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Taking Stock after 40 Years of Comparative Land Policy Analysis (1980–2020). A Review of the Predictors of Regional Policy Output in Germany

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ABSTRACT:

The number of policy analyses at the Land level has been rapidly increasing, yet we lack a comprehensive and systematic review of this literature. To close this gap, we have collected the entire population of eighty-five analyses of policy output from the last four decades and evaluated their research designs and findings. This evaluation reveals a gap in cultural and law enforcement policies as well as in comparative analyses across several policy fields. Methodologically, there is a need for policy content to be captured in a way that facilitates statistical analysis over time. We then examine to which extent established theories of policy-making predict variance in policy output. The partisan composition of government is clearly the strongest predictor. Since institutions and public opinion are rarely rejected, they should be included more frequently in future policy analyses. Our findings are of interest for both federalism research and policy analysis in general.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although there has been a marked proliferation of policy analyses of German states (Länder) recently, we lack a systematic review of the state of the art which discusses results and provides recommendations for future research. This literature review investigates how Land policy analyses have been conducted (regarding investigation period, policy fields, method, etc.) and what factors predict the variance in policy output among Länder (such as parties, socioeconomic conditions, and institutions). It is the first literature review to evaluate the findings on these questions over the last four decades comprehensively and systematically and to identify the resulting research gaps. This contributes to federalism research which seeks to understand regional politics as a whole (Jeffery 2005) and is thus interested in the factors causing regional policy diversity across many policy fields. It is also relevant for policy analysis in general as we evaluate established theories of policy analysis over a long period of time and across policy fields (using the Länder as homogeneous cases).

Researchers have become more interested in the Land level since reunification in 1990 (on elections: e.g. Burkhart 2005; on parties: e.g. Bräuninger et al. 2020; on institutions: e.g. Leunig 2012). In this context, Land policies came increasingly into focus (e.g. Münch 2011; Schmid and Blancke 2001; Sturm 2005). In 2008, Hildebrandt and Wolf published the first edited volume focusing solely on Land policies (a second edition appeared in 2016), followed by special issues of *German Politics* (Jeffery et al. 2016) and *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* (Sack and Töller 2018).

While Wolf and Hildebrandt (2008, 2016) and Sack and Töller (2018) summarise the state of the art partially, the only extensive literature overview across policy fields and policy theories so far was compiled by Blumenthal (2009, 30–9), who includes thirty-two publications on Land policies. Beyond Germany, two broad literature reviews on regional policy analysis were conducted by Peterson (1995, 85–103) and Miller (2004) who cover the US states. While these literature reviews are instructive, none of them comprehensively evaluates research designs and results.

Thus, we lack a systematic review of the state of the art of regional policy analysis (for Germany as well as for other federations). Our evaluation addresses the following limitations of existing literature reviews of regional policy analysis. None of the afore-mentioned reviews gathers the entire population of policy analyses. Moreover, none of the reviews measures how much influence the predictors have on regional policy-making relative to each other. Our contribution is therefore that we gathered the whole population of eighty-five Land policy analyses published since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany. This limits typical biases of literature reviews, such as publication bias resulting from sampling only from (specific) journals. Furthermore, we systematically evaluate the policy analyses according to a uniform scheme to rank the predictive power of theories. This scheme allows us to include policy analyses with different methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed), whereas most meta-analyses are limited to quantitative studies.

The article is structured as follows. In the second section, we present our database. Then we examine the research designs of the Land policy analyses. In the fourth section, we outline our analytic approach. We then show the empirical results for the predictors of Land policy output, before concluding.

2. DATABASE

By carrying out a broad search combining various strategies we obtained the whole population of Land policy analyses (see online appendix A for details) and avoid publication-type related biases (see online appendix B which also discusses publication bias). First, a comprehensive search with search terms for the period 1949 to September 2020 was conducted in the Bavarian Library Network, which contains books and articles purchased by the member libraries. The same search was conducted in the catalogue of the German National Library, which contains all books and journals published in Germany. To ensure wide coverage of English-language articles, a topic search (title, abstract, keywords) with search terms from 1956 to September 2020 was carried out in the Social Sciences Citation Index. Next, we checked the references in all selected literature titles to identify further relevant works (snowball principle). In addition, we checked all publications of researchers who have published frequently on Land policy-making. Since the snowball system is less effective for recent years, we validated the results by carrying out a full search of articles – without limitation to specific search terms – in titles and partly in abstracts of nine relevant German (at least since 2010) and twenty-one relevant English journals (from 2014 to September 2020).

The policy analyses thereby collected are included if they fulfil the following requirements (for details, see online appendix C). The first prerequisite is that it be a theory-based empirical study. Each study must have a clearly specified object of investigation. It can be any substantive policy, including the expenditures associated with it. This means that we exclude analyses of overall spending, debt, budget balance, administrative policy, and local government law because they are not substantive policies. Since our focus is on (primary and secondary) legislation, we only consider analyses of policy outputs, not policy outcomes. Policy implementation is excluded. Within a study, several Länder have to be compared; studies of a single Land are excluded.

Our unit of analysis is a single policy field within a publication. If several dependent variables within one policy field are examined, we assess them jointly. If dependent variables from several policy fields are analysed within one publication, we evaluate them separately for each policy field. The number of units of analysis is therefore slightly larger (eighty-five) than the number of publications (seventy-six).

