BRINGING CITIZENS BACK IN?
ON THE EFFECTS OF A POLITICAL WEB PLATTFORM

Gorgi Krlev
Centre for Social Investment (CSI), University of Heidelberg
gorgi.krlev@csi.uni-heidelberg.de

University of Oxford, Kellogg College

Remark: This is the full report of a study conducted as part of my completed DPhil at the University of Oxford. It is thus only a very extensive first draft of an article.

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the results of a study that focussed on the political capital created by abgeordnetenwatch.de (AW). AW is a web-platform that aims to promote a dialogue between citizens and politicians, increase political transparency, and limit the influence of lobbyists on politics. It does so by a spectrum of activities ranging from offering a public forum for political exchange, to documenting politician's voting behaviour, to initiating legal action against misconduct. 745 citizens and 255 politicians participated in an online survey to express their views on the effects of AW. Some comparisons have been drawn to data from the European Social Survey (ESS), both as regards traits of AW users against the general population and in assessing AW's effects.

My research finds that AW users have higher levels of literacy and engagement than ESS respondents who are representative of the general population, and only part of the differences are due to different inclinations of the two groups. AW users are also politically more conscious (cultural capital) than the population. AW users express much more positive views than politicians about the platform's effects in terms of information, awareness raising, exposure of politicians to the public and sensitisation for lobbyism. Given the positive assessment of impacts by citizens it is striking that politicians are rather indifferent towards the platform's effects. This applies even more so as activity on AW seems a replacement for rather than a way into political engagement within formal organisations.

Keywords: Impact; social enterprise; political capital; online; citizens.

INTRODUCTION

Studying political capital is a key to understanding actor participation and influence within political systems, both of which are central to democratic functioning and thus wider social productivity. Existing research has pushed the boundaries in understanding the moderating factors of political capital as people being politically engaged within the democratic system. On the level of nations research has for instance focussed on the effects of employment programmes on the target groups' political behaviour (Blattman, Emeriau, & Fiala, 2017). On the field or group level is has looked at the formation of networks or actor coalitions promoting political issues (Sørensen & Torfing, 2003; Weible, 2006), and on the level of individuals on practices and skills acquired in professional and associational life (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).[1]

Ways of engaging politically online have received increasing attention lately, supposedly due to their wider spread, lower threshold for engagement, and higher accessibility than offline activities. Most studies focus on how the internet is used as a means of political mobilization (Di Gennaro, 2006; Stanley & Weare, 2016), as a forum for political debate (Albrecht, 2006), or as a new mode of access to politically relevant information (Gil De Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2010). Often they have a focus on how it affects young people (Vissers & Stolle, 2014). However, we lack insights on whether and how targeted online initiatives that aim at promoting citizens' political capital have an actual impact. The activities of AW provide an excellent space for testing whether and how the capital based approach to social impact can be fruitfully applied, with a particular focus on political capital.

The concept of political capital I apply here is described in more detail in the theoretical parts of my dissertation. Throughout my work it refers to the "engagement and activity of individuals within social settings" and comprises variables that relate to activism, involvement, or influence. In the context of AW it is applied within the explicit realm of politics. Therefore it addresses the "discursive exchange between a large variety of constituents", including ordinary citizens and politicians alike. It comprises aspects such as the "engagement in political debate, or participation in policy formation" and related components. The effects of AW on

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[1] See for instance Dacin, Goodstein, and Scott (2002) for a distinction of the different levels, however, in relation to institutional research.

these variables have been tested in a survey for citizens and a separate one for politicians. The effects have been assessed in two ways: (1) by means of comparison between the levels of capitals held by respondents to the survey on the one side and those held by the German population as derived from representative data of the European Social Survey (ESS) on the other side, and (2) by asking citizens and politicians explicitly whether they saw or experienced a range of effects. In the first approach the effects are measured indirectly, in the second one they are measured directly.

Predispositions in cultural capital (relating to norms and values such as trust, solidarity or tolerance) and satisfaction measures (for instance with how democracy works) have been assessed to account for the specific characteristics of CS respondents that might have had a moderating influence of the measured effects. Two further cultural capital items (being interested in current issues; caring for others) and one social capital item (forming communities of interest) have been used as measures of effects complementary to the political capital ones.

SPECIFICS OF THE WEB-PLATFORM

The web-platform "abgeordnetenwatch.de" is an independent, nonpartisan internet space on which citizens can get in touch with members of parliament (MPs) of the German National Parliament (Bundestag), the European Parliament, and the parliaments on the German federal state level. AW was founded in 2004. At the time it was only the citizens of Hamburg who could contact their MPs publicly online. Citizens' questions and politicians' answers are documented on the website. In late 2006 AW was extended to address the level of the Bundestag and 2008 that of the European Parliament. In 2009 over 90 percent of the politicians that stood for election into the German or the European parliament engaged in some political dialogue with citizens through the platform. AW is the biggest political discussion platform in Germany with about 125.000 users and 275.000 page clicks per year as of August 2017. AW is considered a social enterprise and the founder has been elected an Ashoka fellow.

In addition to the moderation of political dialogue AW performs several targeted activities surrounding political transparency, lobbyism and corruption. Prominent activities of AW include: (1) the documentation of MP's voting behaviour in parliamentary decisions on politicians' web profiles on the website; (2) a legal appeal to the Bundestag to reveal information on permanent access permits for lobbyists; (3) an initiative for greater transparency of MPs'

auxiliary income, that is for work performed alongside their political mandate; (4) a petition and subsequently passed legislation for punishing corruption among MPs; (5) an initiative for lowering the threshold for party donations that require revelation of the donors' identity. The main means for exerting influence on these matters are public communication through online, television and print media, petitions and legal appeals.

METHODS

Participants

Participation in the citizen survey (CS) was not restricted by any mode of preselection, apart from the one that participants had to be users of AW, and a high number of completed questionnaires was sought to increase practical significance of the data. 745 citizens participated in the online survey in total. It was open for ten weeks beginning in late February 2016. Calls for participation in the survey had been issued by AW on their website, in their newsletter and on social media. Access through AW had to be sought since there was no other way of attracting a critical mass of participants otherwise. The calls for participation stressed the independence of the research and that the researcher was in no way affiliated with AW. No direct contact to potential participants was made apart from the modes of access mentioned above. Participants for the politician survey were recruited through contacting MPs on the national, federal state and EU level via their official email accounts, including three reminders. The politician survey (PS) was initiated about a week after the citizen survey but closed at the same time as the latter. Over 2500 MPs (1800 on the federal state level, 630 on the national level, 87 on the EU level) were contacted in total and 255 MPs chose to participate, yielding a response rate of roughly 10 percent.

Analytic strategy

In addition to standard demographic variables, such as gender, region of residence, income and education, some more specific variables have been assessed to describe the target group. In the absence of a proper control group, the characteristics of the group of respondents have been compared to those of respondents to ESS conducted in 2014.[2] In addition to comparisons of socio-economic variables further differences and commonalities between CS and ESS have

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[2] Data of ESS Round 8 conducted in 2016 had not been released yet at the time of the present analysis.

been explored. Comparisons were drawn on people's level of trust and satisfaction for example, but also on that of their political orientation. Instead of higher level variables pointing to 'fundamental beliefs', such as a preference for security or economic well-being (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 252), participants were asked about their political orientation more directly and offered categories such as 'conservative' or 'liberal' (some call these "policy core beliefs"; Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009).

ESS data have not only been used for comparing general characteristics, but also to reckon how much the users of AW differed in terms of their interest in political issues, their assessment of possibilities for participation in the political system or their estimation of the influence individual citizens can have on political decisions. Citizens' responses were reflected in yet another way, namely through comparing their answers to the views held by politicians as expressed in the separate PS.

Socio-demographics of the groups of respondents

In the following I describe commonalities and differences between the participants in the citizen survey (CS), and thus supposedly the general user structure of AW, and characteristics found in ESS data. The latter are representative of the general population as regards gender, age, education, and region (federal state) when "post-stratification weights" are applied (European Social Survey, 2014b). A further comparison is drawn to the characteristics of the group of politicians that participated in the separate politician survey (PS).

Table 1 provides a summary of these characteristics. While the share of women in ESS is around 50 percent, only about 25 percent of CS respondents were women, and around 30 percent of respondents to PS.[3] In comparison with ESS, people aged 55 years and over are overrepresented in the citizen survey, while those aged between 15 and 34 are underrepresented.[4] The age shares are 16-30-54 percent in CS (lowest-medium-highest stratum), 28-36-36 percent in ESS, and 10-56-34 in PS. There are also fewer people who were not born in Germany or were not a German citizen in CS (about 4 and 1 percent) and PS (about 3.5 percent)[5] than in ESS (about 12 and 6 percent). People living in (1) cities and (2) suburbs are

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[3] All figures are rounded to full percentage points in the text.
[4] These and another category between the two are the usual age strata applied in the calculation of ESS weights (European Social Survey (2014a)).
[5] All MPs need to have German citizenship.

overrepresented against people living in (3) smaller towns and (4) villages in CS and PS as compared to ESS. The shares are: 29-16-33-21 percent in CS, 33-15-33-19 percent in PS and 16-12-37-35 percent in ESS.

The partnership status of respondents differs in several regards. As compared to ESS, PS contains a larger share of married people (73 percent) and a lower share of celibates (16 percent). The last trait is shared by respondents to CS (16 percent of celibates), whereas the percentage of divorced people is higher in CS, especially when compared to ESS (28 percent in CS versus 8 percent in ESS). This is also reflected in the larger share of single person households in CS: 27 percent versus 18 percent in ESS, and 11 in PS.

Table 1 Socio-demographics CS, PS and ESS

#	Variable	Values	Citizens		ESS		Politicians		N Total		
			N	%	N	%	N	%	Cit	ESS	Pol
1	Gender	female	176	24.5%	1570	51.6%	69	28.8%	717	3045	240
2	Age STRATA	15-34	115	16.2%	847	27.9%	23	10.1%	711	3031	227
		35-54	213	30.0%	1083	35.7%	126	55.5%			
		55+	383	53.9%	1101	36.3%	78	34.4%			
3	Born in Germany	No	27	3.8%	363	11.9%	8	3.4%	711	3045	237
4	German citizen	No	9	1.3%	191	6.3%	-		716	3041	-
5	Locality	City	211	29.0%	487	16.0%	79	32.8%	727	3043	241
		Suburb	118	16.2%	381	12.5%	36	14.9%			
		Town	241	33.1%	1123	36.9%	80	33.2%			
		Village	157	21.6%	1053	34.6%	46	19.1%			
6	Partnership	Married	355	51.1%	1589	52.4%	160	73.1%	695	3031	219
		Divorced	195	28.1%	250	8.3%	23	10.5%			
		Widowed	20	2.9%	213	7.0%	1	0.5%			
		Celibataire	125	18.0%	978	32.3%	35	16.0%			
7	Household #	1	189	27.2%	538	17.7%	23	10.6%	695	3037	216
		2	309	44.5%	1158	38.1%	71	32.9%			
		3	91	13.1%	537	17.7%	53	24.5%			
		4+	106	15.3%	804	26.5%	69	31.9%			
8	Income	0 -1.380 (20%ile)	120	19.0%	451	17.0%	-		630	2648	-
		1.381-2040 (40%ile)	86	13.7%	584	22.0%	-				
		2.041-3.280 (70%ile)	185	29.4%	779	29.4%	-				
		3.281-4.960 (90%ile)	165	26.2%	534	20.2%	-				
		4.961+ (91%ile)	74	11.7%	300	11.3%	-				
9	Occupation	Paid work	364	51.5%	1458	48.8%	-		707	2988	-
		Education	65	9.2%	385	12.9%	-				
		Unemployed	56	7.9%	193	6.5%	-				
		Retired	211	29.8%	710	23.8%	-				
		Household; child	11	1.6%	242	8.1%	-				
10	Education STRATA	Lower (GS, HS)	36	5.0%	1038	34.2%	6	2.6%	722	3031	230
		Medium (RS, GYM)	258	35.7%	1576	52.0%	47	20.4%			
		Higher (Uni)	428	59.3%	417	13.7%	177	77.0%			

As regards income, ESS respondents comply fairly accurately with the decile-based German income distribution, which has been collapsed into five categories in the table. CS respondents also do so for the largest part. However in CS, households earning between 1,381-2,040 € account for only 14 percent whereas those earning 3,281-4,960 € are at 26 percent, while both shares should be at 20 percent to be representative of the general population.[6] As regards their occupation respondents to ESS and CS are pretty similar with only some differences, for instance a higher share of retired people (30 percent in CS versus 24 percent in ESS) and a lower share of people doing housework and child caring (2 percent in CS versus 8 percent in ESS).

