



Tricky Politics



1. Political tricks in democracies

Angela Merkel, Germany's current chancellor, is a tricky politician. Meanwhile she is well-known for tricky operating, the so-called *Merkel Method*. This method involves the following practices:

- Merkel publicly announces to cope with any occurring challenge. These announcements are characterized by ambitious, but diffusely formulated, headwords; often they are linked with her person, such as *Klima-Kanzlerin* (chancellor of climate protection), *Bildungsrepublik Deutschland* (*Educational Republic of Germany*), or *No-Spy-Treaty*. Those well communicated headwords usually foster Merkel's public standing, but usually they do not correspond with practical results, not even with real governmental activities. So Germany's climate balance sheet has distinctly worsened under Merkel. The chancellor has massively fostered the coal mining industry and the German car-industry (primarily selling SUVs with high CO2 emissions all over the world). Germany's educational balance sheet under Merkel has been much worse than many other OECD countries.¹ The well-sounding announcement of a no-spy-treaty with the USA in 2013 has meanwhile turned out to be without any substance.
- Once another party appears to hold the opinion leadership in a policy area of rising relevance, Merkel tries hard to overtake this opinion leadership - independently from which position her party (Christian Democrats) hitherto hold. Merkel pursues a radical policy of adaptation to popular programs.
- Once another person is associated in public with a successful policy option, she tries to represent the issue together with the cited person aiming at being publicly perceived as the main person to represent the issue.

¹ OECD 2012: <http://www.oecd.org/germany/EAG2012%20-%20Country%20note%20-%20Germany.pdf>
See for instance chart A3.2. at page 3, chart A6.5. at page 4, and chart A10.2 at page 6

- Merkel often changes her political opinion according to the phrase, *What do I care about my silly talk from (time) before?*² See Merkel's political turns regarding nuclear and anti-nuclear policy from 2011 until today lead. After having intensified pro-nuclear policies until March 2011, she completely changed the governmental course towards nuclear phase-out after the Fukushima accident. Meanwhile she operates in a diffuse way advocating the energy turn to regenerative energy, but concretely hesitating. Another example has been Merkel's behavior regarding the so-called *Maut (toll)* initiative. 2013 Merkel publicly proclaimed to be against the project (that is to burden foreigners using the German highways) by explicitly saying, *With me not!* Almost two years later, the government headed by Merkel has resolved the toll initiative.

- Merkel proceeds in political turns often by remarkable operations: Once she is confronted with a new substantial challenge, she denounces a new (for the public uncommon) option - let's call it x - as being out of reach or as no feasible at all. After having put this option on the public agenda by explicitly denouncing it, Merkel or somebody around her publicly states that x is too expensive respectively illegal - that's why it should be rejected. Nevertheless she declares to be open for negotiating possible solutions of the problem - resulting in a slightly modified version of x. This result is presented by Merkel as



solution without any alternative - in public prevailingly commented as *a success of Merkel's bargaining strategy*.

At the first glance, the outlined patterns seem to characterize Angela Merkel personally respectively Merkel as a personalized symbol (including her *Merkel rhombus* - another tricky marketing clue.

Looking around in politics, we see however many important actors to deploy tricky practices, for instance the current US president Barrack Obama who

² *Was kümmert mich mein Geschwätz von gestern?* - usually attributed to the former German chancellor Konrad Adenauer



came up above all by his rhetorical abilities. The results of Obama's policies and even the practical ways of how he has been governing have not met these hopes in many regards.

Although this inconsistency between programs respectively rhetoric on the one side and practical politics on the other side has certain personal traits, there is a general linkage between multi-dimensional politics and inconsistencies. Once different interests are to be coordinated in a pluralistic society, problems of pursuing political programs and upcoming pressure to accept compromises are usual - a familiar constellation that does not fundamentally bother the political public.

We should notice that both, the rhetoric presentation of policy programs and elevated policy debates as well as institutionalized procedures to select certain political decisions, are useful dimensions of developed political systems. The resulting multi-dimensionality of rich politics might imply some disappointment about inconsistent political statements; nevertheless it constitutes a necessary structure of democracy.

