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Roberts, Carl W.; Zuell, Cornelia; Popping, Roel

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On the social construction of democracy: Modal rhetoric in former East & West German journalists' post-reunification editorials

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jou**Carl W Roberts**

Iowa State University, USA

Cornelia Zuell

GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Germany

Roel Popping

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

Abstract

We report differences in political rhetoric within former East- and West-German journalists' editorials written during the 7 years immediately following reunification. Whereas the former evoked frames inconsistently and disproportionately conveyed *citizens' possibilities* during the 1994–1995 provincial, national, and European election period; the latter framed their rhetoric consistently and did so in overwhelmingly political terms. From these findings, we draw inferences on citizens' mutual interpretations within authoritarian societies (what is permitted) versus functioning democracies (what is legal), suggesting that only the latter affords the basis for the social construction of democracy.

Keywords

Culture, democratization, frame, modality, rhetoric, social construction

Corresponding author:

Carl W Roberts, Department of Statistics, Iowa State University, 1121 Snedecor Hall, Ames, IA 50014, USA.

Email: carlos@iastate.edu

Introduction

This article is a 7-year longitudinal study of patterns in political rhetoric within a social environment of free press and free speech, namely within Germany in the years immediately following reunification. With this socio-temporal context as a backdrop, we test aspects of a theory of political rhetoric within editorial news reported at the national level. In particular, we submit that source-credibility is the key criterion of rhetorical success in nondemocratic societies (including nonfunctioning democracies, within which citizen rights and responsibilities are constitutionally guaranteed but arbitrarily appealed to by those in power). Leaders endowed with sufficiently credible power or status merely need to claim the possibility, impossibility, inevitability, or contingency of their subjects' actions, for these claims to be accepted without contest. Yet functioning democracies are characterized by consistently enforced legal systems that – as an alternative to source-credibility – afford citizens frames with which to justify their political rhetoric's *legitimacy*. Following this theoretical narrative, we derive hypotheses regarding the distinct ways that journalists formulate their political rhetoric after having been socialized in societies both with a functioning democracy and without it. We then test them using data from editorials authored by former West- and East-German journalists during the first 7 years after German reunification. In the case of the latter journalists, our investigation is thus of a socialization-legacy that endured from an authoritarian context into a democratic free-press environment.

Beyond this theoretical contribution, the article's importance for communication studies lies also with its provision of quantitative tools for meeting recent appeals for social constructionist studies of mediated news (Scheufele, 1999: 105; Van Gorp, 2007). It also provides a semantic framework for differentiating among the five news frames that have been recurrently found in mediated national news. Finally, in light of contemporary cases globally of citizens from so many 'democracies' (Russia, Iraq, Egypt, etc.) struggling for political leaders' accountability, it has become exceedingly important to understand more about the rhetorical strategies these leaders (along with journalists) use to preclude citizens from contesting their credibility or the legitimacy of their claims.

Credibility in the construction of reality

From a social constructionist standpoint, frames evoke perspectives that a message's source invites an audience to use in interpreting the message's content (e.g. Van Gorp, 2007: 73). Construction of the same content (generally an issue or event) may differ, depending on which frames are invoked by sources and, if successful, accepted by their audience (Chong and Druckman, 2007: 113, 119; Matthes and Schemer, 2012). For example, the *issue* of 'nuclear power' or the *event* of 'a nuclear power plant's construction' could be framed as either technological progress or ecological risk (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989: 11, 16). Our approach in this article is to analyze the framing of *reality claims* within which sources rhetorically situate their fellow citizens as the subjects of modal statements. That is, we propose a mechanism of reality construction in which sources' steady use of claims like 'We *need* nuclear power to maintain economic growth' would, if not contested, result in their targets' belief in the inevitability of, or need for,

nuclear power (here framed in economic terms). Yet modal reality claims of inevitability (need to, must, etc.), possibility (may, can, etc.), impossibility (cannot, must not, etc.), or contingency (be unnecessary, able not to, etc.) may be contested not only in accordance with frames but also due to insufficient source credibility (Druckman, 2001).

In authoritarian societies leaders' credibility is preserved as they back up their discourse by steadily activating (and occasionally 'convincing' via more coercive means) their audience's awareness of their power to limit its possibilities, thereby leading them to imagine audience-members' past as one of precisely such possibility-activations. Rather than steadily framing their political communications in accordance with constitutionally stipulated rationales, these leaders strengthen their credibility by reliably reinforcing their citizen-audience's belief that they are powerful enough to ensure safe pursuit of permitted activity (Roberts, 2008: 133). Defining 'permission' as an assertion of possibility from a credible source, authoritarian political rhetoric may thus account for why during Hungary's transformation from authoritarianism in 1990–1997, over half of the reality claims in its most broadly read newspaper's editorials were ones of possibility (Roberts et al., 2009: 513). Accordingly, we hypothesize that *the political rhetoric of journalists from authoritarian societies consists primarily of permission claims* (i.e. reality claims of possibility in the absence of consistency in their appeals to frames over time) (H1).

Frame competition and the law

Nation-states with functioning democracies afford their citizens credibility-neutral alternatives for interpreting their leaders' claims. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that, even in a democracy without 'silencing structures' to preclude citizen-feedback (Dutta-Bergman, 2008: 15, 171), citizens may still interpret a leader's claims according to her or his credibility – e.g. as a Democrat, patriot, Christian, or as someone entirely without scruples (Borah, 2013; Druckman, 2001; Sheaffer et al., 2014). The alternative interpretations available to citizens of democracies stem from their shared (i.e. their in-principle impartial) legal system, in terms of which they evaluate each other's arguments on national matters.

Our argument is thus that in comparison to members of authoritarian societies, citizens within functioning democracies are more likely to interpret political rhetoric in terms of its frame's legitimacy rather than its source's credibility. In addressing these citizens, political leaders and journalists risk popular contestation if, when addressing a national issue, they do not appeal to the frame most familiar to (i.e. that was previously most activated in) them in conjunction with the issue. As a result, journalists' attempts to 'activate their audience's most-activated frames' (i.e. their sensitivity to *audience frames*)¹ has a stabilizing effect within a democracy on the relative frequency at which frames appear in a country's political rhetoric – an effect manifest as frame-use in equal proportions over time, at least insofar as the types of issues that audiences associate with these frames tend to be addressed in equal proportions over the long term. The relative magnitudes among these frames will likely differ among democracies, however. For instance, Germany's civil-law discursive environment lends itself to an additional expectation regarding this pattern of steady proportions.