Table 2 Federal states CS, PS and ESS

# Variable	Values	Citizens		ESS		Politicians		N Total		
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	Cit	ESS	Pol
11 Location	Baden-Württemberg	99	13.7%	386	12.7%	50	19.6%	722	3045	255
	Bayern	112	15.5%	449	14.8%	28	11.0%			
	Berlin	53	7.3%	128	4.2%	16	6.3%			
	Brandenburg	14	1.9%	98	3.2%	4	1.6%			
	Bremen	6	0.8%	25	0.8%	0	0.0%			
	Hamburg	29	4.0%	65	2.1%	13	5.1%			
	Hessen	77	10.7%	223	7.3%	17	6.7%			
	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	8	1.1%	68	2.2%	0	0.0%			
	Niedersachsen	60	8.3%	290	9.5%	14	5.5%			
	Nordrhein-Westfalen	150	20.8%	662	21.7%	31	12.2%			
	Rheinland-Pfalz	37	5.1%	149	4.9%	26	10.2%			
	Saarland	7	1.0%	40	1.3%	1	0.4%			
	Sachsen	21	2.9%	168	5.5%	17	6.7%			
	Sachsen-Anhalt	8	1.1%	99	3.2%	1	0.4%			
	Schleswig-Holstein	33	4.6%	102	3.4%	13	5.1%			
	Thüringen	8	1.1%	93	3.1%	1	0.4%			

CS data are marked by a considerable negative skew in education, that is a large share of people in the highest educational stratum:[7] Only 5 percent are at the lower educational level (Hauptschule or no secondary school degree), while almost 60 percent are at the highest educational level (went to university). Another 36 percent are at the medium level (Realschule and Gymnasium). This skew is even stronger in PS, with 77 percent of respondents having

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[6] MPs have not been asked about their income, since due to their standard salaries, they should all be in the highest decile.

[7] Strata applied correspond to those used in ESS; see European Social Survey (2014a).

been educated at a university. For a comparison only 14 percent of ESS respondents possess higher level degrees, while 34 percent are located at the lowest level.

Finally, Table 2 (see above) gives a summary of the location of respondents in the 16 German federal states. Generally there is a tendency for people from Eastern Germany (for instance from Brandenburg, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen) to be underrepresented in CS and PS as compared to ESS. Overall, however, CS and PS respondents comply for the most part the with regional provenience pattern of the German population.

Further characteristics: capitals baselines and satisfaction

All three groups have furthermore been compared as to their general level of: (1) political capital (voting; political orientation; obtaining political information on TV); (2) cultural capital (tolerance; solidarity; sense of community; trust); and (3) satisfaction (with the national government; how democracy works; life in general). The measures were chosen as available in ESS. None of them are supposed to be fundamentally affected by the use of AW.[8] The purpose of this comparison was to get a better sense of the character of the different groups.[9] Table 3 contains two political capital dimensions (voting and political orientation), "interest in political information" instead is displayed in Table 4 due to its different format.

About 80 percent of both CS and ESS respondents indicated that they had voted in the last national elections (item 1). Taking ESS as a benchmark, CS data contain much fewer people that describe their political orientation (item 2) as "conservative" (about 9 versus 38 percent) and "nationalist" (about 2 versus 5 percent). At the same time the participation of "communitarian", "green", "liberal" and "left-liberal"[10] people was higher in CS—shares in CS were mostly twice as high as in ESS, in the case of "liberal" thrice as high. Participation in PS was

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[8] Voting in CS referred to several previous elections and has been assessed by a scale ranging from "never" to "seldom" to "mostly" to "always". The latter category has been transformed to "yes" and the rest to "no" for comparison with ESS data. Since the median length of respondents' use of AW was only at about 3 years, the voting variable has been treated as an inclination unaltered by AW.

[9] Initially some further social capital items had been considered, such as "how often do you meet socially with your friends, relatives or colleagues", or "how many people are there, with whom you can discuss intimate or personal matters." These were dismissed due to their relatively lower importance for the present investigation as compared to those listed above. They were also disregarded due to practical restraints to the overall length of the questionnaire and the time needed for completion by respondents.

[10] Left-liberal was not initially a category, but emerged through frequent mentions in the category "other." In conjunction with PS data, it turned out that mostly people who identified with the "Piratenpartei" used this term to describe their political orientation.

more in line with ESS, yet with a markedly lower participation from "conservatives" (about 24 percent in PS) and higher participation from "liberal" and "left-liberal" politicians (about 16 and 4 percent in PS). While conservative politicians in PS occupied a higher share than conservative citizens in CS, the shares of liberal and left-liberal individuals were almost at an equal level in both surveys.

Table 3 Voting and political orientation CS, PS and ESS

#	Cap.	Category	Item	Citizens		ESS		Politicians		N Total		
				N	%	N	%	N	%	Cit	ESS	Pol
1	PC	Voting	yes	604	82.0%	2149	79.5%	-		737	2703	-
2		Pol. orient.	Conservative	58	9.1%	718	38.3%	59	24.4%	640	1876	242
			Social-democratic	169	26.4%	572	30.5%	76	31.4%			
			Communitarian	101	15.8%	144	7.7%	17	7.0%			
			Green	186	29.1%	236	12.6%	40	16.5%			
			Liberal	92	14.4%	83	4.4%	38	15.7%			
			Nationalist	10	1.6%	88	4.7%	2	0.8%			
			Left-liberal	24	3.8%	34	1.8%	10	4.1%			

Table 4 illustrates the results on the differences in cultural capital and satisfaction (and gathering political information by watching TV as another political capital item). These differences have been assessed by comparing the mean and standard deviation as well as the median in the groups, due to the non-normal distribution of most of the data. They have been furthermore assessed graphically and by means of the Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples (confidence interval at 95 percent, CI=95%). Z-scores of the test have been translated into effect sizes as measured by Cohen's d (1992).[11] A further comparison to politicians has only been drawn for illustrative purposes.

The comparisons show that people responding to CS and ESS have a number of traits in common, which are discussed first before I turn to detected differences.[12] Respondents to both surveys are similarly tolerant, both with regards to accepting sexual diversity (see item 4 Table 4; corresponding question: "gay men and lesbians should be able to live their lives as they wish; medians between "agree" and "fully agree") and cultural diversity (item 5; medians at

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[11] A Cohen's d of 0.1 indicates a small effect size, 0.3 a medium size and 0.5 a large size.

[12] In order to simplify responses for the participants of CS and PS, all questions # 4-7 were recorded on a 1-5 scale ranging from "agree strongly"-"disagree strongly", and all questions # 8-14 on a 0-10 scale ranging from "not at all" to "totally." **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** in the Appendix illustrates the original scales from ESS, how they were applied in CS and PS and how the two versions were unified to allow for direct comparisons.

"allow *some* people from a different cultural background to come and live in Germany"). Politicians are almost at an equal level.

Table 4 Political capital, cultural capital and satisfaction CS, PS and ESS

#	Cap.	Category	Item	Citizens			ESS			Politicians			N Total			Diff. CS-ESS		
				M	SD	MD	M	SD	MD	M	SD	MD	Cit	ESS	Pol	z*	d	x
3	PC	Interest	Polit. info.	2.45	1.616	2	1.80	1.154	2	-	-	-	732	2879	-	-11.66	0.19	x
4	CC	Tolerance	Sexual diversity	1.46	0.729	1	1.79	0.940	2	1.38	0.645	1	724	3022	237	-9.43	0.15	
5			Cultural diversity	2.35	0.870	2	2.09	0.781	2	2.14	0.823	2	731	3024	235	-7.00	0.11	
6		Solidarity	Income inequal.	1.55	0.846	1	2.20	0.971	2	2.07	1.187	2	698	3001	207	-18.57	0.31	x
7		Unity	EU unif.	2.23	1.327	2	2.87	1.199	3	1.69	0.980	1	683	2964	237	-12.87	0.21	
8		Trust	People	6.33	1.810	7	4.95	2.207	5	6.74	1.663	7	734	3044	231	-16.32	0.27	x
9			Legal system	4.97	2.544	5	5.73	2.474	6	7.45	1.968	8	738	3025	240	-7.35	0.12	
10			Political parties	2.49	2.032	2	3.91	2.133	4	5.93	2.186	6	734	3005	231	-15.69	0.26	x
11	Sat.		Govern-ment	2.97	2.319	3	5.00	2.178	5	4.68	2.723	5	733	2929	242	-19.53	0.32	x
12			Democr.	3.72	2.685	4	5.87	2.383	6	6.59	2.650	7	739	3015	242	-18.59	0.30	x
13			Life	7.39	2.078	8	7.38	2.107	8	8.27	1.505	8	727	3038	233	-0.20	0.00	

Remarks:*= z (and d) all p=0.000, except item 13 (not sig.); x= marked difference (highlighted in grey: displayed separately in density plot); M=mean; SD=standard deviation; MD=median; PC=Pol. Cap.; CC=Cul. Cap.; SC=Soc. cap.

Similarities have also been detected as regards EU unification (item 7), with some higher variation than in the two items before. CS participants tend to agree that "unification should go further", while ESS respondents were located rather at "neither…nor" on that question. Politicians are more pro-unification than both, CS and ESS. Overall, politicians are also more satisfied with their life (item 13; median 8 and mean 8.3) than CS and ESS respondents, who are almost on a par (median 8 and mean 7.4). Respondents to CS and ESS also have a similar level of trust in the legal system (item 9; median 5 for CS and 6 for ESS), while politicians' trust in the legal system is clearly higher (median 8).

In contrast to the above variables, there are several areas in which CS and ESS differ (marked with "x" in the table). Some of the items that exhibit differences have been selected to outline discrepancies in more depth through the illustration of (scaled) density plots (highlighted ad-

ditionally in grey).[13] To begin with, CS and ESS respondents differ in the time they spend watching news and political information on TV (item 3; see Figure 1).[14] While the majority in ESS consume such information for up to half an hour per day (1 on the scale), the majority in CS do so for half an hour to one hour (2 on the scale), and a substantially higher share of people do so for even greater amounts of time.

Figure 1 Watching news and political information on TV
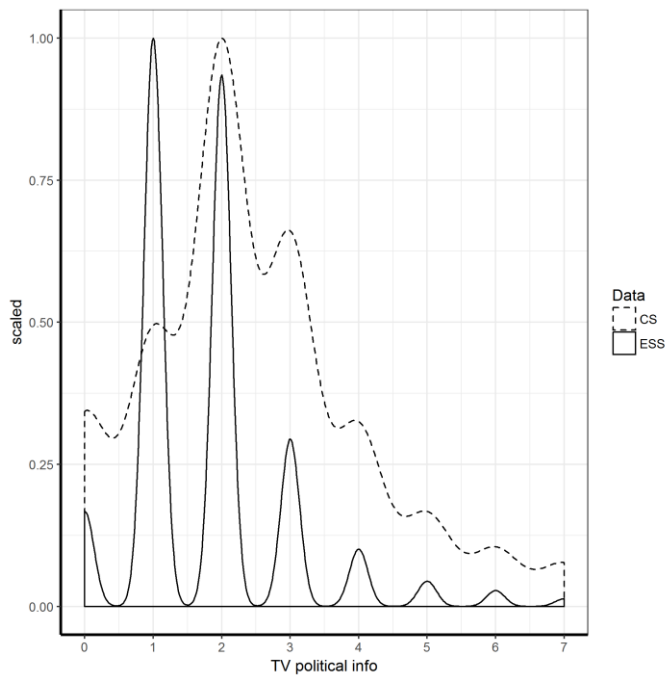
In reference to item 6 called "solidarity" and as displayed in Figure 2, CS and PS are similar in that a majority of respondents "agree strongly"[15] that the "government should take measures to reduce income inequalities" (peaks in both groups at 1). However, the relative difference between "full support" and lower levels is clearly more pronounced for CS, who are thus more supportive of the claim. ESS respondents, while remaining on the supportive side, have their stress on "agree" but not on "agree strongly."

