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THE CHANGE IN DISCOURSE AND RHETORIC ON CANNABIS LEGALISATION IN GERMANY

This paper examines the change of German political discourse regarding cannabis legalisation (Cannabisgesetz), scrutinising its transition from a medical and criminal issue to a highly politicised moral instrument. The primary research question examines whether conservative opposition make public health matters into moral and political areas of conflict. I argue that the conservative opposition (CDU/CSU) employs rhetoric grounded in historical authority and tradition, thereby establishing a manifestation of power. Historically, prohibition was motivated not by health concerns, but by global moral economies, resulting in discursive sedimentation through moral-bureaucratic laws (1929) and the fear narratives associated with the "gateway drug" framework (1970s–1990s). The main case study uses discourse and rhetorical analysis, combining Entman's framing theory with Kahneman's System 1/System 2 model. It looks at the present day (2000s–2024). We analyse the rhetoric of individuals such as Markus Söder, who utilises maximal emotional impact ("Kiffer-Paradies"), and CDU leaders who characterise the law as a "fatal error." The results support the main hypothesis: the opposition uses a strategy that is linked to each other. They use health arguments (youth risk) to support the moral frame (paternalism) and moral arguments (social stability) to support the political frame (government irresponsibility). This directly appeals to System 1 fear responses to override rational policy assessment, which is further supported by a technocratic frame that predicts "administrative chaos." The analysis shows that moral rhetoric is still crucial to German drug policy. It shows that the opposition has successfully turned the law into a moral danger and a political disaster. This study enhances political communication by analysing the moralisation and politicisation of a technical issue in contemporary Europe.