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German Longitudinal Election Study

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Over three subsequent periods of funding, the German Longitudinal Election Study GLES is to examine the German federal elections 2009, 2013, and 2017 and therefore will be able to track the German electoral process over an extended period of time and at an unprecedented level of detail. The study will be directed by Prof. Dr. Hans Rattinger (University of Mannheim/GESIS), Prof. Dr. Sigrid Roßteutscher (University of Frankfurt), Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck (University of Mannheim) and PD Dr. Bernhard Weßels (Social Science Research Center Berlin): It will be be conducted in close cooperation with the German Society for Electoral Research DGfW (http://www.dgfw.info).

The GLES will comprise various, interrelated components at each of the three next elections:

- An extensive face-to-face *pre- und post-election cross section survey* of a random sample of voters will form the core of the study. It will encompass a large number of variables to account for as many potentially relevant predictors of vote choices as possible and include a large number of cases to allow for meaningful analyses of even small subsections of the electorate (component 1).

- Several components are to allow for an in-depth analysis of the short-term dynamics preceding the elections we will study. We will conduct a *rolling cross section campaign survey* that allows for tracing developments of public opinion in response to parties' campaigning and media coverage at the aggregate level on a day-to-day basis (based on a random sample of voters, and conducted by telephone). This pre-election study will be complemented by a *post-election panel wave* to allow for the individual-level analysis of relationships between orientations held during the campaign and those held at the end of the campaign, including actual voting decisions (component 2). Since it is mandatory to observe effects of campaigns at the individual level in the pre-election phase, this component will be complemented by a *short-term campaign panel survey,* which will be conducted based on an online access panel (component 3). These two survey components (whose content will match the core parts of component 1) will be

accompanied by studies examining the context of voting: A *campaign media content analysis* (component 4) focuses on the most important issues, candidate profiles and evaluations by the media, the parties' reported electoral prospects and desired coalition options. Additionally, as in recent elections the parties' leading candidates' *TV debates* have quickly become the key events of election campaigns the proposed project will include a detailed study of the conduct and effects of the TV debates (component 5). Moreover, to be able to assess the electoral effects of local district candidates' personal electioneering, our study will include a *candidate campaign survey* (component 6). Components 4 to 6 will allow us to draw a comprehensive picture of the supply side of elections. Together the short-term components of the GLES, which we seek to implement at each of the three upcoming federal elections, will provide unprecedented insights into the campaign dynamics of voters' orientations, as well as into the electoral context, constituted by the parties, their candidates, and the media. They will provide a detailed and fine-grained examination of individual and aggregate level changes on the part of voters as they are brought about by processing the information presented to them by parties, candidates, and mass media.

- As opinion formation on the part of voters does not stop when a campaign is over, but carries on over the entire electoral period up until the next election, a full understanding of the electoral process requires that we observe not only one election and the campaign that precedes it, but several elections in succession, using an integrated set of instruments. Restricting the project to only one election would preclude any meaningful analysis of the key question that poses itself with regard to the future of the electoral process in Germany, i.e., the amount of electoral change that occurs from one election to the next, its nature and causes. A *long-term panel survey,* which – based on component 1 – interviews the same respondents at all three elections of our period of observation is to provide deep insights into the extent and patterns of electoral change (component 7). A continuous *long-term tracking survey*, conducted online over the entire electoral cycles, will allow for the close observation of the dynamics in-between elections of voters' perceptions and evaluations of parties and politicians, including the analysis of the impact of second-order elections (component 8). For a better understanding of the reasons behind these dynamics, a parallel *long-term media and event analysis* (component 9) will accompany it. By combining these two components we will be able to explain changes in the course of parties' popularity. Taking second-order elections (at the "Land" and European level) into account will allow us to analyze the impact of such elections on national elections, thereby closing a major gap in German electoral research.

The proposed project comprises a major long-term effort in social science data collection in Germany. In its basic approach, scope and ambition it is inspired by the best programs of national election studies of the world, such as the American National Election Study (ANES), the British Election Study (BES), or the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES). It will produce a wealth of data that will be shared with the entire community of electoral researchers in Germany and other countries as well as all other interested social scientists.