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[13] Scaled density plots are transformed so that the spot of highest density for each group lies at 1.
[14] Question not contained in PS survey. Scale starting with "no time at all" with subsequent increases by 30 minute intervals up to 7="more than 3 hours."
[15] Solidarity scale: 1="agree strongly"–5="disagree strongly."

Figure 2 Reduction of income inequalities
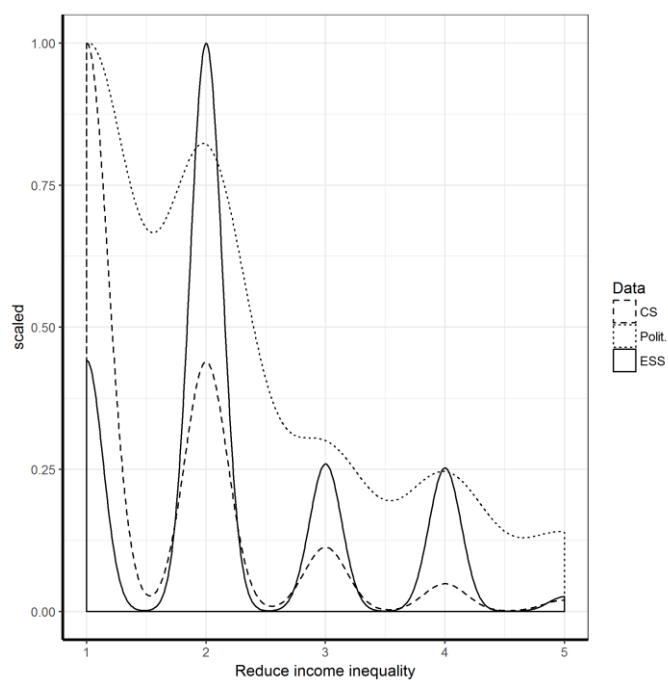
When it comes to trusting people (item 8) the picture looks different, as shown in Figure 3. The plots for CS and PS are almost identical and inclined towards trusting people, while the ESS distribution is centred at a medium level (scale: 0="don't trust"–10="fully trust").

Figure 3 Trust in people
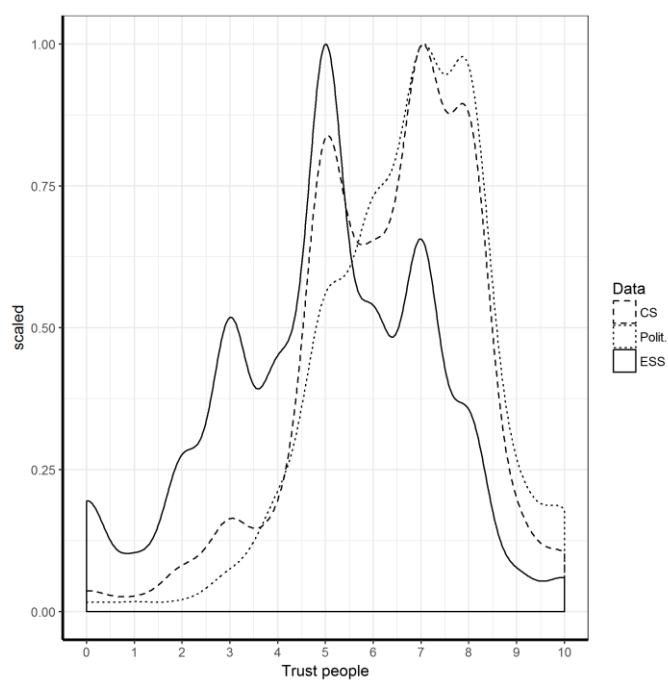
In contrast to trust in people, the participants in CS are more mistrusting of political parties than those in ESS (item 10; median 2 in CS versus 4 in ESS; both levels expressing scepticism though). CS respondents are also more dissatisfied with the work of the government (item 11; median 3 in CS versus 5 in ESS). It needs to be remarked that the 'refugee crisis' which peaked in 2015/2016 might have caused shifts in the level of satisfaction with the government in the population, which cannot be detected in the 2014 ESS data.

A further difference relating to the scepticism towards the political system is the respondents' different take of how well democracy works in Germany (item 12). As shown in Figure 4 the share of people dissatisfied with "how democracy works" is prominent in CS (dashed line), while the distribution in ESS is left-skewed leaning towards a positive assessment (solid line). Politicians instead are even more positive (dotted line). In particular as compared to CS, politicians are also much more trusting of political parties (item 10; median 6 for ESS versus 2 for CS) and satisfied with the national government (item 11; median 5 for ESS versus 3 for CS).

Figure 4 Satisfaction with how democracy works
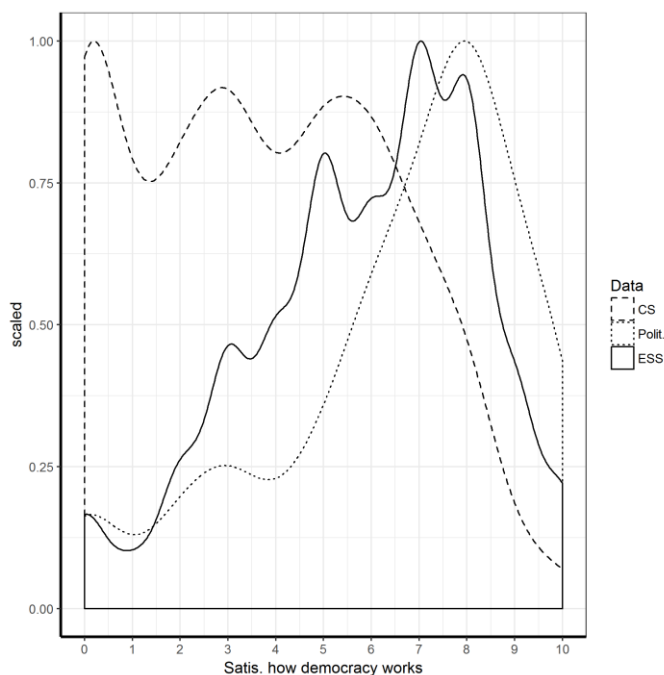
Based on the above observations we can say that respondents to CS in comparison to the general population are: more interested politically, more solidary and more trusting of people in general, but also more sceptical of the established political system (more mistrusting of parties, and less satisfied with the government and how democracy works).

Effect measures

The questions posed in the surveys referred to two main populations that AW potentially affects: politicians and citizens. Both were incorporated in each of the surveys. So I can mostly present the 'self' and the 'other' view of effects on each target population. Results to be presented in the following are, however, not structured by the target groups, but by the mechanisms by which AW can produce impacts: (a) effects of the website and its use; (b) AW's organisational activities (information on MPs' voting behaviour, lobbyism etc.).

There are furthermore two types of effects the website can have: immediate and mediated effects (see Table 5). The immediate effects do not need much time to evolve and can best be assessed by asking directly whether an effect has been experienced or not. Mediated effects in contrast to immediate ones need to grow and manifest over time. They include potentially unintended spill-overs of using AW and do not focus on intentional change only. They are best assessed by estimating how capital levels in CS differ from the level of capitals held in other groups (here: the general population). But they can also be assessed by asking for effects directly.

Table 5 Effect measures

#	Level	Mechanism	Capital*	Category
1	Effects of platform	Immediate		Communication
2				Advocacy
3			Cultural	Inclusion (of formerly excluded)
4			Social	Community (of interest)
5		Mediated	Cultural	Consciousness
6				Literacy
7				Engagement
8				Influence
9	Effects of AW activities	Immediate		Information
10				Politicians' effort
11				Politicians' exposure
12				Restriction of third party influence

Remark: *=All except for those marked=Pol. Cap.

The table only outlines the general categories used to differentiate the capitals further. It will be seen further which specific items these are composed of. For a lack of previous studies on the effects of specific interventions and the unique character of AW's activities, the immediate impacts have been assessed by a number of generic questions. The categories assessed

comprise: (1) communication (in relation to revelation of political positions, but also political dialogue); (2) advocacy (promotion of thematic issues); (3) inclusion (in the sense of the creating political interest in people, who were previously disinterested); (4) community (in the sense of enabling the formation of like-minded interest groups).

Category 4 called "community" contains some reference to coordinated behaviour and coalition building (Sabatier, 1998). Effectively it is more about building a community among users though and its relational character makes it a social capital variable. Category 3 referred to as "inclusion" also deviates from the activity-based character of political capital. It refers to an initial sensitization for political issues of people formerly disinterested. The normative character of showing interest in politics makes it a cultural capital variable. All other variables belong to political capital.

In contrast to the immediate ones, the questions on the mediated effects on citizens were mostly derived from existing literature along the four broad categories: (5) consciousness (knowing and caring about issues); (6) literacy (being able to participate in political processes); (7) engagement (passive and active); (8) perceived influence (access to and being able to shape policy making).

Most of the questions applied have been used in assessing the state of contemporary democracy in the 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' (CID) survey, which was performed between 2000-2004 in several European countries and in the USA (Andersen et al., 2007; Howard, Gibson, & Stolle, 2006; van Deth, Montero, & Westholm, 2008). Many of these questions have consecutively found their way into the European Social Survey and been discussed in-depth by (Dalton, 2008). I therefore refer to his work quite intensely, though relabel most of the concepts to relate more strongly to the capitals terminology, which makes it easier to distil the essence of the different components. The same applies to some other previous work I refer to (for instance Sørensen & Torfing, 2003).

Political consciousness relates to what Dalton calls 'social citizenship' (2008), that is perceived ethical and moral responsibility towards others. The latter comprises for instance awareness for societal issues that matter and the inclination of caring for people with weak social positions in society. It thus shares some similarities with the 'spurring interest in disinterested citizens' variable from above. Since both these aspects comprise norms or are moti-

vated by them, such as the idea that it is important to know what is going on in society, and although they relate to politics, political consciousness has no or only a weak activity-based character. For this very reason, political consciousness, in contrast to all categories to follow, is treated as cultural capital.

Political literacy in turn refers to some of the items that Dalton calls 'autonomy', namely forming a political attitude independent of others and the competence to communicate positions in a political dialogue.

Political engagement includes passive forms of action, for instance gathering information, following discussions etc., just as "direct and individualised forms of action" (Dalton, 2008, p. 92). The active forms of engagement have been specified further in a follow-up question. Citizens were asked to indicate how often they engaged in activities ranging from sharing political information, to protesting, to petitions, to founding new political groups or getting engaged in existing ones, to donating to political parties, to "political consumerism" (Norris, 2013), that is boycotting products out of political reasons. An in-between item in terms of activity and passivity is the aspect of "encouraging others to vote" (Kalaycioglu & Turan, 1981), and has thus been listed separately.

Political influence is occupied with the question of whether people have access to politicians, whether they can influence politicians' agendas and decisions, and whether they overall have the feeling that they can make a difference within the political system in place (see for instance Sørensen & Torfing, 2003).

Finally, the potential effects of AW's organisational activities are always immediate and span: (9) offering structured political information; (10) pushing politicians' efforts; (11) leverage on politicians' public exposure; (12) the restriction of third party influence on policy making.

RESULTS

The presentation of results happens against a general description of patterns of use of the platform, which I provide as a grounding reference here: The average length of using AW was about 3 years for citizens and 5.5 years for politicians. The majority of citizens used the platform one or several times per month, the majority of politicians less than once per month. The

largest share of respondents in both groups spent less than half an hour per week on AW. While the main purpose for politicians was to communicate with citizens, citizens themselves indicated that the main use of AW for them was for gathering information. For citizens communication with politicians on AW seems to have 'crowded-out' or replaced other electronic modes communication, for instance via e-mail or other websites. No such change could be observed for politicians. Using AW for them is rather in line with a general increase in the use of electronic communication in relation to other modes, such as personal contacts. The main observation in terms of patterns of use and effects triggered thereby is that the share of citizens, who had "never been in touch" with politicians in any way—electronic or personal—decreased from about 39 to 17 percent after citizens had started using the platform.

Further details on how AW is employed by its users are reported in the Appendix. The information provided also refers to issues such as which parties citizens had previously been in touch with and which of them they viewed as most accessible. The results presented here instead directly relate to the measures of AW's effects introduced in the methods section.

Immediate effects on capitals

All variables have been tested by asking citizens and politicians directly about their opinion if AW had a particular effect in a number of dimensions.[16] As outlined in Table 6 the immediate effects refer to five political capital variables. The first three relate to information and communication, another two to advocacy (items 4 and 5). The strongest effect as regards political capital is the informational one (item 1). Both, citizens and politicians agree that AW "makes politicians reveal their positions", that is increased transparency. However, citizens assess the effect to be considerably higher than politicians (median in CS=8, in PS=6).

