

Voters' Political Conversations during the 2005 German Parliamentary Election Campaign: Causes and Consequences

Bruchsal, May 14, 2009

Thorsten Faas, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck
University of Mannheim

Email:

Thorsten.Faas@uni-mannheim.de

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION



- “word-of-mouth communication that occurs in face-to-face interaction between two or more individuals”
- But: not all (political) talk is the same; differences exist ...
 - ... in the frequency of occurrence
 - ... in the level of disagreement
 - ... with regard to the relationship between talking individuals („strong“ vs. „weak ties“; „primary“ vs. „secondary relations“)

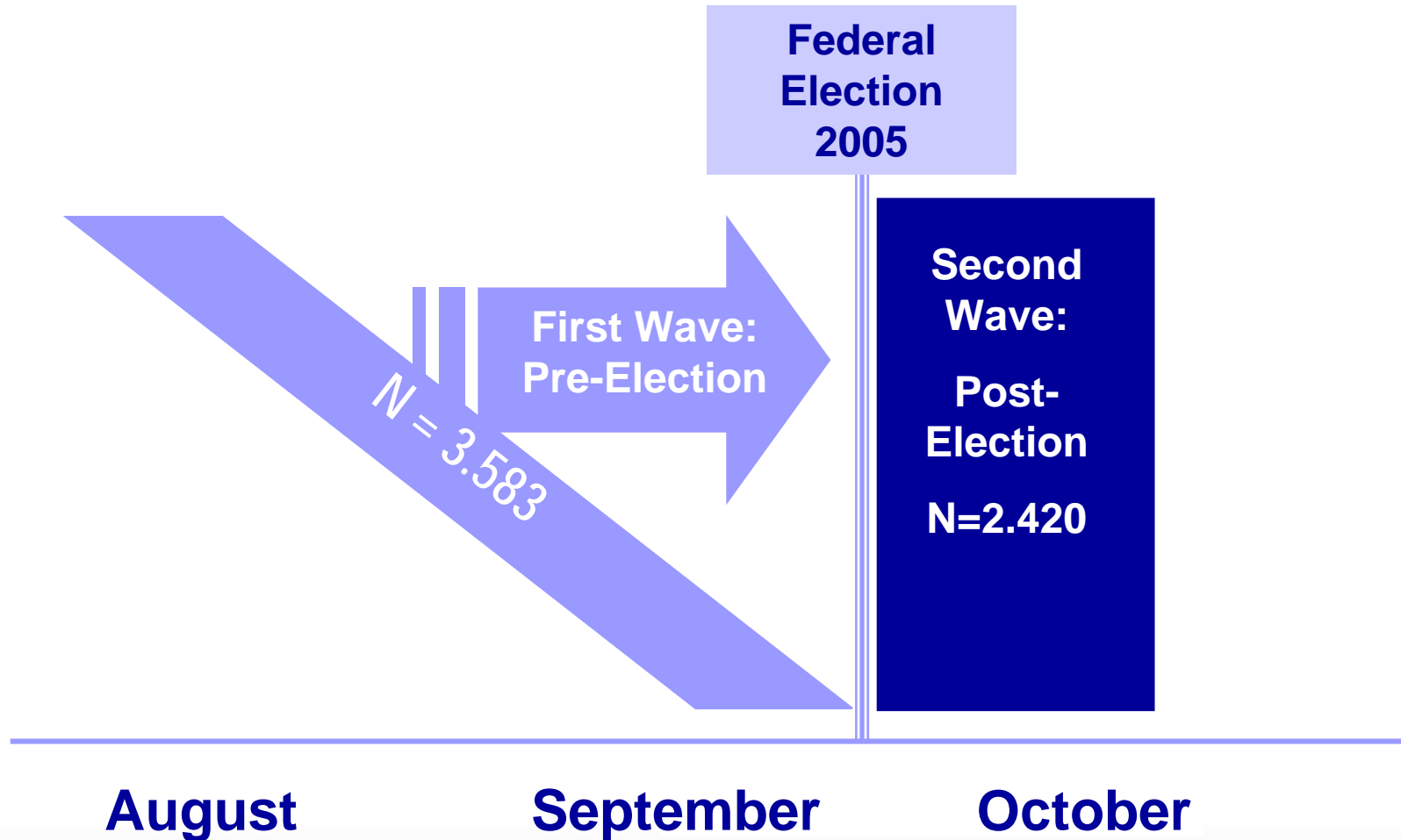
AIM OF THE PRESENTATION



- Analysis of the causes and consequences of (the different dimensions of) interpersonal communication
- Special attention is paid to the dynamics of interpersonal communication in the course of a campaign, as our data is especially suitable to do so