Generally speaking, legal systems in developed democratic countries are one of two types: common law (England, United States, Australia) and civil law (continental Western Europe, Scandinavia, Japan). Whereas common law is built on concrete juridical precedent in the absence of an overarching conceptual structure, 'civil law is based on codes which contain logically connected concepts and rules, starting with general principles and moving on to specific rules' (Pejovic, 2001: 820). For example, despite its usual classification as a common-law state, Canada's healthcare laws consist primarily of five abstract principles (universality, public administration, portability, comprehensiveness, and accessibility) that provincial leaders are required to implement or risk loss of funding (Patel and Rushefsky, 2002: 83). And so the mission statement of Canada's Public Health Agency is *abstract* ('the promotion of health'). Yet in contrast, the corresponding mission statement of the US Social Security Commission is *concrete* ('the delivery of services'). Succinctly put, civil law affords abstract rationales for 'why' citizens should act in specific ways, whereas common law enumerates concrete consequences (Medicare payments, prison terms, etc.) that will result from 'how' citizens act.

These two legal systems' implications for democratic functioning can be viewed as extensions of framing theory. For example, Price and Tewksbury (1997: 193) have argued that given frame activation, subjects' attention shifts to options with perceived relevance to this frame. By extension, when a single *overarching frame* is legitimated via inscription in civil law, it will likely form the kernel of a discursive environment in which the overarching frame is not only citizens' most activated frame, but also the frame that directs discourse toward relevant options instead of toward competing frames. In contrast, *frame competition* is associated with a tendency for citizens to make choices 'consistent with their underlying principles' (Sniderman and Theriault, 2004: 146), suggesting that when citizens' concrete legal rights and obligations are inscribed in common law, these legally enforced procedures on 'how matters are accomplished' will generally be accepted as legitimate, leaving frame-contestation (i.e. discourse on 'why', not 'how') the grist of political rhetoric among interest groups identified with their respective frames. Roberts and Liu (2014) provide evidence for both these dynamics in a historical-comparative study of modal arguments (i.e. reality claims plus associated frames) in two Western democracies' editorials on health-related topics: Against a background of Canadian civil-law versus US common-law in healthcare legislation, Canadian editorialists' modal arguments were found to exhibit much greater frame consensus than did those authored by US editorialists. Consistent with their study, we propose a second hypothesis: *If a functioning democracy has civil laws regarding a specific national issue (healthcare, party politics, etc.), journalists from this society will generate political rhetoric regarding this issue that is consensually framed* (i.e. will steadily provide frames in the same proportions over time, one of which is a single overarching frame) (H2).

Association of claims with frames in mature democracies

Beyond steadiness in frame use, some analyses of modal rhetoric have found evidence in mature democracies' political discourse of an affinity between specific frames and reality claims. For instance, in both United States and Canadian health-related editorials reality-claims of possibility are most common among economically framed arguments

and ones of inevitability are most common among arguments framed in welfare-related terms (Roberts and Liu, 2014: 779). From this, one might infer that whereas ‘free-market logic’ communicates opportunities (i.e. possibilities within a marketplace), modal arguments that are framed in welfare-related terms tend to involve a ‘logic of necessity’, according to which preemptive action is inevitable to ensure the preservation of each citizen’s beneficent reality (Roberts and Liu, 2014: 771). Thus in addition to steady frame use (per H2), democratic maturity may also manifest itself in citizens’ use of reality claims ‘appropriate’ to the frames they invoke (e.g. economic possibilities and welfare-related inevitabilities). Indeed, in an analysis of post-1989 Hungarian political rhetoric, evidence of precisely such maturation was found in the form of monotonic increases in both ‘economic rationales for possibility’ and (in an analysis that combined political and welfare-related frames) ‘political rationales for inevitability’ (Roberts et al., 2009: 517).

And so we add four more hypotheses: *If political rhetoric from a functioning democracy’s journalists contains modal arguments in which economic frames are used, these arguments will tend to include reality claims of possibility* (H3). *In comparison to this, political rhetoric from an authoritarian society’s journalists will be less likely to claim possibility within economically framed modal arguments* (H3a). *If political rhetoric from a functioning democracy’s journalists contains modal arguments in which welfare-related frames are used, these arguments will tend to include reality claims of inevitability* (H4). *In comparison to this, political rhetoric from an authoritarian society’s journalists will be less likely to claim inevitability within modal arguments framed in welfare-related terms* (H4a). That is, democratic functioning not only involves steady frame use, it involves adherence to the logics of the frames evoked – specifically, to a logic of ‘economic opportunity (possibilities)’ and ‘welfare-related needs (inevitabilities)’.

Methods

The following sections describe and illustrate a methodology for testing the above 6 hypotheses based on parallel samples of modal arguments used in editorials written by former East- and West-German journalists during 7 years immediately following German reunification on 3 October 1990. Based on H1, we expect journalists with prior professional training and experience in the authoritarian German Democratic Republic (hereafter GDR-journalists) to emphasize possibility in the absence of any consistent framing, whereas from H2 we expect journalists with training and experience in the functioning-democracy-with-civic-legal-system Federal Republic of Germany (hereafter FRG-journalists) to consistently provide rationales in accordance with a single overarching frame. We test these and the other 4 hypotheses using a quasi-experimental design in which GDR- and FRG-journalists’ political rhetorics are compared for differences due to their respective authoritarian versus free-press professional backgrounds – differences evident, for example, in the former’s relatively stronger, authoritarian-like belief in journalists’ role as public advocate, educator, and lay-politician (Hagen, 1997: 14; Kunczik, 2001: 65).

