B1.1 (GLES) Campaign Dynamics of Media Coverage and Public Opinion

Directors/ Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck
Researchers/ Julia Partheymüller, Sascha Huber, Anne Schäfer, Sebstian Schmidt, Mona Krewel
Funding/ MZES, DFG

Research Goals

Focusing on the three Bundestag elections of 2009, 2013, and 2017, the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) analyses how today's mobile electorate adapts to the new constellation of electoral politics, which is characterized by an increased degree of complexity.

Within the GLES, this MZES project deals with research questions that concern the short-term dynamics of media coverage and public opinion:

- How much do campaigns affect voting behaviour? Do campaigns mobilise voters? Do they matter for party choice?
- What are the mechanisms behind campaign effects? Do campaigns mainly activate long-term predispositions?
- To what extent do news reporting and highly visible events, such as TV debates or state elections, affect voters' perceptions, attitudes, behaviour?
- How long do media effects on public opinion last?

Research Design

Data collection

Within the GLES, this MZES project is responsible for conducting two components:

- Rolling cross-section (RCS) campaign survey with post-election panel wave
    - Daily telephone interviews (CATI) with approx.100 randomly selected respondents during the last weeks before the election
    - Second interview immediately after the election
- Two content analyses of mass media coverage
    - TV evening newscasts of four major broadcasters (ARD, ZDF, RTL, Sat.1)
    - Most important print media outlets (FAZ, FR, SZ, TAZ, Welt, BILD)

All data are available via GESIS:
**www.gesis.org/gles**

Data linking

Voter data and data on media coverage (incl. lagged media content) can be linked through the date of interview and media use measures (integrated data matrix).

	Voter survey		Content analysis	Combined measure
Resp. ID	Day of interview	Media use on day before (Medium 1)	News stories on day before (Medium 1)	Exposure on day before (Medium 1)
1	35	1	7	7
2	35	0	7	0
3	36	1	3	3
4	36	0	3	0