2. Challenges of democracy

Not all tricky ways of behavior comply with democratic norms and structures. There is a big variety of behavior in the grey area between democracy and non-democracy, and there are ways of behavior that challenge democracy fundamentally.

As we meanwhile know, secret services of the USA and some other Western states (*Five eyes*) systematically spy any other country out - including *companioned* states like Germany or France. These activities are not limited to political institutions; they rather reach for economic and technical espionage, in case of Germany with the help of German secret services - an unbelievable way of *cooperation* between friendly sovereign nations. As to see in this case, Germany's sovereignty has practically given up by its own government to a power-searching and powerful external actor - a fundamental challenge of democracy.³

Insofar tricky politics of Angela Merkel and Barack Obama go distinctly beyond what can be accepted as democratic. Democratic sovereignty of the people presupposes first effective protection of human rights, secondly checkable procedures including provable results of elections and other participative procedures. To the degree lies, deceit, and clandestine dominion get

³ See on the evaluation of the German political system <http://diberlin.info/tpi%20germany.htm> , on the USA <http://diberlin.info/tpi%20usa.htm>

systematically used by a government, a democracy is fundamentally endangered. An issue of peculiar relevance under that aspect is the opening of wars and warfare - in history a well-known tool of underrunning or even finishing vital democracy.

Against this background, the revitalizing of seemingly overcome military conflict patterns in the Ukraine, a part of Eastern Europe, is alarming. How the Russian president, Wladimir Putin, affiliated the Crimea to Russia - allegedly responding to the illegitimate loss of power in the Ukraine - has been assessed as extremely tricky not only in Russia. Putin sent, as he meanwhile has admitted, camouflaged regular Russian soldiers to the Crimea, occupied the country in a surprise attack, and made conduct a so-called popular vote there, allegedly resulting in a clear vote for Russia.



Since spring 2014 he is trying to realize a similar maneuver under more difficult preconditions (no clear majority of Russian population, some military resistance by Ukraine forces, international pressure) in the Eastern regions of the Ukraine (Donbass). At that he is oscillating in very tricky ways between different political roles, such as Russia's president as military hope on *New Russia*, as peace-maker in diverse negotiations, as helping institution for unfortunately captured OEEC personal, and so forth.

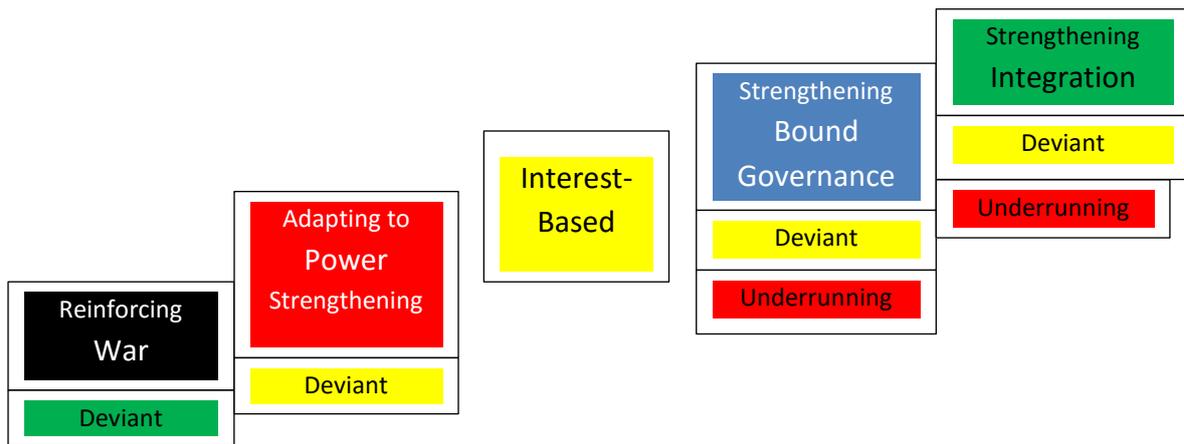
These maneuvers have undoubtedly strengthened Putin's political standing in Russia and in political circles that traditionally identify with Russian power politics, such as left wing parties in Germany, Greece and other European countries. Indeed, they have not made better the political and economic situation of Russia in the international system. In the contrary, Russia has meanwhile lost many political resources of trust and cooperation and undergoes a deep economic crisis.

