

DFG research project

Mediated Contestation in Comparative Perspective

CODEBOOK (version 7.7)

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3. CODING STEP: CREATION OF THE POSITION LIST [POSITION_NAME]

A position is understood here as a communicative statement in which (at least among other things) **normative opinions, judgements, objectives or actions** are presented. Opinions, judgements or objectives are normative if they at least implicitly give an answer to a question about how **something should or should not be** (for example questions about the right behaviour of actors or the proper handling of social problems). That is, positions are **never purely descriptive** (i.e. they do not just give an answer to the question how something **is**, see note 4). Positions can refer to political, economic and all other social contexts (religion, art, law, everyday culture, sports, etc.).

Step 1: formulation of key question(s)

Always refer to the general key question of the project when identifying the position: what is the **desirable public role of religion in the present or future social life** of the country in which the article was published? Since this key question is not likely to appear in an article in this general/abstract form, the first step in coding the position is to formulate one or more specific key question(s) on the specific subtopic that is discussed in the article. Particularly interviews can touch several different topics and thus cover several key questions!

Coding instruction:

Consider which sub-aspect of the article’s general topic is addressed and formulate the corresponding sub-question. Phrase the sub-question **as general as possible, without departing from the actual topic of the article**. Note: single articles generally deal only with a single sub-question in the above sense. However, it is also possible that an article deals with several sub-questions in the above-mentioned sense.

Example 1: *for an opinion article about the ban on wearing niqab (full-face veil) in Germany, the key question ‘Should the wearing of niqab for religious reasons be regulated by German law?’ can be phrased.*

Example 2: *the article ‘Our hate preacher’, which appeared on Spiegel Online, reads: ‘The Pope supports corporal punishment, Bremen is outraged at a Protestant pastor who allegedly has incited people to religious war. After Islam, do we also have to fear Christianity?’ On the basis of the further explanations in this article, the following key question could be formulated here: ‘Is not only Islam but also Christianity contradicting the enlightenment views and values generally assumed in Western democracies?’*

Example 3: *in the article ‘Islamophobia existed before terror’, an interview in the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the political scientist Marc Helbling comments on his research on Islamophobia and the fear of strangers. While the first three quarters of the interview only describe the causes of Islamophobia, the last quarter deals with the political handling of the problem. The following key questions could be formulated here: ‘What should politics do against Islamophobia within the population?’.*

Example 4: *in the article ‘Breaking the paralysis’, an interview in the Süddeutsche Zeitung, Alois Glück comments on his time in the Catholic lay movement, ‘the Pope and his reforms, democracy and controversy in the Church, about refugees and the CSU’. For this interview, the following key questions could be formulated: ‘What should the Catholic Church do to regain trust and credibility in*

the population? What role should Christian values play (especially in CSU politics) in refugee issues and other global crises?’

Step 2: identification of positions as answers to the key question(s)

2.1. Key positions

Positions are answers to the key question(s) formulated in step 1 and hence also answers to the general key question of the project about the **desirable public role of religion in the country’s present or future social life**.

Coding instruction:

Often, the key positions on an issue can be schematically divided into pro and contra positions. Therefore, first search for these pros and cons in the article to capture the key positions before checking the text for other positions.

***Example:** for the key question ‘Should the wearing of niqab for religious reasons be regulated by German law?’, 2 key positions can be formulated first: 1) ‘For banning niqab’ and 2) ‘Against banning niqab’.*

The decision to code these two key positions ultimately depends on whether the article reveals/contains **opinions, judgements, objectives or actions** that refer to or support one of these or both key positions. Positions can also be **implicit**: if the article contains arguments/justifications that support or refute a position, the position must be coded - even if the position itself is not explicitly formulated in the article. However, it should be clear to a **generally educated reader** without special technical knowledge on the topic of the article which position is dealt with.

In some cases, positions may emerge through **negative distancing** or their mere rejection.

***Example:** an article could address the question ‘Why a ban on niqab is wrong’. In this case, not only the position ‘Against banning niqab’ is conceivable, but also the counter position ‘For banning niqab’, even if it is not further discussed in the article. In such cases, both the pro and the contra position is coded.*

If you are not sure whether a position occurs in the article, code conservatively (i.e. do not include the position in question). **Only include positions you can identify clearly in the text in this way!**

2.2. Other positions and small differences between positions

Apart from pro and contra key positions, there may be other positions in the text which give more detailed/differentiated answers (e.g. ‘Yes, but...’) to the key questions of the article or the general key question of the project. What is important is that the position represents an **independent** answer to the key question and can be clearly distinguished from other positions. It depends on whether the identified positions, if they served as a basis for actions, would lead to **different consequences**. If this is the case, they are different positions that have to be coded separately.

Example: *apart from the key positions ‘Forbanning niqab in the public sphere’ and ‘Against banning niqab in the public sphere’, another position is possible: ‘For banning any religious symbols in the public sphere’. This position would comprise banning niqab, but would also go far beyond.*

Look for specific passages in which a position occurs. Often, a position will appear several times or is spread across the article. In Angrist, mark the text passage that – in your opinion - most clearly expresses the position (max. 20 words) and then click on the green button ‘Position’. If you code an article in PDF or paper format, mark the passage in the PDF editor or highlight it with a green marker , respectively.

