



Presentation of the Academy of Finland Professor “Political Representation” Project and the *People & Parliament* interface

Political representation: Modernisation of estates and parliaments, 1789-1870

University of Jyväskylä, Department of History and Ethnology, Seminarium (S), 20-21 June



Democracy in crisis?

Long-lasting debate on representative democracy in crisis -- since the gradual adoption of notions of what is today called "representative" or "parliamentary democracy" in the late nineteenth century

To what extent are we experiencing an exceptional crisis of democracy?

Are occasional tensions between the people and parliament a normal – even essential – feature of representative democracy?

How has parliamentary / representative democracy been reforming itself to respond to changing societal circumstances?



Towards digital long-term conceptual history of democracy

Academy of Finland Professor Project

“Political Representation: Tensions between Parliament and the People from the Age of Revolutions to the 21st Century”
(2021-2026)

- Based on the analysis of digitized plenary debates in national parliaments as nexuses of multi-sited political discourse
- <https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/laitokset/hela/en/research/political-representation>

Bridging traditional conceptual history and digital history: DH helps in answering questions about

- The timing of the entangled debates on sovereignty, the representation of the people, democracy and parliamentarism and alternative vocabularies
- Overall trends in changing conceptions
- Shifting individual representative claims
- Cases of tensions over who or what has been represented
- Representatives' changing self-descriptions and perceptions on their parliamentary role



Keywords, fields of research, budget, team

Keywords

- comparative history, transnational history, conceptual history, digital history
- representation, popular sovereignty, parliamentarism, democracy
- Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden

Fields of research

- History
- Political science
- Computational data analysis
- Language, society and culture
- Applied linguistics

• Team

- Pasi Ihalainen (Jyväskylä)
- Marnix Beyen (Antwerp)
- Hugo Bonin (Jyväskylä)
- Anne Engelst Norgaard (Trondheim)
- Jo Guldi (Southern Methodist University in Dallas)
- Zachris Haaparinne (Jyväskylä)
- Jussi Kurunmäki (Jyväskylä)
- Jani Marjanen (Helsinki)
- Ville Vaara (Helsinki/Jyväskylä)
- Visiting Scholars, Associate members



“Political Representation” Project Work Packages

- **WP1 Comparative big data analysis of political speech**
 - A series of methodological webinars
 - The comparative *People & Parliament* interface constructed: ten national corpora, neighbouring words, absolute and relative term frequencies
 - CEUR article on the interface: [Building and Testing a Comparative Interface on Northwest European Historical Parliamentary Debates: Relative Term Frequency Analysis of British Representative Democracy \(ceur-ws.org\)](#)
 - Pasi Ihalainen, [Miten edustuksellinen demokratiamme on muuttumassa? Digitaalisen käsitehistorian näkökulma | Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae \(journal.fi\)](#)
 - Jani Marjanen, “Quantitative Conceptual History”, CHOC 18(1).
 - Pasi Ihalainen & Jani Marjanen (eds), *Writing Conceptual Histories* (Bloomsbury Academic)
 - One more methodological article
- **WP2 From representation by estates to representation by the nation, 1760s-1860s**
 - Two workshops (November 2021, June 2023), a third one with Cesare & Ere?
 - Zachris Haaparinne, *Language of Scale: Petitions, Parliament, and the Changing Perceptions of Representation, 1688-1832* (monograph)
 - Hugo Bonin, « *At the sound of the new word spoken* »: *Le mot démocratie en Grande-Bretagne, 1770-1920* (monograph)
 - Jani & Jussi: special issue on “in absence of representation, 1800-1870”
 - Monograph chapters /articles



“Political Representation” Project Work Packages

- **WP3 Pressures to democratise parliamentary representation, 1860s-1920**
- Jussi Kurunmäki, Pasi Ihalainen & Kai Peksujeff on democracy and parliamentarism in Sweden until the 1930s
- Sessions and special issues on “people approaching the parliament” (Zachris) and “parliament approaching the people” (Hugo & Pasi)
- Chapters in monographs / articles
- **WP4 From crisis to consolidation of national democracy, 1920-1990**
- Pasi Ihalainen, Kari Palonen, Rosario Lopez & Henk te Velde (eds), *The Figure of the Politician in Modern and Contemporary Europe* (Berghahn Books)
- Jussi Kurunmäki & Jani Marjanen, *The formation of national democracy and political ideologies in parliamentary debate, 1920-90*
- A special issue on representation after the end of ideology (Jani & Jussi)
- Chapters in monographs / articles



“Political Representation” Project Work Packages

- **WP5** The dislocation of nations, peoples and ideologies as challenges to representation
- Hugo Bonin, *New Wines in Old Bottles: ‘Liberal Democracy’ in France and the United-Kingdom, 1860s-2010s* (monograph)
- A special issue on representation after the end of ideology (Jani & Jussi)
- Hugo Bonin, Pasi Ihalainen & Zachris Haaparinne, article manuscript “Redefinitions of representative democracy in the United Kingdom, France and Germany in the beginning of the 21st century”
- Hugo Bonin, Irène Herrmann, Pasi Ihalainen & Zoé Kergomard, article manuscript on “Swiss direct democratic instruments in parliamentary debates in France and Germany, 2000-2019”
- Chapters in monographs / articles

WP6 Political Representation: Tensions between Parliament and the People from the Age of Revolutions to the 21st Century

- Pasi Ihalainen, *Towards Representative Democracy: A History of Claims, Tensions and Parliamentary Self-Definitions in Northwest Europe* (monograph)

People & Parliament – Tool for Writing Long- Term Comparative Conceptual History of Representative Democracy



Parliament

the eduskunta

Explore



People & Parliament
(France 1881-2022) ⓘ

Speeches from the 3rd, 4th and 5th
republic of France

Explore



People & Parliament
(Germany 1949-2021) ⓘ

Speeches from the Bundestag

Explore



People & Parliament
(Germany Reichstag -
1867-1942) ⓘ

Speeches from the Reichstag

Explore



People & Parliament
(Netherlands) ⓘ

Speeches from the Eerste Kamer and
Tweede Kamer

Explore



People & Parliament
(Norway, 1814-2004) ⓘ

Speeches from the Storting

Explore



Towards digital conceptual history of democracy

Democracy is both a consensual and contested concept.

Conceptual history: nominalist analysis focuses on the uses of the term 'democracy' and related vocabulary by historical actors themselves as part of their political action.

Parliamentary debates as analytical nexuses: competing (re)definitions by "representatives of the people"; discourses on democracy from other forums recycled.

How has the dominant form of institutionalised (representative) democracy, shifted over time, especially in the United Kingdom, France and Germany?

How have political actors argued for the need to change democracy and what kinds of complementary elements have they demanded and on what grounds?