Having thought about the outlined experiences of tricky politics it is not far to seek for a systematic overview.

3. Systematic overview: Tricky politics in diverse logics of interaction

Tricky politics relate to diverse logics of interaction. At that, they may - as being allowed - comply with certain logics or they may deviate from those logics respectively underrun them - see figure 1.

Figure 1: Tricky behavior towards *logics of interaction*



Interest-Based

Tricky politics is usually interest-based. Anybody who deploys tricks tries to get an advantage either for him/her-self or for his/her group. Even if certain tricks are not allowed, they are attractive for advantage-seeking actors as far as the risk of getting detected and punished is relatively low. And even with high risks of detection, some actors tend to use non-allowed tricks.

Power-related tricks

Once a given structure of power prevails, tricky politics first and foremost consists in tricky adapting to the given power structure - resulting in opportunism. So far tactical moves, lies, and deceit serve to get accepted and to come up in a given power structure. Vice versa, representatives of the given power structure sometimes act in tricky ways to recruit additional forces. On the other side, tricks may be used to escape the stringent logic of given power or even to resist against it. Hence tricky politics marked by the logic of power exhibits clearly asymmetric features from different sides.

Bound governance related tricks

Jointly accepted procedures and law (*bound governance*) principally implies equal preconditions for all operative actors (players). In this governance system, rule-bound tricks, for instance clever tactical moves, are allowed and even fostered. Hence intensive competition is an ideal frame to apply and to

develop legitimate tricks - see for instance sports like football or tennis, but also economics and politics where sophisticated ways of behaving are tantamount to high standards of interaction.

A completely different type of tricky behavior consists in circumventing or even subverting bound governance, so by forms of fraud and corruption. Tricky ways of that kind are mostly illegal and highly illegitimate in bound governance structures - leading to an existential split between the community and actors searching their individual advantages at the expense of the public. Linked with activities of that kind often less fair power structures are established, such as the dominion of corruptive persons or groups. War-oriented logics (according to criteria of friend or foe), in contrast, cannot and should not be analyzed as being tricky at all. It is simply terror.

Integrative tricks

Exemplarily think of how adults deal with kids in a functioning group. Here tricky politics is used to foster weaker actors and to include them into the community - see for instance sweet little lies strengthening the self-concept of the weaker ones, consciously overlooking mistakes and deficits, and friendly jokes to have fun together.

Indeed, also in integrating societies anti-integrative behavior is possible, such as fraud, deceit, and corruption - again implying negative power aspects. The aftermaths of such practices are particularly grave because the main atmosphere of integration is open and friendly. Even here, any war-like thinking and behaving should not be analyzed in terms of being tricky. It is simply violence and destruction.

Logic of war

In complete contradiction to the logic of integration, all activities according to the logic of war are determined by differentiating *friend* or *foe*. Hence tricky behavior, such as tactical moves, lies, and systematic deceit, appears to be an existential need in order to match activities of the enemy. Indeed also *the other*, on his part, interprets my - more or less tricky - activities as an existential threat. Resulting, any politics solves up and turns into fighting a war.

Although quite unknown, the logic of war can be overrun by tricky maneuvers. See for instance the historic fact that German and France soldiers celebrated Christmas together in the first winter of World War I 1914/1915 - a kind of behavior possible by tricky informal ways of agreement between both sides (such as shooting and non-shooting very regularly as a sign of

rapprochement). In sum we see a broad spectrum of tricky politics in favor of respectively working against ruling logics of interaction.

Check-up: Tricky Politics

1. Are there allowed forms of tricky politics in democracies?
2. Please outline some features of the so-called *Merkel Method*.
3. What do you think about the relationship between rich politics and tricky politics?
4. In what respects can tricky behavior endanger a democracy? Please outline two examples.
5. Would you call terrorism and war-fare as tricky? Please argue your position.
6. How work tricky maneuvers against bound governance, how can they work against integrative politics?
7. Can tricky behavior positively correspond with certain logics of interaction? Please sketch three types.

Thanks for your answers.

VP