Youth and Regime Breakdown
Discourse Networks and Political Mobilisation during Perestroika and the Weimar Republic

Abstract: This paper offers a comparison of the public significance of youth during two episodes of regime breakdown. It draws on my thesis which explores the meaning of youth in key crisis moments in Europe and the political mobilisation of young people. I selected cases of hybrid regimes with significant mobilisation of young people and an intense struggle about the meaning of youth as part of regime change. I propose to analyse episodes of the Weimar Republic from 1929 to 1933, and of the Soviet Union’s perestroika from 1984 to 1991.

I offer a new method of textual analysis for the historical comparison of the processes underlying discourse about youth and political mobilisation of young people. This method combines qualitative content analysis and network analysis which permits a novel perspective on the meanings of youth in these two cases. I develop the analysis based on a rich textual corpus of newspaper articles. This method brings to the fore the structural relations between different articles and represents them as a network which allows for a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of unstructured textual material without denying the subjective act of interpretation. The networks permit a study of H1: In moments of regime breakdown, disintegrating discourses about youth indicate the collapsing of the political regime.

An analysis of youth encourages us to go beyond structural or elite-centred approaches which prevail for explaining regime breakdown. Indeed, youth mobilisation conditioned what elites could do and gave meaning to structural conditions such as unemployment, ideology, and the political system. Mobilisation underlines as how contradictory and manifold contemporaries understood their political realities, leading to H2: In moments of regime breakdown, political diversity characterises youth mobilisation which links to competing positions to overcome the regime crisis.

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In March 1987, the 24-year old Aleksei Kovalyev along with hundreds of young people took to the streets of Saint Petersburg. Their gathering constituted the movement Spasenie, Russian for Rescue or Salvation, aimed at preventing the demolition of Angleter. The Hotel Angleter, like many of Saint Petersburg’s buildings dating from the Tsarist era, was in dreadful conditions. Local authorities shut it in 1985 as a precautionary measure. But this was not just any other old building. Instead, it symbolised the avant-gardist Soviet high culture. An association which went back to Sergei Yesenin’s spectacular and widely discussed suicide in 1925. The 30-year young poet was found dead in his hotel room, after he had just finished writing his last poem Goodbye my friend, goodbye with his own blood.

During the spring of 1987, more and more workers and ecological groups joined the hundreds of young people. Spasenie eventually could not stop the demolition of the hotel, but the youth who took to the street, illustrated to local politicians and the public, that citizens wanted to be involved in decisions. Though the demolition symbolises the movement’s powerlessness, the mobilisation itself suggested the unity of a city, assembled to defend its history. By defending the city’s architecture, Kovalyev lived the new freedoms that glasnost and perestroika offered to resist authorities. Gorbachev affirmed the legitimacy of young people to engage in public and called upon them to continue notwithstanding the bulldozers.

This anecdote points to a largely forgotten aspect of the Gorbachev era. Soviet youth mobilised throughout the reform period and were amongst the first to use nascent freedoms of the early 1980s. But instead of taking “youth” as a given category, this paper explores the meaning of “youth” during the Soviet Union’s and the Weimar Republic’s breakdown. In both episodes, young people were extensively mobilised; the case selection therefore allows theory developing about youth during regime breakdown.

In such moments of crisis, discussions about the significance of youth uniquely capture fundamental socio-political divides. The term’s biological permeability, we are young only for a short period of time, combines with the term’s social persistence, in modern times there is always a cohort referred to “as youth”. This combination of continuity and rupture and the specific generational divides of the two episodes analysed, induced negotiations about a society’s past, present, and future through the prism of youth. Youth became central for understanding regime breakdown itself. However, young people cannot be considered as a
homogeneous groups and were not exclusively involved in an idealistic struggle for democracy. Literature on the political involvement of youth, in particular in the aftermath of “1968”, frequently refers to youth as a unified social force assuming either idealistic involvement or a disruptive impact on political systems (Feuer 1969, Boren 2001, Moller 1968, Leaman and Wörsching 2010, Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Fahmy 2006).

Youth played an important role during Weimar’s regime breakdown. Analyses which focus on young people contrast with those structural explanations centred on political, economic, and social conditions, likely to be deterministic by ignoring the actors involved in the process of regime change. Existing research on young people, however, favoured extremist youth mobilisation. Historians focus on fascist and communist youth groups (Klönne 2008, Krabbe 1993, Brown 2009) and social scientists underline the failure of civil society (Berman 1997). The field of contemporary youth mobilisation knew, however, significantly more nuanced political behaviour.

Analyses of the perestroika period have placed an emphasis on elite-competition or structural conditions. Shlapentokh understands Gorbachev as “single motor of initial change” (2001, 190) and Plokhy’s recent analysis focuses exclusively on the interaction between high-ranking politicians (2014). Such an emphasis is astonishing given contemporary observations about the nascent civic culture during glasnost’ (Kenney 2002), also referred to as civil society (Bernhard 1993, Thaa 1996).

Two research hypotheses guide the investigation:

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H1: \text{In moments of regime breakdown, disintegrating discourses about youth indicate the collapsing of the political regime.}
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H2: \text{In moments of regime breakdown, political diversity characterises youth mobilisation which links to competing positions to overcome the regime crisis.}
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The comparative framework comprises hybrid regimes on either side of the democratic-authoritarian spectrum. In the Weimar Republic, democratic procedures and freedoms were in principle in place. The existence and functioning of democracy, however, has been severely undermined since the late 1920s leading to conflicting assessments of the country’s political reality during its last years. In the Soviet Union, democratic rights were de jure absent but citizens created independent and pluralisticspheres of exchange already prior to Gorbachev’s arrival to power. The media got more diverse and democratic freedoms were increasingly practiced. Overall, both regimes knew a degree of competition for public approval and sought legitimacy through media.
This article relies on contemporary newspaper articles which discuss political mobilisation of young people and the social group youth in general. Newspapers are an important source as these were easily available to ordinary people. Even more, in both episodes plenty of evidence points to the importance of reading newspapers as a primary source of information and opinion making about political events. I briefly contextualise the condition of youth in two cases of regime breakdown to then introduce the method of discourse network analysis and the data generated for this paper. An overview of the results of the network analysis follows and these are subsequently discussed in more detail. Lastly, I draw wider comparative and theoretical conclusions which the two episodes suggest.

**YOUTH DURING REGIME BREAKDOWN**

Those who lived through the late Weimar Republic and perestroika “as youth” share in surprisingly similar experiences. For young people of those times, opposition to the parental generation manifested itself in political ways. During the final years of the Weimar Republic the *Jugendbewegungen* which had existed since the 19th century, became politically outspoken on a large scale. Also in the Soviet Union youth had developed distinct cultural habits, remember the controversies about *stilyagi* in the 1960s (Edele 2002). But it was not until the *neformaly* of the 1980s that politicians and the public valued (or dismissed) independent youth activism as genuinely political.

Once politicised, the perceived generational gulf undermined the stability of the existing political systems which were associated with the old generation. In Weimar and the late Soviet Union, economic problems substantiated the political dimension of the generational conflict. Failures to solve economic problems amplified doubts about the extent to which current political systems could respond to the challenges of their time.

Weimar’s economic situation deteriorated quickly throughout the late 1920s. After the short post First World War recovery, unemployment rates and inflation rose, public debt increased which furthered hostility to other Western powers. The dire state of public finances affected the educational system and youth experienced an ever more difficult transition into the adult run labour market. Given economic failure it seemed questionable whether Weimar’s politicians were able to solve the problems. Likewise, during the last years of the Soviet Union it became a matter of public consensus that the Soviet economy failed to produce
desired goods. Consumer products looked-for by youth were often unavailable, contributing to the flourishing black market of clothes, music, and newspapers. There was a significant housing shortage in particular for young families and some youth started to long for an imaginary West of democratic and free societies, turning its back to the Komsomol, the official youth organisation.

