Attributions of Responsibility – Dynamics, Determinants and Consequences: The Case of the 2005 German Election

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Attributions of Responsibility

- Important ...
  - ... from an individual’s point of view
  - ... but also from the point of view of the political system as a whole

- Studying such attributions – their determinants, but also their effects
  – as an important task for political science

- However, this task has not been extensively met for a long time

- Only recently have attributions of responsibility become a matter of interest, e.g. in the field of economic voting
Determinants of Attributions of Responsibility

- "Defensive attributions"
- "Morselizing"
- "Contextualization"
- Political sophistication, partisan rationalizations and cultural predispositions
- Campaigns
Data

• Rolling Cross-Section Survey covering the final 41 days of the 2005 German Federal Election campaign (n=3,583)

• Items:
  – “What do you think, to what extent is the ruling government responsible for the development of this economic situation: to a large extent, to some extent or not at all?”
  – „this economic situation“ refers to
    • Individual’s own economic situation
    • Situation of the national economy
Data

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Perceived State of own and national economic Situation

Interaction term

Interest in Politics, Party Identification, Left-Right-Placement

Time
Development of Level of Attributed Responsibility

Mean Level of Attribution

- Individual's economic situation
- Nation's economic situation

Date:
- 13.8.
- 20.8.
- 27.8.
- 3.9.
- 10.9.
- 17.9.
Determinants of Attributed Responsibility for ...

... Individual Economic Situation

... National Economic Situation

- Ind. Econ.
- Nat. Econ.
- Interest
- Left-Right
- PI: SPD
- PI: Union
- PI: other
- day
- interaction

logit coefficients

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4

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logit coefficients
Predicted Probabilities

- Individual economic situation
  - very poor
  - poor
  - average
  - good
  - very good

- National economic situation
  - ... very poor
  - ... poor
  - ... average
  - ... good
  - ... very good
Consequences of Attributions of Responsibility

• Kinder/Kiewiet (1979): sociotropic vs. pocketbook voting

• Empirically, sociotropic voting prevails

• But: attributions of responsibility as a potential “contingency dilemma”

• Do attributions of responsibilities moderate effects of economic perceptions (pertaining to one’s own economic situation) on feeling thermometers for Germany’s major parties?
Consequences of Attributed Responsibility for ...

... feelings towards Social Democrats

... feelings towards Green Party
Conclusions

• Studying attributions of responsibility is worthwhile. 😊

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