DATA: ROLLING CROSS-SECTION SURVEY

3



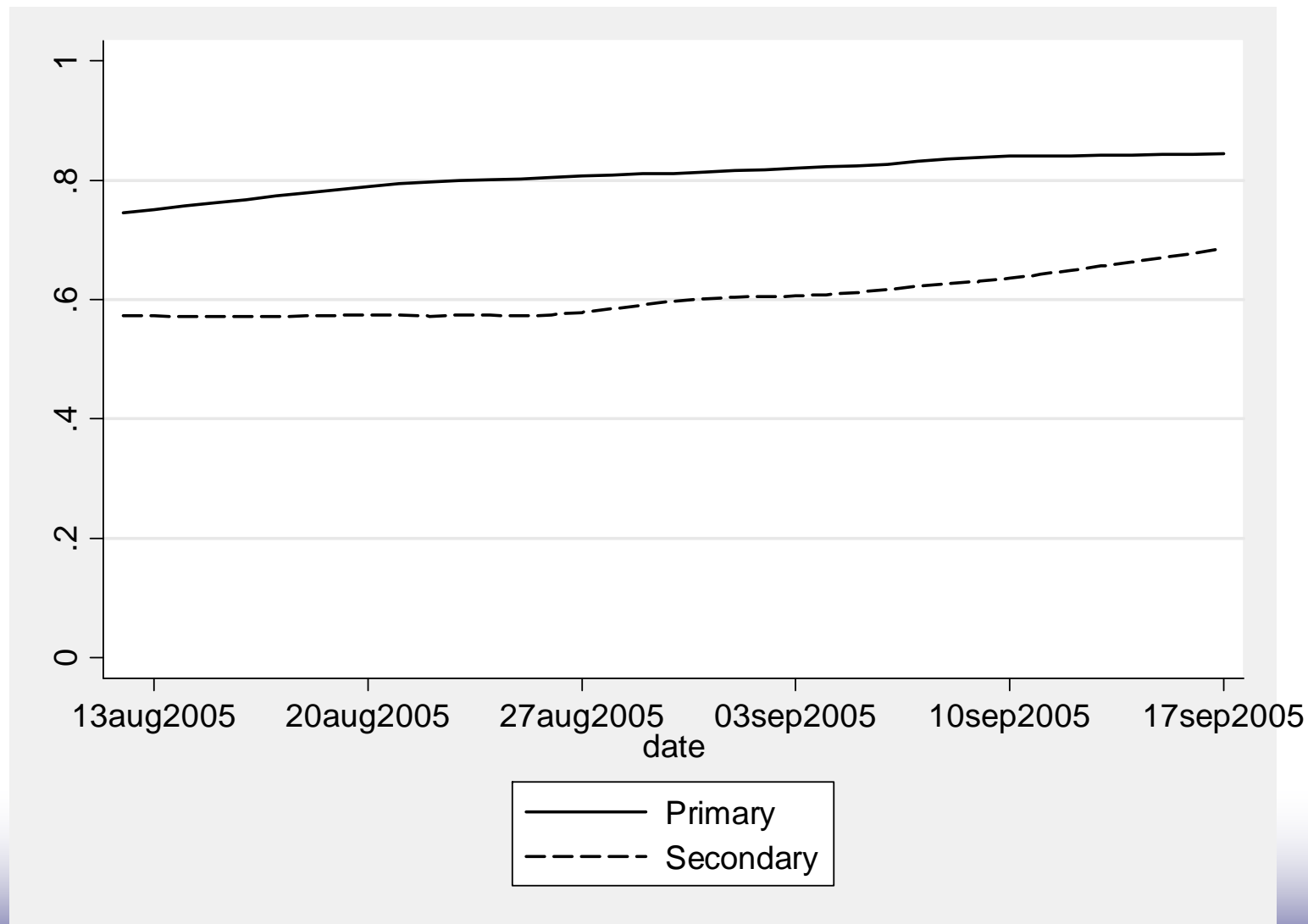
QUESTIONS INCLUDED

4

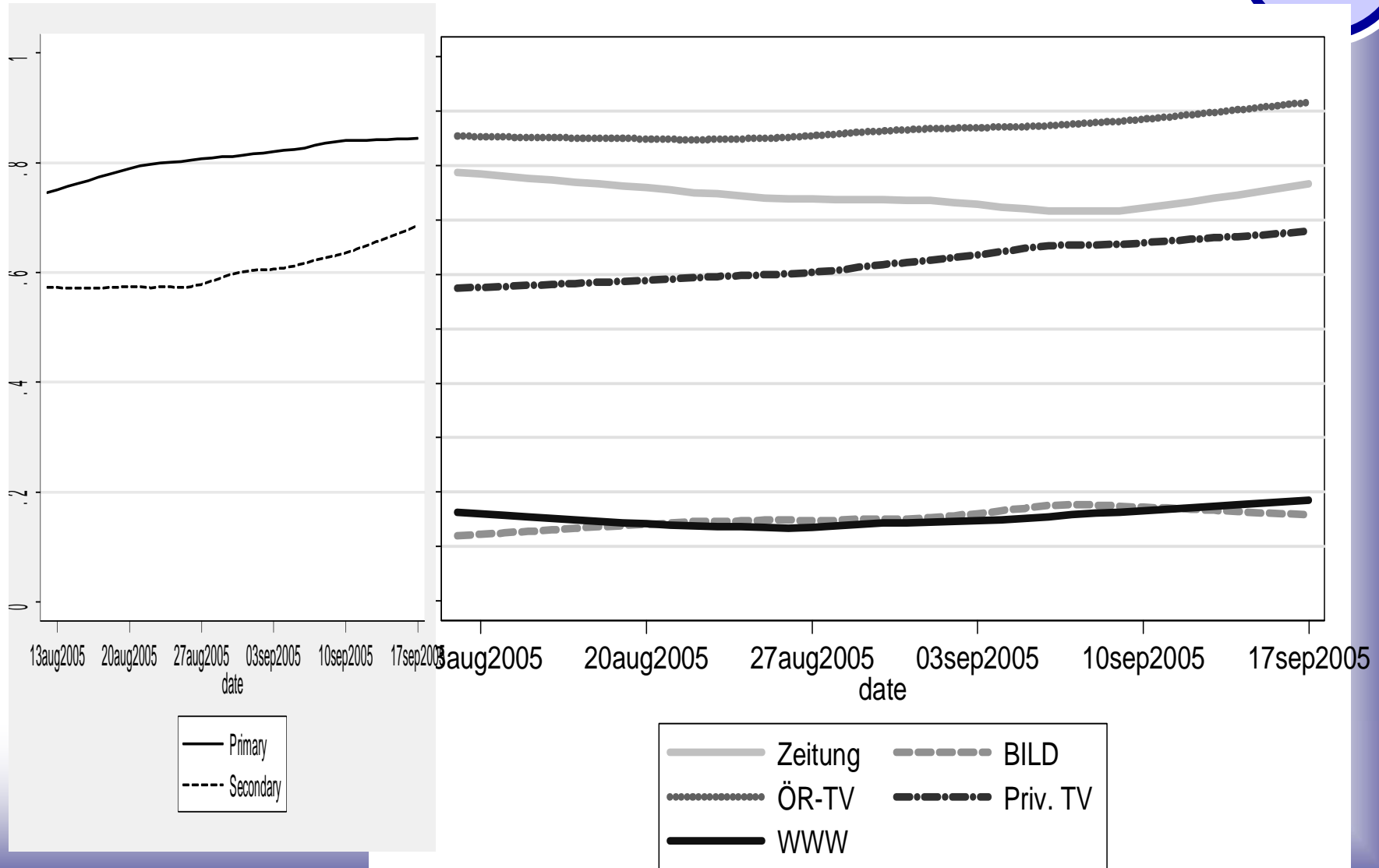
- Do you talk to your family and friends about politics? [If so] On how many days have you done so during the last week?
- What would you say, how often have you had different opinions in these talks – very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never?
- And do you talk to your colleagues and neighbors about politics? [If so] On how many days have you done so during the last week?
- What would you say, how often have you had different opinions in these talks – very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never?
- In comparison: a series of questions pertaining to mass communication

TALK DURING THE CAMPAIGN (BINARY)

