

# Coding Policy Influence With ATLAS.ti Methodological Notes From A Study On Hungarian Banking

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## Abstract

*The paper provides a cursory analysis of the methodological problems of coding policy influence in ATLAS.ti. In a series of notes on a research project on Hungarian banking, the measuring problems of preference attainment are considered in the context of lobbying in developed democracies. Two such issues are discussed in more detail: The identification of policy issues in large-sized corpora (as well as their relative importance), and the estimation of relevant policy positions regarding these important issues. For the first point, the flexible coding schemes as well as grouping and commenting features of ATLAS.ti contribute to a proper identification of policy issues and their respective boundaries. For the second point, it is asserted that the estimation of lobby group and government policy positions is best assisted by the quotation managing, query and co-occurrence functions of the software. The discussion of this case study in applied qualitative data analysis also reveals the strong dependence of research results not only on appropriate research rules and procedures but also the transparency thereof.*

## Keywords

*ATLAS.ti; content analysis; lobbying; policy influence; preference attainment.*

## Introduction

The paper provides a cursory analysis of the methodological problems of coding the influence of lobby groups on public policy outcomes in developed democracies. The general field of business and politics, as well as lobbying research in political science puts a premium on novel results gained from the empirical measurement of political clout of various interest groups on all levels of government policy-making. However, the presentation of these results is often disjointed from a detailed exposition of the process of inquiry itself, so as to suggest that the procedures leading to these results are inherently uncontroversial.

In fact, it is important to note that these results may be somewhat dependent on the actual coding strategies and process undertaken by scholars (see the problems related to inter-coder reliability, for instance). Furthermore, a detailed demonstration of researchers' decisions related to the coding and grouping of the underlying material may shed light not only on the internal validity of these studies but may also serve as a stepping stone for future projects facing similar stumbling blocks. This task here is undertaken by an analysis of the methodological problems encountered during the preparation of a case study on Hungarian banking. The original project addressed a puzzle of Hungarian policy history: the apparently *diminishing influence* of the Hungarian Banking Association (HBA), the pre-eminent lobbying organization of domestic and international banking interests in the country.

In order to confirm (or refute) this hypothesis, a computer-assisted coding and content analysis of relevant corpora had been undertaken. Throughout the process problems requiring careful attention emerged in each step leading to a near-constant stream of analytic decisions. This paper briefly highlights a small selection of such methodological issues that seem to be inherent to empirical analyses of policy influence in particular, and qualitative data analysis in general. The presentation is also illustrated by screenshots and examples of the ATLAS.ti toolkit.

In the following, first an overview is provided of the relevant methodological literature. Second, insights are presented from the coding process of the Hungarian project on banking sector lobbying. The final section concludes.

### **Methodological Literature**

The assessment of the policy influence of political actors poses problems even for seasoned empirical social scientists. For starters, a number of competing conceptualizations are in circulation for an issue that has variously been labelled as "bargaining success" (Cross, 2013; Weiler, 2012; Rasmussen & Reh, 2013), "interest group success" or "lobbying success" (Bernhagen, Dür & Marshall, 2014), "interest group preference attainment" (Bunea, 2013), "agenda setting influence" (Binderkrantz & Rasmussen, 2015), "bargaining power" (Bailer, 2010), "lobbying winners and losers" (Kim, Urpelainen & Yang, 2014), "who gets what" (Bernhagen, 2012) or "how powerful they are" (Dür, 2008b).

Two, sometimes interconnected, strands of the literature are discernible from this terminological multitude. Some studies approach influence in terms of the power to frame debates according to interests. The occurrence of "frame congruence" between lobbyists and politicians (Boräng & Naurin, 2015) is considered to be evidence of interest group success. This line of research focuses on media reports, speeches and discourses in general (Boräng et al., 2014; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). In contrast to these communication-based studies, a second approach focuses on policies. Here "positional proximity" of policy stances is considered in what is called a spatial modelling context (Bernhagen, Dür & Marshall, 2015; Dür, 2008a: 566).

Besides these *thematic* differences, and notwithstanding the empirical sources of research, at least three strands of the literature may be delineated from a strictly *methodological* point of view. Dür (2008a: 559) distinguishes "three broad approaches to measuring interest group influence: process-tracing, assessing 'attributed influence' and gauging the degree of preference attainment." Each of these approaches has its strengths and shortcomings (for a comparison see: Jesus, 2010).