3. RESEARCH DESIGNS OF LAND POLICY ANALYSES

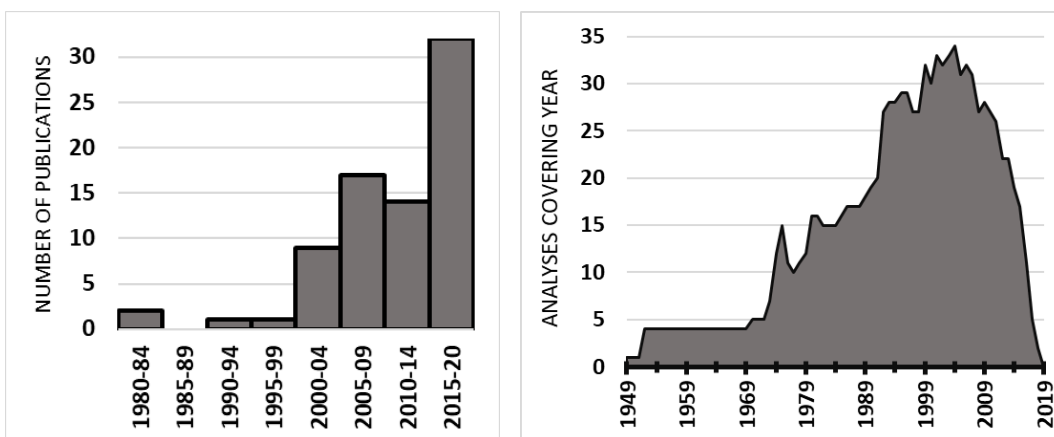
We now examine how policy analyses across Länder have been conducted and lay out the resulting research gaps.

3.1 *Publication Dates and Investigation Period*

Research on Land policies began in 1980 with Schmidt's seminal study, *CDU und SPD an der Regierung*. Between then and 1999 (see figure 1, left), only two articles and one monograph were published. From 2000 onwards, interest in Land policy-making increased strongly, from nine publications in the period 2000–4 to an all-time high of thirty-two in the most recent period (2015–20). Thus, 95 per cent of the publications appeared in the second half of the 40-year publication period. The spike in 2008 and 2016 is due to the edited volumes by Hildebrandt and Wolf.

The investigation period of the policy analyses (see figure 1, right) covers the entire period from the foundation of the Federal Republic. The years from 1949 to the mid-1970s, however, have been little investigated, while the most recent years are naturally also still underrepresented. The most-studied period is from shortly after reunification to the beginning of the 2010s. Overall, there is a need for analyses that span the 1970s to the 2020s. Such analyses could examine how Land policy-making has changed over time.

FIGURE 1: PUBLICATION DATES (LEFT) AND INVESTIGATION PERIOD (RIGHT)

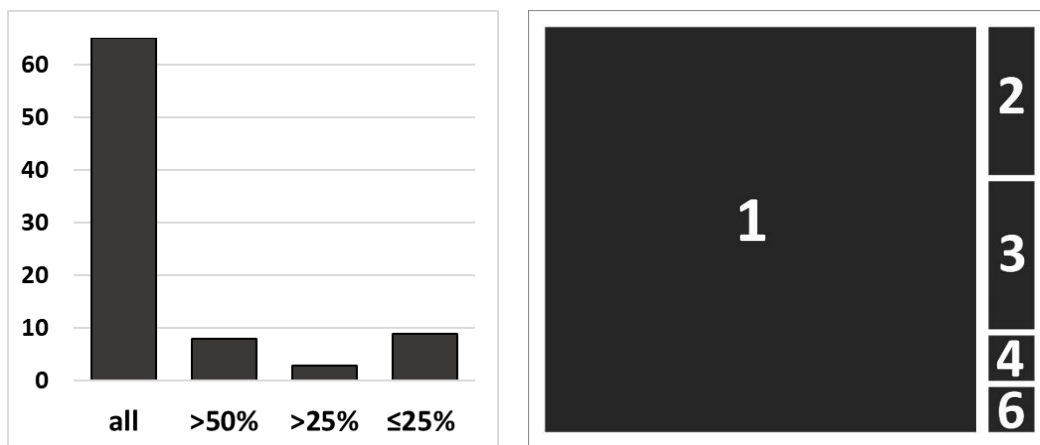


3.2 Number of Länder and Policy Fields

Looking at the number of Länder investigated per policy analysis (see figure 2, left), we find that 76 per cent of the studies include all Länder, which is positive for generalisability. Another 9 per cent of the policy analyses cover more than half of the Länder (at least six Länder before reunification and at least nine after). The remaining 15 per cent of the analyses are limited to a maximum of half the Länder.

Figure 2 (right) shows the number of policy fields examined per publication. The size of the boxes indicates the proportion of all publications. Thus, 89 per cent of the publications cover only a single policy field. Only eight of the seventy-six publications analyse several policy fields: Schmidt 1980 (six); Schmid 2002 (four); Dose and Reus 2016, Galli and Rossi 2002, Turner 2011 (three each); as well as Berzel 2019, Potrafke 2011 and Schniewind et al. 2010 (two each). Therefore, a significant research gap exists in studies that compare policy fields with a uniform scheme.

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF LÄNDER ANALYSED (LEFT) AND NUMBER OF POLICY FIELDS COVERED (RIGHT)

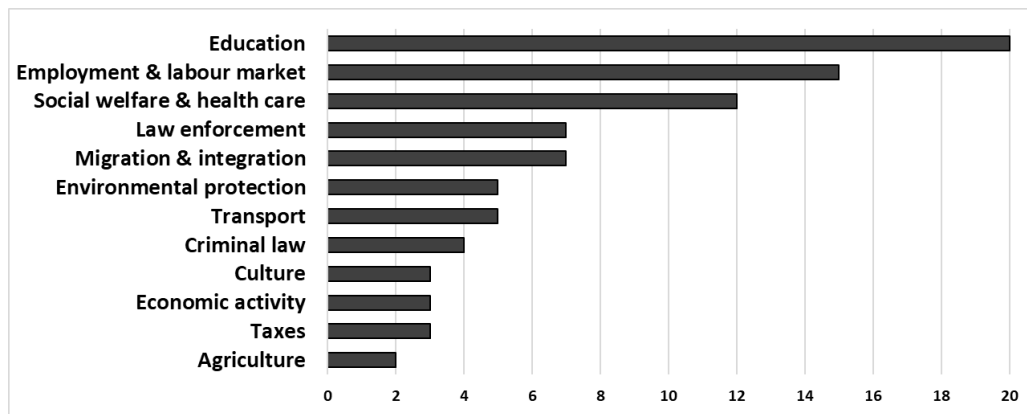


Note: The treemap on the right shows – by the varying sizes of the boxes – how many publications analyse the displayed number of policy fields.

