

Abstract: What is this about?

Bad luck or bad habits? Traits and perceptions of recruitment-based professional politicization among federal ministries' lower-ranking civil servants in Germany

Research interest in Western democracies has been rising on the question of whether civil servants should prioritize neutral competencies or political responsiveness, particularly in political contexts. While the scientific consensus has been becoming more relaxed regarding political involvements in civil service recruitment, public concerns over the potential replacement of merit-based criteria with political ones persist.

In Germany, top civil service positions legally require political loyalty, lower ranks are expected to remain politically neutral.

A recent qualitative study on lower-ranking civil servants in German federal ministries suggests that political considerations may also influence hiring beyond top positions. The study distinguishes three types of politicization: [1st] a mere party membership, [2nd] an actual party-politicization that is likely to harm public service integrity, and [3rd] a so-called professional politicization as a politico-administrative blend or hybridization. Based on this distinction, the aim of the research data recycling project is to shed light upon traits and perceptions of recruitment-based politicization among German federal ministries' lower-ranking civil service, particularly concerning party politicization, patronage, meritocracy and professionalism. The empirical results show, on one hand, that patronage is not verifiable, and, on the other, that only professional political activities bring significant advantages in a recruitment process. Surprisingly, the reputation of professional politicization is far worse than its actual organizational impact.

