Universiteit Leiden

Thesis evaluation Emilie Brandt

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Programme details

Programme: European Politics and Society

Specialisation:

EC: 30

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Thesis details:

Title: Framing Democratic Backsliding in Hungary: Conservative Media Portrayals of Democratic Transgressions under Viktor Orbán

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

The thesis is plagiarism free

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by M. Stepka: it can be made public throught the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

Strong points: the thesis has a very interesting premise, it is very well written, driven by data and theoretical framework. The findings are presented in a clear way. The Author has put a lot of effort into it.

Weak points: methodology and research design are very problematic. This substantially lowers the overall evaluation of the thesis.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

The selected topic is very interesting, relevant and in line with the scope of the Master's programme. The research question presented in the introduction could benefit from more detailed description, especially explaining its academic significance (i.e. what do I want to explain something or help my reader understand better with my thesis). The literature review section is the weakest part of the introduction. It does not build on most relevant or up to date academic literature or position the topic of the research within broader academic discussion.

Assessment: good　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Weighing:** n/a

Application of knowledge and insight

The methodological aspect of this thesis is problematic. The Author refers to frames and framing, treating this approach as main the method. However, there is no explanation what a frame is, what it consists of, or what is the difference between frames and framing. The Author even refers to Entman's articles, which include one of the most influential definitions of framing in media studies, however it is never mentioned directly in the text. Framing is very well discussed within communication studies, policy studies or social movement studies. A review of these approaches could be very helpful in developing methodology for this type of thesis. This leads to another problem – does this thesis offer a frame analysis? In my view, no. The presented discussion is more in line with problematization approach or analysis of categories, then media framing.

The idea to analyse US media outlets is very interesting. My issue is with selection of sources. The Author does not really provide convincing explanation why these sources are better than others. There an indication that the media outlets are influential, important and relevant for conservative discourse in the US, but there is no empirical backing provided. In other words, does not provide clear criteria in terms of number of accesses, audiences, type of media outlet could fully justify the selection of the four sources. Also, the selection of these are quite diverse sources. This diversity should be well justified and explained in regards to content they produce, its frequency and audiences they have.

The theoretical framework is suitable. However, the Author discusses democratic transgression or backsliding mostly through the lens of one work (by Ahmed). It is understandable, as it this text provided the Author with analytical categories, but MA thesis should include more in-depth discussion and reflect diversity of academic positions on the analysed topic.

The data is well and clearly presented. However, there is a problem of generalization of these findings. The data itself shows how selection of sources affected the analysis – Fox News had only 5 relevant articles, while the American Conservative 116. In such a situation, the sources should be adjusted accordingly (e.g. during preliminary research phase), so that the dataset could include more relevant media outlets

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory   **Weighing:** n/a

Reaching conclusions

The conclusions include a discussion on and verification of all hypotheses. The link between data and conclusions is clear and research objectives, as stated in previous sections of the thesis, are achieved

Assessment: very good   **Weighing:** n/a

Communication

The thesis is very well written in line with academic language, with clear layout and consistent citation style (though the style is not in line with any standardized template).

Assessment: very good   **Weighing:** n/a

Formal requirements

The thesis is in line with formal requirements.

Final assessment

This thesis is graded with a 7.6

Signatures

M. Stepka