

**Ministerial Positions on the Level of the German Länder –
Stepping Stones or Dead Ends for Political Careers?**

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I. Introduction

Studies on political elites in Germany have for quite a long time been engaged primarily with parliamentarians (Best, Jahr, & Vogel, 2011; Gruber, 2008; Herzog, 1975; Küpper & Wenzelburger, 2013; Patzelt, 1997). Only more recently the focus has shifted towards studying executive elites.¹ These works mainly describe the situation of the federal cabinet, focusing particularly on hiring and firing mechanisms (Ali, 2003; Fischer & Kaiser, 2009a; Fischer, Kaiser, & Rohlfing, 2006) or they try to figure out under which circumstances the Bundestag can serve as a springboard for a career in the federal government (Fischer & Kaiser, 2009b, 2010). Nevertheless, there are not only studies focusing on the federal level, but also some that look at the Länder governments (Jäckle, 2012, 2013; Vogel, 2009). Yet, students of German political elites regarded the subnational level for a long time only as a recruiting pool for positions at the federal level (Fischer & Kaiser, 2011) and this thinking guided their analyses. While the relevance of the subnational-level for positions at the federal level may indeed exist in some instances, Borchert and Stolz make a good point when they argue that the Länder level – at least for members of the state legislatures – is a desirable goal in its own right in terms of job security, a professionalized working environment and even status. Movement ‘up the ladder’ towards a higher level (national, EU) on the other hand is often not really supported by the own party, is risky and in the end in the light of a cost-benefit-analysis for many state legislators not worthwhile (Borchert & Stolz, 2011: 219).

First, the existing studies help us to understand who has good chances to enter a cabinet, i.e. what it needs to become a minister. Second, we know now much more about the factors explaining why some ministers stay for very long periods in office, while others have to leave their office just after a few months. However, one part of the picture is still lacking. The post-cabinet career. What do ministers do after they have left the cabinet? In general, only little is known about the late careers of politicians. A study by Herrick and Nixon (Herrick & Nixon, 1996) analyses the follow-up positions of members of the Congress. A similar approach is taken by Best et al. (2008) within their German survey of parliamentarians (“Abgeordnetenbefragung”).² For executive elites there is even less systematic knowledge available. We have to move back to the early 1990s to find at least some works that focus on the post-cabinet careers of ministers at the national level. Blondel (1991) compared the post-

¹ In a recent study the term “political elites” has also been applied to chief justices at the German Federal Constitutional Court (Jäckle & Wagschal, 2014).

² They ask: “what was your profession immediately after you left the parliament?” (Best et al., 2008: 15). See Edinger and Schwarz for a more detailed analysis of the same dataset (Edinger & Schwarz, 2009).

ministerial careers of politicians in fourteen Western European systems while Nicholls (1991) examined the opportunities of cabinet members within the US-system. Both came to the conclusion that a cabinet position constitutes in nearly all cases the peak of a political career. Having in mind the extremely small number of higher political positions a national cabinet member could possibly assume, this finding does not come as a big surprise. Nicholls for example shows that only six out of the 237 cabinet members that he had examined became president after their time in cabinet (Nicholls, 1991: 160-161). On the other hand he reveals that cabinet membership in the USA definitely helps to promote a career in private business after the government position (Nicholls, 1991: 169).

It seems to be an interesting question if there are in fact a number of different possibilities for politicians to take their political career to an even higher level as well as to get well-paid positions in the private business – for which alternative they go for. To answer this, it is necessary to look at a political level from where upward climbing to better political positions is actually possible. In this paper I will therefore concentrate on post-cabinet careers of members of the German Länder governments. Focusing on the time after ministers have left their positions in government helps to answer three blocks of questions that have not been systematically looked at until now:

- 1) Does it help to be a cabinet member of a Länder government for making a political career after the time in the Länder executive? In other words, is the Länder cabinet position just a staging post on the road to a more prestigious political position and thus a stepping stone that helps to achieve ambitious political plans, or is it more of a dead end for any career in German politics? Are there any frequently occurring trajectories? Furthermore, can we identify factors, supporting or factors hindering such multi-level political careers?
- 2) What types of post-cabinet-careers do we find? What other, non-political positions do former ministers occupy in the private economy, in foundations or the academia? Are these positions posts for being well provided for old party hacks who can no longer be held in the political business (e.g. due to their old age or to scandals) or is a well-paid job in lobbying even more desirable than a high level job in politics?
- 3) Are there any significant differences within the post-ministerial career pattern? Does it change through the decades? Are there significant differences according to the party of the minister, gender or the Land he or she has been working in?

II. Data

The data I use consists of post-ministerial careers of ministers from all 16 German Länder that had started their (last) ministerial appointment in the time span between the establishment of the first democratic cabinets³ and December 31. 2010. Spells which are still ongoing as of August 1st 2014 have been removed from the dataset. To become a better insight into the complete career patterns I examined not only the position directly following the ministerial job, but I coded for the following ten years which positions the former ministers occupied. In total this makes 1,400 post-ministerial career trajectories. The dataset is organized in state-sequence (STS) format. Each sequence starts with the first year after the end of the ministerial spell. “The successive states (statuses) of an individual are given in consecutive columns” (Gabadinho, Ritschard, Studer, & Müller, 2011: 28). The codebook I used can be found in the annex (Table A1). Ministers who serve more than one spell are multiply coded. This makes sense as every ministerial spell provides for a distinct possibility to continue it in the post-ministerial period. The snapshot in table 1 gives an impression how the data set looks like.

Table 1: The data set

Name	Land	Party	sex	Last portfolio	End of spell	p1	p2	...	p9	p10
Elisabeth Heister-Neumann	NI	CDU	0	Education	27.04.2010	p_land_lt	p_land_lt	...		
Franz Heitgres	HH	KPD	1	Compensation and refugee relief	15.11.1946	foundation	foundation	...	no data	no data
Steffen Heitmann	SN	CDU	1	Justice	15.09.2000	p_land_lt	p_land_lt	...	p_land_lt	foundation
Arthur Heitschmidt	SL	FDP	1	Finance and forestry	27.01.1963	death	death	...	death	death

Apart from the name, gender, the party and the Bundesland the minister has served the dataset includes the exact date when the ministerial spell ended (and thus the post-ministerial career begins), the last portfolio the minister has been working in and, being the most important information for the analysis, yearly coded the positions the former minister held in the following ten years. Franz Heitgres for example has been a member of the communist KPD (Communist Party of Germany) in the first Senate in Hamburg after WW II. Until 1950 he was chairman of a committee representing former political prisoners. The first two years are thus coded “foundation”. After this time there is no information available and I code the following years thus “no data”. Empty cells are only possible if the ten years of the post-ministerial career are not yet (as of August 2014) finished. An example is Elisabeth Heister Neumann. Her spell as minister of education in Lower Saxony ended in April 2010. Therefore

³ For Western Germany and Berlin this means after 1945, for Eastern Germany the observation period starts with the first Länder cabinets after the Fall of the Wall in 1990.

only four years of post-ministerial career can be coded for her. The last six cells are thus empty for this row.

An obvious problem with this approach is the fact that persons can occupy multiple positions at the same time. For example a former minister can still be active in her party (perhaps at the regional level), can be a member of a city council, work as a lawyer, presiding over a foundation and acting as a chairman of a board of directors. All these occupations and probably even more could in theory (and in practice often do) come along with each other. My solution to this problem is a pragmatic one that for sure comes along with some bias. I coded only the most relevant position, regarding political positions in general as more relevant than all others, positions at the federal level as more relevant than positions at the Länder level, executive positions as more relevant than legislative positions. For all other multiple positions I tried to figure out which is the occupation, the former minister tends to spend the most time for – and only coded this one.

I collected the data from a wide range of online resources⁴, trying wherever possible to crosscheck the codes with at least two or three different sources. Yet, there are still a number of years for which it is not possible to find any information about the position of the former minister. These have been coded as “no data”. Such a code, nevertheless, also tells a story, as it illuminates that these ex-cabinet members are no longer in any relevant political and in most cases also in no other noteworthy position. They have left the political, economic and social arena and became mere private persons.

