Election campaigns and voter decision-making in a multi-party system: The 2009 and 2013 German federal elections

Harald Schoen, Hans Rattinger, Maria Preißinger, Konstantin Gavras, Markus Steinbrecher, assisted by Elena Werner

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1. Introduction

1.1 Perspectives on voting behavior in the 2009 and 2013 elections

In the 2009 and 2013 elections Germany witnessed the highest levels of inter-election volatility after unification. It somewhat resembled volatility in the Federal Republic's founding era in the 1940s and 1950s (e.g., Blumenstiel 2014; Saalfeld and Schoen 2015). In the 2009 election the SPD's sharp electoral decline and the FDP's success at the polls were the main factors behind the high level of volatility. In 2013 the FDP's vote share precipitously dropped, whereas CDU and CSU managed to gain support. Moreover, the recently founded *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) garnered almost five percent of the party votes and just failed to enter the Bundestag – as did the liberal FDP, for the very first time in a federal election. Due to the logic of the electoral system and to changes in the party system the high rates of inter-election volatility gave rise to changes in the partisan composition of government, but did not jeopardize Angela Merkel's position as Chancellor.

The strong inter-election volatility fits nicely with observations about the party system and the electorate in Germany in this period. The German party system had undergone a period of depolarization, giving rise to centripetal competition revolving around the center of the political spectrum, the *Mitte*. Parties contributed to this process by giving up traditional positions on issues which were formerly key to their identity. In the era of Chancellor Schröder, the SPD joined the British Labour Party in pursuing a "third way" and adopted middle-of-the-road positions in the socio-economic domain. Despite strong ties to the peace movement, the Green Party eventually had given up their principled opposition to the use of military force in foreign policy. Likewise, under Chancellor Merkel, the CDU and CSU abandoned traditional positions on family policy, conscription, nuclear power, and in social policy (Zolleis and Schmid 2015: 34-39). This centripetal tendency of party competition is also visible in far-ranging agreement on salient issues in the period under study. In 2009 a consensus on Keynesian measures to tackle the financial crisis that had begun in the previous

year prevailed. In the 2009-2013 period, a pro-Euro consensus united governing and opposition parties (Zimmermann 2014). There were only two exceptions to this race to the center. The Left Party was the odd one out on the left, pleading for more redistributive policies in the socio-economic arena. Moreover, it heavily opposed the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In early 2013, on the other side, critics of the pro-Euro consensus founded the AfD to organize Euro-sceptic views (Niedermayer 2015). Despite these two exceptions deep ideological cleavages were not at all characteristic of German politics in that period. Necessities for cooperation arising from the logic of the German bicameral parliamentary system made that tendency even more pronounced. Without sharp ideological divides between political parties, switching between them had become quite easy for voters.

On the demand side, the electorate did not comprise of lots of voters with strong political predilections (e.g., Weßels et al. 2014; Schoen and Weßels 2016). In many Western democracies processes of social and partisan dealignment as well as value shifts have changed the composition of electorates considerably. The proportion of citizens who subscribe to electoral participation norms and regularly turn out in elections has decreased (e.g., Franklin 2004; Dalton 2008). Likewise, the proportion of staunch partisans has shrunk since the 1960s and 1970s in several Western countries including Germany (Dalton 2002; for Germany see Schoen and Weins 2005; Arzheimer 2006). As a consequence more voters than before were "up for grabs" and might have contributed to electoral volatility.

Such evidence about increasingly non-ideological politics, partisan dealignment, and growing volatility gave rise to the notion that campaign periods have become more important for the decision-making of an increasing number of voters and thus for the outcomes of elections (e.g., Dalton et al. 2002; McAllister 2002). It is hence no surprise that a quickly growing literature has emerged that addresses intra-campaign volatility, late deciding, and campaign effects on voting behavior (e.g., Fournier et al. 2004; Johnston et al. 2004; Kenski et al. 2010;

Kogen and Gottfried 2012; Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller 2012; Rattinger and Wiegand 2014). In this vein scholars argue that the number of voters who only come up with their definitive vote decision during the final weeks before Election Day has increased considerably in previous decades (McAllister 2002; but see for opposing findings Plischke 2014). Building on this notion others aim at identifying specific effects of various events and tools on voting preferences during campaigns (e.g., Hillygus and Jackman 2003; Hillygus 2010).

Against the backdrop of this scholarly literature the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections provide some kind of paradox. Despite favorable conditions on the demand and supply side of the political market place aggregate-level evidence suggests that intra-campaign volatility prior to these two elections was not exceptionally high. Rather, party shares in published pre-election polls did not change heavily during these campaigns, suggesting that they did not make a considerable difference for election outcomes (e.g., Partheymüller 2014; see also Krewel et al. 2011).

Leaving aside methodological issues of pre-election polling (e.g., Plischke and Rattinger 2009), this pattern raises several interesting possibilities. To begin with, low rates of aggregate-level volatility may simply reflect high individual stability of the vote choice. At first sight this would raise a paradox because it is somewhat at odds with the notion that a dealigned electorate is particularly prone to intra-campaign volatility. Yet, a lack of strong political predilections is not a sufficient condition for electoral volatility (e.g., Schoen 2003). Even though voters are susceptible to campaign efforts, the latter may cancel each other out at the individual level, or they may simply be ineffective in affecting voters' decision-making. According to this line of reasoning the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections were cases in which a potentially volatile electorate turned out to be quite stable. Even though voters are responsive to external stimuli in principle, those provided within these two election campaigns did not influence voters sufficiently strongly. This account fits nicely with

prevailing characterizations of these campaigns as not very exciting – or even outright dull (e.g., Krewel et al. 2011; Tenscher 2013; Krewel 2014).

Although it is widely shared, this characterization may not capture the campaigns in their entirety because they did comprise some high-profile events. E.g., two (in 2013) and three weeks (in 2009) before election day televised debates of the chancellor candidates were held and reached huge audiences (Maier et al. 2014). Moreover, in 2013 a magazine cover showing Peer Steinbrück, the SPD's candidate for chancellor, giving the finger attracted considerable public attention. These examples lend some credence to an alternative interpretation, namely that the stability at the aggregate level conceals a considerable number of changes at the individual level in voting preferences that cancelled each other out. According to this line of reasoning the 2009 and 2013 elections did exhibit high levels of individual-level volatility and numerous voters made up their minds late during the campaign. The absence of clear-cut aggregate-level trends reflects the lack of a one-sided stream of political communication during the campaign. In effect, intra-individual variations cancelled each other out at the aggregate level.

This explanation fits nicely with a large body of research on campaign effects emphasizing the absence of large aggregate-level shifts despite considerable campaign effects at the individual level (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Campbell 2008; Erikson and Wlezien 2012). According to this minimal effects paradigm campaigns exert predictable effects in circumscribed sections of the electorate. Among partisan independents and low-involvement citizens campaigns can make voters switch parties, or they might simply be led into abstention (e.g., Hillygus and Jackman 2003). Among party adherents, however, activation and reinforcement effects prevail. Accordingly, voters with partisan predispositions develop one-sided political views during the campaign and thus stick to their initial party preference or return from initial indecision to their cherished party (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Finkel 1993;

Finkel and Schrott 1995; Erikson and Wlezien 2012; Sides and Vavreck 2013).[1] Put differently, voting behavior results from the interplay of political predispositions and new information (Zaller 1992). In empirical terms, however, campaign communication makes political predispositions more powerful in shaping behavioral outcomes, rather than exerting effects independent of these predilections.

This account of aggregate-level stability of party shares during a campaign is more interesting and theoretically more intriguing than the first one. Yet, it still rests on some simplifying assumptions that may miss important nuances in the analysis of campaign effects. We shall highlight three such issues. First, these accounts conceive of campaigns as large-scale events of political communication, without paying close attention to specific events, controversies, and tools (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Finkel 1993; Gelman and King 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995). To be sure, for scholars interested in the outcome of elections and the net effect of campaigns on it, this perspective is a straightforward choice. However, it may miss an important portion of campaign variation at two levels. Certain events, controversies, and campaign efforts may be beneficial for one party, whereas others increase electoral support for a competing party, and a third group of campaign efforts remain ineffective. A quickly growing number of studies has explored the varying impact of specific campaign stimuli like nomination conventions, televised debates, media coverage, and diverse campaign tools like TV ads and radio spots (e.g., Schrott 1990; Holbrook 1996; Shaw and Roberts 2000; Hillygus and Jackman 2003; Brader 2005; Imai 2005; Klein 2005; Panagopoulos and Green 2008; Panagopoulos 2010; Gerber et al. 2011; Whiteley et al. 2013: 116-124). It is thus not far-fetched to assume that components of election campaigns differ in their impact on individual-level voting behavior and the partisan balance as well as their contribution to the overall outcome. Omitting these differences may give rise to an overly simple impression of the role

[1] High levels of political involvement are conducive to stabilize party attachments. In different accounts, both predispositions interact in conditioning voters' susceptibility to campaign effects (e.g., Dalton 2007, 2012; Lachat 2007).

campaigns play in voting behavior. Disaggregating campaign periods into diverse campaign features thus enables scholars to understand the campaign dynamics more adequately.

Second, the impact of political predispositions on the processing of political information may vary across campaign components. Party identifiers are probably inclined to engage in partisan motivated reasoning all of the time during a campaign (e.g., Lodge and Taber 2013). Despite their best effort, however, they may fail to witness congenial information or to avoid meddlesome messages from uncongenial sources. Turning to evaluations, learning about a gaffe of their preferred candidate, they may be more lenient in evaluating it than partisan independents and identifiers of competing parties. Still, this could mean mild criticism that may undermine their willingness to vote for the party they identify with. Events and campaign activities thus can make party identifiers to turn away from their most appreciated party. By implication, if campaign communication proves consistently unfavorable for a party, even its identifiers may become less, rather than more, inclined to vote for it during the campaign. The conventional wisdom on the increasing fit of vote choice and party identification (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Finkel 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995; Erikson and Wlezien 2012) does not represent some kind of natural outcome. It is rather the outcome under certain campaign conditions. Irrespective of which of these scenarios applies, disaggregating campaigns into diverse features to which voters may respond differently thus provides an opportunity to study the interplay of political predispositions and stimuli providing new information in leading to political behavior on election day.

Third, the role of political predispositions proves even more nuanced, once we take into account the multi-party system under which German voters made their decisions in the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. Leaving aside issues of tactical voting, ideological distances differ between pairs of parties in multi-party systems (e.g., Müller and Debus 2016). In the two elections under study, the SPD and the Green Party were more similar to each other than to the center-right parties CDU/CSU and FDP that, in turn, were much closer to each other.

While ideologically close parties are likely to form governing coalitions, they are particularly fierce competitors in the electoral arena because they compete for voters with similar political worldviews (for a similar line of reasoning see, e.g., Hillygus and Shields 2008). By implication, voters with a specific political worldview may totally disregard ideologically distant parties but consider two or more parties that more or less fit their preferences. This suggests that party switches between ideologically close parties may be disproportionately more likely during campaign periods. In response to campaign communication even party identifiers may quite easily switch between parties within the boundaries of ideological camps. Put differently, the nature of party competition may mitigate the role of partisan predispositions in inhibiting campaign volatility.

