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### **It's not always the campaign**

Explaining inter-election switching in Germany, 2009-2013

Maria Preißinger

Harald Schoen

## Abstract

Inter-election volatility is essential for the functioning of democracy. In accounting for the underlying processes prior research focused on campaign volatility, while neglecting between-campaign volatility. This neglect is not warranted however. Between-campaign periods may include multiple events that set the stage for electoral competition and shape citizens' political cognitions, attitudes and party preference until the next election. Depending on the flow of political communication, between-campaign periods may considerably contribute to inter-election volatility. Drawing on a data set from an intra- and inter-election panel survey conducted in the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections, the evidence suggests that between-campaign changes in party preferences and political attitudes were at least as important as within-campaign changes in contributing to inter-election switching. Moreover, political involvement is less powerful in conditioning electoral volatility than suggested by conventional wisdom. The analysis thus provides a first step toward a general account of inter-election volatility.

Keywords: inter-election switching, electoral volatility, campaign switching, campaign effects, vote switching

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In an era of dealigned and volatile electorates, inter-election vote switching (e.g., Dalton et al. 2000; Schoen 2003) as well as campaign volatility have attracted much scholarly attention (e.g. Fournier et al. 2001; Gopoian and Hadjiharalambous 1994; Kogen and Gottfried 2012; Plischke 2014). Although referring to different time frames, prior research treated switching within and between elections as closely related phenomena. Both kinds of volatility are similarly connected to voter characteristics like political involvement (Granberg and Holmberg 1991; Rattinger and Wiegand 2014; Granberg and Holmberg 1990; Lachat 2007, pp. 124–132).<sup>2</sup> What is more, in an influential line of reasoning intra-campaign volatility is the main source of inter-election volatility. As Converse (1962, p. 579) puts it: “individuals who vacillate in forming their voting decisions during the campaign period are likely to contribute disproportionately to such inter-election shifts” (see also Lachat 2007, p. 111). By implication, between-campaign volatility is deemed virtually irrelevant for inter-election volatility (but see Dassonneville 2012, 2014). In this vein, between-campaign periods are “lengthy lulls” (e.g. Dreyer 1971, p. 553) which lead to changes in party preference that prove irrelevant for the next election because “electoral change cancels rather than cumulates, even at the level of individuals” (Miller et al. 1990, p. 10). This fits nicely with theories of campaign effects suggesting that campaigns serve as a means of bringing vote choices back in line with long-standing predispositions (Finkel 1993; Finkel and Schrott 1995; Gelman and King 1993; Campbell 2008), thereby giving rise to a “homing tendency” (Butler and Stokes 1974, p. 271). Likewise, the literature on the timing of electoral decision-making (e.g., Fournier et al. 2004; Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller 2012) treats voters who report having made up their mind before the campaign as if they did not switch party preferences. By

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Given this state of affairs, it is tempting to disregard the specific time period when studying stability and change in party preference (Bakker et al. 2016; Kuhn 2009; van der Meer et al. 2014; van der Meer et al. 2012).

conflating between-campaign changes with non-changing, this strategy dismisses periods between campaigns as irrelevant for inter-election switching.

While it is beyond any doubt that campaign-volatility contributes to inter-election volatility, it is not reasonable to treat between-campaign periods as irrelevant for inter-election volatility. We argue that conventional wisdom builds on overly simple assumptions about the streams of political communication during and between campaign periods and voters' responsiveness to it. To be sure, campaigns provide voters with intense and obtrusive communication intended to affect vote choice (e.g., Brady et al. 2006). However, streams of political communication between campaigns may also exert lasting effects on voters' party preferences until the next election. For example, in the period between campaigns political entrepreneurs may form new parties as well as existing parties may shift policy positions or replace leaders. These between-campaign changes set the stage for the next election because parties are unlikely to undo them during the campaign. By implication, voters who switch party preferences in response to these events between campaigns are likely to stick to their new party preference until Election Day. Depending on the streams of political communication, between-campaign periods could thus play an important role in contributing to inter-election switching.

In the remainder of this paper, we discuss the role of campaign and non-campaign periods in contributing to electoral volatility from a theoretical perspective. Building on this discussion, we derive testable hypotheses on inter-election switching from the 2009 to the 2013 German federal elections. As in the period between the 2009 and the 2013 campaigns new issues and parties emerged and parties shifted policy positions, we expect between-campaign changes to contribute considerably to inter-election switching. Relying on data from an intra- and inter-election multi-wave panel survey conducted on behalf of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), we demonstrate that for voters at different levels of political involvement between-campaign changes in party preferences contribute considerably to inter-election switching in the 2009-to-2013 period. The evidence also indicates that between-campaign

changes in candidate and issue attitudes, in addition to within-campaign changes, considerably account for inter-election changes in party choice. We conclude by summing up key findings and discussing implications and limitations.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

For the analysis of inter-election, intra-campaign, and between-campaign volatility we build on a model of voting behavior in which attitudes toward issues, candidates, and other features feed into vote choice (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960). These attitudes respond to changes in the real world and ultimately lead to changes in voting behavior. In this setup, the issue of whether inter-election volatility derives from intra-campaign or between-campaign volatility boils down to the question in which period the political environment changes and whether voters perceive as well as respond to these changes. Because campaigns provide many stimuli that may give rise to switches in party preference in the run-up to Election Day it is straightforward to expect that campaign volatility contributes to inter-election volatility (e.g., Converse 1962; Miller et al. 1990; Lachat 2007).