Towards digital conceptual history of democracy

Digitization of
parliamentary records
-> conceptual
historians can analyse

- general trends in conceptualizations of politics quantitatively
- uses of concepts by individuals in particular political struggles qualitatively

Combining computer-
assisted distant and
context-sensitive close
reading

- Conceptual history no longer needs to base its arguments about trends in political discourse on selected quotations only but can use statistical data as proof.
- The more exact meanings of the concepts and causal explanations can still only be reconstructed through contextual close reading.



Digital history methods for conceptual historical analysis

Neighbouring words, bigrams/trigrams/fourgrams:

identifying the 100 most common phrases containing democracy in each country's parliamentary debate

locating key qualifiers of 'democracy' in limited time periods

Relative term frequencies:

bigrams or phrases as central conceptualisations of democracy visualized
subdiscourses reconstructed

reveal patterns and ruptures, guiding our attention to certain periods

Word embedding models (under construction):

going beyond obvious vocabularies to unexpected historical ones
words with a similar or different role or meaning in the same context
synonyms and antonyms



About our data

Quality highly variable: OCR errors, data structure, availability of metadata

No unified data model for all the various national datasets

- Britain (1803-), Sweden (1809-), The Netherlands (1814-), Norway (1814-, closed), Denmark (1849-), Germany (1867-), France (1882-, closed), Canada (1903-), Finland (1907-), Ireland (1920-), Inter-Parliamentary Union (1889-), **EP English dataset?**

An interactive, iterative dialogue between digital and traditional research

Public launch uncertain due to rights and development/maintenance costs:
accesses to research partners for testing



Key features of the *People & Parliament* prototype

Based on the I-Analyzer developed by Utrecht University DH Lab

10 countries, from 1800s to 2020s (Ihalainen et al. 2022), quality of data and metadata varies

Full-text search and filtering

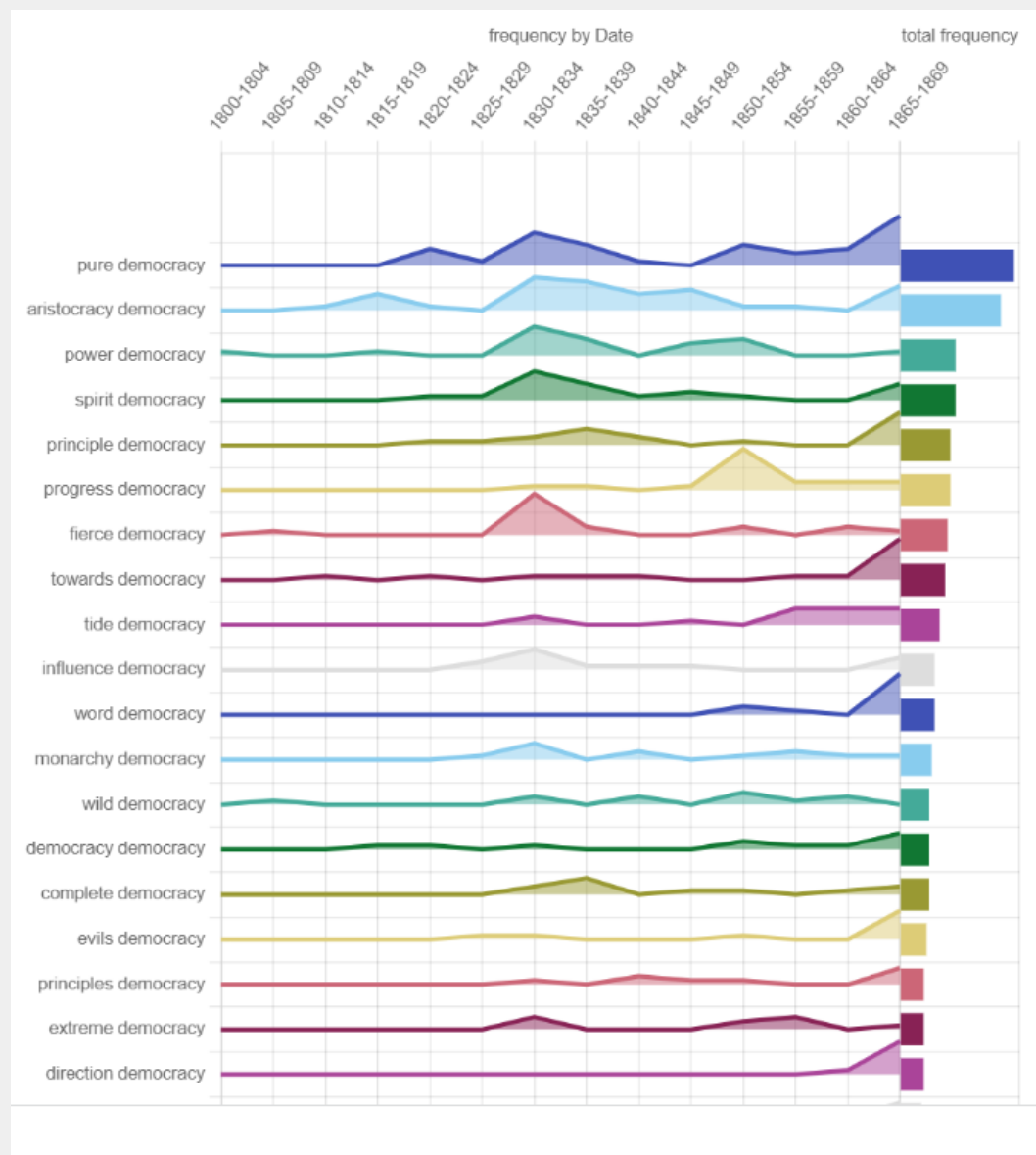
Visualisations: frequencies and neighbouring words (up to 100 most common bigrams, trigrams or fourgrams both ways)

Word models for synonyms (up to 100) and comparison of similarity of context (development and interpretation)

The screenshot displays the I-ANALYZER web interface. The top navigation bar includes the I-ANALYZER logo, a 'Corpora' dropdown menu, and links to 'Manual' and 'About'. The main search area is titled 'Search "People & Parliament (France 1881-2022)"'. A search bar contains the word 'démocratie', with buttons for 'Search' and 'Download csv'. Below the search bar, there are tabs for 'Search Results' and 'Visualizations'. The 'Search Results' tab is active, showing 67209 results. A 'Filters' sidebar on the left allows filtering by 'Date' (with a range from 01-01-2000 to 31-12-2020), 'Chamber' (with a 'Choose' dropdown), and 'Legislature' (with a 'Choose' dropdown). The main results area shows '67209 results. Showing results 1 - 20:'. It includes a 'Context (no. of characters):' input field, a 'SORT BY' dropdown set to 'Relevance', and a 'PAGES' section with a 'Relevance' dropdown and a 'Descending' button. The first result is displayed with a 'Date' of '2001-04-25' and a 'Speech' snippet: 'ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE – 1 re SÉANCE DU 25 AVRIL 2001 2237 — .. — mais dans une responsabilité partagée. Vous savez bien, en effet, que la sécur...'. A 'Relevance: 100%' indicator is shown next to the date.