III. Method

I use sequence analysis techniques to describe the post-ministerial careers. Particularly the ability to analyze a biography with respect to its different partitions – while still keeping the holistic view of the complete sequence – is a great asset: sequence analysis takes simultaneously into account states, their order and their durations. This feature makes it a more appropriate method to examine complete biographies or, as in this paper, longer periods of post-ministerial careers than those techniques focusing solely on certain single states such as the first position immediately after the ministerial spell ended, or approaches that look at the whole experience of a person, cumulating all career-stages without taking into account the

⁴ I used *curricula vitae* from official websites of Länder and federal ministries, Länder parliaments, the Bundestag and the EU parliament, personal homepages of the politicians, party websites, the Munzinger Archive and Wikipedia. Furthermore, especially for the more problematic cases in terms of data availability I searched online newspapers for articles about the post-ministerial career. Particularly articles with the headlines “whatever happened to...?” or “where are they now?” can be fruitful sources of information.

ordering or the duration of them.⁵ However, in this paper I only describe the sequences of careers at an aggregate level without digging deeper into the careers and without using the more sophisticated methodological possibilities that sequence analysis offers, like clustering algorithms or multi-dimensional scaling. For such an approach, attempting to find distinct clusters of post-ministerial careers, a longer period under investigation (more than 10 years) and also less categories of coded positions would be needed. In view of these facts and the apparently inductive nature of this study – in fact it is a clear data mining project – graphical representations of the post-ministerial careers serve best our purpose. In general, there are two ways of presenting sequence data:

1) *Regular sequence plots* which are in the end nothing else than a graphical translation of the STS-format structure presented in table 1. Each horizontal line represents one post-ministerial career and the different colors are the different positions. These plots are well suited if you are interested to see which career steps follow upon each other for every single case. For getting an idea of the general patterns regular sequence plots are nonetheless often too fuzzy. Figure A1 in the annex depicting the complete dataset as a regular sequence plot can serve as an example.

2) In *transversal frequency plots* each column (= year) gives the frequencies of the statuses. These plots help to understand the general patterns in the data and are thus the most appropriate way of presenting sequence data for our purposes here.

IV. Results

In this section the results of the analysis are presented. First I give an overview of all post-cabinet careers. After that I compare groups of post-ministerial careers trying to find patterns that help to answer the research questions.

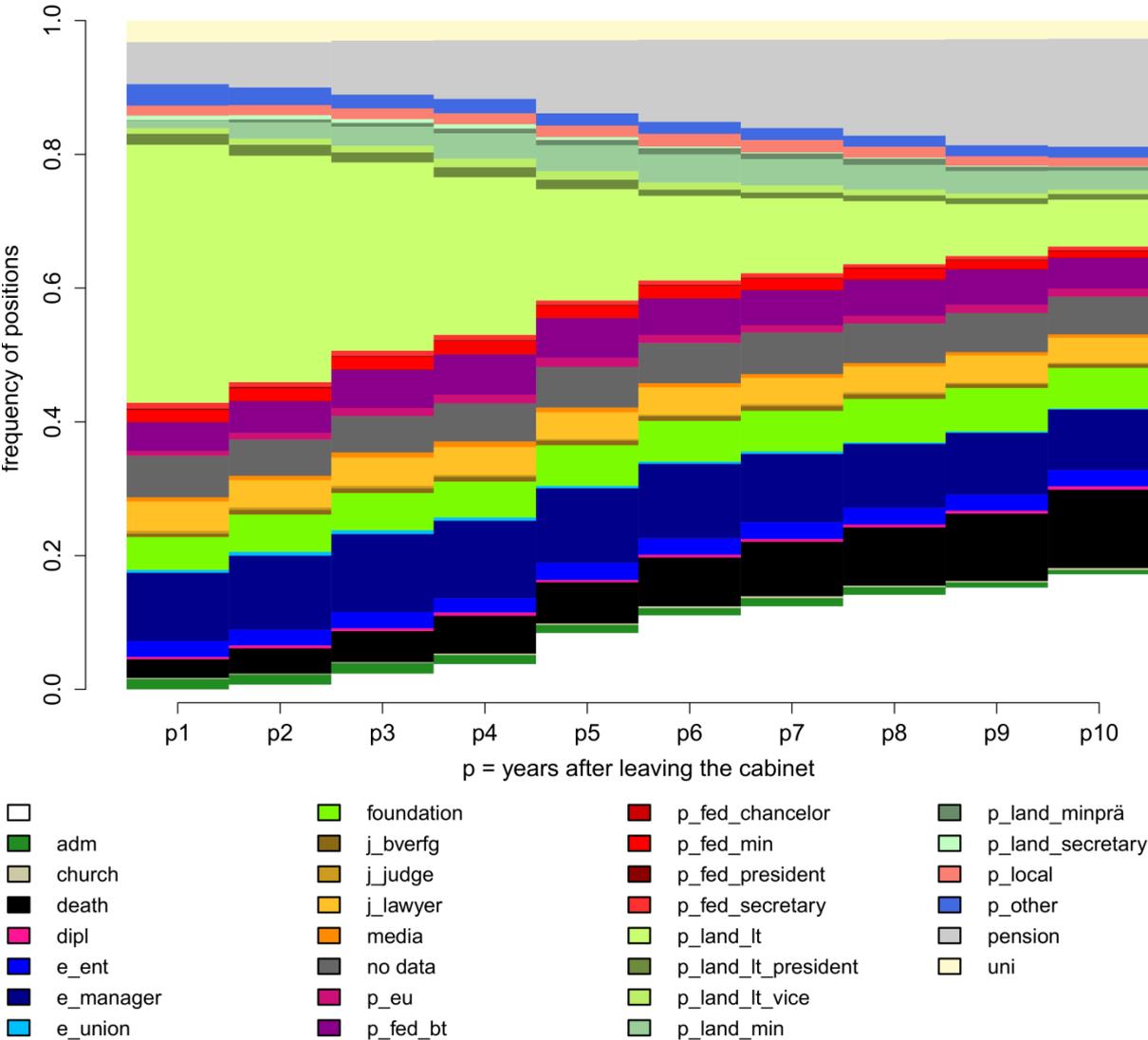
a) The overall picture

The transversal frequencies in figure 1 already show which occupations are often found for former Länder ministers and which are very rare. In the first year after leaving the cabinet more than 40 percent of all ministers continue their political work at the Länder level as a member of the Länder parliaments (the important posts of the president and vice-president of the Länder legislatures are depicted as separate colors). Member of a Länder parliament is also the only category that is continuously shrinking. This indicates that being a member of a Länder parliament seems to be a good opportunity for many of the former ministers

⁵ For such an approach see Borchert and Stolz (2011).

immediately after leaving their executive position. But most of them turn to other positions during the following ten years. It seems also quite unlikely, that someone who has left the Länder parliament either to a higher position on the federal or EU level or to a non-political position comes back to it in the years after. Most of the other positions exhibit more or less the same frequency during the whole ten years, except three categories that become more frequent through time: Pension, death and the white cells indicating that the ten years of the observed post-ministerial career have not been finished in 2014. The first two rising frequencies are of course an obvious pattern produced by aging of the sample while the last one is due to the very current ending point of the observation period.