For our present purposes, the literature on *preference attainment* offers the best match with its emphasis on replicability, its potential for generalization, and its capability of the detection of behind-the-curtain lobbying actions (or their results, to be more specific). During this type of a research process "political controversies are modeled spatially and each actor involved can be placed on a point of a policy scale to represent the position that it favors (while) by comparing the policy outcome with the policy preferences of interest groups, one can draw conclusions about the winners and losers of the decision-making process" (Klüver, 2012: 62).

Even as the preference attainment approach seemed a good match for our thesis regarding the diminishing influence of the HBA, the *measurement* of preference attainment is considered a hard nut to crack

even by scholars of the subject. Pedersen (2013) ponders whether measuring interest group influence is a "mission impossible," whereas Dür (2008a) makes the case for a triangulation of various approaches. With the maturation of the preference attainment research programme, however, some methodological concerns have been mitigated either via the extended use of expert interviews or quantitative content analysis techniques.

As for the first option, Bernhagen, Dür & Marshall (2014: 16) construct a measure called "Success" which relies "on the idea that an actor is more successful, the more it manages to pull the outcome closer to its ideal point relative to the reversion point" (this latter refers to status quo in most cases). Dür and his aforementioned colleagues went on to apply this methodology to a "data set containing the positions of 1,043 non-state actors on 112 controversial issues included in 70 different legislative proposals introduced by the European Commission between 2008 and 2010." The respective spatial positions were derived from interviews with "European Commission officials that had particular responsibilities for the relevant legislative proposal at the time of its initiation and who command detailed knowledge of the negotiations that took place at this time" (Bernhagen, Dür & Marshall, 2015: 12). Besides such elite interviews, surveys are also a favored tool of data collection in lobbying research (Marchetti, 2015).

Klüver (2012: 4) took a different approach to EU-level lobbying success. She applied quantitative text analysis techniques to the corpus of "online consultations launched by the European Commission." She extracted the policy preferences of interest groups from their consultation submissions and compared them with the policy outcome (for a methodological debate regarding the merit of this approach see Klüver [2009; 2015] and her critics [Bunea & Ibeskas, 2015]). In a mini case study of two competing algorithms and hand-coding she concludes that "the policy position estimates obtained by the three techniques correlate highly and therefore largely cross-validate each other" (Klüver, 2012: 90). In a similar vein, Zhiru & Zhiqiang (2013) apply quantitative text analysis to measure the policy influence of think tanks in the field of environmental policy in the U.S.

In the final analysis Klüver (2012: 91-92) opts for an algorithm-based technique called Wordfish, as she considers hand-coding to be "only useful if one or just a few issues are studied since it is very time-consuming and cost-intensive." Besides presenting the underlying methodological problems of coding policy influence in general, the other purpose of this paper is to prove that qualitative data analysis by hand-coding may be a viable alternative to quantitative text analysis for selected research questions.

As it will be shown below the number of issues is, in fact, not a prohibitive problem for this type of research, especially if hand-coding is supported by computer-aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software such as ATLAS.ti. This is true even as Klüver (2012: 67) is right to point out that "whereas hand-coding claims validity as its central advantage over computerized text analysis, the content analysis approach of [the Comparative Manifestos Project, one of the most extensive project of this kind] has been severely criticized for a number of reasons." In the next two sections we consider the potential ad-

vantages and pitfalls of the computer-aided manual coding of policy influence along with procedures for countering these shortcomings and improving research validity and reliability.

### Using ATLAS.ti For Coding Policy Influence

Studies of the preference attainment of European financial lobby groups are few and far between despite their importance in shaping legislation with wide-ranging consequences for both consumers of financial services and the taxpayer in general (for a recent exception see Pritoni, 2014).

Our decision to use ATLAS.ti was rooted in its unique features facilitating the mass hand-coding of official documents, legislative texts and news items and also its analytical tools. In this we followed a similarly methods-oriented study by Friese (2011) on the financial crisis. She conducted a descriptive/initial coding of various materials related to the financial calamity and also a "build-up" towards analysis (e.g.: her "consequences of the crisis" is similar to the "policy outcomes" variable of this project). In our investigation of the policy influence of the Hungarian Banking Association we also partly relied on the research design for hand coding by Klüver (2012: 74—as discussed above).

