OXFORD

THE CHANGING
GERMAN VOTER

Edited by

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Sigrid Roßteutscher,
Harald Schoen, Bernhard Weßels, *&* Christof Wolf

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Preface

German voters' behavior has undergone a massive transformation over the three federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017. The goal of this book is to improve our understanding of the fluidity of present-day electoral politics and its consequences for the prospects of democratic governance in Germany.

It is the product of the collaborative effort of the project team of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), which also generated most of the data used for the analyses presented in the following chapters. In some sense, this book is like a movie with product placements. It showcases the GLES data, but its analyses by no means exhaust their potential. Hopefully, it stimulates the welcome side effect of raising further scholarly interest in digging into this unprecedented treasure trove of election data. Starting in 2009, the GLES has generated over a hundred separate but interlocking datasets that include a methodologically diverse range of surveys on voter beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in three federal elections, one European election, multiple state elections, and the dynamics between these elections, as well as surveys of candidates running for mandates in the national parliament, and various large-scale analyses of political media content.

The GLES project has been located at four institutions, the University of Frankfurt, the University of Mannheim, the Berlin Social Science Center WZB, and GESIS—Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. Over three electoral cycles, it received generous funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) under its long-term program. In an important sense, the GLES has been a project of the entire community of scholars interested in German electoral behavior. Its organization, the German Society for Electoral Research (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Wahlforschung, DGfW), has over many years provided intellectual input and organizational support but also generalized legitimacy for the project, thus rendering it a true public good. Early on, the GLES project also enjoyed indispensable support from GESIS, which built up a special unit whose members went to great lengths to organize uncomplicated access to the GLES data for the national and international social science community. Jointly with the DGfW, GESIS will also assume responsibility for continuing the GLES at future elections.

A project of this scope could not have thrived for many years without the very serious engagement of many individuals. We are grateful to Hans Rattinger, Professor Emeritus of the University of Mannheim, for the time and energy he invested in the GLES as co-principal investigator of the first and second rounds of the project. Eckard Kämper of the DFG deserves our sincerest thanks for his

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PART I
INTRODUCTION

1

A New Era of Electoral Instability

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Harald Schoen,
Bernhard Weßels, and Christof Wolf

Turbulent Elections

Over the past half century, the behavior of German voters has changed profoundly. After a long period of stability, elections have dramatically altered their character—at first rather gradually, but during the past decade at an accelerated speed. When commenting on the outcomes of the 2013 and even more so the 2017 federal elections, few observers were at a loss for dramatic metaphors. A "new openness" of the electorate (Münch and Oberreuter 2015) appeared to have brought about a "caesura" of "historic" dimensions (Jesse 2018; Faas and Klingelhöfer 2019), where "nothing remained as it had been" (Niedermayer 2015) and "the stability of parties and the party system," if not "normal politics" altogether had "come to an end" (Grabow and Neu 2018; Schultze 2018). Clearly, voters' decision-making has become much more volatile, rendering election outcomes less predictable. The long-term process of party system fragmentation that had already been going on for a while intensified sharply. A particularly conspicuous outcome of this period of turbulent electoral politics was the termination of Germany's exceptionality as one of the few European countries without a strong right-wing populist party.

Long-term processes of social and cultural modernization of the kind also experienced by other advanced industrial democracies, but also German unification as a unique historical occurrence has given rise to these trends. In addition, at each of the most recent elections, parties and voters were confronted with extraordinary challenges. Whereas the 2009 federal election took place just one year after the world's most serious financial and economic crisis since the 1930s, the 2013 election was overshadowed by the European sovereign debt crisis. The 2017 federal election, finally, took place in the aftermath of the European refugee crisis that had peaked in 2015. The fast-paced electoral change brought about by these developments has made life much more complicated for voters and parties alike. Electors' decision calculi have become more heterogeneous and complex

([Weßels et al. 2014](#)). In important ways, the electoral politics of the German Federal Republic appears to return to where it started 70 years ago.

How did the turbulences that increasingly characterize German electoral politics come about? How did they feed back into voters' decision-making? How relevant were situational factors that pertained to the specifics of particular elections, such as, most notably, the sequence of three crises, for electoral beliefs, attitudes, and choices? These are the questions addressed by this book. It takes an in-depth look at electoral behavior in Germany during the period of its hitherto most dramatically increased fluidity, at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. It aims for a better understanding of the trajectory of electoral politics and its consequences for the prospects of democratic governance in this country by discerning the extent and nature of change and stability across the three federal elections that together mark a phase of exceptional electoral volatility. To provide the necessary background and put these elections in perspective, the following section places them in the wider context of the long-term development of German electoral behavior and the party system. It identifies three distinctive phases: 1949 to 1976, 1980 to 2005, and 2009 to 2017. The topoi of realignment and dealignment are then evoked as key concepts for interpreting the trends that have become increasingly visible since the second of these phases. The final section outlines how the book examines changing voters in the context of changing parties, campaigns, and media.

Voting Behavior and the Party System: From Fragmentation to Concentration—and Back

1949 to 1976: The "German Electoral Miracle"

The first federal election took place in 1949, immediately after the creation of the German Federal Republic. It was the founding election of the second German democracy, but at the same time, it displayed strong continuities with the first democracy that in 1933 had been destroyed and replaced by one of the most brutal dictatorships in human history ([Falter 1981](#)). Organizationally, ideologically, and with regard to their social bases, several of the parties that competed at this election had close ties to parties of the demised Weimar Republic. The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU[1]) and the Social Democrats (SPD) scored highest, with 31 and 29 percent of the votes respectively (Figure [1.1](#)). The SPD had originally been founded in 1875 to represent the interests of the working class in the emerging industrial society of the German empire and was re-established immediately after liberation from

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[1] The CSU is a regional party that exists only in Bavaria, whereas its sister party, CDU, maintains no party organization and does not run at elections in this state. At federal elections both parties have always campaigned together and in the national parliament they regularly form a joint faction.

□ CDU/CSU □ FDP ▤ SPD ▥ The Greens ▩ The Left ▨ AfD □ Others
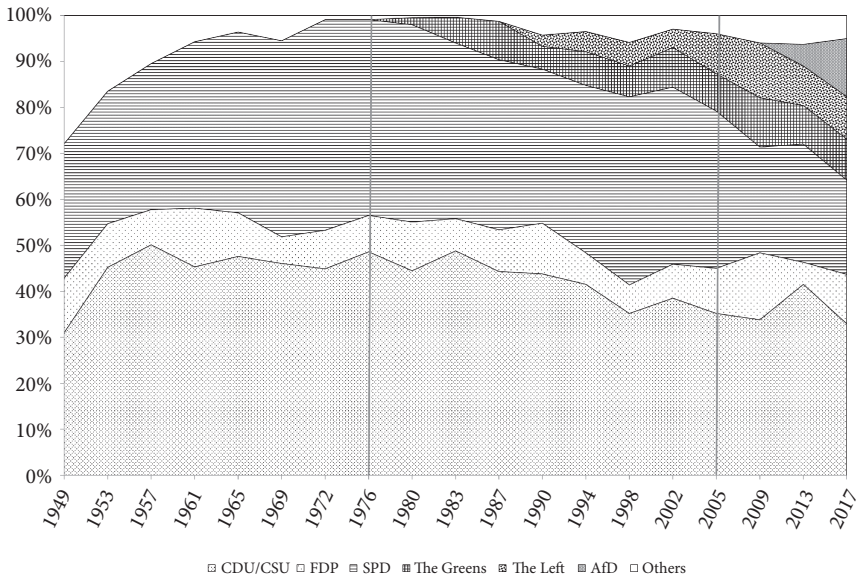
Fig. 1.1 Results of German federal elections, 1949–2017 (second votes)
Source: www.bundeswahlleiter.de.

the Nazi regime in 1945. Whereas its main competitor thus looked back at a long tradition, the CDU/CSU was a new creation. Although partly succeeding the pre-1933 Catholic *Zentrum* (Center) party, the founders of the CDU/CSU opted for an inter-denominational approach, seeking to represent Christian Democratic values more broadly. As center-left and center-right parties located on opposite sides of the socio-economic and religious cleavages (Pappi 1973), the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats until today have defined the gravitation core of German politics (Dalton 1993: 278–326).

While these two parties came out strongest, the first Parliament of the German Federal Republic was quite crowded. All in all, ten parties gained mandates. The party system's electoral fragmentation was very high on all accounts (Figure 1.2). The effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) amounted to 4.8, the party system's fractionalization (Rae 1968) amounted to 0.79. This raised worries among contemporaries that the second German democracy might fall victim to the same spiral of hostile segmentation and polarization as its predecessor, which barely survived fourteen years after its inception in 1919. Pleasantly disappointing these expectations, the party system instead underwent a rapid concentration process that contemporary observers lauded as a "German electoral miracle" (Baer and Faul 1953). The CDU/CSU formed the first federal government together with the liberal Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP) as well as several smaller parties of various conservative hues. During the following electoral cycle, it was able
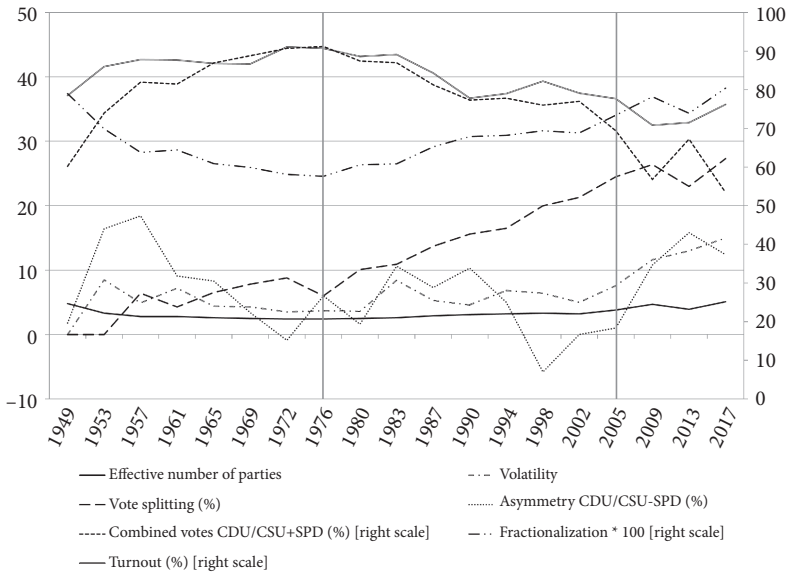
Fig. 1.2 Structural parameters of the German electoral party system, 1949–2017

Sources: www.bundeswahlleiter.de; Blumenstiel (2011, 2014a); Dietz and Roßteutscher (2019); own calculations.

to absorb the latter into its own organization and electorate. As a consequence, already at the 1953 federal election, it achieved a structural majority position vis-à-vis the Social Democrats that allowed it to remain comfortably in power for almost two decades (Niedermayer 2013).

For the SPD, leadership in government came within reach only after a slow and tedious uphill struggle that began with a major redefinition of its programmatic identity. Acknowledging the facts that had been created under Christian Democratic rule, in the late 1950s the Social Democratic Party abandoned the rhetoric and political outlook of class struggle and made its peace with the market economy as well as the country's rearmament and political and military integration in the West. This allowed it to broaden its electoral appeal beyond its traditional working-class support base, increasingly attracting voters from the new middle class of white-collar employees and civil servants (Heimann 1986). After an interim period of three years during which the SPD participated in the federal government as a junior partner in a Grand Coalition with the CDU/CSU, it eventually took over the leading role in government at the 1969 federal election. The enabler of this first change of power was the FDP, which in turn entered the new government as a junior partner (Baring 1982). Two decades of FDP-supported Christian Democratic dominance were now followed by a "social-liberal" era that lasted until 1982.

During the 1960s and 1970s, electoral competition was highly concentrated in a "two-and-a-half" party system with SPD and CDU/CSU as the two dominant parties and sole competitors for governmental leadership, and the FDP as kingmaker in between (Ware 1996: 161–5; Siaroff 2003). While the right-wing extremist NPD (National-Democratic Party) occasionally scored minor successes at state elections (Schmollinger 1986), no other party besides CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP was of relevance in the national electoral arena. Already since 1961, no other party had gained any seats in the federal parliament. Party system concentration, as well as stability, peaked at the 1972 and 1976 federal elections. More than 90 percent of all voters chose one of the two "people's parties" (Volksparteien; cf. Mintzel 1984) that displayed many attributes of catch-all parties in the sense of Kirchheimer (1966) while nonetheless retaining distinct policy profiles on core issues of domestic and foreign policy (Schmidt 1985). The effective number of parties and party system fractionalization scored all-time lows of 2.4 and 0.58. Electoral volatility (Pedersen 1979) was down to 3.5 from 8.5 in 1953. At the same time, electoral mobilization reached peak values, with less than 10 percent of the electorate abstaining.

1980 to 2005: Diminishing Party System Stability and Fragmentation on the Left

During its early years, the SPD–FDP coalition enacted an ambitious reform agenda of political, economic, and cultural modernization in domestic and foreign policy. By the mid-1970s, however, it began to run out of steam, not least due to the economic fallout of the 1973 and 1979 oil crises (Paterson and Southern 1991: 202–7, 228–9). At the same time, the "participatory revolution" (Kaase 1984) made itself increasingly felt in the country's public life. Following the tracks of the 1968 students' movement, hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets to support the new social movements and their protest agenda of ecology, international peace, and equality of women and minorities (Dalton and Küchler 1990; Rucht 1994). These developments also marked a turning point for the evolution of the German party system (Dalton 1984b). In 1980, the Green party was founded as the electoral arm of the new social movements (Frankland and Schoonmaker 1992; Poguntke 1993). While it failed to overcome the electoral system's 5 percent threshold in that year, it passed it comfortably at the subsequent federal election in 1983—a success of high symbolic value, since for the first time in a quarter century it awarded national parliamentary representation to a party other than the CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP. The Greens found their seats on the opposition benches to the left of the Social Democrats, which had lost power in 1982 due to yet another coalition change of the Liberals who had teamed up again with the Christian Democrats. Since then, the Greens have turned into a constant of German electoral politics, although until recently tied in a symbiotic relationship to the Social Democrats—relying on them

as the only feasible coalition partner and competing with them for the same reservoir of "new left" voters of the post-materialist middle class (Poguntke 1999; Falter and Klein 2003). Their emergence changed the character of party competition toward a model of alternating governments between two camps of one dominant and one minor party each—a leftist camp of SPD and Greens and a "bourgeois" camp of CDU/CSU and FDP.

The breakdown of the socialist German Democratic Republic and East Germany's accession to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990 led to further differentiation of the party system, once again on the left. Mergers with newly founded or existing regional sister organizations allowed the West German parties to expand their reach into East Germany so that the supply structure of the party system remained remarkably stable despite the profound transformation of the political system (Jesse 2013; Niedermayer 2013). The only major innovation was the establishment of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). As the successor organization of the former East German state party SED (Socialist Unity Party), the PDS at first was relevant only in the East and displayed little ability to attract voters in the West (Neu 2007). This changed at the 2005 federal election, which marked yet another important turning point in German electoral history (Spier et al. 2007). Ultimately, this development can be traced back to the first-ever change of power that resulted not from a party's shifted coalition preference but directly from an election result, which took place in 1998.

At this federal election, the Social Democrats had been able to gain more votes than the Christian Democrats, thus for the second time after 1972 temporarily offsetting the traditional electoral asymmetry between the two large parties. More importantly, the election result allowed, for the first time, a complete government turnover. A "red-green" center-left coalition of the Social Democrats and Greens ousted the incumbent "black-yellow" center-right coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP. However, narrowly re-elected in 2002, it found itself soon confronted with increasing economic problems (declining growth, rising unemployment, and subsequent budgetary problems for the pension system). Its response was the "Agenda 2010," a far-reaching program of market-oriented social policy and labor market reforms (Camerra-Rowe 2004; Schmidt 2007). It drew heavy criticism from within the SPD itself as well as its long-standing allies within the German cleavage system, the trade unions, and other forces of the traditional socio-economic left that denounced it as a "neoliberal" attack on the welfare state (Hegelich et al. 2011). In this climate of estrangement on the left, the PDS was able to gain traction also among West German voters (Olsen 2007). It could capitalize on this at the 2005 election, which had been called early by the Social Democratic chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who felt he could no longer rely on the loyalty of his own party's MPs.

While the Social Democrats still managed to come out at least on par with the Christian Democrats at this election, from then on they had to face direct competition for left-leaning voters from two ideologically neighboring parties in all regions of the country—the Greens on "new politics" issues of culture, lifestyle, and environmentalism, and the PDS, in 2007 renamed the Left, on socio-economic issues of "old politics" (Schwander and Manow 2017). Importantly, while the SPD cooperated with the PDS/Left in several East German state governments, it has always refused to team up with this party at the national level, due to fundamental disagreements in central policy areas, most notably foreign policy (Spier 2013).

The 2005 federal election marked the beginning of a period in which government formation has been rendered increasingly difficult by the ongoing differentiation of the party system (Saalfeld and Schoen 2015; Schoen and Weßels 2016). Regarding electoral accountability, the 1998 and 2002 elections had been unique in German electoral history because they saw direct competition between clear and discrete electoral alternatives: a center-left alliance of SPD and Greens, and a center-right alliance of CDU/CSU and FDP. Before 1998, changes in government had always come about through parties shifting coalition allegiances. From 2005 onward, however, the prospects of building majorities for viable governments became notoriously precarious (Bytzek and Huber 2011). At that election, neither the "bourgeois" coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP nor the leftist coalition of SPD and Greens came out with a parliamentary majority. A Grand Coalition of the election's main competitors, the large center-right and center-left parties CDU/CSU and SPD, appeared as the only feasible option to form a viable government. It was only the second one in German history but turned out to indicate what later on was to become almost a new normality of governing Germany (Lees 2011).

At the 2005 election, many indicators of party system complexity reached new extremes (Figure 1.2). To be sure, these developments were culminations of long-term trends that had been observable since the 1980 federal election (Dalton 2014). However, so far they had been rather gradual, whereas they intensified from 2005 on and began to move in leaps and bounds (Schoen and Weßels 2016). The effective number of parties, for instance, was recorded at 3.8 at the 2005 election (up from 2.5 in 1980), whereas the combined vote share of the two large parties fell below 70 percent (1980: 87.4 percent). Electoral volatility doubled from 3.6 in 1980 over 5.0 in 2002 to 7.6 in 2005. Party system fractionalization went up from 0.61 in 1980 to 0.73 in 2005. In addition, the proportion of voters that split their first and second votes between different parties increased more than two-fold, from 10.1 percent in 1980 to 24.5 percent in 2005. Paralleling these trends, turnout declined quite steadily from 88.6 percent in 1980 to 77.7 percent in 2005. Another noteworthy development concerned the timing of voters' decision-making. Between the mid-1960s and 1980, the share of late deciders that took their decisions only while the election campaigns were underway remained stable at about 15 percent. In 2005,

by way of contrast, the recorded share amounted to over 50 percent (Plischke and Bergmann 2012).

Still, the 2005 election did not define a final culmination point of the overall trajectory toward increasing instability of the German electoral process. The "fluid five-party system" (Niedermayer 2008) of CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens, and the Left that had resulted from the changes in voting behavior over the past quarter century marked by no means a new equilibrium (Poguntke 2014). To a degree surpassing rather than matching expectations, the impression of a system in intensifying flux was fully confirmed by the subsequent three federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017 (Rattinger et al. 2011; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2014; Schoen and Weßels 2016; Niedermayer 2018; Roßteutscher et al. 2019).

2009 to 2017: Roller-Coastering toward a Six-Party System

In 2009, vote switching was just as frequent as in the previous election, ticket-splitting even more so, and the combined vote share of the two large centrist parties yet again smaller than ever before. Regional fragmentation of voting behavior also saw a substantial increase (Rattinger et al. 2011: 119–29; Niedermayer 2012), whereas late deciding remained at about the same high level as at the previous election (Plischke and Bergmann 2012) and turnout dropped considerably. If anything, at the federal election of 2013, voters rocked the party system even more. This was an election of paradoxes (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2014). Electoral volatility was larger than ever, yet again surpassing the all-time high of the previous election by a considerable margin. At the same time, the CDU/CSU as the most successful party at this election failed, by just a hair's width, to obtain an absolute majority of seats, which would have allowed it to form the first-ever single-party majority government in the German Federal Republic. Obviously, rising volatility must not always spur party system fragmentation, but can at times also lead to an astounding amount of (re-)concentration, albeit only of an unstable nature (for similar developments in the UK see Fieldhouse et al. 2020: 9–49). On the other hand, the FDP, which had participated in more national governments than any other party, lost two-thirds of the record vote share it had scored in 2009. As a consequence, for the first time, it failed to overcome the 5 percent threshold of the electoral system and lost all mandates in the federal parliament.

Another striking feature of the 2013 election was that, even when not counting the evicted Liberals, a much larger share of votes than ever before went to parties that failed to gain entry into the national parliament. More than one out of ten voters chose a party that did not win any mandates. 2.2 percent, for instance, voted for the Pirates Party—a result that, in fact, was considered surprisingly weak at the time, since this party, although a complete newcomer, had occasionally scored over 10 percent in public opinion polls and collected enough votes at state elections

to send representatives to four legislatures during the previous national electoral cycle (Koschmieder and Niedermayer 2015).

More importantly, more than twice as many votes went to another new party that, unlike the Pirates Party, arrived on the electoral stage to stay there. With 4.7 percent of the second votes, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) came very close to winning mandates—a remarkable success for a party that had only been founded half a year before the election. During the following electoral cycle, the AfD was voted into the European Parliament as well as into most state parliaments. Finally, at the federal election of 2017, it also made it into the federal parliament. This meant that a right-wing populist party was able to gain parliamentary representation at the national level for the first time, and it did so with more votes than the FDP, the Greens, and the Left, rendering it the strongest opposition party (Schroeder and Weßels 2019a). Since the FDP was nonetheless voted back into parliament, after the 2017 election, the federal parliament thus—for the first time since 1953—consisted of delegates from six parties.

As a consequence of these developments, at the 2017 election, almost every indicator of party system fragmentation and instability was pushed to a new high in comparison to all previous elections—including the founding election of 1949 (Figure 1.2). Turnout is the only exception. Amounting to 76.1 percent, it indicated a slight trend reversal compared to 2013, although not a return to participation rates as they had been reached up until 2005. Late deciding, by contrast, had gone continuously further up since 2009, reaching 55 percent in 2017 (Plischke and Bergmann 2012; CrossSec13_Post; CrossSec17_Post). Electoral volatility and vote splitting also scored record levels, amounting to 15.0 and 27.3 percent, respectively. With 5.1, the effective number of parties also surpassed the value of 1949 that hitherto had been the highest one ever. Party system fractionalization likewise climbed to a new all-time extreme (0.80). That Christian Democrats and Social Democrats together captured only 53 percent of the votes correspondingly marked a new low (Dietz and Roßteutscher 2019). This drastically diminished level of electoral support for the two centrist "people's parties" is the result of a massive, though temporally staggered drain of voters from each of them. It hit the Social Democrats earlier and more dramatically in 2009. With 20.5 percent at the 2017 election, they scored less than half the vote shares they had regularly obtained in their best times during the 1970s. The Christian Democrats' electoral support appeared less drastically deflated but still indicated their weakest result ever with the exception of 1949.

Since 2005, German electoral politics has thus become ever more fluid and turbulent, rendering government formation increasingly difficult (cf. Chapter 15). It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that at another level the same period was also characterized by remarkable stability. Despite dramatic shifts in the electoral fates of parties, during all these years the country has been ruled by governments led by the same party and under the same head of government. In each coalition,

the Christian Democrats were the dominant party (though with different junior partners: once the FDP and twice the SPD), and the federal chancellor was always the CDU's leader Angela Merkel. None of the candidates that the Social Democrats successively nominated to challenge her in the competition for the chancellorship at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections (Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Peer Steinbrück, and Martin Schulz) was able to surpass her popularity. By the time of the 2021 election, the "Merkel era" will have drawn level with the thus far longest chancellorship, by Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl (1982 to 1998).

Below the Surface: Electoral Dealignment and Realignment

Phenomena like increasing volatility, split-ticket voting, late-deciding, and abstention as well as party system fragmentation and the emergence of new parties are behavioral manifestations of long-term processes of electoral change that profoundly alter the relationship between citizens and political parties (Crewe and Denver 1985; Dalton et al. 2002; Dalton 2018). Dealignment indicates a withering away of the links between people and parties, gradually dissolving voter groups' traditional loyalties to specific parties. Realignment likewise indicates a process of dissolution of traditional party loyalties, however, one that is not leading to destructuration and entropy but ultimately to a new pattern (Flanagan and Dalton 1984; Dalton et al. 1984a).

Realignment may be envisaged as a temporary destructuring and subsequent restructuration of a party system and its voter base. After a phase of uncertainty and potentially profound change in which familiar patterns of electoral behavior weaken or even disappear, it ultimately results in a new more or less stable equilibrium of the relationship between voters and parties. Dealignment, by contrast, changes electoral politics in more fundamental ways. Where realignment reshapes the linkages between certain voter groups and certain parties, dealignment alters the relationship between voters and the party system overall. It denotes a unidirectional secular change in the way citizens relate to all parties toward a general erosion of long-standing patterns of loyalty and a more fluid, less predictable style of electoral politics. Political behavior is believed to become more "particularized" (Franklin et al. 1992: 407–17) or "individualized" (Dalton and Wattenberg 1993: 212–3), as traditionally stable long-term templates of voting behavior break up and are replaced by short-term factors emanating from the specific situational circumstances of particular elections as increasingly powerful drivers of voters' decision-making. Pushed to its ideal-typical extreme, a dealigned electorate is unanchored in traditional patterns of group-based party competition and its choices depend solely on the politics of the moment. Having lost "their moorings [voters and party systems] will drift in whatever direction they are propelled by unpredictable events" (Franklin et al. 1992: 413).

What drives realignment and dealignment is a matter of debate (von Schoultz 2017; Heath 2018). An influential line of reasoning stresses the importance of large-scale processes of socio-economic and cultural modernization that Western societies have undergone since World War II. Sweeping societal trends like secularization, rising standards of living through increasing affluence and social security, the tertiarization of the economy and concomitant changes in the class structure, the expansion of higher education, social and geographic mobility, and the information revolution brought about through the electronic media, in particular television, are thought to have profoundly changed citizens' outlook on the political world. Relieved from immediate concerns of physical survival and material well-being, people could increasingly turn to more sophisticated aspirations of self-fulfillment and lifestyle, but also larger questions of the human condition that reach beyond immediate personal or group concerns.

This value change led to an expansion of the traditional agenda of political contestation with its strong emphasis on issues of material well-being, by "new politics" issues concerning as of yet unrealized potentials of modernization, such as personal self-fulfillment and the emancipation of minorities in all walks of life, but also negative side effects of modernization, such as environmental pollution and climate change or the threat of nuclear war (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997, 2018; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). According to more recent theorizing, these transformative developments have received additional impulses in the 1990s and 2000s when the intensifying process of economic and cultural globalization added novel and often highly divisive issues to the political agenda. Immigration and the supranationalization of institutions of governance stand out among these new areas of contestation in which universalistic and integrationist "cosmopolitan" preferences are pitted against particularistic and demarcationist "parochial" preferences (Kriesi et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2012; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; De Vries 2018).

Other theories emphasize political factors. They argue that electoral change cannot be sufficiently explained in a bottom-up perspective as a mere by-product of social change but depends also on top-down factors connected to party competition (von Schoultz 2017; Heath 2018), most notably parties' strategies of electoral mobilization. From the perspective of classical cleavage theory (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), it is not voters' demand alone, but the interplay between this demand and the supply offered by the party system that explains electoral reactions to party competition (Dalton 2018). Whether and how particular emerging interests and policy demands are represented in the party system is thus an important precondition for understanding the continued success but also failure of established mainstream parties as well as the prospects of new parties (Meguid 2007). The ambiguity or distinctiveness of parties' policy profiles may also play a role, as does the amount of ideological and policy polarization between them. While adversary politics appears conducive to partisanship, the convergence of the major parties to an indistinct middle-of-the-road mainstream is assumed to foster more fluid

relationships between voters and parties (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Schmitt 2009; Spoon and Klüver 2019).

The Dealigning German Voter

Comparative research provides ample evidence for partisan and social-structural dealignment. That party attachments have been eroding has been demonstrated for many advanced democracies (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Dalton 2002; Berglund et al. 2005; Dalton 2013: 151–79; Schmitt 2009). Likewise, it is clear that the traditional cleavage groups are shrinking and that their relevance for structuring electoral choices is receding (Franklin et al. 1992; Oskarson 2005; Jansen et al. 2013). Germany belongs to those countries that have experienced a notable decline in partisanship. In the West German electorate, the share of partisans dropped steeply between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s but leveled off afterward (Arzheimer 2017). It contracted from about 80 percent to about 60 percent, where it remained for the following two decades (Figure 1.3). The strength of partisanship has also declined (Dalton 2014: 62), and its impact on vote choice seems to have weakened as well (Berglund et al. 2005). In East Germany, where people could collect electoral experiences only after German unification, the situation is better described as "pre-alignment" (Dalton 2014: 64). Spurred by accumulating experiences with competitive elections, the proportion of partisans increased slightly during the decade following the first all-German federal election in 1990, but then it likewise leveled off. More recently, the prevalence of party attachments in the East seems to have increased. But they nonetheless have remained below the West German level, and they are also less intense. Overall, then, the German Federal Republic is now considerably less partisan than it used to be forty years ago when party mobilization was at its zenith.

Whereas partisan dealignment has thus far only progressed to a point at which a majority of the electorate still feels attached to a party, social-structural dealignment was more pervasive. To some extent, partisan dealignment in Germany indeed appears as a consequence of social-structural dealignment (Arzheimer 2006). German politics was traditionally dominated by the class and religious lines of conflict (Pappi 1973). However, tertiarization led to a shrinking of the traditional core groups of the socio-economic cleavage, and secularization in an analogous way hollowed out the foundations of the religious cleavage. Nowadays, the working class and the old middle class constitute only minorities of the workforce, and the same applies to Catholics and faithful churchgoers (Elff 2013). Yet, while the structuring power of membership in these groups for electoral choices may have receded, especially for the working class, it appears not to have evaporated completely (Weßels 2000; Elff and Roßteutscher 2011, 2017). All in all,
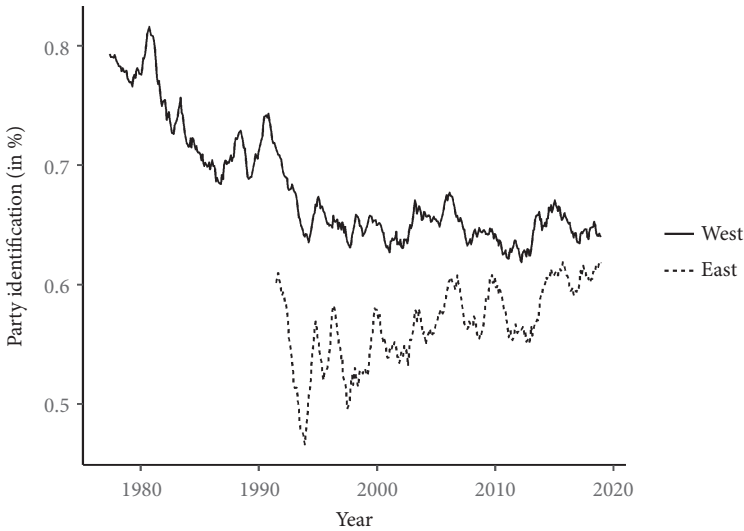
Fig. 1.3 Partisanship in Germany, 1977/1991–2018

Note: Aggregated monthly shares of respondents identifying with a party, smoothed by moving averages using a five-month window (2-1-2), replicating and updating the analyses of Arzheimer (2017): 52, 57).

Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (2020).

cleavage voting thus appears to have become much less important, although it has not disappeared for good.

In the literature, it is often taken as self-evident that processes of dealignment are accompanied by increasing responsiveness to the situational circumstances of particular elections on the part of voters. It seems quite natural to expect short-term factors to fill the explanatory void left by the decline of longstanding electoral loyalties. Accordingly, issues and candidate personalities as well as the political information flows to which voters are exposed through the parties' campaigning, and the media are expected to weigh nowadays more heavily in electoral choices than they used to in the past (Dalton and Wattenberg 1993: 207, 212–3; Dalton 2000: 924–5; Gabriel et al. 2020: 22). Subjective "forces of entropy," which render electoral behavior more situational and individualistic, should thus ultimately take precedence over the traditional "forces of structure," which are rooted in objective circumstances and render choices more uniform and patterned (Weber and Franklin 2018). However, the evidence on the long-term development of issue or candidate voting is mixed at best. Unequivocal confirmation that short-term factors or the flow of electoral information have turned into more powerful predictors of electoral choice is largely missing.

The Realigning German Voter

In many advanced industrial democracies, the structure of party conflict is no longer adequately described by the unidimensional opposition between left and right. Instead, it often displays a two-dimensional pattern, organized by two cross-cutting left–right (or progressive–conservative) dimensions, one socio-economic, the other socio-cultural (Lachat 2017; von Schoultz 2017; Dalton 2018). The unfolding of this more complex constellation of conflict started in the 1960s on the left side of the ideological spectrum. It was spurred by the "silent revolution" of value change from materialism to post-materialism (Inglehart 1977) and the emergence of a "new politics" agenda that resulted from this new set of priorities (Baker et al. 1981). Up to this point, the opposition between left and right had been primarily defined in terms of the traditional confrontation between Social Democratic and Socialist parties on the one hand and Liberals as well as Conservatives on the other over the amount of state intervention in the market with regard to economic and social policies (Downs 1957)—the class cleavage of industrial society (Lipset and Rokkan 1967).

The politicization of the new post-materialist values from the 1970s onward led to a differentiation within the left. It transformed the conflict structure from a bipolar one into a triangular constellation. The traditional socio-economic left found itself no longer only in opposition to advocates of the free market on the right but also increasingly to a "new left" that articulated post-materialist concerns (Fuchs 1991). Whereas the "old left" was concerned about redistributing the wealth generated by the industrial society in order to improve the material living conditions of the working class and disadvantaged groups more generally, the socio-cultural left took position against the negative side effects of the "paradigm of growth" that drove this production model (Weßels 1991). In Germany, this conflict was at first fought out inside the SPD (Dalton 1984b), but, eventually, it gave rise to the creation and successful establishment of a new party—the Greens, which made representation of these demands its core mission (Frankland and Schoonmaker 1992; Poguntke 1993).

However, the crystallization of the new line of conflict was not complete with this sub-differentiation on the left. The opposite pole on this dimension was still vacant. The main antagonist of the "green-alternative-libertarian" (Hooghe et al. 2002) vision of all-encompassing inclusiveness with regard to the environment as well as plural forms of life was yet to emerge on the scene. However, the transformation of social and political life that new social movements and green-alternative parties were able to achieve during the following decades appears to have spurred a "silent counterrevolution" (Ignazi 1992) of those holding "traditionalist-authoritarian-nationalistic" preferences (Hooghe et al. 2002), with right-wing populist parties as their political spearhead (Minkenberg 1998; Bornschier 2010; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Accordingly, the surge in votes for

populist parties since the 1980s is seen "in large part as a reaction against progressive cultural change" (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 2–3). More strongly emphasizing material interests, other authors interpret this development in terms of real or imagined adverse consequences of open markets and increased immigration for the labor market and welfare prospects of "globalization losers" (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Manow 2018).

While right-wing populist parties already had been gaining strength in many European countries for some time (Mudde 2019), Germany—presumably as a consequence of its traumatic history under National Socialist totalitarian rule—for a long time appeared immune to this trend (Bornschier 2010, 2012). This began to change in the aftermath of the 2013 federal election, at which the AfD jumpstarted to a near success, just narrowly failing to pass the 5 percent threshold (Schmitt-Beck 2014). In 2013, the AfD had campaigned primarily on an economically liberal and culturally conservative platform with Euroskepticism as its core (Arzheimer 2015). Its main issue was the proposition to dismantle the Eurozone, in response to the European sovereign debt crisis (Grimm 2015). However, during the subsequent electoral cycle, the AfD transformed its character profoundly. In 2015, after a period of intense in-fighting, party members ousted the party's founders and elected a new leadership with a clearly more radical agenda (Jäger 2019). From then on, the AfD unequivocally showed all the hallmarks of a right-wing populist party of the kind that had already much earlier begun to make significant inroads into the electoral markets of other European countries (Schroeder and Weßels 2019b).

Strategically responding to the European refugee crisis of 2015, the AfD chose opposition to immigration as its core issue, with a strong Islam-critical tinge (Geiges 2018). Its populist outlook manifested itself in a pervasive repulsion of all established "system parties" and their elites on behalf of "the" people. Thus, mutating into a full-fledged right-wing populist party only after having scored initial successes and thereby gaining public visibility, the AfD was able to establish itself as a non-negligible player in Germany's party competition quasi "through the back door" (Schmitt-Beck 2017; Arzheimer and Berning 2019). That the party sees its mission in rolling back the last decades' cultural transformation toward a more cosmopolitan society becomes evident from its platform as well as from statements of its leaders. Thus, at the 2017 federal election, voters at long last terminated Germany's exceptionality among European democracies as a context in which right-wing populist parties could not gain a foothold. The German party system now displays the same two-dimensional configuration (Figure 1.4; for similar classifications derived from parties' programmatic positions and expert ratings see Lehmann et al. (2019) and Thomeczek et al. (2019)) that for quite some time has been recorded in other Western European countries (Dalton 2018: 109–37). Remarkably, parties are spread out much farther on the socio-cultural conflict dimension than on the socio-economic dimension.
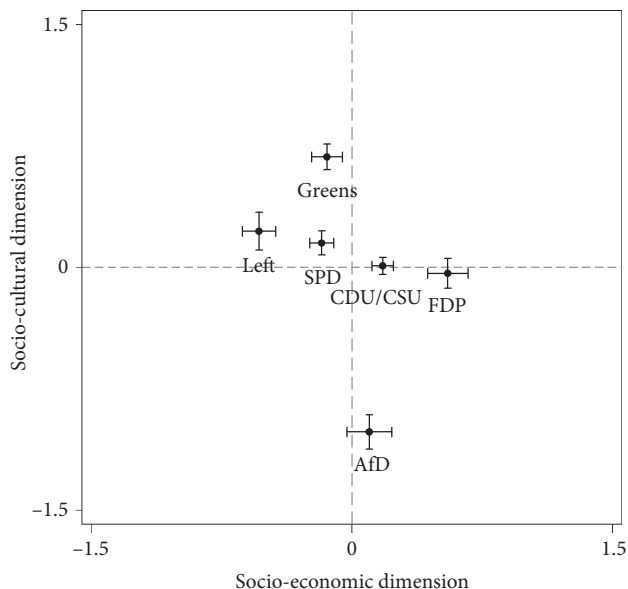
Fig. 1.4 The two-dimensional party system at the 2017 federal election

Note: Entries are standardized means of principal component factors within voter groups (second votes), with 95 percent confidence intervals; component factors are derived from a factor analysis, which delivered a two-dimensional solution based on respondents' self-placement with regard to the following position issues: socio-economic dimension = government interventions in economy, government reduction of income inequalities, low taxes vs. strong welfare state; socio-cultural dimension = facilitate vs. impede immigration, promote European unification (drawing on Schilpp 2018).

Source: CrossSec17_Cum.

An Era of Crises

The relationship between policy demand on the part of voters and policy supply by the parties may become especially critical during times of crisis (Hooghe and Marks 2018). "Large, cataclysmic events of national scope and extended duration" (Miller and Shanks 1996: 132) are often claimed to bear a particularly large potential for unsettling the alignments between voter groups and parties. In their analysis of recent British elections, Fieldhouse et al. (2020) proposed the notion of "electoral shocks" to conceptualize the potential relevance of such exceptional occurrences for electoral behavior under conditions of widespread dealignment. Electoral shocks are conceived as "unavoidable, high-salience changes or events that can prompt large sections of the population to update their political evaluations and party preferences" (Fieldhouse et al. 2020: 31). Compared to the politics

of "normal times," they stand out by their power to break through voters' inclination to process information selectively and rationalize their experiences in ways consistent with previously held dispositions and attitudes (Lodge and Taber 2013). They do so by massively raising the salience of certain issues and constricting the political agenda, eroding or strengthening attributions of party competence, and altering party images. Yet, how specific electoral shocks ultimately play out depends to a considerable extent on how parties respond to them (Fieldhouse et al. 2020: 31–44). In this regard, the three federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017 are clearly special. Each of them took place in the more or less immediate aftermath of a major crisis with far-reaching social ramifications, to which parties were forced to react.

The election of 2009 was held shortly after the global financial crisis of 2008, which went down in history as the world's worst financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Tooze 2018). Triggered by the breakdown of the American investment bank Lehman Brothers, within days it led the international finance system to the brink of collapse, which could only be prevented by unprecedented government bailout programs for financial institutions, stimulus packages for reviving the economy, and other state interventions whose hitherto unseen scope was only matched by the speed with which they were implemented. Germany was hit very hard by the crisis, but it got through it considerably better than many comparable countries. Although GDP declined by almost 6 percentage points in 2009, the German labor market was harmed much less, and economic recovery set in more rapidly than in other countries (Enderlein 2010). By the time of the federal election, solid growth had already set in and continued at higher rates than in most other European countries.

The European sovereign debt crisis of 2010 onward was to a significant extent a consequence of the preceding global financial crisis. Having invested huge sums for government interventions to rescue banks and stop economic decline, several member countries of the European common currency zone were unable to repay or refinance their public debt or bail out over-indebted banks. Other EU countries, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund were repeatedly forced to bail out these countries to prevent them from state insolvency (Hall 2012; Copelovitch et al. 2016). Germany took a leading role in these rescue policies, although conditioning them upon strict austerity measures. The German government was able to muster the necessary parliamentary support for its course of conditional assistance, though not without difficulty. As the 2013 federal election came into sight, the issue was hotly contested, and important actors demanded to suspend support for the indebted countries (Bulmer 2014). The most vocal of these critics was the AfD, which was founded in early 2013 by, among others, liberal economists, with the express aim to provide an electoral alternative to the apparent all-party consensus to assist the ailing countries of the European South (Schmitt-Beck 2014).

Finally, in the midst of the electoral cycle that led to the 2017 federal election, Germany was deeply shaken by the 2015 European refugee crisis. After a long period of rising numbers of asylum seekers, mainly seeking refuge from the Syrian civil war and domestic strife in countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq, as well as economic migrants reaching Europe across the Mediterranean or via the Balkans, the situation dramatically culminated in the fall of 2015, when the federal chancellor Angela Merkel in a flash ruling decided to allow entry into the Federal Republic for hundreds of thousands of refugees who were stranded in Hungary. All in all, more than one million asylum seekers moved to Germany during that year. At first, a newly discovered German "welcome culture" dominated public reactions to the refugee crisis, but quickly immigration turned into a matter of bitter domestic dispute (Mader and Schoen 2019). Although a series of national and European measures led to a sharp decline in the number of immigrants (Wiesendahl 2016; Mushaben 2017), the topic remained high on the public agenda up until the election (Blätte et al. 2019). The style and tone of party competition became more and more controversial from then on, not least due to the AfD leadership's decision to place opposition to immigration at the heart of its increasingly-nativist rhetoric (Niedermayer 2016).

Studying the Changing German Voter

This volume presents in-depth analyses of German voters' attitudes, beliefs, and behavior at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. Investigating changing voters in the context of changing parties, campaigns, and media, it aims for a better understanding of the amount and character of the fluidity increasingly observable in present-day electoral politics as well as of its backgrounds and consequences for the prospects of democratic governance in Germany. At the same time, it treats Germany as a testbed for examining general theories of political behavior and electoral democracy, thus addressing broader questions of citizen politics in advanced industrial democracies and its development in the early 21st century. The analyses discern how today's politically mobile citizens coped with the increasingly difficult choices they were confronted with at the most recent elections, and what repercussions followed from these developments for the dynamics of the party system and the functioning of representative democracy.

All chapters of the book draw on the rich database that was compiled by the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) across the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections (cf. Schmitt-Beck et al. 2010b). At the heart of this study are numerous interlocking surveys of different kinds, which allow for examining the dynamics of voters' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in great detail. They encompass extensive cross-section face-to-face surveys, combining pre-and post-election waves, long-term and short-term panel surveys conducted face-to-face and online, rolling

cross-section campaign surveys conducted per telephone, and a series of cross-sectional online surveys fielded continuously every three months over the entire electoral cycles from 2009 to 2013 and 2013 to 2017. Supplementary instruments include surveys of the candidates running for parliamentary mandates at the three federal elections, content analyses of political news coverage on TV and in the press, and quasi-experimental data on the chancellor candidates' TV debates held at each of the three elections. Some analyses additionally utilize electoral data from other sources, such as survey data from previous German national election studies, cross-national survey data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), and content analyses of parties' election platforms conducted by the Manifesto Project.

The book is organized along the three lead questions evoked earlier. Part II examines how the recent turbulences in German electoral behavior came about. Part III explores how the changes of the party system that resulted from these developments fed back into voters' attitudes and decision-making. Theoretically, these chapters relate to the realignment perspective, with a focus on its backgrounds in Part II and implications in Part III. Part IV refers to dealignment and examines the relevance of situational factors for voters' attitudes and choices at the most recent federal elections.

Combining long-term and medium-term perspectives, the four chapters of Part II examine the processes that led to the culmination of the party system's fragmentation at the 2017 federal election. Chapter 2 sets the stage with an analysis of the evolution of traditional cleavage voting since the first federal election in 1949. To understand the long-term decline in electoral support for the two parties at the gravitation center of the German party system, SPD and CDU/CSU, the chapter compares the relevance of compositional effects, originating from the shrinking sizes of these parties' traditional socio-economic and religious core support groups, and linkage effects, resulting from these groups' diminishing relevance for structuring their members' behavior at the ballots. The chapter shows how a protracted weakening of traditional social-structural alignments rendered the two centrist parties' voter support increasingly precarious. Yet, where did voters go, and why? The following three chapters address these questions from different theoretical angles. Their common reference is the two-dimensional conception of political space that distinguishes the traditional socio-economic from a new socio-cultural line of conflict.

Applying a cross-nationally comparative and longitudinal perspective that covers the period from the 1990s to 2017, Chapter 3 investigates the role of changes in parties' policy profiles for voters' shifts in party support. Drawing on Downs' (1957) positional logic of party competition, it examines whether the growing success of right-wing populist parties, notably the German AfD, was a response to programmatic moves of the mainstream center-left and center-right parties to the left. Chapter 4, by contrast, emphasizes the role of issue salience for right-wing

populist party support in Germany. Using data continuously collected from 2009 to 2017, it explores whether the AfD's electoral success reflects a shift in issue importance from the socio-economic to the socio-cultural dimension of conflict, for which the issue of immigration has in recent times become particularly pertinent. With a special focus on partisanship, Chapter 5 looks at another facet of the increasingly disruptive power of conflicts over the immigration issue. Partisan identities are an important mediator between traditional cleavages and electoral choices. The chapter studies whether and in which ways the European sovereign debt crisis and the refugee crisis contributed to a weakening or even restructuration of German voters' party attachments.

The emergence and ascent of the AfD and the progressive fragmentation of the party system that it brought about are results of voters' choices. At the same time, these developments in turn make choosing more challenging for voters. They have raised the complexity of electoral decision-making, thus rendering it more difficult for electors to make up their minds about how to vote (Weßels et al. 2014). The chapters of Part III zoom in on how voters reacted to the changing supply structure of the party system. Combining a longitudinal and East–West comparative perspective, Chapter 6 examines how the AfD affected the underlying structure of inter-party electoral competition, conceived in terms of overlaps in the support bases of different parties as indicators of the availability of each party's voters for other parties. Focusing on the partisan composition of voters' networks of political discussion partners, Chapter 7 explores the correlates of this pattern in citizens' everyday communication with one another.

Drawing on Lau and Redlawsk's (2006) notion of "correct" voting, Chapter 8 studies implications of the emergence and establishment of the AfD for the consistency of voters' electoral choices with their political attitudes and preferences from the 2009 to the 2017 federal elections. Apart from registering change and stability in the rates of consistent voting, the chapter is particularly interested in the variability of the underlying modalities of how voters arrived at their decisions across the three elections. Prompted by the country's PR voting system and multi-party system, coalition governments have always been an important feature of German politics. However, the stark growth of electoral volatility and the accelerated differentiation of the parliamentary party system has rendered coalition politics more and more complex. Chapter 9 examines how voters navigate the intricacies of coalition politics under the increasingly challenging circumstances of the fragmenting party system. Drawing theoretical guidance from a juxtaposition of instrumental and expressive interpretations of coalition voting, the chapter takes a special interest in the long-term stability and change of coalition preferences.

According to the dealignment perspective, traditional mechanisms and patterns of choice are gradually dissipating from electoral politics. As traditional cleavages and partisan affiliations lose their power to structure voters' electoral attitudes

and choices, voting decisions are expected to become more contextually contingent and short-term in nature. With the "blinders of partisanship" (Dalton 2020) receding, dealigning electorates should become more sensitive to influences originating from the specific circumstances of particular elections. The chapters of Part IV examine how such situational factors resonated with voters at the most recent German federal elections and place them in perspective. Experiences of crises can be expected to figure particularly prominently among the election-specific circumstances that may leave an imprint on voting behavior. Whether this was the case at the federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017 is discussed in Chapter 10. It explores the relationship between the strongly increased electoral volatility at these elections and the fact that each of them was overshadowed by a massive crisis (the world financial and economic crisis, the European sovereign debt crisis, and the European refugee crisis).

The following chapters focus on the personalization of party preferences. Chapter 11 studies the relevance of changing candidate evaluations for voters' decisions to desert previously supported parties and switch to other parties instead. Using long-term panel data collected at the 2013 and 2017 federal elections, it investigates the push and pull effects of shifts in candidate evaluations—originating from improving or deteriorating views of the same, repeatedly nominated candidates or from differing views of parties' current candidates in comparison to their predecessors at earlier elections—on electoral volatility. Studying the impact of televised debates of the chancellor candidates, Chapter 12 looks at candidate voting from a communication point of view. Since 2002, American-style "TV duels" are a staple of German federal election campaigns. Drawing on quasi-experimental data collected at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections, the chapter examines the impact of these media events on voting intentions.

Chapter 13 addresses the assumption that partisan dealignment has rendered electorates more responsive to persuasive influences of the news media. Linking data on voters and media content, it examines the impact of news coverage that is valenced in ways that are favorable or unfavorable toward certain parties or candidates on evaluations of these actors during federal election campaigns. Widening the scope beyond specific sources of electoral information, Chapter 14 reflects on the claim that the erosion of long-standing partisan and group loyalties has generally increased the relevance of campaign periods for the outcomes of elections. The chapter undertakes a sweeping stocktake of a large variety of attitudes of well-known relevance for electoral behavior, aiming to assess, in longitudinal perspective, their variability during campaigns, but also in between elections. Comparing data from rolling cross-section campaign surveys conducted daily at the 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections, the chapter examines the dynamics of beliefs and attitudes within election campaigns and across elections as well as patterns of short-term campaign changes in long-term comparative perspective.

The concluding Chapter 15 summarizes the book's findings on its three lead questions: How did the turbulences that increasingly characterize German electoral politics come about? How did they in turn condition voters' decision-making? How were electoral attitudes, beliefs, and choices affected by situational factors that pertained to the specifics of particular elections? Reflecting on these developments' systemic consequences the chapter discusses the ideological and affective polarization of the party system and the increasing difficulties of government formation under the German parliamentary system. Looking ahead the chapter closes with some speculations about the prospects of electoral politics in Germany.

PART II
A FRAGMENTING PARTY SYSTEM

2

All Gone? Change and Persistence in the Impact of Social Cleavages on Voting Behavior in Germany since 1949

Martin Elff and Sigrid Roßteutscher[1]

Introduction

The impact of social structure on the shape of party systems and the patterns of voting behavior has been a classical topic of political sociology and electoral research for several decades. While earlier studies emphasized the role of social cleavages related to class and religion in the formation of party systems and the emergence of stable patterns of voting behavior in Western Europe (e.g., Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini and Mair 1990), the more recent literature pivots on the debate whether these patterns persist or have dissolved in an era of fragmented, individualized voting behavior, which is characterized by increasing volatility (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984b; Clark and Lipset 1991; Franklin et al. 1992; Clark et al. 1993; Dogan 1995; Nieuwbeerta 1996; Brooks et al. 2006; Elff 2007, 2009; van der Waal et al. 2007; Kriesi et al. 2008; Best 2011; Jansen et al. 2013; Goldberg 2020). The emergence and persistent success of green parties signaled the advent of a new cleavage, which cuts across the old left–right divide (Dalton et al. 1984b; Inglehart 1990). At present, it is being debated whether traditional party alignments have given way to new patterns of polarization on issues related to globalization, European integration, and migration (Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2018), leading to electoral successes of right-wing populist parties. In addition, Western European democracies have been troubled by declining turnout rates for decades, particularly among younger citizens (see, e.g., Franklin 2004; Blais et al. 2004; Wattenberg 2008; Konzelmann et al. 2012; Smets 2012). Moreover, recent studies have documented a considerable and, in many countries, widening gap in electoral participation between citizens of lower and higher socio-economic status, as well as between the least and the most educated (Gallego 2015; Armingeon and Schädel 2015; Dalton 2017; Dassonville and Hooghe 2017; Schäfer et al. 2020).

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[1] We are much obliged to the comments of Christof Wolf on an earlier version of this chapter.

Germany is a typical case in so far as its major parties emerged in relation to the lines of cleavage that play a central role in the classic literature on the topic: the class cleavage and the religious cleavage. As in other Western European countries, the persistence of traditional cleavage structures or their possible weakening and dissolution caused by newer lines of conflict is debated in Germany (e.g., Pappi 1977, 1985; Weßels 1994, 2000; Gattig 2006; Debus 2010; Arzheimer and Schoen 2007; Elff and Roßteutscher 2011, 2017; Roßteutscher 2012). Moreover, like other Western European countries, Germany shows a long-term decline in turnout (Elff and Roßteutscher 2017), an increasingly socially stratified pattern of electoral participation (Schäfer et al. 2020), and—most recently—rising electoral support for a right-wing populist party (the AfD; cf. Bieber et al. 2018; Arzheimer and Berning 2019).

This chapter explores the developments that precede these recent shifts in electoral behavior. Focusing on the long-term trajectories of the two major parties that dominated and stabilized the German party system, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU),[2] we explore how traditional cleavage voting and the search for new voter constituencies explain the shifting electoral strength of these parties during the past decades as well as the turbulences of present-day voting behavior. We examine cleavage voting in West Germany since the state's foundation in 1949 and formerly socialist East Germany beginning with the second federal election after German unification, held in 1994.

In our analysis, we distinguish between two processes of change, which are often conflated in the literature although they are conceptually distinct. The first is the process of general social change in which certain groups that formed the core electorate of cleavage-based parties decline in size—a process we refer to as compositional change in the following. The second process is the change in support for cleavage-based parties by different social groups—a process that we refer to as linkage change.[3] The first process may be an irreversible consequence of the transformation of industrial into post-industrial society and ongoing secularization processes, while the second process may also be accelerated or decelerated by political choices (Elff 2007, 2009; Evans and Tilley 2012; Evans and de Graaf 2013). Of course, the first process may impact the second one: diminishing group size may result in increasing within-group homogeneity (Evans 2010: 643), but it is at least as plausible that parties react to compositional changes by either intensifying the mobilization of their traditional base or by extending their appeal beyond

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[2] The CDU and the CSU are de jure separate party organizations, but de facto they can be seen as wings of a common party since they have always formed a unified parliamentary group in the Bundestag and do not compete in elections (the CSU runs only in Bavaria, whereas the CDU runs only in the other German states).

[3] Others prefer the terms structural dealignment and behavioral dealignment (see e.g., Brooks et al. 2006; Lachat 2007; Goldberg 2020). We contend, however, that these terms are possibly misleading, because a change in group size is unrelated to issues of alignment and dealignment (see e.g.,Elff and Roßteutscher 2017).

it (Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Rohrschneider 2002; Elff 2009; Roßteutscher 2012). Hence, there are theoretically four possible scenarios: (i) an intensification of the linkage between social groups and parties which might—from the perspective of the respective party—even compensate for the numerical decline of core cleavage groups, (ii) an unchanged linkage which results in decreasing vote shares of parties that rely on shrinking social groups, (iii) a weakening of the linkage between core social groups and cleavage-based parties where the latter succeed in compensating the change in size of the former by broadening their electoral appeal, and finally (iv) an accelerated decline of cleavage-based parties that lose more votes by alienating former core supporters than they gain from beyond their traditional basis (Przeworski and Sprague 1986).

In the next section, we discuss the historical background of the party system and voting patterns in Germany to clarify how and why religious and class divisions shaped the electoral fortunes of the major German parties, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, despite their self-description as *Volksparteien* (people's parties) in much of their campaign rhetoric. This is followed by a section that clarifies the concept of social cleavages and the crucial distinction between the notions of compositional and linkage change. We then bring this distinction to bear in an empirical analysis that delineates, first, how the size of relevant social groups has changed since the reconstruction of democracy in West Germany, and second, how the voting patterns have changed within these groups. The analysis is completed by contrasting the actual trajectory of the electoral support for the major parties over time with two counterfactual scenarios, one in which the composition of the electorate stays the same and one in which the patterns of voting stay the same. These scenarios illustrate how much of these developments can be attributed to compositional change and how much can be attributed to linkage change.

Social Cleavages and Parties in Germany: The Historical Background

When Lipset and Rokkan (1967) traced back the structure of European party systems to the cleavage structures of the past, they generally described cleavage formation as the result of opposition or resistance of a political faction or social group against the activities of a state- and nation-building elite (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 14–23). According to Lipset and Rokkan, the variation among European party systems that formed in the processes of state formation, nation-building, and democratization depended on whether and how the conflicts that arose along the lines of center–periphery, church–state, or urban–rural cleavages coincided or crosscut one another. By contrast, the owner–worker cleavage, which resulted from the process of industrialization, led to the emergence of socialist and labor

parties in all European party systems, thus rendering European party systems more similar to one another (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 21, 46).

The specific pattern of the German case was characterized by opposition to the Prussian center of the ascending German Reich. The center was allied to the landed aristocracy and the established Lutheran Church, while the opposition originated from the urban bourgeoisie of the cities and city-states throughout Germany and the Catholic Church and Catholic population of southern and western Germany (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 37–9; Madeley 1982). In the emerging German party system of the 19th century, the Lutheran and rural center of state formation and nation-building found its manifestation in the form of various conservative parties (*Deutschkonservative Partei*, *Freikonservative Partei*, and *Deutsche Reichspartei*), which merged into the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP) after the formation of the Weimar Republic in 1918. The urban opposition led to the formation of various liberal parties in the 19th century (e.g., the *Deutsche Fortschrittspartei* and the *Nationalliberale Partei*), which transformed into the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* and *Deutsche Volkspartei* during the Weimar Republic. The Catholic opposition to the Lutheran elite found its political representation in the *Zentrumspartei* (Center Party). Finally, the labor movement, the opposition of workers against capitalism, led to the foundation of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany—SPD), from which a communist wing split off to form a communist party, the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), after World War I.

After the end of World War II in 1945, Germany was split into two parts. In 1949, West Germany returned to democracy, while East Germany established a socialist regime that lasted until 1989. The major parties that were founded in West Germany after the interruption of democratic politics by the Nazi Regime can be traced back to parties or party groups that existed before. This is most obvious with respect to the SPD, which re-emerged as the party of the working class and revived its alliance with the labor unions, reconstituted under the umbrella of the German Federation of Trade Unions (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*—DGB). The second major party in West Germany, the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) can also be traced back to a precursor from the Weimar Republic, the *Zentrumspartei*. Nevertheless, the new CDU explicitly aimed at becoming the political home of both Catholics and Protestants. The CDU's Bavarian sister party, the *Christlich-Soziale Union* (Christian Social Union—CSU), however, retained a more clearly Catholic profile. Yet, despite its founders' intention to build a cross-denominational party, the CDU initially was electorally less successful in the Protestant north of West Germany than in the more Catholic or denominationally mixed south and west (Pappi 1985: 267; Roßteutscher 2012: 113). While the Prussia-centered conservatism disappeared as a relevant political force in West Germany, liberalism re-emerged in the form of the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (Free Democratic Party—FDP). The only new party

without predecessors in the Weimar Republic that gained persistent representation in the Bundestag was the Green party (*Die Grünen*), which emerged from the new social movements of the 1980s.

The collapse of the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) and German unification led to an eastward expansion of this party system after 1989, yet with some significant variations: the former state-socialist party, the SED, was re-founded as a left-wing socialist party, the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (Party of Democratic Socialism—PDS), later renamed into *Die Linke* (The Left). While it initially mobilized votes from former GDR elites and smaller functionaries (Roth 1990; Weßels 1994, 2000; Elff 2000; Arzheimer and Schoen 2007), it became gradually attractive also to working-class voters (Elff 2000; Elff and Roßteutscher 2009, 2011). As a result, and in stark contrast to the CDU, in the East, the SPD never attained an electoral strength as in the West.

Most studies on the social bases of voting in contemporary Germany have focused on the two major parties that dominated (West) German party politics, i.e., they have examined the impact of class and union membership on the support for the SPD and religious denomination and church attendance on the support for the CDU/CSU (Pappi 1977, 1985; Weßels 2000; Arzheimer and Schoen 2007; Elff 2007; Debus 2010; Elff and Roßteutscher 2009, 2011, 2017). In line with this tradition, we subsequently discuss whether and how changes in group size and linkage strengths have impacted the electoral trajectories of these two major cleavage parties.

Two Types of Change: Compositional Change and Linkage Change

Both the CDU/CSU and the SPD have endured a considerable long-term decline in their vote shares (second votes) since their heydays in the 1960s and 1970s (see Figure 2.1). By contrast, rates of non-voting have risen considerably. Such declining vote shares in combination with decreasing turnout are often (mis-)interpreted as a weakening if not dissolution of cleavage voting and as an indication of cleavage parties' inability to mobilize their core voter clientele. Subsequently, we examine whether and how much the decline in vote shares is related to changes in the composition of society and/or to decreasing mobilization capacities of the parties. In other words, do the major cleavage parties mainly suffer from a numerical decline of their core constituencies, i.e., the (unionized) industrial working class in the case of the SPD, Catholics, and devout Christians in the case of CDU/CSU? Or is these parties' electoral fate rather a result of lacking mobilization and loosening linkages with social groups?

Even though the term cleavage suggests an opposition between two sides (Rae and Taylor 1970), the purported weakening of social cleavages is often attributed to the shrinking of the social groups whose mobilization and opposition against
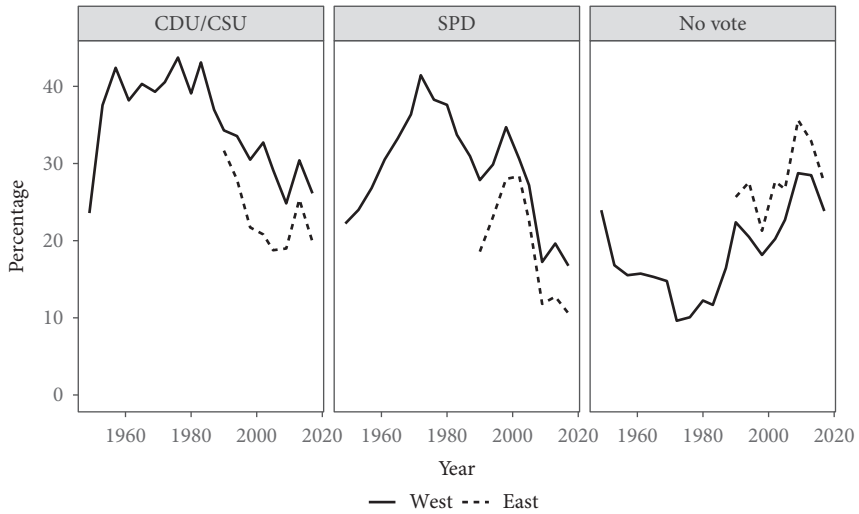
Fig. 2.1 Shares of CDU/CSU voters, SPD voters, and non-voters 1949 to 2017 (in percent of all citizens eligible to vote)
Source: Bundeswahlleiter.

political elites had given rise to these cleavages (to which we refer in this chapter as core cleavage groups or the core constituencies of cleavage-related parties). Thus, it has often been claimed that the shrinking of the industrial working class due to the rise of the service economy and the diminishing shares of Catholics and Protestants with strong church affiliations as a result of the process of secularization by itself means a weakening of class and religious cleavages (Dahrendorf 1988; Clark and Lipset 1991; Clark et al. 1993; Dogan 1995; Nieuwbeerta 1996; Best 2011). From such a perspective, the numerical decline of core constituencies of cleavage parties is interpreted as an indication of a weakening of the social cleavages themselves (e.g., Dogan 1995; Best 2011). Referring to German elections until 1998, Weßels already concluded that, if the two parties' electoral appeal had been restricted to their core constituencies, they would have turned into *Kleinparteien* (minor parties; cf. Weßels 2000: 148). The change in group size and its political consequences is what we refer to as *compositional change* in social cleavages.

However, a change in group sizes is not the same as a change in the political distinctiveness of social groups. If members of a group, such as the working class, no longer support the party seen as this group's political representatives, in this case, the Social Democrats, and either fail to turn out at elections or even defect to some other party, they lose their distinctiveness as loyal supporters of a particular party. This is what we refer to as *linkage change* because the support for certain

parties that makes a social group distinctive is often viewed as the manifestation of a linkage between the group and these parties.

A range of possible reasons that may have brought about linkage change in recent decades is discussed in the literature. The first line of argument states that group distinctions have blurred and have therefore become behaviorally less relevant. Workers have become more affluent and thus more socially and economically similar to their "bourgeois" contemporaries (Goldthorpe et al. 1968; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Myles 1990). Moreover, the differences between these groups' economic interests may have been softened by increasingly generous welfare states (van der Eijk et al. 1992). The second line of argument refers to the emergence of new non-economic, culturally based cleavages as a consequence of social change (Dalton et al. 1984b; Inglehart 1990; van der Waal et al. 2007) or of cleavages between winners and losers of globalization (Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2018) that crosscut traditional class-based alignments (see also Chapters 1 and 4). The third line of argument points to factors that are claimed to have eroded the mechanisms behind the linkage between groups and parties. For instance, cognitive mobilization resulting from educational expansion and the expansion of news media is claimed to have undermined individuals' group and party loyalties (Dalton 1984a), while the decline in labor union membership and church attendance has weakened the organizational underpinning of social cleavages (Pappi 1985; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Gray and Caul 2000; Elff and Roßteutscher 2017). In addition, the alliances between these organizations and parties have become more fragile. Since the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the Catholic Church has come to define itself as a civil society actor that no longer seeks to issue vote recommendations to church members (Roßteutscher 2009: 174–175). The trade unions, on the other hand, have adopted a rather ambivalent, partly even critical stance toward the Social Democrats, not least because of the labor market reforms enacted by the SPD-led government in the 2000s (Wiesenthal 2014: 400–401; Schönhoven 2014: 79).

The fourth line of reasoning refers to parties' attempts to reach voters beyond their traditional core constituencies by changing their political positions and campaign strategies (Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Rohrschneider 2002; Elff 2009; Elff and Roßteutscher 2011, 2017; Jansen et al. 2013; Roßteutscher 2012; Goldberg 2020). While it can be expected that vote maximization is always important for parties, traditional cleavage parties might be in particular need for strategies to compensate for core groups whose sizes are shrinking. However, such attempts to widen a party's electoral appeal can backfire if they alienate traditional core voters (Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Lane and Ersson 1997). An expanded electoral appeal may render traditional support groups politically less decisive, but a genuine weakening of linkages will happen only if former core voter segments defect to other parties or even withdraw from the electoral process altogether by abstaining. Considerable evidence suggests that cleavage-based parties have indeed changed

politically over the past decades. In 1959, the SPD adopted a new party program, which toned down traditional anti-capitalist claims and accepted market economy, in order to attract left-liberal voters from other social classes. In the 1990s, alongside other European social democratic parties, the SPD took inspiration from the notion of a so-called Third Way, propagated by British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990). Under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who headed a red-green coalition from 1998 to 2005, the Social Democrats actively targeted the so-called new middle classes, i.e., the highly educated service classes in predominantly cultural/educational/health professions. This strategy was accompanied by several welfare reforms (the so-called *Hartz IV* measures of the *Agenda 2010*), which implied a drastic turn from a classic social democratic welfare regime to a more liberal one (Elff 2009; Elff and Roßteutscher 2017). Also, the CDU/CSU has changed over the past decades. To compensate for the declining number of religious voters, the Christian Democrats have tried to modernize their policies and appearance in order to gain traction among urban and secular voters (Träger and Pollex 2016; Henninger and Wahl 2019; Oppelland 2019: 71).

Against this backdrop, we subsequently examine how compositional and linkage change affect the long-term trajectories of Germany's major cleavage parties. Our analyses will always focus first on compositional and linkage trends in core social groups (i.e., social classes and religious groups) and second on subgroups that also are organizationally tied to cleavage parties (i.e., unionized workers and churchgoing Catholics). This serves to account for the fact that the intensity of linkages between social groups and parties depends not only on social positions and the patterns of values and opinions that come with them but also on affiliated organizations (Bartolini and Mair 1990). In Germany as well as in other countries, such linkages have traditionally been strengthened for the state–church cleavage by church organizations and for the owner–worker cleavage by trade unions (Pappi 1977, 1985; Gray and Caul 2000; Weßels 2000; Elff and Roßteutscher 2017). As a result, organizationally linked social groups can be expected to vote at higher rates for their respective party than group members who are organizationally non-aligned (e.g., unionized workers compared to workers without union labor membership and churchgoing Catholics compared to Catholics who never or rarely attend services).

Compositional Change

We illustrate the consequences of compositional change using the German electoral studies data compiled by Arndt and Gattig (2005), extended by the data from the cumulated cross-sectional face-to-face surveys of the German Longitudinal Election Study of 2009, 2013, and 2017 (CrossSec09_Cum; CrossSec13_Cum; CrossSec17_Cum). To begin with compositional change in the class cleavage and

following Arndt and Gattig (2005), we distinguish between (i) the class of farmers, (ii) the class of manual workers (in industry and mining)—the traditional working class—(iii) the class of routine non-manual workers (which includes shop assistants, secretaries, and clerks), (iv) the service class (which includes technical specialists, managers, administrators, and socio-cultural professionals), and (v) the petty bourgeoisie. This class scheme is inspired by the well-known Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) class scheme that is widely used in studies of social inequality and social mobility (e.g., Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). Respondents were assigned to classes based on their own occupation or the occupation of the main earner in their household (see Online Appendix for technical details).

Figure 2.2 shows the direction and magnitude of compositional change in terms of social class. The classes of farmers and manual workers have been shrinking throughout the post-World War II era, while the class of routine non-manual workers has been growing. The service class and the petty bourgeoisie appear to have stagnated in this period.[4] It is clear from this figure that the traditional constituency of social democracy, the industrial working class, has been in numeric decline, a trend that may have prompted the SPD to seek its electoral fortunes beyond its traditional core group.[5]

The second source of compositional change concerns membership in trade unions. As argued earlier, union membership can be viewed as the organizational core of the class cleavage (Gray and Caul 2000; Weßels 2000). If this organizational aspect of the class cleavage is politically more important than class membership itself and if unionization is stable, this may compensate for the compositional changes in terms of social class. As Figure 2.3 indicates, however, this is not the case. It shows the development of the official membership rates compiled by the German Trade Union Federation for the period from 1950 to 2017. The proportion of unionized workers and employees among the total labor force has decreased from almost 45 percent during the early 1950s to 15 percent in 2017. Unionization spiked when the highly unionized workers of the former GDR joined the German workforce in 1990, but this did not suffice to turn the tide as the decline continued after 1992. The decline appears even more dramatic when compared to the total population. Among all adult Germans, only 5 percent belonged to a labor union in 2010 (Roßteutscher and Stegmüller 2014: 177). Hence, the SPD suffered from severe numerical decline of its core constituency in terms of both social position and organizational alliance.

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[4] Note that, due to survey instruments and coding, the rise of the class of routine non-manual workers is presumably exaggerated because many lower service professions, e.g., in health care, are assigned to this class. Vice versa, the growth of the service class is underestimated because lower service class professions are often coded as part of the classes of routine non-manual workers (Arndt and Gattig 2005).

[5] The lines in the diagrams do not appear as smooth as one should expect from a long-term gradual change. This is mostly due to changes in the way occupations are queried in the respective surveys.
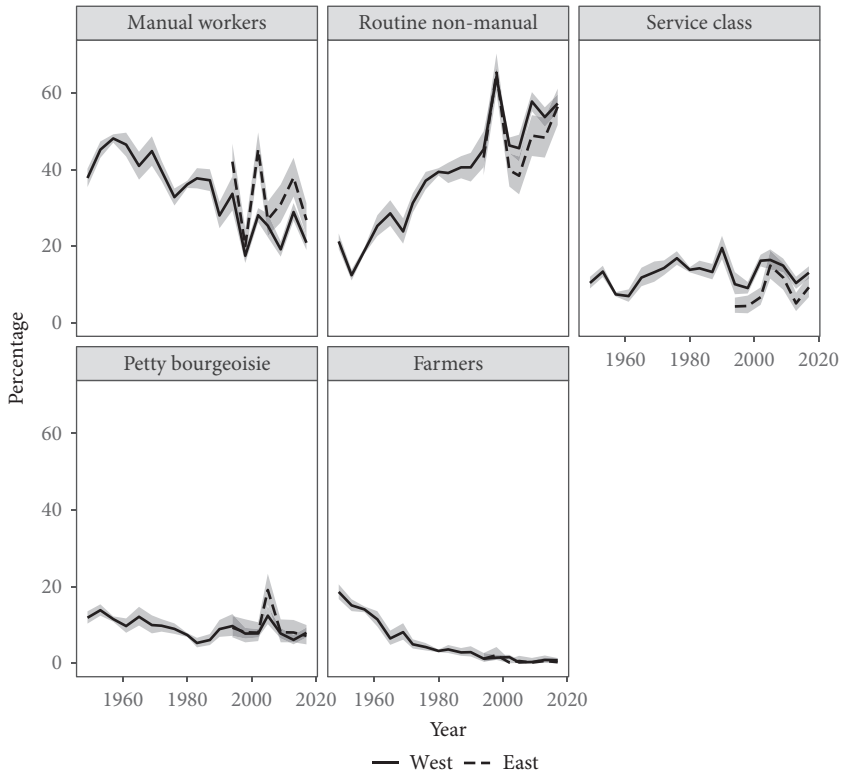
Fig. 2.2 Distribution of social classes 1949 to 2017 (in percent of all respondents with valid responses; with 95 percent confidence intervals)

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

Subsequently, we look at compositional trends regarding the religious cleavage. In Germany, membership in a church is not just a matter of self-identification and religious attendance, but a legal status usually inherited from one's parents. In order to end one's church membership, one has to file an application for its cessation with the municipal administration. Despite the fact that leaving a church thus takes some effort, membership numbers have been continuously declining since the 1950s. Figure 2.4 shows the percentage of members of the Catholic and the Protestant Church in the West German population until 1989 and in unified Germany from 1990 onward. During the 1950s and 1960s, close to 90 percent of the West German population were members of either the Catholic or the Protestant Church. This proportion has declined to less than 60 percent. The apparent drop in 1990 is a consequence of German unification, after which the more secularized East German population entered the statistics. Worth noting is the different pace in the decline of the proportion of Catholics and
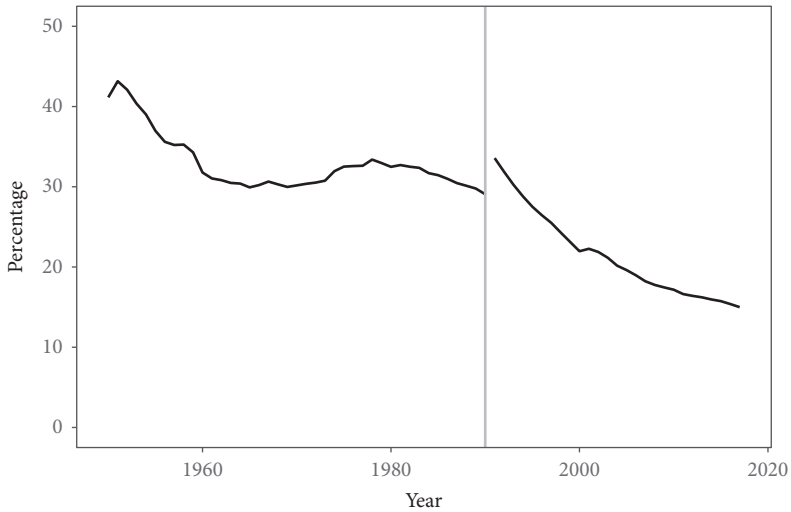
Fig. 2.3 Distribution of labor union membership 1949 to 2017 (in percent of total workforce)

Sources: German Trade Union Federation (www.dgb.de) and German Statistical Office.

— Catholics   ⋯ Protestants   –– Catholics + Protestants
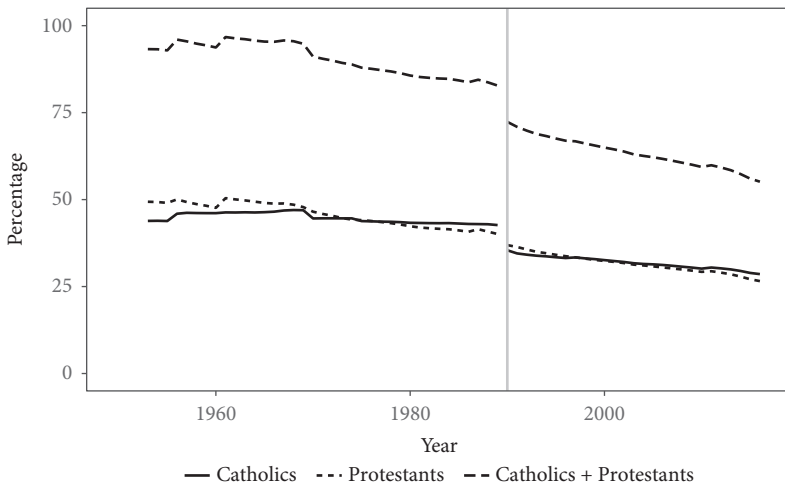
Fig. 2.4 Distribution of church membership 1953 to 2016 (in percent of population)

Source: German Statistical Office.

Protestants. In the 1950s, West Germany had about 5 percent more Protestants than Catholics, while just before 1990 in West Germany, and in 2016 in unified Germany, the proportion of Catholics was higher than the proportion of Protestants.
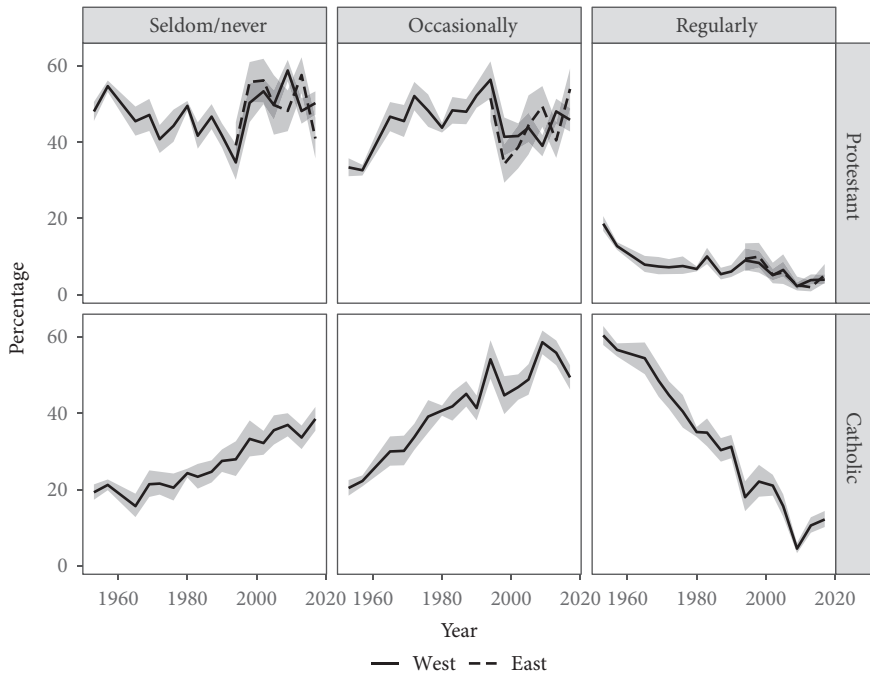
Fig. 2.5 Distribution of regular church attendance 1949 to 2017 (in percent of all respondents with a valid response; with 95 percent confidence intervals)

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

In order to assess the decline in church attendance, i.e., the organizational component of the religious cleavage, one needs to rely on survey data, because official data on this topic does not exist. For this purpose, we again use the combination of the Arndt and Gattig (2005) data and the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) data. Figure 2.5 shows a further difference between Protestants and Catholics: While Protestants already showed low levels of church attendance in the 1960s and this level has remained low throughout the entire period, Catholics' attendance rates declined continuously. During the 1950s and 1960s, roughly 60 percent of Catholics attended services on a regular basis, while church attendance has declined to little more than 10 percent at present.[6] Among Protestants, the rate of church attendance has been relatively stable, yet at a considerably lower level. The proportion of Protestants who report attending church seldom or never has fluctuated around 50 percent, while the proportion of those who

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[6] Since the number of members of the Catholic Church is too small in East Germany to allow for a reliable analysis of church attendance, we excluded it from the analysis.

attend church regularly has decreased from about 15 to 20 percent to roughly 5 percent.

To summarize, both cleavage parties have experienced partly drastic declines of their historical core constituencies: (unionized) workers in the case of the SPD, (churchgoing) Catholics in the case of the CDU/CSU. Note, however, that both trends and their effect on the parties' vote shares are joined at the hips. The CDU/CSU's vote share had been very low among the industrial working class but very high among farmers. Thus, the Christian Democrats profit from the numerical decline of the former and suffer from the shrinkage of the latter. By contrast, the SPD only profits from ongoing secularization. The party has always been strongest among the non-affiliated and those who rarely went to church. Hence, the increase in the share of secular voters may have been a boon to the SPD or at least may have helped to compensate for the decline in the size of the industrial working class. However, as argued above, compositional change does not equate to changes in voting behavior. Are these social groups, albeit shrinking in numbers, still loyal supporters of their respective parties?

Linkage Change

Compositional change will have an unambiguous effect on the electoral fortunes of these parties only if the link between social groups and the parties remains unaltered. In the light of the literature discussed earlier in this chapter, this must not necessarily be the case. We already discussed four theoretically possible scenarios, (i) linkage intensification, (ii) linkage persistence, (iii) cleavage parties' success in broadening their appeal, and (iv) accelerated decline of cleavage parties due to an alienation of their core supporters. In this section, we examine how much these scenarios fit the reality.

The Class Cleavage

To analyze linkage change in the class cleavage, we use again the combination of the electoral studies data compilation by Arndt and Gattig (2005) and the cross-sections of the GLES from 2009, 2013, and 2017. We focus on the percentages of the members of four social classes and their support for the SPD as well as their respective rate of electoral abstention. The development of these percentages is depicted in Figure 2.6 for West and East Germany, starting at the 1949 and 1994 federal elections, respectively.[7]

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[7] Note that no data was available to us for East Germany in 1990, even though Germany was unified when the federal election took place in that year. We exclude the class of farmers and farm laborers due to the small size of this group in more recent election studies.
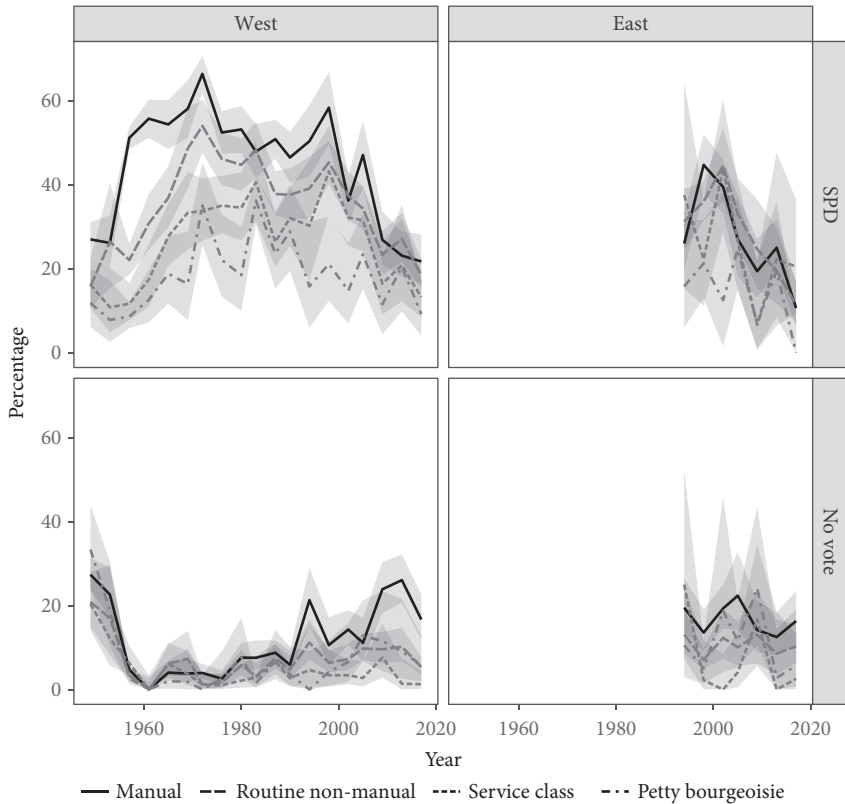
Fig. 2.6 Social class, voting for the SPD, and non-voting 1949–2017 (in percent of all respondents with a valid response; with 95 percent confidence intervals)

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

The first conclusion that can be drawn from Figure 2.6 is that most of the time patterns of party support are in line with the notion of the SPD as a "workers' party," because the support for this party has been highest among the class of manual workers almost throughout the entire period in West Germany. The support among routine non-manual workers surpassed the support among manual workers on a few occasions. In any case, support for the SPD is highest among the traditional (industrial) and the newer class of lower-ranking employees in non-industrial occupations. The pattern is less clear in East Germany, but this is likely due to the peculiarity of East Germany, where a strong Left party competes with the SPD.

None of the four scenarios mentioned earlier is borne out for the full period from 1949 to 2017. The first decade seems to exhibit a pattern of linkage intensification since it took some time for the SPD to mobilize the voters from the

working class right after the re-establishment of democracy in West Germany. Only one-third of the members of the manual working class supported the Social Democrats in 1949 and 1953, but the vote share increased substantially in the 1960s. The 1960s show a pattern of broadening appeal of the SPD as it was able to gain support among routine non-manual workers and the service class. After its peak in 1972, support for the SPD in the class of the manual workers has been in a gradual decline, interrupted by a successful mobilization in 1998 and an accelerated decline thereafter. It should be noted that the decline in support among manual workers was accompanied by a more or less stable level of support in the service class, which continued until 1998. Moreover, the SPD also continuously increased its vote share among the numerically growing class of routine non-manual workers. Hence, until the late 1990s, the SPD could first compensate for the shrinking size of its core constituency by intensifying the link (scenario i) and later by keeping it constant and broadening its appeal to other classes (scenario iii). Since 1998, the support in the service class declined almost at the same pace as among routine non-manual and manual workers. Thus, in more recent years, a scenario we have not anticipated seems to apply: a parallel decline in all classes, most pronounced in the industrial working class but almost similarly strong in the service and routine non-manual classes. At present, class patterns in SPD voting are hardly discernible.

The long-term gains and losses of the SPD seem to be mirrored by drops and increases in electoral abstention. When the SPD was able to increase its share among the manual workers in the 1950s, abstention declined almost to the same amount. Also, the long-term decline in support for the SPD among manual workers since its peak in 1972 is accompanied by an increase in electoral abstention, particularly among this class. Consequently, while differences between classes in terms of SPD support have almost disappeared after 2005, electoral abstention has attained an obvious class-related pattern.

We argued earlier in this chapter that union membership may strengthen the link between working-class membership and support for social democratic parties. In Figure 2.7, we take a closer look at the development of SPD vote share and non-voting of trade union members within the manual working class. A relatively clear pattern emerges: most of the time, members of a labor union have been more likely to vote for the SPD. This difference was especially pronounced before 1972, which suggests that before their electoral peak it was much easier for the SPD to mobilize unionized voters than non-unionized voters. Across time, however, the support for the SPD is not more stable among unionized than among non-unionized working-class voters, albeit electoral abstention is lower among unionized members of the manual working class than among the non-unionized members. Thus, unionization is clearly favorable for the SPD, but organizational ties are far from explaining all of the group–party linkage.
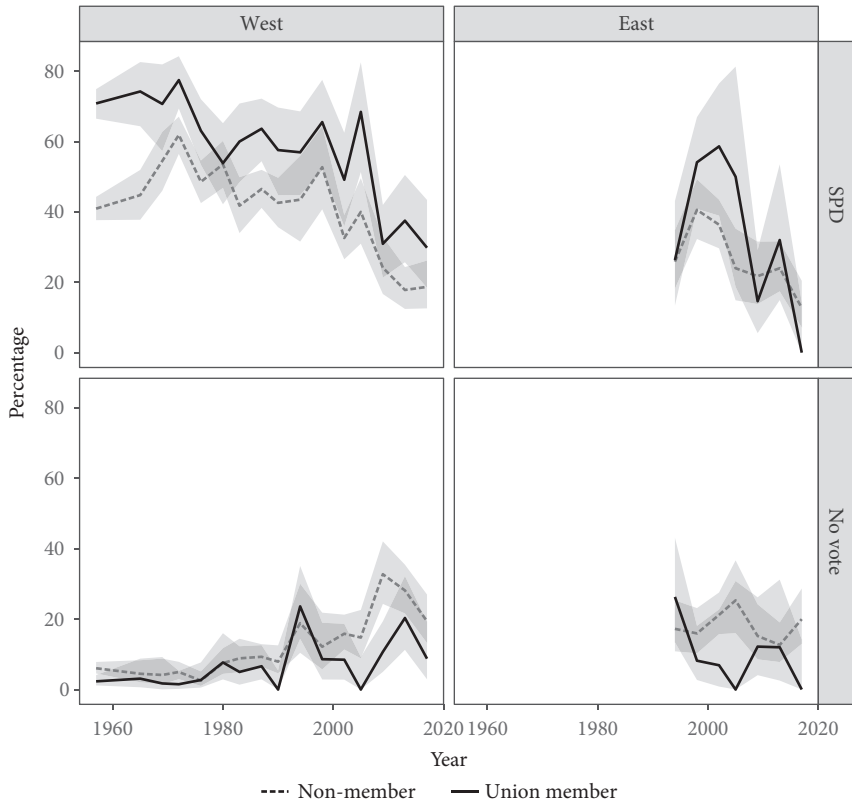
Fig. 2.7 Union membership, voting for the SPD, and non-voting among members of the manual working class 1949–2017 (in percent of all respondents with valid responses; with 95 percent confidence intervals)

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

The Religious Cleavage

For the analysis of linkage change in the religious cleavage, we rely on the same data as in the previous section but focus on the differences in support for the CDU/CSU among Catholics, Protestants, and the non-religious (Figure 2.8). Although the CDU was formed as a cross-denominational party, differences between Catholics and Protestants have persisted with regard to support for the CDU/CSU, both in West Germany and in East Germany. That is, there are still vestiges of the old church–state cleavage of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Given that the CDU and CSU have presented themselves as proponents of Christian values, it does not come as a surprise that these parties have found less support among voters not belonging to a Christian church. That notwithstanding, the link between church
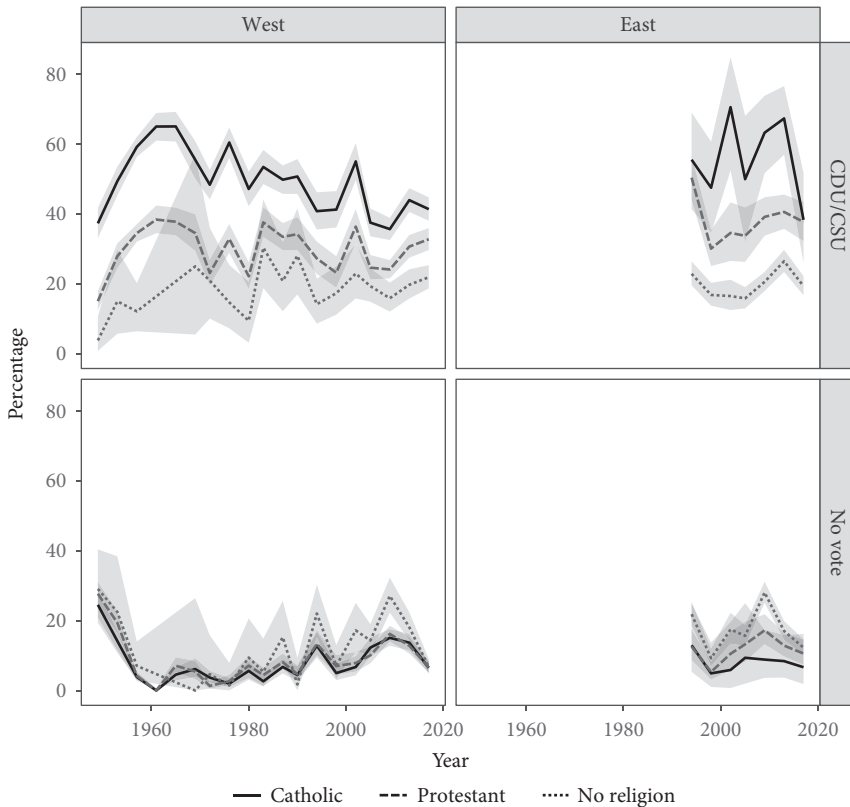
Fig. 2.8 Religious denomination, voting for the CDU/CSU, and non-voting 1949–2017 (in percent of all respondents with a valid response; with 95 percent confidence intervals)

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

membership and CDU/CSU support has been less than perfect. Neither has the CDU/CSU been able to draw support from all Catholics nor have non-members of the Christian churches been completely dissuaded from voting for it. It is all the more remarkable that even larger Catholic-Protestant differences emerged in East Germany after the unification, despite the fact that denominational differences played a much smaller role in the highly secularized East German society, in which Catholics were a tiny minority. Looking once more at West Germany, where Catholics provide a substantial segment of the electorate, we see that differences in the support for the Christian Democratic Party between Catholics, Protestants, and non-affiliated segments became smaller across time. This decreasing gap between religious groups since its peak in 1965 has been exclusively caused by the weakening linkage between Catholics and the CDU/CSU, while the

support among Protestant and secular voters remained more or less constant, albeit on a lower level. The CDU/CSU thus suffers from a gradual linkage decline with the members of the Catholic Church, but this decline is much less dramatic than the decline of the linkage between the manual workers and the SPD. Yet, the CDU/CSU never succeeded in increasing its vote share among Protestants and, more importantly, among the growing fraction of German citizens who are not affiliated with the churches. Hence, in terms of our scenarios, we find a clear alienation of the traditional core group (Catholics) coupled with a failure to strengthen the bond with other groups, most notably secular voters. However, in contrast to the SPD, which lost electoral support in both the shrinking class of industrial workers and the growing class of routine non-manual professions, the CDU/CSU could at least retain a stable (albeit relatively low) vote share among the growing group of secular voters, i.e., it gained in absolute vote numbers.