Economic failures, however, were only one aspect of a long list of problems. The “national question” required political leadership. In Weimar, youth movements across the political spectrum expected national unity to be a priority of political leaders, and in the Soviet Union, youth movements throughout the Republics mobilised for independence. Moreover, the political and economic chaos undermined long established truths about each country’s history. A questioning of heroic soldier narratives also undermined past-based projections into glorious national futures. In the Weimar Republic, the young generation gradually questioned myths about German heroism on the battlefield and during perestroika, Soviet youth took distance from the heroic role linked with eternal youth and *Nasha Pobeda* [Our Victory].

In a disintegrating present, politicians and the public overloaded the social imaginary of youth with expectations and hopes. During the moment of regime crisis, the public granted increasing space to demands for political alternatives voiced by independent youth activism. Such calls were powerful because youth resonated with ideas of renewal and modernity.

**METHOD: DISCOURSE NETWORK ANALYSIS**

Discourse creates a symbolic order and those who can follow its rules may communicate about a given topic which forms social reality. Discourse conditions the production of knowledge based on rules of how to use its respective symbols, such as language. Sets of rules constitute patterns of meanings – or discursive formations (Foucault 2008 [1969]). Within and between such formations, knowledge about things or concepts, for instance youth, is represented and altered. Discourse thereby governs how a topic can be reasoned about, establishing identities and framing the social world.
To undertake the qualitative content analysis, I developed a coding scheme which is parsimonious without reducing the discursive diversity at an early stage\(^1\)

\textit{Definitions} capture the meanings attributed to youth. (1) Social attributes [SA]: Is youth portrayed as being dependent upon the older generation or as being granted an independent and autonomous status? How is youth in general and its political mobilisation in particular perceived? Is youth understood as being involved or disinterested, enthusiastic or apathetic, well-informed or naïve, precious or a threat? (2) Factions [F]: Is youth described as homogenous or are differences and contradictions underlined?

\textit{Evaluations} [E] How is youth and its behaviour valued? I distinguish between (1) Positive, (2) Neutral, and (3) Negative. \textit{Evaluations and definitions} are the central codes for extricating the different understandings of youth.

\textit{Tempi} [T] encompass the temporal dimension of the meaning of youth. The semantics of language contain experiences and expectations; this temporal anchorage makes language intelligible. Two temporal dimensions are investigated: (1) Layers: What times are evoked when speaking about youth (past, present, future)? (2) Rhythms: How is the relationship between different temporal layers characterised (repetition, rupture, continuity, acceleration)?

Analysing discourse as network combines the in-depth knowledge generated by qualitative content analysis with the strength of formal network analysis.\(^2\) Formally, a bipartite network is composed of two sets of nodes, and no two nodes of the same set are adjacent.\(^3\) Let a graph \(G = (T, C, E)\) be composed of a set of individual texts (T), and the concepts used in them (C). Edges (E) exist \textit{only} between T and C. The number of concepts by is given my n so that \(C = \{c_1, c_2 \ldots c_n\}\), the number of texts is given by m so that \(T = \{t_1, t_2 \ldots t_m\}\). The bipartite network is a rectangular matrix \(c \times t\), with the number of rows equivalent to \(c_n\) and the number of columns equivalent to \(t_m\):

\(^1\) The coding scheme is enclosed in the appendix. The plots use abbreviations as indicated.

\(^2\) Leifeld and Haunss use a similar approach for political networks (2012) and Verd for biographical narratives (2014)

\(^3\) Recent debates underline the importance of the specificity of multimodal networks, (Barber 2007, Opsahl 2013, Opsahl, Agneessens, and Skvoretz 2010)
The presence of an edge articulates that an author uses a given concept (dark grey) to make sense of youth in a specific text (light grey). The edge’s thickness indicates the density of this link, the number of times that a specific concept about youth is used. Since meaning is contradictory and manifold, most articles combine multiple concepts. Beyond descriptive network statistics, such as centrality measures for bipartite networks, I employ a modularity detection algorithm for bipartite network which carves out clusters to unite articles referring to shared sets of concepts. This division of the discourse network reveals important structural characteristics. Barber expresses the modularity for bipartite networks (2007). Taking the above bipartite network (Figure 1) and applying Barber’s BRIM algorithm suggests a division into four communities (Figure 2).

Modularity detection unravels structural components of the discourse but always requires careful contextualisation and interpretation. For making sense of the modularity classes, individual text segments have to be taken into consideration along with the historical context. This division of large discourse networks presents a transparent way of inferring sets of meaning shared by articles and newspapers which could hardly be identified with such precision through mere reading of many articles.

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4 These are computed using the tnet package in R.

5 “Modularity is a scalar value that measures the density of edges inside communities as compared to edges between communities” (Murata 2010, 110).

6 The division leads to $Q_{\text{max}}$ of 0.4936 which is much higher than what we can expect in actual discourse networks which are much larger and more complex.
By 1930 more than 11,000 papers were published in the Weimar Republic (Büttner 2010, 322), the most successful ones three times a day. The media landscape revolved around two centres. On the one end of the political spectrum sat Ullstein, a Berlin-based liberal editor. On the other end Alfred Hugenberg, owner of one of Europe’s most influential media empires (Humphreys 1994, 16-19). Despite this concentration of power, competing liberal, social, and Catholic spheres endured (Schildt 2001, 196). I identified four outlets to capture the diverse public discourse and went through each issue of the newspapers to identify articles referring to youth.

In total I collected 1,399 articles for the period of October 1929 until February 1933 from the Zeitungsarchiv at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, of which 319 were randomly selected for coding. Almost 6,000 codes were then subject to discourse network analysis. The newspapers vary in their target audience and political orientation. (1) Germania: close to the Zentrum

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7 Ross cites an overall circulation of 15.8 million for 1932 (2008, 292). The press maintained its role for political opinion-making as radio gave little attention to news (Büttner 2010, 321). Curbing the constitutional freedoms of the press was amongst Hitler’s first acts (Ross 2008, 292)

8 Owner of bürgerlich-liberale Zeitungen such as Vossische Zeitung, Kölner Zeitung, Berliner Tageblatt, and Frankfurter Zeitung, cf. (Stöber 2005, 237).

9 Hugenberg, member of the DNVP, was fiercely anti-socialist (Humphreys 1994, 19).
party became one of the main Catholic voices, maintaining a forum for the conservative establishment. (2) *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (*DAZ*): amongst the best known conservative papers, gradually developed an anti-republican attitude but supportive of Brüning during the 1920s. (3) *Vossische Zeitung* (*VZ*): defended liberal politics, with international reputation as one of Germany’s oldest print outlets; an early target for Nazi attacks. (4) *Vorwärts*: this Socialist paper maintained a critical attitude towards the USSR. Forbidden in 1933, it continued in exile. The topic of youth was particularly prominent in the progressive *Vorwärts* (31%) and is distributed roughly equally between the other three.

A vibrant public sphere characterised the Weimar Republic. Young people, notably students, often spoke in the name of their generation, attempting to impact on the way youth was portrayed to the public. Adults – citizens, intellectuals, and representatives of civil society – wrote letters or opinion pieces to welcome or condemn the public behaviour of youth, usually intervening from a clear generational standpoint.