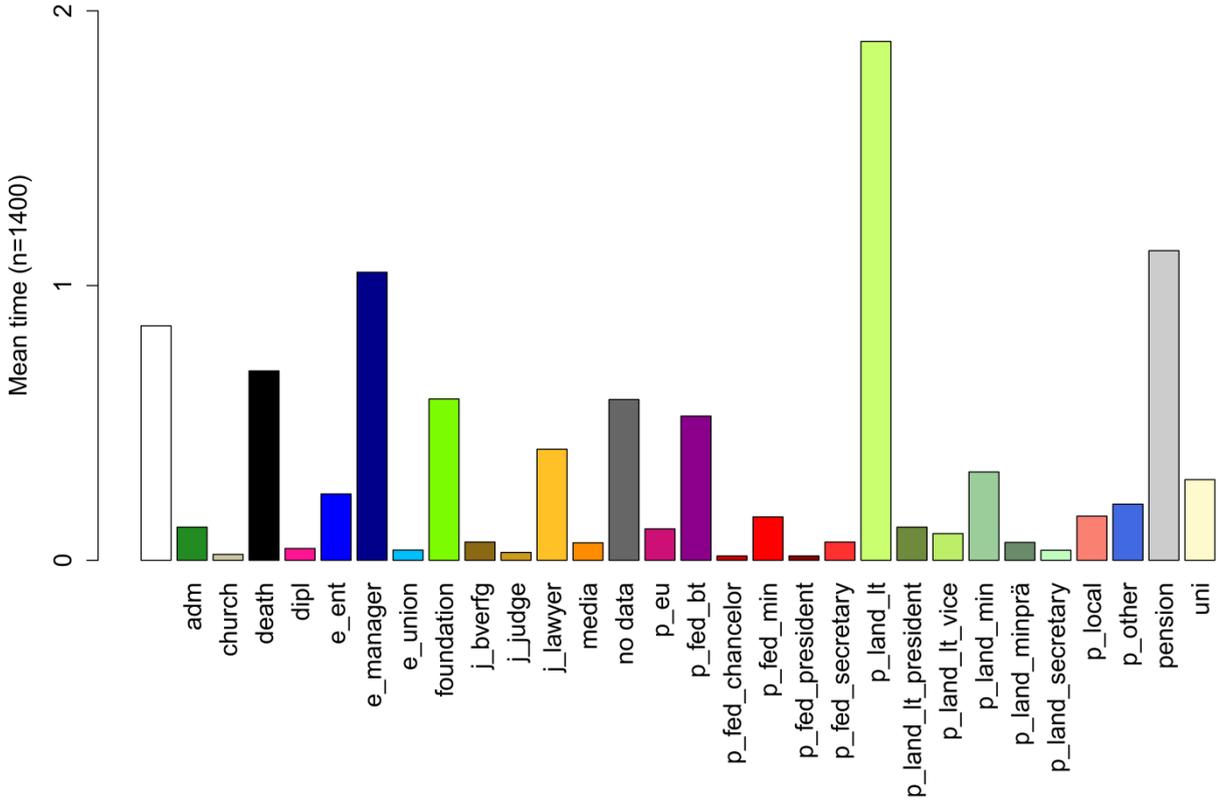
Figure 1: Transversal frequency plot of all post-cabinet careers



According to figure 1 and figure 2 which presents the complete data by means of mean durations within the states, the most relevant post-ministerial occupations are “manager”

(salaried), “foundation”, “lawyer”, “no data”, “member of the Bundestag” and “return to a Länder cabinet as a minister”. Although by far not the biggest bars, the graph shows that advancement to a higher political position either at the Länder-level as a prime minister of a Land, at the federal level as a member of the Bundestag, the Federal Government or even the Federal President, or to the European level is a real possibility for at least some of the Länder ministers.

Figure 2: Mean duration in each category

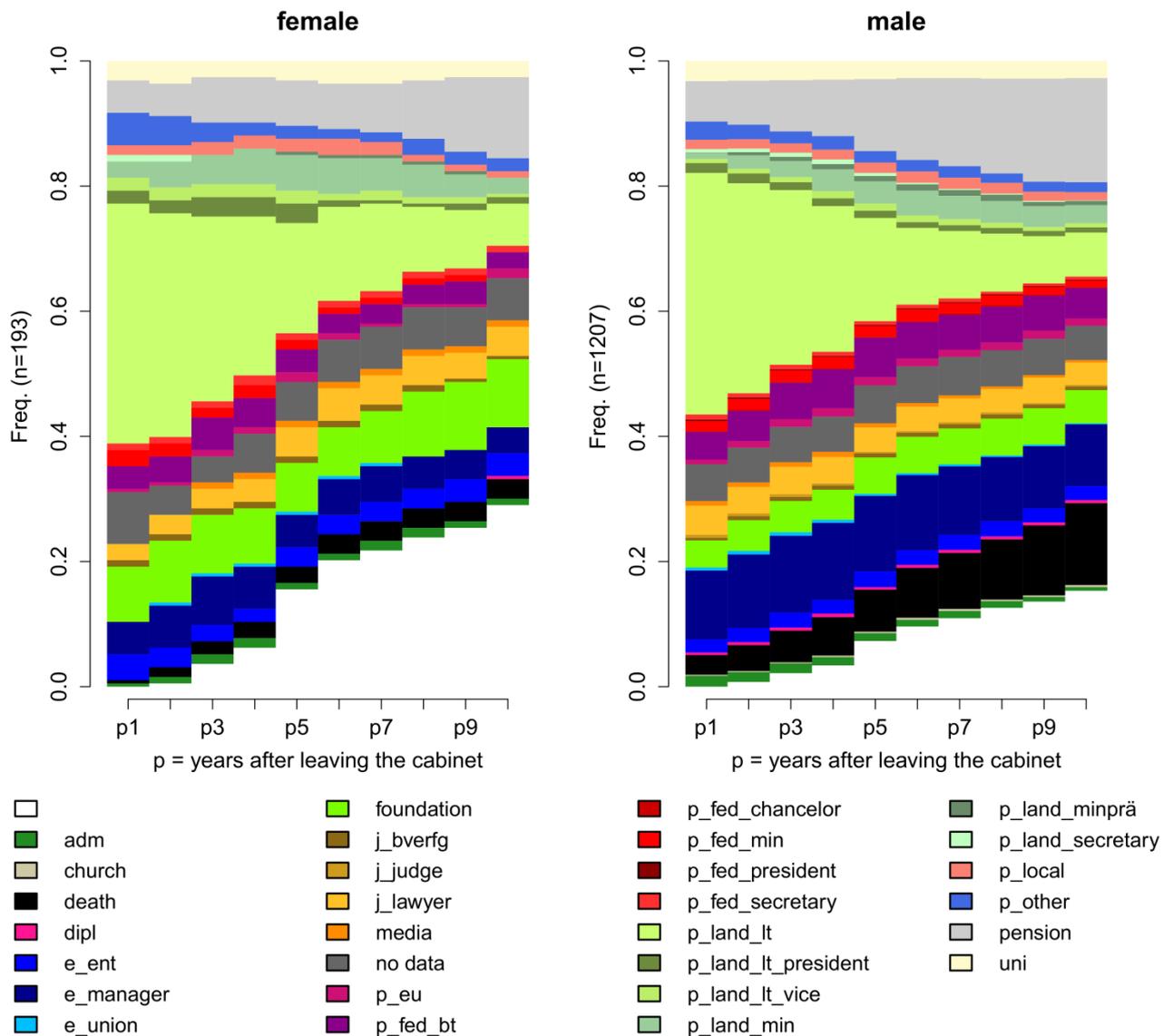


b) By gender

Comparing the transversal frequencies for female and for male former ministers shows for most categories only minor differences. The only more significant deviations are that less women go on pension or die during the ten years after leaving the cabinet, that women make it less often to the Bundestag or work as a managers⁶ while they are more often active in foundations doing charitable work after their cabinet careers.

⁶ The category “manager” also includes salaried members of boards of directors and salaried members of advisory boards.

Figure 3: Transversal frequency plots by gender



c) Party effects?