3.3 Selected Policy Fields

Mapping the number of policy analyses by policy field reveals major differences (see figure 3; for details, see online appendix D). Education is the front-runner with twenty policy analyses – one in every four. Employment and labour market with fifteen policy analyses and social welfare and health care with twelve policy analyses are next. Together, these three policy fields account for more than half of the analyses. The next policy fields trail far behind. Agriculture is at the bottom with only two policy analyses.

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF ANALYSES BY POLICY FIELD

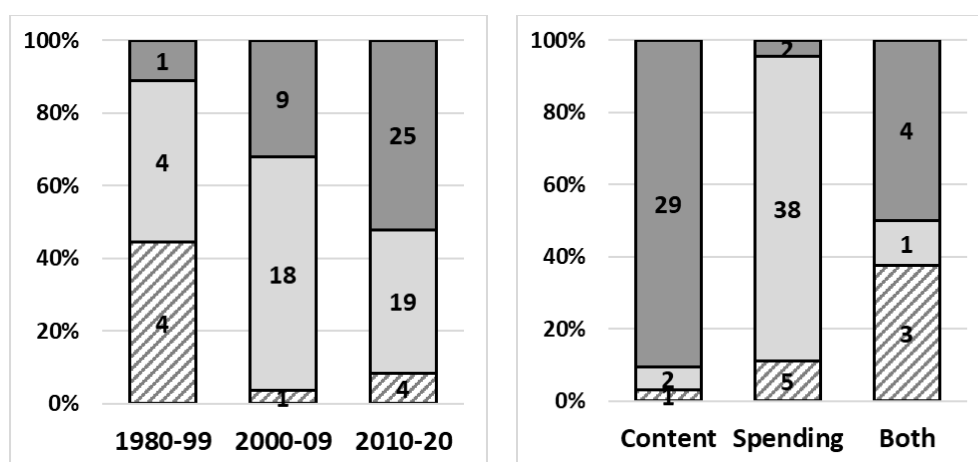


Now we test whether Land policies are examined all the more frequently, the greater the legislative power of the Länder in the respective policy field (data on legislative power from Kaiser and Vogel 2019; for details see online appendix E). Disproportionality in this regard might bias statements about the overall predictive power of the theories, given the overrepresentation of some policy fields. The results show partial proportionality: in about half of the policy fields, the number of policy analyses tracks the extent of legislative power. A misfit is found in employment and labour, as well as in social welfare and health care, where numerous policy analyses were carried out despite low legislative autonomy. The reversed misfit applies to culture and, to a lesser extent, law enforcement, which indicates the need for more analyses in these policy fields.

3.4 Methods

A survey of the methods used across all three publication periods shows a relatively balanced distribution, with forty-one quantitative (48 per cent), thirty-five qualitative (41 per cent) and nine mixed (11 per cent) policy analyses (see figure 4, left). Contrary to the general trend in political science towards quantitative methods, their proportion decreased for the period 2010–20. Previously, in 2000–9, twice as many quantitative as qualitative analyses had been published. In the most recent years, QCA has established itself as a new method. First used in 2016, it has since been employed in almost every fourth policy analysis.

FIGURE 4: METHOD BY PUBLICATION DATE (LEFT) AND TYPE OF DEPENDENT VARIABLE (RIGHT)



Note: The column sections on the left represent the share of policy analyses that are qualitative (dark grey), quantitative (light grey), and mixed (striped), by publication date. The column sections on the right show these shares for all publication dates by type of dependent variable.

Figure 4 (right) shows the methods used for the entire publication period in conjunction with the type of dependent variable. The focus is on spending, with forty-five analyses (53 per cent); policy content was analysed thirty-two times (38 per cent) and spending and policy content together eight times (9 per cent). Until the 2000s, studies on spending dominated; by the 2010s policy content and spending were researched equally. This trend is to be welcomed because policy-making is not adequately reflected by spending alone. We find that almost all content analyses were examined qualitatively – only Bauer-Blaschkowski (2020) and Payk (2009) carried out a quantitative analysis (however, just for one policy field). A challenge for future research, therefore, is to capture policy content more often in a way that increases the number of cases and facilitates statistical analysis over time.

4. ANALYTICAL APPROACH

We now describe how we build the theoretical categories, on which this evaluation is based, from public policy theories. We then present the methodological guidelines leading to the assessment of the predictive power of the theories, before we derive expectations from the literature.¹

4.1 Theoretical Categories

The aim of our evaluation is to assess the predictive power of public policy theories. We thus seek to make a statement across all policy fields about the extent to which the factors belonging to a theory have an impact on the respective dependent variables (for example, whether parties make a difference). We derived the theoretical categories for our evaluation from two strands of literature (for details, see online appendix F). On the one hand, we consulted textbooks on policy analysis in general; on the other hand, we conducted a wide-ranging search on empirical policy analyses at the regional level.²

Our theoretical categories are intentionally designed broadly and focus in each case on the factor that is decisive for policy-making decisions (such as parties). They form the wider framework for a number of variables, which can take many different forms in individual cases but, importantly, are linked by a common mechanism. These theoretical categories treat theories less differentiatedly but allow us to assign all indicators from the policy analyses we evaluate over the entire investigation period into distinct classifications. This is necessary to compare them at a more abstract level. We enumerate our theoretical categories in Table 1 and present them in detail in online appendix F.