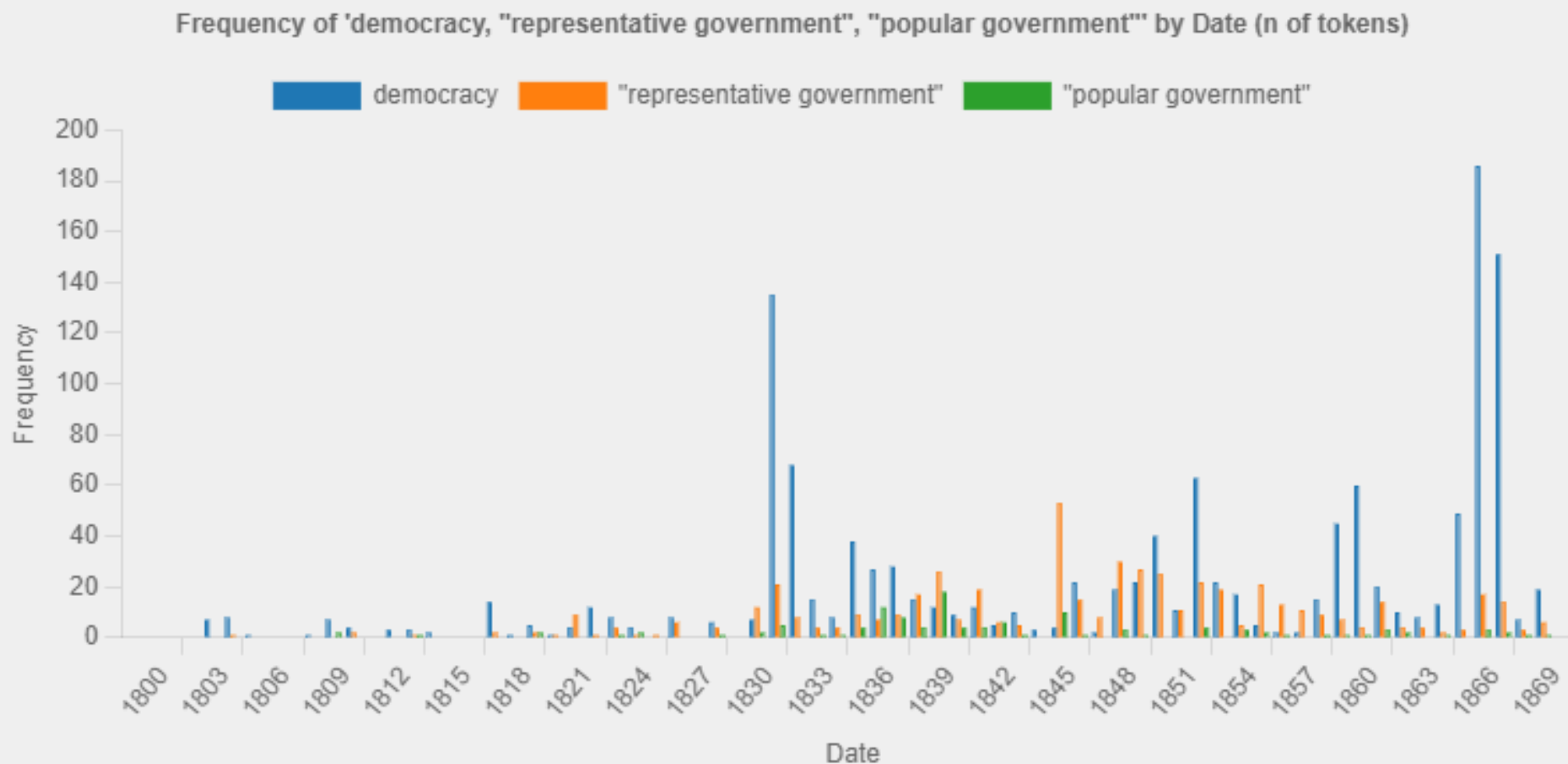


Neighbouring words: Bigrams of democracy, 1803-1869, stopwords removed





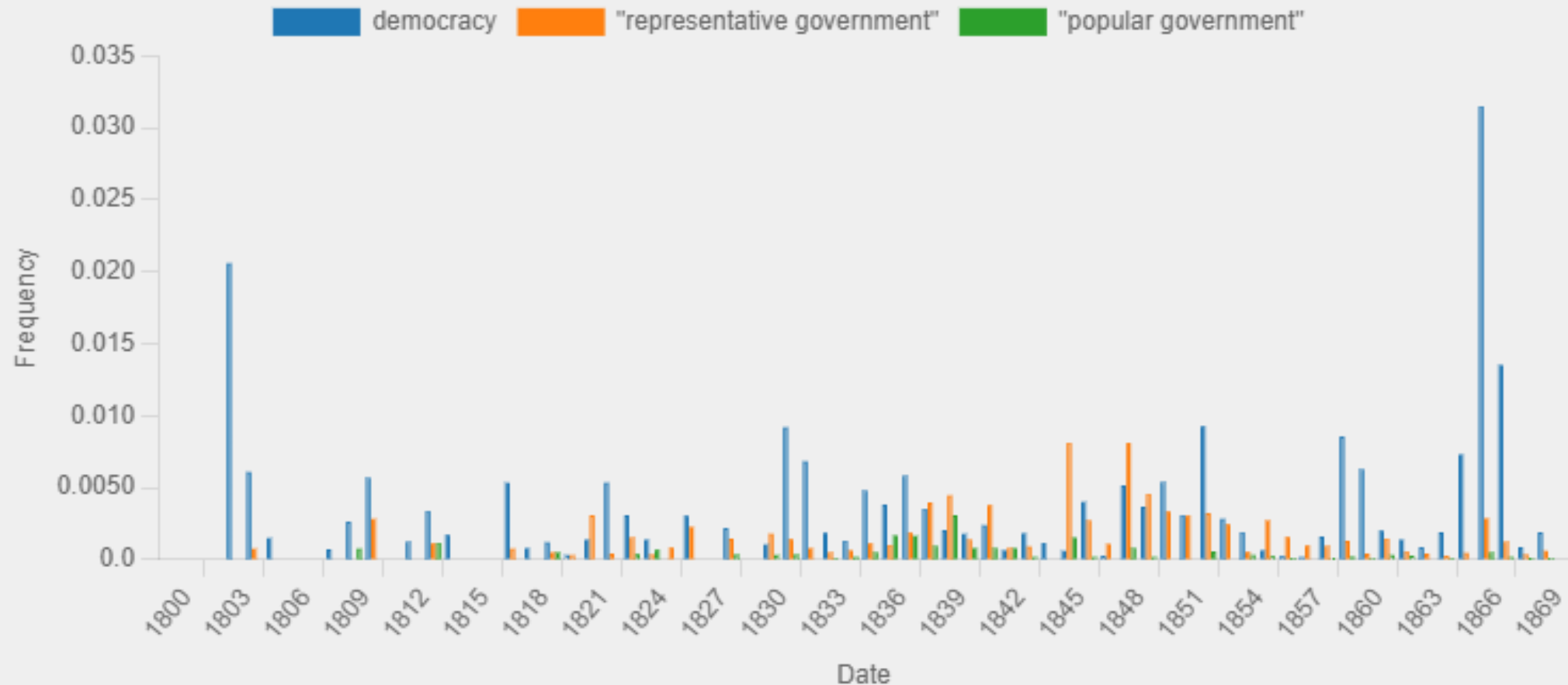
Frequency of the search term: Absolute frequency of 'democracy', 1803-1869