The research question for the project was motivated by a puzzle of Hungarian economic policy: the apparently diminishing influence of banking interests after 2010. This question was examined by operationalizing policy influence as preference attainment. The research design then compared the lobbying power of the HBA during the government cycles before and after the 2010 elections which, arguably, ushered in a new era of anti-finance politics with the victory of the right-wing Fidesz party.

This comparison of the 2006-2010 and 2010-2014 periods was undertaken in three steps. The first step entailed a content analysis of Hungarian Banking Association (HBA) press releases, with the aim of establishing the ideal policy positions of the association. The second step concerned the self-assessment by the HBA of the success of its lobbying activities as presented in its yearly reports. The final step featured a comparison of preference attainment before and after the 2010 elections based on these two sources along with a discussion of the results. The resulting analysis offers guidance regarding the winners and losers of decision-making in the domain of financial policy in the given period. During this process a number of methodological issues had to be resolved—in what follows we discuss two of these with illustrations from the pertinent ATLAS.ti workflow. The first problem concerns *identifying policy issues* from various sources and over time. The second is connected to the *estimation of spatial positions* of actors in a two-dimensional policy space.

### Identifying Policy Issues

Provided the textual sources of inquiry are settled on, the first actual task of content analysis is identifying the units of analysis. In this case extant literature is unambiguous in its reliance on policy issues (such as the subprime crisis following the bailout of Bear Stearns and the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in the U.S. in 2008) as the cornerstone of empirical analysis. Nevertheless, policy issues are less well behaved as

policy topics, such as economic policy or financial regulation (to name just two related to the policy issue of the subprime crisis). Taken together these latter constitute a closed universe of policy domains for any given period (and they are also relatively stable over time, except for dramatic technological changes such as the emergence of telecommunication and its regulation in the 20th century).

Policy issues, on the other hand, are not finite and not stable over time. Any given number of issues may materialize in a policy domain at the same time: Various proposals for establishing tuition in higher education may constitute separate policy issues, just as the wage demands of lecturers or foreign student visas may come to the fore of the debate the very same month. Also, some issues come and go while others are more permanent. All this results in a dynamic evolution of the issue space with a constantly changing population of issues and their respective salience. These features put a premium on researchers' decisions (as opposed to policy topic analysis).

Furthermore, policy issues are less susceptible to exploration through data mining: In contrast with relatively stable policy domain titles, their labels may be variegated and idiosyncratic. Basic methods of word or phrase extraction, therefore, may not yield useful results (see Figure 1).

Word	Length	Count	%
banks	5	1792	1,076
financial	9	1247	0,748
banking	7	1215	0,729
association	11	1041	0,625
bank	4	972	0,583
new	3	944	0,567
hungarian	9	922	0,553
act	3	910	0,546
european	8	856	0,514
committee	9	837	0,502
loans	5	764	0,459
proposed	8	736	0,442
capital	7	726	0,436
working	7	716	0,430
credit	6	702	0,421
issues	6	616	0,370
supervisory	11	607	0,364

Figure 1: The limitations of the bag of words method

Figure 1 shows the results for the application of the ATLAS.ti Word Cruncher module to a corpus of annual HBA reports (English language). Even if we exclude non-necessary stop words, the more frequent words only reveal the policy topic in question (this is—to some extent—also true of expressions). Recurring terms such as "banks," "financial," or "European" are simply not indicative of policy issues.

Moreover, digging deeper only compounds this problem. Even a cursory analysis of Association press releases revealed that direct reference to salient issues as they were *labeled or framed by the media*, or public discourse was simply non-existent. Government proposals were referred to in legislative terms or

by allusions to the underlying policy topic. All in all, reading HBA yearly reports and press releases was akin to reading between the lines of diplomatic cables. The daily business of media and politics on the one hand, and lobbying on the other hand are conducted in different "dialects"—and the translation is not always an easy task. The conversion requires the skills of the researcher. As this methodological problem was not related to natural language processing or word clusters in a corpus, manual coding was selected as the preferred method over machine learning techniques (such as Wordfish) for the diverse data sources of the research design.