The GLES design in detail:

Figure 1 provides an overview of the various GLES components and their timing with regard to the federal election of 2009. For the elections of 2013 and 2017 analogous designs are planned. The long-term components are to link these elections so that integrated analyses become possible. All survey components are connected by a largely identical core questionnaire that is complemented by component-specific questions that are necessary to attain the particular goals of each component. Additionally, a similar time frame provides the opportunity to compare different components. The cross section survey is at the same time the first wave of the long-term panel; its respondents will be interviewed over three subsequent elections. Parallel to survey components, the campaign media content analysis, the TV debate analysis, the candidate campaign survey and the long-term media and events analysis provide contextual information for the explanation of individual behavior measured by the survey components.

Figure 1: The German Longitudinal Election Study – Overview of Components
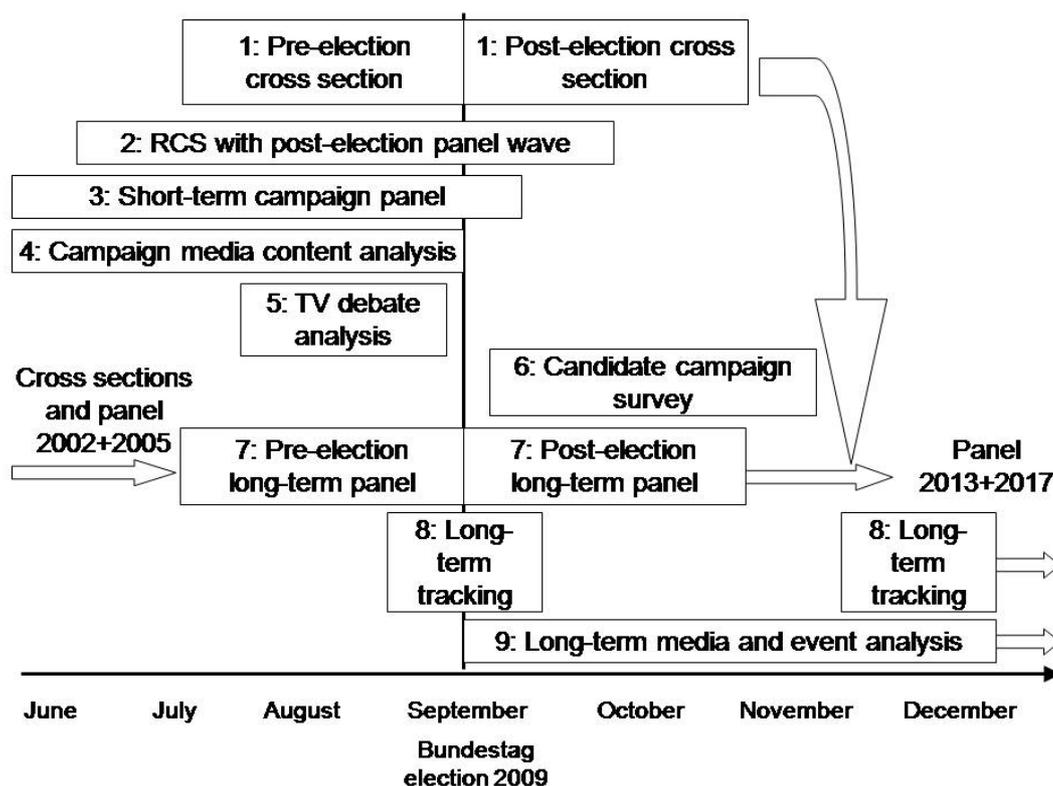
The Core: Pre-election and Post-election Cross Section
Extensive cross sectional surveys are the core of all election studies worldwide. Such a study will also form the core of the GLES for each of the three elections (component 1, directed by Prof. Dr. Sigrid Roßteutscher and PD Dr. Bernhard Weßels). The total number of interviews will be 4.200, which are split evenly between a pre- and a post-election survey. All German nationals of voting age with a permanent residence in Germany belong to the universe of the

sample. The ratio between East and West German respondents will be one-third to two-thirds, so that East Germans are overrepresented. This kind of oversampling is necessary for our analytical purposes since major changes are expected to occur especially in the Eastern part of the country. The cross section component will be conducted as Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI), which will last about one hour on average. Hence, it is possible to draw a comprehensive picture of social and political attitudes as well as the political behavior of the respondents. This is facilitated by CAPI-technology, which allows applying complex survey instruments. The questionnaire will be related to previous electoral studies in two respects: On the one hand, many questions from the 1994-2002 Bundestag election panel study by Falter, Gabriel and Rattinger (ZA No. 4301), and the 2005 election study by Kühnel, Niedermayer and Westle (ZA No. 4332) will be applied, so that the GLES is closely linked to previous electoral research. On the other hand, the post-election questionnaire will incorporate the CSES module and hence link the GLES to international electoral research and guarantee continuity of the 1998 (ZA No. 3073), 2002 (ZA No. 4216), and 2005 (ZA No. 4559) German CSES studies. The pre-election questionnaire will contain more questions regarding the use of rational expectation heuristics, such as the perceived prospects of smaller parties and coalitions. Furthermore, the pre-election questionnaire will be linked to all components focusing on the election campaign. Across elections, the cross section surveys will allow for aggregate comparisons. Moreover, the cross section survey of 2009 will also serve as the foundation for the long-term panel (component 7).