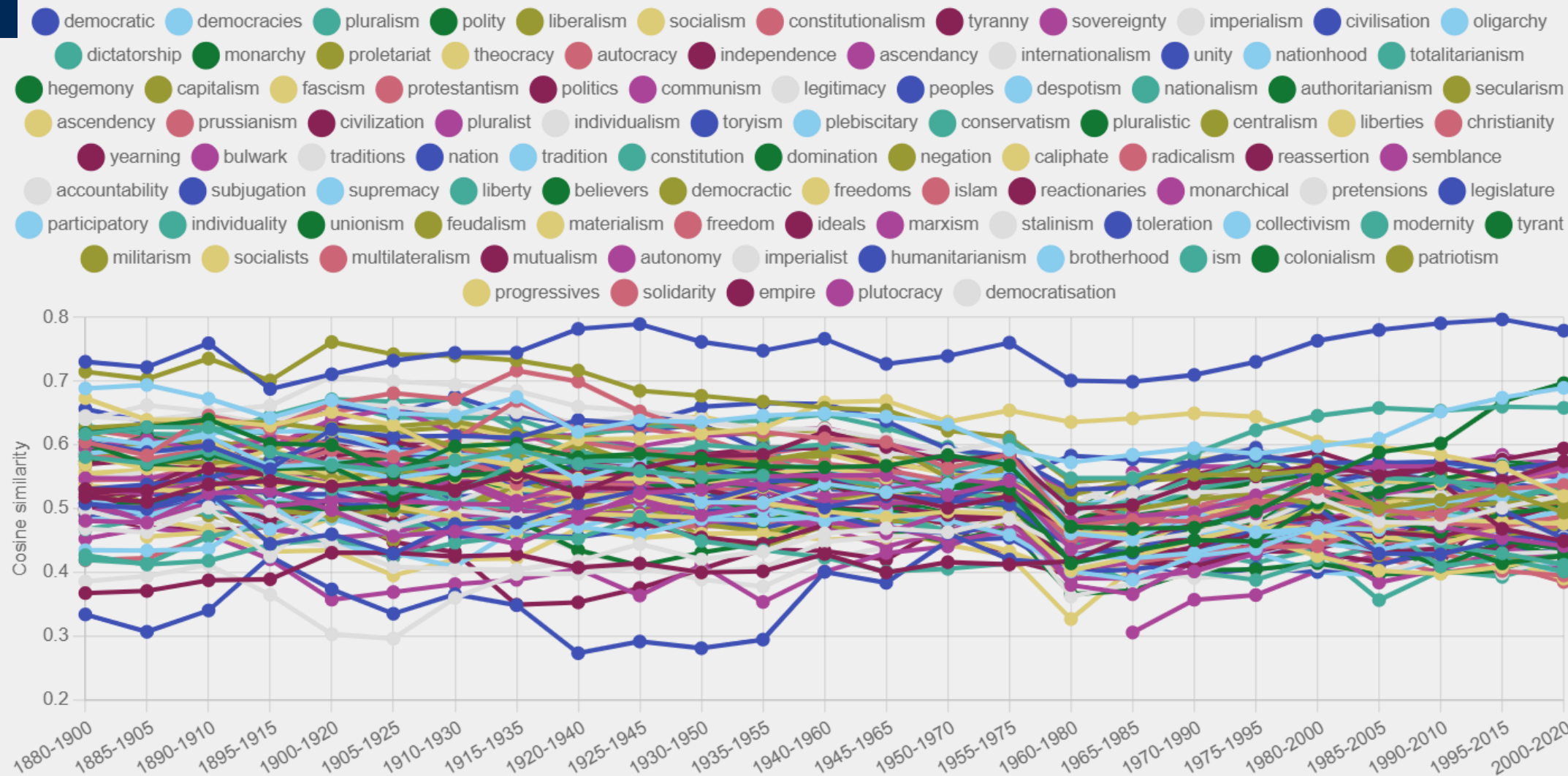
Frequency of the search term: Relative frequency of 'democracy', 1803-1869, normalization per documents

Frequency of 'democracy', "representative government", "popular government" by Date (n of tokens, normalized by documents)