A comparison between the development of CDU/CSU vote shares and the development of non-voting leads to an impression different from the one obtained in the previous section on class voting. The gains of the Christian Democrats in the 1950s were accompanied by a comparable decline in non-voting. Furthermore, the losses suffered by the CDU/CSU among Catholics since the late 1960s have been accompanied by a modest increase of non-voting, but non-voting increased clearly more among those without religious affiliation.

The declining support of the CDU/CSU among Catholics raises the question of whether this has been a result of the decline in church attendance (composition), which we documented in a previous section, or whether church attendance itself has become electorally less relevant (linkage). Figure 2.9 shows the development of CDU/CSU support among Catholics in West Germany, broken down by church attendance. It suggests that the differences between regular churchgoers, occasional churchgoers, and non-churchgoers in terms of support for the CDU/CSU remained quite stable until the mid-1980s. From then on, it appears to have become unstable, reaching a low point in 2005 and 2009 but recovering in 2013 and 2017. It is not yet clear whether this is a substantial fluctuation in the level of support or merely a manifestation of sampling error and thus requires further investigations beyond the scope of this chapter.[8] This open question notwithstanding, the level of support for the CDU/CSU appears to have been in decline in recent decades.

Thus, like the SPD, the Christian Democrat parties have not only been affected by the numerical decline of their core voter segments, in this case, Catholics and in particular church-attending Catholics but clearly also by a continuously loosening

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[8] The changes between 2002 and 2005 and between 2009 and 2013 are larger than the width of the confidence intervals. However, the fluctuation seems to occur only among regular churchgoers, despite the fact that the difference between regular churchgoers and occasional churchgoers is just a matter of degree. If there is an interaction between short-term factors and church attendance, it seems unlikely that these factors do not also affect occasional churchgoers if only less strongly.
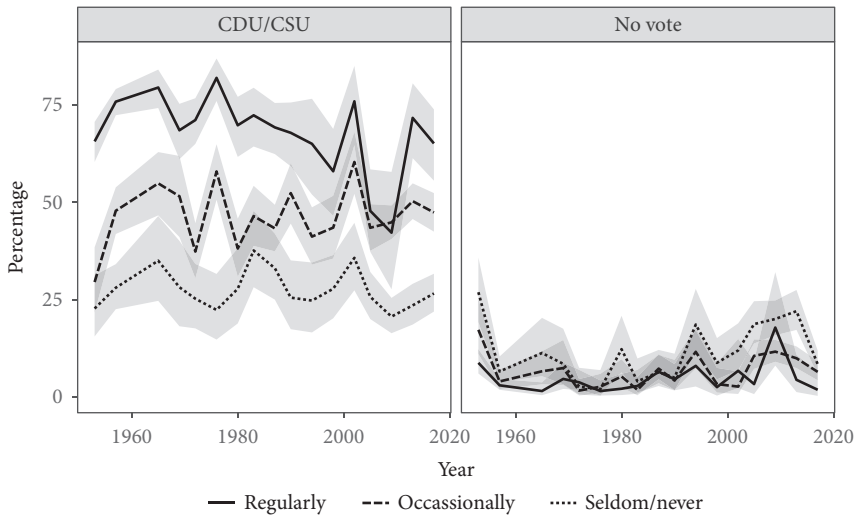
Fig. 2.9 Church attendance, voting for the CDU/CSU, and non-voting among West German Catholics 1949–2017 (in percent of all respondents with valid responses; with 95 percent confidence intervals)

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

of the tie. The CDU/CSU, however, has retained a relative advantage over the SPD: while the SPD has also lost vote shares among growing classes, especially among routine non-manual workers and non-unionized workers, the CDU/CSU can rely on the much lower but, in relative terms, constant support of numerically growing and thus electorally increasingly significant voter groups, i.e., voters without church affiliation and Catholics who rarely or never visit a church.

The Effects of Compositional and Linkage Changes on Cleavage-based Parties' Electoral Fortunes

At the beginning of the chapter, we pointed to the long-term electoral decline of the two major parties, the SPD and the CDU/CSU. We also argued that a weakening of social cleavages has been attributed to two different processes in the literature: compositional change, i.e., change in the sizes of groups that are relevant to a social cleavage, and linkage change, i.e., change in the patterns of voting behavior that characterize these groups. Our analyses in the preceding sections indicate that both kinds of processes have been at work in Germany since the 1960s and 1970s, which leads us to the question: Which of these processes is more important for the fate of the major parties in Germany? Since electoral turnout has declined as well

from the 1970s onward, we also look at the effects of compositional change and linkage change on electoral abstention.

Drawing on current debates about causal identification (e.g., Morgan and Winship 2014), we define the effect of compositional change as the difference between the actual development of voter shares of the parties and the vote shares of the parties under the counterfactual condition that the composition of the electorate did not change. Similarly, we define the effect of linkage change as the difference between actual vote shares and vote shares under the condition of constant linkage.

For the construction of counterfactuals, we need to determine a reference level at which the composition and the linkage, respectively, have to be fixed. For West Germany, we chose the averages of the federal elections of 1957 and 1965 as a reference because these were the earliest federal elections in which the electorate was fully mobilized by the major parties and the relevant data are available in election studies.[9] For East Germany, we use the earliest two federal elections for which data are available in electoral studies, that is 1994 and 1998. We use more than a single election as a reference in order to neutralize possible peculiarities of specific elections.[10] Figure 2.10 shows the predictions from these scenarios about the vote share percentage for the SPD, the vote share percentage for the CDU/CSU, and the percentage of electoral abstention, along with the sample values of these percentages.

The first conclusion to be drawn from Figure 2.10 is that if links between social groups and party choice had remained at their level of the Bundestag elections of 1957/1965, the fate of the CDU/CSU and especially of the SPD would have turned out quite differently than in reality. The CDU/CSU would have experienced a considerably more limited decline in vote share from the 1980s. The SPD would not have achieved its gains in the 1960s and 1970s and would probably not have been as electorally successful as it was between 1969 and 1998. Yet, neither would it have endured its hemorrhaging losses after 2005. Instead, it would have overtaken the CDU/CSU in vote share in the last three Bundestag elections but not before.

The second conclusion Figure 2.10 suggests is that the changing composition of the electorate had a very limited effect on the (predicted) vote shares of the SPD and the CDU/CSU. The CDU/CSU would have fared somewhat better before 2009 if the composition of the electorate had stayed at the level of 1957 and 1965, and the SPD would have fared somewhat worse, but the overall pattern of change would have been the same. A clearer divergence between the actual percentages and the percentages predicted from the counterfactual scenario would have appeared only after 2009, in which case the major parties would have fared worse, in particular the CDU/CSU. Conversely, compositional change can hardly explain decreasing
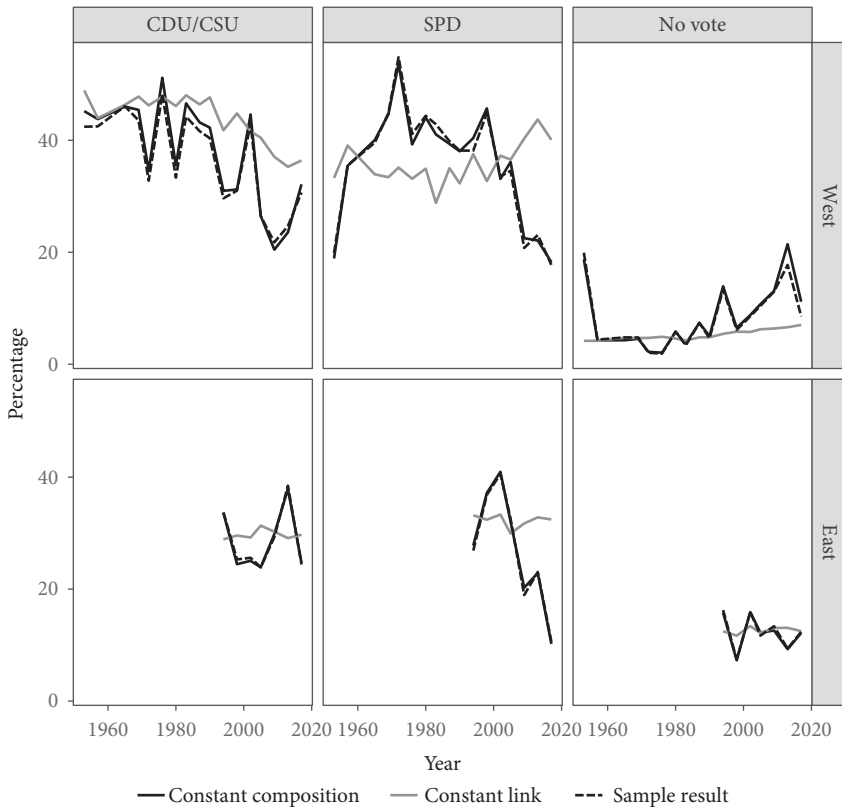
Fig. 2.10 Actual and projected shares of SPD and CDU/CSU voters as well as non-voters in federal election studies 1953–2017 (in percent of all respondents with a valid response but excluding farmers)

Note: "Constant composition": sizes of groups defined by social class, religious denomination, and church attendance held constant at average of elections of 1957 and 1965 (West Germany) and 1994 and 1998 (East Germany). "Constant link": relationship between social class, religious denomination, church attendance, and voting held constant at average of elections of 1957 and 1965 (West Germany) and 1994 and 1998 (East Germany).

Sources: 1949 to 2005: Arndt and Gattig (2005); 2009 to 2017: cumulated cross-sections of the GLES (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum).

turnout rates. By contrast, if linkages had remained at the level of 1957 and 1965, there would have been hardly any increase in electoral abstention.

Considering the much shorter time frame in the case of East Germany and the related fact that the interruption of democratic rule lasted much longer than in the West, the results of our simulation are strikingly similar. Compositional change has hardly any impact on the fate of the cleavage parties. The declining vote shares of both SPD and CDU as well as increasing levels of electoral abstention can almost exclusively be attributed to a waning linkage intensity between core social

groups and the respective parties. Thus, in both the West and the East, compositional changes have contributed only a little to the waxing and waning electoral fortunes of Germany's major parties. Most of these changes, including shifts in turnout, are to be attributed to changes *within* social groups.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the evolution of cleavage voting from the very first federal election of post-war West Germany in 1949 and the post-unification election in 1994 in East Germany to the most recent election in 2017. Covering almost 70 years of electoral history, we examined how much change in cleavage voting has been due to compositional effects, i.e., changing numerical sizes of core cleavage groups, and how much to linkage effects, i.e., changes in the electoral bonds between social groups and "their" respective parties.

Our findings confirm a decline in the size of the core constituencies of the cleavage parties: the industrial working class and union members in the case of the SPD, and Catholics and regular churchgoers in the case of the CDU/CSU. Both parties have suffered from shrinking shares of core groups within the electorate as well as diminished affiliations with intermediary organizations relevant for aligning these groups to "their" parties. Apparently, the parties have been in need to seek additional voter segments in order to retain their electoral strength.

Ironically, the change in the composition of the electorate has had only very limited consequences on the electoral fortunes of the major parties. The actual vote shares in the electoral studies' samples would have changed only marginally if the composition of the electorate had stayed the same throughout the post-World War II era in West Germany and since unification in East Germany. However, had the linkage between social groups and parties stayed the same, the consequences would have been much more pronounced: The SPD's vote share would even have slightly increased under these counterfactual circumstances. Conversely, the vote share of the CDU/CSU would have declined and indeed been surpassed by the share of the SPD from about 2009. The impact of secularization thus has been deeper than the impact of sectoral change in the economy.

Most of the changes in the electoral fortunes of the major parties can be attributed to linkage change, but this change does not conform to any simple pattern that would apply to the whole period of analysis. Of the four scenarios of linkage development, the first scenario of intensification applies to the first decade of West German electoral politics, when the major parties could re-mobilize their pre-war core voter segments. Similar patterns of re-mobilization are apparent regarding the East German first elections after unification. Our second scenario of unchanged linkage quite obviously has never applied in West or East Germany. The third scenario of a weakening linkage with core social groups compensated by a broadened

electoral appeal applies to the Social Democrat vote from the 1970s through the late 1990s and to the CDU/CSU vote from the 1960s on. Note, however, that the CDU/CSU could (partly) compensate for linkage decline only because it succeeded in keeping constant the relatively lower support from social groups that are growing in size while the SPD actually gained vote shares in other social groups. The fourth scenario of accelerated decline by unmitigated alienation of former core supporters appears to apply exclusively to the SPD after 1998. Even worse, it also loses the support of the additional classes it gained since the 1970s.

This raises the question of why the SPD is more gravely affected by linkage changes than the CDU/CSU. Is it because the ideological transformation and the policy changes in the SPD have been more profound than those in the CDU/CSU? Is it because church-attending Catholics are more tolerant toward policy changes in "their" party than members of the manual working class are toward changes in theirs? Or is the reason that the reorientation of the SPD resulted in welfare state reforms with tangible consequences for members of the working class, while, e.g., moral policy changes such as the legalization of same-sex partnerships did not disaffect church-attending Christians because they have already become less conservative in terms of moral values (Wolf and Roßteutscher 2013)? While these are highly interesting questions, we have to relegate them to future research.

3

Leaving the Space—Opening the Gap?

Electoral Effects of Parties' and Voters' Repositioning

Bernhard Weßels

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, the German party system has become increasingly frag-
mented and polarized in the past decades. West Germany's previously super-stable
party system already started to change in the early 1980s with the success of the
Greens. German unification in 1990 led to further differentiation of the party sys-
tem on the left. Following the 2017 federal election, yet another new party entered
the Bundestag, this time on the right side of the political spectrum: the AfD. This
most recent expansion of the party system is an exceptional development and came
quite unexpectedly, given that, at the national level, German voters had never
given parties to the right of the CDU/CSU a chance to pass the five-percent thresh-
old required to obtain parliamentary representation. For a long time, Germany
had appeared to be immune to right-wing parties, making significant inroads at
the polls, although such parties were quite successful in other Western European
countries, in which right-wing and populist parties had been on the rise since the
early 1990s. Against this background, some observers interpreted the emergence
of the AfD simply as a normalization of the German party system in the sense
that already existing "sleeping" political orientations were eventually activated at
elections (Anders et al. 2018: 371; Müller 2016).

Implied in this argument is a demand-side perspective on vote change: voters
have preferences that are not represented, and as soon as there is a matching offer,
they vote for it. This assumption finds some support in the fact that about a quarter
of the AfD's vote share in 2017 came from individuals who had abstained in the
2013 election. However, this is only part of the story. To complement this demand-
driven explanation, the development of political supply must be considered. At
issue is whether there has been a programmatic shift of the mainstream center-left
and center-right parties to the left, thus opening the space on the right side of the
political spectrum and creating a gap for new right-wing populist offers.

Accordingly, the questions to be answered in this chapter are threefold. The first question puts Germany in the wider European context. Does the entry of a right-wing populist party into parliament at the 2017 German federal election signal a "normalization" in that Germany has just caught up with a broader European development? Second, the chapter queries whether it was a change in supply structures that opened the space for this party. If a repositioning of mainstream parties has happened in this way, the more general—third—question arises whether voters reacted to it and with which consequences.

The chapter adopts a dual-track perspective by examining the specific case of Germany in parallel with a broader perspective of Western Europe overall. It shows that the centrist mainstream parties—the parties of the Social Democratic family and specifically the German SPD on the center-left as well as the Liberal, Christian Democratic, and Conservative party families, respectively the CDU/CSU and FDP, on the center-right—indeed have opened a gap on the right side of the political spectrum. This analysis is followed by a discussion of research on voters' reactions to parties' political repositioning, which shows that evidence is mixed and there are serious doubts that voters perceive parties' movements at all. Against this background, the chapter then explores if and with what consequences voters react to position shifts of the parties they voted for at the previous elections. It demonstrates for Germany as well as for Western Europe overall, that voters indeed respond to position shifts of the parties they voted for at the previous elections. Having established this relationship, the question is addressed to which degree parties' repositioning has contributed to vote switching to right-wing populist parties in Western Europe in general and the AfD in Germany in particular.

As the research question deals with relationships between parties' political supply and voters' individual-level reactions to changes in this supply, the chapter draws on data from two levels. To indicate parties' programmatic supply, the Manifesto Project provides data on the content of election platforms, coded into fifty-six categories, which allow for constructing ideological scales. These data are used to measure the repositioning of political parties from one election to the next (Volkens et al. 2019a). For the individual-level analysis of voters, the post-election surveys compiled by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 2019a, 2019b), which also incorporates the CSES module of the post-election surveys of the German Longitudinal Election Study (CrossSec09_Post, CrossSec13_Post, CrossSec17_Post), is used. The Manifesto Project Dataset 2019 has been matched to this individual-level dataset. The resulting matched data cover the period from 1996 to 2017 and include fifteen Western European countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden). Based on these data, findings that refer either to all countries together or to the special case of Germany are presented in the following.

A Changing Political Space

The idea that the general structure of party competition can be conceived in spatial terms originates from Downs (1957). While the notion of space as such is derived from an economic argument, the content of the space is conceived in terms of the left–right dimension that has its origin in the historical seat allocation to political parties in parliaments (Best 1991). The left–right semantics has become a powerful heuristic in political life, both for political actors and for citizens (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989). The traditional economic cleavage could be easily mapped on this dimension. However, political competition has also always been organized by a second, cultural dimension of cleavage. This second dimension was generally much less salient than the traditional economic left–right divide, but in recent decades, it has received increased attention in the public debate (cf. Chapter 4). Accordingly, numerous scholars have pointed out that the growing importance of the cultural dimension has created a new cleavage constellation, within which a space has been opened up for new political entrepreneurs from the right to enter the scene (Kriesi et al. 2012; Hutter et al. 2016). In their interpretation, long-term trends show an "increasing conflict between universalistic/integrationist cosmopolitans and particularistic/isolationist nationalists" (Kriesi 2013: 2).

Drawing on this two-dimensional perspective allows for describing political space by four quadrants that result from the cross-classification of the economic and the cultural left–right lines of conflict. From this point of view, it is the specific combination of economically and culturally right-oriented positions in which the mainstream parties provide no viable programmatic supply. The general hypothesis, then, is that it is the opening of this particular segment in the two-dimensional political space that allowed neoliberal nationalists and right-wing populists to become important political players in almost all Western European party systems. The same may have happened in Germany in the 2017 federal election when the AfD was able to overcome the 5 percent hurdle and score larger vote shares than the FDP, the Greens, and the Left Party, thus rendering it the largest opposition party. It thus seems that the European trend of increasingly successful right-wing populists and right-wing extremists has finally also reached Germany.

Inspecting the positional movements of center-left and center-right mainstream parties for both Western Europe overall and the special case of Germany shows that these parties indeed left a gap. These movements can be made visible by examining the respective parties' election platforms based on the data from the Manifesto Project. This project provides data on election manifestos using about fifty categories of coding topics and positions from which different kinds of position scales can be constructed (Lowe et al. 2011). The economic left–right dimension, e.g., refers to positive mentions of the free market economy, economic growth, and welfare state limitations as indications of right positions, and market regulation,

corporatism/mixed economy, and welfare state expansion of left positions. The cultural left–right dimension includes positive mentions of traditional morality as well as law and order motives and negative mentions of multiculturalism to indicate positions on the right, and the exact opposite to indicate positions on the left (see Appendix for a full list of categories). For both the economic and the cultural left–right dimension, subtracting the sum of the shares of right positions from the sum of the shares of left positions results in a scale that in principle ranges from −100 for an overall far-left position to +100 for a far-right position. However, in the following analyses, logarithmic transformations of these scales are used that have been calculated according to a formula proposed by Lowe et al. (2011), resulting in a range of roughly −5 to +5 (see Appendix A). Based on these scales, it becomes apparent that, in the Western European countries studied here, the Social Democrats have on average moved to the left both economically and culturally since the 1990s (Figure 3.1, left panel). Since 2004/2005, the center-right parties have also moved to the left on both dimensions. As a result, today the space in the quadrant defined by economically and culturally rightist positions is free from offers of centrist mainstream parties. For Germany, the programmatic shifts of the center-left SPD and the center-right CDU/CSU and FDP show a particularly pronounced picture, with both party camps having moved to the left on each of the two dimensions (Figure 3.1, right panel). Analyzing the political space in Germany, Bornschier classified the movements of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats between 1994 and 2002 as shifts to the left on the economic social welfare vs. economic liberalism dimension (Bornschier 2010). Our data show that the move to the left of CDU/CSU and FDP started earlier than that of the SPD. In recent years, however, the picture has become the same as for the Western European overall average: all parties are now positioned left of center.

There are three interesting aspects. First, the movement of the center-right parties to the left does not mean that they converged with the center-left. On the contrary: The distance between Liberals, Conservatives, and Christian Democrats on the one hand and the Social Democrats, on the other hand, has remained pretty much the same because the latter have also moved further to the left. Second, the center-right moved so far to the left that a huge gap opened on the right. Third, the development of these parties' vote shares pretty much mirrors their positional shifts. The joint vote share of the mainstream center-left and center-right parties has declined continuously. From 2005 to 2009 it amounted to about 48 percent but dropped to 34 percent between 2010 and 2014 and to 30 percent from 2014 to 2017 across the fifteen Western European countries under investigation. In Germany, the Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Liberals together scored 84.4 percent at the federal election in 2002, 79.2 percent in 2005, 71.4 percent in 2009, 72.0 percent in 2013, and, finally, only 64.3 percent in 2017.

These developments complement the electoral successes of right-wing populist and extremist parties in Western Europe. Right-wing populist parties have already
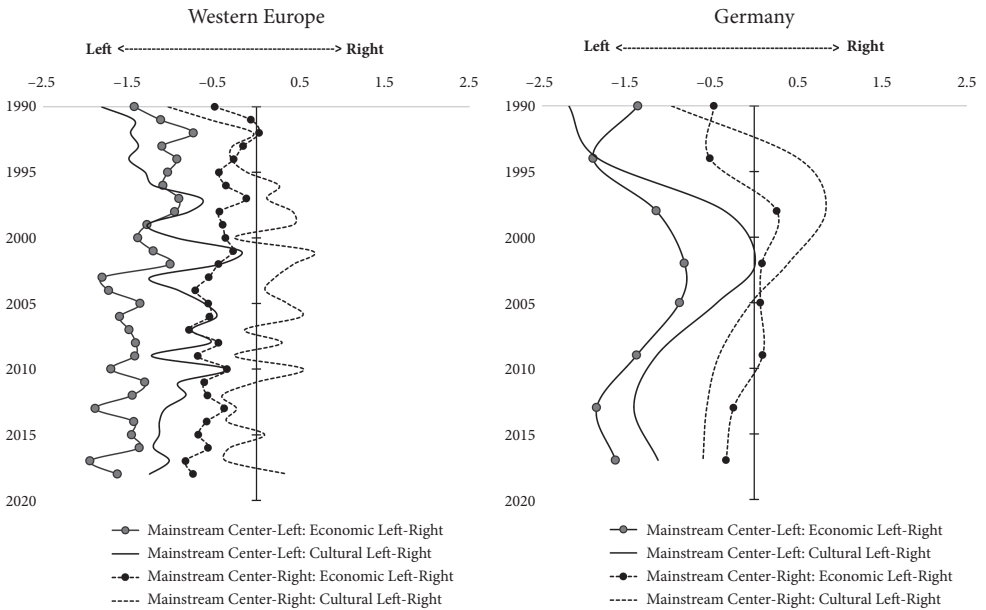
Fig. 3.1 Position shifts of mainstream center-left and mainstream center-right parties on the economic and cultural left–right dimensions, 1990–2017

Notes: Party-specific moving averages over two elections. Mainstream center-left: Social Democratic Parties (Germany: SPD); mainstream center-right: Liberal, Christian, and Conservative Parties (Germany: FDP and CDU/CSU). Range of scales about −5 to +5 (log-scales calculated according to procedure proposed by Lowe et al. (2011)).

Source: Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a); for definition of economic and cultural left–right dimensions see Appendix A.

had some success since the early 1990s, with an average of about 6 percent of the votes in national elections. However, only from 2004 onward, there has been a steady and continuous increase in their average vote share to almost 12 percent (Guardian 2019). In Germany, the AfD came close to the 5 percent hurdle already in 2013 (4.7 percent) and easily surpassed it with 12.6 percent of the (second) votes in 2017. These numbers leave the impression that (a) there is a negative relationship between the left turn of the mainstream parties and their overall vote shares and (b) the decline in the combined vote shares of the mainstream center-left and center-right parties matches the rise of the vote share of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe overall but also specifically in Germany.

According to Roberts, "political space for populism is opened by the failure of established parties to effectively represent salient interests or sentiments in the body politic" (Roberts 2017: 390). Looking at the political space created by the economic and cultural dimensions of political conflict, we indeed see room for competitors. Placing the Western European party families and German parties in this two-dimensional space clearly shows considerable skewness in terms of the

symmetry in space. The zero point must not be regarded as the empirical political center; nevertheless, the gap left open by the mainstream parties is so huge that a potential challenger may regard this as an invitation and may ultimately be successful at the polls. Yet, this presupposes that voters actually react to shifts in parties' positions. The next section explores whether this has been the case.

Parties' Repositioning and Voters' Reactions—A Research Review

Mainstream parties in Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe are embedded in social cleavages. Under normal conditions, voters of these parties are hardly available to other parties (Bartolini and Mair 1990; cf. Chapter 6). Repositioning can then be costly for parties and may lead to voter reactions that are not profitable for them. Therefore, parties tend to change their positions only under special conditions. Research shows that these conditions are manifold, complex, and do not necessarily lead different parties to react in the same ways. Adams et al. (2004) have found parties not changing positions in response to past election results but in response to strong shifts in public opinion away from them. Schumacher et al. (2013) refined this finding by demonstrating the conditionality of the effects of voters' shifts on party organizations. While leadership-dominated parties respond to changes in the mean positions of all voters, activist-dominated parties care more specifically about position shifts of their own voters. Motivation to change positions also comes from the success of competing parties. Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) have shown that the strength of radical right parties motivates mainstream parties to change positions independently of public opinion. Yet, under normal conditions parties must stick to their "corridor of political identity" to sustain the programmatic linkages with their voters and keeping linkages requires competing parties to offer meaningful alternatives. There are two situations that may outweigh the potential costs of position shifts: one is the reaction to serious position shifts of the party voters or the electorate at large, and the other is successful mobilization. For both alternatives, the implication is that voters react to position shifts of parties.

Extant research on voters' reactions to position shifts of parties has come to different conclusions. In a recent review, Adams (2012) concludes that parties do shift positions in line with the expectations of the spatial model, whereas the assumption that voters perceive parties' policy shifts and that these perceptions lead to behavioral consequences does not find consistent support. There is strong evidence that citizens "hold reasonably accurate perceptions of parties' long-term policies, in the sense that voters' party perceptions match experts' party placements along with the left–right codings of party policy manifestos" (Adams 2012: 409). Still, this does not imply that voters react to position shifts in line with the assumption "that all voters have identical perceptions of each party's policy

positions, and that voters instantly update these perceptions—along with their party evaluations—in response to changes in the policy statements issued by the party's elites" (Adams 2012: 403). Empirical evidence that voters react to policy shifts is weak or at best mixed. The variation of results is huge.

Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) found that voters take some time to update their perceptions of parties' policy positions. Voters do not react to current policy programs but policy profiles at the last election. Another study shows for Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Netherlands that voters only perceive and react to policy shifts if they concern issues they care about (Plescia and Staniek 2017). But it is not saliency alone that renders reactions on the part of voters more likely, but also the polarity of parties' positions on issues. Mauerer et al. (2015) show that this results in party-specific issue voting. For Denmark, Seeberg et al. (2017) show in a panel study that voters update their perceptions of party positions quite accurately. Even differences in voters' political awareness do not matter for these perception adjustments. Most recently, Spoon and Klüver (2019) have demonstrated that voters tend to switch their electoral support from mainstream parties to a non-mainstream party if the former converge on the left–right dimension.

Thus, the phenomenon of parties repositioning themselves appears to create reactions in electoral behavior. In other words, changes in parties' supply lead to effects on the demand side. To illustrate, let us assume that the party a voter has voted for in a previous election changes its position and thus distances itself from the voter (whose position is assumed as constant). In this case, the possible recourse of the voter would be either to abstain from voting or to switch to another party. However, switching would only work if there were electoral alternatives available in close vicinity of the position held by the party supported by the voter before its programmatic shift (Bendor et al. 2011). Accordingly, it should be possible to model voters' reaction to the repositioning of parties in spatial terms (Downs 1957; Dassonneville and Dejaeghere 2014).

Measuring Parties' and Voters' Repositioning

In the following, the implications of parties' positional shifts on the two lines of conflict in party competition—the economic and the cultural—are examined. Specifically, the analyses focus on shifts that occurred between the election immediately preceding the analyzed (post-election) survey, henceforth addressed as the "most recent" or "last" election, and the one before that, henceforth addressed as the "previous" election. The parties chosen at these elections are determined by means of recall questions, one pertaining to the election on which the respective survey followed as post-election study, the other pertaining to the previous election. Parties' position shifts are measured by means of data from the Manifesto

Project. For reasons of comparability with the CSES and GLES survey data, we use the log version of the scales as proposed by Lowe et al. (2011). The range of the log scales of about −5 to about +5 matches the range of the survey measure of left–right self-placement of −5 to +5 quite nicely. The measurement for a party's policy shift is the difference between its position in the most recent election and its position in the previous election. If there is no difference, no shift occurred. A negative score indicates a shift to the left and a positive score a shift to the right. According to the CSES data, about half of the voters in the fifteen Western European countries included in our study voted in the last election for a party that had not changed its position on either the economic or the cultural left–right dimension. On average, about 30 percent of the voters were confronted with a party that had moved, after they had supported it at the polls, to the left, and about 20 percent with a party that shifted its position to the right (Figure 3.2).

However, position shifts are not restricted to parties. Voters can also change their positions between elections. This can happen for various reasons. Preferences may change due to changing individual circumstances or re-evaluations of the general situation. It is also possible that parties take the lead and persuade voters to follow them, thereby altering their views. In any case, voters' positional shifts must also be considered when examining the effects of parties' movements in political space on voters' choices.
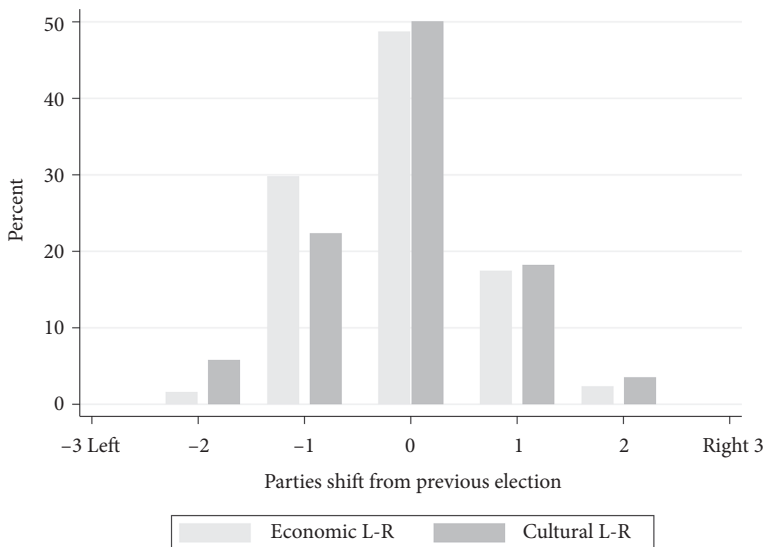
Fig. 3.2 Parties' repositioning in Western Europe, 1996–2017

Notes: Only parties chosen by respondents in previous election. Scale recoded to integer values for descriptive reasons.

Sources: CSES (2019a, 2019b), Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

We have direct measurements of parties' position changes from the previous to the recent election. Unfortunately, we lack similarly direct information on position changes of voters. Shifting one's vote from one party to another may have different reasons. In the context of spatial voting, there are three possible reasons for vote shifting: (1) The party has changed its position away from the voter, (2) the voter has changed his or her position away from the party voted for in the previous election, and (3) another party has moved closer to the voter's position and he or she has switched to this now more proximate party. If the party has maintained its position, only (2) or (3) could be reasons for switching.

The distribution of voters' distances to the economic and the cultural left–right positions of the party they voted for in the previous election, measured by the distance between this party's positions on each of these dimensions and voters' left–right self-placement, suggests that a fairly large proportion of the voters may have been motivated to watch out for a more suitable party in the subsequent elections (Figure 3.3). Empirical results on the distances between the parties and their voters show overall closer positions in the subsequent, most recent elections. In this case, distances on both dimensions amount to only a tenth of those to the parties voted for in the previous elections. If the party has not moved, this may
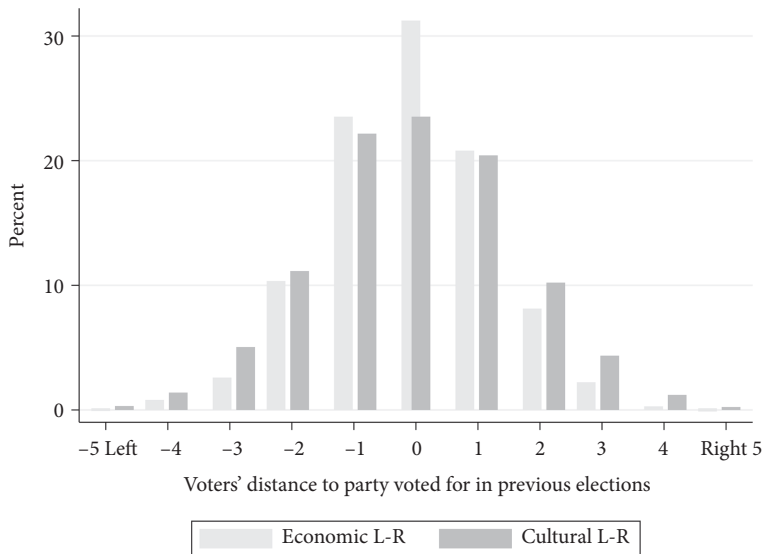
Fig. 3.3 Distance to the party voted for in previous elections, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Distances between economic and cultural left–right positions of parties as determined by party manifestos and voters' self-placements on left–right scale. Left–right scale for voters standardized to range of party manifesto scales from original scaling 0 to 10.

Sources: CSES (2019a, 2019b), Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

indicate that the voter may have changed position. But this is only suggestive and not measured precisely, because the logical alternatives are that another party has moved closer or that the voter just made a bad choice in the previous election in terms of proximity.

Voters' options for reacting to increasing distances between the parties they voted for in the past and their own views are either abstention due to alienation (Aarts and Weßels 2005) or switching to a more proximate party. Non-voting due to alienation from the parties that moved to the left or the right on the economic or the cultural left–right dimension has occurred rather rarely. Only about 2 percent of all voters on either side have joined the non-voter camp in Germany. Vote switching between parties has been much more frequent. Figure 3.4 shows its long-term development among Western European voters and German voters. To get an idea of how changes in voters' choices developed over time, the 21 years for which CSES studies are available (1996–2017) are divided into three seven-year periods: 1996–2003, 2004–2010, 2011–2017. This way, a reasonable number of studies and countries are available for each period. Furthermore, the steady rise of right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties in Europe began in 2004 with an increase in the average vote share across Western Europe of almost half a percentage point
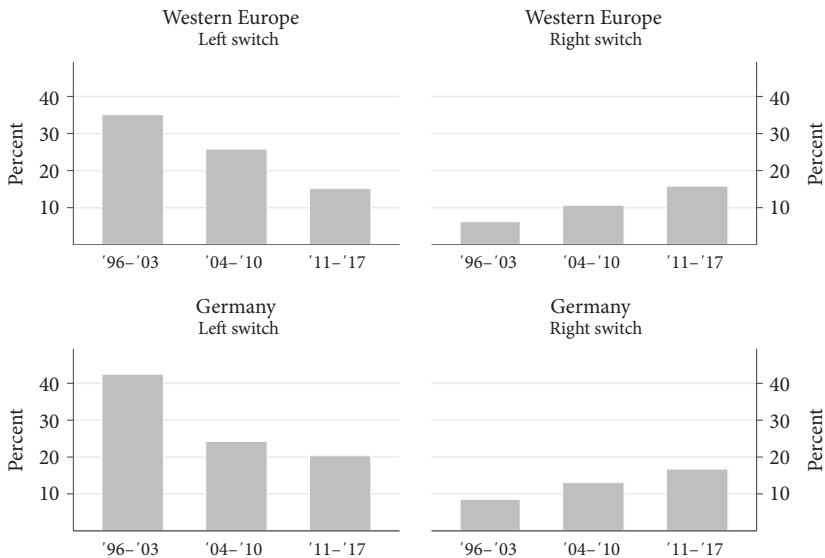
Fig. 3.4 Vote switching in Western Europe and Germany, 1996–2017

Note: Left and right-switching defined by change between reported party choices in previous and recent elections with regard to party families (ordered from left to right: Communist, Green, Social Democratic, Liberal, Christian, Conservative, and Nationalist party family; corresponding to the party families' average positions on the left–right measure of the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a)).

Source: CSES waves 1 to 5 (CSES (2019a, 2019b)).

per year, a trend that wore out in 2011 and the following years with an annual in-crease of a tenth of a percentage point (Guardian 2019). Left- and right-switching is defined in this analysis in terms of changing from a party from a certain family to a party from another family, positioned either on the left or on the right of the initial one.

The interesting aspect of the results displayed in Figure 3.4 is that the patterns of switching have changed considerably: The proportion of those switching to the left, which had been very high in the first period (1996–2003), has continu-ously decreased over time. In contrast, switching to the right has become more frequent. While in the first period, the proportion of those switching to the left was about four times higher than of those switching to the right, in the last period (2011–2017) the two directions are almost on par, their shares amounting to about 14 to 18 percent. In other words, right-switching has been about twice as high in the third period as it was in the first. These alterations in voters' switching patterns could be an explanation for the centrist mainstream parties' decreasing electoral fortunes.

Vote Switching: A Reaction to Parties' Repositioning or Position Changes of Voters?

The research literature on voters' reactions to parties' positional and policy shifts does not provide clear evidence to suggest whether voters are aware of parties' movements. Yet, the hypothesis pursued here, namely that it is the gap in polit-ical supply that opened the space for new challengers from the political right, is tested under the assumption that voters react to the observable repositioning of the mainstream parties on the left and the right. Therefore, the relationship be-tween parties' shifts and voters' reactions must be demonstrated. The empirical task is to answer the following questions: How are parties' positional changes, voters' distances to the parties they chose in the previous election, and their party switching at the most recent election related? Does it make a difference whether one looks at the economic or the cultural left–right dimension of political conflict?

The evidence at the aggregate level suggests that mainstream parties' reposi-tioning on the left leads to votes witching to the right and vice versa. Regarding the relevance of the economic and cultural left–right dimension, the general expectation—given the general salience of the two dimensions for the conflict structure (cf. Chapter 4)—is that the economic dimension has a stronger impact on vote switching. However, this may depend on political camps. Perhaps the cultural conflict dimension is more important for center-right mainstream parties.

To test these expectations, two rather parsimonious models have been calcu-lated. Specifically, two multi-level fixed-effects logistic regression models have

been estimated, one for left-switching and one for right-switching as dependent variables. As predictors, the models include position shifts of the parties the respondents had voted for at the previous election compared to the most recent election. As described above, this information is generated from the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a), using the two ideological scales in the log version. The second set of independent variables includes the left–right distances on both dimensions between the positions of the parties at the previous election, determined using the data from the Manifesto Project, and the positions of the respondents as measured by the CSES and GLES surveys by means of respondents' general left–right self-placement, standardized to the range of the manifesto left–right logarithmic scales. Dummy variables for party families are included as controls, with Communist respectively Nationalist party families as baselines. Since further control variables, such as party identification, age, and education, did not show statistically significant effects, we opted for the more parsimonious model described above. It includes four explanatory variables and five party family dummies for both dependent variables (see Table 3.A1 in Appendix).

At the core of interest are the variables indicating parties' positional shifts in interaction with voters' positional shifts. The emphasis on these factors' interaction results from the fact that they can compensate each other. Let us assume a party has moved to the left. If a voter who supported it at the previous election has also moved to the left, there is no need for switching. If only the party has moved but not the voter, the likelihood that he or she looks for other political offers increases. If the voter has moved, again he or she should be motivated to look for a different party. If the party has moved in one direction and the voter in the other, the probability of vote switching should be highest. Therefore, not taking the interaction into account cannot provide an answer regarding the character and strength of the effect of positional shifts on vote switching.

However, the constitutive terms of the regression equation can also provide useful information, namely their effects when the interaction variable is zero (Brambor et al. 2006). Under the condition that voters do not move, a previously supported party's positional shift to the right on the economic dimension leads to a statistically significant increase in Western European voters' left-switching (see Table 3.A1 in Appendix). Under the same condition, a party's move to the left on the cultural dimension increases right-switching on the part of voters. If parties do not move, a voter's movement to the left on the economic dimension leads to more left-switching, whereas a move to the right on the cultural dimension increases right-switching. These findings show that there are different effects for switching, depending on which of the two conflict dimensions—the economic or the cultural left–right contrast—is concerned. The asymmetry in the effects of both the repositioning of parties' and voters' distance to the party previously voted for concerning the two dimensions of conflict is remarkably clear: left-switching is determined by the economic left–right dimension but not by the

cultural left–right dimension. Right-switching, by contrast, is mainly induced by the cultural left–right dimension.

However, parties and voters are communicating vessels, and the assumption of one remaining constant and the other moving is probably not the most realistic one. The pattern of positional stability with regard to parties or voters on at least one of the two dimensions of conflict pertains to 40 percent of the electoral choices examined in our analysis. Hence, in about 60 percent of our cases, shifts occurred with regard to both parties and voters. It is therefore necessary to consider the interaction between the shifts of parties and the movement of voters.

Regarding effects on vote switching, there is a strong interplay between parties' repositioning and voters' distances to the respective parties of choice in the previous election. Regarding the economic left–right dimension, the probability of a voter switching to the left is highest if he or she has moved to the left and the party voted for in the previous election has moved to the right. The distance to the party voted for in the last election is large and negative, implying that the voter has moved to the left (Figure 3.5). The probability of left-switching is still high in
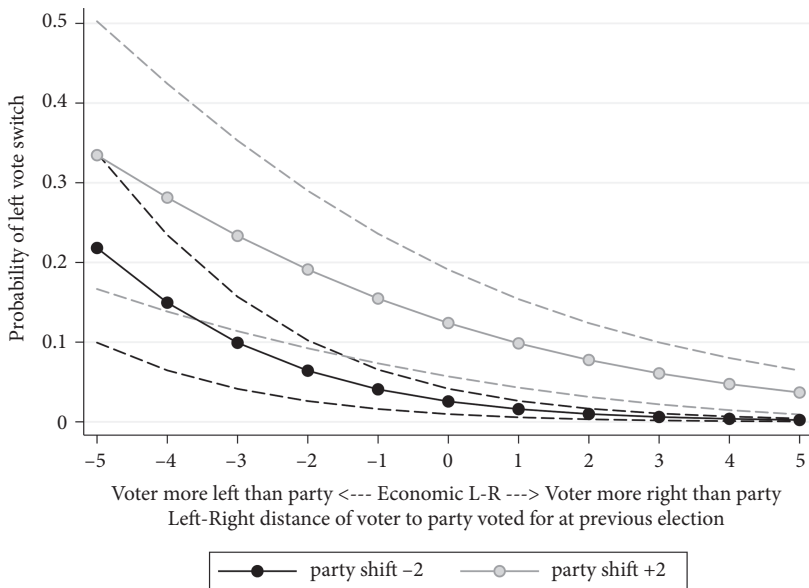
Fig. 3.5 Marginal probabilities for left vote switching depending on parties' repositioning and voters' distance on the economic left–right dimension to the party voted for in the previous election, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A1, Model 1. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

cases in which a voter moved to the left of the position of the party voted for in the previous election and the party has also moved to the left. However, the likelihood of such a switch amounts to only about half the size. The difference in effects by a party's movement is significant, indicating that both the repositioning of the parties and the voters are of relevance. Turning to the cultural left–right dimension, a voter's distance to the party voted for at the previous election and movement of the party voted for at the previous election has a much lower impact on vote switching to the left. Neither a voter's distance to the party voted for previously nor the party's movement shows a statistically significant effect. Thus, left-switching depends on what happens on the economic left–right dimension. The cultural dimension has no significant effect (Figure 3.6).

Turning to right-switching, shifts in the economic left–right dimension produce effects that again clearly show the common impact of supply, i.e., the movement of the party voted for in the previous election, and demand, i.e., the change in left–right distance to that party. If voters have moved to the right and the party
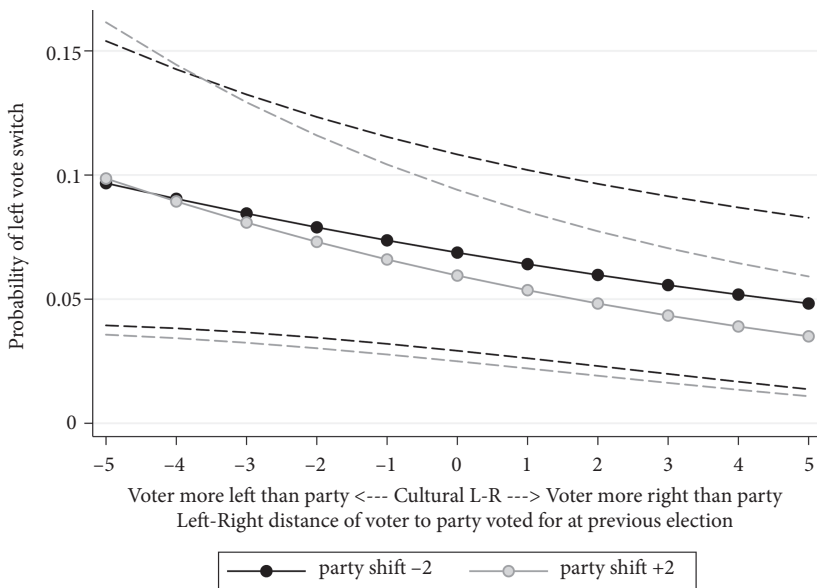
Fig. 3.6 Marginal probabilities for left vote switching depending on parties' repositioning and voters' distance on the cultural left–right dimension to the party voted for in the previous election, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A1, Model 2. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).
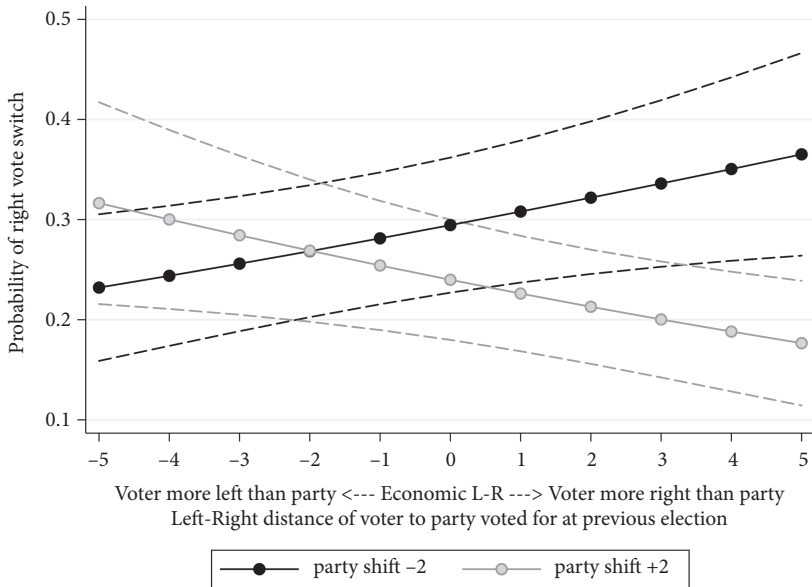
Fig. 3.7 Marginal probabilities for right vote switching depending on parties' repositioning and voters' distance on the economic left–right dimension to the party voted for in the previous election, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A1, Model 2. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

has moved to the left, the probability of a shift to the right in one's vote choice is highest. If the party has also moved to the right, this compensates for the shift in the position of the voter to some extent and accordingly decreases the probability of right-switching considerably and in a statistically significant way (Figure 3.7). The movement of voters on the cultural left–right dimension relative to the party they have voted for in the previous election has a strong and statistically significant effect. Voters' positional moves to the right lead to a much higher likelihood of switching to the right also in their electoral choices than positional stability or even shifts to the left. This is true regardless of change in the position of the party voted for. There is no difference regardless of whether the party voted for in the last election has moved to the left or the right (Figure 3.8).

Turning to the special case of Germany, country-specific logistic regressions show similar but not identical patterns. Regarding the economic left–right dimension and left-switching, the pattern is very similar to the Western European one. Regarding the cultural dimension, German voters show a pattern with no impact attributable to the parties' repositioning, but effects regarding the voters'
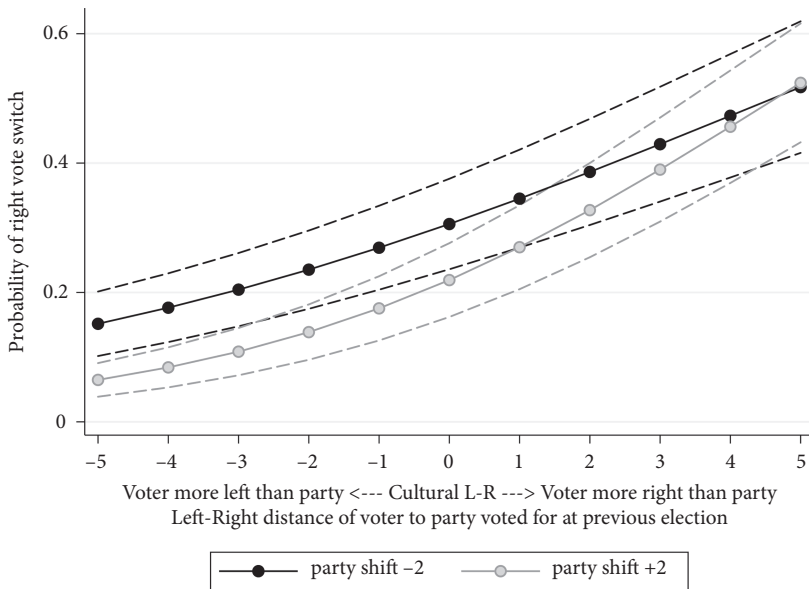
Fig. 3.8 Marginal probabilities for right vote switching depending on parties' repositioning and voters' distance on the cultural left–right dimension to the party voted for in the previous election, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A1, Model 2. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

own positional moves. Here, the clear result is that the more voters turn culturally to the right the more they switch to the left. Regarding right-switching and the economic dimension for German voters, there also exists a significant effect of the party's move to the right or the left. If the party has moved to the right, the probability of right-switching is lower. It is in general higher if a voter him- or herself has moved to the right. For the cultural dimension, findings are equivalent to the Western European ones: a voter's movement counts, but not movement of the party (tables and figures are documented in the Online Appendix).

These analyses show that voters react to parties' repositioning. The chance that voters switch their electoral choices is higher when a party changes its position. However, this is not the only reason for switching. Position changes of the voters themselves also matter. If a voter's position moves away from the party he or she has voted for at the previous election, the probability of switching increases too. The results show that the necessary condition for the hypothesis is met, namely that the recent successes of right-wing populist parties in general and the AfD in Germany, in particular, are a result of a gap mainstream parties opened up in the

political space. More globally, they suggest that the success of right-wing populist or extremist parties in general and the AfD in Germany, in particular, is a reaction to changing political supply creating a gap for their specific programmatic offers.

Shifting Parties, Shifting Voters, and Turns to Right-Wing Populist Parties

We have seen above that parties' and voters' positional shifts are consequential for electoral behavior. Depending on the shifts' direction, voters switch to parties further to the left or further to the right. These findings indicate reasonable political behavior: if parties change their positions and voters do not follow, party-switching becomes likely. However, electoral switches to the left and the right are not triggered by the same dimension of conflict. Voters' moves to the left are associated with position shifts on the economic dimension of conflict, whereas moves to the right concern the cultural dimension of conflict. A large distance of a voter to the party he or she supported at the previous election is a strong stimulus to move to another party at the subsequent election. This mechanism works in both directions, left and right, although regarding different lines of conflict. It is not yet clear, however, if it also specifically explains the success of right-wing populist parties. Our findings suggest that switching to right-wing populist parties may be stronger related to the cultural than to the economic left–right dimension. Furthermore, while parties' repositioning matters, changes in the distance between voters' positions to the party voted for in the previous election probably matter more.

   In the following, these assumptions are tested using the same model setup as in the analysis of switching above. However, the dependent variable is now specified as switching to a right-wing populist party. In eight of the fifteen Western European countries under investigation here, right-wing populist parties have become quite successful since the mid-1990s. Altogether this concerns nine parties: Freedom Party of Austria, Danish People's Party, True Finns, National Front, Alternative for Germany, United Kingdom Independence Party, Party for Freedom, List Pim Fortuyn, and Sweden Democrats (Mudde 2007: 305–308; Akkerman et al. 2016: 2). The dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent had not voted for a right-wing populist party in the election before the recent election but subsequently switched to such a party. Code 0 is assigned if a voter chose either a right-wing populist party at both elections or any other party. Thus, the variable contrasts switching to a right-wing populist party with all other patterns of party choice, including stable support for such a party. Non-voters are not included because for them neither a party's movement nor their own position relative to a party voted for in previous elections is available. Using the same independent and control variables as above leads to a model that explains 13 percent of the variance in switching to a right-wing populist party (McKelvey & Zavoina's R-squared; cf. Table 3.A2 in Appendix).

Fig. 3.9 Marginal probabilities for switching to a right-wing populist party depending on parties' repositioning and voters' left–right distance to the party voted for in the previous election on the economic left–right dimension, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A2, Model 3. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

Figure 3.9 shows the marginal probabilities of the interaction between parties' repositioning and the distance to the party on the economic left–right dimension. There is no significant probability change depending on the distance of voters' left–right positions at the most recent election to the party voted for at the previous election. There is a small area in which the difference between the party's movement to the left and a party moving to the right from the previous to the recent election is significant. Surprisingly, vote switching to a right-wing populist party was more likely when the previously supported party had shifted to the right on the economic dimension.

Regarding the cultural left–right dimension, only the distance to the party voted for at the previous election matters, whereas changes on the political supply side do not. The more a voter is positioned on the right with regard to the party he or she voted for at the last election the more likely is switching to a right-wing populist party (Figure 3.10). Thus, for the cultural dimension of conflict, the specific pattern of switching votes to a right-wing populist party closely resembles the
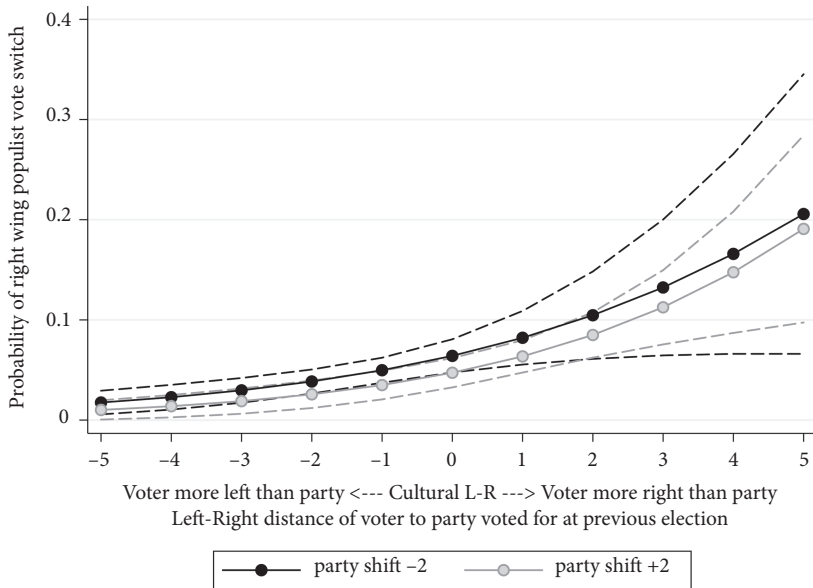
Fig. 3.10 Marginal probabilities for switching to a right-wing populist party depending on parties' repositioning and voters' left–right distance to the party voted for in the previous election on the cultural left–right dimension, Western Europe 1996–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A2, Model 3. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

general pattern of switching to the right observed above. Regarding the economic left–right dimension, however, the pattern of right-wing populist switching differs from that of general switching to a party further to the right.

The general diagnosis for right-switching and switching to a right-wing populist party, in particular, is the same, however: The cultural left–right dimension matters not only more but also shows more significant differences in probabilities. A second similarity is that the repositioning of parties matters only if it occurs on the economic left–right dimension. On the cultural dimension, changes in probabilities are driven by voters' distance to the party voted for at previous elections. Thus, it is the cultural dimension that motivates voters to switch to parties further to the right and right-wing populist parties in particular. A policy profile including opposition to multiculturalism and a preference for a traditional way of life and law and order seems to drive the move to the right.

Do the same patterns also describe German voters' shifts to the AfD? Since the AfD was only founded in 2013 and entered the national parliament in 2017, the
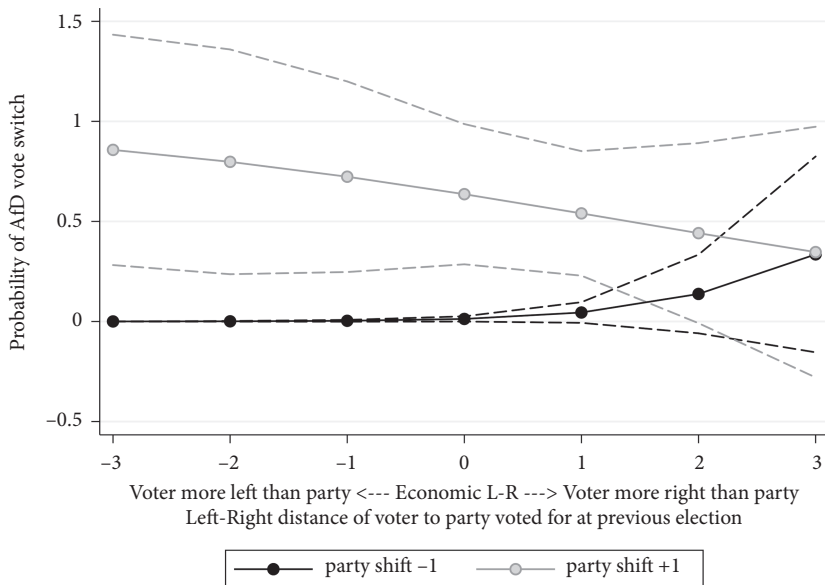
Fig. 3.11 Marginal probabilities for switching to the AfD depending on parties' repositioning and voters' left–right distance to the party voted for in the previous election on the economic left–right dimension, Germany 2013–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A2, Model 4. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

analysis is constrained to switching between the 2013 and 2017 federal elections. Despite the fundamental transformation that the success of the AfD implies for the German party system, there has been less change between 2013 and 2017 in the positions of both parties and voters than during the whole period from 1998 to 2017. For this reason, the measurement of voters' distance to the party voted for at the previous election scores only within a range of −3 to +3, and parties' position changes do not reach −2 and +2.

In a simple logistic regression model, parties' repositioning and voters' movements bind about 15 percent of the variance in switching to the AfD (defined as changing from another party to the AfD; switches from non-voting to the AfD are excluded from the model). Contrary to the finding for general right-switching and switching to right-wing populist parties, in particular, switching to the AfD is not induced by change on the demand side, i.e., voters' distance to the party chosen at the previous election, but only by changes on the political supply side. However, on the economic left–right dimension, our finding for the AfD resembles somewhat the pattern observed for switching to right-wing populist parties in
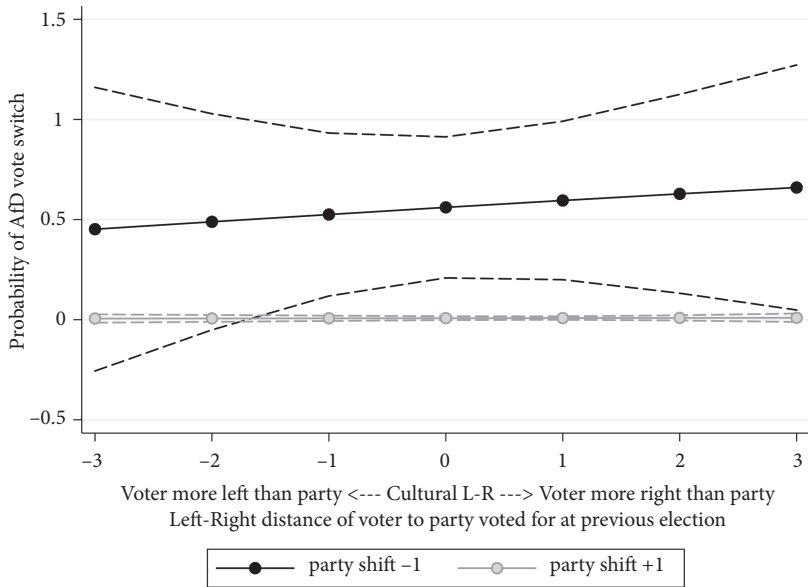
Fig. 3.12 Marginal probabilities for switching to the AfD depending on parties' repositioning and voters' left–right distance to the party voted for in the previous election on the cultural left–right dimension, Germany 2013–2017

Notes: Marginal effects derived from Table 3.A2, Model 4. Covariates fixed at their means. Dashed lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Party shift refers to the difference between the position of the party a respondent voted for in the previous election compared to that same party's position in the most recent election.

Source: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

Western Europe overall. If the party supported at the previous election has moved to the right on the economic dimension, the likelihood of switching to the AfD is higher than if the party voted for at the previous election has moved to the left (Figure 3.11). For the cultural left–right dimension, the pattern is reversed: if the cultural position of the party voted for at the previous election has shifted to the left, the probability of switching to the AfD is higher than if the party has moved to the right (Figure 3.12).

Conclusions and Speculations: A Right-wing Populist Preference Shift?

This chapter put forward the expectation that the rising electoral support for right-wing populist parties is a result of a programmatic move of mainstream center-left and center-right parties to the left. During the past ten to fifteen years, this development has opened the political space for new political entrepreneurs from the right.

Our inspection of long-term trends in the political positioning of mainstream center-left parties (Social Democrats) and center-right parties (Liberals, Christian Democrats, and Conservatives) in the two-dimensional political space defined by the economic and the cultural lines of conflict in Western Europe and specifically in Germany found indeed indications of a gap. The vote shares of these parties have decreased considerably, corresponding to the expectation that their repositioning contributed to the success of new challengers. The goal of this chapter was to clarify whether evidence for the presumed mechanisms could be found at the level of individual voters.

Examining the behavior of Western European voters in general and German voters in particular by means of parallel analyses, the study proceeded in three steps. First, a general model was estimated to test the effects of parties' repositioning as well as position shifts on the part of voters themselves on these individuals' propensity to switch to a party further to the left or the right. Left- and right-switching was defined in terms of changing from a party from a certain family to a party from another family, positioned either on the left or on the right of the initial one. Our indicator of voters' position shifts pertained to distances on the economic and the cultural left–right dimensions with regard to the party voted for in the previous election. The chapter's results suggest that voters consider spatial changes of parties for their choices. However, parties' repositioning has a smaller effect than changes of individuals' own positions. Remarkably, the economic left–right dimension showed stronger effects on switching to the left, whereas the cultural left–right dimension appeared more important for switching to the right. Parties' repositioning on the left produced right-switching on the part of voters, whereas movements to the right made left-switching more likely.

In a second step, the same model was tested specifically for switching to right-wing populist parties. Even stronger than switching to the left or the right in general, switching directed toward right-wing populists is asymmetric regarding the two ideological dimensions. On the economic left–right dimension, parties' position shifts produce a weak effect on vote switching. The more the party voted for at the previous election moved to the right, the more likely switching to a right-wing populist party became. This is an effect opposite to that of the findings for general left- or right-switching. Voters' own position shifts on the economic dimension do not produce any significant effects. In contrast, position changes of voters on the cultural left–right dimension are clearly relevant. However, parties' repositioning does not show a significant effect.

The third step of this investigation concentrated on voters' shift to the AfD in Germany between the 2013 and 2017 federal elections. Again, the model included position changes of both parties and voters. For the economic dimension, the pattern is similar to that of shifting to right-wing populist parties across Western Europe: Parties' repositioning on the right is associated with a higher probability to switch to the AfD. Regarding the cultural left–right dimension, the German

pattern differs considerably from that of Western Europe. In contrast to the latter, position shifts of voters do not have any impact on voters' likelihood to move to the AfD. Also contrasting the Western European pattern, parties' repositioning does matter, although not strongly. If the party voted for in the previous election has moved toward the cultural left, the probability of shifting to the AfD increases.

These findings show various patterns that may be relevant for the strategic behavior of political parties. In the general model, switching to the left or the right is either a counter-reaction to parties' repositioning or consonant with position changes on the part of voters themselves. However, with regard to switching to right-wing populist parties including the German AfD, it does not help the mainstream parties to move to the right on the economic dimension in order to prevent voters from turning their back on them. A possible conclusion mainstream parties might draw from these findings is to better not move to the right on the economic dimension. Regarding the cultural left–right dimension, effects are different for the Western European right-wing populist parties and the AfD in Germany. While it seems that in Western Europe overall voters' own position shifts to the right on the cultural dimension lead them to switch choices to right-wing populist parties, in the German case, no effect of voters' position shifts is discernible. Rather, a weak effect of repositioning of the party voters chose in the previous election emerges. If the party moves to the cultural left, the probability of switching to the AfD increases somewhat. However, parties' repositioning on the right does not entail any effects. Thus, moving to the right does not help prevent voters from deserting parties to support the AfD instead. The best for the mainstream parties would be to stay put in this dimension.

Contrary to the inconclusive evidence offered by previous research, the chapter provides clear indications that voters do perceive position changes of parties and react to them by altering their electoral preferences. Perhaps this effect only became visible because the analyses considered the interaction between parties' repositioning and voters' positioning. Second, the role of the economic and the cultural left–right dimensions in vote shifting seems to be asymmetric, depending on whether voters move toward parties further to the right or toward parties further to the left. Position changes on the economic left–right dimension affect both left- and right-switching as well as switching to right-wing populists in general and the AfD in particular. The cultural left–right dimension, in contrast, seems to be only relevant for switching to a party further right and specifically toward a right-wing populist party.

All in all, we found that about 50 percent of the Western European voters were in a situation in which the party they voted for in the previous elections has changed its position. More than half of these voters chose another party at the recent election than they had supported at the election before. The overall trend of these party changes seems to be more and more directed to the right than to the left. Only half

of the Western European electorates face a situation of stability and accordingly are not incentivized to consider moving to another party.

With the data available we cannot fully disentangle whether switching is a result of parties' or voters' repositioning. Obviously, there are effects of parties' repositioning. It seems plausible that there is also an additional effect of voters' preference shift. Of those voters for which the party they had voted for in the previous election did not change its position on the economic left–right dimension, about 10 percent switched to the left and about 24 percent to the right. Roughly, the same applies to the cultural left–right dimension. This seems to suggest that voters have changed their position. These results lead to the conclusion that the success of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe is not only induced by changes in political supply but also by preference changes on the part of voters. This becomes apparent only when supply factors are analytically differentiated into two dimensions of conflict, one pertaining to traditional economic left–right issues and the other to cultural left–right issues. The unidimensional standard indicator of left–right positions routinely used in election studies hides this differentiation so that the actual character of electorally relevant position changes on the part of parties and voters stays hidden. Shifting to the right happens twice as often as switching to the left, and it seems to be the cultural left–right dimension on which not only supply change has happened but also a considerable preference shift of voters to the right. Thus, not only the opening of the political space by mainstream parties has contributed to the success of competitors from the political right. Results suggest that preference shifts on the part of voters may also have contributed considerably to this development. Results also suggest that it does not help mainstream parties to behave electorally opportunistically by running after the voters. For political competition, the implication could be that it is not running after the voter but mobilization that counts for electoral success.

Appendix A. Documentation of Left–Right Scales

Construction of left–right scales from Manifesto Project Dataset 2019 (Volkens et al. 2019b):

Economic Left–Right

Economic Right

> per401 Free market economy
> per402 Incentives: positive
> per407 Protectionism: negative
> per410 Economic growth: positive
> per414 Economic orthodoxy
> per505 Welfare state limitation
> per507 Education limitation
> per702 Labor groups: negative

Economic Left

> per403 Market regulation
> per404 Economic planning
> per405 Corporatism/mixed economy
> per406 Protectionism: positive
> per409 Keynesian demand management
> per412 Controlled economy
> per413 Nationalization
> per415 Marxist analysis
> per504 Welfare state expansion
> per506 Education expansion
> per701 Labor groups: positive

Cultural Left–Right

Cultural Right

> per601 National way of life: positive
> per603 Traditional morality: positive
> per605 Law and order: positive
> per608 Multiculturalism: negative
> per704 Middle class and professional groups

Cultural Left

> per201 Freedom and human rights
> per202 Democracy
> per503 Equality: positive
> per602 National way of life: negative
> per604 Traditional morality: negative
> per607 Multiculturalism: positive

Calculation of Index

Economic Left–Right Scale = log(sum Economic Right + 0.5)—log(Economic Left +0.5); mean − 0.92, minimum − 4.93, maximum 3.93.

Cultural Left–Right Scale = log(sum Cultural Right + 0.5)—log(sum Cultural Left + 0.5); mean − 0.51, minimum − 5.21, maximum 5.05.

Appendix B. Regression Models

Table 3.A1 The effect of parties' repositioning and voters' distance to the party voted for at the previous election on left- and right-switching in Western Europe

	Model 1 (left switch)		Model 2 (right switch)	
	Odds Ratio	P>|z|	Odds Ratio	P>|z|
Distance to party (vote choice recall)				
Economic L–R dimension	0.69	0.000	0.99	0.761
Cultural L–R dimension	0.91	0.000	1.27	0.000
Party's repositioning				
Economic L–R dimension	1.54	0.000	0.93	0.000
Cultural L–R dimension	0.96	0.139	0.89	0.000
Party's repositioning X distance				
Economic L–R dimension	1.06	0.001	0.96	0.001
Cultural L–R dimension	0.99	0.457	1.03	0.001
Vote choice recall				
Green Party	1.75	0.000	1.10	0.090
Social Democratic Party	2.59	0.000	0.65	0.000
Liberal Party	2.27	0.000	0.71	0.000
Christian Democratic Party	3.71	0.000	0.35	0.000
Conservative Party	8.03	0.000	0.28	0.000
Constant	0.02	0.000	0.62	0.006
N (observations)	41,221		41,221	
N (countries)	15		15	
McKelvey & Zavoina's R^2	0.13		0.07	

Note: Results from fixed-effects multi-level logistic regression estimations with respondents clustered in countries.

Sources: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b), combined with the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

Table 3.A2 The effect of parties' repositioning and voters' distance to the party voted for at the previous election on switching to right-wing populist parties

	Model 3 Switch to right-wing populist party		Model 4 Switch to AfD	
	Odds Ratio	P>|z|	Odds Ratio	P>|z|
Distance to party (vote choice recall)				
Economic L–R dimension	1.11	0.171	1.53	0.210
Cultural L–R dimension	1.34	0.000	1.14	0.587
Party's repositioning				
Economic L–R dimension	1.49	0.000	15.13	0.001
Cultural L–R dimension	0.92	0.144	0.06	0.000
Party's repositioning X distance				
Economic L–R dimension	1.00	0.926	0.41	0.035
Cultural L–R dimension	1.01	0.560	0.95	0.909
Vote choice recall				
Green Party	0.39	0.000		
Social Democratic Party	1.21	0.152		
Liberal Party	1.53	0.015		
Christian Democratic Party	1.31	0.060		
Conservative Party	1.31	0.090		
Constant	0.05	0.000	0.23	0.000
N (observations)	17,528		1,368	
N (countries)	8		1	
McKelvey & Zavoina's R^2	0.13	McFadden R^2	0.15	

Note: Results from fixed-effects multi-level logistic regression estimations with respondents clustered in eight Western European countries (Model 3) and from a logistic regression of German voters (Model 4).

Sources: Micro-level data from CSES (2019a, 2019b) combined with the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2019a).

4

Issue Salience and Vote Choice

A Cultural Turn?

Lars-Christopher Stövsand, Melanie Dietz, Sigrid Roßteutscher,
and Philipp Scherer

Introduction

During the past decades and in particular, during the last years, many Western democracies have experienced a shift in the political climate, characterized by increasing polarization and growing political tensions (e.g., Abramowitz 2013; Jacoby 2014; Lupu 2015). In elections, this has found expression in sizable vote shares and even electoral victories for populist radical right parties in some countries (Rydgren 2018). Parties of this type base their successful mobilization efforts mainly on cultural, previously unpoliticized topics, most prominent among them questions of national identity, state sovereignty, and immigration (Ignazi 1992; Mudde 2007). Comparative research identified a general turn in issue salience from traditional socio-economic to cultural issues as the main reason for the susceptibility of significant voter segments to such campaign appeals (e.g., Flanagan and Lee 2003; van der Waal et al. 2007; Kriesi 2010; Oesch 2013; Oskarson and Demker 2015; Bornschier 2018).

Germany was a latecomer in this regard. Right-wing populism has reached political significance only very recently with the advent of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in 2013 and its electoral successes in the 2014 European election, in all subsequent state elections, and finally also in the 2017 federal election. The AfD has attracted especially strong electoral support since 2015, when it began campaigning against the federal government's refugee policy, advocating a much more restrictive asylum and immigration legislation and condemning Islam. As a result, voters with anti-immigrant stances and voters who positioned themselves on the right of the ideological spectrum were increasingly drawn to the AfD (Bieber et al. 2018; Arzheimer and Berning 2019). Does this indicate a shift to the right of German voters? Did they adopt more critical attitudes toward immigration? Evidence from other European countries suggests that there were

hardly any changes with regard to issue positions during the past decades, but there were clear shifts in issue salience on the public agenda from socio-economic to cultural issues, in particular those related to immigration (Lahav 1997; Messina 2007; Alonso and Fonseca 2011; Grande et al. 2019). Such a shift in issue salience might have contributed to improved electoral fortunes of right-wing populist but also green parties to the expense of parties that traditionally mobilized voters on socio-economic concerns. This chapter explores whether this was the case in Germany.

Specifically, we investigate, first, whether a shift in issue salience from socio-economic toward non-economic issues has taken place in the German electorate, second, whether the German electorate's aggregate positions have changed on the three core position issues market vs. state (socio-economic), environmental protection, and immigration (both cultural), and, third, whether these developments have had an impact on electoral behavior. The analyses rely on data from the cumulated GLES online tracking datafile, covering the period from 2009 to 2017 (Track09-17_Cum). We begin our analysis with a discussion of the literature on long-term changes in issue agendas in Western Europe. We then examine the long-term development of issue salience and issue positions in Germany between 2009 and 2017 and ask in the next section how these developments found expression in electoral behavior. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings.

Societal Change and the Cultural Turn in Issue Salience

Scholars claim that, during the last decades, cultural issues have seen an increase in attention that led to far-reaching changes in Western politics and party systems (Flanagan and Lee 2003; Kriesi 2010). In the context of the rise of new social movements since the late 1960s, young generations increasingly urged individual freedom and environmental sustainability, which resulted in the establishment of green parties and changing party alignments in several Western European countries (Rohrschneider 1993). It is further argued that immigration has recently emerged as a salient issue all over Western Europe, notwithstanding considerable differences between countries with regard to the shares and origins of immigrants (Lahav 1997; Messina 2007; Alonso and Fonseca 2011; Grande et al. 2019). Immigration was predominantly politicized in cultural terms of national identity and cultural threat rather than in economic terms (Hainmüller and Hiscox 2007; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012).

In the course of sustained economic growth, improving social security, progressing secularization, expanding education, the rise of the mass media, the tertiarization of the labor force, the class cleavage, and the religious cleavage, the traditionally dominant lines of political conflict in Western Europe (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini and Mair 1990) lost much of their structuring capacity.

This gave new dimensions of conflict leeway to emerge (Dalton et al. 1984b; Franklin et al. 1992; see also Chapter 2).

According to Inglehart (1977), the new existential security experienced by large segments of Western societies led to a generational shift in value priorities from materialist to post-materialist concerns, thereby redirecting attention from traditional socio-economic to cultural "quality-of-life" or "new-politics" issues, including cultural liberalism and environmental concerns (Poguntke 1987; Müller-Rommel 1995). These new priorities gave rise to new left and green parties, which mobilized the new demands and accordingly received support primarily from the younger, predominantly post-materialist generations (Inglehart 1987; Pappi et al. 2019).

A recent account of the formative power of value priorities interprets the rise of populist radical right parties as a backlash to post-materialist value change with a focus on strong in-group solidarity, hostile attitudes against out-group members, and opposition to deviations from established group norms (Inglehart and Norris 2017). As a consequence, the populist radical right challenges the new left agenda and renders cultural issues more salient (Ivarsflaten 2005; Arzheimer 2009).

Other scholars see the supposed increase of cultural issues' salience rooted in globalization processes that resulted in transformations of Western Europe's traditional cleavage structure (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008; Kriesi et al. 2012). According to this view, globalization has led to three social conflicts since the 1990s: First, it reinforced economic competition between countries as well as between world market and domestic market-oriented sectors within countries. Second, an influx of immigrants led to increased cultural competition. Third, the advancement of European integration caused concerns about a loss of national sovereignty. These processes produced "winners and losers of globalization" (Kriesi et al. 2008: 4), who, according to Kriesi et al., constitute the demand side of a possible integration–demarcation cleavage, waiting to be exploited by political parties. The authors see a predominance of a cultural rather than an economic mobilization of demarcation positions by populist radical right parties with a focus on immigration and national sovereignty. They attribute this "cultural logic" to "the new neoliberal consensus in economic and social policymaking," which impedes an economic mobilization (Grande and Kriesi 2012: 17).

The discussion outlined above reflects different interpretations of how the nature of political conflict has changed during the last decades. However, what they have in common is the implied assumption that a cultural turn in issue salience occurred. However, empirical evidence of this turn remains to be provided. We contend that Germany is an ideal case to test the assumption that cultural issues gained in importance, while socio-economic issues lost in importance. For a long time, the party system was firmly rooted in the traditional cleavage structure, but it has been in turmoil during the past decade (see Chapters 1 and 2). The party system experienced processes of partisan dealignment (Arzheimer 2006) as well

as realignment based on post-materialist value change with a comparatively early and strong green party (Inglehart 1983). Unlike most Western European countries, however, no far-right party had been able to gain sizable and sustainable electoral support until the successes of the AfD led to a considerable rightward turn in the German party system.

Whether and how these trends in electoral behavior are related to the supposed shifts in issue salience remains unclear. In the dominant literature on cleavage trajectories, there is hardly any research on how exactly such grand refigurations impact voting behavior. The international literature on class voting provides scattered evidence that both the decline of Western European social democracy and the rise of right-wing populism may be caused by shifts in issue salience (van der Waal et al. 2007; Rennwald and Evans 2014; Oskarson and Demker 2015). For Germany, there is evidence that the issue agenda indeed underwent changes (cf. Chapter 10). In 2013, concerns over immigration issues increased in the pre-election public agendas, while key socio-economic domains such as economic policy and employment became less important (Partheymüller 2017). Immigration-related topics climbed from rank 8 in 2009 to rank 5 on the public agenda in 2013 and up to rank 1 in 2017 (Kratz 2019: 231). Furthermore, the immigration issue proved to be a strong predictor of voting decisions in the 2017 federal election (Mader and Schoen 2019; Pappi et al. 2019). However, a more systematic and long-term analysis of issue agendas in the German electorate is still missing. The present chapter aims to fill this void. We will therefore examine in the following whether priorities and positions with regard to socio-economic, immigration, and environmental topics changed in the German electorate between 2009 and 2017.

Data and Operationalizations

For the analyses, we use eleven waves of the long-term tracking component of the German Longitudinal Election Study, which is based on quota samples drawn from online panels and was conducted three to four times per year between 2009 and 2017 (Track09-17_Cum). With this data, we can examine possible shifts in issue trajectories in a fine-grained and continuous way.

To analyze issue salience, we rely on two measures. First, we refer to respondents' answers to the open-ended "most important problem" question. To trace the development of the public's issue agenda, we examine the shares of citizens naming issues that can be classified into different issue groups. Traditional socio-economic issues comprise references to topics such as redistribution, state intervention in the economy, and welfare policies as well as issues related to the state of the economy such as growth, crises, inflation, and unemployment. All mentions of problems related to the protection of the environment, climate concerns, and energy supply

are sorted into the category of environmental sustainability. The immigration category includes all mentions related to immigration and asylum policy, such as the integration of residents with migration backgrounds, general positive or negative stances toward immigrants, or welfare benefits for immigrants (see Online Appendix A1 for details of these categorizations). In line with the literature (Hainmüller and Hiscox 2007; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012), we interpret mentions of environmental or migration themes as essentially culturally motivated. Our second measure of issue salience builds on a battery of survey questions concerning three core position issues: the traditional socio-economic conflict (measured by a question pertaining to the trade-off between higher or lower taxes and more or less welfare spending), the environmental conflict (first measured in terms of the opposition between dismissal and approval of nuclear energy and then, starting in 2013, with regard to the polarity between prioritization of climate protection and prioritization of economic growth), and the immigration conflict (indicated by the opposition between facilitation and restriction of immigration; for exact question wordings see Online Appendix A2). These questions are ideally suited to explore whether the assumed changes in Western Europe's political conflict structure are, as theorized, paralleled by shifts in issue salience. Respondents were asked to indicate their own positions on these issue dimensions and to assess how important they considered them (on a five-point scale ranging from "not at all important" [0] to "very important" [4]). To measure issue salience for one of these issue dimensions, we refer to the shares of respondents who gave them priority over both other dimensions. For each wave of our surveys, we thus calculate the share of respondents who, for instance, considered socio-economic concerns more important than environmental and migration issues. Finally, we test whether the respondents also significantly changed their positions on the three conflict dimensions (on bipolar eleven-point scales).

Trends in Issue Salience and Issue Positions

We begin our analysis by exploring possible shifts in the public agenda in Germany between 2009 and 2017. Figure 4.1 presents results based on the electorate's perceptions of the country's currently most important problems. What we see in Figure 4.1 is not in line with the assumption that a general shift from socio-economic concerns to cultural issues has taken place. The data suggest that socio-economic themes were of high concern to the German electorate most of the time. Apparently, only single events, such as the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster or the sudden and massive influx of refugees in 2015, led to temporary shifts in public opinion during which socio-economic concerns moved to the background. We see a significant but extremely short-lived peak of environmental concerns directly after the Fukushima incident. The second shift was more dramatic and
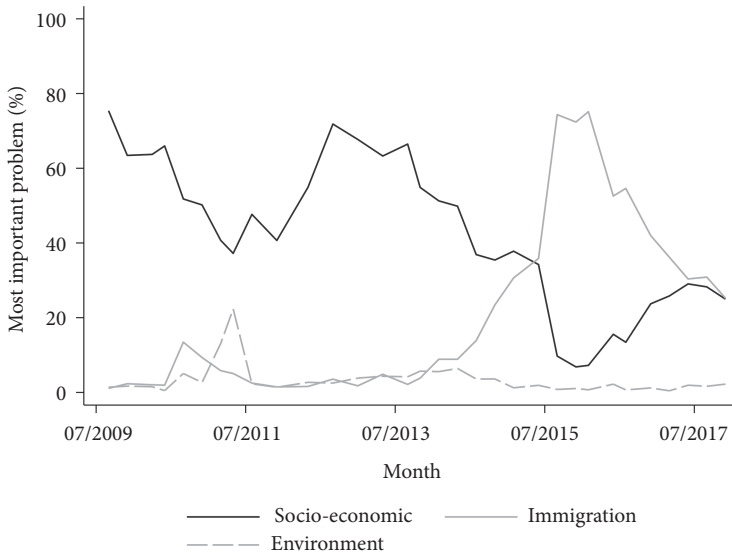
Fig. 4.1 The public agenda (most important problem), 2009–2017

Source: GLES Long-Term Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (Track09-17_Cum).

lasted longer. Between the so-called refugee crisis of late summer 2015 and early 2017, the immigration theme clearly dominated the agenda of the German electorate. After that, immigration concerns became less important, and socio-economic topics returned. At the time of the 2017 federal election, both policy fields were of similar importance to the German electorate.

Figure 4.2 turns to the three dimensions of issue conflict. For each of them, it displays the shares of respondents who considered this dimension more important than the other two. In addition, it shows the percentages of respondents who attached more importance to at least one of the two cultural issues, i.e., immigration and the environment, than to the socio-economic line of conflict. Figure 4.2 tells a somewhat different story to Figure 4.1. During the entire period from 2009 to 2017, more citizens considered either the environment or the immigration issue more important than the socio-economic issue dimension. This was also the case for the few moments—in late 2009 and early 2014—in which the socio-economic issue ranked as the single most important issue dimension. Compared to the trend based on respondents' perceived most important problem, the effect of the Fukushima nuclear disaster lasted longer on the electorate's issue priorities. From 2011 until late 2013, German voters assigned higher priority—partly by a large margin—to the environment issue than to the socio-economic and the immigration issue. By contrast, the immigration issue, which skyrocketed as the perceived "most important problem" since late 2015, has never gained such prominence.
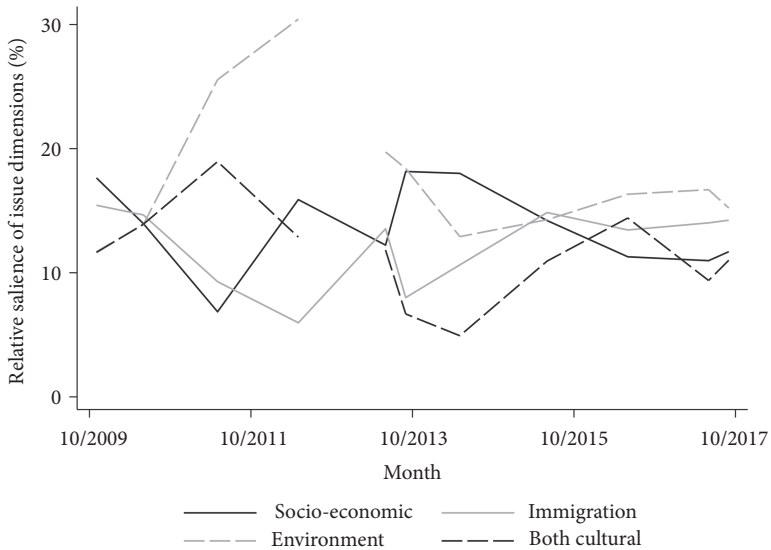
Fig. 4.2 Salience of issue dimensions, 2009–2017

Note: Share of respondents attaching higher importance to the issue relative to the other two issues.

Source: GLES Long-Term Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (Track09-17_Cum).

Its salience has increased since 2015, but migration concerns were never particularly prominent compared to the other issue dimensions. Figure 4.2 shows that the German electorate was split almost evenly into three segments, except during the immediate post-Fukushima months: those who believed that the socio-economic conflict dimension was the most important one, those for whom the environmental conflict was dominant, and those who assigned the highest priority to the immigration conflict. Taken together, however, cultural issues clearly dominated. The additional trend line representing respondents who perceived both cultural issues as more important than the socio-economic issue dimension shows that, at all points of observation, substantial parts of the electorate, varying between 5 and 20 percent, believed that both environment and migration were more important than the socio-economic issue dimension.

To sum up, our two-issue salience measures show partly similar and partly divergent trends. Both issue agendas reacted on extraordinary events such as the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 and the influx of refugees in 2015. Regarding perceptions of Germany's most important problem, socio-economic themes appear to have been the default mention, interrupted only by certain drastic events that then temporarily dominated public and media discourse. By contrast, when looking at position issues and specifically the question of which issue dimension was of highest significance to voters, the socio-economic conflict dimension
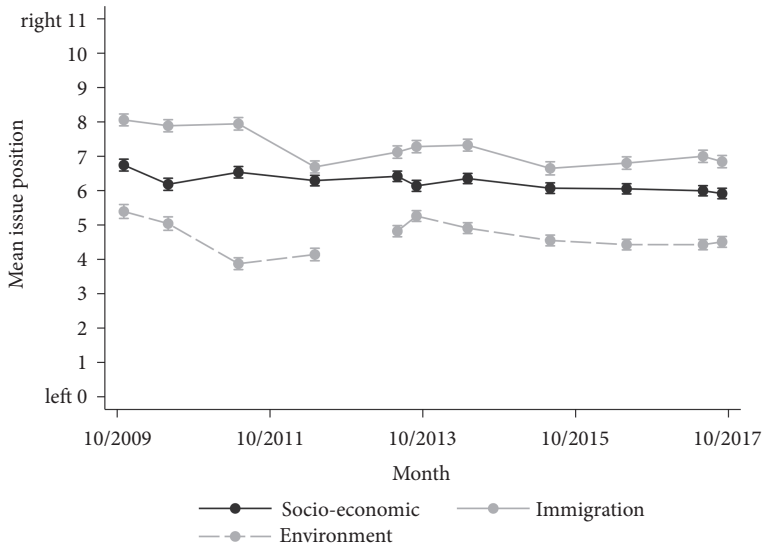
Fig. 4.3 Mean issue positions, 2009–2017

Note: Mean values of the German electorate's issue positions with 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: GLES Long-Term Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (Track09-17_Cum).

appears not particularly prominent. Larger segments of the electorate believed that either the conflict between environmental protection and economic growth or the conflict between liberal and restrictive immigration policies was more relevant. A substantial part of the electorate even considered both cultural conflict dimensions more important than the socio-economic one. Importantly, this relative dominance of cultural over socio-economic issues characterized the entire period from 2009 to 2017. If a cultural turn has occurred in Germany, it happened before 2009.

But how about issue positions? Did they change as well? According to Figure 4.3, the mean voter positions on the three conflict dimensions have moved somewhat to the left or more liberal stances. This is most evident in the immigration issue. Here, the public's mean position moved more than one point on the eleven-point scale away from the anti-immigration pole. The socio-economic mean position shifted almost one point toward higher taxes and more welfare expenditures. Owing to the change of the survey question regarding the position issue that represents the environmental conflict dimension in 2013—from nuclear energy to climate change—the assessment of trends in aggregate opinion is less straightforward. Each of these two issues developed to the left. The electorate's mean position shifted toward opposing nuclear energy during the Fukushima catastrophe. Moreover, the electorate increased its prioritization of climate protection over economic growth from 2013 to 2017. These trends are in line with evidence on a similar move to

the left regarding the more general left–right self-positioning in the same period (Scherer and Stövsand 2019).

Figure 4.3 also clearly shows that German voters strongly leaned toward restrictive immigration policies on average. This holds true even at the end of the period of observation, i.e., after the turn to slightly less restrictive positions. By contrast, the electorate's mean position was rather centrist on the socio-economic issue dimension. Concerning the environmental conflict dimension, the electorate overall tended toward rejecting nuclear energy and giving environmental concerns priority over economic growth. If issues are salient, positions matter because voters seek parties that are close to their own position. Figure 4.3 clearly shows that shifts in issue position cannot explain the changes in the German party landscape that occurred during the past years. Whether and how shifts in issue salience were associated with voting behavior is the main concern of the subsequent section.

