Political Sophistication and Vote Intention Switching
The Timing of Electoral Volatility in the 2009 German Election Campaign

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the link between political sophistication and electoral volatility. Showing that there is disagreement in the literature on whether switching party preferences is related to low or high levels of political sophistication, it is then argued that the effect of sophistication on vote switching might differ depending on when switching is measured. The effect of timing on volatility is investigated by means of the Short-term panel of the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Study. Results indicate that timing indeed matters, while sophistication increases the probability of switching parties before the campaign, the effect of political sophistication becomes more negative as Election Day draws near.

1.   Introduction

Electoral volatility is a central concept in political research and has even been called *"one of the most important areas of comparative political research".*[1] Despite a rich literature investigating the causes and consequences of volatility, the link between political sophistication and electoral volatility is still debated. The 'floating voter' hypothesis, launched by the pioneers of voter studies at Columbia University[2], links volatility to a lack of information and little interest in politics. A number of scholars countered this one-sided view of volatile voters by pointing out that different types of volatile voters could be thought of. These scholars argued that volatile voters could be highly politically sophisticated as well.[3] The apparent simultaneous rise in educational levels and information sources available for voters on the one hand and the increase in volatility on the other hand, have led Russell Dalton[4] to question the rather pessimistic image of unsophisticated volatile voters. He argues that the electorate has fundamentally changed over the past decades and that by now we could observe that changes in party preferences are quite pronounced among the higher educated and voters who are highly interested in politics.

A large group of scholars has already tried to disentangle the link between political sophistication and vote switching and different approaches have been taken to do so.[5] The fact that this topic has received wide scholarly attention is not surprising; whether it is the high or the low politically sophisticated who are most prone to change parties is at the heart of democratic theory. As Berelson and his colleagues[6] have pointed out, given that volatile voters hold the balance of power, vote switchers are preferably high politically sophisticated.

What has been somewhat neglected in the literature, however, is the difference between volatility from one election to another and within-campaign volatility. While the first scholars investigating volatility –partly due to the data at hand− focused on campaign-volatility only, a number of scholars consequently assume that the factors found to be related to switching vote intentions in an election campaign are also determinants of switching parties from one election to another.[7] When campaign- and inter-election volatility is distinguished between, some essential differences between both phenomena do show up. Lachat, for example, who is one of the few scholars explicitly distinguishing between these two types of volatility, indicates different trends. In the long term, Lachat finds campaign volatility to be increasing, but he does not observe a similar pattern for inter-election volatility. This contrast leads Lachat to conclude that inter-election volatility signifies realignment, while campaign-volatility can be considered an indicator of over-time changes in the vote choice process.[8]

Even though inter-election and campaign-volatility are only rarely distinguished between, it is argued in this paper that it might be essential to do so. This is especially true because most of what we know on volatile voters is based on research investigating campaign-volatility only. Previous research has indeed suggested that when strictly separating changes within an election campaign from changes in-between elections, the effect of political sophistication on electoral volatility is in opposite directions. In the Belgian multiparty context, political sophistication has been found to increase the probability for inter-election switching, but to decrease the probability of a switch during the campaign period.[9] As such, these findings suggest that it is essential to take both types of switching and the aspect of timing into account when investigating the link between political sophistication and volatility.

In this paper, this gap in the current literature is addressed by a specific focus on the difference between campaign volatility and inter-election switching in the German context. In a first step, it is investigated whether, as was previously found for Belgium, the link between political sophistication and volatility differs for both types of volatility. In a second step, this paper seeks to gain insights into the mechanisms of potential differences. Are differences inherent to differences between campaign- and non-campaign periods, or are differences merely an artefact of time and the fact that as the campaign unfolds, Election Day draws near?

These questions are investigated through an analysis on vote switching by respondents in the Short-term panel of the German Longitudinal Election Study.[10] Methodologically, multilevel event history analysis techniques are used, which allow investigating vote (intention) switching over time. The focus is on vote switching in the run-up to the German 2009 elections, as such the spotlight is on volatility in a multiparty context that has previously found to be affected by a trend of dealignment and in which a considerable degree of instability has been reported.[11]

The paper starts with an overview of the literature on the link between political sophistication and electoral volatility. Within the literature section there is specific attention for differences between campaign-volatility and inter-election volatility and the aspect of timing. Next comes the description of the data and the method chosen. Subsequently, the results are presented and interpreted and the paper ends with a discussion on the implications of the findings and limitations of the current study.

2.   Literature Review

2.1.   *Electoral volatility driven by political sophistication?*
Originally hinted at in the 1970s[12], it is by now considered an established fact that political behaviour and voting more specifically are becoming increasingly unstable.[13] To some extent, electoral volatility is deemed essential. If voters switch parties, this implies that there can be real competition between

parties. Additionally, if voters are to hold governing parties accountable, they should be open to change parties from one election to another.[14] The increase of volatility has also led to concerns, however. Effective representation and governability are thought to be at risk in a context of extreme instability.[15]

Even before scholars noticed an increase of volatility, the pioneers of voting behaviour research already investigated the phenomenon of volatility. The findings on campaign switching presented in their studies led them to a rather pessimistic conclusion: *"Stability in vote is characteristic of those interested in politics and instability of those not particularly interested"*.[16] The implication of this finding is that, contrary to the Downsian idea of rational voting, it is the least interested in politics who switch votes most during an election campaign. Consequently, alterations in election results and in government seem to be driven by changes among the least interested part of the electorate. While from an idealistic perspective on democracy some flexibility within the system is considered essential, this flexibility should be introduced preferably by sophisticated voters. The contradiction between the findings of Berelson and his colleagues and an ideal-type democracy has therefore been labelled the 'Berelson paradox'.[17]

Empirical evidence hinting at the fact that it is the less informed and less involved voters that hold the balance of power further accumulates. Both in the U.S. and in a European context, scholars have indicated that partisans are significantly more informed about and interested in politics.[18] Those without a strong identification with a particular party, by contrast, who are also more prone to change preferences, are less informed about and less involved in politics.

A more optimistic account on volatile voters has been put forward by Russell Dalton.[19] He asserts that current electorates can no longer be compared to the voters surveyed by the Columbia school scholars. In the 1950s voters were in general less educated and they had access to much less information compared to present-day voters. Voters remedied this lack of information by developing long-term attachments to political parties based on social characteristics or partisanship.[20] A process of cognitive mobilization, however, with rising levels of education and sources for political mobilization multiplied, has armed voters to choose parties independently. As a result, habitual party loyalties have become redundant for these voters. With partisanship weakened across western industrialized countries, the potential for switching party preferences has increased considerably. According to the process described by Dalton, the group of apartisans –and therefore also the group most likely to change preferences− is increasingly characterized by high levels of political information and involvement in politics.[21]

The literature does contain more nuance than the mere opposition between scholars arguing that political sophistication decreases volatility on the one and scholars pointing out that sophistication increases the probability of switching parties on the other hand. As such, a number of publications empirically indicate that the relation between political sophistication and the probability of campaign-switching is curvilinear. While the least sophisticated voters are not likely to be exposed to political information and consequently not likely to change preferences, the most sophisticated voters have well-developed political attitudes, rendering them resistant to change. As a consequence, according to these authors, it is the middle sophisticated voters who are most likely to switch parties.[22] The arguments on which this line of thought is based are grounded in the literature on information processing[23] and are therefore suited best for understanding campaign volatility. Nevertheless, scholars assume that the same curvilinear pattern is likely to be found for inter-election switching as well.[24]