Fundamental to our design is that there be further similarity among the journalists and their working conditions as they produced the texts to be analyzed. One step in this direction was to mitigate differences in the journalists’ writing due to variation in newspaper

ownership, editorial direction, and the like. To this end, we restricted our study to only two newspapers: *Berliner Zeitung* (BZ) and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), respectfully from the former GDR and FRG. Takeover of BZ by Gruner+Jahr (and briefly, Maxwell Communications) had already begun before reunification. Newsroom changes there were relatively quick and limited in scope, like virtually all GDR-media takeovers during which ‘two-thirds to three-quarters of the former editors remained in editorial offices, though usually not in senior positions. For the most part the percentage of former GDR journalists only amounts to about half, and between 10% and 30% are newly educated junior staff’ (Enquete-Kommission, 1998: 3.3.2). And so the GDR journalist, Hans Eggert, remained BZ’s editor-in-chief from 1989 to 1996 – a period of relative editorial consistency sandwiched between large personnel changes both as his tenure began and then again when his successor, Michael Maier, oversaw a major infusion of talented FRG-journalists. Confidence in post-1989 free-press workplace consistency is also bolstered given that BZ remains ‘the only East German paper to regain credibility and circulation after reunification’ (Wilder, 2013). In SZ – Germany’s largest broadsheet newspaper – consistency in ownership, solvency and editorship are also evident, with Süddeutscher Verlag ownership throughout, and the overlapping chief-editor tenures of Schröder (1985–1995), Sittner (1989–2006), and Kilz (1996–2010). Both newspapers were established in 1945, are center-left in editorial slant, and (given that West Germany was 2.3 times larger than East Germany with nearly 4 times its population) were of somewhat comparable size with circulations in 1998 of 245,227 (BZ) and 413,717 (SZ). In sum, we have reason to believe that the newspapers’ editorial environments remained relatively stable during our 1990–1997 study period. Nonetheless, as we shall see, GDR-journalists experienced considerably greater workplace stress than their FRG counterparts.

We randomly sampled one weekday every second week from the date of reunification until 30 June 1997, for a total of 176 dates. Of these dates, nine were eliminated because they were national holidays on which no newspapers were published. An editorial (Leitartikel) in each newspaper’s first (national politics) section was then randomly sampled. Only if the section explicitly included an editorial with an identifiable journalist’s byline was the editorial eligible for inclusion in our data set. Furthermore, BZ editorials had the additional constraint that their *authors needed to have been verifiably identified as a GDR-journalist*. Accordingly, 48 more dates were eliminated from our SZ sampling frame because their associated national politics sections contained no editorial-with-byline, and 56 additional dates were eliminated from the BZ frame because their associated sections contained no editorial-with-byline *from a GDR-journalist*. Thus, our data are derived from the texts of 230 editorials: 111 from BZ and 119 from SZ. Table 1 lists the distribution of these editorials for the 7 (July to June) years of our study.

As alluded to above, it is important not to downplay the psychological challenges that GDR-journalists faced when switching to performance-based positions in a free-speech environment from jobs guaranteed by the state and the ‘announcement journalism’ (Verlautbarungsjournalismus) that had been required of them. These journalists’ training at Leipzig University’s School of Journalism (a.k.a. the *Rotes Kloster*) entailed ideological indoctrination and no research skills, but nonetheless ‘trade skills’ (in stylistics, formatting, etc.) that possibly exceeded those of their FRG colleagues (Meyen and Fiedler, 2013). The years following reunification involved weakened job security for them not

Table 1. Editorials Authored by Former East- vs West-German Journalists, 1990–7.

German origin	Year							Total
	1990–1	1991–2	1992–3	1993–4	1994–5	1995–6	1996–7	
East	53.3 (16)	48.3 (14)	52.9 (18)	45.5 (15)	47.5 (19)	47.4 (18)	42.3 (11)	48.3 (111)
West	46.7 (14)	51.7 (15)	47.1 (16)	54.5 (18)	52.5 (21)	52.6 (20)	57.7 (15)	51.7 (119)
Total	13.0 (30)	12.6 (29)	14.8 (34)	14.3 (33)	17.4 (40)	16.5 (38)	11.3 (26)	100.0 (230)

only due to any prior SED (party) or STASI (secret police) connections, but also because of ingrained fear of retributions for their own research and independent commentary, plus newly instilled fears of their own incompetence (Enquete-Kommission, 1998; Hoff, 2011: 120–121). Some evidence of this is apparent in Table 1, with a 1990–1997 decline in editorials authored by GDR-journalists. Yet even more dramatic evidence is in GDR-journalists' hesitance to use modal arguments at all.² In particular, five times as many GDR- than FRG-editorials in our sample contained no modal arguments whatsoever – arguments conveying their authors' views on what German citizens should, must, can, and so on do. Even so, added challenges faced in an unfamiliar free-press environment are necessary in an investigation of the effects GDR-journalists' professional background had on their political rhetoric.

The final sampling step was to identify all modal arguments within the 230 sampled editorials. In particular, our unit of analysis is the 'modal clause plus rationale' pair, where each modal clause conveys a reality claim regarding something possible, impossible, inevitable, or contingent (i.e. not inevitable) for a German citizen (Roberts et al., 2010). Each modal argument was coded as conveying one of four types of reality claim. Grounded in modal logic (e.g. Van Benthem, 2010), these types stem from the observation that statements using modal auxiliary verbs (in particular, can, must, ought, may (i.e. to be permitted), and their semantic equivalents) have a positive form plus three negatives: possibility, impossibility, inevitability, and contingency (i.e. able, not able, not able not (or must), and able not; or permitted, not permitted, not permitted not (or ought), and permitted not).

Identification of reality claims requires relatively little subjective judgment during the coding process, since they are identifiable via a fixed set of token instances and are relatively straight-forward to classify into the four logical forms. Excluded from the study are all reality claims that did not have a German citizen as its semantic subject ('stoves *can* heat food' or 'the Chinese *do not need* to meet our standards'), did not infer its subject's intentionality ('one *cannot* breathe in a vacuum'), were not within a direct quotation by someone else ('Kohl asserted, 'We *must* stay the course!'), or were not semantically linked to a specific news frame. These exclusion criteria were applied to ensure that the modal arguments analyzed here comprise editorialists' *own explicitly framed social constructions of fellow citizens' reality*. Interrater agreement is $\kappa = .86$ for reality claims in each newspaper.

