Analysing German parliamentary debates: a special case of calls to order

Anonymous ACL submission

Abstract

Our research investigates incivility in parliamentary discourse, focusing on calls to order (CtO; plural: CtOs) in the German parliament. A notable gap exists in the analysis of CtOs in parliamentary discourse. Consequently, we present a novel and comprehensive analysis of speeches delivered by German politicians spanning 72 years of parliamentary history, employing both automated and manual methodologies. This paper represents the first attempt to develop a classification system for the triggers of CtOs and to analyze the factors contributing to incivility in parliamentary discourse. Both statistical and empirical evidence suggests that despite strict regulations, the issuing of CtOs is often subjective, being significantly influenced by the session president and prevailing parliamentary trends. Thus, presidents of the parliament tend to call particular individuals to order preferentially. An insult towards individuals is the most frequent cause of CtO. Generally, male individuals and opposition party members receive more calls to order than their female and coalition party counterparts. Most of the CtO triggers were detected in speeches dedicated to governmental issues and presidency actions.

1 Introduction

Our research investigates incivility in parliamentary discourse, focusing on calls to order (CtOs) in the German parliament (Bundestag). Call to order (CtO) is a valuable resource for examining the negativity and incivility in political debates (Jenny et al., 2021). Moreover, we believe that CtOs can reveal tendencies in the country's political scene, collaboration patterns, evaluate political behaviour, and track sociopolitical changes. However, a notable gap exists in the analysis of CtOs in parliamentary discourse. To the best of our knowledge, the sole effort in this area is that of (Jenny et al., 2021). In this study, we present a novel and comprehensive analysis of speeches delivered by German politicians spanning 72 years of parliamentary history, employing both automated and manual methodologies. CtOs have been largely overlooked in political research. Consequently, this paper represents the first attempt to develop a classification system for the triggers of CtOs and to analyze the factors contributing to incivility in parliamentary discourse.

In the present research, we will address the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Which topics caused most CtOs?
- **RQ2:** What are the most frequent trigger classes for issuing a CtO?
- **RQ3:** How do factors such as political party affiliation, individual politicians, legislative periods, and topics relate to issuing CtOs?

1.1 Terminology used in this paper

A call to order, issued by the president of the session, serves as a disciplinary measure in response to breaches of parliamentary protocol, such as instances of personal insults among members or disruptions to the proceedings. Only the president may call members of the German parliament to order by stating their name (Schindler and Feldkamp, 2005, p. 447). Figure 1 demonstrates an example of CtO and how it is triggered during a parliamentary session. In the present paper, speeches of the president are referred to as presidency actions. An interjection is an interruption during a speech or introduction of another person[1].

A legislative period (LP) is a period in which a parliament can act as a lawmaker and generally lasts four years in Germany. Our data spans a period from September 7, 1949, to September 7, 2021, which covers 19 legislative periods (LPs).

[1] https://de.wiktionary.org/wiki/Zwischenruf

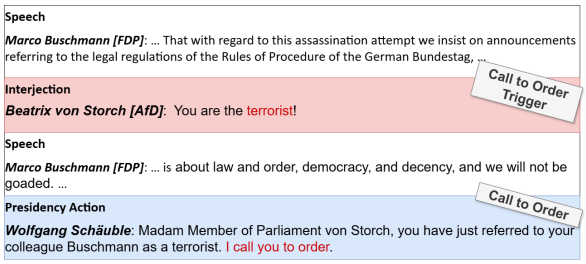

Figure 1: Example of a trigger (red) and an issued call to order (blue). Translated to English from German debates.

2 Related works

Recent research on parliamentary discourse has focused on the use of automated or semi-automated analytical methods. Within the framework of gender-based research, Ash et al. (2024) examined the differences between reactions to speeches given by male and female parliamentary members (PM) in the German parliament, focusing on interruptions and employing topic modelling techniques. Similarly, Mandravickaitė and Krilavičius (2017) investigated gender differences in language use in the professional environment based on parliamentary speeches in the Lithuanian Parliament using stylometric analysis. In the context of the United States, Miller and Sutherland (2023) analyzed interruptions in congressional hearings to explore interruption behavior influenced by gender and topic.