At the same time, it is not reasonable to dismiss between-campaign periods as “lengthy lulls” (e.g. Dreyer 1971, p. 553) that do not contribute to inter-election volatility. Rather, they comprise manifold events that provoke obtrusive streams of communication. Moreover, some of these events are likely to durably change the options from which voters choose and thus have a lasting impact on voters’ party preference until the next election. To begin, new parties competing for votes are likely to be launched before, rather than during, campaigns. In addition, existing parties establish manifestos before the campaign starts (e.g., Däubler 2012; Dolezal et al. 2012). In some cases, they shift policy positions as a response to defeat in the previous election or other events (e.g., Janda et al. 1995; Meyer and Schoen 2015). Likewise, parties replace leaders and nominate candidates before the start of a campaign. In this vein, voters appreciating a party’s revised program or its new leadership may switch to it between

the campaigns. These between-campaign changes set the stage for the next election because parties are unlikely to re-change positions and personal during the campaign. By implication, voters who switch party preferences during the between-campaign period are likely to stick to their new party preference until Election Day. Similar shifts may result from voter responses to the performance of incumbent government and opposition parties between campaigns including accomplishments and scandals (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier and Franklin 1995). At the same time, performance is somewhat more variable and may thus not give rise to enduring changes in party preference. In any case, between-campaign periods comprise many events that set the stage for the campaign and might contribute to inter-election volatility.

Prior research suggests that political involvement may moderate voter responses to changes in the environment (Zaller 1992). Highly involved voters are likely to witness much political information but are not eager to respond to them by changing attitudes or party preference because of motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2013). Although partisan motivated reasoning is important, it does by far not predetermine voters' responses to new information (Redlawsk et al. 2010; Schoen et al. 2016). Even highly involved voters may thus respond to events between campaigns by shifting party preferences. Lowly involved voters, by contrast, will be easily swayed by new information but are unlikely to encounter new information in the first place (Zaller 1992). As many of the above-mentioned events, such as changes in parties' leaderships and programs, major accomplishments and failures of incumbents, and the launch of promising parties are likely to be broadly and obtrusively covered by mass media, we argue that even lowly involved voters will respond to these changes, thereby calling prior research into question (Dassonneville 2014). Still we have to keep in mind that some voters, especially at lower levels of political involvement, may not bother coming up with a vote choice between campaigns, although their party preference changed, because they do not feel the need to form a vote intention when Election Day is far away (Enns and Richman 2013).

Taken together, it is an oversimplification to assume that inter-election volatility derives from campaign volatility but not from between-campaign volatility. Both periods may provide streams of communication that make lowly and highly involved voters switch parties. Inter-election changes may thus be fueled by changes in both periods. The relative contribution of between- and within-campaign volatility to inter-election volatility thus depends on the specific contents of communication in both periods. Put differently, between-campaign periods may be more important in bringing about changes in vote choice than previously suggested.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the role of specific contents in conditioning the contribution of between- and within-campaign volatility to inter-election volatility. Rather, we focus on a case that is suited to test the claim that provided suitable events between-campaign and within-campaign changes contribute to inter-election volatility among voters at different levels of political involvement. This case is the 2009-to-2013 legislative period in Germany. During this period economic conditions in Germany improved considerably from the international economic crisis in 2008 (Mader 2014). We expect larger changes in economic evaluations between the campaigns than within the 2013 campaign and therefore larger effects of these changes on inter-election switching. Relying on the incumbent hypothesis (Key 1966), we anticipate positive effects of increasing economic confidence on switching toward the major governing party CDU/CSU. Turning to candidates, in both 2009 and 2013 incumbent chancellor and CDU-leader Angela Merkel ran for office. Because she was not involved in major gaffes during the 2013 campaign, but was a key figure in German politics in the 2009-to-2013 legislative period, attitudes toward her are likely to have undergone larger changes between the campaigns than within the few weeks of the 2013 campaign and to have contributed to inter-election switching. By contrast, the SPD changed chancellor candidates from 2009 and 2013. Moreover, the SPD candidate Peer Steinbrück provoked some surprises and gaffes during the 2013 campaign (Mader 2014). As far as

attitudes toward Steinbrück are considered, between-campaign and within-campaign change might both contribute to inter-election switching.

During the 2009-to-2013 period voters faced considerable changes in party supply. Starting in 2010, a new issue arose revolving around the question of whether Germany should grant highly indebted Euro-zone countries financial help (Bechtel et al. 2014). In response to the widely shared pro-Euro consensus of parliamentary parties (Zimmermann 2014), in early 2013 the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) was founded to voice opposition to this stance and was quickly considered as viable (Schmitt-Beck 2014). Because the financial-aid issue and the AfD emerged well before the 2013 campaign, we expect between-campaign changes in attitudes toward the issue and the AfD to be larger and to have a larger effect on inter-election switching than within-campaign changes. Moreover, the nuclear disaster in Fukushima 2011 made the German public even more skeptical of nuclear energy and the CDU/CSU gave up its long-held pro-nuclear power stance. This shift decreased the saliency of the nuclear power issue (Meyer and Schoen 2015) and opposition to nuclear power no longer served as an impediment to voting for CDU/CSU. Given no viable party pleading for nuclear power, supporters of nuclear energy who considered switching away from CDU/CSU could only abstain. In any case, changes between the campaigns should prove larger and more influential than those in the 2013 campaign.

In summary, the period between the 2009 and the 2013 campaigns comprised several events that may have affected voters' attitudes and party preferences. We thus expect larger attitude changes between the campaigns than within the 2013 campaign. Likewise, attitude change in the between-campaign period should be more powerful than within-campaign change in explaining inter-election switching. Building on this, we expect that between-campaign switching contributed a considerable portion to inter-election volatility. Moreover, political involvement should not affect the prevalence of between-campaign switching.



### 3. Data and Methodology

For our analysis, we draw on data from a panel data set collected on behalf of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES).<sup>3</sup> Both in 2009 and 2013, seven-wave short-term online panel surveys were conducted, with six pre- and one post-election wave (Rattinger et al. 2015a; Rattinger et al. 2015b). Respondents were recruited from an online access panel using a quota sampling procedure (Steinbrecher et al. 2015). 4,552 respondents started the panel survey in 2009. As a special feature of the 2013 campaign panel, respondents of the 2009 panel, who had participated four waves or more, were no panel mutants, and were still members of the employed online access panel (N=1,527) got invited again. 1,030 of those people took part in the 2013 campaign panel survey as well (Rattinger et al. 2014a, 2014b). These respondents enable us to analyze the interplay of between- and within-campaign changes in leading to inter-election volatility in the 2009-to-2013 period.