2.3. Formulation of positions

The description of positions will not always be suitable for the precise formulation of a position. Apart from marking the text passage that describes a position, formulate the key message of the position concisely in your own words (max 20 words). This carries several advantages:

- 1) Intersubjective comprehensibility for other coders: a concise formulation of positions helps other coder pairs who are working with the text in the second part of the coding. All positions found must be well comprehensible to them *without having read the text intensively*. Positions should be formulated such that a new coder requires little effort of interpretation to understand the positions on the list.
- 2) Facilitation of own further coding: a concise formulation of positions facilitates the further coding of the positions with Angrist.
- 3) Facilitation of self-examination: a concise formulation of positions helps you to verify whether a position actually is a position (and not a justification or a statement that is not related to the key question of the project or to the key questions of the article). If a statement cannot be rephrased in a certain way, it is likely not a position.

A position is a **claim or statement of how something should be** (as opposed to a factual assertion) regarding an issue. A position should therefore be propositional and use terms such as ‘for/against’, ‘should/should not’, ‘may/must not’, ‘must/must not’.

In formulating positions, also make sure that its statement (of how something should be) is clear.

Example: *formulated position: ‘Recognition of Islam’– here, a controversial question or issue is described, but there is not made any statement on how it should be. Is recognition approved, rejected, ...? A better formulation would be: ‘For the recognition of Islam’.*

Coding instruction:

If necessary, rewrite the position expressed in the marked passages according to the rules listed above and enter it in the provided text box in Angrist with P1, P2, etc. (e.g. ‘P1: For banning niqab’).

Note 1: positions must be strictly distinguished from actors (who can represent positions) and arguments/justifications (which may be given for or against positions).

Example 1: *the statement ‘The headscarf is a symbol rather of the social oppression of women than of religious freedom’ may sound like a position in the sense of expressing an*

opinion. However, it could be used to justify the position ‘For banning niqab’. Therefore, it is not a position, but a justification.

Example 2: *‘The AfD advocates a ban on niqab’—here, an actor (the AfD as representative of the position) already appears in the description of the position. Avoid this and code **only** the position.*

Note 2: positions can also be expressed in the form of actions, such as protests (e.g. demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, violence against people or things, boycotts) or the promulgation of institutional acts (e.g. court decisions, legislative decisions). In this case, it is important that not the action itself is coded as a position, but the position that the reader can clearly identify as an expression of this action.

Example: *if an article mentions that a law prohibiting niqab based on religious grounds has been passed, the position to be coded here is not ‘law to ban niqab passed’ but ‘for banning niqab’.*

Note 3: a position may occur several times in an article and may be expressed in different ways. However, in such cases, only one position should be coded. This also applies if a position is expressed in different forms. That is, you always have to consider in your coding decision whether two statements (positions) are identical in essence and therefore should be treated as a single position. The position list should not contain double positions!

Example: *an article describes that a demonstration for the prohibition of burqa took place, a talk show guest spoke out in favour of a ban on burqa, and a bill to ban niqab was introduced into the Bundestag. Here, the position ‘For banning niqab’ is expressed in three different ways, but is coded as a position only once.*

Note 4: positions are **normative** and never **purely descriptive**. That means a position is a statement about how the world should be, not about how it is. Descriptions of social developments/tendencies are not relevant just because they cover the topic of religion. In order to be potentially considered as a position (with reference to the central issue of the article), they must **at least implicitly include a normative judgement** of these developments that is **recognisable to the generally educated reader** (for example, that they are ‘good’ or ‘bad’).

Example: *‘There is a religiously motivated sexualization of all areas of life’—this statement describes only a fact. In order to qualify as a position, however, the text must rather indicate whether and how this situation is judged. If that is the case, then a position ‘Not all areas of life should be sexualised out of religious motivation’ would be conceivable.*

Note 5: opinions, judgements, objectives, or actions that concern **individuals** are considered pertinent to the debate about the desirable public role of religion in the country’s present or future social life only if the reader can identify them clearly in the text and put them in a larger social context. If this is not the case, they are not counted as a position.

Note 6: claims of how something should be made by **religious dignitaries** in their function as such (for example, the pope, imams, pastors, etc.) are automatically considered religiously motivated. If you are not sure whether a position answers to the question of the desirable public role of religion in

the country's present or future social life, a reference to religion in positions expressed by religious dignitaries can be taken for granted .

Example: *an article deals with the question whether textbooks should be redesigned to include alternative family models. The reference to religion is exclusively implicit throughout the article. A pastor expresses his opposition to a reorganization of the textbooks. It is automatically assumed that the actor, in his role as a religious dignitary, advocates the inclusion of religious considerations when deciding on this issue. Thus, this claim of how something should be is coded as a relevant answer to the central issue of the project.*

Caution: conversely, not every utterance is automatically relevant because it is made by a religious actor or justified using a religious argument !