2.2. *Campaign volatility versus inter-election volatility*

The relation between low levels of interest in politics and party preference switching established by Berelson and his colleagues, was originally one found for campaign switchers only. On the question whether this finding could be generalized to inter-election switching as well, they were much more hesitant.[25] The issue of comparability between campaign switching and inter-election volatility has remained a point of debate ever since. While there is agreement that one should distinguish between both concepts because they are inherently different, the same mechanisms are usually assumed to be related to both types of volatility.[26] One reason for this continued assumption is rooted in data constrains. While panel-data on single election campaigns are abundantly available, data following the same voters for longer periods of time and covering several elections are scarce. This then leads to a reliance on recall-data for investigating switching parties from one election to another, which is generally considered an imperfect measure.[27]

As a consequence of these data constrains, only a limited number of publications explicitly distinguishes between campaign and inter-election volatility. Given a reliance on findings based on campaign volatility, when different patterns between campaign volatility on the one hand and inter-election volatility on the other hand are found, these contrasts tend to be interpreted as surprising.[28]

The argument put forward in this paper is that when investigating the link between political sophistication and volatility, finding differences for campaign volatility and inter-election volatility respectively *should* not be considered surprising. This is all the more true if one focuses on differences in the timing of switching and explicitly differentiates switching before the election campaign and campaign switching.[29] Such a strict division implies that inter-election switching refers to switching to another party before the subsequent election campaign takes off. Campaign-switching then refers to

switching to another party than the party one has voted for in the previous election during the subsequent election campaign. A number of arguments can be thought of to be causing differences.

First, previous research in the field of political communication has indicated that political experts and political novices respond differently to the information they are exposed to in the media. In research on priming, for example, hypotheses are formulated that remind us of the 'floating voter hypothesis' of Berelson and his colleagues.[30] Scholars in this field expect and find evidence indicating that political novices are to a larger extent influenced by media messages compared to politically sophisticated citizens.[31] For political campaigns more specifically, Zaller has indicated that low informed voters are most responsive to election-specific influences.[32] Well informed voters, by contrast, have well developed political attitudes and quite often a strong identification with a particular party. As a consequence, these citizens look at the campaign with a partisan lens and campaign messages only have a limited impact on their attitudes.[33] Consequently, within the context of an election campaign more specifically, the high sophisticated can be expected to have a low probability of switching parties. The low sophisticated, by contrast, can be expected to be highly susceptible to change in a campaign period more specifically because this is when information on parties reaches them.

Second, we can gain insights from the literature on the timing of the vote choice as well. Several authors have indicated that being highly interested in politics, being attentive to political information and high levels of political knowledge all lead to deciding earlier what party to vote for.[34] As Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller conclude based on their reading of the literature: *"… a lack of political involvement on the part of the voters impeded both their capacity and their motivation to arrive at a voting decision, leading to delayed choices"*.[35] Consequently, if voters change preferences, the least sophisticated are expected to do so during the campaign, while the high sophisticated –who are early-deciding− are more likely to have done so before the campaign took off. High sophisticated voters, having decided early, are furthermore unlikely to subsequently change their minds. The low sophisticated voters, on the other hand, who cannot rely on well-developed political attitudes or strong dispositions are more likely to alter their choice before coming to a final decision on what party to vote for. Previous research on the time of the voting decision clearly leads to the expectations that the low sophisticated should have a high probability of changing parties during the election campaign. At the same time, given that the high sophisticated tend to decide early, if these voters switch parties, they should be doing this before the campaign period.

For high sophisticated voters, the literature leads us to expect that the probability of switching parties is highest before the election campaign takes off and this merely by the fact that this group generally decides early. Additionally, in case parties have shifted ideologically since the previous election[36],

only the high politically sophisticated can be thought to be aware and to change parties accordingly. This is so because gaps in political knowledge are generally higher outside of the information-rich contexts that election campaigns provide.[37] For low sophisticated voters, on the other hand, the probability of switching parties should be highest during the campaign. This expectation is driven both by the fact that this group tends to decide late and by the fact that the low sophisticated have been found to be more susceptible to campaign information.

These expectations tie in with previous research that indicated that when investigating inter-election volatility and explicitly distinguishing this from changing during the campaign, high levels of political sophistication increase the probability of switching parties but that political sophistication decreases the likelihood of switching parties during an election campaign.[38] This finding is expected to hold for the German political context as well, which leads to the following hypotheses:

> Hypothesis 1: Political sophistication increases the probability of inter-election volatility.

> Hypothesis 2: Political sophistication decreases the probability of campaign-volatility.

The mechanisms underlying these hypotheses are one of susceptibility to change as the amount of information exposed to accumulates and one of the timing-of-voting-decision. Both mechanisms can be thought of to continue affecting the relation between political sophistication and volatility as Election Day draws near. If so, we should not merely think of a distinction between the campaign period and what comes before, but of a more or less continuous process by which the high sophisticated voters' probability to switch parties decreases as the election draws near, while the low sophisticated voters' probability should increase as one approaches election day. This then leads to expectation of an interaction between political sophistication and time, implying that as Election Day comes close, the effect of political sophistication on volatility becomes more negative.

> Hypothesis 3: The closer to Election Day, the stronger the negative effect of political sophistication on volatility.

2.3. *The German electoral context*

There has already been quite some scholarly attention for the evolution of party identification and the stability of party preferences in Germany. These studies provide indications of change over the past decades, with an erosion of the bonds between voters and political parties through a gradual process of dealignment.[39] Furthermore there is already a long tradition of investigating electoral volatility as well within the German context.[40]

Investigating the link between political sophistication and volatility for the German electoral context implies that a number of specificities of this context have to be considered. More specifically, one can expect to find a substantial amount of switching among the high sophisticated. The main reason therefore is that strategic voting is promoted within the German electoral system and political culture, due to the presence of an electoral threshold and the formation of coalition governments. The openness of German parties about their preferred coalition partner and fear for the smaller parties to fall short of the electoral threshold convinces voters to refrain from their sincere vote for one of the larger parties and to support a small party instead. These preferred coalition partners are also ideologically close and one can distinguish between a conservative CDU/CSU-FDP-block on the one hand and a leftist SPD-Green-block on the other hand.[41] Given that voters have to be aware of preferred coalitions and how close an election is, i.e. whether or not the small coalition partner is in need of votes, strategic voting requires some level of political sophistication.[42] Furthermore, as Lachat argues, the asymmetry between large and small parties within the ideological blocks of political parties, might explain why the high politically sophisticated are more likely to switch preferences within that block. Large political parties receive more media attention both in the course of the campaign and outside of the campaign period. As a consequence, the lower politically sophisticated are less likely to receive the messages of smaller parties, decreasing their probability of switching to the smaller party within 'their' preferred block.[43] These specificities of the German system necessitate controlling for the presence of strategic considerations when investigating the link between political sophistication and volatility. Only if we find the expected link between political sophistication and volatility while controlling for these aspects, we can generalize our findings outside of the German context as well.

Focusing on voting behaviour in Germany, one furthermore has to take into account the heterogeneity of East and West. Although unification dates from 1990 already, differences between voters in both parts of the country persist. As such, East-Germans are found to be party identifiers less often than their compatriots in the West.[44] Missing the stabilizing impact of party identification, volatility can be expected to be higher among voters living in the East. On the other hand, vote switching caused by economic considerations is expected to be less pronounced in East-Germany. This is thought to be so because the reasoning making voters to reward or punish the incumbent at elections, is expected to be less strong in newer democracies.[45] Clearly, differences between voters living in the East and voters from West Germany have to be taken into consideration in the analyses.

2.4. *Other determinants of volatility*

While the debate on the impact of political sophistication on volatility is an important one, and the focus of the current paper, other determinants as well have been investigated in the literature. Because

he found theories on political sophistication having only a limited amount of explanatory power when investigating volatility, Carsten Zelle proposed the 'frustrated floating voter' hypothesis.[46] Zelle's main argument is that voters who switch parties are, very much like citizens abstaining from voting, dissatisfied. As such, volatility should not be considered a consequence of a lack of interest in politics but an expression of a mood of protest. Several scholars have more generally linked volatility to political disaffection and empirical results do point out that volatile voters tend to have lower levels of political trust and political efficacy and to be less satisfied with democracy.[47] Even though this paper seeks to investigate the link between political sophistication and volatility, these concurrent theories cannot be neglected and should be controlled for in the analyses.

