Political Charisma as Performance and Projection

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Abstract. This paper explores the connection between political capital and political charisma. Although both concepts identify persons as political representatives, Bourdieu differentiated between political capital, personal capital and charisma. His notion of political capital is based on the credibility of political actors. Political capital signifies both the power and influence of political organisations and a politician's reputation and is as such a fragile capital. At its core, it is generated by the authenticity of an actor and felicitous performances associated with being a representative. In this understanding, political capital partially overlaps with Weber's conceptualisation of charisma. The paper explores these convergences of Bourdieu and Weber and introduces Elias' critical reformulation of charisma as a group phenomenon. Charisma is based both on individual performances that generate a 'pecking order' of authority and on collective projections in which a group takes an individual as a person who represents the minority of their best group members – and thereby ascribes charisma to the person. As a public figure, such a 'charismatised' person gains acceptance as a symbolic representative of the group and is placed in opposition to other groups that are ranked lower in status and are locked into their lower status by pejorative stereotypes. An assessment of charisma thus has to take such relational aspects into consideration and can approach the operationalisation of the concept via communicative dynamics: ascriptions of praise and blame. Positive campaigning and branding of public figures as embodiments and representatives of a group's values and virtues usually go hand in hand with negative campaigning against opponents. This paper prepares the ground for how such communication can be measured and integrated into the leadership capital index (LCI).

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Introduction

Charisma fascinates as a theoretical concept. Its source has been attributed to leaders, followers, or specific situations of crisis. It often refers to an extraordinary personal quality of a leader and a person's ability to create emotional dominance over others (Collins 2014). It has been established that the sociological concept of charisma emerged from Max Weber's discussion of religion (Riesebrodt 1999) and builds on transcendental ideas like the sacred (Shils 1965); it is often linked to salvation narratives (Smith 2000). In the realm of politics, charisma has been found to be decisive because it brings personality back into matters of government. But charisma becomes analytically useless when it merely means that someone "has contrived to interest a certain number of people in the glitter of his personality" (Geertz 1983: 122). Charisma then denotes a political sex appeal, which is little more than a final resort explanation.

Research on charisma still tends to focus on Max Weber's conceptualisation, which has attained an almost dogmatic character in the discipline and is taught around the world in introductory courses to social science. Hundreds of case studies on leaders utilise the concept, but relatively few theoretical insights have been incorporated to sharpen the concept as an analytical instrument. And while Weber attempted to disentangle and categorise ideal-types of authority, his theory of charisma is fragmentary and partly incoherent.

It is somewhat surprising that the concept is so prominent in political science, sociology, history, and communication and media studies. Schweitzer (1984) even referred to *"The Age of Charisma"* in his book by the same title. Many suggestions have been made to apply and expand Weber's concept (Aberbach 1996; Breuilly 2011; Herbst 2010; Lipp 2010; Glassman & Swatos Jr. 1986; Schweitzer 1974; Turner 2003).

It was outlined that charisma builds on a repertoire of transcendental ideas and links political sociology and religion (Gebhardt, Zingerle & Ebertz 1993). The relevance of charisma for populists and authoritarian regimes has also been addressed many times (Bach & Breuer 2010; Bliesemann de Guevara & Reiber 2011; Ibrahim & Wunsch 2012).

Based on Weber, numerous typologies have been worked out that differentiate between personal or institutional charisma (Schweitzer 1974), charismatic giants, luminaries, failures, and aspirants (Schweitzer 1984), charisma of reason, ideas, or nations (Breuer 1994), and extraordinary, routinized and everyday charisma (Bliesemann de Guevara & Reiber 2011). Current research asks how charisma can create 'intimacy at a distance' (Berenson & Giloi 2010) and addresses conditions that evoke charisma, its institutionalisation, and its artificiality. Relatively few studies have focused on the importance of mass media to construct and amplify charisma (Häusermann 2001; Tänzler 2007).

Historically informed contributions on the artificiality of charisma and the role of the media have pointed out that charisma can emerge from supporters and fans and that personalities can 'charismatise' themselves. Moreover, traditional elites have been shown to play an active role in reinforcing the myth of their charisma in order to guard their social privileges by referring to a divine order – codified as hereditary or aristocratic charisma (Berenson & Giloi 2010). The possibility to influence the evocation or even artificially generate charisma has been taken to new levels with the development of mass media, especially the popular press, photography and the moving image. The significant influence of the media on charisma is absent in Weber's theory. He addressed the relevance of Theodore Roosevelt's political campaigns (1920/1976: 667f) but did not yet see the importance of the media as actors in their own right. At

least since John F Kennedy's presidency (1961-1963), modern politics in democracies have been in a symbiotic relationship with the mass media, which can create, amplify and destroy a candidate's 'charisma', or in this sense synonymously used, political capital.

Criticism aside, Max Weber's discussion of charisma is still the most relevant. However, while his conception remains influential across social sciences, it is not free from pre-scientific connotations. Weber himself was not able to create a value-free analytical concept in his theory of charisma. He was biased by the Prussian inclination to retell history through the prism of heroic individualism, as the history of big leaders. It led him to believe that genuine charisma is rooted in the individual (Kraemer 2008: 66, footnote 3). This erroneous assumption is one of the reasons why charisma still tends to be surrounded by more obscurity than clarity.

Weber's conceptualisation of charisma partially overlaps with Bourdieu's concept of political capital. This paper explores the connection between these two concepts. Both identify persons as political representatives that lead others. While charismatic leaders, at least for Weber, are endowed with an extraordinary 'gift of grace', Bourdieu regarded leaders with political capital as representatives with influence, credibility, and a certain degree of popularity. Political capital signifies the gravity of a political organisation and a politician's reputation and is as such a fragile capital – a fragility that is also characteristic of charisma (Bourdieu 2001: 101).

This contribution firstly outlines Weber's perspective on charisma and presents a profound critique of his concept. Next, valuable extensions and corrections of Weber's theory of charisma are presented through the introduction of Norbert Elias' figurational perspective, which can be used as a foundation for contextualising Bourdieu's field theory. In a third part, Bourdieu's field theory is discussed to identify

the intricate dynamics of charisma and political capital that reflects Weber's and to some degree Elias' thoughts. While Weber neglected mass media's influence on charisma, Elias illustrated the centrality of communication (especially neighbourhood gossip) for charismatic phenomena and Bourdieu systematically introduced field theory to media dynamics. A comparison of these three classical authors' conceptualisations of charisma is outlined towards the end of this study. The paper is concluded with a summation for contextualising studies on the leadership capital index (LCI) with interpretive methods of research.