In the domain of sentiment analysis, Abercrombie and Batista-Navarro (2020) introduced ParlVote, a benchmark corpus designed for the evaluation of sentiment analysis methods in the political domain, utilizing transcripts from the UK House of Commons debates. Several experimental approaches were applied to assess sentiment analysis performance on this dataset. Additionally, Tarkka et al. (2024) compared the performance of generative (GPT) and fine-tuned BERT-based models in emotion detection tasks applied to transcripts of Finnish parliamentary plenary sessions.

Within the scope of discursive framing research, Reinig et al. (2024) analyzed speech acts in German parliamentary debates using a manually annotated dataset in combination with a fine-tuned BERT-based classifier. In a related effort, Rehbein et al. (2024) examined the use of factive expressions in political rhetoric and introduced GePaDe_SpkAtt, a corpus for speaker attribution based on the German parliamentary debates. This work also involved training a model for predicting speech events across a large corpus of parliamentary texts.

From a perspective of negativity analysis, Jenny et al. (2021) analysed negativity in Austrian parliamentary discourse by predicting instances of calls to order. Further, Haselmayer et al. explored whether the speaker's gender and debate context impact the level of negativity, utilizing sentiment analysis and word embedding techniques.

3 Data and Method

We utilized an annotated XML version of the GermaParl corpus (Blaette, 2017), which comprises a collection of transcribed protocols of debates in the German parliament. The raw data underwent processing, including conversion to a format optimized for analysis, splitting speech contributions into sentences and explicit parsing sentences containing CtOs. Calling to order in the German parliament is regulated, consequently, specific words indicating a CtO are used. Therefore, we employed a rule-based approach to identify CtOs within parliamentary speeches[2]. As Table 1 demonstrates, 42% of all speech contributions in GermaParl are presidency actions, and 0,1% of presidency actions contain a CtO.

	count
total speech contributions	958,098
presidency actions	399,807
speech contributions containing a call to order	558

Table 1: Number of speech contributions and calls to order in GermaParl corpus

Subsequently, we extracted references to individuals mentioned in these calls using a Named Entity Recognition (NER) model (Akbik et al., 2018), trained to recognize 4 types of entities in German texts, including names of individuals. CtOs that lacked identifiable individuals or referenced multiple individuals were manually annotated. Finally, we applied a rule-based method to resolve ambiguities among identified individuals and match them with a comprehensive database of all members of the German parliament since 1949[3].

As the last step, we analysed and manually annotated speech contributions containing a CtO, categorizing them according to the underlying cause

[2]Data processing workflow and rules for matching sentences containing a CtO are provided on our GitHub page (link will be added after acceptance).

[3]https://www.bundestag.de/services/opendata

that triggered the CtO[4]. We developed a classification scheme according to the manual analysis of CtOs, as no such classification was conducted in previous research. Additionally, we detected the topic discussed in each speech using a classification model, trained to detect 21 topics in speeches of the German parliament (Klamm et al., 2022)[5].

4 Results

Analysis revealed that the insult towards an individual (ITO) is the most prevalent cause prompting a CtO, with a median occurrence of 17 per LP, followed by miscellaneous (MISC) (median of 6 per LP), general insult (GI) (median of 3 per LP), and non-verbal (NV) (median of 1 per LP). Additionally, a total of 48 instances of verbal actions that led to a CtO were identified but were either not transcribed or could not be located within our dataset (NDV) (Appendix A, Table 4). As illustrated in Figure 2-A, the distribution of causes across LPs is non-uniform, with high standard deviations observed for all causes. The most frequently occurring cause, ITO, is present in all LPs except for LPs 16, 17, and 18.