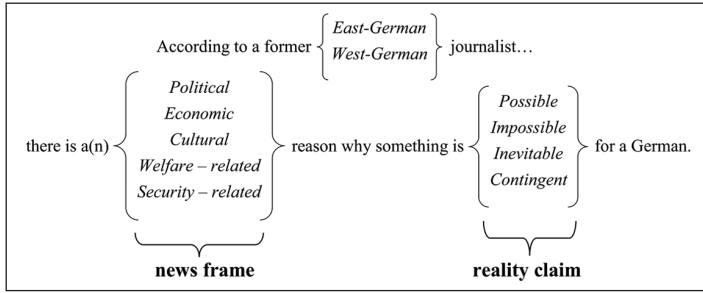


Figure 1. A Semantic Grammar for Analyzing Modal Arguments within Post-Reunification Germany’s National News Content.

Figure 1 depicts our complete semantic grammar – a grammar that has already lent itself to various social constructionist analyses of modal rhetoric in nations’ editorial news (Popping and Roberts, 2009; Roberts et al., 2009, 2010; Roberts and Liu, 2014). The grammar has three parts: a news frame, a reality claim, and the GDR or FRG background of the journalist (our key independent variable). So why precisely the five news frames depicted in the figure? The short answer is that these five frames are ones citizens (and journalists, in particular) in Western democracies use when interpreting national news. Despite acknowledgment that other scholars had previously developed analytic schemes with parallels to their own, Neuman et al. (1992: 60) were among the first to report ‘five predominant conceptual frames which are evident in both media coverage and informal public discourse about politics’. Subsequent studies have recurrently found evidence that these five frames – economic (cost vs benefit), security-related (us vs them), political (controllers vs controlled), welfare-related (hindered vs helped), and cultural (right vs wrong) – are commonly used in different languages by citizens and diverse news media in various Western democracies (De Vreese, 2005; De Vreese et al., 2001; Price et al., 1997; Roberts and Liu, 2014; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Zillmann et al., 2004; but also see Chong and Druckman, 2007: 107, Note 2).

Coders were instructed to identify the *reason why* each modal argument’s predicate was claimed to be possible, impossible, inevitable, or contingent. If more than one reason was provided, their instructions were to code the one most proximate to the claim or, if reasons were enumerated in a list, to code the first listed reason. If no reason was found within one paragraph either side of the reality claim, the claim was deemed not part of a modal argument and was not included in our sample. Interrater agreement for news frames is $\kappa = .83$ in BZ and $\kappa = .87$ in SZ.

Although their recurrence has emboldened some to elevate these five frames to generic or master-frame status, such reification is anathema to social constructionists’ emphasis on interpretation. Accordingly, coders were instructed to classify the primary reason journalists provided for each reality claim in terms of two types of reciprocal relations (namely, ‘on behalf of’ and ‘in accordance with’) between a nation and its citizens: Acting *on behalf of* their nation, citizens differentiate themselves (we) from others (they) who might threaten the nation’s *security*. A nation ‘acts’ *on behalf of* its citizens’ *welfare* by transforming those in need (hindered) into those who are not (helped). Acting *in*

Table 2. Overall Percentages of Modal Arguments According to News Frame and Reality Claim.

<i>Reality claim</i>					
<i>News frame</i>	Inevitability	Possibility	Impossibility	Contingency	Total
Political	17.2 (89 + 17)	15.9 (76 + 22)	5.5 (25 + 9)	1.8 (8 + 3)	40.5 (198 + 51)
Cultural	9.3 (38 + 19)	9.4 (33 + 25)	4.2 (19 + 7)	1.8 (9 + 2)	24.7 (99 + 53)
Economic	11.4 (43 + 27)	7.0 (27 + 16)	3.6 (9 + 13)	0.3 (1 + 1)	22.3 (80 + 57)
Welfare	5.0 (23 + 8)	1.8 (6 + 5)	0.7 (4 + 0)	0.3 (2 + 0)	7.8 (35 + 13)
Security	2.9 (13 + 5)	1.3 (2 + 6)	0.3 (0 + 2)	0.2 (1 + 0)	4.7 (16 + 13)
Total	45.9 (206 + 76)	35.4 (144 + 74)	14.3 (57 + 31)	4.4 (21 + 6)	100.0 (428 + 187)

Note: West + East counts are listed in parentheses below overall (i.e. combined) percentages.

accordance with their nation's legal system, citizens weigh options (costs vs benefits) provided to them within the *economy* this system affords. And the *politics* of a functioning democracy ensure that the nation 'acts' *in accordance with* majorities (controllers) but not minorities (controlled) among its citizens. Finally, every nation's citizens share a *culture*, or historical continuity, that provides them with a common-sense grasp of normativity (right) and nonnormativity (wrong). Illustrations of our encoding of frames and reality claims are provided in the results section. (See Popping and Roberts, 2009: 258–259; Roberts and Liu, 2014: 767) for similar accountings of and coding illustrations for these frames.) Thus, a nation's reality may be socially constructed by virtue of the rationales citizens provide in their political rhetoric – rationales having greater legitimacy, we argue, when legally sanctioned within a functioning democracy.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the 428 modal arguments made in the 119 editorials authored by FRG-journalists, and the 187 modal arguments made in the 111 editorials by GDR-journalists. As already mentioned, this paucity of GDR-journalists' modal arguments is preliminary evidence that professional training within an authoritarian state alters (here, quantitatively reduces) journalists' political rhetoric. Despite FRG-journalists' modal arguments dominating its percentages, Table 2 affords insight into the types of reality claims and news frames used overall. In particular, over 80% of reality claims are ones conveying inevitability or possibility, leaving relatively few claims of impossibility or contingency. 'Political' was the most frequent news frame in our data. Cultural and economic frames were mentioned with relative frequencies comparable to studies of Hungarian, Canadian, and US political rhetoric, within which the security frame was likewise least-used (Roberts et al., 2009: 513; Roberts and Liu, 2014: 775). In the following section, we add time to Table 2 as a third dimension, thereby allowing us to test for steadiness in the journalists' frame-use (per H2) and claim-use over time.

Evidence of deviations from this steadiness will consist of significant frame- or claim-by-time effects in our data (per H1). Taking advantage of the inherently qualitative nature of our raw data, we shall supplement our findings with direct quotations from the texts themselves.