Research Findings

Agenda dynamics during the campaign period

Most important problems, 2009 & 2013

Legend: --- 2009 — 2013
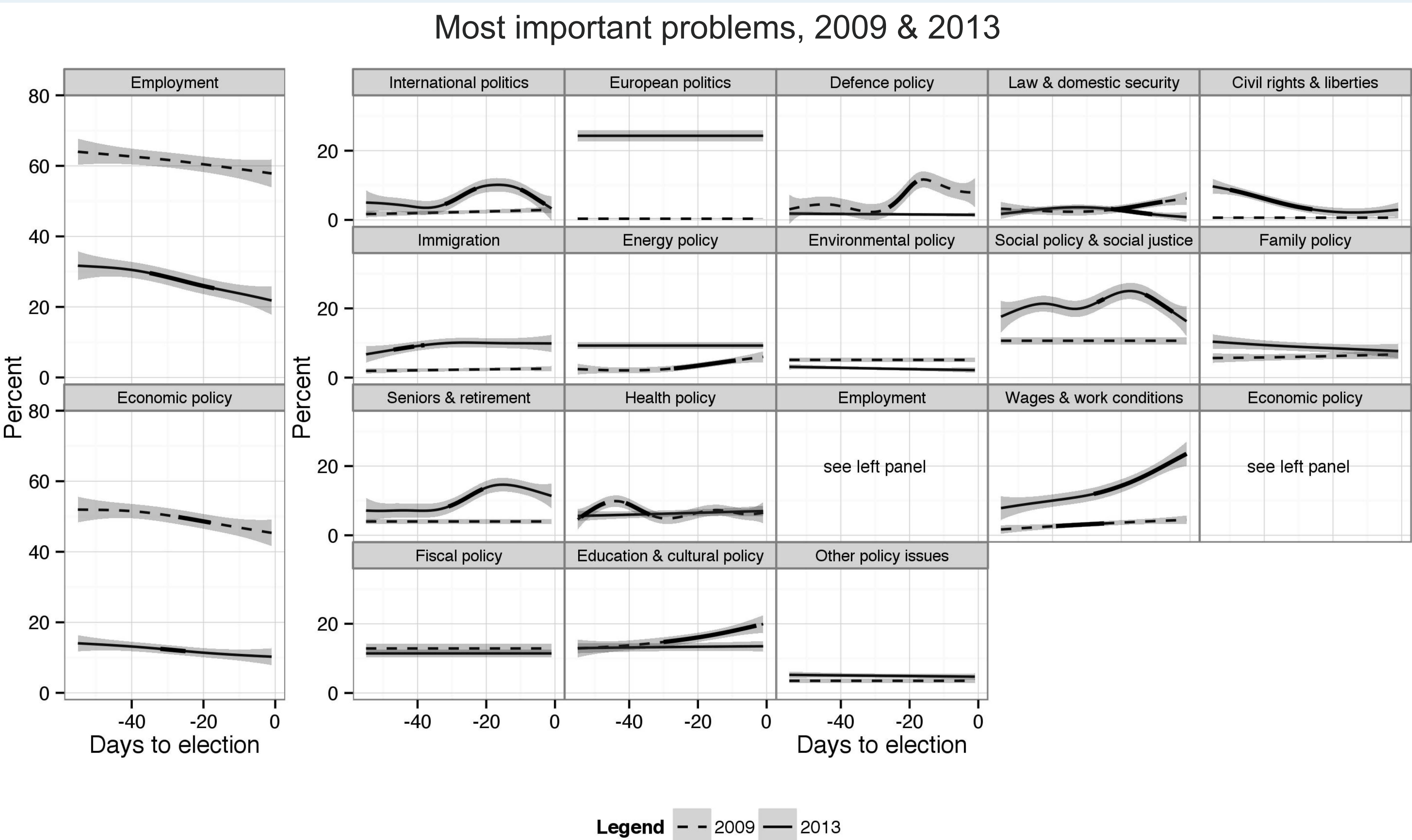
Data: RCS 2009 & 2013 (GLES); Smoothed by penalized cubic regression spline, with 95% confidence bands (shaded area); periods of significant change (first derivative > 0; p<0.05) highlighted in bold face.
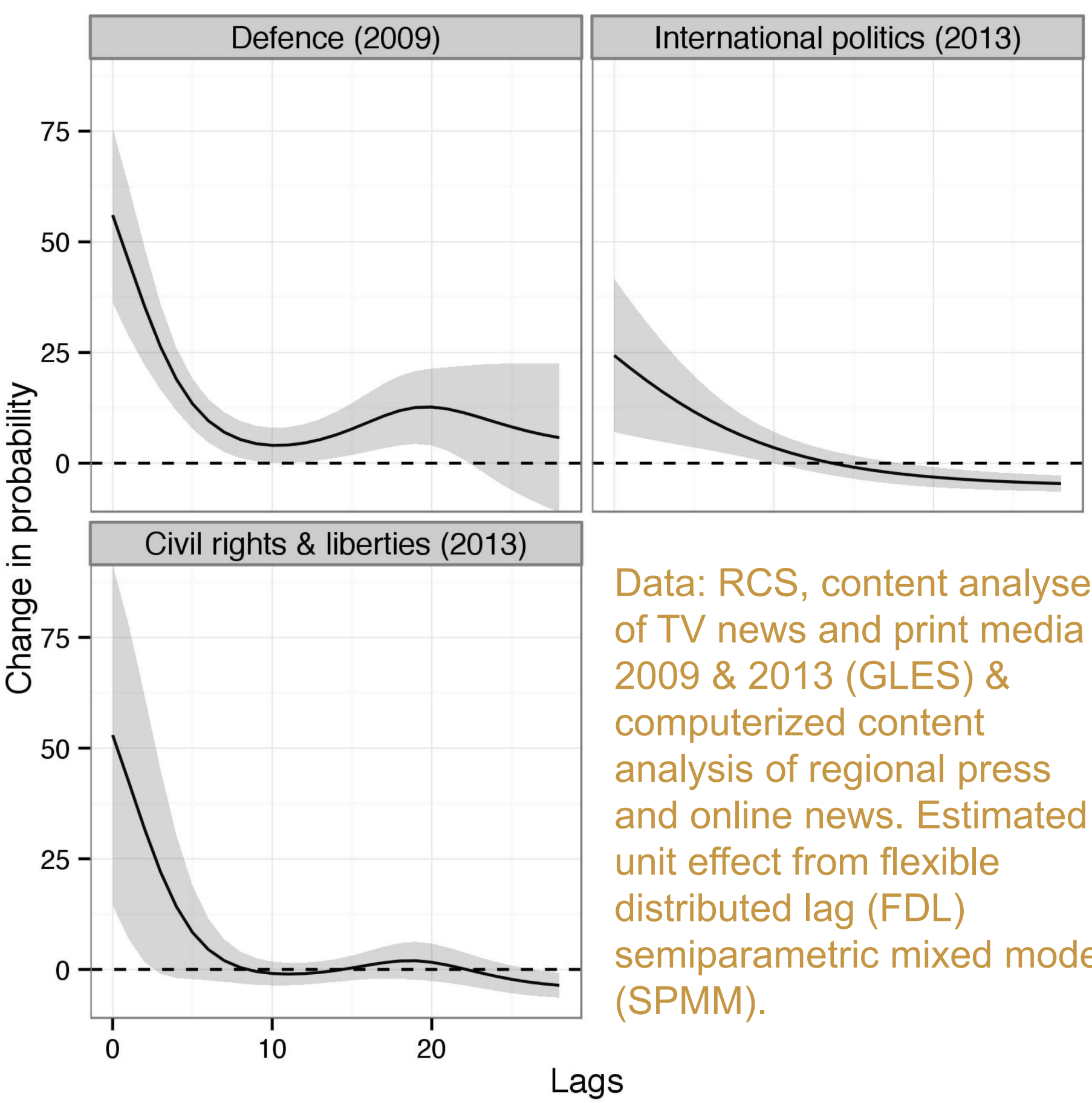
News media – the agenda-setter?