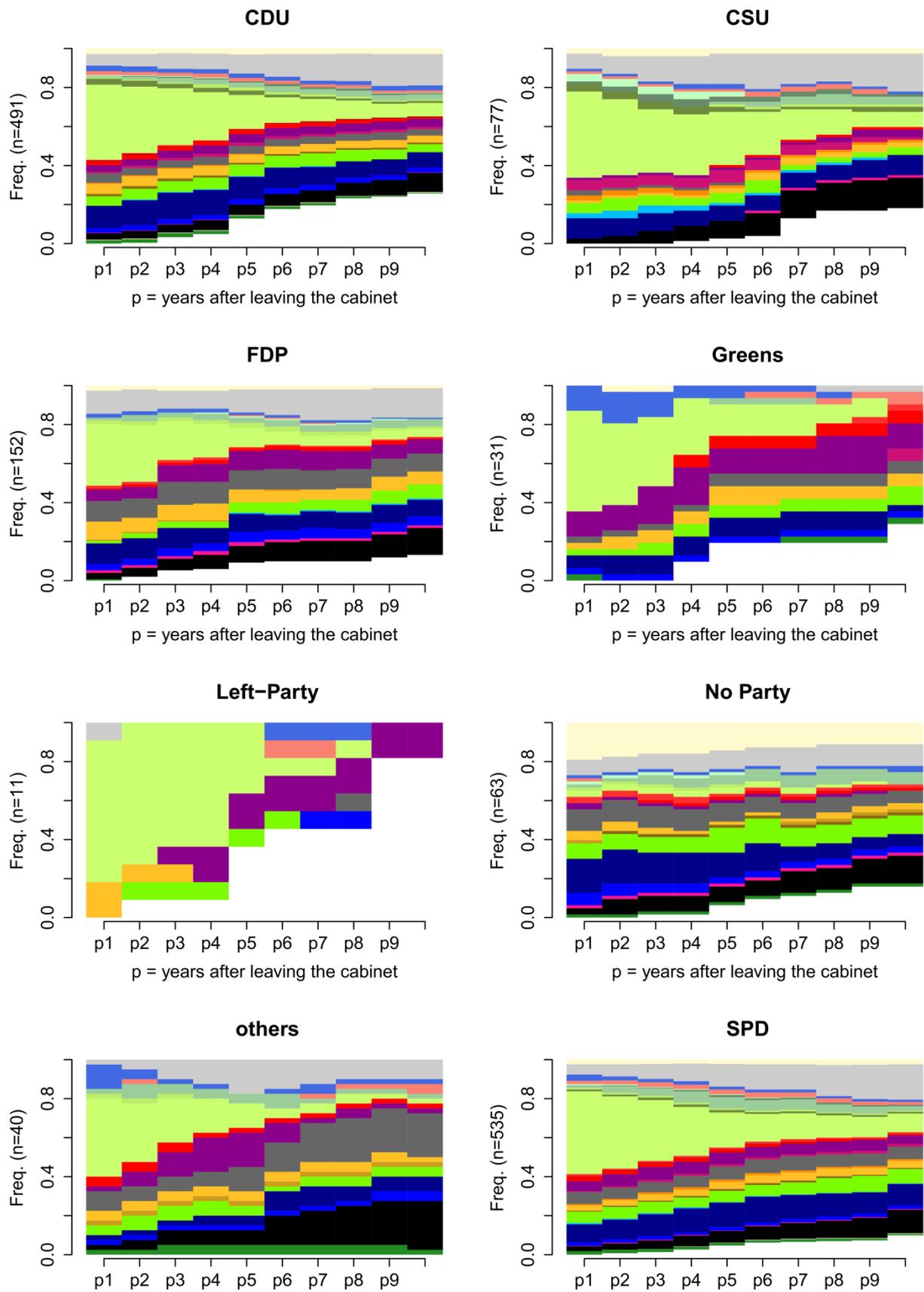
One of the knee-jerk questions asked by political scientists is the one about the consequences of parties and party-affiliation. In the context of this paper we may ask whether ministers from different parties also pursue substantially different post-ministerial careers. For example, given the in most cases clearly distinct socialization of FDP and SPD ministers, we could assume that the former may exhibit a higher probability of working as entrepreneurs or self-employed consultants while social democratic ministers may turn more often to local politics where a bigger party as the SPD has better chances than the small FDP (e.g. when it comes to the election of a mayor). The following figure 4 gives an answer to this and other questions regarding differences between the major German parties within the post-cabinet careers of their ministers.

As supposed former FDP ministers indeed exhibit the highest probability of all parties of becoming self-employed/entrepreneurs in the follow up of their political career at a Länder government. And also the second point is true: SPD as well as CDU members – so both large parties – turn more often to local politics in the ten years after leaving the cabinet.

Furthermore, there are some other conclusions that can be drawn from the pictures. While an upward move to the federal level (either Bundestag or cabinet) makes up about 5-10 percent for most parties, the Bavarian CSU is an exception here. The most common higher political level CSU ministers are heading for is not the federal level, but the European level. This may be due to the fact that for CSU politicians working in Berlin together with, or in many cases against the sister party CDU is not as desirable as a minister job in Bavaria.⁷ Another clear finding is that non-party ministers have the highest probability of all ministers of working as a professor at a university (or in a research institute) after their cabinet career. This does not come as a surprise if you think about the possible pool of expert ministers – they come in many cases from the academia and return to these positions afterwards. The final point I want to make here is nevertheless not so much about differences between the parties but about similarities: There are no significant differences between the two big parties CDU and SPD showing their highly professionalized party-structures which do not deviate much from each other and thus facilitate very similar post-cabinet career patterns.

⁷ A recent example is former federal minister of agriculture and consumer protection Ilse Aigner who left the federal level at her own request to become the Bavarian minister of economy. Particularly in Bavaria it seems not to be completely self-evident which is really the highest esteemed political level. In this regard the German federal system in some way resembles patterns known from Belgium (Dodeigne, 2014).

Figure 4: Transversal frequency plots by party



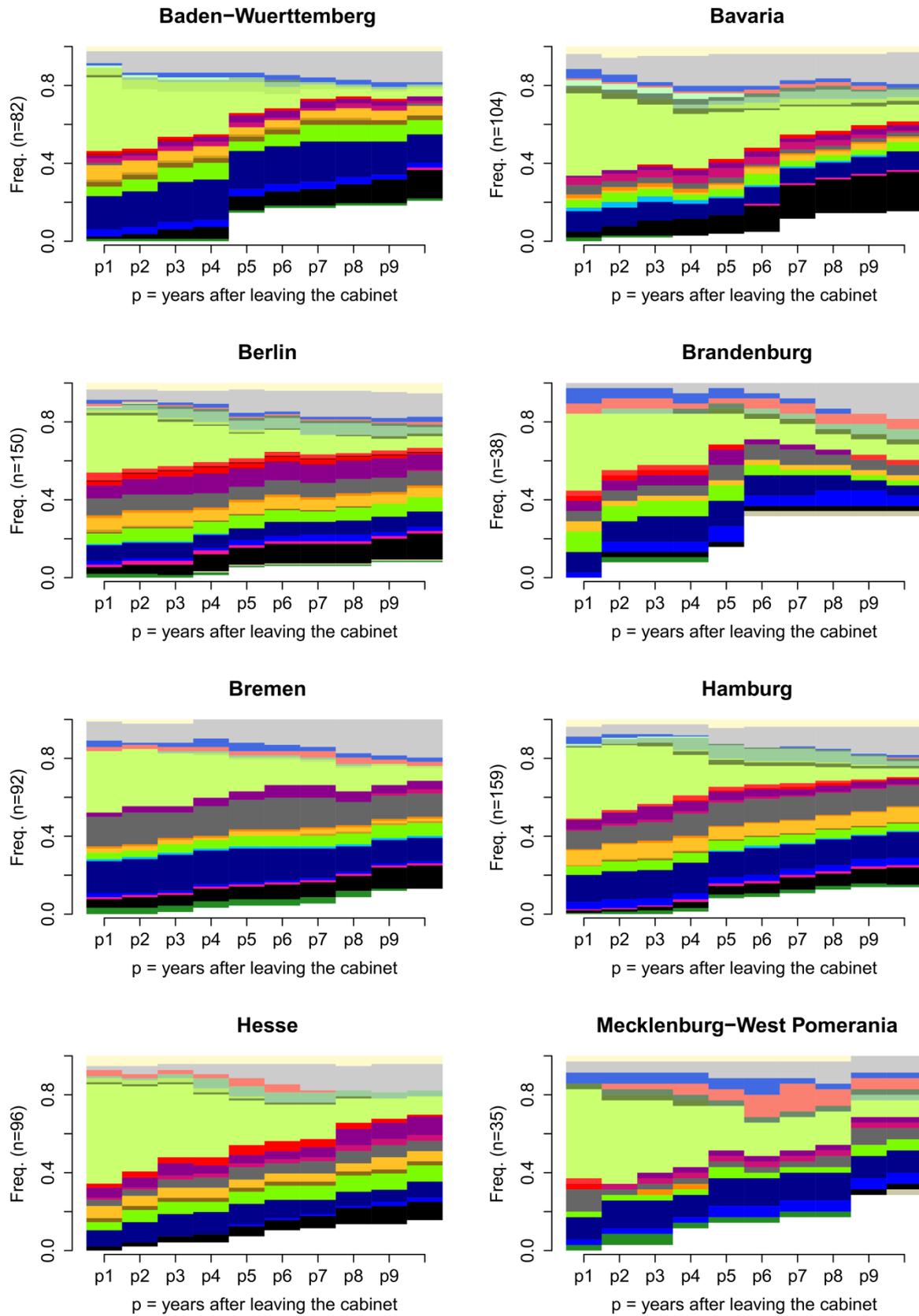
For the color coding compare the legend of figure 1.

d) Differences between the Länder?