The χ^2 test for independence was conducted using the Monte Carlo method to assess relationships between variables, as the majority of the data did not meet the assumptions required for the χ^2 test. To assess the association strength between variables, we additionally applied Cramér's V measure using the χ^2 statistics from the Monte Carlo simulation[6]. As Table 3 demonstrates, statistically significant relationships were found between a CtO cause and LP, date, year, and the session's sequence number in the LP. However, the associations between these variables were negligible.

Figure 2-B illustrates that more men than women are generally called to order. The median number of men receiving a call to order per legislative period is 19, compared to 5.5 for women. However, high standard deviations were observed, indicating substantial variability in the data (Appendix A, Table 5). Statistically significant relationships were found between the gender of a person called to order (PCO) and the cause of the CtO, LP, and the session's president. Additionally, a moderate association was observed between the session's president and the PCO's gender, as well as between the PCO's gender and the LP. In contrast, a weak association was found between PCO's gender and the cause of the CtO.

As presented in Figure 2-C, opposition party members receive more CtOs than coalition party members, with a median of 10 per legislative period compared to 6 for coalition members. However, high standard deviations indicate significant variability in the data (Appendix A, Table 6). A moderate association was found between the session president and the PCO's party affiliation. Additionally, a strong association was observed between the gender of the session president and the PCO's party, as well as between the president of the session and the PCO. In contrast, the president's party showed only a weak association with the PCO's party.

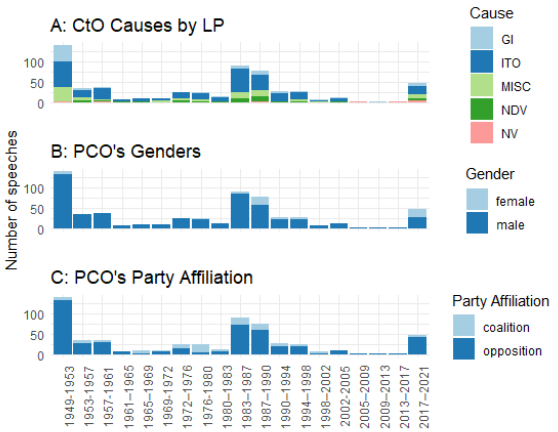

Figure 2: Distribution of causes, genders and party affiliations of PCOs over legislative periods (LPs).

A statistically significant relationship was found between the discussed topic and the presence of a CtO in speech, though a negligible association was observed. As shown in Figure 3, the highest number of CtO causes was observed in speeches related to governmental issues (188), followed by presidency actions (89), civil affairs (56), and international affairs (48). No CtOs were recorded in discussions on foreign affairs and culture. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the top 10 topics containing CtOs over the 72 years. Government remains the most discussed topic across all LPs, and the number of speeches on most topics has increased over time. However, there was a sharp decline in immigration-related speeches between LPs 1 and 3, with a continued decrease in subse-

[4]Annotation schema is provided in Appendix B.

[5]Classification model was applied to the whole speech, excluding presidency actions, as presidency actions merely include moderation of the session.

[6]For the analysis of the relationship between party affiliation, gender, the name and PCO's party affiliation, only disambiguated individuals were considered.

quent LPs. No statistically significant relations were found between the gender of the president, and the PCO's gender and party affiliation, as well as the cause that triggered CtO. Additionally, no statistically significant relationship was found between the presence of CtO trigger in a speech and the speech's position (sequence number) in the agenda.

variable1	variable 2	p-value	Cramér's V
name of the president	name of the PCO	0.0	**0.795**
	gender of the PCO	0.0	***0.462***
	party of the PCO	0.0	***0.464***
	cause of the CtO	0.0	***0.4***
	PCO's party affiliation	0.0	**0.524**
gender of the president	gender of the PCO	*1.0*	
	party of the PCO	0.0	***0.326***
	cause of the CtO	*0.105*	
	PCO's party affiliation	*0.109*	
party of the president	party of the PCO	0.0	*0.28*
name of the PCO	cause of the CtO	0.0	**0.713**
gender of the PCO	cause of the CtO	0.043	*0.13*
	legislative period	0.0	***0.4***
party of the PCO	cause of the CtO	0.0	*0.267*
CtO trigger	date	0.0	*0.109*
	LP	0.0	0.035
	session's sequence number in LP	0.0	0.028
	speech's sequence number in the agenda	*0.052*	
	discussed topic	0.0	0.02
	year	0.0	0.038

Table 2: The χ^2 test with a Monte Carlo method and Cramér's V. P-value above the threshold marked with italicized text. A small association is marked with italicized text, a medium association with italicized bold text, and a large association with bold text.