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[16] All items have been assessed on an 11-point scale ranging from 0-10 ("not at all"-"totally"). Due to the non-normality of the data median comparisons are more telling and non-parametric tests, namely the Mann-Whitney U test (CI=95%), have been used to examine the size of differences between the judgment of citizens and that of politicians. Cohen's d has been calculated to account for the size of the differences.

Table 6 Capital formation: immediate effects

#	Cap.		Category	Item	Citizens			Politicians			N Total		Diff. CS-PS		
					M	SD	MD	M	SD	MD	Cit.	Pol.	MD diff.	z*	d
1	1+	PC	Communication	Make politicians reveal positions	7.70	2.352	8	5.44	3.083	6	714	227	2	-10.085	0.33
2	2			Stimulate dialogue between citizens and politicians	5.99	2.684	6	3.81	2.943	3	686	226	3	-9.394	0.31
3	3			Stimulate dialogue between politicians across	5.57	2.899	6	2.40	2.591	2	650	225	4	-13.044	0.44
4	I		Advocacy	Raise awareness for neglected	7.85	2.196	8	4.79	2.881	5	710	228	3	-13.870	0.45
5	II			Promote specific political issues	7.24	2.483	8	3.74	2.805	3	685	223	5	-14.342	0.48
6		CC	Inclusion	Spur interest in disinterested	5.97	2.819	6	2.36	2.327	1.5	668	216	4.5	-14.579	0.49
7		SC	Community	Interest group formation	6.99	2.632	7	2.88	2.593	2	659	198	5	-15.343	0.52

Remarks: *= z (and d) all p=0.000; M=mean; SD=standard deviation; MD=median; PC=Pol. Cap.; CC=Cul. Cap.; SC=Soc. cap.

+= Listing used in corresponding Figure for clustering along capital components.
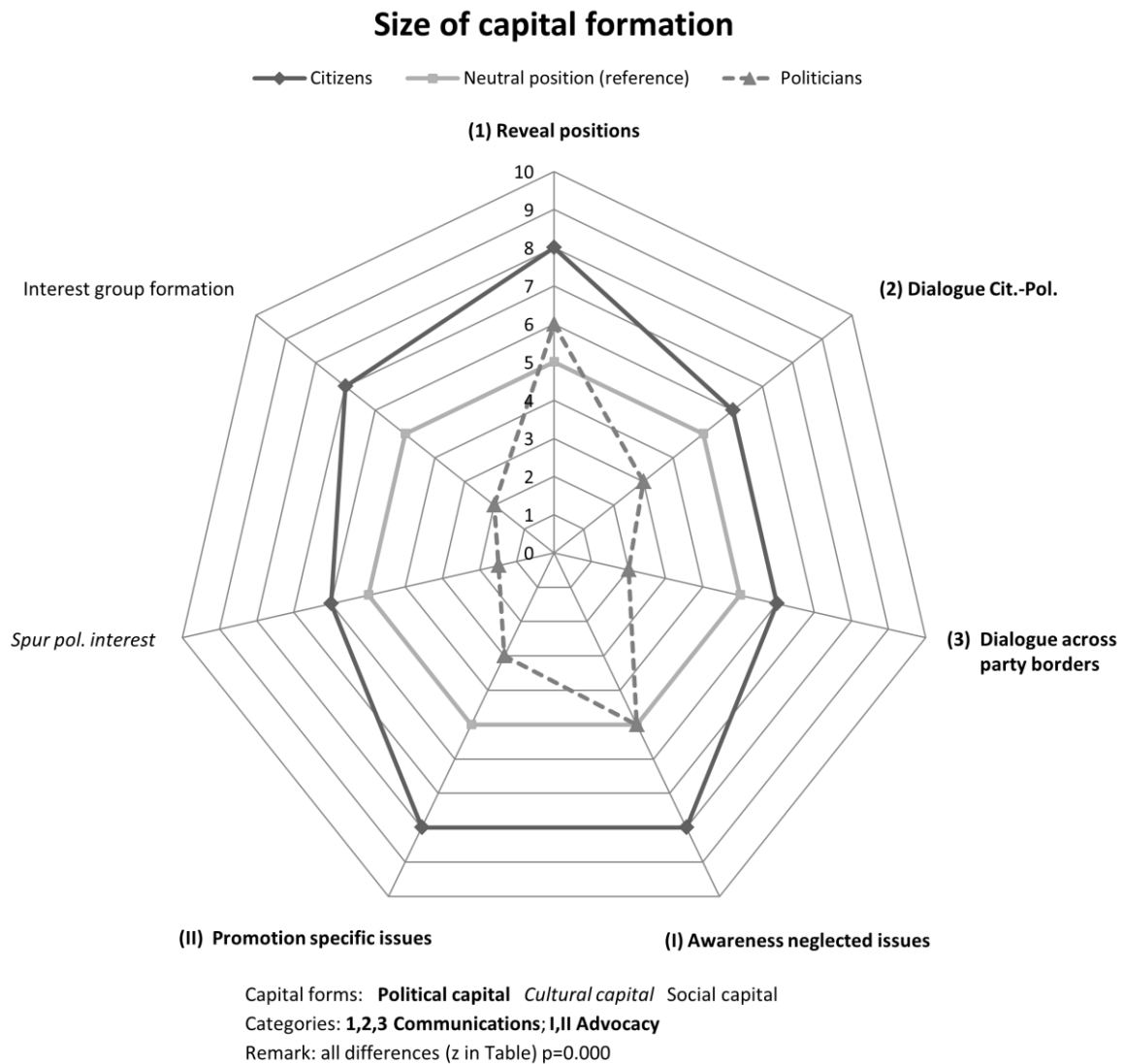
As a follow-up to this informational aspect two further questions were implemented in the survey. One question referred to whether AW had "increased the coherence of politicians' positions" through documenting their statements on certain issues over time. Another question asked respondents whether AW "made politicians' decisions and line of argumentation more traceable." The coherence aspect was neutrally assessed by both groups (medians at 5). The same goes for the traceability aspect when it comes to politicians, while there was slightly more support for it among citizens (median at 6). For the apparent unimportance of the items they have not been reported in the table.

A contrast between citizens' and politicians' views becomes apparent in the 'dialogue items' (items 2 and 3). Citizens support the claim that AW "stimulates a dialogue between citizens and politicians" and "among politicians across party borders" (both medians at 6), whereas politicians deny the claim (medians at 3 and 2). The difference between citizens' and politicians' views is "medium" when judged by Cohen's d for item 1 and 2 (d=0.33 and 0.31) and tends towards a "strong" effect for item 3 (d=0.44).

Among citizens, the level of support for the two advocacy items "AW helps raise awareness among politicians for neglected issues" (item 4) and "AW helps citizens promote specific issues" (item 5) is close to the support for item 1 (medians for both items at 8). The contrast to politicians' views on these two items, however, is even sharper than in the previous case. Politicians' support for the claim is at a median of 5 for item 4, and at a median of only 3 for

item 5. Consequently, the difference between the two groups is high according to Cohen's d (=0.45 and 0.48 respectively). Citizens had the chance to point out which neglected or specific issues AW helped promote in a text box. Among the ones most frequently mentioned were: TTIP, lobbyism, refugees, welfare/social policy (issues surrounding inequality), citizen engagement, and ecology.

Figure 5 Immediate effects: differences between citizens and politicians

Capital forms: **Political capital** *Cultural capital* Social capital
Categories: **1,2,3 Communications**; I,II Advocacy
Remark: all differences (z in Table) p=0.000

Two further capitals have been assessed as direct effects, each by a single item, namely cultural capital (item 6) and social capital (item 7). The cultural capital measure was a question on whether AW "was able to spur interest in politics in groups or individuals previously disinterested with politics." While politicians strongly disagreed (median=2), there was slight agreement among citizens (median=6). The social capital question referred to AW's "capacity to bring together likeminded citizens and to form communities of interest." Citizens agreed

with the statement (median=7), while politicians clearly disagreed (median=2). The stark contrast in the groups' view on the matter resulted in large effect differences (d=0.49 for item 6 and 0.52 for item 7).

Figure 5 summarises the views of citizens and politicians in a radar chart, in which 0 marks total dismissal and 10 full support for a claimed effect. The level of 5 is marked as the "neutral position" in the graph, where respondents are undecided whether there is an effect or not. Several observations are striking: Politicians only agree with a single item, the one on the "revelation of political positions" by the website (item 1), and are neutral towards another, the one on "raising awareness for neglected issues" (item 4). They clearly dismiss all others, that is think there is no effect on these dimensions. Citizens in contrast tend to agree with all the assessed items. Yet, there is a lower level of support for three of them: Two on the promotion of a political dialogue, either "between politicians and citizens" (item 2), or "between politicians across party borders" (item 3). The third one relates to the aspect of inclusion, more specifically the cultural "sensitisation for political issues of citizens previously disengaged with politics" (item 6). In addition to the "revelation of political positions", citizens are very positive about the variables "raising awareness for neglected issues" (item 4) and "the targeted promotion of specific issues" (item 5) as well as about "the community building function" of AW (item 7).

Mediated effects on capitals

Since some standard assessment of the investigated variables is available in ESS—if partly in a different format—a two-step analytic procedure has been chosen to account for mediated effects on citizens:

First, users of AW were asked about the size of their own political capital (political literacy, engagement, influence) and cultural capital (political awareness).[17] Differences in the level of capitals between CS and ESS are a first indication of impacts of AW, whereby ESS respondents serve as a quasi-control group.

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[17] In parallel to previous questions, answers were recorded on an 11-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "totally."

Second, the research needed to find out whether differences were mainly due to the fact that AW users and the general population had different inclinations to begin with, as partly suggested by the initial comparison of the base levels of political capital, cultural capital and satisfaction in CS and ESS data discussed in the methods section. For this reason, respondents were asked directly to indicate which influence AW had had on the level of their capitals. In order to reveal differences between the effects perceived by citizens and politicians' estimation of AW's effects, politicians were asked to make the same assessment. For politicians, there was obviously no initial question about the level of citizens' capitals, but a direct question about AW's suggested influences.

In order to probe the area of active engagement and complementary to the above there had been some follow up questions on the connection between using AW and other forms of engagement.

Comparison of capital levels

Table 7 outlines citizens' levels of several capital (components) as found in CS and ESS. The ESS questions that correspond to those asked in CS can be found in the footnote to the table. While differences on all other questions were tested based on an 11-point scale, the comparators for items 1 and 2 necessitated some data conversions on both sides.[18]

In CS, the level of "awareness for important political issues" and of "awareness for the needs of fellow citizens" (cultural capital) measured by items 1 and 2 is high in both cases (median=9 or 1 on the converted scale for item 1; median=8 or 2 for item 2). But there is a huge discrepancy with regard to the difference between CS and ESS as measured by Cohen's d. While the difference between CS and ESS in relation to item 1 is very large (d=0.78), the difference between the two in relation to item 2 is very small (d=0.07). The German population on average thus cares for their fellow citizens as much as the users of AW, but not nearly as much about political issues as AW users.

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[18] For item 1 in order to meet ESS data, which was recorded on a 1-4 scale (with 1 marking the highest point and 4 the lowest one), CS data was reverse-coded and condensed to match the latter scale. Recoding of CS: 0, 1 & 2 → 4; 3, 4, & half of 5→ 3; other half of 5, 6 & 7 → 2; 8, 9 & 10 → 1; (5 split by half and allocated to 2 and 3).

For item 2, both CS and ESS data were condensed to a 1-5 scale (with 1 marking the highest point and 5 the lowest; as for item 1 CS also had to be reverse-coded). Recoding of CS: 0 & 1 → 5; 2, 3 & 4 → 4; 5 →3; 6, 7 & 8 → 2; 9 & 10 → 1. Recoding ESS: 1 & 2 unchanged; 4 &5 → 3; 5 → 4; 6 → 5.

