

Content analysis of official foreign policy speeches

Presentation

Created in 2012, the project “Content Analysis of Official Foreign Policy Speeches” (ACPOLEX) aims to employ content analysis as a research method in foreign policy analysis, with an initial focus on Brazilian foreign policy.

Content analysis is an investigative and descriptive approach to content of agents’ discourse, not neglecting the social, political and economic influences, as well as the historical and geographical context in which the official speeches are published. This is a heterogeneous and pluralistic approach to content analysis that can be applied in various theoretical and epistemic perspectives, and to different thematic fields of foreign policy. Under this project conducted by LABMUNDO researchers, content analysis is applied to convert textual materials into quantitative data and to analyse them qualitatively for the sake of logical deductions for hypothesis verification, confirmation or refutation, for question raising as well as building of new hypotheses.

This analytical, quantitative and qualitative perspective enables researchers not only to provide empirical material to support denser causal, explanatory, interpretative or descriptive arguments, but also to identify frequencies, occurrences and co-occurrences of topics/categories and to know the elements that are included or are set aside in the foreign policy formulation process.

To date, ACPOLEX has a bank of official pronouncements that has collected official speeches of Brazilian Presidents from José Sarney to Michel Temer (1986-2018). We use NVivo analysis software through which the selection, coding and analysis of pronouncements are made, according to the objectives of each individual or collective research project.

Results so far

ACPOLEX has already generated articles and doctoral theses that applied the methodology of content analysis in the analysis of Brazilian foreign policy. Project members and researchers formerly affiliated with LABMUNDO have developed papers presented in various seminars and congresses, among them: the IX Meeting of the Brazilian Association of Political Science (2014); the 5th National Meeting of the Brazilian Association of International Relations, which presented a complete panel composed of papers from the project (2015); and the 9th Latin American Congress of Political Science (2017). For the future, three avenues of research are being developed: (i) the integration of official speeches by foreign ministers; (ii) the opening of a bank of official speeches from other regional powers; (iii) a thematic bank of official (presidential and ministerial) speeches on climate change (in partnership with the Climate and Society Institute).

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