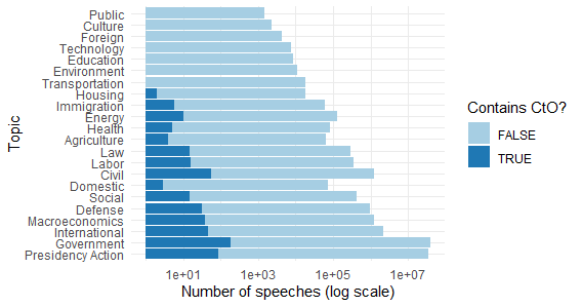

Figure 3: Distribution of topics and CtO inclusion in the topic.

5 Conclusion

In this study, we conducted a manual analysis of CtOs in the German parliament and developed a classification consisting of 5 underlying reasons (causes) for issuing a CtO. Our analysis indicates that ITO is the most frequent CtO trigger. NV comprises the smallest parts of CtO triggers. Moreover, statistical testing suggests that certain presidents are more likely to be prompted by specific triggers. Additionally, particular parliamentary members tend to employ specific classes of insults. At

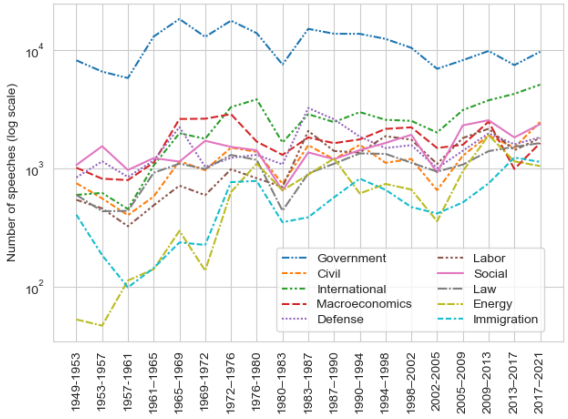

Figure 4: Distribution of the top 10 topics that caused CtOs over legislative periods.

the same time, no gender-specific classes of insult were observed.

Following, we applied a classification model that distinguished speech contribution to 21 topics, including presidency actions, as an additional category. Most CtO triggers were detected in speeches dedicated to governmental issues and presidency actions. The χ^2 test revealed a statistically significant association between the topic and the CtO trigger; however, a Cramér's V showed only a weak association between these variables, which indicates that this association is not of practical interest and might occur due to the large data sample size.

Notably, session presidents tend to call particular individuals to order preferentially. Moreover, presidents are more likely to call representatives of certain parties and genders to order. In addition, CtOs are associated with the affiliation of the party. Generally, male individuals and opposition party members receive more calls to order than their female and coalition party counterparts. This supports the hypothesis that opposition members are more prone to breaching parliamentary order. Historically, there are fewer women than men in the German parliament that can contribute to the pattern. Furthermore, the likelihood of being called to order varies by gender, depending on LP. However, no statistically significant relationship was detected between the gender of the session president and that of the PCO.

In conclusion, both statistical and empirical evidence suggests that despite strict regulations, issuing CtOs is often subjective and significantly influenced by the session president and prevailing parliamentary trends.