The following figures 5a and 5b show the post-ministerial careers grouped by the 16 Länder. Again a number of insights can be gained from these pictures. These are first and foremost just empirical observations which have to be checked whether they are just statistical artifacts or whether they have a real causal underpinning. These causal mechanisms explaining variation between the Länder should then be analyzed more thoroughly in subsequent studies.

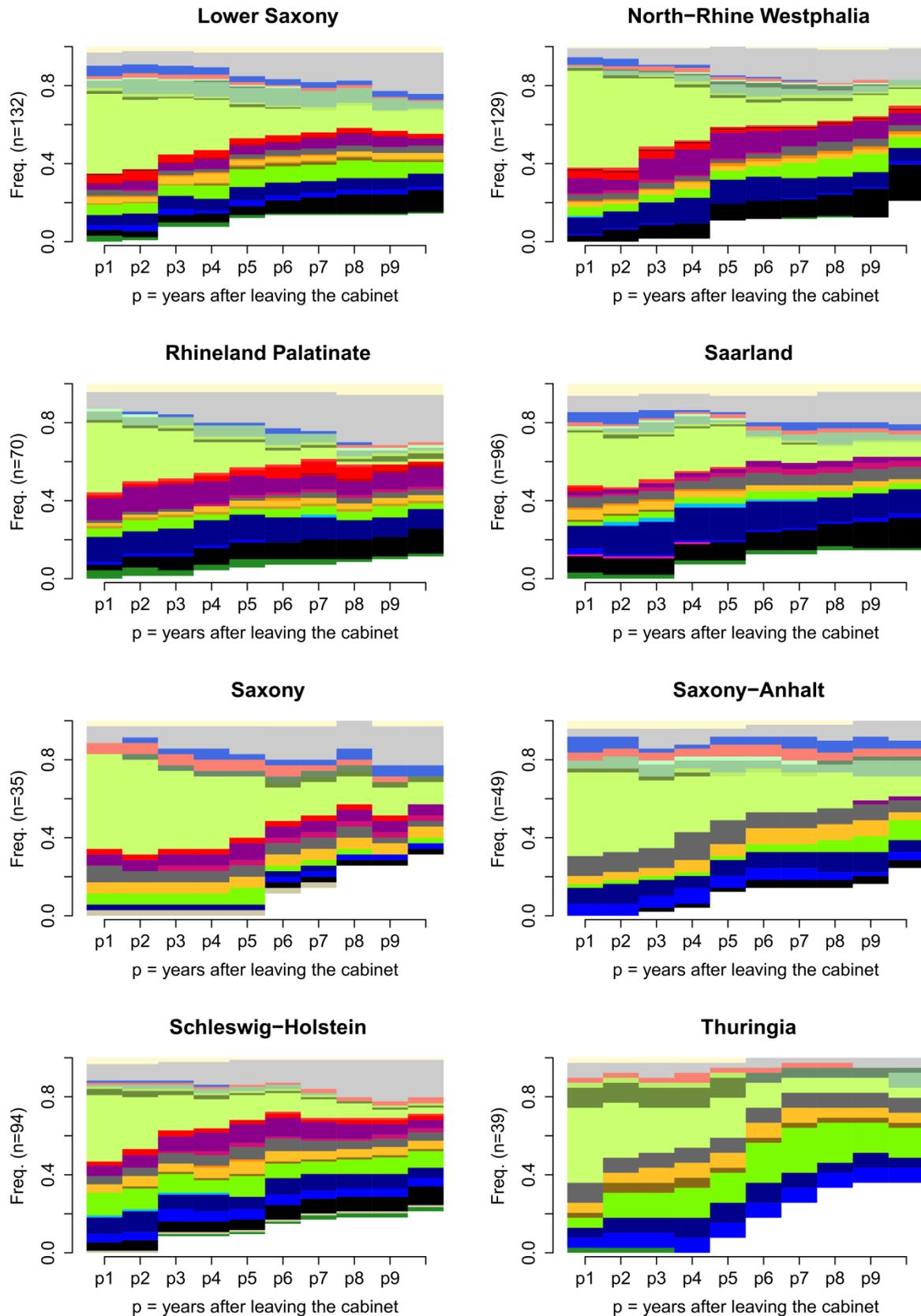
- 1) In Baden-Wuerttemberg much more former ministers work as managers and in the private economy than in the other Länder.
- 2) The chances to use the position in the Länder cabinet as a stepping stone for a post at the federal level are much lower for ministers in the Eastern German Länder Thuringia (except for Saxony).
- 3) The best chances to make it to the Bundestag do ministers from Berlin, North-Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate have.
- 4) Local politics is particularly for the Eastern German Länder ministers an option.
- 5) The number of former cabinet members working in the judicial system, mainly as lawyers, but also as judges (also at the Federal Constitutional Court) varies considerably between the Länder. While in Bavaria, Bremen and Mecklenburg West-Pomerania virtually no former cabinet member changes into the judicial system, in Thuringia, Saxony or Hamburg former ministers stay on average more than half a year of the ten observed years within the judicial system.
- 6) The possibilities for former ministers to once again become a minister at a Land are also very unevenly distributed: In Bremen, Mecklenburg West-Pomerania, Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein a return to a position within a Länder executive is very rare, whereas this is career pattern makes up a significant proportion in Berlin, Hamburg and Lower-Saxony.

Figure 5a: Transversal frequency plots by Bundesland I



For the color coding compare the legend of figure 1.

Figure 5b: Transversal frequency plots by Bundesland II



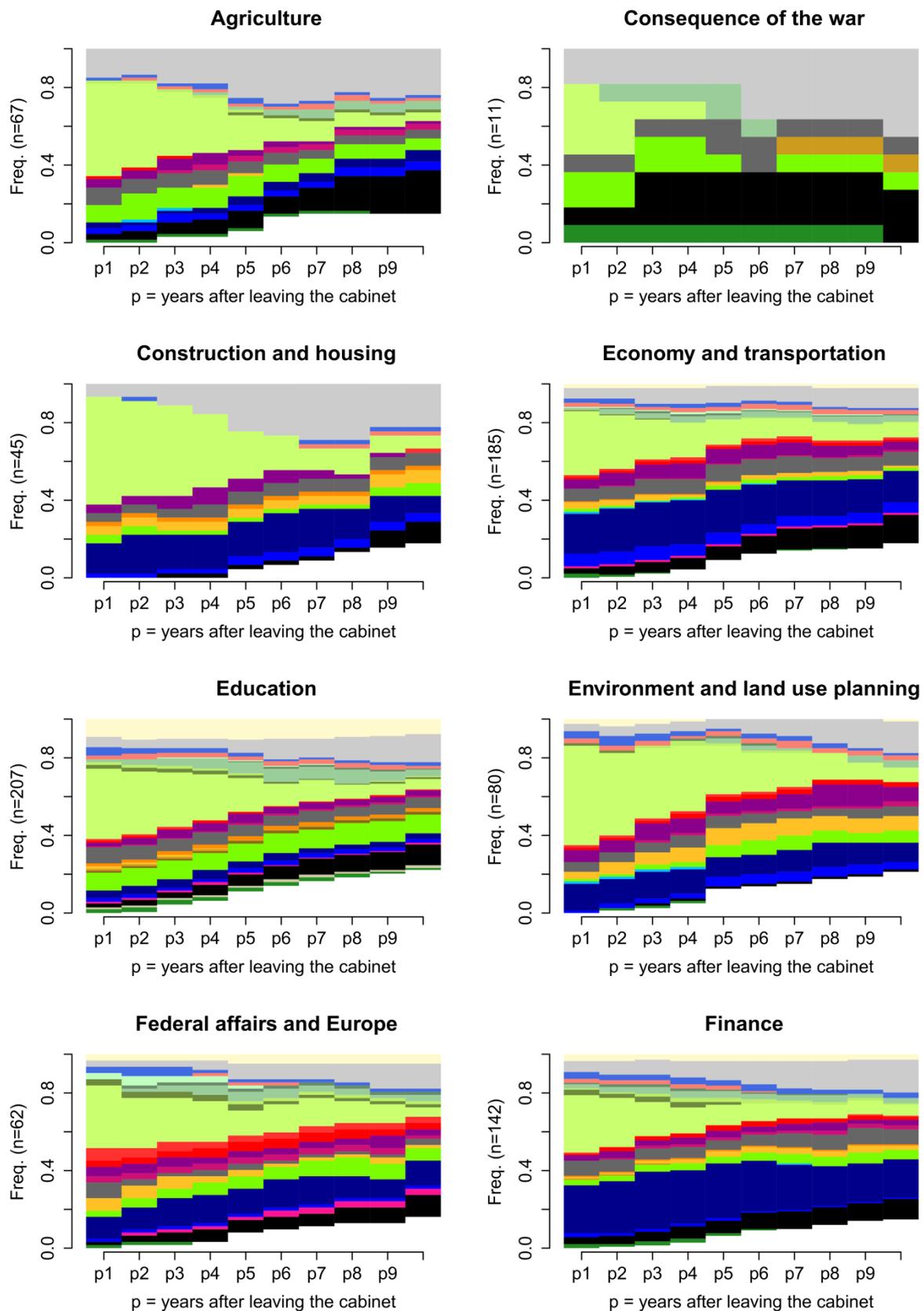
For the color coding compare the legend of figure 1.