Exploring this interplay requires measures of inter-election, between-campaign, and campaign volatility within individuals which in turn begs the question how to distinguish campaigns from non-campaign periods. Capturing the dividing line proves somewhat tricky because German election law does not provide a clear marker of the campaign start. Moreover, German state elections are staggered over time and provide parties with incentives for permanent campaigning. These problems notwithstanding, it appears reasonable to treat the first wave of the 2013 panel survey as capturing vote intentions before the start of the campaign. This wave was conducted some 12 to 14 weeks before Election Day and thus well before the ‘hot’ phase of the campaign comprising parties’ rallies and events such as the TV debate (see Figure 1). This decision receives additional backing from the fact that the most recent state election had taken place some eight months before the federal election and two state elections took place one week before the federal election and on Election Day. Although

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<sup>3</sup> GLES is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

far from perfect, the first wave of the 2013 panel survey appears to be a reasonable source for information about pre-campaign preferences.

- Figure 1 about here -

Building on this line of reasoning, we created three kinds of variables intended to capture stability and change in vote choice (intention) within different time periods: between the 2009 and 2013 campaigns, within the 2013 campaign, and between both elections. Between-campaign switching is measured by comparing vote choice in the post-election wave of the 2009 survey and the vote intention in the first wave of the 2013 survey. Stable voters are coded '0' whereas switching from non-voting to a party and vice versa as well as switching from a party to "don't know" are coded as changes (=1). We measured inter-election switching in an analogous way by comparing the responses in the post-election waves in the 2009 and the 2013 panel surveys. We also created variables that indicate the direction of inter-election switching. Due to small numbers of voters of small parties, we focused on switching toward the major parties CDU/CSU and SPD. To this end, we measure if someone reported voting for CDU/CSU or SPD in the post-election interview in 2013 and excluded all voters that had already voted for this party in the prior election.

Campaign switching is measured by comparing the vote intentions voiced in each wave of the 2013 panel. Campaign switchers are respondents who switched their vote intention at least once in the course of the campaign. We chose this criterion because this was the modal category of switches (about 40% of all switchers). In order to avoid a sharp decrease in the number of observations, we treated missing values in the following way: If a single missing value was embedded within two valid observations, we simply ignored the missing value in between and compared the embedding valid observations. Consider, e.g., a person who reported an intention to vote for CDU in the first three panel waves, had a missing value in

wave 4 and afterwards reported to vote for FDP. Although one value is missing in between we know that this person switched at least once. While this decision does not require any assumption, we need some in cases in which no party switch occurred before and after the missing value. If someone reported a vote intention for SPD in all waves but had a missing value in between, we simply do not know if the person wanted to vote for SPD in the missing wave or for another party. Here we assume stability, thereby potentially overestimating stability. Yet, empirically the missing-data strategy virtually does not change the aggregate share of campaign switchers as compared to a strategy that includes only respondents with valid values in all panel waves.<sup>4</sup>

However, drawing on data from a group of online panelists who participated in 14 waves of an online survey ranging from 2009 to 2013 limits the generalizability of results. The 2009 online panelists differ from a random sample drawn from the German electorate in terms of several political attitudes as well as party preference (e.g., Steinbrecher and Schoen 2013). Moreover, the 2009 respondents who participated in 2013 are somewhat more interested in politics and less likely to have switched in the 2009 campaign than the respondents who participated in 2009 only (see Appendix A2). We may thus exaggerate the absolute level of electoral stability.<sup>5</sup>

Although panel data enable us to avoid problems arising from recall questions (e.g., Waldahl and Aardal 2000; Schoen 2011), measurement error may bias results. A need for over-time consistency in reported vote choice may make some respondents report the same party preference time and again although they actually changed their party preference. As the intervals between panel waves are much shorter within the campaign than between campaigns and elections, this kind of consistency may bias the results in favor of the role of between-campaign changes in contributing to inter-election volatility. While we cannot rule out this

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<sup>4</sup> In 2013, the strict and the missing data strategy yield 61% campaign switchers. This figure is slightly higher than those reported in Table 1 because the latter covers only respondents that participated in both years.

<sup>5</sup> We did not exclude respondents who responded particularly quickly because prior research suggests that removing so-called speeders does not make a difference in substantive conclusions (Greszki et al. 2015).

possibility, prior research suggests that consistency bias makes respondents inclined to adapt recalled voting behavior to current party preferences rather than the other way round (e.g., Waldahl and Aardal 2000; Schoen 2011).

In order to examine whether between- and within-campaign attitude changes contributed to inter-election switching, we created several change scores for the two time periods. For the first time span, we computed the difference of attitude variables between the last wave of the 2009 survey and the first wave of the 2013 survey. For the second time span, we computed the difference between the start of the 2013 campaign and its end (wave 1 and wave 7). In order to avoid biases arising from influential outliers, we categorized the difference scores. One set of these change variables indicates if a change occurred or not (0/1), while the other also indicates the direction of change (-1 for a decline, 0 for stability, and +1 for an increase). These attitude change variables refer to evaluations of the chancellor candidates of the SPD and CDU/CSU, evaluations of the AfD, attitudes toward nuclear energy, attitudes toward financial help for Euro-zone countries<sup>6</sup>, and evaluations of national economic conditions.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these change variables, we included some static variables. Because the AfD did not exist in 2009, a between-campaign change cannot be computed – the attitude toward AfD in wave 1 of the 2013 study is included instead. Similarly, attitudes toward financial help for Euro-zone member states were not measured in 2009 because this issue was then not on the political agenda. Again, attitudes toward this issue are measured in the first wave in 2013. We included attitudes toward nuclear energy in 2013 because the change in party positions rendered the 2009-to-2013 comparison of voter evaluations not very informative. Finally, political involvement is measured using an indicator of general political interest (see for the wording of questions and response options Table A1 in the appendix).

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<sup>6</sup> Due to a lack of suitable data, we include only voters' policy positions rather than the difference between them and party positions as perceived by voters.