Altogether, this discussion suggests that the seemingly ineffective and boring campaigns in the run-up to the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections deserve a closer look. Aggregate-level stability probably hides much volatility at the level of individual voters. Moreover, campaigns are not homogeneous, but comprise multiple events, controversies, and tools that probably exert independent effects on voters. Although these may cancel each other out, identifying them and their interplay is important for our understanding of how campaigns affect voting behavior. Furthermore, the logic of electoral competition in multi-party systems is likely to affect electoral decision-making in response to campaign efforts. In particular, it probably shapes the way political predispositions give rise to campaign volatility. Put more generally, we suggest the interplay of predispositions and new information during campaign periods is more complex than implied by previous research.

In this book we thus aim at analyzing the impact of the 2009 and 2013 campaigns on vote choice in the ensuing German federal elections. In our analysis we will investigate the relationship between the aggregate- and individual-level perspectives on campaign volatility at two levels. To begin with, we will combine findings on the campaign dynamics in the electorate as a whole and at the level of individual voters. In addition we will attempt to

disentangle the impact of specific campaign stimuli and study their contribution to overall changes during the campaign periods. In focusing on the interplay of predispositions and campaign information, we will also take into account the logic of electoral competition in the German multi-party system that probably modifies the role of political predispositions in shaping campaign effects. Finally, studying two campaigns enables us to identify similarities and differences, thereby potentially yielding some insights into how the interplay of predispositions and campaign information depends on contextual features.

1.2 Theoretical framework, model, and expectations

As already noted, we proceed from the notion that electoral behavior results from the interplay of political predispositions on the one hand and new information arising from contextual factors on the other hand (e.g., Zaller 1992; Herrmann et al. 1999; Hillygus and Jackman 2003). Specifically, campaigns exert effects in combination with preexisting cognitions and affect, leading to behavioral outcomes (Iyengar and Simon 2000). At times predispositions may utterly trump campaigns, thereby giving support to an "internalist" model of electoral behavior; in other cases an "externalist" notion may be more appropriate (Jackman and Sniderman 2002). Most of the time, however, a nuanced interplay of predispositions and campaign context in leading to voting behavior is likely to occur.

In outlining our model of campaign effects (Figure 1) we start at the end of the causal chain, i.e. with behavioral outcomes. Here we distinguish electoral participation and vote choice. As voting for a party requires participation in the respective election, these are two very closely related outcomes. For analytical purposes, however, we prefer to treat participation and vote choice as distinct phenomena (e.g., Jacobson 2015: 38). At least in certain subgroups of the electorate participation in elections appears to be habitual and driven by participatory norms (e.g., Rattinger and Krämer 1995; Plutzer 2002; Franklin 2004). This notion implies that some

citizens have a standing decision to turn out – irrespective of candidates, policies, campaign communications and the like – and may only have to decide their vote choice. To be sure, not all citizens participate in elections on a habitual basis or by obeying perceived social norms. Citizens lacking strong participatory norms may decide before each election upon electoral participation and vote choice. If they happen to identify an acceptable option before or during the campaign they will turn out. If they do not consider any party at all acceptable they will abstain. As a sizable majority of German citizens still subscribe to the notion that voting is some kind of a civic duty (Schoen and Weßels 2016), we decided to treat electoral participation and vote choice as distinct behavioral outcomes.

- Figure 1 about here –

In the German multi-party system voters can choose from among a multitude of parties. In our analysis of vote choice in 2009 and 2013, we focus on five of them. As center-right parties CDU/CSU and FDP resembled each other in several policy fields, though not in all. On the other side of the political spectrum, we have the Social Democrats and the Green Party as center-left parties with much programmatic overlap. The Left Party, finally, held clearly leftist positions and was not considered as an acceptable partner by the SPD and Green Party at the federal level.[2] Policy affinities played a role in the formation of coalition governments. The center-right CDU/CSU led the government from 2005 to 2013. From 2005 and 2009 it formed a grand coalition with the center-left SPD. In the legislative period from 2009 to 2013 the CDU/CSU was in a minimum-distance coalition with the liberal FDP. After the election of 2013 a grand coalition between CDU/CSU and SPD was formed again. Throughout the period under study the Green and the Left Parties were in opposition within parliament. We do not

[2] This description receives additional support from findings on the parties' positions on the left-right dimension as perceived by the respondents of the 2009 and 2013 campaign panels (not shown in tables). Despite the conceptual and methodological issues the left-right dimension raises, this evidence might provide some backing for the validity of the relative ideological differences between parties in Germany in the 2009 and 2013 elections.

analyze vote choice for the recently founded AfD in 2013 because our data do not allow us to do so in sufficient depth.

While the differences in ideology are important to understand the logic of electoral competition and campaign effects, we consider voting for single parties rather than for blocs of parties. Otherwise we would miss the simple (but important) point that for a party its own vote share is of primary interest. Although it is tempting to consider voting for potential coalitions or ideological blocs, after an election parties may consider forming coalitions that do not fit smoothly with pre-election coalition signals and ideological closeness. It is thus more reasonable to focus on voting for individual parties. Pursuing this avenue allows us also to examine empirically key expectations about the role the multi-party system (e.g., differences in ideological proximity) plays in guiding voting behavior.

In accounting for voting behavior we rely on an attitudinal model that, despite some criticism (e.g., Lindenberg 1985), has dominated electoral research since many decades (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996; Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Falter and Schoen 2005; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). According to this basic notion, decisions on turnout and vote choice flow from citizens' attitudes toward politics, parties, and candidates. A person who becomes more favorable of a party or its attributes (such as candidates) will, e.g., become more likely to vote for it. This relationship is assumed to be probabilistic. Some changes in attitudes may not suffice to exert any effect on behavior. Consider an individual with very low pro-participatory attitudes at the outset of the campaign. She may exhibit an increase of these attitudes during the campaign, but this increase may be too small to mobilize her to go to the polls. In addition, attitudes may be adjusted to conform to an already existing decision on electoral behavior, thereby bolstering this decision or serving as a post-hoc rationalization. Moreover, behavior may change while attitudes remain unaltered. As election day approaches voters may feel an increasing need to take a stand, leave the state of indecision and therefore change their behavior, although their attitudes do not (e.g., Enns and Richman 2013). Furthermore,

behavior may also change due to tactical considerations and not in response to attitude change. Campaigns may play a role in engendering tactical voting because voters learn about coalition signals and polls that provide cues about the likely outcome of the upcoming election (e.g., Meffert and Gschwend 2011). Using data from large-scale surveys, however, it is hard to examine tactical voting precisely. It is thus sensible not to focus on tactical voting at all in this analysis. Yet we have to keep in mind the possibility of tactical voting and other deviations from the attitudinal account of behavioral change. We thus conclude that the attitudinal model is unlikely to account fully for the dynamics of voting behavior during campaigns.

For identifying suitable participatory attitudes we picked concepts that prior research treated as factors of turnout and that might respond to campaign communication. If both conditions are met, a variable might mediate campaign effects on turnout. This logic led us to select internal and external efficacy, satisfaction with democracy, interest in the campaign, partisan indifference, and alienation from political parties. Prior analyses suggest that all of them play a role in affecting turnout (e.g., Campbell et al. 1954; Brody and Page 1973; Aldrich and Simon 1986; Kleinhenz 1995; Blais 2000). Moreover, they may respond to the campaign. Campaigns aim at arousing voters' interest. During the campaign people may also form the impression that they are able to understand political problems and thus may feel more efficacious (Rahn and Hirshorn 1999; Norris 2000; Banducci and Karp 2003). Likewise, parties and candidates aim at portraying themselves as responsive to citizens' demands. Provided they are successful, voters may feel less alienated, consider parties and politicians more responsive, and may become more satisfied with democracy. Finally, parties and candidates aim at emphasizing their distinctiveness in order to gain votes. Citizens may

respond by changing their levels of perceived partisan indifference. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these attitudes mediate campaign effects on turnout.[3]

In selecting partisan attitudes potentially affecting vote choice during the campaign we followed a similar logic. We looked for attitudes that may respond to campaign communication and in turn affect vote choice. We picked four attitudes that meet these criteria. Evaluations of candidates and of parties' issue competency are obvious choices (e.g., Campbell et al. 1954, 1960). The top candidates are the key representatives of political parties during the campaign, and issues play a major role in campaign communication. Citizens may thus most likely respond to the campaign by changing attitudes toward candidates and issues. As these attitudes have extremely strong partisan content, we should also expect rather strong effects on vote choice. In addition, we include evaluations of government performance because the achievement of the incumbent government often takes center stage in campaign communication. They may also feed into vote choice, although in a multi-party setting they are not as easily applicable and do not provide cues as straightforward for vote choice as in two-party systems. Poor such evaluations suggest a vote *against* a governing party, but do not imply which party to vote *for* (e.g., Fisher and Hobolt 2008; Bytzek 2011; Schoen and Greszki 2015). Finally, we also included coalition preferences because parties provide usually coalition signals during the campaign to which voters may respond. Coalition preferences may then in turn influence vote choice. However, again they do not suggest a decision for a specific party. Given a preference for a particular coalition, its effect on vote choice may depend on various additional factors, such as perceptions of the inclination of parties to enter into this or that coalition. Because these are rather complex and uncertain calculations, coalition preferences might have a limited impact on voter decisions during campaigns when compared to candidate and issue attitudes.

[3] As we treat turnout and vote choice as resulting from different processes, we do not consider party-specific factors of mobilization or demobilization.

According to the attitudinal model of voting behavior campaigns play a role in affecting citizens' attitudes, that in turn influence vote choice. We thus focus on the rather "simple" mechanism of persuasion (e.g., Bartels 2006a). In analyzing vote choice we assume that campaigns provide messages that influence evaluations of parties, candidates and other relevant attitude objects. In a similar vein, the model of turnout suggests that voters will decide to cast a vote if they acquire increasingly more participatory attitudes.[4] Campaigns comprise streams of communication from various sources, via multiple channels of communication, and on manifold topics. In our analysis we focus on two specific ways campaigns may feed into attitudes and electoral behavior. To begin with, campaigns provide straightforward participatory and partisan cues. In this vein, witnessing media coverage with a pro-participatory slant, talking to acquaintances who plan to vote, watching TV spots that aim at mobilization may make citizens more likely to participate in the election. Turning to vote choice, party contacts, personal talk to party supporters, and recommendations from voting advice applications (VAA) provide straightforward partisan cues. These cues will be effective if they are salient for citizens and have clear-cut participatory or partisan consequences. This implies, e.g., that cues from personal conversations with friends and VAAs may prove quite powerful.