e) Consequences of the last portfolio for the post-ministerial career

In this section we cluster the post-ministerial careers according to the last portfolio the minister held, before leaving the cabinet. Here we find again huge variations (see figures 6a and 6b):

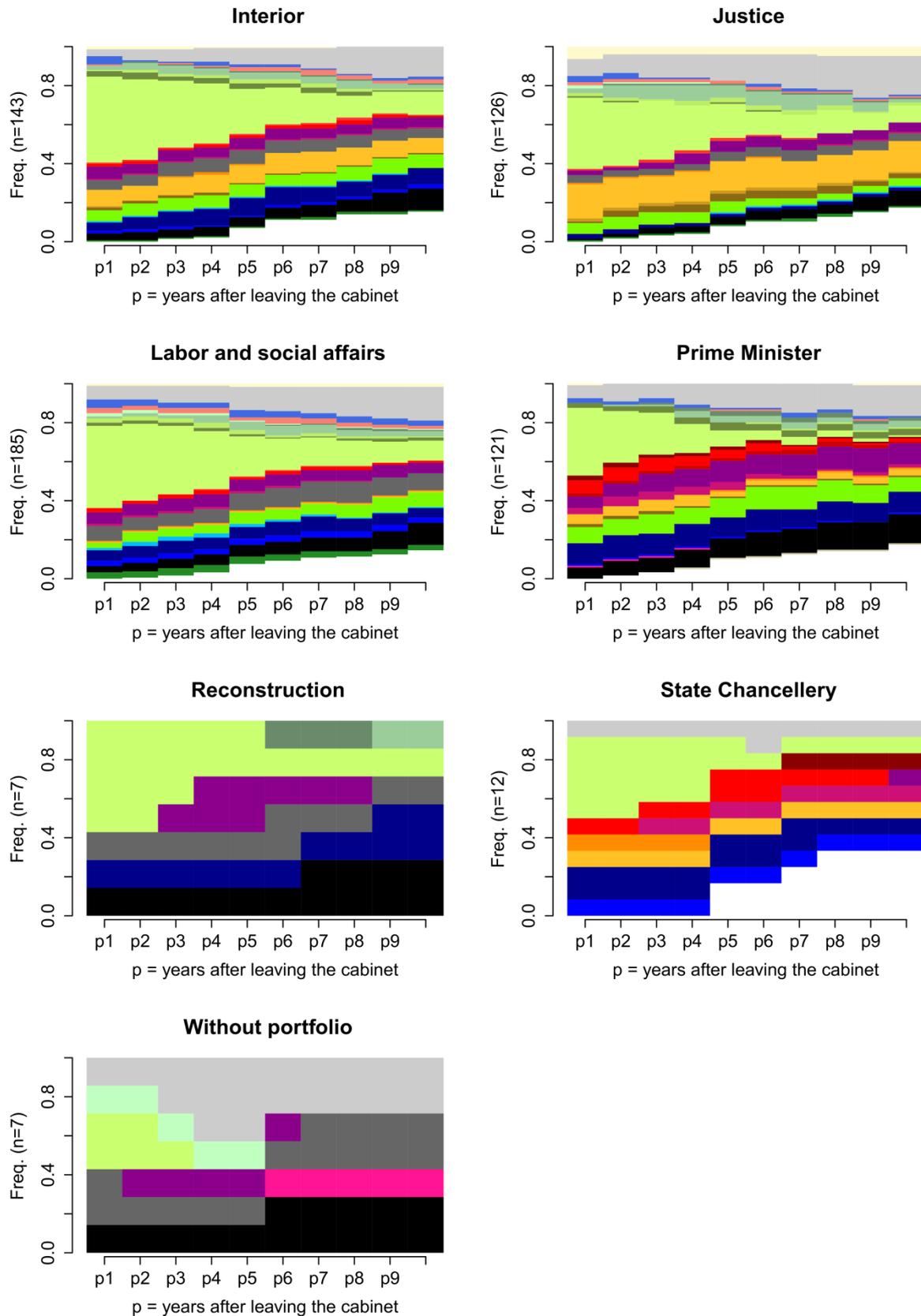
- 1) For a position within the private economy (either as self-employed or as an employee) the best starting blocks are the ministries of economy and transportation, of finance or of constructing and housing.
- 2) The best chances to become a member of the federal government have prime ministers, ministers for federal affairs and the heads of the state chancelleries. All these already have to work together with the federal government during their cabinet jobs which could explain their better chances to switch to the federal level. Other ministries as the ministries of agriculture, education or justice provide for less opportunities to make it to the federal level.
- 3) Not at all surprising is that ministers of interior and of justice very often continue their career as lawyers or judges.

Figure 6a: Transversal frequency plots by last portfolio I



For the color coding compare the legend of figure 1.

Figure 6b: Transversal frequency plots by last portfolio II



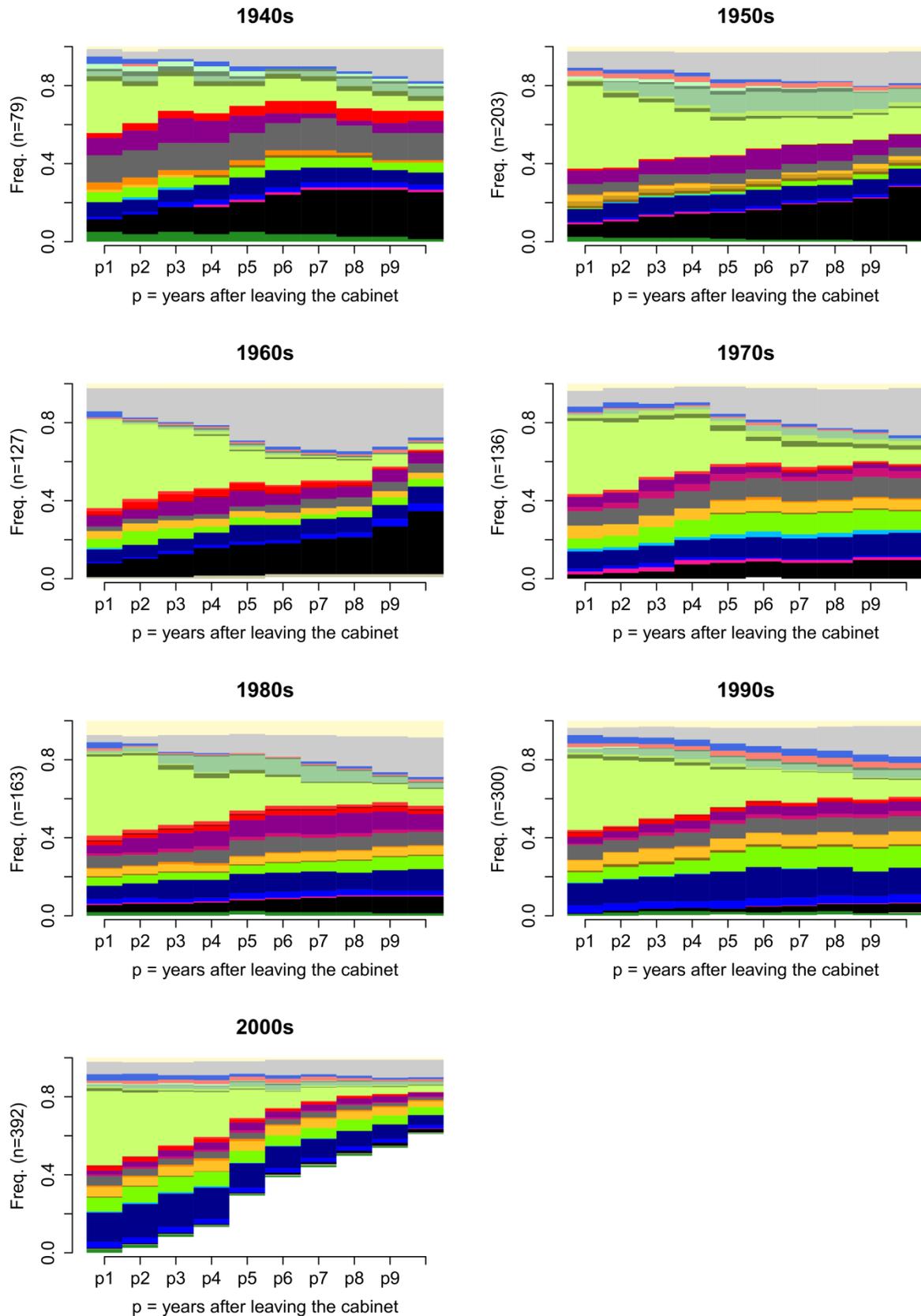
For the color coding compare the legend of figure 1.