<sup>7</sup> For attitudes toward nuclear energy and help for Euro-zone states, unfortunately items were not asked in 2013 wave 1 and wave 7. For nuclear energy, we utilized data from wave 2 and wave 5, for Euro-zone aid wave 3 and wave 7 as the earliest and as the latest waves.

We ran two sets of models to explore the contribution of attitude change between the campaigns and within the campaign to inter-election switching. In the first set, we utilized the non-directional indicators of dependent and independent variables. These models build on the notion that a change in any direction in attitudes is conducive to switching party preference. The second set of models takes into account the direction of switching. The dependent variables capture changes to the CDU/CSU and the SPD, respectively. As a consequence, the independent variables indicate whether the attitude became more positive, more negative, or did not change at all. By utilizing this specification to gauge the relative contribution of between-campaign and within-campaign changes to inter-election changes, we build on a simplification. We capture changes in attitudes between the start and end of the respective time periods and do not take into account attitudes that swing back and forth within each of these time periods. In effect, we measure the net effect of the between campaign period and the campaign period which ultimately should influence the vote decision in 2013. It is thus beyond the scope of this paper to figure out whether changes at certain points in time between two campaigns or within a campaign are particularly influential.

#### 4. Findings

We start our analysis by exploring how often campaign and non-campaign volatility occurs. As the evidence reported in the first row of Table 1 demonstrates, the aggregate shares of campaign-, between campaign- and inter-election switching resemble each other quite closely. About half of the respondents switched whereas the other half stood pat. Yet, there are some slight differences. Inter-election switching is somewhat less frequent than campaign and between-campaign switching, suggesting that some of the latter switches might cancel out each other. Turning to the relationship of political involvement to the three forms of switching, the evidence reported in Table 1 suggests that in all four cases low-involvement voters were more likely to switch than high-involvement citizens, though the relationship is

not particularly strong. In any case, the evidence does not support the notion that the probability of between-campaign switching increases with political involvement (see Dassonneville 2012, 2014).<sup>8</sup>

- Table 1 about here -

The aggregate-level evidence suggests that the different types of electoral volatility are related in interesting ways at the individual level. We now turn to analyze this relationship in more depth. The evidence reported in Table 2<sup>9</sup> demonstrates that almost 40 percent of the respondents did not change their voting behavior from 2009 to 2013 (row 1). Turning to campaign volatility, 8 percent of the respondents were undecided at the start of the 2013 campaign and returned to the party they already had voted for in 2009 (row 2). Another 5 percent switched to a different party between the campaigns and returned during the subsequent campaign to the party they had voted for in 2009 (row 3). These patterns of volatility fit nicely with the notion that campaigns serve as a means to activate long-term political predilections and bring citizens back into their partisan folds. At the same time, the rather small proportion of respondents exhibiting these patterns suggests that these trajectories tell only one part of the story.

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<sup>8</sup> These differences may stem from various sources in addition to substantive differences. To begin, Dassonneville's (2012) measure of between-campaign switching captures vote preferences at different levels of government. In her analysis of vote switching from the 2005-to the 2009 German federal election, Dassonneville (2014) excludes all cases exhibiting "don't know"-responses in vote intentions from the analysis. As Table 2 (rows 2 and 6) in this paper demonstrates, low-involvement voters have an above-average likelihood to switch in the between-campaign period to "don't know," whereas high-involvement voters have a higher probability to switch between parties in the between-campaign period. Moreover, employing a recall measure of vote choice in the previous federal election, as Dassonneville (2014) did, yields larger involvement effects because low involvement voters have a much higher probability to state that they cannot recall their vote choice four years ago (see Appendix A4).

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we only compared vote intention in 2013 in wave 1 and wave 7, rather than across all waves because otherwise the number of combinations would have increased considerably. This also means that those voters we consider as stable over the course of the 2013 campaign might have actually wavered between these survey ways. As additional evidence shows, however, including or excluding waverers does not change the substantive conclusions reported in the text (see Appendix A3 for results).

Some 40 percent of the sample ended up voting for a different party in 2013 than in 2009 (rows 4-7). 25 percent of the respondents (rows 4, 5, 6) made the final decision to cast a vote for a different party during the 2013 campaign. This does not mean that between-campaign periods are unimportant. About 14 percent of the sample switched between the campaigns to the party they ultimately voted for in the 2013 election (row 7). For them the deal was already done before the campaign began. What is more, political involvement does not moderate the prevalence of this pattern. Irrespective of political involvement, a considerable share of voters switched between the campaigns and stayed with this decision until Election Day. The evidence thus suggests that neither pure campaign effects nor pure between-campaign changes fully account for how the inter-election trajectories evolve. Omitting between-campaign changes from analyses of inter-election switching thus runs the risk of missing an essential component contributing to electoral change.

– Table 2 about here –

In light of the above model, the findings presented thus far suggest that stimuli arising between campaigns and during the 2013 campaign contributed to inter-election volatility between the 2009 and 2013 elections. Limitations in data availability inhibit fine-grained analyses of all empirical patterns of electoral volatility in the course of the 2009-to-2013 period. Therefore, we focused on exploring the role of between- and within-campaign changes of political attitudes in accounting for inter-election switching. Before turning to the results of these analyses, we take a look at stability and change in attitudes potentially predicting inter-election changes. The results reported in Table 3 confirm the expectation that more respondents changed their attitudes between the campaigns than within the 2013 campaign. Furthermore, these results lend only limited credence to the traditional view that lowly involved citizens change their attitudes during the campaign whereas higher involved

voters change their attitudes between the campaigns. If existent at all, differences between levels of political interest are small.