3.   Data and methods

3.1.   Data

The data used for the analyses presented in this paper are from the Short-term panel of the German Longitudinal Election Study.[48] The data cover seven survey waves, conducted between 10 July 2009 and 7 October 2009. The final wave was a post-electoral wave, for which field work started shortly after the elections that were held on 27 September 2009.[49] The data come from a non-probability online panel and active panellists who were eligible to vote were selected to participate. The selection of respondents was based on quota for gender, education and age groups. In the first wave 3,376 respondents participated, of which 1,289 took part in all seven waves of the Short-term Campaign panel.

The panel does not span several elections, but it does provide an extensive overview of dynamics within an election campaign. Furthermore, a recall question on voting in the previous election was included in the first wave of the survey. As such, with regard to the timing of vote switching, we can assess whether changes occurred before the campaign took off or within the campaign period. Relying on a recall question of previous voting behaviour, it should be highlighted that this is an imperfect measure for investigating volatility. A number of mechanisms render recalled vote choices less reliable. First, citizens strive for consistency, resulting in reports of previous behaviour that are adjusted in the direction of current behaviour.[50] Second, voters can provide false reports simply because they are not able to remember previous behaviour. Third, the issue of social desirability leads voters who did not turn out to vote in elections to falsely report that they did.[51] Despite these shortcomings, given the lack of panel data covering multiple election cycles, relying on recall data is the *"only way out"* if one wants to investigate both inter-election and campaign volatility.[52] Additionally, not for all types of volatility the explanatory power has been found to increase when using panel data instead of recalled behaviour.[53] Comparing inter-election volatility, measured by means of a recall question and campaign volatility, measured via panel-data, we will have to keep in

mind that the different measuring method can potentially affect the findings. The main question, however, is whether the effect of political sophistication continues to change as the campaign unfolds and it is for this crucial campaign period that observed vote intentions can be relied on.

The dependent variable in the analyses is vote switching, which takes the value 0 in case a respondent is stable and 1 when a respondent switches parties. A respondent can switch parties up to seven times, with the first possibility for switching being from the recalled vote choice of 2005 to the vote intention of wave 1. Subsequently a respondent can change vote intentions at every survey wave, up until wave 7, where the 2009 vote choice is recalled (see Table 1). Volatility is operationalized in a strict sense and refers to switching between parties only. As a consequence, respondents switching to or from a don't know option are treated as missing. This strict operationalization is opted for in order not to confuse electoral volatility with uncertainty, undecidedness and deciding late what party to vote for.[54] As clear from Table 1, stability dominates and only 13% of the observations are switches between parties. Table 1 equally illustrates the issue of attrition throughout the panel, while information in wave 1 is still based on 1,418 respondents, in the final wave only 499 of them can still be included.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The main interest of this paper lies in investigating how political sophistication affects inter-election and campaign volatility. As a consequence, how political sophistication is operationalized is of crucial importance for the validity of the analyses. In the literature, different approaches have been taken to measure citizens' level of political sophistication, which can be considered to stand for *"the extent to which (…) political cognitions are numerous, cut a wide substantive swath, and are highly organized or 'constrained'"*.[55] The consensus seems to be that political knowledge is the best single indicator for measuring sophistication, but other indicators such as political interest or political activity are also regularly looked at.[56] The data used in this paper are from an online panel and consequently do not include measures of political knowledge. As an alternative, how Dalton operationalizes what he calls 'cognitive mobilization' can be looked at; he relies on an additive index of levels of education and interest in politics. Dalton defends this index by stating that the two items *"make an independent theoretical and empirical contribution to measuring cognitive mobilization"*.[57] Additionally, the two items seem to be correlating strongly with measures of political knowledge. Similarly, aiming to measure political sophistication, Lachat relies on a combination of measures of education and political interest when knowledge questions are not available.[58] Following these examples, in this paper as well an additive index of levels of education and interest in politics is used as a proxy for the concept of political sophistication. Respondents' level of education is measured on a scale from 0 to 4[59] and political interest is measured in five categories as well.[60] Both of these items were summed, which results in an index of political sophistication running from 0 to 8.

In order to take into account the impact of political disaffection on volatility, measures of political trust, satisfaction with democracy and external efficacy are included. For political trust, the survey questioned respondents on their level of trust in a number of institutions, which could be rated on a scale from 1 (I do not trust at all) to 5 (I fully trust). Since measures for trust in the Bundestag, the federal government, parties and members of the German parliament strongly loaded on a one dimensional scale (Eigenvalue: 2.74, Explained variance: 68.51%), they were combined into a 1 to 5 sumscale of political trust. Second, a measure of satisfaction with democracy is added, which comes from the single item included in the first wave asking respondents how satisfied they are with democracy in Germany. The response options for this item range from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Third, a measure of external political efficacy is included in the analyses. Therefore scores of respondents on two items included in the first wave of the survey were summed into a 1 to 5 sumscale. The question wording of the items was the following: 'Politicians care about what people like me think' and 'Citizens can hardly influence politics' (reverse coding). Respondents could indicate to what degree they agree with the statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and both items loaded on a one-dimensional scale (Eigenvalue: 1.22, Explained variance: 61.15%).

One of the arguments put forward in the literature for expecting highly sophisticated voters to be less likely to switch party preferences is that they are more likely to identify with a particular party. As a consequence, in order to avoid spurious effects when investigating the link between political sophistication and vote switching, partisanship is controlled for in the analyses.[61] Furthermore, as was pointed out in the theory section, the German electoral system can be considered conducive for strategic voting. As a consequence, one can expect to find indications of a substantial degree of high sophisticated (within-block) volatility in the German context. To control for the effect of strategic considerations on volatility, a variable capturing likely strategic voters is included. Therefore, a dummy variable is included taking the value of 1 for a respondent identifying with one of the major parties (CDU/CSU or SPD) but having voted for one of their small preferred coalition partners (FDP or the Greens respectively) at the occasion of the previous election.[62]

Additionally, some socio-demographical variables are included. Gender and age as well as the region where a respondent was born (distinguishing respondents born in the West, in the East and respondents born abroad/respondents without German citizenship) are added. Furthermore, religious denomination (distinguishing Catholic, other Christian denomination, other denomination and no denomination) and subjective class membership (Working class or lower middle class, middle class and upper middle class or upper class) are controlled for in the analyses. Descriptive statistics of all independent variables included in the analysis are listed in Table 2.

Because some key covariates in the analyses were only measured in the first wave of the survey, the dataset is necessarily limited to respondents who participated in at least the first two waves of the survey. Missing values therefore reduced the dataset to 6,636 observations nested in 1,418 individuals.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Making use of panel data does have some disadvantages of which we should be aware. First, panel attrition problems may cause the sample to be biased and this bias is likely to increase in subsequent panel waves. Furthermore, and this is an important caveat for the current analysis; higher educated and highly interested respondents have been found to be less sensitive to attrition than low educated or the low interested.[63] Because of the multilevel modelling approach, however, information available on all respondents taking part in the first two waves is included in the analyses, regardless of whether these respondents take part in the full panel study. Therefore, although panel attrition effects should not be discarded, the method chosen reduces these distortions to some extent. Second, panel conditioning might be an issue, in which more stability is reported exactly because panel respondents are asked repeatedly about their vote intentions.[64] Clearly, the reliance on online panel data and attrition problems limit the generalizability of the findings presented in this manuscript.