Charisma: Weber's perspective

In his sociology of domination, Weber contextualised charisma as one of three ideal types of legitimate authority. On the one hand, he differentiated between traditional authority and (modern) legal-rational authority. These two types of rule work well in 'ordinary times'. On the other hand, he considered charismatic authority a somewhat odd ideal type. Charismatic authority tends emerge in times of crisis or in extra-ordinary circumstances, and is inherently unstable. It disappears with the downfall or death of a charismatic leader, or becomes routinised and institutionalised in legal or traditional rule (Weber 1920/1976: 143-4). Weber's genuine concept of charisma is personal. In *Economy and Society,* he defined charisma as

> "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities" (1920/1976: 124).

Weber primarily saw it as a social ascription by others and a specifically structured

social relation that creates an ego-centred authority network *within* a group. In its 'pure'

form, charisma is associated with warriors', prophets' or magicians' 'heroic' deeds and,

hence, it can be considered a phenomenon of politics, religion, and leadership cults

(ibid.: 141). However, Weber claimed that genuine personal charisma can be

transformed into a charisma of office (*Amtscharisma*) or hereditary charisma

(*Erbcharisma*) (ibid.: 144-5). In all of these instances, the recognition of charismatic

leaders is bound to a community of followers who share the perception of charisma.

Charismatic authority rests on followers' beliefs that charismatic leaders possess

extraordinary powers that allow them to overcome existential crises. But the charismatic

force is not an aspect personality; it is not a character trait. It is a leader's mission that

defines the social relation to his followers; a relation that is seemingly based on

voluntary recognition and deeply anchored in an emotional affection. Leader and

followers perceive it as a duty that creates a personal loyalty. This perception seems to

preclude formal hierarchies: devotion is principally absolute and blind. A charismatic

leader hence draws his authenticity from the mission in which he appears to believe and

by which he is bound.

It is often a revolutionary mission that seeks to overcome traditional structures

and contains a design for an alternative, better and brighter future, and, as such, a

societal concept of order. Based on this mission, charismatic leaders have to continually

succeed when being challenged. They need to be able to exert emotional dominance

over the strongest and also the weakest contestants of their mission or their authority

(Collins 2014, Elias 2002). Today, these clashes are usually waged through rhetoric. At

times, this occurs in front of media and mass audiences, such as in pre-election televised

debates. In such cases, all aspects of the performance matter: arguments, verbal, para-

verbal, and non-verbal communication; people even judge details, such as candidates' tan, make-up, and hairstyle, to assess who is more leader-like.

With the 'performance turn' in sociology (Alexander, Giesen & Mast 2006), charismatic phenomena, like Barack Obama's first presidential campaign in 2008, received increased academic attention and highlighted the symbolic dimension of politics and the role of the media. Jeffrey C. Alexander (2010) interpreted the mise-en-scène of Obama's political campaign as a social performance in which Obama's charisma was created by the fusion of speaker and audience and the projection of the audience's hopes and expectations onto him. Charisma can then be explained as a collective projection of a group's self-image onto individuals whose performances invite such projections. Charismatic individuals embody and convey cultural meaning.

The connection between a speaker and audience becomes central and depends on aspects like charismatic leadership tactics, especially verbal skills, but also voice, gesticulation, and emotions (Antonakis et. al. 2012). The display of self-assertiveness and presence is vital to being considered charismatic. There must be no loss of face in public, no humiliation in prestige contests. Status must always be re-attained. It is therefore stipulated that charisma can, to a certain degree, be learned during behavioural routines and skilled strategic plays ('status games') in face-to-face social interactions. If successful, that is, if such performances are felicitous, a fabric of communication is created through the charismatic figure's behaviour that establishes and sustains authority structures between leader and followers and a hierarchy with the audience. Charisma is then linked with the attainment of a high status (e.g. being an 'alpha' in a social group) and accumulating social prestige and honor, what Bourdieu called symbolic capital.

Following Weber's concept, charisma depends on a leader's performance and is rooted in followers' corresponding social dynamics. The focus is placed on the charismatic figure and this person's captivating performance. A charismatic leader is exposed to the public and tends to be a polarising figure – the leader is a beacon that serves the purpose of finding orientation for many, either by turning them towards or away from him or her. And by looking up to or down upon on this figure, any audience can gain a sense of position in the symbolic macrocosm of their society. In such instances, charismatic leaders become living symbols of collective meaning.

In a recent case study, Herbst (2010) applied Weber's theory to dissect the myth of Hitler's charisma. In a skilful deconstruction of Weber's concept of charisma, and effectively stripping it of magic undertones, Herbst was able to show how Hitler's reputation as a charismatic leader was developed as a political strategy, which the Nazi propaganda apparatus used to install a messiah-like figure in Germany. It was a strategically constructed legend embedded in larger cultural narratives and was built upon a prevalent cultural idea that 'history is made by great men' – a predisposition that Weber shared, at least in his theory of charisma. This predisposition is also found in strongly individualised cultures that prescribe to the 'from rags to riches' myth and is hence often found in actor-centred social science perspectives.

Seen from such vantage points, the characteristic fragility of charismatic authority is seen as a deficiency that requires solutions. Numerous self-help manuals on how to become charismatic can be found in bookstores. Nevertheless, as a merciless sociological regularity, over time the charisma of a person fades in intensity and public recognition. When performances that re-invigorate a leader as charismatic become rare and when claims by followers asserting their leader's charisma become less frequent, charisma disappears and is lost. It is a dilemma for leaders that the 'kairos', which is the

decisive moment in which chances that bring success are seized (such as victory in a war or election, or overcoming a crisis), cannot always be utilised. Weber describes this as the beginning of the routinisation of charisma. Charisma then transforms into traditional and more personal forms of authority (patrimonialisation leading to a hereditary charisma, passed on through blood-lineage) or more institutionalised types of authority (formalisation leading to charisma of office, bound to positions and institutions). In such transformations, authority retains its charismatic elements that legitimise domination (Schlichte 2009: 180).