Observing Short-term Dynamics
Rolling Cross Section Campaign Survey with Post-election Panel Wave (Component 2)
Several elements of the GLES are designed to allow for the best possible measurement of the short-term dynamics of campaign communication and its effects. To achieve this, movements of public opinion need to be observed at close intervals during the campaign. The GLES is to combine two components that complement one another for that purpose (components 2, directed by Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, and 3, directed by Prof. Dr. Hans Rattinger). The first consists of a daily rolling cross section (RCS) campaign survey with 100 interviews per day on average for the final 60 days of the campaign. Interviewing will be organized in such a way that not only the entire sample but also the subsamples available for each day of the campaign will constitute random samples of the universe of all voters. Conducted by telephone (CATI), it will thus produce about 6.000 interviews in total, and cover a sufficient span of time with enough interviews per day to allow for robust results. Interviews will last about 25 minutes on average. RCS studies trace aggregate change on a day-to-day basis, and are very sensitive instruments for measuring campaign-induced shifts of public opinion, immediately registering voters' reactions to any foreseeable or unforeseeable event occurring during the campaign, and allowing to detect the decay or sustenance of these effects. Although they do not capture intra-individual change during the campaign, they can be easily supplemented with a post-election panel wave, which then allows for pre-post-election comparisons at the individual level based on a representative sample. Using an RCS campaign survey as the pre-election wave, followed by re-interviews of the same respondents after the election (also conducted by CATI) has therefore in recent

years become a standard design for analyzing short-term change at elections (Johnston 2001; Romer et al. 2004). It combines the advantages of the RCS design with those of a pre-post-election panel survey and has been successfully introduced in Germany for analyzing campaign dynamics at the Bundestag election of 2005 (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). It will therefore also be adopted for the GLES. While this design has been applied in recent years by many election studies in other countries and has thus established itself as a kind of standard, it has one important drawback in that it does not capture intra-individual short-term dynamics of attitudes that occur during the course of the campaign.

Short-term Campaign Panel (Component 3)
A separate short-term panel study over the course of the campaign thus is another important element of the GLES, since including several pre-election panel waves cannot be reconciled with the logic of RCS. Moreover, for reasons of field logistics, running multi-wave CATI surveys at close distance with the same respondents is almost impossible. Online surveys based on access respondent pools allow for much shorter field periods, as there is no need for interviewers – the main reason why field periods for CATI surveys may stretch out over extended periods of time. Respondents of online surveys drawn from access pools typically respond very quickly as they themselves control the location and time when they complete their interviews. Hence, this mode allows for including a multi-wave pre-election panel study in our project that very efficiently complements the RCS study. We will use the existing online access pools of the survey institute and draw a subsample of German nationals at least 18 years of age. The short-term campaign panel will track attitudes over a period of 12 weeks prior to the election and consist of six pre-election and one post-election wave. The panel will start with 3.000 respondents who will be interviewed at two-week intervals. The short-term campaign panel component allows for a close monitoring of intra-individual change during the campaign and will provide information about short-term effects on change of political attitudes and behavior. Although a similar design had been applied by a commercial institute in the context of the election of 2002 (Dülmer et al. 2005), it will be a major methodological innovation in the field of electoral research that has never been used before in any national election study. For this reason, the applicants are in close contact with Dave Howell, the current Director of Studies of the American National Election Studies (ANES), because an online panel will be included for the first time in the research design of the ANES for the U.S. elections of 2008. The cooperation with ANES will allow the applicants to benefit from the methodological experience gained by the ANES-researchers. While the short-term campaign panel will provide substantial information about intra-individual change, the representativeness of this component is problematic because of panel attrition. Moreover, online studies are not fully representative for the electorate, as they include only respondents with access to the internet. However, a comparison of the data obtained from the short-term panel to those of the RCS study allows for an assessment of these processes. Components 2 and 3 complement one another ideally, and together provide an internationally unprecedented basis for rigorous analysis of campaign-induced change of attitudes and behavior among voters.