Although we acknowledge that public policy theories are occasionally interlinked, we treat them as separate here because policy analysts do not agree on the nature of these links, rendering a comparative analysis unfeasible. The theories have been established since the beginning of Land policy analysis and thus policy analysts could have tested any of them during the full investigation period (no bias). Empirically, their test frequency also does not change over time in a way that creates bias (see online appendix B). As our research interest is on policy variance, we only include independent variables that differ across Länder and can therefore predict policy variance among them.

¹ The focus of this article is on the independent variables and their effects. We do not categorise policy differences reported by the authors by type or extent.

² While our theoretical categories largely reflect established and widely used public policy theories, the East/West distinction is a factor specific to Germany.

4.2 Assessing Predictive Power

In order to evaluate the policy analyses uniformly and systematically despite varying methods (quantitative, qualitative, mixed) and operationalisations, we use a deliberately simple rating system with three values (for details and examples see online appendix G):

- + = indicator has high predictive power
- o = indicator has partial predictive power
- – = indicator has no predictive power

TABLE 1: ASSIGNMENT OF INDICATORS TO THEORETICAL CATEGORIES

Theoretical category	Common mechanism and exemplary operationalisations
Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators relating to different ideologies and aims of parties on which politicians base policy-making • E.g. left vs. right governments, specific coalition formats
Socioeconomic determinism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators comprise socioeconomic conditions in terms of functional problems and needs in society to which politicians react • Four subcategories: economic factors (e.g. unemployment rate), demographic conditions (e.g. proportion of senior citizens), degree of urbanisation (e.g. city states vs. territorial states, population density in territorial states), social factors (e.g. rate of incarceration)
Financial power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators relating to financial resources which define the affordable options for action • E.g. debt per capita, tax revenues per capita
Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators are formal and informal rules and conventions which structure political decision-making (including path dependencies) • E.g. constitutional provisions, coalition partners as veto players
Interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators relating to voluntary organisations (such as trade unions or environmental organisations) which seek to influence policy-making through lobbying or participation in corporatist structures • E.g. degree of organisation of associations, access to decision-makers
Public opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators comprise values and attitudes of citizens (cross-policy fields and issue-specific attitudes, as well as attitudes derived from religion) which politicians take into account when making policy decisions, in order to be re-elected • E.g. attitudes measured by surveys, share of Catholics, public opinion presented by the media
East/West divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators relating to the area-specific combination of economic and societal structures and needs, attitudes and values, and path dependencies, resulting from the 40-year division before reunification • Dummy for Eastern vs. Western Länder

We measure the predictive power by examining whether certain values of the independent variable are systematically associated with certain values of the dependent variable (in quantitative analyses: significance of an effect). For our assessment, we generally follow the author; if an explicit evaluation is missing, we gather it ourselves from the regression tables or the text (for details see online appendix G). In order to arrive at an overall assessment for a theoretical category, the individual assessments of the corresponding indicators are aggregated. These indicators are considered equal unless the author deems any indicator particularly valid. All evaluations and the corresponding text references from the policy analyses can be found in the online appendix H. To ensure intercoder reliability, the authors checked each other's assessments and discussed doubtful cases.

The predictive power of a theory can be assessed in two ways: as a proportion of all policy analyses (including 'non-tests') or as a proportion of only those policy analyses in which a theory was tested. We assume that the predictive power of most theories can best be assessed using all policy analyses. Since authors usually test the variables for which they expect effects based on theoretical considerations and previous studies and should include the relevant control variables, the non-test of an established theory should in principle equate to no predictive power (–). However, a non-test may also be due to missing or difficult to obtain data. For the predictors considered here, this applies in particular to public opinion, interest groups, qualitative studies on path dependency (quantitatively, the lag of the dependent variable is available), and partly to policy field-specific indicators of socioeconomic determinism. Moreover, a non-test could reflect that certain factors, particularly relating to culture and religion, are less common in the literature generally. Therefore, we also include a measure of predictive power in tests only.

4.3 Expectations Derived from the Literature

We now derive – due to the limited availability of research rather tentative – expectations about the predictive power of the theories based on three strands of literature. First, we summarise the findings from regional policy analysis in the US which is the only federation that has attracted broad scholarship on that question. Second, we report the results from existing literature reviews on Land policy-making. Third, we draw on literature on characteristics of German federalism.

Beginning with US state policy analysis, the predictive power of *parties* differs greatly by the object of study and the period under investigation (showing stronger effects in times of higher polarisation). It reaches a medium level overall if one takes into account that the lack of partisan effects in some studies can be attributed to inappropriate research designs and methodologies (Caughey et al. 2017, 1342–4; Kousser 2002, 642–4). While *socioeconomic conditions* were considered key predictors in the first decades of state-level policy analysis in the US (from the 1960s onwards), they are still deemed frequent predictors in more recent research (Lax and Phillips 2009, 369; Miller 2004, 35–7). *Financial power* is mentioned as one of many predictors (Miller 2004, 35; Peterson 1995, 80). Owing to the lack of literature reviews on it, we cannot make any statement on its predictive power. This

also applies to *institutions* such as the power of governors or legislative professionalism which are commonly tested (Miller 2004, 35–6; Tandberg 2010, 742–3), but rarely the focus of analyses. *Interest groups* are seldomly tested but turn out to be quite predictive when tested (Anzia 2019, 343, 349; Tandberg 2010, 741). *Public opinion* has proven to be a strong predictor (Tausanovitch 2019, 334). While initially this influence was not recognised, Erikson et al. (1993) and numerous subsequent studies on responsiveness established this strong link.