Issue Salience and Vote Choice

The discussion about the role of issues and issue salience has a long history in theories of voter behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Stokes 1963; Davis et al. 1970; RePass 1971). According to the classic social psychological account of voting behavior, an issue may have an impact on vote choice only if the following prerequisites are met: if a voter perceives the issue, attaches importance to it, holds a position toward it, and perceives differences in the parties' stances on it, then he or she may base his or her vote decision on this issue (Campbell et al. 1960: 169–71). From this perspective, salience is a moderator of position issue voting. Individual issue salience increases the influence of the voter's issue position on his or her party choice (Krosnick 1989, 1990; Blumenstiel 2014b). Moreover, a voter who is particularly interested in a certain issue will perceive position differences between the parties precisely with regard to this issue (Krosnick 1990: 62–3). Accordingly, it is plausible to expect a moderating effect of issue salience on the impact of issue position proximity between a voter and a party on this person's electoral choice (Linhart 2014: 25). In other words, close proximity between a voter's and a party's position on an issue should increase the probability of voting for this party if the issue is highly salient.

Besides following this classic account, we moreover assume that issue salience has a direct effect on vote choice. Downs famously highlighted the role of uncertainty in political behavior and assumed that voters seek to diminish this uncertainty, as they estimate the utilities of vote alternatives (Downs 1957). Therefore, a voter avoids voting for a party that does not hold a clear and credible position or is internally split over an issue, since this involves high uncertainty regarding the party's handling of the issue in the parliamentary and governmental arenas (Enelow and Hinich 1981; Bartels 1986; Alvarez 1997; Gill 2005;

Pappi et al. 2019). For example, a voter who is deeply concerned about asylum policy would rather vote for a party with a clear and unambiguous view on immigration than cast a ballot for a party with a highly contingent or obscure position on the issue. Parties hold a visible and unambiguous issue stance when they take an extreme issue position (Rovny 2012; Mauerer et al. 2015; Lachat and Wagner 2018), when they "own" the issue (Dejaeghere and van Erkel 2017), or when they developed from a social cleavage related to the issue (Enyedi 2005; Rovny 2012). Whenever an issue is high on the agenda, parties with these characteristics will benefit.

With regard to the moderating effect of issue salience on vote choice, we expect that all parties profit from voter–party proximity on all issue positions. We assume that voters are likely to vote for the party that resembles their position most closely if they care about an issue. Concerning the direct effect of issue salience, our assumption is that parties profit from their issue position clarity, which is conditional on historical party–issue allegiances, issue ownership, and position extremity. Accordingly, the environment issue is "owned" by the Greens (Kratz 2019). Concerning immigration, we expect the AfD to benefit most from high issue salience due to its extremely restrictive position (Abou-Chadi 2015; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2017; Bieber et al. 2018; Arzheimer and Berning 2019). Concerning issues that refer to the traditional socio-economic conflict dimension, the SPD is historically associated with pro-welfare and redistribution stances, while the Liberals are positioned on the opposite pole, i.e., advocacy of a free market. Since German unification, the Social Democrat's unique position as the only welfare party has been challenged by the new party PDS, now the Left (Kratz 2019). As a result, also the Left might benefit from voters for whom the socio-economic line of conflict has high salience.

Finally, whenever there are significant shifts in aggregate issue salience, e.g., in the aftermath of the Fukushima and the refugee crises, the effects of position distances concerning the respective issue on party choice should increase. We assume that a shift in issue attention might lead to significant changes in electoral behavior even if issue positions of voters and parties are perfectly stable over time. Thus, we presume that the recent shifts in the parties' electoral fates were not due to changing issue positions, in particular more restrictive attitudes on migration, but resulted from shifts in issue salience. In the subsequent sections, we explore whether and how issue salience affected vote choices.

Operationalizations and Research Strategy

We now turn to multivariate analyses to test the effect of shifts in issue salience on voting behavior both cross-sectionally and across time. The subsequent analyses build on the same data as the previous ones. As we are now interested in the

effects of voter–party proximities in interaction with issue salience, we rely exclusively on the position issue salience measures. The dependent variable is the party vote (either as the intended vote in a hypothetical *Bundestag* election on the following Sunday or, in surveys fielded immediately before elections, in the respective upcoming election). We only consider votes for one of the six major parties, i.e., CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens, Left, and AfD. We rely on the absolute proximities[1] between voters' positions and the individually perceived party positions on the three aforementioned position issues as independent variables. To assess the moderating effect of individual-level salience on issue voting, we insert interaction terms for issue proximities and issue salience in the models. To account for time, we use a continuous measure considering the year and month of the survey. To examine changes in issue voting over time, we refer to interaction terms between issue proximities and the time variable.[2]

We rely on conditional logistic regression and accordingly use a dataset that is stacked by parties within respondents (Alvarez and Nagler 1998).[3] We estimate three models: the first includes position proximities and saliences of all issues simultaneously, the second examines the moderating impact of issue salience by adding the interaction terms between proximities and saliences, and the third tests for trends in position issue voting by interacting position proximities with time while controlling for issue saliences.

The Electoral Impact of Changing Issue Salience

To examine the direct effects of issue salience, we estimate the party-specific effects of issue salience on party choice relative to a vote for the CDU/CSU (which serves as reference category) and control for the generic effects of voter–party position proximities. Figure 4.4 presents the average marginal effect of a one-point change of the independent variables on the probability of voting for the respective party (for full model estimates see Tables A3–A6 in the Online Appendix). With regard to voters who deem the traditional socio-economic dimension highly salient, the results are in line with our assumptions. The probability of voting for the Left, the SPD, or the FDP (compared to the reference category of CDU/CSU

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[1] In spatial vote models, both absolute and squared distances are used frequently. We decided to employ absolute distances because they make more realistic assumptions about voters' risk aversion (Tiemann 2019). To facilitate the interpretation of effects, we inverted the distances to proximities ranging from 0 for party and voter positions situated on opposite extremes of the position issue scale to 10 for identical positions.

[2] We chose not to control for the effect of party identification because of endogeneity problems arising from the reciprocal causal connection between issue positions and partisanship (Fiorina 1978; Luskin et al. 1989; MacKuen et al. 1989).

[3] To avoid unnecessary data loss, we delete observations alternative-wise instead of case-wise. This means that respondents who did not estimate the issue positions of all but of at least two parties were included in the analysis.
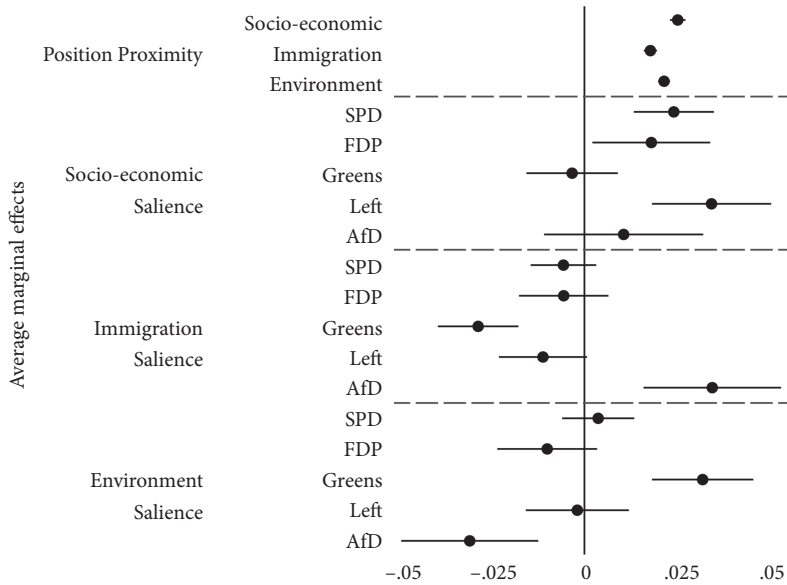
Fig. 4.4 The impact of issue salience and voter–party position proximities on vote choice

Notes: Average marginal effects with 95 percent confidence intervals. Full model estimates are presented in Table A3 in the Online Appendix. Reference category for the effects of salience: CDU/CSU vote.

Source: GLES Long-Term Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (Track09-17_Cum).

votes) increases with salience. Specifically, the probability of voting for the Left increases by 3.5, the SPD by 2.4, and the FDP by 1.8 percentage points when the salience increases by one point on the 5-point scale.

As expected, the AfD ranks high among voters who are concerned about immigration, whereas the Greens benefit from a high salience of environmental questions. These effects are strong and statistically significant, while the effects are insignificant for the other parties. Evidently, gains and losses of AfD and Greens in response to the salience of these two issues are mirror images of one another. What benefits one party harms the other. The two parties, therefore, appear as opposites. The findings strongly suggest that they receive support from different issue publics. Assessing the position proximity between parties and voters on the three issue dimensions, we see significant positive effects. This indicates that voters tend to cast a ballot for a party that holds similar views on the three position issues. With a one-point increase in the position proximity between a voter and a party on the eleven-point scale, the probability of voting for the party increases on average by 2.5 percentage points on the socio-economic, by 1.8 percentage points on the immigration, and by 2.2 percentage points on the environmental issue dimension.
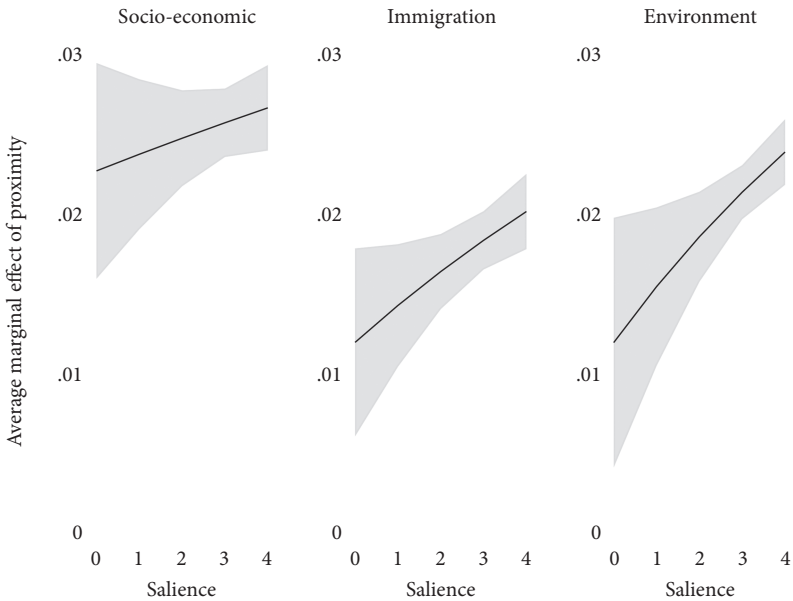
Fig. 4.5 The effect of voter–party position proximities on vote choice by levels of individual-level issue salience

Notes: Average marginal effects with 95 percent confidence intervals by levels of issue salience. Full model estimates are presented in Table A4 in the Online Appendix.

Source: GLES Long-Term Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (Track09-17_Cum).

Next, we examine whether voter–party issue congruence is particularly effective regarding vote choice if a voter attaches great importance to the respective issue. Figure 4.5 presents the changes in the average marginal effects of position proximity by levels of individual-level salience for the same issues. Evidently, voters prefer parties with similar views with regard to an issue, particularly when they find the issue important. However, this moderating effect is significant only for the two cultural issues. The effect of proximity on the environmental issue is twice as strong for a voter who attributes high importance to this issue compared to a voter who ascribes no importance to it. While the probability of an indifferent voter to cast a ballot for a party increases by 1.1 percentage points with every unit in position proximity, the probability increase for a voter who considers the issue highly relevant is about 2.3 percentage points per unit increase in position proximity. For immigration, the moderating effect of salience is not as large, though still considerable. The socio-economic issue, by contrast, always has a comparatively strong effect, whose strength is unaffected by the importance attached to this topic. Thus, even voters who do not attach importance to the socio-economic conflict vote for a party with concordant views on that issue. Hence, individual-level salience does not moderate the impact of socio-economic positions on vote choice.

The uniformly strong effect of the socio-economic issue dimension might reflect the long-lasting imprint of this traditional line of conflict on the German party system.

Given that, as shown above, the individual-level salience of an issue renders the issue positions (except those concerning the socio-economic line of conflict) more consequential for voting behavior, and issue salience has first turned toward the environmental issue and then later to the immigration issue; voter–party proximities on cultural issues should have become more effective over time with regard to vote choice. We now test this assumption of a long-term trend in issue voting. To this end, we insert the continuous time variable in the model and interact it with our measure of the proximity of voter and party positions. According to Figure 4.6, immigration positions became indeed much more consequential for vote choices over time. In 2009, the probability to vote for a party increased by only 1 percentage point with a one-point increase in voter–party position similarity. This effect size more than doubles until 2017, surpassing the impact of environmental positions and reaching the momentousness of socio-economic stances. The impact of socio-economic and environmental position proximities, by contrast, appears to decrease over time. However, these trends are not statistically significant.
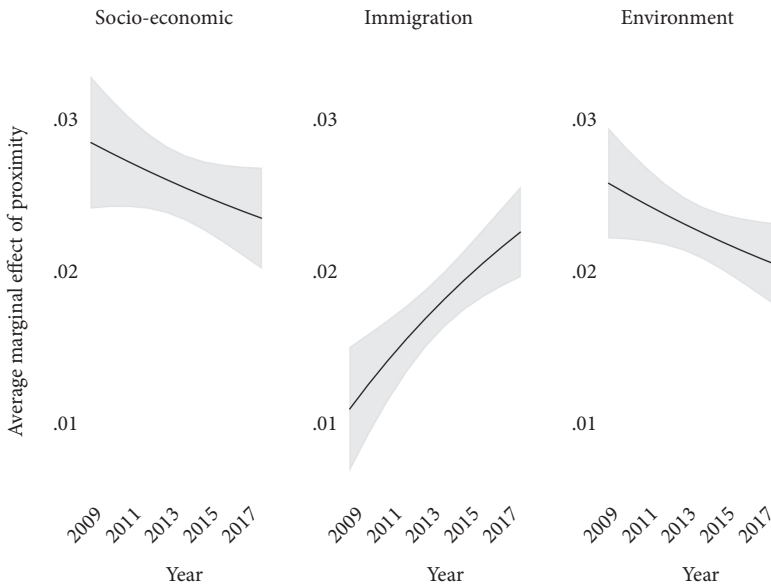
Fig. 4.6 The effect of voter–party position proximities on vote choice over time

Notes: Average marginal effects with 95 percent confidence intervals over time. Full model estimates are presented in Table A5 in the Online Appendix.

Source: GLES Long-Term Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (Track09-17_Cum).

To sum up, we have first seen that parties with unambiguous positions on an issue benefit directly from this issue's salience. Second, the salience of immigration and environmental concerns makes the respective voter–position proximities more consequential for vote choice. Finally, we have shown the growing importance of the immigration issue for voting over time. The increase in issue attention toward immigration led voters to vote for the AfD—a party that offered a very clear and unambiguous position with regard to immigration. Apart from this, parties also generally profited whenever their immigration positions were closer to voters' positions. Since this was a rather restrictive position for many voters, as shown above, the AfD benefited twice: from direct salience effects on vote choice and from the moderating role of salience that conditioned the impact of immigration positions on electoral choices. In this way, changes in issue salience led to a rightward turn in electoral behavior without any similar turn to the right in the electorate's issue positions.

Conclusion

For many decades, Germany was an odd case in the concert of Western European democracies. While in most countries there was an ongoing debate about cultural backlash and a huge concern about the rise of mainly right-wing populist leaders and parties that mobilized on anti-globalization and national identity issues, nothing comparable happened in Germany for a long time. Although German politics was equally affected by declining levels of partisanship, rising electoral volatility, declining and increasingly unequal turnout, and shrinking levels of traditional cleavage voting (see, e.g., Weßels et al. 2014; Schoen et al. 2017b; Chapters 1 and 2), no party successfully drew on the agenda that in other countries spurred voters to support right-wing populist parties.

This has changed by now. In 2017, for the first time in German post-war history, a right-wing party—the AfD—was elected into the national parliament. At the same time, the electorate increasingly perceived immigration as Germany's most important problem, and since the autumn of 2015, mentions of immigration overtook the prioritization of socio-economic issues that for a long time had been typical for the German electorate. Yet, looking at the salience of position issues the story is somewhat different. Although single events can drive issue salience, we discovered a quite stable pattern overall. During the entire period from 2009 to 2017, the German electorate put more emphasis on cultural issues than on the traditional socio-economic line of conflict. Thus, if a cultural turn in issue salience occurred, this must have happened before 2009. Looking at the trajectories of the positional issue agenda, the story is thus rather one of party supply. Throughout the entire period, a significant part of the population deemed conflicts related to

immigration policy to be most salient. However, a party that caters to this demand has existed only since 2013.

Issue salience leaves footprints on voting behavior. Voters prefer parties that hold clear stances on the issues that are important to them. In consequence, those for whom cultural issues are of highest salience tend to cast their votes for parties belonging to relatively new party families, e.g., the AfD in the case of the immigration issue and the Greens in the case of environmental concerns. By contrast, parties that were historically associated with the socio-economic cleavage, i.e., the SPD, but also the Left party and the FDP, still perform particularly well when socio-economic issues are high on the electorate's agenda. An aggregate shift in issue priorities toward cultural issues thus affects the relative strengths of parties, benefiting parties that are not tied to the socio-economic conflict dimension.

We further demonstrated that individuals who deem a non-economic issue highly salient seek out parties with positions close to their own positions. As immigration has become more important to voters since 2015, sentiments related to this issue have turned into an important basis of voters' choices. Because most voters favored restrictive immigration policies, the AfD profited from this increase in issue salience. Parties such as the Greens, the Left, and the SPD, whose more liberal stances on immigration were shared only by a smaller part of the electorate but who represented more voters concerning socio-economic or environmental issues, were clearly disadvantaged by the high attention to immigration. As a result, shifts in voting behavior occurred although the public's position on all three conflict dimensions, in fact, moved toward more left stances between 2009 and 2017.

The emphasis on cultural issues, however, does not imply a disappearance of socio-economic issues, neither from the political discourse nor as a foundation of voting behavior. Nevertheless, we conclude that, over the last decades, changes in society and party systems have created fertile ground for cultural issues to emerge, compete with, and even surpass traditionally predominant socio-economic issues in the struggle for attention, and there is no reason to expect these issues to disappear.

Ties that No Longer Bind?

Effects and Responsiveness of Party Attachments in a Period of Crises

Lea Gärtner, Harald Schoen, and Alexander Wuttke

Introduction

Like many Western democracies, Germany has undergone a period of dealignment (Dalton 2012). As partisan independents are particularly likely to switch their vote from one election to the next (Schoen 2003), the erosion of party attachments makes the electorate more responsive to external changes and the partisan balance more flexible. However, it may also undermine the stability of the party system. Party attachments serve as a stabilizing force because party identifiers often stick to their parties despite their parties' inability to meet their demands. Moreover, some party identifiers may even adjust their positions to the party line to accommodate unexpected policy shifts. This is because their attachments provide a perceptual screen, which structures and stabilizes political attitudes and behavior (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2002; Green et al. 2002; Lenz 2012). Although the notion might be unappealing to proponents of bottom-up theories of democracy (Achen and Bartels 2016), party identification may thus inhibit, or at least limit, protest voting and party defection. Consequently, it may enable (mainstream) parties and the party system as such to survive severe social, economic, or political challenges forcing unpopular political decisions largely unscathed. For the German political system, the European debt crisis and the European refugee crisis represented such challenges, which may have underscored the importance of party attachments as a stabilizing force.

However, serious societal challenges not only emphasize the desirability of party attachments as a stabilizing force but may also undermine partisan ties. While it is widely accepted that ties to political parties shape perceptions of the political context, they do not completely blind party adherents to the political reality (e.g., Redlawsk et al. 2010). Under certain circumstances, partisan attachments may be weakened or even abandoned or changed (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al.

2002). For instance, parties may have to make policy choices that contradict their traditional policy stances in order to cope with severe internal and external challenges. Although party supporters may ignore or reinterpret such policy changes as matching their own preferences, crises increase the salience of political choices. Party identifiers are thus more likely to perceive the mismatch between their preferences and their party's policies in times of crisis. Such feelings of dissonance are likely to disaffect party supporters, some of whom may choose to abandon their partisan ties. Along these lines, the societal challenges faced by the German political system in the last decade may have undermined the attachments of party identifiers in the German electorate, potentially furthering the dealignment process or even engendering realignment. Party identifiers may have learned that their policy preferences are at odds with policies pursued by the party they identify with. In turn, attachments to parties in government that were considered responsible for resolving crises may have weakened or even eroded. Rather than underscoring the stabilizing function of party attachments, these challenges may thus have shaken the prevalence and balance of party attachments in Germany. Against this backdrop, we examine how identifiers' policy positions and party attachments have changed during the debt and refugee crises, considering their perceptions of parties' policies.

Party Attachments in Periods of Crises

The role of party identification as a force of its own, guiding identifiers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior, has been at the heart of the concept since its inception (Campbell et al. 1960). Nowadays, it is widely accepted that the relationship between party identification and novel experiences is flexible (e.g., Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Accordingly, party attachments, understood as psychological bonds, may induce partisan motivated reasoning (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Redlawsk 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006) and guide voters' political perception, information processing, and decision-making (e.g., Evans and Pickup 2010; Huddy et al. 2015). The degree to which party attachments exert these effects may depend on several individual-level and contextual factors. For example, strong partisan ties are more resistant to change and exert stronger effects on perceptions, attitudes, and behavior than weak ones. Moreover, high levels of partisan polarization increase the salience of party attachments and thus make partisan considerations more accessible to voters (e.g., Druckman et al. 2013; also Jerit and Barabas 2012; Nicholson 2012). Accordingly, strong identifiers may be particularly inclined to vote for their party and support its politicians, performance, and policies in political environments in which party attachments are highly salient.

However, even in periods of high polarization, parties cannot always count on the unconditional support of their adherents. This suggests that partisan motivated

reasoning has limits and that other factors may also influence political information processing (e.g., Redlawsk et al. 2010). The political information citizens receive usually consists not only of partisan cues but also speaks to self-interest, other identities, values, and attitudes. Depending on voters' perception of partisan cues and the importance they attach to relevant predispositions, the latter may come into play as a force of their own. In other words, the impact of party attachments may also depend on the weight party identifiers give to other predispositions. Accordingly, even strong identifiers may disapprove of their party leader's misconduct or oppose a policy proposed by their party if novel information suggests that their party did or proposed something that is at odds with a strongly held predisposition (e.g., Schoen et al. 2017a). If this dissonance is large, party identifiers may even be willing to reconsider their party attachment (Jennings and Markus 1984).

In real-world politics, conditions are usually quite favorable for party attachments. Most parties pay close attention not to change policy positions too quickly to prevent challenging their supporters' preferences (e.g., Adams 2012; Adams et al. 2014). Moreover, parties' policy positions, like the outcomes of government action, are seldom unequivocal, but rather ambiguous, providing parties and their adherents with considerable leeway for interpretation and frequently allowing identifiers to project their own policy positions on their parties (e.g., Brody and Page 1972; RePass 1976; Parker-Stephen 2013; Bisgaard 2015). In times of crisis, however, parties may have to make hard choices and, consequently, implement policies that contradict their traditional stance to limit the fallout of severe societal challenges. Because crises raise public attention, such contradictory policies tend to be highly visible and less open to interpretation. In consequence, crises increase the probability that party identifiers are confronted with information that puts their party affiliation at odds with other vital attitudes. In this vein, large-scale events that challenge many adherents' party images have the potential to shake party affiliations and lead to a shift in the balance of party attachments in the electorate (Key 1959; Campbell et al. 1960: Chapters. 7, 19; Carmines and Stimson 1989).

Germany in Times of Crises

Over the last decade, political discourse in Germany has focused heavily on a series of crises, including the European debt crisis and the European refugee crisis. To derive convincing expectations about party identifiers' reactions to these crises, we require a thorough analysis of the flow of events, in general, and the behavior of parties, in particular. A crisis must be severe in several respects to shake deeply ingrained party identifications. First, it must be salient enough to surpass the threshold of awareness. Second, because party attachments are central

to identifiers' belief systems, challenging them requires a crisis to touch upon an issue that is considered equally important. Third, the crisis must either draw attention to parties' positions on an issue that had not been salient prior to the crisis or force parties to revise their positions on an issue. If this is not the case, party adherents are unlikely to perceive any changes in the position of their party and hence have no reason to adopt the party position or to reconsider their attachment. In short, a crisis needs to be salient, speak to an important issue, and change identifiers' perceptions of parties' positions in order to affect party attachments.

While many events described as political crises unfold without capturing the attention of a larger public, the two crises named above were, without doubt, very salient in citizens' minds (cf. Kratz and Schoen 2017). The European debt crisis entered German public awareness in 2010 when the Eurozone countries passed the first European bailout package for Greece and the resolution to establish a European Stability Mechanism (ESM). In September 2011, public interest and media coverage skyrocketed after Bundestag and Bundesrat had approved an extension of the German guarantees and agreed to cut Greek debt by 50 percent three months later (Appendix 1; Picard 2015). Attention to the European refugee crisis rose sharply in 2015 when more than one million asylum seekers crossed the German border. Their arrival was extensively covered by the media and elicited heated discussions about immigration policies at all levels of society. All in all, these events were ubiquitous both in terms of media coverage and their prevalence in political debates at the time.

Besides being highly salient, the crises also revolved around issues most citizens consider important, namely financial security and immigration attitudes (e.g., Sniderman et al. 2004; Sides and Citrin 2007; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008a). The European debt crisis threatened German savers' investments and perpetuated the economic downturn brought about by the global financial crisis. Among citizens with restrictive immigration preferences, the one million asylum seekers entering Germany in 2015 aroused fears that the government had lost control over the German borders, resulting in indiscriminate mass immigration. The increase in the number of asylum seekers also prompted a larger public discussion about the feasibility of integration on such a large scale. Empirical evidence confirms that citizens were aware of these crises and considered them an important, if not the most important, problem German politicians had to counter at the time (cf. Chapter 10).

Party identifiers' perceptions of their parties' positions are less straightforward to assess. The European debt crisis did not induce major shifts in German parties' policy positions, but it did result in serious intra-party rifts. This suggests that identifiers who favored the "losing" side of the internal debate may have felt abandoned by their parties. Eventually, all parties except the Left supported the bailout packages and the ESM, forming a broad parliamentary consensus on how to respond to the crisis. However, factions within the governing parties CDU, CSU, and FDP insisted that the bailouts would lead to an unacceptable and illegal joint liability

between the Eurozone states (Detjen 2014; Lange et al. 2014). The left wings of the largest opposition party, the SPD, and the smaller Greens aligned themselves with the Left in criticizing that the conditions of the bailout packages would inevitably lead to cuts in the social services of impacted countries (Lange et al. 2014). In consequence, the debt crisis provided opponents of the Euro rescue, who did not identify with the Left, with reasons to reconsider their party attachments, especially if their opposition to German aid was strong. At the extreme, supporters of SPD and Greens may have abandoned their party attachments, and some identifiers may even have switched their allegiance to the Left. Similarly, CDU, CSU, and FDP identifiers may have turned their backs on their parties. Considering that no (parliamentary) conservative party opposed the Euro rescue, these supporters are unlikely to have shifted their support to another party. Because the European debt crisis as well as the party positions pertaining to it were difficult to grasp, we may find that party identifiers who are highly interested in politics more readily reconsidered their party attachments.

The situation was entirely different during the European refugee crisis. In August 2015, Chancellor Merkel spoke the often-quoted words "Wir schaffen das!" ("we can do this"), marking a major shift toward a more liberal immigration position of the CDU, the senior party in the governing grand coalition with the SPD (cf. Mader and Schoen 2019). This change was met with fierce criticism by the conservative wing of the CDU as well as the Bavarian sister party, the CSU. In consequence, not only the changed position of the CDU but also the more restrictive stance of the CSU became very salient for citizens. At the same time, the newly established AfD caught the public attention with its openly xenophobic anti-immigration positions and harsh attacks on the government's allegedly lax immigration policy (Wuttke 2020). We therefore expect weakening or eroding partisan ties and, in extreme cases, even an increased attachment to the CSU and the AfD among CDU identifiers opposing immigration. In comparison, the left-wing parties SPD, Greens, and the Left faded into the background, as they all stuck with their pro-immigration stance. However, identifiers of these left-wing parties who opposed immigration may still have experienced a weakening or erosion of their party attachments due to the increased salience of their parties' positions during the crisis.

Data and Methodology

We use two different types of survey data to test whether party identifiers who perceived a large or increasing distance between their and their parties' positions ignored the resulting dissonance, followed their party's position, or adapted their party attachments to reflect their own positions. We first look at long-term trends in identifiers' and parties' positions, drawing on a series of quarterly cross-section

online surveys conducted between September 2009 and December 2017 as part of the German Longitudinal Election Study (Track09-17_Cum). We then use data from the cumulated GLES campaign panels 2009–2013 (CampPanel09-13) and 2013–2017 (CampPanel13–17) to analyze intra-individual change during the two crises. As no survey waves were fielded between September 2009 and June 2013, no data was collected during the height of the debt crisis in 2011/2012. Because we are interested in the long-term consequences of societal challenges rather than just in the short-term repercussions, this gap is not problematic for our analyses. In addition to the regular campaign waves, the campaign panel 2013–2017 includes two intermediate survey waves in 2014 and 2015, the latter of which coincides with the climax of the refugee crisis.

Across all data sets, we measure party identification using the German standard item, which asks respondents whether they have leaned toward a political party for an extended period of time and, if so, which party they have leaned toward. The strength of party identifications was measured with an item asking respondents how strongly or weakly they leaned toward this party altogether ("very strongly" to "very weakly"). The intermediate survey waves in 2014 and 2015 only offered the joint option "CDU/CSU" for the party identification item, and the subsequent survey waves offered the separate options "CDU" and "CSU" as well as the joint option. To harness the large number of respondents who chose the joint option, respondents from Bavaria, where the CSU competes, were added to the category "CSU," while respondents from all other states were subsumed under the category "CDU." Evidently, party identification is not restricted by state boundaries. Therefore, we re-ran all analyses without the respondents who chose the joint option and point out divergent results throughout the analysis.[1]

In an attempt to provide a fine-grained analysis of effects exerted by crisis-induced dissonance between policy preferences and perceived party positions, we also consider changes in partisan attitudes and behaviors that fall short of but may lead to changes in party identification. Accordingly, we measure respondents' general evaluations of the parliamentary parties. Recorded on an eleven-point scale ranging from "very negative view" to "very positive view," this measure is more likely to reflect situational influences and thus to reveal first cues for developments that may result in changing party identifications. For our analyses, all scales were converted to a range between 0 and 1. Another indication for the waning influence of party identifications are supporters who cast their ballot for a party they do not identify with. Therefore, we included a measure for respondents' vote choice, which asked respondents to indicate which party they had voted for in the past election. As self-reported recall questions are prone to bias, we use the vote choice

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[1] In our data, on average some 15 percent of the self-reported CDU identifiers reside in Bavaria and on average about 11 percent of the self-reported CSU identifiers reside in other states.

reported in the first post-election wave instead of the current wave to measure panel respondents' vote choice.[2]

To measure respondents' policy positions during the European debt crisis, we use an item asking whether European integration should be promoted toward implementing a European government in the near future, or whether European integration already went too far. As this measure is hardly ideal to capture respondents' attitudes toward the Euro rescue, we also use an item directly asking respondents whether Germany should participate in the European financial aid for indebted EU member states, with responses ranging from "for German participation" to "against German participation." Unfortunately, this second item is available in the campaign panel 2009–2013 only after the crisis, and we therefore have to draw on the first item for time-series analyses.[3] Respondents' policy positions during the European refugee crisis were queried using two items asking whether immigration restrictions should be tightened or relaxed and whether foreigners should assimilate completely into German culture or live according to their own culture. The responses for the position items were given on an eleven-point scale in the tracking surveys and on a seven-point scale in the panels, but were converted to a range between 0 and 1 for the analyses. Parties' perceived policy positions were measured analogously with items asking where the respondent thinks each party stands on an issue.

To test whether identifiers' policy positions and party attachments changed during the two crises, we subtracted identifiers' pre-crisis ratings of policy positions and parties from their post-crisis ratings, thereby capturing the difference from before to after the crisis. In addition, we created dummy variables indicating whether respondents abandoned their party identification, changed their party identification to another party, or voted for another party during the crisis. We distinguish short-term[4] changes occurring between the last pre-crisis wave and the first post-crisis wave from long-term changes emerging between the first wave of a cumulated panel and the post-election wave of the next campaign over four years later.

In addition to changes over time, we also measure the distance between identifiers' and parties' perceived positions at one point in time. For reasons of data availability, these measures differ for the two crises. To measure policy proximity during the debt crisis, we calculated the absolute distance between identifiers' and parties' positions on German aid for indebted EU member states and weighted it by

[2] The survey item on vote choice offered the joint option "CDU/CSU" instead of separate options because the CSU only competes in Bavaria, where the CDU does not run.
[3] The correlation between the two measures is around 0.57 in any given survey wave.
[4] Of course, short-term effects are rather "long" in the campaign panel 2009–2013, as there is a gap of nearly four years between the last pre- and the first post-crisis survey wave.

the personal importance of the issue.[5] Thus, higher values indicate larger distances and higher issue importance. To measure how the refugee crisis impacted the policy proximity of identifiers and parties, we first calculated the distance between identifiers' and parties' positions on immigration for each survey wave. We then subtracted the pre-crisis distance from the post-crisis distance to determine if identifiers and parties moved apart on immigration. Here, we use an unweighted measure, as issue importance was not recorded for this item. As respondents' own positions on immigration were queried in twice as many survey waves as the perceived positions of parties, we take advantage of this richer data by using an additional indicator measuring identifiers' average pre-crisis positions on immigration at the cost of not being able to test the direct impact of identifiers' perceptions.

The European Debt Crisis

Do party identifiers adopt their party's position or adjust their party attachment when their party identification contradicts their policy preferences? Or do they simply endure the dissonance? To answer these questions regarding the Euro crisis, we inspect citizens' and parties' positions relating to the debt crisis before, during, and after its occurrence, and then analyze intra-individual changes. The time-series data show that citizens' mean positions on European integration and German aid for indebted Eurozone states are very stable over the period of the debt crisis. The average respondent continuously leaned slightly against furthering European integration, with minimal fluctuations of 0.04 points around the mean (mean value tracking surveys: 0.60, panel: 0.58; not shown here, see Online Appendix 2). Respondents' attitudes toward German aid for other Eurozone member states were similarly stable over time. With mean positions of 0.38 in the tracking surveys and 0.39 in the panel, the average respondent was rather reluctant to spend German tax money on rescuing the Euro (results not shown, see Online Appendix 3). Altogether, despite the severity of the crisis, attitudes toward the Euro crisis remained strikingly stable.

However, this impression of stability may be misleading, as supporters of different parties may have moved in different directions on these issues, with shifts balancing in the aggregate. Such contrary movements would contradict our expectation that identifiers of all parties except the Left should move toward furthering European integration and endorsing German aid if identifiers followed their parties' positions. On the other hand, identifiers' positions should not move at all if they reconsidered their party attachments based on their positions. To test whether

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[5] Since the item on German aid is available only after the crisis, we had to rely on post-crisis data here instead of comparing the pre- and post-crisis distance.
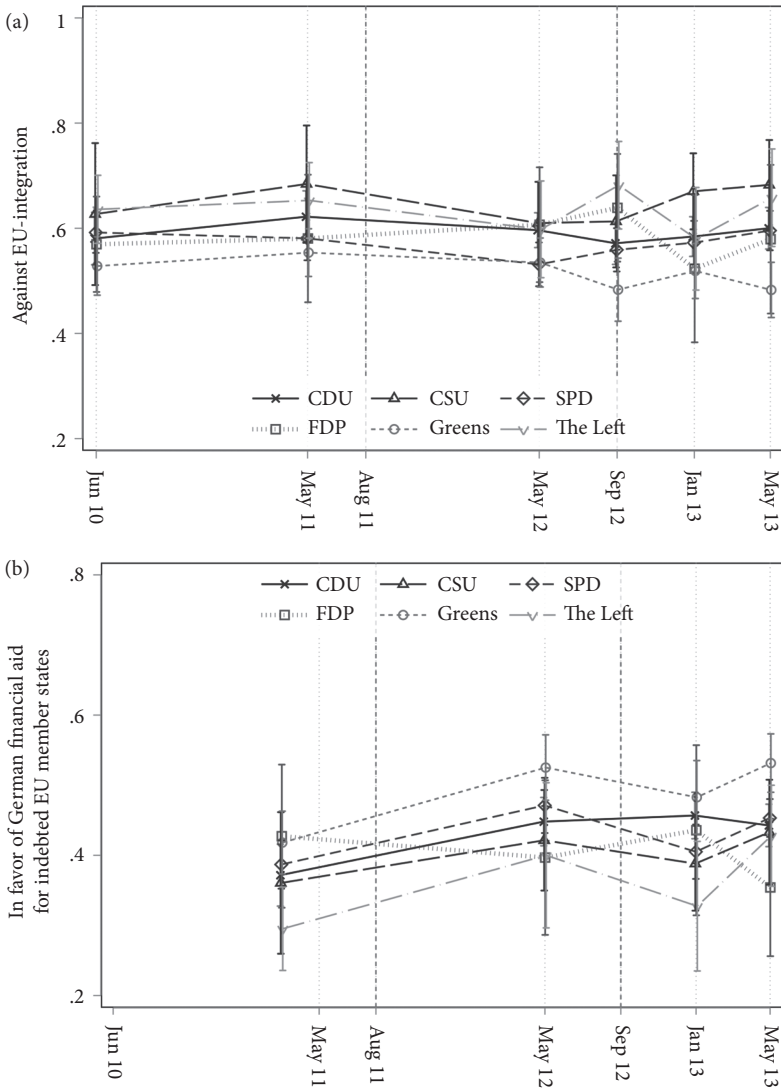
Fig. 5.1 Current party identifiers' mean positions toward the Euro rescue

Notes: The dashed vertical lines depict the beginning and the end of the most salient phase of the debt crisis; vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: Track09–17_Cum.

the aggregate stability conceals shifts among party identifiers, we separate the mean positions on European integration and German aid by respondents' party identification. In line with our expectations, the upper panel of Figure 5.1 shows that the changes in party identifiers' positions on European integration were minimal (less than 0.1 points on a scale from 0 to 1). The same holds for German

aid (bottom panel of Figure 5.1).[6] Replicating the analysis with panel data yields substantively identical results, with no significant changes in party supporters' positions on European integration and German aid (Online Appendix 4). In short, the aggregate stability does not conceal, but rather reflects, the stability of positions among the supporters of each party.

Comparing the support for European action among party identifiers yields two interesting observations. First, the average level of support does not differ markedly between adherents of different parties. Using support for German aid in the tracking surveys as an example, we see that identifiers of the Greens, who were most in favor of German aid, have an average position of 0.48. They are thus just slightly more supportive than adherents of the Left, who were least supportive and whose mean position is still 0.33. Second, considering that the Left opposed the Euro rescue due to the likely ramifications for recipient countries' welfare systems and that its adherents were the most skeptical toward European integration and German aid, the relative level of support among party identifiers could well reflect the political actions of their parties. Such an interpretation would suggest that identifiers aligned their positions with those of their party.

So far, we have explored the positions of current party identifiers. However, identifiers who felt that their party chose the wrong strategy during the debt crisis may have abandoned their party identifications. In that case, the positions of pre-crisis identifiers would differ from those of current identifiers, which we can test by comparing the positions of respondents who identified with a party in July 2009, well before the debt crisis, with the positions of respondents who identified with a party in the survey wave when their position was recorded (hereafter current identifiers). Table 5.1 illustrates that the average positions of pre-crisis identifiers do not appreciably differ from those of current identifiers, providing no indication for a recomposition of parties' support bases during the crisis.

To further test our argument, we compared the share of party identifiers who were for or against German aid over the course of the crisis. Figure 5.2 shows that, as expected, CDU, SPD, FDP, and Greens had more identifiers who supported German aid, whereas the majority of the adherents of the Left and the CSU opposed German aid. However, the trends for party identifiers who were for or against German aid diverge only minimally, if at all, during the debt crisis. The results remain stable when we use party approval ratings as the dependent variable (results not shown, see Online Appendix 5). Hence, the results do not support the notion that identifiers who were dissatisfied with their parties' approval of German aid relinquished their party attachments. In summary, the descriptive results on citizens' positions do not offer any indication that the debt crisis induced

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[6] The slightly larger changes among supporters of the Greens and the Left are still far from substantive and likely due to the smaller number of respondents who identify with these parties.

Table 5.1 Current and pre-crisis party identifiers' mean positions on European integration

| | August 2009 | | August 2013 | |
Party	Current	Pre-crisis	Current	Pre-crisis
CDU	0.552	0.537	0.601	0.598
CSU	0.581	0.641	0.594	0.653
SPD	0.552	0.565	0.562	0.560
FDP	0.516	0.473	0.505	0.449
Greens	0.431	0.444	0.510	0.504
The Left	0.625	0.581	0.593	0.616

Source: CampPanel13–17.
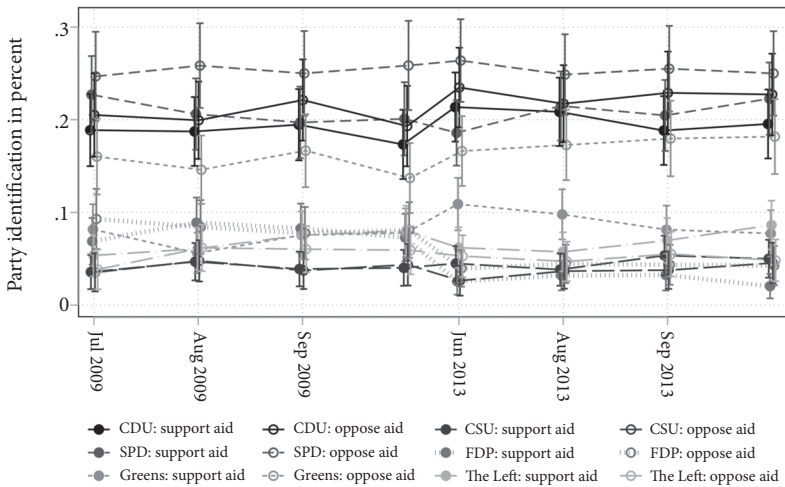
Fig. 5.2 Party identification among supporters and opponents of German financial aid for indebted EU member states

Notes: Filled dots denote effects for supporters of German financial aid for indebted EU member states, hollow dots denote effects for opponents of such aid; vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: CampPanel09–13.

identifiers to follow their parties or to reconsider their attachments based on their positions.

The finding that identifiers' positions did not affect their partisanship, or vice versa, could mean two things. Either identifiers' positions never came into conflict with the party line during the crisis, or their positions and attachments persisted despite a perceived dissonance between identifiers' and parties' stances. To determine which explanation applies to the debt crisis, we examine identifiers'

Table 5.2 Comparison of perceived party positions on German aid among all party identifiers, identifiers who are against, and identifiers who are for the Euro rescue

Party	August 2013			September 2013		
	All	Against	For	All	Against	For
CDU	0.711	0.648	0.781	0.722	0.695	0.752
CSU	0.611	0.544	0.694	0.648	0.583	0.708
SPD	0.652	0.615	0.685	0.622	0.588	0.671
FDP	0.611	0.591	0.625	0.587	0.583	0.589
Greens	0.535	0.427	0.608	0.556	0.487	0.590
The Left	0.423	0.325	0.539	0.303	0.226	0.489

Source: CampPanel13–17.

perceptions of their parties' positions over time. Table 5.2 illustrates that, in general, perceptions of parties' positions mirror parties' behavior during the debt crisis: whereas most parties cluster above the midpoint in support of German aid for indebted Eurozone states, the Left is perceived as holding a markedly more negative position toward the Euro rescue. A comparison of the positions of identifiers (Table 5.1) and their parties (Table 5.2) shows that the average stance of supporters of all parties is more negative toward German aid than the perceived party position, although the difference is marginal for supporters of the Left. This gap was to be expected as the internal opposition experienced by all parties but the Left should find expression in the mean positions of party supporters, but not in the perceptions of parties' positions, which are guided by parties' political actions.

What does this mean for identifiers who opposed their parties' reactions to the debt crisis? Did they ignore the rift between their own position and the party line? To answer this, we re-ran the analysis, separating the perceptions of identifiers who favored or opposed German aid. Table 5.2 reveals a consistent pattern in which supporters of the Euro rescue perceive parties as more inclined to help indebted Eurozone states, whereas opponents of the Euro rescue think of the same parties as more skeptical toward the Euro rescue. For instance, Left identifiers who favored German aid and whose position thus contradicted the official party line, considered the position of the Left as neutral (mean 0.52), whereas opponents of German aid perceived the Left to be squarely against German aid (mean 0.26). The same pattern is observable for the other parties, though the difference in perceptions is not always statistically significant. Over time, perceptions converge for CDU, CSU, FDP, and Green supporters, but the gap becomes significant for SPD and Left identifiers. These differences indicate that motivated reasoning occurred among party identifiers, albeit not quite as expected. Instead of bringing their attitudes in line with perceived party positions, identifiers adapted their perceptions

to reflect their own positions. Such misperceptions may have been fostered by the complex nature of the issue and the multitudinous intra-party fissures, which led to an equally complex coverage in the media that may have lent itself to, or even called for, interpretation.

Although the aggregate descriptive results provide no indication that identifiers followed their parties' positions or reconsidered their party attachments during the debt crisis, we analyzed intra-individual change in the panel data to be sure that these processes were not at work on the individual level. We first tested whether identifiers adopted the positions of their parties by regressing the distance between party identifiers' pre- and post-crisis positions on European integration on their pre-crisis party identification. Party identification did not explain intra-individual changes in attitudes toward European integration, thus offering no indication that party identifiers followed their parties' positions during the debt crisis (results not shown, see Online Appendix 6).

We then examined the possibility that identifiers reconsidered their party attachments when the party line contradicted their positions on an issue. Here, party attachment was the dependent variable to be explained by the weighted gap between identifiers' and their parties' positions toward the Euro rescue. Party attachment was measured with several indicators, including respondents' party identifications, the strength of their identification, their probability to abandon their party identification, and their probability to switch their allegiance to another party. In addition, we included respondents' party evaluations as a low-threshold indication of potential changes in party identifications. The results show that larger distances between identifiers' and parties' positions do not routinely undermine party attachments. However, the 15 percent of CDU supporters whose position on the Euro rescue is removed at least 0.5 points from the party position rate their party around 0.15 points poorer after the crisis. In this group, around 31 percent (confidence interval: 17–45 percent) abandon their party identification in the short term, and this share rises to 47 percent (confidence interval: 32–61 percent) in the long term. The 7 percent of Green identifiers with a distance of at least 0.5 to the Green position also evaluate their party around 0.21 points poorer in the long run (results not shown, see Online Appendix 7).

In conclusion, the results provide some evidence that party identifiers rated their parties less favorably or even abandoned their attachments because their positions contradicted their parties' political actions during the debt crisis, but these changes were mostly confined to supporters of the senior government party. This is in line with our expectation that effects might have been limited during the debt crisis because the crisis itself as well as the party positions pertaining to it were relatively hard to comprehend in comparison to, e.g., the European refugee crisis. Against this background, the position of the senior government party is most likely to have been perceived the clearest.

The European Refugee Crisis

To disentangle the impact of party attachments on identifiers' positions, and vice versa, during the European refugee crisis, we again examine citizens' and parties' positions over the relevant period. We then use regression analyses to capture changes on the individual level. A first look at citizens' average positions on immigration and integration (whether foreigners should assimilate) reveals that they were as steady during the refugee crisis as during the debt crisis. Neither the mean position on immigration nor the mean position on integration changed considerably between 2014 and 2017 (results not shown, see Online Appendix 8). Respondents thus consistently supported a slight tightening of immigration restrictions (mean value tracking surveys: 0.6, panel: 0.66) and extensive assimilation of foreigners to German culture (mean value tracking surveys: 0.33, panel: 0.32).

To test whether the aggregate stability conceals balanced shifts among party identifiers, we separated the mean positions on immigration by respondents' party identification. Figure 5.3 illustrates that, unlike before, the aggregate stability does conceal some changes. Among tracking respondents, both CSU and AfD identifiers shifted their positions 0.12 points toward stricter immigration policies[7], and the same trend is visible in the results of the panel analysis, in which AfD identifiers moved 0.14, and CSU supporters moved 0.13 points toward tighter immigration restrictions. At the same time, adherents of the CDU shifted 0.06 points toward more relaxed immigration policies during the refugee crisis. These shifts are more marked when we drop the observations from the "CDU/CSU" category, increasing to 0.18 for CSU supporters and doubling to 0.12 for CDU supporters. This contradicts the widely held belief that the CDU had become too liberal for its supporters. Moreover, whereas party identifiers' positions toward the Euro rescue were rather similar, the mean positions with regard to immigration vary much more. Half the scale divides the mean positions of Green identifiers (0.41), who were still only slightly in favor of relaxing immigration policies, and adherents of the AfD (0.91), who strongly advocated more restrictive immigration policies. In between, the AfD is followed by CSU (0.74), CDU, FDP (0.62), SPD (0.53), and the Left (0.47). Thus, the shifts of CDU, CSU, and AfD supporters and the relative positioning of party identifiers both mirror the parties' behavior during the refugee crisis. With regard to our research question, this seems to fit with identifiers following their parties, rather than prioritizing their positions over their party identity.

However, these changes occurred among current party identifiers; therefore, another plausible explanation for this finding could be that identifiers with attitudes

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[7] The somewhat larger fluctuations around the mean among identifiers of the FDP and the Left are most likely due to the smaller samples for these parties and do not mark a trend in one direction.

(a)

(b)
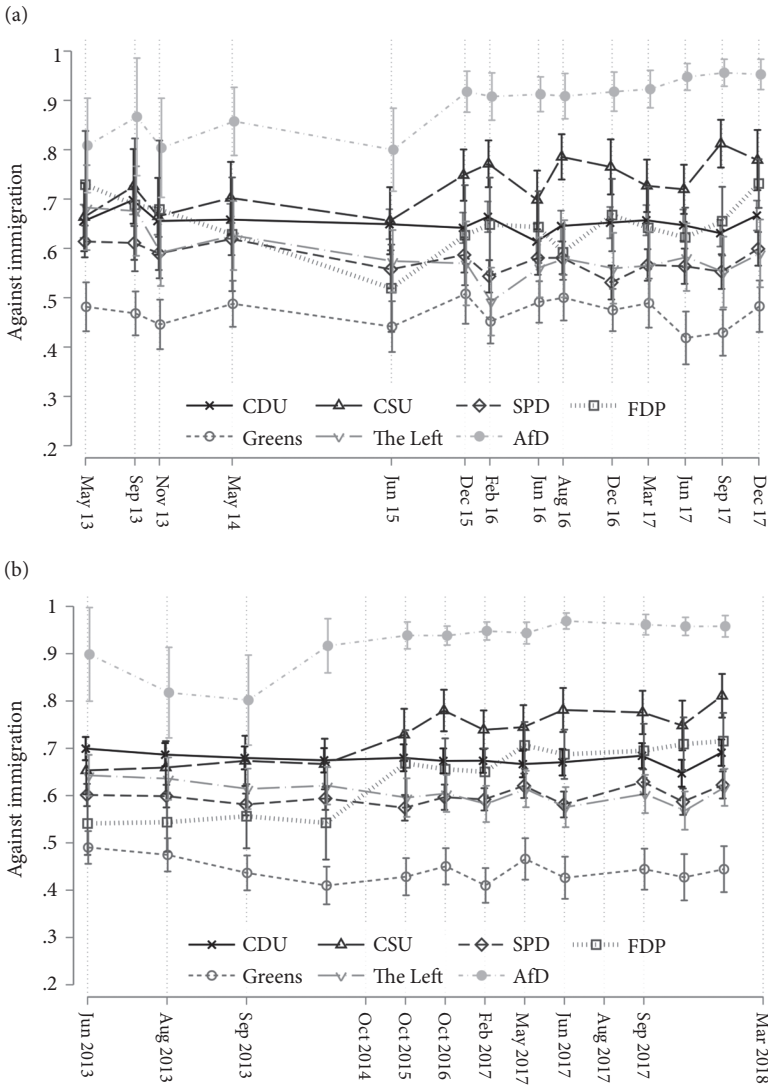
Fig. 5.3 Current party identifiers' mean positions on immigration

Note: Vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: (a) Track09–17_Cum (b) CampPanel13–17.

that were at odds with the party line abandoned their party identifications during the refugee crisis. In this case, the mean positions of party identifiers would mirror the changes in official party positions, because party supporters would have realigned according to their positions on immigration. We explore that possibility by tracing the immigration positions of panel respondents who were party
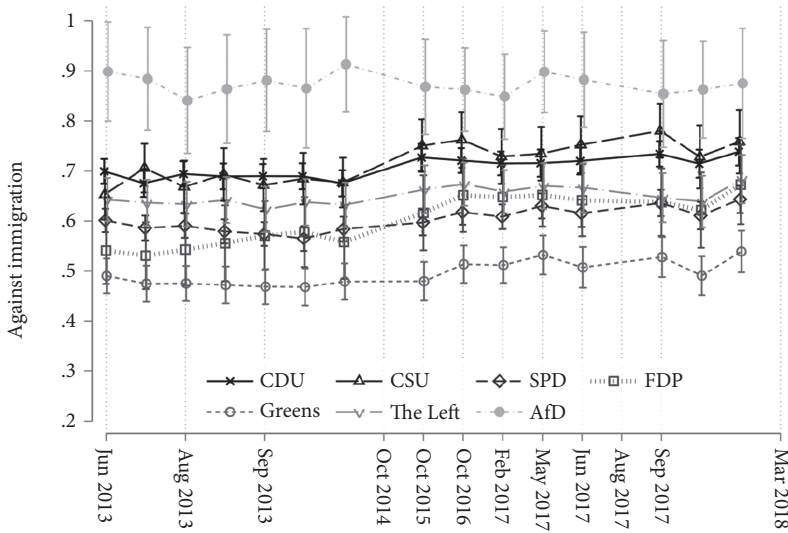
Fig. 5.4 Pre-crisis party identifiers' mean positions on immigration
Note: Vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.
Source: CampPanel13–17.

identifiers in June 2013 but may have abandoned or switched their identifica-
tion during the refugee crisis. The results in Figure 5.4 indeed contrast strongly
with the results for current party identifiers displayed in Figure 5.3(b). Respon-
dents who identified with the CSU before the crisis still moved around 0.13 points
toward more restrictive immigration policies, but neither pre-crisis identifiers of
the CDU nor those of the AfD substantially shifted their positions. Pre-crisis FDP
identifiers, on the other hand, moved 0.14 points toward more restrictive immigra-
tion policies. In short, the attitudes toward immigration among adherents of the
CDU, CSU, and AfD changed over time, reflecting shifts in their parties' policies.
However, these changes were not driven by pre-crisis identifiers changing their
positions on immigration, implying that the policy shifts during the refugee crisis
induced party identifiers to reconsider or even switch their attachments, leading
to a recomposition of these parties' support bases.

If this interpretation is correct, we should observe changes in the shares of party
identifiers with opposite pre-crisis positions on immigration during the refugee
crisis. Figure 5.5 contrasts the attachments of party adherents who favored either
a relaxation or a tightening of immigration restrictions during the refugee crisis.
This reveals that, while the slopes for the two groups are roughly parallel for CSU,
SPD, FDP, and Green identifiers, the trends change for supporters of the CDU,
the Left, and AfD. Among AfD adherents, the number of immigration opponents
increased much faster than the number of immigration supporters, whereas the
reverse is true to a lesser degree for identifiers of the Left. Among CDU identifiers,

(a)

(b)
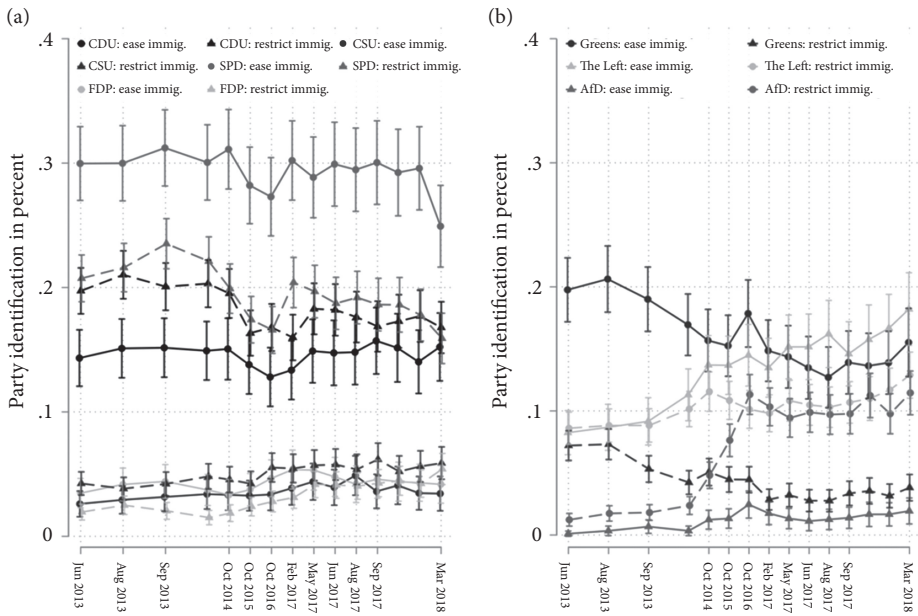
Fig. 5.5 Party identification among supporters and opponents of immigration
Note: Vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.
Source: CampPanel13–17.

immigration supporters became as prevalent as immigration opponents during the crisis. If we only analyze self-reported CDU identifiers, excluding respondents who chose the option "CDU/CSU," immigration supporters even overtook the majority position previously held by opponents. These diverging trends as well as the differences in the development of immigration positions among current and pre-crisis identifiers point to identifiers following the position of the CSU, but changing their attachments toward CDU, AfD, and possibly the Left to reflect their positions on immigration.

Our theoretical considerations posit that identifiers' perceptions of their parties' stances on specific issues are an important link between identifiers' positions and their party attachments. To better understand how supporters' perceptions may have influenced their positions and attachments, we explore how these perceptions changed over the course of the refugee crisis. Figure 5.6 shows that party identifiers' average perceptions parallel the shifts in the positions of current identifiers (see Figure 5.3).[8] In the eyes of their supporters, the CDU and the Left moved 0.16 and 0.15 points respectively toward relaxing immigration policies, whereas the CSU moved 0.13 points in the opposite direction and the AfD shifted 0.19 points

[8] Because the positions of CDU/CSU were queried jointly and the position of the AfD was not asked at all before 2017 in the campaign panel 2013–2017, Figure 5.6 draws on data from the tracking surveys.
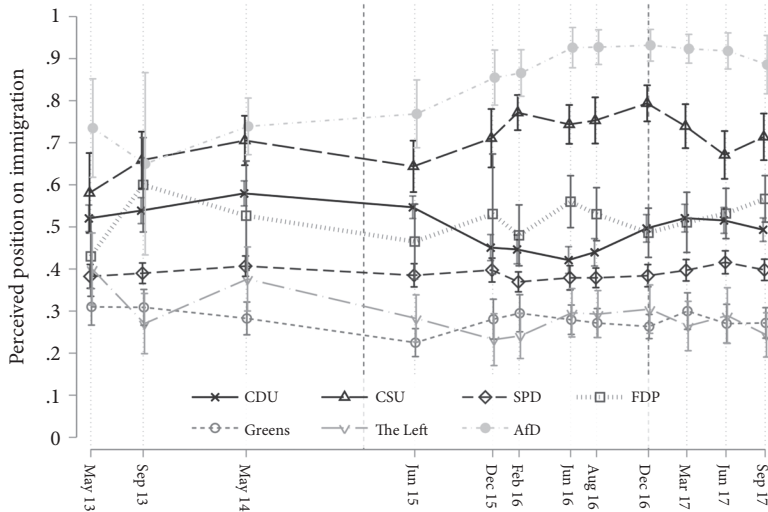
Fig. 5.6 Perceived party positions on immigration among party identifiers

Note: The dashed vertical lines depict the beginning and the end of the most salient phase of the debt crisis; vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: Track09-17_Cum.

toward restricting immigration. In other words, identifiers did perceive changes in the behavior of their parties during the refugee crisis, satisfying the theoretical condition for parties' policy shifts to affect party attachments. Hence, the results strengthen our interpretation of the previous findings as issue-based changes of party identifications.

Do we see the same patterns of party-cued and issue-based position changes on the individual level? To further corroborate that the refugee crisis induced some party identifiers to adopt their parties' positions while prompting others to reconsider their party attachments, we analyze intra-individual changes over time using panel data. In these analyses, we distinguish long-term from short-term dynamics, comparing changes from shortly before to shortly after the crisis (June 2014–Oct 2016) with changes from long before to long after the crisis (June 2013–Sep 2017).

To determine whether identifiers followed their parties' positions during the refugee crisis, we explore in a bivariate regression analysis how well the pre-crisis identifications of party supporters explain the shifts in their immigration attitudes. As the upper panel of Figure 5.7 illustrates, party identification explains the long-term changes in the immigration positions of CSU and FDP supporters but not the positions of other parties' identifiers. To assess more directly the proposed mechanism, namely that identifiers perceive a change in their parties' positions and move their own position accordingly, we repeat the analysis using changes in the perceived party positions from before to after the crisis as our independent variable. We find that changes in the perceived positions of their parties induced

(a)

Effect of party identification on respondents' positions

(b)

Effect of perceived changes in party position on respondents' positions
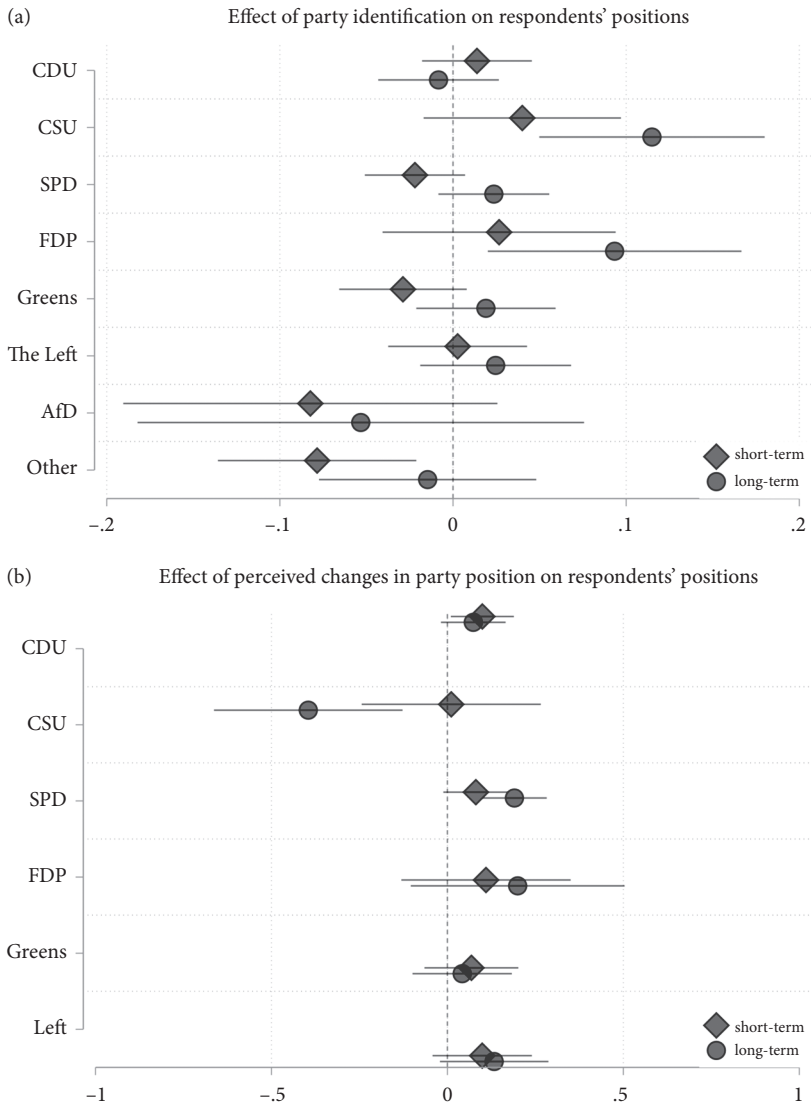
Fig. 5.7 Identifiers following their parties during the refugee crisis

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients of bivariate linear regression analyses; horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals; "short-term" refers to changes occurring between the last pre-crisis wave and the first post-crisis wave, "long-term" refers to changes occurring between the first wave of a cumulated panel and the post-election wave of the next campaign.

Source: CampPanel13–17.

CDU and SPD supporters to shift their own positions slightly in the same direction (bottom panel of Figure 5.7). For CDU identifiers, these shifts manifest during the crisis but do not last. SPD supporters seem to have reacted only after the crisis, but

shifts in their positions can be observed two years later. Curiously, the relation between a perceived change in the CSU position on immigration and the positions of CSU supporters is negative, that is CSU identifiers seem to become more positive toward immigration as the CSU shifts toward a more restrictive stance. Hence, we see some evidence that party identifiers adopted their parties' positions during the refugee crisis.

To test whether party identifiers whose positions were at odds with the party line reconsidered their party attachments, we again switch dependent and independent variables, regressing identifiers' party attachments on increases in the absolute distance between identifiers' and parties' immigration positions from before to after the crisis. In addition to a party's rating by its identifiers, identification strength, and the probability to give up or switch their attachment to another party, we also used the probability to vote for another party in 2017 as an indicator for weakening party attachments. Because the CDU was the only party to substantially shift its position during the refugee crisis, we first explore how this shift influenced CDU identifiers' attitudes and attachments. As Figure 5.8 shows, the 10 percent of the CDU identifiers for whom the distance between their position and the party line increased by at least 0.5 points on a scale from −1 to 1 tended to evaluate their own party less favorably, with ratings dropping by around 0.12 points in the short
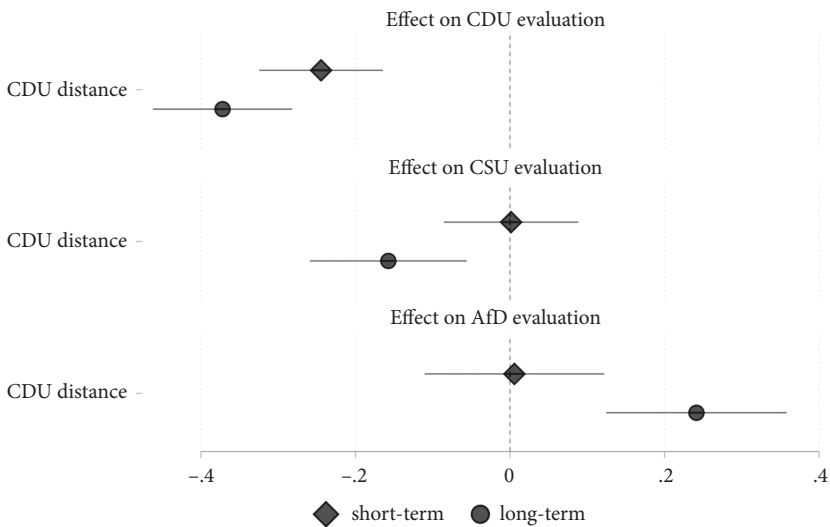
Fig. 5.8 Effect of increasing distance between CDU identifiers' and the CDU's position on immigration on party evaluations from before to after the crisis

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients of bivariate linear regression analyses; horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: CampPanel13–17.

term and 0.19 points in the long term. This group did not rate the CSU[9] better or rethink the strength of their attachment but evaluated the AfD around 0.12 points more positively in the long run and was around twice as likely to vote for the AfD in 2017. These identifiers even had a 13 percent higher chance to abandon their partisanship right after the crisis and a 21 percent higher chance to do so in the long term (see Online Appendix 9 for the full analysis).

Although CDU identifiers were the most likely candidates for issue-based changes in party attachments, the refugee crisis may also have affected supporters of pro-immigration parties, as their parties' immigration preferences became more salient. Around 6 percent of the SPD identifiers, 8 percent of the Green identifiers, and 10 percent of the Left identifiers experienced an increase of at least 0.5 points in the absolute distance between their positions and the party line from before to after the crisis. As Figure 5.9 shows, the affected SPD supporters rated their party 0.06 points more negatively right after the crisis and 0.11 points more
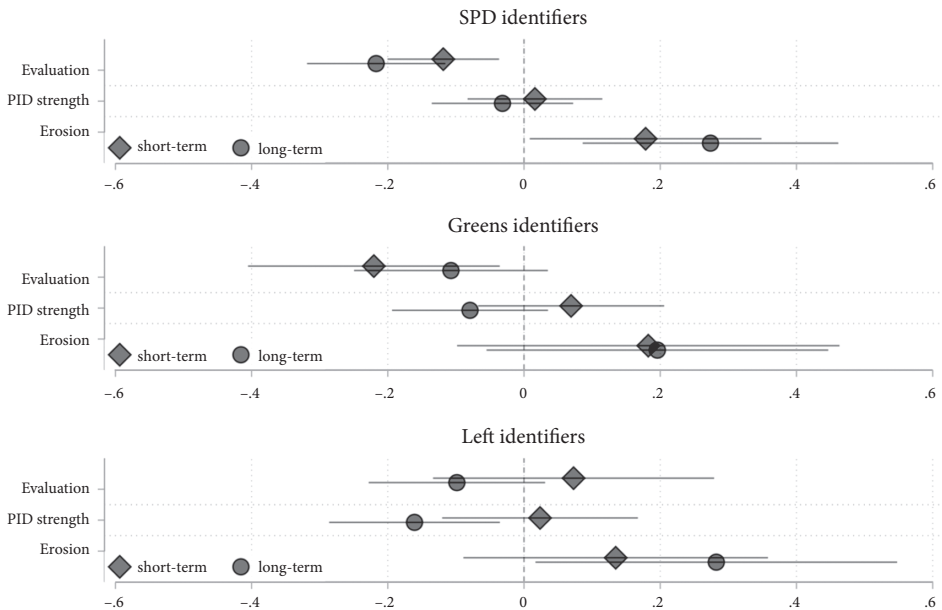
Fig. 5.9 Effect of increasing distance between party identifiers' own and the respective party's position on immigration on party attachments from before to after the crisis

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients of bivariate linear regression analyses (evaluation, PID strength) and average marginal effects from a logistic regression analysis (erosion); horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: CampPanel13–17.

[9] The negative coefficient for the CSU likely stems from the fact that immigration positions were queried jointly for the CDU and the CSU before the crisis.

negatively in the long term. Moreover, they had a higher probability to abandon their attachment in both time frames. A larger absolute distance also decreased the party evaluations of affected Green identifiers by 0.11 points, reduced identification strength for affected Left supporters by 0.08 points, and doubled the latter's odds to abandon their party identification in the long run. In other words, although the CDU was the only party to reverse its course on immigration during the refugee crisis, supporters of the SPD, the Greens, and the Left likewise reconsidered their party attachments when the refugee crisis revealed that their parties' position was farther from their own than anticipated.

In the last step, we repeated the analyses above using identifiers' pre-crisis positions on immigration to explain changes in their party attachments. The observed effects confirm the findings we obtained using the absolute distance between identifiers' and parties' positions as the independent variable and are even slightly stronger. Analyzing the impact of CDU supporters' pre-crisis migration attitudes on their party evaluations, we find that the 15 percent of CDU identifiers with very strong anti-immigration positions tended to rate their party 0.14 points less favorably right after the refugee crisis and 0.22 points less favorably in the long term (Figure 5.10). Interestingly, this group evaluates the CSU 0.15 points more favorably right after the crisis, whereas assessments of the AfD improve 0.25 points but only in the long run. CDU supporters who strongly opposed immigration were
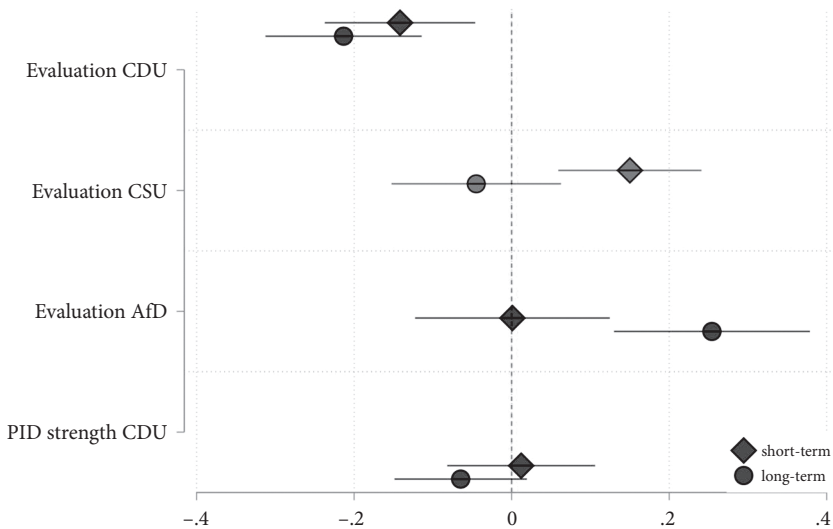
Fig. 5.10 Effect of identifiers' pre-crisis anti-immigration attitude on party evaluations from before to after the crisis

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients of bivariate linear regression analyses; horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: CampPanel13–17.
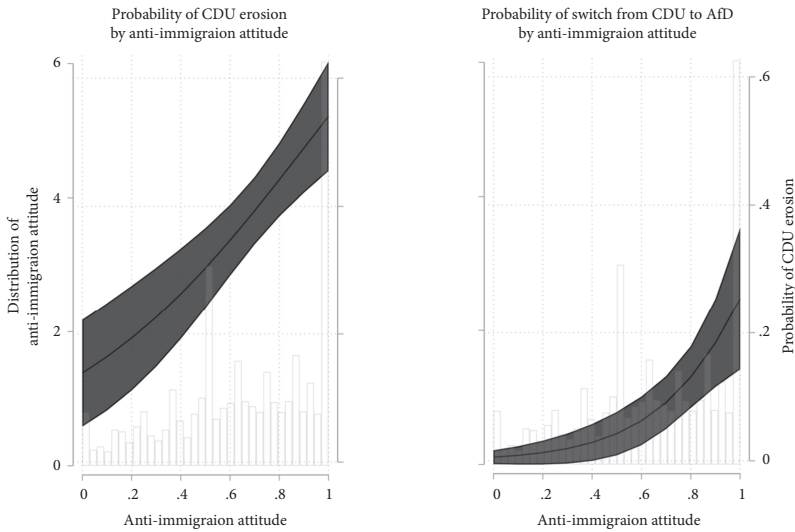
Fig. 5.11 Effect of identifiers' pre-crisis anti-immigration attitude on de- and realignment

Notes: Reported are predicted probabilities at different levels of anti-immigration attitudes; horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. The histogram shows the distribution of anti-immigration attitudes

Source: CampPanel13–17.

also 4.6 times as likely to defect at the ballot box and 5.2 times as likely to vote for the AfD in 2017 (results not shown, see Online Appendix 10). Moreover, effects extended to party identifications. Almost one out of two (44.9 percent, confidence interval: 25.9–63.8 percent) CDU supporters with very strong anti-immigration positions gave up their party identification in the long run, with around 37 percent (confidence interval: 15.9–57.2 percent) switching their identification to the AfD (Figure 5.11). Importantly, these effects are not moderated by identification strength, which means that even strong partisans were affected. In summary, the results add to the evidence that party attachments among CDU identifiers who opposed the relatively open immigration policy of Chancellor Merkel weakened or even eroded during the refugee crisis.

Using pre-crisis anti-immigration positions to explain changes in vote choice, party evaluations, and identifications of the adherents of pro-immigration parties, we find that supporters of the SPD, the Greens, and the Left, who strongly opposed immigration before the refugee crisis, all lowered their post-crisis approval of their party, at least in the long term (Figure 5.12). This is the case for around 11 percent of SPD supporters, 5 percent of Green identifiers, and 16 percent of Left adherents, all of which also had higher odds to abandon their party attachments or switch to another party. In addition, a third of the affected Left adherents (33 percent,
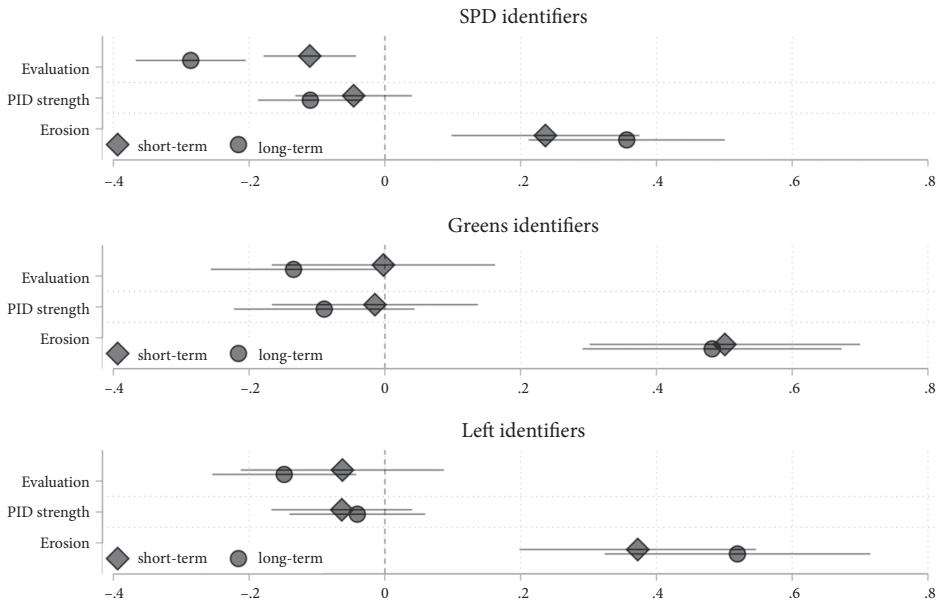
Fig. 5.12 Effect of identifiers' pre-crisis anti-immigration attitude on their party attachments

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients of bivariate linear regression analyses; horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Source: CampPanel13–17.

confidence interval: 18–49 percent) defected at the ballot box in 2017. When it comes to party identification, affected SPD identifiers felt 0.1 points less attached to their party after the refugee crisis. These findings support our conclusion that the issue-based changes in party attachments induced by the refugee crisis did not only affect CDU supporters but also adherents of the SPD, the Greens, and the Left.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the European debt and refugee crises have confronted European democracies with severe challenges that had the potential to stabilize or undermine party identifications in the electorate. Our results suggest that the debt crisis and, even more so, the refugee crisis uncovered discrepancies between identifiers' and parties' positions toward important issues and prompted identifiers to resolve this dissonance in different ways. While there is no evidence that party identifiers ignored such inconsistencies outright, supporters did readily interpret their parties' positions as matching their own during the debt crisis, when

equivocal party messages allowed them to project their own positions on their parties. Supporters thus mostly eluded the choice to adapt their positions to their attachments or vice versa.

That was not the case during the refugee crisis when shifts in party positions were perceived quite clearly, inducing adherents without strong policy positions to adopt the party line. Only the attachments of identifiers who held strong positions on the issues weakened or eroded. Thus, party identification had a stabilizing effect for supporters whose positions were less distant from the party line. However, particularly strong positions on immigration undermined party identifications to the point of supporters switching their allegiances, mostly to the AfD. Interestingly, the strength of party identifications, unlike the vehemence of policy positions, does not appear to have moderated these effects.

From a party system perspective, our findings suggest that crises foster weakening attachments as well as de- and even realignment among party identifiers who have strong policy convictions. In the German case, for instance, each crisis induced more than 5 percent of the CDU identifiers to abandon their attachment in the long term, which results in a substantial cumulative decrease. Hence, salient societal challenges have the potential to induce substantial shifts in the balance of party systems. The changes in and the erosion of party attachments appear to have been driven by two crises, which made policy attitudes salient. Broadly speaking, these policy attitudes refer to questions of national sovereignty, demarcation, international cooperation, and openness (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2008; see also Chapter 10). Accordingly, our findings may be read as demonstrating two (event-specific) steps in a process of issue-based de- and realignment that made the conflict revolving around openness and demarcation (see, e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2018) more prominent in German electoral politics.

PART III
CHALLENGED VOTERS

6

A New Player in the Game: Changing Electoral Competition in Germany

Aiko Wagner and Josephine Lichteblau

Introduction

As laid out in Chapter 1, concurrently with the establishment of the AfD since 2013, the German party system changed dramatically: at the 2017 election, polarization increased and volatility levels, as well as fragmentation, reached all-time German records. Against this background, this chapter asks how the inter-party electoral competition in Germany changed from 2013 to 2017. Considering that previous research has discussed whether there are still two distinct party systems in East and West Germany (e.g., Arzheimer and Schoen 2007; Arzheimer 2016; Abedi 2017), we will investigate such changes in electoral competition in both regions. Following Sartori, who defines a party system as "the *system of interactions* resulting from inter-party competition" (1976: 39, italics in original), we focus on the content-related properties of the German party systems. More specifically, we first investigate the extent of inter-party electoral competition in terms of overlapping electoral support of party pairs. Second, we study how the establishment and development of the AfD changed the substantial dimensions underlying this electoral competition in East and West Germany. In other words, we examine the changing structure of inter-party electoral competition, thereby providing answers to three questions: First, which dimensions were relevant for inter-party electoral competition in East and West Germany? Did, e.g., parties with similar socio-economic platforms compete for the same voters? Second, how did the structure of electoral competition change between 2013 and 2017? Was the new divide between populist and non-populist parties more important than the established policy issues? Third, are regional differences (still) visible? Or, alternatively, are the structures of electoral competition the same in East and West Germany?

We argue that temporal differences of inter-party electoral competition are mainly the result of the changing relevance of the socio-economic and socio-cultural policy issue dimensions and the newly emerged populist–pluralist

divide to (the structure of) electoral competition in East and West Germany (associational effects). Regional differences, however, are mainly the result of different voter preferences and party positions (compositional effects). Instead of focusing on manifest voting behavior, our study looks below the surface by analyzing the more nuanced, non-ipsative electoral preferences. Building on previous work on electoral competition, we apply a measure for the availability of a party's supporter for other parties. As this measure depicts the degree to which parties compete for the supporters of a specific rival, we are able to investigate inter-party electoral competition and its development from 2013 to 2017 on the individual level and in a very direct manner.

In the following section, we will discuss the concept and the nature of party competition, its relevant dimensions, regional variations, and development between 2013 and 2017 in Germany. Afterward, we will present our measurement of inter-party competition based on the individual availability of votes for different parties and our statistical approach, which includes a complex, cross-classified multi-level setting with measures on both the party and the individual level. After having presented the results on the structure of electoral competition for East and West Germany in 2013 and 2017, we will discuss the central question of the changing structure of electoral competition in Germany due to the rise of the AfD and its implications.

Analyzing Party Systems: Two Approaches

In general, there are two approaches to analyzing party systems. Building on election results, the first approach focuses on structural characteristics of party systems, the most prominent of which being the number of parties constituting the system, the fragmentation of the party system, and/or—for systems with two major parties—the dominance and size ratio (Niedermayer 2018: 98). The second approach focuses on the content-related properties (Niedermayer 2018: 99–100). This strand of research views the dimensions of political competition and the underlying cleavage structures as the primary characteristics of party systems. Taking the (effective) number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), the underlying cleavages and issue dimensions, and the relative positioning of the relevant parties on these issues—i.e., the polarization—together, one can define a party system as "the *system of interactions* resulting from inter-party competition" (Sartori 1976: 39; italics in original; for a similar conceptualization see Duverger 1954). When analyzing party systems in the Sartorian sense, one should focus on the level of individual votes, as they are the aim of party competition. Following the reasoning of Bartolini (1999, 2000), we therefore consider the availability of voters to lie at the center of electoral competition. Availability refers to the openness of a party's supporter for other parties. If a citizen is determined

to vote only for one party, he/she is beyond competition. If, on the other hand, a party's supporter regards another party as an attractive alternative, the two parties compete for this person's vote. In the latter case, the second party is understood to be a threat to the first party, as it competes for the first party's electoral base. Consequently, to analyze party systems through the lens of electoral competition, we must look at the level of relative party preferences of the different parties within the two regional party systems in Germany. This approach has been explicated by van der Eijk and Niemöller (1983) for the Netherlands and by Wagner (2017) for the European electorates (for a conceptual discussion see Tillie 1995). With this perspective on electoral competition, we can investigate the content-related or substantial properties of the party systems in Germany, because the electoral competition in terms of supporters' availability is related to the relative positions of parties and voters in an n-dimensional competition space.

The German Party Systems in the East and West since the Founding of the AfD

With regard to Germany, scholars largely agree that there are still two party systems: even nearly three decades after unification, the party system in the East seems to be different from the party system in the West. All studies dealing with that topic base this conclusion on the differences in parties' election results in the two regions, thus following the structural approach to analyzing party systems (cf. Kießling 1999; Arzheimer and Falter 2005; Dalton and Jou 2010; Arzheimer 2016; Abedi 2017). As mentioned above, the electoral support for the political parties varies notably between East and West Germany. For a long time, the differences between East and West were attributed primarily to the differing strength of the Left: While it was a major party in the East, the Left hardly played a role in West German elections. However, this situation changed with the 2017 election (see Chapter 1). With the success of the AfD, there are now two parties that are particularly strong in East Germany and significantly weaker in West Germany (cf. Arzheimer 2016). This strength of the Left and the AfD in the East is accompanied by comparatively weak results for the *Volksparteien* (catch-all parties) CDU/CSU and SPD, the Greens, and the FDP (Wagner 2019).

How do these structural differences—East vs. West and 2013 vs. 2017—occur? On a conceptual level, differences can come about in two ways and, therefore, two types of effects can theoretically be responsible for the diverging electoral support for the parties (see also Chapter 2 for the related distinction between "compositional change" and "linkage change" in the development of traditional cleavage-voting). First, there might be compositional differences, i.e., the distribution of characteristics and preferences relevant for vote choice might vary

between different (regional or temporal) electorates. On that account, the election outcomes would be the result of compositional effects. Second, the structure of competition might differ between 2013 and 2017 and between the East and West German electorates. This argument builds on the simple fact that voters don't necessarily follow the same logic when making up their minds about which party to vote for. Research on voter heterogeneity shows that different citizens apply different decision-making strategies. This relates to the varying issue importance as well: while some people might stress economic policy issues, others might base their party preference more strongly on foreign policy or issues of internal security. As a result, voters with identical policy preferences might prefer different parties (Rivers 1988; Bartle 2005; Blumenstiel and Plischke 2015). In other words, whereas people might have similar preferences on several political issues, the relative importance of these issues can vary between them. We refer to this second type of differences—differences in strength and/or direction of associations between individual attitudes and party preferences—as associational differences.

While most of the literature does not (explicitly) distinguish between the two types of possible differences between the electorates, it is predominantly compositional differences that are investigated and used to explain the East–West divide regarding the political parties' vote shares: there are more socially and economically disadvantaged people in the East, (consequently) more people with leftist attitudes with regard to socio-economic issues, stronger feelings of inequality and social injustice, and more conservative attitudes concerning socio-cultural issues (Kießling 1999; Arzheimer and Klein 2000; Arzheimer and Falter 2005; Arzheimer 2013; Arnold et al. 2015; Abedi 2017; Faus and Storks 2019). Furthermore, East Germans are found to have weaker party attachments (cf. Chapter 1), which also contributes to the differences in elections results, as political issues and short-term campaign dynamics play a more important role in vote choice in the East (Dalton and Jou 2010). Arzheimer (2016) is the only study that explicitly distinguishes between compositional and associational differences between East and West German citizens and investigates both for the 2009 federal elections on the level of individual voters. However, he also concludes that the East–West differences in vote choice stemmed from compositional differences only since all political attitudes and evaluations exerted similar effects on vote choice among East and West German voters.[1]

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[1] One exception to this dominance of findings of compositional differences is the study by Arzheimer and Schoen (2007). They analyze the impact of traditional cleavage voting in East and West Germany separately for four federal elections and differentiate the socio-economic (mainly working class and union membership) and the religious cleavage (church membership and church attendance). Whereas the socio-economic cleavage is only relevant in the West, the religious cleavage works in both regions: while church attendance is positively related to voting for the CDU/CSU in West Germany, it is negatively related to voting for the Left (or its predecessor Party of Democratic Socialism—PDS) in the East.

Changing Structures? The Dimensionality of the German Party System(s) 2013 and 2017

As regards differences between German federal elections, however, in-depth studies of the determinants of party preferences have shown that different factors played a role in the elections (besides long-term stable effects like those of party identification; see Rattinger et al. 2011; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2014; Bieber and Roßteutscher 2019). In 2013, relevant topics were the Euro crisis and the Greek government debt crisis (cf. Steinbrecher 2014: 239). In 2017, on the other hand, the campaign was mostly influenced by the debate about immigration, integration, and the so-called refugee crisis (cf. Bieber and Roßteutscher 2019: 15)—topics that shifted party preferences considerably (cf. Mader and Schoen 2019). Comparing 2013 and 2017, different issues thus gained importance—socio-economic issues in 2013 and socio-cultural issues in 2017—and the difference between both elections seems to be associational in nature (cf. Chapter 4 where it is also shown how perceived issue saliency moderates the effect of issue congruence between parties and voters on vote choice). As outlined above, most prior studies found structural differences between the party systems in the East and the West. The main causes of these differences in party strengths have been found to be compositional differences. What is missing in previous research on party system differences between East and West Germany and between different federal elections, though, is an explicit focus on the systemic character of party systems in terms of content-related interactions between parties in competition. Hence, we follow this Sartorian approach by analyzing this very system of interactions of inter-party competition from an electoral perspective.

What substantial dimensions structure the competitive space in Germany and in what respect did its structure change with the emergence of the AfD? Kitschelt and McGann (1995), among others, propose that a fitting description of the competitive space in Western democracies is a two-dimensionality that distinguishes the socio-economic and the orthogonal socio-cultural dimension (cf. Chapter 1). In this approach, parties closer to each other are thought to compete for the same voters. Recently, Norris and Inglehart argued that party competition might even be three-dimensional: "There is also the emerging Populist–Pluralist cleavage dividing parties over the location of legitimate authority in governance" (2019: 65). On this dimension, which is independent of both the socio-economic and the socio-cultural dimension, populist parties are challenging mainstream pluralists. Norris and Inglehart understand populism as a "political ideology of governance, which is about legitimate authority not substantive policy programs" (2019: 68). Consequently, parties compete on two policy issue dimensions and a third, independent dimension regarding a populist vs. a pluralist vision of society. While this is not the place to discuss the different conceptualizations of populism applied in empirical research, one cannot but notice that electoral research in Germany acknowledges

this multi-dimensionality of competition and analyzes the electoral success of, e.g., the AfD by combining socio-economic, socio-cultural, *and* populist motives of party choice (Steiner and Landwehr 2018).

Furthermore, with the success of the AfD in the 2017 election, the German party system(s) changed not only in terms of structural features (e.g., higher fragmentation; cf. Chapter 1) but also in terms of substantial features. With its extreme positions and strong emphasis on matters of European integration and—most importantly—immigration, integration, and multi-culturalism (see Berbuir et al. 2015), the socio-cultural dimension of political competition has become more polarized and salient (cf. Chapter 4). Moreover, the AfD constitutes not only a radical right but also a populist party. Applying a concept of populism linked to the "ideational approach," originally formulated by Mudde (2004, 2007), Lewandowsky et al. (2016) found that the AfD was substantively and significantly more populist than the other main parties in Germany. Consequently, populist attitudes substantively explain electoral support for the AfD (Steiner and Landwehr 2018). At the same time, citizens with stronger populist attitudes are less likely to vote for non-populist parties, especially for the CDU/CSU and the Greens (Giebler and Wagner 2019). Based on these findings on the relevance of populism, we ask for the German case whether the populism–pluralism divide indeed constitutes a separate, new dimension of electoral competition, as proposed by Norris and Inglehart (2019). Our empirical tests will provide an answer to this question, too.

Analyzing the Structure of Electoral Competition in Germany

As argued above, to analyze electoral competition, it is insufficient to focus only on election results and underlying differences in political attitudes since this perspective does not tell us anything about the *structure* of competition in a given party system. Instead, we need to apply the perspective on electoral competition between parties put forward by Tillie (1995) and others. Furthermore, we argued not only that differing attitudes can theoretically explain differences concerning the strengths of the parties in both elections but also that the relevance of the substantial dimensions underlying electoral competition can differ too. As would seem natural, the source of this voter heterogeneity in our case could be the difference between 2013 and 2017 on the one hand and the East–West difference on the other hand. However, considering the findings of the literature on East and West differences discussed above, we assume that the structure of competition is similar in both regions. The differences between the regional party systems are, then, merely compositional in nature and to a lesser extent the result of an associational difference. The structure of competition would thus be the same in the East and the West, and only the distribution of preferences would account for the different patterns of electoral competition and the different party systems. With regard

to temporal changes, studies found that the relevance of different issues changes over time and is mainly responsible for temporal changes in the relative strengths of parties. Our general assumption is therefore that there is more temporal than regional variation in the structure of inter-party electoral competition in Germany. Here, associational differences mainly account for varying electoral competition over time (and not so much for regional differences).