Results

Given both their lack of theoretical relevance for our hypotheses and their relative disuse (as per Table 2), we omit from our analysis examination of modal arguments with reality claims of impossibility and contingency, as well as those with security-related news frames. However, in light of its potential relevance for H4 and H4a, we shall model usage of welfare-related frames, despite their comprising only 7.8% of the frames used in the editorials’ modal arguments overall. Yet even after this modest reduction in the dimensions of our 4 × 5 × 230 (claim × frame × editorial) table, the table remains too sparse for us to build a meaningful statistical model. To accommodate this limitation, we test our hypotheses using a set of 8 loglinear models – one model for each combination of 2 (possible and inevitable) reality claims and 4 (economic, welfare-related, political and cultural) news frames. Given that modal arguments are nested within editorials, these models will be multilevel ones that take the following form:

$$\begin{aligned} \ln (Y_{ij} + \Delta) = & \lambda + \lambda_i^R + \lambda_j^F + c\lambda^C + \lambda_{ij}^{RF} + c\lambda_i^{RC} + c\lambda_j^{FC} + c\lambda_{ij}^{RFC} \\ & + t\lambda^T + t\lambda_i^{RT} + t\lambda_j^{FT} + ct\lambda^{CT} + t\lambda_{ij}^{RFT} + ct\lambda_i^{RCT} + ct\lambda_j^{FCT} + ct\lambda_{ij}^{RFCT} \\ & + q\lambda^Q + q\lambda_i^{RQ} + q\lambda_j^{FQ} + cq\lambda^{CQ} + q\lambda_{ij}^{RFQ} + cq\lambda_i^{RCQ} + cq\lambda_j^{FCQ} + cq\lambda_{ij}^{RFCQ} \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{ij} is the expected count of the i th reality claim and the j th news frame, c is author’s country of journalistic training ($c=0$ (FRG) 1(GDR), and t is linear time (centered in seven fiscal-year increments from 3.05 for 1990–1991 until 2.95 for 1996–1997), q is quadratic time (orthogonal to t and centered with values ranging from 2.90 for 1990–1991, to 2.11 for 1993–1994, to 3.20 for 1996–1997), and Δ is 10^{-8} (in accordance with Agresti (1990: 250) re. sparse tables).

Table 3 provides estimates for two-way and higher-order interactions from the 8 models of interest in this study. The table’s first 5 rows (beginning with $r \times$) list coefficients estimating deviations from the table’s average log-frequency in mentions of modal arguments conveying reality claims (r) of possibility (four left columns) and inevitability (four right columns). Interactions with the dummy variable, c , indicate how much more or less GDR-journalists’ modal arguments deviate from those of FRG-journalists. For example, the significant estimate in the table’s first row ($\lambda_{ip}^{RC} = -.204$) indicates that (when political (p) news-frame use is modeled, and controlling for marginal differences in reality claim (R) and news frame (F) use) GDR-journalists (C) convey inevitability (i) in their modal arguments at a log-frequency .204 less than do FRG-journalists. Since the other three models in which inevitability claims are estimated also have negative (albeit nonsignificant) slopes, one may make guarded inferences to FRG-journalists’ greater

Table 3. Estimates from Eight Hierarchical Loglinear Models of Interactions among Reality Claim (r), News Frame (f), Journalist's Former Country (c), and Linear- (t) and Quadratic- (q) Time.

	Possibility for Reasons that are...				Inevitability for Reasons that are...			
	economic	welfare-related	political	cultural	economic	welfare-related	political	cultural
r × c	0.074 (0.116)	0.337 (0.296)	0.138 (0.105)	0.171 (0.109)	-0.156 (0.109)	-0.128 (0.288)	-0.204* (0.103)	-0.154 (0.110)
r × t	0.007 (0.033)	0.004 (0.065)	0.014 (0.028)	0.018 (0.032)	0.000 (0.033)	0.018 (0.058)	0.006 (0.027)	0.006 (0.030)
r × t × c	0.018 (0.061)	0.060 (0.166)	0.035 (0.057)	0.020 (0.055)	0.004 (0.055)	-0.053 (0.166)	-0.055 (0.055)	-0.016 (0.053)
r × q	0.026 (0.034)	0.058 (0.062)	-0.015 (0.028)	-0.030 (0.032)	-0.071* (0.033)	-0.019 (0.054)	-0.007 (0.026)	-0.009 (0.030)
r × q × c	-0.120* (0.060)	-0.007 (0.129)	-0.077 (0.057)	-0.041 (0.054)	0.094 (0.054)	-0.057 (0.126)	0.021 (0.054)	0.042 (0.053)
f × c	0.242* (0.116)	-0.224 (0.296)	-0.449* (0.105)	0.135 (0.109)	0.333* (0.109)	-0.335 (0.288)	-0.439* (0.103)	0.095 (0.110)
f × t	0.018 (0.033)	0.076 (0.065)	-0.008 (0.028)	0.004 (0.032)	0.020 (0.033)	0.076 (0.058)	-0.007 (0.027)	0.001 (0.030)
f × t × c	-0.139* (0.061)	-0.405* (0.167)	0.053 (0.057)	0.116* (0.055)	-0.140* (0.055)	-0.395* (0.166)	0.038 (0.055)	0.128* (0.053)
f × q	0.056 (0.034)	-0.021 (0.062)	-0.077* (0.028)	0.034 (0.032)	0.033 (0.033)	-0.064 (0.054)	-0.064* (0.026)	0.042 (0.030)
f × q × c	-0.085 (0.060)	-0.078 (0.130)	-0.026 (0.057)	0.047 (0.054)	-0.034 (0.055)	-0.054 (0.127)	-0.031 (0.055)	0.036 (0.053)
r × f	-0.007 (0.069)	-0.228 (0.125)	0.092 (0.053)	-0.002 (0.062)	0.083 (0.066)	0.183* (0.100)	-0.058 (0.050)	-0.128* (0.060)
r × f × c	-0.165 (0.116)	0.236 (0.296)	-0.083 (0.105)	0.108 (0.109)	0.032 (0.109)	0.032 (0.288)	-0.040 (0.103)	0.034 (0.110)
r × f × t	-0.008 (0.033)	-0.013 (0.065)	-0.001 (0.028)	0.008 (0.032)	-0.009 (0.033)	0.019 (0.058)	0.010 (0.027)	0.003 (0.030)
r × f × q	0.002 (0.061)	0.012 (0.167)	-0.004 (0.057)	0.000 (0.055)	0.057 (0.055)	-0.037 (0.166)	-0.058 (0.055)	0.032 (0.053)
t × c	0.072* (0.034)	0.087 (0.062)	-0.036 (0.028)	-0.025 (0.032)	-0.096* (0.033)	-0.012 (0.054)	0.043 (0.026)	-0.004 (0.030)
r × f × q × c	-0.119* (0.060)	0.055 (0.129)	-0.008 (0.057)	0.055 (0.054)	0.089 (0.055)	-0.097 (0.126)	-0.044 (0.054)	0.045 (0.053)

Note. Standard errors are listed in parentheses below estimates. Coefficients estimate deviations from the average log frequency among all 920 cells in each model's contingency table.

