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

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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 Findings

Agenda dynamics during the campaign period

Most important problems, 2009 & 2013

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

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.