Significant influence of mass media coverage on perceived importance of political problems:

- Defence policy, 2009: Coverage about airstrike in Afghanistan ordered by German forces causing civilian deaths
- International politics, 2013: Coverage about use of chemical weapons by Syrian government against civilians
- Civil rights & liberties, 2013: Coverage about revelations on mass surveillance by international intelligence services

But also limits to the media's agenda-setting power:

- Effects are rather short-lived and often decline until election day
- Parties' campaign communication as alternative source of information

Effect of news exposure and its decay over time

Data: RCS, content analyses of TV news and print media 2009 & 2013 (GLES) & computerized content analysis of regional press and online news. Estimated unit effect from flexible distributed lag (FDL) semiparametric mixed model (SPMM).

Media polls, events and expectations about the election outcome

Media polls and events may provide information about the electoral viability of possible coalitions. Events such as TV debates and state elections often have a lasting impact on electoral expectations.

Legend:
— CDU/CSU+FDP
···· CDU/CSU+SPD
-- SPD+Greens
- CDU/CSU
··· Other
-·- Don't know
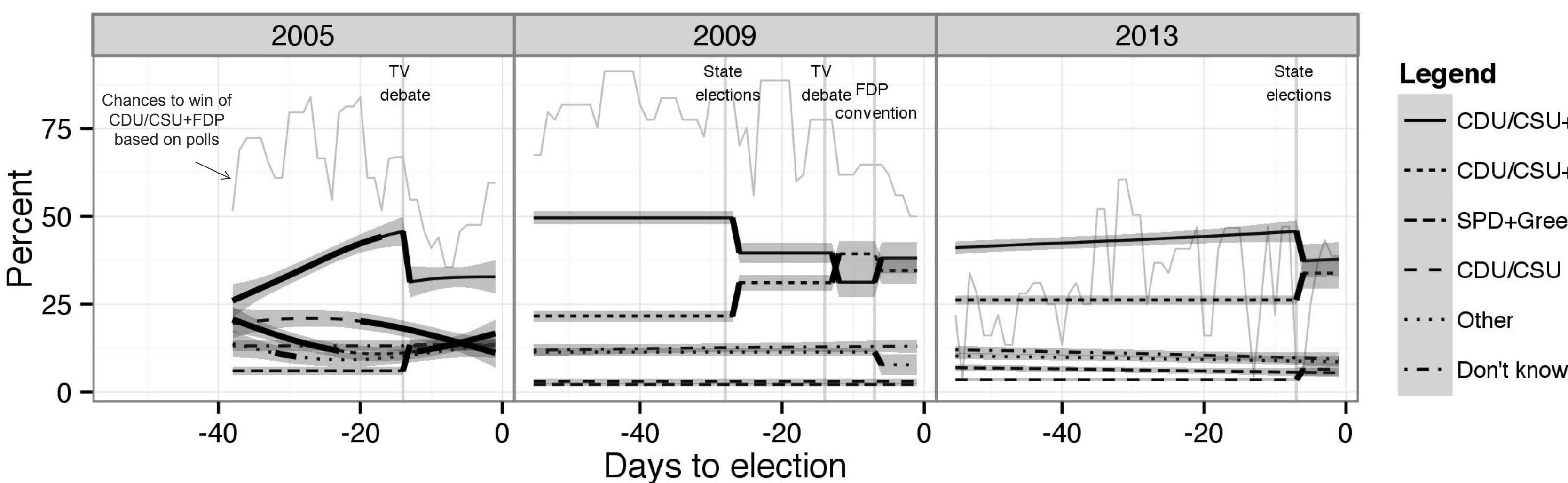
Data: RCS 2009 & 2013 (GLES) & RCS 2005 (Campaign dynamics project); Data on media polls from wahlrecht.de; Smoothed by penalized cubic regression spline, with 95% confidence bands (shaded area); Periods of significant change (first derivative > 0; p<0.05) highlighted in bold face.