*p < .05 in two-tailed test (one-tailed for $\lambda_{iw}^{RF} = .183$).

overall tendency relative to GDR-journalists to have made reality claims of inevitability.

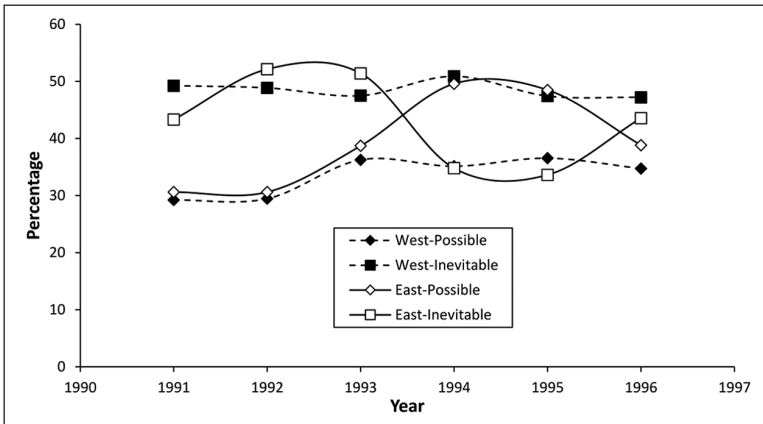


Figure 2. Percentages of Former East-or West-German Journalist's Modals Argument that Convey Possibility or Inevitability.

Note. Data are smoothed using 2-year averages.

According to H1, one would expect four significant positive estimates for the four $r \times c$ interaction terms in the left half of Table 3's first row. Although these estimates are all in the hypothesized direction, we have insufficient evidence of GDR-journalists' relatively greater overall tendency to make possibility-claims (per H1). Where we do find significant reality-claim differences are in quadratic temporal variations in claims of possibility and inevitability. That is, relative to each other (and most evident when the economic (e) news-frame is modeled) FRG-journalists were more likely to make inevitability claims, and GDR-journalists were more likely to make possibility claims in editorials written around 1994–1995 than earlier or later in our study period. A visual depiction of this pattern is provided in Figure 2.

Note in the figure how prior to 1994 both FRG- and GDR-journalists consistently claimed inevitability more than probability, and that only FRG-journalists continued this pattern through our study period. In contrast, during 1994–1995 GDR-journalists reversed this claim-usage with a partial return to the original pattern around 1996. Thus, support for the hypothesis (H1) that GDR-journalists would have been more likely than FRG-journalists to have conveyed possibility in their modal rhetoric, is restricted to 1994–1995—which, as it turns out, is the period of greatest concentration of elections in German history.

Germans referred to 1994 as 'super election year' (Superwahljahr), because in addition to federal elections on 16 October '(s)tate elections were due in each of the five new states in the east and several western states, as well as some local elections and the European election in June' (James, 1996: 23). Following elections for half of Germany's 16 state parliaments in 1994, elections for another four were held in 1995. The increase in GDR-journalists' mentions of citizens' possibilities during this period typically contained references to politicians' exploiting possibilities (e.g. for electoral victory), as opposed to FRG-journalists' mentions of politicians' accommodation of necessities (e.g. for party solidarity).

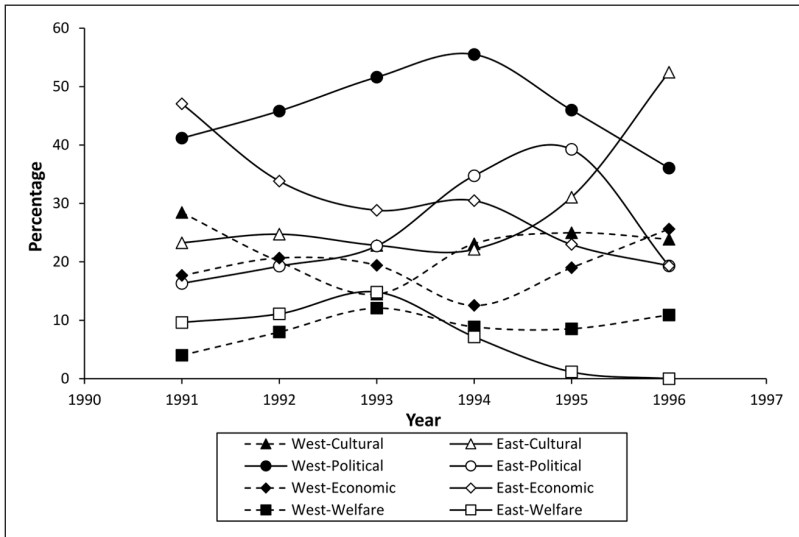


Figure 3. Percentages of Former East-or West-German Journalist’s Modals Arguments with Cultural, Economic, Political, or Welfare-related Rationales.
 Notes. Data are smoothed using 2 year averages. Dotted lines indicate nonsignificant variation over time.