These considerations lead us to the next task of identifying policy issues in extended masses of text by hand-coding. The first prerequisite for such an undertaking is a working definition of a policy issue. In this we followed Baumgartner et al. (2009: 1-3) and designated all policy problems and proposals for solutions as policy issues which are considered as such by the relevant lobbying organizations (in our case the HBA, and its press releases and yearly reports). Second, a multi-round process of coding and code-book revision was necessary in order to adjust for the peculiarities of the material at hand. As we did not have a preexisting list of issues an inductive approach was followed. We started out with a "descriptive-level analysis" during which "noticing" was the main task, which was followed by a conceptual phase (Frieze, 2014:17-18). Figure 2 presents a screenshot of the coding process by highlighting various code groups (including "policy issues", "lobby action" and the sentiment variable of "policy outcome")

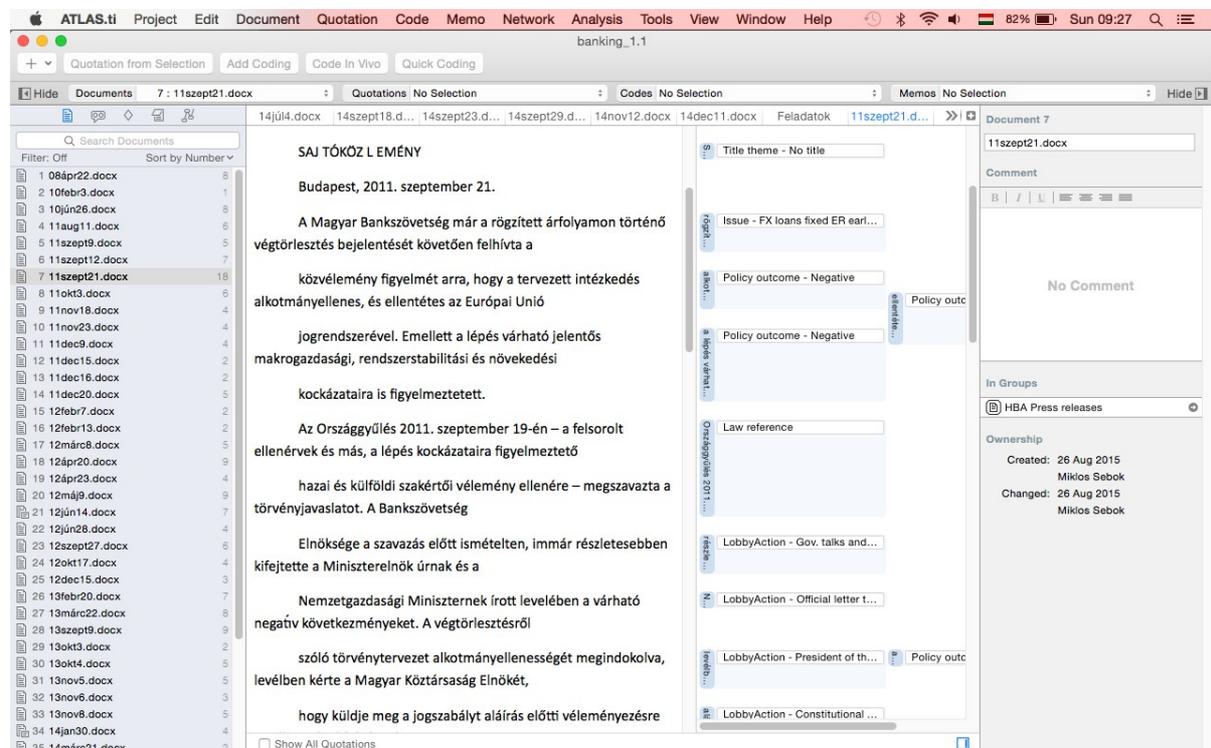
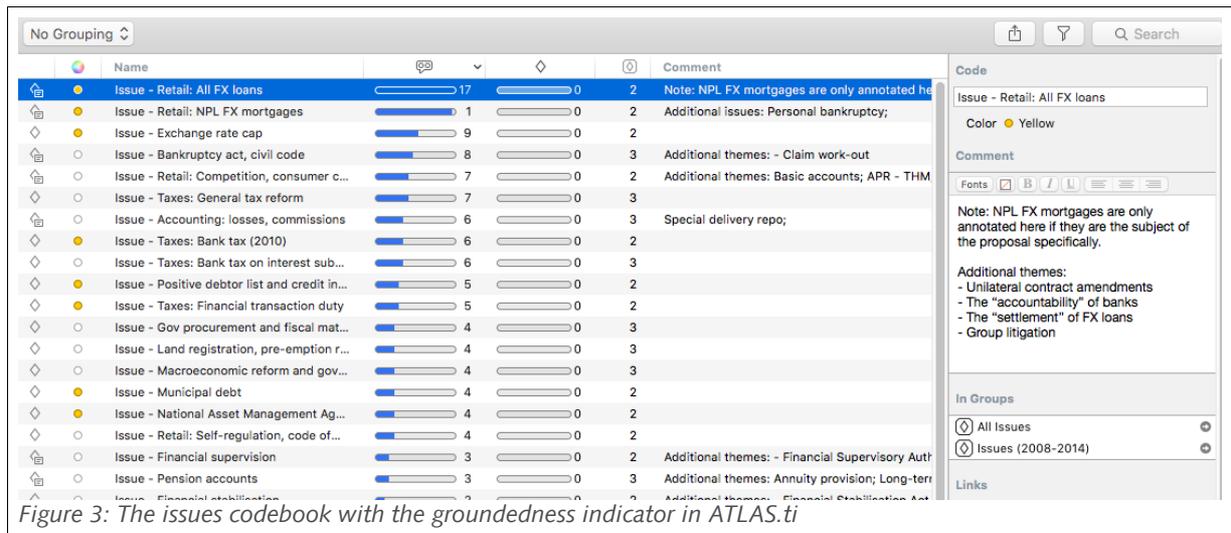