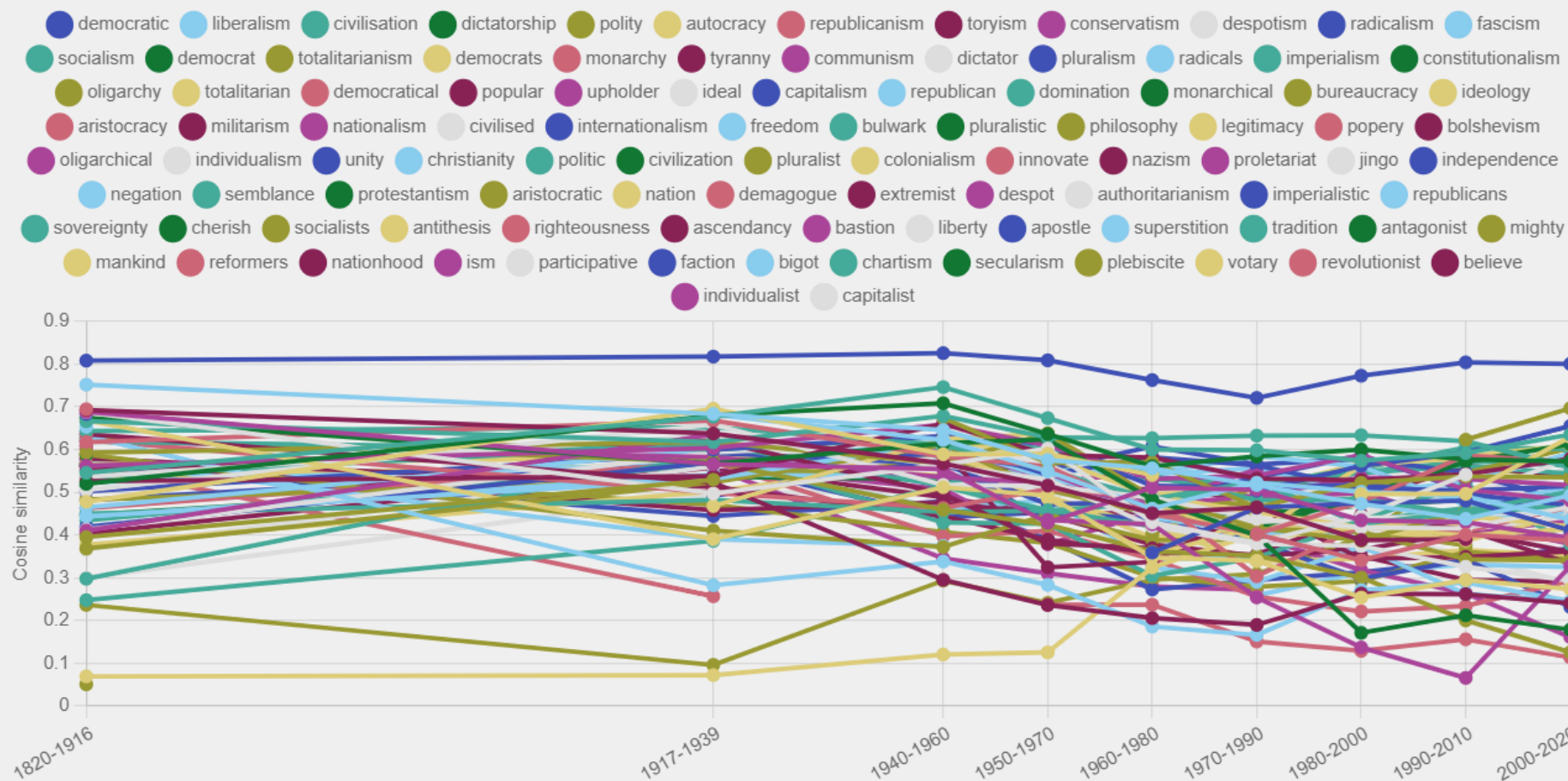


Word models (old): Related words: Democracy since 1880



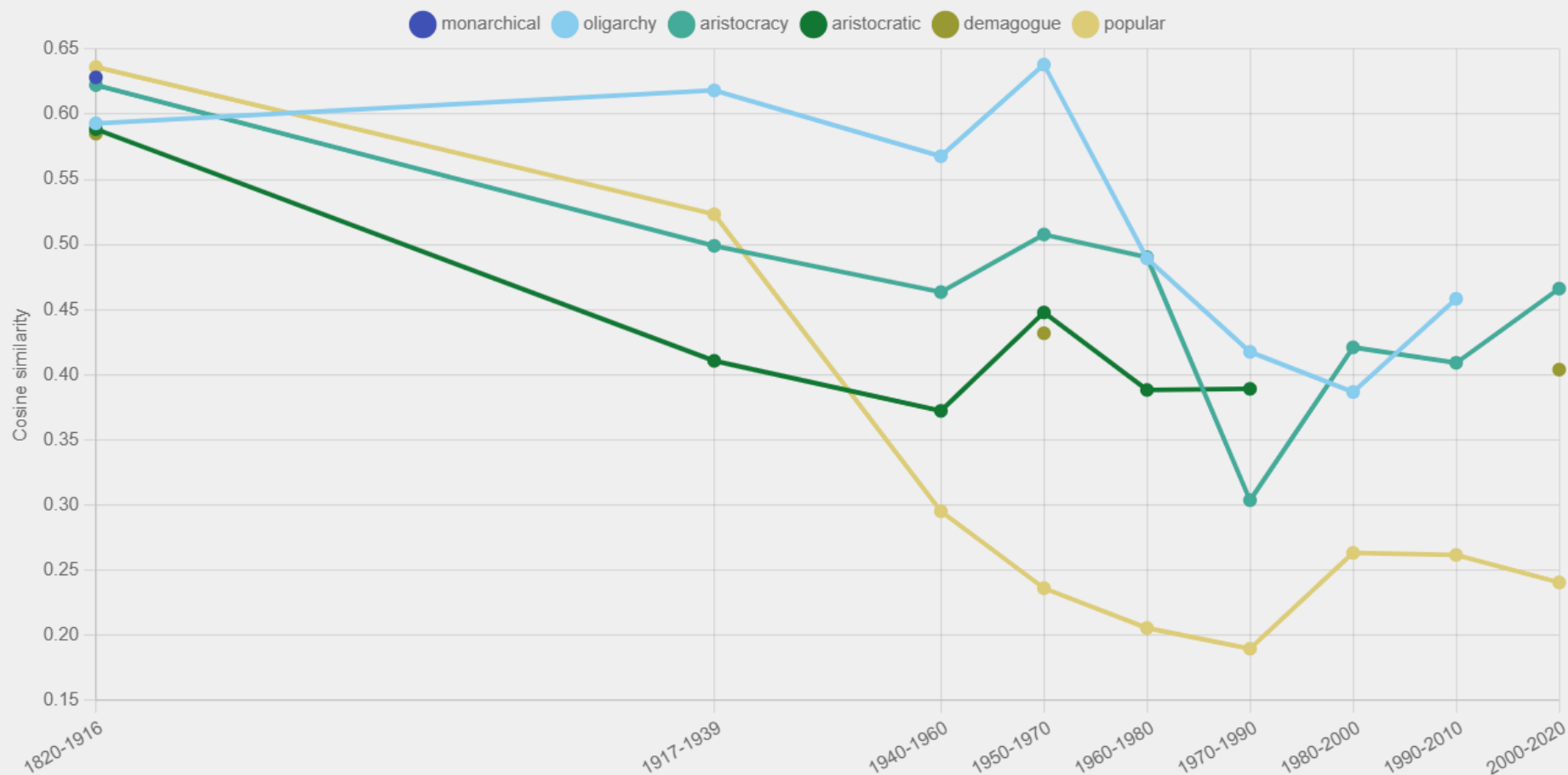