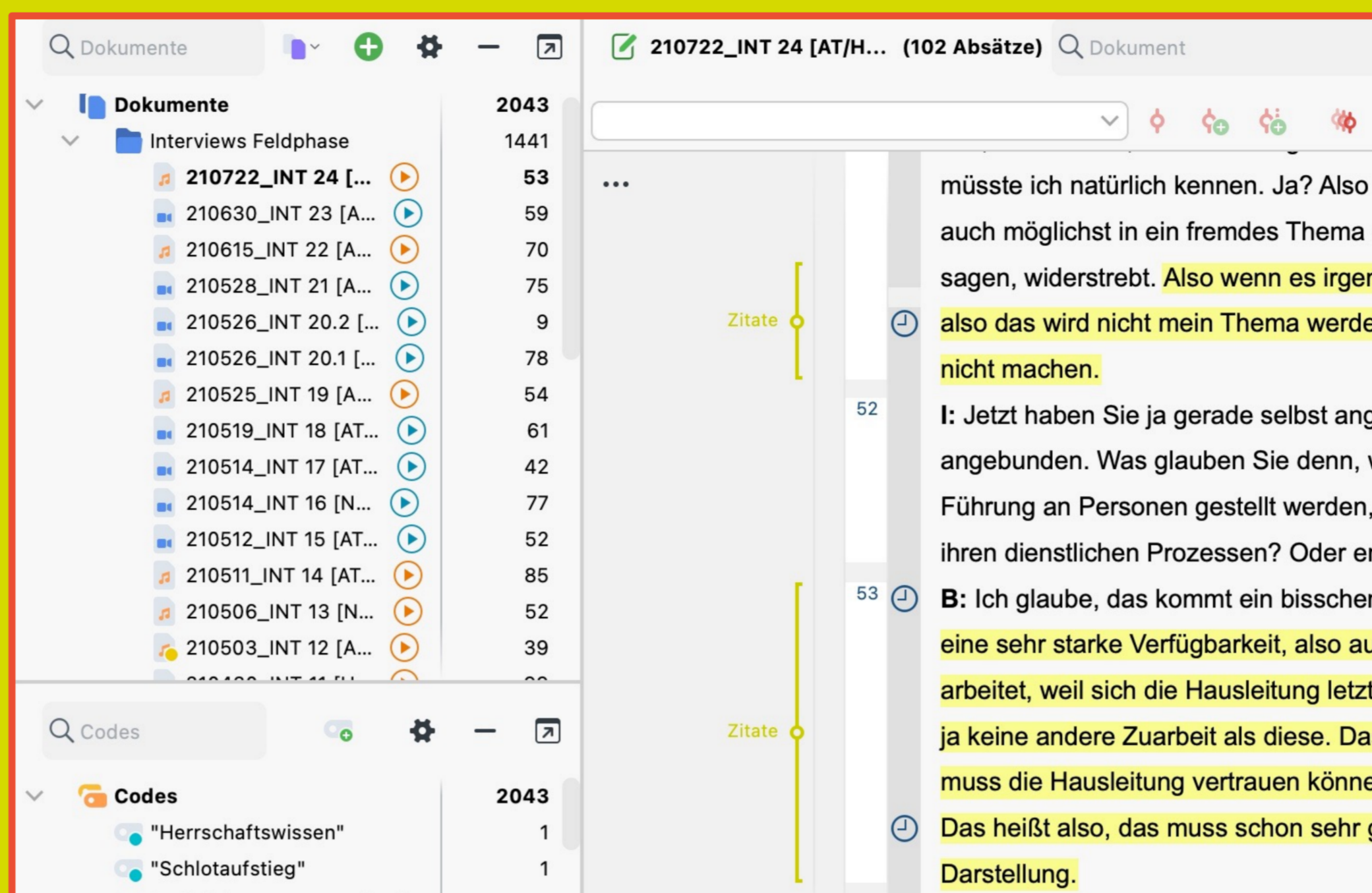


figure 1: existing dataset from PhD-project using Grounded Theory Methodology

Previous project

- ✓ 1 year of data collection
- ✓ 6 federal ministries
- ✓ 30 expert interviews among lower-ranking civil servants
- ✓ almost 32 hours audio/video material
- ✓ more than 2,000 coded segments

figure 2: description of dataset recycled for new project

Research data recycling with MAXQDA tools & AI Assist Re-using data for deductive content analysis

Prerequisites

Reusing data from a previous study for a new research project is possible and often a sensible topic, there are several important aspects to consider:

- ✓ **relevance and timeliness** of data
- ✓ **data privacy and ethical considerations**
- ✓ **copyright and data access rights**
- ✓ **transparency in reporting** by a clear indication that the data come from a previous study
- ✓ **quality and reliability** of data

figure 3: prerequisites of reusing research data

preparing dataset by cleaning from previous categories, coded segments, and added memos



Coding procedure

- ✓ auto-coding by using relevant **keywords**: politisch (political), Politik (politics, polity, policy), Partei (party), Regierung (government)
- ✓ **1,158 auto-coded segments** delivered
- ✓ additionally, word explorer to identify those documents in which the keywords were used most frequently
- ✓ **elimination** of documents not least relevant and **prioritizing** documents most relevant
- ✓ creating **code guidelines**