Turning to the German federation, a few statements about the predictive power of theories across many policy fields can be found in literature reviews on the Länder (their limitations are discussed in the introduction). Blumenthal (2009, 30–9) concludes that the main predictors are first of all, party differences (yet providing only limited predictive power), and then political culture, path dependencies, and socioeconomic differences. Wolf and Hildebrandt's (2008, 363–5) overall picture of sixteen policy fields shows the greatest differences to lie between East and West Länder, as well as between territorial and city states, often deriving from socioeconomic differences. They also found historical path dependencies and, to some extent, effects of political institutions and organised interests. Party effects were also confirmed, whereas according to the new edition (Wolf and Hildebrandt 2016, 395), they have partially decreased. In the latest Special Issue (Sack and Töller 2018, 611–2), some partisan effects are found. Other influential factors mentioned include socioeconomic problem pressure and, occasionally, interest groups.

We now present our rather tentative expectations on the predictive power of the theories, drawing on the general literature on German federalism. Where information is available, we use the extent of variation on the independent variable (i.e. the theoretical category) to inform our expectation, assuming that larger variation *ceteris paribus* leads to higher predictive power (concerning differences in policy outputs). *Parties* are important actors in the German federation and much studied (Bräuninger et al. 2020; Jun et al. 2008). Moreover, the parties-do-matter hypothesis is tested frequently in policy analysis in general (Wenzelburger and Zohlnhöfer 2020, 1). Thus, we expect a rather high predictive power among all policy analyses. *Socioeconomic heterogeneity* among the Länder has increased since reunification, for example regarding economic development or demographics such as age structure, proportion of foreigners or the proportion of welfare recipients (Jeffery et al. 2016, 168; Schmidt 2016, 303). This suggests a rather high predictive power of socioeconomic conditions.

Fiscal differences among Länder are extensively levelled out through vertical and horizontal fiscal equalisation (Renzsch 2011). Moreover, not all policies have financial implications. Thus, we expect *financial power* to not be a crucial predictor. Regarding *institutions*, no clear expectation can be derived. Various institutions are fundamentally similar across Länder (e.g. existence of proportional representation, or veto players beyond the coalition government), however, their detailed design differs, for example the proportionality of electoral law or the extent of direct democracy (Freitag and Vatter 2008).

Since interest mediation is moderately corporatist throughout the federation (Siaroff 1999), the balance of power between interest groups (capital and labour) should not differ profoundly among Länder (compared to the free competition of pluralism). Thus, we expect rather little predictive power for *interest groups*. Compared to other federations, *public opinion* does not differ immensely among Länder because there are no large territorially concentrated ethnic or religious minorities (Bendel and Sturm 2010, 168–70). Given this relative homogeneity, we expect public opinion to have at most medium predictive power.

Reflecting the particular situation in Germany, *East/West* represents a specific combination of economic and societal structures and needs, attitudes and values, and path dependencies, resulting from the 40-year division before reunification. Lacking international equivalents, we do not formulate an expectation.

5. PREDICTORS OF LAND POLICY OUTPUT

In this section, we assess the predictive power of the theories in the policy analyses:³ first, for all policy analyses, and second, split by type of dependent variable (content versus spending). All graphs follow the same scheme. The length of a bar indicates the proportion of all policy analyses in which a theoretical category was tested. The different colours represent the proportion of high (black), partial (dark grey) and no (light grey) predictive power in the tests (for exact numbers, see online appendix J). To add more concrete policy insights, we also analyse the substantive policy effects of frequently tested indicators (for example, which effect left parties have). Details on these effects are provided in online appendix K and L. A further analysis on the predictive power of the theories before and after reunification in 1990 is reported in online appendix M.

5.1 All Policy Analyses

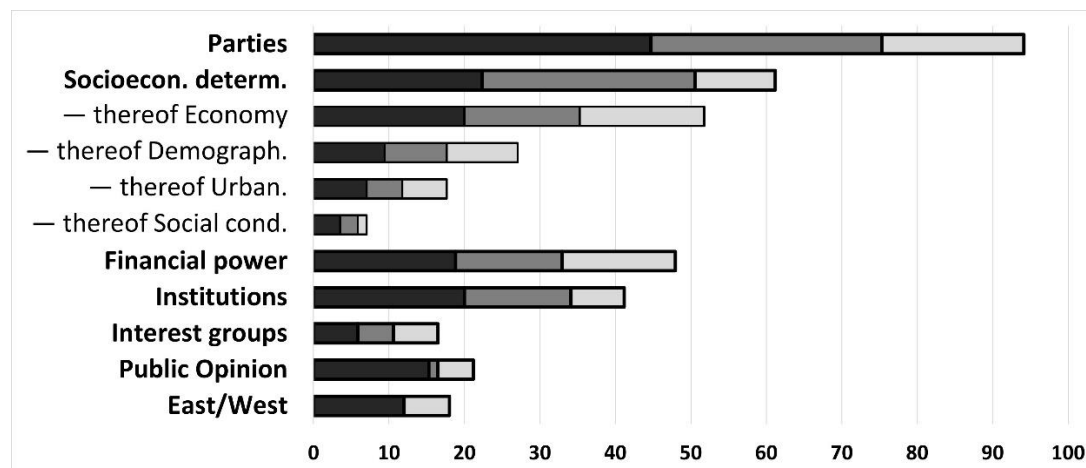
❖ Parties

Parties are by far the most frequently tested predictor (in 95 per cent of policy analyses; see figure 5), which reflects that they are a preeminent object of study in policy analysis. They have high predictive power in 45 per cent of all policy analyses and partial predictive power in another third (31 per cent), thus contributing to the prediction of policy differences in three out of four cases. In the tests, parties

³ In the bivariate analyses, we do not run significance tests because we collected the entire population.

fare reasonably well compared to factors from other theoretical categories. Clearly, then, party differences are the strongest predictor.