Building on the literature on relative issue importance in different elections and for different parties (cf., e.g., Lachat and Wagner 2018), we can develop more specific expectations with regard to temporal changes of the structure of electoral competition. When should we assume certain dimensions of competition to be of more relevance? First, a plurality of parties is found to increase the differentiation of the political offer. Such parliamentary fragmentation makes individual choices more meaningful (Weßels and Schmitt 2008), which in turn strengthens issue voting (and reduces the impact of party identification and other heuristics, see Lachat 2011). As the fragmentation of the German parliament increased in 2017, this would imply that policy issue dimensions were more important for inter-party electoral competition in 2017 than in 2013. Second, the relevance of issues and other factors of party preferences varies over time and between citizens. Saliency theory (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996) argues that competition consists mainly of parties emphasizing particular policies or concerns. Furthermore, comparative studies found issue saliency to be positively linked to polarization (Alvarez and Nagler 2004; Lachat 2008) as the perceived importance of an issue increases with the ideological differences among the parties in competition (Nicolet and Sciarini 2006; Lachat 2011). Therefore, the more salient and polarized an issue is, the more relevant it is for explaining inter-party electoral competition. With regard to varying issue saliencies, we mentioned above that the 2013 and the 2017 election campaigns saw different problems pressing and, hence, different issues became salient: whereas the issues of the 2013 campaign were more strongly related to the socio-economic dimension, in 2017 the campaign focus was predominantly on socio-cultural issue of immigration (cf. Chapters 1 and 5). Furthermore, existing research has shown that, due to the establishment of the AfD, the German party system became more polarized in 2017, especially with regard to the socio-cultural and populist–pluralist dimensions (Kriesi 2018). It thus seems natural to assume that electoral competition was strongly dependent on socio-economic issues in 2013, whereas it was dominated by socio-cultural issues in 2017. As mentioned above, the populist nature of this newcomer became a more and more important topic in German politics, especially since the success of the AfD in European and regional elections after the 2013 Bundestag election. Consequently, one would expect populism to play a more important role in 2017. Taken together, our objective thus is, first, to describe electoral competition in East and West Germany in 2013 and 2017—which parties competed for the same voters? Second, we want to investigate whether this electoral competition has a

three-dimensional structure, with two policy dimensions—a socio-economic and a socio-cultural one—and a separate populism–pluralism divide. Third, we will clarify whether this structure of competition is the same in East and West and whether it changed between 2013 and 2017.

Data and Operationalization

For our analyses, we combine data from the post-election cross-section and candidate surveys of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) 2013 (CrossSec13_Post, CandSurv13_Plus) and 2017 (CrossSec17_Post, CandSurv17). Our dependent variable is the individual availability of a parties' supporter for another party. It is based on a survey item called propensities to vote (PTV), derived from the 2013 and 2017 GLES post-election cross-section data sets. Respondents were asked about their individual probability to ever vote for the six biggest and most relevant political parties (CDU/CSU[2], SPD, Greens, the Left, FDP, and AfD)[3] on an eleven-point scale ranging from 1 = "not at all probable" to 11 = "very probable." Going back to van der Eijk and Niemöller (1983), PTVs are an established, non-ipsative tool in electoral research to measure party preferences, and, based on that, parties' voter potentials. Furthermore—and more important in our context—Tillie (1995: 81ff.) convincingly demonstrates that and how individual PTV responses can be used to calculate the degree to which two parties' voter potentials overlap on the aggregate level. Thus, PTV survey items enable us to develop a direct measure of inter-party electoral competition on a party pair level and, therefore, to analyze party systems according to Sartori's notion of systems of interactions between parties.

Building on Wagner's (2017) attempt to develop a measure for the individual availability to all parties of a given system, we calculate the availability of each potential voter of a given party (A) for another party (B) as

$$Availability_{AB} = \begin{cases} 1 - \left(\sqrt{PTV_A} - \sqrt{PTV_B}\right), PTV_B \neq 0 \\ 0, PTV_B = 0 \end{cases},$$

where PTV_A is the PTV score[4] for party A and PTV_B is the PTV score for party B. The availability of a specific potential voter of party A for party B depicts the degree

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[2] Due to the special relationship of the CDU and CSU, with the latter only competing in Bavaria and the former not competing there, and because the two parties form a single faction in the federal parliament, we follow common practice and treat them as a single party. Consequently, we replaced the Bavarian respondents' PTV responses for the CDU with their responses for the CSU.

[3] In the 2013 post-election survey, respondents were also asked to evaluate the probability that they ever vote for the Pirate Party of Germany. However, as the Pirate Party was of no relevance to political competition already in 2013 and had completely vanished from the electoral arena by the time of the 2017 election, we did not include it in our analyses.

[4] We recoded the original PTVs to 0–1, with 0 = "not at all probable" and 1 = "very probable."

to which party B competes with party A for that specific person. At the same time, it depicts the degree to which party A is threatened by party B with regard to that potential voter. Our units of analysis are therefore combinations of respondents and party pairs. A respondent is considered a potential voter of party A if his/her PTV score for party A is (a) the highest score of all parties and (b) above the mid-point of the PTV scale.[5] Therefore, the individual availability is only calculated for party pairs for which $PTV_A = PTV_{max}$ and $PTV_{max} > 0.5$. The range of this measure is between zero (party A's potential voter is beyond competition to party B) and one (party A's potential voter is equally available to party B). Our measure fulfills important conditions that have to be met to adequately capture the degree of inter-party competition on the individual level (see Wagner 2017: 509): (i) If two parties are rated similarly on the PTV scale, the individual availability is higher (and vice versa). (ii) Ties always yield the highest possible value on the party pair–specific availability measure and therefore the highest degree of competition. (iii) Higher levels of PTVs imply higher individual availabilities and higher degrees of inter-party competition ($PTV_A = 1$ and $PTV_B = 0.9$ yield higher availability scores of a supporter of party A for party B than $PTV_A = 0.6$ and $PTV_B = 0.5$).

Consider as an example the PTV scores of four respondents for three parties (Table 6.1) and the resulting data structure (Table 6.2). As respondent 1 has the maximum voting propensity for all three parties, he/she can be considered a potential voter of all of them to the same degree. Consequently, respondent 1 is equally available to all the hypothetical parties, i.e., all three parties compete for respondent 1 to the same degree. In contrast, party A is the only option for respondent 2; thus, he/she is only available to the latter and (almost) beyond competition for the remaining parties. In other words, party A does not compete for respondent 2 with any of the other parties.[6] Respondent 3 is similar to respondent 2 in the sense

Table 6.1 Example of PTV scores and party pair-specific availability

r	PTV A	PTV B	PTV C	Availability AB	Availability AC	Availability BA	Availability BC	Availability CA	Availability CB
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	1	0	0.1	0	0.32	-	-	-	-
3	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.89	0.76	-	-	-	-
4	0.7	0.5	0	0.87	0	-	-	-	-

[5] The restriction at this cut-off point is necessary because, according to our theoretical concept, two parties compete for voters that are potential voters of both parties. Someone whose inclinations to vote for party A goes in direction of "not at all probable" cannot be considered a potential voter of that party.

[6] Note that the degrees to which parties B and C compete with party A and with each other for respondent 2 (availability BA, BC, CA, CB) are not relevant for analysis, since by definition respondent 2 is not a supporter of parties B and C. The same applies to respondents 3 and 4 (maximum PTV also for party A).

Table 6.2 Example of data structure

r	Party dyad	Availability
1	AB	1
1	AC	1
1	BA	1
1	BC	1
1	CA	1
1	CB	1
2	AB	0
2	AC	0.32
3	AB	0.89
3	AC	0.76
4	AB	0.87
4	AC	0
…		

that he/she is a supporter of party A. However, as he/she is more inclined toward parties B and C, the availability index is higher, i.e., party A competes with parties B and C for respondent 3 more than for respondent 2. Respondent 4 is also most inclined toward party A. However, whereas the magnitude of PTV differences between parties A and B is the same as for respondent 3, party A competes with party B for respondent 3 more strongly because respondent 4 gives lower PTV scores to both parties.

Our independent variables are two proximity measures regarding policy issues representing the two relevant policy issue dimensions and a proximity measure regarding the parties' degree of populism for the populist–pluralist dimension. We use the GLES 2013 and 2017 taxation/redistribution and welfare state issues[7] as indicators for the socio-economic issue dimension and the immigration issue[8] as an indicator for the socio-cultural issue. We measure relative issue proximities between the respondents and the parties constituting a party pair. Following common practice, we calculate the squared differences between the respondent's position and the positions of both party A and party B, whereby the latter are derived from the GLES 2013 and 2017 candidate study.[9] We then take the absolute differences of these distances and recode the variable so that higher values represent higher proximities. For the populist–pluralist dimension, we calculate

[7] This issue concerns the redistribution of income. The endpoints of the eleven-point scales are "lower taxes/fewer social services" and "more social services/higher taxes."

[8] The socio-cultural issue deals with the subject of immigration laws and asks, also on an eleven-point scale, whether those should be more permissive or more restrictive.

[9] We calculate a party's position on these issues as the mean score of all candidates of that party. The wording and range of the scales are identical to those of the voter surveys.

the similarity of two parties with regard to their degree of populism, also relying on data of the GLES candidate surveys. First, we measure the degree of populism according to Lewandowsky et al. (2016), who translate two core concepts of populism—anti-elitism and popular sovereignty—to the area of candidate surveys. We then calculate squared distances between party A and party B to derive their populist similarity. To ensure comparability of effect sizes, we standardized our three proximity measures for our multivariate analyses.

Furthermore, we control for whether the respondent has a party identification (PI) for party A (1 = PI for party A, 0 = PI for another party, PI for all parties, no PI), as we assume that identifying with party A decreases the availability for another party. At the same time, having a party identification might also bias their issue positions toward the position of the party identified with.

In order to investigate change in the three-dimensional structure of electoral competition in Germany, we calculate four separate regression models for 2013 and 2017, one for each of the two German regions. As our units of analysis are combinations of respondents and party pairs (see Table 6.2), we are confronted with a peculiar data structure. Our observations are clustered in two groups, respondents and party pairs, which are not nested within each other. Having such cross-classified data at hand, we would not expect the party pair–specific availabilities of a single respondent to be independent of one another. At the same time, one and the same party pair is evaluated by different respondents, which also sheds doubt on the independence of estimation errors. Hence, we calculate standard errors based on cross-classified multi-level regression models. Furthermore, we need to account for the small number of cases at the party pair level (N = 30). Elff et al. (2020) showed that restricted maximum-likelihood estimations ensure valid estimates in settings with such a limited number of cases.

The Intensity of Electoral Competition between the Political Parties

Figure 6.1 gives some descriptive information on our dependent variable and displays the average availabilities of each party's support base for each of the other parties in East and West Germany in 2013 and 2017.[10] Each subplot thus shows the degree to which the respective party was threatened by a specific competitor, which at the same time can be interpreted as the electoral potential of that competitor among the supporters of the former party.[11]

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[10] Note that the parties' support bases of 2013 are distinct from their 2017 support bases as the GLES post-election data are cross-section and not panel data.

[11] In the following, we only consider electoral threat or competition to be meaningful when availability scores reach values above the midpoint of the scale (> 0.5). Furthermore, as the focus of this paper is on how electoral competition in Germany changed from 2013 to 2017, we only report whether those
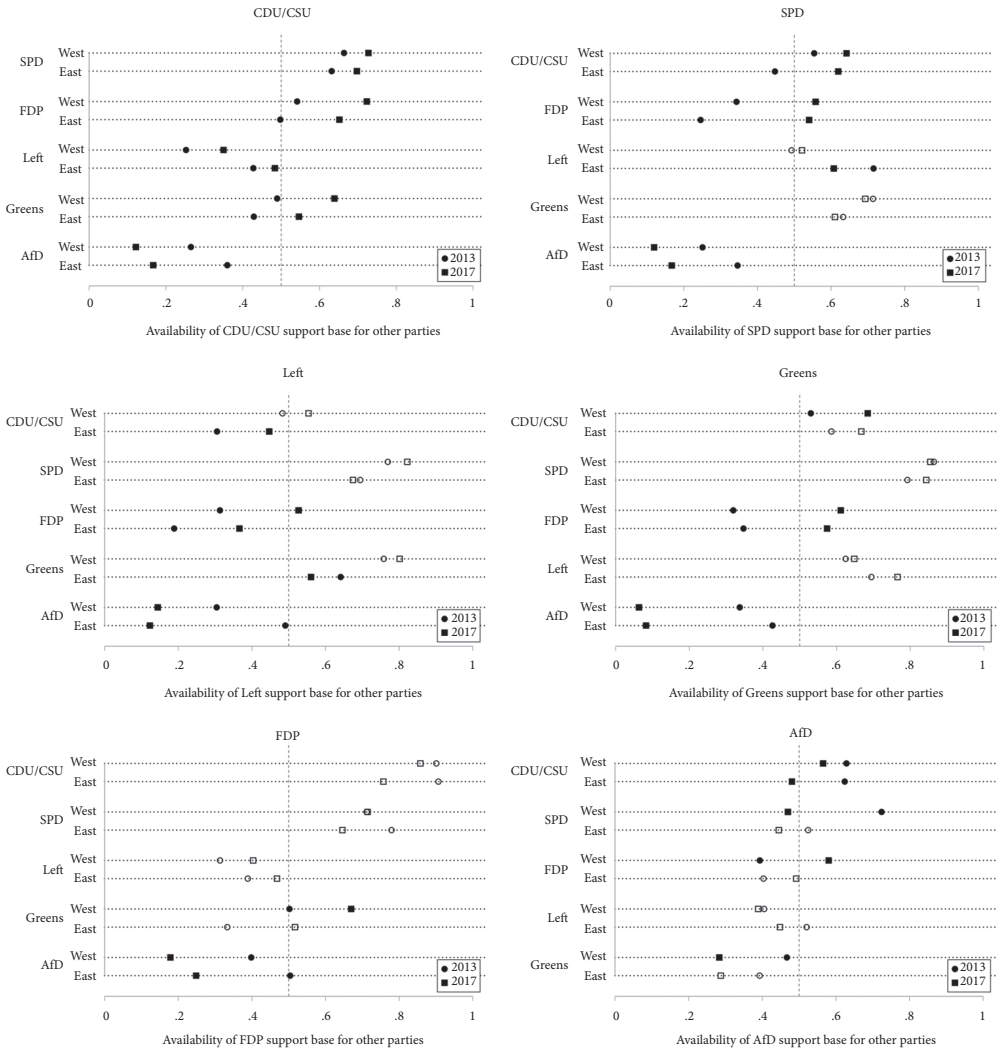
Fig. 6.1 Availabilities of parties' support bases for other parties in East and West Germany, 2013 and 2017

Notes: Filled out markers depict differences in availability scores between 2013 and 2017 that are statistically significant at least at the 5 percent level. The dashed vertical line represents the midpoint of the scale (0.5).

The upper left plot of Figure 6.1 displays inter-party electoral competition from the perspective of the CDU/CSU. In both election years and in both regions, its main competitors were the SPD and the FDP. The electoral threat by both parties

temporal changes are statistically significant in Figure 6.1 (filled out markers). Relevant regional differences are reported in the text. Respective tables reporting p-values of regional differences can be found in the Appendix (Table 6.A1 and Table 6.A2).

increased significantly from 2013 to 2017. This is particularly true for competition with the FDP: in 2013, CDU/CSU supporters were only moderately available for the Liberals—corresponding to a particularly low amount of coalition-targeted threshold insurance votes (*Leihstimmen*—see Chapter 9). However, in 2017, their availability score reached values of 0.65 in the East, and there was an even stronger threat in the West (availability of 0.75). More CDU/CSU supporters had a stronger inclination to vote for the FDP, its coalition partner for several legislatures, in the future. The SPD supporters' availability (upper right subplot) in 2013 and 2017 is highest for the CDU/CSU, the Greens, and—in the East—for the Left.

The CDU/CSU managed to increase its electoral potential among the social democratic support base from 2013 to 2017, especially in the East, causing regional differences to vanish. Yet, regional differences in electoral competition persisted with regard to the Left: unsurprisingly, in both election years, the Left was a bigger threat to the Social Democrats in the East than in the West. Whereas the Left's electoral potential among SPD supporters remained stable at a moderate level in the West, it decreased significantly in the East (availabilities of 0.72 in the East and 0.48 in the West in 2013 compared to 0.61 and 0.54, respectively, in 2017). The FDP's (center left subplot) main competitor at both elections and in both regions was the CDU/CSU, for which FDP supporters showed stable availability scores above 0.8. In general, the electoral threat of the FDP by none of the other established parties changed significantly, except for the Greens in West Germany, for which availability increased by two scale points to a meaningful level and regional differences emerged. Looking at inter-party competition from the perspective of the Greens (center right subplot), we can see that electoral competition is also strongest with regard to parties from the same political camp: the Greens' supporters in both regions and both years were most available to the Social Democrats, followed by the Left, although electoral availability for the latter was significantly higher in the East than in the West. The Left's support base (lower left subplot) was almost exclusively available to the SPD and the Greens in 2013 as well as in 2017. The availability of Left supporters for those two parties was higher in West Germany than in East Germany and stable over time.

Lastly, turning to the new competitor in the German party system(s), the AfD (lower right subplot), the most interesting pattern of inter-party competition (changes) occurs. First and foremost, we observe an electoral closure of AfD supporters. In 2013, the AfD's overall threat by other parties was already relatively low, and the AfD support base only showed substantial availability levels for the CDU/CSU and the SPD. For the latter, however, this was only the case in the West. By 2017, the electoral competition with regard to those parties had decreased to a moderately low level. Overall, there was no longer any serious threat for the new challenger party in the East. In the West, the Christian Democrats and Liberals— who were able to increase electoral pressure on the AfD from 2013 to 2017—were the only parties for which AfD supporters were somewhat available. On the other

hand, we can also observe an electoral closure of the established parties with regard to the AfD. Albeit on low levels, the AfD was a bigger threat to all other parties in 2013 than in 2017.[12] With an average availability level of below 0.15 in both regions, there was de facto no longer any electoral potential for the AfD among the established parties' supporters at the last federal elections.

All in all, we see clear shifts in inter-party electoral competition from 2013 to 2017. For 50 percent of party pairs comprised of established parties in the East and 55 percent in the West, we find statistically and substantially significant changes[13] in the availability of these parties' support bases. Overall, the availability of party supporters increased for all parties except for the AfD, meaning that electoral competition between the established, especially the mainstream parties became more intense in the sense that electoral threat increased. The AfD as the new challenger party was beyond electoral competition in 2017, as there was a closure of the AfD support base vis-à-vis the established parties and at the same time closure of the other major parties' support bases vis-à-vis the AfD.

The Dimensionality and Structure of Electoral Competition in Germany

How did these shifts in inter-party electoral competition come about? As outlined above, two kinds of factors can theoretically be responsible: First, compositional differences might have emerged, i.e., preferences of voters and/or positions of the political parties with regard to issues relevant for political competition in Germany might have changed. In Figure 6.2, the distributions of voters' issue preferences with regard to the taxation/redistribution and immigration issue for 2013 and 2017 in East and West Germany are plotted. Concerning the taxation/redistribution issue, we see that there were no substantial changes in party supporters' preferences on the aggregate level, neither in the East nor in the West. Calculating the Duncan Indices of Dissimilarity (DID, range from 0 to 1) for temporal distributional differences confirms this observation (0.07 in the East and 0.11 in the West).

For the immigration issue, we can observe shifts in voter preferences from 2013 to 2017, albeit only in East Germany. Here, people's preferences shifted somewhat to the right, and the DID of 0.16 hints at more pronounced differences in distributions as compared to the taxation/redistribution issue. In the West, the distribution of preferences in 2017 was almost identical to that in 2013 (DID = 0.08).

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[12] Against this background, it seems plausible that the majority of the AfD's electoral gains in 2017 stemmed from former nonvoters and voters of minor parties.
[13] A change is considered meaningful if either average availability levels above the midpoint of the scale in 2013 increased significantly in 2017 or average availability levels increased from below 0.5 to above or decreased from above 0.5 to below the midpoint of the scale.
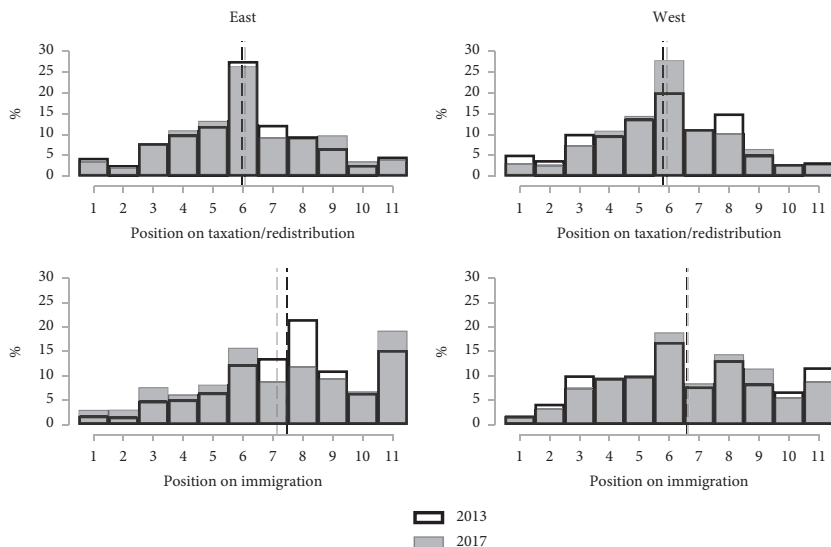
Fig. 6.2 Individual positions on taxation/redistribution and immigration in 2013 and 2017

Comparing issue preferences between East and West German party supporters, we conclude that there were no relevant differences concerning their welfare state orientations in both election years (DID = 0.11 in 2013 and 0.06 in 2017). Things look different, however, when inspecting the immigration issue: on average, East Germans favored restrictive immigration policies more than West Germans in 2013 and 2017 (DID = 0.21 in 2013 and 0.15 in 2017).

Turning to the political supply side, Figure 6.3 shows the parties' policy positions with regard to the immigration and taxation/redistribution issues as well as their degree of populism. With regard to the first, there were only minor changes of party positions; merely the SPD and the Greens moved to the right on that issue, and the parties on the right moved slightly toward the center. Consequently, the relative proximity of the parties to the majority of voters located at the center did not change substantively. Concerning the immigration issue, most parties—especially the CDU/CSU, FDP, and AfD—shifted toward a more restrictive position in 2017, resulting in a somewhat higher degree of polarization with regard to that issue. However, since this shift involved almost all parties, the relative positions of most parties vis-à-vis each other did not change substantively. Looking at the parties' degrees of populism, we see a similar result. Due to the less populist profiles of the Greens, the FDP, and the SPD, polarization with respect to that dimension increased.

All in all, there were no major compositional changes on the political demand side except for the immigration issue preferences of East Germans. Furthermore,
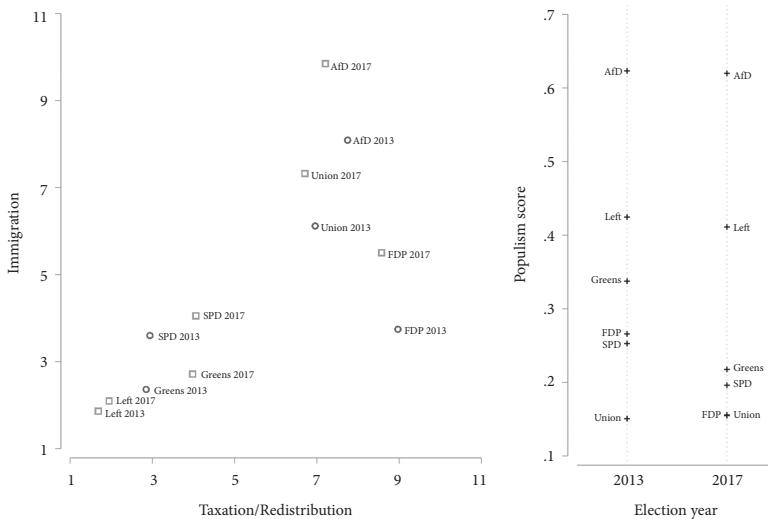
Fig. 6.3 Party positions in 2013 and 2017 on taxation/redistribution, immigration, and populism

the positions of the political parties toward each other did also not change substantively for any of the issues. Therefore, our descriptive results suggest that compositional effects cannot account for the differences in inter-party electoral competition between 2013 and 2017, whereas the more right-wing attitudes in the East concerning immigration policies can help understand the regional differences. Hence, our claim that the differences in availabilities of party supporters for other parties from 2013 to 2017 is attributed to a varying structure of political competition seems to be more plausible. To more thoroughly investigate whether associational differences can indeed account for the temporal variations of electoral competition, we calculated four separate cross-classified regression models (see Table 6.A3). For each year in each region, we regressed the individual availability of a party's potential voter for a specific other party on relative issue proximities between these two parties with regard to the economy/welfare state and immigration policies as well as the populist similarity of the parties. Figure 6.4 displays the coefficients of our independent variables (and our control variable PI) of all four models. First, we see that all but one of our coefficients show positive signs and are statistically significant. Substantially, this is in line with the assumptions of the spatial model of party competition: a specific party's potential voter is more available for another party if both parties are similarly close to the supporter's own ideal point with regard to the welfare state or immigration issue. In other words, if two parties are equally close to a potential voter, the latter is equally available to both. Hence, political parties primarily compete for citizens that are located between them in the political space. The positive coefficients for
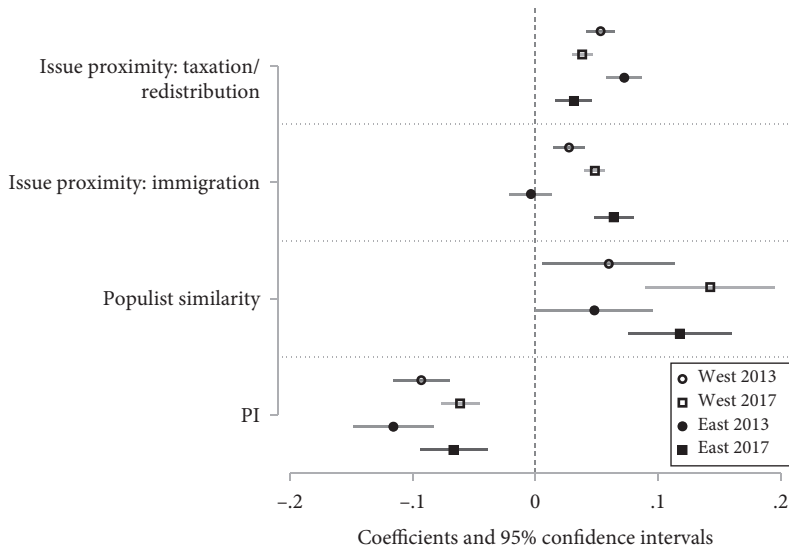
Fig. 6.4 Results of cross-classified multi-level models regressing dyadic availability on policy issue proximities and populist similarity

Notes: Coefficients are standardized. N (West 2013): 5,690 observations simultaneously nested in 979 individuals and 30 party pairs; N (West 2017): 7,967 observations simultaneously nested in 1,240 individuals and 30 party pairs; N (East 2013): 2,937 observations simultaneously nested in 576 individuals and 30 party pairs; N (East 2017): 3,494 observations simultaneously nested in 586 individuals and 30 party pairs.

the populist–pluralist similarity of parties can mean that the more similar parties are with regard to their degree of populism, the more intense electoral competition is between them, or more specifically, the more available party supporters are for the respective other party. Conversely, non-populist parties hardly compete for the same voters as populist parties do.

How did the structure of inter-party electoral competition change from 2013 to 2017 in East and West Germany? As fragmentation of the German party system(s) increased and, thus, the political offer became more differentiated and peoples' choices more meaningful, we expected an increasing relevance of policy issues for inter-party electoral competition in general. However, this claim is only supported for the issue proximities with regard to immigration policies. For that issue, the coefficients increased substantially from 2013 to 2017 in both regions, meaning that inter-party electoral competition was structured more by the immigration issue in 2017 than in 2013. The taxation/redistribution issue was even less relevant in 2017 than in 2013. Figure 6.5 illustrates this: in 2013, economic issue proximity had a strong effect on a party supporter's individual availability for another party. In cases in which a party's policy position is very distant from a party supporter's ideal point as compared to that of the supported party, there
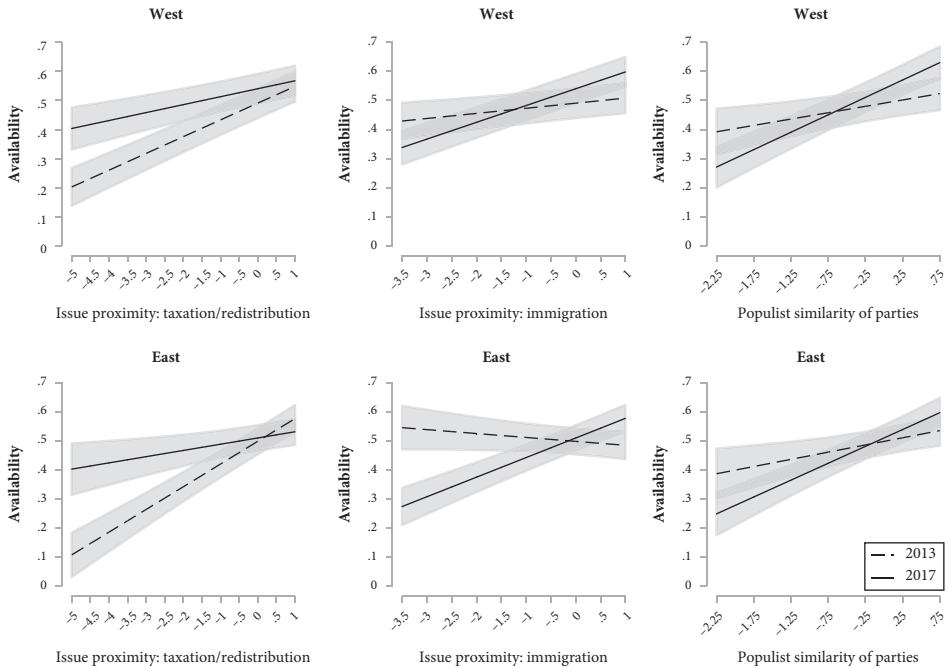
Fig. 6.5 Marginal effect plots for policy issue proximities and populist similarity, East and West, 2013 and 2017

Notes: Coefficients are standardized. Shaded areas depict the 95 percent confidence intervals.

is factually no competition between the parties; this person's vote is beyond competition (predicted availabilities of 0.2 in the West and 0.1 in the East). As already outlined, in 2017 the immigration issue not only dominated the political debate but also was very polarized. Economic issues, however, only played a minor, if any, role in the 2017 election campaign, and there was also no polarization with regard to that dimension. From this perspective, the increasing relevance of the immigration issue and the decreasing relevance of the taxation/redistribution issue for inter-party electoral competition, as shown in the marginal effect plots of Figure 6.5, seem plausible. Consequently, we find that in 2013 the economic issue was more relevant for electoral competition than the immigration issue. In East Germany, parties actually did not compete at all on that issue at that election. A shift in the relevance of these two policy issues vis-à-vis each other from 2013 to 2017, however, can only be observed in East Germany. Here, the effect of issue proximity regarding immigration on individual availability was significantly higher than the effect of taxation/redistribution issue proximity. In West Germany in 2017, the difference in the effect sizes of the immigration and economic issue is very small; both issues were therefore equally relevant for party competition in the West.

Turning to the coefficients for our populism variable, we can observe bigger values in 2017 than in 2013 in both regions, which is in line with our expectations. This means that the degree to which parties competed with each other over potential voters was structured more strongly by their similarity concerning a populist–pluralist vision of society in 2017 than in 2013. In fact, in 2017 this variable shows the largest coefficient of all variables considered here. Thus, the new, saliency-winning populist–pluralist divide or dimension of politics structured inter-party electoral competition more strongly than the older economic and even the immigration issue that had experienced high saliency at that time. These results support the interpretation of three-dimensional political competition in Germany.

Regarding our control variable, we can state that party identification decreases the availability of a party's supporter for another party. The effect was weaker in 2017, which speaks in favor of the reasoning presented above about the decreasing importance of party identification in more fragmented and polarized party systems.

Inspecting Figure 6.4 with regard to differences in the structure of electoral competition between East and West Germany, we conclude that differences still existed in 2013: the taxation/redistribution issue was more relevant for party competition in the East than in the West and vice versa for the immigration issue. Yet, in 2017, the effect sizes of all three variables were not distinguishable between the regions; the differences have vanished. This means that regional differences with regard to the degree to which political parties compete for individual voters with each other can no longer be explained by differences in the structure of inter-party electoral competition. Whereas associational effects with regard to the economic and the immigration issue and compositional effects with regard to different distributions of preferences toward immigration policies can account for the East–West variation in inter-party competition in 2013, only the latter is a plausible source of explanation for the variation in 2017.

Conclusion

How is electoral competition in Germany structured? Did the establishment and development of the right-wing populist AfD change the structure of competition? And did these changes occur to the same extent in both regions, East and West? These questions are fundamental to understanding the current politics in Germany. In this analysis, we investigated the differences and similarities of electoral competition since the founding of the AfD in East and West Germany at the 2013 and 2017 federal elections. By asking whether there are attitudinal differences between the four corresponding electorates and focusing on the structure of competition, we took a Sartorian perspective on party systems as systems

of interactions between parties. Accordingly, competition on the electoral level is characterized by the openness or availability of a party's support base for another party. In line with recent research, we ask if a three-dimensional view of the structure of party competition is more adequate than the traditional two-dimensionality. Therefore, besides taking into account the socio-economic and socio-cultural issue dimension, we included the populism–pluralism divide as a third dimension structuring the political space. With respect to these three dimensions, we differentiated between compositional effects—different attitudes and positions of parties and voters that might explain temporal and regional differences between the party systems—and associational effects—the relative relevance of these dimensions that might explain the differences between the party systems. We referred to the latter as different structure of electoral competition.

Our main findings are threefold. First, the relevance of policy issue dimensions for electoral competition varies over time, but less so across the two regions. The taxation/redistribution issue, as an indicator of the socio-economic issue dimension, was more relevant in 2013 than in 2017. In contrast, the immigration issue, representing the socio-cultural dimension, was more relevant in the 2017 election. Taken together, the relative proximities on those issues make the electoral overlaps within the two political camps—center-left and center-right—plausible. Second, despite a substantial though varying role of these relative issue proximities, electoral competition in Germany can be considered three-dimensional. More important for inter-party competition than issue proximity is the degree of a party's populism. Especially in 2017, parties with a similar level of populism competed for the same voters whereas populist and non-populist parties hardly competed with each other. East and West Germany are similar in this respect too. The structure of competition is very similar in both regions but changed from 2013 to 2017.

Against the background of these first two findings and considering the observed polarization regarding the populist–pluralist divide, our third main finding—the double-sided electoral closure regarding the AfD—becomes plausible: Already in 2013, AfD supporters were hardly available for other parties, and other major parties' support bases weren't available for the AfD either. This trend increased from 2013 to 2017. Therefore, with the establishment of the AfD as a new player in the game of electoral competition in Germany, we observe a segmentation of party competition in East and West Germany and, in this context, a diminishing role of (formerly) relevant policy issues for the structure of electoral inter-party competition.

Appendix

Table 6.A1 Regional differences in average availability scores of parties' support bases for other parties, 2013

Support base of:	Availability for:					
	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Left	Greens	AfD
CDU/CSU		−0.05	−0.04	0.16***	−0.08*	0.08
SPD	−0.13**		−0.11**	0.21***	−0.09*	0.08
FDP	0.01	0.07		0.14	−0.11	0.14
Left	−0.19***	−0.07*	−0.13**		−0.13**	0.17**
Greens	0.07	−0.08*	0.04	0.08		0.09
AfD	0.00	−0.19*	−0.01	0.12	−0.07	

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Negative values = support bases are less available in the East than in the West; positive values = support bases are more available in the East than in the West.

Table 6.A2 Regional differences in average availability scores of parties' support bases for other parties, 2017

Support base of:	Availability for:					
	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Left	Greens	AfD
CDU/CSU		−0.04	−0.08**	0.12***	−0.11***	0.05
SPD	−0.03		−0.02	0.08*	−0.10**	0.05
FDP	−0.10**	−0.06		0.05	−0.16**	0.08
Left	−0.12*	−0.16***	−0.16***		−0.26***	−0.01
Greens	−0.02	−0.02	−0.04	0.12*		0.02
AfD	−0.09	−0.03	−0.10	0.07	0.01	

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Negative values = support bases are less available in the East than in the West; positive values = support bases are more available in the East than in the West.

Table 6.A3 Regression results of cross-classified linear models

	(1) West 2013	(2) West 2017	(3) East 2013	(4) East 2017
Issue proximity: taxation/redistribution	0.05*** (0.04/0.06)	0.04*** (0.03/0.05)	0.07*** (0.06/0.09)	0.03*** (0.02/0.05)
Issue proximity: immigration	0.03*** (0.01/0.04)	0.05*** (0.04/0.06)	−0.00 (−0.02/0.01)	0.06*** (0.05/0.08)
Populist similarity	0.06* (0.01/0.11)	0.14*** (0.09/0.20)	0.05* (0.00/0.1)	0.12*** (0.08/0.16)
PI	−0.09*** (−0.12/−0.07)	−0.06*** (−0.08/−0.05)	−0.12*** (−0.15/−0.08)	−0.07*** (−0.09/−0.04)
Constant	0.53*** (0.47/0.59)	0.58*** (0.52/0.64)	0.57*** (0.51/0.62)	0.53*** (0.49/0.58)
σ^2 party pair level	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
σ^2 respondent level	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02
σ^2 respondent-p	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.08
R^2	0.14	0.27	0.12	0.20
N observations	5,690	7,967	2,937	3,494
N individuals	979	1,240	576	586
N party pairs	30	30	30	30

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Lower/upper bound of 95 percent confidence interval in parentheses. Coefficients are standardized.

Partisan Agreement and Disagreement in Voters' Discussant Networks

Contextual Constraints and Partisan Selectivity in a Changing Electorate

Simon Ellerbrock[1]

Introduction

Modern societies are inevitably diverse, socially as well as politically. Democracy can be understood as a regime whose essence is the peaceful solution of the conflicts over the allocation of resources and values that arise out of societies' plurality of interests and preferences (Lasswell 1936; Przeworski 2010). A basic agreement about the fact of political disagreement, as well as its legitimacy, is, therefore, a fundamental precondition for the functioning of any democracy. A vibrant democracy entails exchanges over these political differences at all layers of the political system. Different viewpoints must be represented in the arenas of political decision-making, most notably parliaments. But it is also desirable that citizens experience the plurality of politics in their immediate lifeworld (Huckfeldt et al. 2004a). Being confronted with divergent political views increases citizens' opinionation and political knowledge (Shah et al. 2005; Scheufele et al. 2006; Pattie and Johnston 2008), as well as their ability to process complex political information (Eveland Jr and Hively 2009; Erisen and Erisen 2012). Maybe most importantly, exposure to other views has also been shown to facilitate tolerance for and acceptance of different points of view, even disagreeing ones, thereby creating room for compromise in political decision-making processes (Mutz 2002; Huckfeldt et al. 2004b; Sunstein 2007; Pattie and Johnston 2008; Ikeda and Richey 2009; Stroud 2010).

This chapter examines the character and development of partisan disagreement in German voters' social interactions, i.e., political discussions between individuals that support different parties (Klofstad et al. 2013). It is motivated by the assumption that the recent changes in Germany's electorate entail important implications for citizens' experiences of partisan disagreement. At a basic level, citizens' exposure to partisan disagreement can be understood as a function of two factors: their preference for interactions with politically like-minded others, on the one hand, and the availability of such persons in the socio-spatial contexts in which they reside on the other. This is the essence of the so-called "choice-constraint" model of the formation of citizens' networks of political discussants (Fischer 1982; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Johnston and Pattie 2006; Friedland 2016). In line with this perspective, the chapter explores how the increasing fragmentation of the German party system and the emergence of a right-wing populist party as a challenger of the established parties has affected the amount and character of partisan disagreement experienced by voters in their political interactions.

Divergent political views in general, and interactions across party lines, in particular, may appear as a desirable goal for a society, but research has found that people often do not live up to these normative aspirations. In fact, it seems that "few individual people live their everyday lives so as to maximize their exposure to difference" (Mutz 2006: 10). On the contrary, numerous researchers starting with the early Columbia studies have shown that political discussions most often revolve around the "exchange of mutually agreeable points of view" (Berelson et al. 1954: 108; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 2004a; Gerber et al. 2012; Gärtner and Wuttke 2019; see also Schmitt-Beck and Lup 2013). A central cause for the formation of these homogenous discussant networks might be political homophily, that is people's tendency to purposively search out politically similar others (McPherson et al. 2001; Settle and Carlson 2019; Minozzi et al. 2020). Minozzi et al. (2020) describe this as an intentional process of selection. People are more comfortable among like-minded others because they don't have to fear social isolation as a result of voicing unpopular opinions (Noelle-Neumann 1974; Settle and Carlson 2019). Put more generally, people may try to avoid exchanges across lines of difference to circumvent unpleasant situations (Ulbig and Funk 1999; Mutz 2006) and therefore seek out people who share their political views as interaction partners.

However, oftentimes people only have limited control over who they discuss political matters with. Simply put, selection presupposes availability, and that is necessarily constrained. People are situated in socio-spatial environments which determine who they encounter and consequently what kinds of people are in principle available to them for discussing politics (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; see also Finifter 1974; Fischer 1982; Johnston and Pattie 2006; Friedland 2016; Minozzi et al. 2020). Some people may find themselves in contexts where most potential interaction partners share their own views, but others may have a hard time finding a

like-minded soul in their vicinity. The structural composition of socio-spatial con-texts thus can facilitate but also severely limit the chances for people to fulfill their desire to restrict their communications to like-minded conversation partners. In particular, people situated in more politically diverse social contexts should have a harder time finding people who share their political views.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the German electorate has changed in ways that may have implications for these general processes. The emergence of a right-wing populist party might have changed the conditions for partisan selectivity. Perhaps voters' adversity to conversations across party lines is particularly intense between right-wing populist parties and the established parties that they reject. At the same time, the increasing fragmentation of the electoral party system should have made it harder to avoid cross-cutting communication, at least if it translated into peo-ple's narrow socio-spatial contexts. These recent developments render Germany an ideal case to explore how electoral change maps onto people's everyday political conversations across party lines.

The chapter consists of two parts. The first part pertains to the "constraint" component of the guiding model. It investigates whether and to what extent the growing electoral fragmentation observed at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections increased the probability of German voters discussing political matters with persons that supported a different party to themselves. This presupposes that the structural changes observed at the national level (as described in Chapter 1) were actually mirrored within voters' lifeworld; the chapter accordingly examines whether this was the case at the level of electoral districts. It then goes on to estab-lish how the composition of these contexts structured the occurrence of partisan disagreement. The chapter's second part addresses the "choice" component of the model by analyzing whether and in which ways voters still managed to surround themselves with like-minded others, despite increasing party system fragmenta-tion. Specifically, the chapter ascertains whether voters have become increasingly selective in their choice of political conversation partners along partisan lines, as a result of the emergence of the right-wing populist AfD.

Choices, Constraints, and Partisan Disagreement

Partisan Selectivity

Homophily is one of the most pervasive facts of social interaction (Smith et al. 2014). It entails that similar people are connected at a higher rate than dissimi-lar people: like talks to like (McPherson et al. 2001). This pertains to a variety of socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics such as race, gender, or social status—but most notably also to political attitudes and preferences (Berel-son et al. 1954; McPherson et al. 2001). Numerous studies have confirmed that

political conversations within voters' discussant networks more often than not tend to revolve around congenial points of view (Berelson et al. 1954; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 2004a; Gerber et al. 2012; Gärtner and Wuttke 2019; see also Schmitt-Beck and Lup 2013). People's urge to prioritize interactions with like-minded others has been linked to various psychological processes and motives. Downs (1957), for instance, argued that persons who agree with oneself on political matters are a valuable and highly trustworthy source of useful political information at low cost and are therefore preferred as political discussion partners. Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, by contrast, emphasizes the emotional discomfort that may arise from confrontations with information contradicting one's own views (Festinger 1957). Similarly, in her seminal work on the "Spiral of Silence," Noelle-Neumann (1974) has argued that individuals' interactions are driven by an urge to avoid social isolation. Talking politics with disagreeing others might create discomfort so that, again, individuals can be expected to prefer discussions with congenial partners (Mutz 2006; Settle and Carlson 2019; Minozzi et al. 2020).

While these lines of thought emphasize citizens' general tendency to turn to like-minded others when communicating about politics, recent research suggests that there even may be a trend toward increasing selectivity in political exposure (Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng 2009; Iyengar et al. 2008; Flaxman et al. 2016; Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2017). Hearing the other side occurs less frequently because citizens appear to increasingly isolate themselves within echo chambers and strongly filter their news consumption and online communication (Taber and Lodge 2006; Stroud 2008; Flaxman et al. 2016). It is unclear, though, whether such a trend also affects unmediated communication between individuals.

The tendency to search out politically congenial conversation partners might not only vary over time but also across citizens. Applying a one-size-fits-all framework on voters' selectivity seems somewhat implausible given what we already know about the impact of individual political predispositions when it comes to political behavior (for an overview see McClurg et al. 2017). Having said this, the chapter focuses on how citizens' party preference might differently impact their tendency to selectively expose themselves to political information and in particular to connect with fellow supporters of their party. Recent research shows that people with strong populist attitudes tend to be particularly selective in their news consumption and their communication on social media (Heiss and Matthes 2019; Stier et al. 2020). Selecting congenial information over being exposed to contradicting points of view seems to be especially pronounced among supporters of populist parties. Against the backdrop of electoral gains for populist parties all across Western democracies, it is argued that parties are increasingly aligned not only along issue dimensions but along a populist–pluralist divide (Galston 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019; see also Chapter 6). Populist parties in principle question the legitimacy of the "established" political parties, referring to them as "dysfunctional" and to the electoral process in which they compete as "fraudulent"

(Hameleers et al. 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019). These views are diametrically opposed to those held by most voters of other parties. Thus, supporters of populist parties are likely to be particularly selective when constructing their discussant networks in order to avoid exposure to these points of view that challenge their party's views at their very core.

With the AfD gaining 12.6 percent of the votes in the 2017 German federal election, for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic a sizable right-wing populist party was represented in parliament. As the name suggests, the founders of the AfD intended the party to be an alternative to all established parties, fostering a logic of "us versus them" (cf. Schroeder and Weßels 2019b; for the general logic of "us vs. them" of populist parties see Mudde 2007). While in 2013, the AfD had appeared as a mostly Eurosceptic party, by 2015 it had developed into a right-wing populist party (cf. Arzheimer and Berning 2019). This led all established parties to further distance themselves from the new competitor.

Therefore, due to the party's populist rhetoric and its stance against all "established parties," I expect AfD supporters to show particularly high levels of partisan selectivity when constructing their discussant networks. Given the change in the party's ideological orientation between the 2013 and 2017 federal elections, AfD voters might have become even more inclined to connect to fellow party supporters instead of exposing themselves to partisan disagreement.

Contextual Availability

Importantly, people are not unconstrained in their choice of political conversation partners. Contextual constraints determine the availability of people supporting the same party as oneself in a geographically bounded area at any given time. Whom a person can talk to—about politics or other matters—is circumscribed by the composition of the socio-spatial context she resides in (Books and Prysby 1991). It determines who the neighbors are one can talk to over the garden fence, the colleagues one meets every day at the workplace, or one's drinking fellows in the local pub (Finifter 1974; Fischer 1982; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988, 1995; Mutz 2006). The people that share one's context constitute a pool of potential conversation partners out of which one can choose. This pool may contain large numbers of like-minded people—or not. The composition of this pool constrains citizens' attempts to selectively construct congenial discussant networks. Thus, who people talk to about political matters may be driven by the desire to talk only to persons of identical attitudes and preferences, but the extent to which this aim can be realized depends on the available options which, in turn, are conditional on the composition of the context (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988).

For partisan agreement and disagreement, what counts is whether and to what extent the available people support the same party as oneself or another party.

This is directly linked to the overall composition of the electorate within one's context. Since most everyday encounters occur close to one's place of residence, the region one lives in can thus greatly impact the partisan coloration of one's social interactions (e.g., Fischer 1982; Huckfeldt 1983). If a region's electorate is evenly split between just two parties, supporters of both parties have plenty of chances for encounters with others supporting their own party. If however, voters within a region support a number of different parties, overall these individuals are considerably less likely to encounter fellow supporters of their party (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 2005). While extant research has demonstrated this structuring factor of partisan composition on voters' likelihood of experiencing disagreement from a cross-sectional perspective, this chapter adds a longitudinal view on discussant networks. If the availability of like-minded discussants is a function of the partisan composition of a region it should, of course, be affected by shifts of this composition due to changes in its residents' electoral behavior. Importantly, as more parties gain significant numbers of votes, in the aggregate, the number of available adherents of each single party necessarily declines. Thus, as voters' contexts become more fragmented in partisan terms they are likely to encounter more disagreeing others. Increasing electoral fragmentation and the resulting changes in the partisan composition of regional contexts are likely to lead to a decline in the availability of congenial political discussion partners and consequently increase the chances of political conversations across party lines. As outlined in Chapter 1, electoral fragmentation in Germany changed remarkably in recent decades and reached an all-time high at the 2017 federal election. If German voters' discussant networks were responsive to the overall changes in the makeup of the electorate, voters can be expected to have been more likely to experience partisan disagreement in their social conversations in 2017, when electoral fragmentation reached its peak thus far, than at previous elections (cf. Chapter 1).

Electoral Fragmentation and Partisan Disagreement

Electoral Fragmentation in Regional Contexts

As outlined above, voters' likelihood to interact with people that support the same party as they do can be understood as a (partial) function of the partisan composition of the socio-spatial context within which they reside. Accordingly, partisan disagreement should be more widespread in electorally fragmented contexts. At the most recent federal elections, German voters' choices led to a substantially more fragmented party system. Did this development lead to a higher incidence of experiences of partisan disagreement among voters? This question entails an important premise: that the global trend toward a more fragmented national party

system was reflected at the level of the socio-spatial contexts that circumscribe voters' experiences with their fellow citizens. To ascertain the validity of this premise I begin the analysis with an examination of the development of party system fragmentation at the level of regional contexts. Complementing the overall picture displayed by Figure 1.2, Figure 7.1 shows the development of party system fragmentation since the first federal election in 1949 at the disaggregated level of electoral districts. As a measure of fragmentation, I use the well-known Rae-Index, which indicates the probability of two randomly chosen people within an electoral district voting for different parties (Rae 1968). For comparative purposes, Figure 7.1 also includes the aggregate fragmentation on the national level (dashed line; cf. Chapter 1).

National developments can, but must not necessarily be reflected within subnational levels. Increasing overall fragmentation at the national level could also reflect a trend toward regional sorting, i.e., increasing homogeneity within electoral districts, accompanied by widening differences between them (for mechanisms of regional sorting cf. Mutz 2006; Gimpel and Hui 2015; Mummolo and Nall 2017). If this were the case, immediate experiences in citizens' lifeworlds would not be ones of increased fragmentation, but increasingly homogenous social environments. According to Figure 7.1, however, this is not the case in German electoral districts. The changes in the electorate over time on the national level are clearly mirrored within the regional contexts. There are no tendencies of increasing regional sorting or more generally of increasingly homogenous regional contexts. Although at all
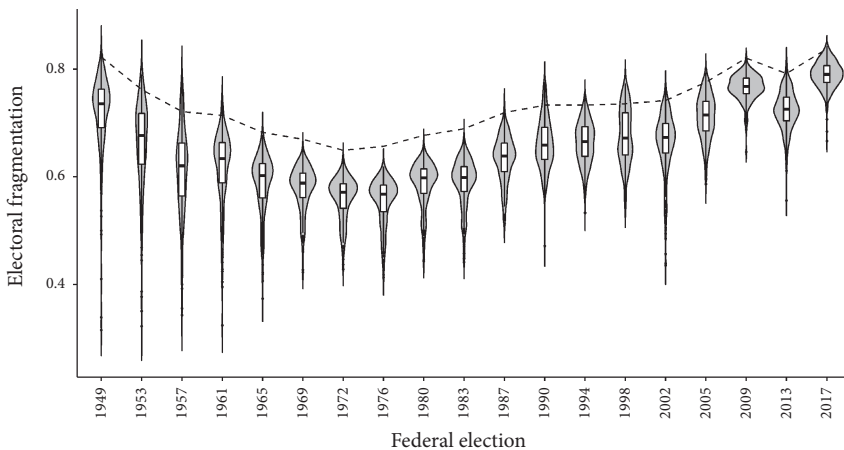
Fig. 7.1 Electoral fragmentation over time and across electoral districts

Notes: Displayed is the distribution of fragmentation across electoral districts and across federal elections. Boxplots show the median fragmentation and the first and third quantiles. Fragmentation refers to the Rae-Index of the electorate in a given electoral district. The dashed line refers to fragmentation on the national level.

Source: Bundeswahlleiter.

elections most regional contexts were less fragmented than the national context as a whole, the overall temporal trends are very similar. Remarkably, the differences between regional contexts decreased visibly over time. During the early elections of the Federal Republic, there were still very homogeneous regions in which for instance the Christian Democrats gained over 80 percent of the votes. This changed over time, however, and nowadays, all German voters live in highly fragmented regional contexts. In 1949, electoral fragmentation ranged between 0.32 and 0.83 across electoral districts and in 2017 only between 0.67 and 0.84.

This means that nowadays German voters are likely to encounter mostly people who hold a different party preference across all regional contexts. However, although regional contexts aligned over time, there are still significant differences across electoral districts at the 2017 federal election securing that citizens face different contextual constraints when constructing their political discussion networks. Since the complementary probability of the fragmentation index indicates the probability that two randomly chosen voters within a region opt for the same party, this implies that at the 2017 federal election the purely stochastic baseline likelihood of partisan agreement ranged between 16 percent in the most fragmented region and 33 percent in the least fragmented one.

In sum, the increase in electoral fragmentation at the national level presented in Chapter 1 was indeed reflected at the level of electoral districts, and thus an object of voters' immediate experiences in their lifeworld. Importantly, although all German voters should have been very likely to encounter others with whose party preferences they disagreed, this likelihood still varied substantially across regions.

Fragmentation and Partisan Disagreement

Did these increased chances of encounters across party lines affect the partisan composition of discussant networks? To answer this question for the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections, I combine the data on election results within electoral districts used in the previous section with individual-level data from voter surveys. To maximize statistical power, I pool data from several survey modules conducted under the auspices of the GLES: the cross-sectional face-to-face surveys, the short-term campaign panel surveys, and the rolling cross-section surveys, conducted in 2009, 2013, and 2017 (RollCrossSec09, RollCrossSec13, RollCrossSec17, CampPanel09, CampPanel13, CampPanel17, CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum). Each of these surveys contains a network battery designed to map respondents' political discussant networks. Preceded by a question about the general frequency of political discussions, respondents were asked to think of those persons with whom they had discussed politics most frequently. Subsequently, they were invited to indicate for each of these individuals

which party she would most likely vote for. Up to three political conversation part-
ners could be named depending on the survey. For the following analyses, these
data are rearranged into a dyadic format (cf. Huckfeldt et al. 1995) so that the units
of analysis are respondent-discussant pairs.

The dependent variable of the following models is partisan disagreement within
these dyads (1 = disagreement: respondent's intended vote choice ["Zweitstimme,"
pertaining to CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens, Left, and, except 2009, AfD] and dis-
cussant's perceived vote intention are not identical, 0 = identical). All observations
with missing information on the respondent's and/or the discussant's vote choice
were dropped from the dataset. Similarly, all respondents who were undecided at
the time of the survey or did not intend to vote at all were dropped from the anal-
yses, as were respondents who never discussed politics with anyone, whose share,
however, was rather small (29 percent across surveys). This resulted in approx-
imately 40,300 respondent-discussant pairs with valid information on partisan
disagreement.

The following analyses estimate the effect of electoral fragmentation within
electoral districts on disagreement between voters and their most important po-
litical conversation partners by means of hierarchical logistic regression models
with respondent-discussant dyads clustered in respondents and electoral districts.
From a methodological point of view, it deserves mention that this setup does not
entail the claim that the psychologically relevant regions of experience for voters
correspond to electoral districts. They are quite large, encompassing about 200,000
voters. The actually relevant spaces are probably considerably smaller (McAllister
et al. 2001), but data availability dictates reference to this rather imprecise measure
of context. What this implies is that the analyses entail a rather conservative test
of the association between electoral fragmentation and partisan disagreement.

Figure 7.2 shows the predicted probabilities and 95 percent confidence intervals
of disagreement in respondent-discussant dyads across the ranges of fragmen-
tation observed in electoral districts in a cross-sectional perspective for each of
the three elections. It clearly shows a positive relationship between the contexts'
electoral fragmentation and partisan disagreement for all time points under inves-
tigation. At the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections, the probability of discussing
with people who supported a different party to oneself significantly increased with
rising fragmentation in one's electoral district. In other words, people living in
more politically fragmented regional contexts tended to discuss politics with peo-
ple who voted for a different party at a higher rate than people in less diverse
contexts. The sizes of these effects are quite astonishing: In 2013, a 1 percentage
point higher fragmentation of the regional context was associated with a 1 per-
centage point increase in the probability of disagreement between two discussion
partners and in 2009 with a probability increase of 0.80 percentage points. In 2017,
in contrast, the effect was much smaller (0.55). It thus appears that in 2017 regional
differences in the chances of encountering disagreeing others may have been less
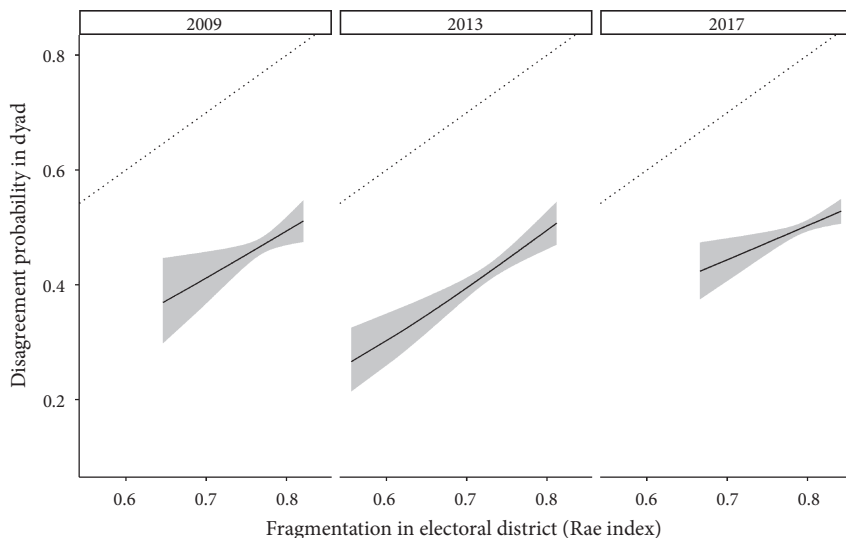
Fig. 7.2 Effects of electoral districts' fragmentation on the probability of talking politics across party lines at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections

Notes: Displayed are predicted probabilities of a respondent supporting a different party than her discussion partner. Results are based on three separate hierarchical regression models with respondent-discussant dyads clustered in respondents and electoral districts. The dashed diagonal line refers to a scenario in which the makeup of discussion networks is solely a function of the composition of electoral districts. Shaded areas indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Sources: RollCrossSec09, RollCrossSec13, RollCrossSec17, CampPanel09, CampPanel13, CampPanel17, CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum, Bundeswahlleiter.

likely to translate into voters discussing politics across party lines. This suggests that in 2017 voters in more heterogeneous contexts were particularly selective in their choice of discussion partners—something to which I will return later.

This analysis has demonstrated that cross-sectionally the composition of the voters' socio-spatial contexts mapped onto their discussant networks in 2009, 2013, and 2017. Where people lived was strongly related to how much partisan disagreement they were likely to experience in their everyday political conversations. However, these cross-regional associations could have come about as a result of underlying attributes of the regions themselves. For instance, urban areas could generally be more electorally fragmented because they attract people from all strands of life, and living in a city makes people more accepting of different viewpoints and consequently likely to connect with disagreeing others. To address this possibility, I run an additional model that applies a longitudinal perspective while keeping region-specific time-invariant characteristics constant. The model includes several covariates to account for differences in the socio-demographic makeup of the electorate over time (education levels, coded as 0 = "Hauptschule," 1 = "Realschule," 2 = "Abitur"; age groups: coded as 18–30 = reference category,

30–45 = 1, 45–60 = 2, > 60 years = 3; size of the discussant network, ranging from 1 to 3; sex, coded 0 = male, 1 = female). Table 7.1 shows the average marginal effects in percentage points derived from a logistic regression estimation with fixed effects for electoral districts.[2] According to these estimates, a 1 percentage point increase in the fragmentation of an electoral district over time led to a 0.66 percentage point increase in the probability of a voter being exposed to a disagreeing discussant on average across all three elections. This confirms that the composition of the regional electorate is a powerful factor in shaping German voters' everyday conversations about politics, and that changes in districts' electoral fragmentation altered people's chances to experience partisan disagreement in their discussant networks. The largest change in fragmentation between two elections in a region amounted to an increase of 13 percentage points. Accordingly, for people in this regional context, the predicted probability of talking to a disagreeing political conversation partner increased by more than 8 percentage points.

The mean absolute change in contexts' fragmentation between two successive elections amounted to about 5.6 percentage points. Accordingly, the associated change in the probability of a voter and a discussant disagreeing amounted to 3.6 percentage points, an effect size comparable to those of individual characteristics. In view of the large sizes of electoral districts, this effect strength is a remarkable finding indeed. For instance, people who completed the highest German secondary school were 5.7 percentage points more likely to disagree with their political conversation partners than those with the lowest educational attainment. Women were 3.7 percentage points less likely than men to disagree with their discussants, and for the eldest in the sample, encountering partisan disagreement was 6.4 percentage points less likely than for voters below the age of 30.

In sum, people in electorally more fragmented regions were more likely to discuss politics across party lines. Notably, people's exposure to partisan disagreement became more likely as the regional contexts' fragmentation increased over time. Thus, as expected, the increasing electoral fragmentation in regional contexts was associated with more frequent political discussions between disagreeing voters. Obviously, the composition of socio-spatial contexts constrained voters' ability to realize their tendency to seek out congenial discussion partners and to avoid partisan disagreement. The next section examines this selectivity component behind the structuration of voters' discussant networks more closely. It will show to what extent voters managed to surround themselves with like-minded others, despite the increasing partisan fragmentation of their social contexts. Indeed, across the three federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017 voters displayed an increasing tendency to purposively select fellow party supporters as political conversation partners.

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[2] Electoral districts for which the geographic boundaries were changed between 2009 and 2017 were excluded from the analysis. I owe gratitude to Teresa Haußmann for consolidating the data on electoral districts across federal elections.

Table 7.1 Effects of temporal changes in electoral districts' fragmentation on the probability of talking politics across party lines

	Logits	AMEs
Fragmentation (in %)	0.03***	0.66***
	(0.00)	(0.11)
Education (Realschule)	0.05	1.20
	(0.03)	(0.75)
Education (Abitur)	0.23***	5.71***
	(0.03)	(0.72)
Female	−0.15***	−3.71***
	(0.02)	(0.52)
Age: 30–45	−0.19***	−4.57***
	(0.04)	(0.87)
Age: 45–60	−0.25***	−6.11***
	(0.03)	(0.82)
Age: > 60	−0.26***	−6.39***
	(0.03)	(0.84)
N (discussants)	0.12***	3.02***
	(0.02)	(0.37)
Intercept	−1.85***	
	(0.39)	
AIC	51,523.13	
BIC	54,295.44	
Log likelihood	−25,436.56	
Deviance	50,873.13	
Num. obs.	37,429	

Notes: Results from a logistic regression with fixed effects for electoral districts. Displayed are logit coefficients and average marginal effects (AMEs) in percentage points with standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.
Sources: RollCrossSec09, RollCrossSec13, RollCrossSec17, CampPanel09, CampPanel13, CampPanel17, CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum, Bundeswahlleiter.

Voters' Partisan Selectivity at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 Federal Elections

Voters' and Discussants' Partisan Agreement

So far, I looked at the structural effects originating from the partisan composition of voters' socio-spatial contexts on the makeup of their discussant networks. As outlined above, voters typically have a strong homophilic tendency and thus are likely to select conversation partners on partisan grounds. This section investigates

the dynamics of this partisan selectivity at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections. It aims to analyze to what extent German voters discussed politics with like-minded others despite a very high likelihood of mostly encountering people with differing party preferences within their lifeworld. Given this changed theoretical perspective, the analytical focus will now be on the avoidance of partisan disagreement. Accordingly, in the following analyses, partisan agreement instead of disagreement will be the outcome attribute of interest (technically implying a reversal of the dependent variable's coding). The analyses will evaluate agreement among discussion partners against the backdrop of changing compositions of regional contexts to establish the degree to which German voters were selective on partisan terms in their choices of political conversation partners. The section first looks at the temporal developments of partisan selectivity over the three federal elections. Then it tests whether voters' tendency to select like-minded over disagreeing discussants varied by parties. It demonstrates that supporters of different parties differed with regard to how strict they were in avoiding exposure to disagreement in their political conversations by deliberately choosing to talk politics with congenial others.

To evaluate partisan agreement against the backdrop of changes in the electoral fragmentation of socio-spatial contexts, for all survey respondents I calculate a baseline measure of partisan agreement, which captures the probability of partisan agreement occurring by chance alone, conditional on the partisan composition of the contexts where they reside. It simulates a counterfactual scenario in which respondents do not exercise any choice when constructing their discussant networks, so that these networks only reflect the workings of the constraint mechanism discussed above, as if voters do not choose but simply talk about politics at random with anyone they encounter in their district. This measure provides a benchmark that allows me to isolate the element of choice reflected in voters' experiences of partisan agreement respectively disagreement.[3] Based on official election results, these values are calculated as the mean probability of two voters sharing the same party preference across electoral districts. Specifically, I calculate the likelihood of having an agreeing discussant for each survey respondent solely based on the partisan composition of the electoral districts she resides in. These individual probabilities are subsequently aggregated to reflect the overall probability across all respondents of encountering like-minded others in their electoral districts. The dark bars in Figure 7.3 show the results of this operation for each federal election. In contrast, the light bars show the actual levels of partisan agreement experienced by respondents at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. They are derived from a hierarchical logistic regression model in which agreement in a

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[3] It should be noted that individuals may also choose their political discussion partners based on nonpolitical criteria that are correlated with political similarities, which, in turn, might increase the chances of partisan agreement. However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to disentangle these different processes.
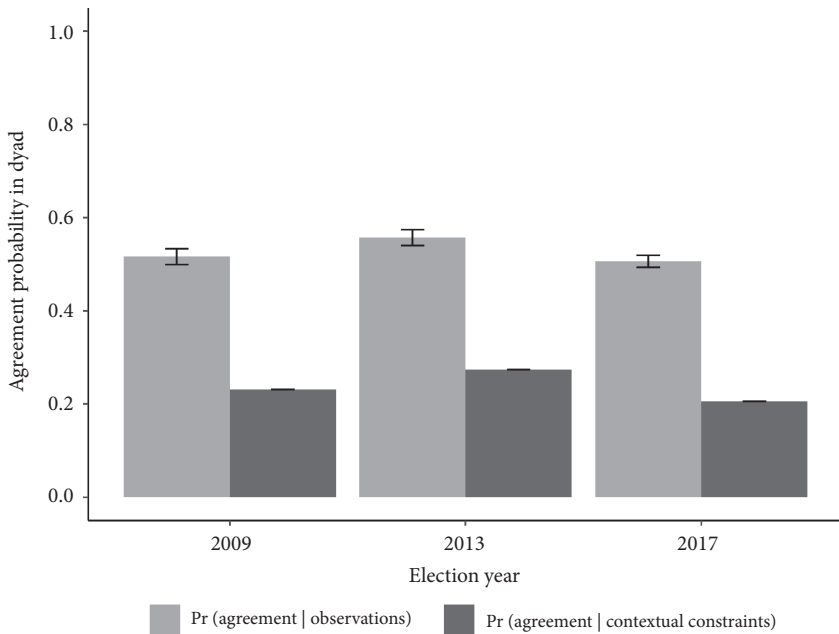
Fig. 7.3 Simulated and actual partisan agreement at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections

Notes: Displayed are predicted probabilities and 95 percent confidence intervals based on a hierarchical logistic regression with dyads clustered in survey components (Model 1 in Table 7.A1 in Appendix). Dark bars refer to the probability of partisan agreement under the condition of random selection of discussion partners in electoral districts and light bars to the predicted probability of agreement as observed among respondents. Categorical control variables are held at their shares and continuous control variables at their respective means.

Sources: See Figure 7.2.

respondent-discussant dyad is modeled as a function of the respective federal election, controlling for respondents' socio-demographic characteristics to partial out changes in these attributes across the three elections (see Model 1 in Table 7.A1). For each election, the discrepancy between the two bars indicates the amount of selectivity exercised by voters to fulfill their urge for like-minded others as political conversation partners.

Voters indeed connected at a much higher rate with like-minded others than they would have in a scenario where only availability, but not selectivity driven by party preference mattered for the formation of discussant networks. At each election, they managed to have more like-minded discussion partners than disagreeing ones although they were situated in highly fragmented regional contexts. Across the three federal elections, the share of respondent-discussant pairs supporting the same party was over 50 percent. With the regional contexts being more fragmented than ever before, it was to be expected that the probability of discussion partners sharing the same party preference was lowest in 2017 when

electoral fragmentation reached its peak. And this was indeed the case: Partisan agreement amounted to just 51 percent at the 2017 federal election, compared to 56 percent in 2013 and 52 percent in 2009. To see a decrease of 5 percentage points between two federal elections (2013 vs. 2017) is quite remarkable if we consider that this translates to millions of individuals more discussing politics with disagreeing instead of agreeing fellow citizens. Apart from the changes between the three most recent elections, it is also worth noting how strikingly these numbers contrast with comparable data published by Huckfeldt et al. (2005) on the 1990 federal election. They suggest that a few decades ago, when the party system was still much less fragmented, the amount of partisan agreement had been much higher (69 percent in West Germany respectively 61 percent in East Germany).

Voters' Partisan Selectivity

To arrive at a numerical assessment of how selective voters were in their choices of political conversation partners we need to compare the stochastic probability (dark bars in Figure 7.3) with the observed probability of agreement (light bars) in a quantifiable way. By contrasting these probabilities, we can develop an index of partisan selectivity, formally denoted r_t, that provides a measure of the amount of discussant choice exercised by voters net of changing contextual constraints. The index is adapted from Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995: 151) and formalizes as

$$r_t = \frac{(P_t - S_t)}{(P_t * (1 - S_t))}$$

where P_t stands for the predicted probability of partisan agreement for respondents at election t (cf. light bars in Figure 7.3). S_t captures the probability of partisan agreement among respondents solely as a result of the partisan composition of regional contexts (dark bars). The index takes on the value 0 if the probability for actual agreement is the same as in the counterfactual scenario where no choice is exercised. The value 1, by contrast, indicates a situation in which voters completely shun adherents of other parties and discuss politics exclusively with supporters of their own party.

Figure 7.4 displays the index values for 2009, 2013, and 2017. Remarkably, it indicates that although overall partisan agreement had decreased over time (as seen above in Figure 7.3) partisan selectivity in fact increased. It was highest in 2017 (0.75), whereas it amounted to only 0.70 in 2013 and 0.72 in 2009, indicating that the increase was not linear. Thus, while voters were overall least likely to talk to persons supporting the same party in 2017, they were at the same time more likely to actively choose conversation partners based on shared party preferences out of the pools of potential discussion partners available in their electoral districts.
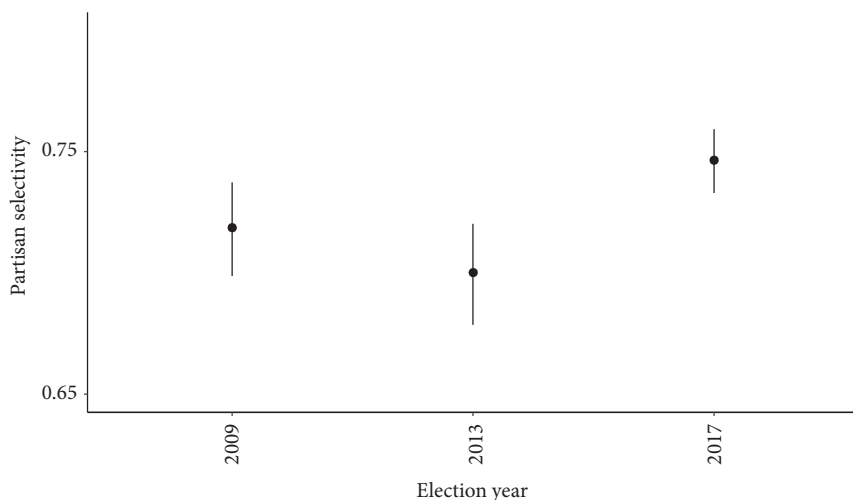
Fig. 7.4 Partisan selectivity at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections

Notes: Values are calculated based on the probabilities displayed in Figure 7.3; vertical lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

This implies that across the eight years covered by these three elections, partisan agreement between voters and their discussants did decrease, specifically between 2013 and 2017. But it did so to a lesser extent than could have been expected based on the increase in the fragmentation of regional electorates, because voters became more selective in their choices of conversation partners, thus partially offsetting the long-term effect of growing electoral fragmentation.

Variations by Parties

Having looked at partisan selectivity at the aggregate level, I now turn to a more nuanced analysis which is motivated by the idea that perhaps voters' selectivity was not the same for supporters of different parties. In particular, as outlined above, voters of right-wing populist parties might be even more aversive to partisan disagreement than supporters of other parties, echoing their parties' massive and generalizing rejection of the alleged "cartel" of established "system parties" (cf. Mudde 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In Germany, this concerns in particular the right-wing populist AfD, which emerged on the political stage at the 2013 federal election, and became the strongest opposition party in the national parliament in 2017. The analyses apply the same methods and follow the same two steps as taken in the previous section. However, they no longer examine all voters together but distinguish between the different parties' supporters. This allows me to clearly identify the differences that might exist between these voter groups.

Figure 7.5 conveys the same information as Figure 7.3 not for the totality of all voters but rather broken down by the different parties' voter groups. The estimates are derived from a hierarchical logistic regression model similar to the one used above but including respondents' party preferences as an additional independent variable (see Model 2 in Table 7.A1). The figure indeed shows large differences between parties that are, moreover, not constant across elections. First, supporters of the larger parties CDU/CSU and SPD generally experienced much more partisan agreement in their political conversations than voters of the smaller parties (light bars). However, this was at least partially a result of the higher baseline probability of voters of the larger parties to encounter agreeing others in their regional contexts (dark bars; cf. Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Second, disaggregating partisan agreement over party preferences actually reveals two opposing temporal trends: while most parties' voters discussed politics less frequently with supporters of their own party, AfD voters were exposed to much more partisan agreement in 2017 than in 2013. In 2017, the amount of partisan agreement experienced by
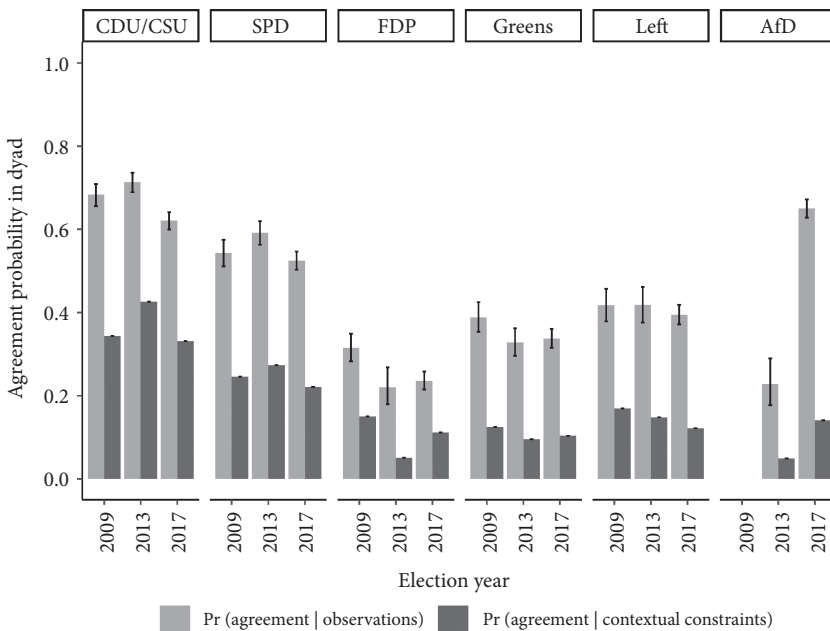
Fig. 7.5 Simulated and actual partisan agreement by party preference

Notes: Displayed are predicted probabilities and 95 percent confidence intervals based on a hierarchical logistic regression with dyads clustered in survey components (Model 2 in Table 7.A1 in Appendix). Dark bars refer to the probability of agreement under the condition of random selection of discussion partners in electoral districts and light bars are the predicted probabilities of agreement as observed among respondents supporting different parties. Categorical control variables are held at their shares and continuous control variables at their respective means.

Sources: See Figure 7.2 .

AfD voters even surpassed the levels detected for CDU/CSU and SPD voters. The discrepancy between AfD voters' chances of encountering like-minded others in their contexts and the actual partisan composition of their discussant networks that becomes obvious at this election is indeed striking. This suggests that over time AfD voters became more selective and, in 2017, were much more selective when constructing their political conversation networks than voters of the other parties.

Yet, as outlined before, only looking at absolute levels of partisan agreement ignores the changing availability of like-minded potential discussants and does not provide a clear indication of the amount of deliberate partisan-driven choice. Similar to Figure 7.4 but broken down by parties, Figure 7.6 displays the amount of partisan selectivity, correcting for changes in the availability of co-partisans within electoral districts. This differentiated analysis confirms that for each party's electorate at each election, separately, there is the general tendency of voters to prefer fellow voters of the same party over other potential conversation partners. Most estimates range between 0.70 and 0.80 with two notable outliers. With the exception of 2013,[4] FDP voters were least likely to select political conversation partners based on a shared party preference. This seems to be a stable finding over time given that already Huckfeldt et al. (2005) found that at the federal election in 1990,
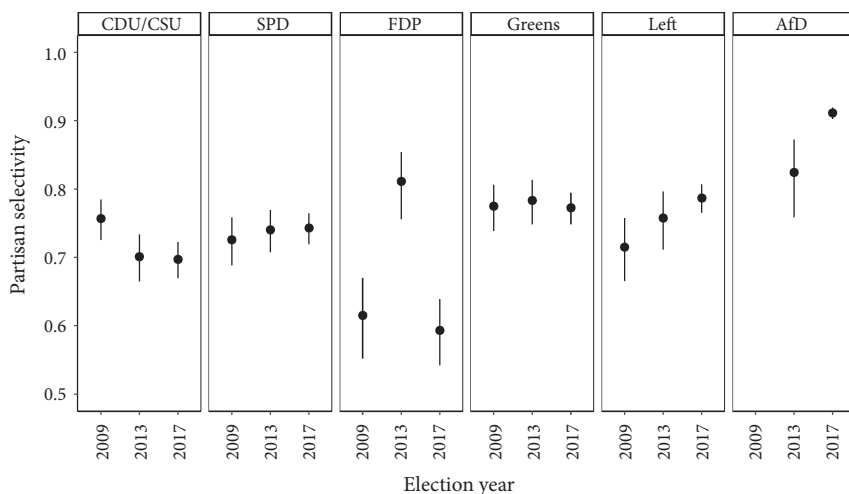
Fig. 7.6 Partisan selectivity by party preference

Notes: Values are calculated based on the probabilities displayed in Figure 7.5 ; vertical lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

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[4] Since the FDP received less than 5 percent of the total votes in 2013, it is most likely that it was supported only by its core voters, who in turn, might have had the highest inclination to connect with like-minded others.

FDP voters—most likely due to their centrist position in the party system—were most frequently connected to voters of other parties. More importantly, AfD voters show the highest tendency to deliberately encapsulate themselves in homogeneous discussion networks (0.82 in 2013 and 0.91 in 2017). These findings suggest that indeed, as assumed, but only at the 2017 federal election, not yet in 2013, the voters of the AfD were characterized by a much stronger tendency to avoid conversations across party lines than the voters of any other party at any of the three elections. An important implication of this finding is that much of the general trend toward more partisan selectivity on the level of the electorate at large, which has been detected above, can be attributed to differences between the AfD's respective electorates at the elections of 2013 and 2017.

Conclusions

This chapter analyzed political discussions among German citizens across party lines. I used a framework of "choice-within-constraints" (Fischer 1982; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995) to study two factors that affect the formation of discussant networks: the varying availability of individuals who support the same party as oneself in individuals' socio-spatial contexts and the deliberate choices exercised by them that are presumably driven by the desire to avoid discussions across party lines and instead search out like-minded discussants.

Combining data from three survey modules of the GLES, conducted in 2009, 2013, and 2017, with official election results on the level of electoral districts, I analyzed the probability of voters having been exposed to disagreeing political conversation partners conditional on the partisan composition of their regional contexts. I established that the increasing fragmentation of the German electorate was mirrored within these contexts and affected the likelihood that voters talked to adherents of parties other than their own. From a cross-sectional point of view, I found voters residing within more fragmented electoral districts displaying higher rates of partisan disagreement with their most important political discussion partners. Importantly, in line with my expectations, changes in districts' electoral fragmentation between elections clearly affected their residents' prospects to encounter disagreeing viewpoints in political conversations. Increasing fragmentation led to more numerous experiences of partisan disagreement. The increasing electoral fragmentation at recent federal elections has made decision-making for German voters and coalition formation on the part of party elites much more complex (cf. Chapters 1 and 9), to be sure. But from the more general perspective of democratic theory, it has also entailed a normatively desirable outcome: that voters became more likely to experience the diversity of political views in their immediate lifeworld.

However, from extant research we know that voters are moved by a desire to maintain homophily in their social interactions (Berelson et al. 1954; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 2004a; Gerber et al. 2012; Gärtner and Wuttke 2019; see also Schmitt-Beck and Lup 2013). The chapter has shown how German voters navigated the more difficult situation arising out of the diminished availability of like-minded potential discussants in their socio-spatial contexts. In the aggregate, the probability of voters having like-minded political conversation partners slightly decreased between 2009 and 2017. However, a more nuanced look at patterns of partisan agreement across voters of different parties showed that this overall decrease concealed two countervailing dynamics: Voters of the established parties increasingly discussed politics across party lines, while AfD voters increasingly surrounded themselves with supporters of their own party.

Only by contrasting partisan agreement as experienced by German voters and the probability of them encountering congenial others in their regional contexts can one get an impression of the amount of partisan selectivity actually exercised by voters. Studying the amount of partisan agreement conditional on extant contextual constraints, the analyses demonstrated that partisan selectivity indeed increased over time. However, this was mainly due to the adherents of one party: the AfD. In 2017, that is after the party's turn toward a clearly right-wing populist agenda (cf. Chapter 1), its voters displayed a far stronger partisan selectivity than in 2013 but also than those of any other party at any of the three elections investigated in this chapter. Thus, AfD voters responded to the increasing constraints imposed on them by the progressing fragmentation of the party system by exercising more deliberate choice when constructing their discussant networks. Presumably, their exceptionally strong inclination to communicate only with like-minded fellow citizens reflected the party's populist across-the-board rejection of all established parties. That AfD voters have come to display a particularly pronounced selectivity with regard to their communication with other people raises concerns about a looming polarization of party politics in Germany at the grassroots level of voters. Apparently, even more than other voters, supporters of the AfD prefer to shut themselves off from what normative theorists have deemed to be crucial for a vital democracy—the discussion of politics across lines of difference and the experience of disagreement as an essential part of democratic conflict resolution.

Appendix

Table 7.A1 Partisan agreement across federal elections and differentiated by party preference

	Model 1: Agreement	Model 2: Agreement
Year (Reference: 2009)		
2013	0.16 (0.05)***	0.14 (0.08)
2017	−0.04 (0.04)	−0.28 (0.08)***
Education (Reference: Hauptschule)		
Realschule	−0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Abitur/FH	−0.25 (0.03)***	−0.07 (0.03)*
Female (Reference: male)	0.16 (0.02)***	0.18 (0.02)***
Age (Reference: 18–30)		
30–45	0.18 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.04)***
45–60	0.26 (0.03)***	0.20 (0.03)***
> 60	0.27 (0.03)***	0.21 (0.03)***
Discussion partners (N)	−0.13 (0.02)***	−0.17 (0.02)***
Vote choice (Reference: CDU/CSU)		
SPD		−0.60 (0.07)***
FDP		−1.54 (0.08)***
Greens		−1.22 (0.08)***
Left		−1.10 (0.09)***
AfD		0.13 (0.04)**
Vote choice X year		
SPD 2013		0.06 (0.10)
FDP 2013		−0.63 (0.16)***
Greens 2013		−0.41 (0.11)***
Left 2013		−0.14 (0.13)
AfD 2013		−2.26 (0.17)***
SPD 2017		0.20 (0.08)*
FDP 2017		−0.12 (0.10)
Greens 2017		0.05 (0.09)
Left 2017		0.18 (0.10)
Constant	0.17 (0.05)**	0.91 (0.08)***

Continued

Table 7.A1 *Continued*

	Model 1: Agreement	Model 2: Agreement
AIC	2,309.58	7,605.06
BIC	2,354.18	7,746.09
Log likelihood	−1,143.79	−3,777.53
N (dyads)	40,302	40,302
N (surveys)	9	9
Var: survey (Intercept)	0.00	0.00

Notes: Results from a hierarchical logistic regression model with respondent-discussant dyads clustered in survey components. Displayed are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Sources: RollCrossSec09, RollCrossSec13, RollCrossSec17, CampPanel09, CampPanel13, CampPanel17, CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum.

8

(In-)Consistent Voting in the 2009, 2013, and 2017 German Federal Elections

Reinhold Melcher

Introduction

Germany's political landscape changed considerably between 2009 and 2017. The party system underwent a process of both fragmentation and concentration (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2014: 13–4): concentration because the two largest political parties—CDU/CSU and SPD—formed a government coalition after the 2013 and 2017 elections; fragmentation because in 2013 a historically high proportion of about 16 percent of the party-list votes did not lead to any parliamentary mandates since they were given to parties that failed at the 5 percent threshold of the electoral system. In 2017, party system fragmentation became even more apparent when a new party, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), received enough party-list votes to be represented in the German *Bundestag* for the first time after its inception just four years before. Many of these developments can at least partially be attributed to the effects of the string of crises that hit Germany since 2008 (the world financial and economic crisis of 2008, which over time led to the European sovereign debt crisis of 2011, and the so-called refugee crisis, which peaked in 2015). As exogenous shocks, crises can spark grievances and resistance toward political elites, which stimulate protest behavior in the electoral arena (Kriesi 2012: 518). In Germany, the aforementioned crises contributed to the rise of the AfD since 2013 (Lees 2018: 299–303; cf. Chapter 5). Protest voting can be understood as the opposite of consistent voting, which can be conceived of as voting decisions that correspond to voters' own self-defined preferences (Baum and Jamison 2006: 947). The question, therefore, is whether patterns and determinants of consistent voting remained stable during this turbulent period of German politics or whether they changed in response to the party system's tectonic shifts.
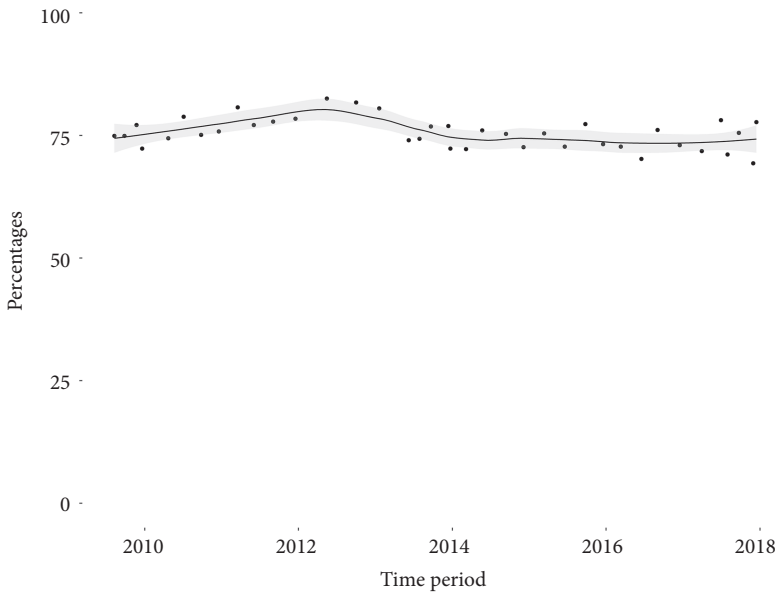
Fig. 8.1 Consistent voting between 2009 and 2017

Notes: The line indicates the smoothed trend (using LOESS) with 95 percent confidence intervals. Dots display the proportion of attitude-consistent voters at different points in time. The data are weighted using transformation weights.

Figure 8.1[1] traces the share of consistent votes (and vote intentions) from 2009 to 2017. It clearly shows that, despite the massive changes in Germany's political landscape during these years, continuity, and persistence prevailed with regard to consistent voting. German voters appear unfazed by the political turmoil during the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections. Most of them always voted (or would have voted in between elections) consistently, despite the successive crises that hit the political system and the emergence and rapid rise of a new party. This stability is quite remarkable given that the changing electoral environment implied greater variety in decision-making complexity and shifting "task demands" with regard to voting (Lau et al. 2008: 397, 399; Lau et al. 2014: 244–4; see also: Payne et al. 1993). The complexity of voting decisions has doubtlessly increased since

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[1] The data for this analysis come from the GLES face-to-face pre- and post-election cross-sectional surveys 2009, 2013, and 2017 and from the GLES online tracking surveys from 2009 to 2017 for the periods in between elections (CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum, Track09_06, Track09_08- Track17_38). To operationalize consistent voting, we adopt the "normative-naïve" procedure developed by Lau and Redlawsk (1997), which we discuss in detail in the "Data and Methods" section. Due to the surveys' partly varying content, the operationalization of consistent voting varies slightly between the face-to-face cross-sectional and the online tracking surveys. Nevertheless, it yields almost equivalent results. The procedure for the face-to-face cross-sectional surveys is presented in detail below. The measurement strategy for the tracking surveys follows the same principles, but is not presented in detail for lack of space.

2013 when the AfD first emerged as a new competitor. More variation over time and a temporary decrease in the proportion of preference-consistent votes between 2013 and 2017 would therefore not have been all that surprising. Yet, Figure 8.1 leaves open the possibility that shifts in its determinants may have occurred below the surface, although the overall amount of consistent voting was stable. This is what the present chapter is interested in: Have the reasons for (in-)consistent voting changed between the federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017? To answer this question, we employ a longitudinal perspective and study how the role of voters' political expertise and motivation for consistent voting developed over this period.

While the consistency of German voters' electoral choices has already been explored in several studies (Kraft 2012; Kraft and Schmitt-Beck 2013; Rudi and Schoen 2013; Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014; Christian 2017), this chapter's perspective is novel in at least two respects: First, no study has yet examined the long-term development of consistent voting and its determinants in Germany. Second, no attention has so far been paid to the relationship between (in-)consistent voting and protest voting. Adopting Lau and Redlawsk's (1997, 2006) "normative-naïve" procedure to measure consistent voting, we employ cross-sectional survey data collected by the GLES to model consistent voting for each of the three election years 2009, 2013, and 2017. The findings suggest that inconsistent voters in 2013 were primarily dissatisfied with democracy and the political elites and were sympathetic toward the AfD. In 2009 and 2017, on the other hand, inconsistent voting was more strongly associated with low levels of political knowledge.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows: We first discuss the theoretical foundation of consistent voting and how it relates to voters' self-defined preferences. We then elaborate on our main theoretical arguments regarding the question of how political motivation and political knowledge affect the consistency of a vote decision. Third, we describe our data, the operationalization of consistent voting, our independent variables, and the strategy of analysis, which includes the calculation of a probit model for every election year. Finally, we present the results on how the reasons for (in-)consistent voting have changed from election to election and discuss the normative implications of these findings.

Consistent Voting and Its Determinants

Consistent votes have a higher quality since they are normatively desirable. What is the benchmark for the quality of a vote decision? Lau and Redlawsk (1997: 586) answer this question by referring to Dahl's (1989: 98–100) notion of a citizens' actual interest. According to Dahl (1989: 180), a voters' actual interest "is whatever that [voter] would choose with the fullest attainable understanding of the experience resulting from this choice and its most relevant alternatives." Accordingly, a vote decision can be considered consistent (or "correct," to use the terminology

of Lau and Redlawsk (2006)) if a voter chooses the party or candidate s/he would choose under conditions of complete information (Lau and Redlawsk 2006: 75; Lau et al. 2008: 396). This definition can be adapted to a much simpler understanding of consistent voting by using voters' preferences as a reference point. In this interpretation, consistent voting refers to a vote decision that matches voters' self-defined preferences best (Baum and Jamison 2006: 947). A party-list vote decision in a German federal election is therefore considered consistent if a voter chooses the highest-ranking party in an order based on ideological and policy proximity, party identification, perceived performance assessments, leader evaluations, and problem-solving ability (Kraft 2012; see also: Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014: 195). But why should voters deviate from their rank order by voting for a party other than the one ranking first? Answering this question requires some understanding of what makes voters decide consistently in the first place.