Table 7 Mediated effects: levels of capitals CS and ESS

#	Cap.	Category	Item	Citizens			ESS			N Total		Diff. Cit.-ESS		
				M	SD	MD	M	SD	MD	Cit.	Pol.	MD diff.	z*	d
1	1[+] CC	Awareness	Care about important political issues[1]	8.87	1.359	9								
			1 converted to 1-4[x]	1.35	0.527	1	3.44	0.831	3	713	3043	2	-47.619	0.86
2	2		Want to help worse-off[2]	7.93	2.154	8								
			2 converted to 1-5[x]	2.08	1.424	2	1.91	0.742	2	697	3001	0	-4.135	0.08
3	I	PC	Literacy	Form own opinion	8.25	1.784	8				701	-		
4	II		Able to communicate political positions[4]	7.85	1.870	8	4.83	2.628	5	702	3010	3	-26.946	0.44
5	A	Engagement	Motivate others to vote	7.51	2.870	8				686	-		
6	B		Engage passively	8.05	2.562	9				683	-		
7	C		Engage actively[7]	7.12	2.772	8	4.04	2.843	4	694	3023	4	-23.424	0.38
8	D		Want to be party/group member	3.47	3.623	2				660	-		
9	i	Influence	Have access to politicians	5.72	3.261	6				671	-		
10	ii		Can influence political decisions[10]	5.19	3.315	5	3.77	2.487	4	669	3007	1	-10.124	0.17
11	iii		Think what they want/ do matters politically[11]	5.57	3.245	6	3.56	2.412	3	674	3014	3	-14.769	0.24

Remarks: [x] for comparison to ESS; *= z (and d) all p=0.000; M=mean; SD=standard deviation; MD=median; PC=Pol. cap.; CC=Cul. cap.; [+]= Listing used in corresponding Figure for clustering along capital components.

[1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 11]= ESS reference questions per item: 1: "How interested are you in politics?"; 2: "It is important to help the people around you and care for their well-being." (originally 6-point scale, collapsed to 5-point for comparison); 4: "How confident are you in your own ability to participate in poltitics?"; 7: "How able do you think you are to take an active role in a political group?"; 10: "How much would you say the political system allows people like you to have an influence on politics?"; 11: "How much would you say the political system allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?"

For CS respondents, the two political literacy items, namely "forming one's own opinion independent of others" (item 3) and "feeling able to communicate political positions" (item 4) are at the same level (medians=8) as the awareness items discussed before. Only one of the two could be compared to ESS data and the difference turned out to be close to large when judged by Cohen's d (0.44), but not as large as the one on "caring about political issues."

The engagement variables reveal an interesting distinction. Items 5-7 ("motivating others to vote", "engaging passively", "engaging actively") are again at a high level in CS with medians at a level of 8 or 9 on the scale. When item 7, namely "engaging actively", is compared to ESS data, we see that the difference is quite pronounced, its size being between a medium and large effect (d=0.38). Item 8 "wanting to be a party member or engage in another political group" in contrast is at a very low level in CS (median=2). This suggests that engagement that is not formalized in an organization is much more relevant to AW users than the latter.

Although marked by a small positive tendency, the three political influence items are clearly at lower levels than the other items. The medians for "having access to politicians" (item 9),

"being able to influence political positions" (item 10) and "what citizens do and want matters politically" (item 11) are at 6 and 5 on the scale respectively. And when items 10 and 11 are compared to ESS data (medians at 3 and 4), the size of the difference is only in between "small" and "medium" (d=0.17 and 0.24).

Figure 6 Mediated effects: differences CS and ESS

Level of capitals CS & ESS

Capital forms: *Cultural capital* **Political capital**
Categories: *1,2 Awareness*; **I,II Literacy**; **A,B,C,D Engagement**; i, ii, iii Influence
Remark: all differences (z in Table) p=0.000; even (2) although medians equal
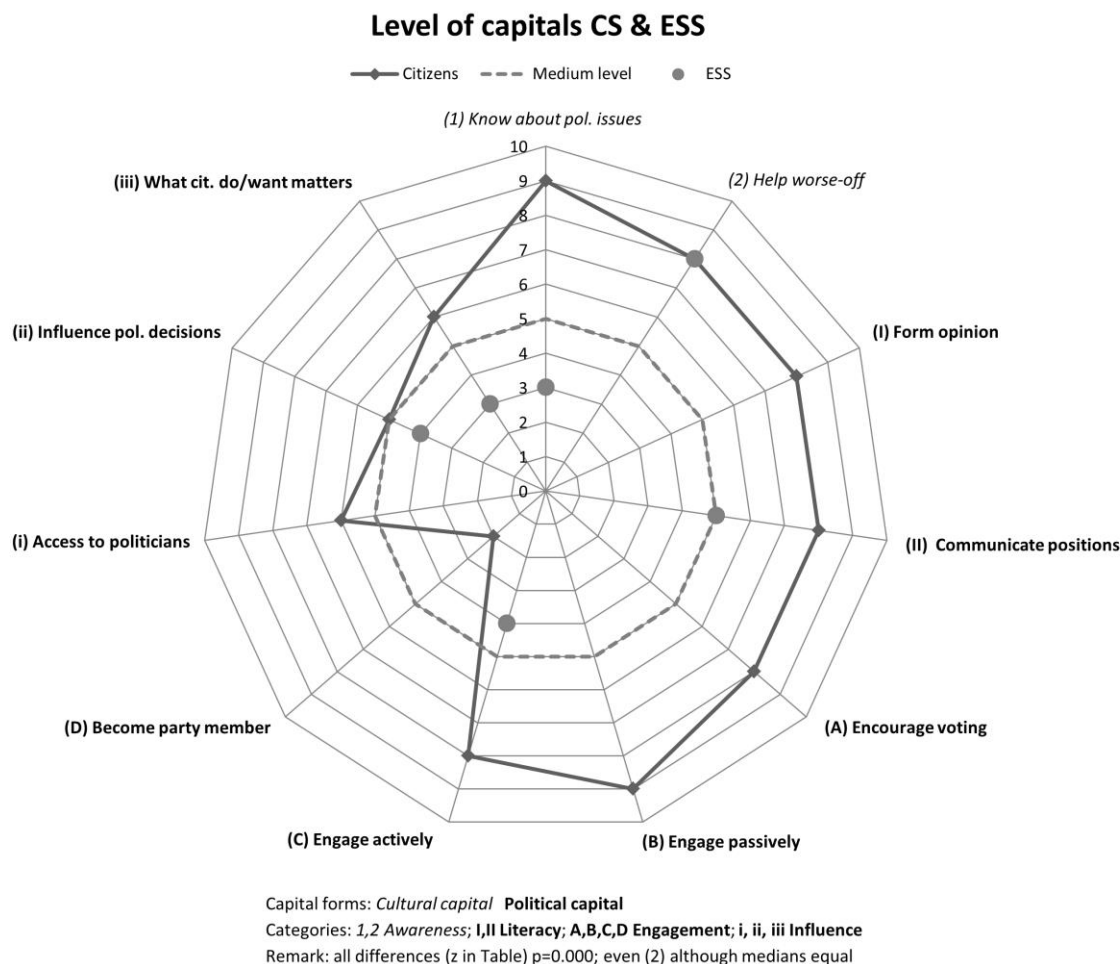
Figure 6 illustrates the differences between the levels of the capitals found in CS and ESS. Items 1 and 2 have been rescaled to a 0-10 scheme.[19] The dark solid line marks the levels measured in CS and the dots mark ESS reference positions, for those items where comparisons were possible. The dashed line marks the "medium or neutral level" of 5 and serves only for more easily identifying high or low levels of the capitals. It is becoming clear that there is a considerable difference between CS and ESS throughout all four categories, except for item

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[19] The rescaling of the items was based on the percent difference between the medians in the two groups in relation to the respective applied scale. While this difference for item 1 is at 2/3 (yielding an ESS position of 3 on the 0-10 scale, given an original median of 9 for CS), it is close to 0 for item 2 (which is why ESS is at the same level as CS on the 0-10 scale).

2 in the awareness category. It is also evident that capital levels are higher on 'awareness', 'literacy', and 'engagement' than on 'influence'. The outlier in the engagement category when it comes to formalized engagement (item 8; D in the graph), reconciles with the scepticism towards political parties and the government found in the initially assessed base levels of trust and satisfaction of CS respondents.

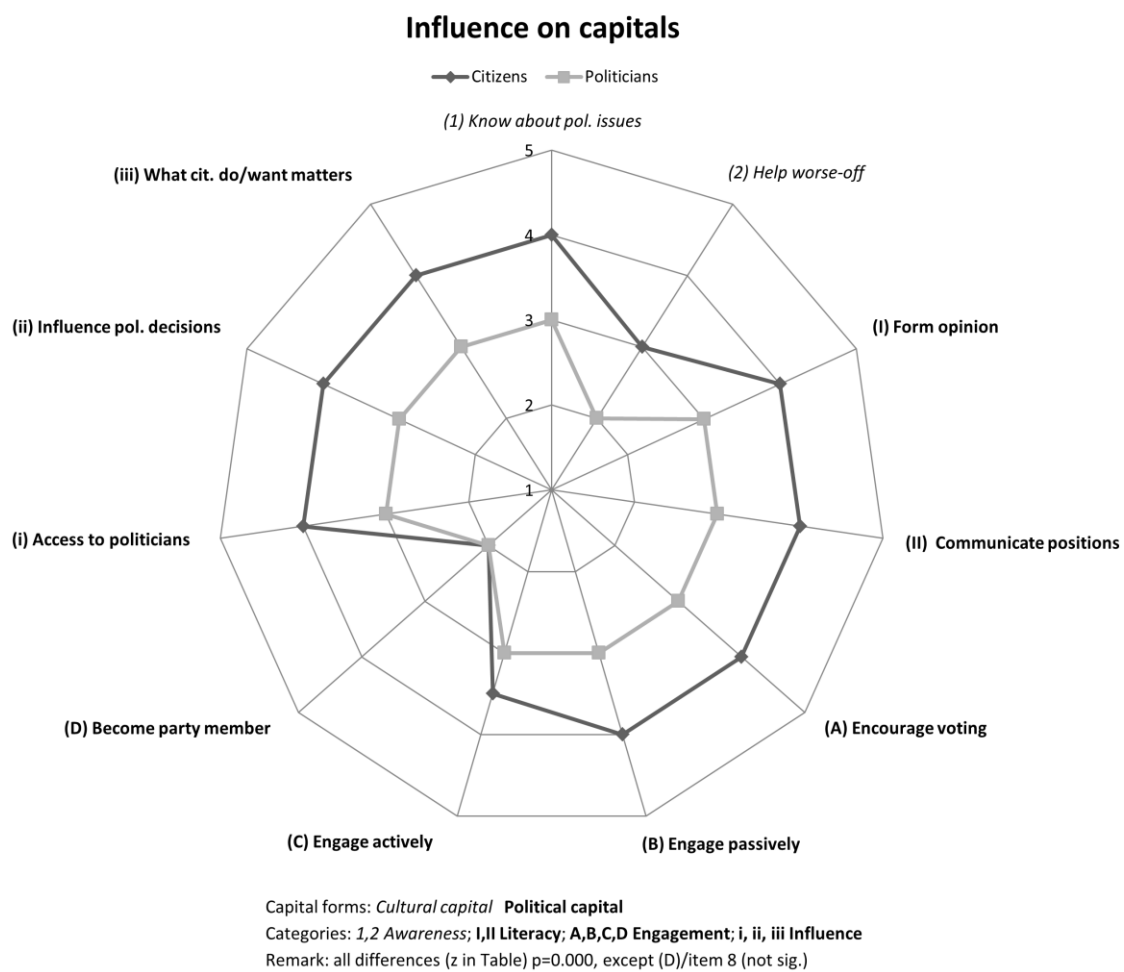*Citizens' and politicians' assessment of mediated effects*

As referred to in the above description of the two steps in the analysis, citizens were also asked to indicate explicitly how much AW influenced the formation of capitals.[20] Citizens' statements were compared to politicians' estimation of effects. Both are summarised and displayed in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Influence of AW on capital formation: differences CS and PS

Capital forms: *Cultural capital* **Political capital**
Categories: *1,2 Awareness*; **I,II Literacy; A,B,C,D Engagement**; i, ii, iii Influence
Remark: all differences (z in Table) p=0.000, except (D)/item 8 (not sig.)

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[20] Assessment on a 5-point scale ranging from "none at all", to "very low influence", to "some influence", to "high influence", to "very high influence."