3.2.   Method

For testing the first two hypotheses, time is not a crucial variable, which is why regular logistic regression analyses can be employed. The dependent variable for investigating the first hypothesis is inter-election switching, which takes the value of 1 if a respondent switched preferences from the recalled 2005 vote to the wave 1 vote intention for the upcoming 2009 elections and 0 if a respondent reports to remain loyal to his or her 2005 vote choice. For testing the second hypothesis, campaign volatility is looked at. Therefore, the dependent variable included in the analyses takes the value of 1 if a respondent switched parties at least once during the campaign and the value of 0 otherwise.

Additionally, this paper seeks to investigate the timing of vote switching, with specific attention for time-differences depending on levels of political sophistication. This aim renders event history analysis the appropriate methodological tool to investigate the third hypothesis, for which timing is crucial.[65] Although the technique of event history analysis lends itself to investigate panel data and despite being frequently used in the field of sociology, only few studies employ event history analysis for investigating voting behaviour.[66]

For testing the third hypothesis, as a first step, the data is converted into a person-period file, with for each individual as many records as survey waves participated to. What is then modelled is the time a

respondent is *at risk* of an event (i.e. switching parties) to occur. A respondent is at risk of the event to occur until he or she switches parties or does not take part in the survey anymore, which is labelled 'censoring'. Given that throughout the panel survey, respondents could switch multiple times, a repeated events model is needed. Repeated events can be modelled in different ways, for the current analysis, a 'total time' approach is preferred, which implies that for each event, the time since the previous election is modelled.[67] Steele has convincingly argued that recurrent events can be included in a straightforward way in a two-level hierarchical framework, with risk episodes nested in individuals. Following Steele's approach, the models presented are multilevel models for longitudinal data.[68] Obviously, for a single individual, durations until vote switching are probably correlated. To take this possibility into account, the model controls for the number of previous switches within the panel.[69] Respondents can switch vote intentions at any time before or during the campaign, but changes could only be measured when a survey wave was organized. As a consequence, discrete time hazard models are called for.[70]

4. Results

As a first step, we investigate the link between political sophistication and volatility for inter-election and campaign volatility separately. Previous research has indicated that when strictly separating both types of volatility, and distinguishing between switching parties before an election campaign starts off and switching during the election campaign, the effect of political sophistication is in opposite directions.[71]

Table 3 presents the results of logistic regressions, in which inter-election and campaign volatility are analysed separately. Inter-election volatility is operationalized as reporting a vote intention in the first wave of the survey that differs from the recalled vote choice in 2005. All subsequent switches are operationalized as campaign switching. Given that campaign switching is possible at different instances, a respondent who switched at least once during the campaign is operationalized as a 'campaign switcher'.

Because a number of scholars argue that the effect of political sophistication on both inter-election and campaign volatility is curvilinear, we also model a non-linear relation by additionally including the squared effect of the political sophistication index (Model 2 and Model 4).

In Model 1 the correlates of inter-election volatility, strictly defined as switching before the campaign, are investigated. Looking at the effect of political sophistication first, only including the main effect of the political sophistication index indicates a significant and positive effect. As previous research already indicated, and as hypothesized (Hypothesis 1), higher levels of political sophistication increase the probability of changing parties from one election to the next election campaign.

The results for Model 1 furthermore indicate that Zelle's claim that political disaffection should be looked at if one wants to understand the causes for vote switching is warranted.[72] Higher levels of satisfaction with democracy significantly and strongly decrease the probability of inter-election switching and voters with higher levels of political trust as well are less likely to change parties. The results presented in Table 3 additionally indicate that none of the socio-demographic control variables seems to significantly affect voters' probability of inter-election switching. Interestingly, although it is often claimed that East and West are still highly divergent political systems, the probability of inter-election switching does not differ significantly in both parts of the country. The effect of party identification is significant and indicates that respondents who feel close to a party are clearly less likely to switch parties from one election to the next campaign. The strength of the effect accentuates the need to control for partisanship when investigating what causes voters to switch parties. An additional specificity of the German electoral context is the presence of incentives for strategic voting. The effect of strategic voting in 2005 indicates that this group of voters is significantly more likely to have changed parties by the start of the 2009 campaign.

Model 2 includes all the independent variables from Model 1 and additionally the squared term of the political sophistication index, as such a curvilinear effect of political sophistication on inter-election switching is investigated. Doing so does not indicate a significant effect of political sophistication on inter-election volatility, which provides additional evidence that the effect of sophistication on inter-election switching is linear. We can hence conclude that the results suggest that we can confirm our first hypothesis; higher levels of political sophistication significantly increase the probability of inter-election volatility.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In Model 3 and Model 4 in Table 3, using the same set of independent variables, it is investigated what factors are related to campaign volatility. Given that campaign volatility was possible at several instances during the campaign, as measured in different waves, the dependent variable measures whether a respondent has switched parties at least once during the campaign. As clear from the results, neither modelled linearly nor modelled curvilinearly, is the political sophistication index significantly related to campaign volatility. As a consequence, the results do not allow accepting the second hypothesis.

Unlike what holds for inter-election volatility, attitudes of political disaffection do not seem to be affecting campaign volatility. As was the case for inter-election volatility as well, the socio-demographical variables do not predict campaign volatility. In line with what was found for inter-

election volatility, then, it is clear that being close to a party significantly decreases the probability of switching, while being a strategic voter significantly increases voters' probability of switching. Given that only two independent variables are significant predictors of campaign volatility, the explanatory power of Model 3 and Model 4 is very low.

The previous analyses indicated some crucial differences between inter-election volatility on the one hand and campaign volatility on the other. In the framework of the current paper, the results most importantly indicated that political sophistication increases the probability of switching parties from one election to the start of the next election campaign. Unlike what was hypothesized, political sophistication is not found to decrease the likelihood of changing parties along the election campaign. The next question then is whether differences in the effect (or absence of an effect) of political sophistication can be explained merely by the fact that a campaign period is inherently different from a non-campaign period, or whether −as stated in the third hypothesis− the effect of political sophistication becomes increasingly more negative as Election Day draws near? In order to test this, the timing of party switching is analysed by means of event history modelling techniques.

Table 4 presents the results of three models. Model 1 is the main model of the pooled data including both switching before and during the campaign. In this model volatility is analysed by means of a random intercept multilevel model, with observations nested in individuals. The timing of switching is investigated through the inclusion of dummy variables for subsequent waves of the panel survey. In Model 2 additionally a random slope of the effect of time and an interactive term between sophistication and the campaign period is added. In Model 3, then, political sophistication is interacted with each of the wave dummies, which allows investigating whether the effect of political sophistication becomes more negative as the campaign unfolds. The independent variables included in the pooled models are the same as for the separate analyses of inter-election and campaign volatility. Additionally, because of the repeated-events-framework, the number of times a respondent has switched before is controlled for.

Looking at the results for Model 1 first, the negative and significant coefficients for the survey wave dummies indicate that in all survey waves during the campaign, voters are less likely to change parties than they are before the campaign period. Additionally, the size of the coefficients somewhat increases for subsequent waves, indicating that the probability to switch decreases as Election Day draws near. This finding is indicative for the fact that as the election approaches, more and more voters have decided what party to vote for, rendering their vote intention more stable.

The results of Model 1 presented in Table 4 furthermore indicate that when pooling inter-election and campaign volatility, the effect of political sophistication is no longer significant. The variables

capturing political disaffection do indicate significant effects, as clear from the significant and negative effects of satisfaction with democracy and political trust. Additionally, in line with the analyses for campaign volatility and inter-election volatility separately, being close to a party decreases the probability of switching while being a strategic voter increases the probability of switching. Given that repeated events are analysed, the number of times a respondent has switched parties by the time of the survey is controlled for. As clear from Model 1 in Table 4, however, this does not significantly affect the probability of changing parties. For the pooled analysis there are some indications of an effect of socio-demographics. Women seem to be somewhat more likely to change parties compared to men and respondents from the upper middle or upper classes are significantly less likely to switch parties than the middle classes.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Model 2 includes the same independent variables as Model 1 and additionally an interaction term between political sophistication and the campaign period. As can be seen from Table 4, most results are robust to the inclusion of this interaction term. Surprisingly, the effect of the number of times switched before is negative and significant, which is indicative for a ceiling effect. Having switched parties in the course of the campaign does not provoke more switching, but on the contrary obstructs further volatility. For political sophistication, then, it can be observed that the main effect of the political sophistication index is positive and becomes marginally significant. The interaction term, with a coefficient of about equal size, is negative and significant. As such, these results indicate that the effect of political sophistication on volatility is positive before the campaign, but this positive effect is countered and becomes negligible during the campaign period, which is in line with the findings in Table 3.