Campaign Media Content Analysis (Component 4)

Short-term movements of perceptions, attitudes, or electoral preferences on the part of voters can only come about as responses to the reception of some kind of current information. The media are the main source of such information during election campaigns. The thematic agenda of the campaign, the presence and evaluation of parties and candidates (including the sources of these evaluations), messages concerning relations between the parties such as criticism, attacks, but also, importantly, coalition signals, as well as statements about electoral prospects (originating from polls but also from other sources), and reports on significant events that may or may not be related to the campaign itself, but have a potential to influence voters evaluations of parties and their candidates – all these are present in media content. To register this information it is essential to include a media content analysis in the GLES (component 4, directed by Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck). These data need to be collected in such a way that they can be linked to the survey data, most notably the RCS component as well as the short-term campaign panel. In order to be able to identify important turning points for public opinion it is essential that such data are collected at very dense intervals. Therefore, every day of the campaign period must be included in the content analysis, so that based on the interview dates the content data can be directly linked to the RCS and campaign panel survey data sets. The content analysis will include the most important German mass media, either with regard to their ratings, or with regard to their opinion leader role within the German media system: The main evening newscasts of the four channels with the highest ratings – the public broadcasters' news programs "Tagesschau" (ARD) and "Heute" (ZDF), as well as the newscasts from the most popular commercial channels "RTL aktuell" (RTL) and "News" (SAT1); the news magazines of ARD ("Tagesthemen") and ZDF ("heute journal"); the five most important national quality newspapers ("Die Welt", "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", "Süddeutsche Zeitung", "Frankfurter Rundschau", "die tageszeitung"), the most widely read tabloid "Bild-Zeitung" which is at the same time the newspaper with the largest total readership in Germany, and the weekly news magazines "Der Spiegel", "Focus", and "Die Zeit". Apart from the dynamic analyses, the content analysis will also allow for aggregate analyses, describing media coverage of the campaign in total. In the long run, these content analyses will provide data that are comparable over time and therefore allow tracing long-term developments of campaign coverage in Germany.

TV Debate Analysis (component 5)

TV debates between the chancellor candidates of CDU/CSU and SPD are the major event in the campaign for a Bundestag election. Attaining the research goals outlined above concerning TV debates requires a complex research design (component 5, directed by Prof. Dr. Sigrid Roßteutscher, in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Frank Brettschneider, Thorsten Faas, M.Sc., Prof. Dr. Jürgen Maier and Prof. Dr. Michaela Maier). Nationwide surveys are only of limited value when it comes to studying the processing of information by individual voters. An experimental approach is much more promising in this respect, including a pre- and post-test questionnaire in combination with real-time-response (RTR) measurement during the course of the debates. Equipping participants with dials to allow them to express their evaluations during the debate, one can easily link viewers' reactions to the actual progress of the debate,

which can provide innovative insights about the processing of information. Obviously, this design needs to be complemented by a content analysis of the debate, a coding scheme for which has already been developed in previous debate studies (Maier and Strömbäck 2008). In order to study the stability and persistence of debate effects, the amount, quality and directional content of the follow-up communication has to be covered (Maier and Faas 2006; Maier and Maier 2007). This implies surveying the participants a third time a few days after the debate and finally for a fourth time right after election day to determine whether debates – directly or indirectly – ultimately affected their voting decision. Aside from this, the RCS and the short-term campaign panel, of course, also provide valuable insights about the existence and persistence of debate effects. Finally, the general content analysis of campaign communications plays an important role when it comes to linking the stability of debate effects to the content of media follow-up-coverage of the debates. Taken together, RTR measurement allows for the study of information processing while RCS, the short-term campaign panel, and the third and fourth round of interviewing the participants of the experiment allow for studying effects over the further course of the campaign. The content analysis of the debate, but also of the follow-up communication, allows for linking changes in attitudes to the processing of information.