Table 3’s second 5 rows (beginning with $f \times$) depict clear differences in the journalists’ use of news frames. Note how all of these rows’ significant interactions within the four ‘possibility-columns’ are also significant within the corresponding ‘inevitability-columns’. This mirroring of effects affords us greater confidence that, for example, in comparison to FRG-journalists GDR-journalists used more economic ($\lambda_{pe}^{FC}=.242$; $\lambda_{ie}^{FC}=.333$) and fewer political ($\lambda_{pp}^{FC}=-.449$; $\lambda_{ip}^{FC}=-.439$) frames. The table’s scarcity of significant frame-by-linear ($f \times t$) and frame-by-quadratic ($f \times q$) interactions shows the FRG-journalists to have used frames in relatively constant proportions over time, with the single exception of an increase in political news frames during the middle of the study period ($\lambda_{pp}^{FQ}=.077$; $\lambda_{ip}^{FQ}=-.064$)—a reasonable exception given its coincidence with the previously discussed period of electoral activity. In contrast (and in partial support of H1), evidence of variation in GDR-journalists’ use of news frames ($f \times t \times c$) is found in significant linear declines in economic ($\lambda_{pe}^{FTC}=-.139$; $\lambda_{ie}^{FTC}=.140$) and welfare-related ($\lambda_{pw}^{FTC}=-.405$; $\lambda_{iw}^{FTC}=-.395$) frames, supplanted by a linear increase in their use of cultural frames ($\lambda_{pc}^{FTC}=.116$; $\lambda_{ic}^{FTC}=.128$). Figure 3 affords a simultaneous depiction of all these trends, thereby revealing a pattern of frame use consistent with H2.

According to H2, relative to GDR-journalists FRG-journalists utilized in their editorials both a single overarching frame and greater consistency in frame use. As previously discussed in conjunction with H2, evidence of *framing consistency* is found in editorialists’ tendency to frame political rhetoric for their citizen-readers in relatively stable proportions over time. Accordingly, throughout our study period about 20% of the modal arguments in FRG-journalists’ editorials were framed as cultural, another 20% were framed as economic, and about 10% were framed as welfare-related. Beyond these

nonsignificant trends, Figure 3 also shows the political news frame in FRG-journalists' modal rhetoric to have been overarching, with the only lack of consistency in its approximately 40% frame-use to have been a spike to 56% in years proximate to Germany's super-election-year, 1994. Our analysis thus provides compelling support for H2: Beyond their steady use of frames throughout our study period, FRG-journalists framed national news in predominantly *political* terms (even more so during election campaigns).

Next, we turn to *specific modal arguments* (i.e. the combinations of reality-claim and news-frame that the journalists used). These argument-types are listed in Table 3's bottom 6 rows (beginning with $r \times f \times$). Most important for this study are the three significant coefficients in Table 3 associated with quadratic trends in economically framed modal arguments – trends that parallel economic hard times. Besides the 1994–1995 elections and in contrast to stimulated 1992–1994 GDP growth in the East, the middle of our study period saw a recession in the former West German provinces – along with a steady increase in unemployment throughout Germany (Burda and Hunt, 2001: 6) – that nearly resulted in a defeat for then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl in the 1994 federal election. During the recession, appeals in SZ editorials were not for business-as-usual pursuits of economic possibilities, as hypothesized in H3 ($\lambda_{pe}^{RF} = -.007$). Instead, we find evidence of FRG-journalists' 'austerity rhetoric' (i.e. references to economic necessities) that peaked in 1993–1994 in parallel with the recession ($\lambda_{ic}^{RFQ} = -.096$). One finds, for example, 'Behind the (tr.: housing) need there is high demand.... On average, Munich's tenants *have to* (inevitably) spend around a third of their disposable monthly budget on rent' (Volker Woerl, *Preiswertes Wohnen bleibt eine Illusion* (Inexpensive Housing remains an Illusion), 20.06.1994, SZ: 4). The linear (albeit nonsignificant at $\lambda_{ic}^{RFCT} = .057$) increase in the log odds of GDR-journalists' use of austerity rhetoric mirrors the post-1993 decline in former East Germany's GDP, suggesting that all journalists reported economic necessities at times of their respective audiences' financial challenge.

The austerity rhetoric in SZ is sandwiched between FRG-journalists' elevated use of 'economic opportunity' (i.e. possibilities for economic reasons) rhetoric ($\lambda_{pe}^{RFQ} = .072$). That is, at the beginning and end of our study period, one finds economically framed modal arguments like '(E)veryone who uses a home as an economic-commodity, knows that (tr.: the law on tenants' protection), and *can* (possibly) calculate with it (tr.: in mind)' (Heribert Prantl, *Zurueck ins 19. Jahrhundert?* (Back into the 19th Century?), 16.01.1997, SZ: 4). And so our data only support a modified version of H3, such that functioning democracies' economically framed political rhetoric conveys possibility *in relatively prosperous times* but inevitability in recessionary ones. In contrast, GDR-journalists' references to economic opportunity remained generally less frequent than those from FRG-journalists, with a nonsignificant increase around 1993–1994. Thus, we have support for H3a, with an accompanying caveat that (likely in conjunction with the 1993–1994 recession) this support was apparently weakened via a displacement of opportunity rhetoric for austerity rhetoric in FRG-journalists' modal arguments.

Although we find support for H4 ($\lambda_{iw}^{RF} = .183$), we do not find the contrast between FRG- and GDR-journalists' political rhetoric imagined in H4a. Both hypotheses deal with modal arguments of welfare-related framing of inevitabilities – arguments like, 'Protesters complain of their right to a life free of poverty and humiliation, to the shaping of their living conditions.... That will probably also lie essentially with the rulers, who

now *need to* (inevitably) keep their promises' (Dieter Resch, *Aufstand der Geprellten* (Uprising of the Injured), 19.03.1991, BZ: 1). According to H4a GDR-journalists should be less likely than FRG-journalists to formulate their political rhetoric in this way. Yet, if anything, they were slightly *more* likely ($.215 = .183 + .032 = \lambda_{iw}^{RF} + \lambda_{iw}^{RFC}$) to do this. Thus, H4a is not supported by our data: A logic of 'welfare-related needs' was evoked at relatively similar rates by all of the journalists.

Conclusion

The central premise confirmed in this article is that editorialists trained in a functioning democracy will frame national news consistently over time, whereas editorialists with journalistic training in an authoritarian state will justify their political rhetoric in accordance with an ever-changing variety of frames. The theoretical rationale for this premise is that political rhetoric in democratic and authoritarian states differs primarily in how public policies are conveyed to citizens. In a democracy, policies are legitimated (via framing) in accordance with its system of laws; in authoritarian states, policies are credible when communicated by a sufficiently powerful source.