The second mechanism assumes that citizens witness and evaluate stimuli arising during campaigns (including campaign activities and events organized by parties, mass media, and others) as well as controversies and policy proposals. When citizens form evaluations of stimuli, these feed into attitudes and voting behavior. Because the data do not enable us to examine this mechanism for turnout, the discussion will focus on partisan attitudes and vote choice. As with campaign cues, highly salient campaign stimuli with straightforward partisan

[4] Observed changes in attitudes and vote choice may reflect different causal mechanisms such as learning, agenda setting, priming, and framing. As we are well aware of how hard it is to disentangle these effects empirically (e.g., Lenz 2009; Leeper and Slothuus 2014), we refrain from specifying hypotheses on these mechanisms.

implications may be conducive to strong effects on evaluations. From this perspective televised debates of the chancellor candidates as major media events (Dayan and Katz 1992) are likely to exert sizeable effects. Given their huge audience and prominence in media coverage they may serve as focusing events (e.g., Birkland 1997) and arouse the interest of many voters. Moreover, evaluations of the candidates' performance have straightforward implications for electoral decision-making as they refer to the leading candidates of the two major parties. Evaluations of candidate performance during the campaign thus may considerably influence voting behavior, though not all gaffes and accomplishments attract the attention of huge numbers of voters. In the 2013 campaign, evaluations of Mr. Steinbrück's fiercely debated gesture may have affected attitudes toward him and vote choices. Likewise, the controversy in the 2013 campaign over major political figures such as top candidate Jürgen Trittin in the 1980's together with a considerable faction of the Green Party having demanded to legalize sexual acts with under-aged juveniles may have exerted similar effects. Policy proposals that give rise to partisan conflict and attract public attention are likely candidates for considerable effects on vote choice. In the 2013 campaign the Green Party's (long-standing) proposal to introduce a vegetarian so-called "veggie day" in public cafeterias also qualifies as potentially influential. It attracted much public attention, and competing parties criticized the Green Party heavily as a "prohibition party". In response the Green Party affirmed that this "veggie day" should be introduced on a voluntary basis only, not as public legislation. While this issue probably had clear-cut partisan implications for voters, another prominent policy proposal did not. The CSU, i.e. the CDU's Bavarian sister party, proffered to introduce a highway toll for foreign-registered cars. This idea gave rise to much public controversy – but it lacked clear-cut partisan implications because Chancellor Merkel, the CDU leader, clearly stated not to support such a measure. It is thus difficult to form unequivocal expectations about its electoral effects.

The latter example suggests that not all campaign events and debates possess the same potential for effects on vote choice. Controversies during the campaign over government performance for managing certain problems are a case in point. To begin with, government performance in some issue areas may not be very salient to many voters, thus not giving rise to intense evaluations. In addition, in a multi-party system with coalition governments evaluations of government performance do not possess straightforward implications which party in government to blame or which party in opposition to vote for instead. Moreover, poor evaluations of government performance in managing public affairs may have various sources and thus have different meanings and implications for voting behavior. Citizens may have criticized, e.g., how the German government handled the NSA affair during the 2013 campaign because they thought it responded too harsh – or not harsh enough. Taken together, controversies about government performance and other events will not impact on voting particularly strongly – unless they arouse the attention of large portions of the electorate and are largely viewed in a common frame of reference with specific partisan implications (on the creation of public scandals see, e.g., Kepplinger 2012; Nyhan 2015). We are therefore reluctant to expect strong effects of campaign controversies about government performance. More generally, this line of reasoning suggests nuanced effects of campaign features on partisan attitudes and vote choice.

Our model suggests a two-step process through which campaigns feed into electoral behavior. Campaign stimuli as witnessed by citizens affect attitudes which in turn can make a difference in voting behavior. In a strict interpretation, participatory and partisan attitudes serve as intervening variables and campaign stimuli as perceived by voters exert only indirect effects on voting. This expectation is unrealistic, however. It presumes that our selection of participatory and partisan attitudes comprises all potentially mediating variables. Given our selection this assumption is not tenable. Campaign events may, e.g., refer to issue and candidate dimensions not very well captured by the selected partisan attitudes. We also did

not include any attitudes suitable to tap into a social calculus of voting (e.g., Uhlaner 1989; Beck et al. 2002; Gerber et al. 2016). It is thus reasonable to also expect direct effects of campaign stimuli (as witnessed by voters) on voting behavior. This reasoning of imperfect mediation also works the other way around. We cannot pretend to have included all campaign stimuli capable of affecting participatory and partisan attitudes. The selected cues and controversies as perceived by voters will thus account only for a portion of the variation in participatory and partisan attitudes during the campaign. It is an empirical question how large this proportion is.

The final ingredients of our model are political predispositions. When election campaigns start, voters are not blank slates. They rather differ considerably in political cognitions and motivations (e.g., Iyengar and Simon 2000; Hillygus and Jackman 2003). These individual differences tap political worldviews which shape the way voters perceive and respond to politics. In our model they play a dual role. Political predispositions shape exposure to political information, attitudes, and behavioral inclinations at the start of the campaign. These initial values capture voters' pre-campaign tendencies that might be a good predictor of their final behavior and limit the potential for attitudinal and behavioral changes during the campaign. Moreover, predispositions lead to motivated processing of political information during the campaign (e.g., Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2000, 2013). As these effects refer to the exposure to and evaluation of information, predispositions may well shape the trajectories of attitudes and behavior during the campaign.

Starting with turnout, we consider general interest in politics and the identification with a political party as participatory predispositions. Prior research demonstrated that both are positively inter-correlated (e.g., Albright 2009; Ohr et al. 2009) and both increase turnout in Germany (e.g., Steinbrecher et al. 2007). It has been shown that interest in politics was somewhat more powerful than party identification in accounting for turnout in the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections (Schoen and Weßels 2016). Still, people who score high on

these predispositions tend to be more inclined to vote and to exhibit stronger participatory attitudes at the outset of the campaign (Campbell et al. 1954, 1960). Moreover, they are likely to absorb disproportionately high amounts of political information during the campaign. Given their predispositions, the search for and consumption of political information is gratifying in itself.[5] These predispositions also make them more prone to witness campaign communication they did not actively look for because they are likely to be embedded in environments providing a multitude of political messages. When compared to apolitical individuals who may even exhibit some kind of anti-politics bias, these persons may interpret incoming information in a disproportionately participatory way and respond to it more favorably (see, e.g., Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009; Enos et al. 2014). It is thus logical to conclude that the initial participatory gap between those scoring high and low on participatory predispositions will not close during the campaign.[6]

However, electoral campaigns aim at obtrusively reaching out to citizens including those not inclined to follow public affairs regularly. Televised candidate debates and other forms of communication not fitting nicely with "politics as usual" may prove valuable in this respect. The crucial question thus is how effective campaign messages are in affecting citizens' decision to turn out at different levels of participatory predispositions. If high scorers on such predispositions are already fully mobilized at the start of the campaign, any additional campaign effort will be ineffective, due to ceiling effects. Provided some mobilization effects among low scorers on participatory predispositions exist, the participatory gap will shrink – in line with a notion well known from research on social diffusion (e.g., Rogers 2003). Yet, it

[5] This argument is distinct from the notion that citizens have a task-specific motivation to look for information during an electoral campaign (for an example see Irwin and Holsteyn 2008), i.e. they search political information because they want to make a good decision (see Lodge and Taber 2000). Assuming high levels of task-specific motivation among all citizens alike, those scoring low on participatory predispositions should be most likely to look for information during the campaign. Yet this assumption of voter homogeneity is questionable. Actually, high scorers on participatory predispositions are likely to deem elections important. If vote-specific motivations play a role, it will be among high scorers. In effect, this argument is likely to underscore the significance of participatory predispositions for turnout and its campaign dynamics.

[6] The perceived duty to vote is another participatory predisposition (e.g., Rattinger and Krämer 1995; Galais and Blais 2016). It differs, however, from political interest and party identification in motivational underpinnings and implications. In order to keep the analysis manageable we decided to not include it.

might be too strong an assumption that all high scorers are already willing to vote at the outset of the campaign. In this case campaigns may increase turnout even among them. Depending on the relative impact of campaigns at different levels of participatory predispositions, the participatory gap might decrease, increase, or stay the same. The outcome of this process is also conditional on whether campaign efforts actually make a difference for turnout or not. Imagine a person with a ten-percent likelihood of casting a vote who receives some mobilizing messages. Although he has a huge potential to be mobilized, it takes quite strong stimuli to make him pass the threshold of actual participation. Accordingly, if those scoring low on participatory predispositions have very low initial propensities to vote, campaign efforts might not suffice to increase turnout among them and close the participatory gap. As the outcome of the interplay between participatory predispositions and campaign efforts also depends on the strength of the latter, it is impossible to derive any meaningful expectation whether the participatory gap between those scoring high or low on the proneness to participate will close during a campaign or not.

Turning now to vote choice, partisan predispositions shape initial partisan attitudes and propensities to vote for a specific party as well as the processing of information during the campaign (e.g., Bartels 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006; Lodge and Taber 2013). Partisan identities comprise notions of who belongs to the in- and out-groups as well as what group membership means, including group values (e.g., Greene 1999; Abdelal et al. 2006). As they aim at defending their identity, party identifiers tend to be selective in their exposure to and processing of political information. They prefer politically congenial information and struggle to reinterpret dissonant information in a way that allows them to retain their partisan identity. Partisan identities thus tend toward self-reinforcement, at least up to a certain point (e.g., Redlawsk et al. 2010). This line of reasoning suggests that at the start of the campaign party identifiers have an above-average likelihood to hold favorable partisan attitudes toward the party they identify with as well as to vote for it. During the campaign, they prefer compatible

political messages and acquire increasingly one-sided partisan opinions. Party identifiers initially intending to vote for their preferred party thus stick to their choice. Among those party identifiers not already willing to cast a vote for their cherished party at the start of the campaign, the likelihood to vote for it will increase. Campaign communication thus makes a difference for vote choice. In line with the resonance model (Iyengar and Simon 2000) this argument suggests that campaigns lead to reinforcement and activation effects (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Hillygus and Jackman 2003) that bring vote choice in line with partisan predispositions (again) and give rise to a homing tendency (Butler and Stokes 1974). Partisan independents, on the other hand, are the source of unpredictable campaign volatility. Lacking partisan predilections these citizens respond strongly to campaign stimuli and may switch back and forth during the campaign. They are thus most likely to exhibit party changes (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). By implication, campaign stimuli are most effective in affecting vote choice in this subsegment of the electorate. Taking a closer look, however, things are a bit more complicated.[7] Leaving aside the fact that partisan independents are no blank slates either, but possess some values, policy preferences, and other attitudes that lend stability to their political views, we also must not overstate the power of partisan reasoning for selecting and evaluating campaign messages. Selective exposure requires a choice between several sources of information and some motivation to choose on the part of voters.[8] Messages that lack clear partisan cues inhibit selective exposure. Moreover, partisan campaigns are probably so obtrusive that citizens hardly can avoid exposure to politically uncongenial messages. Campaign posters, TV and other ads blatantly scream at all voters. Even dyed-in-the-wool partisans thus may not really mind receiving messages from competing parties during a

[7] Political awareness (or sophistication) may moderate the impact of partisan predilections on campaign dynamics (Zaller 1989, 1992). As highly sophisticated partisans possess rather complex political belief systems new information is less likely to change their attitudes and behavior than those of their less sophisticated counterparts. In Dalton's (2007, 2012) notion, the level of political involvement may affect the propensity to respond to specific kinds of political stimuli during campaigns. We do not further pursue these lines of reasoning, because our data do not enable us to examine specific hypotheses in this regard.

[8] The level of partisan polarization at the elite level may condition the size of these individual-level effects (e.g., Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper and Slothuus 2014).

campaign because they do not deem them terribly bothersome. This suggests that partisan predilections might be less powerful in guiding voters' exposure to campaign communication than a strong reading of the notion of political reasoning motivated by partisanship would imply.

When it comes to evaluations of campaign stimuli, we have to keep in mind that campaign information does not only provide partisan cues. If citizens learn that a candidate is depicted giving the finger on a magazine cover, e.g., this message is likely to invoke moral orientations and values as criteria for judgment in addition to or instead of partisan attachments (on non-typical information see Lord et al. 1984). As a consequence, supporters of this candidate's party will be more lenient in evaluating this behavior than partisan independents and supporters of competing parties. They are unlikely to endorse it, however. As for this example is concerned, we cannot take it for granted that party supporters form increasingly one-sided partisan opinions and become more likely to cast a vote for the party they identify with. Rather, the campaign trajectories of partisan attitudes and party choice depend on the nature of campaign stimuli. Some partisans may even consider switching from their identification party to another one.