Figure 2: Assigning codes to text segments in ATLAS.ti

This coding process underlined the necessary attributes of policy issues to be searched for during coding, both also led to further methodological problems. The two most important of these were *issue boundaries* and *issue salience*.

Starting with the former, the delimitation of issues proved to be a less than straightforward task. Figure 3 provides a snapshot of an intermediate phase between the initial code-list and a grouped code list for policy issues (as derived from press releases for the period 2008-2014).



The first item on this list already highlights the difficulties of defining policy issues. A primary decision relates to multiple or exclusive coding of quotes in ATLAS.ti. Reality defies simple conceptual schemes in this respect: Words/expressions/sentences/paragraphs in press releases referred to zero, one, or multiple policy issues (and this remark also implies that a strict rule for measurement units also proved to be unfeasible). Therefore, an inclusive approach was adhered to even if it produced anomalies of overlapping policy issues as in the case all foreign exchange (FX) denominated loans (with no special reference to the non-performing loan [NPL] problem) and specifically the NPL aspect of this issue (which is significant in itself as the results show; see the second entry in the list). The comment section in ATLAS.ti served as the primary means in establishing issue boundaries in such cases, as it is presented on the right-hand module of the print screen.

The introduction of a second rule was also necessary regarding the possible limits on codes per unit of observation. As press releases contained various numbers of issues ranging from zero to a dozen, the only rule applied was that only the first mention of an issue in a given press release counted (as yearly reports are by definition a compilation of policy issues a similar rule was impractical in that case). This was important so that we could control for the diverging length and elaboration of specific press releases.

A third methodological decision concerned the scope of a single policy issue. The first round of coding yielded 22 policy issues. Table 1, in contrast, shows the results of an in-between phase with some codes

already grouped into larger categories according to issue area such as "Taxes" (which is one step towards a topic-based conversion of all issue codes; it is notable, however, that ATLAS.ti code groups were reserved for codes related to specific information sources: press releases and yearly reports). This classification scheme also opened up new avenues for analysis for a comparison of issue areas as opposed to single issues (we will get back to this point).