Candidate Campaign Survey (Component 6)

Despite TV debates, which focus on the chancellor candidates of the two major parties, in the German mixed-member electoral system local candidates and their campaigning constitute important contextual information for voters. The candidate campaign survey will be realized as a standardized postal survey of all candidates, i.e., district as well as list-only candidates of the parties that are (or were likely to be) represented in the Bundestag (about 2500 in total) will be part of the survey (component 6, directed by PD Dr. Bernhard Weßels, in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Thomas Gschwend, PD Dr. Hermann Schmitt and PD Dr. Thomas Zittel). The fieldwork for the candidate study will start shortly after the 2009 Bundestag election because we assume that candidates (due to campaign pressure) will refuse to take part in such a survey before the election. We plan to have three waves of reminders to increase return rates. The greatest advantage of postal surveys is that they can be carried out in an efficient way. They are conducted without interviewers and are therefore relatively inexpensive. Another advantage of postal surveys is that respondents do not perceive themselves that much to be in a survey situation, and thus are more open in their answers. In order to substantiate the findings from the standardized instrument it is planned to apply a mixed-method approach and to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with a small sample of candidates (about 30) and representatives from party campaign headquarters. We will use two criteria to select the respondents. First, we will recruit candidates who compete in highly contested as well as largely uncontested races. Second, we will select candidates in light of their position on the party list and the safety of their seat. This component of the study is important in order to validate the meaning of particular campaign strategies and to understand the motivations of candidates in adopting one campaign strategy rather than the other. The representatives from the party headquarters will be selected by a positional approach. We will choose individuals who were close to the national campaign and fulfilled functions within this campaign. The focus of these interviews

will be on the relevance of the local level of campaigning for the overall strategy of the party, the meaning that is attached to the local level, and the strategies of the national campaign focusing on the local level. Additionally, information on national aspects of campaigning, including the relevance of different strategies, such as internet and "politainment" formats, will be gathered. The candidate study will build on two successful predecessor studies in 2002 and 2005 (ZA No. 4225; Zittel and Gschwend 2007b) to allow for the analysis of stability and change through comparison over time while it also allows for the inclusion of election-specific question modules. The common core consists of data on the respondents' background, recruitment and selection, campaign behavior and attitudes, as well as policy positions. Many questions will be identical in the candidate and the cross section surveys (component 1), allowing for a thorough comparison between the attitudes of voters and candidates and also for examining the relevance of local campaigning for voting. The candidate survey data will be linked to aggregate characteristics on the district level and individual voter data from the cross section surveys. This data linkage permits a comprehensive comparison between districts, candidates, and voters.

Observing Long-term Dynamics
The Long-term Panel (Component 7)
Although conducting cross section surveys before and after a general election is a necessity by many criteria, it became clear very early in the history of electoral research that studying individual change in voting behavior based on cross sectional data is impossible. Since we are very much interested in the tracking of long-term individual change in political attitudes and behavior it is necessary to use panel surveys, which cover several Bundestag elections (component 7, directed by Prof. Dr. Hans Rattinger). Our aim is to establish a rolling three-wave panel as it was realized in 1994 through 2002 by Falter, Gabriel, and Rattinger (ZA No. 4301). The respondents of the cross section in 2009 will be the first wave of a panel that spans the three Bundestag elections from 2009 to 2017. The rolling three-wave panel design links the long-term panel component of the GLES to electoral studies conducted by one of the applicants for previous Bundestag elections: We will continue the panel survey that started with the Bundestag election of 2002. These respondents were already re-interviewed in 2005, so that the survey in 2009 will be the third and last panel wave for them. The second study to be continued is the 2005 cross section study by Kühnel, Niedermayer and Westle (ZA No. 4332). These respondents were re-interviewed in October and November 2007, in order to ensure their continued cooperation. The survey in 2009 will be the second panel wave for them. Respondents will stay in the same survey period, either pre- or post-election, in all waves. This close connection to the cross section component implies that the field time of the long-term panel and the cross sections is identical. In addition, both are surveyed with a very similar questionnaire and the same survey method (CAPI). Since panel surveys are inevitably confronted with attrition it is decisive to minimize this by motivating panel respondents to remain in the panel between the Bundestag elections of 2009 and 2013. Short re-interviews will therefore be conducted every year by CATI. The main purpose of the re-interview in 2010 is to verify and update the contact data, so that it will only take about five minutes. The second re-interview in 2011 will last about ten minutes and offer, in addition to

panel maintenance, the opportunity to ask a few substantive questions. Thus, we will be able to track individual changes in attitudes and political behavior that occur between two consecutive elections.