From this discussion, it can be concluded that charisma is not a genuine ideal type of authority. Charisma, which was formerly accumulated and had become routinised, now serves as symbolic capital to legitimise positions of power (Bourdieu 2008: 257). Accordingly, what used to be accumulated warrior charisma has gradually been taking the form of ascribing social prestige and codifications of battle honour (Breuer 1994: 139). Traces of these collective memories about deeds of charismatic heroes, often stored in myths and sagas, are attached to new political leaders who become potential carriers of charismatic ascriptions. This interpretation of Weber might have led Bourdieu to formulate his own theory of the political field, which is discussed later on.

Weber not only discussed the special social bond between charismatic leaders and followers, but at one point also recognised that charisma is relational with regard to the relationships *between* groups; he briefly touched on this aspect in his discussion of the clan charisma or sib charisma (*Gentilcharisma*) in the Indian caste system (Weber 1996: 51-57). However, he did not further explore this innovative aspect in his theory of charisma outlined in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1920/1976). This is the starting point

of Norbert Elias' theory of *Group charisma and group disgrace* (1998), which ties

Weber's theory to Bourdieu's concept of political capital.

Charisma: Elias's perspective

Norbert Elias critically reviewed Weber's ideas of charisma in the 1960s and provided

important theoretical insights. He provided an innovative and far-reaching revision by

showing how Weber's concept of charisma actually refers to group charisma and group

disgrace (Elias 1998). Based on his empirical research in England (1959-1961) and

Ghana (1962-1964), Elias argued that charisma does not originate from an individual

but instead from the group. With this observation, he turned Weber's argument upside

down and provided a more plausible explanation for charismatic phenomena. His work

has, to date, received scant attention because most parts remained in a fragmentary state

and only few of his ideas were published (Elias 1989; 1998; 2002: 209ff; Elias &

Scotson 1965).[1]

Elias outlined how Weber's treatment of the Indian caste system, from which he

concluded that the Brahmin caste (Hindu priests, artists, teachers, and technicians) have

a *Gentilcharisma* (Weber 1996: 51-57), was in fact a common sociological observation

that could be described more accurately as group charisma. Brahmins 'possess' a group

charisma, but they only have it as a differentiation to the untouchables, the Pariahs, who

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[1]   The relevance of the charisma concept as group charisma and group disgrace becomes
        clear once one notes the various expressions used to describe such phenomena in the
        literature. They are inherent in studies on populism, national pride, political campaigning,
        class identity, gender and racial stereotypes, etc. The relational character of process and
        figurational sociology is key to understanding Elias's perspective (Goudsblom 1977;
        Kilminster 2008).

are associated with a group disgrace. According to Elias, charisma and disgrace are related to each other because they define the inequality of the power differential between these groups – charisma is thus an inherently relational concept. The notion of charisma as a 'gift of grace' retains this relational aspect, because the term grace can only become meaningful in the absence of grace. The 'extraordinariness' of a charismatic individual is defined by the 'ordinariness' of the non-charismatic public. Accordingly, charisma is linked to authority *in groups* and *of groups themselves* vis-à-vis other groups. It is linked to a specific pattern in social networks: *Within* groups, charisma is linked to a centralised network, focused on a leader who is supported by a selected and emotionally attached entourage (Elias 2002: 210f). *Between* groups, charisma is linked to networks (Elias labels them 'figurations') of established and outsider groups (Elias & Scotson 1965).

As Elias's perspective integrates numerous assumptions that part from Weber's methodological individualism, especially with regard to the concept of power underlying all leader-follower relations, a brief exposition of his figurational sociology is presented.

Figurations and charisma

In a lecture on *Power and Civilisation* (2008) held in 1981, Norbert Elias outlined his ideas on the relationship between these two terms that he had worked on throughout his life. Similarly to Weber, he asserted that "power is a relationship". However, Elias accentuated that it "always consists in a relationship of balance between control and dependence" (2008: 136-7). This means that A's power over B is somehow connected to B's power over A, because power creates a social bond between A and B that is characterised by interdependence. To better understand Elias's perspective on charisma,

it is important to understand what he meant by figuration.

The term figuration is defined as the changing pattern of relations between interdependent individuals (Elias 1970/2009: 76f). Focus is placed on *relations* between individuals or other units of figurations as constitutive elements. Elias started studying these relations already in the 1930s in his work on the royal court (2002). He showed that the figuration of a royal court (*Die höfische Gesellschaft*) is neither reducible to the king's decision nor to abstract structures of absolutist societies. Elias discovered that the architecture of Versailles, the rules of the life at the court and the 'habitus' of its officials are all part of the figuration of the court society.

Elias described figurations as "fluctuating power balances" (1970/2009: 142). The continuing struggle in these relations, the recurrent tests of power and the never-ending games between the interdependent individuals in such relations are all about finding balance. As illustrated later, Bourdieu's concept of 'field' shares many commonalities with 'figuration'.

Individuals might have relative autonomy in certain figurations, but no one is totally autonomous from all kinds of figurations (Elias 1970/2009: 91). And while figurations are independent of numerous individuals, they are never independent of all individuals. So individuals might distance themselves from a given figuration, but the extent to which this is possible depends on the particular character of these interdependent relationships. People live together in figurations and as single persons change, so do figurations. But these changes occur on different levels even if they are inextricably linked with each other. The same persons can form different figurations like ship passengers before and after a wreckage, or noblemen before and after a revolution. Moreover, different people can form pretty much identical figurations, like families, bureaucracies or political movements.

Three further aspects of figurations need to be considered. Firstly, figurations have a history. They are socially and historically embedded. Not only do they not exist independently of a broader social context, they also bear traces of earlier phases of this context. These kinds of interdependencies are therefore not devoid of inheritances. And as much as new forms and practices may emerge in figurations, they are always a combination of the new and the old. They do not differ in all regards from the qualities of their environment.