Both the results for separate analyses of inter-election volatility and campaign volatility and the results of the pooled approach seem to confirm that the effect of political sophistication differs for campaign and non-campaign periods. As such, there is suggestive evidence for what previous research has already indicated; political sophistication increases the probability of switching before an election campaign but this effect is reversed in campaign periods. The next step, then, is to investigate whether this difference between the campaign and the non-campaign period is the reflection of a continuous process of change in the run up to the elections or merely a contrast between the campaign and the non-campaign period. Therefore, in Model 3 the political sophistication index is interacted with each of the wave dummies. If the process were one of increasingly more negative effects of political sophistication on the probability of switching, we would observe significant negative effects for these interaction terms and an increase of the sizes of coefficients as Election Day draws near.

The results of Model 3 are in line with this expectation, even though not all interactive terms are significant, the trend is clearly one of increasingly more negative effects of political sophistication on the probability of switching parties. Furthermore, looking at the main effect of political sophistication in Model 3, curvilinearity is hinted at. As a result, the main effect of sophistication on volatility found is in line with what previous research has already indicated. But the results point to an important addition in terms of timing. As Election Day draws near, the effect of political sophistication becomes more negative and the constraining effect of sophistication on switching is enhanced. As a consequence, we find suggestive evidence for the third hypothesis. The differences in the effect of political sophistication on volatility in non-campaign periods and campaign periods seem to be a reflection of a continuous process by which the effect of political sophistication changes. Higher levels of political sophistication significantly increase the probability of switching before the campaign, but this 'advantage' diminishes as Election Day draws near. In the final wave, then, the effect is reversed and higher levels of political sophistication are associated with a lower probability of switching parties. As a consequence, the aspect of timing is crucial to take into account when scholars investigate the link between sophistication and electoral volatility.

To have a better grasp of what the size of the estimated effects of political sophistication and its interaction with time are, we present the results of some predicted probabilities in Figure 1. Predictions are made for two extreme cases; a respondent with a minimum level of political sophistication and a respondent with a maximum level of political sophistication. Most importantly, the graph illustrates that the high sophisticates are strongly more likely to switch parties before the campaign takes off (see the difference in probabilities in Wave 1). In the course of the campaign period, then, the probability that a high sophisticated voter switches parties is in continuous decline. For the low sophisticates, by contrast, the probability to switch parties increases as Election Day draws near.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

As an additional robustness test, interactions of other independent variables and time were included as well. These tests indicated that results for political sophistication are robust to taking into account that the effects of political trust, external efficacy or satisfaction with democracy on volatility as well can vary over time.[73]

5.   Conclusion

What effect political sophistication has on volatility is an old question in the field of political research. It is additionally a highly relevant question, because the voters who switch parties from one election to

another hold the balance of power. Nevertheless, the debate on whether political sophistication increases or decreases the probability to switch parties is still on-going.

In this article, this classical puzzle within research on voting behaviour is investigated with specific attention for the element of timing. Building on previous research, the starting point is that the effect of political sophistication on volatility differs depending on whether inter-election or campaign volatility is looked at. For the German 2009 elections, the results do indeed suggest that political sophistication somewhat increased the probability to switch parties before the campaign took off. Along the campaign period covered by the German Short-term campaign panel, however, political sophistication does not significantly affect the likelihood that voters switch parties.

A number of reasons can be thought of why high levels of sophistication increase the probability of switching before the campaign but not in the campaign period. First, it is known that high politically sophisticated voters decide earlier what party to vote for. If these voters decide to switch parties from one election to another, therefore, they can be expected to be doing so early on. Second, high levels of sophistication arm voters against the influence of political messages during the campaign. Both of these factors, then, can be thought of to become increasingly important as Election Day comes near and the campaign unfolds. Therefore, the analysis is taken a step further and a continuous process of a changing impact of political sophistication on volatility is investigated.

The results of the multilevel analyses do indeed suggest that the effect of political sophistication on volatility continues to change as Election Day draws near. This finding is not inconsequential for political science research; it implies that when voters are interviewed on their vote choice and vote intentions affects the relation found between political sophistication and volatility. The differences between inter-election and campaign volatility that have previously been found therefore are not a mere consequence of the different setting. Processes are at work that continue to alter the effect of sophistication on volatility up until Election Day.

This study obviously suffers from some important limitations, the impact of which warrant further investigation. First, the data are based on analyses on a non-probability on-line panel sample. This aspect can obviously bias findings, especially when it comes to investigating the effect of political sophistication on volatility. Furthermore, the repeated survey-design introduces an attrition bias, leading to an enhanced focus on a small group of most likely high politically sophisticated respondents. As a consequence, the results should be interpreted with some caution and a straightforward generalization towards the electorate at large is not possible. Future research, therefore, should provide insights on whether the same patterns can be observed when analysing volatility among a representative probability sample. Second, the presence of a substantial amount of

strategic voting could be argued to warrant investigating differences between within- and between-block switching or to take into account the ideological distance bridged.[74] The relatively small number of volatile respondents in the sample, however, and the differentiation of the effect in panel waves, render the results of such an analysis highly unstable. Third, although the survey used included a recall question on voting behaviour in the previous election, ideally the contrasting effects of sophistication for inter-election and campaign volatility respectively are investigated by means of a full panel covering different election campaigns. The fact that the process of change observed continues throughout the campaign period and therefore for observed changes as well, however, increases the reliability of the findings. Nevertheless, investigating the impact of timing on the relation between political sophistication and volatility by means of a full panel is the next step to take.

The results of the current analysis indicate that timing matters when investigating volatility. When one measures vote intention switching is likely to affect the relation found between political sophistication and volatility. Given the importance of the debate on the effect of political sophistication in research on volatility, this finding should not be disregarded. Future research therefore should bear in mind that the timing of measuring change does affect the results.

Table 1. Dependent variable measurement

	N stable	N volatile	Total N estimation sample
Recall vote choice 2005 (w1) – Vote intention (w1)	1,047	371	1,418
Vote intention (w1) – Vote intention (w2)	1,192	152	1,344
Vote intention (w2) – Vote intention (w3)	982	103	1,085
Vote intention (w3) – Vote intention (w4)	838	80	918
Vote intention (w4) – Vote intention (w5)	710	74	784
Vote intention (w5) – Vote intention (w6)	526	62	588
Vote intention (w6) – vote choice 2009 (w7)	452	47	499
Total	5,747	889	6,636

Source: GLES 2009. Short-term Campaign Panel ZA5305, version 3.0.0.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of independent variables

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Female	6,636	0.45	0.50	0	1
Age	6,636	45.57	13.72	18	80
West German	6,636	0.79	0.41	0	1
East German	6,636	0.19	0.39	0	1
No German/Abroad	6,636	0.02	0.13	0	1
Working or lower middle class	6,636	0.35	0.50	0	1
Middle class	6,636	0.54	0.50	0	1
Upper middle or upper class	6,636	0.11	0.32	0	1
No denomination	6,636	0.37	0.48	0	1
Catholic	6,636	0.28	0.45	0	1
Other Christian denomination	6,636	0.33	0.47	0	1
Other denomination	6,636	0.02	0.13	0	1
Political sophistication index	6,636	5.10	1.51	1	8
Satisfaction with democracy	6,636	3.35	0.89	1	5
External efficacy	6,636	2.73	1.00	1	5
Political trust	6,636	2.81	0.69	1	5
Party identification	6,636	0.92	0.27	0	1
Times switched before	6,636	0.35	0.67	0	5
Strategic voter	6,636	0.06	0.23	0	1

Source: GLES 2009. Short-term Campaign Panel ZA5305, version 3.0.0.