Additional complexities arise from the logic of political competition in a multi-party system, in which parties differ in terms of policies and ideology, but some resemble each other more closely than others do. Adherents of ideologically adjacent parties are likely to share some values and policy preferences. Moreover, party identifiers may perceive not all other parties as equally belonging to the outgroup; rather, ideologically distant parties may form the core of the outgroup. This implies that, at the start of the campaign, adherents of ideologically close parties will exhibit similar, though not identical, partisan attitudes that differ considerably from those of adherents of ideologically distant parties. They may also exhibit similar patterns of exposure to partisan information sources (within the limits outlined above), of evaluations of campaign events and of trajectories of partisan attitudes. This similarity in attitudes and

evaluations implies that adherents of ideologically close parties may quite easily switch between these parties – but not to others. Party identifiers may thus also exhibit campaign volatility, though within the confines of ideological camps. Put differently, ideologically close parties are particularly fierce competitors in the electoral arena because they aim at garnering votes from citizens who have a relatively high probability to vote for either of them. This line of reasoning casts a fresh light on the classic notion that partisan independents are most responsive to campaign effects. The logic of electoral competition in multi-party systems suggests that adherents of ideologically adjacent parties have a high probability to vote for either party and may thus quickly switch from one to another of these parties in response to campaign messages. Party identifiers may thus be as susceptible to campaign efforts as partisan independents.

The selected predispositions for the study of turnout and party vote capture important components of political belief systems and are rather impervious to short-term changes that might arise during campaigns. To be sure, prior research suggests that indicators of these concepts may exhibit some changes in the short term. Yet these changes are likely to be responses to extraordinary events (Prior 2010), confined to certain subgroups of the electorate (Sears and Valentino 1997), or result from measurement error (e.g., Green et al. 2002; Arzheimer and Schoen 2005, 2016). We are thus confident that measuring these predispositions before the start of the campaign is suitable to capture individual differences that persist and exert effects throughout the campaign.

In sum, we propose a model of campaign effects in the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections that builds on the notion that political predispositions and new information arising during the campaign jointly feed into voting behavior. Initial attitudes and behavioral propensities as well as the processing of and responses to campaign communication depend upon political predispositions. The latter thus do not determine, but interact with campaign communication in shaping campaign volatility and the ultimate voting behavior. Moreover,

we argue that campaign stimuli differ in their effectiveness when shaping attitudes and voting behavior. The nature of party competition then in addition conditions the interplay of predispositions and campaign communication by making certain party changes and differences in responses across partisan subgroups particularly likely. With our model we aim at understanding the dynamics of electoral decision-making at the individual level as well as how they contribute to aggregate-level trajectories. What is more, we also aim at exploring the impact of specific campaign stimuli on voting behavior in order to examine whether they jointly account for the dynamics in voting behavior during the campaign as a whole. Thereby we also seek to bridge the gap between research focusing on effects of specific events and tools (e.g., Panagopoulos 2010; Gerber et al. 2011) and research that tracks changes during campaign periods without paying close attention to specific events and tools (e.g., Gelman and King 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995).

1.3 Data and Methodology

Given our goal of shedding light on citizens' opinion formation and decision-making in the run-up to the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections, we need to have information about the individual-level dynamics of citizens' perceptions, evaluations, and behavioral intentions during the final weeks before Election Day. We therefore rely on data from the GLES (German Longitudinal Election Study) online campaign panel surveys for these two elections (Rattinger et al. 2015, 2016). Both panel surveys comprise seven panel waves each, including six pre-election waves and one post-election wave, and started well before the so-called hot phase of the campaigns. As Figure 2 shows, the 2009 panel survey commenced in July 2009, some 80 days before election day. In general, the 2013 panel resembles its predecessor, although it started somewhat earlier in mid-June 2013. In any case the panel surveys started well before the parties' rallies. Because in 2013 the Bavarian state election took place one week before the federal election, in this state the campaigns started considerably earlier. The

field periods of each survey wave comprised six to a maximum of eighteen days, with the 2013 panel exhibiting higher variance.[9] To permit these rather short field periods the panel surveys were conducted online.

Figure 2: Timeline of federal campaigns and GLES campaign panel surveys in 2009 and 2013

- Figure 2 about here -

In the 2009 survey 3771 respondents participated in the first wave, another 781 respondents were added in the second wave in order to boost sample size. In the 2013 survey 5256 respondents participated in the first wave, including 1011 respondents who already had participated in the 2009 campaign survey. Like many panel surveys the two GLES short-term panels are subject to panel attrition and item nonresponse.[10] The analyses presented in this book draw on information about the respondents who participated in all seven waves (in the case of respondents who only started with the second wave in 2009 in all six waves) of the panel surveys.[11] This naturally leads to a drop in the number of observations. The 2009 analyses draw on 1,792 observations, whereas the analyses for 2013 are based on information about 3,487 seven-wave respondents. These came from an online access-panel maintained by the service provider Respondi AG. To overcome bias in combined marginal distributions of age, sex, and education, a quota design was employed to draw the respondents (Steinbrecher et al. 2015; GESIS 2015). It is well-known that persons who participate in online access-panels differ from random samples of the population at large, in Germany well as in other countries (see Couper 2000). Since in addition we restricted our sample to only those

[9] The field periods were: 2009: wave one: 7/10-7/20; wave two: 7/24-8/2; wave three: 8/7-8/17; wave four: 8/21-8/31; wave five: 9/4-9/13; wave six: 9/18-9/27; wave seven: 9/29-10/7; 2013: wave one: 6/20-7/7; wave two: 7/18-7/28; wave three: 8/1-8/11; wave four: 8/15-8/25; wave five: 9/2-9/12; wave six: 9/16-9/21; wave seven: 9/24-10/4.
[10] See for details on participant verification and panel mutants Steinbrecher et al. (2015) and GESIS (2015).
[11] Consequently, analyses in the remainder of this book that rely on predispositions measured in wave one include the respective information for wave-two starters from the earliest possible wave, which is wave two or wave three. Doing so does not substantially change the results.

participating in all waves the possibility for further bias in the selected subsample cannot be denied.

In order to analyze bias in our data we compare the original panel survey samples and the subsample of participants in all waves with face-to-face cross-section surveys conducted after the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections (Table 1). We consider socio-demographics, i.e. age and education, political predispositions, and voting behavior. Among political predispositions, we include political interest and the existence of party identification as indicators for participatory predispositions. The directional component of party identification serves as an indicator of partisan predispositions. In terms of demographics the original campaign panel samples in 2009 and 2013 comprise larger shares of young and highly educated persons whereas less well educated and older people are not well represented.[12] The online panelists on average report higher interest in politics and (according to their self-reports) are more likely to turn out. At the same time they comprise a larger share of party identifiers. As to specific parties, identifiers and voters of the conservative CDU/CSU are underrepresented in the online samples whereas vote shares of left and non-mainstream parties are inflated. The good news is that restricting the campaign-panel sample to only those respondents who participated in all panel waves does not lead to a further substantial increase in bias. The marginal distributions in the total online sample and this subsample resemble each other quite closely. Given these differences between the cross-sections, on the one hand, and the online panelists, on the other hand, however, the online panelists are likely to respond differently to events and policy proposals during the campaign period than a random sample from the electorate would.

- Table 1 about here -

[12] We have to keep in mind, however, that the GLES post-election cross-section surveys also are biased somewhat in terms of socio-demographic variables. Older people, e.g., have a higher probability to take part in the cross-section survey than younger people (GESIS 2012, 2014).

Our evidence suggests that the online respondents have somewhat more leftist political preferences and exhibit lower levels of volatility in attitudes and behavior than the general public. We therefore may underestimate the occurrence of campaign effects for the electorate as a whole. Yet when considering relations over time between variables of interest across subgroups in terms of political predispositions we are arguably in a better (though far from ideal) position to draw general conclusions than any cross-sectional study (which may be superior in terms of representativeness). These sampling issues, however, must not obstruct our view of the great advantages data from panel surveys do have in measuring and estimating the concepts and quantities of interest (e.g., Bartels 2006b). Repeated measurement of evaluations and behavioral intentions is a prerequisite for the analysis of processes of opinion formation and decision-making in the run-up to an election. With the kind of information from multi-wave panels available here, we are in a much better position to analyze voters' responses to events, the timing of voting decision (e.g., Steinbrecher and Schoen 2013; Plischke 2014), and the evolution of vote choice than with data from standard cross-section or rolling cross-section surveys.

Using multi-wave panels implies that one does not have to make as strong assumptions concerning measurement as with these more standard surveys. One does not need to assume, e.g., that respondents in post-election interviews provide valid information about their party preference at the start of the campaign (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960: 35). As these assumptions are hardly tenable, analyses building on them are likely to be biased in favor of "internalist" accounts of voting behavior (Jackman and Sniderman 2002: 210). Likewise, scholars do not need to assume that respondents remember correctly at what time they made up their mind during the campaign period or how often they attended campaign rallies or watched political TV ads during the final weeks before an election. Respondents rather report campaign contacts and party preferences only a short while after the fact. This is a considerable improvement compared to widely used techniques, although we cannot rule out the possibility

that self-reports of campaign reception and voting behavior lead to bias (e.g., Vavreck 2007). By comparing responses over time we are able to capture the trajectory of electoral decision-making. The relatively short intervals between the panel waves also imply that we are in a good position not to miss a large portion of the variation in attitudes and behavioral outcomes that actually takes place.

These advantages notwithstanding, our analysis raises some measurement issues. To begin with, we have to assume that respondents' answers reflect their attitudes and behavior accurately, rather than being attempts to provide socially desirable responses. But we cannot take it for granted that social desirability is completely absent from our data. Some respondents may, e.g., consider stability or volatility in attitudes and behavior as (un)desirable. Social desirability likewise makes a difference when voters switch to an undesirable option and report stable preferences for a socially desirable option. Prior research suggests however that this kind of bias makes respondents likely to adjust reports about past attitudes and behavior to conform to current preferences (e.g., Waldahl and Aardal 2000; Schoen 2011). As we do not rely on recall data to study the over-time evolution of opinions and behavior, we are quite confident that social desirability, if it exists at all in web surveys on electoral behavior (e.g., Holbrook and Krosnick 2010; Persson and Solevid 2014), is unlikely to severely bias findings on the dynamics of political attitudes and behaviors.

Random measurement error also could be detrimental to our analysis. In studying the evolution of attitudes and behavior over time we rely on a comparison of single-item measures. With just one measure per time period it is impossible to disentangle real change and apparent change due to random measurement error. Given prevalent attitudinal and behavioral stability, random measurement error inflates the degree of volatility (Schoen 2003: 297-301). Accordingly our inability to control for random measurement errors will increase apparent volatility as compared to actual volatility. Moreover, in models aiming at the detection of causal effects, random measurement error adds some kind of noise that is

uncorrelated with real changes in dependent and independent variables. Random measurement error thus in all likelihood decreases the potential of causal models to reveal strong correlations (Bartels 2006b). As the data do not permit to tackle this issue by means of statistical techniques we have to keep in mind these methodological problems when discussing substantive results of our analyses.