Word models (new): Related words: Democracy since 1820



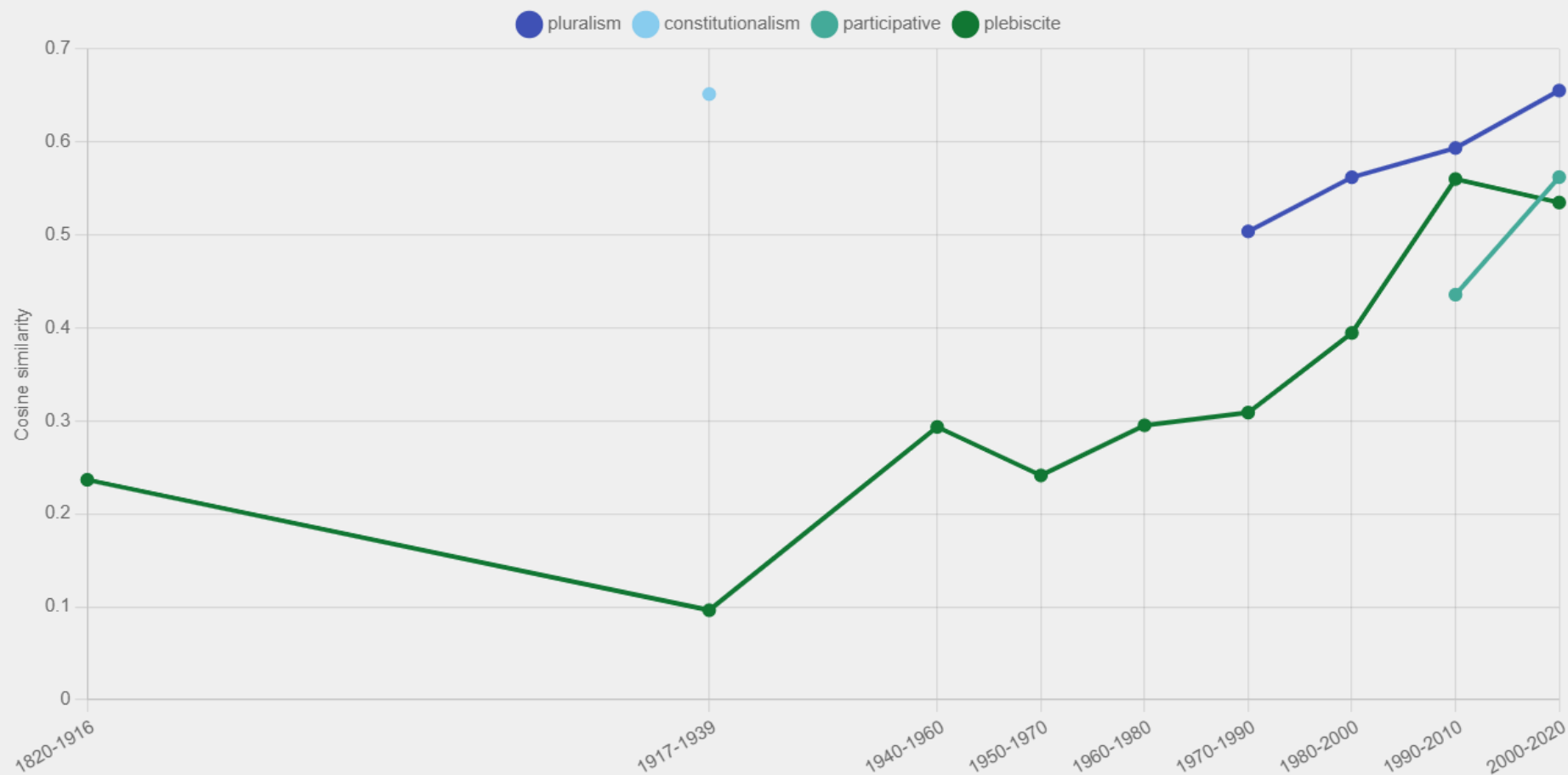


Word embedding models (updated after June 2023)