In the event, the manual coding process returned a relatively stable list of recurring policy issues. Variance in the technical level of exposition or the dynamics of the evolution of content was smoothed by the application of a few simple rules. One such rule sanctioned that if the non-performing element became more pronounced in the general FX loan crisis, this led to the creation of a separate issue code and the recoding of previous FX loan-related segments. This process was helped by the query system of ATLAS.ti as witnessed by Figure 4, which shows how documents slated for re-coding were selected by a search of their content for the keyword "deviza" (foreign exchange).

# ^	Name	Type	Quotations	Comment
5	11szept9.docx	Text	5	
6	11szept12.docx	Text	7	
7	11szept21.docx	Text	18	
8	11okt3.docx	Text	6	
9	11nov18.docx	Text	4	
10	11nov23.docx	Text	4	
19	12apr23.docx	Text	4	
28	13szept9.docx	Text	9	
29	13okt3.docx	Text	2	
31	13nov5.docx	Text	5	
33	13nov8.docx	Text	5	
37	14jun26.docx	Text	4	
38	14jul4.docx	Text	8	
39	14szept18.docx	Text	20	This is not a regular press release.
40	14szept23.docx	Text	4	

**Result: 15 of 57 Document(s)**

Figure 4: Using the query tool to find documents slated for recoding

Let us now assume that an appropriate solution to the task of policy issue homogenization has been arrived at. From the perspective of our research question the problem still remains that not all issues are created equal. Table 1 refers to a number of policy issues related to taxation (see entry 6 and 8, for instance). Some of these issues concern the economy as a whole with only indirect consequences for the banking sector ("general tax reforms") while some are related to the consumers of financial intermediaries (specific rules of the personal "income tax" regarding, say, interest revenue). A third category pertains to the revenue of the shareholders of financial institutions: various forms of corporate and bank taxation (see e. g., "special bank tax 2006").

For those in charge of the lobbying activities of banks these three types of issues related to taxation do not represent the same level of importance. In some cases even a pure financial analysis may be applicable: One form of taxation can cost the banking sector more than two other type of taxation taken together. This and similar anomalies are, on the one hand, at odds with our selection of policy issues as

the unit of analysis in our study of preference attainment. Re-conceptualizing policy influence in monetary terms (profits gained or revenue loss avoided), on the other hand, may well upset our initial research design.

Fortunately, all is not lost. Issues can be weighted according to various metrics. One is readily available from ATLAS.ti: code frequency is indicated in Table 1 under the title of "groundedness." Some issues also come equipped with uncontroversial metrics of importance (such as numerical monetary values), as is the case with the value of non-performing loans as a percentage of total loans. Finally, issue saliency may be accounted for by expert surveys and interviews (see Baumgartner et al., 2009; Bernhagen, Dür & Marshall, 2015).

Based on these considerations advanced phases of the research design can focus on only the "big fish": issues that are above a threshold of importance by some specific metrics or a composite index thereof. This is also the path that we have chosen during the research process by selecting only "major" issues for further analysis. This importance indicator was constructed as a result of top 10 issues as measured by both the groundedness indicator of ATLAS.ti and the expert evaluation of the researcher. The most salient issue in both cases was allocated 10 points and the least salient 1 point. The composite index provided a rank order by adding the two saliency scores.

#### **Spatial Position And Success Rate Estimation From Various Sources**

Even as questions related to issue identification are resolved, a major obstacle remains before the progress of our research design. This concerns the core element of all preference attainment studies, the success rate of lobbying. In order to establish such a metrics of policy influence, policy positions have to be estimated for both the status quo and the ideal point of the interest group. This basic rule has to be adjusted for our present purposes as in most cases policy issues emerged as a result of a government proposal with the aim of altering the status quo.

Therefore, in this simplified account, there are two "sides" (Baumgartner et al, 2009: 46) to every story. These can be positioned in the standard one-dimensional policy space (along, say, the left-right spectrum) and the framework for analysis is set. In order to apply this conceptual scheme to our research question (the preference attainment of the HBA over time) a further position has to be placed on the spectrum: the policy outcome of the political process. From the relative alignment of these policy positions a *score of preference attainment* can be extracted (in the research process this was labeled as the PrefScore).