Secondly, figurations are dynamic. The interdependencies that constitute figurations change when change occurs in any other relations. This might be the case when new resources become available, or when somebody involved in a figuration loses a capacity due to, for example, age, sickness or new agents entering a figuration. Figurations can thus perpetuate and their constituting power relations may resemble the Weberian types of traditional, legal-rational or charismatic authority.

Thirdly, figurations have a political dimension. Power balances in these relations that constitute figurations are not relations among equals. Groups always create networks of authority and a 'pecking-order' that is more or less robust and, at the same time, dynamic and open to change. In this dimension, figurations are not about citizens who have one vote each, but about individuals forming social groups with intricate sociological dynamics that emerge in delegation and representative claims making when structuring fluctuating power relations into authority networks.

Understanding figurations as networks of interdependencies between people highlights that charisma can only be sensibly explained as a relational phenomenon. A key argument by Elias is that those who are ascribed a charisma are a minority of the most exemplary representatives of a group who symbolise and exaggerate the group's

positive self-image. Such a *charismatised* person represents and embodies the idealised self-image of the group and is placed into opposition with other groups that are usually ranked lower in status and locked into their lower status by pejorative stereotypes of disgrace. Communicative dynamics via praise gossip and blame gossip influence the construction of group charisma and group disgrace (Elias & Scotson 1965). Elias thus focused on the structural dynamics of *intragroup* and *intergroup* relations.

Intragroup dynamics

With regard to intragroup dynamics, charisma sets into motion a centripetal dynamic that leads to stronger group cohesion, a stricter hierarchy for group coordination, and the creation of a charismatic leader's entourage. It is useful to build upon Weber's definition of political association *(Verband)* and his differentiation between three strata: leaders *(Führer)*, staff *(Stab)*, and followers *(Gefolgschaft)*. It is furthermore useful to distinguish between two types of followers, as Weber labels them *Gefolgschaft* and *Anhänger*. Emotionally attached followers constitute what Weber termed *Gefolgschaft*. Similar to Jesus's disciples, their contact with charismatic leaders rests on fact-to-face interactions, the social relations are direct, unmediated and generate reciprocal interdependencies. When leaders address crowds in scripted settings, for example, when a party leader addresses the convention, it makes sense to refer to the audience as supporters (*Anhänger*) because *mediated* interactions form the basis of social relations. They get to see and judge a leader's performance based on only a facet of his or her personality – only through the appearance on the public stage. The public might believe they know a leader and create an affect-loaded identification as supporters. The charismatic leader, or rather the image of the leader in the minds of supporters, becomes subject to projections of hope and what people wish to become. Charismatic leaders

embody prospects of social promotion, a promotion and ascent of status relative to other social groups. According to Elias (2002: 215), "a charismatic leader steers his group during the ascent on the basis of the need for ascent by simultaneously covering up the risk and the often dizziness evoking fear of ascent".

It is of sociological relevance that charismatic leaders establish new social networks that first have to disconnect individuals from their previous figurations. The consequences of reversing the polarity of their affections, emotional and often material links, hold significant risks for followers and supporters. New substructures emerge that create both a fabric of authority, a social 'pecking order', and a symbolic system of cultural meaning – a new perspective of the world according to the interpretation of the leader and his or her core group. Every new charismatic figuration, religious sect, group of warriors, or political movement, becomes a challenge for existing actors on the political field.

The common conception that charismatic phenomena are specifically structured relations between leaders and followers tends to neglect the importance of staff. Leaders and staff build a core group and need to stabilise their rule over followers and supporters by guaranteeing that the basic needs of material well-being are fulfilled and offering a plan and mission for future development as a form of symbolic orientation (Elias 1970/2009: 75). Especially staff can personally gain from reinforcing the charismatic myth of the leader. By concealing their own influence and highlighting the leader's extraordinariness, the social gap between the leader and followers widens. The privileges of power on which the core group depends become more firmly established.

Staffs are relevant to the charisma of leaders because they regulate followers' access to them. Political, religious and business leaders have secretaries, assistants and bodyguards who select and filter which information and which followers pass through.

The staffs build an oligarchic core group around the leader, effectively altering the dyadic relationship between charismatic leaders and followers to a triadic figuration and a specifically patterned social network (Elias 2002: 215). They are partially responsible for charisma-related reality distortions and groupthink effects (Elias 1989).

Continuing on the path Elias has laid out, charisma is ascribed to leaders and public figures when they become representatives of a group's shift to a higher status. It is often historically connected to a narrative of triumph over a former high status groups. The argument is based on the general assumption that societies tend to be hierarchically structured; the majority of less powerful groups form the broad base and the elite circles form the narrow peak.

Intergroup dynamics

The focus on the analysis of charisma shifts to intergroup dynamics when the larger social context is considered. According to Elias, groups tend to be structured into various established-outsider figurations, i.e. into particularly patterned interdependencies between established groups and outsider groups. In established-outsider figurations, those who are ascribed a charisma are a minority of the most exemplary representatives of a group who symbolise and exaggerate its positive self-image. Such an individual gains acceptance as a symbolical representative of the group and is placed into opposition to other groups that are ranked as lower in status and locked in their lower status by pejorative stereotypes of disgrace. Lower ranking status groups tend to internalise such stereotypes in their group self-image, consequentially reinforcing the structure of authority and domination.

Elias highlighted that charisma imprints group charisma and group disgrace on two sides of the same coin. Grasping charisma as a relational concept that is connected

to intergroup dynamics has far-reaching consequences. The contrast between cultural and temporal backgrounds against which charismatic figures appear charismatic comes to attention. For example, the Soviet Union provided the 'evil empire' contrast against which John F. Kennedy became a charismatic politician and democracy's knight in shining armour. The eight years of the Bush administration became the contrast against which Obama appeared charismatic.

Furthermore, communicative dynamics via praise and blame gossip influence the construction of charisma. Praise gossip are "news items of communal interest which support a stereotyped belief in the special goodness of one's own group" while blame gossip refers to "news items which confirm the unfavourable standard beliefs about outsiders or deviants, and can be used as a device for controlling and checking them" (Elias 1998: 75). They are stereotypes of collective self-praise and collective denigration and humiliation and find their mass media expressions in political campaigns in the branding of public figures as embodiments and representatives of a group's values and virtues and strategically placed negative campaigning against opponents.