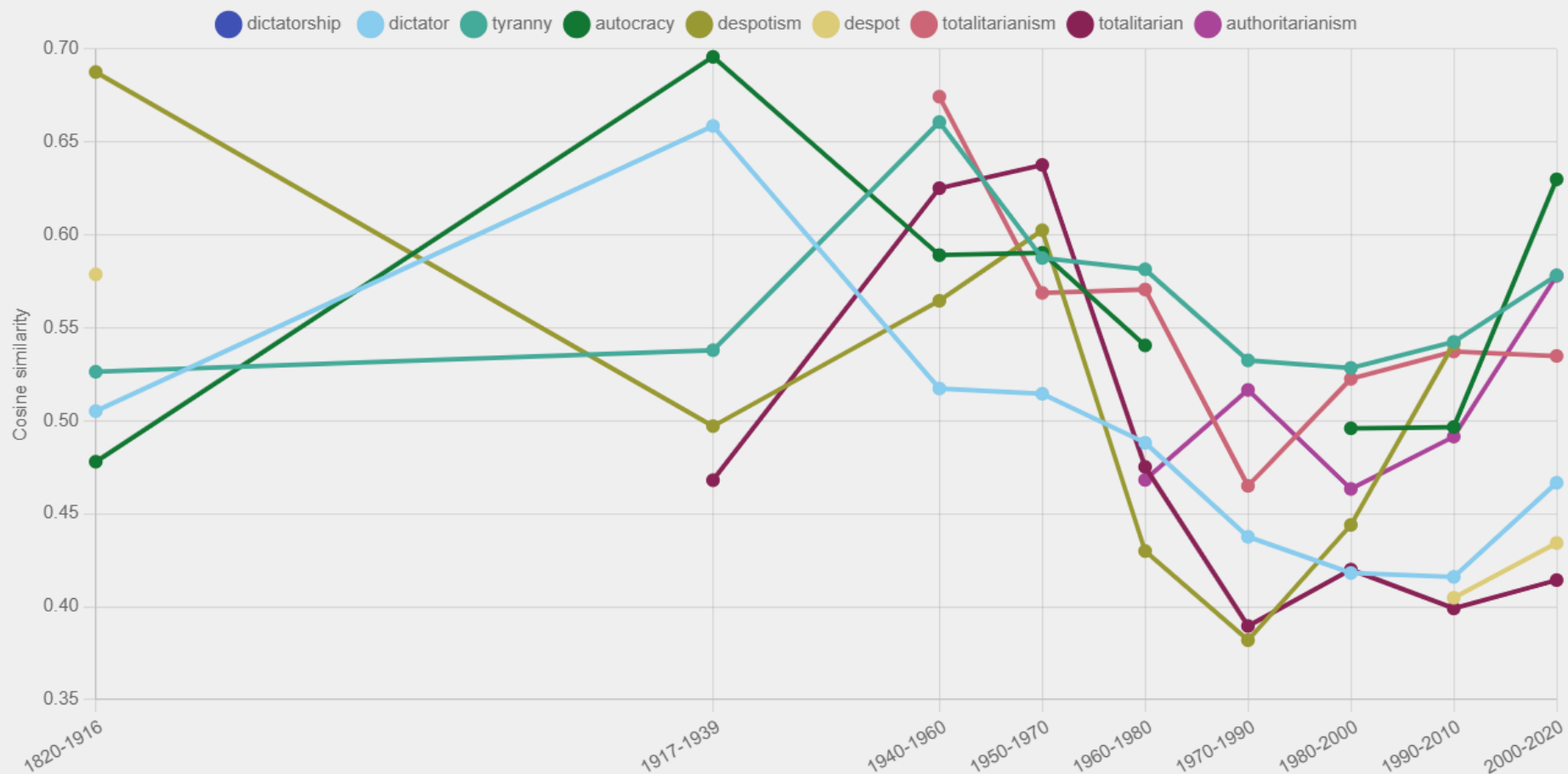


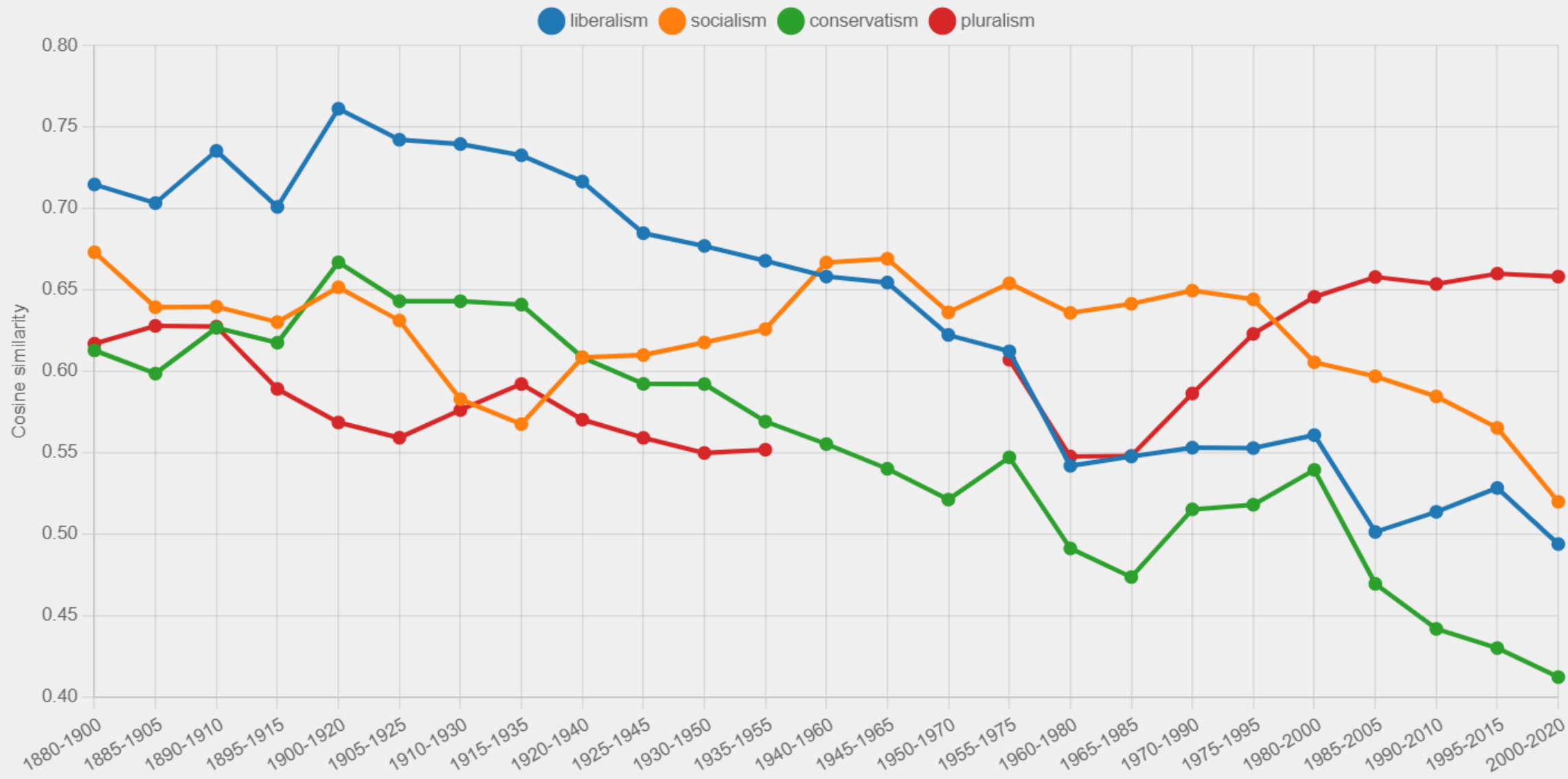
Word embedding models (updated after June 2023)