During *glasnost’* the heavily censored Soviet media and historically accumulated self-censorship evolved (Pasti 2005). Journalists used new freedoms and newspapers regained respect (Milojković-Djurić 1991, 53). Their circulation increased and editors frequently published critical readers’ letters (Cerf et al. 1990, 19-20). In this atmosphere of change I selected four newspapers which capture the disintegration at different levels and speeds of the Soviet Union. The time span stretches from the pre-reform era of 1984 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The perestroika era corpus is made of 1,323 articles on the topic of youth. I coded 276 articles, attributing more than 6,000 codes. (1) The official voice of the Party *Pravda* was compulsory reading for members and easily available for a wide audience, circulation of 11 million (Roxburgh 1987, 55). (2) *Izvestiya* expressed the views of the Soviet government but was less ideologically pronounced than other official publications and read primarily by intellectuals and academics. (3) *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, established during the 19th century, later became the Union of Soviet Writers’ official organ; discussed socio-political issues during *glasnost’,* with intellectuals expressing their views. (4) The critical paper *Argumenty i Fakty* was founded in 1978 with an important role for public debate during perestroika;
achieved a circulation of more than 33 million in 1990. The theme of youth was particularly prominent in Argumenty i Fakty.\textsuperscript{10}

In both episodes, so my argument, youth-initiated political mobilisation challenged the discursive rules about youth and thereby the political regime more fundamentally. In the Weimar Republic, politicians and the public extensively discussed the importance of the political activism of young people and attempted to win them over. However, the competing meanings of youth underline just as how open contemporaries perceived Weimar’s political situation. During perestroika, youth mobilisation progressively broadened to include other groups. In this broadening, youth gradually disappeared as a distinct, politically relevant group. From 1988 onwards, youth no longer mobilised specifically as youth and political contestation had generalised before political elites precipitated the regime collapse.

\textit{The Weimar Republic: Stable diversity}

Applying the modularity algorithm on the matrix of codes attributed to interpret the articles about youth in the Weimar Republic suggests a division of the data into four large modules alongside a residual (Figure 3).\textsuperscript{11} The opacity of discourse makes clear-cut distinctions between such discursive formations unrealistic as reflected in the plot. Links exist not only within each modularity class, but there are many between classes, pointing to those nodes which structure the overall discourse. The residual module assembles scattered nodes that do not fit elsewhere and do not form a discrete discursive community.

The visualisation highlights overlaps between the formations coloured burgundy and orange. I interpret the former as PRO-DEMOCRACY,\textsuperscript{12} revolving around the idea of AUTONOMOUS youth that is the VANGUARD of society and INVOLVED in public to save democracy. I understand the latter as YOUTH & FUTURE, articles and concepts which projected a FUTURE DECISIVE role on youth and put this youth-to-come in CONTINUITY with PRESENT youth, understood as being PRECIOUS for the German Volk.\textsuperscript{13} By 1932, such

\textsuperscript{10} 32\% of all articles come from Argumenty i Fakty.

\textsuperscript{11} The modularity score is 0.247.

\textsuperscript{12} To indicate the analytic language I capitalise DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS and CONCEPTS in the text.

\textsuperscript{13} Berlins Jugendarbeit, in: VZ, 03.04.1930 as well as Das Volk von Morgen, in: Germania, 29.06.1930.
arguments gained traction as journalists and politicians associated the demographic decline in the share of young people with Weimar’s *Untergangsstimmung* [sense of decline].

From the concepts of the blue discursive formation I inferred that this module frames youth as VICTIM, comprising utterances about youth in CRISIS, understanding it as INNOCENT and dependent on the older generation. During the episode, *Jugendnot* [hardship endured by youth] was a commonplace: economic deprivation and soaring unemployment rates dominated everyday life. Moreover, contemporaries explained political radicalism through

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14 Volk ohne Jugend, in: VZ, 30.08.1932.
15 Jugend gegen Radikalismus, in: VZ, 27.01.1931; Kümmert Euch um die arbeitslose Jugend, in: VZ, 19.05.1932.
16 For readers’ letters see Helft der Jugend!, in: DAZ, 20.03.1932.
unemployment and the economic situation thus threatened the country’s political stability. Authors did not simply condemn juvenile crimes but portrayed youth as victimised, driven for instance by hunger. Ideally, families would be a safeguard against political radicalism but economic uncertainties intensified family tensions.

Concepts and articles of the green module construct youth as a THREAT to the established order, unlike past youth. Contemporaries agreed on the cross-European relevance of this idea of rupture but Weimar’s youth cultivated a uniquely strong group identity and confrontations became increasingly violent after 1931. During the last three years of the Weimar Republic feelings of abandonment among youth filled this gulf, which worsened because of parents’ inability to support their children in economic difficulties. By 1933, the destabilising political implications of the generational gulf was uncontested.

Perestroika: Long established truths disintegrate

The modularity division of the discourse network suggests a split into five communities: three large discursive formations, along with two small residuals. The visualisation of the network (Figure 4) highlights that the SOVIET-LENINIST, in turquoise, and AUTONOMOUS discursive formations, coloured brown, are densely connected and overlap. The former emphasises youth’s special status and its heroic role in constructing the future socialist society, the latter related to youth being an independent actor, but acted in accordance with propagated socialist values. The VICTIM & THREAT formation, coloured in purple, is more scattered and links with nodes in the two residual formations. These links indicate that a more diverse discourse revolved around this new idea.

Bridging-concepts unite what would be disconnected parts. PRESENT captures references to contemporary issues through the signifier youth and is revealing when looked at in combination with the temporal rhythms. In other words, is the present placed in RUPTURE or

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17 Kümmert Euch um die arbeitslose Jugend, in: VZ, 19.05.1932.
18 Mißbrauchte Jugend, in: Vorwärts, 11.03.1931.
21 Wege zum Jugendgericht, in: Vorwärts, 10.02.1931.
22 Der Jugend eine Gasse, in: VZ, 06.01.1933.
23 The modularity score is 0.217.
CONTINUITY with PAST and FUTURE? In the conservative, pro-government Izvestiya and Pravda the majority of authors framed the present as part of a continuous socialist Erfahrungsraum (Koselleck 1995). And in light of the contemporary crisis, they placed the communist salvation to the FUTURE. On the other hand, the regime-critical Literaturnaya Gazeta or Argumenty i Fakty emphasised that the PRESENT was a RUPTURE with the PAST. To the overall discourse a POSITIVE image of youth was important. Notwithstanding the Komsomol’s crumbling legitimacy, media presented youth as a DECISIVE societal force.

The temporal dynamics of individual discursive formations (Figure 5 and 6) highlight that in the Weimar Republic, before the 1933 Nazi take-over put an end to free debate, no discursive formation dominated. The frequency of news about youth, which slightly increases towards the end of the episode, expresses the dynamics of this mobilisation which became increasingly violent early 1932. However, media presented competing interpretations of Weimar’s present until the very end of the Republic.

As for the perestroika period, it is striking, that the temporal mean of each formation lies in the first half of the period analysed and that the mean is always larger than the median. The
frequency of articles that follow the rules of each discursive formation about youth declines over time. Comparing the three formations highlights, that the SOVIET-LENINIST peaks earlier than the VICTIM & THREAT formation.

![Figure 5: Weimar Republic: Frequency per Modularity Class](image)

![Figure 6: Perestroika: Frequency per Modularity Class](image)

The processes at work during Weimar’s breakdown provide the basis for reconsidering the role of the symbol and the mobilisation of youth during the breakdown of an unconsolidated democracy. The breakdown of the Soviet Union enables a better understanding of youth
during the breakdown of an authoritarian regime. The analysis permits a conceptualisation of youth that takes its symbolic space and contradictory political involvement into account. The aim is to compare the rules which structure the way public discourse constructed the symbolic space youth with how young people mobilised for political ends.

**DISCOURSE AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION**

The outlined discursive structures on the level of networks must be linked with its constitutive texts to understand the relation between discourse about and political mobilisation of youth. The close analysis of networks and texts allows an exploration of the article’s two hypotheses.

Changing meanings of youth in the Weimar Republic and during perestroika convey the political factions during the regime breakdowns. Competing visions about youth conveyed topics of wider importance during these periods. Discussing youth, the public exposed conflicting visions about past trajectories, present conditions, and future expectations, thereby addressing most urgent questions. Youth turned into such an overdetermined space of meaning given the public visibility of young people and the concept’s semantic flexibility: biological permeability combined with persistence as social category over time.