f) Changes through time?

The final categorization is by the decade. I use the date when the minister left her office and started into her post-cabinet career to group the transversal frequency plots. Indeed we find differences in the plots.

- 1) Until the 1960s up to 20 percent of all ministers died during the observed ten years after they left the cabinet. This percentage is much lower in the following decades. This is on the one hand due to a trend towards younger cabinets and on the other hand due to the increasing life expectancy.
- 2) Especially in the 1960 “pension” is a large position. This shows that in that decade the position of a Länder minister was really the apex of a political career for many politicians. They reached this high level mostly at the end of their professional career and then went on pension and/or died. It is really staggering that in the 1960s ten years after leaving the cabinet only about 40 percent of the ministers were not either dead or on pension. In the 1990s it was about 85 percent!
- 3) Work in foundations expanded since the 1970s.
- 4) Positions in the economy have also become more frequent, especially since the 1990s.

Figure 7: Transversal frequency plots by decade of the last day in cabinet

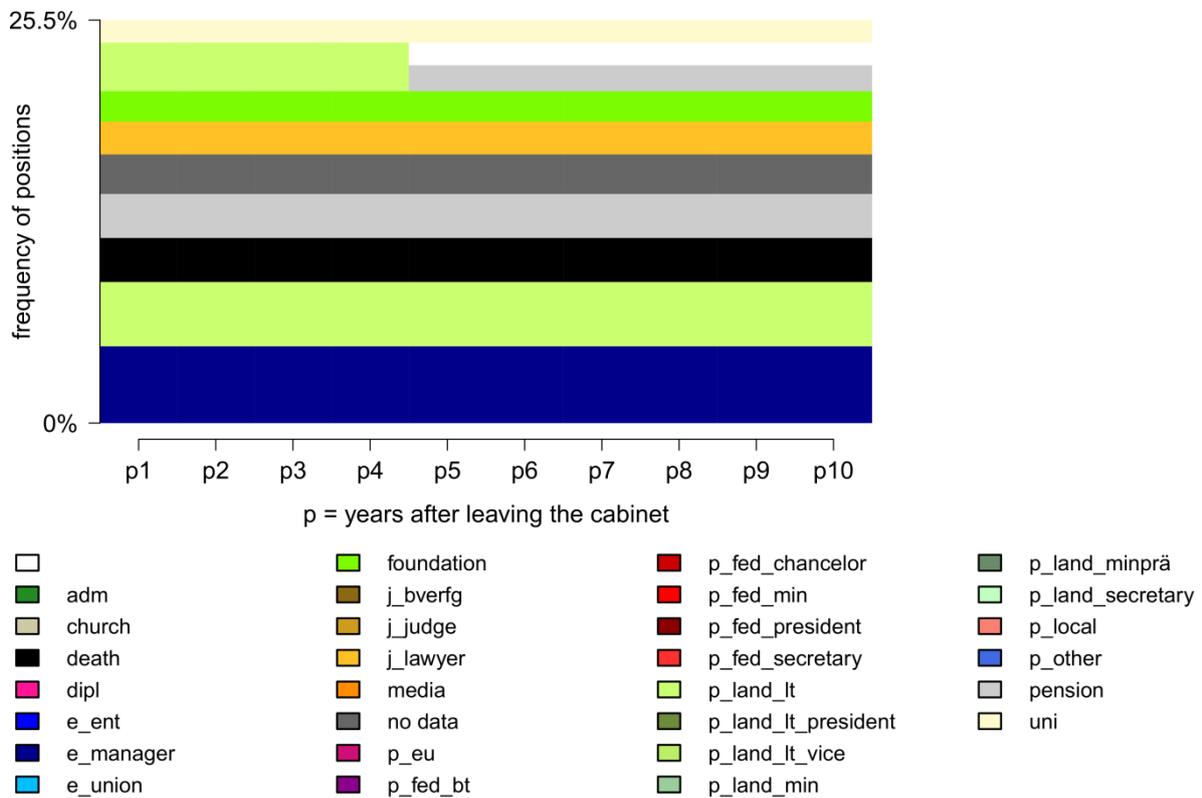


For the color coding compare the legend of figure 1.

g) From state to event sequences: what are the most frequent transition sequences?

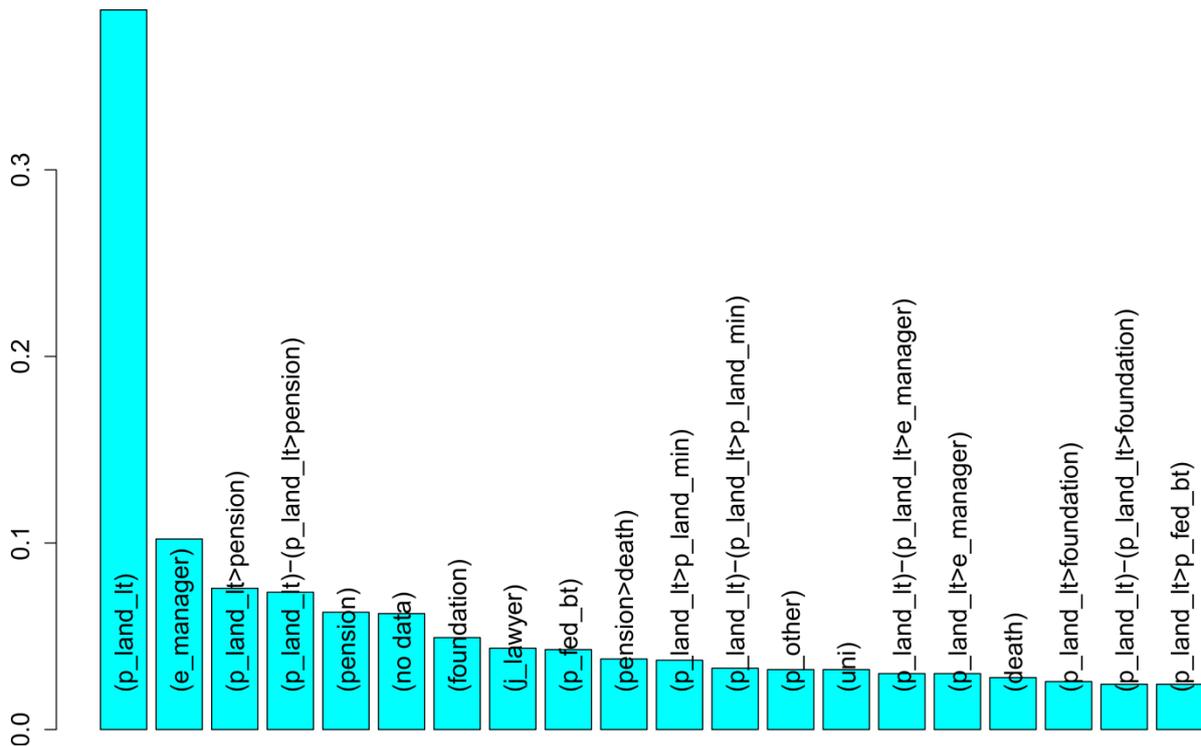
Another interesting question is which the most common career patterns are after leaving the cabinet. To answer this we can take a look at the ten most frequent sequences (see figure 8). Only about one fourth of all sequences constitute the ten most frequent ones. The most frequent sequence of all is ten years of work as a manager, followed closely by ten years of uninterrupted work as a member of the Länder parliament. Looking at the complete sequences is nonetheless not that informative. Just imagine someone who is 5 years a member of the Länder parliament and then he dies. This would be counted as a different sequence than someone who is 4 years member of the Länder parliament and dies then.