According to Lau et al., "decision-makers are guided by two chief motivations, the desire to make a *good* decision, and the desire to make an *easy* decision" (2008: 397, emphasis in original). Based on this assumption, the authors provide a general framework of voter decision-making and distinguish three groups of factors, (1) political motivation, (2) political expertise, and (3) political heuristics. First, voters who are highly motivated to make a good decision, i.e., a decision that reflects their actual interests, also focus more on the decision-making process and therefore should more often vote consistently. However, the intensity of individuals' motivation to do so may vary between elections. When the stakes of an election are high, voters may be more motivated because the outcome of the election matters more to them. In any case, more motivated voters are more likely to cast a ballot for a party matching their actual interests (for Germany see: Kraft 2012: 30; for the US see: Lau et al. 2008: 403–4; Richey 2008: 373–4). Second, it is easier for voters with a high level of political knowledge to vote consistently (for Germany see: Kraft 2012: 30–2; Kraft and Schmitt-Beck 2013: 130; Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014: 212–3; for the US see: Richey 2012: 652; Lau et al. 2014: 254; Lau 2013: 344; see also: Rapeli 2018: 188; Bergbower 2013: 104; Bergbower et al. 2015: 1205). These so-called political experts can use their knowledge and cognitive skills to make better choices than voters with less expertise. Last, to make both easy and good decisions, voters may also rely on cognitive shortcuts and political heuristics (Kahneman and Tversky 1972; Tversky and Kahneman 1974). Heuristics are especially useful in situations in which voters do not meet the information requirements for informed decision-making (Lau and Redlawsk 2006: 25). If applied adequately, political heuristics are therefore a way to cope with information deficits (for social networks as shortcuts see: Ryan 2011: 763–4). In what follows, we examine how the role of political motivation and knowledge changed between the 2009, 2013, and 2017 German federal elections. Since our data contain no suitable measures, we will not address the role of political heuristics.

How (In-)consistent Voting Might Have Changed
between 2009 and 2017

Political expertise (or knowledge) increases voters' ability to make good decisions. It is especially important when the demands of a task are complex. Hence, its impact on voters' likelihood of choosing consistently should become stronger with increasing difficulty of a vote decision. The emergence of the AfD in 2013 may have been a development that made choices more challenging for voters. Accordingly, we first discuss how the impact of political knowledge on the quality of a vote decision may have changed over the three elections covered by our study. Second, we elaborate a theory why an inclination to political protest can be interpreted as a lack of political motivation or as a negative political motivation to cast a consistent vote, how it therefore may promote inconsistent voting, and how this relationship has changed in German electoral politics as a result of the AfD's rise and the crises between 2009 and 2017.

The AfD's Political Ambiguity and the Importance of
Political Knowledge

Casting a ballot for the party that matches ones' political preferences is more complicated and challenging in multi-party systems than in party systems with only two major political parties (Rapeli 2018: 188). Multi-party systems can become even more complex when new parties enter the political arena, as there is a higher ambiguity concerning their political positions in comparison to more established parties. The appearance of a new partisan actor will typically go hand in hand with ambiguity about its political positions for at least two possible reasons. First, obfuscating its political positions can be electorally rewarding for a new political party, as ambiguous positions help attract voters from different political camps (Somer-Topcu 2015: 852), and can therefore be understood as a party strategy to win additional votes (Bräuninger and Giger 2018: 544–5). Second, new political parties often consist of different factions with quite diverse positions and interests. Consequently, their public appearances are anything but homogeneous, which also fosters ambiguity about their political positions. This was certainly the case with regard to the AfD's neoliberal and national-conservative wings (cf. Chapter 1).

What does this mean for the quality of vote decisions of highly knowledgeable voters? Due to their broader understanding of the political sphere, political experts should be better equipped to narrow down a new party's political position on various issues, even if the true political positions are blurred. This should give political experts an additional advantage in voting consistently. Voters with a high level of political knowledge are therefore likely to cope even better in situations with more complex "task demands" than politically less knowledgeable voters. Concerning

the three federal elections examined in this chapter, we expect that highly knowl-
edgeable political "experts" were even more likely to vote consistently than less
knowledgeable voters in 2013, when the AfD was new, compared to 2009 and 2017.

Protest Voting as the Opposite of Consistent Voting

Originally, Lau et al. (2008: 398) conceived of political motivation as "put[ting]
more effort into the decision making" and operationalized it as a concern about
the outcome of an election. However, this definition does not account for why
voters do or do not put more effort into their decision-making to vote consis-
tently, although this is necessary to understand the true motives behind a vote
decision. We argue that the reasons why voters are not motivated to cast a consis-
tent vote are linked to protest behavior. According to Alvarez et al. (2018: 136), the
term "protest voting" is highly ambiguous and refers to different patterns of vot-
ing behavior such as casting a blank ballot, explicitly choosing "none of the above"
(NOTA) if this is a valid ballot option (Damore et al. 2012), or voting for a po-
litical outcast instead of one's most preferred party (van der Eijk et al. 1996: 157;
van der Brug et al. 2000: 82). The latter can be understood as the logical opposite
of consistent voting and is of primary interest here because it implies that a voter
consciously chooses not to vote for the party that is in his/her (perceived) best in-
terest or ranks highest in his/her order. Following the nomenclature proposed by
Alvarez et al. (2018: 141), we can label these voters as insurgent party protest vot-
ers. These voters not only lack the motivation to choose consistently, but they are
actually motivated to cast purposely inconsistent votes. Why might some voters
use their ballots to express political protest, and against whom do protest voters
direct their discontent? In other words: How can we conceptualize this negative
political motivation? Van der Brug et al. argue that insurgent party protest voters
"cast their vote *not* to affect public policies, but rather to express disenchantment
with the political system or with the political elite" (2000: 83, emphasis in original).

We can gain a conceptual understanding of these attitudes toward the politi-
cal system and the political elites by referring to Easton's (1965, 1975) concept of
political support. Easton (1975: 436) defines political support as an evaluative at-
titude toward political objects that can be negative or positive. He distinguishes
two kinds of support, diffuse and specific (Easton 1975: 437), and three differ-
ent political objects, the political authorities, the political regime, and the political
community (Easton 1965: 171, 190, 212). Specific support reflects the evaluation
of specific outputs generated by the political authorities (Easton 1965: 267–8),
whereas diffuse support "forms a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that
helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed" (Easton
1965: 273). Political authorities are the primary beneficiaries of a high level of dif-
fuse support because citizens are most likely to attribute output deficits that evoke

a loss in specific support to them. People who do not support the political authorities on a general level are not only dissatisfied with certain political actors but also highly skeptical of all politicians and parties that are considered to be part of the political establishment. The political regime constrains and regulates the political interactions of citizens and political authorities alike. It consists of three components—values, norms, and structures of authority (Easton 1965: 193)—that are essential for a political system to define "what are or are not permissible goals, practices, and structures in the system" (Easton 1965: 192). In liberal democracies, this includes the implementation of basic values and norms such as freedom of speech, pluralism, or political representation.

We assume that people who want to vote consistently support the political authorities and the political regime (i.e., basic democratic values and their implementation) at least on a diffuse level, even if they may not always support their specific output. Voters who oppose the political authorities and the political regime as a whole, on the other hand, should not be concerned with whether their vote choice reflects their real interests. Why should a voter choose from a set of political alternatives if s/he despises all of them? Moreover, why should a voter abide by the electoral rules if s/he is unsatisfied with the whole political regime or rejects some or all of its basic values and norms? Therefore, voters who do not diffusely support the political authorities or the political regime are more likely to vote in protest against both (see also: van der Brug et al. 2000: 83).

This leads to several assumptions about how the (in-)consistent voters might have changed between the three German federal elections. In 2009, voters who did not support the political authorities or the political regime in general probably chose to abstain from the election or cast an invalid ballot to express protest instead of voting for an insurgent protest party. Therefore, the proportion of unsupportive voters among inconsistent voters should not be above average. The situation most likely changed in 2013. When the AfD entered the political arena, it gave voters another opportunity to express political protest by voting for an insurgent party besides casting a blank ballot or abstaining. From that point on, Germany had an insurgent party that was founded in clear opposition to the way the German government handled the European debt crisis (cf. Chapter 1). For voters who were dissatisfied with the crisis management policies such as the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) (i.e., low specific support) and who did not support the political authorities or the political regime, the AfD was an obvious choice to express this dissatisfaction and opposition. Voting for the AfD as a new insurgent protest party should therefore have been especially appealing to diffusely unsupportive voters willing to express protest in the 2013 German federal elections. Therefore, we can assume that, in 2013, voters unsupportive of the regime and the political authorities were more likely to vote inconsistently than supportive voters. After its schism in 2015 and its successes in several regional elections, the AfD even strengthened its image of an insurgent protest party by sharpening its extreme political profile

(cf. Chapter 1). It therefore seems plausible to assume that, in view of the European migrant crisis in 2015, several generally unsupportive voters again placed their ballot in protest rather than expressing their disenchantment by remaining absent from the elections.

Data and Methods

Data

We employ a combination of pre- and post-election face-to-face cross-sectional surveys (CrossSec09_Cum; CrossSec13_Cum; CrossSec17_Cum) conducted by GLES between 2009 and 2017 to test our assumptions empirically. Data from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2018) and the German Candidate Studies 2009, 2013, and 2017 (CandSurv09, CandSurv13_Plus, CandSurv17) are used to compute the parties' "true" positions on the left–right dimension and on three issue dimensions (immigration, socio-economics, and environment).

The Dependent Variable: Consistent Voting

The standard approach for operationalizing consistent voting with survey data is the "normative-naïve" procedure developed by Lau and Redlawsk (1997: 589–90; 2006: 77–8). The two authors first combine information on four different attitude dimensions—party identification, agreement with candidates' policy stances, linkages between the candidates and social groups, the incumbent's job performance, and candidate personality evaluations—to determine which party a voter should have voted for (Lau and Redlawsk 1997: 595–6; Lau et al. 2008: 400). The authors call this approach naïve because they use the voters' attitudes and beliefs as subjective criteria for evaluating the correctness of a vote (Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014: 197). However, the approach is also normative because some attitude dimensions, such as the issue stances, are related to external objective criteria or expert judgments (Lau and Redlawsk 1997: 586). Since the approach originates in the American two-party system, a one-to-one adaptation to the German context is problematic. Fortunately, Kraft (2012) has proposed a very similar procedure based on the original version for the German multi-party system, which we adopt but modify in some respects. In the following, we describe in general terms how we compute our dependent variable and in which aspects our approach differs from Kraft's procedure.

First, we account for the following eight attitude dimensions to determine the party a respondent should have voted for according to his/her political beliefs and preferences: party identification, issue positions on immigration, taxation and

welfare state, and the environment, left–right placement, personality evaluations of the leading candidates, parties' perceived performance in government or opposition, assessments of party competence in solving what the respondent perceived as first and second most important problems, and retrospective evaluations of the general and personal economic situation.[2]

Second, since data is only available for CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, the Greens, the Left, and, from 2013 on, for the AfD, consistent voting can only be measured for these parties. As with previous studies on consistent voting in Germany (e.g., Kraft and Schmitt-Beck 2013; Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014), the number of attitude dimensions included is not the same for all parties. First, the GLES cross-sectional surveys only contain questions on the personality evaluations of the leading candidates of the two major parties CDU/CSU and SPD. Second, questions about the retrospective evaluations of the governing parties' perceived performance and the general and personal economic situation weighted by the respondents' perceived responsibility of the government only apply to parties that governed in a coalition: CDU/CSU and SPD before the German federal elections in 2009 and 2017, and CDU/CSU and FDP before the 2013 German federal elections. Since the FDP and AfD did not achieve the minimum share of party-list votes to pass the 5 percent parliamentary hurdle in the 2013 German federal elections, no data on the performance of both parties in opposition is available between 2013 and 2017. Hence, we can determine the party that matches a voter's interests best based on a minimum of at least five attitude dimensions.

Third, even though we use attitude dimensions that are similar or identical to Kraft's (2012), the actual procedure for calculating the party-specific overall scores that are used to determine the party suited best for a voter differs in three main aspects. First, like Kraft (2012) and Schmitt-Beck and Kraft (2014), we use the traditional proximity spatial model to calculate policy proximity scores (Davis et al. 1970: 434). Accordingly, we weight each issue dimension with the issues' salience reported by each respondent to account for intra-individual differences in issue importance. However, contrary to Kraft (2012) and Lau and Redlawsk (1997, 2006, 2008) and more similar to Johann and Glantschnigg (2013: 379) and Johann and Mayer (2019: 268–9), we gauge the "true" party position not by relying on the judgment of the most knowledgeable respondents but by referring to the external criterion of issue self-placements of the parties' parliamentary candidates as determined by the GLES candidate surveys. For the "true" left–right position of a party, we also take into account the party manifestos by averaging the candidates' left–right placements and the party positions derived from the Party Manifesto data. Second, we weight the direction of party identification with its respective strength,

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[2] Since it is debatable whether personality evaluations of the leading candidates should be part of a "rational" decision-making process, we generated an alternative measure without them. The results are almost identical to the full operationalization.

which is more in line with the original procedure (Lau and Redlawsk 1997: 596). Third, we assume that the assessment of party competence in solving what the respondent perceived to be the most important problem has more leverage on consistent voting than the assessment of party competence in solving the second most important problem. Therefore, we double-weight the party the respondent perceived to be competent enough to solve the most important problem.

Finally, we compute the party-specific overall scores by averaging the attitude dimensions of all selected parties. We interpret the party with the highest score as the party a respondent should have voted for in order to vote consistently. If the reported party-list vote intentions (pre-election surveys) or the reported party-list vote choice (recall questions in post-election surveys or self-professed postal votes in pre-election surveys) of a respondent matches his/her first-ranking party, we consider him/her to be a consistent voter. This procedure results in a binary variable with a 0/1 coding (see: Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014: 198–9 for arguments for and against this approach), where 1 indicates a party-list vote choice (or intention) for the first-ranking party (consistent vote) and 0 a party-list vote choice (or intention) for any other party (inconsistent vote). In contrast to previous studies (Kraft 2012: 25; Kraft and Schmitt-Beck 2013: 127; Rudi and Schoen 2013: 414; Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014: 198–9), we do not take strategic coalition voting (Gschwend 2007) into account, because only the pre-election surveys asked for coalition preferences. In order to achieve a stable operationalization of consistent voting over time, we therefore refrain from explicitly accounting for strategic coalition voting.

The Independent Variables

The diffuse support of political authorities is intertwined with external political efficacy. If voters do not believe that the political authorities are able or willing to recognize their interests, it is very likely that these voters will not support the political authorities at all. Turning this argument upside down, we can conclude that voters with high external efficacy support the political authorities in general. We measure external political efficacy by using an item that asks respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement that politicians care about voters' opinions. On the five-point Likert scale, high external political efficacy is indicated by strong agreement (1) and low external political efficacy by strong disagreement with the statement (5).

However, the opposition of some voters against not only the political authorities but also the political regime perhaps ran even deeper. In democracies, opposing the political regime is tantamount to rejecting fundamental democratic values and norms or at least the way these principles are implemented. The latter is roughly indicated by a citizen's dissatisfaction with the current democratic regime. Voters who are dissatisfied with how the current democratic regime functions have even

less reason to vote consistently than voters who do not support the political authorities. Therefore, the same protest voting logic should apply: voters who were satisfied with the current democracy had no reason to vote for a new insurgent party like the AfD. These voters probably voted more in line with their interests than voters who were dissatisfied with the democracy. Dissatisfaction with German democracy was measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating a highly satisfied and 5 a highly dissatisfied respondent.

Since we assume that the AfD functions as a catalyst for insurgent party protest voting, we also add an indicator to measure how much a respondent supports the AfD. Since the AfD was founded only in 2013, the item is solely available in the 2013 and 2017 cross-sectional surveys. Respondents were asked on an eleven-point scale what they think about the AfD, where 1 means "I do not think much of the party at all" and 11 "I think a great deal of the party." Respondents who evaluate the AfD very positively probably more often voted inconsistently in 2013 and 2017.

Political knowledge is operationalized by an index that consists of two items indicating respondents' understanding of important details of the German electoral system, which are queried in all cross-sectional surveys (relevance of first and second votes and level of electoral threshold), as well as a dummy variable indicating whether a respondent was able to place the established parties and the AfD on the left–right dimension correctly. To generate the latter, we use survey questions on respondents' perceptions of the various parties' positions on the left–right scale and compare the answers to the correct sequence (see also: Scherer 2011: 34–5 for a similar operationalization). This correct party sequence, however, changed between 2009 and 2017 owing to the rise and political shift of the AfD. In the first two years after its founding, the AfD occupied a center-right position on the right of the SPD and Greens but close to CDU/CSU and FDP, as indicated by party manifestos and self-placements of candidates. Only after one of the liberal-conservative founders left the party in July 2015 did the AfD shift to a position right of the CDU/CSU and FDP. Therefore, and based on data from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2018), we consider the following sequences of party positions to be correct: from September 2009 to May 2013: the Left < SPD, Greens < CDU/CSU, FDP; from June 2013 to June 2015: the Left < SPD, Greens < CDU/CSU, FDP, AfD; from July 2015 to December 2017: the Left < SPD, Greens < CDU/CSU, FDP < AfD. We sum up the two items of the German electoral system and the dummy of the perceived party positions as an additive index to obtain a variable with four values (0 = no political knowledge, 1 = low political knowledge, 2 = high political knowledge, and 3 = very high political knowledge).

Since gender (0 = female, 1 = male), age (age in years divided by 10), education (1 = no formal education to 5 = highest secondary qualification, i.e., *Abitur*), political interest (1 = no political interest at all, 5 = high political interest), and region

of residence (0 = West Germany, 1 = East Germany) are also associated with consistent voting, we include these variables as control measures in the multivariate analyses.

Strategy of Analysis

We test our assumptions by estimating separate probit models containing political knowledge, political motivation, and the control variables for every election year. All independent metric variables are standardized to a range between 0 and 1 to allow rough comparability between effect estimates. To compare effect estimates across different models and samples, we compute average marginal effects (AMEs; cf. Mood 2010: 79–80). Depicting the predicted probabilities of our main independent variables using marginal effect plots for every election year allows us to track possible changes in greater detail. The results are presented as follows: First, we discuss the impact of political knowledge and how it has changed over time. Second, we take a look at the impact of lack of political efficacy, dissatisfaction with democracy, and sympathy for the AfD.

Results: How (In-)consistent Voting Changed between 2009 and 2017

Political Knowledge and Consistent Voting in the 2009, 2013, and 2017 Federal Elections

Figure 8.2 shows the AMEs and the 95 percent confidence intervals of political knowledge for the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. We expect that the contrast between more and less knowledgeable voters in their respective ability to vote consistently was larger in 2013 than in 2009 and 2017. The AME coefficients for 2013 indicate that this was not the case. Not only are the effects weaker in 2013 than in 2009 and 2017, they even fail to reach statistical significance. However, it appears that the influence of political knowledge on consistent voting partly recuperated in 2017, as voters with high and very high political knowledge had a slightly higher probability of 9 and 12 percentage points on average to cast a consistent vote than the least knowledgeable voters.

Figure 8.3 further supports the results obtained by showing predicted probabilities for each political knowledge value and election year. In 2009, voters with high and very high political knowledge voted consistently with an average probability of 77 and 84 percent, respectively, whereas less and least knowledgeable voters had a probability of 72 and 60 percent, respectively. In 2013, as can be seen from the almost identical distributions, knowledgeable and unknowledgeable voters
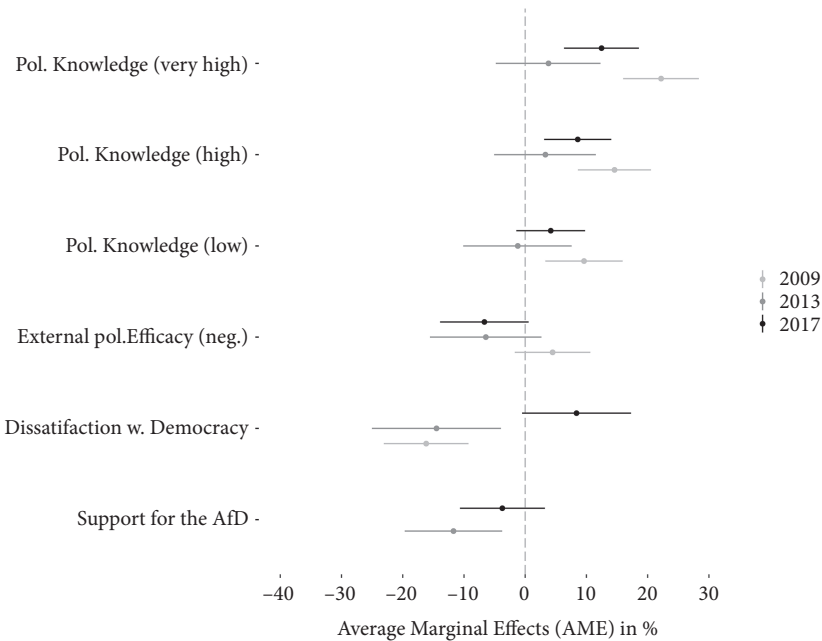
Fig. 8.2 Average marginal effects of the main independent variables on consistent voting

Notes: AME coefficients with 95 percent confidence intervals are calculated on the basis of the estimated probit models. To save space, control variables are not displayed. For a tabular depiction including the control variables and model fits, see Table 8.A1 in the Appendix. For political knowledge, respondents with no political knowledge are the reference.

had nearly the same probability of casting a consistent vote, which, again, is contrary to our original assumption. In the 2017 federal elections, political knowledge again became somewhat relevant, as the most knowledgeable voters had a higher probability of casting a consistent vote of about 12 percentage points compared to the least knowledgeable voters. Nonetheless, political knowledge remained far less influential than in 2009.

Negative Political Motivation and Consistent Voting in the 2009, 2013, and 2017 Federal Elections

Figure 8.2 also includes estimates for political motivation. We assume that voters are more likely to vote in protest and therefore inconsistently when they do not support central objects of the political system. This should be especially true when insurgent protest parties appear as choice options on the ballot. Hence, in 2013 and 2017 voters who lacked political efficacy, were dissatisfied with democracy, and supported the AfD should have been more likely to vote inconsistently
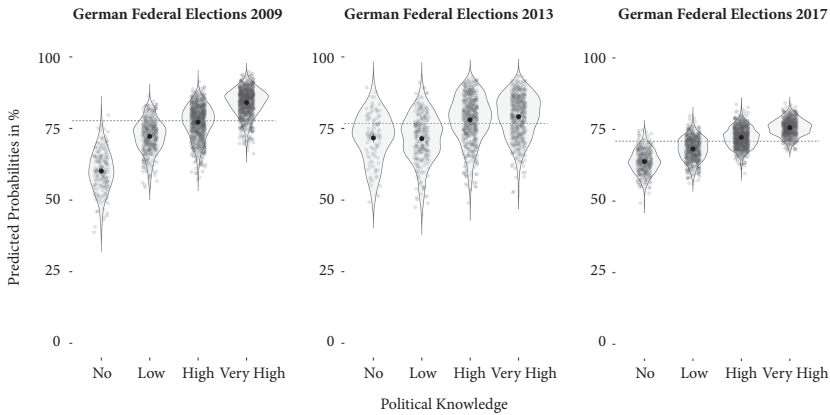
Fig. 8.3 Predicted probabilities of voting consistently for different levels of political knowledge

Notes: Predicted probabilities are calculated on the basis of the estimated probit models. Horizontal dashed lines indicate the overall mean of the predicted probabilities. Violin plots are generated using a Gaussian kernel. Transparent dots display the predicted probability of an observation. Black dots at the center of each violin indicate the category-specific mean of the predicted probabilities with 95 percent confidence intervals.

than in 2009. As far as the AfD rating measure is concerned, the estimates seem to confirm our assumption that the strongest supporters of the AfD in 2013 were much less likely to cast a consistent vote than its most vigorous political opponents, averaging 12 percentage points. However, with a lower probability of 4 percentage points on average in 2017, the link between AfD support and the quality of a vote decision is not only weaker but also lacks statistical significance. Consequently, in the 2017 German federal elections, AfD supporters were not more likely to vote inconsistently than AfD opponents.

We also find only weak evidence for our theoretical consideration regarding external political efficacy. While there is no discernible difference between voters with low and high political efficacy in 2009, the former were 6 percentage points less likely to vote consistently than the latter in 2013, which is in line with our expectations. However, the coefficient size is not significantly larger than zero. In the 2017 federal election as well, voters unsupportive of the political authorities did not differ significantly from the more supportive voters concerning the quality of their vote decision.

The strongest effect on the quality of a vote decision seems to result from (dis-)satisfaction with democracy. In 2009, voters highly satisfied with German democracy were on average 16 percentage points more likely to vote consistently compared to highly dissatisfied voters. This is somewhat unexpected, as we assumed that dissatisfied voters would have opted for other forms of protest voting to express their disenchantment, e.g., by casting a blank ballot or by abstention.

It will require further research to investigate this puzzle. More in line with our theoretical consideration are the results for the 2013 federal elections since voters who were very satisfied with the German democratic system gravitated much more to the party that reflected their actual interests than voters highly dissatisfied with German democracy (14 percentage points on average). However, even when applying a less conservative standard for hypothesis testing (Schenker and Gentleman 2001: 185), the effect of satisfaction with German democracy is not significantly higher in 2009 than in 2013, as the AME's point estimates fall within the respective confidence intervals. Furthermore, the effect of dissatisfaction with the German democratic system on consistent voting has vastly diminished and lost its statistical significance in 2017.

So far, we have obtained quite mixed results regarding the influence of support for the AfD, dissatisfaction with democracy, and external political efficacy on the quality of vote decisions. To gain more detailed insights, Figure 8.4 additionally shows the marginal effects of the factors based on the calculated probit models. The marginal effects compellingly show that negative political motivation was most influential in 2013, which is indicated by the very steep curves. Voters who were extremely dissatisfied with political authorities and democracy and who strongly supported the AfD had a predicted probability of casting a consistent vote of only 70, 65, and 63 percent respectively. On the other hand, extremely satisfied voters and voters highly skeptical of the AfD had a predicted probability of voting consistently of 80 to 84 percent. Compared to the results in Figure 8.2, it is perhaps most striking that external political efficacy still affected consistent voting in 2017, albeit to a lesser extent. Although not statistically significant in Figure 8.2,
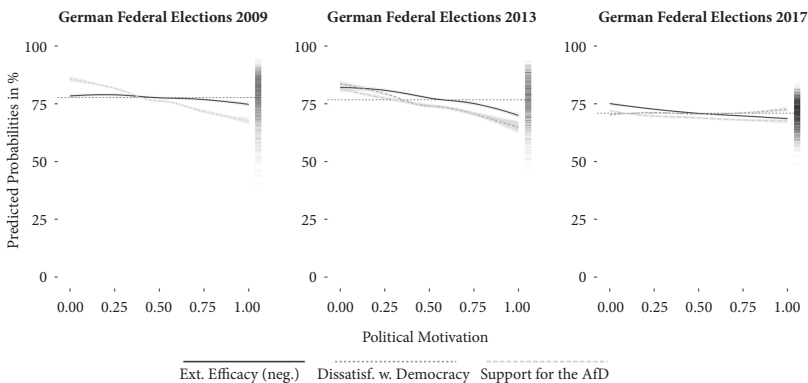
Fig. 8.4 Predicted probabilities to vote consistently for different indicators of political motivation

Notes: Predicted probabilities are calculated on the basis of the estimated probit models. Horizontal dashed lines indicate the overall mean of the predicted probabilities. Curved lines show the smoothed trend (using LOESS) with 95 percent confidence intervals.

the difference in the quality of a vote decision between highly motivated and un-motivated voters (i.e., very low external political efficacy) seems to be small but substantial, as the difference is about 6 percentage points. The results for the 2009 federal elections are almost identical.

Conclusion

Choosing the "right" party has been especially challenging for German voters due to considerable changes in the German political landscape, with the AfD's rise in 2013 being just the tip of the iceberg. Rapidly changing electoral environments increase the complexity of vote decision processes and challenge the voters' ability to cast ballots consistent with their interests. However, despite the political changes between 2009 and 2017, most voters were able to place a ballot consistent with their actual interests throughout this period. The consistency of vote decisions is a cornerstone of democratic quality, not least because parties and politicians must be held accountable by voters for their political actions (Schmitt-Beck and Kraft 2014: 214). Hence, this is good news and especially encouraging for democratic theory, as it proves that voters can adapt to a rapidly changing political landscape and are still able to make high-quality electoral choices. Consequently, the changes in the German party system do not seem to have had a negative effect on the quality of representative democracy, at least not regarding the quality of voting decisions.

In this chapter, we have tried to track how (in-)consistent voting may have changed between 2009 and 2017 in the context of the AfD's rise. Based on the general framework of voter decision-making proposed by Lau et al. (2008), we have shed light specifically on how the influence of political knowledge and negative political motivation on the quality of vote decisions developed over time. We defined negative political motivation according to Easton's (1965, 1975) concept of political support as a negative evaluative attitude toward the political regime and authorities and assumed that voters who do not support these political objects are more prone to protest voting. We argued that insurgent party protest voting is the opposite of consistent voting, and assumed that insurgent party protest voting became more relevant to German voters in 2013 with the rise of the AfD as a new insurgent protest party. Regarding political knowledge, we assumed that more knowledgeable voters would have an additional advantage over less knowledgeable voters in terms of consistent voting in the 2013 federal elections compared to 2009 and 2017. We tested our assumptions using a combination of GLES pre- and post-election face-to-face cross-sectional surveys.

Our main findings can be summarized as follows: Contrary to what we assumed, more knowledgeable voters were not overrepresented among consistent voters in 2013. However, this was the case in 2009. It seems that, when a party system is in turmoil because a new political actor with ambiguous political positions enters the

political sphere, this affects all voters equally, regardless of their level of political knowledge. However, we also see that, as soon as the party system has stabilized (which was apparently the case in 2017), more knowledgeable voters are more likely to vote consistently again.

How negative political motivation affects consistent voting and how it developed between 2009 and 2017 was largely in line with our theoretical consideration. The voters who were dissatisfied with the German democratic system and who did not diffusely support the political authorities were more likely to vote inconsistently in 2013 when the AfD emerged and the German party system started to change. It seems that, in the first year of its existence, the AfD attracted protest voters who would otherwise have expressed their disenchantment by remaining absent from the election or by casting a blank ballot. This view is supported by the fact that voters who favored the AfD in 2013 were much less likely to cast a consistent vote than voters opposing the AfD. Hence, by consciously defecting self-defined preferences, protest voters produced an over-proportional number of inconsistent votes in 2013. The overly strong effect of negative political motivation was only temporary, however, as the influence of these factors had vastly diminished by 2017. One possible explanation could be that the AfD lost its halo of *the* new insurgent protest party and started to attract voters who were more deliberate in choosing the AfD for its political program, which also became more pronounced, thus leading to more consistent votes. Thus, in 2017 more preference-guided voters found a political home. From the perspective of democratic theory, this could become more problematic in the long run if the AfD continues with its course of radicalization and successful mobilization.

Appendix

Table 8.A1 Probit models of consistent voting

	2009		2013		2017	
	β	AME	β	AME	β	AME
Constant	0.38		1.23***		0.28	
	(0.21)		(0.26)		(0.18)	
Pol. knowledge (very high)	0.76***	0.22	0.13	0.04	0.37***	0.12
	(0.11)		(0.15)		(0.09)	
Pol. knowledge (high)	0.50***	0.15	0.11	0.03	0.25**	0.09
	(0.10)		(0.14)		(0.08)	
Pol. knowledge (low)	0.33**	0.10	−0.04	−0.01	0.12	0.04
	(0.11)		(0.15)		(0.08)	
External efficacy (neg.)	0.15	0.04	−0.22	−0.06	−0.19	−0.07
	(0.11)		(0.16)		(0.11)	
Dissatisf. with democracy	−0.55***	−0.16	−0.48**	−0.14	0.25	0.08
	(0.12)		(0.18)		(0.13)	
Support for the AfD			−0.39**	−0.12	−0.11	−0.04
			(0.14)		(0.10)	
Pol. interest	0.46***	0.13	0.27	0.08	0.13	0.04
	(0.14)		(0.18)		(0.12)	
Region (West Germany)	−0.07	−0.02	−0.38***	−0.11	0.04	0.01
	(0.06)		(0.08)		(0.06)	
Sex (Men)	−0.08	−0.02	0.02	0.01	−0.05	−0.02
	(0.06)		(0.08)		(0.05)	
Education	−0.07*	−0.02	−0.06	−0.02	−0.04	−0.01
	(0.03)		(0.03)		(0.03)	
Age	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.03*	0.01
	(0.02)		(0.02)		(0.02)	
McKelvey & Zavoina R^2	0.08		0.08		0.02	
Observations	2,609		1,501		2,753	
Log likelihood	−1,331.80		−784.98		−1,640.56	
Akaike inf. crit.	2,685.60		1,593.97		3,305.11	

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses.

9

Dynamics of Coalition Preferences and Vote Choices

Sascha Huber and Robert Welz

Introduction

Governments in multi-party systems with proportional representation are usually coalition governments. Still, ballot papers offer voters only the possibility to cast their vote for a party but not for a particular coalition. In most electoral research, parties and their candidates are thus considered the primary and often only political objects voters care about when making their decisions at the ballot box. This view is probably too simple and misses a crucial element of the political decision-making environment in countries like Germany. A growing literature points out that many voters in multi-party systems have a more complex decision calculus than that and consider potential coalitions when making up their mind about elections (e.g., Cox 1997; Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Duch et al. 2010; Irwin and van Holsteyn 2012; Kedar 2012). Research has shown that coalitions are meaningful political objects for voters in multi-party systems (e.g., Blais et al. 2006; Huber 2014) and quite a bit is known about how coalition preferences inform vote choices at one election at a time (e.g., Pappi and Thurner 2002; Shikano et al. 2009; Hobolt and Karp 2010; Faas and Huber 2015). However, very little is known about the dynamics of coalition preferences and their potentially changing effect on vote choices at subsequent elections.

In this chapter, we will study the dynamics of coalition preferences in Germany over the course of the past three elections and analyze whether or not voters have stable coalition preferences and how much the effects of coalition considerations vary between different elections. The three elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017 are particularly interesting for a better understanding of coalitions and their effects on voting. They were characterized by an increasing dealignment of partisan attachments, higher volatility, a significant reshuffling of political preferences, and rapid differentiation of the German party system. Most importantly for our study of coalition effects, there was a considerable variation of coalition options, and voters

were confronted with an increasingly complex political environment of coalition and government formation over the course of the three elections.

Up until the early 2000s, government formation used to be pretty straightforward in Germany. Voters were presented with a small number of clear coalition options before an election and could adapt accordingly. From the 1960s until the 1980s, there were two dominant parties—the CDU/CSU and the SPD—and only one relevant smaller party—the FDP—which was often seen as the kingmaker of governments. There were coalitions between CDU/CSU and FDP (1961–1966), a short Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD (1966–1969), followed by a long period of coalitions between SPD and FDP (1969–1982) and again a period of governments of CDU/CSU and FDP (1982–1998). In the 1980s, however, the party system began to differentiate with the emergence of the Greens as a new party. After German reunification in 1990, the East German PDS (since 2007: The Left) regularly gained seats in the Bundestag, although it first struggled in the West of the country. In 1998, a red–green coalition of the SPD and the Greens was formed for the first time and lasted until 2005.

With more parties in parliament, government formation became increasingly complex. The 2005 election resulted in the first culmination of this development, as there was no majority for the conservative side of CDU/CSU and FDP or the governing left coalition of SPD and Greens. In the end, a Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD was formed. With five parties in parliament, potential coalition options increased, although the parties reduced those options by refusing to work with certain other parties. The elections of 2009 to 2017 are situated in this context of increased coalition complexity. The 2009 election led to a CDU/CSU–FDP coalition, the 2013 election to yet another CDU/CSU–SPD coalition. Despite these variations in the governments' composition, Angela Merkel (CDU/CSU) served as head of government throughout this entire period. In each of these elections, voters were presented with different coalition options, a different incumbent coalition government, and very different expectations on the likelihood for certain party combinations to be able to form a government after the election. Take, for instance, the chances of a red–green coalition (SPD and Greens). In 2009, there was still the distinct possibility that this coalition, which had governed Germany from 1998 to 2005, would again win a parliamentary majority. In 2017, however, the combined vote share of these two parties amounted only to about 30 percent. With the AfD entering parliament for the first time, forming coalition governments became much more difficult. Even three-party coalitions no longer seemed a far-fetched possibility, although the first attempt to form such a coalition (between CDU/CSU, Greens, and the FDP) failed in 2017.

As the political context changed alongside the prospects of different coalitions, according to instrumental accounts of coalition voting we should expect very different effects of coalition considerations for each of the elections. If, on the other hand, voters are not so much motivated by instrumental goals but

just want to express their coalition preferences at elections regardless of the specific electoral context, we would expect rather stable coalition effects across the three elections. The differing electoral contexts of the three elections are thus an ideal setting to shed some light on the underlying factors of coalition voting in multi-party systems. The stability or variability of coalition preferences and effects in these varying contexts may give us an indication of the instrumental and non-instrumental reasoning of coalition voting.

Against this backdrop, this chapter will examine the stability of German voters' coalition preferences and their effects on vote choices over the three elections between 2009 and 2017. The German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) offers unique datasets for analyzing the dynamics of coalition preferences and effects across different elections. We will use the tracking component of the GLES, which surveyed voters not only at each of the three federal elections but also between elections. In combination with the large face-to-face pre-election cross-section surveys, this allows us to investigate the stability of the coalition evaluations and their effects on vote choices in much more detail than with traditional election surveys that are conducted only every four years. In addition, we will use the long-term-panel component of the GLES to look at individual-level stability of coalition preferences and to disentangle some of the endogeneity issues of coalition evaluations and their effects on vote choices.

Coalition Evaluations and Instrumental Reasoning

The theoretical importance of coalition considerations in multi-party systems is quite obvious in instrumental accounts of voting behavior: in multi-party systems with coalition governments, votes are cast for parties that most of the time will have to strike compromises regarding their policies when they enter governments. Ultimately, an elector's vote supports the policies of whatever coalition the chosen party joins (Downs 1957). Therefore, instrumental voters should not only keep in mind what each party stands for. They should also anticipate which coalitions might be formed after an election and which compromises might be implemented by these coalitions.

Downs (1957) was skeptical whether voters have the capacity and willingness to use these complicated calculations when voting and therefore expected voters to fall back on simple partisan calculations. Yet, there is growing evidence from different countries that voters indeed rely on instrumental coalition considerations in multi-party systems (e.g., Cox 1997; Blais et al. 2006; Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Duch et al. 2010; Meffert and Gschwend 2010; Indridason 2011; Fredén 2017). For Germany, there is extensive literature on strategic coalition voting showing that voters do not only care about their partisan evaluations but also about the formation of the future government (e.g., Schoen 1999; Pappi and Thurner 2002;

Gschwend 2007; Herrmann 2014). It has repeatedly been demonstrated that coalition considerations influenced vote choices and that particularly small parties like the FDP benefited from coalition voting (e.g., Shikano et al. 2009). In the case of the German party system with two big parties and various small parties, coalition voting has been attributed mainly to the so-called threshold insurance strategy, which takes into account thresholds to enter parliament (Pappi and Thurner 2002). If the potential small coalition partner of a preferred larger party is in danger of not passing the 5 percent threshold required by the German electoral system, supporters of the latter party may defect from their first preference and vote for the small potential partner in order to secure the formation of this coalition. This deviation from the preferred party is thus conditional on expectations about the result of the election and the following coalition bargaining process. The FDP referred to this logic over decades to convince supporters of the CDU/CSU to vote for it in order to enable a coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP, and various studies suggest that this campaign strategy was quite successful (Gschwend 2007; Shikano et al. 2009; Faas and Huber 2015; Huber 2017).

Theoretically, there are, of course, also other potentially rational voting strategies that might maximize the expected utility of a vote at a particular election. Some argue, for instance, that voters should particularly care about the weight of a party in a given coalition and therefore use a so-called coalition-targeted Duvergerian strategy in which voters will deviate from their preferred party if the chances are low that this party will be part of a governing coalition (Bargsted and Kedar 2009). Furthermore, voters might consider the policy compromises in coalition bargaining and hence cast a vote for a party that differs more from their own position than other parties to compensate for the multi-party trade-offs and influence the position and yet the policy outcome of the potential coalition (Kedar 2005). There is quite some debate about which kind of instrumental reasoning is best for voters and which reasoning they actually follow (Linhart 2009; Duch et al. 2010; Indridason 2011; Herrmann 2014). Still, there is a common understanding of instrumental approaches that coalition considerations per se should not have strong effects but that voters analyze the particular context of each election, consider the possible election outcomes of various parties and coalitions, and use their expectations to calculate their best choice. In other words, it is assumed that the relevance of coalition evaluations for the electoral behavior of instrumental voters depends on the particular context of a specific election. Take, e.g., the threshold insurance strategy outlined above: According to this view, voters should only take their coalition evaluation into account if the small member of a preferred coalition is in danger of missing the parliamentary threshold, otherwise, they should vote according to their party preference. Accordingly, the effects of coalition preferences should vary widely when examining different elections.

Coalition Evaluations and Expressive Reasoning

It is conceivable that voters may also consider coalitions as meaningful political objects that they want to consider in their decision-making for other than purely instrumental reasons. In multi-party systems, coalitions are natural objects to which voters will relate in some way or another. The media reports extensively about coalitions, the incumbent government coalition will be discussed in detail, and there will always be speculations about possible coalition alternatives. It is therefore plausible that many voters in multi-party systems will form genuine preferences not only about parties and candidates but also about coalitions. And if voters have preferences about coalitions, they might also want to express them at elections.

According to theories of expressive voting, voters are motived primarily by just expressing their preferences and not by an instrumental goal like selecting a government (e.g., Brennan and Lomasky 1993). In this view, expressing one's own preferences is a good in itself, providing utility to a voter independent of the outcomes of a future government. Expressive voting is seen as a "non-consequentialist" form of political action (Shayo and Harel 2012). Voters are seen as consumers who construct their identity as a biographical narrative by summing up all acts of choice exerted in their life (e.g., Schuessler 2000). Expressive voting decisions are thus seen as a way for individuals to reassure themselves and others about their personal identity. Theories of expressive vote choice have mainly focused on parties and candidates. However, expressive motives must not be restricted to them. If one has strong coalition preferences, one may also find it attractive to express a coalition preference (see also Huber 2014).

Expressing a preference for a coalition can signal that one is adapting to the changing political offer and the performance of government, that one is flexible, sophisticated, and reflective, and is not just sticking to one party or candidate once and for all. Coalition choices are by definition more differentiated than party choices, and voters might find themselves best represented by a particular combination of parties rather than only one party. They might as well be motivated to express their dislike for a certain coalition and thereby distance themselves from a disliked group or political idea or ideology. One major difficulty for expressive coalition voters is that coalitions do not appear on the electoral ballot. Voters have to choose between parties when casting their vote. This makes it harder to understand the act of voting as a way of expressing support for one particular coalition. If voters have only one vote to cast for one party, a defection from the preferred party would always come with some psychological costs, as voters would have to trade off the utility they would gain from expressing some coalition preference—by voting for a junior partner of the preferred party, for instance—and the utility they would gain by expressing their party preference.

Interestingly, the German mixed-member proportional electoral system with two ballots provides an opportunity to get around this trade-off. With two votes at hand, citizens can express their support for a particular coalition at the same time as expressing their support for a particular party. They can split their vote and choose a district candidate of one party with the first vote (*Erststimme*) and another party with the second vote (*Zweitstimme*). The two votes provide an opportunity to indicate a coalition preference and should therefore particularly suit expressive coalition voters. Contrary to instrumental voters, expressive voters will not care about the institutional logic of the electoral system. They will be satisfied with the opportunity to cast two votes and thereby possibly express their coalition preferences.

If coalition voting was mainly driven by expressive motivations, one would expect coalition evaluations and their effects on vote choices to be pretty stable over time. As expressive voters would not care too much about the outcome of an election, changes in the electoral context should not make much of a difference in expressing their preferences. Obviously, this does not preclude that coalition preferences can change. However, we would expect that they are more stable than for instrumental voters, and, more importantly, we would expect that their effects on vote choices do not vary much over time.

Expectations on the Stability of Coalition Preferences and Their Effects on Vote Choices

Although there is now considerable evidence that voters in multi-party systems use coalition evaluations when making up their mind about voting decisions (e.g., Gschwend 2007; Shikano et al. 2009; Duch et al. 2010; Fredén 2017), little is known about the stability or mutability of coalition preferences and their effects on vote choices across various elections. Research on the formation of coalition preferences has so far focused on explaining why voters prefer one coalition over another at a given election. Recent studies have shown that voters primarily rely on policy considerations and the ideological proximity of a coalition but also the learned familiarity of a certain combination of parties in governments (Falco-Gimeno 2012; Debus and Müller 2014). At the same time, it was shown that voters also use valence considerations when making up their mind about their coalition preference (see Shikano and Käppner 2016; Nyhuis and Plescia 2018).

While these findings are important contributions to a better understanding of coalition evaluations, they also raise questions about the significance of coalition considerations for vote choices. If coalition evaluations can be fully accounted for by other factors, they might be just endogenous to other well-studied predictors of voting behavior and have no explanatory value on their own. Take, for instance, evaluations of government performance and their effects on vote choices.

Coalition evaluations could be just the result of judgments of government performance at a given time. If one is satisfied with an existing government coalition, one would evaluate this coalition accordingly and vote in line with this assessment. The coalition evaluation itself would not necessarily have an independent effect. In cross-sectional surveys, these endogeneity issues are difficult to address. This chapter, therefore, draws on panel data to shed some light on the question of independent effects of coalition evaluations.

Conceptually, one has to differentiate between the stability of coalition evaluations and the stability of their effects, as it is perfectly possible that voters have stable coalition preferences but still do not use them in the same way in every election. For the stability of coalition preferences, two different expectations are plausible. On the one hand, voters may primarily care about parties and candidates and form coalition preferences only in a campaign context, if at all. Coalition preferences would be rather fickle and without foundation. On the other hand, voters may care about coalitions per se. They would then rather form long-lasting attitudes about various coalitions and stick to these attitudes even if there are changes in the political environment.

For the stability of coalition effects, there are likewise two plausible expectations. As outlined above, from the perspective of instrumental voting, there should not be stable effects of particular coalition evaluations across elections with changing political contexts. Depending on the political context of each election with its different coalition signals, the changing expectations about the prospects of future government formation, and the positioning of parties, we would expect very different effects of specific coalition evaluations on vote choices for each election. From the perspective of expressive coalition voters, however, we would expect that coalition evaluations have rather stable effects on vote choices. If one is interested in expressing and signaling a coalition preference (or a distaste for another coalition), the political context of an election should be less important. Thus, the research question we try to answer in this chapter is pretty straightforward: How stable are coalition preferences, and how stable are the effects of coalition evaluations on vote choices? By answering this question, we try to get a better understanding of the underlying factors of coalition voting. For expressive coalition voters, we would expect rather stable effects of coalition preferences. For instrumental coalition voters, we would expect a considerable variation of these effects.

Data and Methods

We use three GLES data sources to address this question: the pre-election cross-section surveys for the German federal elections in 2009, 2013, and 2017, the cross-sectional long-term online tracking surveys from 2009 to 2017, and the long-term panel study from 2009 to 2017. The pre-election face-to-face cross-section surveys

are based on large representative random samples with about 2,000 respondents each. The survey always spanned a period from about two months up to the last day prior to the election. The data sets include comprehensive measurements of respondents' party and coalition preferences, which include ratings on standard eleven-point scales as well as questions about respondents' expectations about the election outcomes.

The long-term online tracking surveys of the GLES project give us the opportunity to study the stability and change of coalition evaluations and their effects on vote intentions in a more fine-grained way. These online cross-sectional surveys were conducted four times annually since 2009 and offer standardized interviews of about 1,000 respondents in each round. In addition to fixed core questions, asked in every cross-section, the questionnaires contain more specific recurring module questions. One of these modules includes respondents' attitudes toward coalitions and was included in the survey once a year, that is in about every fourth cross-section, as well as in every pre- and post-election tracking survey for the federal elections in 2009, 2013, and 2017. These standardized measures allow us to analyze coalition preferences not only shortly before or after the federal elections but also with a view at changes in the four years in between elections. The pre-election cross-section surveys as well as the tracking studies are first used to analyze the development of party and coalition preferences over time and second to study the effects on vote choices over time, employing multinomial logistic regressions.

We use the long-term panel data of GLES to complement our analysis by looking at intrapersonal attitude formation and vote choices over time. The respondents of the panel were recruited from the 2009 GLES cross-sectional survey and participated in face-to-face interviews either prior to or after the German federal elections in 2009, 2013, and 2017. We focus on the pre-election waves because coalition evaluations were measured consistently only in these waves. Besides a better understanding of intrapersonal change in coalition preferences, the panel data also allows for exploring some of the possible interdependencies between government evaluations and coalition evaluations over time. Employing a path analysis of the voting decisions in 2009, 2013, and 2017, we try to get a better understanding of the importance of coalitions as an explanatory variable for voting.

The Stability of Coalition Preferences

In a first step, we analyze the stability of coalition preferences on the aggregate level from 2009 to 2017. Figure 9.1 displays the coalition preferences of voters across the various surveys of the pre-election cross-sections and the long-term tracking surveys. A preference for a coalition is assumed when a respondent gave his or her

Fig. 9.1 Shares of coalition preferences over time

Note: GLES pre-election cross-section surveys (indicated as CS) and GLES long-term online trackings. Vertical dashed lines mark the dates of federal elections.

highest rating to the coalition on an eleven-point rating scale. As the surveys did not ask about the same set of coalitions over the whole period, we focus on the three most popular coalitions that also dominated the public discourse.

The Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD was the preferred party combination for a long period. While it ranked only third among the three coalition options in 2009, it gained considerable support during the time of the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition and already ranked first in 2012. Around the time of the election in 2013, support of the Grand Coalition dropped a bit, as the polarization of the election campaign apparently led people to reconsider their coalition evaluations. After the 2013 election, this coalition option also became more and more popular again.

Preferences for the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition decreased by about 23 percentage points from the pre-election survey in 2009 to 2010, which suggests that voters strongly adapted their coalition preferences to the perceived performance of the CDU/CSU–FDP government. Comparing the shares of preferences for the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition and the Grand Coalition, an interesting pattern emerges. While the latter had long been seen as the "last resort" in coalition formation, over time it became a more popular option for voters. Along with the declining probability of an SPD–Greens coalition, which was the main counterpart to the conservative–liberal coalition throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, and the unwillingness of the parties to form three-party alliances, the Grand Coalition

was probably perceived as the most likely alternative. The almost symmetric lines of the two coalitions in Figure 9.1 point to a strong antagonism between these government options.

The preferences for an SPD–Greens coalition were surprisingly steady. While we find some fluctuations between 2009 and 2013, our data indicate relative stability afterward. This is remarkable, as the chances of this coalition of actually forming a government decreased substantially over time. Before 2009, the red–green coalition appeared to be a realistic option, but due to the subsequent electoral losses of the Social Democrats, a joint majority of these two parties became more and more unlikely. Polls indicated only tiny chances for a parliamentary majority for these two parties.

Overall, these findings point to relatively stable coalition preferences. If coalitions were no meaningful political objects for voters, we would expect more—and more arbitrary—fluctuations. The fluctuations we find indicate that voters adapt their coalition preferences to the political context. The mirror image of preferences for the Grand Coalition and the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition is a case in point, as it suggests that voters adapt their coalition evaluations according to the perceived performance of a governing coalition. Additionally, the preference changes right before the federal elections in 2013 and 2017 suggest that the high-information contexts of election campaigns contained political signals about possible future coalitions that led to a certain amount of reconsiderations of coalition preferences.

One needs to be cautious when interpreting aggregate changes of various cross-sectional surveys. We therefore turn to the GLES long-term panel data to inspect intra-individual changes. Table 9.1 displays the stability of respondents' party and coalition preferences. It illustrates the share of respondents who preferred the same party and the share of respondents who preferred the same coalition over consecutive panel waves. As party identification is supposed to be one of the most stable political attitudes, we also include the stability of party identification as a yardstick for comparison. Interestingly, the share of respondents with stable

Table 9.1 Stability of attitudes over three panel waves

Attitude	Stable over …			
	one wave only	two waves only	three waves	N
Party preference	17.81 %	38.06 %	44.13 %	247
	(44)	(94)	(109)	
Coalition preference	27.17 %	29.06 %	43.77 %	265
	(72)	(77)	(116)	
Party identification	13.71 %	22.85 %	63.44 %	372
	(51)	(85)	(236)	

Source: GLES long-term panel.

coalition preferences is very similar to the share of respondents with stable party preferences with about 44 percent. This is quite remarkable as the political context changed significantly during this time and the prospects of various coalitions were severely affected by changes in the party system. As expected, the share of 63 percent of respondents with a stable party identification shows that there are some more stable political attitudes. Still, the differences are not that big. Both the analysis of aggregate changes in coalition preferences and the analysis of individual-level changes thus indicate that coalition preferences are far from being fickle.

The Stability of Coalition Effects on Vote Choices

Voters may have relatively stable preferences about coalitions, yet this does not necessarily mean that these coalition evaluations have stable effects on vote choices. The following analysis therefore investigates vote choices in Germany over time. Before turning to the effects of various coalition evaluations in detail, the analysis presented in Figure 9.2 gives a first indication of the stability of voters' decision calculi. It displays the share of voters who deviate from their preferred party with the party list vote (*Zweitstimme*) as well as the share of voters who split their
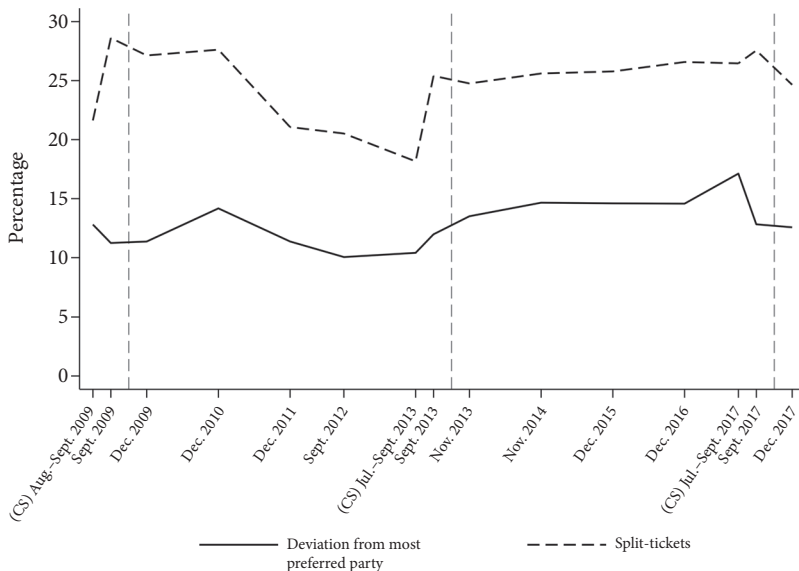
Fig. 9.2 Shares of deviating list votes and split-ticket voting over time
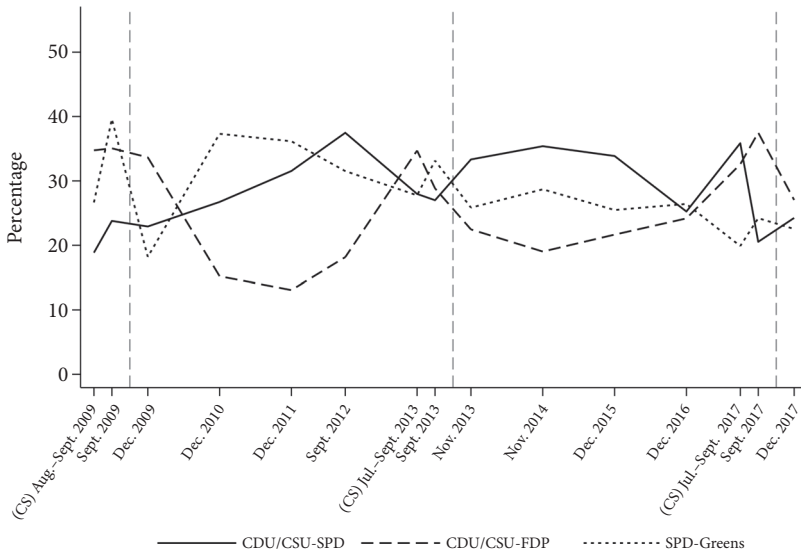
Notes: GLES pre-election cross-section surveys (indicated as CS) and GLES long-term online trackings. Share of respondents who deviated from their most preferred party with the list vote and share of split-ticket voters over time. Vertical dashed lines mark the dates of federal elections.

two ballots between two different parties. If only party preferences influence vote choices, one would expect both measures of inconsistency to be very low. This is not the case. A considerable share of respondents indicated deviating from their preferred party. An even higher share falls under the category of split-ticket voters. While this finding is not new for Germany and suggests that voters care about coalitions and not only about parties when making their decision, the relative lack of variation over time is more important for our analysis in this chapter. If voters take each election at a time and follow purely instrumental reasoning, we would expect more variation over time. The share of voters deviating from their preferred party constantly ranged between 10 and 15 percent. The same is true for split-ticket voting, which ranged from about 20 to 30 percent. Both the stability of deviating from the party preference and the stability of split-ticket voting across these eight years suggest at least some portion of expressive coalition voting.

In order to get a more detailed sense of coalition voting across time, we look at the effects of specific coalition evaluations on voting for the various German parties. Multinomial logistic regressions were estimated for each of the online tracking surveys as well as for the pre-election cross sections in 2009, 2013, and 2017, with the respondents' intended list votes as the dependent variable. Multinomial regressions allow for analyzing influences on a specific choice set that an individual is presented with. The choice set of our analysis is restricted to the five (2009, 2013), respectively six (2017), largest German parties. We focus our analysis on the effects of the three most popular and relevant coalitions of the studied period: the Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU–SPD, the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition, and the SPD–Greens coalition. The ratings of these coalitions serve as the main independent variables. In addition, we control for respondents' ratings of all the respective parties and some socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, and education). To compare the results across the various surveys, we compute marginal effects for the independent variables of interest. In contrast to standard coefficients obtained from multinomial logistic regressions, the computed marginal effects refer to the overall probability of choosing an alternative and thereby stating how much an increase in the independent variable changes the probability of choosing one of the alternatives while controlling for the other independent variables. We show plots of the marginal effects with 95 percent confidence intervals of the respective coalition preferences (see Online Appendix for the full models with all regression estimates).

Figure 9.3 displays the marginal effects of the CDU/CSU–SPD coalition rating on the probability of voting for the respective parties. It suggests that the relevance of the Grand Coalition increased over time. For choosing the CDU/CSU, significant positive effects of this coalition rating emerge from 2012 onward. A better evaluation of the CDU/CSU–SPD coalition enhanced *ceteris paribus* the probability of voting for the Christian Democrats. In contrast, for the SPD such influences can only be found in the model for the pre-election tracking of 2009

Fig. 9.3 Effects of CDU/CSU-SPD coalition rating on vote choice

Notes: GLES pre-election cross-section surveys (indicated as CS) and GLES long-term online trackings. Average marginal effects of CDU/CSU-SPD coalition rating on vote choice with 95 percent confidence intervals. Horizontal dashed lines mark the dates of federal elections.

and the post-election survey in 2013. Preferences for the Grand Coalition had less impact on votes for the (potential) junior coalition partner, which may indicate that in voters' perception the Grand Coalition was closely linked to the party of chancellor Merkel and not so much to the SPD.

The variation in influence points to some context dependency of coalition considerations: as the Grand Coalition became a likely government option, the effects of the preferences for this coalition became more pronounced. The choices for other parties were not affected by voters' preferences for the CDU/CSU–SPD coalition. The only exception was the AfD in advance of the federal election in 2017. Given that the Grand Coalition was the main target of the harsh criticism of the political elites from politicians of the AfD, the negative influence of the coalition rating on the probability of voting for the party seems quite plausible.

Figure 9.4 displays the marginal effects of CDU/CSU–FDP coalition ratings on vote choices. It is remarkable that the coalition rating had a consistently negative effect on voting for the SPD: a better evaluation of the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition reduced the probability of voting for the SPD. Put differently, a strong dislike of the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition increased the probability of voting for the SPD, even when party evaluations are held constant.

There are only small positive effects of the coalition rating on the probability of voting CDU/CSU between 2010 and 2016. This finding corresponds to some

Fig. 9.4 Effects of CDU/CSU-FDP coalition rating on vote choice

Notes: GLES pre-election cross-section surveys (indicated as CS) and GLES long-term online trackings. Average marginal effects of CDU/CSU-FDP coalition rating on vote choice with 95 percent confidence intervals. Horizontal dashed lines mark the dates of federal elections.

of the literature on strategic voting in Germany that assumed particularly the small coalition partner, the FDP, should benefit from voters with preferences for a CDU/CSU–FDP coalition, as they employ a threshold insurance strategy to help the junior partner get into parliament (e.g., Gschwend 2007; Shikano et al. 2009; Faas and Huber 2015; Huber 2017). There are actually much stronger effects on FDP votes than on CDU/CSU votes. The FDP was benefiting more from positive coalition ratings than the CDU/CSU, and this was most pronounced around election time. From the perspective of instrumental voting, this can be expected. Coalition considerations become particularly important with an election approaching when voters find out which coalitions are viable options and whether it might make sense to deviate from one's most preferred party to support a desirable coalition.

However, according to the threshold insurance strategy, one would not expect unconditional support for the FDP from voters with a strong CDU/CSU–FDP coalition preference. The coalition preference should only be consequential if the FDP is believed to be in danger of not crossing the parliamentary threshold in the election. In 2009 and 2017, polls in the run-up to the elections indicated a quite secure representation of the FDP in the *Bundestag*, with around 13 percent in 2009 and about 10 percent in 2017. In 2013, polls indicated that the FDP was actually in

danger of not crossing the threshold, and eventually, it did fail to do so. Comparing the effects of the coalition rating on FDP voting in 2009, 2013, and 2017, we find no big differences though. The FDP benefited from voters with strong coalition preferences in all three elections and not only in 2013, which suggests that the differing context did not moderate the influence of coalition preferences.

To further investigate a potential application of a threshold insurance strategy, we examine the interaction between expectations and coalition evaluations on the individual level. Fortunately, the GLES pre-election cross-section surveys asked the respondents about their expectations about smaller parties entering parliament. For our analysis, we categorized respondents into two groups: those who indicated that the FDP "will definitely" or "will definitely not" enter parliament and thereby stated certainty about the chances of the FDP and those who stated some uncertainty by answering "probably," "probably not," or "maybe." Figure 9.5 shows the interaction effect of these expectations with the rating for the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition and displays the marginal effects of the coalition rating on voting dependent on the respondents' certainty about the representation of the FDP. Contrary to the assumptions of the threshold insurance strategy, we do not find any moderation of effects by expectations in any of the elections.
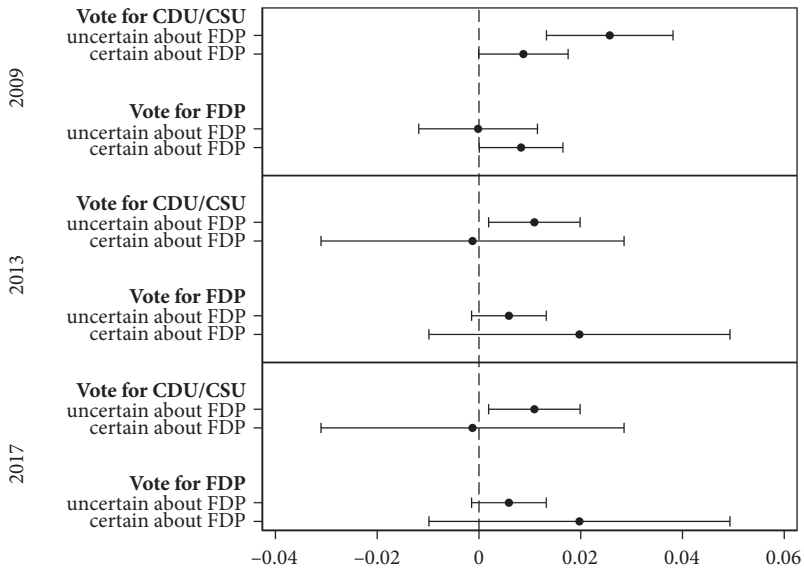
Fig. 9.5 Interaction effects of CDU/CSU-FDP coalition rating with respondents' expectations about representation of the FDP on vote choice for CDU/CSU and FDP

Note: GLES pre-election cross-section surveys. Average marginal effects of CDU/CSU-FDP coalition rating with 95 percent confidence intervals on vote choice for the respective parties dependent on perceptions of the likelihood of the FDP entering parliament.

For individual-level expectations, we therefore find no evidence that coalition preferences play a role only if certain conditions are met.

Figure 9.6 shows the marginal effects of SPD–Greens coalition ratings. In contrast to the effects of the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition rating, there were strong positive effects on the vote for both of the respective potential coalition partners. The overall stability of effects and particularly the strengthening of effects for both the SPD and the Greens after 2013 are not what one would expect from the perspective of an instrumental voter. The chances of the SPD–Greens coalition to obtain a parliamentary majority declined continuously since 2009 and were extremely low after 2013. Still, we find the strongest effects on vote choices after 2013. From an instrumental perspective, most theories expect that, even if voters prefer a coalition, coalition preferences should not influence the voting decision when there is no chance that this coalition will form the government after the election.

Overall, these findings show remarkable stability of coalition effects with some fluctuations over time. If voters were purely driven by expressive motives, we would have expected no or very little fluctuation over time. This was not the case. Still, we found much more stability than what we would expect if voters were purely instrumentally motivated. Additionally, looking at one possible instrumental reasoning more thoroughly, the so-called threshold insurance strategy,
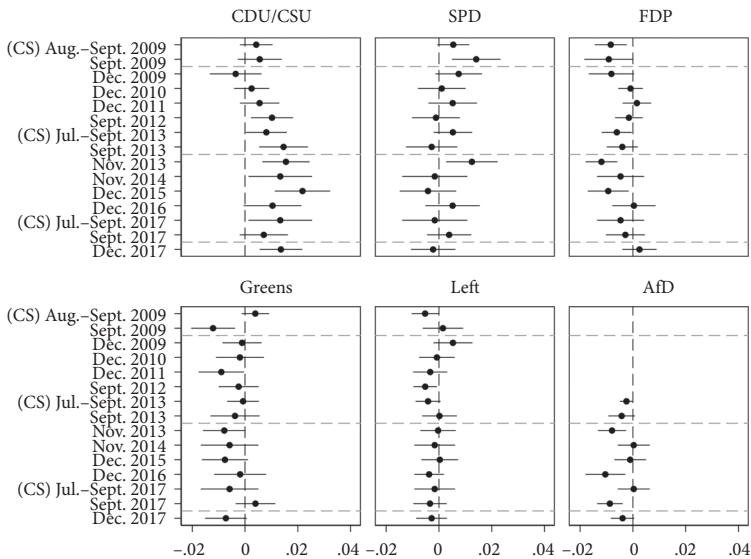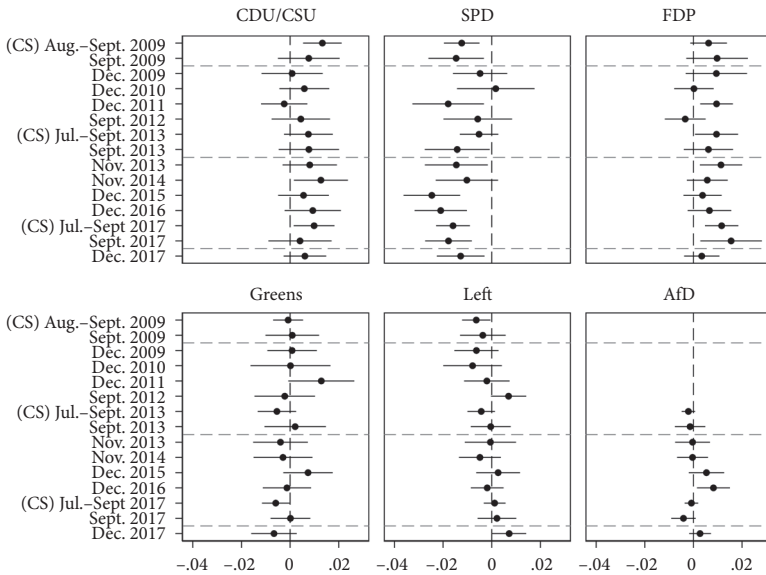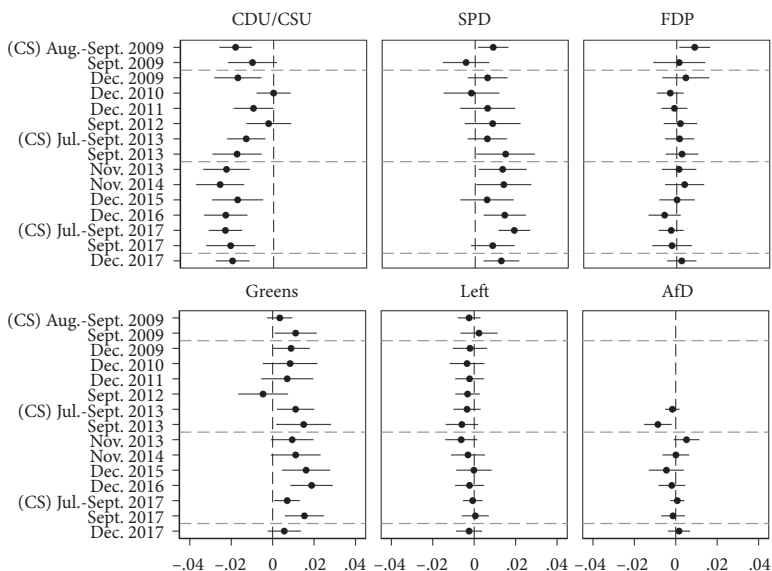

Fig. 9.6 Effects of SPD-Greens coalition rating on vote choice

Notes: GLES pre-election cross-section surveys (indicated as CS) and GLES long-term online trackings. Average marginal effects of SPD-Greens coalition rating on vote choice with 95 percent confidence intervals. Horizontal dashed lines mark the dates of federal elections.

we find no evidence that coalition effects were moderated by individual expectations. The findings for the SPD–Greens coalition ratings provide further evidence of non-instrumental coalition voting. Finally, we find an increasing importance of coalition evaluations for vote choices over time. Interestingly, most of the stronger effects can be found from the 2013 election onward, when coalition options became more and more complex.

The Dynamics of Coalition Preferences, Government Evaluations, and Vote Choices

We may observe strong coalition effects on voting behavior in cross-sectional data, but these effects may still not be meaningful and endogenous to other factors of decision-making. Regarding coalition preferences, one particular problem of endogeneity concerns the evaluations of the actual government at any point in time. Coalition evaluations might be based primarily on the assessment of the governing coalition, and effects of general coalition evaluations might be traced back to the simpler evaluation of the government at the time. Using GLES panel data for a path analysis, we try to explore some of the interdependencies between party preferences, coalition preferences, government evaluations, and vote choices from 2009 to 2017.

The core variables of this analysis are the respondents' party and coalition preferences, the evaluation of the incumbent government, and the intended vote choice in each of the three waves. As our main interest here lies in the effects of government evaluations on voters' attitude formation, we focus on preferences for the two coalitions that held office in the respective period, the Grand Coalition and the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition. The evaluation of the government coalition's performance at the time was measured on an 11-point rating scale. It referred to the CDU/CSU–SPD government in 2009 and 2017 and the CDU/CSU–FDP government in 2013. The main dependent variable is the intended vote choice at the respective federal election. As we need to be as parsimonious in our model as possible, we collapse vote intentions into choices for the CDU/CSU, the SPD, the FDP—the parties that held office at some time in the observed period and are therefore of primary interest to us—and for any other party.

The logic of the analysis is as follows: The central exogenous variable is the evaluation of the incumbent government. We expect this evaluation not only to influence the ratings of the respective government parties but also the preferences for this particular coalition. To examine these influences in our path analysis, linear regressions in each wave are estimated with the preferences for the respective political objects as dependent variables and the government evaluations as the independent variable. Furthermore, we include the preferences for the respective coalition partners as independent variables in the models explaining the coalition
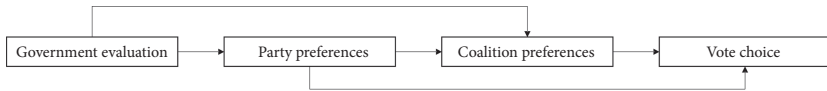
Fig. 9.7 Logic of path analysis

preferences because we assume that the rating of a coalition also depends on the rating of the constitutive parties. Both party and coalition ratings were modeled as independent variables in the multinomial regression models and both explain vote choice in the respective panel waves. Figure 9.7 illustrates the general idea of this path analysis within one panel wave. To account for potential stability in respondents' preferences, linear regressions were estimated, with the preferences in the respective wave as a dependent and the preference for the object in the previous wave as an independent variable. With this strategy, we can tackle some of the problems of endogeneity, as we model not only effects on vote choice but also dependencies between the explanatory variables in and between the waves.

The solid line arrows in Figure 9.8 display effects that reach the 5 percent level of statistical significance. The dotted arrows indicate dependencies in our model that do not reach levels of statistical significance. As the model is rather complex, we show only the coefficients that are theoretically interesting for our purpose. They are displayed next to the respective arrows (see Online Appendix for the full models).

Starting with 2009 and the effects of government evaluations, we find the expected positive influence on the preferences for the CDU/CSU and the SPD. In addition, the rating of the Grand Coalition was affected by the government evaluation. Satisfaction with the government was thus influencing party preferences and the rating of the governing coalition itself. Interestingly, the evaluation of the Grand Coalition was mainly influenced by evaluations of the SPD and the perceived government performance but not by the CDU/CSU rating. For the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition, there were significant positive influences of the preference for the CDU/CSU and the FDP. The model indicates that an increase in preferences for either of the two potential coalition partners had a positive effect on the rating of the coalition. Turning to the effects on intended vote choice in 2009, significant positive effects can be found for the preference for the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition on voting for either CDU/CSU or FDP—always in comparison to the reference category. In contrast, no significant effect on voting can be found for the preference for the Grand Coalition.

Between 2009 and 2013, we find strong effects of the 2009 party and—most important for our analysis—coalition preferences on those in 2013. The evaluation of the incumbent CDU/CSU–FDP government in 2013 shows the expected effects on the preferences for both the CDU/CSU and the FDP as well as for
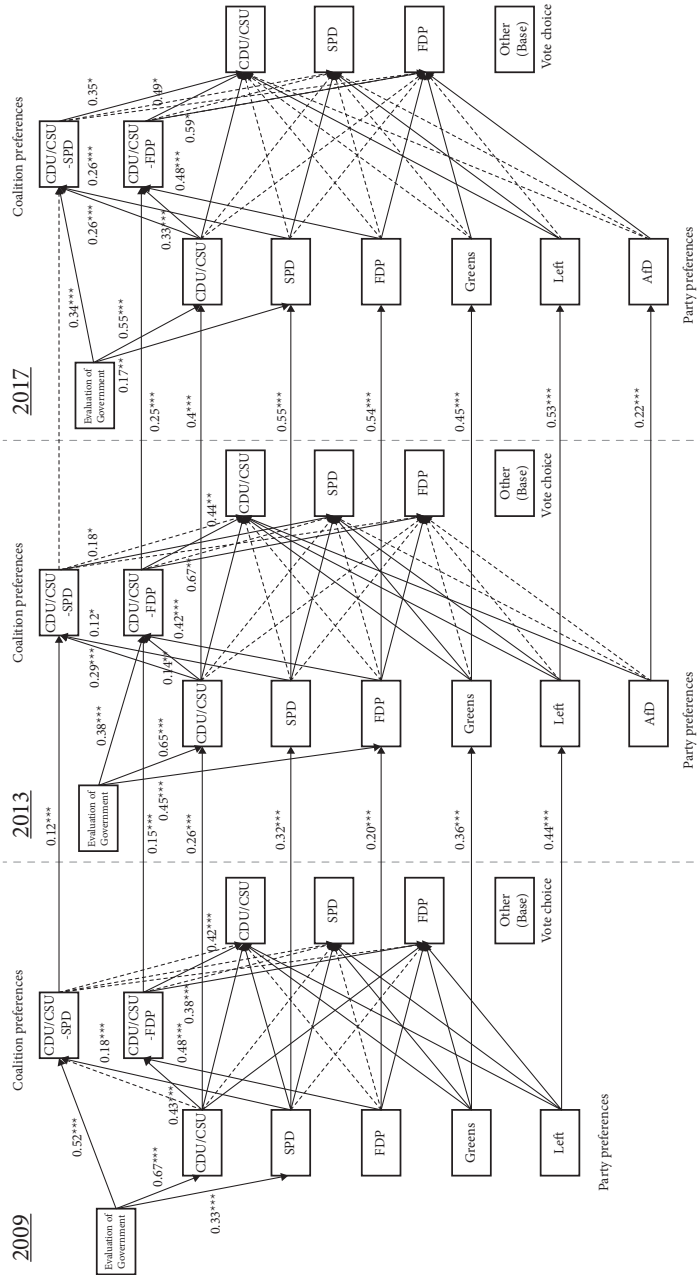
Fig. 9.8 Results from path analysis

Notes: GLES long-term panel. Bold arrows display effects with p < 0.05. Dashed arrows indicate dependencies in the model that do not reach 95 percent level of statistical significance. Displayed are theoretical relevant regression coefficients.
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

the evaluation of the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition. Still, it is important to note that the coalition rating is by no means a simple reflection of the government evaluation.

The results for vote choices in 2013 are similar to those in 2009. There are effects of the evaluation of the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition on voting for both respective coalition partners. In line with our cross-sectional results, the effect on the FDP vote was much stronger than on the CDU/CSU vote. In contrast to 2009, the rating of the Grand Coalition had a significant influence on voting for the SPD. Again, this may suggest that the Grand Coalition became more relevant for voters over the course of the legislative period between 2009 and 2013 because it represented the most likely alternative to the incumbent CDU/CSU–FDP coalition. The rather small effect of the coalition rating on voting for the CDU/CSU supports this interpretation, as voters who wanted a change in government and preferred a Grand Coalition could not be certain that a vote for the CDU/CSU would support their preferred coalition.

Looking at changes in coalition preferences between 2013 and 2017, we again find that earlier preferences had effects on current preferences independent of the government evaluation. The effect of the 2013 CDU/CSU–SPD rating on the 2017 rating was a bit smaller than before and narrowly misses our standard of statistical significance. Overall, the evaluation of the Grand Coalition in 2017 was much more driven by government evaluations and the individual party ratings of the CDU/CSU and the SPD. Turning to vote choices, the CDU/CSU–SPD coalition evaluation had a positive influence on voting CDU/CSU but not on voting SPD. As the SPD with its lead candidate Martin Schulz was skeptical about participation in another Grand Coalition before the election, this finding is not too surprising. Voters who preferred this coalition might have turned to the CDU/CSU, which mainly campaigned for a continuation of the chancellorship of Angela Merkel and seemed to be more open to another Grand Coalition. For the CDU/CSU–FDP coalition preferences, we find a similar pattern as before. Again, the positive effects for the FDP were stronger than for the CDU/CSU.

In order to test the robustness of our findings and examine a possible mediation of party preferences via coalition preferences, we conducted an almost identical path model in which we did not model respondents' coalition preferences. The comparison of the effects of the remaining determinants between the two models indicates possible mediating effects. Table 9.2 displays the differences in effects between the reduced model (without coalition preferences) and the full model. It shows the differences in the effects of party preferences for CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP on vote choices. The differences were computed by subtracting the absolute value of the coefficient of the full model from the absolute value of the coefficient of the reduced model. Positive values for the differences indicate that the party preference effect was larger in the reduced model than in the full model. Hence, negative values for the difference indicate a smaller effect in the reduced model

Table 9.2 Differences in effects of party preferences when controlling for coalition preferences

Party preference	Vote choice								
	2009			2013			2017		
	CDU/ CSU	SPD	FDP	CDU/ CSU	SPD	FDP	CDU/ CSU	SPD	FDP
CDU/CSU	0.13	0.00	0.12	0.21	−0.07	0.45	0.16	−0.07	−0.14
SPD	0.14	0.03	0.18	−0.07	0.02	−0.06	−0.22	0.03	−0.05
FDP	0.01	0.00	0.16	0.21	0.10	0.13	0.41	−0.02	0.29

Note: Displayed are differences in absolute values of the effects of the party preferences on vote choice in the respective panel waves between the reduced model and the full model. In the full model, coalition preferences for CDU/CSU–SPD and CDU/CSU–FDP coalition were incorporated (compare Figure 9.8). In the reduced model, these coalition preferences were not included.

Source: GLES long-term panel.

than in the full model. The absolute value of the difference illustrates the mediation of the effects via the coalition preferences. A difference of zero thus indicates that party preferences were not mediated by coalition preferences at all.

Table 9.2 reveals considerable mediation effects of coalition evaluations. Comparing the changes over time, there is a clear growth in differences during the observed period. Obviously, the mediating influence of coalition preferences increased over time. While it became more and more unclear which coalitions would be formed after the election, the mediating effect of coalition evaluations was not diminishing but strengthening.

Remarkably, we find both directions of differences: There are both larger and smaller effects in the full model compared to the reduced model. While the table shows a stable pattern for 2009, as all the effects of party preferences are larger in the reduced model, this changes over time. Take, for instance, the negative difference of the effects of the SPD rating on voting for the CDU/CSU in 2017, which means that the party effect was larger in the full model. That is, the reduced model underestimates the negative impact of the SPD evaluation on the probability of casting a vote for the CDU/CSU because coalition considerations are not taken into account. When we do not control for the effects of party preference on coalition preference and coalition preference on vote choice, conflicting influences seem to offset each other. As we can see in Figure 9.8, the rating of the SPD has a positive influence on the evaluation of the Grand Coalition. A more positive evaluation of that coalition then enhances the likelihood of voting CDU/CSU. At the same time, we find a direct negative effect of the SPD rating on voting for the CDU/CSU. By not modeling the path via the coalition preference, these two effects are confounded, which explains the larger negative effect of the party rating in the

full model. These results are thus another indication of the importance of coalition preferences for vote choices.

Overall, the path analysis delivers a number of interesting findings. First, we find that coalition evaluations inform the coalition attitudes of the ensuing period, even if we allow for interdependencies with government evaluations and party ratings. Apparently, coalition evaluations are indeed more than the sum of changing party ratings and government evaluations. Second, government evaluations play a critical role in evaluating various coalitions and drive some of the changes in coalition evaluations, even if they do not fully determine them. We find strong direct effects of government evaluations on coalition ratings and almost equally strong indirect effects via changing the party ratings of the incumbent government. Third, coalition evaluations have meaningful effects on vote choices, even if we allow for interdependencies with government evaluations and party ratings over time. For the two coalitions studied in our analysis, these effects were pretty consistent and stable over time. Still, we also find differences in strength for each election that point to some volatility of the effects. Finally, the comparison of the full path model with the reduced model reveals strong mediating effects of coalition evaluations. A substantial part of the effects of party evaluations is mediated by coalition considerations. At the same time, the effects of coalition evaluations cannot be reduced to party evaluations.

Conclusion

Coalition governments have always been an important feature of German politics. Our analysis of the last three German elections suggests that coalition considerations become even more important when the party system is changing and the number of possible coalitions increases. There is a growing literature in electoral research that acknowledges that voters in multi-party systems are not only influenced by attitudes toward parties and candidates but also care about coalitions when making their voting decisions. In recent years, several studies have demonstrated the effects of coalition considerations on vote choices in a number of countries. Yet, we know very little about the stability of coalition preferences and the stability of their effects on vote choices. Our analysis suggests that coalition preferences are far from fickle. Studying three federal elections and two electoral cycles from 2009 to 2017, we found a considerable amount of stability of coalition preferences on both the aggregate level and the individual level. There was not only aggregate stability during election times but also in between, which indicates that coalition preferences are long-term political attitudes and are not just made up on the spot at every election anew. At the same time, the path analysis has shown that coalition evaluations are systematically influenced by government evaluations and therefore at least partly endogenous

to the political process and the perceived performance of the governing coalition.

Coalition evaluations had an independent effect on vote choices in each of the three elections. The various long-term tracking surveys as well as the panel analysis revealed a surprising stability of coalition effects over a long period. While most studies attribute coalition effects on electoral choices to instrumental reasoning on the part of voters motivated by a desire to obtain the best (policy) outcome from the upcoming election, this must not be the only mechanism through which coalition evaluations influence voting behavior. We argued that some voters in multi-party systems just want to express their support for a particular coalition—independent of expectations about the election outcome. This seems to be particularly plausible in the case of Germany, as the German mixed-member proportional electoral system with two ballots provides a simple opportunity to express one's preference for a (two-party) coalition by splitting the two votes between the two partners of a preferred coalition.

Our results suggest that coalition voting is indeed not only driven by instrumental reasoning. If it was purely instrumental, coalition effects should have been less stable across elections and less strong in between-election surveys, as the political context of each election determines whether it is reasonable to base one's decision on a specific coalition preference or not. Depending on parties' pre-election coalition signals and polls' information on the chances of various coalitions to gain enough votes to form a government, instrumental voters would use coalition evaluations differently for each election. By examining the threshold insurance strategy more closely, we found no evidence that the effects of coalition evaluations were moderated by expectations in any of the elections.

This is not to say that instrumental motives do not play a role in coalition voting. We found some variability of effects, which point to adaptations to the changing electoral context. In addition, voters could have instrumental motives but still not show the behavior we would expect from a strict rational choice perspective. This could occur because they lack the necessary information about the electoral context or because they do not have the cognitive capacities to use all information they would require. Still, the narrow focus on instrumental reasoning in the coalition voting literature seems to be misplaced, as voters could also have simple expressive motivations when using their coalition evaluations in multi-party systems. Our findings suggest that considering both instrumental and expressive motivations for coalition voting and disentangling them is a promising path for future research on coalition effects on voting.

Compared to previous decades, the period from 2009 to 2017 saw an increased dealignment of partisan attachments, higher volatility of voting, and a further differentiation of the party system in Germany, which rendered coalition politics more and more complex. Given this changing political environment, the stability of coalition preferences and their effects on voting is particularly striking. Within a

changing party system and under shifting coalition options, many voters nonetheless maintained their coalition preferences and incorporated them in their voting calculi. With less clarity about alternative coalitions before elections, one could have expected coalition evaluations to become less important. Interestingly, our findings indicate just the opposite. If anything, the effects of coalition evaluations on vote choices increased somewhat over time. With less clear options, more voters apparently use their vote to express their individual preferences on a future government.

PART IV

SITUATIONAL VOTING

10

Changing Crises, Changing Votes? Problem Priorities, Party Competence, and Electoral Behavior in Germany, 2009–2017

Agatha Kratz, Maria Preißinger, and Harald Schoen

Introduction

In the decade following 2008, politics in Germany hardly qualified as "politics as usual." According to contemporaneous accounts, the period was overshadowed by a series of crises (e.g., Zohlnhöfer 2011; Zohlnhöfer and Saalfeld 2015; 2019; cf. Chapters 1 and 5). It began with the world financial and economic crisis, which hit Germany severely. As an aftershock, beginning in 2010, the European sovereign debt crisis put a strain on the European Monetary Union (EMU). Though not fully resolved yet, the Euro crisis was subsequently overshadowed by the refugee crisis, which peaked in fall 2015. This sequence of crises attracted considerable media attention (e.g., Kratz and Schoen 2017: 50) and provided an important background for the federal elections between 2009 and 2017. In these elections, aggregate volatility of the votes reached the highest level since the early days of the Federal Republic: Almost half of the voters switched parties from one election to the next (Blumenstiel and Wiegand 2014; Schoen 2019b). Given this striking simultaneity of the succession of several severe crises and the rising electoral volatility, it is tempting to speculate that the latter was a consequence of the former. At face value, it certainly seems highly appealing to interpret the three crises as stimuli that caused voters to switch their party preferences.

A plausible way to conceive of the link between the sequence of crises and electoral volatility starts with the idea that the three crises made issues related to the respective crisis salient for voters and thus led to changes in the public agenda. If voters attributed the competence to solve these changing problems to different parties, the shifts in issue salience may well have led to changes in individual-level vote choice. Though convincing at first sight, this line of reasoning loses some of its initial appeal when taking a closer look. To begin with, voters' problem priorities and competence attributions may, to some extent, reflect not the flow of external

events but rather personal dispositions, such as partisanship or policy preferences (e.g., Bellucci 2006; Stubager and Slothuus 2013). Some people might be concerned about similar problems at all times and deem parties competent that correspond to their party attachments and policy preferences. Moreover, even if they changed, competence attributions might not necessarily make a crucial difference in voters' decision-making. Instead, their impact on vote choices might be trumped by other short-term factors such as candidate orientations or by long-term factors such as party identifications (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960). In effect, event-driven changes in voters' problem priorities and competence attributions may not be very effective in changing vote choice. Accordingly, the three crises might ultimately not have contributed significantly to the shifts in voting behavior that were observed between 2009 and 2017.

In this chapter, we examine the relationship between the succession of crises experienced by German voters between 2008 and 2017 and the changes in voters' behavior during this period. Specifically, we explore whether the succession of crises led to changes in voting along the lines outlined above. In the next section, we discuss the causal chain that links changing crises to changes in voting behavior as well as possible objections that might be raised against it. We then derive expectations from these considerations for the federal elections 2009, 2013, and 2017. After a brief description of the research design, we present the results from analyses using cross-sectional data as well as panel data. The chapter concludes by summing up key findings.

Theoretical Considerations

From 2008 to 2017, the German public was confronted with a sequence of crises that had the potential to lead to major shifts in the electorate's problem priorities (e.g., Zohlnhöfer 2011; Zohlnhöfer and Saalfeld 2015, 2019). These changes, in turn, may have brought about shifts in voters' perceptions of which parties were most competent to address the problems dominating their agenda. As competence attributions provide clear cues for electoral choices (e.g., Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008), these changes may finally have led to shifts in voters' choices and, consequently, also in aggregate electoral outcomes. This would be well in line with the observation that this period was characterized by high inter-election volatility. In effect, as a series of events, the three successive crises may have had a major impact on shifts in popular attention, party support, and ultimately election outcomes. This line of reasoning can be characterized as an "event-driven vote model" of crisis-related vote change.

This model builds on a set of assumptions that are not uncontested, however. For instance, existing research suggests that problem priorities are to some extent endogenous to voter characteristics rather than completely driven by external factors.

Values and policy-related predispositions appear to make voters chronically attentive to certain topics, and inattentive to others (Boninger et al. 1995; Kratz and Schoen 2017; Rössler 1997). Voters might also follow party cues when identifying political problems, particularly during campaigns (Bellucci 2006; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; also see, e.g., Clarke et al. 2004; Damore 2004). This suggests that voters' problem perceptions not only might have been responsive to the three crises but also were conditioned by policy- and party-related predispositions. Given this potential endogeneity, some voters' problem priorities might indeed have remained unchanged over time, irrespective of external events. This, in turn, would limit the potential of crises to bring about major shifts in party support.

Concerning the perceived competence of parties to tackle a specific issue (on controversies about this concept, see, e.g., Green and Jennings 2017b), the event-driven vote model works nicely with the issue ownership perspective. According to this view, many voters share stereotypes about parties' competence in tackling certain problems (see e.g., Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1991, 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003; Damore 2004).[1] Whether a sequence of crises with accompanying shifts of problem priorities brings about changes in party support should therefore depend on the nature of the focal problems and related party images. If voters consider the same party capable of addressing all issues that become salient across several successive crises, no change in party support is to be expected despite the shifting public agenda. However, when different parties are considered competent in dealing with the various problems that relate to these crises, electoral support should undergo change.

However, objections can be raised against these assumptions. From the perspective of valence politics (e.g., Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Whiteley et al. 2013), there is no agreed-upon link between problems and parties that are considered competent in tackling them (on economic voting see, e.g., Clarke et al. 2011; Anderson and Hecht 2012; Nezi 2012; Lewis-Beck et al. 2013). Following this line of reasoning, shifts in problem priorities do not necessarily benefit a specific party or hurt others at the polls. This depends on, e.g., whether governing parties succeed in tackling problems or not.

Competence attributions might also be endogenous to political predispositions such as party attachments, values, and policy preferences (e.g., Kuechler 1991; Bellucci 2006; Stubager and Slothuus 2013; Schoen and Rudnik 2016). Party attachments may incline voters to consider their own party as competent in tackling all problems. In addition, competence attributions might also reflect policy preferences (Stokes 1963; Nezi and Katsanidou 2014). If different problem perceptions bring the same policy preferences into play, competence attributions will remain

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[1] To avoid conceptual confusion, we do not use the term "issue ownership" to denote competence attributions of individual voters (e.g., Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Stubager 2018) but to describe a party's advantage in the distribution of competence attributions at the aggregate level.

stable because voters will always prefer parties with a certain policy approach. However, this prediction does not hold if a party changes its approach to a problem, e.g., by changing its goals or its ideas about the right means to deal with it (Green and Jennings 2017a). In this case, even identical policy preferences may lead to changes in competence attributions. These considerations suggest that changes in problem priorities must not necessarily be accompanied by changes in competence attributions and subsequent party switches at the polls.