FIGURE 5: PREDICTIVE POWER FOR ALL POLICY ANALYSES



When classifying the various operationalisations into the overarching scheme ‘right vs. left parties’, we find that both right and left parties have the strongest effect in the theoretically expected direction on policy content. In more than five sixths of these analyses on economic and social policy, left parties are associated with ‘left’ (state-interventionist/egalitarian) policies. This includes limited shop opening hours to protect employees (Dose and Reus 2016), the rapid extension of institutional childcare (Turner 2011), and less selectivity and a focus on integration in the school system (Payk 2009). Right parties passed ‘right’ (market-liberal/meritocratic) policies in four fifths of these analyses. The effect is even more pronounced in societal policy, where left parties have pushed through progressive and/or libertarian policies in twelve out of thirteen tests, such as more rights for prisoners (e.g. Rowe and Turner 2016) or more measures for equal rights for women (Schuster 1997). Likewise in eleven out of twelve tests, right parties enacted conservative and/or authoritarian policies such as a ban on the Muslim headscarf (e.g. Blumenthal 2009) or deportations to the insecure Afghanistan (Hörisch 2018).

However, contrary to general theoretical expectations, left parties correlate with higher expenditures – compared to other parties – only in two fifths of the spending analyses. Similarly, right parties lead to lower expenditures only in slightly less than every third analysis. Left parties are associated with higher spending on childcare (Andronescu and Carnes 2015), benefits for asylum seekers (Hörisch 2018), and active labour market policies (e.g. Schmid and Hedrich 2008). Right parties are associated with lower spending in the afore-mentioned areas, yet with higher spending in higher education (e.g. Oberndorfer and Steiner 2007; Potrafke 2011). Thus, across all parties, spending decisions appear to be constrained by external factors, which limit party differences.

The participation of the Greens in the government systematically correlates with ecologically left policies: stricter regulations on fracking (Töller 2017) and genetically modified organisms (Hartung and Hörisch 2018) and a spending focus on agri-environmental measures (Ewert 2016). Surprisingly, the Greens do not increase spending more than other parties, even in education (e.g. Galli and Rossi 2002; Wolf 2006), culture (e.g. Tepe and Vanhuysse 2014), and public transportation (Schöller-Schwedes and Ruhrort 2008).

Grand Coalitions are associated with higher expenditures for internal security (Schniewind et al. 2010), while evidence on social security (Galli and Rossi 2002; Schneider 2010), culture (Potrafke 2011; Schniewind et al. 2010), and education (e.g. Galli and Rossi 2002; Potrafke 2011) is mixed. This mostly confirms the theoretical expectation that Grand Coalitions increase spending for both left and right policies as they cater to the claims of many voters.

❖ Socioeconomic conditions

The second strongest predictor is socioeconomic conditions, which have high predictive power in 22 per cent of all policy analyses (and are tested in 61 per cent of analyses). Even more frequently, in a further 28 per cent of policy analyses, they partially predict the output. When considering only the tests, socioeconomic conditions show both a high and a lack of predictive power more rarely than most other factors but offer a partial prediction most often among all predictors, resulting overall in an average performance in the tests. This can be attributed to the fact that socioeconomic determinism is usually operationalised by numerous indicators, which makes a medium overall rating more likely.

Socioeconomic indicators are very heterogeneous. Thus, for most of them, not enough similar analyses are available to evaluate concrete effects. For the unemployment rate, which we investigate subsequently, we find that higher unemployment is often associated with higher spending (in seven out of twelve tests). A consistent influence in this respect was shown for social (Rothgang and Wessel 2008) and educational spending (e.g. Arends 2017; Baum and Seitz 2003). For labour market expenditures, the effect of higher unemployment reversed over time as it led to higher expenditures from the 1990s until about 2000 (Schmid and Blancke 2001), but to lower expenditures afterwards (Schmid and Hedrich 2008).

Comparing the four subcategories of socioeconomic determinism, *economic factors* are by the far most influential as they predict the policy output in more than a third of all analyses (35 per cent) at least partially. This is a remarkable figure, because limited data access makes it occasionally difficult to test policy field-specific indicators. In the tests, economic factors perform at an average level. *Demographic variables* provide a systematic or partial prediction in only every sixth policy analysis (17 per cent). Their rejection rate of 35 per cent in the tests is the second highest of all factors examined. The proportion of high or partial predictive power is even lower for *urbanisation* (12 per cent)

and *social conditions* (6 per cent). Both subcategories are rarely tested, namely in 18 per cent (urbanisation) and 7 per cent (social conditions) of all policy analyses. In these tests, urbanisation performs poorly compared to other predictors, while social conditions fare very well.

While urbanisation has a low predictive power overall, it can explain why some city specific needs such as longer shop opening hours (Dose and Reus 2016) or the focus of social housing on flats instead of owner-occupied homes (Jaedicke and Wollmann 1983) are taken into account in urban areas. Urbanisation correlates positively with expenditures for culture (Stocker 2010) and labour market promotion (Schmid and Hedrich 2008). There is contradictory evidence on expenditures for police officers (Birkel 2008; Tepe and Vanhuysse 2013).

❖ **Institutions**

Institutional factors predict policy output systematically in 20 per cent of all analyses and partially in another 14 per cent. When tested, institutional factors perform at an above-average level compared to other predictors. They are only rejected in every sixth test (17 per cent) which is a remarkably low rate because various institutions among the Länder are fundamentally similar as mentioned before. We therefore recommend including institutional factors more frequently in future analyses.

Since this theoretical approach combines many different factors (e.g. veto players [Reus 2016; Stocker 2010] and direct democracy [Turner 2011]), which also unfold specific influences depending on the policy field, it is difficult to summarise concrete effects across policy fields. The policy analyses show path dependencies, for instance, for agricultural and educational spending, which is based on previous spending patterns (e.g. Ewert 2016; Wolf 2006), and for the regulation of fracking, which is influenced by the established economic structure (Töller 2017). We notice a large research gap with regard to detailed qualitative studies of long-term path dependencies.