The Weimar Republic’s four discursive formations highlight the different aims young people mobilised for and the numerous responses they offered during the most intense years of crisis. The analysis of youth therefore also suggests to conceptualise “crisis” as a term which underlines the openness of Weimar’s situation: interpretations as crisis acknowledged difficulties, but equally underlined the potential to overcome them. The discursive diversity about youth persisted until the end of the democratic breakdown (¬H1) and young people mobilised for very different ideas about how to overcome the regime crisis (H2).

During perestroika the media widely discussed young people’s opposition to the regime. Until around 1988, only oppositional newspapers spoke in benevolent terms about youth gathering outside of the Komsomol. Over time, however, also regime loyal media acknowledged the important voice which such youth gave to society at large. Anti-establishment youth mobilisation gradually undermined the prevailing discourse and demanded for an alternative way of thinking about the reality of young people and the political system. The disintegration
of the discourse about youth indicated, even predated, the regime’s crumbling (H1). Political mobilisation of young people centred on rejecting or supporting the status quo (¬H2).

The many roads not taken in the Weimar Republic

Scholarship on Weimar has centred on those youth activities that undermined democracy. Amongst many, Swett (2004) and Brown (2009) emphasise that youth radicalism deteriorated the public sphere and Berman underlines that civil society failed to play its Tocquevillean function (1997, 41). However, the largest discursive formation revolves around an AUTONOMOUS youth, engaged for democracy, associated with POSITIVE ideas. The lens of youth changes the perspective on Weimar’s regime crisis: PRO-DEMOCRACY youth was integral to what youth meant for contemporaries.

Sources of the time highlight the importance of Catholic, Republican, and socialist youth. Their mobilisations were visibly important to those who lived during the final years of the Weimar Republic to make sense of their present. From 1931 onwards, the share of the PRO-DEMOCRACY formation even augmented (Figure 5). Increasingly violent confrontations on the street also encouraged young people to mobilise for democracy. The plot underlines the importance of AUTONOMOUS and POSITIVE (Figure 7). Moreover, concept-codes which underpin an active and politically INVOLVED youth are important. Public discourse constructed youth as political VANGUARD. The prominence of IMAGINATION is also noteworthy, capturing utterances about foreign youth portrayed as IDEALISTIC and HEROIC which in turn shaped understanding of Weimarian youth.
The Republikanischer Studentenbund [Republican Student Association] is one such democratic movement. In 1929, its members expressed support for republicanism during the “Wartburgfest der Republikaner”. But by 1929 support included demands that the leadership failed to accommodate, notably to take decisive actions to end anti-republican violence. While supporting republican ideas, demands by youth underlined the gap between its expectations and political reality. Thereby Studentenbund activities eventually voice the dissatisfaction with the existing democracy. In 1931 the Studentenbund general assembly adopted a resolution supportive of republicanism but explicitly not of the Weimar system.

In 1932, with increasing political tensions, the Studentenbund attenuated its idealistic positions. Without enthusiasm, members supported the “Greis” [old man] Hindenburg, who seemed able to calm the violence. The Studentenbund hoped that Hindenburg, despite his age, could overcome the generational gulf by “Aufrichtigkeit und Reinheit des Wollens” [sincerity

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25 Jugend gegen Radikalismus, in: VZ, 27.01.1931.
and purity of will], similar to the devotion of republican youth to the entire “Volk”. However, the Studentenbund’s support for Hindenburg lacked the passion of the earlier struggles for an idealised democracy: a pragmatic choice driven by the rejection of fascism.27

Such democratic youth engagement failed to stabilise the Weimarian system. Indeed, these groups’ democratic ideals delegitimised Weimar’s parliamentary democracy even amongst those who did not support fascism or communism. All of the sampled newspapers contributed to the pro-democratic idea of youth but each newspaper had very distinct ideas about Weimar’s democracy and the involvement of youth. Despite its size, internal divisions left the PRO-DEMOCRACY formation ultimately weak.

Those intellectuals who advanced the idea of a democratic rescue by youth abstracted from political cleavages and endowed youth with the mission to reconcile European countries.28 In 1931, the novelist Thomas Mann emphasised the uniqueness of European youth who experienced the present more intensely than other groups. Therefore only youth could face the truth. The decaying adult generation, so Mann, contrasted with youthful OPTIMISM and “Tatendrang” [zest for action]. Compared to its European peers, Weimar’s youth stood out:

A young Frenchman who travelled in Germany recently said to me: ‘Oh my God, we also have young people but they are petits bourgeois, small and immature [unfertig] adults wearing a Schniepelrock [tailcoat] and pince-nez on their nose. Youth in a picturesque sense of the word, which understands itself and feels and behaves as youth, which adds to the life and the picture of the country its own, distinct note – that we do not have unlike you.’

The PRO-DEMOCRACY view intersects with the YOUTH & FUTURE discursive formation. Together, they provide the rules for speaking about pro-democratic youth involvement with the former relating to the “present future” expressed through youth. Flourishing debates about Weimar’s future contradict conventional historiographical assumptions. Ever since Peukert claimed that the Weimar Republic represents the crisis of classical modernity (1987), the crisis talk of the interwar period became consensual. This enclosed analyses of Weimar within a horizon of doom (Föllmer, Graf, and Leo 2005, 16-22).

26 Jugend für Hindenburg, in: VZ, 12.03.1932.
27 For a similarly pragmatic support of Hindenburg by the “Landesverband der Statsbürgerlichen Jugend Berlin Brandenburgs” see: Jugend an Hindenburg, in: VZ, 23.07.1932.
However, crisis did not imply an absence of visions for the future. To the contrary, interpretations as crisis conveyed competing horizons of expectation. The YOUTH & FUTURE discursive formation is equally distributed across the episode (Figure 5) youth allowed a negotiation about the country’s future until the end of democracy.

Conservative newspapers dominate the discursive formation; moderately conservative voices sought salvation in imagining the future. Moreover, the concept-node CONTINUITY figures prominently in the network and indicates that contemporaries interpreted the present as having predictive power for the future and linking positive attributes with future youth. The political behaviour of young people shaped optimistic projections into the Weimar Republic’s tomorrow.

A clear opposition to this future oriented and democratic discourse about youth is the second largest discursive formations. Concepts and articles of this formation frame youth as victim of economic difficulties, the disintegration of the family, and the failures of parliamentary democracy. The overall network plot conveys this gap by placing some concepts of the blue cluster at the margin of the overall network, underlining their uniqueness to this formation. An association of youth with societal difficulties amplified those problems. The overall image also portrayed youth as dependent on the older generation. In this perspective, youth as a symbolic space conveyed the impact of economic and political problems for which it was not responsible and which it could not solve. The discursive formation was particularly important in the second half of the episode (Figure 5), when the consequences of the economic crisis spilled over into the socio-political realm.

IN-NEED and NEUTRAL are central concepts in the formation (Figure 8), avoiding an outright negative picture of youth but understanding it as suffering and being in crisis. Such difficulties were linked with an innocent youth which was not seen as being united as socio-economic distinctions underlined the unequal effects of the crisis on young people. Generational affiliations raised however awareness of a shared lack of orientation and dependent on the older generation, youth craved parental attention. Parents, themselves embittered, were unable to respond. Family disintegration amplified the isolation of young people: “Children never knew the example of the working father.” Paternal unemployment

29 Germania constitutes 30% and DAZ 33%.
linked with domestic abuse of young people which the psychologists Birkenfeld and Klepper understood as “ohnmächtiger Zorn” [helpless anger].30

References to the First World War provided one way to externalise responsibility from youth. Frequently reiterated, this past became programmatic for understanding present troubles. Keeping up the memory enclosed the Weimar Republic within the war’s space of experience. In 1930, a series of student letters to the DAZ gave an insider perspective into its persistence. The war’s violence and isolation explained present political fragmentation. The student Ludwig Eisenhard stated:

The societal splintering is explained with the dreadfully bleak past which today’s students had to go through. Our parents were born into a happy and victorious Germany with world-wide recognition. At that time it was easy to approve of this state and to dedicate all youthful might to it. For us, however, when we first went to school with pretty satchels, our fathers went to

the fields with knapsacks and bayonets. Even if back then we did not yet understand the horrors, this horrible war is in our memory, deep in it, ineradicable for the rest of our life. 