Finally, there is also the possibility that voters do not incorporate competence attributions in their party choices, even if they entail clear cues to that end, because other factors weigh more strongly in their electoral behavior (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996). For example, vote choice may be affected by other short-term factors, such as candidate orientations, tactical considerations, campaigns, events, or media coverage in the run-up to the election (e.g., Dilliplane 2014; Schoen et al. 2017a). Moreover, long-term political predilections such as party identification may shape vote choice, irrespective of competence attributions (e.g., Bartels 2002). In addition, campaigns that cover other topics than those relating to a crisis may limit the electoral impact of competence attributions related to it. In effect, changes in competence attributions do not always lead to changes in voting behavior.

Taken together, the event-driven vote model suggests strong repercussions of the successive crises on voting behavior and election outcomes. Our discussion demonstrated that this model builds on a causal chain and a set of assumptions that do not necessarily hold in every case. We now turn to discuss the sequence of crises that may have affected the federal elections from 2009 to 2017 in light of the theoretical discussion.

Problem Priorities and Competence Attributions in Germany in Times of Crises

The financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 may have made economic problems prevalent in the 2009 election. The Euro crisis should have given rise to the perception that the EMU, the common currency, and bailout programs for indebted countries were the most important problems in the 2013 election. Finally, the influx of refugees may have made immigration the top priority on the public agenda in the 2017 election. However, since the three crises did not coincide with these elections but peaked well before them, the shares of voters considering the respective problems as the most pressing ones might already have decreased somewhat before they were called to the ballots. In effect, the impact of the crises on changes in problem priorities may therefore have been limited and further curtailed by the endogeneity of problem priorities to voter characteristics. Party attachments may have affected problem priorities if parties emphasized

or downplayed certain topics in their campaigns. In the 2009 campaign, parties did not differ in their emphasis on economic issues (Krewel et al. 2011). During the 2013 and 2017 campaigns, the governing parties attempted to "dethematize" the EMU and immigration, whereas the AfD highlighted them (Krewel 2014; Schoen 2019a). If these communication strategies were successful, supporters of the governing parties should have been less likely and AfD adherents more likely to consider these topics important. As concerns policy preferences, attitudes toward state intervention into the economy may have affected people's inclination to consider issues related to the financial and economic crisis important in 2009. Given the multi-faceted nature of the Euro crisis, attitudes toward public debt, European integration, open borders, and—more broadly—national sovereignty may have made voters inclined to deem this issue important in 2013. In 2017, opposition to immigration should have made people more likely to consider this topic important. If voters conceived of the Euro crisis and the refugee crisis in terms of national sovereignty, demarcation, and openness (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2008; Hellwig 2014; Teney et al. 2014; Hooghe and Marks 2018), the same policy-related predispositions may have been invoked and voters may have considered these problems important in both the 2013 and 2017 elections. In addition, the endogeneity of problem perceptions to issue positions may have even led voters to regard the same topics as important across all three federal elections, irrespective of the flow of events.

Regarding competence attributions, the issue ownership model suggests that widely held party stereotypes come into play as well. In 2009, the CDU/CSU was considered most competent in dealing with economic issues (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2019). Although there is no clear evidence on the Euro crisis, the CDU/CSU might have been considered most capable of dealing with this issue due to its general image as being competent in matters of economics and national sovereignty (Engler et al. 2019: 322). However, by giving up its strict antibailout policy during the Euro crisis, the CDU/CSU might have undermined this stereotype. Turning to the issue of immigration, the CDU/CSU was traditionally considered competent by the majority of voters (Pardos-Prado et al. 2014). Under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel, however, the CDU had given up its long-held restrictive stance on immigration in 2015, which led to fierce debates within the CDU and the CSU (Mader and Schoen 2019; Schoen and Gavras 2019). This may have eroded the traditional ownership pattern with regard to this issue. In effect, deviations from traditional party images suggest crisis-driven changes in competence attributions and thus a potential for changes in voting behavior.

If party attachments played a role, partisans should have displayed a general tendency to consider their own party the most capable one, irrespective of the problem at hand. Following this line of reasoning, the three successive crises did not have the potential to lead to any changes in voting behavior. Given the fissures within parties during the Euro and the refugee crises, especially within the CDU

and CSU, some voters may have lacked clear partisan cues. This may have under-mined the role of party attachments on competence attributions in these cases.

Turning to the effects of policy preferences on competence attributions, atti-tudes toward state intervention into the economy might have affected competence attributions in the case of the financial crisis in 2009. However, parties widely agreed on how to handle this issue, with the FDP being the main exception. Accordingly, these preferences should not have made a major difference in com-petence attributions in 2009, though opponents of state intervention may have considered the FDP particularly competent. In the European sovereign debt cri-sis, CDU, CSU, SPD, the Greens, and the majority of the FDP backed a policy course that implied conditional support for EMU countries under financial strain. People who preferred a more generous policy may have considered the Left Party competent, which demanded a move away from austerity measures. Economic conservatives, on the other hand, worried about the possibility of joint liability between the Eurozone states. This criticism was voiced mainly by the AfD (which was founded in early 2013). The rank-and-file of CDU, CSU, and FDP took a rather mixed position on the Euro crisis (Zimmermann 2014). Attitudes toward public debt, European integration, and—more broadly—demarcation and openness may thus have affected competence attributions as well. In the refugee crisis, cham-pions of liberal immigration laws might have considered the Greens, the SPD, or the Left Party—all of which preferred openness—most competent. By contrast, the AfD might have been an option for opponents of liberal immigration laws (see En-gler et al. 2019). If directional attitudes toward the oppositional goals of openness and demarcation played a role not only in this conflict but also in the European sovereign debt crisis, they may have attracted the same people to the pro and con camps on these issues.

In sum, the event-driven vote model suggests that the sequential crises between 2008 and 2017 changed voters' problem priorities and competence attributions and thereby accounted for huge shifts in party support in Germany from 2009 to 2017. On the other hand, substantive and theoretical objections can be raised against this view. Aside from the temporal distance between the crises' peaks and the ensuing federal elections, they concern the possible impact of political predilections such as party attachments and policy preferences on problem priorities and competence attributions as well as the limited effect of competence attributions on vote choice. The following analysis confronts these diverging expectations with empirical data.

Data and Methodology

To explore whether and how the three crises affected problem priorities, compe-tence attributions, and finally voting behavior, we primarily use panel data from the GLES Election Campaign Panels 2009, 2013, and 2017 (CampPanel09-13,

CampPanel13-17). As a special feature, respondents from 2009 (2013) were re-interviewed in 2013 (2017), thereby turning the campaign panels into inter-election panels. Since we are interested in intra-individual change between two federal elections, we restrict our analysis to the waves fielded in the week after the respective election.[2] Because the crises and the boost in media attention they triggered peaked quite some time before the next federal elections, the findings for the election years should be put into perspective. We therefore track the evolution of problem priorities in the whole period by means of a cumulated file containing thirty-two online tracking surveys conducted in the GLES framework (Track09-17_Cum). With approximately four cross-sectional surveys each year, these data permit us to cover the period from 2009 to 2017 quite extensively.

To measure problem priorities, we employed an open-ended question asking respondents to report what they saw as the most and the second-most important problems in Germany (on methodological issues see, e.g., Wlezien 2005; Min et al. 2007; Johns 2010). For all three elections, an integrated but adaptable coding scheme was used. To measure problem priorities related to the financial and economic crisis, we employed the categories "the current state of the economy" and "unemployment." To address the Euro crisis, we relied on a wider range of categories, which included mentions of the common currency, financial aid programs for indebted Euro countries, fiscal policy, and public debt in general. Finally, to capture concerns referring to the refugee crisis, we opted for a broad indicator including all references to immigration and right-wing extremism (since the latter includes concerns about hostility toward foreigners; see Table A1 in the Online Appendix for details). In the analysis, we combined all mentions of most and second-most important problems, to the effect that one person can have more than one problem priority at the same time. Moreover, we assigned all mentions not referring to any of the three crises to a residual category of "other problems." In analyses of inter-election dynamics, problem priorities are considered stable if a person mentioned the same crisis or nothing crisis-related at all in both years.

Competence attributions were elicited by means of a follow-up question to these problem priorities, asking which party was most competent in tackling the problem the respondent had mentioned before. In analyses of inter-election dynamics, we consider competence attributions as stable if the same party was named or if no party was deemed competent in both post-election interviews. If a respondent did not name any political problem in one or both years, the variable is set to "missing."

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[2] In 2009 and 2013, 720 respondents participated in the respective interviews; for 2013 and 2017, we have 1,617 cases. Participation in these surveys requires online access; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the German electorate without caution. The same applies to the online tracking surveys mentioned below. In addition, panel attrition and panel effects are potential issues, although some additional analyses do not hint at massive problems (see Table A3 in the Online Appendix).

Vote choices in the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections were captured by vote re-call questions asked in the week after the respective election. We consider voting behavior in two consecutive elections stable if a voter chose the same party or did not vote in either election. Inter-election switchers comprise all respondents who voted for different parties or participated in only one of the two elections (for the question wording, see Table A2 in the Online Appendix).

Results

We begin our analysis by studying aggregate shifts as well as individual changes of problem priorities, competence attributions, and voting behavior across the three elections. Relying on data from the GLES online tracking surveys, Figure 10.1 re-ports the evolution of problem priorities at the aggregate level from 2009 to 2017 (cf. also Chapter 4). The results show how the three successive crises led to shifts in voters' problem priorities. Obviously, the crises-induced alterations in public opinion had peaked already before the three election days. On the other hand, at the time of the 2009 and 2017 elections, still half of the electorate was concerned
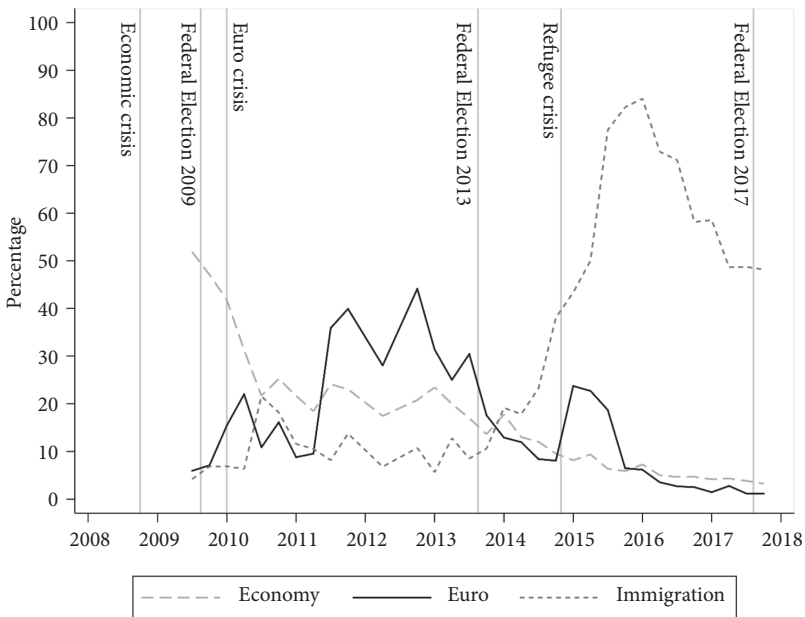
Fig. 10.1 Problem priorities during the crisis period 2008–2017

Notes: Data are weighted by post-stratification weights. Multiple answers were possible. All mentions for the first and second problem considered.

Source: Track09–17_Cum.

about the economic and the refugee crisis respectively, whereas a third worried about Euro issues in 2013.[3] Hence, the crises and their nature appear to have played a genuine role in shaping the public agenda.

At the same time, (changes in) voters' problem priorities were not perfectly aligned with the sequence of the crises. By far not all voters were concerned about the respective crises that overshadowed the three elections; many considered other problems pressing. For example, some people had been concerned about immigration already before 2015. In effect, changes in problem priorities appear to have responded to the flow of events but do not perfectly reflect it. Hence, the link between the sequential crises and changes in voting behavior appears not very strong.

To study this chain in more depth, we turn to intra-individual change. Building on data from the inter-election panel surveys, the left-hand column in Table 10.1 reports that about 60 percent of respondents changed their problem priorities from one election to the next. Leaving aside that this measure is agnostic about the substance of the problems mentioned as well as about how they related to the crises, changes in problem priorities had a considerable potential to stimulate vote switching. At the same time, we see that changing crises did not necessarily lead to changing problem priorities on election days. Consequently, the evidence on intra-individual change squares nicely with the aggregate-level results shown before.

Table 10.1 Shares of respondents with individual changes in problem priorities, party competence attributions, and vote choices 2009–2013 and 2013–2017

	Problem priorities	Competence attributions	Voting
2009–2013	57%	38%	42%
	(325)	(215)	(229)
2013–2017	63%	48%	47%
	(1,009)	(773)	(730)
N (2009–2013)	572	570	545
N (2013–2017)	1,608	1,606	1,567

Notes: Data are weighted by post-stratification weights. Entries are relative frequencies; corresponding absolute frequencies are in parentheses. N differs between columns because of nonresponse to single items.

Source: GLES campaign panels (CampPanel09–13, CampPanel13–17).

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[3] The evidence from the panel data supports this conclusion. However, the share of respondents naming the economic crisis in 2009, the Euro crisis in 2013, and the refugee crisis in 2017 is somewhat higher than in the tracking surveys (see Table A3 in the Online Appendix). We cannot rule out that these differences between the online tracking surveys and the panel data are partly due to inconsistencies in the coding process. Although using identical coding schemes, the problem priorities in the two datasets were coded by different institutes.

Table 10.1 also demonstrates that, according to the panel-based evidence, party competences were less flexible than problem priorities. Between 2009 and 2013, 38 percent changed competence attributions, whereas this rate rose to 48 percent in the following period. The rate of changes in voting behavior resembles the results for party competences more than those for problem priorities. The evidence shows that 42 percent cast votes for different parties or switched between abstention and a party vote in 2009 and 2013; from 2013 to 2017 the rate was even 47 percent. In comparison to prior German federal elections, these rates are quite high (e.g., Schoen 2003; Rattinger and Schoen 2009). However, they fall short of approaching the rates of change in problem priorities. The results suggest that not all changes in problem priorities went hand in hand with changes in competence attributions, nor did they ultimately result in vote switching.

In order to further explore the relationship between (changes in) problem priorities, competence attributions, and vote choice, we cross-tabulated the three change variables at the individual level and identified eight trajectories. Table 10.2 reports the marginal distributions of these trajectories during the two periods under study. Between 2009 and 2013, 12 percent of the respondents experienced changes in all three respects, whereas this share amounted to 18 percent during the following electoral cycle (2013–2017). Thus, the link from changing problem priorities to changing competence attributions to vote switching appears to hold for some people. For many, it does not, however. More than half of the people who changed their problem priorities from one election to the next did not change competence attributions. Some 10 percent of the respondents in both periods changed

Table 10.2 Patterns of individual change in problem priorities, party competence, and vote choice 2009–2013 and 2013–2017

Individual change in:				
Problem priorities	Competence	Voting	2009–2013	2013–2017
Yes	Yes	Yes	12% (63)	18% (280)
Yes	Yes	No	9% (48)	12% (195)
Yes	No	Yes	12% (67)	11% (175)
Yes	No	No	24% (131)	21% (331)
No	Yes	Yes	8% (45)	11% (166)
No	No	Yes	10% (53)	7% (108)
No	Yes	No	9% (51)	7% (106)
No	No	No	16% (85)	13% (203)
N			543	1,565

Notes: Data are weighted by post-stratification weights. Entries are relative frequencies; corresponding absolute frequencies are in parentheses. Putting various problems into the residual category "other problem" decreases the overall turnover rates.

Source: GLES campaign panels (CampPanel09–13, CampPanel13–17).

problem priorities and competence attributions but not vote choice. About 20 percent of the respondents changed problem priorities without changing competence attributions or vote choice. Looked at from a different angle, 42 (2009–2013) and 47 (2013–2017) percent of the respondents changed voting behavior from one election to the next, but only 12 and 18 percent also changed problem priorities and competence attributions, respectively. Accordingly, changes in the latter two appear to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for changes in voting behavior. Thus, the relationship between problem priorities, competence attributions, and vote choice is far from perfect.

Clearly, the sequence of crises did not translate into changes in voting behavior in the straightforward way suggested by the event-driven vote model. To better understand the—obviously, at best imperfect—connections between crises-induced problem priorities and related competence perceptions, we now turn to an exploration of how the mechanisms discussed above contribute to weakening the linkage between the flow of events and electoral choices. We start with examining the evolution of specific problem priorities between two elections at the individual level by cross-tabulating the mentions in successive elections.

The evidence reported in Table 10.3 indicates, again, that some voters did not alter their problem priorities between elections, although the situational context changed significantly from one crisis to the next. This particularly applies to economic and immigration issues, whereas Euro-related mentions appear to be rather

Table 10.3 Individual trajectories in problem priorities 2009–2013 and 2013–2017

| Problem priority 2009 | Problem priority 2013 | | | | |
	Euro	Economy	Immigration	Other problem	N
Economy	27%	32%	16%	35%	386
Immigration	15%	31%	50%	26%	41
Other problem	23%	6%	7%	64%	160
All respondents	26%	24%	14%	43%	572

| Problem priority 2013 | Problem priority 2017 | | | | |
	Euro	Economy	Immigration	Other problem	N
Euro	3%	3%	73%	25%	430
Economy	2%	18%	69%	22%	343
Immigration	1%	8%	87%	12%	263
Other problem	0%	2%	56%	42%	734
All respondents	1%	5%	65%	32%	1,608

Notes: Data are weighted by post-stratification weights. Shares do not add up to 100 percent because multiple answers were possible. All mentions for the first and second problems are considered. Putting various problems into the residual category "other problem" decreases the overall turnover rates.

Source: GLES campaign panels (CampPanel09–13, CampPanel13–17).

time-bound. If the Euro crisis and the European refugee crisis related to the same overarching demarcation vs. openness cleavage (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2018), endogeneity might have developed in a more overarching way. From this perspective, the endogeneity of problem priorities appears more widespread between 2013 and 2017 because transitions from Euro-related to immigration issues do no longer count as changes. Empirically, some three in four respondents who had mentioned Euro-related issues in 2013 switched to immigration as a problem priority in 2017. The fact that this rate is higher than the proportion of respondents mentioning immigration in 2017 in the sample as a whole might be read as supporting the notion that there is some affinity between these topics.[4]

How about party attachments and policy preferences—did they also affect problem priorities? Using binary logistic regression models, we predicted crisis-related issue salience by predispositions and policy preferences. For each crisis, we took the same set of predispositions and policy preferences in order to compare their effects. Party identification was measured by means of the German standard instrument; for the purpose of our analysis, this information was turned into a set of dummy variables for the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens, The Left, and—starting from its formation in 2013—AfD. To measure policy preferences, we relied on attitudes toward state intervention into the economy indicated on a bipolar scale in 2009 and a five-point Likert scale in 2013. We also included attitudes toward public debt (only available in 2009). To measure attitudes toward financial aid for indebted Euro countries, we relied on an item that asked respondents how they saw Germany's involvement in such a program. In addition, we included attitudes toward European integration and immigration.[5] For these variables, we used—as far as possible[6]—data from the panel wave conducted at the preceding federal election, i.e., before the respective crises unfolded and four years before problem priorities were measured. As these attitudes may have undergone some change in the course of four years (cf. Chapter 5),[7] we are likely to get rather conservative estimates of the effects of predispositions. As controls, we included age, education, region, and unemployment in our models. All variables were rescaled to run from zero to one (for the question wording, see Table A2 in the Online Appendix).

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[4] Looking at all mentions in the same interview, we found very small proportions of respondents worrying about both crises at the same time (see Table A3 in the Online Appendix). In particular, hardly anyone cared about the Euro crisis in 2017 anymore.

[5] Some attitudes were measured using a split-half design with seven- and eleven-point response scales in the 2009 data. Because the results do not differ substantially between response scales, we treat them as interchangeable.

[6] Lacking data from a 2005–2009 panel survey, in the analyses of the 2009 election we relied on predictor variables measured in 2009. As the debate about bailout programs was not anticipated in 2009, we also had to employ a measure of attitudes toward financial help programs for indebted Euro countries from 2013.

[7] Empirically, some attitudes prove stable over the period under observation (immigration, r = 0.7), while others do so less (state intervention into economy, r = 0.4).
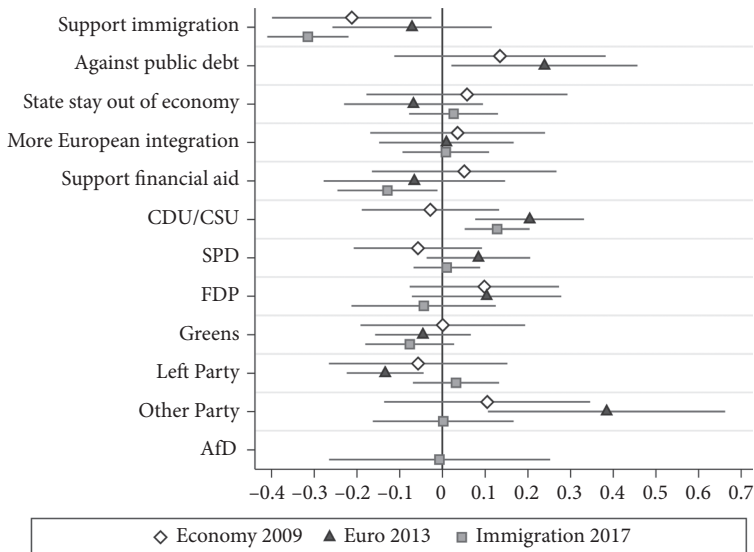
Fig. 10.2 The influence of predispositions and policy preferences on problem priorities 2009, 2013, and 2017

Notes: Data are weighted by post-stratification weights. Entries are average marginal effects from logistic regressions with 90 percent (Economy & Euro) and 95 percent confidence intervals (Immigration). For party identification entries are discrete probability changes from omitted reference category (Independents). N: Economy (399), Euro (399), Immigration (1,597). Effects of control variables (age, education, region, unemployment) are not displayed.

Sources: GLES campaign panels (CampPanel09–13, CampPanel13–17).

Figure 10.2 reports the respective average marginal effects (for the regression coefficients of the complete models see Table A4 in the Online Appendix).

The effects of policy preferences and party identification on problem priorities in many cases do not pass conventional levels of statistical significance—even if we employ the 90 percent level in 2009 and 2013 in order to account for the rather low numbers of observations. To some degree, this result reflects the conservative setup of our analysis that led us to use predictor variables (where applicable) that were measured four years before the respective election. Still, the evidence suggests that party identifiers of the CDU/CSU were particularly likely to consider Euro-related topics in 2013 and immigration in 2017. Given the CDU and CSU's attempts at downplaying rather than highlighting these topics, this finding may appear somewhat surprising. However, supporters of the leading governing party may tend to care especially for problems the government attempts to address. Moreover, support for relaxing immigration policies made voters less likely to be concerned about immigration in 2017 and about the economy in 2009. Although we find a slight tendency to, but not a robust effect on, mentioning Euro-related topics in 2013, support of more open immigration policies appears to have made

voters less likely to mention problems relating to any of the three crises as important. Looked at from a different perspective, opposition to immigration increased voters' likelihood to mention these problems and thus appears to be a common source of concerns voiced in these elections. In a similar vein, opposition to giving financial aid to EU members in need appears to have made people more likely to regard immigration as a problem in 2017. This finding may be read as indicating some relationship between the Euro crisis and the refugee crisis in voters' minds. Thus, we find some, albeit not very strong evidence for the idea that people with specific political views are particularly (un)likely to pick up problems related to the three crises.[8]

Party attachments and policy preferences may also exert influence on evaluations of which party is the most competent one. They may therefore explain the weak link between individual changes in competence attributions and vote choice. In exploring this question empirically, we have to consider the specifics of data collection. As respondents were asked about competence attributions as a follow-up to problem priorities, we have information on party competence attributions for a crisis only if a respondent regarded issues associated with this crisis as (second-) most important problems. Accordingly, the number of cases available for the following models is reduced by half (economy 2009, immigration 2017) or even by two-thirds (Euro 2013). Given the small number of respondents, we treated CDU/CSU and "no party" as separate outcome categories in all analyses, while we had to put all other parties in a residual category. The only exception is the AfD, which was mentioned rather often as being most competent to deal with the immigration issue in 2017. We use a multinomial logistic regression, employ the same set of predictor variables as in the analysis of problem priorities, and again present average marginal effects (regression coefficients of the complete models in Table A5 in the Online Appendix). Since they are not of substantive interest, we do not display the effects for the residual category "other party" in the presentation of the results.

According to the results in Figure 10.3, party attachments made a difference in voters' perceptions of which party was most competent to tackle important problems. In 2009 and 2017, adherents of the CDU/CSU (as measured four years earlier) were considerably more likely to deem this party most capable of tackling problems concerning the economy (2009) and immigration (2017). Given the CDU's policy shift on immigration in 2015 and the ensuing debates, the latter finding is particularly noteworthy. The 2013 analysis yields a similar pattern, but the effect does not pass conventional levels of statistical significance. Furthermore, party identifiers are less likely to deem no party competent. This applies not only

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[8] Additional analyses (not presented) suggest that opposition to relaxing regulations on immigration and to financial aid for EU member countries in need made voters more likely to deem immigration an important problem in 2013. This result squares nicely with the idea that predispositions made voters also somewhat less likely to pick up problems in line with the sequence of changing crises.
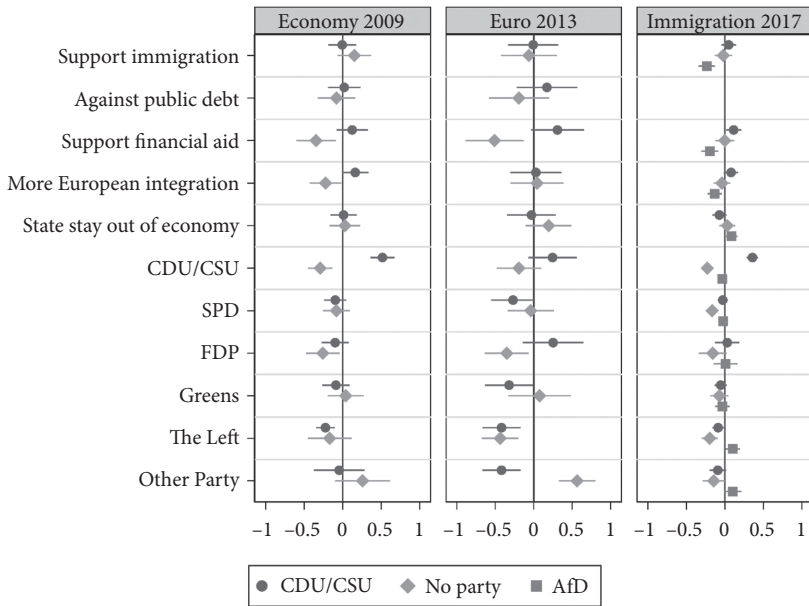
Fig. 10.3 The influence of predispositions and policy preferences on party competence attributions

Notes: Entries are average marginal effects with 90 percent (Economy 2009 and Euro 2013) and 95 percent (Immigration 2017) confidence intervals from multinomial logistic regressions. For party identification entries are discrete probability changes from omitted reference category (Independents). N: 258 (Economy 2009), 113 (Euro 2013), 1,103 (Immigration 2017). Effects of control variables (age, education, region, unemployment) are not displayed.

Sources: GLES campaign panels (CampPanel09–13, CampPanel13–17).

to CDU/CSU attachments but also to attachments to parties such as SPD, FDP, and The Left. Although the data do not allow us to study competence attributions for each party separately, we conclude that party attachments made a difference in competence attributions and may have served as an impediment to vote switching.

Competence attributions were also affected by some policy preferences.[9] Socioeconomic policy preferences do not make a difference. However, opposition to financial aid for indebted EU countries made voters more likely to judge no party as competent in 2009 and 2013 and to consider the AfD most competent in dealing with immigration in 2017. A similar pattern applies to opposition to the deepening of European integration. Finally, opposition to relaxing immigration regulations made voters more likely to deem the AfD most competent in addressing the immigration issue in 2017. Although the effects are not overly strong, the results

[9] Lacking a sufficient number of observations, we were unable to include distances between voter positions and (perceived) party positions.

indicate that competence attributions were affected by (positional) policy preferences. Moreover, the pattern of effects across topics and elections suggests that a combination of opposition to European integration, financial aid, and immigration made people particularly eager to deem the AfD competent and that this party appears to have filled a representational gap (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017; cf. Chapter 3).

Our analysis thus lends credence to the idea that party attachments and policy preferences affect competence attributions. In the former case, the effects mean that—despite changing problem agendas—voters stick to a party when it comes to tackling pressing problems. If anything, the result will be lesser incentives for changes in voting behavior. The implications of the role of policy preferences are less clear: They rather depend on whether policy preferences fit best with the platform of the same party in every election or not. The electoral implications of endogenous competence attributions thus vary across sources of endogeneity.

Even if competence attributions change from one election to the next, they do not necessarily lead to changes in voting behavior, however. As voting behavior can be affected by a plethora of factors (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996), other factors may prove influential in shaping vote choice or may even make changes in competence attributions completely ineffective at the polls. To explore this possibility, we ran a simple model of vote switching that includes change in competence attributions, change in evaluations of chancellor candidates (on candidate voting cf. Chapter 11), and party identification as measured at the first election of the respective pair of elections. As concerns candidate attitudes, we focused on evaluations of the chancellor candidates of the CDU/CSU and SPD, which were registered on eleven-point feeling thermometers. We calculated absolute differences for the CDU/CSU and SPD candidates for the period of 2009 to 2013 and 2013 to 2017. Of course, this is not a comprehensive model of vote choice. For the present purposes, however, it may suffice to analyze whether party identification as a long-term political predisposition and candidate orientations as a factor that is susceptible to short-term influences affect vote switching and how their impact compares to the influence of changes in competence attributions. Table 10.4 reports average marginal effects from logistic regressions of inter-election vote switching in 2009–2013 and 2013–2017.

The results demonstrate that the three types of factors made a difference in vote switching in both pairs of elections. Partisan independents had an above-average likelihood of vote switching, while SPD supporters were less likely to switch. Changing candidate evaluations increased the likelihood of vote switching in both pairs of elections considerably, though the effect is confined to attitudes toward the CDU/CSU candidate between 2009 and 2013. Consequently, other factors than changes in competence attributions affected vote choice, thereby decreasing the impact of the latter. Despite that, changes in competence attributions are clearly

Table 10.4 The effect of change in party competence evaluations on change in vote choice

	2009–2013	2013–2017
Δ Competence	0.15** (0.06)	0.23*** (0.03)
Δ CDU/CSU candidate	0.48** (0.17)	0.22** (0.07)
Δ SPD candidate	0.09 (0.17)	0.30*** (0.07)
Party ID (ref.: CDU/CSU):		
SPD	−0.14* (0.07)	−0.10* (0.04)
FDP	0.02 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)
Greens	0.05 (0.11)	0.09 (0.05)
The Left	−0.05 (0.12)	−0.05 (0.05)
Other	−0.03 (0.15)	−0.06 (0.07)
Independent	0.26** (0.09)	0.17*** (0.04)
N	536	1,542

Notes: Average marginal effects from logistic regressions of inter-election vote change. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: GLES campaign panels (CampPanel09–13, CampPanel13–17).

related positively to changes in vote choices in both elections.[10] We thus conclude that changes in competence attributions made voters more likely to change their voting behavior from one election to the next but that they are by far not the only factor.

In sum, the analysis demonstrated that the causal chain from a sequence of crises via changing problem priorities and changing competence attributions to changing voting behavior proved quite tenuous in the cases under study. Voters' problem priorities were not fully aligned with the sequence of crises. Moreover, changes in problem priorities did not always translate into changes in competence attributions or changing voting behavior. These imperfections reflect, at least partially, endogeneities stemming from political predispositions.

Conclusion

In Germany, a series of crises coincided with a high level of electoral volatility between 2008 and 2017. This observation squares nicely with the idea that political events in general and political crises in particular have the potential to bring

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[10] We acknowledge that there are many issues in disentangling specific effects of, e.g., attitudes toward candidates and issues because they are interrelated. Including the policy preferences (integrated in the above models) does not alter the results substantially.

about large shifts in voting behavior (Campbell et al. 1960: 151). One way of linking a sequence of crises to shifts in voting behavior is to regard crises as leading to changes in voters' problem priorities and competence attributions, which in turn result in changing voting behavior. The analysis demonstrated that the causal chain underlying this event-driven vote model appears to work for some voters but by far not for all. Quite often, problem priorities were not congruent with the respective crises and might rather reflect personal circumstances and preferences. Further complexities arise from competence attributions, which appeared to be somewhat endogenous to political predispositions and did not always affect vote choice strongly. As a result, less than half of the voters who changed problem priorities simultaneously changed voting behavior; neither did changes in competence attributions necessarily go hand in hand with changes in voting behavior. Putting the findings together, the causal assumptions underlying the event-driven vote model proved fragile and appear to have less explanatory power than one might expect at first sight.

From a substantive perspective, the findings suggest that voting behavior is less responsive to the flow of external events than the event-driven vote model suggests. This imperfection implies that changes in society, even crises, may not necessarily translate into large shifts in electoral support. Therefore, the party system appears to be to some extent insulated against these external influences. Regardless of whether one considers this a lack of responsiveness or a valuable source of stability, the drivers of this disconnect include voter characteristics such as values, party attachments, and policy preferences, which give rise to motivated reasoning (Skitka et al. 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006). Accordingly, the explanatory power of the event-driven vote model may vary across cases, depending on the circumstances. An electorate comprising dyed-in-the-wool partisans with well-aligned policy convictions is unlikely to exhibit patterns derived from the event-driven vote model. However, crises with severe consequences for people's everyday lives and clear attribution of responsibility to partisan actors may cause strong responses even by such an electorate. And progressing dealignment should render electorates generally more responsive to crises by decreasing the mediating role of motivated reasoning in information processing. Studying these processes from a comparative perspective is thus a valuable way forward to better understand the way crises produce repercussions in the electoral arena and on voting behavior in particular.

11

The Push and Pull of Political Leaders

Changing Candidate Evaluations and Vote Switching between the 2013 and 2017 Federal Elections

Nils Jungmann, Ina Bieber, Manuela Blumenberg, and Konstantin Glinitzer

Introduction

The German federal election of 2017 brought about significant shifts in the German party system. The massive changes in the parties' vote shares that voters caused in this election fit into a general development of rising volatility at elections (cf. Chapter 1). Voters' increasing mobility is often attributed to partisan dealignment (Dalton et al. 2002; Dalton 2013), which in Germany, like in many other countries, has progressed significantly since the 1970s, although not in a linear fashion (Arzheimer 2006, 2017; Dassonneville et al. 2012). Since partisanship works as a filter for voters' perceptions of the political landscape, it colors issue and candidate orientations in a way that is favorable for the party a voter feels attached to, and thus exerts a stabilizing effect on vote choices (Schoen 2014: 502). By contrast, voters who do not feel attached to a party are more likely than partisans to switch votes between elections (Sinnott 1998). Lacking stable party attachments to rely on, apartisans' votes should be more strongly affected by short-term orientations toward issues and candidates (Dalton and Bürklin 2003). In this chapter, we analyze the relationship between party identification, candidate orientations, and vote switching for all parties and their *Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidates) in the German Bundestag. Data availability restricts the scope of this analysis to the 2013 and 2017 federal elections.

Unlike most extant research, our study does not focus exclusively on the candidates of the two major parties who compete for the office of head of government (Wattenberg 1991; Gabriel et al. 2009; Wagner and Weßels 2012; Klein and Rosar 2016). While the chancellor candidates of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats have always played a special role in federal election campaigns, the smaller parties also usually nominate lead candidates as an important element of personalized campaign strategies. Some parties, such as the Greens and the

Left, even have set up teams of two or more lead candidates instead of just one. Nonetheless, most research on the electoral roles of lead candidates has focused on the chancellor candidates, perhaps reflecting the "presidentialization" of the politics of parliamentary democracies (Brettschneider 2001, 2002; Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Boomgaarden and Semetko 2007; Maier and Faas 2005; Klein and Rosar 2016). However, the lead candidates of the smaller parties have so far received only limited attention.

Candidate orientations have been found to exert a stronger impact on the electoral behavior of apartisan voters than on the choices of those who identify with a party (Brettschneider et al. 2006). Whether this also leads to a higher propensity to switch votes between parties, however, is still subject to debate (Dassonneville 2016). We address this issue by focusing on "push" and "pull" effects of lead candidates (Aarts and Blais 2013) in the 2013 and 2017 German federal elections. Specifically, we examine whether a positive change in voters' evaluations of a party's lead candidates between 2013 and 2017 attracted voters who had voted for a different party or abstained in 2013. Likewise, we ask whether a negative change in candidate evaluations between these elections induced voters to abandon parties in 2017 that they had supported in 2013. We employ an inter-election (and intra-campaign) online panel survey conducted during these two elections by the German Longitudinal Election Study (CampPanel13-17). Covering a period of particularly strong voter movements between parties, this dataset is ideally suited for our investigation of individual-level vote switching between elections. In the next section, we derive testable expectations from a discussion of extant research. We then describe our data and methods. After having presented our findings, we conclude by summarizing the results and discussing their implications for research on electoral volatility.

Partisan Dealignment and its Consequences for Voting Behavior

Partisan Dealignment and the Personalization of Voting

According to the "Michigan orthodoxy," vote choice can be explained by a mixture of long-term and short-term factors (Campbell et al. 1960). The key long-term factor is party identification, conceived as a persistent affective orientation to a political party that is passed on from parents to their offspring during childhood and youth and is usually assumed to remain stable over the course of life. However, some authors question the assumption of lifelong stability, claiming that voters update their party identification in response to new information (e.g., Achen 2002). And indeed, Schmitt-Beck et al. (2006) find party identification to be a "shaky attachment," with only a minority of the German electorate persistently identifying with the same party over the period 1984–2001 (see also Neundorf et al. 2011).

For many years, researchers have been observing a decline in the shares of party identifiers in Western democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Dalton 2013). These weakening ties of voters to political parties are an important ingredient of the personalization thesis, which claims that "the political weight of the individual actors in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e., political party) declines" (Rahat and Sheafer 2007: 65; see also Karvonen 2010). Concerning voting behavior, the notion of personalization refers to a strengthening of candidate voting, i.e., a presumably growing influence of candidate evaluations on voting decisions, relative to the impact of party identification (Adam and Maier 2010; see also Wattenberg 1991; Mughan 2000; Poguntke and Webb 2005). It is expected that weakening long-term party attachments leave more room for the effects of candidate attitudes (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002: 132; see also Dalton et al. 2002). Apartisan voters are believed to base their decisions more strongly on the perceived personal qualities of politicians, whereas party identifiers should "disregard the personal qualities of the competing leaders or else view them largely through the prism of their already established party preferences" (King 2002b: 41). However, the empirical evidence for this presumed long-term development is at best mixed.

Comparative studies by Aarts et al. (2013) and King (2002a) found no conclusive evidence in support of the expectation that citizens rather cast their votes on the basis of their views on the parties' candidates. King concluded that "the almost universal belief that leaders' and candidates' personalities are almost invariably hugely important factors in determining the outcomes of elections is simply wrong" (King 2002c: 206). In the same vein, Karvonen (2010) detected no increase in the importance of party leader evaluations for party choices in his analysis of six parliamentary democracies between 1961 and 2001. Bittner (2011), on the other hand, observed a substantial influence of voters' perceptions of politicians' traits on electoral choices in her comparative analysis of thirty-five elections in seven countries.

Numerous researchers have also examined the influence of candidates, in particular the two large parties' chancellor candidates, on voting behavior in Germany. Several of them detected important candidate effects (Schmitt and Wüst 2006; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Rohrschneider et al. 2012; Wagner and Weßels 2012; Ohr et al. 2013; Rosar and Hoffmann 2015; Glinitzer and Jungmann 2019), suggesting that, if a candidate is rated positively by a voter, chances increase that this voter will choose the candidate's party. However, candidate evaluations have also been found to be strongly correlated with party identifications. Partisan voters tend to give the candidates of their own parties particularly positive ratings (Brettschneider 2001; Anderson and Brettschneider 2003). Similar to the international research literature, studies of candidate voting in Germany did not come up with unequivocal evidence for a long-term process toward more personalized electoral behavior either (Kaase 1994; Ohr 2000; Brettschneider 2001, 2002; Pappi and Shikano 2001;

Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Anderson and Brettschneider 2003; Gabriel and Neller 2005; Blumenberg and Blumenberg 2017). Schoen (2007), e.g., found in a time series analysis that the effects of candidate evaluations on voters' choices between 1980 and 2002 varied between elections but did not increase over time. For the four German federal elections of 1998 to 2009, Wagner and Weßels (2012) even reported decreasing effects of candidate preferences on vote choices.

Partisan Dealignment and Electoral Volatility

Another plausible consequence of declining party ties is rising electoral volatility, i.e., an increasing inclination of voters to switch their party preferences between elections. As part of a person's political personality, party identification has a long-term stabilizing effect on voting decisions. Voters who are affectively bonded to a party tend to support it regularly—although not necessarily always and under all circumstances—in elections (Dalton et al. 2002). As a "perceptual screen," partisanship also lends coherence to short-term orientations on issues and candidates. Presumably, among apartisans, short-term attitudes such as candidate evaluations are not only more important for electoral decision-making, but also more susceptible to change in response to new information. "[P]arty identification can serve as a source of cues for individuals as they interpret politics" (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008b: 116), but those lacking it will presumably find it more difficult to evaluate candidates in the complex world of politics. Partisans should usually evaluate the candidate of their own party more favorably than those of the competing parties. This way, party identification can be expected to stabilize electoral behavior also indirectly. Apartisans, on the other hand, lack these clear guidelines. Their candidate attitudes should therefore be more susceptible to short-term changes. Furthermore, if the electoral decision-making of apartisans is strongly influenced by volatile short-term attitudes, their vote choices should be more volatile as well.

However, there is a lack of research on whether and how candidate orientations contribute to electoral volatility (see Dassonneville 2016 for an exception). For candidate orientations to induce changes of party choices from one election to the next, they must also change between these elections. The next section illustrates how such changes in candidate perceptions might result in changes in vote choices.

Changing Candidate Orientations and Vote Switching

A lead candidate might directly impact the electoral fortunes of his or her party "through the effectiveness of his/her public image as appraised at that specific time" (Barisione 2009: 474). In general, a candidate's image can work in both directions. Borrowing the terminology from Aarts and Blais (2013), a candidate who is evaluated positively by voters should be able to pull new voters toward his or her party, while a negatively evaluated candidate can be assumed to push some

of his or her party's previous supporters away. The pull effect thus denotes the propensity of a candidate to attract voters who previously voted for other parties or abstained. These voters alter their voting behavior between two elections because a likable candidate turns his or her party into a more attractive alternative. In an analog way, a push effect of a candidate means that a candidate repels voters who previously supported his or her party. These voters are pushed away from a party because of its less attractive candidate so that they end up choosing a different party or even abstaining. Push and pull effects result from changes in voters' assessments of a party's lead candidates between two elections. This might occur when a party nominates the same candidate at both elections, but voters' views of that person have changed significantly in between, or when a party replaces a more (or less) attractive candidate with a less (or more) attractive one.

Importantly, in two respects this propensity to alter voting behavior in response to changes in candidate evaluations should be highly dependent on the party identification of a voter. First, since a voter's long-term affective bond to a party is part of his or her political personality, it directly stabilizes his or her voting decisions and makes vote switching unlikely. Second, as a "perceptual screen," this bond also brings short-term orientations toward candidates into line with a voter's affective orientation toward his or her party and thus decreases the probability to change the evaluation of the candidate of his or her party in the first place (Brettschneider 2001; Anderson and Brettschneider 2003). Both mechanisms should exert a stabilizing effect on subsequent vote choices.

For our analyses, four expectations can be derived from these considerations. As indicated above, party identifications have been found to be highly, but not perfectly stable. We therefore expect, first, that voters who reported identical party identifications in 2013 and 2017 were less likely to change their views of the candidates of the parties they chose in 2013 or 2017. Second, we expect that the more voters' evaluations of the candidate of their 2013 party choice deteriorated in 2017 in comparison to 2013, the more likely they were to defect from this party, i.e., to vote for a different party in 2017 (push effect). Third, we also expect that the more voters' evaluations of the candidate of their party choice in 2017 improved in comparison to 2013, the more likely they were to move toward this party, i.e., to vote for this party in 2017 (pull effect). Fourth, we assume that these changes in candidate evaluations had a weaker effect on vote switching among voters who identified with the same party in 2013 and 2017 than for voters who did not.

Data and Measures

Data

Panel data is necessary to adequately study the determinants of electoral volatility at the individual level. For our analysis of the push and pull effects of the candidates for the German federal election in 2017, we make use of an online multi-wave

panel survey that straddled the 2013 and 2017 elections (CampPanel13-17). Members of online access panels who were eligible to vote in these federal elections were invited to take part in the survey according to a quota sample based on age, sex, and education. 2,725 respondents overall were interviewed in weekly intervals up to six times before the federal election in 2013 and up to seven times before the general election in 2017, with one additional post-election panel wave each. Additionally, these respondents were surveyed once in 2014, 2015, and 2018. Our change measures rely in most cases on data taken from the two panel waves immediately following the respective election (wave 7 from September 24 until October 4, 2013, and wave 17 from September 27 until October 9, 2017).

Dependent Variables

The central aim of this chapter is to examine the effects of changes in candidate evaluations on the probability of vote switching between two subsequent elections. German parties usually nominate one (or sometimes more) lead candidates for every federal election. In the two elections we study, one individual was nominated each time as the lead candidate of her party. This was the CDU/CSU's chairperson and incumbent chancellor, Angela Merkel. All other parties exchanged their lead candidates. The SPD nominated Peer Steinbrück in 2013 and Martin Schulz in 2017. The FDP's lead candidates were Rainer Brüderle in 2013 and Christian Lindner in 2017. The Greens and the Left nominated teams of lead candidates. However, for lack of questionnaire space, the GLES study included only one candidate per party and election, selected according to the criterion of highest public visibility. For the Greens, this was Jürgen Trittin in 2013 and Katrin Göring-Eckhardt in 2017. For the Left, the study included Gregor Gysi (2013), followed by Sahra Wagenknecht (2017). Since the AfD did not officially nominate a lead candidate in 2013, the survey focused on Bernd Lucke, the party's best-known chairperson. In the 2017 election, it included Alexander Gauland, the better-known of the party's two official lead candidates. Respondents were asked to rate these candidates on eleven-point thermometer scales ranging from −5 (labeled "I do not think much of this politician at all") to +5 ("I think a great deal of this politician").[1] We transformed this scale to range from 0 to 10 and then subtracted, in a party-wise fashion, the 2013 from the 2017 rating. The resulting difference scores range from −10 to +10, with +10 depicting a change from the most negative rating of a party's candidate in 2013 to the most positive rating in 2017. To assess whether party identification prevented changes in candidate evaluations, we compute two

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[1] Since Bernd Lucke of the AfD was not included in the 2013 post-election wave, we instead rely on a question included in the immediate pre-election wave (wave 6).

dependent variables from these difference scores, one for 2013, the other for 2017. They indicate whether the evaluation of the candidate of the party a respondent voted for in 2013 and 2017 changed between these elections by at least one scale point (coded 0) or remained perfectly stable (coded 1).

To analyze vote switching, we compute two dependent variables depicting a change in party choice between 2013 and 2017, taking either the former or the latter election as a reference point. Due to the low number of cases for some voter groups (most notably, voters of the AfD in 2013) and in line with extant research (e.g., Rattinger and Wiegand 2014), we opt for a generic approach and refrain from examining vote switching for each party separately. Accordingly, the first variable indicates a voter's defection from his or her 2013 choice and is coded 1 if a respondent chose the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens, Left, or AfD in 2013 but voted for a different party or abstained in 2017. The second dependent variable is coded 1 if a respondent voted for a different party or abstained in 2013 but moved to a vote for one of the six parties in 2017. For both variables, all remaining combinations of electoral behavior in 2013 and 2017 are coded 0.

Independent and Control Variables

To analyze the influence of changing candidate evaluations on vote switching, we refer again to the difference scores described above. From these measures, we derive two variables that relate to the evaluations of the candidate of the party a respondent chose in 2013 (to establish the presumed push effect) and to those in 2017 (to register the pull effect). To examine the role of stable partisanship, we construct a dummy variable that distinguishes between respondents who described themselves as partisans of the same party at both elections (coded 1) and apartisans and respondents who moved in or out of partisanship (0).

Our models also include a range of control variables. Since the chancellor candidates of the big parties CDU/CSU and SPD are the only viable competitors for the office of head of government, they play a particularly prominent role in German election campaigns and are accorded high media visibility, for instance, through the so-called TV duels in which only these two candidates take part (cf. Chapter 12). It therefore seems plausible to assume that the overall influence of changed candidate evaluations on vote switching could be driven more strongly by changed attitudes toward the chancellor candidates than toward small parties' lead candidates. To control for this, we compute two variables depicting a vote for one of the big parties CDU/CSU or SPD (coded 1) and a vote for one of the smaller parties (Greens, FDP, Left, or AfD; coded 0) in 2013 and 2017. Following similar approaches to investigate the influence of issue orientations on vote switching (Rattinger and Wiegand 2014; Preißinger and Schoen 2016), we also account for the effect of changes in issue attitudes. Specifically, we choose the issue

of immigration, which was highly salient in our period of observation and very relevant to electoral behavior (Mader and Schoen 2019). At both elections, respondents were invited to register their positions on immigration on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 "immigration should be easier for foreigners" to 7 "immigration should be more difficult for foreigners." Our measure is the difference between responses in 2013 and 2017 (range −6 to +6).

Political sophistication is also regularly found to be associated with vote switching (Kuhn 2009; Dassonneville 2012, 2014; van der Meer et al. 2015; Dassonneville 2016; Geers and Strömbäck 2019). In line with extant research (Lachat 2007), we measure this construct on the basis of an additive index of factual political knowledge (taken from the 2013 post-election wave). It is based on nine items that focused on institutional features such as the electoral threshold or the procedure to elect the chancellor (range 0 to 9). Also, age and gender have often been found to be important for voters' likelihood to shift votes between parties (Kuhn 2009; Dassonneville 2012, 2014; van der Meer et al. 2015; Dassonneville 2016; Geers and Strömbäck 2019). Moreover, we also incorporate in our models a dummy variable that indicates whether the same or different persons ran as lead candidates for a party in both election years (0 = same person as lead candidate in both elections, 1 = different person).

Analyses

In the first part of our study, we test our expectation that candidate evaluations were less volatile for partisans than for apartisans. Table 11.1 shows findings from two binary logistic regression models. The first model examines the influence of stable party identification on voters' likelihood to change their evaluation of the candidate of the party they had chosen in 2013. In a similar fashion, the second model looks at change or better stability of evaluation of the candidate of the party elected in 2017. Stable partisans were on average six percentage points less likely to change their candidate evaluations between the elections—regardless of whether we refer to the party chosen in 2013 or 2017. This is in line with our first expectation and suggests that party identification indeed serves as a "perceptual screen" that lends stability to candidate orientations. Moreover, voters were on average 11 percentage points more likely to change their candidate evaluations when the party they elected in 2013 nominated another politician as lead candidate in 2017. This suggests that sticking to the same candidate at repeated elections is less likely to lead to altered candidate evaluations on the part of voters than "changing horses" between elections. However, since in the elections studied here this only concerned the incumbent Chancellor Angela Merkel of the CDU/CSU, whereas all other parties exchanged their lead candidates, we cannot rule out the possibility that this pattern has to do with her incumbent role or her personality.

Table 11.1 Partisanship and change in candidate evaluations (average marginal effects)

	Change of evaluation of lead candidate of party chosen in…	
	(1)	(2)
	2013	2017
Stable party identification	−0.06[**]	−0.06[*]
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Δ Attitude toward immigration	0.01	0.02[*]
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Political sophistication	0.00	−0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age (divided by 10)	−0.01	−0.03[*]
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Male	−0.04	−0.06[*]
	(0.05)	(0.02)
Candidate different person	0.11[**]	0.12
	(0.03)	(0.07)
N	1,215	1,155
Nagelkerke R^2	0.04	0.05

Notes: entries are average marginal effects with clustered standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors clustered for parties voted for in 2013 (Model 1) and 2017 (Model 2) with six clusters each;
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Turning to push and pull effects on electoral choices, we again compute two binary logistic regression models (Table 11.2, derived from models 1 and 2 in Table 11.A1 in the Appendix). The first model examines the push effect of a party's candidate. Accordingly, the dependent variable indicates whether voters defected from the party chosen in 2013. This should have become more likely when this party's 2017 candidate was evaluated more negatively than its candidate in the previous election. The second model examines the pull effect, and its dependent variable indicates movement in 2017 toward a party that had not been chosen in 2013. The expectation is that improved evaluations of this party's 2017 candidate in comparison to its 2013 candidate resulted in a higher likelihood to vote for this party on the part of voters who had not done so in the previous election. Table 11.2 shows statistically significant effects in the expected directions in both models. A one-point increase in the evaluation of the candidate of the party

Table 11.2 Changes in candidate evaluations and vote switching (average marginal effects)

	(1) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(2) Move toward party chosen in 2017
Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2013 party choice	−0.05*** (0.01)	
Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2017 party choice		0.04*** (0.01)
Stable party identification	−0.28*** (0.03)	−0.23*** (0.04)
Big party vote 2013	−0.11 (0.08)	
Big party vote 2017		−0.31*** (0.08)
Δ Attitude toward immigration	0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)
Political sophistication	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.02* (0.01)
Age (divided by 10)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.01)
Male	0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.03)
Candidate different person	−0.09 (0.09)	−0.16* (0.08)
N	1,013	998
Nagelkerke R^2	0.26	0.38

Notes: entries are average marginal effects with clustered standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors clustered for parties voted for in 2013 (Model 1) and 2017 (Model 2) with six clusters each.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

a voter had supported in 2013 decreased the probability of moving away from that party in the subsequent election by 5 percentage points on average, whereas a less positive candidate evaluation increased the probability of defection. While this finding indicates a push effect of changing candidate evaluations, we also see evidence of a pull effect. According to the second model, a one-point improvement of the candidate evaluation of the party elected in 2017 compared to 2013 led to an increase in the probability of voting for this party of four percentage points on average.

For stable party identifications, we see the expected negative effect on the probability of switching votes, which is in line with prior research (Dassonneville 2014, 2016). Voting for the CDU/CSU or SPD has a significant impact
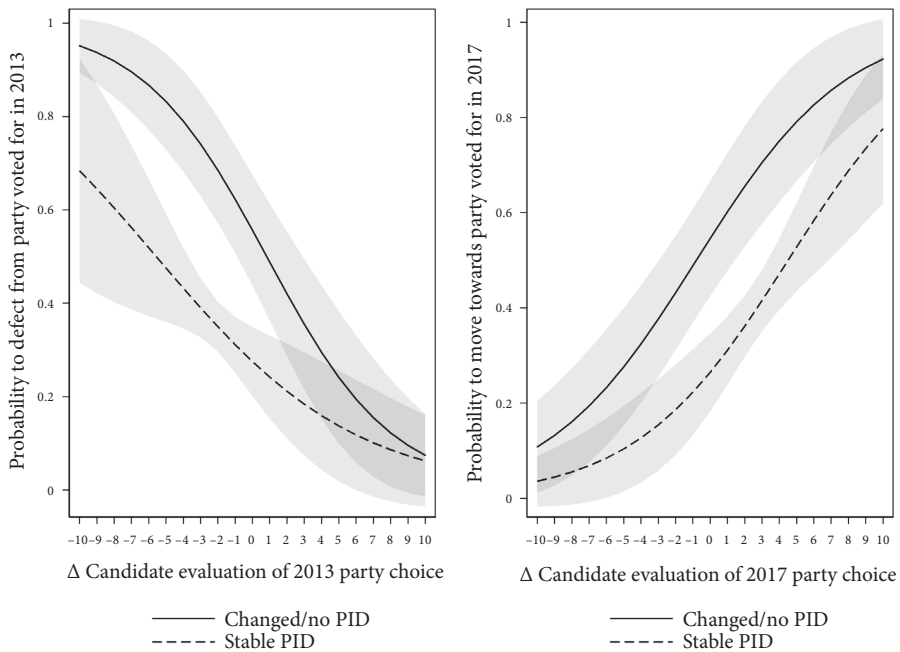
Fig. 11.1 Changes in candidate evaluations and vote switching by partisanship (conditional probabilities with 95 percent confidence intervals)

only on moving toward one of these bigger parties in 2017. Such a party choice in 2017 decreases the probability of movement toward these parties in 2017 by 31 percentage points. This suggests that CDU/CSU and SPD voters were more likely to have already voted for these parties in 2013. The voters of the major parties thus seem less likely to switch than the voters of the smaller parties.

To test the expectation that the push and pull effects of candidates are more pronounced for apartisans than for partisans, we include interactions between party identification and changes in candidate evaluations in our models. Figure 11.1 shows the substantive findings (derived from models 3 and 4 in Table 11.A1, with control variables fixed at means). Clearly, changes in candidate evaluations affected the likelihood of defecting from the party voted for in 2013 (left panel) and of moving toward the 2017 party choice (right panel) differently for stable partisans compared to instable partisans and apartisans. As expected, stable partisanship diminished both push and pull effects.

As indicated above, most research on candidate voting in Germany focused on the chancellor candidates of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. Presumably, this selectivity of research is premised on the tacit assumption that
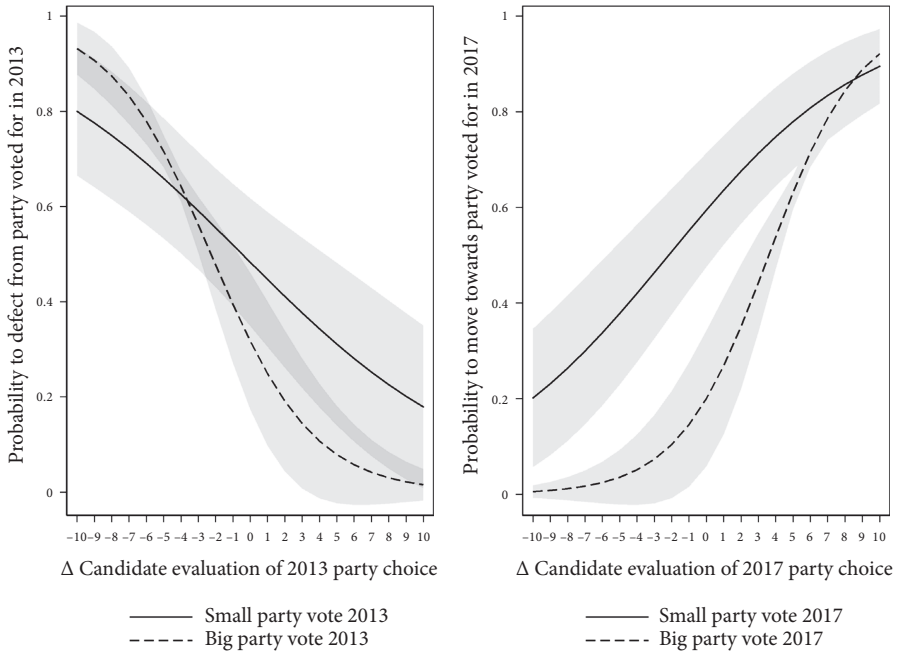
Fig. 11.2 Changes in candidate evaluations and vote switching by big party vote (conditional probabilities with 95 percent confidence intervals)

these candidates are more important reference objects for voters than the lead candidates of the small parties that are not running for the office of head of government. To examine whether changed views of chancellor candidates indeed had a larger impact on vote switching than altered evaluations of the smaller parties' less visible lead candidates, we, in a similar vein, include interactions between voting for one of the major parties and changes in candidate evaluations in our models (cf. Models 5 and 6 in Table 11.A1). As Figure 11.2 shows, changes in candidate evaluations affected the likelihood of vote switching differently for CDU/CSU and SPD voters than for voters of the small parties. Figure 11.2 suggests that the chancellor candidates of the major parties indeed exerted stronger push and pull effects than the candidates of smaller parties.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of a long-term decline in party identifications in Germany and a concomitant rise of electoral volatility, our chapter explored the relationship

between changes in candidate evaluations and individual-level vote switching in Germany. Partisan dealignment has been claimed to have led to an increase in both electoral volatility and candidate voting. But the connection between these two phenomena is still a matter of dispute. Using long-term multi-wave panel data from the German Longitudinal Election Study, we contributed to this debate by analyzing the effects of changing candidate evaluations on vote switching in the German federal elections between 2013 and 2017. Specifically, we focused on the push and pull effects of the candidates at the individual level by examining how intra-individual changes in candidate evaluations may instigate voters to defect from a previously chosen party and toward a different party.

We found that voters who evaluated the 2017 lead candidate of a party they had chosen in 2013 less favorably than his or her predecessor in the previous election were more likely to defect in 2017 by choosing another party or abstaining. Similarly, voters who considered the 2017 lead candidate of a party more attractive than the same party's 2013 candidate tended to move toward this party in 2017. Put differently, an increase in the evaluation of the candidate of the party a person voted for in 2013 decreased the probability of switching the vote to a different party in 2017. Likewise, an increase in the evaluation of the candidate of the party a person voted for in 2017 also increased the probability of switching the vote to this party in 2017. However, these relationships were moderated by party identification. Stable partisans were less likely to change their candidate evaluations. Moreover, changes in candidate evaluations made vote switching less likely for these voters than for those without a stable partisan attachment. In addition, candidate-induced vote switching was also more likely for voters of the two major parties CDU/CSU and SPD than for voters of the smaller parties. Push and pull effects thus appear more pronounced for chancellor candidates than for lead candidates of smaller parties.

These findings support our expectations of candidate push and pull effects in the German federal election in 2017. In addition, our analyses also showed that party identification decreased the likelihood to change candidate evaluations. Our results corroborate findings from previous research on attitudes toward chancellor candidates. Rattinger and Wiegand (2014) found changes in voters' attitudes on chancellor candidates in Germany between 2002 and 2009, heightening the probability of vote switching between parties. Likewise, Preißinger and Schoen (2016) observed changes in attitudes toward the chancellor candidates between 2009 and 2013 to increase vote switching toward their respective parties. Our research broadened the scope and found similar, if only weaker patterns also for lead candidates of the smaller parties. Taken together, this evidence suggests that how voters see the parties' lead candidates can substantially influence voters' decision-making at German federal elections. As a result, progressing partisan dealignment can be expected to lead to further increased volatility, brought about by more fluid candidate evaluations and concomitant push and pull effects.

Appendix

Table 11.A1 Changes in candidate evaluations and vote switching (odds ratios)

	(1) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(2) Move toward party chosen in 2017	(3) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(4) Move toward party chosen in 2017	(5) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(6) Move toward party chosen in 2017
Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2013 party choice	0.80*** (0.04)		0.76*** (0.05)		0.86*** (0.04)	
Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2017 party choice		1.26*** (0.06)		1.26*** (0.06)		1.19*** (0.04)
Stable party identification	0.28*** (0.04)	0.30*** (0.04)	0.30*** (0.03)	0.30*** (0.04)	0.28*** (0.04)	0.31*** (0.05)
Stable party identification * Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2013 party choice			1.11 (0.07)			
Stable party identification * Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2017 party choice				1.00 (0.05)		
Big party vote 2013	0.58 (0.24)		0.57 (0.23)		0.50 (0.22)	
Big party vote 2017		0.20*** (0.10)		0.20*** (0.10)		0.17** (0.09)
Big party vote 2013 * Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2013 party choice					0.82* (0.07)	

Table 11.A1 *Continued*

	(1) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(2) Move toward party chosen in 2017	(3) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(4) Move toward party chosen in 2017	(5) Defection from party chosen in 2013	(6) Move toward party chosen in 2017
Big party vote 2017 * Δ Evaluations of candidates of 2017 party choice						1.23[*] (0.11)
Δ Attitude toward immigration	1.02 (0.05)	0.99 (0.05)	1.02 (0.06)	0.99 (0.05)	1.01 (0.05)	1.00 (0.05)
Political sophistication	0.93 (0.06)	0.89[*] (0.05)	0.93 (0.06)	0.89[*] (0.05)	0.94 (0.06)	0.90[*] (0.05)
Age (divided by 10)	0.92 (0.10)	0.91 (0.05)	0.93 (0.10)	0.91 (0.05)	0.93 (0.11)	0.92 (0.06)
Male	1.03 (0.08)	0.93 (0.14)	1.04 (0.07)	0.93 (0.15)	1.00 (0.06)	0.95 (0.15)
Candidate different person	0.63 (0.28)	0.38[*] (0.18)	0.62 (0.27)	0.38[*] (0.18)	0.63 (0.28)	0.34[*] (0.17)
Constant	4.07 (3.14)	12.47[**] (9.77)	4.06 (3.19)	12.47[**] (9.84)	4.22 (3.23)	13.41[**] (10.66)
N	1,013	998	1,013	998	1,013	998
AIC	1,185.00	1,050.75	1,181.89	1,050.75	1,174.04	1,043.16
Nagelkerke R^2	0.26	0.37	0.26	0.37	0.27	0.38

Notes: entries are odds ratios with clustered standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors clustered for parties voted for in 2013 (Models 1, 3, and 5) and 2017 (Models 2, 4, and 6) with six clusters each.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

12

Do Televised Debates Affect Voting Behavior?

Evidence from the 2009, 2013, and 2017 German Federal Elections

Jürgen Maier, Michaela Maier, and Thorsten Faas

Introduction

Although introduced later than in many other democracies, "American-style" televised debates, i.e., discussions between candidates for the office of head of government, broadcasted live, have become core elements of German election campaigns. The first two TV debates were held before the 2002 federal election and included the incumbent Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and his conservative challenger Edmund Stoiber (CDU/CSU) as sparring partners. In the 2005 election campaign, Schröder debated Angela Merkel (CDU/CSU). In all following campaigns, Merkel debated in the role of the incumbent. Her opponents were the Social Democrats' lead candidates Frank-Walter Steinmeier (2009), Peer Steinbrück (2013), and Martin Schulz (2017).

These TV debates always attracted large audiences. Of somewhat more than 60 million voters, about 15 million each watched these broadcasts in 2002, 21 million in 2005, 14.2 million in 2009, 17.7 million in 2013, and 16.2 million in 2017. The debates also regularly attracted much attention from the news media, and over time, they were also introduced in other levels of German electoral politics, most notably in state elections. However, there were also critical voices (Donsbach 2002). In particular, doubts were raised about whether an event imported from the US, i.e., a presidential system with only two major parties and an institutionally strong position of political leaders can adequately reflect the complexity of German democracy, a parliamentary system in which federal governments are always formed as coalitions between at least two parties, often including a rather small one. Furthermore, there were concerns that the televised candidate debates might stimulate a trend toward personalization of politics

or even presidentialization of the political system because they privilege the two most important parties by excluding the smaller parties' lead candidates (see also Chapter 11).

Although debates are often considered a risky endeavor for the partaking politicians (Schroeder 2008), the participation rate indicates that the candidates are convinced that possible positive debate outcomes outscore potential negative effects. Indeed, a large body of research has demonstrated that debate exposure is by no means inconsequential. It can have an impact on voters' cognitions, motivations, emotions, and political attitudes (see, e.g., Maier and Faas 2019 for a summary). For instance, it has been demonstrated that watching a debate can influence general assessments of candidates and impinge on particular candidates' images as well as voters' candidate preferences. Furthermore, there is evidence that debates can, e.g., influence the perceived importance of issues, cause agenda-setting effects, affect voters' assignments of political actors' competences to solve a nation's most pressing problems, or shift voters' own or the perceived issue positions of candidates and parties.

That televised debates can significantly influence voters squares with the more general observation that communication can alter political attitudes and behavior—today even more easily than in the past. The reason for this is a long-term dealignment of citizens' attachments to political parties that is rooted in large-scale processes of social change in Western democracies (Crewe and Denver 1985; Dalton et al. 2002). Whereas relatively stable long-term factors influencing individual voting behavior have been weakened over time, short-term factors such as issues and candidates have apparently become more important for electoral decision-making (cf. Chapter 1). Against this backdrop, it is argued that political information today has a stronger influence on electoral behavior than in the past. A few decades ago, the vast majority of voters (in Germany about 80 percent; cf. Arzheimer 2017; see also Chapter 1) relied on their party identifications to decide which information they exposed themselves to and how they interpreted it. Based on this, heuristic voters were able to—unconsciously—avoid dissonant information, i.e., information incompatible with their own view of the world, and turn to consonant information, i.e., information confirming their own beliefs. Due to a significant decline in partisanship (Dalton 2014), today a large share of the German electorate—about one third in the West and about 50 percent in the East (Arzheimer 2017)—lacks a heuristic providing a clear-cut picture of the political world and simultaneously operating as a protective device to shield existing belief systems against dissonant information. As a result, it can be expected that major campaign events like televised debates, in which voters expose themselves to a massive stream of information, have a strong influence on voting behavior and that this impact increases over time.

Importantly, TV debates can exert both direct effects, resulting from personal exposure to these media events, and indirect effects, originating in the news

media's as well as voters' interpersonal follow-up communication (cf. Chapter 13 for a partly similar distinction). The present chapter examines the direct and indirect impact of the televised debates between the Christian Democrats' and Social Democrats' chancellor candidates on voting behavior for the three federal elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017. Analyzing debate effects for these three elections throws light on the relevance of the single most important communication event in German election campaigns during a crucial period of the country's recent electoral history. Simultaneously studying TV debates at all three elections makes our finding more robust and prevents us from overly generalizing from single events. We proceed as follows: After a brief review of research on direct and indirect debate effects, we describe our data and research design. We then analyze the impact of debate exposure on voting intentions, focusing first on direct, then on indirect effects. We conclude with a summary and discussion of our results.

Chancellor Candidates' TV Debates and Electoral Preferences

Although there are good reasons to assume that televised debates can affect short-term attitudes preceding political behavior and although many studies provide empirical evidence supporting this expectation, findings for debate effects on voting behavior itself are rather mixed. Most US studies conclude that debates are able only to reinforce but not to convert voting intentions (for a summary see, e.g., McKinney and Carlin 2004). This finding is in line with classical campaign research (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; see also Chapter 14) and highlights the importance of party identification in selective information processing (Festinger 1957). Yet, it seems reasonable to expect partisan dealignment to have created potentials for a more significant role of TV debates on voting. Findings on debate effects in Germany are more in line with this; they suggest noticeable behavioral consequences of debate exposure (Donsbach et al. 2004; Klein 2005b; Scheufele et al. 2005; Maier 2007b; Plasser and Lengauer 2010; Maier and Faas 2011b; Bachl 2013). Most importantly, German studies even indicate that debate effects are not restricted to independent voters. It appears that exposure to chancellor candidates' TV debates can also stimulate partisans to rethink their voting decisions.

Witnessing a TV debate exposes voters to many arguments and there is evidence that predisposed viewers not only accept points raised by their "own" candidates but also utterances of the opponents (Faas and Maier 2004). Since people prefer to belong to the majority—even when it comes to politics and elections ("bandwagon effect"; for a summary see Schmitt-Beck 2008)—(un)successful debate performances may shift voting intentions. However, sizes and directions of debate effects on voting depend on how the candidates perform and, in particular, on which of

the opponents appears to "win" a debate (McLeod et al. 1979; Geer 1988; Blais and Boyer 1996; Klein 2005b, 2005a; Klein and Pötschke 2005; Maier and Faas 2005; Maier 2006; Klein and Rosar 2007; Maier 2007a; Maier and Faas 2011b, 2011a; Pattie and Johnston 2011). When voters perceive their "own" candidate as the winner of a debate, this tends to reinforce existing voting intentions (Geer 1988; Klein 2005a; Maier 2006; Maier 2007b; Maier and Faas 2011b). By contrast, if a previously preferred candidate appears to lose a debate, voters are likely to change their voting decisions (Geer 1988; Maier 2006; Maier 2007b; Maier and Faas 2011b; Bachl 2013). Again, the largest effects appear for independent voters. If they see a candidate as the winner of a debate, the probability to vote in favor of his/her party is on average 30 to 40 percentage points higher than if s/he is perceived as the loser (Maier 2006; Maier and Faas 2011b).

Apart from direct effects through viewing TV debates, there is also the possibility of indirect effects originating in follow-up exchanges about these media events. It consists of both the news media's coverage of these events and voters' interpersonal communication with one another. Establishing who won or lost a debate, for instance, is an important element in the news media's coverage of these events, and this may also influence voters. Early research has recognized that follow-up communication concerning a debate can have a major impact on voters' attitudes and behavior (e.g., Lang and Lang 1978a; Lang and Lang 1978b; for media effects on voting behavior see, e.g., Blais and Boyer 1996; Deutschmann 1962; Elliott and Sothirajah 1993; Maier 2007c; Shaw 1999; Steeper 1978; see also Chapter 13; for effects of interpersonal communication on voting behavior see, e.g., Deutschmann 1962; Katz and Feldman 1962; Lowry et al. 1990; McLeod et al. 1979). Some scholars even argue that indirect debate effects are more powerful than the direct effects stemming from exposure to the debate content itself (e.g., Lemert et al. 1991). Furthermore, the impact of the media is considered more important than the effects of interpersonal communication (Maurer and Reinemann 2003; Donsbach et al. 2004; Donsbach and Jandura 2005; but see also Tsfati 2003). Overall, research suggests that voters tend to adjust their beliefs about a TV debate to the (perceived) opinions of the media or their communication partners—which are considered as the opinions of the majority. Depending on the exact combinations between voters' own perceptions and perceived opinions of the "majority," the former can be reinforced, softened, or even converted.

Disentangling direct and indirect debate effects is not trivial, as follow-up communication sets in immediately after a debate is finished. In fact, only experimental designs can provide a reliable separation of these two effects. Therefore, this chapter analyzes the impact of three televised debates on voting intentions in Germany using an experimental design with a follow-up panel wave. Based on the (German) literature, we expect that the debates changed a substantial share of voting intentions. In line with the general tenor of research on debate effects, we expect that indirect debate effects were substantially larger than direct debate

effects, but that sizes and directions of debate effects depended on perceptions of who had won the debate (or rather on the winner reported by the media or by partners in interpersonal communication). For both types of analyses, we are interested in (i) how many voters changed their voting intentions due to debate exposure or due to follow-up communication with regard to a debate, (ii) which voters were most open to conversion, (iii) what was the impact of the perceived debate winner, and (iv) in which direction voter movements triggered by the debates were heading and which parties benefited from it.

Research Design

In all three debates included in our analysis, Chancellor Angela Merkel of the CDU/CSU debated a challenger from the SPD. While competing against one another for votes, in the two debates of 2009 and 2017 both parties were at the same time partners in a Grand Coalition. Hence, the SPD could not campaign as an opposition party although it tried to distance itself from the CDU/CSU in order to gain enough votes to replace the Grand Coalition with a left-wing government led by its own lead candidate as the new head of government. However, before each of the three debates, the CDU/CSU was clearly ahead of the SPD in the polls, letting this aim appear quite unrealistic.

The 2009 debate took place over two weeks, and the 2013 and 2017 debates three weeks before election day. All 90-minute debates were aired simultaneously by (at least) the four major German television stations (public broadcasters: ARD, ZDF, in 2013 also the special-interest channel Phoenix; private broadcasters: RTL, in 2009 and 2017 also Sat.1, in 2013 also ProSieben). Given their large audiences, the debates always constituted the most important single campaign event. Additional analyses using data from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES)—the 2009 post-election cross-sectional survey (CrossSec09_Post) as well as the 2013 and 2017 rolling cross-section campaign studies (RollCrossSec13; RollCrossSec17)—indicate that exposure to the debates significantly increased with age, education, and political interest. Voters who identified with the CDU/CSU or SPD were significantly more likely to watch the debates than voters with another or no party identification. Exposure to the debates also systematically increased with the strength of party attachment (see also Maier and Faas 2011a, 2019).

The main analyses presented in this chapter are based on experimental data collected under the auspices of the German Longitudinal Election Study (TVDeb09_Surv; TVDeb13_Surv; TVDeb17_Surv). Participants invited to join the experimental group were exposed to the debate in a university lecture auditorium. Participants joining the control group were watching a non-political movie. Due to logistic reasons—namely that data collection was performed in five

(2009), three (2013), and two (2017) different German cities—it was not possible to randomly assign the participants to the experimental and the control group. Therefore, strictly speaking, our data stems from a quasi-experimental design. However, we tried to parallelize the two groups as far as possible. Furthermore, we used quota sampling to ensure an equal distribution of the participants with respect to gender, age, education, and party identification.

In total, 449 (2009), 269 (2013), and 216 (2017) citizens participated in these studies. Before and after the debates, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. In both waves, these surveys included measures of participants' voting intentions but also questions on political knowledge and attitudes, demographics (pre-debate only), and perceptions of the candidates' debate performance (post-debate only). In total, our sample for the analysis of direct debate effects was N = 737 (2009: 379, 2013: 212, 2017: 146).[1] Forty-seven percent of the subjects were female (experimental group: 48 percent, control group: 41 percent; p > 0.05), 8 percent had a low, 27 percent a medium, and 65 percent a high level of education (experimental group: 8, 27, and 65 percent; control group: 8, 27, and 65 percent; p > 0.05), 79 percent identified with a party (experimental group: 80 percent, control group: 73 percent; p > 0.05). The average age was 39.6 years (experimental group: 39.9, control group: 37.3; p > 0.05), the average political interest was 2.7 on a five-point scale from 0 "no interest" to 4 "very high interest" (experimental group: 2.7, control group: 2.5; p > 0.05). Furthermore, we carried out a third survey wave a few days after each debate including only the subjects that had been assigned to the experimental group. Again, we asked our participants about their voting intentions and also about their reception of post-debate media coverage and communication with other people about the debate. In total, our sample for the analysis of indirect debate effects was N = 639 (2009: 320, 2013: 192, 2017: 127). As the dropout rate was minimal (2.2 percent), the social and political structure of the sample was similar to the composition of the experimental group we used for the analyses of direct effects.

Direct Debate Effects

In line with most studies of German TV debates, our results indicate that these media events had a significant direct impact on voting behavior (see Table 12.1). On average, 22.1 percent of the participants who were exposed to a debate changed their voting intentions. This share is lowest for 2017 (17.8 percent) and highest for

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[1] We excluded subjects from the analyses who did not participate in both waves, indicated that they had already casted their vote, or participated in an experimental condition in which they were exposed to instant analyses right after the debate.

Table 12.1 Change of voting intentions immediately before and immediately after debates in experimental and control groups, 2009, 2013, and 2017: direct debate effects (in percent)

	2009–2017	2009	2013	2017
Experimental group	22.1	24.3	24.1	17.8
Control group	8.0	13.0	11.8	0.0
Difference	14.2***	11.3*	12.3	17.8***
N (experimental group/control group)	737 (659/78)	379 (333/46)	212 (195/17)	146 (129/17)

Notes: For column "2009–2017" all years equally weighted. * $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$.

Table 12.2 Impact of debate exposure on changes of voting intentions, 2009–2017: direct debate effects

	B	exp (b)
Control group	−1.23** (0.59)	0.29
Gender	0.25 (0.20)	1.28
Age	−0.00 (0.01)	1.00
Education	−0.25 (0.16)	0.78
Political interest	−0.22 (0.11)	0.80
Party ID	−0.42 (0.22)	0.66
Debate 2013	0.06 (0.22)	1.07
Debate 2017	−0.41 (0.24)	0.66
Constant	0.33 (0.59)	1.39
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.07	
N	728	

Notes: All years equally weighted. Entries are regression coefficients of a logistic regression (in parenthesis: standard errors) and odds ratios. * $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$.

2009 (24.3 percent). Of course, these changes could also stem from the cognitive processes initiated by getting in touch with a massive amount of information about the candidates, the issues, the campaigns, etc. when filling out the questionnaires. Indeed, a small number of members of the control group without debate exposure also changed their voting intentions (except in 2017). However, controlling for these questionnaire effects, we still see a significant impact of debate exposure in 2009, 2017, and the pooled data set including all three debates. The average share of changes in voting intentions then is 14.2 percent with the lowest share in 2009 (11.3 percent) and the highest share in 2017 (17.8 percent). The significant effect of the debates on voting behavior also remains when we control for gender,

Table 12.3 Explaining changes of voting intentions, 2009–2017: direct debate effects (experimental group only)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	**exp (b)**	**B**	**exp (b)**
Gender	0.17 (0.21)	1.19	0.19 (0.21)	1.21
Age	−0.00 (0.01)	1.00	−0.00 (0.01)	1.00
Education	−0.20 (0.16)	0.82	−0.22 (0.16)	0.81
Political interest	−0.25* (0.12)	0.78	−0.25* (0.12)	0.78
Party ID	−0.40 (0.23)	0.67	−0.37 (0.23)	0.69
Debate 2013	0.08 (0.23)	1.08	0.09 (0.23)	1.09
Debate 2017	−0.31 (0.24)	0.73	−0.32 (0.25)	0.73
Preferred candidate has won debate			−0.02 (0.21)	0.98
Preferred candidate has lost debate			0.64* (0.29)	1.90
Constant	0.28 (0.60)	1.32	0.17 (0.61)	1.19
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.04		0.05	
N	649		649	

Notes: All years equally weighted. Entries are regression coefficients of a logistic regression (in parenthesis: standard errors) and odds ratios. * $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$.

age, education, political interest, and party identification in a logistic regression (see Table 12.2). In sum, our finding that debate exposure affected party choice is very robust; the odds ratios displayed in Table 12.2 suggest that the likelihood that subjects assigned to the control group changed their voting intentions was dramatically lower than for subjects exposed to the debate.

Focusing only on participants who were exposed to a televised debate, we see that it is difficult to explain why some voters were more open to conversion than others (see Table 12.3, Model 1). The only significant factor is political interest, indicating that the likelihood to switch voting intentions due to debate exposure increased with decreasing interest in political affairs. Furthermore, the findings from the logistic regression indicate that the perceptions about the result of a debate had consequences for changing voting intentions (see Table 12.3, Model 2). Those who had the impression that their preferred candidate had *lost* the debate were significantly more likely than others to switch their vote. In contrast to this, getting the impression that one's "own" candidate had won a debate had no significant impact on voting decisions.

What did the patterns of debate-induced change of voting intentions look like? Table 12.4 reveals that changes from undecidedness to a specific party preference account for almost half of the changes (45.7 percent). Obviously, the debates were very helpful for voters in clarifying their preferences. By contrast, about one quarter (23.9 percent) abandoned previous commitments to a specific party and considered themselves as undecided after the event. Vote switching in the form of party changes accounted for 28.3 percent.

Table 12.4 Patterns of voter movements, 2009–2017: direct debate effects (only voters of the experimental group who changed their voting intentions; in percent)

From one party to another party	28.3
From undecidedness/nonvoting to a party	45.7
From a party to undecidedness/nonvoting	23.7
Other combinations	2.3
N	146

Additional analyses (results not shown) indicate that the parties whose lead candidates participated in the debates tended to benefit more than other parties. For instance, CDU/CSU and SPD attracted more undecided voters than smaller parties (27.0 vs. 18.7 percent). In addition, the two large parties profited more from previous voters of smaller parties than vice versa (16.3 vs. 6.4 percent). Moreover, CDU/CSU and SPD were less likely than smaller parties to lose voters into undecidedness or abstention (8.1 vs. 15.6 percent). To some extent, these findings illustrate some scholars' concerns about the consequences of the implementation of "American-style" debates in a parliamentary multi-party system like Germany (e.g., Donsbach 2002). However, there is no evidence that the showdown between the two aspirants for the office of head of government enabled any of them to persuade initial supporters of his/her opponent. Only very few voters shifted from the CDU/CSU to the SPD or the other way around (4.2 percent).

In sum, our findings suggest that exposure to the televised debates of the chancellor candidates broadcasted during the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal election campaigns had a substantial direct impact on voting intentions. On average, about one-seventh of the debate audience changed their voting intentions. Particularly, two factors explain these changes. First, predisposed viewers who had the impression that "their" candidate had lost the debate were likely to reconsider their intended voting behavior. Second, those who lacked political interest were most likely to be affected by debates. Extant research has suggested that debate audiences tend to include quite high shares of politically uninterested voters; according to Maier and Faas (2011b, 2019), for instance, about one-quarter of those not interested in politics at all were watching TV debates. Accordingly, the impact of the debates on election outcomes could potentially be quite high. As there is a good chance that these voters do not receive much other campaign information until election day, debate effects might be sustainable for this segment of the electorate. Finally, our findings indicate that a major function of the debates was to crystallize voting intentions. Most of the observed changes were from indecision to a clear voting preference. There were, of course, also exchanges between parties; however, this pattern was much less important.

Indirect Debate Effects

How do indirect effects compare to these direct debate effects? Our data indicate that follow-up communication had a significant impact on voting intentions. On average, the share of voters who changed their voting intentions in the days after a debate was 22.7 percent (see Table 12.5). Hence, direct and indirect debate effects were about the same size. Unfortunately, we cannot control for questionnaire effects, as almost all participants of our study indicated that they were exposed to follow-up communication (93.4 percent followed media coverage of the debate; 90.5 percent claimed to have talked to other people about the debate). Therefore, indirect debate effects might be overestimated. In any case, a fair comparison between direct and indirect debate effects accounting for the impact of our instruments is not possible.

What is the social and political profile of the voters who were influenced by follow-up communication? Results of a logistic regression indicate that the likelihood of indirect debate effects significantly increased with decreasing levels of education and political interest (see Table 12.6, Model 1). This is in line with classical campaign research suggesting that these segments of the electorate usually have instable political attitudes and are therefore quite easy to persuade (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). Furthermore, we find that the recipients who changed their voting intention due to debate reception were much more likely to again revise their decision later on than voters who were not affected by the debate.

This picture does not change when we additionally take into account who was identified as the debate winner by the news media used by respondents and by the communication partners they talked to (see Table 12.6, Model 2). (Lacking) education, (lacking) political interest, and the fact that the voting decision had already changed before were the major drivers of post-debate vote switching. Neither mass communication nor interpersonal communication had an effect on changes in voting intentions. In addition, it does not seem to have mattered whether the

Table 12.5 Changes of voting intentions in 2009, 2013, and 2017: indirect debate effects (experimental group only; in percent)

	% change	N
2009	23.3	296
2013	19.2	182
2017	26.0	104
2009–2017	22.7	573

Note: For column "2009–2017" all years equally weighted.

Table 12.6 Explaining changes of voting intentions, 2009–2017: indirect debate effects (experimental group only)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	exp (b)	b	exp (b)
Gender	0.09 (0.23)	1.09	0.08 (0.23)	1.08
Age	−0.01 (0.01)	0.99	−0.01 (0.01)	0.99
Education	−0.48** (0.18)	0.62	−0.47** (.18)	0.62
Political interest	−0.32* (0.13)	0.73	−0.33* (0.13)	0.72
Party ID	−0.26 (0.26)	0.77	−0.25 (0.26)	0.77
Vote switched after debate	1.59*** (0.23)	4.89	1.56*** (0.23)	4.76
Debate 2013	−0.14 (0.27)	0.87	−0.11 (0.28)	0.90
Debate 2017	0.33 (0.27)	1.38	0.35 (0.27)	1.41
Media: Preferred candidate has won debate			−0.01 (0.28)	0.99
Media: Preferred candidate has lost debate			−0.27 (0.30)	0.76
Interpersonal communication: Preferred candidate has won debate			−0.12 (0.26)	0.88
Interpersonal communication: Preferred candidate has lost debate			0.42 (0.35)	1.52
Constant	0.68 (0.66)	1.98	0.74 (0.68)	2.09
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.20		0.20	
N	575		575	

Notes: All years equally weighted. Entries are regression coefficients of a logistic regression (in parenthesis: standard errors) and odds ratios. * $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$.

preferred candidate had won or lost the debate in the views of the media or the people our respondents talked to.

For those who changed their voting decision due to exposure to follow-up communication, the patterns of movements were quite similar to the patterns we observed for direct debate effects. The most important path was still the one from former undecidedness to committing oneself to a party (40.4 percent). Changing voting intentions between parties ranked second (30.7 percent), followed by voters who became uncertain after having had expressed a voting decision before (19.2 percent; see Table 12.7).

A more detailed look at the patterns of movements (not shown) reveals that parties whose candidates did not participate in a debate experienced a pushback

Table 12.7 Patterns of voter movements, 2009–2017: indirect debate effect (only respondents within experimental group who changed their voting intentions; in percent)

From one party to another	30.9
From undecided/nonvoters to parties	40.4
From parties to undecided/nonvoters	19.2
Other combinations	9.7
N	130

of voters. 29.1 percent of those who indicated after the debate that they could not decide how to vote opted for a party not represented in the debate. In contrast to this, only 11.3 percent of these voters then decided to cast a vote for CDU/CSU or SPD. Furthermore, parties not represented in the debates were, in addition, able to attract former CDU/CSU and SPD voters (25.2 percent). The reverse motion (i.e., voters switching from parties not participating in a debate to one of the two major parties) occurred much less frequently (7.6 percent). Furthermore, a substantial share of voters committed to a party after a debate indicated then that they were undecided or did not aim to vote at all (in total 19.2 percent). Shifting from the CDU/CSU to the SPD or the other way around was very rare (0.5 percent).

In sum, our findings suggest that indirect debate effects were also important but not more than direct debate effects. Particularly voters with lower levels of education and political interest were influenced by communication following the debates. Furthermore, we find that the viewers who had changed their voting intention due to debate reception were more likely to be influenced by media coverage and interpersonal communication than voters who had not been affected by the debate. As for the debates themselves, the most important function of follow-up communication was to crystallize voting intentions. However, wavering effects—abandonment of a voting intention in favor of a new party choice—became more frequent. This also included decisions for smaller parties that were suffering from direct debate effects. Hence, the concerns of those who criticize the implementation of a televised debate in parliamentary democracies are relativized.

Conclusion

Televised debates between party leaders nowadays are a staple of electoral campaigns across the globe. Data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2019) indicates that debates are broadcast during the run-up to an election in 60 percent of the democracies worldwide. Nonetheless, their impact is not always clear. This

is particularly true for their effects on voting behavior, insofar as the often high expectations of the involved actors, such as candidates themselves, the news media, or voters, are usually not fulfilled.

Using a quasi-experimental design to study direct and indirect effects of the Christian Democrats' and Social Democrats' chancellor candidates' televised debates in the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections we demonstrated that:

- exposure to a televised debate led to changes in voting behavior for at least one out of seven viewers (however, since our data lack representativeness, this precise number should be treated with caution; suffice it to say that the number of affected debate viewers was far from negligible);
- this direct impact of televised debates was as strong as the impact of the follow-up communication relating to them;
- politically unsophisticated voters (i.e., voters with low levels of education and no or weak political interest) were most open to (both direct and indirect) debate effects;
- follow-up communication affected voters who had already changed their voting decisions due to debate exposure most;
- directly perceiving the preferred candidate to have lost the debate increased the likelihood of changing one's vote; surprisingly, a similar indirect effect did not emerge;
- debates and follow-up communication were very helpful for undecided voters in making up their minds about whom to vote for; as a consequence, the shares of undecided voters dropped substantially after having viewed the debates as well as after exposure to news media's follow-up coverage and interpersonal communication;
- debate exposure benefited the parties whose lead candidates took part in a debate, whereas follow-up communication helped parties that were excluded from them. This seems plausible because the debates themselves contained only messages pertaining to the two large parties CDU/CSU and SPD. Follow-up communication broadened the perspective, however, as it involved also smaller parties in the reflection on the consequences of a debate (e.g., concerning the election outcome, coalition building).

In a nutshell, we were able to demonstrate that televised debates can indeed cause substantial shifts in voting behavior. Although indirect debate effects are strong, direct debate effects are no less important. However, as some of these effects cancel each other out, the true impact of televised debate is often underestimated. Even worse, the finding that direct and indirect effects can work in different directions often leads to the impression that debate effects are instable or that debates are not persuasive.

However, the overlay of direct debate effects by follow-up communication raises the question of whether televised debates are not only able to affect voting intentions but also voting behavior. Although this was not part of our analyses, the answer from previous research is "yes." In addition, some studies have even demonstrated that debates can be decisive for the outcome of an election (Gallup 1987; McKinney et al. 2003; McKinney and Warner 2013; Jamieson 2015). However, the size and sustainability of debate effects depend on the timing of these events (see Maier and Faas 2003). On the one hand, debates held long before election day, e.g., US primary debates, tend to create larger effects than debates at the end of a campaign. The share of voters who had not made up their minds is larger in the early phase of a campaign; hence, debates can be more persuasive. The downside of early debates is that debate effects might not last until election day for most voters—too much is going on until then. On the other hand, the likelihood that debate effects make it until the election is higher for debates held late in the campaign. However, a couple of days before the election most voters have already made their decision. Therefore, debate effects are expected to be small. But as the share of late deciders has dramatically increased in the last decade (Plischke and Bergmann 2012: 490), this rule might soften. As other electoral trends (e.g., dealignment) also contribute to an increase of the likelihood of communication effects, we expect that the importance of televised debates should rise, too.