Table 3: Explaining Inter-election and campaign volatility

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Inter-election volatility		*Inter-election volatility*		*Campaign volatility*		*Campaign volatility*	
	Coef.	(s.e.)	Coef.	(s.e.)	Coef.	(s.e.)	Coef.	(s.e.)
Female	-0.110	(0.128)	-0.108	(0.128)	0.141	(0.098)	0.142	(0.098)
Age	-0.001	(0.005)	-0.000	(0.005)	0.002	(0.003)	0.002	(0.003)
Region born (ref: West)								
East	-0.234	(0.175)	-0.234	(0.175)	-0.016	(0.132)	-0.016	(0.132)
Abroad/no German citizenship	-0.003	(0.439)	-0.001	(0.439)	0.368	(0.299)	0.365	(0.299)
Subjective class membership (ref: Middle class)								
Working or lower middle class	-0.030	(0.143)	-0.023	(0.143)	0.086	(0.109)	0.089	(0.109)
Upper middle class or upper class	-0.207	(0.211)	-0.196	(0.211)	-0.118	(0.165)	-0.115	(0.165)
Religious denomination (ref: no denomination)								
Catholic	0.028	(0.165)	0.037	(0.165)	0.038	(0.128)	0.042	(0.128)
Other Christian	-0.049	(0.156)	-0.039	(0.156)	-0.084	(0.121)	-0.080	(0.121)
Other	-0.417	(0.525)	-0.419	(0.525)	-0.356	(0.341)	-0.353	(0.341)
Political sophistication index	0.099*	(0.044)	0.392	(0.257)	0.050	(0.034)	0.146	(0.181)
Political sophistication index^2			-0.029	(0.025)			-0.010	(0.018)
Satisfaction with democracy	-0.226**	(0.079)	-0.226**	(0.079)	-0.040	(0.060)	-0.040	(0.060)
External efficacy	-0.012	(0.065)	-0.011	(0.065)	-0.029	(0.051)	-0.029	(0.051)
Political trust	-0.220*	(0.100)	-0.225*	(0.100)	-0.108	(0.078)	-0.108	(0.078)
Party ID	-1.022***	(0.194)	-1.027***	(0.194)	-0.335*	(0.139)	-0.335*	(0.139)
Strategic voter	1.203***	(0.244)	1.198***	(0.244)	1.226***	(0.236)	1.223***	(0.236)
Constant	0.845°	(0.478)	0.153	(0.765)	-0.185	(0.354)	-0.408	(0.542)
N	1,418		1,418		1,896		1,896	
Log likelihood	-774.693		-774.004		-1,233.218		-1,233.097	
Pseudo-R^2	0.050		0.050		0.018		0.019	

Source: GLES 2009, Short-term Campaign Panel ZA5305, version 3.0.0. Significance levels: ° $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4: The timing of switching

	Model 1		Model 2		
Survey wave (ref: wave 1)					
Wave 2	-1.375***	(0.124)	-0.307	(0.547)	-0.1!
Wave 3	-1.617***	(0.147)	-0.795°	(0.592)	-1.11
Wave 4	-1.705***	(0.159)	-1.337*	(0.648)	-0.84
Wave 5	-1.627***	(0.179)	-1.715**	(0.715)	-1.73
Wave 6	-1.453***	(0.202)	-1.989**	(0.800)	-1.4:
Wave 7	-1.642***	(0.232)	-2.720***	(0.890)	-1.0(
Female	0.201°	(0.126)	0.046	(0.225)	0.08
Age	-0.002	(0.004)	0.000	(0.008)	-0.0(
Region born (ref: West)					
East	0.212	(0.165)	-0.062	(0.297)	-0.0:
Abroad/no German citizenship	-0.085	(0.426)	-0.151	(0.754)	-0.18
Subjective class membership (ref: Middle class)					
Working or lower middle class	0.030	(0.143)	-0.067	(0.257)	-0.1(
Upper middle class or upper class	-0.339*	(0.193)	-0.563°	(0.389)	-0.51
Religious denomination (ref: no denomination)					
Catholic	0.156	(0.166)	0.226	(0.300)	0.21
Other Christian	0.012	(0.152)	0.041	(0.277)	0.04
Other	-0.398	(0.516)	-0.822	(0.909)	-0.8!
Political sophistication index	-0.161	(0.150)	0.259°	(0.204)	0.405*
Political sophistication index^2	0.019	(0.015)	-0.006	(0.017)	-0.02
Political sophistication*Campaign period			-0.200*	(0.099)	
Political sophistication*w2					-0.231
Political sophistication*w3					-0.1∠
Political sophistication*w4					-0.30
Political sophistication*w5					-0.21
Political sophistication*w6					-0.32
Political sophistication*w7					-0.54
Satisfaction with democracy	-0.147*	(0.075)	-0.273*	(0.137)	-0.32
External efficacy	-0.060	(0.068)	-0.046	(0.125)	-0.0∠
Political trust	-0.226*	(0.092)	-0.478***	(0.135)	-0.35
Party ID	-0.868***	(0.190)	-1.881***	(0.340)	-1.617
Times switched before	0.098	(0.128)	-2.041***	(0.405)	-1.853
Strategic voter	1.163***	(0.255)	2.387***	(0.485)	2.158*
Constant	0.797	(0.602)	0.572	(1.042)	0.03
σ^2 constant	1.961	(0.415)	8.730	(2.082)	7.79
σ^2 time			1.273	(0.381)	1.19
$N_{observations}$	6,636		6,636		
$N_{individuals}$	1,418		1,418		
Bayesian DIC	4,450.20		3,489.02		

Source: GLES 2009. Short-term Campaign Panel ZA5305, version 3.0.0. Significance l∈
0.1; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of switching parties over time – comparing low and high sophisticates
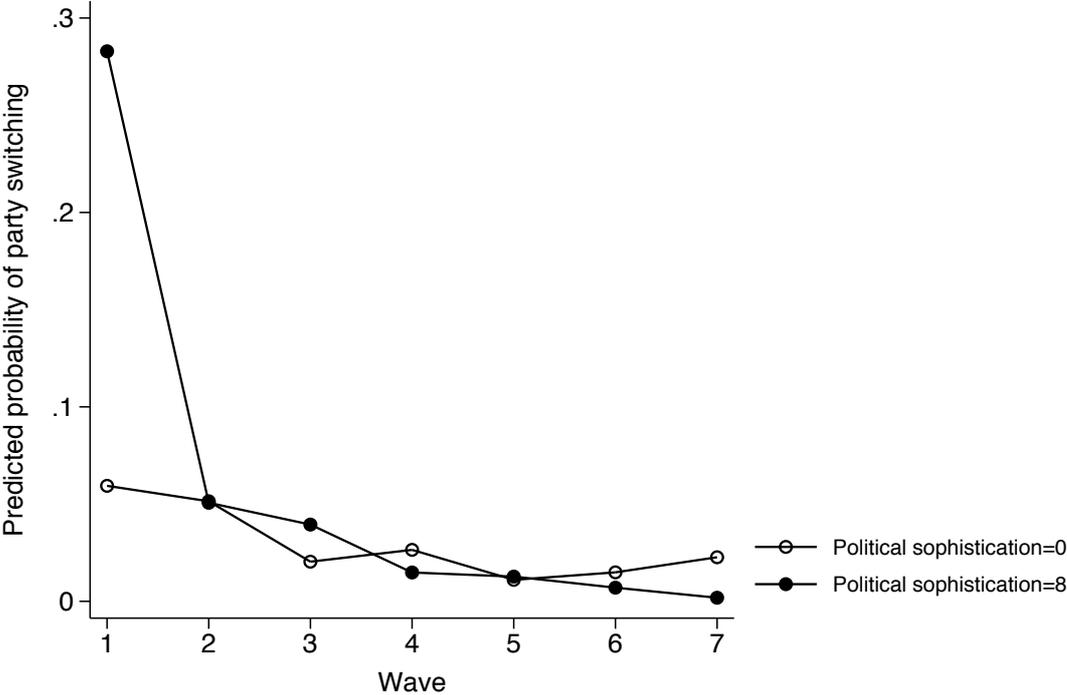
Predictions based on estimations in Model 3 of Table 4. Predictions for female respondents of middle social class and with an other than Catholic christian denomination, not identifying with a party and are not voting strategically. All other variables set at their mean. *Source:* GLES 2009. Short-term Campaign Panel ZA5305, version 3.0.0.