Finally, the survey process itself may affect the results because repeated interviewing is likely to have conditioning effects. Using data from the 2009 short-term campaign panel, Bergmann (2015) demonstrated that repeated participation in surveys considerably decreased response latencies, which suggests an increase in attitude accessibility. He also found mild conditioning effects on the consistency, extremity, and stability of evaluations of less well-known political objects. Moreover, panel participation appears to have caused some behavioral changes as participants became more likely to search for political information and to participate in the election as measured by self-reports. These effects proved particularly strong among politically less involved respondents. These results suggest that panel participation exhibits effects that closely resemble those of campaigns. Ignoring panel conditioning thus may lead to exaggerated effects being attributed to campaigns. When interpreting results we thus have to take into consideration that some portion of the effects attributed to the campaign itself may actually stem from repeated survey participation.

In summary, the analysis relies on data from two seven-wave panel surveys that should be highly useful in studying the aggregate- and individual-level dynamics of electoral decision-making and identifying causal effects of specific campaign stimuli. We thus join a recent movement in research on campaign effects that has re-detected the panel technique (e.g., Hillygus and Jackman 2003; Johnston et al. 2004; Hillygus 2005; Romer et al. 2006; Sides and Vavreck 2013; Dilliplane 2014). In a sense, we are joining a march back to Erie County where Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (1944) set the stage for the analysis of campaign effects with an ingenious seven-wave panel study of the 1940 U.S. presidential election.

1.4 Plan of the book

In the following five chapters we will analyze what difference the campaigns made for voting behavior in the 2009 and 2013 federal elections. Building on an attitudinal model of voting behavior, we argue that campaign communication as perceived by voters affects participatory and partisan attitudes as well as turnout and vote choice. Chapter 2 deals with the question how citizens perceived these campaigns. The analysis covers two components, i.e. exposure to campaign communication and evaluations of campaign issues and events. Bringing together the macro- and micro-level notions of campaigns, we will analyze how the exposure to partisan campaigns and media coverage at the individual level evolved during the campaign period. The notion of selective exposure suggests that participatory and partisan predispositions shape the level and dynamics of campaign exposure. We will also analyze evaluations of campaign issues and events over the course of the campaign period. Here partisan predilections may shape evaluations and their dynamics. If the notion of polarization is correct, partisan predispositions should become more powerful in influencing evaluations as the campaign moves on.

Chapter 3 addresses the evolution of participatory and partisan attitudes during the campaign. As argued above, participatory and partisan attitudes should respond to campaign communication. We thus expect considerable variation at the individual level during the campaign. Building on the notion of motivated reasoning, participatory and partisan predispositions should shape the level and trajectories of these attitudes. While conventional wisdom suggests that predispositions become more powerful in predicting attitudes that precede voting behavior, our theoretical discussion casts some doubt on this expectation.

The analysis of behavioral outcomes in Chapter 4 follows a similar path. We will analyze how turnout intentions evolved at the individual level and how the relationship between participatory predispositions and turnout changed during the campaign. In the analysis of vote

choice things are a bit more complicated because of the polytomous nature of this variable. We thus will explore the prevalence of party changes during the campaign and will have a look at whether ideological closeness of parties and partisan predilections guide the campaign trajectories of vote choice. The conventional wisdom suggests that these individual-level changes lead to an increasing match between vote choice and partisan predispositions. The line of reasoning pursued above gives rise to some doubts whether the evidence will support this notion or not. Finally we will combine the evidence about individual-level dynamics of attitudes and behavioral outcomes in order to get a first impression of the potential of the former to affect the latter. To this end we will compare the intra-subject variation of participatory and partisan attitudes between behaviorally stable und unstable respondents.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to the analysis of causal effects of individual-level indicators of campaign communication on turnout and vote choice during the campaign. Employing fixed-effects (FE) panel regression, the analysis aims at discerning to what extent campaign exposure and campaign events as perceived by voters account for variations of turnout and vote choice during the campaign. Put differently, we here address the question whether or not micro-level indicators of campaigns account for some of the aggregate-level trends in the campaign period. As the impact of campaign efforts on turnout and vote choice may depend on predispositions, analyses will address effects in selected subgroups of the electorate.

In the concluding chapter we will sum up the main findings on campaign dynamics and voters' campaign decision-making prior to the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections. In addition, we will put them into perspective, discuss limitations, and derive conclusions on voting behavior, the role of campaigns therein, and on the analysis of voting behavior. We also will provide suggestions for future research on the role of campaigns in affecting voting behavior in general.

7. Conclusion

In the 2009 and 2013 elections inter-election volatility reached higher levels than in any German federal election after unification. This observation squares well with the dealignment Germany – like other liberal democracies – has undergone for some decades. Campaign volatility, by contrast, did not peak in 2009 and 2013. As the campaigns that preceded these elections have a reputation for being uninspiring or even dull and boring (e.g., Tenscher 2013; Partheymüller 2014), it is tempting to consider them as a sufficient explanation for the absence of a sharp increase in volatility in the run-up to these elections. Accordingly the campaigns did not provide strong stimuli to produce considerable campaign volatility, even in an electorate that had undergone decades of dealignment and exhibited much inter-election volatility. Drawing this conclusion would be premature, however. By focusing on aggregate-level shifts of party shares it ignores that macro-level stability can conceal much individual-level volatility. If many voters did not stick to their initial vote intentions throughout the campaigns, there would be no reason to worry about contradicting findings about inter-election and campaign volatility. At the same time considerable individual-level volatility raises questions about its nature and causes. Proponents of the "minimal effects" hypothesis argue that campaign volatility follows well-known and easily predictable patterns in certain subsections of the electorate (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Finkel 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995; Campbell 2008). This widely shared view, however, builds on questionable assumptions, too. It overlooks that campaigns include numerous and various features (such as campaign efforts, political controversies, and events) that could influence voting behavior independent of political predilections. We thus suggested that the 2009 and 2013 German federal election campaigns could have triggered considerable individual-level volatility not in line with the "minimal effects" model.

To explore the prevalence and sources of campaign volatility we took a closer look at voter decision-making during these two campaigns. For the analysis we relied on data from seven-wave online panel surveys conducted in the run-up to the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections. In these surveys respondents were asked to provide information about campaign exposure, evaluations of campaign events and controversies, political attitudes, and electoral behavior. Building on this information we examined the evolution of these phenomena over the course of the campaigns and explored the impact of campaign features (as perceived by voters) on voting behavior. Theoretically the analysis builds on a simple attitudinal model of electoral behavior. It suggests that turnout and vote choice are driven by participatory and partisan attitudes, respectively. Campaign stimuli exert persuasive effects and feed into electoral behavior via these attitudinal mediators. Finally the model builds on the assumption that participatory and partisan predispositions shape (but do not determine) information processing and decision-making. This framework allows for both behavioral stability and change during election campaigns.

Our analytical approach provided multiple insights into how voters made up their minds during the 2009 and 2013 German federal election campaigns. Starting at the descriptive level, our results from multi-wave panel surveys indicate considerable intra-subject volatility that did not produce huge aggregate-level shifts.[13] Two out of three respondents stuck to their initial turnout intention until election day, one in three did not. Half of the voters did not at all change their party choice throughout the campaign period, whereas half of them exhibited some change. Moreover, intra-subject changes did not cancel each other out. Just tiny fractions of the 2009 and 2013 samples wavered about turnout. About one in ten entered and left the campaign with the same party preference after wavering. One in five voters was initially undecided and later made up his mind for one party. Another one in five ended up

[13] For methodological reasons we were unable to include vote choice for the then newly founded AfD in the 2013 analysis. As this party was a newcomer to the political scene, findings on the campaign dynamics of its vote in all likelihood would lend additional support to the conclusions presented in this book.

voting for a different party than the one initially preferred. In addition to partisan independents many party identifiers switched parties during the campaigns, too. This variation at the individual level implies that the campaign periods were significant for many voters' electoral decision-making. This finding squares well with the notion of a dealigned and volatile electorate.[14] Our analysis thus confirms that aggregate-level evidence can lead to false conclusions about campaign volatility. The reason is straightforward: Aggregate-level shifts require considerable individual-level volatility that also has to be lopsided. Scholars would therefore be well advised not to exclusively focus on aggregate-level evidence in analyses of campaign volatility.

The 2009 and 2013 campaigns appear to have included sufficiently interesting stimuli to make many voters switch in the run-up to the election. This finding raises the questions how the voters made up their mind during the campaigns and, more specifically, whether these processes square with the "minimal effects" model. To begin with, our results suggest that exposure to campaign communications was subject to the interplay of chronic political involvement and a supply-driven logic. As the campaigns unfolded increasing numbers of voters got exposed to partisan campaigns, watched televised debates, or used voting advice applications. Campaign communications reached voters at different levels of chronic political involvement, but people scoring high on the latter were more likely to get in touch with campaign communication than those scoring low. Although campaign-specific channels of communication were quite intrusive, they did not overcome differences in the inclination to get in touch with politics arising from chronic political involvement. In some cases this gap in campaign reception even widened as the campaign carried on. Exposure to campaign-specific channels of communication also did not go hand in hand with an increase in media reception. Campaign exposure thus appears not to have motivated voters to modify earlier (pre-

[14] Due to a lack of suitable data we do not know how the 2009 and 2013 elections compare to other German federal elections in terms of individual-level campaign volatility.

campaign) habits of media consumption. In line with Downs' (1957) classic thoughts, the upcoming elections hardly encouraged politically less involved citizens to search for election-specific information in order to make a good decision. While these findings square well with a long-held view in scholarship about campaign reception (e.g., Converse 1962; Zaller 1992), the data at hand do not allow us to determine whether our results are peculiar to these two cases or can be generalized to other, e.g., more exciting, campaigns.

The notion of reasoning motivated by partisanship implies considerable effects of partisan predilections on exposure to and responses to campaign communications (e.g., Bartels 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006; Lodge and Taber 2013). Our results lend moderate support to this idea. Party attachments made voters somewhat more likely to get exposed to congenial messages, but did not serve as a shield against information challenging preexisting partisan preferences. They exerted considerable effects on the evaluations of issues, political controversies, and events during the campaign. But even staunch party-followers did not evaluate failures of leading candidates of ideologically distant parties completely negatively nor did they fully endorse actions and proposals of their own party and its representatives. Given the moderately one-sided information intake it does not come as a surprise that partisan attitudes did not regularly become more polarized. The limited impact of partisan predilections on campaign exposure and responses to campaign communications may reflect factors like the intrusiveness of some campaign features, the lack of clear partisan cues, and the existence of non-partisan cues in campaign communication. Our findings suggest that reasoning motivated by partisanship is context-dependent (e.g., Bolsen et al. 2014) and thus we cannot take for granted that campaigns bring about strong partisan polarization of perceptions and attitudes.

During the campaigns the relationship between predispositions and electoral behavior underwent some changes. The participatory gap between highly and less involved citizens decreased by a small margin over the course of the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. When

compared to persons scoring low on participatory predispositions high scorers were already strongly mobilized when the campaigns set in. While less involved citizens provided a huge potential for mobilization, actually mobilizing them appears to have required stronger and more intrusive tools than those employed in the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. In terms of electoral participation at different levels of general political involvement these elections would have had virtually the same outcome if they had been held at the end of July rather than in September. Things look somewhat different when it comes to the role of party identification in shaping campaign dynamics of vote choice. Partisan predilections considerably affected initial voting preferences. In some cases this relationship remained unchanged over the course of the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. In other instances it became closer nicely squaring with the idea of a homing tendency. In still others it deteriorated because numerous party identifiers defected from their party. Our results thus challenge the "minimal effects" model that predicts increases in the correlation between party identification and vote choice across the board. The evidence rather suggests that the relationship between party identification and vote choice results from an indeterminate process of decision-making responsive to election campaigns and other contextual factors. Finding a strong relationship between party attachments and vote choice on election day thus is a bit more exciting in fact than just reiterating a truism.

