used these *topoi* quite frequently, too. Also, *topoi* used particularly frequently by the non-cooperating opposing parties like the *humanity topos*, the *social peace topos* or the *consistency topos* and rarely by the governing parties, were used nearly as rarely by the cooperating opposition parties, too.

Hence, cooperating opposition parties did not only and not even mainly use typical opposition *topoi*, but often those the governing parties used frequently. Hence, the intermediate position of cooperating opposition parties was reflected in their argumentation. This shows that the blurred boundaries of government and opposition that were described in section 2.2 did not only exist in decision-making but were evident in the discourse as well in the sense that cooperating opposition parties in parts acted and argued like governing parties.

5. Conclusions

Proceeding from the question of whether consensus orientation and the particular way of decision-making in minority governments are reflected in parliamentary debates, I examined parliamentary debates on asylum policy from the German Bundestag and the Swedish Riskdag in 2015 and 2016. The analysis was conducted as a topos analysis to identify concepts and principles behind the arguments that speakers used to persuade their addressees. A topos analysis can show habitualised preconceptions – either of the speakers or of their expected addressees. Assuming that speakers in parliament act to persuade the public or part of it, it can be concluded that they draw on concepts the *topoi* rest on to make their argument and thereby their position accessible for their imagined audience. The importance of particular concepts in relation to the form of government can be a long-term cultural characteristic because of the predominance of a specific form of government for decades and short-term because of the specific cooperation constellations regarding the specific subject.

The results show that there are similarities in *topoi* usage in both countries which suggests the most important *topoi* in the discourse. But there are significant differences, too, that can, at least partly, be attributed to the different forms of government and the different degrees of consensus orientation and cooperation.

Germany was ruled by a majority government that decided on the measures independently of the opposition and was then attacked by the opposition. The measures were controversial, and consistent with this the *topoi* used were mainly related to the measures' content. Both the opposing and the governing parties drew on concepts like *humanity* or *social peace*. They justified and criticized the measures fundamentally in relation to their content. In Sweden, where six of the eight parties banded together to determine asylum policy, all parties agreed to at least some of the measures and often used *topoi* related to the procedure of decision-making. The parties drew on concepts like *cooperation*, presenting the measures as necessary and as a jointly-decided best alternative, and the opposing parties criticized the measures for not being worked out enough rather than for being substantively wrong.

Another finding related to the minority government and the consequent non-uniform role of the opposition in Sweden, is that the opposition parties supporting the measures argued to a certain degree like governing parties rather than like non-cooperating opposition parties. This suggests that their special role in parliament also shapes their rhetoric, at least their argumentation.

Hence, the government form as a minority or majority government seems to influence the kind of arguments used. The results indicate that in minority governments where cooperation between governing and opposing parties is common, the focus of dissent and the arguments used is on the process of decision-making and the legislative procedure. In majority governments where no cooperation between governing and opposing parties is needed, the argumentation deals mainly with substantive aspects of the proposed measures. Furthermore, the specific roles of parties as governing, cooperating or non-cooperating opposition parties in the context of minority governments seem to be associated with the choice of arguments. In comparison to majority governments this results in a less clear division between governing and opposing parties – not only in voting but also in choosing arguments.

Whether these findings can be generalized and are typical for discourses in minority and majority governments in general needs to be examined in a larger scale study containing debates from more countries with majority and minority governments. Another interesting study would be to analyse argumentation in different Nordic countries' parliamentary debates regarding migration policy in 2015 and 2016 to see if they, despite reaching diametrically opposed policy decisions, show a common consensus culture.

Corpus

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