❖ **Financial power**

The financial power of the Länder yields similar results to institutional factors, with a share of 19 per cent high and 14 per cent partial predictive power. These numbers reflect that financial power is only expected to predict differences between policies with financial implications. Considering only the tests, financial power performs worse than most factors as it is often rejected.

Concrete effects can be summarised over many analyses, since almost all indicators can be classified into the overarching scheme ‘low vs. high financial power’. We find that financial power correlates positively with spending in slightly more than half of the tests. This positive association applies to public employment (e.g. Schmidt 1980) as well as expenditures on youth policy (Beinborn et al. 2018) and (partially) on care and childcare (e.g. Busemeyer and Seitzl 2018). It is also mostly confirmed in

education (e.g. Wolf and Heinz 2016). The influence of financial power on economic activity in a narrower sense has not yet been investigated, which constitutes a research desideratum.

❖ **Public opinion**

Public opinion was tested very rarely – in only every fifth policy analysis (21 per cent) – and predicted the policy output systematically or partially in only every seventh analysis (15 per cent). However, it showed high predictive power in 72 per cent of the tests (highest value of all factors). It therefore seems plausible that its actual predictive power is significantly higher. This is all the more likely as the effect of public opinion has been often shown in other federations.

Due to the small number of cases, concrete effects across several analyses can only be summarised for the Catholics share, which is part of the indicator group 'religion'. Four out of five studies show that a higher Catholics share correlates with lower spending (e.g. Andronescu and Carnes 2015; Wolf 2006). Since these tests relate primarily to expenditures for education and childcare, the lower spending by the government might be due to higher church engagement in these areas. The low number of tests of general and issue-specific citizens' attitudes (such as Töller 2017) results to some extent from limited survey availability at the Land level. In contrast, it is inexplicable that public opinion as reported by the media (easily accessible via digital archives by now) has only been tested in a single analysis (Reus 2016) – this constitutes a major research gap.

❖ **East and West**

The differentiation between Eastern and Western Länder has, of course, only been a factor since reunification. It was tested in every fourth (24 per cent) and demonstrated high predictive value in every seventh post reunification policy analysis (16 per cent). As with public opinion, the proportion of the tests revealing high predictive power is sizeable at 67 per cent.

We find that in slightly more than half of the tests the Eastern Länder spend more (childcare [Andronescu and Carnes 2015], sports promotion [Haring 2010] and mostly in education [e.g. Wolf 2006]). No effect for spending was shown in culture (Stocker 2010) and domestic policy (Schniewind et al. 2010). Furthermore, all tests control for socioeconomic conditions and most tests also for financial power, which points to the unique predictive value of the East/West distinction. A considerable research gap concerns how this factor shapes policy contents.

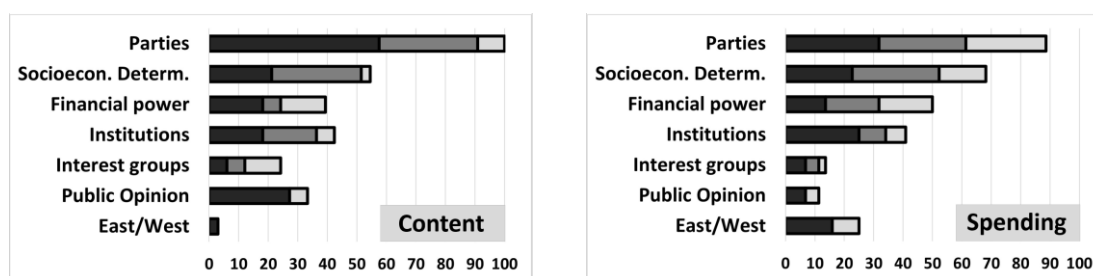
❖ Interest groups

The influence of interest groups, finally, is low, given a share of only 11 per cent of high or partial predictive power in the policy analyses and the highest rejection rate among all factors at 36 per cent of the tests. A systematic effect of interest groups in the theoretically expected direction was only shown for civil servants' salaries (collective bargaining organisation of the Länder, Dose and Wolfes 2016), expenditures for development programmes for rural areas (farmers' associations, Ewert 2016), expenditures for culture (Federal Association of Artists, Stocker 2010), and the presence of Islamic religious education (Muslim religious organisations, Euchner 2018). The low number of tests is partly due to the lack of relevant interest groups in some policy fields and to limited availability of membership numbers. There is a large research gap in analyses that examine the influence of interest groups in qualitative detail.

5.2 Policy Content and Spending Compared

If one differentiates by the type of dependent variable (see figure 6), we see that some predictors are better at accounting for either spending or content. Interestingly, despite substantial differences in individual percentages, similar rankings of the predictors emerge: the most frequent prediction originates from parties, socioeconomic conditions, institutions and – only regarding contents – public opinion.

FIGURE 6: PREDICTIVE POWER: POLICY CONTENT (LEFT) AND SPENDING (RIGHT)



Partisan effects are markedly more frequent in policy content than in spending.⁴ They predict the variance well in slightly more than half of all policy content analyses (56 per cent) and almost always (90 per cent) at least partially. For spending, the share of high predictive power is only 33 per cent and of at least partial predictive power merely 62 per cent. This could be due to low Land tax autonomy which limits governing parties' ability to implement their spending-related preferences. In the

⁴ Further analysis on this aspect is conducted in the earlier section '5.1 All Policy-Analyses – Parties'. For other theoretical categories such a detailed analysis was infeasible due to the lower number of tests.

analyses evaluated, partisan effects on policy content are particularly strong in education as well as in social welfare and health care. For example, governments led by Social Democrats (SPD) reduce the selectivity of the school system (Payk 2009) and extend comprehensive schools (Turner 2011). Moreover, SPD government participation strengthens the protection of non-smokers (Reus 2016) and the integration of the disabled (Schmidt 1980).