Examining Elias's work, it is also possible to solve the puzzle of why charisma emerges in crisis situations: the temporal dimension of charisma is created by shifts in status constellations between groups. While established groups may associate the rearranging of power differentials in a figuration with potential losses of privileges, outsider groups perceive the possibility to ascent to a higher status as revolutionary. The breaking up of traditions and routines also creates anxiety, which can lead to a common social solution: placing trust in individuals. Owing to its function as a collective anxiety avoidance mechanism, charismatic authority is partially a social solution to collective

distress. The emergence of charismatic phenomena then indicates a critical phase of fluid power balance in a larger figuration (Elias 2002: 215).

Audiences, and the communication flows they emit, create resonance chambers for charismatic phenomena. Followers are never a homogeneous community. They form different subgroups according to age or milieu that differ in size, in internal structure, power and in the intensity of their responses to the charismatic figure. For instance, Mandela meant something different to black and white South Africans. While almost any audience can recognise people's self-assertiveness, attractiveness or will to stand their ground as basic and universal features of human communication, only a *culturally informed audience* can 'read' charisma because they have prior cultural knowledge about the person's historical, political, social, and religious meaning to the community. Without that information, even an extraordinary personality remains ordinary.

For example, being familiar with Western culture, we might have found Martin Luther King charismatic if we had met him due to his importance in the civil rights movement. But the Indian social activist Anna Hazare, who battles corruption, probably leaves us unimpressed – even though most Indians consider him charismatic. Cultural meaning matters or, more specifically, group-specific contexts matter and need to be considered when designing empirical research on charismatic phenomena. Stories of triumph and tragedy, heroic acts and deeds, and fateful events narratively link charismatic figures, their groups, and the audience's members with each other in a community of commemoration. The size, structure and response of an audience delineate the 'reach' of a charismatic figure.

To outline the innovative potential of Elias's perspective on charisma – and as we will see when analysing political capital – five points of critique could be identified.

(1) Charisma does not stem from the extraordinariness of individuals but is rather a group phenomenon. Those who are ascribed a charisma are a minority of the most exemplary representatives of a group that symbolise and exaggerate a group's positive self-image.

(2) Charisma links individual-centred figurations of authority *in* groups with the authority *of* groups. It is related to the detachment of individuals from existing figurations (social networks) and the creation of a new specifically patterned figuration that has specific social functions, usually a real or imagined status ascent, for those embedded in it. The figuration's motion evokes a sense of crises in the political field.

(3) Charisma is a relational concept that involves both group charisma and group disgrace and hence requires social contrasts and social distinctions across the political and the wider social field. Charisma is limited to the reach and responsiveness of a culturally informed audience.

(4) Charisma has its roots in public communication (especially gossip) and is expressed via affirmative representative claims about a groups' high status (praise gossip) and negative or pejorative representative claims about outsiders of the charismatic group (blame gossip).

(5) Charisma leaves traces in the psychosocial mind-set of leaders, staffs and followers. The degree of identification (with a leader, his or her mission, or his or her ideals) can lead to deformations of norms and psychological illnesses, such as megalomania, narcissism, reality-distortion and group think (Elias 1989).

Charisma: Bourdieu's perspective

Bourdieu's approach to politics was well informed about the early empirical works of political sociologists. It was influenced by Ostrogorski, Michels, and Weber (Bourdieu 2001). He also strongly associated with Elias's observations on the court society, the subtle power structures and the configurations of actors in interdependencies:

> "My Elias is not the one of grand historical transformations of the *Civilizing Process* etc., rather the one who uncovers, like in the *Court Society,* hidden, invisible mechanisms that rest on existing and observable relations between individuals or institutions. The royal court, how Elias describes it, is an impressive example of what I call *field*, within which the actors – like in a gravitational field – are drawn by insurmountable forces into perpetual and necessary motion to sustain the rank, the distance, the gap towards others". (Bourdieu 1989: 35, own translation from German)

Pierre Bourdieu's field theory shows a striking analogy to Elias' concept of figuration (Paulle, van Heerikhuizen & Emirbayer 2012). He argued that a field consists of an ensemble of social relations between agents that have different sorts and amounts of capital at their disposal. The patterns of distribution of economic, social and cultural capital and the relative weight of these different forms of capital in a given field are the actual structures of such a field. In Bourdieu's sociology, power consists in the differences in availability of various types of capital. However, according to him, authority is related to a form of specific capital, namely symbolic capital.

The transformation of power into authority can then only be successful when these contingent distributions of capital are covered by symbolic strategies. A salient example in Bourdieu's writings about this mechanism is the emergence and success of the class of lawyers in the process of state building. Bourdieu (2005a) argued that lawyers were extremely successful in creating a specific code and knowledge into a rare capital with a symbolic halo so that the possession of this knowledge became

unquestioned. Symbolic strategies are central in the institutionalisation of power, i.e. in its transformation to Weberian style authority (*Herrschaft*). The genesis of the state is also closely linked to the emergence of a bureaucratic field (Bourdieu 2005a). The modern state resembles a meta-field containing numerous other fields.

Bourdieu regarded the political field as an autonomous microcosm within the broader social field (Bourdieu 2001: 41). However, he considered it to be different from the cultural, religious, and academic field, because it retains its necessary connection with voters who are outsiders of the field in order to win the games played within the field: electoral victory and installation in government. His work is based on the notion that the political field is the social space in which representative performances are made and where actors project what they say and do to audiences with the aim to have their performances recognised as legitimate. One of the most important transformations of the political field pertains to the growing influence of journalists, mass media, and public opinion pollsters (Bourdieu 2001: 49).

The political field is the genuine field of representation where politicians and parties claim to speak for and act for certain groups (2005a). Representation itself is always an imposition to some extent, since politicians and their parties draw their 'magical' power from "the group's belief of his representation of the group, which is a representation of the group itself and the relations to other groups" (Bourdieu 2001: 99). The representative's legitimacy is hence bound to, firstly, being accepted by those who are represented, and secondly, recognition by other groups with whom the representative negotiates (Jentges 2010).