Hundreds of competing student organisations, all primarily concerned with individual partisan interest, manifested this “verhängnisvolle Uneinigkeit” [fatal disaccord]. Mistakes made in the past explained the badly conceived political system which left the government weak and allowed for economic interests to create political divisions. Moreover, the current generation grew up humiliated after the shameful peace settling: “The disappointed man, like a wandering moth, pushes towards the glorious light of the revolutionary parties, which allegedly bring happiness. Dazzled [geblendet] by the light he loses the sight of the general interests of the Volk.”

The last discursive formation that the network contains revolves around youth as a THREAT and continuously portrays youth mobilisation as undermining the existing political order – prominent in the progressive Vorwärts and the Catholic Germania. Its authors opposed fascist and communist-induced violence and legitimised socialist or Catholic mobilisation respectively. However, despite their political significance, discussions about such violent youth never dominated.

Only a few concept codes are relevant to this discursive formation. Almost all articles are linked by a combination of PRESENT, NEGATIVE, RUPTURE, and TROUBLE-MAKER (Figure 9). Mobilisation of groups such as Stahlhelm or Wehrwolf was usually interpreted as being NATIONALIST and purely VIOLENT, or a sign of NAÏVE youth. Influenced by external forces, youth was also described as IRRESPONSIBLE and INCAPABLE.

Youth itself reiterated such radical ideas. The student Ursula Klosse lamented her egoistic and narcissistic peers who undermined the Republic’s foundations. By trying to be authentic and living a life according to their own desires, they failed to contribute to the community and fell short of all ideals. Commentators remarked in 1931 that the older generation exploited the immaturity of youth: “The tragic situation of a good part of today’s youth is that it believes it is being revolutionary whilst it is in reality reactionary and therefore misguided about its real

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31 Revolutionär oder Staatserneuernd, in: DAZ, 08.06.1930.
32 Wege zum Jugendgericht, in: Vorwärts, 10.02.1931.
political position.” To restrict a subversive potential of youth, the conservative press agreed that youth ought not to be socialised into particular parties. Germania argued:

First of all, the state had to be comprehended out of the idea of the Volk, in every Volksgenossen one ought to look for the human being and in every human being for God’s creature. It is therefore not about de-politicisation of youth but ‘Entparteiung’ [“de-party-fication”].

Communists and fascists constituted Weimar’s radical youth. Confrontations were common after political meetings since competing groups knew when and where opponents met. Detailed reports about the often armed conflicts underlined, however, that the distinction between communists and fascists was merely situational – individuals frequently changed political allegiance even between diametrically opposed groups. Germania gave insight into this practice adding to the picture of a violent young generation lacking a credible political

34 Wo steht die Jugend?, in: VZ, 23.05.1931; see also (Kiesel 1933).
35 Um Jugend und Staat, in: Germania, 25.06.1930.

Figure 9: THREAT: Discourse Network

Concept Codes
DAZ
Germania
Vossische
Vorwärts
commitment. Youth appeared “leichtsinnig” [frivolous] and even politically uninvolved people might get killed in arbitrary violence.37

From 1931 onward, nationalist mobilisation increased. Progressive media argued that to protect youth, right-wing student associations should be forbidden.38 Their activities were described as terror and their violence made no difference between political opinions.39 Vorwärts reported on public disturbances caused by the Hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth], while insisting that the group was much smaller than it claimed to be. The journalist argued that marching in circles inflated its visibility.40

During Weimar’s most intense crisis the discourse about youth remained diverse and plural, like the manifold mobilisation of young people. Politicians tried to be associated with a youth which expressed modernity and the future to gain public support for their political course. Resonating with the historic context of the idealistic Jugendbewegungen, political youth mobilisation appeared authentic, an authenticity that contrasted with the political reality of Weimar. Youth therefore benefited from moral superiority – the largest discursive formation underlines the extent to which youth was seen in a positive light during the crisis years.

**The Soviet Union’s fallen vanguard**

Some young people had always questioned the SOVIET-LENINIST ideal about youth, throughout the Soviet Union. Their behaviour occasionally challenged the symbolic place of the Komsomol as the unifying organisation for youth, but overall, the political leadership tried to maintain the organisation’s importance. However, with the freedoms of expression during glasnost’ these acclamations of past glory and future potential became incoherent. Projecting the Soviet collective into its idealised future and navigating its heroic past through the symbol youth was disturbingly at odds with the lived realities of youth. The everyday experience in the Komsomol and a longing for new freedoms contrasted with the official discursive rules about youth (Andreeva, Golubkova, and Novikova 1989).

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37 Politisches Rowdytum, in: Germania, 28.05.1930.
40 Hitlerjugend marschiert im Kreis, in: Vorwärts, 06.10.1932 – the metaphor “going around in circles” points to the movement’s idleness.
Given the Komsomol’s importance for the general Soviet order, one of the country’s largest political bodies and a significant economic actor, its crisis fuelled and exposed the Soviet Union’s fundamental socio-political tensions. The disintegrating organisation made room for a new set of rules for speaking about youth during the late Soviet period. The political behaviour of *neformaly* shaped these new rules which took the lead in Soviet discourse about youth around 1988. This alternate narrative about youth referred to deviant youth which questioned the authority of the parental generation and the existing political system.

On the eve of perestroika, Chernenko reminded the Komsomol of its historic task. As “reliable reserve for the Party” the Komsomol had to actively assist “in the communist education of the younger generation in the struggle for the triumph of the ideals of communism”. The organisation, according to Chernenko, “guaranteed the continuity of the revolutionary generation in a socialist society”. From Chernenko to Gorbachev such ritualised language maintained the Soviet ideology and also perestroika-era sociologists highlighted the ritualised dimension of participation (Sundiev 1987, 58).

The idea of a homogenous youth striving for the establishment of socialism characterised the SOVIET-LENINIST discursive formation. This official vision of Soviet youth referred to ideas that had structured Soviet discourse since the 1920s. It gradually faded in importance, accelerated by the arrival of Gorbachev as head of the Communist Party and disappeared before the Soviet Union collapsed (Figure 6). Youth was framed as *precious*, something to be nourished, protected, and requiring specific care given its central role for the symbolic order (Gill 2011, 181). The two conservative newspapers dominate this formation.

The network of the discursive formation emphasises that most articles are linked to core concepts such as *precious* or *decisive* which shaped the discursive rules (Figure 10). Codes like *disciplined* or *courageous*, however, are placed at the margins since fewer articles use, expressed through lower degree centrality. Within this formation more than 30% are anonymous and unsigned articles, which underlines the importance of unquestionable, de-personalised knowledge.

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43 Pravda and Izvestiya make up for 66% of all articles.
The collapsing of past and future into present was critical to the SOVIET-LENINIST formation. In other words, the two “absent” temporal dimensions extended the present. Anticipations of the communist future’s success justified present sacrifices. Historic references of the October Revolution and the heroic effort during the “Great Patriotic War” maintained the relationship with the past.\textsuperscript{44} References to the past became popular once youth induced questions about long-established narratives of communist progression. Not knowing where Soviet society might head to, “looking back” provided for social self-reassurance. In 1984, Izvestiya emphasised the decisive role youth played in past events, de-temporalising heroic memories. Past, present, and future collapsed:

The party and the people (narod) will remember the heroic deeds of the Komsomol for the protection of our national borders during the Civil and Great Patriotic War. For all generations of Soviet people, they will always serve as inspiring example of loyalty to the patriotic,

\textsuperscript{44} Despite all socio-political changes, opinion polls during perestroika indicate e.g. that Stalin’s role remained unchallenged by many young people (Davies 1989, 194)
military duty. It is sacred for our Komsomol army to preserve and continue the wonderful traditions of our fathers.  

