

Mapping the Digital Landscape: An Analysis of Party Differences between Conventional and Digital Policy Positions

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Abstract : Although digitization is a buzzword in almost every election campaign, the political parties leave voters largely in the dark about their specific positions on digital issues. In the run-up to the 2019 elections in Switzerland, the 'Digitization Monitor' project (DMP) was launched in order to change this situation. Within the framework of the DMP, all 4,736 candidates were surveyed about their digital policy positions and values. The DMP is designed as a digital policy supplement to the existing 'smartvote' voting advice application. This enabled a direct comparison of the digital policy attitudes according to the DMP with the topics of the 'smartvote' questionnaire which are comprehensive in content but mainly related to conventional policy areas. This paper's main research goal is to analyze and visualize possible differences between conventional and digital policy areas in terms of response patterns between and within political parties. The analysis is based on dimensionality reduction methods (multidimensional scaling and principal component analysis) for the visualization of inter-party differences, and on standard deviation as a measure of variation for the evaluation of intra-party unity. The results reveal that digital issues show a lower degree of inter-party polarization compared to conventional policy areas. Thus, the parties have more common ground in issues on digitization than in conventional policy areas. In contrast, the study reveals a mixed picture regarding intra-party unity. Homogeneous parties show a lower degree of unity in digitization issues whereas parties with heterogeneous positions in conventional areas have more united positions in digital areas. All things considered, the findings are encouraging as less polarized conditions apply to the debate on digital development compared to conventional politics. For the future, it would be desirable if in further countries similar projects to the DMP could emerge to broaden the basis for conclusions.

Keywords : comparison of political issue dimensions, digital awareness of candidates, digital policy space, party positions on digital issues

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