- Table 3 about here -

Next, we turn to analyzing the impact of between- and within-campaigns changes in attitudes on inter-election switching of vote choice. We performed logistic regression analyses for inter-election switching without considering partisan direction (column 1, Table 4) and for changes toward CDU/CSU and SPD, respectively (columns 2 and 3). In the model of general inter-election model, all change variables are dummies (1=change; 0=no change). The reported average marginal effects (see for log odds Table A5 in the appendix) indicate changes in the probability of inter-election switching if an attitude change occurred compared to no attitude change. The attitudes measured at the start of the campaign 2013 are tripartite variables, differing between negative, neutral, and positive attitudes. As the effect of the AfD evaluations proved curvilinear in additional robustness checks, we included two dummies with the neutral category as reference category. Consequently, for AfD evaluations at the start of the campaign, the estimates in Table 4 indicate the average discrete probability change when moving from the reference category to the negative or positive category. The variables “start campaign debt crisis” and “start campaign nuclear energy” are tripartite as well but proved linear in robustness checks (see Tables A6 and A7 in the appendix) and were therefore entered as linear variables. The respective entries in Table 4 indicate probability changes in the dependent variable resulting from a change from a neutral to a favorable stance on the independent variables.

- Table 4 about here -



The results reported in column 1 of Table 4 demonstrate that poor evaluations of the AfD at the start of the campaign decreased the probability to switch by 17 percentage points compared to moderate evaluations. Changes during the campaign in attitudes toward the AfD, however, did not have any effect on inter-election switching. In this case, attitudinal changes between the campaigns appear to outperform within-campaign changes. For evaluations of SPD candidates the opposite applies. A within-campaign change of attitudes toward Steinbrück in 2013 increased the probability to switch by 11 points, whereas differences between evaluations of the 2009 and 2013 SPD candidates proved ineffective. Interestingly, changes in attitudes toward Chancellor Merkel within and between campaigns were both without consequences for inter-election switching. Subscribing to the notion that Germany should contribute to financial aid to indebted Euro-zone countries at the start of the campaign slightly decreased the probability to switch. It thus appears as if the far-ranging pro-Euro consensus among parliamentary parties made opposition to this policy led some voters to change their vote. During the campaign changes in this attitude slightly increased the probability to switch as well. Finally, attitudes toward nuclear power proved ineffective in both periods.

While these findings are valuable, they rest on quite strong assumptions and may hide some effects. For example, changes in attitudes toward a party's candidate might affect vote choice for this party but not for others. Putting vote switching to all parties together may thus suppress some effects. We now turn to the models of inter-election switching to CDU/CSU and SPD. The models reported in columns 2 and 3 in Table 4 include directional indicators of attitude change (negative change, no change, positive change). The results thus indicate the difference in the likelihood of switching in response to a move from no to positive change.

Starting with switching toward CDU/CSU, between-campaign changes in evaluations of the AfD account for inter-election switching but within-campaign changes do not. This finding confirms our expectations. Likewise, between-campaign changes in evaluations of Chancellor

Merkel exert stronger effects on inter-election switches than within-campaign changes. Contrary to expectations, evaluating the current economic situation more favorably during the campaign, rather than between the campaigns, makes voters 7 points more likely to switch to CDU/CSU in 2013. Given the comparatively large between-changes in these evaluations, this pattern is even more interesting. The impact of within-campaign changes on inter-election switching may hint at people's inclination to link economic conditions with incumbent government only during the campaign (Huber et al. 2016; Healy and Lenz 2014). Finally, the evidence suggests that support of nuclear energy made people more likely to switch toward CDU/CSU. We hesitate to treat this finding as a causal effect because CDU/CSU no longer subscribed to nuclear energy. It is thus more appropriate to conclude that CDU/CSU's policy shift on this topic did not inhibit some supporters of nuclear power from switching to this party. This pattern fits nicely with the decreased electoral salience of nuclear power (Meyer and Schoen 2015).

The results reported in column 3 of Table 4 indicate that between- and within-campaign changes in attitudes do a poorer job in accounting for SPD switching than CDU/CSU switching. Changes in attitudes toward AfD, financial assistance for highly indebted Euro-zone countries, and the economy prove ineffective. Consistent effects emerge only for attitudes toward the SPD candidate. In line with our expectations that build on the surprises and gaffes this candidate provoked during the 2013 campaign, within-campaign change of candidate orientations is more powerful in changing vote choice than between-campaign change. Moreover, negative attitudes toward nuclear power appear to have made voters more inclined to switch to the SPD in the 2009-to-2013 period, whereas within-campaign changes of these attitudes proved ineffective.

The evidence thus suggests that both between- and within-campaign changes in vote choice contribute to inter-election switching. Moreover, between- and within-campaign changes in political evaluations affect inter-election switching. Scholars aiming at understanding the

dynamics of inter-election volatility thus would be ill advised if they focused on external stimuli arising during campaigns while dismissing political communication between campaigns.

## 5. Conclusion

Electoral volatility is of key importance for democratic change and has received quickly growing attention in the scholarly literature. Yet, in accounting for inter-election volatility prior research focused on campaigns and widely neglected the role of between-campaign periods. Depending on the political setting, between-campaign periods set the stage for electoral competition. Parties in government and opposition may fail or achieve accomplishments; parties may replace their leadership and change policy positions; even new parties may emerge. Voters at different levels of political involvement may learn about these developments and form political cognitions and attitudes feeding into their ultimate decision-making. Drawing on a data set from an intra- and inter-election panel survey conducted in the 2009 and 2013 German federal elections, we demonstrated that between-campaign changes in party preferences and political attitudes were at least as important as within-campaign changes in contributing to inter-election switching. Moreover, low-involvement voters were not across the board less likely to exhibit between-campaign changes and more likely to experience within-campaign changes. Taken together, the analysis implies that scholars who attempt to account for inter-election vote switching are well-advised not to focus on campaign periods, at the expense of between-campaign periods, and on certain subsections of the electorate.