5

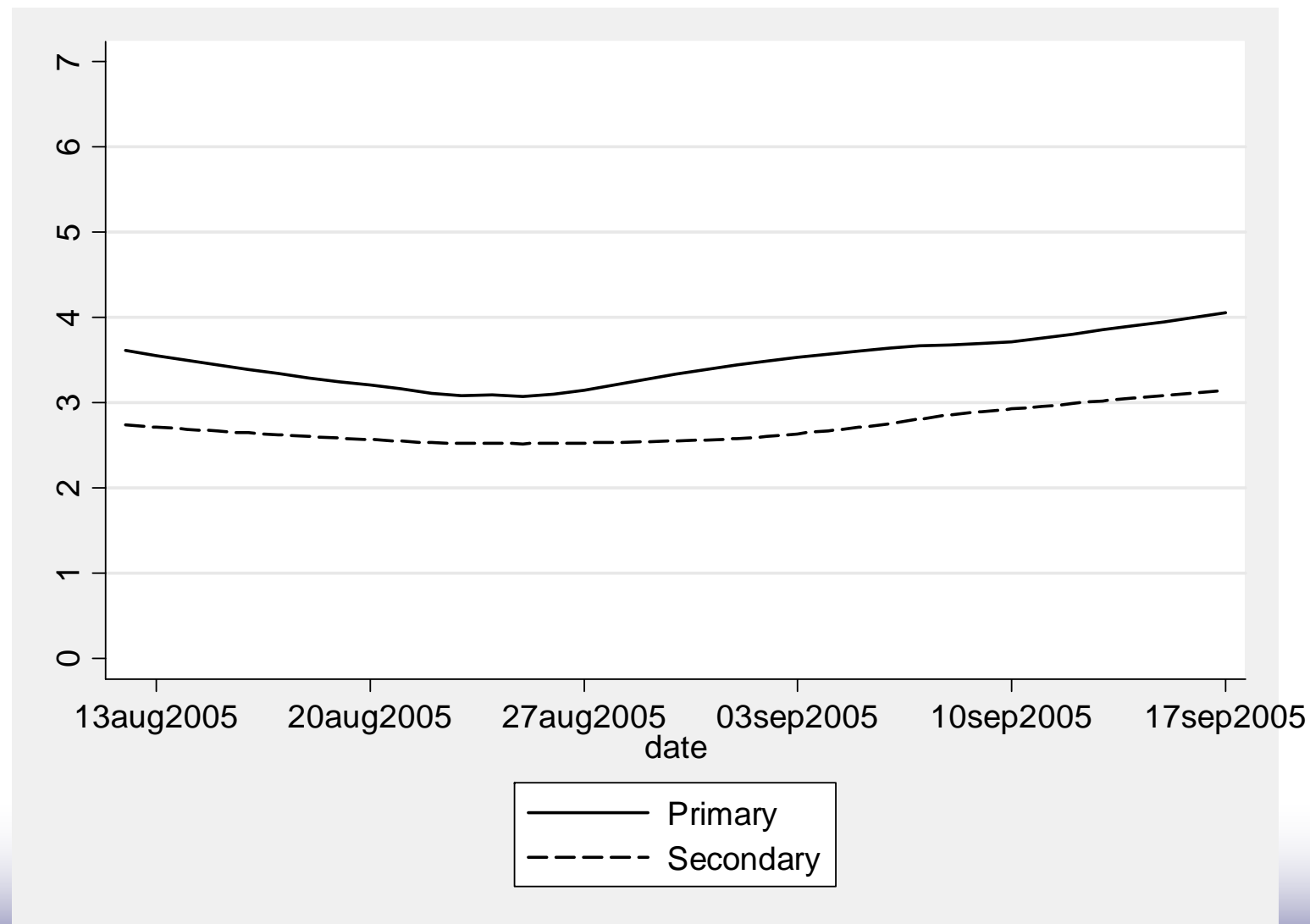


IN COMPARISON: MASS MEDIA



TALK DURING THE CAMPAIGN (AVERAGE)

7



DETERMINANTS OF FREQUENCY



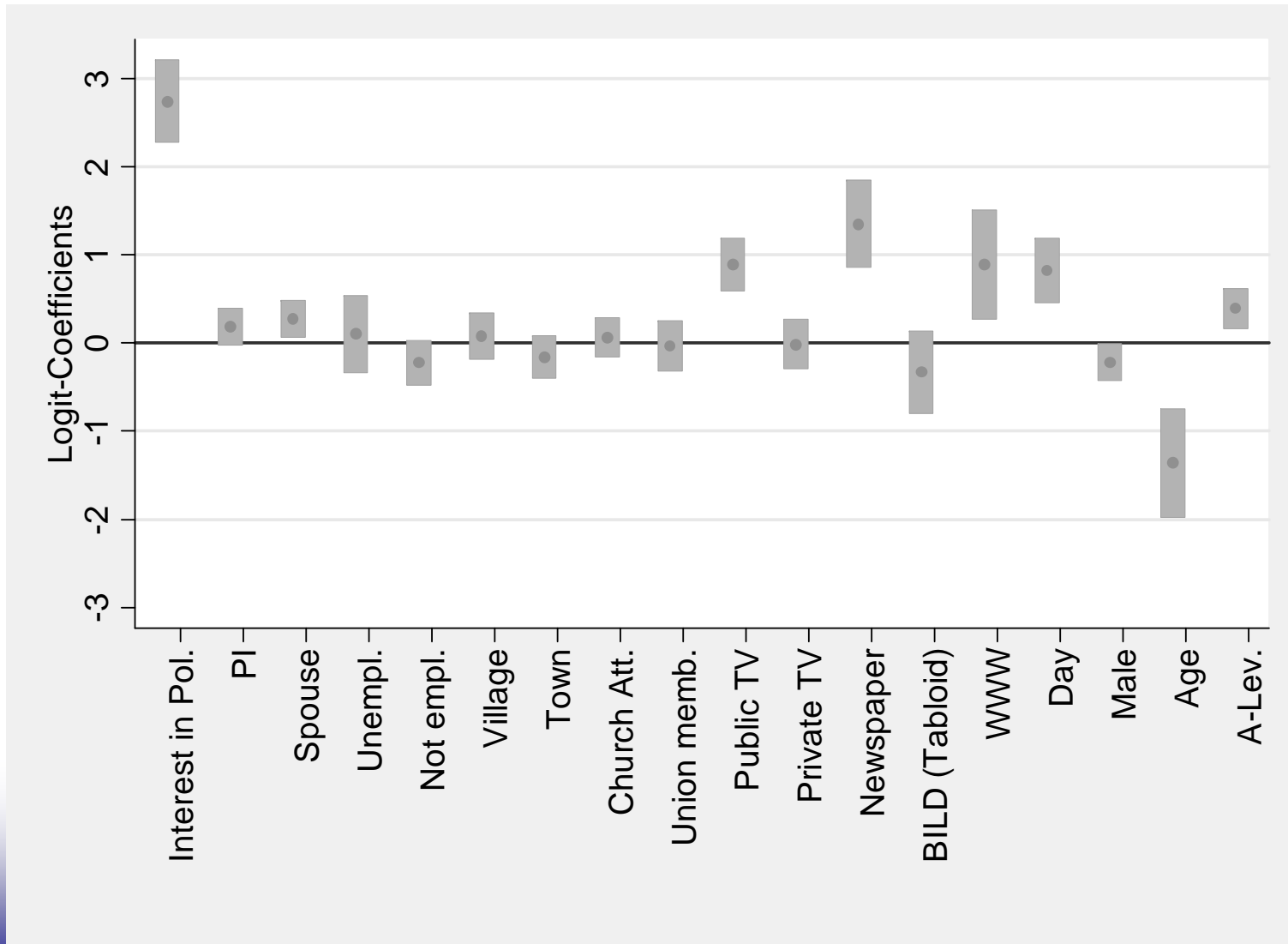
- Three prerequisites for having a discussion:
 - willingness to talk
 - someone to talk to
 - something to talk about