The figure shows that citizens assess AW's influence as "high" on all tested items, except for "wanting to help others" (item 2, median at "some influence") and "becoming a party member" (item 8, median at "low influence"). The pattern of politicians' assessment is almost a mirror of that of citizens, yet transferred to a lower level each, except for item 9 "becoming a party member", where the medians in CS and PS are equal. Item 2 "helping worse-off" is thus at "low influence" and all other items are at "some influence." Thus, although politicians seem to see an influence by the platform, its magnitude is smaller than when assessed by citizens themselves.

Table 8 Influence of AW on capital formation: levels CS and PS

#		Cap.	Category	Item	Citizens			Politicians			N Total		Diff. Cit.-Pol.		
					M	SD	MD	M	SD	MD	Cit.	Pol.	MD diff.	z*	d
1	1[+]	CC	Awareness	Care about important political issues	4.09	0.830	4	2.97	0.880	3	674	233	1	-14.751	0.49
2	2			Want to help worse-off	3.29	0.992	3	2.63	0.744	2	624	227	1	-11.037	0.38
3	I	PC	Literacy	Form own opinion	4.03	0.830	4	2.90	0.864	3	634	231	1	-14.761	0.50
4	II			Able to communicate political positions	3.85	0.850	4	3.04	0.932	3	626	232	1	-9.562	0.33
5	A		Engagement	Motivate others to vote	3.48	1.071	4	2.69	0.769	3	617	230	1	-10.220	0.35
6	B			Engage passively	3.96	0.952	4	3.07	0.925	3	636	230	1	-11.392	0.39
7	C			Engage actively	3.47	1.027	4	2.96	0.919	3	640	228	1	-6.859	0.23
8	D			Want to be party/group member*	2.63	1.058	2	2.48	0.654	2	606	227	0	-1.33	0.05
9	i		Influence	Have access to politiciancs	3.67	0.978	4	3.25	0.920	3	633	229	1	-5.738	0.20
10	ii			Can influence political decisions	3.57	0.987	4	2.78	0.764	3	635	230	1	-10.769	0.37
11	iii			Think what they want/ do matters politically	3.50	1.013	4	2.92	0.852	3	602	229	1	-7.980	0.28

Remarks: *= z (and d) all p=0.000, except item 8 (not sig.); M=mean; SD=standard deviation; MD=median; PC=Pol. cap.; CC=Cul. cap.; [+]= Listing used in corresponding Figure for clustering along capital components.

A closer look at the distribution of responses and not only the medians (as previously, assessed by the Mann-Whitney U test and translated to Cohen's d), gives deeper insights into the differences between citizens' and politicians' views. The results are displayed in Table 8. Apart from the item on party membership (item 8; d=0.05), the size of the differences is least on item 9 ("access to politicians"; d=0.2) and item 7 ("engage actively"; d=0.23). It is biggest in relation to item 3 ("form own opinion"; d=0.5) and item 1 ("know about political issues"; d=0.49). Although there is no general pattern, deviations between politicians' and citizens' standpoints are smaller on those capital components where the difference between AW and ESS respondents is also small—in particular the "political influence" items.

Probing active engagement

In parallel to the strategy above and as a complementary analysis, I have taken a more detailed look at forms of active engagement AW could have an influence on. Participants in CS were given a list of items and asked how often they performed the particular activities: (1) participating in a political event, (2) initiating or signing a petition, (3) sharing information electronically, (4) boycotting products, (5) engaging in a political group, (6) engaging in a political party, (7) being involved in party campaigning, and (8) donating to a political party. Citizens were asked to indicate how often they performed the listed activities on a scale ranging from "never", to "once per year", to "several times per year", to "several times per month", to "weekly". Citizen distributions were compared to ESS data, available for all activities except for items 3, 7 and 8, and available only in a binary format.

Table 9 Active political engagement: differences CS and ESS

		Citizens						ESS		Infl. AW
#	Activity	Never	1 x year	>1 x year	>=1 x month	weekly	N	Never	N	Share (N=723)
1	Political event	29.8%	29.5%	32.9%	6.3%	1.6%	699	91.3%	3043	1.7%
2	Petition	1.5%	6.4%	36.8%	27.9%	27.4%	720	67.3%	3038	52.0%
3	Sharing info. electronically	9.5%	5.2%	31.0%	27.0%	27.3%	714			20.6%
4	Boycotting products	16.3%	6.6%	33.8%	15.8%	27.5%	669	68.2%	3041	7.2%
5	Engaging in a political group	53.3%	6.5%	17.3%	11.1%	11.9%	649	73.7%	3042	1.4%
6	Engaging in a political party	82.3%	4.0%	5.1%	4.4%	4.2%	643	96.4%	3042	0.7%
7	Party campaigning	63.6%	8.4%	16.3%	6.4%	5.3%	656			1.2%
8	Party donations	56.2%	16.0%	19.6%	7.1%	1.2%	689			2.6%
9	(None)									12.6%

Remarks: Medians marked in grey.

CS respondents were additionally asked about *the* main activity AW had an influence on. Politicians did not have to answer these more detailed questions, since they really only are of value when reported as actual activities by citizens and not assessed as hypothetical ones by politicians. Table 9 illustrates the CS–ESS comparison.

Items 5-8 serve to explore in more detail item 8 from above ("becoming a member of a political party or another political group"). This is done by differentiating between parties and other political groups and also by listing other forms of active support than becoming a member (donating and campaigning). With the median lying at "never" for all items (all medians marked in grey in the table), they outline that the AW users tend to be more averse to organi-

zational engagement in politics, be it membership, campaigning, or donations, than to individualised forms of engagement. There are some nuances to be considered though. First, membership/engagement in some other group occurs more often in CS than membership in an established political party. Also, the share of people, who are a member in either is considerably higher in CS than in ESS. In turn the share of people, who have campaigned for a party or donated to one, is higher than of those directly engaged in a party. The overall degree of formal political engagement is thus not low at the absolute level, but less important in relative terms. What is more, the spill-overs from AW to formal engagement are particularly small as will be seen in the following.

Items 1-4 are much more prevalent than items 5-8, with item 2 and 3 ("petitions" and "sharing information") as the most prominent ones. The median in both cases is at "several times per month." There is a huge difference between CS and ESS when it comes to petitions. While about 67 percent of the population have never signed a petition, it is not even 2 percent of AW users. Although at different levels, the contrast is similarly strong with regard to participation in a political event: Only 30 percent of AW users have never done it, but over 90 percent of ESS respondents. For CS respondents, the median lies at "once a year" when it comes to participation in political events. Finally, the contrast in "boycotting products" (median at "several times per year" in CS) is somewhat smaller but still huge, with 68 percent in ESS and only about 16 percent in CS, who have never done it.

Items 2, 3 and 4 (petitions, sharing information, boycotting) are also the most prominent ones with regard to activities on which AW had an influence (see last column in Table 9): 52 percent indicated "petitions" as the one activity that AW had influenced most, about 21 percent picked "sharing information electronically" and about 7 percent "boycotting products." All other activities were of minor significance compared to the latter. It is striking to see that only about 13 percent of AW users reported that AW had no influence on any of the listed activities (line number 9 in Table 9).

Effects of organisational activities on political capital

With regard to AW's additional activities, both citizens and politicians had first been asked whether they knew about them at all. Activities included: (1) politicians' profiles, on which their voting behaviour is documented alongside their communication with citizens; (2) a legal

appeal to reveal permanent access permits for lobbyists to the Bundestag; (3) an initiative to reveal MPs' auxiliary income; (4) a petition and subsequent legislation against corruption among MPs; (5) an initiative for lowering the requirements for mandatory public reporting of donations to political parties.

In a second step, respondents were asked to choose from a list of potential effects that these activities might have, ranging from the structuring of available political information to increasing the public exposure of politicians. Finally, respondents were asked to assess whether they found the effect they had selected positive or negative on a 0-10 scale. Table 10 outlines whether respondents knew the listed activities. It shows that citizens know AW's activities better than politicians, except for politicians' profiles where the publicity is nearly the same in both groups (at 73-74 percent). It also shows that items 2-4, relating to lobbyism, auxiliary income and party donations are more well-known (at or above 88 percent in CS and between 55 and 65 percent in PS) than the initiative against corruption (65 percent in CS, about 41 percent in PS).

Table 10 Knowledge of AW's activities CS and PS

		Citizens			Politicians		
#	Activity	Yes	%	N	Yes	%	N
1	Politicians' profiles & voting statistics	523	74.4	703	177	73.1	242
2	Legal appeal on revealing permanent access permits for lobbyists	690	96.5	715	133	55.0	242
3	Initiative for greater transparency on MPs' auxiliary income	679	94.8	716	156	65.3	239
4	Initiative for lowering threshold for mandatory reporting of party donations	626	87.8	713	133	55.6	239
5	Initiation of legislation against corruption among MPs	459	65.0	706	98	41.4	237

Table 11 highlights which effects citizens and politicians see as most prominent in relation to the above mentioned activities. The ranking performed in the table is a heuristic one oriented at the combined recognition of an effect by citizens and politicians.

Table 11 Effects of AW's activities

#		Is effect?*					Assessment of effect							
		Cit.		Polit.		Rank	Cit.				Polit.			
		Yes	%	Yes	%		Mean	SD	MD	N	Mean	SD	MD	N
1	Expose politicians to the public	622	86.9%	151	62.4%	1	8.96	1.552	10	592	7.01	2.718	7	145
2	Inform citizens	599	83.7%	104	43.0%	2	9.20	1.322	10	578	8.09	2.182	9	96
3	Reveal party influencers	595	83.1%	49	20.2%	3	9.27	1.275	10	579	8.30	1.910	9	47
4	Spur discussions about corruption	522	72.9%	71	29.3%	3	9.14	1.447	10	509	7.75	2.378	8	68
5	Force politicians to focus on politics	381	53.2%	91	37.6%	4	8.55	1.910	10	357	7.56	2.189	8	86
6	Structure information	288	40.2%	56	23.1%	5	8.91	1.609	10	276	7.54	2.252	7	50
7	Lower influence of lobbyists	333	46.5%	16	6.6%	5	8.79	1.895	10	321	8.20	1.859	8	15
8	Support politicians in following their own opinion	212	29.6%	36	14.9%									
9	Make politicians work more	130	18.2%	18	7.4%									
10	Force politicians to stick with position	65	9.1%	21	8.7%									

Remarks: * % of "Is effect" calculated in relation to N max (716 cit., 242 polit.) of "knowing activities" in previous table; M=mean; SD=standard deviation; MD=median.

The most prominent effect is the "increased exposure of politicians to the public" (considered an important effect by about 87 percent in CS and about 62 percent in PS). In second place comes that the platform "provides important information" to its users (about 84 percent in CS, 43 percent in PS). Two further effects are in third place, since the priority allocated to them differs between the groups: the "revelation of party influencers" is supported by about 83 percent of citizens and about 20 percent of politicians, while about 73 percent of citizens and about 29 percent of politicians support the claim that AW's activities "spur discussions about corruption." Item 5 "forcing politicians to focus on politics" is backed by about 53 percent of citizens and about 38 percent of politicians. The two items ranked in fifth place ("structure information" and "lower influence of lobbyists") don't have a majority of support in either of the groups, but they are still more prominent than the rest (about 40 percent in CS and 23 percent in PS for item 6; and about 47 and 7 percent for item 7). Items 8-10, namely "supporting politicians in following their individual opinion", "making politicians work more", and "forcing politicians to stick with positions" only find negligible levels of support.

When it comes to the assessment of effects (right part of the table), those who have recognized the existence of one of the effects are generally positive in its assessment.[21] This pattern is apparent in both groups. Yet, there are some differences. First, the median is at 10 for all items in CS, whereas it is at a lower level in PS ranging from 7 to 9. The aspect seen as least positive by politicians is the "exposure of politicians to the public." Since there is not much difference between CS and PS in their assessment of the effects, it is not displayed separately in a radar chart as per AW's other impacts.

DISCUSSION

The following sections highlight the main effects identified by and with regard to citizens. Thereafter I discuss politicians' perspectives and then demonstrate insights generated from a sensitivity analysis, before outlining limitations.

Main effects produced from citizens' perspective

In contrast to the other sections, citizens' perspectives are illustrated on three different levels: (1) immediate effect and (2) mediated effects of the platform as well as (3) immediate effects of AW's additional activities.

Immediate effects

Citizens judge the communication and advocacy (political capital), and the community effects (social capital) of the platform to be most prominent. At a closer look, the promotion of advocacy is clearly the strongest effect, since both its components, namely "raising of awareness for neglected subjects" as well as the active "promotion of specific issues" by citizens are rated as "high." The mentioned main subjects, ranging from TTIP, to social policy, to ecology are very relevant for contemporary society, which makes this impact the more important.