While this spatial approach may sound easy in theory, its operationalization for empirical research is not without its challenges. First, we have seen before that the content of issues changes over time and so do the policy positions with regard to these issues. Which point in time should serve as the reference for estimating policy position? And on a related note: Should the *reduction* of a tax form be considered

lobbying success if the lobbying outfit itself was opposed to the *introduction* of this tax type in question from the very beginning?

Second, the epistemological status of various sources may differ when it comes to calculating policy stances. Interest groups may have strategic motives in their public communications while internal documents are seldom accessible to researchers. Klüver (2012) used consultation submissions and compared them with the policy outcome, while Baumgartner et al. (2009) and Dür et al. (2015) relied on interviews and surveys. What to make of potential discrepancies between these sources of positional estimation?

Third, the measurement of distance between seemingly non-quantifiable positions spawned an entire literature of spatial models of politics. Nevertheless, the ordinal scales used in this line of research are fairly crude in capturing the numerical degree of preference attainment, and so is the derivative method adopted by Klüver (2012: 99) which counts as "success" all and any movement of the policy outcome towards the ideal point of the interest group. This binary approach was supplanted by PrefScore, our proposition of a success variable with three values: zero for failure; one for partial success; and two for "victory" (in this the technique follows the standard of empirical studies of the redemption of electoral pledges – see e. g., Thomson, 2011).

Such a manual scoring of preference attainment—accompanied by intense memo-making that details the logic behind the scores—comes out as a viable alternative to more mechanical approaches. Table 1 shows the preliminary scores for some salient issues in press releases.

Issues (w/ some codes consolidated)	N	Estimation of HBA ideal policy position	PrefScore
Bank tax	6	No new taxes on banking are supported (2010); Freeze the level of bank tax (2012)	0
Charge-free ATM withdrawal	1	Proposal is "damaging for society" and "branches close" because of it (2013-14)	0
Consumer finance "settlement", unilateral interest rate increases, ER spread and banking "accountability"	11	Banking practices were legal and fair . It puts an "enormous burden on the sector"; it is retroactive and "against the rule of law" (2014)	0
Eviction ban	1	"Flawed measure" for summer months (2013)	1
Exchange rate cap	9	The decision is the result of the "hard work" and shared responsibility" of government, consumers and HBA	1
FX loans HUF conversion, early and final repayment policies	14	The proposed "final repayment of FX loans gravely threatens the stability of the financial system and could lead to serious macroeconomic repercussions"	0
Financial transaction duty	3	Measure is against the 2011 agreement as "it will be paid by the banks" not the customers	0

Issues (w/ some codes consolidated)	N	Estimation of HBA ideal policy position	PrefScore
Municipal debt and reform	4	It may be "justified" in the case of small municipalities (2011); less so for bigger cities (2011-13)	1
National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)	4	HBA "welcomes" the creation of NAMA (2011)	2
Positive debtor list and credit information	1	The HBA has been supporting this policy "for more than a decade" (2010)	2

Table 1: Policy issues and HBA positions in press releases (2008-2014)

By using the example of the first entry in Table 1 (Bank tax) the analysis proceeded as follows. In the corpus of HBA press releases the issue of the bank tax was mentioned six times (N=6). In the code manager of ATLAS.ti all relevant quotations were listed (see Figure 5).

Quotations of Code Issue - Taxes: Bank tax (2010)							
# ^	Name	Text Content	Document	Codes	Number of Cod...	Comment	
3:2	tervezett bankadóró	tervezett banka...	10jún26.docx	Issue - Taxes: B...	1		
3:5	A tervezett bankadó összege és egyéb...	A tervezett bank...	10jún26.docx	Issue - Taxes: B...	1		
3:6	Összességében a bankadó a kormány s...	Összességében...	10jún26.docx	Issue - Taxes: B...	1		
18:3	bankadó	bankadó	12ápr20.docx	Issue - Taxes: B...	1		
20:3	banki különadó	banki különadó	12máj9.docx	Issue - Taxes: B...	1		
39:18	kormányzat különadók,	kormányzat külö...	14szept18.docx	Issue - Taxes: B...	1		
<b>Result: 6 of 331 Quotation(s)</b>							

Figure 5: Quotations related to the issue of "bank tax"

This list also shows that the issue was present on the policy agenda for over four years (see Document column describing the date of the press release). This leads to another aforementioned methodological problem: policy positions change over time as they reflect a changing environment. Therefore, in this case, two separate signature quotations were extracted from these text segments. First, the Banking Association supported "no new taxes on banking" (2010). Second, and after the government had introduced a new bank tax, they argued for "freezing the level of the bank tax (2012)." This is how the estimation of the HBA ideal policy position was finalized with respect to the policy issue of the bank tax (see the third column of Table 1).