In the early 1980s this nexus of “youth–triumphant victory” and “youth–selfless sacrifice for the people” fostered Soviet identity and shaped the public image of youth (Zinoviev 1983). Reiterated memories of large-scale economic projects linked historic with present youth. This discourse sacralised the young generation in the Komsomol which competed with the party for the most important symbolic place. Historic references and anniversaries bypassed current economic difficulties and instead underlined the importance of youth for economic successes, since “almost half of all our scientific and technical intelligentsia are people younger than 30 years”.

The notion of generation was a conceptual cornerstone, linking Erfahrungsraum and Erwartungshorizont, present to past, and, anticipating further developments, present to future. This association carried a moral component in publically expressed social thought. Youth owed its comfort to the older generation’s efforts and was therefore indebted to them. Chernenko underlined this in 1984 to a Komsomol audience: “You, dear comrades, belong to a generation of Soviet people which […] have unprecedented opportunities. You will be on the shoulders of achievements which, even yesterday, seemed like a fantasy”.

But at the onset of glasnost’ youth questioned the Komsomol’s social rules, i.e. personal progression through replication of Soviet norms of order. Shows organised by the Komsomol had lost their appeal, as even Izvestiya recognised:

There is a certain discrepancy between the forms of work and the increased material and spiritual needs of youth. Komsomol organisations often remain aloof from the pressing problems that really trouble youth. […] Formalism, paperwork, and bureaucracy are intolerable in any case. They are doubly, triply intolerant within the Komsomol.

45 Vo vremya vrucheniya nagrady, in: Izvestiya, 29.05.1984.  
49 Vo vremya vrucheniya nagrady, in: Izvestiya, 29.05.1984.  
When official media openly criticised the way the institution was handled, the gulf between lived youth and its institutional embodiment became more apparent. Soviet political leaders acknowledged that the Komsomol failed in its core missions. Chernenko admitted: “the Komsomol committees, sometimes, stay away from the pressing problems that really excite youth” and subsequently asked the committees “to strengthen everyday concrete organisational and educational work, […] to strengthen the link between the Komsomol workers and the masses of youth”.

In 1987 Gorbachev fought to reverse dispersal, he insisted on the organisation’s importance, equating participation with sense by bridging the contemporary feeling of crisis with its anticipated decisive future roles (1987). The purpose of young people’s engagement was yet to come, intended to compensate for the lack of contemporary meaning. In June 1987, the 34-year old Viktor Mironenko became the Komsomol’s General Secretary to increase the organisation’s appeal to young people. He reformed the bureaucracy, finances, and extended the independence of local organisations. Aimed at making local structures more responsive to local realities, the decentralisation led, instead, to opportunism by local agents and an inability of Moscow bureaucrats to control the periphery. The organisation turned into an object of its members’ personal interests and amplified economic possibilities (Shubin 2006, 18).

Gorbachev’s speech at the 1987 Congress of the Komsomol, “Youth – The Creative Force for Revolutionary Renewal”, combined inherited expectations with youth’s new discursive and social reality. The General Secretary bridged the disintegrating discursive patterns and narrated Soviet history based on experiences of successive young generations – their involvement during the revolution and the Civil War, the “Great Patriotic War”, and the post-war reconstruction. But after reiterating the rules of the SOVIET-LENINIST formation, he turned to the Komsomol, complaining about its rhetoric and unnecessary bureaucracy which he described as a “grave and dangerous disease”. He went on:

> Sometimes, in analysing the world of the Komsomol’s leaders, one gets the impression that the masses of young people are moving on one side of the street and their leaders are moving on the other and, furthermore, in the opposition direction. I think this is largely due to the

52 A radical rejuvenation compared to the 49-year old predecessor Boris Pastukhov.
general situation and atmosphere in the country. So we shall not lay the blame for everything on the young alone. [italics added]

This represented a major shift: “The Komsomol has no right to relieve itself of the responsibility for such a state of affairs.” Gorbachev mentioned mistakes in the “upbringing of youth”, notably that “we have been preaching too much to our young people” rather than discussing with them.

By 1988, replicating the social norms of the Komsomol had even lost its meaning for Mironenko’s own son. Gorbachev demanded by 1989 that young people no longer accept rules imposed “from the top” but critically examine them instead: youthful energy was central to perestroïka(1989). This partially reiterated the SOVIET-LENINIST discourse, but also amplified predispositions towards change and the critical atmosphere encouraged youth to join neformaly instead of the Komsomol.

The crumbling SOVIET-LENINIST formation gave way to a perspective which referred to those young people who were disenchanted with the Komsomol. Such neformaly initially referred to the new cultural movements, notably punks, rock fans, and heavy metal fans and were not exclusively linked with negative stereotypes. But even the communal pursuit of personal interests brought young people into conflict with authorities (Riordan 1988, Fain 1990). The conservative establishment interpreted such behaviour as politically-motivated competition with the Komsomol.

Juris Podnieks’ 1987 documentary “Is It Easy to Be Young?” emphasises how much the awakening of youth and the growing generational rift preoccupied society. Though Podnieks initially wanted to make a film about the hopes and dreams of youth, he discovered their disillusion with socialist ideals. This sharp and polemic rejection of Soviet society captured the pulse of the time and furthered the visibility of the generational divide. A fundamental shift in Soviet society. In 1988 even Pravda gave voice to young people’s alienation.

We are sorely lacking in confidence, in particular the lives of young people are affected by the domestic turmoil. Youth leaders of our country during the 1920s are now perceived as fiction, now there are practically no young people in significant leadership positions.\(^5^7\)

After 1987 the Soviet press emphasised the role neformaly played in social upheaval: young people became a barometer for the general mood of society (Shubin 2006, 16). Youth gradually spoke out on an ever-wider range of topics, which increased its importance in the political arena. In the autumn of 1987, the internal structure of neformaly evolved. As older leaders joined, the groups’ profiles sharpened and they acted more self-consciously, formulating explicit political demands. Neformaly multiplied,\(^5^8\) though many people participated in several neformaly as well as the Komsomol.\(^5^9\) In this expansion, mobilisation lost its characteristic as youth mobilisation and the symbolic and political importance of youth vanished. Over time, the VICTIM & THREAT formation also lost importance, along with the dissolution of youth into general mobilisation (Figure 6).

Given the discordance of such ideas with established discourse, progressive newspapers dominate this VICTIM & THREAT formation.\(^6^0\) The plot indicates that many concept-codes make this scattered network (Figure 11). This underlines the formation’s polyphony which, unlike the SOVIET-LENINIST formation (Figure 10), lacked a centre. On average, each article refers to a larger set of concepts when speaking about youth. However, nodes on the periphery are relevant for specific aspects of the discourse and relied on the central concept-nodes. These are RUPTURE, expressing the feeling of living in a distinct time period with reconstituted Erwartungshorizonte and a changing social structure, youth IN-NEED of the older generation, and youth being a VICTIM of Western influence and the disintegrating Soviet Union.

The idea of a generational divide distinguishes this discursive formation. Youth expressed a social rupture, unlike earlier Soviet youth for whom nasledovanie [social inheritance] assured

\(^{57}\) Letter by Alena Ivanova, 17 years, in: Pravda, 11.01.1988.