figure 4: coding procedure and coding tools



MAXQDA tools used: word explorer, document summary, text search and auto-coding

table 1: characteristics of a deductive approach

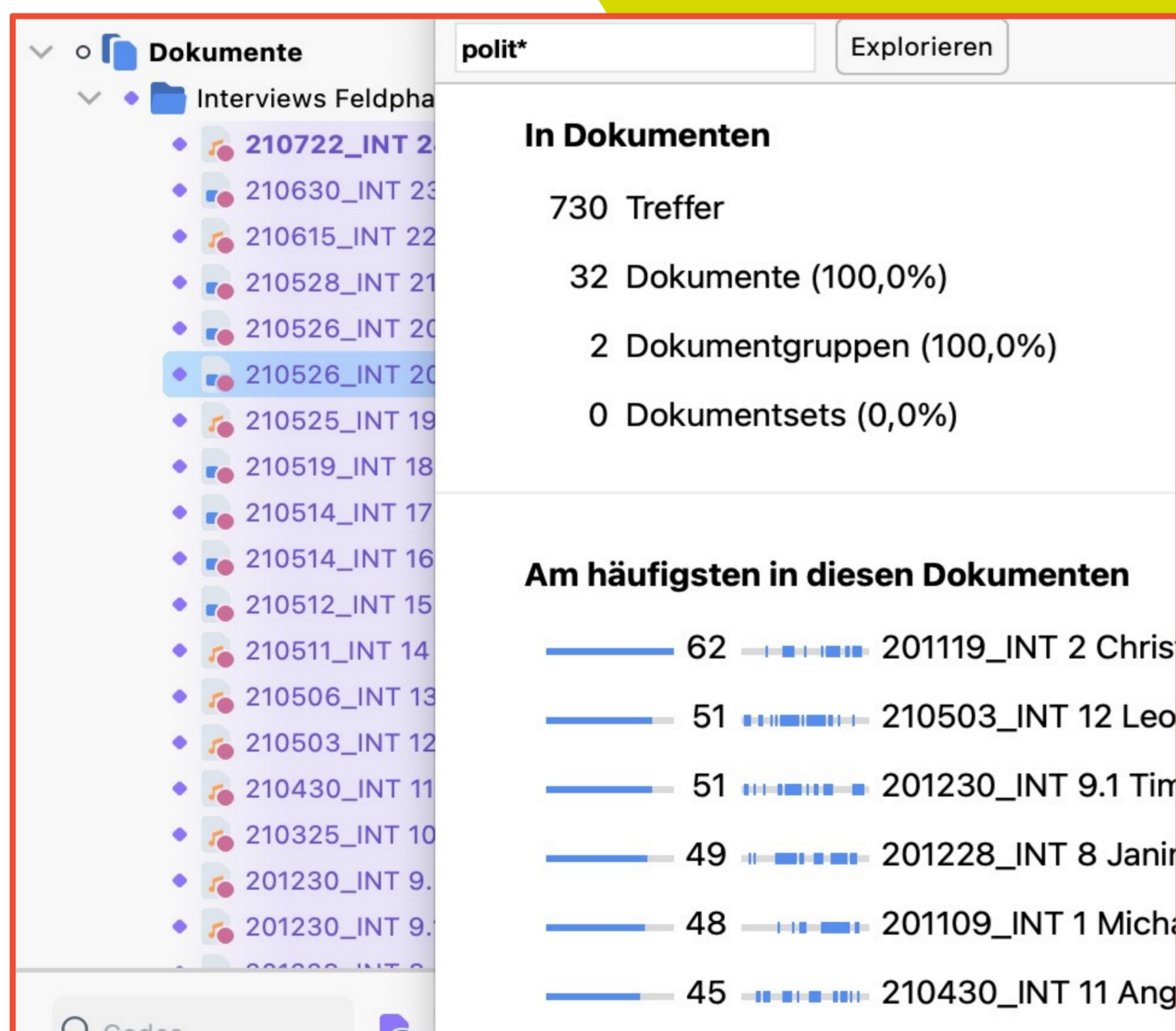


figure 6: identifying most relevant documents by using the word explorer

deductive approach	
definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ starts with relevant research findings ✓ researcher uses preconceived theories to form coding scheme ✓ testing or validating existing theory or hypotheses
data coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ applying pre-existing codes to text ✓ codes are usually derived from a theoretical framework or prior research ✓ structured and systematic
purpose and usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ situations where researcher wants to test a theory or hypothesis ✓ in fields where theories are well established
flexibility, creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ relies on pre-established codes ✓ focus on confirmation rather than discovery

Multi-step evaluation

- ✓ **review of coding**
- ✓ **identifying patterns** and themes
- ✓ detailed analysis
- ✓ **integration and synthesis**
- ✓ **creation of narratives, framework**
- ✓ **reflection and validation**
- ✓ **reporting** of results
- ✓ reflection on **implications**

figure 5: quality management



table 2: coding scheme based on criteria derived from previous project

	political affiliation or ideological alignment	party-politicization or patronage	professional politicization, hybridization
traits	example	example	example
self-perception	example	example	example
external perception	example	example	example



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Let's get connected!

If you would like to know how this research project is progressing, let's stay in touch