Endnotes

[1] R.S. Katz, H. Rattinger and M.N. Pedersen 'The Dynamics of European Party Systems' *European Journal of Political Research* 31/1 (1997), p. 86.

[2] B.R. Berelson, P.F. Lazarsfeld and W.N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); P.F. Lazarsfeld, B.R. Berelson and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up his Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

[3] C.R. Bybee, J.M. McLeod, W.D. Luetscher and G. Garramone 'Mass Communication and Voter Volatility', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45/1 (1981), pp. 69-90; P.E. Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes' The Public Opinion Quarterly 26/4, pp. 578-599.

[4] R.J. Dalton 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate', Electoral Studies 31/1 (2012), pp. 34-45; R.J. Dalton, *The Apartisan American: Dealignment and Changing Electoral Politics* (Washington: CQ Press, 2013).

[5] D. Granberg and S. Holmberg 'The Berelson Paradox Reconsidered. Intention-Behavior changers in U.S. and Swedish Election Campaigns', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54/4 (1991), pp. 530-50; U. Kuhn 'Stability and Change in Party Preference'; R. Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate. Political Sophistication, Predisposition Strength and the Voting Decision Process* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007); J. Zaller, 'Floating Voters in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1948-2000', in W.E. Sarris and P.M. Sniderman (Eds.), *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error and Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 166-214.

[6] Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, p. 20.

[7] Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes'; Kuhn 'Stability and Change in Party Preference'; Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[8] Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[9] R. Dassonneville 'Electoral Volatility, Political Sophistication, Trust and Efficacy: A Study on Changes in Voter Preferences during the Belgian Regional Elections of 2009', *Acta Politica* 47/1 (2012), pp. 18-41.

[10] H. Rattinger, S., Roßteutscher, R., Schmitt-Beck and B., Weßels. German Longitudinal Election Study - Short-term Campaign Panel, 07/10/2009-10/07/2009 (2012). GESIS, Cologne: ZA5305, Version 3.0.0.

[11] R.J. Dalton, 'Voter Choice and Electoral Politics', in S. Padgett, W.E. Paterson and G. Smith (Eds.), Developments in German Politics 3 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 60-81; Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[12] M.N. Pedersen 'The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility' *European Journal of Political Research* 7/1 (1979), pp. 1-26.

[13] R.J. Dalton, I. McAllister and M. Wattenberg 'The Consequences of Partisan Dealignment', in R.J. Dalton and M. Wattenberg (Eds.), Parties without Partisans (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 37-63; P. Mair 'Electoral Volatility and the Dutch Party System: A Comparative Perspective' Acta Politica 43/2-3 (2008), pp. 235-253.

[14] C.S. Bischoff 'Electorally Unstable by Supply or Demand? An Examination of the Causes of Electoral Volatility in Advanced Industrial Democracies' Public Choice 156/3-4 (2013), pp. 537-561.

[15] S. Mainwaring and E. Zoco 'Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty Competition: Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies' Party Politics 13/2 (2007), pp. 155-178.

[16] Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, p. 20.

[17] P.E. Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes', *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 26/4 (1962), pp. 578-99; Granberg and Holmberg 'The Berelson Paradox Reconsidered'.

[18] J.J. Albright 'Does Political Knowledge Erode Party Attachments? A Review of the Cognitive Mobilization Thesis', Electoral Studies 28/2 (2009), pp. 248-60; R. Dassonneville, M. Hooghe and B. Vanhoutte 'The Decline of Party Identification in Germany, 1992-2009. An Age, Period and Cohort Analysis of a Two Decade Panel Study in Eastern and Western Germany', *German Politics* 21/2 (2012), pp. 209-27; S. Marthaler 'The Paradox of the Politically Sophisticated Partisan: The French Case', *West European Politics* 31/5 (2008), pp. 937-59.

[19] R.J. Dalton 'Cognitive Mobilization and Partisan Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Democracies' *Journal of Politics* 46/2 (1984), pp. 264-84; Dalton 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate'; Dalton, *The Apartisan American*.

[20] R.J. Dalton and W. Bürklin 'Wähler als Wandervögel: Dealignment and the German Voter', *German Politics and Society* 21/1 (2003), pp. 57-75; W.P. Shifeley 'The Development of Party Identification among Adults: Exploration of a Functional Model', *The American Political Science Review* 73/4 (1979), pp. 1039-54.

[21] Dalton, *The Apartisan American*.

[22] Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes'; Kuhn 'Stability and Change in Party Preference'; Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[23] J. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[24] Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes'; Kuhn 'Stability and Change in Party Preference'; Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[25] Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes'.

[26] Granberg and Holmberg 'The Berelson Paradox Reconsidered'; Kuhn 'Stability and Change in Party Preference'; Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[27] Converse 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes'; M. Kaase 'Analyse der Wechselwähler in der Bundesrepublik', in E.K. Scheuch and R. Wildenmann (Eds.), Zur Soziologie der Wahl. Sonderheft 9 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Socialpsychologie (Köln/Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag), pp. 113-125.

[28] Dassonneville 'Electoral Volatility, Political Sophistication, Trust and Efficacy'; Lachat, *The Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[29] Dassonneville 'Electoral Volatility, Political Sophistication, Trust and Efficacy'.

[30] Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign.*

[31] S. Iyengar, D.R. Kinder, M.D. Peters and J.A. Krosnick 'The Evening News and Presidential Evaluations', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46/4 (1984), pp.778-87; J.A. Krosnick and D.R. Kinder 'Altering the Foundations of Support for the President through Priming', *American Political Science Review* 84/2 (1990), pp. 497-512.

[32] J. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Zaller 'Floating Voters in U.S. Presidential Elections'.

[33] L.M., Bartels 'Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions', *Political Behavior* 24/2 (2002), pp. 117-150; Boyd 'Electoral Change and the Floating Voter'; A. Campbell, P. Converse, W. Miller and D. Stokes, The American Voter (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960); Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*.

[34] P., Catellani and A.I., Alberici 'Does the Candidate Matter? Comparing the Voting Choice of Early and Late Deciders', *Political Psychology* 33/5 (2012), pp. 619-34; S. Chaffee and S.Y. Choe 'Time of Decision and media Use in the Ford-Carter Campaign' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44/1, pp. 53-69; P. Fournier, R. Nadeau, A. Blais, E. Gidengil and N. Nevitte 'Time-of-Voting Decision and Susceptibility to Campaign Effects', *Electoral Studies* 23/4 (2004), pp. 661-681; D. Gopoian and S. Hadjiharalambous 'Late Deciding Voters in Presidential Elections' *Political Behavior* 16/1 (1994), pp. 55-78; R. Schmitt-Beck and J. Partheymüller 'Why Voters Decide Late: A Simultaneous Test of Old and New Hypotheses at the 2005 and 2009 German Federal Elections' *German Politics* 21/3, pp. 299-316.

[35] Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller 'Why Voters Decide Late', p 301.

