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

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Attributions of Responsibility

- Workshop “Political Information, public knowledge and perceptions of reality”: How do people see (and explain) reality? What is the role of the informational environment?

- Attributions of responsibility as a crucial element

- Important ...
  - ... from an individual’s point of view
  - ... but also from the point of view of the political system as a whole: what is government / politics responsible for?

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

- Here with respect to economic situations: Who is responsible for the state of the economy (and how can we explain that)?
Determinants of Attributions of Responsibility

- "Defensive attributions"
- "Morselizing" / "politically relevant variance"
- Political sophistication
- "Contextualization" (real-world cues, front-page news)
- Campaigns
- Partisan rationalizations and cultural predispositions
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
  - dichotomized
Data

- „Defensive attributions“
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- Political sophistication
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- Campaigns
- Partisan rationalizations and cultural predispositions

- Perceived state of own and national economic situation
- Interest in Politics
- Interaction term
- Media usage (total vs. by source)
- Distance to Election Day
- Party Identification, Left-Right-Placement
Development of Level of Attributed Responsibility

[Graph showing the development of mean level of attribution over dates, with lines indicating individual's economic situation and nation's economic situation.]
Determinants: National Economic Situation

Media use: total

Media use: by source
Determinants: Individual Economic Situation

Media use: total

- Ind. Econ.
- Nat. Econ.
- Interest
- Left-Right
- PI: SPD
- PI: Union
- PI: other
- day
- Media use: total
- Media use: priv. TV
- Media use: Public TV
- Media use: Tabloid
- Media use: Quality
- interaction

Media use: by source

- Ind. Econ.
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Logit coefficients

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

Logit coefficients

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Determinants: Individual Economic Situation

+ Interaction Term

- Ind. Econ.
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logit coefficients
Predicted Probabilities

Individual economic situation

National economic situation

- very poor
- good
- poor
- very good
- average
Conclusions

- Information environment affects how people make sense of the world
- Information can have different sources
- However, media effects hard to understand without content analysis

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