Electoral Consequences of Unemployment Experiences

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Cornell Institute for European Studies

Thorsten Faas
University of Mannheim

Email: Thorsten.Faas@uni-mannheim.de
### Schlozman/Verba 1979: Injury to Insult

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<td>Specific Model</td>
<td>Unemployment and/or low socio-economic status</td>
<td>Sense of economic dissatisfaction and deprivation</td>
<td>Perception that government is responsible</td>
<td>Preference for economic policies designed to ease problem</td>
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Unemployment Experiences

- ... as a discrete characteristic of individuals
- ... ranging from short-term to long-term experiences
- ... also fear of unemployment as a relevant experience

- ... as a characteristic of social/regional units
- ... ranging from individuals‘ household to network to regional contexts to the national economy
- Concentric circles
Unemployment Experiences: Being Unemployed

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+ only
Unemployment Experiences: Staying Unemployed

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+, who have been unemployed during the last 10 years only
Unemployment Experiences: Fear of Unemployment

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+, who are currently employed
Unemployment Experiences: Household Perspective

Source: German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP), German citizens aged 18+ only
Unemployment Experiences: Network Perspective

Source: Politbarometer, German citizens aged 18+ only

Source: Politbarometer, German citizens aged 18+ only
Unemployment Experiences

• To fully understand the relevance of unemployment from a political science perspective, but also a political perspective, one should apply a differentiated view.

• Simply focusing on the number of people currently unemployed is too short-sighted.
I  Unemployment Experiences
II  Perceptions of Economy
III  Attributions of Responsibility
IV  Electoral Consequences
Perceptions of the Economy

• “How does the electorate internalize the objective economy and transform it into a subjective economy?” (de Boef/Kellstedt 2004: 633) – and what is the role of unemployment experiences?

• Concerning such perceptions, one should (in line with the literature) distinguish ...
  
  – by the time frame used (retrospective, present, prospective)
  – by the object that is being evaluated (individual, regional, national economy)

• Unemployment experiences should have a strong impact on perceptions of the retrospective development and the present state of the economy (pertaining to an individual's situation, but also the national situation); fear of unemployment should have an impact on prospective ones
Perceptions of Individuals’ Situation (East G.)

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+ only
Perceptions of Individuals’ Situation (West G.)

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+ only
Perceptions of Prospective Situation (East G.)

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+ only
Perceptions of Prospective Situation (East G.)

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+ only
Perceptions of National Economic Situation

- In relation to national unemployment
- Multilevel model (using the temporal context as level 2)
- Strong and significant effect of national employment rate on perceptions of the national economy

Source: German General Social Survey (Allbus), German citizens aged 18+ only
1. Unemployment Experiences
2. Perceptions of Economy
3. Attributions of Responsibility
4. Electoral Consequences
Attributions of Responsibility

- Are individuals willing to and capable of linking perceptions of economic situations to governmental action?

- Do they attribute responsibility?

- Institutional as well as psychological contingency dilemmas

- What are the determinants of attributed responsibility?
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

- „Defensive attributions“
- „Morselizing“
- „Contextualization“
- Political sophistication, partisan rationalizations and cultural predispositions
- Campaigns

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

![Graph showing the development of mean level of attribution over time for individual's economic situation and nation's economic situation. The graph indicates a decrease in mean level of attribution over time, with individual's economic situation starting higher and nation's economic situation following a similar trend but at a slightly lower level.]
Determinants of Attributed Responsibility for ...

... Individual Economic Situation

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

logit coefficients

... National Economic Situation

Ind. Econ.
Nat. Econ.
Interest
Left-Right
PI: SPD
PI: Union
PI: other
day
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logit coefficients
Determinants of Attributed Responsibility for...

...Individual Economic Situation

Ind. Econ.
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logit coefficients

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
Predicted Probabilities

Individual economic situation: very poor, poor, average, good, very good

National economic situation: very poor, poor, good, very good, average
I Unemployment Experiences
II Perceptions of Economy
III Attributions of Responsibility
IV Electoral Consequences
Consequences of Perceptions of Economic Situations

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

• Empirically, sociotropic voting prevails

• Additionally: policy-oriented voting according to which certain parties “own” specific issues, e.g. left parties “own” unemployment issue, tend to be supported by people making unemployment experiences
Government Approval: Individual Unemployment

![Graph showing unstandardized regression coefficients over time. The x-axis represents years from 1977 to 2005, and the y-axis represents unstandardized regression coefficients ranging from -3 to 3. The graph displays a trend with years 1982 and 1994 highlighted.]
Government Approval: Perceptions of Ind. Economy

![Graph showing trend in government approval with unstand. regression coefficients from 1977 to 2005.](image)
Government Approval: Perceptions of Nation. Econ.
Government Approval: Individual Unemployment

unstand. regression coefficients

Government Approval: Perceptions of Ind. Economy

unstand. regression coefficients

Government Approval: Perceptions of Nation. Econ.
Social Democrats: Individual Unemployment
Social Democrats: Perceptions of Ind. Economy

unstand. regression coefficients

Social Democrats: Perceptions of Nation. Econ.
Social Democrats: Individual Unemployment

[Diagram showing unstandardized regression coefficients for individual unemployment over years 1977 to 2005.]
Social Democrats: Perceptions of Ind. Economy

[Graph showing unstandardized regression coefficients for years 1977 to 2005, with data points for each year. The x-axis represents the years from 1977 to 2005, and the y-axis represents unstandardized regression coefficients. The graph indicates a trend of slightly negative coefficients over the years.]
Social Democrats: Perceptions of Nation. Econ.
Christian Democrats: Perceptions of Ind. Economy
Christian Democrats: Perceptions of Nation, Econ.
Christian Democrats: Individual Unemployment

unstand. regression coefficients

Christian Democrats: Perceptions of Ind. Economy
Christian Democrats: Perceptions of Nation. Econ.
Leftist Party: Perceptions of Ind. Economy (East G.)

unstand. regression coefficients

Leftist Party: Individual Unemployment (West G.)

The graph shows the trend of unstand. regression coefficients from 1994 to 2005. There is a general decline in the coefficients over the years.
Leftist Party: Perceptions of Ind. Economy (West G.)

unstand. regression coefficients

But when including attributions of responsibility ...

... feelings towards Social Democrats
Conclusions

- Unemployment experiences can take on several forms and should be studied in a differentiated way.
- Unemployment experiences leave their imprint on perceptions of economic situations on different layers.
- Attributions of responsibility:
  - Should be studied as dependent variables to understand the mechanisms that lead to attributions of responsibility.
  - Should be included in economic-voting models due to their nature as intervening variables.
- Policy-, but also incumbency-oriented effects of unemployment depending on party and political context.
Thank you!

- Contact:
  Thorsten Faas
  University of Mannheim
  A5, 6
  68131 Mannheim
  Germany

  Thorsten.Faas@uni-mannheim.de
  www.thorsten-faas.de