\(^{58}\) In December 1987 Pravda spoke of more than 30,000: Demokratiya i initsiativa, in: Pravda, 27.12.1987 and in February 1989 of more than 60,000: Demokratiya ne terpit demagogii, in: Pravda, 10.02.1989. Most were young (Petro 1991, 103)


\(^{60}\) Argumenty i Fakty accounts for 42% and Literaturnaya Gazeta for 27% of all articles.
generational continuity. With *glasnost’* such tensions were publically debated. Also Izvestiya admitted by 1987 that youth’s power might harm society.\(^{61}\)

A 1985 survey already confirmed that Soviet youth frequently listened to Western radio, including political debates (Manaev 1991, 73). Media accused Western propaganda of shamelessly exploiting the vulnerable youth and stories about travel to the West fuelled anxieties about a capitalist West misleading Soviet youth (Kozovoi 2011, 224). The First Secretary of the Estonian Central Committee, Karl Vaino, reiterated the leading role of youth for constructing socialism but accused the West of moving the ideological front into everyday life. Even fashion, music, or sports, turned into weapons of the enemy.\(^{62}\)

Writer Vladimir Amlinsky (1935-1989) summarised the disapproval of the Komsomol during the 1987 meeting of the Union of Writers: “In recent years, the Young Communist League lived a separate life from youth”\(^{63}\) But in 1987 Amlinsky expressed self-confidence,

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\(^{61}\) See the interview with the sociologist M. Kh. Titmy: Okhota k peremene mest, in: Izvestiya, 15.01.1987.


\(^{63}\) Speech reprinted in: Literaturnaya Gazeta, 06.05.1987.
predicting that “without even noticing, the ‘rebels’ are converted into zauryadnykh meshchan [petty bourgeois], and even into speculators, collecting records, LPs, posters and magazines, trying to outrun one another with their collections”.64

However, by the end of 1987 neformaly were no longer limited to entertainment. The unleashed civil forces concerned every aspect of Soviet society: culture, ecology, law, economics. Perestroika was, according to Laboratorya obshchestvennogo samoupravleniya [Laboratory of Public Self-Management], the opening of a new phase of youth mobilisation, characterised by unprecedented themes and participants’ commitment and ENTHUSIASM:

Three sleepless nights were spent drawing up appeals, drafts, and petitions, and sorting through the complex twists and turns of a polemical struggle could not but have an effect. And there it was. It was Sunday, so their weary faces caused understanding smiles from subway passengers. It was all over […] but everything was just beginning.65

By 1987, some officials gave credibility to the neformaly, confirming that they were contributing to social transformation of society. Yuri Lyubtsev, Communist Party spokesperson in Kazakhstan:

These [youth] associations […] have a common idea – participation in the transformation of society. It is difficult to foretell which of today’s young leaders will become political and state leaders […] Their energy makes one take an optimistic, rather than a pessimistic view of the future. Many of these youngsters are people who are potentially ready to give society new concepts and new ideas.66

Dimitri Ostroushko, member of the Komsomol’s Central Committee, had already admitted by 1986 that “[u]nfortunately, the criticism addressed to the Komsomol is largely valid.”67 By 1987, Pravda emphasised the need to cater to leisure demands to combat growing disaffection among youth; the flagship communist newspaper mentioned that more than a third of all Komsomol members were only members on paper.68 And by 1989 Viktor Mironenko, First General Secretary of the Komsomol (1986–1990), could complain on Izvestiya’s title page

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that “[t]he Komsomol is merely a tool in the hands of the party” and that all talk about its leading role lacked substance since its political role had continuously been undermined.69

Youth mobilisation was not restricted to rejecting the establishment but suggested means of change. Viktor Zolotarev participated in the October 1987 coordination meeting and emphasised youth’s new ambitions:

The feeling of civic bankruptcy, depression and timidity in the face of the lordly indifference of bureaucrats is now being crowded out before our very eyes by a growing feeling of civic involvement, by a sense of our own guilt for the bad things within and around us, by a completely new desire to participate directly and personally in the process of social improvement.70

One neformaly, Miloserdie [Compassion], proposed more extended forms of local economic self-management and provided material and spiritual assistance to pensioners and veterans. Similar groups emerged: Sotsial’nyi mir [Social World] held public events to foster social cohesion, and Grazhdanskoе dostoinstvo [Civic Virtue] assisted in the detection, publicising, and elimination of bureaucratic mistakes. There was a growing number of neformaly, and 47 “youth associations” attended Moscow’s first coordination meetings.71 They jointly pursued public interests, unlike the earlier youth groups revolving around entertainment.

Political mobilisation in these years was diverse and included support for and opposition to perestroika, as well as criticism for not going far enough. Al’yans [Alliance] and Demokratiya i Gumanizm [Democracy and Humanism] demanded a profound restructuring of the entire political system to develop a pluralist society with freedom of assembly and a free press. The Kol’tso ob’edinennykh initsiativ [Ring of Joint Initiatives] advocated self-criticism by the party and society, openness, democratisation, and new thinking.

During 1988 the debate about neformaly expanded. Reactionary interpretations described them as psychologically disturbed, consuming excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs:

All this leads to a loss of the older generations’ leading role. However, the older generation is the carrier of traditional culture, ideals and values, the perception of which changes along with

69 Risk ostaetsya, ibo staroe nikogda ne ukhodit bez boya, in: Izvestiya, 03.01.1989.
the changing attitudes towards the older generation. Traditional values become outdated for youth with the desire for independence and self-expression.\textsuperscript{72}

The debate around Nina Andreeva’s letter triggered further mobilisation. “Students nowadays, following the period of social apathy and intellectual dependence, are gradually becoming charged with the energy of revolutionary changes.”\textsuperscript{73} She interpreted these developments as worrisome, because “numerous arguments among students about the country’s past” arose. The letter links with a shift in the discursive rules of speaking about youth, consolidating the visibility of those neformaly opposing perestroika. The most prominent one was Pamyat’, which framed itself as a “literary historic-patriotic association” centred on protecting Russian culture, allegedly threatened by a Zionist-Freemason conspiracy (Engel 1987, 896-7). Pamyat’ [Remembering] united dears originated from neformaly and Pravda used the example to portray neformaly as misusing new freedoms for their own interests.\textsuperscript{74}

Once media understood “independent clubs” as barometer for the wider social mood, their importance increased:

In truth there remain issues of trust and confidence, understanding and misunderstanding, which are based on much more compelling reasons than age barriers. Broadly speaking we are left with the issues of democracy, since independent social associations claim their right to influence the life of society.\textsuperscript{75}

When Ronald Reagan visited the Soviet Union for a summit in May 1988, the trip’s “centerpiece” was his appearance at Moscow State University to encourage “the forces of change now unleashed”.\textsuperscript{76} His speech revolved around the importance of freedom and democracy and the significance of youth for enduring transformations:

Your generation is living in one of the most exciting, hopeful times in Soviet history. It is a time when the first breath of freedom stirs the air and the hearts beat to the accelerated rhythm

\textsuperscript{72} Professor A Ambrumova, cited in Neformaly glazami psikhologa, in: Argumenty i Fakty, 20.02.1988.
\textsuperscript{73} The Leningrad teacher’s letter, published 13.03.1988, remained without reaction for three weeks and caused popular concerns about a reversal of glasnost’: Printsipy perestroyki: revolyutsionnost’ myshleniya i deystviy, in: Pravda, 05.04.1988.
\textsuperscript{75} Kak zhivut “neformaly” Yaroslavlya, in: Literaturnaya Gazeta, 05.08.1987.
\textsuperscript{76} Moscow Summit: President Charms Students, But His Ideas Lack Converts, in: The New York Times, 01.06.1988; White House planners saw this as most important element “to reach out to the Soviet people” (Whelan 1990, 44)
This “Moscow Spring” – as Reagan described it – also manifested itself in the audience’s reactions. Even though it had probably been selected by the Komsomol, “[l]aughter and applause seemed heartfelt”. The questions illustrated the fascination of some young people with Reagan’s political and societal vision. And the Soviet press was not sure what to make of the speech: “The president’s speech was almost entirely devoted to propaganda, proclaiming the advantages of the American system and the desire to teach our youth how to proceed now.” But some comments illustrate glasnost’: Izvestiya, for instance, reprinted most of the speech in a non-judgemental way and included some of the delicate questions asked to Reagan.