Figure 8: Percentages of the ten most frequent sequences



To get a better idea of the sequences of the transitions it makes sense to change the data set structure from the STS-format towards an event sequence format. The duration of the single stages are no more important in that format. It only holds the ordered sequences of the transitions from one state to another (this is what we call an event sequence). Knowing all the complete event sequences we can also figure out which are the most frequent event subsequences. Figure 9 shows them.

Figure 9: The 20 most frequent event subsequences

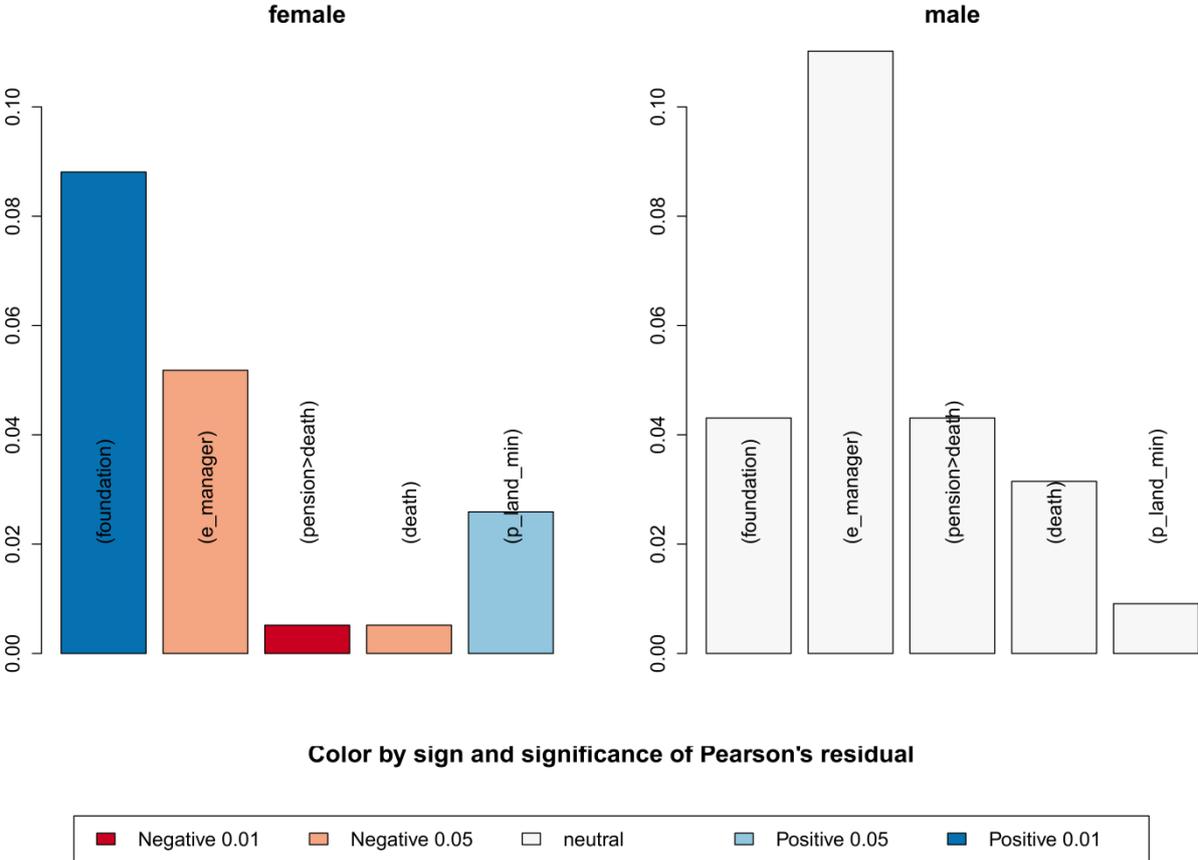


Interpreting this figure is straightforward: The most frequent event subsequence is the change into the Länder parliament, followed by a transition to a manager-position. About 8 percent of all event-sequences include a change from the Länder parliament to pension. It is interesting that most of the frequent subsequences (that are not consisting of a transition towards a single stage only) are starting at the Länder Parliament. This is of course not surprising when we see the wedge-shaped form of the Länder parliament members in most of the previous figures which indicate a dying out of this category. And these persons must change into some other state. And that are the frequent event subsequences we see here.

Event subsequences are also very helpful to determine differences between groups. As an example figure 10 shows the five most discriminating event subsequences between men and women. The significance values are based on a chi-square-test, testing against the null hypothesis of independence with gender. The result confirms our previous findings: Female ministers are significantly more often working for foundations after leaving the cabinet, while they are less often managers and they also die less often. These results have to be treated with

some caution since the large number of multiple paired comparisons leads to an accumulation of the alpha error, leading to significant results where there is in reality no real difference.⁸

Figure 10: The five most discriminating event subsequences between men and women



V. Conclusion

Post-cabinet careers of German Länder ministers have not been analyzed in a systematic manner until now. This paper is a first attempt to study these final stages of political careers in a comprehensive way. I concentrate on a time span of ten years after the minister has left the cabinet. My dataset covers all German Länder ministers since 1945, a total of 1400 cases. This study is clearly a first inductive, data mining approach. Yet, some preliminary results can be made: Firstly, being a member of a Länder government is for most of the politicians the highest political position they ever hold and thus a dead end. Nevertheless a minority definitely uses the Länder cabinet positions as stepping stones for a further career at the federal or even European level. Secondly, I identified four major alternative career trajectories if the minister does not switch to a higher political level: Länder politics, private economy, the

⁸ Performing the test with the Bonferroni-correction indeed does no longer report any significant differences. Yet, this correction is extremely conservative, which makes it very likely that also in reality significant differences are no longer detected. Thus, I believe the chi-square-test is the better option.

judicial system and charitable foundations. By far the biggest amount of Länder ministers stay in Länder politics. They stay for some time in the Länder parliament and some even come back into the Länder cabinet. Thirdly, the analyses showed some major variations regarding the post-ministerial careers according to variables as sex, party affiliation, Bundesland, last portfolio and decade. All these differences should be further analyzed and it must be checked which causal mechanism can explain them.

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Annex:

Tabelle A1 Codebook

adm	Administration
church	Priest, church administration
death	Death
dipl	Diplomacy (Federal Foreign Office, ambassador)
e_ent	Self-employed (e.g. founder of a company, farmer, corporate consultant)
e_manager	Manager, Member of a board of directors, Member of an advisory committee
e_union	Member of employee's or employer's associations
foundation	Registered association, charitable foundation, voluntary work
j_bverfg	Judge at the Federal Constitutional Court
j_judge	Judge
j_lawyer	Lawyer
media	Media
p_eu	EU (Parliament, Commission, Agencies)
p_fed_bt	Member of the Bundestag
p_fed_chancellor	Federal Chancellor
p_fed_min	Federal minister
p_fed_president	Federal President
p_fed_secretary	State Secretary federal level
p_io	Internationale Organisations
p_land_lt	Member of a Länder parliament
p_land_lt_president	President of a Länder parliament
p_land_lt_vice	Vice-president of a Länder parliament
p_land_min	Minister of a Land
p_land_minprä	Prime minister of a Land
p_land_secretary	State secretary of a Land
p_local	Local politics (e.g. mayor, city councilor)
p_other	Other political engagement (mostly party business, counseling of politicians)
pension	Pension, retired
uni	University (full) professor, researcher at research institute

Figure A1: Regular sequence plot of all post-ministerial careers