GDR-journalists' framing of national news in 1990–1997 was clearly inconsistent. Like Hungarian editorialists during the same time period (Roberts et al., 2009: 516), we find a significant monotonic decline in GDR-journalists' use of economic frames and a corresponding increase in their cultural framing. During the early 1990s, *economic* rationales in our BZ editorials were used to explain struggling newspapers, underfunded public services (e.g. childcare), out-migration, poverty, lingering mismanagement, inequitable taxation, delayed public divestments, and even fear of the enormity of Germany's reunification. By 1995 GDR-journalists' frames had shifted to ones that explained current events in broad *cultural* terms like theatrical and artistic sensitivity, racial animosity, fashion, self-improvement, perfectionism, and the rule of law. In 1995–1997 welfare-related frames virtually disappeared in the BZ editorials, mirrored by a lagged spike in political frames possibly due to the 1 year lag between provincial elections in Bavaria and those in Berlin. Generally put, in the wake of reunification, we find no temporal consistency whatsoever in GDR-journalists' framing of Germans' social reality.

In contrast and despite more powerful tests by virtue of the larger sample of modal arguments in SZ than BZ, we found overwhelming evidence of steady frame use in FRG-journalists' editorials. Moreover, in accord with our hypothesis that nations with systems of civil law will have political rhetoric characterized by an overarching frame, we found the political frame to be predominant in FRG-journalists' modal arguments. Yet, this political framing peaked around 1994 along with extraordinary levels of electoral activity, providing our only evidence of frame inconsistency in FRG-journalists' political rhetoric. Nonetheless, the inference suggested here is that unlike journalists from authoritarian societies, those in functioning democracies tend to provide the same relative emphasis among frames in their political rhetoric – suggesting that only in the latter do audience frames play a noteworthy part in moderating journalists' political rhetoric.

All quasi-experimental framing studies face limitations due to a scarcity of research settings within which the perspectives under investigation (here those of GDR- vs FRG-journalists) are not overwhelmed by atypical reactions to extraordinary contemporary

events (Roberts, 2015: 772). One hopes for a study period sufficiently devoid of events related to one's research topic. Yet the advantage of comparing the political rhetoric of journalists who share the same country and language but were trained in authoritarian vs democratic systems, seems to outweigh the challenge of post hoc speculations on which effects reflect differences in journalistic training versus the exigencies of Germany's *Superwahljahr* and its 1993–1994 recession. And so we proceed to tentatively speculate on the balance of our findings.

Challenging economic times appear to have had different effects on FRG- and GDR-journalists' political rhetoric. As hypothesized, FRG-journalists disproportionately referenced opportunities (possibilities for economic reasons) – yet this only occurred as the German economy was relatively strong. During the recession, they continued evoking the economic frame, but shifted toward austerity rhetoric (inevitable for economic reasons). In contrast, we have no significant evidence that GDR-journalists linked economic rationales to any form of reality claim. During *Superwahljahr* – a time of citizens' acute political participation – they mentioned possibilities/permissions in the absence of consistent framing. Both these findings lead us to believe that during critical historical events political rhetoric in functioning democracies hinges on frames (e.g. during recessions, it shifts from economic reasons for possibility to ones for inevitability), whereas in authoritarian states, it hinges on reality claims (e.g. shifting during elections from inevitability to possibility) that alleviate citizens' doubts regarding their 'most permissible' options.

Next, is the unforeseen finding that GDR-journalists were slightly more likely than FRG-journalists to use the frame-logic of 'welfare-related needs.' We had hypothesized this logic's relatively greater use in functioning democracies, based on findings from Canada and the United States (Roberts and Liu, 2014: 779). However, in hindsight, we might have expected journalists schooled in the Marxist tenet of 'each according to his need' to frame needs in welfare-related terms. Nonetheless, when writing in a free-press environment GDR-journalists not only decreasingly framed modal arguments in welfare-related terms, they also mentioned them less frequently overall than FRG-journalists. Thus, Marxist schooling in an authoritarian state apparently did not yield an elevated level of welfare-related framing in GDR-journalists' political rhetoric.

To say that democracy is socially constructed, is to say that citizens interpret their relations to each other in specific ways. Using journalists' political rhetoric to gain insight into such relations, we provide evidence that when political participation (e.g. voting) is imminent, citizens of authoritarian states interpret each other's actions in accordance with what is possible (or permitted). If justification for such permission is grounded solely in the credibility of political leaders' use of coercive power, one can understand, for example, why in many former East Bloc countries previously forbidden ethnic hostilities surfaced as leaders' retribution for them no longer seemed credible. Yet insofar as citizens consistently interpret political participation in accordance with an overarching frame (e.g. a political one, referencing legal acts of their own and their elected representatives' creation), they come to justify their actions in accordance with a shared, legal interpretation of these actions' legitimacy or illegitimacy. Of course, these

tentative conclusions cry out for replication in future historical-comparative research on political rhetoric.

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Notes

1. The 'audience frame' concept – sometimes referred to as audience resonance or cultural congruence – refers to the tendency in functioning democracies for political communications to be formulated in ways familiar to their citizen-audience (Baylor, 1996: 249; Entman, 2003: 428–429; Neuman et al., 1992: 74; Scheufele, 1999: 117–118).
2. Popping and Roberts (2020) report a similar paucity of modal arguments in pre-1989 Hungarian editorials.

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Author biographies

Carl W Roberts (PhD, SUNY at Stony Brook) is Emeritus Professor of Statistics and Sociology at Iowa State University. His research on world cultures (*'The' Fifth Modality*, 2008) is motivated by an interest in how language shapes perception and behavior. His current substantive work on the cultural foundations of democracy is published in the *Journal of Communication*, *International Sociology*, and elsewhere. He has also written extensively on linguistic structure in articles appearing in *Social Forces* and *Sociological Methodology*, as well as in his edited collection, *Text Analysis for the Social Sciences* (1997).

Cornelia Zuell is Senior Researcher in the Survey Design and Methodology Department at GESIS (Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences). Her research focuses mainly on textual and content analyses, with respect to both data collection and data analyses and on methodological aspects of social science surveys in general.

Roel Popping (PhD, University of Groningen) is at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. His research interests include methodology, with a specialty in text analysis. He has applied these methods on historical shifts in public opinion, values, and scientific knowledge, primarily within the context of post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe. His book, *Computer-assisted Text Analysis*, was published by Sage in 2000.