In relation to communication and information, it is really only the "revelation of positions held by politicians and parties" that finds citizens' strong support. AW does not seem effective (enough) in promoting intense "political dialogue." Since there were no follow-up ques-

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[21] Due to the negligibility of the effects, items 8-10 are not listed in the assessment of effects, but the general pattern from the other variables applies in a similar way, although with some lower levels of positive assessments by about 1-2 points on the scale for both, citizens and politicians.

tions on this issue, it is hard to judge whether this is due to reluctance on the side of citizens, on that of politicians, or caused by some other factor, for instance the structure of the website. In contrast to this, it has been surprising to see that users thought AW was somewhat more effective in forming "communities of interest among citizens" (social capital). An outside observer would probably have expected to see the opposite, since the stress of AW seems to lie on getting in touch with politicians. More needs to be understood about the dynamics of citizen-politician dialogues and user-user communities to enable AW to promote one further without neglecting the other.

Another issue in relation to the informational aspects of the platform comes up through the observations on follow-up effects arising from available information, or rather the lack of follow-up effects. The results suggest that a higher amount of available information on AW does not necessarily make politicians stick with their positions (coherence). Nor does it make the overall line of argumentation or the evolvement of politicians' positions automatically more traceable. While the first aspect is mainly in the politicians' hands, AW could try to promote devices that better map the positioning and communication of politicians over time.

Mediated effects

At the level of mediated effects citizens highlight consciousness (cultural capital), literacy and engagement (political capital) as most important. When it comes to the levels of capitals held by CS respondents against ESS respondents and to citizens' own judgement of whether AW had an effect, political literacy stands out as unambiguously positive. All three, the level, the difference to ESS and the perceived effect are high on both, "forming an own opinion" and "communicating political positions."

The level of political consciousness (cultural capital) is also high, but the line of argumentation just outlined only holds for "knowing about political issues." The item "caring for others" instead is neither very different from the level found in ESS nor promoted strongly by AW. This could suggest that the two do not effectively belong into one category, or that improvements in the latter variable are hard to achieve or even unnecessary, since it is generally at a very high level in the population. In any case, it needs to be remarked that cultural capital aspects were not as central as political capital ones in this investigation, but their perceived existence suggests some interesting dynamics between different capitals that would be worthwhile exploring further.

The stimulation of political engagement through AW is also strong, but with very specific limits. Users of AW seem to prefer acting individually or in online communities rather than in formal organisations. While this is bad news for political parties, it is good news for engagement in general, since it seems to be effectively spurred by using AW. And this engagement, though maybe not formalised, certainly has 'real world' consequences. Petitions will lead to legislation in the best of cases and boycotting products can have significant effects on producers. The range of connected citizen actions shows that AW produces some important spillovers in particular to individualised forms of engagement, whether intended or not.

With regard to levering political influence, AW's ability seems to be restricted. Although citizens say that the influence of AW was high, the level and difference to ESS was not very pronounced. It is not entirely clear whether the effect would need more time to unfold, whether representative democracies have a 'natural cap', that is a threshold for citizen influence, or whether the perceived level of political influence of AW users may have been particularly low before they started using AW, which would magnify the meaning of an above average level of influence. There is some indication that the improvement of a previously low level could in fact have been the case, since there was some support among citizens for the claim that AW could spur interest in politics among those previously disinterested (immediate effects).However, whether they said so in relation to others or themselves cannot be sais based on the data, and the perceived effect was not very strong. Another hint in this direction would be that the share of CS respondents, who had "never been in touch" with politicians dropped from 39 to 17 percent after they had started using AW. Thus, although neither a real dialogue, nor considerably more influence for citizens has emerged, there is definitely more interaction between citizens and politicians. Longitudinal observations and thus more precise tracking over time could help untangle some of these issues.

Effects of organisational activities

In relation to AW's activities, citizens have highlighted five effects that can really be merged into three: The first and most prominent one is moving politicians into the limelight and exposing them to public scrutiny (items 1 "exposure" and 5 "make politicians focus on politics"). The second aspect is the provision of information (item 2), yet not only with regard to political positions (as tested within the category of immediate effects of the platform), but also on lobbyism, misconduct etc. The third one directly relates to the latter in that the effect of

AW does not stop at providing information, but furthermore "promotes public discussions" about these issues (items 3 and 4).

If read in conjunction with the effects that have found only little support, some further interpretations are possible: In the users' view AW's activities are seen as useful in "providing information" to citizens (item 2), but improvements might be needed in the "structuration of information", since this effect has not found major support in CS (item 6). AW's activities furthermore "reveal party influencers" (item 3) and "stimulate discussions about corruption" (item 4), but they are not effective (enough) in "lowering lobbyists' influence" (item 7). Finally, AW "exposes politicians to the public" (item 1) and this might "push politicians to focus on politics" rather than additional activities (item 5, but only weak support), but the exposure does not translate into increased effort of politicians (item 9, "work more"), "help politicians follow their own opinion" (item 8), or force them to be coherent in their position by "sticking to their claims" (item 10).

To close the loop, missing support for all the latter is consistent with citizens' position that communication between citizens and politicians through AW helps reveal politicians' positions, but does not increase traceability of political decision making or the coherence of politicians' positions (see immediate effects of the platform).

Main effects produced from politicians' perspective

In what I say below, it is not to be forgotten that some further effects than those discussed here have been backed by a fair proportion of politicians that participated in the survey. The discussion, however, relates only to those variables that were supported by the majority of politicians and/or could clearly be identified as a positive aspect (items above 5 on the 0-10 scale for instance).

When these criteria are applied, there are really only two items for which politicians recognise a positive effect by AW. In the immediate effects, it is only the informational aspect, more specifically the "revelation of political positions." All other items, with the exception of "raising awareness for neglected issues", which is at the neutral level, are nowhere near a positive effect from the perspective of politicians. When it comes to the mediated effects, politicians have a somewhat more positive take and ascribe "some influence" on several items to AW. However, no single influence is assessed as "high", which is why we can't effectively say that

politicians see any profound impacts by AW in this regard. We find the second positive assessment in relation to AW's activities when politicians back the claim of "increases in the exposure of politicians" and assess its function as generally positive (median at 7). None of the other effects of AW's own activities is supported by a majority of politicians.

Although I had learnt about some similarly sceptical positions from politicians that chose not to participate in the survey but got into touch to communicate their scepticism, such a huge gap between citizens' and politicians' view in response to the surveys was very surprising to find. Some of those who did not participate said they had made that decision, because they found the platform unimportant, or because AW was tendentious in giving more room to the big and established parties.[22] Some others expressed that in their view AW was mainly used by a particular kind of people, with a specific political orientation and a narrow set of prioritised issues.

The validity of some of these presumptions is relativized by the sensitivity analysis to follow.

Sensitivity of results

To test for the sensitivity of the obtained results CS data have been weighted to match ESS data in gender, education and age distribution. Adjustments for regional provenience of respondents have not been implemented, since that distribution was rather representative to begin with (and only a little modified after the weighting just referred to). Thus, after weighting CS data complied with ESS data on all variables typically used for assessing whether data are representative of the German population (European Social Survey, 2014a). Political orientation has been included as an additional variable into the weighting, since it stands to reason that results might be strongly dependent on the fact that conservative voters were strongly underrepresented in the CS data. A perfect match between CS and ESS on all five levels could not be achieved. One reason was the strong original deviation of CS in terms of gender and political orientation in particular, another the share of missing values, in particular for political orientation.[23] Overall, I have arrived at a reasonably high correspondence between the two data sets. For illustration the distribution of political orientations after

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[22] Please note that all these comments are anecdotal evidence based on some emails I received and not a proper analysis. They might still be useful for embedding the analysis into the wider context.

[23] While the share of missing data was about 3-4 percent for age, gender and education, it lay at about 14 percent for political orientation.

weighting was about (excluding missing values): 36 percent conservative, 34 percent social-democratic, 9 percent communitarian, 12 percent green, 4 percent liberal, 3 percent nationalist, 2 percent left-liberal (and thus close to the distribution in ESS).

The balancing out of the data on the levels of age, gender and education has led to some other shifts in the socio-demographic characteristics of CS, of which, however, only one is very prominent: the weighting has increased the share of people in the 20th income percentile (0-1,380 €; now 28 and previously 19 percent) against those in between the 40th and the 70th (2,041-3,280 €; now 23 and previously 29 percent) as well as those above the 91st percentile (above 4,960 €; now 7 and previously 11 percent). This has been accompanied by a concurrent shift towards single person households (now 37 and previously 27 percent) as well as an increase in the share of unemployed people (now 14 and previously 8 percent). There were only less prominent shifts in other socio-demographic variables.

When it comes to base levels of political and cultural capital and satisfaction, some further differences after weighting become apparent. For instance, the number of people who voted in the last election declined to about 72 percent (previously 82 percent). Visual inspection together with distributions test, such as the Mann-Whitney U test used before, highlighted other shifts. After weighting people in CS are: somewhat less in favour of cultural diversity and EU unification, and somewhat more mistrusting of the legal system as well as more dissatisfied with the national government and the way democracy works in Germany.[24] All other variables have remained largely unaltered (for example levels of solidarity or trust in people).

Effect tests have been re-run with the weighted data, which is then not only closer to ESS in terms of socio-demographic variables and thus to the general population, but also in terms of shares of political orientations. It is striking to note that all effects, the immediate and mediated ones of the platform (including forms of citizens' active engagement) as well as the activities of AW, remain remarkably stable. Of course some shifts have occurred, but most of them are negligible. If anything, effect sizes (with ESS or PS data as comparators) were slightly higher than before. The impacts of AW identified in this study thus do not seem to depend strongly on the particular structure of the CS respondent group (supposedly AW's user structure).

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[24] The general tendency remains unaltered; it is only the level that changes to some degree.

Limitations

The comparison between CS and ESS mainly served a heuristic rather than an analytic function for two main reasons: First, and although the likelihood is small, there might be some proportion of AW users in the sample of respondents to the ESS, distorting the separation between the two groups. Second, the user structure of AW is not representative of the German population in a number of regards. The difference between the two groups in variables supposed to be affected by AW could result because of different inclinations in related areas. Most relevant in this regard was the higher degree of political interest of AW users. It needs to be remarked, however, that this relates mainly to the difference in following the news or political contents when watching TV. The difference was not that pronounced though. The size of the detected difference was between 'small' and 'medium'. The difference in people who indicated they had "always voted" in national elections was even less stark: 82 percent of respondents in CS and 79.5 percent in ESS said they had done so. Any differences detected at all, have been uncovered through controlling for socio-economic characteristics and base levels of capitals, enabling readers to put results into perspective.

What is more, the sensitivity analysis of effects just outlined and the weighting procedure applied therein balanced out many of the differences. Nevertheless, perfect control is not possible in the present setup. There is always the risk of omitted variables that might have an important influence, but could not be controlled for. The direct responses of participants on the effective influence AW had on their capitals is generally more indicative of effects than the comparison between the levels of capitals in CS and ESS. The analysis performed is thus somewhat more useful in detecting the difference AW has made for citizens, rather than for a comparison of the absolute levels of the tested variables against the general population.

Further limitations relate to some of the aspects mentioned further above: the social and cultural capital aspects could for instance have been pursued further, had there been more room within a single survey or a separate investigation. Most of the pursued issues, including the assessment of the levels of capitals, would also benefit from a longitudinal tracking to follow up on the cross-sectional observations presented here. It also should be remarked that the assessment of capitals has been performed in reference to several individual items (questions) rather than multi-item aggregative scales. Finally, a qualitative component in the form of interviews or focus groups would be a useful addition to get a better sense of who and how the

users of AW really are. It would also help to explore why they perceive certain impacts and how they think they could be levered further. A reflective discussion with politicians would be useful to find out what they think about the huge divide between their own assessment and that of citizens.

CONCLUSION

The research has outlined how impacts of the promotion of political activity and democratic functioning can be studied and compared to existing data. Based on the analysis it can be said that political capital has grown through AW. The study has specified the main impacts of AW as perceived by citizens, which cover a wide range of areas. It has also served to highlight a large discrepancy between the impacts felt by citizens and the assessment of impacts provided by politicians. It is undeniable that AW users, at least those who chose to participate in the survey, exhibit some traits that differentiate them from the general population and that some groups of people, in particular 'conservatives', seem to be underrepresented in AW's user structure. AW should strive to become more inclusive in this regard.