[36] I. Budge, L. Ezrow and M.D. McDonald 'Ideology, Party Factionalism and Policy Change: An Integrated Dynamic Theory' *British Journal of Political Science* 40/4 (2010), pp. 781-804.

[37] M. Fraile 'Do Information-Rich Contexts Reduce Knowledge Inequalities? The Contextual Determinants of Political Knowledge in Europe' *Acta Politica* 48/2 (2013), pp. 119-143.

[38] Dassonneville 'Electoral Volatility, Political Sophistication, Trust and Efficacy'.

[39] K., Arzheimer 'Dead Men Walking? Party Identification in Germany, 1977-2002', *Electoral Studies* 25/4 (2006), pp. 791-807; Dalton 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate';

Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*; A., Neundorf, D., Stegmueller and T.J., Scotto 'The Individual-Level Dynamics of Bounded Partisanship', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75/1 (2011), pp. 458-82; R., Schmitt-Beck, S., Weick and B., Christoph 'Shaky Attachments: Individual-Level Stability and Change of Partisanship among West German Voters, 1984-2001', *European Journal of Political Research* 45/4 (2006), pp. 581-608; S., Weldon and A., Nüsser 'Bundestag Election 2009. Solidifying the Five Party System', *German Politics and Society* 96/3 (2010), pp. 47-64.

[40] Kaase 'Analyse der Wechselwähler in der Bundesrepublik'; H. Schoen 'Gründe für wechselndes Wahlverhalten: Helfen neue Instrumente Licht in das Dunkel zu bringen?', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 41/4, pp. 677-706; C., Zelle 'Social Dealignment versus Political Frustration: Contrasting Explanations of the Floating Vote in Germany', *European Journal of Political Research* 27/3 (1995), pp. 319-45.

[41] T., Gschwend 'Ticket-splitting and Strategic Voting under Mixed Electoral Rules: Evidence from Germany', *European Journal of Political Research* 46/1 (2007), pp. 1-23; M.F., Meffert and T., Gschwend 'Polls, Coalition Signals and Strategic Voting: An Experimental Investigation of Perceptions and Effects', *European Journal of Political Research* 50/5 (2011), pp. 636-67; S., Shikano, M. Hermann and P.W., Thurner 'Strategic Voting under Proportional Representation: Threshold Insurance in German Elections', *West European Politics* 32/3 (2009), pp. 634-56.

[42] Meffert and Gschwend 'Polls, Coalitions Signals and Strategic Voting'.

[43] Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[44] Dalton and Bürklin 'Wähler als Wandervögel'.

[45] R., Rohrschneider, R., Schmitt-Beck and F., Jung 'Short-Term Factors versus Long-Term Values: Explaining the 2009 Election Results', *Electoral Studies* 31/1 (2012), pp. 20-34.

[46] C., Zelle 'Social Dealignment versus Political Frustration'.

[47] R.J. Dalton and S.A. Weldon 'Public Images of Political Parties: A Necessary Evil?', West European Politics 28/5 (2005), pp. 931-951; Dassonneville 'Electoral Volatility, Political Sophistication, Trust and Efficacy'; P. Söderlund 'Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective', *Scandinavian Political Studies* 31/2 (2008), pp. 217-240.

[48] Rattinger, Roßteutscher, Schmitt-Beck and Weßels. German Longitudinal Election Study - Short-term Campaign Panel.

[49] Field work for the first wave: July 10 to July 20, 2009. Wave 2: July 24 to August 2, 2009. Wave 3: August 7 to August 17, 2009. Wave 4: August 21 to August 31, 2009. Wave 5: September 4 to September 13, 2009. Wave 6: September 18 to September 27, 2009. Wave 7: September 29 to October 7, 2009.

[50] L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); R. Waldahl and B. Aardal 'The Accuracy of Recalled Previous Voting: Evidence from Norwegian Election Study Panels', *Scandinavian Political Studies* 23/4 (2000), pp. 373-389.

[51] H.T. Himmelweit, M.J. Biberian and J. Stockdale 'Memory of Past Vote: Implications of a Study of Bias in Recall', British Journal of Political Science 8/3 (1978), pp. 365-375; Waldahl and Aardal 'The Accuracy of Recalled Previous Voting'.

[52] Waldahl and Aardal 'The Accuracy of Recalled Previous Voting', p. 387.

[53] H. Schoen 'Gründe für wechselndes Wahlverhalten'.

[54] As an additional robustness check, the main analyses were also run for the broader operationalization; hence including respondents switching to/from don't know as 'changing'. The results of this analyses pointed in the same direction as the results presented in the manuscript, even though statistical significance was somewhat weaker. These results are available from the author upon request.

[55] R., Luskin 'Explaining Political Sophistication', *Political Behavior* 12/4 (1990), p. 332.

[56] Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[57] Dalton 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate', p. 38.

[58] Lachat, *A Heterogeneous Electorate*.

[59] Distinguishing respondents who finished school without a certificate (0); respondents with the lowest secondary qualification, which is after 8 or 9 years of schooling (1); respondents with an intermediary secondary qualification, which is after 10 years of schooling (2); respondents who fulfilled the entrance requirements to study at a polytechnical college/university of applied sciences (3); respondents with a higher qualification, entitled tot study at a university (4).

[60] The original coding was reversed, so (0) stands for not interested at all, (1) is slightly interested, (2) is moderately interested, (3) is very interested and (4) is extremely interested.

[61] Question wording is: "Many people in Germany feel close to a particular political party for a longer period of time even if they occasionally vote for another party. What about you? In general terms, do you feel close to a particular political party? And if so, which one?" The measure included in the first survey wave is used for the analyses.

[62] I am most grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of this journal for this suggestion.

[63] K. Olson and L. Witt 'Are We Keeping the People Who Used to Stay? Changes in Correlates of Panel Survey Attrition Over Time' Social Science Research 40/4 (2011), pp. 1037-1050.

[64] L.M., Bartels 'Panel Effects in the American National Election Study', *Political Analysis* 8/1 (1999), pp. 1-20; T., van der Meer, R., Lubbe, E., van Elsas, M., Elff and W. van der Brug 'Bounded Volatility in the Dutch Electoral Battlefield: A Panel Study on the Structure of Changing Vote Intentions in the Netherlands during 2006-2010', *Acta Politica* 47/4 (2012), pp. 333-355.

[65] P., Allison, *Event History Analysis: Regression for Longitudinal Event Data* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984); J.M., Box-Steffensmeier and B.S., Jones, *Event History Modeling. A Guide for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); J.D., Singer and J.B., Willett, *Applied Longitudinal Data Analysis: Modeling Change and Event Occurrence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[66] Noteworthy exceptions are Kuhn 'Stability and Change in Party Preference' and Schmitt-Beck, Weick and Christoph 'Shaky Attachments'.

[67] P. J. Kelly and L. L.-Y. Lim 'Survival Analysis for Recurrent Event Data: An Application to Childhood Infectious Diseases', *Statistics in Medicine* 19/1 (1999), pp. 13-33.

[68] F. Steele 'Multilevel Discrete-Time Event History Models with Applications to the Analysis of Recurrent Employment Tradtions', *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Statistics* 53/1 (2011), pp. 1-26.

[69] Kelly and Lim 'Survival Analysis for Recurrent Event Data'; F. Steele, *Event History Analysis. A National centre for Research Methods Briefing Paper* (2005).

[70] Steele 'Multilevel Discrete-Time Event History Models'.

[71] Dassonneville 'Electoral Volatility, Political Sophistication, Trust and Efficacy'.

[72] Zelle 'Social Dealignment versus Political Frustration'.

[73] Results available from the author upon request.

[74] R. Dassonneville and Y. Dejaeghere 'Bridging the Ideological Space: A Cross-National Analysis of the Distance of Party Switching' *European Journal of Political Research* forthcoming (2014).