The visit provided neformaly with new space for self-organisation and mobilisation. The presence of hundreds of journalists protected those who marched along the capital’s streets: the militia let them pass. A crack-down, like the one during the anti-Stalin demonstrations on 5 March 1988, would have been too great a risk to the summit. Activists’ new mobilisation strengthened their internal structures which bended the discursive rules about youth further.

One tangible results of the visit was a Western-style place for public debate, which the city’s prosecutor Lev Baranov brought up a number of times before the summit. “On Pushkin Square, which has become Moscow’s equivalent of Hyde Park corner, young people are daily contesting the official Soviet version of historical events and even questioning the one-party state.” Students used this more relaxed atmosphere and staged demonstrations of around 100 people in front of Izvestiya (Brovkin 1990, 235), which despite glasnost’ Izvestiya did not mention. Nevertheless, “Moscow authorities have quietly adopted a more tolerant attitude toward unauthorized public demonstrations”, a move which the New York Times perceived as
a “significant step toward greater freedom of political expression”. Changed attitudes towards political mobilisation endured and Moscow’s police received orders neither to interfere with street demonstrations nor to detain protestors.

The XIX Party Conference of the CPSU in 1988 opened in an atmosphere of mobilisation and eroding discursive rules driven by young people, publically chanting “Death to Stalinism!” or “Down with Bureaucracy!”:

There have been many, many demonstrations in Moscow, but there was something different about today. Three days before the Communist Party’s first special conference since 1941, the city seemed full of nervous possibility, energized by the sense that, for the first time in decades, the debate is not wholly decided in advance.

When Gorbachev affirmed his desire for change, the Erwartungshorizonte of social actors widened as socio-political reform appeared likely. There were good reasons to get involved in the public sphere and the leadership’s responsiveness encouraged popular demands. Now perceived as legitimate and effective, youth-initiated mobilisation expanded beyond youth. Public figures such as the physicist Andrei Sakharov, historian Yuri Afanasyev, human rights activist Lev Timofey, or Ogonek editor Vitali Korotich, carried the contestation on a different scale: mobilisation was no longer geared towards rejecting the “old generation” but the “old system” which provided a cross-generational cause.

The importance of such youth engagement was most visible locally as illustrated by the opening example of the mobilisation against the demolition of the Hotel Angleter in March 1987. These demonstrations were amongst the first not to be punished by local authorities which shaped the public image of new citizen mobilisation. Debates about cultural heritage, particularly about how to deal with pre-revolutionary buildings, were central to public

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85 Yuri Mityunov, an organiser of protests, illustrates the spillover: “At first we thought it was a show for the summer, but the summit is over and the police still leave us alone. Now we hope it is a small step toward democracy in our country.” In: Ibid.
86 Tale of Two Cities: Old and New Moscows; Some Protests are Polite and Peaceful, Others Reminiscent of ’60s, in: Washington Post, 26.06.1988.
debate. Many other examples testify to young people reacting to demolition of their cultural patrimony by local authorities, such as the young Muscovites around Cyril Parfenov who saved the 18th century palace of the merchant Shcherbakov’s from demolition for the construction of the third ring road.

At the beginning of perestroika, youth mobilisation sparked a society-wide awakening and encouraged others to go out on the streets. However, once adults superseded youth as the drivers of political, economic, and social change, youth lost its position as a core political subject. After 1988 “youth” became gradually marginalised although it participated in other informalities such as *Memorial*. After 1988, the nexus between youth and informalities slowly dissociated. Eventually, those youthful informalities turned into adult-led parties and popular fronts, and the contestation of the political regime was gradually dissociated from the younger generation. But in the years to follow, youth was downgraded to an object rather than a subject of politics. By the time of the transition it no longer figured importantly on agendas. Politics gradually left the streets, and those elements that did remain on the street were increasingly institutionalised by national fronts and new political parties.

**CONCLUSION: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

This article analysed the discourse about youth and the political mobilisation of young people in two cases of regime breakdown. Returning to the guiding hypotheses, the comparison of regimes which fall on either side of the democratic-authoritarian spectrum points to different processes of breakdown and refines the hypotheses further.

*H1.* Discourses about youth in the democratic Weimar Republic did not disintegrate over time. Rather, the decentralised and contradictory discursive formations identified through the network analysis persisted over time. It was only with the end to free debate following the Nazi’s seizure of power that discourse about youth changed significantly given the intimate link between fascism and youth at the time (Mann 2004). The persisting conflicts conformed to contemporary political power structures and social currents. Differing meanings about

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89 Cf.: S predsedatelem ispolkoma leningradskogo gorodskogo soveta narodnykh, in: Ogonek, 07.11.1987, the interviewed Vladimir Khovyreva emphasised the role of youth and that representatives of “youth associations” were included in debates about future projects.

youth illustrate how undetermined the political conflict appeared to the public. Weimar’s citizens could plausibly believe in numerous future trajectories as competing discursive formations occupied similarly large proportions of the discourse.

In the authoritarian Soviet Union, however, the prevailing discourse about youth began to disintegrate already prior to the official reform period. The counter-discourse gained its full extent at the height of glasnost’ which was central to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Only in the context of new media freedom could a new discursive setting, not only about youth, emerge. What may previously have been part of alternative public spheres (Rittersporn, Rolf, and Behrends 2003), could now achieve general relevance. Underlying the diversity in the press coverage of neformaly, the discursive rules in speaking about youth shifted. The shift communicated to the political leadership and society at large the political relevance of the gulf between generations: in a first stage dividing the younger from the older generations, later on the young society from the old system.

H2. Regarding the political mobilisation of young people during moments of crisis, the case of the Weimar Republic suggests that diversity is characteristic of a political system which allows for the expression of competing political interests prior to the crisis. The diversity of youth mobilisation expressed very different visions about how the Republic should respond to its challenges. Unlike this pluralism, mobilisation during the perestroika era suggests that the dominant line of conflict in this liberalising authoritarian regime consisted in the positioning towards the political regime. The weakening of authoritarian structures encouraged a bipolar structure of mobilisation which required that groups either support or disapprove of the state of affairs.91

91 This is similar to mobilisation in the Russian Federation between 2005 and 2010 (Krawatzek 2015)
Bibliography


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Appendix: Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* compulsory (mutually exclusive)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># optional (mutually exclusive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ compulsory (not mutually exclusive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>++ optional (not mutually exclusive)</td>
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</table>

### Definition

a. Relationship youth / non-youth (#)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in-need</th>
<th>Youth in need of help to be delivered by State/public/society</th>
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<tr>
<td>autonomous</td>
<td>Youth (able) to take care of itself</td>
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c. Social attributes (+)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>apathic</th>
<th>heroic</th>
<th>open-minded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>capable</td>
<td>idealistic</td>
<td>opportunism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consciousness</td>
<td>incapable</td>
<td>oppositional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courageous</td>
<td>indifferent</td>
<td>optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crisis</td>
<td>innocent</td>
<td>pacifist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decisive</td>
<td>involved</td>
<td>precious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desired</td>
<td>irresponsible</td>
<td>romantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different</td>
<td>materialistic</td>
<td>sensational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>messianic</td>
<td>trouble maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disciplined</td>
<td>miserable</td>
<td>vanguard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dynamic</td>
<td>moralistic</td>
<td>victimised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic aspects</td>
<td>naïve</td>
<td>violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthusiastic</td>
<td>nationalist</td>
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d. Factions (#)

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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>united</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
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</table>

### Evaluations (*)

a. Positive
b. Neutral
c. Negative

### Tempi (+++)

a. Layers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
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b. Rhythms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repetition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rupture</td>
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<td>Continuity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceleration</td>
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