The evidence from a single election cycle in the German parliamentary system demonstrates that the conventional model of electoral volatility does not apply in each and every case. It does not permit to study in depth the conditional hypotheses implied by our model however. This model requires further testing in comparative designs, be it across time or space. The

relative impact of between- and within-campaign change on inter-election change may depend on the flow of events in both periods. Likewise, the prevalence of partisan attachments may serve as conditioning factor. Small proportions of party identifiers may be conducive to high levels of inter-election volatility and may affect the interplay of between- and within-campaign changes in party preferences in complex ways (e.g., Dalton 2012). Moreover, the balance of between- and within-campaign change may be conditional on institutional features. In this vein, in an open race for the U.S. presidency between not very prominent candidates the bulk of changes in vote choice may occur during the campaign. In a parliamentary election in which voters have to choose between parties that changed policy positions, leaders, or candidates between the campaigns, however, party changes between campaigns may make a larger contribution to inter-election volatility than party changes occurring during the campaign. By implication, these comparative efforts might lead to a general account of electoral volatility and might also help to put our case study into perspective.

Additional limitations stem from data availability. The 2009-to-2013 panel survey covers the between-campaign period not in an as fine-grained way as the campaigns. We thus could not identify specific events between the two campaigns as triggers of attitude changes. More detailed information would enable us to study the dynamics in depth and underscore, rather than challenge, our substantive conclusions. Moreover, our evidence stems from a subsample of a quota sample drawn from an online access panel. The low number of observations led to imprecise estimates and inhibited us from studying the evolution of political preferences in significant subgroups. It prevented us also from testing additional hypotheses about the interplay of between-campaign and within-campaign changes in shaping inter-election switching. For example, although a larger share of attitude change happens in the between-campaign period, voters may increasingly connect these attitude changes with their vote intentions only during the campaign. While a change in relevant attitudes might have already occurred in the between-campaign period, especially low-involvement voters might leave

their state of indecision only if Election Day approaches because otherwise they do not feel a need to make a decision. This limitation calls for larger samples to glean more reliable findings. Another objection builds on the notion that our subsample may have introduced several kinds of bias. To begin, a sample of multiply interviewed online panelists does not represent a random sample from the electorate as a whole. Although our sample is biased and it may very well be that we underestimate the absolute level of switching and involvement in the general population, we also demonstrated that political involvement is of little significance for between-campaign decision making patterns. Therefore we are quite confident that the specific recruitment strategy did not lead to severe bias undermining our substantive conclusions.<sup>10</sup> We thus conclude that between-campaign changes deserve much more attention in research on electoral volatility as a period that sets the stage for voters' electoral decision-making and thus contributes substantively to inter-election volatility.

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<sup>10</sup> A similar reasoning applies to bias arising from panel conditioning.

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Figure 1: Waves of the GLES campaign panels 2009 and 2013

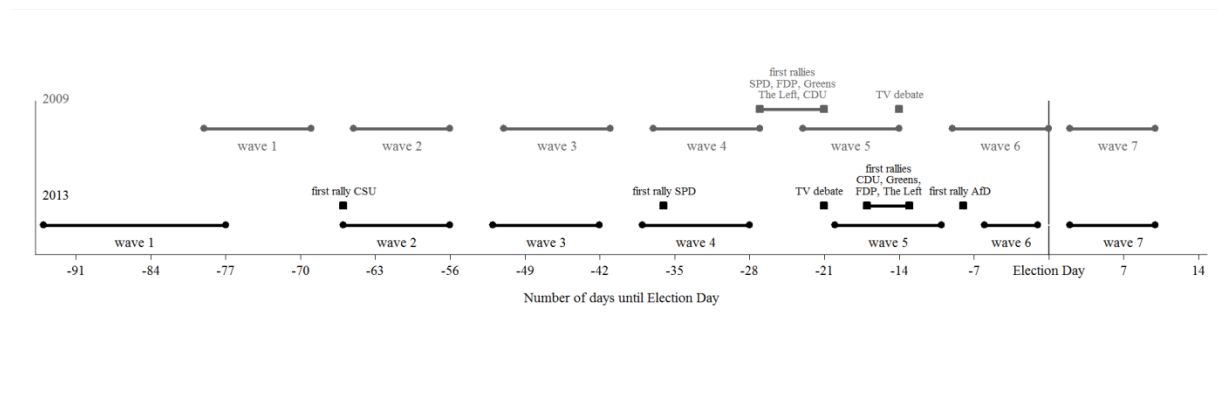


Table 1: Frequencies of switchers at different levels of political interest

	Inter-Election Switch	Between-Campaign Switch	Campaign Switch 2013
Overall	0.50	0.56	0.56
Low interest	0.61	0.70	0.73
Medium interest	0.50	0.56	0.60
High interest	0.46	0.51	0.50
<i>N</i>	697	796	769

Note: Included are respondents who participated in both 2009 and 2013, did not consistently report to abstain in the respective panel waves and have valid information on political interest. Political interest measured in 2009 wave 2 or wave 4 (if wave 2 is missing).

Differences in proportions between low and medium-interest respondents are statistically significant for all switching behaviors ( $p < 0.05$ ). Differences between medium and high interest groups are only significant for campaign switch 2013 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 2: Individual-level patterns of electoral decision-making

	Final decision 2009	Intention 2013	Final decision 2013	Overall	Low interest	Med. interest	High interest
1	A	A	A	36%	24%	36%	41%
2	A	undecided	A	8%	9%	9%	7%
3	A	B	A	5%	3%	5%	6%
4	A	A	B	6%	5%	7%	6%
5	A	C	B	6%	5%	5%	7%
6	A	undecided	B	13%	17%	15%	10%
7	A	B	B	14%	13%	11%	17%
8	did not vote		did not vote	11%	25%	13%	6%
			<i>N</i>	709	109	261	339

Note: Entries are column percentages. “Intention 2013” refers to the voting intention voiced at the first interview in the 2013 panel in June, some 12-14 weeks before the federal election in September. “A”, “B”, and “C” indicate three different hypothetical parties. “Undecided” means answering “don’t know” or “won’t vote” to the voting intention question. Row 8 includes all respondents who abstained irrespective of their vote intention in wave 1 of the 2013 survey. Political interest is measured in wave 2 or wave 4 (if wave 2 is missing) of the 2009 survey.

Differences by political interest are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for patterns in row 1, 6 and 8.