Our analysis of the factors of individual-level turnout demonstrated that both participatory attitudes and specific campaign features affected electoral participation during the campaigns. Variation in participatory attitudes – like interest in the campaign, partisan alienation, and satisfaction with democracy – influenced mobilization and demobilization. The campaign periods somewhat tightened the cross-sectional relationship between turnout and these attitudes (which respond to campaign influences). Indicators of exposure to campaign-specific channels of communication, such as televised debates and VAAs, also exerted limited effects on turnout, whereas many other campaign features remained ineffective. These findings did

not systematically differ across levels of chronic political involvement. The failure of many indicators of campaign exposure to exert an effect on turnout probably reflects the fact that they did not provide strong participatory cues. They may also be incapable of encouraging less involved citizens to participate because they closely resembled "politics as usual." While keeping in mind the limited explanatory power of our models the analysis thus demonstrates the role of attitudinal precursors and – to a smaller extent – specific campaign stimuli in driving turnout at the individual level during campaigns.

Turning to vote choice, our analyses demonstrated partisan attitudes, like candidate and issue attitudes, account for some variation in party choice. These attitudes (which reflect numerous and various campaign influences) became more closely associated with vote choice as the campaign carried on. In some cases campaign features, as witnessed by voters, had an impact on vote choice as well. Partisan cues stemming from personal conversations with prospective voters of a given party and from VAAs made voters more inclined to vote for that party. Evaluations of candidate performance in high-profile media events like TV debates and highly publicized scandals (like Mr. Steinbrück's widely debated gesture in 2013) affected vote choice. This underscores the role of evaluations with clear-cut implications for voting because they allow voters to employ simple heuristics like "If you like the candidate's performance, vote for his or her party." Other campaign issues proved influential as well, though in nuanced ways and only in certain partisan subgroups. The evidence thus suggests how challenging it is to create electorally influential events and issues. It requires focusing the attention of large portions of the public on a topic and establishing widely shared interpretations. This is not easy to accomplish with a democratic public during campaigns. Still some issues and events appear to have this capacity. Like partisan attitudes specific campaign features affected voting behavior among both independents and party adherents. In some cases they made party identifiers more likely to vote for their identification party, while in others they encouraged defections.

These findings were also helpful to improve our understanding of the campaign dynamics of party support. Partisan attitudes that affect individual-level vote choice also can benefit or hurt a party's overall support. Given a candidate's decreasing popularity, e.g., the impact of attitudes toward him will be an electoral liability for his party. By contrast, a party will benefit at the polls from a candidate who gets more popular during the campaign. Specific campaign stimuli likewise leave their trace. A candidate's well-received performance in a TV debate, e.g., can accrue additional votes to a party, while a highly publicized gaffe of its leading representatives can cost it some votes. The 2013 evidence about voting for the SPD and the Green Party is suitable to illustrate this point. The SPD's electoral support benefited from Mr. Steinbrück's popularity, from the voters' increasing belief in the party's issue competence, and from Mr. Steinbrück's performance in the televised debate, while his controversial finger gesture cost the SPD some votes. The Green Party was hurt at the polls – inter alia – by increasing criticism of Mr. Trittin, decreasing confidence in the party's competence, Mr. Steinbrück's campaign performance, and the proposal to decree a "veggie day." Although we did not succeed in completely unraveling them, the analysis shone some light on the ingredients to the overall trends in party support during these campaigns.

Besides the campaign at large and specific campaign stimuli, the logic of the multi-party system proved to be an important contextual factor deserving attention in the analysis of campaign effects and voting behavior. It affected the patterns of electoral volatility as well as the impact of specific campaign stimuli on voting behavior in the electorate as a whole as well as in partisan subgroups. Multi-party systems trivially provide voters with more options for change than two-party systems do. Not all patterns of change are equally likely, however. Because voters evaluate ideologically adjacent parties quite similarly it is easier for them to switch between such parties than to ideologically distant parties. In the 2009 and 2013 federal German election campaigns vote intention switches between the CDU/CSU and FDP were quite popular, and voting for the SPD and the Green Party appeared to resemble the

functioning of communicating vessels. Some specific campaign features proved effective in bringing about these party changes among independents and party adherents. E.g., Mr. Steinbrück's performance appears to have helped the SPD to attract additional votes at the expense of the Green Party. Ideological proximity not only facilitates vote switching, but also appears to make parties fierce competitors for similar pools of voters. The latter have at their disposal a relatively straightforward option to respond to accomplishments, failures, and signals during campaigns, i.e. switching their vote between these adjacent parties. Moreover, the patterns of campaign volatility and campaign effects are sensitive to changes in inter-party relations. The changes in the results on voting for CDU/CSU and FDP in 2009 and 2013 are a case in point. In 2009 both parties campaigned for a CDU/CSU-FDP coalition and positive evaluations of Chancellor Merkel's performance in the TV debate accrued additional votes to the FDP. The latter effect did not emerge in 2013 probably because the relationship between the CDU/CSU and FDP had deteriorated. Finally, coalition preferences as an outgrowth of the multi-party system exerted some limited effects on campaign volatility. The impact of coalition preferences in turn depended on inter-party relations within the multi-party system. The logic of the German multi-party system thus engenders and channels campaign volatility. Taken together, with respect to the role of campaigns for voting behavior our results challenge the "minimal effects" model. The trajectories of party preferences did not follow law-like regularities, such as "party adherents become more likely to vote for their identification party." Even the 2009 and 2013 German federal election campaigns (which are widely considered as similarly boring and dull) produced clearly differing results. The adherents of the Green Party, e.g., became considerably less likely to vote for it during the 2013 campaign, but not in 2009. Rules of thumb thus perform rather poorly in predicting the evolution of party preferences among independents and party identifiers. In light of our other findings, this does not come as a surprise. Partisan predilections did not determine campaign perceptions. Campaign-specific factors made a difference for vote choice in various partisan subgroups,

and these effects were not identical in both campaigns. The two campaigns also differed in the flow of campaign communications that influenced voting behavior. In addition the German multi-party system made it difficult for the "minimal effects" model to succeed. Given many parties some of which are quite similar to each other in policy terms voters can respond sensitively to campaign-specific factors. Moreover partisan campaigns and relations between parties can change from one election to the next, thereby undermining the potential for regularities that equally well apply to numerous elections. We thus do not deny that predictions from the "minimal effects" model can succeed in predicting the evolution of vote choice over the course of a campaign. But we cannot take their success for granted because it depends on manifold factors (which are unknown at the start of a campaign). We thus suggest caution against rules of thumb about campaign dynamics of vote choice.

When it comes to turnout things look somewhat different. Our analysis yielded quite similar trajectories of turnout over the course of the 2009 and 2013 German federal election campaigns. The data at hand do not permit us to determine whether these patterns are peculiar to these two cases or also apply to others. Yet we suspect that findings on turnout are more likely to be generalizable than those on vote choice because campaign-specific factors played a smaller role for turnout than for vote choice and their impact varied slightly across elections. This squares well with the idea that some differences in campaigns are relevant for vote choice but not for turnout. While it matters a lot for vote choice whether a party attracts public attention because of accomplishments or scandals, for turnout it is important that increased attention stimulates electoral participation – the reasons for an increase in attention are not. This suggests that the evolution of turnout during campaigns is somewhat easier to predict than that of vote choice.

Our research demonstrated that there is much room to improve our understanding of the dynamics of electoral decision-making during campaigns and of conditioning effects arising from contextual factors. To fill this lacuna, it is warranted to examine the role of campaigns in

affecting voting behavior in numerous and various elections. In exploring this rich field, we believe that the methodology employed in this book would prove useful. To begin with, short-term multi-wave panel surveys are invaluable in exploring the dynamics of voter decision-making at the individual level during campaign periods. This technique reveals over-time variation in campaign exposure, political attitudes, and behavioral intentions (that otherwise would have gone unnoticed), thereby helping to avoid questionable conclusions. It would also prove fruitful to conceive of campaigns as including numerous and various features (such as campaign efforts, political controversies, and events). Each of them can exert distinct effects that – depending on their direction – may cancel each other out or not. Many effective campaign features may thus add up to a seemingly ineffective campaign. Replacing the holistic view and instead looking at specific campaign features may thus allow to better understand whether, how, and under which conditions the latter prove effective and how they interact to produce the overall outcome of a campaign.

The idea that campaign dynamics of voting behavior depend on context can stimulate additional studies. Our conclusions are based on the analysis of two election campaigns many found boring. This begs the question whether in more animated campaigns similar findings will emerge. In particular, the low level of partisan polarization may have made party attachments less powerful in shaping information processing and electoral decision-making. In a heated partisan campaign, party identifiers may prove less inclined to depart from the party they feel attached to and, if they defect, more likely to return to the herd. These specific findings are unlikely to travel across time and space. This limitation implies a rich agenda for comparative research on the dynamics of electoral decision-making during campaigns. Changes in potential coalitions, in the format of the party system, and in the degree of partisan polarization, e.g., may leave their traces on campaign effects and behavioral dynamics at the individual and aggregate level.

Despite its overall utility our model does not account for all variation in turnout and party choice. Indicators of campaign communication, e.g., fared not particularly well in explaining variation in turnout and in vote choice. This shows that we have to improve measurement and theory. Better indicators of more relevant concepts therefore should be included, and limitations arising from an attitudinal model of electoral behavior and from a lack of fine-grained measures of the content of information intake should be overcome. Future research thus may provide more evidence for the power of campaign efforts, political controversies, and events in the course of campaign periods. Our results suggest that effective campaign features focus public attention and establish widely shared interpretations. Events and issues that have the capacity to exert these effects may as well occur outside of campaign periods (e.g., Meyer and Schoen 2015). Scholars interested in understanding electoral behavior and election outcomes are thus well advised not to focus on the short campaigns, but widen the temporal scope of analysis (Preißinger and Schoen 2016).

As to methodology the analysis underscores the utility of data from multi-wave panel surveys with relatively short intervals between subsequent interviews. But of course our analysis still suffers from several methodological limitations. As already addressed, we relied on data from online surveys of respondents drawn from an online access-panel. Given this recruitment of respondents we have to be careful generalizing from our findings to the German electorate as a whole. Further limitations could arise from panel attrition bias, panel conditioning, random and systematic measurement error, and the lack of more suitable indicators. Some of these, including panel conditioning, are likely to be conducive to exaggerate the impact of campaign features on voting behavior. Random measurement error in all likelihood has the opposite effect. Lacking adequate information, however, we cannot do more here than acknowledging these problems and calling for even better data and rigorous tests.

In analyzing specific effects we relied on fixed-effects regression. Although this technique is better suited than other methods to capture causal effects it does by far not fix all problems.