All characteristics taken together though (socio-demographics and base levels of political and cultural capital as well as satisfaction) suggest that AW users are a group of people well inside the spectrum of potential voters for most parties. Together with the positive view of citizens of the platform this suggests a catalysing function of organisations like AW for democratic functioning in times of political polarisation and disenfranchisement between citizens and political parties. The stark contrast between the positive view of citizens and the more indifferent standpoint held by politicians outlines that such platforms might need to be taken more seriously and that we need to give greater attention to new forms of participation and their effective impact on society. I have shown how a focus on capitals can be applied to capture and differentiate this impact.

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APPENDIX

Additional analysis political web-platform

Note: The descriptive analysis provides a more detailed picture of some of the characteristics of the use of AW as presented as a background for the presentation of results. The issues addressed span from specifics on the intensity and frequency of using AW, to the parties which users perceived as most accessible.

Length, intensity and purpose of using the platform

The mean length of using AW was 2.76 years for citizens and thus at about three years (SD=2.34; N=717). About 4 percent of respondents had only started using AW in 2016, while 2.5 percent had used it for ten or more years. Politicians had been using AW for almost 5.5 years (SD=3.192; N=237). About 8 percent of the politicians had only started using AW in 2016, whereas about 10 percent had been using it for 10 years or more.

As shown in Tables XW and XW almost 60 percent of citizens reported they used AW "once or several times per month", another third even "once or several times per week" (see Table 12).[25] For half of them the time spent on AW amounted to "less than half an hour per week", for another 37 percent to at least that but to no more than 1 hour per week (see Table 13). The use by politicians was considerably less intense and amounting to "less than half an hour per week" for 95 percent of MPs and a frequency of use of "once to several times per month" for 23 percent and of "less than once a month" for 76 percent.

Table 12 Frequency of use AW

	Citizens	%	Politicans	%
< 1 time per month	66	9%	177	76%
1 - several times per month	425	59%	54	23%
1 - several times per week	224	31%	1	0%
Total	715	100%	232	100%

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[25] Here and in other tables: Percentage figures may not total to 100%, due to rounding.

Table 13 Intensity of use AW

	Citizens	%	Politicians	%
< 0.5 h per week	375	52%	215	95%
0.5-1 h per week	264	37%	10	4%
> 1 h per week	84	12%	2	1%
Total	723	100%	227	100%

Respondents were furthermore asked to indicate the main purpose for which they used AW (multiple answers possible). Table 14 shows that the large majority of citizens (96 percent) use the platform for "gathering information", followed by "posing questions to politicians" (60 percent). For politicians it is the other way around. They mainly use AW for communication purposes (87 percent) and only in the second instance for gathering information (37 percent). Commenting on political statements is of lower importance, yet still important for 43 percent of the citizens and 27 percent of the politicians. 28 percent of the citizens furthermore use the platform for discussing issues with other users.

Table 14 Main purpose of use AW

	MAX	Citizens	%(of MAX)	MAX	Politicians	%(of MAX)
Gathering information	745	716	96%	255	94	37%
Asking/answering questions	745	444	60%	255	222	87%
Commenting on political statements	745	318	43%	255	68	27%
Discussing with other users	745	209	28%	N.A.		

Alternative modes of communication

The survey also served to gauge how the use of AW compared to other means of communication between citizens and politicians and how the use of alternative means had changed through the use of AW. Table 15 indicates whether the use of alternative means had "become higher" after using AW, "they have never been used at all", "remained stable", or "decreased." It shows that potential effects differ strongly between citizens and politicians.

Table 15 Alternative modes of communication AW

	Citizens					Politicians				
	Total	Higher	Never used	Stable	Lower	Total	Higher	Never used	Stable	Lower
Personal	667	35	200	313	119	239	15	4	214	6
	100%	*5%*	*30%*	*47%*	*18%*	*100%*	*6%*	*2%*	*90%*	*3%*
Letter	619	69	261	222	67	233	9	7	182	35
	100%	*11%*	*42%*	*36%*	*11%*	*100%*	*4%*	*3%*	*78%*	*15%*
E-Mail	676	47	119	190	320	234	56	4	170	4
	100%	*7%*	*18%*	*28%*	*47%*	*100%*	*24%*	*2%*	*73%*	*2%*
Website	515	37	100	175	203	167	31	6	125	5
	100%	*7%*	*19%*	*34%*	*39%*	*100%*	*19%*	*4%*	*75%*	*3%*

For citizens electronic modes of communication are most important. Letters and personal contact are comparatively less important, yet still matter to about 60-70 percent of CS respondents (only 30 and 42 percent in category "never used"). Shifts in communication also primarily occur at the electronic level. After having started to use AW, many respondents reported a decrease in communication through other websites (decrease reported by 39 percent) and e-mail (decrease reported by 47 percent). With regard to correspondence or personal contact in contrast, the share of people for whom it has increased and those for whom it has decreased (almost) level each other out. This indicates that AW has become a preferred mode of communication for a substantial share of CS respondents. This is backed up by the fact that about 35 percent of respondents (260 responses, N=605) said that AW was their "main means of political communication" to a separate question.

For reasons of completeness citizens had been asked which alternative websites they used for communicating and interacting with politicians. These are the most frequent ones found in the text boxes of the survey: Campact, Avaaz, Change.org, politicians' own websites, Facebook, Bundestag.de. It is to be remarked that the first three are online spaces for petitions and that the German section of Change.org is led by one of the initiators of AW.

For politicians in turn none of the shifts detected for citizens have occurred. All but one politician reported that AW was not their main means of political communication. As can further be seen in Table 15, other means of political communication are equally important (very low percentages of "never used" for any of the four means). Also, the other means' use before and after starting to use AW is remarkably stable (no changes in the other means of communication for about 70-90 percent of politicians, depending on the means). There is some increase

in website and e-mail communication (19 and 24 percent respectively). This is unlikely an effect of AW though, but probably marks a generally intensified use of electronic communication by politicians, provoked by contemporary communication habits or through positions being taken up by first-time elected MPs. Thus, while AW is one of many communication channels for politicians, it gains importance after initial use for citizens relative to others, in particular relative to other electronic means of communication.

Frequency of communication

Respondents were also asked how their frequency of contacts to politicians during a year had changed after having started to use AW. Responses were recorded on one scale each for the situation "before" and "after", with categories ranging from 0-3 (where 0=never, 1=once per year, 2=several times per year, 3=at least once a month). The median shifted from 1 to 2 when comparing the two situations. The sign test was applied to test for the significance of the shift. This was done because: the comparison was made between two observations on the same sample (related sample); and the data were not normally distributed, and the applied scale was ordinal and not an interval one. The difference turned out to be highly significant (z=-14.434, p=0.000, N=681). It is particularly remarkable that the share of people, who had "never been in touch" with politicians in any way, neither personally nor by any other means of communication, decreased from about 39 in the situation "before" people started using AW to 17 percent in the situation "after." For comparison, of the people surveyed in ESS 2014 almost 85 percent (N=3039) reported they had never been in touch during the previous year.

The same questions were posed to politicians. However, no enhancing effect could be detected. This is not surprising, since communication with citizens is of course at the heart of any MP's tasks. Around 38 percent of the politicians reported that they answered citizens' questions "several times per week", another 36 percent even "daily" (N=220).

Policy levels and parties

As illustrated in Table 16, when asked about the policy level participants were interested in (multiple answers possible), citizens gave priority to the national level (96 percent), but the EU and the federal state levels followed suit at close distance (89 and 86 percent respectively). The gap to the local level was greater, but it was still of high significance to 70 percent of

the respondents. Politicians, when asked about the main policy level they were active at, focussed on the federal state and the local level (85 and 61 percent). The focus on the national (45 percent) and the EU level (29 percent) was lower. This gives an indication that federal state MPs made up for the largest share within the group of PS respondents, national MPs the second largest and EU MPs the smallest.

Table 16 Main policy levels AW

	MAX	Citizens	%(of MAX)	MAX	Politicians	%(of MAX)
Local level	745	525	70%	255	155	61%
Fed. state level	745	642	86%	255	218	85%
National level	745	713	96%	255	115	45%
EU level	745	661	89%	255	74	29%

In order to furthermore find out about the primary addressees of citizens' communication, they have been asked to indicate with which parties they had been in touch with most often. Table 17 shows that only 16% of the users of AW had never been in touch with any politician at all and that SPD (Social Democratic Party) is leading the list of frequent contacts with 61 percent, followed at slightly lower levels by CDU (Christian Democratic Party) and Die Grünen (Green Party; 56 and 52 percent each). Then there is a marked and gradual decrease from Die Linke (The Left Party; 37 percent) to AFD (Alternative für Deutschland; 9 percent).[26]

Table 17 Contact with parties AW

	None	SPD	CDU	Die Grünen	Die Linke	FDP	Piraten	AFD
Yes	120	456	420	385	275	155	104	66
%	16	61	56	52	37	21	14	9
Total	745	745	745	745	745	745	745	745

A further question was concerned with the accessibility of parties as perceived by citizens. It was rated on a scale from 0-10 ("not at all accessible"-"very accessible"). The results are reported by means of density plots that illustrate slopes of the distribution of answers. Parties have been split into two groups for the illustration due to strong differences in the number of people who chose to respond. While at least 300 respondents had judged the accessibility of

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[26] Other parties were sporadic in their occurrence and have therefore not been included in the analysis.

group 1 formed by SPD (336 respondents), CDU (334), Die Grünen (340) und Die Linke (300), considerably fewer had done so for group 2, namely FDP (218), Piratenpartei (168), and AFD (127). Please note that the number of responses is low for all parties: less than half of the respondents to CS chose to answer these questions at all. The displayed results are therefore to be interpreted with caution.

Figure 8 & Figure 9 Parties' accessibility AW (frequent & rarer responses)
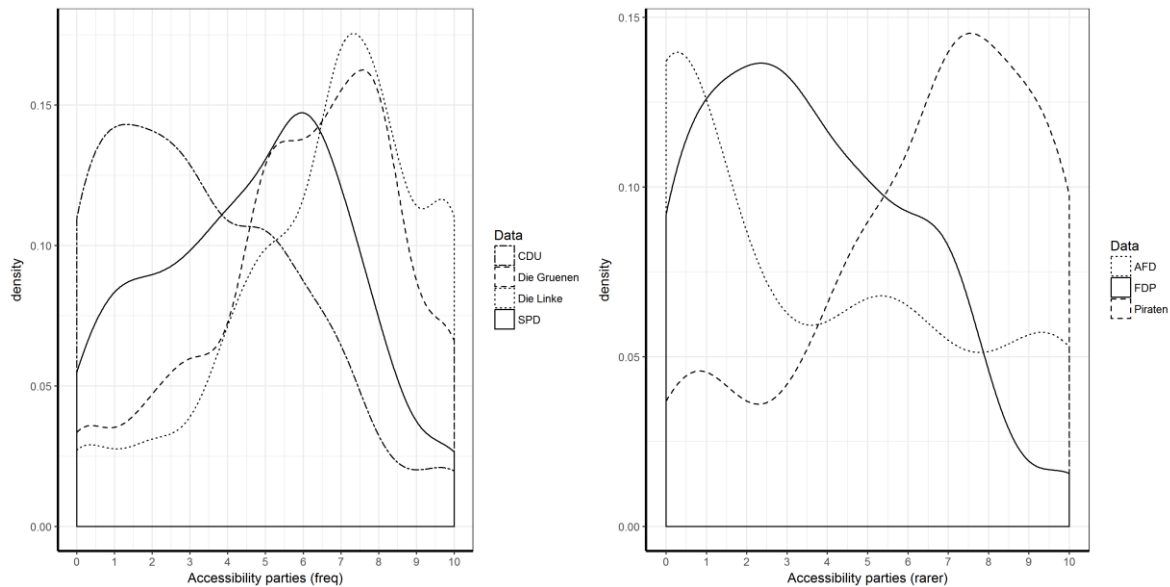
As can be seen from visual inspection of Figure 8 and & Figure 9, Piratenpartei, Die Linke, and Die Grünen (in this order) are seen as most accessible, followed by SPD with a middle to high tendency in terms of accessibility, FDP and CDU with a lower tendency, and AFD at the lowest level.