A political field differs from simple settings of representation because several actors compete regarding their claims of representation. Political leadership is in its essence the "authorizing [of] authoritarian forms of representation, with a small

minority of representatives monopolizing the social energy delegated to them by their electors" (Bourdieu 2005c: 34). While representative claims are constantly challenged, there is still common acceptance that a basic legitimacy of a link of representation is valid. The relations within the field oscillate between contestation and competition (Bourdieu & Wacquant 2006: 38) because field participants gain orientation from each other's positions and have active relations to support groups in adjoining fields (Bourdieu 2001: 86-88). Representatives are obliged to charm the group they represent, illustrate their potential as delegates vis-à-vis their competitors, and find support especially from all other groups involved in the representative figuration.

The political field is hence a field of contestation and symbolic struggles in which political factions compete over the legitimacy of a group's representation and its authority to negotiate with other groups and their representatives. The field develops boundaries and gains relative autonomy when positions are no longer bound to specific individuals. When the charismatic leader retires, the position of party chief retains the authority vested in the office, an aspect that Weber described as the transformation of genuine personal charisma into charisma of office.

Bourdieu presented a detailed outline of how the strategic games in the field are played. An essential element of the political field is 'doxa', central beliefs that are shared by all field participants, for example the sanctity of the nation, the state, or parliamentary debate. What is deemed to be a symbolic sanctuary is bound to the form and degree of institutionalisation of political authority, for example the valorisation of democracy. The power of doxa is evident in the defamation of non-believers, persons who are a-political or unpatriotic and who ignore the value of the common game (Bourdieu 2001: 79). Doxa represents the holy centre of a field and connects the field participants because they recognise each other as participants of the same group, as a

community. In this sense, those working in the government district form a figuration within which numerous factions and core groups – some of them with stronger but most of them with less pronounced charismatic features – compete for influence.

A field is equally defined by a specific 'illusio', which denotes what is being fought for in the field. The participants in a political field are primarily interested in power in order to design society; they struggle for the power to change the lives of those they represent and take active part in planning and shaping reality. Field participants require illusio in order to understand each other's actions. A shared illusio allows actions in the field to gain relevance and meaning and remain open to connecting and responding actions. The illusio is the recognition by players in the field that their activities, their involvement and their investment in the game, will be rewarded. It can become a passion resulting in complete submission to the logic of the game (Bourdieu 2005b). The price that players are willing to pay for participating in the game can be enormous – politicians dedicate much of their personal freedom to move through the corridors of power and stand on a stage in front of their voters. Some even risk their lives.

The more institutionalised the political field becomes and when both doxa and illusio structure the game, for example, as forms of parliamentary parlance and TV-talk show performances, the more participants groom a certain style of behaviour, i.e. a group habitus that creates a foundation for a shared understanding of the game. Habitus is the result of prior socialisation in social fields and hence embodies practical knowledge with which actors can create meaningful acts in the field. The importance of habitus in politics is visible in its function to separate the initiated from the un-initiated (Bourdieu 2001: 47). The routines that are attached to habitus allow politicians to play

the game naturally without constantly reflecting on their strategies and position in the field.

Bourdieu considered political capital and prestige important resources in the game. Politicians and parties need to orient themselves in the field based on their position and the positioning of others; they need to have a sense of the political space. Their own position is deeply linked to their prestige, which is a codification of their credibility. A politician's credibility is based on a life-long accumulation of political capital, but also depends on critics and the critics' credibility. Prestige is thus a relative concept, based on the political capital of the contestants in the field, who are engaged in symbolic confrontations. The whole field can be affected by these struggles: political apathy decreases the value of the game, while grand scale mobilisation increases it. Political capital is a field-specific form of symbolic capital whose value represents the social prestige of a person or a group.

Prestige is based on symbolic capital. Bourdieu writes that symbolic capital is manifested through "the recognition, institutionalized or not, that [one] receive[s] from a group" (Benson & Neveu 2005). John B. Thompson in his introduction to *Language and Symbolic Power* defines symbolic capital as "accumulated prestige or honor" (Bourdieu 1991: 14). Nick Couldry offers the intriguing argument that media constitute a new form of symbolic power – 'media meta-capital' (in essence: celebrity) - that increasingly trumps the power of symbolic capital emerging within specialized fields of cultural production (2003). In its elementary form, symbolic capital rests on three forms of capital, which Bourdieu called economic, cultural, and social capital. These forms of capital are distributive, meaning their utility is based on their rarity value (those who have 'it' can gain privilege and power in relation to those who do not have 'it'). With some limitations, forms of capital can be exchanged or transformed: Economic capital

can 'buy' cultural capital or social capital, and social capital can be 'exchanged' for economic capital, etc. What is common to all forms of capital and what turns them into currencies of social differentiation and distinction is the time necessary for their accumulation.

Positions of power, which are occupied by parties and states, emerged and could be defended because capital was accumulated over generations. The number of potential rivals with similar capital portfolios could be successfully restricted by those occupying these positions. How the different forms of capital are brought into the game and into symbolic conflicts depends on camouflaging these forms and sources of power through symbolic capital, because symbolic capital determines which power is legitimate. Without such symbolic capital, economic capital, such as possessions, is deemed to be illegally appropriated, cultural capital, such as diplomas, are no longer recognised as certified qualifications, and social capital, such as personal networks, are stigmatised as corruption and spoils systems. Prestige is hence bound to the different forms of capital and is never an independent element. However, it can be a *relatively* autonomous element as it rests on public recognition while being deeply embedded in a community's political tradition. While prestige is often a national political tradition, politicians and diplomats also have to abide by internationalised codes of conduct.

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (2006: 152), social capital is the form of capital that is most relevant to political capital. The political influence of politicians and political groups is primarily based on their mutual recognition and the superiority of both their political programmes and their perspective on society. Groups, especially political parties, limit individuals' access to and participation in politics (in the political field) by building a monopoly on political capital (Bourdieu 2001: 69). It may be that individual politicians perform heroic deeds and thus gain high public esteem (which

journalists refer to as an individual's 'charisma'). Such deeds might be finding felicitous solutions to conflicts or crisis situations (Bourdieu 2001: 100f.). According to Bourdieu, the party is "a form of a bank with political capital and the party secretary a type of a banker" (2001: 53). Consequently, it is usually the party that controls the ascent of individuals to political elite positions, and often effectively excluding individuals that are 'too charimatic' and potentially endangering established party structures.