We utilized data from biweekly surveys and interpreted concomitant changes in independent and dependent variables as causal effects. Leaving aside random and systematic measurement errors in dependent and independent variables, omitted-variable bias is also likely to raise severe issues. We could not include indicators for all potentially influential campaign stimuli and attitudinal mediators. Provided one of these omitted variables actually had an impact, the estimates for the included predictor variables are biased. This problem deserves mentioning because even the brightest scholars cannot anticipate all potentially relevant campaign events, controversies and other stimuli and include them in their panel surveys before they even happen. It is thus hard to believe that we will ever see models and analyses not suffering from this kind of omitted variable bias. This advises caution when drawing conclusions from these models.

The model specifications also raise issues of causal order. They presume that a change in the independent variable preceded and caused the change in the dependent variable. With the data at hand, however, we are incapable of examining whether this is valid. In some cases the causal order may be the other way around. Empirically addressing this issue would require regressions of changes in the dependent variables on changes in the independent variable in the preceding period. We could pursue this strategy with our data, but it would hardly capture the true causal process (Vaisey and Miles 2014). Given biweekly surveys this would imply that the independent variable affects the dependent variable about two weeks later. Since campaigns provide citizens with multiple stimuli every day in some instances this model specification may capture the effects we are interested in, but in many others it will not. The model of concomitant change is thus more reasonable, though it is far from perfect and raises consistency issues.[15] We therefore look forward to future research that provides survey data from campaign panels with much shorter intervals between panel waves. That would also

[15] This specification problem may also be a reason for the poor performance of attitudes in mediating the impact of campaign features on electoral behavior.

permit to detect changes in behavioral outcomes that go unnoticed in a panel survey with biweekly interviews and provide a more fine-grained representation of campaign volatility, starting with the descriptive level.

Future research may also widen the scope in conceptual and theoretical terms. To begin with, a necessary condition for effects on electoral behavior is that there actually is change in behavior. This assumption, which is not unique to this analysis, is debatable. It implies that voters who stuck to their initial party preference but were open to switch parties cannot exhibit any campaign effects. Accordingly some more subtle consequences of the campaign may have gone unnoticed. The findings about attitudinal dynamics among behaviorally stable voters indicate the potential relevance of this issue. Focusing on these citizens can also provide valuable insights into the processes of information processing and decision-making in a broader sense. Moreover, in accounting for behavioral changes the analysis builds on a simple attitudinal model of electoral behavior that focuses on persuasion as a key mechanism. Future research may as well include other effects (like priming, learning, and strategic voting) and widen the scope by taking into account reverse causation and reciprocal effects. Our analysis of turnout relies on the notion that decision-making about turnout is unrelated to decision-making on party choice. This might be reasonable for many voters, but not for all. For citizens who decide during the campaign whether or not to turn out party-specific considerations are particularly important. In order to avoid flawed conclusions we therefore suggest including partisan components in models of turnout. In a similar vein, we would suggest including additional concepts that enable scholars to analyze the processes of electoral decision-making in a more fine-grained way. Leaving aside the complexities arising from the two-vote system in Germany, voters also may differ in their political motivation and in perceptions of the decision situation, e.g., the set of parties from which to choose. Finally, disaggregating processes on the time dimension may permit scholars to identify time-bound effects of campaign efforts.

Future research along these lines may provide many valuable insights into voter decision-making during campaigns we did not study in this book. But the analytical approach proposed here is a useful step toward integrative analyses demonstrating how much specific campaign features contribute to behavioral dynamics at the individual and aggregate levels during campaigns. As to methodology short-term multi-wave panel surveys proved invaluable for the analysis of campaign volatility and effects. In substantive terms we are quite confident that future research will confirm, rather than challenge, the main conclusions of our analysis. In our view voting behavior results from the interplay of predispositions with new information during campaigns. It is thus hard to tell at the start of a campaign how individual voters will respond to it, which behavioral trajectories they will follow, and how they will finally decide on election day. As the degrees of freedom become more numerous, the process becomes more indeterminate. Rules of thumb about campaign effects and behavioral trajectories may thus perform considerably better in stable two-party systems than in multi-party systems which are in flux. By being open-minded enough to respond to campaign communication by deviating from their predilections voters provide a fruitful field for future research – and a role model for scholars in the field.

7. Conclusion

In the 2009 and 2013 elections inter-election volatility reached higher levels than in any German federal election after unification. This observation squares well with the dealignment Germany – like other liberal democracies – has undergone for some decades. Campaign volatility, by contrast, did not peak in 2009 and 2013. As the campaigns that preceded these elections have a reputation for being uninspiring or even dull and boring (e.g., Tenscher 2013; Partheymüller 2014), it is tempting to consider them as a sufficient explanation for the absence of a sharp increase in volatility in the run-up to these elections. Accordingly the campaigns did not provide strong stimuli to produce considerable campaign volatility, even in an electorate that had undergone decades of dealignment and exhibited much inter-election volatility. Drawing this conclusion would be premature, however. By focusing on aggregate-level shifts of party shares it ignores that macro-level stability can conceal much individual-level volatility. If many voters did not stick to their initial vote intentions throughout the campaigns, there would be no reason to worry about contradicting findings about inter-election and campaign volatility. At the same time considerable individual-level volatility raises questions about its nature and causes. Proponents of the "minimal effects" hypothesis argue that campaign volatility follows well-known and easily predictable patterns in certain subsections of the electorate (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Finkel 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995; Campbell 2008). This widely shared view, however, builds on questionable assumptions, too. It overlooks that campaigns include numerous and various features (such as campaign efforts, political controversies, and events) that could influence voting behavior independent of political predilections. We thus suggested that the 2009 and 2013 German federal election campaigns could have triggered considerable individual-level volatility not in line with the "minimal effects" model.

To explore the prevalence and sources of campaign volatility we took a closer look at voter decision-making during these two campaigns. For the analysis we relied on data from seven-

wave online panel surveys conducted in the run-up to the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections. In these surveys respondents were asked to provide information about campaign exposure, evaluations of campaign events and controversies, political attitudes, and electoral behavior. Building on this information we examined the evolution of these phenomena over the course of the campaigns and explored the impact of campaign features (as perceived by voters) on voting behavior. Theoretically the analysis builds on a simple attitudinal model of electoral behavior. It suggests that turnout and vote choice are driven by participatory and partisan attitudes, respectively. Campaign stimuli exert persuasive effects and feed into electoral behavior via these attitudinal mediators. Finally the model builds on the assumption that participatory and partisan predispositions shape (but do not determine) information processing and decision-making. This framework allows for both behavioral stability and change during election campaigns.

Our analytical approach provided multiple insights into how voters made up their minds during the 2009 and 2013 German federal election campaigns. Starting at the descriptive level, our results from multi-wave panel surveys indicate considerable intra-subject volatility that did not produce huge aggregate-level shifts.[16] Two out of three respondents stuck to their initial turnout intention until election day, one in three did not. Half of the voters did not at all change their party choice throughout the campaign period, whereas half of them exhibited some change. Moreover, intra-subject changes did not cancel each other out. Just tiny fractions of the 2009 and 2013 samples wavered about turnout. About one in ten entered and left the campaign with the same party preference after wavering. One in five voters was initially undecided and later made up his mind for one party. Another one in five ended up voting for a different party than the one initially preferred. In addition to partisan independents many party identifiers switched parties during the campaigns, too. This variation

[16] For methodological reasons we were unable to include vote choice for the then newly founded AfD in the 2013 analysis. As this party was a newcomer to the political scene, findings on the campaign dynamics of its vote in all likelihood would lend additional support to the conclusions presented in this book.

at the individual level implies that the campaign periods were significant for many voters' electoral decision-making. This finding squares well with the notion of a dealigned and volatile electorate.[17] Our analysis thus confirms that aggregate-level evidence can lead to false conclusions about campaign volatility. The reason is straightforward: Aggregate-level shifts require considerable individual-level volatility that also has to be lopsided. Scholars would therefore be well advised not to exclusively focus on aggregate-level evidence in analyses of campaign volatility.

The 2009 and 2013 campaigns appear to have included sufficiently interesting stimuli to make many voters switch in the run-up to the election. This finding raises the questions how the voters made up their mind during the campaigns and, more specifically, whether these processes square with the "minimal effects" model. To begin with, our results suggest that exposure to campaign communications was subject to the interplay of chronic political involvement and a supply-driven logic. As the campaigns unfolded increasing numbers of voters got exposed to partisan campaigns, watched televised debates, or used voting advice applications. Campaign communications reached voters at different levels of chronic political involvement, but people scoring high on the latter were more likely to get in touch with campaign communication than those scoring low. Although campaign-specific channels of communication were quite intrusive, they did not overcome differences in the inclination to get in touch with politics arising from chronic political involvement. In some cases this gap in campaign reception even widened as the campaign carried on. Exposure to campaign-specific channels of communication also did not go hand in hand with an increase in media reception. Campaign exposure thus appears not to have motivated voters to modify earlier (pre-campaign) habits of media consumption. In line with Downs' (1957) classic thoughts, the upcoming elections hardly encouraged politically less involved citizens to search for election-

[17] Due to a lack of suitable data we do not know how the 2009 and 2013 elections compare to other German federal elections in terms of individual-level campaign volatility.

specific information in order to make a good decision. While these findings square well with a long-held view in scholarship about campaign reception (e.g., Converse 1962; Zaller 1992), the data at hand do not allow us to determine whether our results are peculiar to these two cases or can be generalized to other, e.g., more exciting, campaigns.

The notion of reasoning motivated by partisanship implies considerable effects of partisan predilections on exposure to and responses to campaign communications (e.g., Bartels 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006; Lodge and Taber 2013). Our results lend moderate support to this idea. Party attachments made voters somewhat more likely to get exposed to congenial messages, but did not serve as a shield against information challenging preexisting partisan preferences. They exerted considerable effects on the evaluations of issues, political controversies, and events during the campaign. But even staunch party-followers did not evaluate failures of leading candidates of ideologically distant parties completely negatively nor did they fully endorse actions and proposals of their own party and its representatives. Given the moderately one-sided information intake it does not come as a surprise that partisan attitudes did not regularly become more polarized. The limited impact of partisan predilections on campaign exposure and responses to campaign communications may reflect factors like the intrusiveness of some campaign features, the lack of clear partisan cues, and the existence of non-partisan cues in campaign communication. Our findings suggest that reasoning motivated by partisanship is context-dependent (e.g., Bolsen et al. 2014) and thus we cannot take for granted that campaigns bring about strong partisan polarization of perceptions and attitudes.

During the campaigns the relationship between predispositions and electoral behavior underwent some changes. The participatory gap between highly and less involved citizens decreased by a small margin over the course of the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. When compared to persons scoring low on participatory predispositions high scorers were already strongly mobilized when the campaigns set in. While less involved citizens provided a huge

potential for mobilization, actually mobilizing them appears to have required stronger and more intrusive tools than those employed in the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. In terms of electoral participation at different levels of general political involvement these elections would have had virtually the same outcome if they had been held at the end of July rather than in September. Things look somewhat different when it comes to the role of party identification in shaping campaign dynamics of vote choice. Partisan predilections considerably affected initial voting preferences. In some cases this relationship remained unchanged over the course of the 2009 and 2013 campaigns. In other instances it became closer nicely squaring with the idea of a homing tendency. In still others it deteriorated because numerous party identifiers defected from their party. Our results thus challenge the "minimal effects" model that predicts increases in the correlation between party identification and vote choice across the board. The evidence rather suggests that the relationship between party identification and vote choice results from an indeterminate process of decision-making responsive to election campaigns and other contextual factors. Finding a strong relationship between party attachments and vote choice on election day thus is a bit more exciting in fact than just reiterating a truism.