DETERMINANTS OF FREQUENCY

- So what can be expected?
 - Motivational variables (interest in politics, party identification) should increase the frequency
 - Talk in primary groups as a function of household composition, talk in secondary groups as a function of employment situation and wider setting
 - Mass media (esp. quality media) as content providers

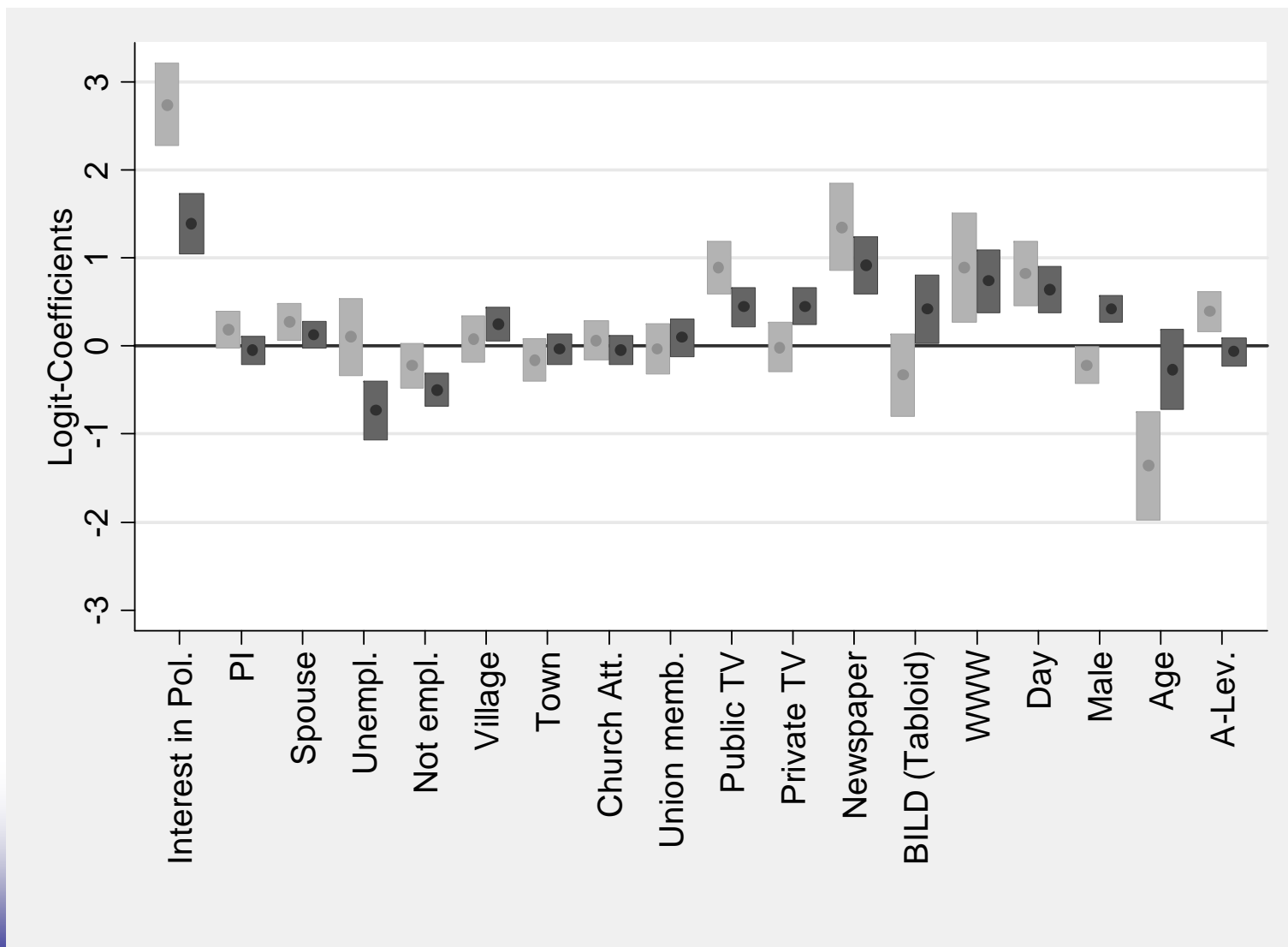
LOGISTIC REGRESSION: WHO TALKS?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary



LOGISTIC REGRESSION: WHO TALKS?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary and secondary



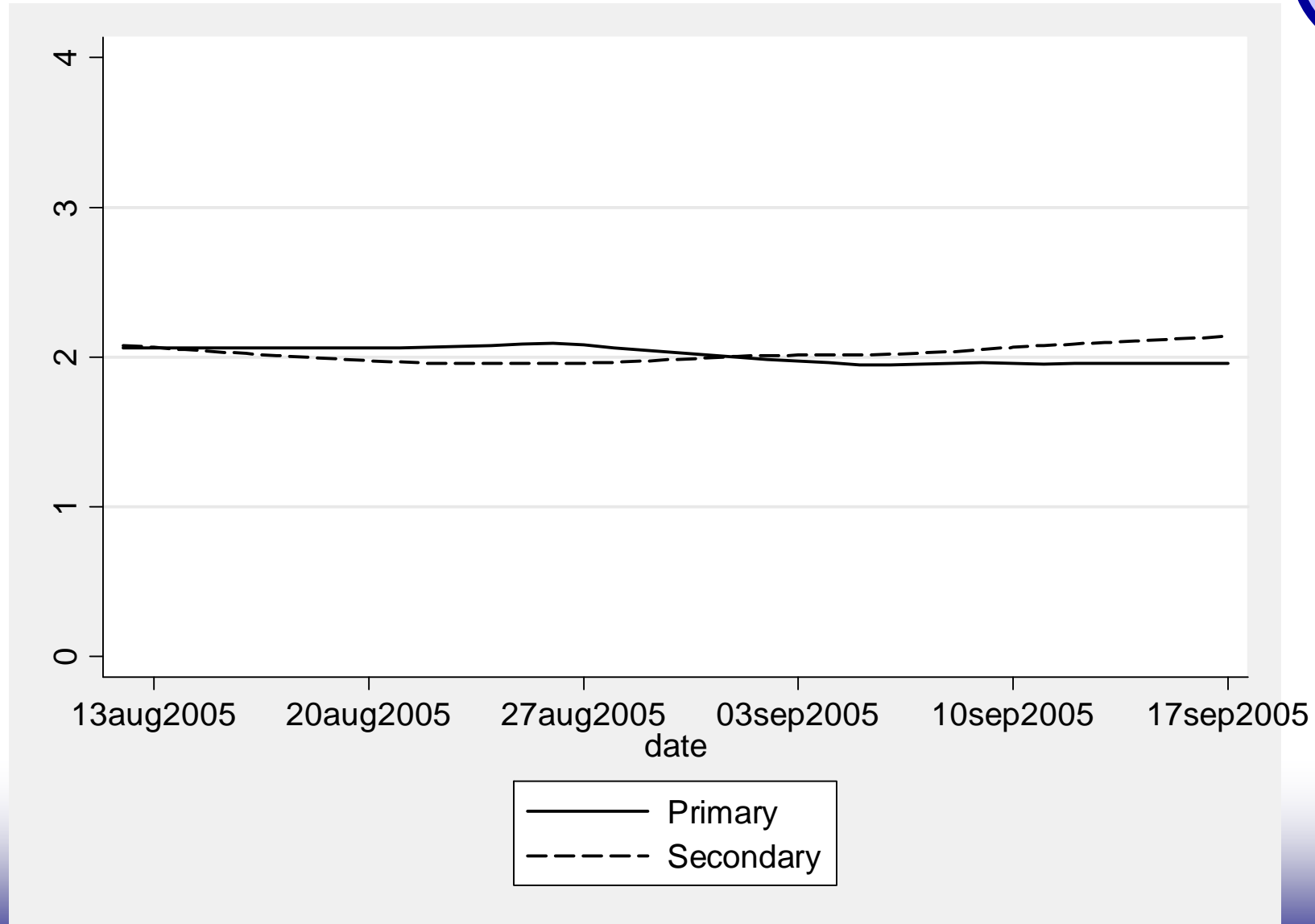
DETERMINANTS OF DISAGREEMENT

12

- Motivational and structural variables likely to be less important
- Mass media as provider of arguments for discussions, to be aware of differences
- More disagreement in secondary relations („crossing lines of difference“ compared to homogenous primary groups)
- Dynamics: „disambiguation“ as a consequence of campaigns vs. increasing polarization in the course of a campaign