Appendix: Coding of Variables

Control group: 0 "experimental group" (subjects watched debate), 1 "control group" (subjects watched a movie).

Voting intention: 1 "CDU/CSU," 2 "SPD," 3 "FDP," 4 "Greens," 5 "The Left," 6 "other party," 8 "not decided yet, no answer," 9 "nonvoter (i.e., 'do for sure not vote')"; excluded: subjects who already cast their vote (absentee vote), subjects who did not participate in second survey wave (for analysis of direct debate effects) respectively third survey wave (for analysis of indirect debate effects).

Change of voting intention: 0 "no, same answer as in previous survey wave," 1 "yes, different answer than in previous survey wave."

Gender: 0 "male," 1 "female."

Age: in years.

Education: 1 "highest level of education: *Hauptschule* (secondary school, 9th grade)," 2 "highest level of education: *Realschule* (secondary school, 10th grade)," 3 "highest level of education: *Fachabitur* or *Abitur* (vocational baccalaureate diploma, high school)."

Political interest: five-point scale from 0 "not at all" to 4 "very much."

Party identification: 0 "no, no answer," 1 "yes."

Debate winner: index based on five-point scales for each candidate to assess debate performance; scales running from 1 "very poor performance" to 5 "very good performance"; the candidate with the higher (lower) score was considered as debate winner (loser).

Preferred candidate has won/lost debate according to media coverage: index based on five-point scales for each candidate to assess the media's judgments on the candidates' debate performance as perceived by subjects; scales are running from 1 "very poor performance" to 5 "very good performance"; scales available for press and TV coverage, index based on the mean score of communication sources; the candidate with the higher (lower) score was considered the debate winner (loser).

Preferred candidate has won/lost debate according to interpersonal communication partners: index based on five-point scales for each candidate to assess personal communication partners' judgments on the candidates' debate performance as perceived by subjects; scales running from 1 "very poor performance" to 5 "very good performance"; for 2009 scales were available for partner, friends, colleagues, relatives, and neighbors, index based on the mean score of communication sources; the candidate with the higher (lower) score was considered the debate winner (loser).

13

Media Biases and Voter Attitudes during the 2009, 2013, and 2017 Federal Election Campaigns

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck and Alexander Staudt

Introduction

Similar to other established democracies, Germany has undergone a long-term process of partisan dealignment during the past decades (cf. Chapter 1). An important, though substantively little developed topic of the dealignment literature is the expectation that among other things this trend has rendered electorates more responsive to persuasive influences of the news media (Klein et al. 2019: 41). Partisanship is typically conceived as a countervailing force that immunizes voters against such media effects. Apartisans, by contrast, are seen as receptive to media influence because their electoral preferences are not anchored in stable identities (Zaller 1992). Partisan dealignment has therefore nurtured speculations that, as the number of susceptible voters has grown, news media may have become more influential in electoral politics.

Viewed more generally, the idea that voters are sensitive to media content and adopt news biases when forming their electoral preferences is a notion with a long history but patchy empirical record. In research, the phenomenon has proven elusive. After the canonization of the so-called minimal effects model in the 1950s (Klapper 1960), interest in this phenomenon faded away. This began to change only in the 1990s under the impression of continuing partisan dealignment and with intellectual and practical stimulation from theories of information-processing as well as more elaborate research tools and data (Kinder 1998). As the "myth of massive media impact [was] revived" (Zaller 1996), scholarly curiosity about the persuasive potential of media at elections reawakened. Since then a small body of work has evolved whose findings suggest that media bias, i.e., news coverage that is valenced in ways that are favorable or unfavorable toward certain parties or candidates, may indeed be consequential for voters' attitudes and behavior at elections.

Building on this literature, we investigate the persuasive influence of the news media's reporting about the parties and their lead candidates on voters' evaluations of these actors during the 2009, 2013, and 2017 German federal election campaigns. Specifically, we are interested in the electoral effects of two attributes of news content: the intensity and direction of the evaluative tone of reporting on the parties and candidates, i.e., its "statement bias," and the amount of reporting that is devoted to them, i.e., its "coverage bias" (D'Alessio and Allen 2000). Focusing on German voters' most important sources of news—the daily press and TV news— this chapter examines whether and in which ways these features of the news were associated with voters' attitudes toward parties and candidates. We simultaneously model direct effects of the media individually used by voters and indirect effects of overall news coverage (see Chapter 12 for a partly related distinction concerning chancellor candidates' TV debates). We address the dealignment hypothesis by exploring how partisanship moderated the news media's impact. Our investigation relies on merged data from rolling cross-section (RCS) surveys and content analyses of the major newspapers and TV news collected as parts of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). It proceeds in four steps. We begin by developing a set of expectations from a discussion of the state of the art in research on persuasive effects of the news media. Next, we describe the German media system, placing special emphasis on voters' media use and the prevalence of coverage and statement bias in the press and on TV. We then outline our methodological approach and present and discuss our findings.

Persuasive Effects of News Media at Elections

Conceptualizing Media Persuasion

Our conception of media effects draws on an analytical understanding of political influence according to which persons after exposure to messages that are valenced in certain ways behave differently than they would have behaved without that exposure (Burnell and Reeves 1984). In line with extant research, we expect persuasive media effects to arise from media content that is characterized by specific "news biases" (D'Alessio and Allen 2000). Potentially persuasive news reports present particular parties or candidates in ways that are more or less favorable or unfavorable. Persuasion takes place when voters "yield" to these messages' impetus (McGuire 1973) by incorporating their positive or negative connotations into their attitudes (Zaller 1992).

Importantly, in contrast to many standard definitions of persuasive communication, our analytical conception of media persuasion does not imply intentionality on the part of communicators. Since we are only interested in the transaction

between media and voters, it does not involve any assumptions about deliberately unfair or unbalanced treatment of the electoral competitors on the part of news media. Identifying communicators' intentions when constructing messages is beyond the scope of our research. Our approach entails the premise that for news content to exert persuasive effects on voters' electoral preferences it is relevant that it is valenced in more or less pronounced ways but not whether this valence is the product of an intentionally distorted or lopsided style of presenting politics (Wirth and Kühne 2013: 314–5). Coverage that is favorable or unfavorable for certain parties or candidates does not necessarily have to reflect purposiveness on the part of the media but can also come about as a consequence of strictly professional reporting in line with the "media logic" of newsworthiness (Dalton et al. 1998). Yet, with regard to its audience, this does not render it any less influential.

Statement Bias and Coverage Bias

Media persuasion at elections is a phenomenon that over decades has appeared stubbornly elusive to research. Only in recent years, evidence has been provided that convincingly supports the case that it may and does occur. Most studies focused on the electoral effects of the *tonality* of news reports on parties and candidates, a dimension of content that is often addressed as *statement bias* (D'Alessio and Allen 2000). It concerns messages conveyed as part of the news within which certain electoral competitors are positively or negatively evaluated. Voters are assumed to learn from this kind of directionally charged coverage whether the competing parties and candidates are to be judged rather favorably or unfavorably (Zaller 1996; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2003). If the tone of a news story on a party or candidate is skewed in a positive direction, voters are expected to follow this coverage by developing favorable views and ultimately a higher likelihood of choosing this competitor. By contrast, if the news is rather negative, voters should tend to like this party or candidate less and be less likely to consider it an attractive electoral alternative. Voters are thus expected to take the media's tone as "an important cue as to whether one should vote for a party or not" (Hopmann et al. 2010: 391). Research on presidential primary and general elections as well as Senate elections in the United States (Joslyn and Ceccoli 1996; Dalton et al. 1998; Kahn and Kenney 2002; Druckman and Parkin 2005; Barker and Lawrence 2006) but also parliamentary elections in the UK (Brandenburg and Van Egmond 2012), the Netherlands (Geers and Bos 2017), Austria (Eberl et al. 2017; Johann et al. 2018), and Germany (Boomgaarden and Semetko 2012) have compiled strong micro-level evidence that voters are indeed sensitive to the tonality of the news media's reporting, although often in highly conditional ways.

Other research was interested in the persuasive effects of the *amount of attention* that news media devote to the various parties or candidates, i.e., the *coverage bias* inherent in their reporting. It can be larger or smaller with regard to quantities like the frequency of coverage, space in newspapers, or time on TV, thus increasing or decreasing electoral competitors' visibility to voters (D'Alessio and Allen 2000). The guiding assumption behind this research is that visibility translates into likability, so that a large amount of media coverage of a party or candidate leads to more positive evaluations of this electoral competitor on the part of audience members. Voters can use the amount of coverage a competitor receives as a cue to infer its political importance, quality, and viability (Eberl et al. 2017: 1128). The familiarity created by a party's or candidate's visibility in the news can thus be expected to give rise to positive evaluations (Zajonc 1968; Geiß and Schäfer 2017: 445–6). Several European studies have tested this expectation and registered positive relationships between the amount of media coverage devoted to parties or candidates and audience members' party preferences (Semetko and Schönbach 1994: 109–115; Hopmann et al. 2010; Geers and Bos 2017).

Direct and Indirect Media Effects

Besides the immediate effects of those manifestations of media bias to which voters are *directly* exposed by way of their personal media usage, it is conceivable that voters' electoral preferences are also sensitive to the statement or coverage bias that is inherent in media coverage *as a whole*. This overall media "environment" might affect individual voters over and beyond their personal media usage (Hopmann et al. 2010). The rationale behind this notion of *indirect* effects is the idea that voters are not only reached by the content conveyed by the media they attend to themselves but also by the general thrust of news reporting overall by way of secondary diffusion. Multi-step message flows that involve one or more stages of interpersonal transmission from media users to persons not attending to the same or even to any media are assumed to be responsible for this phenomenon (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Krause and Gehrau 2007), which has been metaphorically characterized as "civic osmosis" (McCombs 2014: 20) and "rainmaker effect" of the overall media environment (Newton 2019: 153–5). Evidence for indirect effects of the news media's tonality has been registered by studies of US presidential elections (Johnston et al. 2004: 66–100) and Canadian parliamentary elections (Dobrzynska et al. 2003; Fournier et al. 2004). The only research that thus far looked at direct and indirect media effects simultaneously is a Danish study by Hopmann et al. (2010). Modeling the effects of statement and coverage bias of individually viewed TV news as well as all TV newscasts together on electoral preferences, it found strong indirect effects of both types of persuasive media content. The more

visible a party in media coverage overall and the more positive its tone, the more voters were inclined to support this party at the polls, regardless of their own media use.

Partisans and Apartisans

Significantly more German voters nowadays lack attachments to any of the political parties than during the 1970s when party identification was first measured in this country (cf. Chapter 1). Partisan voters are prone to selective exposure, preferring media whose political leaning corresponds to their predispositions (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Stroud 2011). In addition, such voters view political life through a partisan "perceptual screen" (Bartels 2002). Partisanship thus in various ways renders voters resistant to media influence (Zaller 1992). Persuasive effects of media bias should therefore primarily affect independent voters, whereas partisans should be rather immune (Dalton 2000: 924–5). Some scattered findings of extant research may be quoted in support of this assumption. Most notably, Eberl et al. (2017) observed stronger effects of statement bias among apartisan voters. Other studies reported similar patterns regarding either statement or coverage bias for attributes that are closely related to partisan independence, such as undecidedness (Hopmann et al. 2010; Brandenburg and Van Egmond 2012) or late-deciding (Fournier et al. 2004). This suggests that partisan dealignment might indeed have increased the media's power at elections.

Expectations

Against this backdrop, we examine the role of bias in the political reporting of the most important news media on German voters' attitudes toward the major parties and their lead candidates at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. In line with extant theorizing and research, we expect that *statement bias as well as coverage bias in both newspapers and TV news influenced party as well as candidate evaluations.* We further conjecture that these effects came about *both directly, in response to the biases contained in the media content individually received by voters, and indirectly, as a result of overall media coverage whose aggregate bias was conveyed to voters through secondary diffusion.* In addition, we aim to test the expectation that *apartisans were particularly responsive to persuasive media content.* Since our data span only three recent elections, we cannot claim to provide evidence for the long-term process of increasing media power assumed by the dealignment literature. Instead, we focus on a necessary condition for this development by ascertaining whether voters that were not attached to a political party (whose number has increased over the past decades at the expense of those with

firm partisan attachments) responded more strongly to persuasive media content than partisans (whose share of the electorate has decreased).

Media and Voters in Germany

A Democratic-Corporatist Media System

Germany has a typical democratic-corporatist media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004). News production follows a professional "media logic," rather than a politicized "party logic" (Mazzoleni 1987). Within the commercial pillar, constituted by newspapers and private broadcasters' news programs, outlets are not partisan but often also not flatly neutral. More or less pronounced ideological leanings are considered a legitimate element of public affairs coverage under a liberal normative framework that emphasizes "external pluralism" between outlets. Explicit endorsements of particular parties at elections are uncommon, however. Public TV, by contrast, operates under a regulatory framework that requires it to offer high-quality political information programs that comply with criteria of "internal pluralism" and balance (Pürer 2015).

Although the German press, like its counterpart in other countries, has been suffering from declining readership numbers, it is still an important source of news. Regional titles dominate the newspaper market. While providing their readers with close-to-home news, these dailies also offer a fair amount of information on national and international affairs. Within a press market that is stratified with regard to the amount and depth of political information supply, they constitute a middle layer. The top layer consists of the prestigious nationally distributed quality press. It does not reach a large audience, but it assumes an agenda-setter and opinion-leader role for other media (Weischenberg et al. 2005). As a distant echo of the cleavage structure of German politics, its various titles display specific ideological leanings. The spectrum ranges from *Die Welt* on the right to the *Tageszeitung* (taz) on the left. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* (FR) is also rather leftist. The most widely read titles of this segment are the center-right *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) and the center-left *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ). The bottom stratum of the daily press consists of tabloids that cater to an audience interested in "infotainment" rather than "hard" news. This spectrum is dominated by *BILD*, the only nationally distributed tabloid, which is, at the same time, the newspaper with the largest readership overall. It is considered rather conservative and at times populist (Maurer and Reinemann 2006: 129–32).

While newspapers reach a large audience, German voters' main source of news is TV, especially the news offered by the two public broadcasters ARD and ZDF. The ARD's prime-time news program *Tagesschau* is the single most

widely followed source of news overall, followed by *Heute* of the ZDF. Commercial broadcasters' information programs offer a mixed diet of "hard" and "soft" news and are watched less frequently. With regard to the Internet as a provider of news, Germany is lagging behind other countries (Hölig and Hasebrink 2018). Although the relevance of digital news platforms has increased across the three elections covered by our study, they are less relevant than in many comparable countries. According to the GLES surveys (see below), during the 2009 campaign only about one out of five voters paid at least minimal attention to online news. This share doubled until the 2017 election. Online news sites are thus increasingly attended to for up-to-date information about politics, but compared to traditional news media their reach is still much lower. Typically, they supplement rather than substitute conventional outlets. Social media have more recently become an important information source for young voters. But for the electorate at large, even in 2017 they still only played a marginal role.

Figure 13.1 illustrates how direct exposure to traditional news outlets developed across and during the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal election campaigns. It is based on data from RCS surveys (Johnston and Brady 2002) that were conducted by the GLES with about 100 interviews on average per day in 2009 and 2013, and 120 interviews in 2017 (RollCrossSec09; RollCrossSec13; RollCrossSec17).[1] On a day-to-day basis (smoothed by seven-day-moving averages) Figure 13.1 shows the shares of respondents that claimed to have attended to the respective outlets at least once during the week prior to their interview. The picture is one of remarkable stability. Little change occurred between campaigns and virtually none within campaigns. At all elections, around 70 percent regularly followed the news on ARD and about 55 percent on ZDF. The news programs of the two most widely watched commercial channels, RTL and Sat.1, reached much smaller audiences. For RTL in particular, the data even point to a long-term decline from 2009 to 2017.

The data also reflect the steady long-term shrinking of the audience of the press. Yet, this process appears to proceed very slowly. Between 2009 and 2017 the weekly reach of regional dailies declined somewhat from about two-thirds of the electorate to around 60 percent. The readership of *BILD* amounted to about 20 percent in 2009 but also declined during the following years. By contrast, the audiences of the

[1] The surveys were conducted by telephone. Fieldwork was based on multi-stage random sampling based on the ADM-design for landline telephones, a variant of RDD sampling. Sampling was regionally stratified, target persons in households were selected using the last-birthday method. In 2017, sampling was based on a dual sampling frame that also comprised mobile phones. The surveys covered sixty, seventy-six, and sixty-two days, with each day's interviews constituting random samples from the population of German citizens aged eighteen and above (29 July to 26 September, 2009, N = 6,008, AAPOR response rate 19.6 percent; 7 July to 21 September, 2013, N = 7,882, AAPOR response rate 15.5 percent; 24 July to 23 September, 2017, N = 7,650, AAPOR response rate 9.6 percent). IPSOS GmbH was responsible for fieldwork. The datasets can be obtained from GESIS—Leibniz Institute of the Social Sciences (http://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/gles).
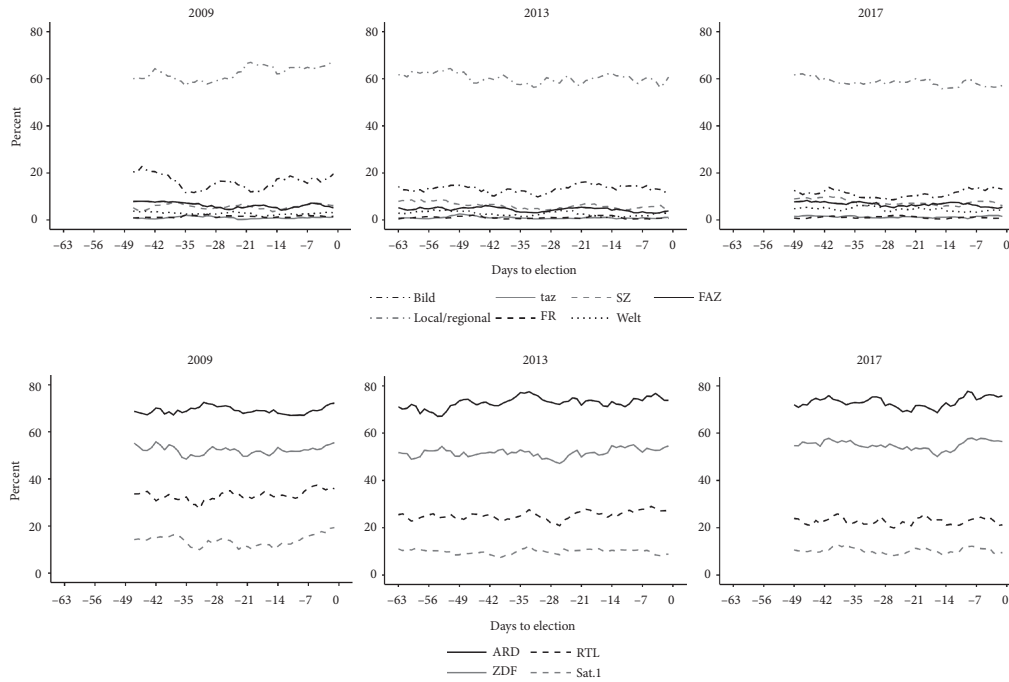
Fig. 13.1 News media use during election campaigns

quality titles appear rather stable. Within this segment of the press, the FAZ and SZ emerged always strongest, with reader shares of around 10 percent. Remarkably, at least for the traditional media the intensifying public competition between the parties and their candidates during the run-up to the respective elections stimulated neither an expansion of news attention nor an intensification of attention among media users (Partheymüller and Schäfer 2013; Staudt and Schmitt-Beck 2019). To a large extent, German voters' news consumption appears as a habitual activity (Rosenstein and Grant 1997), and federal election campaigns do not seem to change this in significant ways. This may change in the future, however, as media usage will foreseeably shift in larger portions to online news providers. Attentiveness to these sources appears more dynamic (Partheymüller and Schäfer 2013; Staudt and Schmitt-Beck 2019).

Coverage Bias and Statement Bias in the News

What did the news that voters received from the press and TV look like? Based on the GLES media content analyses (MediaContent09_TV, MediaContent09_Print, MediaContent13_TV, MediaContent13_Print, MediaContent17_TV, MediaContent17_Print), Table 13.1 provides an overview of the attention paid to the parties and their lead candidates as well as the tonality of news coverage devoted to these competitors during the three election campaigns. The GLES content analyses included all major news outlets of nationwide reach. The TV analysis encompassed the primetime newscasts of the two public broadcasters ARD and ZDF and the two commercial broadcasters with the highest ratings, RTL and Sat.1. The analysis of the daily press included the five national quality newspapers taz, FR, SZ, FAZ, and *Die Welt* as well as the tabloid *BILD*. Due to its fragmentation, the regional press (which encompasses more than 100 different outlets) could not be included in the content analysis.[2]

The table presents data on each news outlet's coverage of the parties and their lead candidates at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections. For each party and lead candidate it displays two aggregate statistics: one concerning visibility, the other tonality. To obtain base measures of the attention devoted to the various parties by the news the content analyses registered for each of the major parties, whether the party itself, any of its organizational sections, or any of its leading politicians, appeared among the first eight actors mentioned in a news report. In the same way, the parties' lead candidates' visibility was determined by identifying specific

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[2] News stories were the coding units. Coding was conducted by a staff of trained coders. The periods of observation covered the last 90 days before each election. Numbers of cases: for TV news in 2009: 6,212, 2013: 5,947, 2017: 5,144; for newspapers in 2009: 2,323, 2013: 2,403, 2017: 2,427. The datasets can be obtained from GESIS—Leibniz Institute of the Social Sciences (http://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/gles/).

Table 13.1 Coverage bias and statement bias in news reports

		Parties						Candidates					
		CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Greens	Left	AfD	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Greens	Left	AfD
2009	FAZ	47.8/−0.9	24.5/−1.7	5.6/ 0.4	4.7/-	4.7/−1.0	-/-	31.2/ 0.2	11.3/ 0.1	2.7/ 2.0	0.2/-	2.4/−2.0	-/-
	Welt	44.3/−1.1	29.4/−1.7	6.3/−0.6	3.5/−2.0	3.4/−0.7	-/-	27.5/−0.4	12.3/−0.9	4.1/−0.5	1.0/-	1.9/-	-/-
	SZ	43.6/−1.5	27.9/−1.6	4.7/−1.3	3.0/−2.0	3.4/−0.4	-/-	26.2/−0.5	11.3/−0.3	2.5/−0.2	0.6/-	1.5/ 1.7	-/-
	FR	44.8/−1.7	25.1/−1.4	5.9/−0.5	6.1/−0.8	4.8/−0.1	-/-	28.7/−0.7	10.3/−0.4	3.4/−1.3	1.1/-	3.1/−0.3	-/-
	taz	38.2/−1.5	28.0/−1.6	6.4/−1.5	7.4/−0.4	4.7/ 0.7	-/-	21.1/−1.0	12.0/−1.2	2.5/−0.7	1.6/−1.0	2.7/ 0.4	-/-
	BILD	38.4/−0.9	26.7/−0.8	8.6/−0.4	3.5/−2.0	3.3/−0.6	-/-	20.6/ 0.2	12.0/ 0.2	4.2/ 1.3	1.0/−2.0	1.4/ 1.2	-/-
	ARD	9.1/−1.0	6.8/ 0.4	1.8/ 0.3	1.5/ 2.0	1.5/ 1.4	-/-	5.1/ 0.7	2.4/ 0.6	0.6/ 2.0	0.4/-	0.6/−1.0	-/-
	ZDF	9.7/−0.8	6.7/−0.6	1.7/ 0.3	1.3/ 2.0	1.2/ 0.9	-/-	6.5/ 0.3	2.6/ 0.7	0.6/ 2.0	0.3/-	0.6/ 0.5	-/-
	RTL	7.0/−0.3	5.6/−0.3	1.3/ 0.4	0.8/ 1.6	0.8/ 1.3	-/-	4.6/ 0.3	2.4/−0.2	0.7/−2.0	0.1/-	0.3/-	-/-
	Sat.1	10.3/−1.1	7.0/−0.1	1.4/ 1.3	0.9/ 2.0	1.0/ 1.9	-/-	7.4/ 0.7	3.2/ 0.2	0.8/-		0.3/-	0.8/ 0.0	-/-
2013	FAZ	37.0/ 0.3	16.3/−1.7	16.0/−0.3	7.7/−1.6	2.9/−1.7	-/-	28.8/−0.7	8.7/−1.2	0.7/-	2.3/−2.0	1.2/-	-/-
	Welt	44.8/−1.0	13.5/−1.5	12.7/−1.4	7.6/−1.9	2.5/ 0.5	-/-	28.5/−0.4	6.8/−1.3	1.6/-	3.5/−2.0	0.0/-	-/-
	SZ	37.7/−0.9	15.5/−0.9	10.2/−0.7	6.3/−0.5	2.5/−0.2	-/-	24.4/−0.7	9.2/−0.2	1.3/ 2.0	1.7/−1.3	0.5/-	-/-
	FR	36.1/−0.9	15.7/−0.7	11.3/−0.8	9.0/−0.5	3.0/−0.0	-/-	24.2/−1.1	8.8/−0.3	0.9/-	2.5/−1.2	1.1/−2.0	-/-
	taz	33.7/−0.3	12.7/−0.8	11.8/−2.0	12.9/−1.0	4.3/ 0.0	-/-	21.1/−0.9	5.8/−0.8	1.4/−2.0	4.2/−1.8	0.6/-	-/-
	BILD	34.7/ 0.3	15.1/−0.9	8.0/−0.1	7.6/−1.0	2.7/ 0.4	-/-	20.5/−0.5	9.5/−0.3	1.7/ 1.0	1.4/−1.0	0.4/−2.0	-/-
	ARD	7.1/−0.2	3.3/−0.3	3.2/−1.6	1.8/−2.0	0.9/-	-/-	4.4/−1.1	1.8/−0.4	0.2/-	0.5/−2.0	0.1/-	-/-
	ZDF	7.1/ 0.5	3.2/−0.1	2.4/−1.9	1.7/−1.0	0.8/ 0.0	-/-	5.1/−1.1	1.9/−0.5	0.5/−2.0	0.5/−2.0	0.2/-	-/-

	RTL	6.6/ 0.7	3.3/−0.4	2.2/−1.7	1.6/−0.7	0.3/−2.0	-/-	4.7/ 0.3	2.5/−0.4	0.1/-	0.5/−2.0	0.1/-	-/-
	Sat.1	10.0/ 0.6	3.8/−0.5	2.9/−1.8	1.9/−1.8	0.5/ 2.0	-/-	7.6/−0.5	2.8/−0.4	0.1/-	0.5/−2.0	0.1/-	-/-
2017	FAZ	38.0/−1.0	25.6/−1.3	2.4/ 0.0	6.3/−1.4	1.8/−2.0	2.4/−0.2	26.9/−0.7	7.3/−1.7	1.2/ 2.0	1.7/-	0.6/−2.0	0.7/−2.0
	Welt	39.4/ 0.9	23.9/−1.6	3.2/−0.7	8.5/−1.4	4.7/−2.0	2.5/−0.6	34.5/ 0.0	10.2/−0.7	0.8/-	2.1/-	0.8/-	0.7/-
	SZ	41.4/−0.5	24.0/−1.7	3.5/−1.3	5.6/−1.6	2.4/−2.0	2.1/ 0.0	28.7/−0.8	9.3/−1.1	1.4/−2.0	1.2/-	0.2/-	0.6/−2.0
	FR	34.2/−0.2	22.1/−0.8	3.0/−1.2	7.9/−1.8	3.8/−0.7	5.0/−0.7	28.8/−0.5	7.6/−0.6	2.0/−1.8	2.1/ 0.0	0.8/ 0.0	0.3/−1.5
	taz	34.4/−0.6	24.3/−1.3	4.3/ 0.0	8.9/−1.0	5.8/−0.9	4.6/ 0.5	28.9/−0.4	9.8/−0.7	2.4/ 1.0	2.4/ 0.0	1.4/−2.0	1.4/−0.8
	BILD	33.2/−0.4	19.7/−0.7	3.1/ 1.2	4.3/−0.7	2.5/−0.3	4.5/−0.7	21.1/−0.6	8.1/−0.7	2.0/−2.0	1.3/-	0.7/−2.0	1.0/−1.4
	ARD	8.9/−1.3	6.6/−1.2	0.4/ 2.0	2.3/−0.3	1.5/−2.0	0.3/−0.7	5.7/−1.0	1.9/ 0.2	0.2/-	1.0/-	0.1/-	0.1/−2.0
	ZDF	7.3/−1.1	6.1/−1.3	0.5/ 0.2	1.2/−0.7	1.0/ 0.7	0.5/−1.8	5.5/−0.2	2.1/−1.0	0.3/-	0.6/ 2.0	0.2/-	0.2/−2.0
	RTL	6.6/−0.3	4.9/−1.1	0.5/ 0.0	0.9/ 1.0	0.5/-	0.8/−1.2	5.0/ 0.0	1.9/−1.0	0.4/ 2.0	0.3/-	0.0/−2.0	0.2/−2.0
	Sat.1	11.3/−1.0	5.9/−1.0	0.4/ 0.0	2.3/−2.0	0.7/ 0.0	0.7/ 0.7	6.7/−0.6	2.4/−0.7	0.3/-	0.8/-	0.1/-	0.2/−0.3

Notes: Each cell of the table (defined by party or candidate, medium and election year) contains two entries, divided by slashes. The first entry (coverage bias) is the average proportion of mentions of the party (candidate) in news reports relative to all actor mentions in same reports (%). The second entry (statement bias) is the average tone of those news reports where the party (candidate) appears as one of three first-mentioned actors and the tone regarding this party (candidate) is not balanced or neutral.

mentions of these individuals.[3] Based on these data we construct an index of the prominence with which a party or candidate appeared in a news report. It was calculated by dividing the number of mentions pertaining to a particular party or candidate by the total number of all actor appearances within the same report and thus indicates the extent to which the report concentrated on this party or candidate. Aggregating these index values across news reports, the table shows how much attention each medium paid to the various parties and candidates on average during each of the three election campaigns.

The data indicate no systematic media favoritism in the sense of recurring patterns of relatively higher or lower prominence of certain parties in particular media at each election.[4] Instead, the various parties' visibility differed greatly and quite consistently across elections, regardless of the medium. Across the board, the leading government party CDU/CSU appeared much more prominently than all other parties. The SPD also obtained quite intense coverage in 2009 and 2017, when it governed with the CDU/CSU in a Grand Coalition. However, it never reached parity with its senior partner, and during the 2013 campaign, when it was in the opposition, media attention dropped considerably. Interestingly, at this election, its visibility in the news was about the same as for the FDP, which then served as junior partner in a "black–yellow" coalition. By contrast, the media accorded the Liberals considerably less attention in 2009, when they campaigned as one of the small parliamentary opposition parties. And losing its parliamentary mandates in 2013 meant that its presence in the news did not even return to this prior level but declined even further. During the 2017 campaign, the FDP obtained the same limited amount of media coverage as the AfD, which also ran from outside parliament. As small opposition parties, the Left and the Greens were always accorded a level of media attention somewhere between the one granted to the SPD in 2013, when it dominated the opposition, and the extra-parliamentary outsiders.

The visibility of the lead candidates was by necessity lower than the overall visibility of their parties. At all three elections, the Christian Democrats' chancellor candidate was the incumbent officeholder Angela Merkel, and she gained a lot of coverage. Her successive challengers from the SPD always lagged considerably behind—in fact, much farther than their party compared to the party of the chancellor. Clearly, in the news media, the two candidates that aspired for the office of head of government did not compete on equal terms. However, despite the large gaps to the incumbent, each of the Social Democratic challengers still

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[3] The average reliability of these base measures (Krippendorff's α, cf. Krippendorff 2004) was 0.84 for newspapers and 0.87 for TV news.

[4] That the values are consistently higher for the press than for TV news is a consequence of the design of the GLES content analyses. For newspapers, they concentrated on reports on German politics as well as domestic and foreign policy published on the front pages and in editorial/op-ed sections, whereas the TV analyses included the complete newscasts.

appeared much more prominently in the news than any of the smaller parties' lead candidates.

The tonality of coverage was determined by the content analyses for those parties and candidates that appeared among the first three actors and could thus be considered the primary objects of a news story. Coders rated news reports' overall tonality on a bipolar five-point scale.[5] Its extreme points (−2, +2) indicate that the respective party or candidate was overall judged in an unambiguously negative or positive way. More moderate scores of −1 and +1 signal that the party or candidate was assessed overall rather negatively or positively but not in a unanimously one-sided way. A score of 0 was assigned if news reports were neutral or ambivalent, i.e., did not entail any discernible tonality or contained an about balanced amount of negative and positive statements. The prevalence of news coverage with a clearly discernible tonality was rather limited. Across parties, media, and elections, its share rarely exceeded 50 percent and was often much lower. Reports with a clear directional thrust were more frequent in the press than on TV. Within the cells of Table 13.1, the second entry shows the tonalities for each party or candidate, news outlet, and election averaged across non-neutral and non-ambivalent news reports. No clear patterns become apparent beyond the basic observation that negative scores dominate—an impression that is in line with findings indicating a general prevalence of negativism in the news media's political coverage not only in Germany (Maurer and Reinemann 2006: 133–144) but also in other countries (Patterson 1993).

In sum, these data suggest that German media's coverage during the 2009, 2013, and 2017 election campaigns was quite clearly patterned with regard to coverage bias. The main source of variation in parties' and candidates' visibility was the parties' political status. These patterns echo the diagnosis, derived by Schönbach and Semetko (2000) from their analysis of election news from 1976 to 1998, that German media display a "merciless professionalism." They allocate their attention in strict accordance to criteria of newsworthiness, unfettered by considerations of balance and equal opportunity between electoral competitors. This generally advantages more powerful actors because they can act and shape policies, which endows them with high news value. Less powerful actors are restricted to campaign rhetoric, and that is not considered particularly newsworthy. During the 2009 to 2017 election campaigns, this logic translated into a pattern of coverage where government parties always received a visibility bonus. In addition, within government coalitions the CDU/CSU as the party of the federal chancellor, and,

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[5] Coders were instructed to refer to explicitly evaluative judgments from journalists or external sources quoted in a report about the respective parties or candidates themselves as well as their actions (e.g., political decisions and their outcomes, communicative acts, political styles, policies, and opinion poll results), qualifying them in positive or negative terms (such as statements of support or rejection and qualifications as success or failure). The average reliability (Krippendorff's α) of the resulting ratings was 0.92 for newspapers and 0.84 for TV news.

even more so, Angela Merkel as the head of government herself, regularly was covered much more prominently than the junior government parties and their leaders. It further appears that in distributing their attention, the media were also responsive to the opposition parties' varying sizes and presence in parliament itself. By way of contrast, evaluative news reports with a clear positive or negative evaluative tone were rather infrequent, and their tonality entailed hardly any structure. We now turn to the question of whether and how these attributes of news content affected voters' attitudes toward the parties and their candidates.

Measures and Strategy of Analysis

Dependent Variables

To measure voters' electoral attitudes, we refer to eleven-point like-dislike scales (−5 to +5). The analysis includes the CDU/CSU,[6] SPD, FDP, Greens, the Left, and—only in 2017—AfD as well as the same parties' lead candidates (Chancellor Angela Merkel for the CDU/CSU at all three elections, varying candidates for the other parties). Figure 13.2 shows how these measures developed during the three election campaigns (day-by-day means, smoothed by seven-day moving averages). Across elections, these data show great stability but also some interesting long-term developments that correspond to the parties' shifting fortunes at the polls (cf. Chapter 1). Yet, within campaigns, the overall impression is one of stability (see also Chapter 14). During the run-up to the elections, party and candidate evaluations oscillated back and forth, but there were hardly any trends. At the aggregate level, at the three elections covered by our study campaign communications do not seem to have shifted voters' attitudes toward the parties and candidates in major ways. This has important implications for our analysis. Our models show whether and how individual voters' views of the parties and their candidates reflected momentary biases of media coverage, but they do not concern processes of consequence for the ultimate outcomes of these elections.

Independent Variables

To test these dependent variables' sensitivity to media coverage, we merge data from the three RCS surveys and media content analyses introduced previously into one pooled dataset in accordance with the logic of linkage analysis (De Vreese et al.

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[6] CSU for Bavarian respondents, CDU for all others (the CSU exists only in Bavaria where the CDU in turn has no state party organization; in the federal parliament the two parties collaborate in a unified group).
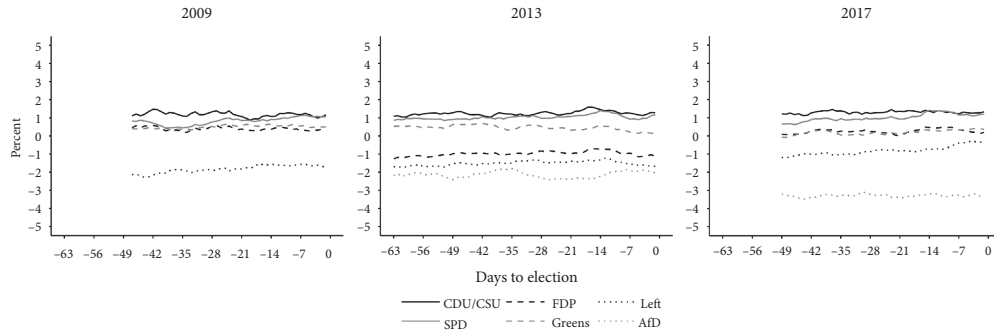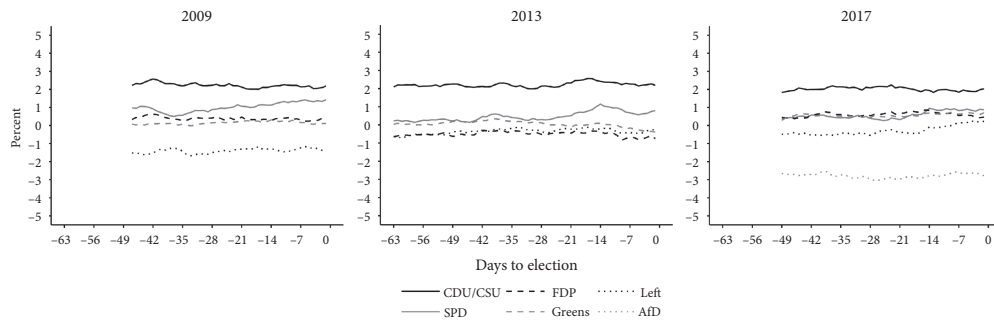
Fig. 13.2 Party and candidate evaluations during election campaigns

2017). Since each day of interviewing within an RCS survey constitutes an independent random draw from the same population, we can, in a straightforward way, use the dates of interviews as a connector between the voter and media data (Johnston and Brady 2002). For the analyses of direct media effects, we additionally rely on information provided by the survey respondents about their personal media use to connect survey and content data. In addition, aggregating these exposure measures provides us with weights for constructing composite indices of indirect exposure to overall media content.

As independent variables, our approach requires message exposure measures (Scharkow and Bachl 2017: 326) that as precisely as possible register the specific media content to which survey respondents were exposed. Our indicators of the coverage and statement biases received by respondents are derived from the measures of parties' and candidates' visibility in news reports and news stories' tonality displayed in Table 13.1. Fusing these indicators into the survey data requires a number of steps. The first consists of aggregating them to the level of publication days and news outlets by means of averaging. The next steps differ depending on whether they aim at creating measures of individually received content or the overall media message environment of a given day.

To indicate the content to which individual voters were *directly* exposed, we assign each respondent the aggregated measures of visibility and tonality for those newspapers and TV news programs that he or she followed on the day before the interview. If a respondent read more than one newspaper or watched more than one TV news program, we average the respective outlets' content scores. This results in individualized measures of respondents' exposure to statement and coverage bias in the press[7] and on TV. To test the expectation of *indirect* effects of overall media coverage, we construct measures of the overall biases of the press and TV news for each day of the three election campaigns (cf. Hopmann et al. 2010). Since secondary diffusion of media messages takes some time (Krause and Gehrau 2007), we build these measures for each campaign day with reference to the media's content of the previous week instead of just the previous day. We aggregate this content across the seven weekdays by way of simple averaging.[8] The resulting daily scores for the various media's coverage bias and statement bias are then combined into visibility and tonality measures of the total coverage of newspapers and

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[7] Since most German newspapers do not issue Sunday editions, the newspaper variables are assigned a value of 0 for respondents that were interviewed on Mondays. Since regional newspapers could not be included in the content analyses due to their large number, we construct proxy measures of statement and coverage bias for this segment of the press. Taking account of the quality dailies' function as lead media (Wilke 2009), we generate these synthetic measures as weighted averages of the content of the five quality newspapers published on the same day. For weighting, we refer to the various titles' shares of readers (relative to all readers of a quality daily, with readership defined as having read the respective paper at least once during the past week). This prioritizes the center-right FAZ and center-left SZ that belong to the most influential outlets of the German media system.

[8] Specifying decay functions does not lead to substantial changes of our results. Hence, we opt for this more parsimonious approach to building our variables.

TV news, respectively. We construct averages across newspapers and TV news, using both the respective media's audience shares (i.e., the portion of respondents following the medium at least once per week) and average weekly usage frequencies within these audiences (1–7 days, rescaled to range 1/7 to 1) as weights. Thus, each outlet contributes to our measures of the overall media environment in accordance with its societal reach and usage intensity, upon the assumption that it fed into societal information flows in proportion to the direct overall attention its coverage received. The resulting daily measures for the overall visibility and tonality of coverage in the press and on TV are then linked to the survey data by date. Each respondent is assigned summary scores for the averaged coverage bias and statement bias of newspapers and TV news during the week before his or her interview.

In total, our study includes sixteen message exposure measures as independent variables: two types of bias (coverage, statement) for two types of media (newspapers, TV news) and two ways of exposure (individual-direct, overall-indirect), for parties, on the one hand, and candidates, on the other (see Table 13.2 for descriptives). To render these variables' coefficient estimates in the models comparable, we rescale all of them to range 0 to 1, based on the empirically observed ranges. Importantly, for most of these variables the empirical range covers only a fraction of the full theoretically possible range (cf. Table 13.2). This reflects the mutual cancellation of biases across media messages described by Zaller (1996). Voters are simultaneously exposed to a variety of news from different sources. Hence, from voters' point of view the news speak in many, partly countervailing voices, which depresses the likelihood of receiving unanimously one-sided messages. Consequently, most independent variables' ranges amount to only a third of the theoretically possible ranges at best, and for many of them considerably less.[9]

Strategy of Modeling and Control Variables

Like similar recent studies of media effects at elections in multi-party systems (Hopmann et al. 2010; Eberl et al. 2017; Geers and Bos 2017; Johann et al. 2018), we stack our data by parties within respondents. This allows us to model generic party orientations, transcending parties' "proper names." Since our dependent variables are continuous, we use hierarchical linear models with varying intercepts (with party-respondent combinations as level 1 and respondents as level 2). To achieve a comprehensive understanding of media effects, the models simultaneously include the complete sets of measures of individually received media content as well as the

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[9] The only exception are our measures of the content of newspapers individually used by respondents. This reflects the fact that most newspaper readers hold a subscription to one daily and never look into any others.

Table 13.2 Descriptives of independent variables

		Mean	SD	Min	Max	Max–min	% possible range
	Individually received media coverage						
	Newspapers: visibility	0.01	0.07	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Newspapers: tone	0.00	0.04	−2.00	1.00	3.00	0.75
	TV news: visibility	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.31	0.31	0.31
Parties	TV news: tone	0.00	0.03	−0.60	0.69	1.29	0.32
	Overall media coverage						
	Newspapers: visibility	0.08	0.08	0.00	0.30	0.30	0.30
	Newspapers: tone	−0.03	0.04	−0.21	0.11	0.32	0.08
	TV news: visibility	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.15	0.15	0.15
	TV news: tone	0.00	0.01	−0.10	0.06	0.17	0.04
	Individually received media coverage						
	Newspapers: visibility	0.01	0.05	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Newspapers: tone	0.00	0.05	−2.00	2.00	4.00	1.00
	TV news: visibility	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.32	0.32	0.32
Candidates	TV news: tone	0.00	0.02	−0.43	0.40	0.83	0.21
	Overall media coverage						
	Newspapers: visibility	0.04	0.06	0.00	0.26	0.26	0.26
	Newspapers: tone	−0.01	0.03	−0.16	0.08	0.24	0.06
	TV news: visibility	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.09	0.09	0.09
	TV news: tone	0.00	0.01	−0.05	0.04	0.09	0.02

Notes: "Max–min" = empirically observed range; "% possible range" = Max–min as proportion of theoretically possible range.

overall media environment regarding visibility and tonality of news coverage in the press and on TV.

Our models control for partisanship as a generic political predisposition. It has a strong impact on electoral attitudes and may be a powerful driver of selective exposure to news media (dummy variables indicating whether or not a respondent identified with respective party and whether or not he or she was an independent; implicit reference category: identification with other parties). In addition, they contain measures of exposure to the most important alternative sources of electoral information: associates with whom respondents discussed electoral politics in everyday conversations (0 = no discussant supported respective party, 0.5 = one discussant supported respective party, 1 = two discussants supported respective party), parties' electioneering (0 = no contact to campaign of respective party, 1 = contacted by respective party), and exposure to online news platforms (1 = followed news online, 0 = no online news). Our models also include education as a generic indicator of cognitive capacity (1 = secondary education completed, 0 = lower level of education) as well as age (rescaled to range 0–1), and gender (1 = female, 0 = male). Furthermore, the models contain a set of structural control variables. The election year (reference category: 2009) accounts for the differing situational characteristics of the three election campaigns. To neutralize differences in average levels of party and candidate evaluations, we furthermore control for parties (reference category: CDU/CSU) and whether a party was a member of the incumbent government coalition at the time of the election campaign (dummy variable). Last, in order to model the effects of all independent variables simultaneously, it is necessary to deal with structural missing values caused by features of media usage and content. The models therefore additionally control for four dummy variables (coded 1 for respondents that did not read a newspaper or did not watch TV news, and for respondents directly exposed to newspapers or TV news that on the day assigned to their interview did not publish any reports with discernible tonality on the respective party or candidate).

Findings

From a methodological point of view, our approach to examining persuasive media effects is in several respects extremely conservative. The deck is clearly stacked against detecting evidence for media effects, thus minimizing the likelihood of false positives.[10] Nonetheless, the model estimates displayed in Table 13.3 suggest that during the 2009 to 2017 election campaigns media indeed exerted persuasive

[10] By including partisanship, we opt for a control variable that erects high hurdles for any additional predictors of party and candidate evaluations. In addition, our models also control for a variety of alternative and potentially competing sources of electoral information. Furthermore, recent methodological research suggests that self-reports on media exposure like those used in the GLES surveys as

Table 13.3 Media effects on evaluations of parties and candidates (unstandardized regression coefficients)

	Parties	Candidates
Individually received media coverage		
Newspapers: visibility	−0.23 (0.12)	−0.03 (0.17)
Newspapers: tone	1.08 (0.54)*	0.23 (0.56)
TV news: visibility	0.12 (0.08)	0.11 (0.12)
TV news: tone	0.60 (0.28)*	0.92 (0.28)***
Overall media coverage		
Newspapers: visibility	0.10 (0.11)	−0.14 (0.11)
Newspapers: tone	−0.04 (0.08)	−0.12 (0.08)
TV news: visibility	0.13 (0.10)	0.23 (0.09)*
TV news: tone	0.37 (0.10)***	0.75 (0.08)***
Control variables		
Party ID	2.68 (0.02)***	2.20 (0.02)***
No party ID	0.28 (0.02)***	0.26 (0.02)***
Political discussions with party supporters	1.77 (0.04)***	1.56 (0.04)***
Contact with party campaigns	0.27 (0.02)***	0.16 (0.03)***
Exposure to online news	−0.20 (0.02)***	−0.17 (0.02)***
Education (secondary completed)	−0.07 (0.02)**	−0.05 (0.02)*
Age	−0.30 (0.06)***	0.28 (0.07)***
Gender (female)	0.24 (0.02)***	0.27 (0.02)***
2013	−0.12 (0.03)***	−0.01 (0.03)
2017	0.37 (0.03)***	0.40 (0.03)***
SPD	−0.16 (0.04)***	−1.41 (0.04)***
FDP	−0.84 (0.06)***	−1.58 (0.05)***
Greens	−0.50 (0.05)***	−1.54 (0.06)***
Left	−2.27 (0.06)***	−2.44 (0.06)***
AfD	−4.59 (0.06)***	−4.98 (0.06)***
Party in government	−0.69 (0.03)***	−0.32 (0.03)***
No newspaper	−0.03 (0.03)	−0.02 (0.03)
No TV news	−0.21 (0.03)***	−0.21 (0.03)***
No tone in newspapers	0.05 (0.02)*	0.02 (0.02)
No tone in TV news	−0.04 (0.02)*	−0.03 (0.02)
Constant	5.43 (0.39)***	6.36 (0.33)***
AIC	484,853.59	478,706.72
BIC	485,149.94	479,002.32
Log likelihood	−242,395.79	−239,322.36
Num. obs.	104,810	102,253
Num. groups	19,701	19,793
Var. (groups)	0.89	0.97
Var. (residual)	5.29	5.57

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

well as measures of media content are often affected by issues of measurement imprecision. These problems are not tractable with current methodological approaches and tend to depress the effects sizes in linkage studies like ours (Scharkow and Bachl 2017).

effects on how voters evaluated the parties and their lead candidates. However, not all of our sixteen independent variables appear relevant. Three of the eight measures of direct exposure to news content show statistically meaningful effects, and they all concern statement bias. By contrast, the table shows no evidence for direct effects of coverage bias. If the TV news programs that voters had viewed on the previous day reported more positively (or negatively) about parties or candidates, they tended to evaluate these actors more favorably (or unfavorably) on the day of the interview. With regard to parties, but not candidates, the same relationship also emerges for the tonality of newspapers. Our findings furthermore suggest that voters' attitudes toward parties are not only sensitive to direct media effects but also to indirect effects that extend beyond the respective outlets' immediate audiences. Specifically, voters also responded to the tonality of the total TV coverage about parties and candidates that was broadcast during the previous week. For candidate evaluations, the table also shows an indirect visibility effect. The more prominently a candidate was covered in TV news overall the better he or she was evaluated by voters, regardless of their own news consumption. By contrast, newspapers do not seem to have exerted any indirect effects.

Benchmarks for assessing the sizes of these effects can be gleaned from the results for partisanship and exposure to alternative information sources. Coefficients can be directly compared as all predictors have been normalized to range 0 to 1. Unsurprisingly, partisanship strongly influenced how voters assessed the electoral competitors. But even controlling for partisanship, both everyday conversations with party supporters as well as contacts with parties' campaigns were also related to these attitudes. In both models, the effects of partisanship appear strongest, followed by personal communications. The parties' electioneering was influential as well but with much smaller effect sizes. The strength of the statistically meaningful media effects displayed in Table 13.3 differs widely, but they all range somewhere between those of personal and campaign communications. Cautiously generalizing, one might thus infer that at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections, media were not all-powerful but certainly also far from a *quantité négligeable*. How positively or negatively they reported about parties and candidates, and how intensely candidates were covered, affected voters' political attitudes, although these effects were apparently only short-lived.

To test whether and in which ways partisanship moderated the effects of media bias on voters' party and candidate evaluations, we rerun the models displayed in Table 13.3 with additional multiplicative interaction terms for each of the independent variables. Technically speaking, we compute cross-level interactions between partisanship as a respondent attribute and all measures of direct and indirect exposure to the two forms of media bias that vary within respondents across parties. At least in part, the results of this analysis conform to our expectations (Figure 13.3). Under this more differentiated model specification, the direct effect of statement bias in TV news on party evaluations appears relevant for apartisans but not for
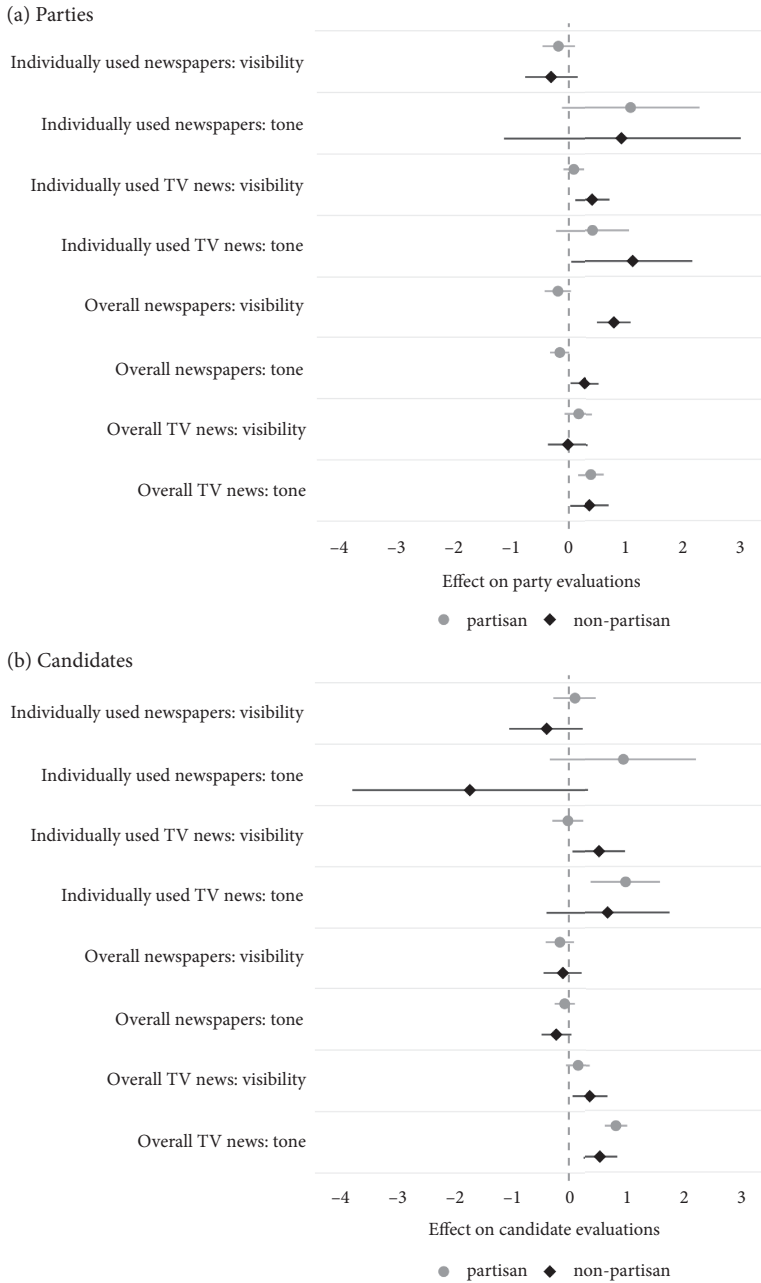
(a) Parties

Individually used newspapers: visibility

Individually used newspapers: tone

Individually used TV news: visibility

Individually used TV news: tone

Overall newspapers: visibility

Overall newspapers: tone

Overall TV news: visibility

Overall TV news: tone

−4   −3   −2   −1   0   1   2   3

Effect on party evaluations

● partisan   ◆ non-partisan

(b) Candidates

Individually used newspapers: visibility

Individually used newspapers: tone

Individually used TV news: visibility

Individually used TV news: tone

Overall newspapers: visibility

Overall newspapers: tone

Overall TV news: visibility

Overall TV news: tone

−4   −3   −2   −1   0   1   2   3

Effect on candidate evaluations

● partisan   ◆ non-partisan

Fig. 13.3 Media effects on evaluations of parties and candidates, conditional on partisanship (unstandardized regression coefficients)

voters that identified with a party. Likewise, the indirect visibility effect of TV news on candidate evaluations attains statistical significance only among voters without partisan identities. Importantly, apart from these clarifications of associations that already were apparent in Table 13.3, this more nuanced analysis also shows a range of effects for measures of message exposure that in the global models appeared unrelated to voters' attitudes. Restricted to apartisans, we now also see direct visibility effects of TV news for both parties and candidates as well as indirect effects of both coverage and statement bias in newspapers on attitudes toward parties. Just one of the interactions shown in Figure 13.3 contradicts our expectations: In stark contrast to the direct effect of TV news tone on party evaluations that in this more fine-grained analysis appears restricted to apartisans, the corresponding effect for candidate attitudes occurs only among voters that felt attached to a party.

Conclusion

Freeing the formation of voters' preferences from its traditional anchoring in stable political loyalties, partisan dealignment is often believed to have opened the door for growing persuasive media influences at elections. Against this backdrop, we examined the role of the most important news media's political reporting for voters' party and candidate evaluations at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 German federal elections. Linking data from content analyses of newspapers and TV news to RCS surveys of voters (De Vreese et al. 2017), we modeled the consequences of exposure to specific types of valenced media messages. We simultaneously examined several expectations: that voters' electoral attitudes were responsive to the amount of news coverage devoted to the electoral competitors as well as the tonality with which they were addressed; that these effects pertained to both newspapers and TV news; that they came about not only directly through personal media exposure but also indirectly, as a result of overall media coverage whose biases were conveyed to voters by means of interpersonally mediated "civic osmosis" (McCombs 2014: 20); and that they affected apartisan voters more strongly than party identifiers.

Perhaps the most crucial message of our study is as simple as it is important: We did find evidence of persuasive effects of media messages on how voters evaluated the parties and their lead candidates. In view of how for a long time such effects have proven elusive in research, this appears quite remarkable in itself. During the three election campaigns that we examined, these media effects manifested themselves primarily in short-term fluctuations of voters' electoral attitudes. Thus, in all likelihood, they did not affect the outcomes of the elections. However, we consider this only an accidental implication of the way the media happen to present politics during German election campaigns, not of their effectiveness as such. The GLES content analyses revealed a style of coverage well in line with the general logic of

democratic-corporatist media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The news media displayed common patterns of selectivity with regard to the amount of coverage devoted to the parties and their candidates, presumably resulting from similar criteria of newsworthiness across media. We detected a remarkable sensitivity of the media for power differences between parties, leading to greater visibility of more powerful actors than less powerful ones in a quite nuanced rank ordering. At the same time, our findings indicate considerable restraint on the part of news media with regard to outspokenly evaluative content and, to the extent it did occur, no systematic variation across media or parties. With regard to tonality, the news did not appear to treat the competing parties and candidates in systematically unequal ways.

We thus found the news media's coverage to be clearly structured with regard to coverage bias but not patterned in meaningful ways with regard to statement bias. In stark contrast, our models revealed that the latter was a more important source of persuasive media effects than the former. More positive news coverage of parties or candidates clearly tended to be associated with more friendly subsequent assessments by voters. We also found higher media visibility to go along with more favorable attitudes on the part of voters, but this relationship appeared more ambiguous. Importantly, the effects of coverage bias, in particular, but to some extent also the effects of statement bias, occurred not across the board but conditional on partisanship. Since our data span only three recent elections, we cannot appraise whether the media's power has indeed increased over the past decades as a result of partisan dealignment. However, our findings offer some support for an important premise of this conjecture. They suggest that to the extent partisanship counts for media effects, apartisan voters are more sensitive to persuasive news content than those that identify with a party. In addition, our findings suggest that both TV news and the press are influential, though the former much more clearly than the latter. Last, our evidence points to the relevance not only of direct but also of indirect effects. News media appear to have influenced not only those directly following them. Rather, their impact extended also to people who did not themselves follow their coverage, presumably because their immediate audiences "spread the news" further to their fellow citizens.

Just how "massive" (Zaller 1996) is the power of the media? Our models located the news media's persuasive impact somewhere between personal communication, which is a very strong force when it comes to electoral behavior (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), and the parties' electioneering. Hence, they appear quite influential, even though our analysis in several respects was set up in ways that rendered the emergence of media effects rather unlikely. Cautiously generalizing from our results, one may speculate that the news media's power at elections could be considerably larger if its coverage were less plural. The amount of mutual cancellation of competing messages, which in our analysis became manifest in the fact that for most measures of news content, only a fraction of the possible range between

favorability and unfavorability was actually covered, would then be much reduced. The media's direct effect would be considerably larger if their coverage were overall more consonantly one-sided in favor of a single competitor. Their indirect effect, however, whereby the cumulated content of all media reaches everyone in society, including even people that abstain from any media usage, would be truly sweeping—a conclusion that attests to the vital importance of a diverse and plural media landscape that serves democracy by offering voters a multi-faceted portrayal of the political world.

14

Plus ça Change?

Stability amid Volatility in German Campaigns

Julia Partheymüller and Richard Johnston

Introduction

Over the past decades, the German political landscape has undergone a fundamental transformation. Long-standing partisan and group loyalties have weakened such that the party system has become increasingly fractionalized and electoral volatility has grown immensely. This observation has led to claims that election campaigns—as periods of intensified information flows aimed at influencing voters—will increasingly shape the outcomes of elections (Dalton et al. 2002). But if previous research has demonstrated that there are fewer reliable *Stammwähler* (loyal voters) today, how the voting function and the dynamics of elections change under the conditions of a dealigned electorate has remained a significant research desideratum.

Awkwardly, the strongest empirically-founded claims about campaigns portray them not as disruptive forces but as re-equilibrating ones. Campaigns are said to *activate* considerations that endure but lie dormant between elections. This was established in the first classic studies (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Berelson et al. 1954). More recent research extends and elaborates this claim, with the primary cause of dynamics being the priming of latent partisanship. Likewise, the success of election forecasting models (Hibbs 1977; Rosenstone 1983; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992) suggests that most campaign dynamics should also be predictable (Campbell 2008). These claims may even be stronger in parliamentary campaigns than in presidential ones (Jennings and Wlezien 2016). Previous research on German elections has shown that predictions of vote shares have been reasonably accurate (Norpoth and Gschwend 2013, 2017; Kayser and Leininger 2016, 2017; Nadeau et al. 2020) and that activation of factors like party identification does occur (Johnston et al. 2014). In light of these studies, and in the spirit of "plus ça change," one might expect that campaigns in Germany today resemble those in the US in the 1940s.

But where then do the heightened levels of electoral volatility come from? The continued presence of long-term stable predispositions and predictable campaign dynamics does not necessarily preclude the possibility of change in other aspects. To investigate this possibility, we propose a four-way decomposition of the voting function depending on the variability of explanatory factors between elections and within campaigns. We revisit the four election campaigns of the last decade (2005, 2009, 2013, 2017) and model their dynamics, using the rolling cross-section surveys conducted each year. These datasets allow us to evaluate change within election campaigns as well as patterns of change across elections, essentially studying short-term changes in a long-term comparative perspective. We analyze the data using smoothing techniques and variance decomposition.

Our findings suggest that despite partisan dealignment, some features of elections have remained unchanged. Most notably, the majority of voters still holds a party identification and for the large parties, activation dynamics as stabilizing forces remain intact. Between elections, changes in perception of the economy stand out, implying that the electorate becomes more vulnerable to economic and other crises. Yet, as this type of medium-term change in economic conditions is well-captured by the existing models, it does not contribute to lower levels of predictability. Apart from that, we identify several other possible sources of electoral flux. Most notably, we find that electoral mobilization, defections from the party line, coalition expectations, and the support for small parties vary considerably across elections and within campaigns. Even when within-campaign change is modest, it is of sufficient magnitude to be pivotal around the electoral threshold and to affect the feasibility of coalitions. Among short-term dynamics within campaigns, coalition expectations increasingly stand out. We conclude that with weakened connections between citizens and parties, campaigns increasingly become a game of strategy (see also Chapter 9).

Previous Research and Expectations

Partisan Dealignment and Its Consequences for the Volatility and Predictability of Election Outcomes

The pattern for party identification is clear (cf. Chapter 1). According to Dalton (2002), the overall percentage of survey respondents identified with a party and the percentage strongly identified both dropped from the early 1970s to the late 1990s. The trend for Germany was roughly in line with the other countries. The trend is confirmed in detail and extended to 2002 by Arzheimer (2006). Arzheimer (2017) shows that the decline has abated, indeed had effectively stopped by 2013. The new parties have so far not attracted identifiers, such that the share of independent voters has grown (Dalton et al. 2002; Dalton 2002).

The basis of the decline is the weakened impact of membership in the party system's traditional pillars, manual workers and Catholics. Membership in these core groups has been shrinking but more important is the diminished impact of membership for those who still belong (Arzheimer 2006; see also Chapter 2). One popular explanation for these trends, cognitive mobilization (Dalton 1984a) is definitely *not* the source of the decline (Arzheimer and Schoen 2005; Albright 2009; Ohr et al. 2009).

As with party identification, so have turnout and other forms of engagement declined. Although interest in politics seems to have increased, or at least it did between the 1970s and the 1990s (Dalton et al. 2002: 57), active engagement in campaigns has diminished, especially for party-related tasks (Dalton et al. 2002: 59). That is, the capacity of parties—and thus of campaigns—as vehicles for voter mobilization has diminished. Voter mobilization instead requires ever greater efforts by the parties, relying increasingly on the media and professionalized advertising campaigns as a means of communication rather than on party activists.

As a result of the decline in party identification, recent elections have been marked by growing levels of inter-election volatility and party system fragmentation (cf. Chapter 1). Voters increasingly wait to observe the campaign and make their final decision closer to election day, most notably. Now, voters often feel similarly drawn to more than one party (Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller 2012) and look to the campaign for cues. Taken together, these trends lead researchers and political observers to infer that voting decisions are increasingly contextually contingent and short-term in nature (Mair 2013: 68). As *long-term factors* decline, *short-term factors*, such as campaigns and media coverage, on the logic of this argument, must become more important (Dalton et al. 2002).

If the diagnosis of trends in Germany, and in Western democracies more broadly, seems clear, not so clear are its implications for short-term dynamics. Notwithstanding the growth in electoral volatility, prediction models for German election outcomes continue to be reasonably accurate (Norpoth and Gschwend 2013; Graefe 2015; Kayser and Leininger 2016, 2017; Norpoth and Gschwend 2017). As Figure 14.1, based on replication material from Nadeau, Dassonneville, Lewis-Beck, and Mongrain (Nadeau et al. 2019) shows, prediction error from a very simple model that relies on early vote intentions and economic growth has essentially remained the same since the late 1950s.[1] This high and constant level of predictability seems at odds with the observation of long-term growth in electoral volatility. How is it, given a dealigned electorate and a fragmented supply side that election results continue to be so predictable?

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[1] For further details regarding the prediction model, see the original source (Nadeau et al. 2019). We thank the authors for making the replication data accessible via the Harvard Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MJKDYS
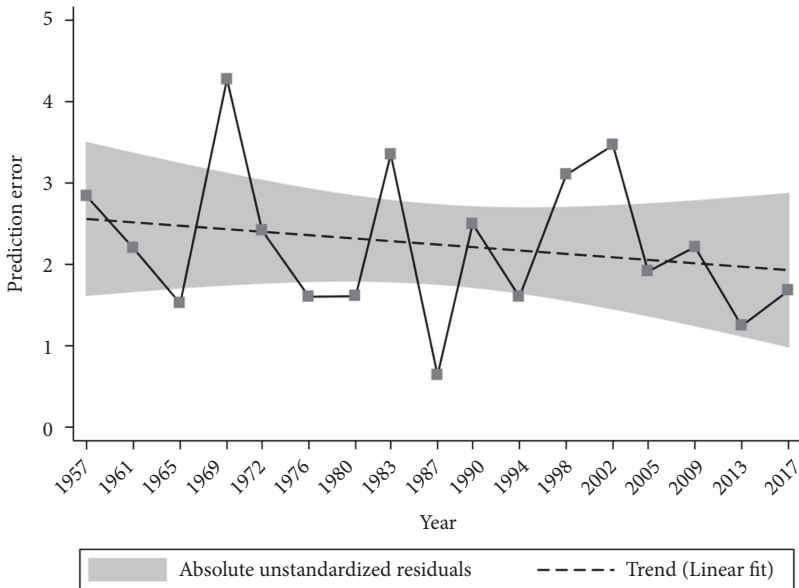
Fig. 14.1 Predictability of German federal elections, 1957–2017

A Four-way Decomposition of the Voting Function: A Typology of Dynamics between Elections and within Campaigns

To address this volatility-predictability puzzle and to make advances in the debate about the role of "long-term" vs. "short-term" factors, we propose a typology that distinguishes more precisely different types of explanatory factors based on their temporal variability. We believe that a more differentiated look at short-term factors can help to improve our understanding of how elections change under the conditions of dealigned electorate and a fragmented supply side of parties.

The general point is that there is no necessary relationship between inter-election and within-campaign volatility. Inter-election volatility is *not* a *necessary* condition for its within-campaign equivalent. This is the point of the activation example. Likewise, long-term volatility is *not* a *sufficient* condition for campaign volatility. Shifts between elections in electorally relevant factors may be distinct enough to register in voters' minds well before the campaign starts. This leads us to stylize the four possibilities in Figure 14.2. Apart from long-term stable predispositions (I), we distinguish among generalized short-term factors (II), medium-term factors (III), and situation-specific short-term factors (IV). The vote we consider a product of all these four factors.[2]

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[2] Note that not all components of the decomposed voting function as portrayed here simply add up additively. Most notably, coalition expectations may exert an indirect influence by moderating the

Within-campaign dynamics
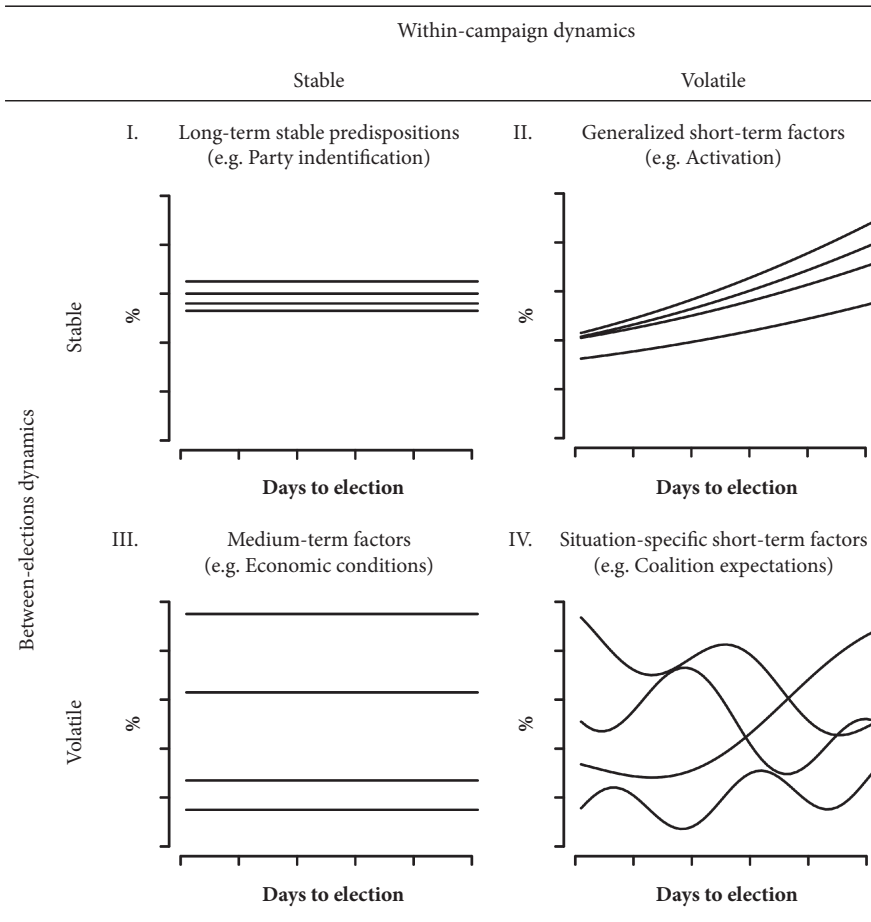
Fig. 14.2 Dynamics between and within election campaigns

In group I, factors change neither between nor within campaigns. Party identification is an example of a factor whose distribution is stable over both the long- and short-term (but see Chapter 5). Although party identification has been decreasing over the past decades, it has not fully vanished yet and the downward trend seems to have come to halt (cf. Arzheimer 2017). As a result, party identification continues to make election results more predictable.

The activation of party identification is an example of a generalized short-term factor (group II). The strongest empirically founded claims about campaigns portray them not as disruptive forces but as re-equilibrating ones. Campaigns are said

effect of party and coalition preferences on the vote. We believe that it is still very informative to study and understand the dynamics of these factors as after all they still may have an impact on the vote depending on further conditionalities.

to *activate* considerations that endure but lie dormant between elections (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Berelson et al. 1954). Conversion during campaigns, in contrast, typically plays only a minor role (Klapper 1960; Finkel 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995). Activation has been portrayed as a stage-wise process: At first, exposure to campaign information arouses interest and raises involvement; voters' attention to campaign content is selective which reinforces voters' predispositions; and finally, votes crystallize. In the case of activation, the generalizability is predicated on the existence of an affective bond between voters and parties. Similarly, a bond between voters and the political class or the political system as a whole is implied in the regular recurrence of gains in campaign interest and turnout intention. In each example, campaigns produce dynamics, but the dynamics are structurally the same in election after election. Previous analyses of the German case confirm the presence of activation dynamics in federal elections (Johnston et al. 2014).

Group III includes factors that shift between elections but not within them. Change between elections has been typically attributed to changes in economic performance, as confirmed by the relative success of election forecasting models (Hibbs 1977; Rosenstone 1983; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992). As with party identification, the economic dynamics make elections largely predictable (Campbell 2008). Ideally, the perceptions of the economy are a truly exogenous source of electoral flux but one whose level is fixed in place before the campaign. To the extent this idealization is *not* true, as Evans and Pickup (2010) assert, campaign volatility may actually neutralize the impact of medium-term shifts. If economic perceptions shift within a campaign, the culprit is probably motivated cognition. Partisans may update their perceptions as their party identification is activated. As they do so, the impact from the economy is blunted (cf. Chapter 10). Previous research on the German case shows that a significant portion of the total electoral volatility stems from the time between successive election campaigns (Preißinger and Schoen 2016).

Finally, group IV includes the factors that vary within and between elections. These factors are situation-specific. As such, they are detached both from long-term forces that stabilize outcomes and from the medium-term forces that alter the electoral balance moderately and predictably. Here might lie leader or candidate images, especially as they can be framed by advertising or strategic manipulation of the news stream (cf. Chapters 11 and 13). Also in play in the increasingly multi-party German context are perceptions of coalition possibilities, which in turn can feed competing logics of strategic voting (Kedar 2005; Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Meffert and Gschwend 2010). Although coalition perceptions may exert a rather indirect influence on the vote by moderating the effects of party preferences, it seems likely, given the increasingly fragmented party system, that they will play an ever more important role (cf. Chapter 9). In any case, what these all have in common is a lack of affective linkages deeply rooted in socialization.

As the affective bond between parties and voters weakens (group I), mobilization and activation (group II) may require ever greater efforts by the political parties, and the volatile factors in groups III and IV may shape election results ever more strongly.

To shed light on this possibility, we study the patterns of the four types of factors across different elections by decomposing their variance into a long-term structural component, a between-election component, and a within-campaign component. The typology can help to gain insight on how campaigns matter under the conditions of a dealigned electorate and a fragmented supply side by comparing how observed dynamics match with or deviate from these stylized characterizations.

Data and Methods

Data

To assess the patterns of different political orientations, we make use of a pooled dataset of the GLES Rolling Cross-Section Campaign Surveys 2009, 2013, and 2017 (RollCrossSec09, RollCrossSec13, RollCrossSec17) to which we add data from an earlier rolling cross-section survey that was conducted during the run-up to the 2005 elections (Schmitt-Beck and Faas 2009). The rolling cross-section design (Johnston and Brady 2002; Romer et al. 2004) is suitable to capture the within-campaign dynamics in a very fine-grained way. By pooling four of these studies, we can also assess the change from election to election and compare the relative amount of change within campaigns and between elections.

The surveys are highly comparable as fieldwork was carried out in a very similar and consistent manner across the years (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2010a; Partheymüller et al. 2013; Staudt and Schmitt-Beck 2018). All four surveys were conducted by telephone, with the 2017 survey using a dual-frame approach integrating both landline and mobile phone samples to ensure a comparable and universal coverage across time. The survey period of the studies varied slightly across the years. To increase comparability with regard to the length of the campaign period covered, we restrict the data set to those respondents that were interviewed within the last fifty-five days for the three most recent surveys. The 2005 campaign was very short, and the survey allows us to go back only to a maximum of thirty-eight days before the elections. The resulting pooled data set overall includes 22,216 respondents.

Measures

Identical or comparable measures were included in the surveys that capture the dynamics of political involvement as well as those of attitudes, perceptions, and

voting behavior. Specifically, the following measures are available in all four surveys that will subsequently serve as dependent variables: campaign interest, turnout, party identification, the evaluation of candidates, economic perceptions, coalition expectations, and voting intentions. In addition, a set of standard socio-demographic variables is available in all four surveys including age, gender, education, religious denomination, church attendance, social class, and union membership.

In general, all variables were coded in such a way as to give us easily interpretable quantities when examining dynamics in the aggregate. The details are as follows. To assess campaign involvement and mobilization, we use three different measures: First, campaign interest captures the cognitive involvement of voters with the campaign and was recoded into a dummy variable where 1 means that the respondent was "very" or "fairly strongly" interested in the election campaign and 0 means less interest. In terms of behavioral intentions, we study the likelihood to turn out. This indicator was measured on a five-point scale recoded to a 0–1 range with zero meaning that the respondent "would certainly not vote" and 1 meaning that the voter "would certainly vote" or had cast his or her ballot already by mail at the time of the interview.[3] Finally, to assess whether the campaign helps voters crystallize voting intentions, we use a measure capturing whether the respondent reported a voting intention (0) or was undecided (1).

Next, we study the stability of party identification and possible dynamics of activation. For this purpose, we derive two different measures based on the measure of party identification. The first measure simply captures whether the respondent reports having a long-standing party leaning "yes" (1) or "no" (0). The second measure assesses the congruence of party identification and the vote. We distinguish between four categories: respondents whose party identification is equal to their voting intention (1), respondents who defect from their party identification but vote for a party within the same ideological camp (2),[4] defecting respondents voting for a party of the other camp (3), and undecided partisans (4). Overall, these measures are suitable in assessing to what extent party identification is truly an unmoved mover and whether voters come home to their party during the campaign period.

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[3] Including postal voters in the analysis seems particularly important, as these voters constitute a growing share of the voting population. Unfortunately, the questions asked are not suitable to distinguish with high precision between "certain voters" and "postal voters," as the question wording did not deliberately offer having cast a postal ballot and the answer code was assigned only for spontaneous mentions. As a result, the surveys seem to underestimate the exact share of postal voters, whereas, as most political surveys, overestimate levels of turnout. Nevertheless, the distribution of voting intentions late in the campaign very precisely predicts the election outcome (see Appendix), suggesting that the surveys represent the German voter population with reasonable accuracy.

[4] We distinguish between a left camp consisting of SPD, Greens, and the Left, and a right camp including the CDU/CSU and FDP as well as a third camp consisting of AfD and "other parties." One might argue that AfD should be grouped in the right camp, but because the party had not been part of the national parliament nor of any state-level government coalitions, we treat it like other parties.

We also examine the dynamics of chancellor candidate evaluations and economic perceptions. The evaluation of chancellor candidates is measured on a −5 to + 5 scale and available for both incumbent and challenger candidates in all surveys. The incumbents were Gerhard Schröder (SPD, 2005) and Angela Merkel (CDU/CSU, 2009–2017). The challengers were Angela Merkel (2005), Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD, 2009), Peer Steinbrück (SPD, 2013), and Martin Schulz (SPD, 2017). As incumbents display more longevity, we expect more dynamics on the side of challengers.

The only political issue that we can capture consistently is voters' evaluation of the economy, captured here by retrospective performance judgments of the national economy over the last "one or two" years. From the original five-point scale, we create a dummy variable on which respondents score 1 if they believe the economy "has improved" somewhat or a lot and 0 otherwise. The economy is a "valence" issue, on which more is always better. Ideally, we would also evaluate the dynamics of "position" issues with competing sides. Unfortunately, the measurement of economic and cultural positioning varies from study to study, so a multi-year comparison would not be meaningful.

Next, we explore the dynamics of coalition perceptions. Here, we focus on the perceptions of the most likely coalitions in the four elections. These were in all four years a center-right coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP and a Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD. Please note that although such perceptions do not necessarily affect the vote directly, coalition perceptions can affect voting preferences indirectly by moderating the effect of party preferences on the vote.

Last, we also explore the dynamics of voting intentions for large and small parties. We focus on the party list vote (second vote), leaving aside the vote for a candidate in the electoral districts (first vote) as the former is decisive for the strengths of the parties in the parliament. As large mainstream parties, we consider the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD). As small niche parties, we include the Liberals (FDP), the Greens as well as the Left party, which emerged in 2005, and the populist radical right party AfD, which entered party competition in 2013. Other small parties are lumped together in a residual category. Non-voters and undecided voters are not excluded so that the base of the reported percentage refers to the entire electorate.

Finally, by design, the socio-demographic composition of the samples in RCS studies does not vary over time, but we need the socio-demographic variables to decompose the total variation into the part attributable to long-term structural forces versus between- and within-campaign dynamics. Our set of socio-demographic variables includes age (18–39 years, 40–64 years, 65 and older), gender (male, female), and education (low, medium, high). We also include socio-demographic variables to capture the effects of the economic and religious cleavage (cf Chapter 2). For the economic cleavage, we include social class (working class, new middle class, old middle class, never gainfully employed) and union

membership (union member: self or household member, not a member); for the religious cleavage, religious denomination (Catholic, Protestant, other, none) and church attendance (four-point scale from 1 "never" to 2 "several times a month").

Strategy of Analysis

The analysis proceeds in two steps. In the first step, we apply smoothing techniques to an aggregated version of the data set. This is necessary because the small daily samples (ca. 100 interviews per day) in the raw rolling cross-section make the data very noisy. Graphical smoothing enables us to separate the systematic signal from the random noise (Brady and Johnston 2006). Smoothing is effected by means of generalized additive models (Hastie and Tibshirani 1990) that include a cubic regression spline and allow for automated smoothness selection (Wood 2006, 2011, 2016; Keele 2008). To identify periods of significant change within campaigns, we also calculate the first derivatives for the estimated smooth functions (Simpson 2014a, 2014b; Partheymüller 2018).[5]

In the second step, we use the pooled data set to decompose the variance into three components: (1) socio-demographic factors, (2) change between elections, and (3) change within campaigns. For this purpose, we use a generalized additive model where each of our dependent variables is modeled as a function of a block of socio-demographic variables (see above), a block of dummies for election years, and the day of interview modeled by cubic regression splines to capture the true change within campaigns.

To decompose the variation, we first calculate a full model including all three blocks of variables. Next, we calculate a reduced form of the model, leaving aside one of the three components. For each, we extract fit statics: the deviance, the percentage of deviance explained, and the Akaike information criterion (AIC). For the reduced forms, we calculate the difference in the total deviance and use a likelihood ratio test to assess whether the inclusion of each block significantly improves the model fit. Comparison of the AIC allows us to evaluate if the additional parameters are worth being included in terms of improved model fit. Overall, this enables us to evaluate whether and to what extent each of the blocks of variables contributes to explaining the total variation.

Finally, to assess our *expectations about the relative amount of change between and within elections across indicators* most directly, we also calculate the relative amount of variation explained by each block relative to the remaining two. For this

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[5] To automate this process, we use a purpose-built R package that accelerates and combines the smoothing and calculation of derivatives (Staudt and Partheymüller 2020).

purpose, we specifically calculate the following ratios of the explained deviances:

$$(1)\ \text{Ratio of dev.expl. (SocDem)} = \frac{\text{Dev.explained (SocDem)}}{\text{Total dev.explained}}$$

$$(2)\ \text{Ratio of dev.expl. (Elections)} = \frac{\text{Dev.expl. (Elections)}}{\text{Total dev.expl.}}$$

$$(3)\ \text{Ratio of dev.expl. (Campaigns)} = \frac{\text{Dev.expl. (Campaigns)}}{\text{Total dev.expl.}}$$

With

$$(4)\ \text{Total dev.expl.} = \text{Dev.expl. (SocDem)} + \text{Dev.expl. (Elections)}$$
$$+ \text{Dev.expl. (Campaigns)}$$

These ratios of explained deviances show to what extent an indicator is strongly influenced by one factor over the others, without being affected by the fact that some variables have been measured on different scales and might be affected by varying amounts of random measurement error. We use bootstrapping to generate confidence intervals for each of the derived ratios.[6]

Then, to assess whether the observed patterns across indicators are in line with our expectations, we create a scatter plot of the variation explained by change between elections and within campaigns and identify four groups based on their location within this scatterplot. Corresponding to our typology, the first group includes long-term stable predispositions that exhibit dynamics neither across election years nor within campaigns and are thus strongly affected by socio-demographics (I). The second group includes generalized short-term factors that are strongly affected by campaigns but not so much by change between elections (II). The third group includes the medium-term factors, changing much between elections but not much within campaigns (III). Finally, the fourth group includes situation-specific short-term factors that are strongly affected by both change between elections and within campaigns (IV). We compare the observed type of the different variables and discuss the implications for the dynamics of elections.

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[6] We wish to thank Rike-Benjamin Schuppner for helping with the optimization of the parameters for the parallelization for remote computation. The choice of suitable optimization parameters reduces computation time considerably.

Results

The Mobilization Context: Campaign Interest, Mobilization, and the Crystallization of Voting Intentions

We begin by examining the dynamics of voter involvement and mobilization. In particular, we explore the dynamics of campaign interest, the likelihood to turn out, and undecidedness (Figure 14.3; bold segments in lines indicate periods of statistically significant change ($p < 0.05$)). As discussed earlier, the activation process follows multiple steps, the first of which is the arousal of interest. The first panel shows that interest in the election campaign increases in all four elections. Apart from the significant growth in campaign interest within elections, we also see that two of the elections, 2005 and 2017, were perceived as more interesting than the other two, 2009 and 2013. The overall level of interest, thus, varies not only within campaigns but also across election years. This is also confirmed by the estimations in Table 14.1: Apart from the important role of long-term predispositions in explaining campaign interest, both change between elections (Difference in deviance relative to Full Model, Column 3) and change within campaigns (Difference in deviance relative to Full Model, Column 4) contribute significantly to explaining why and when voters are interested. Here, the proportion of explained deviance (Deviance explained, Ratio), seems to be somewhat higher for the change within campaigns than for the change across elections, but the confidence intervals derived by bootstrapping are overlapping, meaning that the change within campaigns and between elections are about equally important in explaining voters' interest in the campaign.
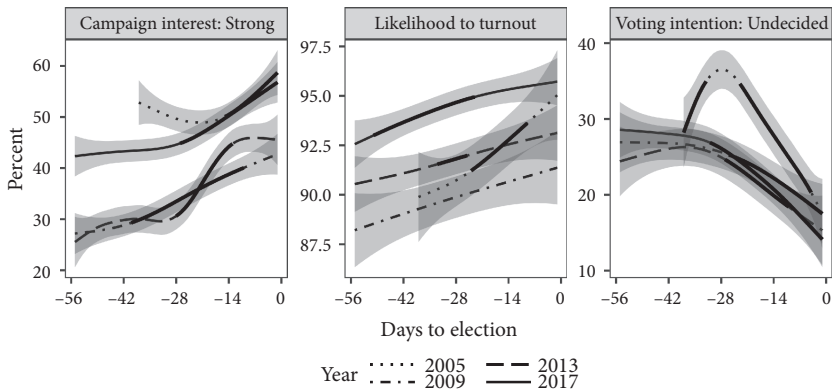
Fig. 14.3 Campaign interest, mobilization, and the crystallization of voting intentions, 2005–2017

Table 14.1 Campaign interest, mobilization, and the crystallization of voting intentions, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio- demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Campaign interest				
Deviance	27,459	28,106	27,702	27,787
Dif. relative to (1)		646***	237***	330***
AIC	27,523	28,139	27,755	27,819
Deviance explained	4.8	2.2	0.8	1.1
Deviance explained (Ratio)		53.0	19.5	27.1
95%-CI		46.4–59.6	13.3–27.8	21.3–33.2
N	21,041			
Likelihood to turn out				
Deviance	805	845	807	808
Dif. relative to (1)		40***	2***	3***
AIC	−8,961	−7,947	−8,905	−8,892
Deviance explained	5.7	4.7	0.3	0.4
Deviance explained (Ratio)		87.1	5.4	7.3
95%-CI		82.0–91.1	3.4–8.2	4.1–12.2
N	21,081			
Undecided				
Deviance	19,112	19,611	19,127	19,364
Dif. relative to (1)		499***	14*	251***
AIC	19,173	19,642	19,180	19,396
Deviance explained	3.9	2.5	0.1	1.3
Deviance explained (Ratio)		65.3	1.8	32.8
95%-CI		58.3–71.1	0.4–4.2	26.6–39.7
N	18,402			

Notes: Summary statistics from bootstrapped generalized additive models. The full model includes socio-demographics, fixed-effects for election years, and smooth terms to model within-campaign dynamics. To calculate the deviance explained by each component a model was estimated leaving aside one of these three components at the time. Significance levels based on likelihood ratio test.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The likelihood to turn out mirrors the observed patterns of campaign interest. In the two more interesting elections, 2005 and 2017, we see substantial dynamics of voter mobilization during the campaigns (second panel, Figure 14.3). In 2009 and 2013, campaign mobilization was less pronounced or even absent. Although the level of turnout is overestimated (a combination of over-reporting and sample

bias), differences between surveys match with the pattern of actual turnout.[7] Although the patterns between campaign interest and turnout are similar, it is worth noting that the proportion of deviance explained (Ratio) by socio-demographic long-term factors is higher than in the case of campaign interest (Table 14.1). This suggests that turnout, compared to cognitions such as campaign interest, is deeply rooted in social structure. As in the case of campaign interest, the confidence intervals of within-campaign and between-election change overlap, implying that the likelihood to turn out is variable in both the long and short term.

The dynamics of the crystallization of voting decisions show a more homogenous pattern across elections (third panel, Figure 14.3). The share of undecided voters in all four elections declines toward the end of the campaign. Although the curve in 2005 does not decline monotonously, there is overall very little variation across years and the confidence intervals of the different smooth functions overlap almost perfectly. The model statistics confirm the visual impression of a more generalized pattern across years. The proportion of explained deviance (Ratio) is significantly higher for within-campaign than for between-election change.

Overall, political involvement—as measured by campaign interest and turnout intentions—varies significantly across elections and within campaigns, whereas the crystallization of votes follows a very regular time path within each campaign that varies little from year to year. Thus, according to our proposed classification, the crystallization of votes follows the logic of a generalized short-term factor (group II) whereas—slightly deviating from our expectations—campaign interest and turnout decisions appear as more situation-specific factors (group IV).

Party Identification: Reinforcement, Defection, and Activation

Party attachments may have declined, but by no means have they vanished (first upper panel, Figure 14.4). In fact, about two out of three survey respondents report an attachment, with hardly any change across elections or within campaigns. For those voters reporting an identification, the campaign may reinforce their initial judgment. In line with expectations, the model results (Table 14.2) confirm that for identification with a party the highest proportion of deviance explained (Ratio) stems from socio-demographics, whereas between and within-campaign changes are negligible.