In a political field in modern democratic states, persons embodying a political habitus cooperate and compete with each other. Their power depends on the position of their party, their position within the party and their belief that their party programme is superior to that of other parties and that the coherence and coordination within their group may give them a strategic advantages in their continuous battles with other field participants. All participants of the field share the illusio that their investment in debates and in finding majority coalitions is valuable, and they share the doxa that the political realm has to be defended against devaluation by public apathy or loss of reputation through corruption and media scandals. The political field is hence an arena of contestation and, at the same time, it is a stage on which performances are presented to audiences in order to achieve certain goals – for example getting elected or re-elected (Swartz 2012: 105).

An interesting connection between political capital and political charisma arises from the following questions: What is the basis of political capital? What is the source of authenticity upon which those who are represented deem the representative's authority as legitimate? Since political ideas refer to future projects, promises are central, but their practicality cannot be accounted for at the time of their formulation. The credibility of the representative is vital.

However, representatives' authenticity is linked to the organisational capacity of groups that support their ideas and claim to guarantee their validity, in other words their amount of political capital. Similar to a credit rating, the guaranty can only be assessed by evaluating the supporting group, their readiness to make sacrifices and past performances (earlier heroic deeds). The proper mise-en-scène is relevant to the trustworthiness. Political ideas are hence future promises that require recognition and whose trustworthiness depends on the political capital of the support group and the representative's performance:

> "What would be 'incompetent talk' by one, is a sensible prediction by another.
> Political statements, programmes, anticipations […] are never logically verifiable
> or falsifiable; they are only true to the degree as who speaks them is able to make
> them become reality in the face of history, by letting them happen in history"
> (Bourdieu 2001: 97, own translation).

A charismatic idea could thus be seen as a cheque, which may or may not be covered, i.e. it is uncertain whether or not the promise will eventually be delivered. Political ideals typically lead to promises of freedom, liberty, social justice, security, or economic growth that are never fully realised. As long as a group does not hold government positions, followers have few options to discover gaps between promises and delivery. An uncovered cheque is valuable as long as it is not cashed. The hope based on the political promise of salvation is thus the core of charismatic 'idées forces' and representatives' political capital.

A group can harvest political capital from the trust placed in them by their voters and those they represent who believe that the political promises are valid and principally realisable. The belief is based on the logic of a gift exchange, which creates a form of credit. The representatives are thus indebted to deliver satisfying services and to stand firm and united until their promises are delivered (which hardly ever happens). This is

why political actors are so deeply affected by everything that tarnishes their reputation, be it slander, scandal, suspicion, or rumours that questions their promise to return the favour (Bourdieu 2001: 99). The claim to represent creates an obligation for the representatives (leaders) to deliver on promises made to those who are represented (followers). Acting as a delegate is a form of arrogating office.

In symbolic struggles, the contestants attempt to defend the trustworthiness of their own ideas and vilify those of their opponents. In actual talk, it plays out in praise gossip and blame gossip. It means that actors in the political field mutually assert that they write uncovered cheques and try to prove it. Established groups defend their position with reference to their central position by 'official nominations' and are challenged by 'insults' from ascending groups (Bourdieu 1985: 732). Contestants mutually accuse each other of writing uncovered cheques while being forced to justify such criticisms of their credibility as well as promise their sincerity with regard to the shared belief of domination in the political field.

The influence of the media on the political field

Although Bourdieu considered the influence of journalists on politics in his sharp criticism "*On Television*" (1998), the influence of mass media on the political field was not coherently worked out. However, much can be found in references scattered throughout his works (Bourdieu 1991, 2001, Benson & Neveu 2005; Myles 2010). As media are involved in framing leaders' charisma, it seems useful to reassess how Bourdieu's idea of political capital and of media dynamics interact, i.e. how the political field and the journalistic field overlap and create genuine field effects.

With reference to the journalistic field, Bourdieu writes

> "A field is a field of forces and a field of struggles in which the stake is the power to transform the field of forces. In other words, within a field, there is competition for legitimate appropriation of what is at stake in the struggle in the field. And, within the field of journalism, there is permanent competition to appropriate the readership, of course, but also to appropriate what is thought to secure readership, in other words, the earliest access to news, the 'scoop', exclusive information, and also distinctive rarity, 'big names', and so on" (2005c: 44).

The journalistic field has hence an inbuilt tendency to present politicians that are attributed with a political sex appeal (Schweitzer 1984) or a glitter of personality (Geertz 1983). The media celebrate the famous because of their fame, and in speaking with Elias, the journalistic field charismatises protagonists of the political field, singling out 'extraordinary' leaders and thereby uplifting the audience who have built up emotional valences and are emotionally attached to these individuals because they support their own positive group charismatic beliefs about themselves as a group.

The political field involves games that are played by the contestants in the field and that change when political and journalistic field overlap. Politics itself can be defined as "strategic actions that aim to realise interests, goals, moral concepts and ideals of 'good' order through a rule-bound game of power and whose advantages are publicly recognized" (Paris 2005: 47, own translation). The rules of this game are bound to the players' empowerment on the condition that their status is legitimised from below, controlled by checks and balances, and bound to a time limit of periodical voting. Power refers to the means to design and organise society and steer the course of societal development. The game of power contains three distinct types of conflicts:

(1) Conflicts related to the political cleavages of parties, differences in political programmes and approaches to solutions of societal problems.

(2) Conflicts related to strategic rivalry of professional politicians concerning

promotions to paid positions in the party or the state administration.

(3) Conflicts related to politicians' competition in mass media to bolster their

standing and public profile as 'good' representatives.

The conflicts have their own temporality. Cleavages are usually much older than the

players themselves and bind parties in the field to their traditional social milieus.

Rivalry about promotion usually occurs throughout politicians' long-term ascent in the

political hierarchy during the lifetime of their career. Competition in the mass media

can be an occasional or frequent activity and is bound to a politician's public exposition

and the nature of the media landscape.

There are important aspects that pre-structure the emergence of charismatic

politicians that are related to visibility in the media and hence public recognition.