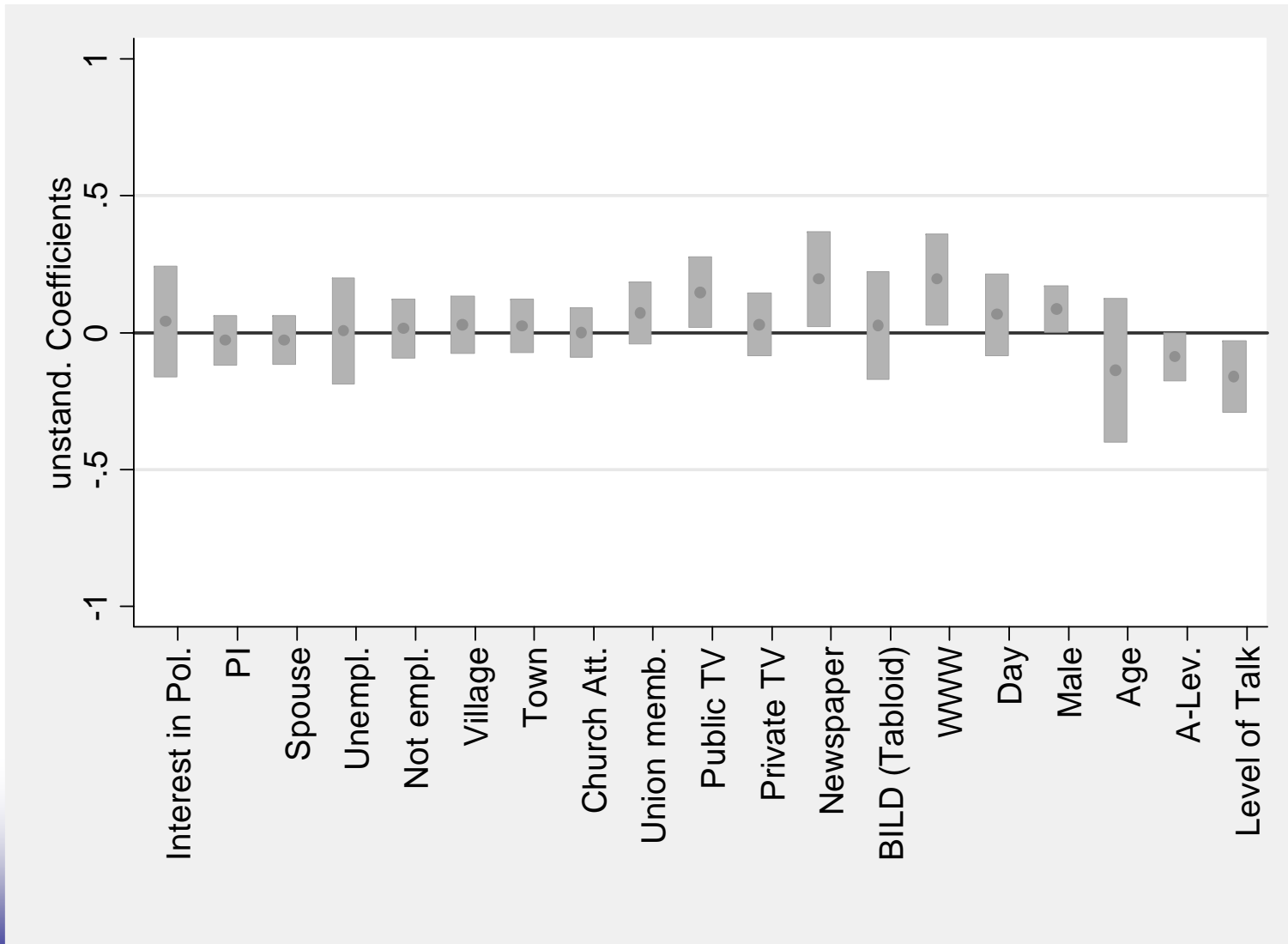
DISAGREEMENT DURING THE CAMPAIGN

13



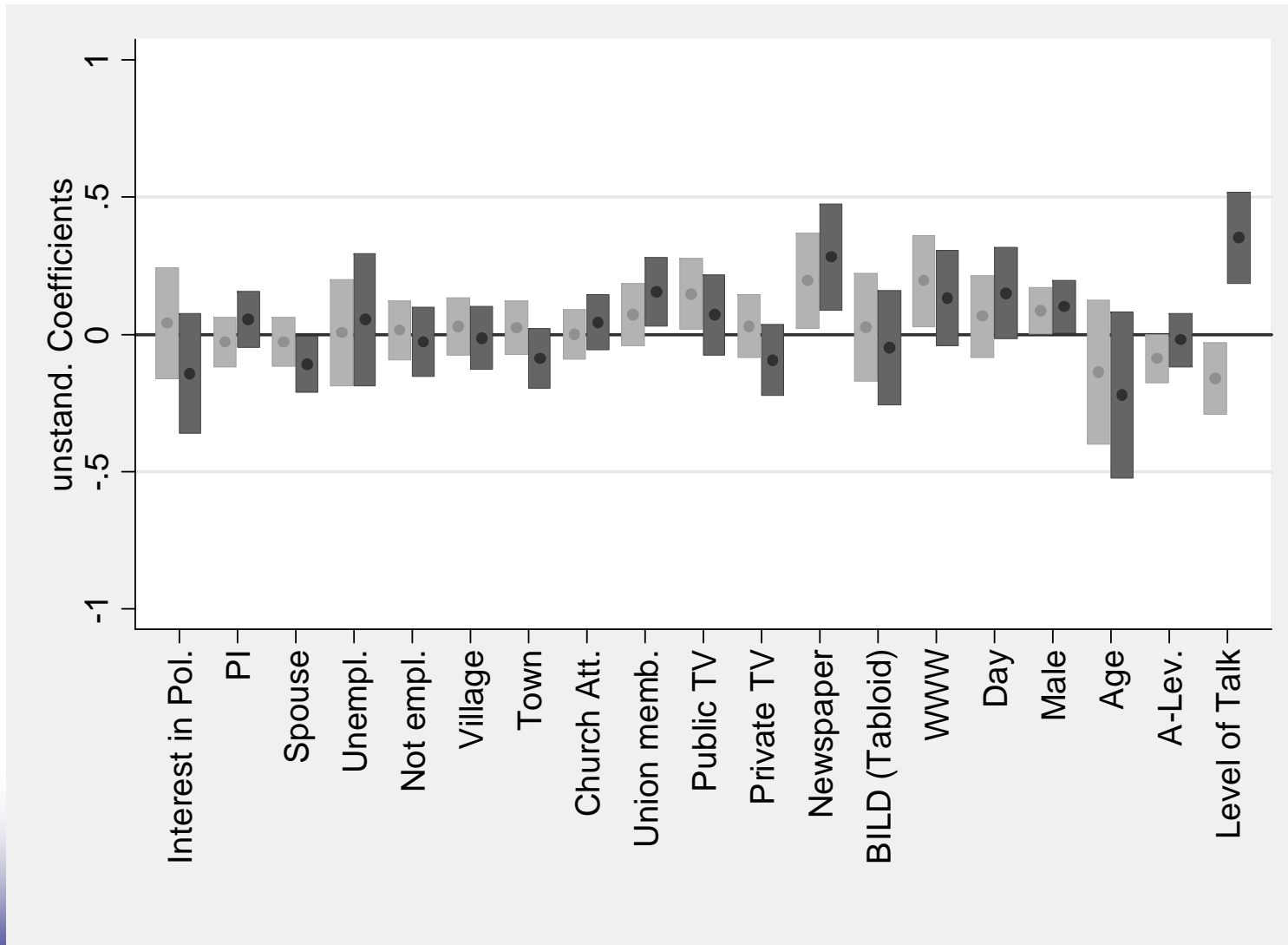
OLS REGRESSION: WHO DISAGREES?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary



OLS REGRESSION: WHO DISAGREES?

Unstandardized coefficients, primary and secondary



CONSEQUENCES OF TALKING

16

- „The basic idea is straightforward: Interactions with others enhance one’s likelihood of political participation“ (Manza et al. 2005: 209)
- Mutz (2002): political talk possibly causes „political ambivalence“ and „social accountability“ if disagreement is encountered
- Scheufele et al. (2004) expect that heterogeneous network have stimulating effects

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

17

- Turnout Intention
- Response latencies for vote intentions
- Perceived difficulty of making up one's mind (in retrospect, post-election wave)

DOES TALKING MATTER?

18

	Turnout	“Vote Choice was easy”	Response Latencies
Level of Primary Talk	0,027	0,021	0,046
Level of Sec. Talk	-0,032	0,022	-0,039
Level of Primary Disagreement	-0,126	-0,134*	-0,121*
Level of Secondary Disagreement	0,375***	0,147*	0,076
<hr/>			
N	1935	1359	1941
R ²	0,316	0,075	0,053