6 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, we employed a semi-automated method to annotate the corpus. Sentences containing CtO instances were identified using a rule-based approach, which is a legitimate choice in this context, given that disciplinary measures in the German parliament are strictly regulated and, therefore, exhibit specific patterns. Nevertheless, a manual review revealed that these patterns occasionally resulted in false positives, as illustrated in the following example:

- **DE:** *Ich kann nur wegen der Zwischenrufe zur Ordnung rufen, die ich selber höre.*
- **EN:** *I can only call to order the interjections that I hear myself.*

Furthermore, the rule-based approach may not detect CtOs issued using non-conventional phrasing if such occurs in the dataset. We opted against the approach proposed by Jenny et al. (2021), as it showed a correct prediction rate of only 75.3% and we believe that this would not capture CtOs triggered by speeches lacking explicit negative connotations, as demonstrated in the following example:

- **DE:** *Die Oder-Neiße-Grenze ist die Grenze des Friedens.*
- **EN:** *The Oder-Neisse border is the border of peace.*

Secondly, a semi-automated approach was utilized to extract and disambiguate called-to-order individuals, which also may lead to false annotations.

Additionally, for different reasons, we were not able to disambiguate all individuals mentioned in CtOs, as well as not all speakers in the corpus. Therefore, some statistical tests were conducted only with the disambiguated data.

Finally, we used a classification model (Klamm et al., 2022) to find discussed topics in the speeches. This model was specifically trained to distinguish topics in speeches in the German parliament. However, the F1-score for some categories, such as Social Welfare and Public Lands, was under 0.5, which can cause false classification of speeches containing this topic. For future work, we consider applying other techniques, such as the seeded Latent Dirichlet allocation as in Watanabe and Zhou (2022).

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A Data statistics

	count
total number of issued CtOs	596
number of CtOs with disambiguated individuals called to order	513
number of CtOs with not disambiguated individuals called to order	96
number of PMs with the presidency role who issued calls to order	50

Table 3: Number of speech contributions and calls to order in GermaParl corpus

cause	total frequency	median per LP	standard deviation
ITO	344	17	18.80
MISC	120	6	10.54
GI	106	3	11.20
NDV	48	2	3.20
NV	13	1	1.46

Table 4: Number of speeches containing specific cause triggered CtO.

PCO gender	total frequency	median per LP	standard deviation
male	493	19	31.99
female	59	5.5	6.57

Table 5: Number of PCOs distinguished by their gender.

PCO's party affiliation	total frequency	median per LP	standard deviation
opposition	460	10	33.14
coalition	123	6	5.722

Table 6: Number of CtO distinguished by PCO's party affiliation.

B Annotation schema

Based on the manual review of the dataset, we propose the following classification of actions that caused a call to order (Table 7).

class name	**abbreviation**	**description**	**example DE**	**example EN**
insult towards individual	**ITO**	insult towards an individual	Schreiner [SPD]: Wild gewordener Gartenzwerg!	Schreiner [SPD]: Garden gnome gone wild!
general insult	**GI**	insult towards a group of people, party, event, actions, etc.	Abg. Renner: Die Union der Faschisten von gestern ist fertig!	PM Renner: The Union of Fascists of yesterday is finished!
non-verbal	**NV**	non-verbal actions that caused a call to order	Abgeordnete der Fraktion Die Linke halten Transparente und Fahnen hoch.	Members of the parliamentary group Die Linke hold up banners and flags.
not documented verbal	**NDV**	verbal actions that caused a call to order but were not transcribed.	Der Abg. Dr. Richter [Niedersachsen] wendet sich dem amtierenden Präsidenten zu und spricht unter andauernder großer Unruhe des Hauses auf ihn ein, ohne daß seine Worte vom Haus und am Stenographentisch verstanden werden können.	PM Dr Richter [Lower Saxony] turns to the President-in-Office and speaks to him, to the continued great agitation of the House, without his words being understood by the House and the stenographers' table.
miscellaneous	**MISC**	all other verbal actions excluding direct insults that caused a call to order	Gerd Andres [SPD]: Wie lange darf der eigentlich noch reden, Herr Präsident? Ist das unbegrenzt?	Gerd Andres [SPD]: How long is he actually allowed to talk, Mr President? Is that unlimited?

Table 7: Classification schema