In line with the expectation of campaigns as re-equilibrating forces, we see that the share of partisans voting in line with their party identification grows significantly by 5 to 10 percent in three out of our four elections (second upper

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[7] Turnout in German federal elections: 77.7 percent (2005), 70.8 percent (2009), 71.5 percent (2013), 76.2 percent (2017).
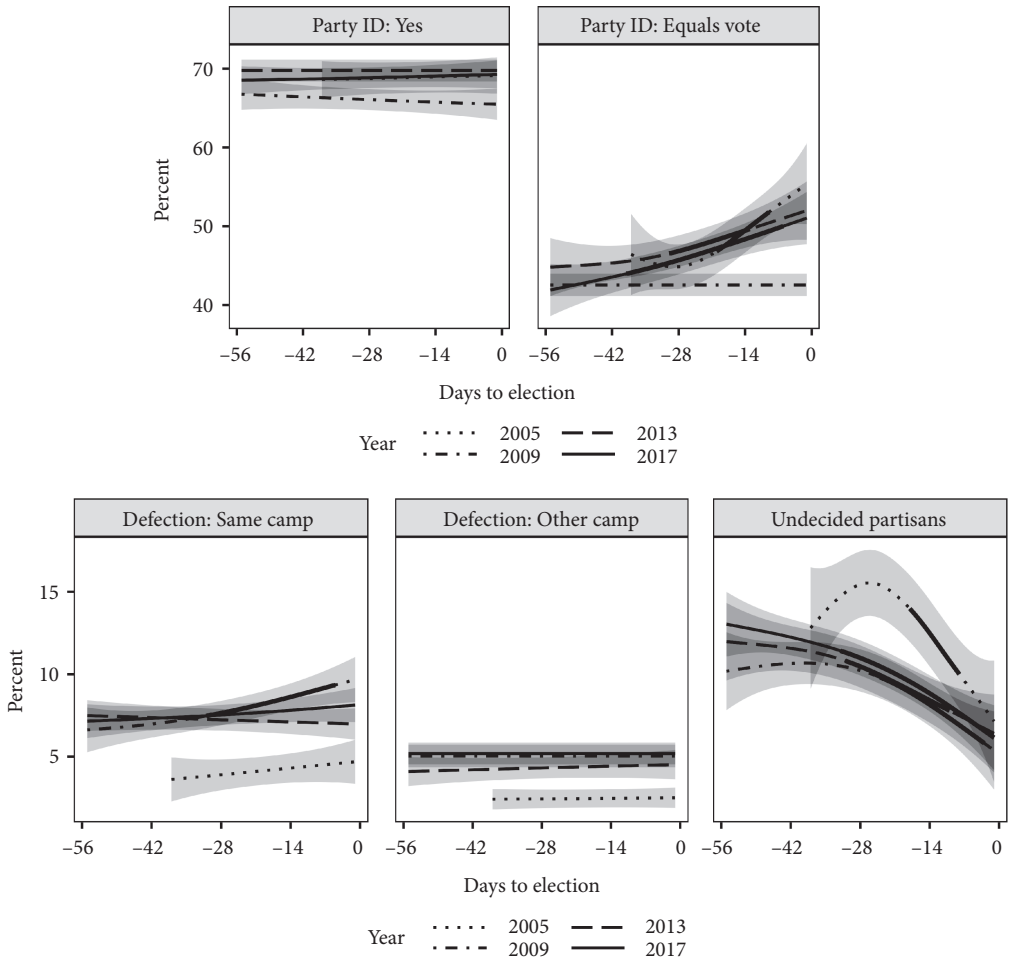
Fig. 14.4 Party identification, activation, and defection, 2005–2017

panel, Figure 14.4). The one exception is the 2009 election where the Grand Coalition made voters defect, especially among left-wing voters (Johnston et al. 2014). Thus, although activation appears predominantly as a general pattern, we here do find at least one case where the regular activation dynamics failed to materialize. Such failures to "optimize" demonstrate that activation by no means is a quasi-automatic psychological process but may be contingent on the campaign context and messages (Vavreck 2009). The model statistics show that, first and foremost, voting in line with the partisan identity is also strongly rooted in social structure (Table 14.2). Campaign dynamics are somewhat more pronounced than between-election variations, but again the confidence intervals overlap, reflecting that partisans do not always find the way home.

Table 14.2 Party identification, activation, and defection, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio- demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
PID: Yes				
Deviance	23,920	24,511	23,940	23,942
Dif. relative to (1)		582***	16**	18**
AIC	23,963	24,528	23,973	23,974
Deviance explained	2.5	2.4	0.1	0.1
Deviance explained (Ratio)		94.1	2.5	3
95%-CI		87.3–97.6	0.5–6.3	0.1–10.3
N	20,060			
PID: Equals vote				
Deviance	25,356	25,950	25,378	25,423
Dif. relative to (1)		590***	21***	64***
AIC	25,406	25,972	25,419	25,455
Deviance explained	2.6	2.3	0.1	0.2
Deviance explained (Ratio)		87.4	3.1	9.3
95%-CI		81.9–91.9	1.1–6.3	4.7–15.2
N	18,824			
Defect: Same camp				
Deviance	9,882	10,015	9,915	9,914
Dif. relative to (1)		135***	31***	31***
AIC	9,925	10,031	9,951	9,946
Deviance explained	2.2	1.3	0.3	0.3
Deviance explained (Ratio)		68.6	15.8	15.3
95%-CI		55.0–80.8	2.3–27.7	4.6–31.7
N	18,824			
Defect: Other camp				
Deviance	6,696	6,732	6,729	6,724
Dif. relative to (1)		35**	33***	27***
AIC	6,743	6,751	6,765	6,756
Deviance explained	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.4
Deviance explained (Ratio)		36.5	34.2	28.6
95%-CI		20.0–60.1	5.3–59.3	3.3–56.3
N	18,824			
Undecided partisans				
Deviance	12,185	12,275	12,197	12,333
Dif. relative to (1)		94***	12*	148***
AIC	12,244	12,305	12,245	12,365
Deviance explained	2.2	0.8	0.1	1.2
Deviance explained (Ratio)		36.8	4.7	58.3
95%-CI		25.1–47.6	0.9–11.6	45.5–70.9
N	18,824			

Notes: See Table 14.1.

Where do partisans go when they do not come home? As the lower right panel of Figure 14.4 shows, defectors tend to go to another party and the campaign makes this happen; undecided shares drop quite dramatically (third lower panel, Figure 14.4). Defectors tend to stay within the same ideological camp, and there is a slight within-campaign trend in this direction (left lower panel). No such trend appears for defection to the other side, and the overall rate of cross-camp defection is low (middle-lower panel). The patterns confirm earlier research (Schoen et al. 2017a) that has emphasized the importance in the multi-party context of campaign dynamics within ideological blocks. Within-campaign dynamics aside, intra-camp defection has become more frequent, so has cross-camp defection, although at a lower level. The model statistics (Table 14.2) confirm the power of activation: Crystallization of the partisan vote is a recurring feature of campaigns. And yet, situation-specific defection is growing in importance, both within and between campaigns.

In sum, partisan dynamics exhibit complex, somewhat contradictory patterns. The existence of a party identification varies hardly at all and, thus, confirms our expectation that this is a long-term factor (group I). Beyond the mere existence of reported partisanship, its activation—voting in line with the identification as well as the crystallization of vote intention—is predominantly a generalized short-term factor, with broadly the same recurring pattern in multiple elections (group II). But situation-specific defection has become more frequent. Voters respond to the growing fragmentation of the party system and the wider menu of alternatives (group IV).

Candidate Evaluations

Candidate evaluations are generally thought of as a short-term factor. Candidates may change from election to election and their images are potentially malleable in the intensified communication stream of a campaign (cf. Chapters 11 and 13). Within our observation period, however, one chancellor candidate, Christian Democrat Angela Merkel, participated in all four elections, in 2005 as a contender and subsequently as the incumbent. Only in 2005 was the SPD candidate, Gerhard Schröder, the incumbent. After that, it was a parade of challengers.

Once in office, 2009 and later, Merkel was an anchor of stability. Her evaluations during this period changed neither between elections nor within campaigns (left panel, Figure 14.5). This might be related to her presidential style, to her overall very high popularity, or her risk-averse character. Some have suggested that the pattern is systemic: More is known about long-standing politicians and the impact of novel information is thereby reduced. At odds with this argument is the pattern for Gerhard Schröder in 2005. Notwithstanding 2005, the model statistics in Table 14.3 reveal that orientation to the incumbent is governed by
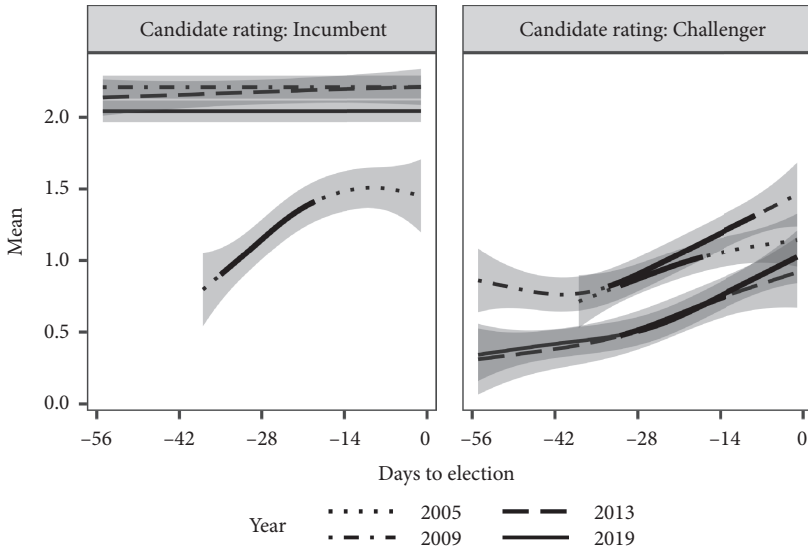
Fig. 14.5 Evaluations of chancellor candidates, 2005–2017

socio-demographic factors, and between and within-campaign dynamics play only a minor role.

Orientations to challengers are more volatile. Some of this variance is across years. In particular, Merkel in 2005 and Steinmeier in 2009 were more popular than the challengers Steinbrück and Schulz in 2013 and 2017. Whatever the starting point, attitudes to challenger candidates consistently improved over the campaign. The model statistics in Table 14.3 confirm the greater dynamics nature in challenger evaluations. The relative proportion of deviance explained (Ratio) by socio-demographics is lower than for the incumbent, and change between elections and, especially, within campaigns is notable. Overlap in the bootstrapped confidence intervals for between-election and within-campaign changes suggest that challenger orientations are important over both time spans.

Candidate evaluation differs between incumbents and challengers. The incumbent pattern resembles that of a long-term factor (group I) with very little change between elections or within campaigns. Challengers, conversely, change from election to election and usually gain significantly in popularity during campaigns. As a result, the pattern for challengers resembles that of a situation-specific short-term factor (group IV), showing considerable change within and between elections.

Table 14.3 Evaluations of chancellor candidates, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio-demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Rating: Incumbent				
Deviance	148,925	156,464	149,477	149,148
Dif. relative to (1)		7,510***	542***	222***
AIC	100,485	101,489	100,551	100,507
Deviance explained	5.9	4.7	0.3	0.1
Deviance explained (Ratio)		90.8	6.5	2.7
95%-CI		86.5–95.5	1.2–11.4	0.8–5.7
N	20,927			
Rating: Challenger				
Deviance	136,276	138,873	137,016	137,560
Dif. relative to (1)		2,597***	726***	1,271***
AIC	97,393	97,751	97,491	97,561
Deviance explained	3.2	1.8	0.5	0.9
Deviance explained (Ratio)		56.2	15.8	27.8
95%-CI		49.0–63.4	10.9–21.7	20.2–34.9
N	20,586			

Notes: See Table 14.1.

Economic Perceptions

Prediction models typically include economic indicators as a medium-term factor to predict electoral outcomes because in a good economy incumbents are more likely to be re-elected, whereas a bad economy creates a climate for change in political leadership. In our observation period, we have two elections, 2005 and 2009, under difficult economic conditions, and two elections, 2013 and 2017, in a positive climate (Figure 14.6). Economic perceptions were worst in 2009, in the context of the global economic and financial crisis (cf. Chapter 10). In 2005, economic perceptions were only slightly more positive. During this time, Germany suffered from very high unemployment levels, in particular, in East Germany. After the economic crisis of 2009, Germany's economy had improved significantly and voters' perceptions reflect that improvement.

During election campaigns, change in economic perceptions is, unsurprisingly, limited. In 2013, and to a lesser extent in 2005, economic perceptions improved during the campaign period. Such dynamics could reflect genuine learning but
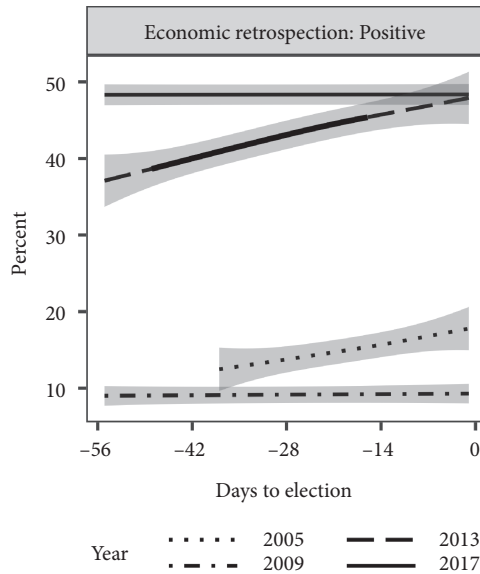
Fig. 14.6 Economic perceptions, 2005–2017

Table 14.4 Economic perceptions, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio-demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Economic retrospection				
Deviance	22,419	22,607	25,535	22,485
Dif. relative to (1)		183***	3,112***	62***
AIC	22,469	22,628	25,575	22,517
Deviance explained	14.1	0.7	11.9	0.2
Deviance explained (Ratio)		5.5	92.6	1.8
95%-CI		4.1–7.0	90.6–94.5	0.8–3.2
N	20,827			

Notes: See Table 14.1.

could also be a dynamic indication of the self-persuasion highlighted by Evans and Pickup (2010). Still, the variation that dominates the picture is between elections. This is confirmed by the model estimates in Table 14.4. Socio-demographics hardly explain any of the observed variation. Similarly, modeling campaign dynamics yields only minimal improvements in model fit. Almost all of the action for the deviance (Ratio) is from the election year. This finding strongly confirms our expectation that economic perceptions should be classified as a medium-term factor (group III).

Coalition Expectations

Given the growing number of political parties, voters increasingly need to anticipate which coalitions are likely to form after the election (cf. Chapter 9). Figure 14.7 shows the dynamics of the perceived likelihood for the most likely coalitions—a center-right alliance of CDU/CSU and FDP vs. a Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD. Expectations vary widely across years and within campaigns. Most striking is the variance across years, with gaps as large as 40 percentage points. Within campaigns, expectations for a center-right coalition usually decline while those for a Grand Coalition rise. But within-campaign trends are not always monotonic; evidently, voters' coalition perceptions are highly susceptible to new information and short-term events. Model estimates (Table 14.5) confirm the visual impression but also highlight differences between the two types of coalition. Socio-demographics explain very little here, and they are especially irrelevant for Grand Coalitions, in contrast to within-campaign forces. In both cases, the dominant variation is between elections. Hence, coalition expectations can be classified as medium-term factors (group III) or situation-specific factors (IV).

Voting Intentions

Voting intentions are potentially a product of all the components considered to this point. What this implies for the absolute and relative impact from between- and within-campaign factors is unclear. Moreover, dynamics may differ between large and small parties, and so we examine them separately. For large
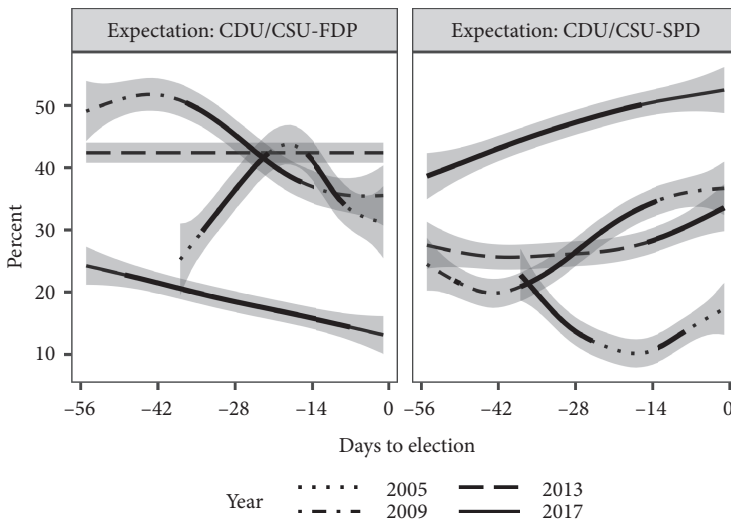
Fig. 14.7 Coalition expectations, 2005–2017

Table 14.5 Coalition expectations, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio- demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Coalition:				
CDU/CSU-FDP				
Deviance	25,082	25,712	26,441	25,367
Dif. relative to (1)		625***	1,361***	283***
AIC	25,151	25,750	26,499	25,399
Deviance explained	7.8	2.3	5	1
Ratio explained variation		27.6	60	12.5
95%-CI		23.9–30.8	56.1–63.6	9.5–15.6
N	20,909			
Coalition:				
CDU/CSU-SPD				
Deviance	24,817	24,958	25,423	25,119
Dif. relative to (1)		141***	599***	303***
AIC	24,888	24,998	25,481	25,151
Deviance explained	6.1	0.5	2.3	1.1
Ratio explained variation		13.6	57.5	29
95%-CI		9.7–17.7	51.0–63.9	23.3–34.8
N	20,909			

Notes: See Table 14.1.

parties (Figure 14.8), the first point is that variation is modest both between and within campaigns. In 2013, however, the CDU/CSU made significant gains, as did the Social Democrats in 2005. It is not clear that either was a disruptive event, however. For the SPD in 2005, the shift reflected very strong activation (Schmitt-Beck 2009; Johnston et al. 2014), which made the result more—not less—like the preceding one. In 2013, the CDU/CSU did make gains over 2009, and these were realized inside the campaign. But both the 2013 and 2005 campaigns arguably yielded re-equilibration, moving the results toward predicted values (see Figure 14.1). Consistent with this interpretation are the estimation results (Table 14.6), which show that, notwithstanding cleavage decline and partisan dealignment, vote intentions for large parties are still most strongly structured by socio-demographicfoundations. This is especially the case for the CDU/CSU. For the SPD, the 2005 case registers in the within-campaign term.

Small parties experienced important shifts across elections (Figure 14.9). The FDP in particular has seen its share vary dramatically from year to year, and similar if less dramatic shifts have occurred for the Greens and AfD.
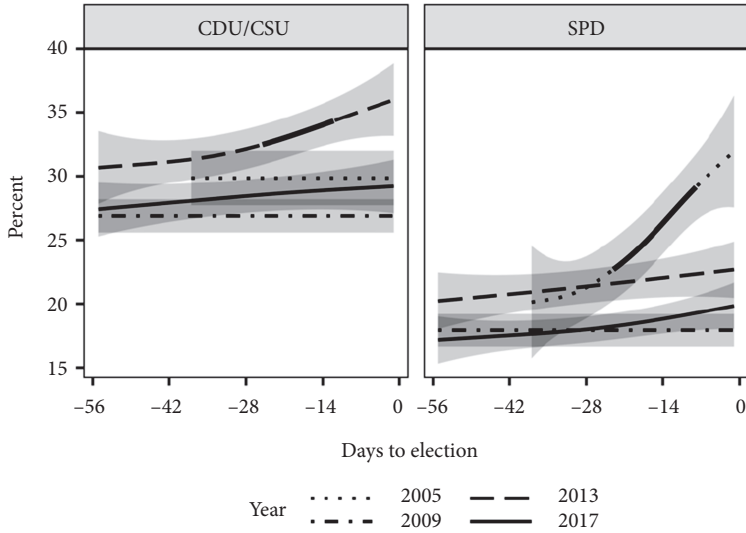
Fig. 14.8 Voting intentions for large parties, 2005–2017

Table 14.6 Voting intentions for large parties, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio- demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Vote: CDU/CSU				
Deviance	20,782	21,905	20,822	20,812
Dif. relative to (1)		1,127***	40***	26***
AIC	20,826	21,925	20,858	20,844
Deviance explained	5.5	5.1	0.2	0.1
Ratio explained variation		94.2	3.4	2.2
95%-CI		90.7–96.8	1.7–6.1	0.3–5.8
N	18,402			
Vote: SPD				
Deviance	17,680	18,187	17,709	17,753
Dif. relative to (1)		513***	27***	72***
AIC	17,730	18,209	17,752	17,785
Deviance explained	3.6	2.8	0.1	0.4
Ratio explained variation		83.6	4.4	11.8
95%-CI		76.9–88.9	1.7–8.4	6.3–19.2
N	18,402			

Notes: See Table 14.1.
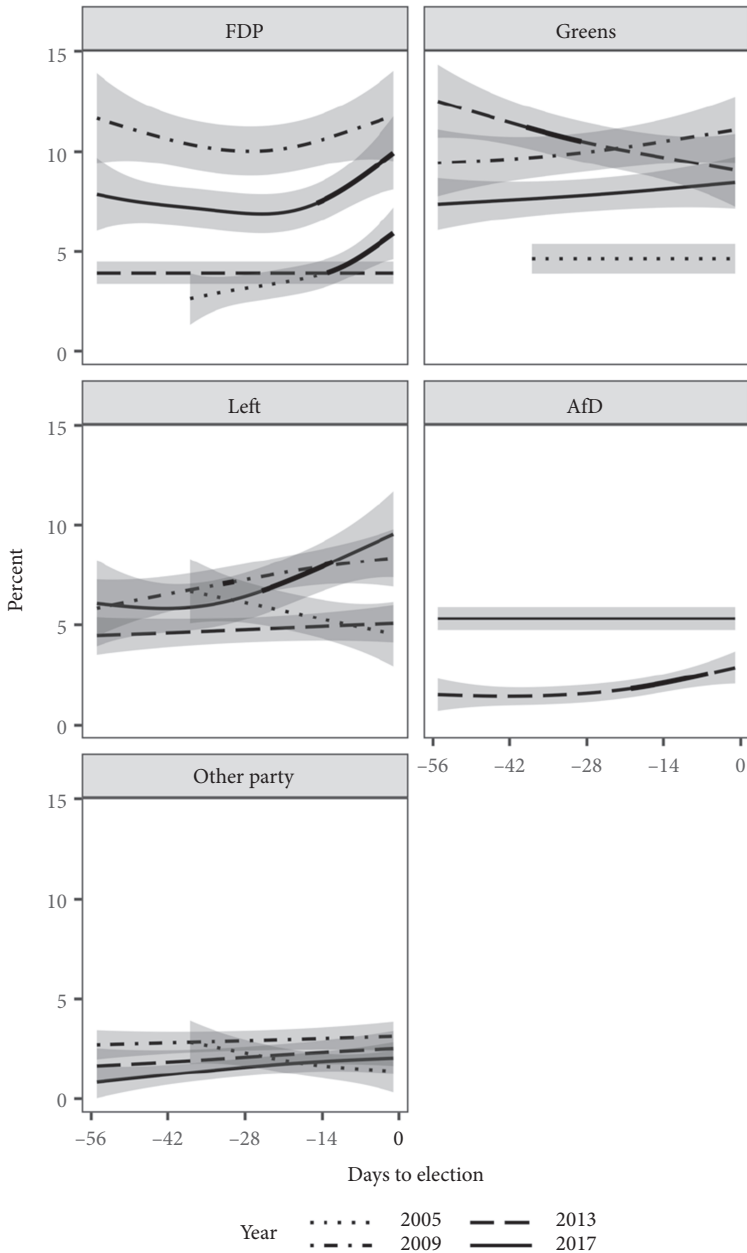
Fig. 14.9 Voting intentions for small parties, 2005–2017

Within-campaign dynamics were more subtle but also noteworthy. The biggest within-campaign story pertains to the FDP. In three of the four years—most significantly in 2005 and 2017, less dramatically in 2009—the party experienced a last-minute surge. The most parsimonious explanation for this is coalition

"insurance." The exception that proves this rule is the *absence* of a surge in 2013, in which year the CDU/CSU refused to signal that it supported an insurance strategy (Gschwend et al. 2016; Gschwend et al. 2017). Although for other small parties no such recurring pattern can be observed, there are significant dynamics in one or another election: The Greens lost support in 2013 from an extraordinarily high starting point; the Left benefited from the campaign in 2017; AfD support ramped up late in the 2013 campaign, although not enough to cross the threshold. The estimation results in Table 14.7 confirm the impression of greater volatility for the small parties. The FDP, Greens, and AfD are strongly affected by between-election dynamics. The vote for the Left party seems to be more deeply rooted than the others in the social structure, which might explain the relative modesty of its between-election dynamics. Most within-campaign dynamics are modest, but as with the FDP in 2013, even such minor dynamics (or the lack of them) can unfold leverage around the electoral threshold, shape the outcome, and constrain post-election coalition possibilities.

Overall, we see that voting is still quite strongly rooted in the social structure but is also susceptible to dynamics between elections and within campaigns. The vote for large parties has been found to be fairly stable across elections, but on occasions, it may vary significantly within campaigns—as in the case of partisan activation for the SPD in 2005. For large parties, the patterns span long-term stable predispositions (group I) and generalized short-term factors (group II). For some of the small parties, in contrast, the vote varies significantly across elections, matching the model of medium-term factors (III). Within-campaign dynamics may be modest, but they can be critical at the electoral threshold.

Summary and Discussion

To summarize the observed patterns, Figure 14.10 plots the between-election ratio of variation explained (vertical axis) against its within-campaign counterpart (horizontal axis), extracted from Tables 14.1 to 14.7. Bracketing each coordinate point are the bootstrapped confidence intervals, vertical for the between-election factors and horizontal for the within-campaign ones. The dashed lines separate the plot into four areas matching the groups in the typology in Figure 14.2.[8] The factors clustering in the lower-left corner comprise group I, with less than 10 percent of variance explained by either between- or within-campaign dynamics. This group includes the existence of a party identification, orientation toward the incumbent, vote for the CDU/CSU, and vote for the Left party.

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[8] Note that as the values of the variation between and within campaigns together with the variation explained by the socio-demographics add up to 100 percent, no factors can be situated in the upper right corner. As some entries overlap, an overview of the numerical values and the observed types is provided in this chapter's Online Appendix.
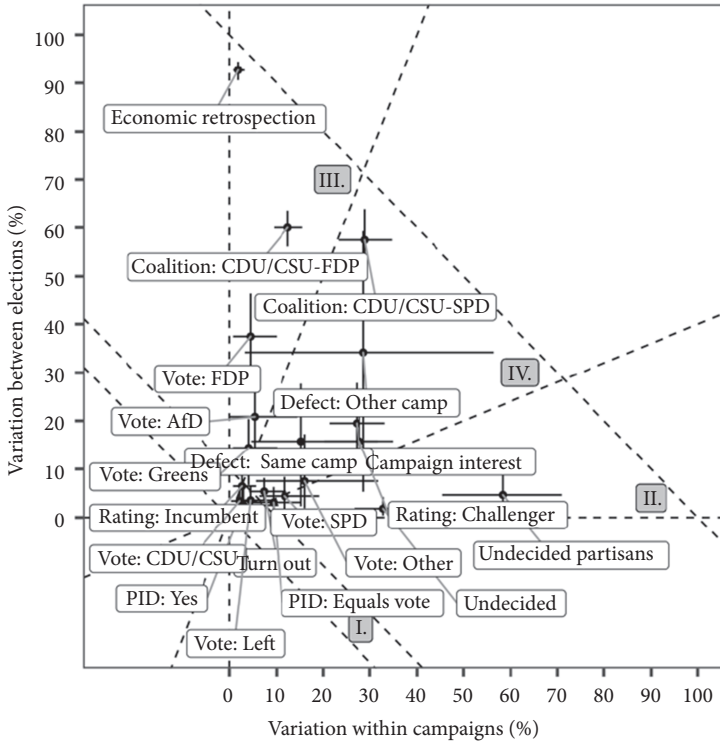
Fig. 14.10 Explained variation between elections and within campaigns across different political orientations

Table 14.7 Voting intentions for small parties, 2005–2017

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio-demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Vote: FDP				
Deviance	9,184	9,530	9,415	9,214
Dif. relative to (1)		341[***]	221[***]	27[***]
AIC	9,228	9,545	9,448	9,246
Deviance explained	6.4	3.5	2.3	0.3
Ratio explained variation		57.6	37.5	4.5
95%-CI		49.7–66.0	29.0–46.5	0.8–10.0
N	18,402			

Continued

Table 14.7 *Continued*

	(1) Full model	(2) Socio-demographic baseline	(3) Change between elections	(4) Change within campaigns
Vote: Greens				
Deviance	11,656	12,232	11,761	11,690
Dif. relative to (1)		570***	101***	29***
AIC	11,704	12,250	11,798	11,722
Deviance explained	5.8	4.6	0.8	0.2
Ratio explained variation		81.2	14.4	4.1
95%-CI		74.1–88.0	6.7–20.4	0.8–10.1
N	18,402			
Vote: Left				
Deviance	8,004	8,728	8,034	8,043
Dif. relative to (1)		718***	27***	35***
AIC	8,050	8,746	8,072	8,075
Deviance explained	9	8.2	0.3	0.4
Ratio explained variation		91.8	3.5	4.5
95%-CI		87.0–95.5	1.4–6.4	1.7–9.1
N	18,402			
Vote: AfD				
Deviance	3,034	3,218	3,087	3,049
Dif. relative to (1)		183***	52***	13**
AIC	3,069	3,228	3,120	3,077
Deviance explained	7.8	5.6	1.6	0.4
Ratio explained variation		73.3	20.8	5.4
95%-CI		61.2–85.5	9.1–31.5	0.0–14.6
N	10,685			
Vote: Other				
Deviance	3,422	3,596	3,442	3,460
Dif. relative to (1)		176***	18**	37***
AIC	3,465	3,617	3,479	3,492
Deviance explained	6.7	4.8	0.5	1.0
Ratio explained variation		75.6	7.5	16.1
95%-CI		61.0–86.4	1.9–17.2	5.6–31.8
N	18,402			

Notes: See Table 14.1.

The diagonal lines define areas where the variation is less affected by socio-demographics and dominated by either within-campaign variation or between-election variation but not both. Values outside the diagonals indicate where one dynamic element outweighs the other by a ratio of 2.5:1 or greater: generalized short-term factors (group II) to the bottom right and medium-term factors (group III) to the top left. In group II, we find the share of undecided voters, the share of voters for whom party identification equals the vote, the share of undecided partisans, and vote for the SPD. This cluster comprises activation processes, dynamics that are regular and predictable elements of campaigns. Group III includes, unsurprisingly, economic perceptions but also expectations for a CDU/CSU-FDP coalition and vote intentions for the FDP, Greens, and AfD. Economic conditions and issue agendas, which shift from year to year, are the main drivers of this pattern. The presence of small parties in this group reflects their role in defining the set of feasible post-election coalitions.

Finally, between the two diagonal lines lie the situation-specific factors (group IV). These factors vary both from election to election and within campaigns. This cluster includes campaign interest, turnout, the likelihood of defection to the same or the other camp, evaluations of the challenger candidate, expectation for a Grand Coalition, and the vote for other minor parties. Evidently, both mobilization and defection are highly contingent on the election-specific background, the intensity of the campaign, and the volume and character of information flow. The juxtaposition of challengers, Grand Coalition expectations, and small-party vote is telling. Although the Grand Coalition is by definition always numerically viable, resorting to it depends on the availability of alternative plausible coalitions and the willingness of both major parties to coalesce.

Conclusion

Although the foundations of party politics in Germany have eroded, election outcomes have not become less predictable: There are fewer loyal partisans; the key social pillars of 20th-century elections have shrunk even as they have lost power over their remaining members; the number of electoral parties has grown; outcomes have become more volatile (cf. Chapters 1 and 2). On first reading, these changes would seem to leave elections vulnerable to ephemera, especially the manipulative ones at play in campaigns. And yet, a few simple factors, including the state of the economy, still do a good job at forecasting who shall govern. To address this puzzle, we proposed a four-way decomposition of the voting function. Apart from long-term stable predispositions (group I), we have proposed a distinction between three types of "shorter-term" factors depending on their patterns of change between elections and within campaigns. This includes generalized short-term factors (group II) that occur on a regular basis during election

campaigns, medium-term factors (group III) that change from election to election, and situation-specific factors that are highly volatile both across elections and within campaigns (group IV). This strategy acknowledges the possibility that short- and medium-term dynamics can be mutually offsetting. We tested this intuition with pooled rolling cross-section surveys covering the four elections from 2005 to 2017.

For all that, and despite partisan dealignment, the fundamental logic of election campaigns as exerting a mainly re-equilibrating effect remains in place. A majority of respondents reported having a party identification, and election campaigns mainly activated that identification. Economic perceptions varied quite strongly across elections and did so in line with published economic indicators. As they moved, economic factors made outcomes variable but also predictable. To the extent that campaigns activated long-term considerations that may have been suppressed in the medium term, they made successive elections more like each other, not less.

But we also identified several sources and patterns of flux. Levels of campaign interest and mobilization varied both between and within campaigns. Each campaign featured a new challenger for the office of chancellor, candidates that varied in their initial plausibility. Most notably, though, with growth in the number of parties, situation-specific defection from party identification has become more ubiquitous. This suggests that activation has become a more contingent process as partisans now can choose from a broader menu of ideologically proximate parties. In line with this notion of a more contingent process of activation, coalition expectations and the vote for small parties were in flux both between elections and within campaigns. Although generalized patterns so far still have dominated within-campaign change, certain numerically modest context-specific shifts may have been pivotal around the electoral threshold, with implications for the feasibility of coalitions.

In sum, the patterns of stability amid volatility are complex and overlapping. Mainstream parties find themselves increasingly in a multi-front battle involving the competition with a growing number of ideologically proximate niche parties making it more difficult to win back the support of wavering partisans during campaigns. At the same time, voters seem to delay their decisions to sort out the differences between those ideologically proximate parties, among other things, by trying to anticipate the implication of their vote for the government-formation stage. Hence, with weakened connections between citizens and parties, campaigns increasingly seem to manifest themselves as a game of strategy in which seemingly small changes can make a big difference.

PART V
CONCLUSION

15

The Changing German Voter

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Harald Schoen,
Bernhard Weßels, and Christof Wolf[1]

Introduction

After decades of slow and gradual change, the German electorate's behavior has
undergone a massive transformation over the three federal elections of 2009, 2013,
and 2017. Vote choices have become much more volatile and accordingly less pre-
dictable. This resulted in rapid differentiation of the party system, which in turn
renders decision-making for voters at subsequent elections harder. With regard
to important structural parameters such as volatility and the fragmentation of
the party system, German electoral politics today shows features that resemble its
character at the very first federal election, 70 years ago. Thus, in important ways,
Germans' electoral behavior appears to have come full circle. At the same time,
these developments are not unique to Germany. In many respects, they mirror
processes that also affect other advanced industrial democracies in Western Eu-
rope as well as in other parts of the world (Przeworski 2019: 83–7, 138–9). In the
early 21st century, in democracies around the globe electoral politics appears to
have entered a new era of instability.

In the German setting, long-term processes of social and cultural moderniza-
tion of the kind typical for all advanced industrial democracies but also the unique
historical event of formerly Socialist East Germany's accession to the German
Federal Republic's liberal democratic regime contributed to this development. In
addition, during the past decade, the German parties and their voters were con-
fronted with an unprecedented succession of dramatic political challenges that
may have profoundly affected the elections conducted during this time. Whereas
the 2009 federal election took place just one year after the world's most serious
financial and economic crisis since the 1930s, the 2013 election was overshad-
owed by the long-term fallout of this crisis, the European sovereign debt crisis.
The 2017 federal election, in turn, took place in the aftermath of the European

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[1] The following reflections were completed in July 2020.

refugee crisis that had peaked in 2015. In the course of this period of electoral turmoil, Germany's second democracy forfeited an element of exceptionality that for decades had set it apart from comparable countries. After several failed attempts to establish a right-wing populist party in previous decades, the country's national parliament now for the first time also includes a sizable number of representatives from such a party (the AfD).

How did the turbulences that increasingly characterize German electoral politics come about? How did they in turn condition voters' decision-making? How were electoral attitudes and choices affected by situational factors that pertained to the specifics of particular elections? These are the questions addressed by this book. The following section summarizes the study's findings on the behavior of changing voters in the context of changing parties, campaigns, and media during the period of its hitherto most dramatically increased fluidity. Subsequently, it will be discussed what consequences these developments entail for the polarization of the party system and the formation of governments under the German parliamentary system of governance. The chapter closes with some necessarily lofty speculations about the prospects of electoral politics in Germany.

An Electorate in Flux

A Fragmenting Party System

How did the turbulences that increasingly characterize German electoral politics come about? Chapters 2 to 5 present facets of evidence that together provide an account of the processes that spurred the recent boost in party system fragmentation. Chapter 2 retraces the long-term process of cleavage decline that prepared the stage for the recent reconfiguration of German electoral politics. Focusing on the traditionally dominant center-right and center-left parties, the SPD and the CDU/CSU, the chapter shows how the traditional conflict dimensions that the second German democracy had inherited from the founding period of the party system in the late 19th century eroded and weakened their grip on voters. After a long period of gradually diminishing voter support, the most recent elections saw a dramatic slump in both parties' electoral outcomes. At first, the Social Democrats, but also with some delay and thus far less dramatic, the Christian Democrats, suffered major vote losses, calling into question their established role as gravitation centers of party competition (see Chapter 1). Examining survey data from all federal elections since 1949, the chapter shows how the socio-economic cleavage and the religious cleavage lost their structuring power for electoral behavior. The past decades saw not only a substantial shrinking of both parties' traditional core voter groups in the course of ongoing socio-economic and cultural modernization. The chapter also finds that these groups' inclination to support "their"

respective parties at the ballots decreased substantially. Indeed, for the parties' electoral fate, the latter process appears as the more significant one (see Goldberg 2020 for similar findings in other countries). Counterfactual simulation analyses suggest that the deterioration of the Social Democrats' and Christian Democrats' electoral standing is mainly attributable to waning loyalties on the part of traditional core groups whose remaining members appear to see these parties no longer as unquestionably self-evident choices.

This protracted weakening of traditional social-structural alignments rendered the traditional centrist parties' electoral basis increasingly precarious. Yet, elections are zero-sum games. Voters who desert parties need to go someplace else. Shrinking support for certain parties must be mirrored by increasing vote shares for other parties. Importantly, even after the fading of Germany's traditional cleavage structure, a two-dimensional perspective on party competition is necessary to make sense of these movements. It still distinguishes a socio-economic and socio-cultural dimension of contestation, but the content of the latter has changed (Rovny and Polk 2019). Of the many issues that pertain to this dimension and have over the years been more or less salient in public political debate (Kriesi et al. 2008), immigration has in recent years proven particularly divisive.

As Chapters 3 and 4 point out, vote losses of Western European center-right and center-left parties during the past two decades have often been accompanied by an upswing of parties with pronounced positions on the socio-cultural dimension of conflict, in more recent years in particular right-wing populist parties (Przeworski 2019: 87–100). Germany experienced this process with some delay, when the AfD, which had already scored close to 5 percent of the votes when it first ran at the 2013 federal election, was able to enter the national parliament as the strongest opposition party at the subsequent election of 2017. From an internationally comparative point of view, Chapter 3 characterizes this development as a normalization process. Somewhat belatedly, it repeated patterns of electoral change that had been observable for some time already in other Western European countries, although not in Germany, despite similar preconditions on the demand side of voters (Bornschier 2012).

Taken together, the evidence presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 suggests that the ground for this development had indeed been laid much earlier but required special conditions to become manifest at elections. According to Chapter 4, already before the 2009 federal election, a shift in issue salience from socio-economic to socio-cultural concerns had occurred among German voters (see also Dalton 2018), rendering this conflict dimension more salient and divisive than topics of redistributional policies (Franzmann et al. 2020). In particular, a large part of the electorate deemed immigration policy increasingly important (see also Chapter 6). The chapter demonstrates that this advantaged the AfD at the ballots in two ways: directly, as voters concerned about immigration showed a clear tendency to support this party, and indirectly, as the topic's high salience also boosted voting based

on positional proximity regarding demarcationist vs. integrationist stances on this issue (Pappi et al. 2019). The electorate's mean position on this issue tended toward the demarcationist pole, and this changed overall rather little during the past decade. From 2013 on, the AfD catered to this demand. Nonetheless, it was not self-evident that it would profit from voters' opposition to immigration. That immigration-critical voters opted in increasing numbers for the AfD had also to do with programmatic changes of the mainstream parties.

This is demonstrated by Chapter 3, which draws attention to the dynamic interplay between voter demand and party supply as a precondition of electoral volatility. It finds that the growing electoral success of right-wing populist parties, in Germany just as in other Western European countries, was a response to shifts of mainstream center-left and center-right parties to the left on the new socio-cultural dimension of conflict. This did not lead to a convergence between these parties, to be sure. But their tandem moves to the left opened up a representation gap in political space that could be occupied by new political entrepreneurs from the right. While not yet clearly committed to a nativist agenda in the beginning, the AfD resolutely seized this opportunity during the refugee crisis of 2015—an event that amounted to a veritable "electoral shock" (Fieldhouse et al. 2020) with the power to undermine even strong party attachments, as is shown by Chapter 5. Accordingly, Chapter 3 demonstrates how voters' likelihood to support right-wing populist parties, in particular the AfD, increased when the parties they had previously chosen moved away from them in policy space. From this perspective, the emergence and establishment of the AfD appear as a result of mainstream parties' failure to address the more traditional socio-cultural preferences held by significant segments of the electorate.

While Chapter 3 applies a wide-angle lens and does not zoom in on the specific issue content that drove these processes, Chapter 4 suggests that the controversy about more restrictive or liberal immigration policies played a pivotal role. It demonstrates that, over time, the immigration issue became more and more consequential for electoral behavior. Chapter 5 provides further detail to this picture by showing that the refugee crisis of 2015 played a major role as a catalyst in these processes (see also Mader and Schoen 2019; Schoen and Gavras 2019). With a focus on partisanship, it attests to the increasingly disruptive power of conflicts on the socio-cultural dimension that revolve around questions of societal openness and demarcation, notably over the issue of immigration. The chapter departs from the premise that urgently pressing crises with far-reaching implications often impose policies on governing parties that do not conform to their images and which they otherwise would not have chosen—and which faithful partisans might profoundly dislike. Comparing the European sovereign debt crisis and the refugee crisis, two events for which this was clearly the case, the chapter finds that the latter, but not the former has led to a major shake-up of party attachments. Partisans that held no strong preferences on immigration policy followed their parties' lead and adapted

their positions to the policies pursued by them. But in cases of more intensely felt discrepancies, partisans tended to devalue their parties, sometimes to the point of abandoning them for good. Intensely negative immigration attitudes most clearly undermined identifications with the CDU, but to some extent also leftist, more immigration-friendly parties. Sometimes they even led to switching allegiances, and it was the AfD that profited from these defections.

Challenged Voters

The emergence and ascent of the AfD and the progressive fragmentation of the party system that it brought about are results of voters' choices. At the same time, these developments in turn have made choosing more challenging for voters. They raised the complexity of electoral decision-making, thus rendering it more difficult for electors to make up their minds about how to vote (Weßels et al. 2014). How did these changed conditions feedback into voters' decision-making? This is explored by Chapters 6 to 9. Chapter 6 examines how the AfD affected the underlying structure of inter-party electoral competition, conceived in terms of the availability of each party's voters for other parties. It reveals a remarkable process of double-sided electoral closure. Already when the AfD first ran in 2013, but even more pronounced at the 2017 election, its supporters were hardly available for other parties. Mirroring this self-encapsulated position within the party system, the other parties' support bases were also not open for the AfD. Thus, in voters' minds, the establishment of the AfD led to a segmentation of party competition. Suggesting that the advent of the AfD may have rendered party competition even more complex than conceived by the two-dimensional conception utilized by the previous chapters, the analysis further indicates that voters' patterns of electoral openness and closure were not only structured by the socio-economic and socio-cultural issue dimensions but also by a new divide between populist and pluralist orientations.

Complementing Chapter 6 with an interpersonal perspective, Chapter 7 reveals similar patterns in voters' social interactions. The focus of the chapter is on the prevalence of partisan agreement and disagreement in voters' everyday conversations about politics, conceived as talks with core network members that supported either the same or other parties than voters themselves. The character of these experiences is a joint product of voters' desire to seek out like-minded discussion partners, and the more or less limited availability of such persons within shared local contexts that serve as reservoirs of potential interaction partners. The reconfiguration of the party system discussed in Chapter 1 translated into an object of voters' social experience by way of changes in the partisan composition of the local contexts within which they resided (demonstrated by the chapter at the level of electoral districts). Comparing the partisan structuration of voters' discussant

networks at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections, the chapter shows how the increasing fragmentation of the party system led to more everyday political talk across party lines. But AfD supporters displayed particularly strong selectivity. More than others, these voters tended to encapsulate themselves in highly homogenous conversation networks.

Drawing on Lau and Redlawsk's (2006) notion of "correct" voting, Chapter 8 studies implications of the emergence and establishment of the AfD for the consistency of voters' electoral choices with their political attitudes and preferences. It detects a remarkably stable amount of attitude-consistent voting for the three elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017. However, this seemingly unchanged surface concealed significant shifts in the ways voters arrived at their decisions. The 2013 federal election stood out in this regard. The 2009 and 2017 elections displayed the well-known pattern of inconsistent voting being strongly associated with low levels of political knowledge. In 2013, by contrast, inconsistent choices reflected "insurgent party protest voting." They seem to have purposely not been driven by the intent to vote in line with one's preferences. When deciding which party to choose, some citizens apparently let general discontent about the course of politics override standard factors of the voting calculus. Accordingly, inconsistent choices were strongly associated with dissatisfaction with political elites and the performance of democracy as well as sympathy for the AfD as a populist party that from early on was heavily and across the board critical of established parties and their leaders (Lewandowsky et al. 2016).

Coalition governments have always been an important feature of German politics. Chapter 9 investigates how voters navigated the complexities of coalition politics under the increasingly challenging circumstances of the fragmenting party system. The chapter analyses the role of voters' coalition considerations at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections in a dynamic perspective. It confirms that government coalitions (and options for alternative coalitions) are important political objects for voters to which they relate in consistent ways, even in times of a rapidly changing political environment. In addition, the chapter reports independent, remarkably stable effects of coalition preferences on vote choices at each of the three elections. Overall, its findings indicate that voters are neither fully instrumental nor fully expressive. They suggest that, as the party system expanded and the number of possible coalitions increased, coalition considerations have become even more important for voters.

Situational Voting

The dealignment perspective entails the expectation that as the structuration of electoral behavior through traditional cleavages and partisan affiliations recedes, voting decisions become increasingly contextually contingent (Schoen

et al. 2017b) and short-term in nature. With partisanship and other traditional politicized identities eroding, voters are no longer able to resort to the internalized guideposts of political predispositions to make sense of politics. In the long run, the filter effect of biased information processing on the part of "rationalizing voters" (Lodge and Taber 2013) should therefore evaporate. Instead, dealigned electorates should respond more strongly to the ever-changing situational peculiarities of elections. Chapters 10 to 14 examine how situational factors resonated with voters at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. They focus on the fall-out of the crises that preceded these elections (Chapter 10), the role of the parties' lead candidates (Chapter 11), media effects (Chapters 12 and 13), and campaign effects (Chapter 14). For lack of data covering an appropriate time span, none of these chapters can prove that short-term factors have actually become more influential in the long run. However, pointing to a greater sensitivity of apartisan voters for the politics of the moment, they provide evidence on a necessary condition for a more prominent role of situational voting under conditions of ongoing dealignment.

Building on an event-driven model of crisis-related vote change, Chapter 10 examines the role of the world financial and economic crisis, the Euro crisis, and the refugee crisis for electoral volatility at the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. It finds that the proposed causal chain from crisis experiences over changing problem priorities and shifting competence attributions to altered electoral choices has been quite tenuous at all three crises. To begin with, voters' problem priorities were not fully aligned with the crises' sequence. Moreover, changes in problem priorities did not always go along with changes in competence attributions. Rather, the latter to some extent reflected voters' political predispositions. Last, although the impact of these changed attitudes on vote choices was noticeable, it remained limited. Altered party competence attributions did promote vote switching, but other factors, such as shifts in candidate evaluations (studied in more detail in Chapter 11), were also important. The chapter confirms that, through changes in problem priorities and party competence attributions, the three crises did contribute to the high electoral volatility that characterized the 2009, 2013, and 2017 federal elections. But their impact was only moderate. The massively increased mobility of voters at these elections was only to a limited extent attributable to the crises that preceded them.

Studying the role of parties' lead candidates for voters' choices in detail, Chapter 11 provides nuanced evidence for personalized decision-making as a driver of electoral volatility. It shows how alterations in candidate evaluations— whether they originated from improving or deteriorating views of repeatedly nominated identical candidates, or differing views of a party's current candidate in comparison to his or her predecessor at the previous election—stimulated voters to reconsider choices taken at the previous election. As a result, they tended to abandon parties they had supported in the past when they held their candidates

in lower esteem (push effects) and moved toward other parties when they viewed their candidates more positively than the ones before (pull effects). Importantly, this concerned not only the lead candidates of the two large parties, CDU/CSU and SPD, which traditionally were considered the only serious contenders for the office of head of government. To a lesser extent, voters' likelihood to switch votes between parties was also influenced by their views of the lead candidates of the smaller parties that served as faces of their parties during the campaigns but did not compete for particular offices.

Zooming in on the Christian Democrats' and Social Democrats' chancellor candidates, Chapter 12 demonstrates the effects of these politicians' televised debates on party preferences. Such media events are a staple of campaign communication across the globe. In Germany, the so-called "TV duels" were introduced in 2002 and immediately became core elements of federal election campaigns. Attracting huge audiences and obtaining a lot of news coverage renders them the single most important communication event in federal election campaigns. The chapter finds that the TV debates of 2009, 2013, and 2017 exerted significant direct and indirect effects on voters. Both immediate exposure to these media events (at which impressions of winning or losing the "duel" were particularly relevant) and—similarly strongly—exposure to follow-up communications in the news media and within voters' networks of family, friends, and acquaintances affected the vote intentions of sizable parts of these broadcasts' audiences. Politically unsophisticated voters appeared most open to both direct and indirect debate effects.

For the same set of elections, Chapter 13 examines the electorate's responsiveness to persuasive influences of news. It shows that news coverage that was favorably or unfavorably valenced toward parties or candidates—either through the intensity and direction of its evaluative tone (statement bias) or the amount of reporting devoted to them (coverage bias)—affected voters' electoral attitudes. These media effects reached not only voters who followed the news but also individuals who did not attend to the news, presumably by means of secondary diffusion through audience members who "spread the news" further to their fellow citizens. Both TV news and the press appeared influential, though the former more clearly than the latter. Importantly, apartisan voters were more sensitive to news content than those identifying with a party (cf. Shehata and Strömbäck 2020: 64–8). However, due to the way the news media presented politics during the examined election campaigns, these effects do not seem to have affected the outcomes of the three elections. In line with the general logic of democratic-corporatist media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004), they displayed common patterns of selectivity with regard to the amount of coverage devoted to the parties and their candidates, presumably resulting from similar criteria of newsworthiness across different media that were strongly guided by power differences between parties. At the same time, the news media showed considerable restraint with regard to evaluative content and do not seem to have treated the competing parties

and candidates in systematically unequal ways. Due to mutual cancellation, much of the news media's potential impact on voters thus remained muted.

Examining campaign dynamics of public opinion at the 2005 to 2017 federal elections, Chapter 14 widens the scope beyond specific sources of electoral information. It proposes a four-way decomposition of the voting function depending on the variability of explanatory factors between elections and within campaigns. The chapter finds that for partisans—which despite partisan dealignment still form a majority of the electorate—election campaigns mainly served as forces of activation (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). This rendered successive elections more similar to one another and, together with economic perceptions, contributed to their predictability. Importantly, however, with growing numbers of parties, situation-specific defection from party identities has become more ubiquitous. Thus, the fragmentation of the party system has turned partisan activation into a more contingent process because partisans increasingly may choose from a broader menu of ideologically proximate parties. In line with this less strict and automatic conception of activation, coalition expectations and voting intentions for small parties fluctuated strongly both between elections and within campaigns. The chapter concludes that, although generalized patterns still dominated pre-electoral short-term dynamics, certain numerically modest situation-driven shifts may have been pivotal around the electoral threshold, with implications for the feasibility of coalitions. This suggests that, with weakened connections between citizens and parties, campaigns increasingly manifest themselves as games of strategy in which seemingly small changes can make a big difference.

A Political System in Flux

An Era Coming to a Close

After the 2017 federal election, the roller-coaster of German electoral politics did not stop—quite to the contrary. Polling data suggest that about a year after the election, an era finally came to a close (Figure 15.1): The duopoly of two mainstream "people's parties," one center-right, the other center-left, which for seven decades had defined electoral contests as the main competitors and sole aspirants to the chancellorship, has ended. Despite its massive vote losses, this yet does not so much concern the CDU/CSU, which once again took over the leading role in the federal government under its chairperson Angela Merkel as chancellor. For most of the electoral cycle, it maintained a rather stable support base at about the level it had scored at the 2017 election, amounting to about a third of the electorate. By contrast, about a year after the election the SPD's support base virtually imploded. It stabilized at a floor amounting to just about half the size of the Christian Democrats' voter base.
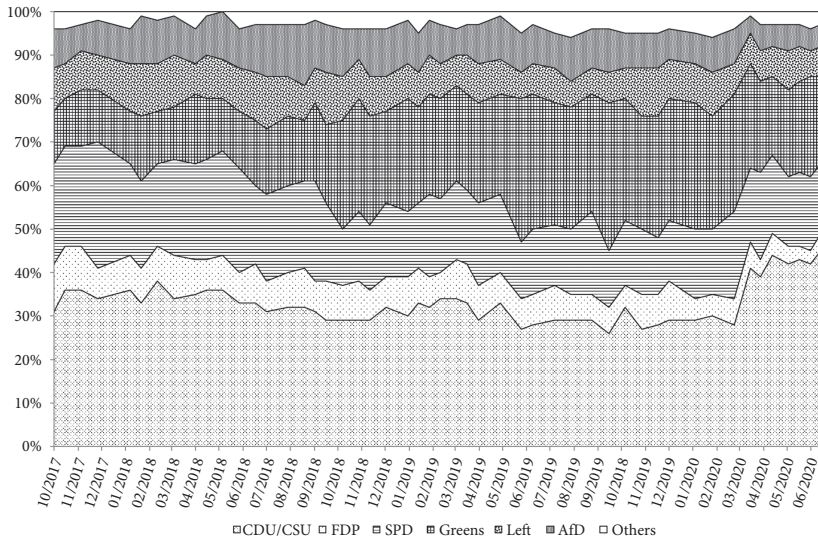
Fig. 15.1 Party support after the 2017 federal election (percent)

Note: Data on "political mood" from Politbarometer polls conducted monthly by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen for the Second German Public TV channel (ZDF). The indicator was chosen because of its relative closeness to the raw data generated by vote intention questions (so-called "Sunday questions").

Source: https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Langzeitentwicklung_-_ Themen_im_Ueberblick/Politik_I/2_Stimmung_1.xlsx (accessed on 14 July, 2020).

Even more importantly, the collapse of the Social Democrats was complemented by an unprecedented ascent of the Greens that from then on constantly surpassed them in the polls by a considerable margin. For about eighteen months, the Greens scored in a range not much below the CDU/CSU. However, this near parity ended with a sharp surge of the Christian Democrats to a level last seen after the 2013 federal election. It occurred in spring 2020 and can be directly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, an event that, like previous crises, immediately turned into an "hour of the executive." Compared to many other democracies, Germany came relatively little scathed through the first wave of the pandemic. As it seems, voters credited the leading government party (but not its junior partner) for the Grand Coalition's handling of the crisis (Bol et al. 2020 demonstrate this phenomenon also for other countries).

Unsurprisingly, these were also years in which all parties, with the possible exception of the Greens, were deeply absorbed in—often highly divisive—internal controversies about how to adapt best to the changing conditions of declining loyalty and rising volatility on the part of voters. Leadership questions were high on the agenda. Both the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats exchanged their party leaders (thereby divorcing leadership positions from government offices), not once, but repeatedly. The newly elected chairpersons were met with

great hopes—but also high expectations and little patience. Once in office, the new leaders' honeymoon period was invariably short, as major improvements of the parties' electoral standing failed to materialize. Questions of policy were also highly salient, and often connected to debates about the right choices for leadership. Some parties were deeply torn on matters of substantive strategy, indicating that today's complex structure of political conflicts is not only divisive between parties but also within parties.

The mainstream parties' internal debates mainly took the form of traditionalists seeking to stand their ground against increasingly dominant (socio-cultural) modernizers. By contrast, the AfD took several distinct moves further right by re-enacting the script of its redefining moment in 2015, i.e., leadership struggles where radicals prevailed over (relatively) moderates. In some states, the AfD's leadership consists of barely concealed right-wing extremists. Last, there have also been intense debates about coalition strategies. After painfully embarking on another Grand Coalition, the Social Democrats continued to debate almost uninterruptedly whether to continue their cooperation with the CDU/CSU or end it during the electoral cycle (see below). Within the AfD, more moderate leaders would like to see the party pursuing its agenda in government coalitions, but the radicals prefer a strategy of both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary obstruction (Schroeder and Weßels 2019b). For the other parties, the AfD is out of bounds as a coalition partner at all levels of the political system, although among some East German Christian Democrats this demarcation appears less principled. The Left, by contrast, is considered an acceptable coalition partner at least in state governments, except for the CDU.

Increasing Polarization

These latest developments imply that, after the 2017 federal election, the long-term process of party system fragmentation has continued to progress in leaps and bounds. In comparative research, party system fragmentation (Schmitt and Franzmann 2020) and more specifically the rise of populist parties (Wagschal 2020) have been found to give rise to the polarization of party systems, i.e., increasing divergence between parties and coherence within them. Traditionally, party system polarization has been conceived as a policy-related phenomenon, in which parties are viewed as objects characterized by particular ideological positions and corresponding policy profiles. It has thus typically been studied in terms of the parties' left–right positions and the distances between them. Sartori (1976: 131–216) has famously attributed the breakdown of Germany's first democracy to its party system's "polarized pluralism," that is, a pattern characterized by significant anti-system parties to the left and right and centrifugal political competition that is fought over non-negotiable principles so that it is difficult to strike bargains on

policies and form stable government coalitions. High ideological polarization thus impairs the working of democracy because it makes it harder or even impossible for parties to cooperate in governance. By undermining constructive politics polarization may damage the functioning and ultimately the stability of democratic regimes.

In democracies around the globe, political life seems to be affected by an escalating process of polarization (McCoy and Somer 2019). Yet, how polarized was Germany's party system at the 2009 to 2017 elections? Did it become more polarized over the course of these three elections? The left–right dimension allows for obtaining an impression of the party system's ideological polarization (see Wagner 2019 for a detailed evaluation of the criteria of polarized pluralism). To begin with some background, Figure 15.2 shows the distribution of voters' ideological orientations. It reveals a stable unimodal distribution of left–right positions. There is no indication of any movement in the direction of the dreaded bimodal distribution, in which significant segments of the electorate are located at the extremes rather than at the moderate center of the ideological scale (Lelkes 2016: 395–8). If there was any change at all, it consisted in the gravitation center of voters' ideological leanings moving very slightly to the left from 2009 (mean: 5.51) over 2013 (5.42) to 2017 (5.34).

Neither conceived as a state nor as a trend (Lelkes 2016: 393) does polarization thus characterize the ideological preferences of the German electorate. Yet,
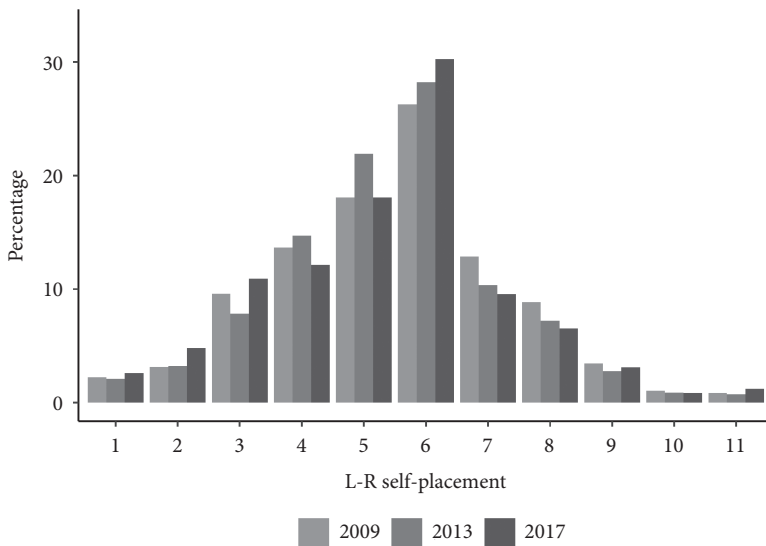
Fig. 15.2 Left–right positions of voters, 2009 to 2017 (percent)
Note: Data are weighted by region and demographics.
Sources: CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum.

Table 15.1 Ideological polarization of voters, 2009 to 2017

	2009	2013	2017
Index of ideological polarization	3.59	3.25	3.85
Parties' perceived left–right positions			
Left	2.09	2.11	2.15
Greens	4.24	4.25	4.28
SPD	4.70	4.67	4.54
FDP	6.66	6.68	5.95
CDU/CSU	7.49	7.22	6.35
AfD	-	6.95	9.64
Left–right range of party system	5.40	5.11	7.49
Left–right range of party system (AfD excluded)	5.40	5.11	4.20

Note: Index of ideological polarization calculated according to the formula by Dalton (2008); analyses based on eleven-point left–right scale (range 1–11); data are weighted by region and demographics. *Sources*: CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum.

polarization is often originating not from voters but from political elites who use polarizing strategies to pursue political objectives (McCoy and Somer 2019). Table 15.1 provides data on the ideological polarization of the party system. The grand picture is supplied by Dalton's (2008) aggregate index of ideological party system polarization. It is derived from voters' perceptions of the parties' locations on the left–right dimension, weighted by their election results. In his seminal study, Dalton (2008: 907) registered a rather low, though slowly increasing degree of polarization for the German parties in the early 2000s. The level reported in Table 15.1 is one full point higher on the polarization scale. It is thus still not high in absolute terms, but the data signal a further small increase at the 2017 election compared to the two earlier elections. This suggests that—overall—the ideological polarization of the German party system is on the rise, although not dramatically.

The lower panels of the table provide more nuanced insights. They show how voters placed each of the parties on the left–right scale at each of the three elections. The Left and the Greens remained steadfast in place on the far respectively moderate left. The SPD and the FDP maintained their center-left and centrist locations between 2009 and 2013 but moved somewhat to the left in 2017. The CDU/CSU moved continuously to the left across all three elections, particularly strongly in 2017. This echoes the findings of Chapter 3. When the AfD emerged in 2013, voters located it slightly to the left of the CDU/CSU and right of the FDP. Yet, at the subsequent election, it was clearly perceived as a right-wing party, located not far from the endpoint of scale. This led to a considerable expansion of the range occupied by the parties on the left–right scale. At the 2009 and 2013 elections,

it amounted to less than half of the scale width, but at the 2017 election the range between the left-most party (the Left) and the party located furthest on the right—now the AfD—was much larger, amounting to three-quarters of the scale. This considerably widened spread was entirely due to the AfD's shift to the right. The span occupied by all other parties was much more restricted. In fact, in 2017, the other parties' ideological positions differed considerably less than in 2009 when the AfD did not yet exist. At the 2017 federal election, the party system thus was characterized by a very peculiar ideological structure, consisting of a rather dense cluster of established parties, ranging from the Left to the Christian Democrats and the AfD as a clear outlier, located quite a distance away from all other parties.

In recent years, the traditional policy-related conception of party system polarization in ideological terms has been supplemented by a second perspective. It views parties as objects of identification that evoke positive or negative emotional reactions, thus giving rise to "affective" polarization (Iyengar et al. 2012; 2019). Here, parties are understood as emotionally valenced group objects. As in-groups that generate a sense of identity and belongingness, they give rise to positive feelings among their members; as out-groups, they may evoke more or less intense negative feelings. Affective polarization has important ramifications for social life. Societies that are affectively polarized on party terms tend to split up into hostile camps that conceive political life in irreconcilable "us-versus-them" terms. Citizens then withdraw into echo chambers of like-minded associates, and dialogue across lines of difference is at risk of breaking down. Under such circumstances, self-reinforcing spirals of encapsulation that turn political opponents into enemies may be set in motion. Developments of this kind may ultimately endanger democracy itself as a system of governance in which societies' pluralism is managed in peaceful ways on the basis of its members' acceptance of the basic norm of "agreeing to disagree" (Kelsen 2013; Przeworski 2010). Eroding approval of this principle appears as part and parcel of an encompassing, worldwide crisis of liberal democracy. Polarized societies' hostile "tribalism" appears as an important driver of democratic backsliding and decay (McCoy and Somer 2019).

Table 15.2 presents indications of affective polarization in the German party system. Our global measure of the party system's overall polarization is a variant of an index recently proposed by Reiljan (2019). Adapting the logic of the standard measure used by studies of the American two-party system to the conditions of multi-party systems, it is based on voters' evaluations of parties on like–dislike thermometer scales, weighted by the parties' vote shares. Whereas Reiljan's (2019) index refers to partisan groups (and ignores apartisans), our version is constructed on the basis of vote choices. Accordingly, the index aggregates information on how electors saw each of the parties they did not choose in comparison to the one they voted for. This seems appropriate for the study of a dealigning electorate in which many voters hold no party identification and in which, in particular, not enough time has yet passed to build up genuine attachments with the AfD as a young party.

Table 15.2 Affective polarization of voters, 2009 to 2017

	2009	**2013**	**2017**
Index of affective polarization	3.56	3.70	3.51
Party thermometer scores by vote choice:			
Most positive score (in-party)			
CDU/CSU	8.89	9.29	9.71
SPD	8.33	8.90	9.34
FDP	8.69	8.34	9.17
Greens	8.94	9.15	9.36
Left	8.87	9.42	9.23
AfD	-	8.78	8.60
Average across parties	8.74	8.81	9.23
Average across parties (AfD excluded)	8.74	9.02	9.36
Most negative score (in brackets: AfD excluded)			
CDU/CSU	3.00	3.45	2.26 (4.39)
SPD	4.72	3.66 (3.92)	2.04 (5.77)
FDP	3.08	3.67	2.41 (4.50)
Greens	4.79	4.29 (4.35)	1.56 (5.97)
Left	3.67	3.26	2.18 (5.14)
AfD	-	3.76	3.77
Average across parties	3.85	3.67	2.37
Average across parties (AfD excluded)	3.85	3.73	5.15
Difference between most positive and most negative score (in brackets: AfD excluded)			
CDU/CSU	5.89	5.84	7.45 (5.32)
SPD	3.61	5.24 (4.98)	7.30 (3.75)
FDP	5.61	4.67	6.76 (4.67)
Greens	4.15	4.86 (4.80)	7.80 (3.39)
Left	5.20	6.16	7.05 (4.09)
AfD	-	5.02	4.83
Average across parties	4.89	5.30	6.86
Average across parties (AfD voters excluded)	4.89	5.35	7.27
Average across parties (AfD + AfD voters excluded)	4.89	5.29	4.24

Note: Index of affective polarization based on eleven-point thermometer scales (range 1–11; CSU for Bavarian respondents, CDU for others), calculated according to the formula by Reiljan (2019), but based on vote choices instead of partisanship (second votes, small parties excluded from base for vote share calculation); data are weighted by region and demographics.
Sources: CrossSec09_Cum, CrossSec13_Cum, CrossSec17_Cum.

The index values displayed in Table 15.2 suggest that the overall intensity of affective polarization among voters was somewhat lower than among the committed partisans studied by Reiljan (2019: 11). On the other hand, it was by no means negligible. In longitudinal perspective, however, the data signal little variability across elections and no linear increase from 2009 to 2017.

Yet, more fine-grained data again show more than meets the eye when looking only at the global index. It is hardly surprising that the thermometer scores given by voters to the parties they chose were invariably the most positive ones. More interestingly, from election to election, most parties were liked better by their respective electorates. The exception is the AfD which departs from this picture in two ways. Its voters were always on average less enthusiastic about their party than the supporters of all other parties, and there was no increase over time. Particularly revealing are the data on the most negative evaluations and the differences between the most positive and most negative evaluations, which can be interpreted as measures of the affective distances between parties. They uncover further aspects that render the status of the AfD special within the German party system. At the 2013 election, only for two voter groups the AfD was the least liked and thus emotionally most distant party: supporters of the SPD and the Greens. By 2017, the picture was completely different. Now the AfD was most strongly disliked by the voters of all established parties, and its scores were also much lower than the most negative ones given to any party at previous elections. Together, these data indicate a gap that widened constantly from election to election—rather modestly between 2009 and 2013 but dramatically from 2013 to 2017. AfD voters themselves appear peculiar, however, since especially in 2017 their affective distance from the party they liked least was considerably smaller than was the case for all other parties' voters. Another interesting piece of evidence can be obtained by omitting the AfD from the calculations (by excluding AfD voters and evaluations of the AfD if this party was the least liked one). This counterfactual restriction of the analysis to the traditional parties leads to a picture of affective polarization that was not increasing but indeed decreasing over time.

These observations illustrate that both the ideological polarization and the affective polarization of the German party system increased between the 2009 and 2017 elections, although overall only slightly, and thus below or at the edge of the sensitivity levels of the global aggregate indices. The driver of this development was the emergence and ideological radicalization of the AfD. This triggered a process of party system segmentation that was not yet apparent in 2013 but came fully to the fore in 2017. At this election, both faces of party system polarization displayed a similar, distinct structure. Its defining feature is an antagonism between all established parties on the one hand and the AfD on the other. In terms of ideological polarization, this dual pattern takes the form of a rather densely spaced cluster of established parties, ranging from the far left to the center-right, and the AfD, occupying a remote position on the far right. The development of affective

polarization was characterized by moves of the voters of the Left, Greens, SPD, FDP, and CDU/CSU closer to one another, and away from the AfD. At the 2017 federal election, this party occupied an isolated position whose emotional distance to all established parties' voters was larger than it had been for any pair of parties in 2009 or even 2013. Together, these findings suggest that the AfD's determined move to the right since 2015 initiated assimilation-contrast dynamics (Bless and Schwarz 1998) on the part of supporters of the established parties. They underline the results of Chapter 6 about the lack of availability of other parties' voters for the AfD but suggest that this constellation was not fully reciprocated by the AfD's voters. Perhaps, given the right circumstances and above all intelligent strategies that distinguish between AfD elites and voters and imply neither policy mimicking nor undifferentiated demonization on the part of established parties (Meguid 2007), these voters are not lost for good.

Precarious Government

The progressive fragmentation and polarization of the German party system, which intensified after 2005, adds considerable complexity to the electoral process. When even the customary distinction between large and small parties appears increasingly meaningless (Poguntke 2014) and voters no longer grant sufficient majorities to the traditional, ideologically consistent bipolar alternatives of "black–yellow" (CDU/CSU-FDP) and "red–green" (SPD–Greens) two-party alliances, the formation of governments becomes more and more difficult (Dalton 2018: 230–1). Coalition taboos concerning the AfD and the Left (at the federal level) raise additional hurdles, especially when voters grant these parties strong parliamentary presences. New, more complex scenarios of governmental cooperation beyond the long-established models need to be developed. This requires parties to think outside the box—and provide adequate rationales to their voters in order not to alienate them. Beyond that, inevitably rising intra-governmental conflict potentials and rising transaction costs of cooperation will render the emerging governments' capacity to function smoothly, act decisively, and remain stable precarious (Kropp 2010). This, in turn, might resonate negatively with voters.

A look at government formations in the German states gives an impression of what this means. As second-order elections, in which less is at stake (Reif and Schmitt 1980), state elections have always made it easier for voters to deviate from customary patterns of choice and experiment with their votes. As a consequence, the rising complexity of the party system manifested itself in the states earlier and more massively (Niedermayer 2012). At the same time, since many areas of policy are outside the states' remit, the conflict potential between parties is lower and they find it easier to cooperate. State governments have therefore repeatedly served as testbeds for innovative party cooperations that later on were also adopted at the

federal level. In recent years, this led to a wide proliferation of different kinds of governments.

During the 1980s, the world of state governments had still been very clearly structured (Table 15.3). Almost two out of three governments were in the hands of just one party. Most others consisted of coalitions of two ideologically connected parties, corresponding to the established formulas of federal governments. After the creation of the five new East German states in 1990, the situation changed. This had to do with the emergence but also considerable electoral strength of the East German newcomer to the party system, the PDS (later the Left), which was at first considered inacceptable as a coalition partner. From then on, single-party governments became less common, whereas coalition governments of two parties from the same side, but increasingly also from opposite sides of the left–right spectrum (Spier 2010), became more frequent. During the same decade, the first coalitions emerged that included three partners and crossed the ideological divide. After 2000, single-party governments rapidly turned into infrequent minority phenomena whereas ideologically congenial two-party coalitions became the modal category.

In the second decade of the new millennium, the situation shifted to yet another degree of complexity. Single-party governments now became truly exceptional, whereas the rest consisted of (ideologically consistent) intra- and (inconsistent) inter-camp coalitions to almost equal shares. Grand Coalitions are a special case of the latter. They first appeared in the 1990s (Kropp 2010). Straddling the ideological divide and coupling the party system's main antagonists in a joint government, they are typically not sought for by any of the participants and created more out of necessity than desire, when no alternative appears feasible (Müller 2008; Spier 2015). Nonetheless, their share increased sharply to about one out of four state governments during the following decade. After a more hesitant start, the number of three-party coalitions also expanded greatly, ultimately amounting to about one out of five governments and including cases in which even a Grand Coalition needed support from a third party to reach a majority in its state's parliament. The traditional bipolar ideological camp logic thus appears to have lost its hold on parties' coalition considerations.

As a result of the AfD's growing popularity in the East, government formation became even harder at the most recent East German state elections. The Thuringian election of October 2019 provides telling anecdotal evidence of the electoral quagmires that may loom under conditions of intensifying fragmentation but also polarization and segmentation of the party system (Oppelland 2020). This election was the first at which, following vote gains of the Left and especially the AfD, not even CDU, SPD, FDP, and Greens together would have reached a parliamentary majority. An attempt to continue the previous left-of-center coalition of Left, SPD, and Greens at least as a minority government on the basis of a relative majority of parliamentary votes failed spectacularly when—in a stunningly

Table 15.3 Composition of state governments, 1980–2020

	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Single-party governments:				
CDU or CSU	15	10	8	2
SPD	11	14	1	1
FDP				1
Intra-block coalitions:				
CDU or CSU and FDP	9	9	8	7
CDU, FDP, and PRO			1	
CSU and FW				1
SPD and Greens	1	10	5	11
SPD, Greens, and SSW				1
SPD and Left		1	3	3
SPD, Left, and Greens				4
Inter-block coalitions:				
Grand Coalition		9	10	13
CDU and Greens			1	4
SPD and FDP	5	3	1	
SPD, Greens, and FDP		2		1
CDU, FDP, and Greens				2
Grand Coalition and Greens			1	2
Single-party governments (%)	63.4	41.4	23.1	7.5
Intra-block coalitions (%)	24.4	34.5	43.6	50.9
Inter-block coalitions (%)	12.2	24.1	33.3	41.5
(Pure) Grand Coalitions (%)	0.0	15.5	25.6	24.5
Coalitions of three parties (%)	0.0	3.4	5.1	18.9
Total (N)	41	58	39	53

Notes: Units are Cabinets.
Source: Own calculations based on https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landesregierung_(Deutschland).

surprising turn of events—a counter candidate of the FDP was elected head of the state government with one parliamentary vote more than the previous incumbent of the Left. As a result, for the first time, the FDP assumed the position of a head of government, which was all the more bizarre since the party had gained just seventy-five votes more than necessary to pass the 5 percent threshold and commanded only five seats in parliament. The CDU's MPs openly supported this candidate to express their rejection of the planned leftist government but that he won was due to votes from the AfD—which had also nominated a candidate of its own but obviously only to deceive the other parties because he received not a single vote.

After massive public criticism and pressure from national party leaders (including his own), which deemed a government grace of the AfD inacceptable, the new head of government stepped down after a few days without attempting to form a government (which is why this episode is counted as single-party government

of the FDP in Table 15.3). In the end, the Christian Democrats helped to install the initially planned minority government of the three leftist parties, in exchange for their commitment to seek new elections within a year. Of course, when called to the polls again, voters can be expected to take their recent experiences into account, thus creating a feedback loop from the parties' parliamentary maneuvering to the electorate's choices at the next election. Whether its outcome will render government formation any easier is impossible to tell but does not appear likely. What the events witnessed by voters will certainly not produce is more trust in the functioning of the democratic process. Given that lacking support for the democratic system is an important ingredient of voting for the AfD (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2017), the party's obstruction of unwritten rules of fair play in parliament might thus in the end be even rewarded at the polls.

State politics has often foreshadowed processes later reaching the federal level as well. As outlined in Chapter 1, at the 2005 federal election, a Grand Coalition appeared as the only feasible way to form a viable government. Whereas in 2009, the seat distribution for once enabled the CDU/CSU and FDP to reactivate the traditional model of a "black–yellow" coalition, parliamentary seat shares yet again allowed for neither this nor the alternative "red–green" option at the two subsequent elections. Both yet again led to Grand Coalitions. From the perspective of electoral accountability, Grand Coalitions are not desirable because they tend to undercut the competition by blurring the alternatives. They also weaken the parliamentary opposition, especially if they command a large majority, as was the case in 2013, although due to the Christian Democrats' and Social Democrats' massive vote losses not any more in 2017. Moreover, they tend to undermine the respective junior partner's electoral prospects to the advantage of the senior partner because voters tend to attribute the successes of governments to the parties of the respective heads of government (Debus et al. 2013). The weakness of the SPD since 2009 may in part have resulted from these dynamics.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2017 election, fear of yet another such outcome of their joining a Grand Coalition indeed motivated the Social Democrats to entrench themselves in a stance of strict rejection of any further collaboration with the Christian Democrats. The only conceivable alternative was therefore a three-party coalition. Such a scenario, although during the past decade not uncommon in the states (Table 15.3), had never been seriously considered at the national level. After the 2017 federal election, for the first time, an effort was undertaken to assess the feasibility of a coalition between CDU/CSU, FDP, and Greens. However, in the end, no agreement could be accomplished, and all eyes were therefore yet again on the Social Democrats. This time, they complied and for the fourth time joined a Grand Coalition under the leadership of the Christian Democrats (Blinzler et al. 2019).

However, even though it thus led to yet another reiteration of a meanwhile established model for organizing the federal government, the 2017 election was unique.

For the first time in the country's post-war history, it appeared seriously doubtful whether the federal parliament would be able to fulfill its crucial electoral function of creating a new government (Bagehot 2001). For almost six months, and thus exactly twice as long as during the hitherto most complicated process of government formation (which had followed the previous election), Germany and its international partners had to get by with a caretaker government without the ability and mandate to act on important issues and the lingering fear that a new election might need to be called to leave it to the electorate to cut the Gordian knot that it had laced in the first place (Siefken 2018; Bräuninger et al. 2019; Linhart and Switek 2019). After the government had finally set to work, the tension hardly eased, and the possibility of premature cessation of the coalition was always in the air. Bitter struggles over immigration policy called the decades-old cooperation between CDU and CSU into question, and the SPD's internal debates about whether to continue or abandon the coalition never ceased—at least until the arrival of SARS-CoV-2.

Hazy Prospects

There is no magic crystal ball that allows us to gaze into the future, and even educated guessing is difficult with so many parameters of coming elections not fixed but variable. With progressing globalization, German voters find themselves more and more exposed to the challenging conditions of today's "VUCA world" (Mack and Khare 2016), in which parties' ability to steer clear courses in line with their manifestos is more and more constricted by events and developments outside their control (Sassen 1996; Hellwig 2015; Vowles and Xezonakis 2016). But through their behavior, voters also contribute their own fair share to the "*V*olatility, *U*ncertainty, *C*omplexity, and *A*mbiguity" of contemporary politics. Over the last federal elections, they have brought about a massive transformation of the party system. The erstwhile highly concentrated party system, in which competition revolved around two mainstream "people's parties" that aggregated the preferences of the vast majority of voters, has mutated into a six-party system. Three years after the last federal election, only one party—the CDU/CSU—still stands out as clearly stronger than the others, but even that only with a share of the electorate that is a far cry from what it scored in its heyday.

The situational context of the next elections cannot be known yet, but voters' greater sensitivity to these circumstances can be taken as a given. At some subliminal level, how voters relate to the parties seems to be changing. Arguably, a subtle shift from expressive to more instrumental electoral behavior is underway (Brennan and Lomasky 1993; Mair 2013). As traditional cleavage politics turns into a distant echo from the past, voters appear less inclined to support parties for their own sake, drawing reward from the mere act of displaying their partisan

identities. Instead, they appear more sensitive to the parties' policies. In particular, they seem to have become more impatient with parties pursuing courses of action they dislike. While voters "began to choose" already decades ago (Rose and McAllister 1986), their behavior at the most recent elections suggests that they have become less tolerant over time with what they perceive as policy aberrations and failures to perform on the part of parties. To some extent, partisan identities seem to have given way to an understanding of parties as political service agencies that are easily abandoned if they do not deliver.

At the same time, parties—pressured to respond to developments outside their control and forced to engage in complex, multi-layered, and apparently "messy" processes of negotiating and bargaining (often semantically vilified by journalists as "bickering")—encounter increasing difficulties to offer policies that appear consistent, efficient, easy to comprehend, and visibly in line with voters' preferences. Accordingly, the likelihood of voter dissatisfaction is systematically rising (Dalton 2004: 128–54; Stoker 2017). On the part of voters, diminishing deference to authorities and recourse to elite-challenging behavior is no longer primarily a domain of leftist-libertarian "critical citizens" (Norris 2011; Campbell 2019). Protest politics has become more ubiquitous (Giugni and Grasso 2019). Its complement in institutionalized participation is electoral behavior characterized by a rising readiness to desert parties and shift to others, thus turning one's back on previous suppliers of policy if they are found wanting, in order to try out others.

Each of the three federal elections since 2009 was overshadowed by a massive crisis, and the analyses presented in this book have shown how they shook up voters' decision-making. As the first election after the end of the Christian Democratic–Social Democratic duopoly is coming up in fall 2021, the next major crisis is already well underway, and it will probably entail more far-reaching long-term consequences than any of its precursors. How the COVID-19 pandemic will play out electorally is highly uncertain. In Germany, the public health challenge of the outbreak was, to date, better under control than in most other Western democracies (Yuan et al. 2020), and federal and state governments swiftly enacted wide-ranging measures to ease immediate economic hardship on the part of businesses and employees (Elgin et al. 2020). Public controversies arose mainly about the extent to which the state legitimately could restrict its citizens' civil liberties. Arguably, in terms of policy conflicts, this crisis initially related more strongly to the socio-cultural than the socio-economic dimension.

However, as the material fallout of the months-long domestic lockdown and the worldwide economic downturn will make itself more strongly felt, this may change. By the time of the next election, rising unemployment and a stumbling economy may well have shifted issue emphasis back from the hitherto dominant socio-cultural dimension to socio-economic "bread and butter" concerns. The last decade's salience-induced electoral realignment was arguably more strongly driven by value-based identity conflicts than by interest conflicts between clear-cut

social groups (Norris and Inglehart 2019). If that is true, the new conflict constellation may turn out to be more responsive to current politics and policies than the institutionalized cleavages originating from the beginnings of democratic mass politics (Dalton 2018: 228–31). As a consequence, the pendulum might swing back, away from the parties advantaged by the salience of cultural conflict—the AfD and the Greens. In recent polls, these two parties already appear weakened (Figure 15.1). It seems not completely out of the question that a significant part of the AfD's greatly increased electorate could be nudged back to one of the established parties.

Partisanship has declined in Germany, but it has not disappeared for good. About six out of ten voters still feel attached to a party, although not necessarily strongly. Such identities have traditionally been seen as an anchor and restraint of electoral behavior that—through the "normal vote" mechanism (Converse 1966)—defines a corridor within which election results fluctuate when conditions are not too far out of the ordinary. This mechanism has not simply vanished. As shown in this book, the activation of partisans is still the dominant process during election campaigns. Partisans have also been found to be less responsive to the situational aspects of elections. This observation needs to be qualified, however, since partisans nowadays appear to defect more easily from straight in-party voting to ideologically adjacent parties, and that renders normal votes somewhat less likely. Moreover, we have also seen that the ways parties deal with major crises—of which yet another one will in all likelihood dominate the next election's agenda—may undermine some of their partisans' attachments, and this entails more profound long-term implications for electoral behavior.

At the next federal election, one important factor will also be turned into a variable that has been a constant at all three elections on which this volume focused. The incumbent chancellor Angela Merkel has vowed not to run again. Candidate effects have occasionally been very strong at federal elections, and during Merkel's long incumbency, the Christian Democrats always profited strongly from their leader's constantly high popularity (Hansen and Olsen 2020). Whether her successor will deliver his (there are several aspirants, all of them male) party the same advantage remains to be seen, but it is certainly not preordained. Given the changed strength relationships between the parties, it is open which of them will nominate candidates for the chancellorship and as a consequence also whether and in which format those competing for the chancellorship will have the chance to present themselves to voters during a televised debate. These broadcasts have regularly garnered larger audiences than any other campaign event, and the analysis presented above has shown that they in principle may move party preferences, depending on the participants' perceived performance. However, the increasingly fragmented party system no longer suits their basic logic as a "duel" of two evident competitors for the chancellorship. How parties and broadcasters will cope with these changing conditions remains to be seen.

As regards TV news and the press, it does not appear likely that they become more openly one-sided in their coverage, in particular not across all the many outlets which together compose the still dominant traditional pillars of the German media system. Mutual cancellation of differently valenced messages can be expected to remain a core characteristic of media-induced persuasion, thus delimiting its net impact (Zaller 1996). What creates uncertainty, however, is the strengthening role of online media. Their audience is growing at the expense of traditional news outlets (Staudt and Schmitt-Beck 2019). Moreover, the parties, with the AfD as avant-garde, are increasingly setting up their own more or less professional online facilities for direct information provision that circumvent the news media's editorial filters. Against the background of the increasing polarization of the party system, these developments open up the possibility of a segmentation of the media audience and the retreat of certain parties' supporters into digital echo chambers (Pickel 2019: 171). Such a development might further strengthen the polarization of the party system (Dvir-Gvirsman 2016).

Coalition politics is bound to become even more complicated than in the past. The parties will need to reflect on innovative scenarios for government formation that may involve straddling the ideological divide, shedding taboos, including more than two partners, or ways to create a workable minority government. These are not only challenges of post-election bargaining. Coalition preferences are an important ingredient of vote choices, but parties will have strong incentives to remain ambiguous and circumvent coalition questions in their campaigns. This might undermine the instrumental value of coalition preferences for electoral choices and render expressively motivated coalition preferences pointless, thus frustrating an electorate socialized into expecting clear coalition statements from its parties. Ultimately, moreover, the new complexity of coalition politics might also contribute to voter alienation by further blurring governmental accountability.

The one thing that is certain, however, is that no terminal station is in sight for the roller-coaster of German electoral politics. This does not preclude future election results that resemble the more concentrated ones of the past. However, as proven by the 2013 federal election, in which this was last the case, such outcomes do not signal a return to a latent equilibrium. They only show that high electoral volatility does not always lead to more fragmentation. It may also reduce it—albeit only temporarily.

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GLES Datasets

Abbreviation	Reference
CampPanel09	GLES (2015): Short-term Campaign Panel (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5305 Data file Version 5.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12198.
CampPanel09-13	GLES (2016): Repeatedly questioned respondents of the Short-term Campaign Panel 2009 and 2013 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5757 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12536.
CampPanel13	GLES (2016): Short-term Campaign Panel 2013 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5704 Data file Version 3.2.0, doi:10.4232/1.12561.
CampPanel13-17	GLES (2018): Repeatedly questioned respondents of the Short-term Campaign Panel 2013 and 2017 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6827 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13129.
CampPanel17	GLES (2018): Short-term Campaign Panel (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6804 Data file Version 6.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13150.
CandSurv09	GLES (2012): Candidate Campaign Survey, Survey (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5319 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.11444.
CandSurv13_Plus	GLES (2014): Candidate Campaign Survey 2013, Survey and Electoral/Structural Data (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5716 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12043.
CandSurv17	GLES (2018): Candidate Campaign Survey (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6814 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13089.
CrossSec09_Cum	GLES (2019): Pre- and Post-election Cross-Section (Cumulation) (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5302 Data file Version 6.0.2, doi:10.4232/1.13230.
CrossSec09_Post	GLES (2019): Post-election Cross-Section (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5301 Data file Version 4.0.2, doi:10.4232/1.13229.
CrossSec09_Pre	GLES (2019): Pre-election Cross-Section (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5300 Data file Version 5.0.2, doi:10.4232/1.13228.
CrossSec13_Cum	GLES (2019): Pre- and Post-election Cross-Section (Cumulation) (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5702 Data file Version 4.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13233.

Abbreviation	Reference
CrossSec13_Post	GLES (2019): Post-election Cross-Section (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5701 Data file Version 3.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13232.
CrossSec13_Pre	GLES (2019): Pre-election Cross-Section (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5700 Data file Version 2.0.2, doi:10.4232/1.13231.
CrossSec17_Cum	GLES (2019): Pre- and Post-election Cross-Section (Cumulation) (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6802 Data file Version 3.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13236.
CrossSec17_Post	GLES (2019): Post-election Cross-Section (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6801 Data file Version 4.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13235.
CrossSec17_Pre	GLES (2019): Pre-election Cross-Section (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6800 Data file Version 5.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13234.
LongPanel09-17	GLES (2016): Long-term Panel 2009–2013-2017 (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5322 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12627.
MediaContent09_TV	GLES (2015): Campaign Media Content Analysis, TV (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5306 Data file Version 1.2.0, doi:10.4232/1.12211.
MediaContent09_Print	GLES (2012): Campaign Media Content Analysis, Print Media (GLES 2009). Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5307 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.11387.
MediaContent13_Print	GLES (2015): Campaign Media Content Analysis, Print Media (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5706 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12293.
MediaContent13_TV	GLES (2015): Campaign Media Content Analysis: TV (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5705 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12173.
MediaContent17_Print	GLES (2018): Campaign Media Content Analysis, Print Media (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6809 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13130.
MediaContent17_TV	GLES (2018): Campaign Media Content Analysis, TV (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6808 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13186.
RollCrossSec09	GLES (2019): Rolling Cross-Section Campaign Survey with Post-election Panel Wave (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5303 Data file Version 6.0.2, doi:10.4232/1.13215.
RollCrossSec13	GLES (2019): Rolling Cross-Section Campaign Survey with Post-election Panel Wave (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5703 Data file Version 2.0.2, doi:10.4232/1.13214.
RollCrossSec17	GLES (2019): Rolling Cross-Section Campaign Survey with Post-election Panel Wave (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6803 Data file Version 4.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13213.
Track09_01	GLES (2011): Long-term Online Tracking, T1 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5334 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.10757.

Abbreviation	Reference
Track09_02	GLES (2011): Long-term Online Tracking, T2 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5335 Data file Version 4.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.10830.
Track09_03	GLES (2011): Long-term Online Tracking, T3 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5336 Data file Version 4.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.10390.
Track09_04	GLES (2011): Long-term Online Tracking, T4 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5337 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.10393.
Track09_05	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T5 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5338 Data file Version 3.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12271.
Track09_06	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T6 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5339 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12220.
Track09_07	GLES (2013): Long-term Online Tracking, T7 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5340 Data file Version 4.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.11699.
Track09_08	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T8 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5341 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12221.
Track09-17_Cum	GLES (2019): Longterm-Online-Tracking, Cumulation 2009–2017 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6832 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.13416.
Track10_09	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T9 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5342 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12222.
Track10_10	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T10 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5343 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12223.
Track10_11	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T11 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5344 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12224.
Track10_12	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T12 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5345 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12225.
Track11_13	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T13 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5346 Data file Version 2.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12277.
Track11_14	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T14 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5347 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12227.
Track11_15	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T15 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5348 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12228.
Track11_16	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T16 (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5349 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12229.

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Track12_17	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T17 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5350 Data file Version 1.2.0, doi:10.4232/1.12230.
Track12_18	GLES (2014): Long-term Online Tracking, T18 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5351 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12033.
Track13_19	GLES (2014): Long-term Online Tracking, T19 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5719 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12034.
Track13_20	GLES (2018): Long-term Online Tracking, T20 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5720 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13016.
Track13_21	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T21 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5721 Data file Version 3.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12231.
Track13_22	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T22 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5722 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12232.
Track14_23	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T23 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5723 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12421.
Track14_24	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T24 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5724 Data file Version 1.2.0, doi:10.4232/1.12279.
Track14_25	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T25 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5725 Data file Version 2.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12280.
Track14_26	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T26 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5726 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12281.
Track15_27	GLES (2015): Long-term Online Tracking, T27 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5727 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12282.
Track15_28	GLES (2016): Long-term Online Tracking, T28 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5728 Data file Version 2.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12521.
Track15_29	GLES (2016): Long-term Online Tracking, T29 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5729 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12522.
Track15_30	GLES (2016): Long-term Online Tracking, T30 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5730 Data file Version 1.2.0, doi:10.4232/1.12540.
Track16_31	GLES (2016): Long-term Online Tracking, T31 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5731 Data file Version 1.1.0, doi:10.4232/1.12655.
Track16_32	GLES (2016): Long-term Online Tracking, T32 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5732 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12625.

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Track16_33	GLES (2016): Long-term Online Tracking, T33 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5733 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12675.
Track16_34	GLES (2017): Long-term Online Tracking, T34 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5734 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12731.
Track17_35	GLES (2017): Longterm-Online-Tracking, T35 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6815 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12795.
Track17_36	GLES (2017): Longterm-Online-Tracking, T36 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6816 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12872.
Track17_37	GLES (2019): Longterm-Online-Tracking T37 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6817 Data file Version 2.0.1, doi:10.4232/1.13295.
Track17_38	GLES (2018): Longterm-Online-Tracking T38 (GLES). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6818 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13009.
TVDeb09_Surv	GLES (2011): TV Debate Analysis, Survey (GLES 2009). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5309 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.10368.
TVDeb13_Surv	GLES (2015): TV Debate Analysis, Survey (GLES 2013). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5709 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12287.
TVDeb17_Surv	GLES (2019): TV Debate Analysis, Survey (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6810 Data file Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.13256.

Online Appendices and Supplementary Materials

Several chapters refer to Online Appendices that provide additional information on the data used, the coding of variables, and the analytical models. These Online Appendices can be found at: https://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/changing-german-voter/.

Replication materials for all chapters of the book can be found at: https://osf.io/mj7hq/.

Further information on the German Longitudinal Election Study can be found at: https://gles-en.eu/.

All GLES datasets used in this volume can be accessed via https://gles-en.eu/download-data/.

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