Impersonal Knowledge Networks of Public Opinion

The concept of impersonal knowledge networks proposes a new approach for the study of political knowledge and public opinion. Factual knowledge questions and the analysis of simple frequency distributions provide only limited insights into the complex structures and dynamics of how people think and decide on political issues. The concept of impersonal knowledge networks proposes to understand public opinion as a network of topic related aspects. Free word associations of individuals are used as the basis to aggregate bigger knowledge networks. This aggregation is possible by transforming the two-mode network of respondents and their answers to a one mode network of topic aspects. Data presented in this talk were collected in representative CATI interviews on three different national referendum campaigns in Switzerland. The panel design allows not only to describe the knowledge structure at a given time point but also to analyse the dynamics of the structure.

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