In the final phase of the analysis the PrefScore (presented in the fourth column) was assigned based on the *policy outcomes* coded for the policy issue of the bank tax. As the new tax had indeed been introduced and a subsequent freeze was not secured this issue points toward a lobbying failure (a PrefScore of "0") on behalf of the HBA.

In conclusion, and in terms of CAQDAS usage, the PrefScore distribution process was assisted by both the coding- and analysis-oriented features of ATLAS.ti. Signature quotes and supporting variables were obtained via the various manager and query tools for each PrefScore as described by Figures 2-5 and Table 1.

Such an inclusion of multiple aspects of both activity and results allows for a more nuanced analysis of lobbying: ex ante policy positions may be corroborated by ex-post criticism of policy measures, and vice

versa. By linking various sources (press releases and professional reports) in ATLAS.ti through a common coding scheme, the inquiry also opens up for more fine-tuned analysis.

One example of this complex coding approach is a further variable pointed towards sentiment (as opposed to positional) analysis (see again Figure 2). By including this aspect of HBA communications it became clear that its press releases contain an overwhelmingly negative content both in describing policy outcomes in general and presenting Association positions in particular. Co-occurrence tables (Friese, 2014: 208) between variable pairs of interest (such as lobby forms and success rates) add another layer to the inquiry. For instance, from the exported Excel tables, a separate PrefScore could be calculated; not just for every issue but for every lobbying action (such as a call for negotiations, going to court etc.).

While such additional layers of analysis played their respective role in reaching PrefScores for various policy issues, decisions were still primarily rooted in spatial analysis as this serves the basis for studying preference attainment (as opposed to the competing approaches of attributed influence and process-tracing).

## Discussion

This paper reviewed a sample of the methodological problems associated with the empirical investigation of policy influence in the context of developed democracies. We peeked into the black box of research in order to shed light on some of the methodological decisions that tackle these problems—and specifically how CACQDAS such as ATLAS.ti may be helpful in mitigating them.

In conclusion, and in order to show the importance of such methodological decisions for valid and reliable research results, let us consider an example decision from our case study.

Empirical results regarding preference attainment are highly sensitive to the level of issue aggregation (see Table 2). From our research process it became abundantly clear that empirical results regarding preference attainment are highly sensitive to the level of issue aggregation. Issue aggregation here refers to the problem of issue boundaries that we discussed above. The table provides an example of how the rules for issue aggregation have an effect on actual results.

Issues	PrefScore	Issue Areas	PrefScore
Bank tax	0	Corporate and bank taxes	1
Charge-free ATM withdrawal	0	Consumer charges	1
Consumer finance "settlement", unilateral interest rate increases, ER spread and banking "accountability"	0	FX loans	1

Table 2: PrefScores for "Issues" vs. "Issue areas" level of aggregation

Table 2 shows how, with each step towards a more general notion of issues, the probability of partial success increases.

In the case of the bank tax, the first row in Table 2, the single issue level analysis shows a lobbying fiasco (hence the PrefScore of 0). This is due to the aforementioned introduction and continued presence of the bank tax in the Hungarian tax system.

The methodological problem related to issue boundaries, however, may turn this failure into partial success. If we consider a more aggregate level of issues (not a specific tax, but general tax types), we have to add up all the lobbying successes and failure in the domain of corporate and bank taxes. As in some cases the HBA won, in some cases it lost, for the general issue area of corporate and bank taxes the result of our PrefScore is 1. This is how issue boundaries and researcher focus may lead to different results.

Similar comparative tables could be constructed for a number of related topics ranging from issue saliency [?] to the structure and rules of the PrefScore. Needless to say, it is exactly these nuances and subtleties that make analyzing qualitative data so intriguing. And in the final analysis they also make a clear case for methodologically informed research designs; and, above all, for transparency in presenting research methods, procedure, and results.

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