Socioeconomic conditions predict policy content and spending similarly well: 22 per cent high predictive power and 28/31 per cent partial predictive power. Regarding contents, for example, the higher the unemployment rate, the more labour market measures are taken (Schmid and Blancke 2001). In terms of spending, higher unemployment increases expenditures for asylum seekers (Hörisch 2018). Generally, socioeconomic conditions should be included more frequently in content analyses because they have predicted the output in almost every test.

Financial power also has a similar effect on spending and contents. While it provides a systematic prediction in only every eighth spending analysis (compared with every fifth content analysis), it offers an at least partial prediction in every third spending analysis (compared with every fourth content study). This surprisingly small difference presumably results from policy contents often having financial implications. Regarding spending, higher financial power, for example, increases expenditures for employment relations and labour market (e.g. Dose and Wolfes 2016) and for law enforcement (e.g. Schmidt 1980).

Institutions predict spending better than policy content. They systematically predict the output in every fourth spending analysis as opposed to every seventh content analysis. This is not offset by the fact that institutions offer a partial prediction in only every eleventh spending analysis, compared to a fifth of the content analyses. Substantively, veto players should receive greater consideration in content analyses (e.g. Reus 2016).

Based on the few policy analyses, *public opinion* has stronger effects on policy content than on spending, with a high predictive power of 28 compared to 15 per cent, whereas *interest groups* appear similarly influential in content and spending. For the *East/West* differentiation, no comparison can be made due to the number of cases.

6. CONCLUSION

To examine the state of the art of Land policy analysis, we have evaluated all eighty-five policy analyses published since 1949 systematically and arrive at the following conclusions.

Governing *parties* are tested in almost all policy analyses (confirming our expectation), fare reasonably well in these tests and are thus clearly the strongest predictor. Compared to the literature reviews mentioned before (Blumenthal 2009; Sack and Töller 2018; Wolf and Hildebrandt 2008), we find an

even higher predictive power of parties. This strong partisan effect has even increased since the mid-2000s, whereas Wolf and Hildebrandt (2016, 395–96) identified a decline for their sample in this period. Parties also appear more influential in the German Länder than in the US states. For most of the following predictors we cannot compare our findings with the existing literature reviews on Germany because the latter lack clear statements about the level or change of predictive power. We are thus the first to rank the predictive power of these theories. The second strongest predictor in our evaluation is *socioeconomic conditions* which are often tested and frequently provide a partial prediction. This rather high predictive power is in line with our theoretical expectation (due to socioeconomic heterogeneity) and mirrors the American case. Trailing these two theories, *institutional factors* are on a par with *financial power*. This reflects our consideration that the variance among Länder regarding both factors is consequential yet also limited. *Public opinion* fares best among all theories in the tests but is not frequently tested, suggesting that its predictive power is actually higher than determined here and higher than we expected. If so, the relevance of this factor might come close to the USA where public opinion constitutes a major predictor of state policy. The unique German factor, *East/West differentiation*, highlighted by Wolf and Hildebrandt (2016, 391), is not often tested but has a rather high predictive power when tested. The influence of *interest groups* has been both hardly studied and infrequently confirmed in the tests, following our expectation.

We derive the following recommendations for future research, beginning with substantive desiderata. Due to their low rejection rates, institutions and public opinion warrant more frequent inclusion in policy analyses. This is particularly the case for public opinion whose effects have been far more frequently tested and shown in other federations using survey data. As an example, the effect of Catholic belief should be tested across many policy fields (including social welfare). For institutions, we found large research gaps with regard to detailed qualitative studies of long-term path dependencies as well as the rarely tested (at the Land level), yet generally prominent veto player theory. To complement the existing spending analyses, future research should investigate how the East/West differentiation shapes policy contents. Besides, further studies are encouraged to reconcile the contradictory findings on the spending effects of Grand Coalitions in social security, education, and culture. Moreover, it should be investigated why the Greens do not increase spending more than other parties in education, culture, and public transportation.

Turning to research designs, there is a need for analyses on culture and law enforcement as well as for comparisons across policy fields with a uniform scheme. Additionally, studies are encouraged that span the 1970s to the 2020s to better understand how Land policy-making has changed over time. Policy content should be captured more often in a way that increases the number of cases and facilitates statistical analysis over time. We also suggest applying mixed methods more frequently to combine the advantages of quantitative and qualitative work (e.g. Andronescu and Carnes 2015).

Regarding data, we recommend operationalising fiscal power with a fiscal indicator (see the list in online appendix N) instead of the less valid GDP. Moreover, membership numbers of the Land branches of interest groups are publicly available or provided upon request for more interest groups

than researchers might assume. This allows calculating the degree of organisation at the Land level and test the influence of interest groups in quantitative analyses, which has hardly been done so far. We also recommend that qualitative studies seek to unfold the causal mechanism of these often informal processes. Similarly, public opinion as reported by the media is easily accessible via digital archives and warrants more research. Partisan indicators are very often operationalised based on party names. We recommend using finely graduated, metric party positions in quantitative analyses more frequently, especially Land-specific party positions (across policy fields: Bräuninger et al. 2020; policy field-specific: e.g. Ewert et al. 2018). In some cases, however, data is actually missing. This speaks to the need to conduct more surveys that are representative at the Land level to facilitate testing the impact of citizens' attitudes more frequently.

This article is a first step to address an important gap in policy analysis research, namely that we lack literature reviews that compare the predictive power of established public policy theories over long periods of time across many policy fields for a significant number of units. Our evaluation also contributes to federalism research which is interested in the drivers of interregional policy diversity. Finally, we list the 235 indicators used in the policy analyses and their sources in online appendix N. We hope this will help researchers to find fitting indicators, make data collection easier, and inspire future research.

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