Long-term Online Tracking (Component 8)

While the long-term panel helps to understand how and why political attitudes and behavior change at the individual level from one election to the next, it cannot capture changes that occur over the course of the four years between two elections (or between two waves of the long-term panel). Although commercial polling institutes offer monthly survey data on public opinion, these surveys do not fit the central questions in the other survey components of the GLES and also often use inconsistent instruments. Hence, for the tracking of short-term changes between the panel waves the only possibility is fielding surveys at regular intervals between two Bundestag elections with a largely constant questionnaire. Thus, it is necessary to establish a long-term tracking component as part of the GLES (component 8, directed by Prof. Dr. Sigrid Roßteutscher). This survey will be conducted four times a year, starting with the Bundestag election in 2009. This GLES-component will not only be innovative because of its regularity. It is also innovative with respect to the survey method: The tracking component will be conducted online, respondents being drawn from an access pool. The online survey mode makes this component a valuable and groundbreaking tool for challenging questions which cannot be answered by established surveys. In particular, for subsamples of respondents we will assess the possibility to conduct a long-term online panel, thus answering the question of panel attrition in online surveys. Of course, online surveys are not automatically representative for the whole population since young and highly educated people are more active on the internet. Still, there are good reasons to conduct online surveys: First, internet usage is increasing in all social strata, hence, the representativeness of online surveys is expected to improve in the near future, making online the coming survey mode. Second, there are also technical and methodical advantages of online surveys: Access to respondents is easy. Field periods are short. Answering an online questionnaire is more convenient for the respondents because there are no interviewers. In addition, respondents can choose their own time and pace for answering the questionnaire. In addition, costs are very low when compared to regular CATI- or CAPI-surveys. Of course, appropriate weighting procedures need to be developed and applied, as every cross section will consist of 1.000 respondents that are representative for the population of German internet users who are at least 18 years of age. The long-term tracking component furthermore recognizes the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany is a political system of multi-level governance, in particular regarding elections in the states ("Länder") and to the European Parliament (EP)[1]. The questionnaires of the respective cross sections will therefore also include state-specific question modules when a state election occurs within four weeks before or after the regular fielding time of the long-term tracking survey. Hence, three times in 2009 (Brandenburg, Saarland, Saxony), two times in 2010 (Schleswig-Holstein, North Rhine-Westphalia) and six times in 2011 (Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt, Bremen, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) (cf.

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[1] Note that the examination of an election to the European Parliament will take place in the second funding period, i.e., the EP election in June 2014.

appendix A 2). These question modules will provide information about attitudes and political behavior with respect to the state level and state elections, and similarly so at the occasion of EP elections. Since the number of respondents in a representative sample for Germany would be too small to conduct meaningful analyses for smaller states there will be oversampling (to a sub-sample size of 500) for those states in which state elections occur close to the field time of the respective tracking survey. This design also distinguishes the tracking component as a major innovation in German electoral research.

Long-term Media and Event Analysis (Component 9)

In addition to the media content analysis related to campaigning and hence the RCS campaign survey (component 2) and the short-term campaign panel (component 3), we will conduct a long-term media and event analysis in order to explain changes in the parties' popularity in-between federal elections and the results of "Land" elections by examining the public issue agenda, politically relevant events and the evaluation of politicians regarding issues and events. The long-term media analysis thus is closely linked to the long-term tracking survey (component 8) and will be useful for the mid-term re-interviews of the long-term panel in 2011 (component 7). Consequently, the long-term media analysis must not be as in-depth as the media content analysis related to campaigns. It focuses instead on a constant monitoring of the media agenda (component 9, directed by Prof. Dr. Sigrid Roßteutscher). We therefore plan a three-staged process: First, to track the course of the media agenda continually we will analyze the weekly political magazines "Der Spiegel" and "Focus". This enables us to identify possible effects of events and political issues. Second, in the month before a tracking survey we will additionally analyze front page and political section of two daily high-quality newspapers, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" and "Süddeutsche Zeitung", and the tabloid "Bild-Zeitung" to assess a more detailed picture of public opinion preceding the online survey. Third, if there is a Land election close to the survey, the long-term media analysis will also take this into account by additionally analyzing important regional newspapers. The relevant newspapers will be identified by looking at the diffusion rate of regional newspapers (as annually published by the "Informationsgemeinschaft zur Feststellung der Verbreitung von Werbeträgern e.V.") and selecting those that guarantee to reach the biggest part of the state electorate (approximately two in small and four in big states). Hereby, differences in reporting between national and state media can be identified which might be crucial for decision-making by voters. Because of the huge amount of information that needs to be processed, the long-term media and event analysis will be conducted by means of computer-assisted content analysis. Hence, we will be able to identify the most important issues and events and, by looking at co-occurrences of words, which politicians or parties are linked positively or negatively to the issues and events.

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