Table 3: Frequencies of changes in attitudes by level of political interest

	Overall	Low interest	Medium interest	High interest
AfD $\Delta$ within	61%	65%	62%	59%
CDU/CSU candidate $\Delta$ between	68%	68%	68%	68%
CDU/CSU candidate $\Delta$ within	59%	52%	63%	58%
SPD candidate $\Delta$ between	78%	75%	80%	77%
SPD candidate $\Delta$ within	68%	64%	68%	70%
Economy $\Delta$ between	62%	51%	63%	63%
Economy $\Delta$ within	31%	31%	32%	30%
Nuclear energy $\Delta$ within	37%	38%	35%	38%
Debt crisis $\Delta$ within	57%	54%	58%	57%
<i>N</i>	582	84	219	279

Note: The subscript “ $\Delta$  between” indicates change between the campaigns 2009 and 2013, whereas the subscript “ $\Delta$  within” signifies change within the campaign 2013. Political interest is measured in wave 2 (or, if missing, in wave 4) of the 2009 survey. The available data does not allow us to calculate between-campaign changes of evaluations of AfD, nuclear energy, and the debt crisis.

Differences by political interest are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for attitude change within the campaign toward the CDU/CSU candidate only.

Table 4: Modeling inter-election switching (average marginal effects from logistic regression)

	Undirected	Toward CDU/CSU	Toward SPD
AfD <sub>start campaign = negative</sub>	-0.17 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.05)
AfD <sub>start campaign = positive</sub>	0.06 (0.08)	-0.10 <sup>*</sup> (0.04)	0.02 (0.07)
AfD <sub>Δ within</sub>	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
CDU candidate <sub>Δ between</sub>	0.00 (0.05)	0.10 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	
CDU candidate <sub>Δ within</sub>	-0.03 (0.04)	0.05 <sup>*</sup> (0.02)	
SPD candidate <sub>Δ between</sub>	-0.04 (0.05)		0.05 <sup>*</sup> (0.02)
SPD candidate <sub>Δ within</sub>	0.11 <sup>*</sup> (0.05)		0.09 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
Economy <sub>Δ between</sub>		0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
Economy <sub>Δ within</sub>		0.07 <sup>*</sup> (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Nuclear energy <sub>start campaign</sub>	0.01 (0.02)	0.09 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	-0.05 <sup>*</sup> (0.02)
Nuclear energy <sub>Δ within</sub>	-0.00 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
Debt crisis <sub>start campaign</sub>	-0.08 <sup>**</sup> (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Debt crisis <sub>Δ within</sub>	0.07 <sup>#</sup> (0.04)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
N	549	438	450

Note: Entries are changes in predicted probabilities with standard errors in parentheses that result from a 0-to-1 change on the respective independent variable. As the independent variables in model 1 capture undirected change, a 0-to-1 shift means a change from no change to change. The independent variables in model 2 and 3 capture directed change. A 0-to-1 shift thus means a move from no to positive change. In case of static variables, this shift means change from a moderate to a favorable attitude. Excluded are respondents who abstained from voting in both years. Levels of statistical significance: # p < 0.10, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

## Appendix

Table A1: Question Wording

Variable	Wording
Political Interest	In general terms: How interested in politics are you? - very interested - interested - moderately interested - slightly interested - not interested at all <i>The lower and the upper two categories are collapsed for analysis in the paper.</i>
Evaluation of AfD	How do you feel about the political parties in general? (AfD) -5 I have a very negative view of this party .... + 5 I have a very positive view of this party
Attitudes toward nuclear energy	Here you can find several statements with which some people agree and while others do not. How about you? Please state your view on these issues. The power supply should also be secured by nuclear power as well. - strongly disagree - rather disagree - neither agree nor disagree - rather agree - strongly agree
Attitudes toward debt crisis	Some people are for the involvement of Germany when it comes to the financial aid for the indebted member states of the EU, others are against it. And what is your personal opinion on the financial aid for EU member states? (1) for the involvement of Germany ... (7) against the involvement of Germany
Evaluation of candidates	Now, please state what you think about some leading politicians. (Merkel, 2009: Steinmeier, 2013: Steinbrück) -5 I have a very negative view of this politician ... +5 I have a very positive view of this politician

Table A2: Panel attrition in GLES campaign panel surveys 2009 to 2013

	Participants only 2009	Participants 2009 and 2013
Campaign switching 2009	0.60 1466	0.53* 752
Political interest 2009 W2	0.57 2720	0.59* 962
Partisan independent 2009 W1	0.29 3332	0.27 1009
CDU/CSU voters 2009 W7	0.21 1800	0.23 828
SPD voters 2009 W7	0.18 1800	0.19 828
FDP voters 2009 W7	0.15 1800	0.15 828
Green voters 2009 W7	0.13 1800	0.14 828
The Left voters 2009 W7	0.14 1800	0.13 828
Non-voters 2009 W7	0.10 1800	0.07* 828

Entries are proportions with number of cases. For political interest the mean (with the number of observations) is reported. Numbers of observations differ because items measured in different waves are reported.

\* Difference between 2009-only respondents and both-year respondents is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table A3: Individual-level patterns of electoral decision-making with campaign waverers excluded

	Final decision 2009	Intention 2013	Final decision 2013	Campaign Switch Sample	Excluding waverers
1	A	A	A	38%	37%
2	A	undecided	A	8%	9%
3	A	B	A	5%	5%
4	A	A	B	6%	6%
5	A	C	B	6%	7%
6	A	undecided	B	14%	15%
7	A	B	B	15%	11%
8	did not vote		did not vote	9%	10%
			<i>N</i>	651	589

Entries are column percentages. In order to detect wavering between different parties during the 2013 campaign we included only respondents for whom we have multiple observations during the campaign (first column). Excluding waverers does not substantially alter the findings (right-hand column).