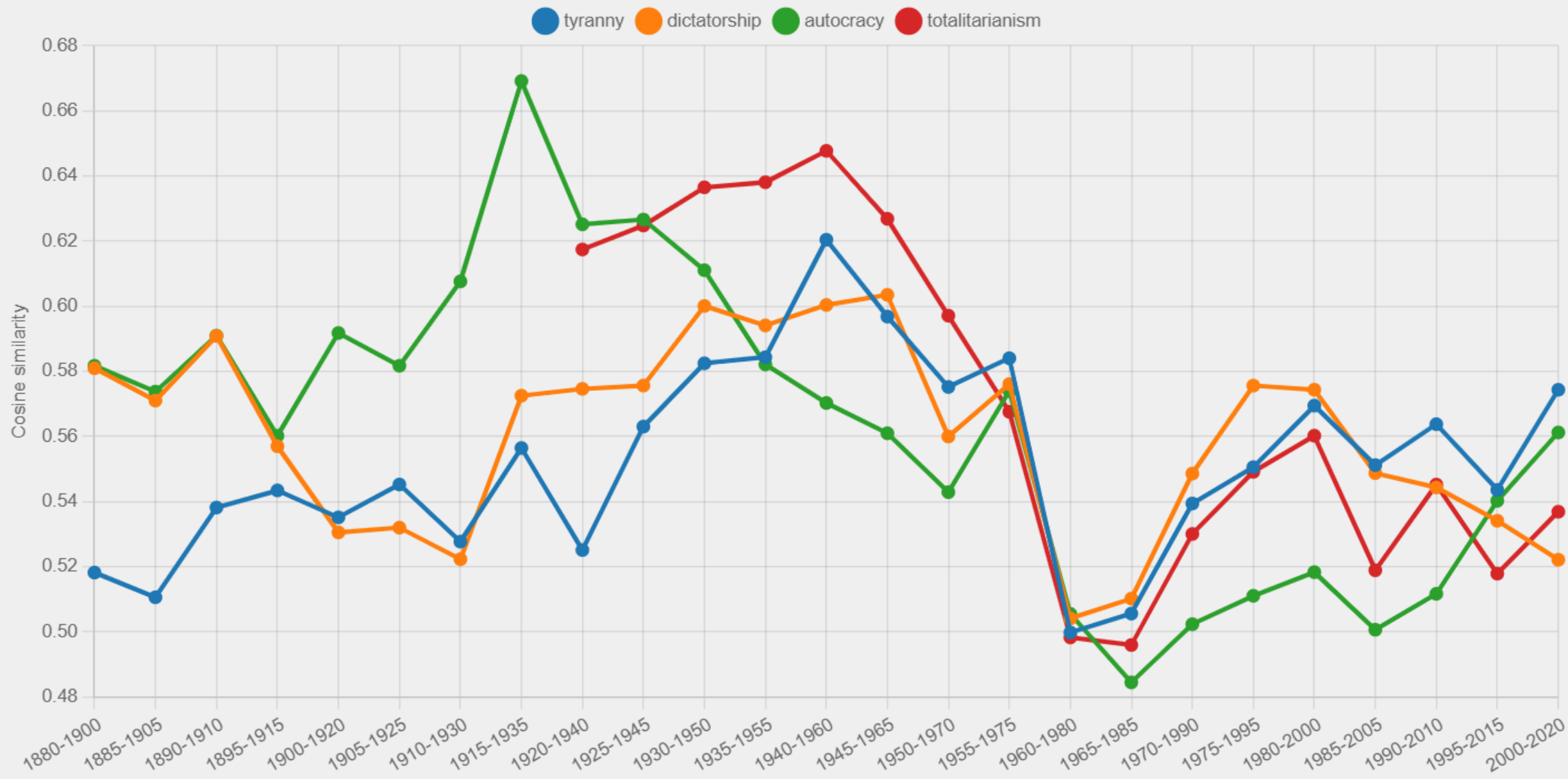


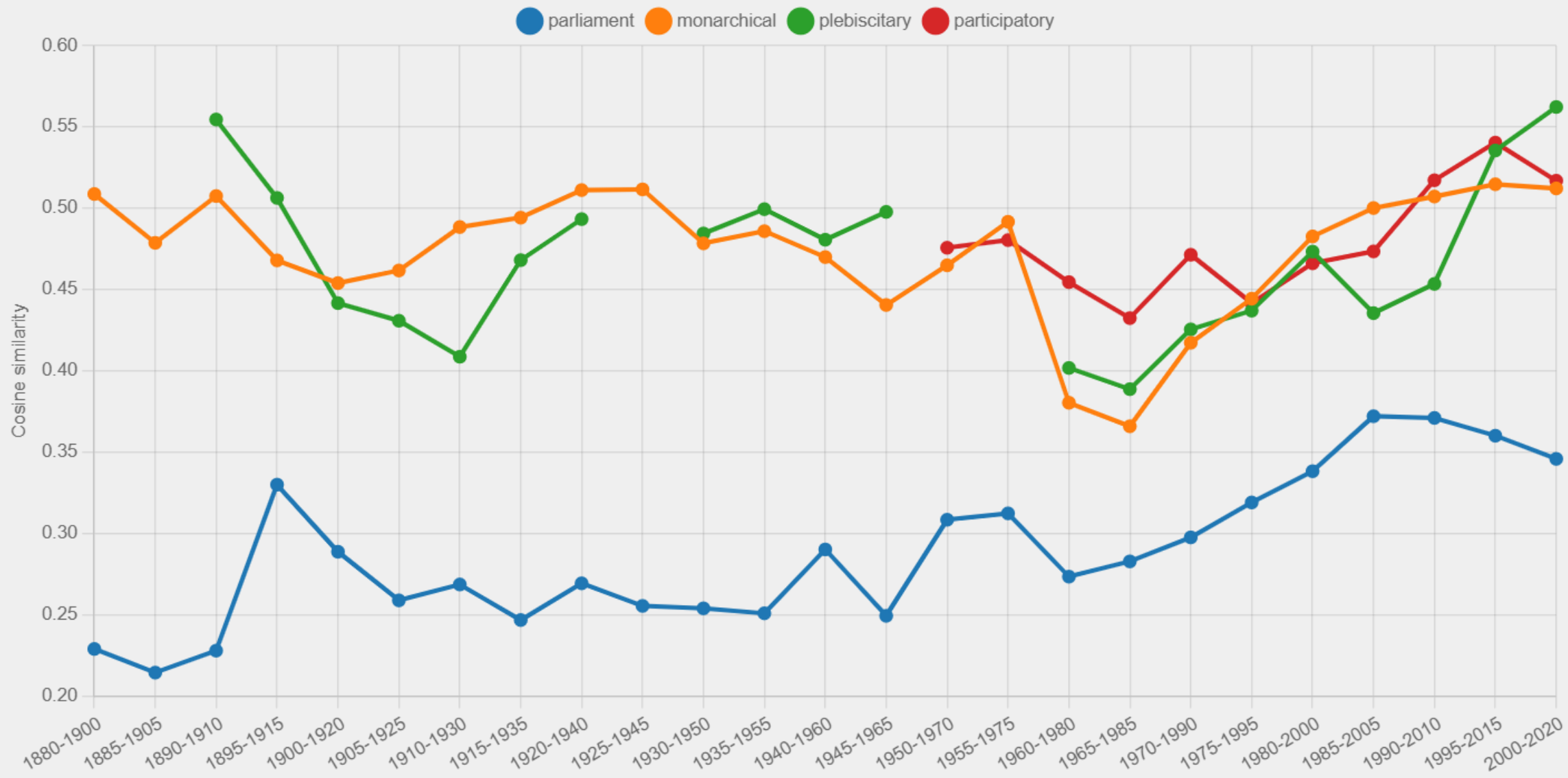


Word embedding models (updated after June 2023)









“Political Representation” Project: Popularisation of our methodological approach



Applying digital methods to long-term conceptual history of democracy (for *Writing Conceptual Histories*)

- Digitisation of primary sources and the development of computational methods and tools for processing and analysing their content -> historical research is changing
- Conceptual history and other constructivist approaches, which have traditionally been interested in meanings assigned to words by historical actors, increasingly relevant
- The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research less obvious
- Digital approaches often based on the quantification of past language
 - contextualising qualitative reading helps to understand how rival individuals used concepts and discourses as part of struggles of the past.
- Qualitative research can make use of quantitative methods to focus analysis:
 - quantitative findings justify the selection of particular debates for contextual analysis.
 - qualitative research can also support its interpretations with quantitative data.



Applying digital methods to long-term conceptual history of democracy (for *Writing Conceptual Histories*)

- A practical introduction to writing conceptual history in an age of increasingly digitised primary sources and computer-assisted reading techniques.
- The implications of digitisation to conceptual history, bridging traditional and digital research.
- Combining the focus on larger linguistic trends (quantification) and focus on contextual close reading of historical sources (qualitative analysis).
- Distant reading of digital datasets by the means of analysing relative term frequencies, collocations and n-grams
 - detecting changes in the use of terms and phrases that help to justify concentrating qualitative content analysis to specific debates.



Applying digital methods to long-term conceptual history of democracy (for *Writing Conceptual Histories*)

- After contextualising reading, it may be necessary to return to digital tools to produce quantitative proof supportive of the results.
- Example: the long-term history of democracy, writing diachronic conceptual history.
- Democracy as a highly contested and historically elastic concept:
 - its analysis can benefit from big data, digital methods and tools that facilitate comparisons over time and beyond national histories.