Our analysis of the factors of individual-level turnout demonstrated that both participatory attitudes and specific campaign features affected electoral participation during the campaigns. Variation in participatory attitudes – like interest in the campaign, partisan alienation, and satisfaction with democracy – influenced mobilization and demobilization. The campaign periods somewhat tightened the cross-sectional relationship between turnout and these attitudes (which respond to campaign influences). Indicators of exposure to campaign-specific channels of communication, such as televised debates and VAAs, also exerted limited effects on turnout, whereas many other campaign features remained ineffective. These findings did not systematically differ across levels of chronic political involvement. The failure of many indicators of campaign exposure to exert an effect on turnout probably reflects the fact that

they did not provide strong participatory cues. They may also be incapable of encouraging less involved citizens to participate because they closely resembled "politics as usual." While keeping in mind the limited explanatory power of our models the analysis thus demonstrates the role of attitudinal precursors and – to a smaller extent – specific campaign stimuli in driving turnout at the individual level during campaigns.

Turning to vote choice, our analyses demonstrated partisan attitudes, like candidate and issue attitudes, account for some variation in party choice. These attitudes (which reflect numerous and various campaign influences) became more closely associated with vote choice as the campaign carried on. In some cases campaign features, as witnessed by voters, had an impact on vote choice as well. Partisan cues stemming from personal conversations with prospective voters of a given party and from VAAs made voters more inclined to vote for that party. Evaluations of candidate performance in high-profile media events like TV debates and highly publicized scandals (like Mr. Steinbrück's widely debated gesture in 2013) affected vote choice. This underscores the role of evaluations with clear-cut implications for voting because they allow voters to employ simple heuristics like "If you like the candidate's performance, vote for his or her party." Other campaign issues proved influential as well, though in nuanced ways and only in certain partisan subgroups. The evidence thus suggests how challenging it is to create electorally influential events and issues. It requires focusing the attention of large portions of the public on a topic and establishing widely shared interpretations. This is not easy to accomplish with a democratic public during campaigns. Still some issues and events appear to have this capacity. Like partisan attitudes specific campaign features affected voting behavior among both independents and party adherents. In some cases they made party identifiers more likely to vote for their identification party, while in others they encouraged defections.

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hurt a party's overall support. Given a candidate's decreasing popularity, e.g., the impact of attitudes toward him will be an electoral liability for his party. By contrast, a party will benefit at the polls from a candidate who gets more popular during the campaign. Specific campaign stimuli likewise leave their trace. A candidate's well-received performance in a TV debate, e.g., can accrue additional votes to a party, while a highly publicized gaffe of its leading representatives can cost it some votes. The 2013 evidence about voting for the SPD and the Green Party is suitable to illustrate this point. The SPD's electoral support benefited from Mr. Steinbrück's popularity, from the voters' increasing belief in the party's issue competence, and from Mr. Steinbrück's performance in the televised debate, while his controversial finger gesture cost the SPD some votes. The Green Party was hurt at the polls – inter alia – by increasing criticism of Mr. Trittin, decreasing confidence in the party's competence, Mr. Steinbrück's campaign performance, and the proposal to decree a "veggie day." Although we did not succeed in completely unraveling them, the analysis shone some light on the ingredients to the overall trends in party support during these campaigns.

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multi-party system made it difficult for the "minimal effects" model to succeed. Given many parties some of which are quite similar to each other in policy terms voters can respond sensitively to campaign-specific factors. Moreover partisan campaigns and relations between parties can change from one election to the next, thereby undermining the potential for regularities that equally well apply to numerous elections. We thus do not deny that predictions from the "minimal effects" model can succeed in predicting the evolution of vote choice over the course of a campaign. But we cannot take their success for granted because it depends on manifold factors (which are unknown at the start of a campaign). We thus suggest caution against rules of thumb about campaign dynamics of vote choice.

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Our research demonstrated that there is much room to improve our understanding of the dynamics of electoral decision-making during campaigns and of conditioning effects arising from contextual factors. To fill this lacuna, it is warranted to examine the role of campaigns in affecting voting behavior in numerous and various elections. In exploring this rich field, we believe that the methodology employed in this book would prove useful. To begin with, short-

term multi-wave panel surveys are invaluable in exploring the dynamics of voter decision-making at the individual level during campaign periods. This technique reveals over-time variation in campaign exposure, political attitudes, and behavioral intentions (that otherwise would have gone unnoticed), thereby helping to avoid questionable conclusions. It would also prove fruitful to conceive of campaigns as including numerous and various features (such as campaign efforts, political controversies, and events). Each of them can exert distinct effects that – depending on their direction – may cancel each other out or not. Many effective campaign features may thus add up to a seemingly ineffective campaign. Replacing the holistic view and instead looking at specific campaign features may thus allow to better understand whether, how, and under which conditions the latter prove effective and how they interact to produce the overall outcome of a campaign.

The idea that campaign dynamics of voting behavior depend on context can stimulate additional studies. Our conclusions are based on the analysis of two election campaigns many found boring. This begs the question whether in more animated campaigns similar findings will emerge. In particular, the low level of partisan polarization may have made party attachments less powerful in shaping information processing and electoral decision-making. In a heated partisan campaign, party identifiers may prove less inclined to depart from the party they feel attached to and, if they defect, more likely to return to the herd. These specific findings are unlikely to travel across time and space. This limitation implies a rich agenda for comparative research on the dynamics of electoral decision-making during campaigns. Changes in potential coalitions, in the format of the party system, and in the degree of partisan polarization, e.g., may leave their traces on campaign effects and behavioral dynamics at the individual and aggregate level.

Despite its overall utility our model does not account for all variation in turnout and party choice. Indicators of campaign communication, e.g., fared not particularly well in explaining variation in turnout and in vote choice. This shows that we have to improve measurement and

theory. Better indicators of more relevant concepts therefore should be included, and limitations arising from an attitudinal model of electoral behavior and from a lack of fine-grained measures of the content of information intake should be overcome. Future research thus may provide more evidence for the power of campaign efforts, political controversies, and events in the course of campaign periods. Our results suggest that effective campaign features focus public attention and establish widely shared interpretations. Events and issues that have the capacity to exert these effects may as well occur outside of campaign periods (e.g., Meyer and Schoen 2015). Scholars interested in understanding electoral behavior and election outcomes are thus well advised not to focus on the short campaigns, but widen the temporal scope of analysis (Preißinger and Schoen 2016).

As to methodology the analysis underscores the utility of data from multi-wave panel surveys with relatively short intervals between subsequent interviews. But of course our analysis still suffers from several methodological limitations. As already addressed, we relied on data from online surveys of respondents drawn from an online access-panel. Given this recruitment of respondents we have to be careful generalizing from our findings to the German electorate as a whole. Further limitations could arise from panel attrition bias, panel conditioning, random and systematic measurement error, and the lack of more suitable indicators. Some of these, including panel conditioning, are likely to be conducive to exaggerate the impact of campaign features on voting behavior. Random measurement error in all likelihood has the opposite effect. Lacking adequate information, however, we cannot do more here than acknowledging these problems and calling for even better data and rigorous tests.

In analyzing specific effects we relied on fixed-effects regression. Although this technique is better suited than other methods to capture causal effects it does by far not fix all problems. We utilized data from biweekly surveys and interpreted concomitant changes in independent and dependent variables as causal effects. Leaving aside random and systematic measurement errors in dependent and independent variables, omitted-variable bias is also likely to raise

severe issues. We could not include indicators for all potentially influential campaign stimuli and attitudinal mediators. Provided one of these omitted variables actually had an impact, the estimates for the included predictor variables are biased. This problem deserves mentioning because even the brightest scholars cannot anticipate all potentially relevant campaign events, controversies and other stimuli and include them in their panel surveys before they even happen. It is thus hard to believe that we will ever see models and analyses not suffering from this kind of omitted variable bias. This advises caution when drawing conclusions from these models.

The model specifications also raise issues of causal order. They presume that a change in the independent variable preceded and caused the change in the dependent variable. With the data at hand, however, we are incapable of examining whether this is valid. In some cases the causal order may be the other way around. Empirically addressing this issue would require regressions of changes in the dependent variables on changes in the independent variable in the preceding period. We could pursue this strategy with our data, but it would hardly capture the true causal process (Vaisey and Miles 2014). Given biweekly surveys this would imply that the independent variable affects the dependent variable about two weeks later. Since campaigns provide citizens with multiple stimuli every day in some instances this model specification may capture the effects we are interested in, but in many others it will not. The model of concomitant change is thus more reasonable, though it is far from perfect and raises consistency issues.[18] We therefore look forward to future research that provides survey data from campaign panels with much shorter intervals between panel waves. That would also permit to detect changes in behavioral outcomes that go unnoticed in a panel survey with biweekly interviews and provide a more fine-grained representation of campaign volatility, starting with the descriptive level.

[18] This specification problem may also be a reason for the poor performance of attitudes in mediating the impact of campaign features on electoral behavior.

Future research may also widen the scope in conceptual and theoretical terms. To begin with, a necessary condition for effects on electoral behavior is that there actually is change in behavior. This assumption, which is not unique to this analysis, is debatable. It implies that voters who stuck to their initial party preference but were open to switch parties cannot exhibit any campaign effects. Accordingly some more subtle consequences of the campaign may have gone unnoticed. The findings about attitudinal dynamics among behaviorally stable voters indicate the potential relevance of this issue. Focusing on these citizens can also provide valuable insights into the processes of information processing and decision-making in a broader sense. Moreover, in accounting for behavioral changes the analysis builds on a simple attitudinal model of electoral behavior that focuses on persuasion as a key mechanism. Future research may as well include other effects (like priming, learning, and strategic voting) and widen the scope by taking into account reverse causation and reciprocal effects. Our analysis of turnout relies on the notion that decision-making about turnout is unrelated to decision-making on party choice. This might be reasonable for many voters, but not for all. For citizens who decide during the campaign whether or not to turn out party-specific considerations are particularly important. In order to avoid flawed conclusions we therefore suggest including partisan components in models of turnout. In a similar vein, we would suggest including additional concepts that enable scholars to analyze the processes of electoral decision-making in a more fine-grained way. Leaving aside the complexities arising from the two-vote system in Germany, voters also may differ in their political motivation and in perceptions of the decision situation, e.g., the set of parties from which to choose. Finally, disaggregating processes on the time dimension may permit scholars to identify time-bound effects of campaign efforts.

Future research along these lines may provide many valuable insights into voter decision-making during campaigns we did not study in this book. But the analytical approach proposed here is a useful step toward integrative analyses demonstrating how much specific campaign

features contribute to behavioral dynamics at the individual and aggregate levels during campaigns. As to methodology short-term multi-wave panel surveys proved invaluable for the analysis of campaign volatility and effects. In substantive terms we are quite confident that future research will confirm, rather than challenge, the main conclusions of our analysis. In our view voting behavior results from the interplay of predispositions with new information during campaigns. It is thus hard to tell at the start of a campaign how individual voters will respond to it, which behavioral trajectories they will follow, and how they will finally decide on election day. As the degrees of freedom become more numerous, the process becomes more indeterminate. Rules of thumb about campaign effects and behavioral trajectories may thus perform considerably better in stable two-party systems than in multi-party systems which are in flux. By being open-minded enough to respond to campaign communication by deviating from their predilections voters provide a fruitful field for future research – and a role model for scholars in the field.