Table A4: Individual-level patterns of electoral decision-making by political interest with 2009 vote choice measured using a recall measure in wave 1 of the 2013 survey

Recall final decision 2009	Intention 2013	Final decision 2013	Overall	Low interest	Med. interest	High interest
A	A	A	41%	30%	40%	45%
A	undecided	A	7%	7%	7%	7%
A	B	A	4%	2%	3%	6%
A	A	B	7%	6%	7%	8%
A	C	B	4%	5%	5%	4%
A	undecided	B	10%	8%	13%	8%
A	B	B	8%	1%	6%	13%
no recall	A	A	2%	6%	1%	1%
no recall	undecided	A	4%	10%	5%	2%
no recall	A	B	1%	1%	2%	1%
did not vote		did not vote	11%	25%	12%	6%
		<i>N</i>	709	109	261	339

Entries are column percentages. Included are only respondents who participated both in 2009 and 2013. Political interest measured in wave 2 (or if missing wave 4) of the 2009 survey.

Table A5: Modelling inter-election switching (logistic regression)

	(1) Undirected	(2) Toward CDU/CSU	(3) Toward SPD
AfD <sub>start campaign = negative</sub>	-0.71** (0.22)	-0.09 (0.35)	-0.39 (0.33)
AfD <sub>start campaign = positive</sub>	0.25 (0.35)	-1.25* (0.61)	0.13 (0.43)
AfD $\Delta$ within	-0.02 (0.19)	-0.32 (0.20)	0.08 (0.18)
CDU candidate $\Delta$ between	0.02 (0.20)	0.90*** (0.22)	
CDU candidate $\Delta$ within	-0.14 (0.19)	0.48* (0.21)	
SPD candidate $\Delta$ between	-0.19 (0.22)		0.39* (0.17)
SPD candidate $\Delta$ within	0.46* (0.20)		0.68*** (0.19)
economy $\Delta$ between		0.32 (0.27)	0.18 (0.25)
economy $\Delta$ within		0.67* (0.29)	0.21 (0.26)
nuclear energy <sub>start campaign</sub>	0.06 (0.11)	0.84*** (0.19)	-0.38* (0.18)
nuclear energy $\Delta$ within	-0.01 (0.19)	0.38 (0.27)	0.14 (0.22)
debt crisis <sub>start campaign</sub>	-0.33** (0.11)	-0.08 (0.21)	-0.18 (0.19)
debt crisis $\Delta$ within	0.30# (0.18)	0.26 (0.22)	0.04 (0.19)
Constant	0.40 (0.35)	-5.54*** (0.98)	-3.09*** (0.82)
Observations	549	438	450
Pseudo $R^2$	0.060	0.145	0.067

Entries are logistic regression coefficients (log odds) with standard errors in parentheses. Levels of statistical significance: #  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Table A6: Modelling inter-election switching with independent variables in dummy format (logistic regression; entries: predicted probabilities with standard errors in parentheses)

	Inter-Election Switching
AfD <sub>start campaign</sub>	
Negative	0.44 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
medium	0.61 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
positive	0.66 <sup>***</sup> (0.07)
AfD $\Delta$ <sub>within</sub>	
No change	0.51 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
change	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
SPD candidate $\Delta$ <sub>between</sub>	
no change	0.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
change	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
SPD candidate $\Delta$ <sub>within</sub>	
No change	0.43 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Change	0.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
CDU candidate $\Delta$ <sub>between</sub>	
No change	0.51 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Change	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
CDU candidate $\Delta$ <sub>within</sub>	
No change	0.52 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Change	0.49 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
nuclear energy <sub>start campaign</sub>	
negative	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
medium	0.47 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
positive	0.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
nuclear energy $\Delta$ <sub>within</sub>	

No change	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Change	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
debt crisis <sub>start campaign</sub>	
Negative	0.55 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
medium	0.51 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
positive	0.39 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
debt crisis <sub>Δ within</sub>	
No change	0.47 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Change	0.53 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Observations	549

Entries are predicted probabilities (with standard errors in parentheses) for all values of independent variables originating from a logistic regression model with independent variables specified as k-1 dummy variables (k = number of manifestations). Levels of statistical significance: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A7: Modelling inter-election switching toward specific parties with independent variables in dummy format (logistic regression; entries: predicted probabilities with standard error in parentheses)

	(1) CDU	(2) SPD
AfD <sub>start campaign</sub>		
Negative	0.15*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)
Medium	0.16*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.04)
Positive	0.06* (0.03)	0.21*** (0.06)
AfD <sub>Δ within</sub>		
Negative change	0.17*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)
No change	0.14*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.03)
Positive change	0.10*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.03)
Party candidate <sub>Δ between</sub>		
Negative change	0.05** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)
No change	0.13*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.04)
Positive change	0.23*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.04)
Party candidate <sub>Δ within</sub>		
Negative change	0.09*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)
No change	0.16*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)
Positive change	0.19*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.03)
economy <sub>Δ between</sub>		
Negative change	0.11 (0.06)	0.12 (0.06)
No change	0.12*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.03)
Positive change	0.16*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)
economy <sub>Δ within</sub>		
Negative change	0.07* (0.03)	0.14** (0.05)
No change	0.14*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)
Positive change	0.21*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.02)

	(0.05)	(0.04)
nuclear energy <sub>start campaign</sub>		
Negative	0.08 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	0.20 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Medium	0.16 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)	0.14 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Positive	0.29 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)	0.11 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
nuclear energy $\Delta$ within		
Negative change	0.12 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	0.16 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
No change	0.14 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	0.15 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
Positive change	0.22 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)	0.19 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
debt crisis <sub>start campaign</sub>		
Negative	0.15 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	0.17 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
Medium	0.14 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	0.16 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Positive	0.13 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)	0.13 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
debt crisis $\Delta$ within		
Negative change	0.11 <sup>**</sup> (0.03)	0.19 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
No change	0.14 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	0.13 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
Positive change	0.16 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	0.18 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
<i>N</i>	438	450

Entries are predicted probabilities (with standard errors in parentheses) for all values of independent variables originating from logistic regression models with independent variables specified as k-1 dummy variables (k = number of manifestations). Levels of statistical significance: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$