Politics can be thought of as having a front stage and a back stage. Performances occur

on the front stage, the one that is visible to the audience (the public and the electorate).

Here, politicians show how they are politicians. On the back stage, the one hidden from

view, negotiations and government actions are carried out. With this simple

differentiation, four sub-sections of the political field can be identified that outline the

topography of politics (see Table 1 and Paris 2005: 54f).

Table 1: Subsections of the political field

	Sub-sections of the political field			
	I	II	III	IV
Back stage of non-public government actions	+	+	-	-
Front stage of public performances	+	-	+	-
I	Fundamental themes of the political community's survival, social order and social development with public resonance, e.g. address to the nation,			

	extraordinary crisis management in foreign policy and domestic initiatives and referenda.
II	Issue-specific policy areas that are hidden from or not of interest to the media and the public (e.g. technocratic EU politics), backchannel diplomacy, detailed negotiations in preparing legislation, committee work.
III	Election campaigns and rivalry about cabinet posts between politicians as contests framed by mass media; government actions are anticipated, discussed or promised but not realised.
IV	Non-action is a political solution if issues are not governable. It makes no sense to strive for a policy that forbids the eruption of volcanoes; also latent interests that lack sponsors or social movement support are absent from back and front stage actions (e.g. veganism until some years ago).

The outlined topography of the political field can account for a great deal of dynamic changes under media influence and pre-structures, where the emergence of charismatic leaders can be expected. The boundaries of a political field are scalable with regard to the political community in question. It can be well applied to a nation and the nation state, it can also be applied to sub-national communities that have an executive core and institutionalised networks of communication. It may also be applicable to business companies or government agencies. As charisma is bound to public recognition, visibility is necessary. Charisma appears on the front stage. It cannot hide from view.

Reputation studies can open up empirical research that might make mediatized political capital visible as a form of 'media capital', an aspect that Couldry (2003) sees as a 'celebrity-ness' of political leaders that anchors them in various fields simultaneously through their personification of collective relevance and their embodiment of an idealised self-image of a group: "We might, in the long term, see 'media capital' in its own right as a new 'fundamental species of capital', in Bourdieu's phrase, that works as a 'trump card' in all fields" (Couldry 2003). Empirical approaches to reputation studies have been pioneered by Eisenegger and Imhof (2007, 2009) that may well be applied to certain aspects of the proposed LCI measure (Bennister, 't Hart & Worthy 2014).

Conclusion

Political charisma, as an aspect of someone's ability to lead, is linked to a person's performance, i.e. the actions that create a pattern of authority within a social group in which a charismatic person becomes a central player. Moreover, it is associated with the group members' projections, which reflect upon and legitimise this centralised social network by emphasising the special and elite character of the charismatic person in their midst. In this understanding, research on charisma and political capital has to be sensitive to interdependencies within groups and between groups.

Charisma can thus be defined as a relational phenomenon that, via communication, fuses the process of attaining a high status and the emergence of authority in groups with narrations of 'heroic acts' in cultural history that symbolically link actors with publics by presenting actors as embodiments of the public. Research needs to be sensitive to the vertical relationship between a charismatic leader, staffs, and followers, to the horizontal social relationship between the members of the audience (supporters), and to the temporal aspects of dynamic changes in figurations. Cultural meaning becomes relevant because public performances of individuals or organised groups have to be remembered by an audience, translated into narrations and linked to the 'holy' centre of their community.

It might be useful to contextualise findings with interpretive methods and thick descriptions to assess the dynamics of contestations in the political field. Performance and projections are embedded in political symbolism, cultural contexts and national political traditions. Narrations are drafted and authored by leaders themselves in their political ideals and visions, and they are framed by journalists and the media. Stories of triumph and tragedy, heroic acts and deeds, and fateful events narratively link

charismatic figures, their groups and the audience members with each other in a community of commemoration. In symbolic struggles, contestants mutually try to expose their opponents' credibility and attempt to convince audiences that cheques written on political capital are in fact uncovered cheques. It is a tricky game, because the *class politique* still has to keep the game legitimate and has to keep the field clearly marked and defended against uninitiated newcomers.

In accordance with Weber, Elias, and Bourdieu, charisma allows for focusing on different dynamics that structure leader-follower relations, charismatic groups in figurations, and games played in the political field to accumulate political capital. A comparison of the key differences between the conceptions of Weber, Elias, and Bourdieu is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Conceptualisation of charisma by Weber, Bourdieu and Elias

	Weber	Elias	Bourdieu
Charisma originates from…	The individual	The group; Weber's genuine charisma is a group charismatic belief about individual charisma	The individual
Perspective on charismatic phenomena	Actor-centred and relation between leader and followers	Group-centred as intragroup authority networks and intergroup figurations of established and outsiders	Field-centred as intergroup contestation in the field as symbolic struggles
Role of leaders	Archetypes of heroic warriors, prophets, magicians. Individual actors exert emotional domination in face-to-face interactions	Living symbol of a group's self-image (much broader than *class politique*)	Politicians in the political field (limited to the *class politique*), politicians as 'celebrities' on the media stage
Temporal aspects of charisma	Routinisation of charisma, transformation of charisma into legal-rational or traditional authority (singular phenomenon)	Narrative of the ascent of less powerful groups to higher status (process phenomenon)	Charismatic cycle of extraordinary-ordinary-extraordinary (cyclical phenomenon)
Forms of distinction	Source of legitimate authority	Group charisma and group disgrace	Symbolic capital
Creation of charisma	Heroic deeds and ascription by followers	Representation of elite minority and reinforced by praise gossip and blame gossip	Recognition by participants in political field

While Weber's conceptualisation is necessary to integrate the majority of research on charismatic leaders into scientific discourse, the conceptual enhancements and corrections provided by Elias and Bourdieu should make the concept more useful as an analytical instrument. With regard to Elias, long-term developments of structural changes in societies, such as shifts in cleavages based on class or caste structures, can be integrated into scientific discourse. Following Bourdieu, the intricate games in the political field can be analysed with a sharpened set of tools such as doxa, illusio, habitus, and of course various forms of capital. With regard to the methodological innovation proposed by the leadership capital index (LCI), all three authors cautioned us to contextualise findings and strive for emotional dis-attachment from what is being researched.

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