

Cobbler, stick to your last? Social democrats' electoral returns from labour market policy

Flavia Fossati, University of Lausanne, flavia.fossati@uni.ch, ORCID: 0000-0002-9218-5422

Philipp Trein, University of Lausanne, josefphilipp.trein@unil.ch, ORCID: 0000-0001-6217-6675

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Abstract

In this article, we examine how labour market policy interventions, notably short-time work (STW), affect voting behaviour in times of electoral downturn. We use the 2009 German general elections as an example. This is a particularly interesting case because the grand coalition of Christian democrats (CDU/CSU) and social democrats (SPD) was up for re-election against the backdrop of a major recession following the 2007/08 financial crisis and extensively used STW policies to counteract rising unemployment. Interestingly, STW policy and unemployment vary considerably between regions. We exploit this variance to create a unique dataset that combines regional information on STW policy and unemployment in 299 German electoral constituencies with individual data from the post-election survey. Our results show that especially the SPD profited from high STW rates at constituency level on election day, but this policy was insufficient to preclude the major losses social democrats suffered during the election. More generally, our results indicate that classic labour market policy can generate electoral support for social democratic parties, even as a "junior partner" in a grand coalition. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether such support is sufficient for electoral victories.

Keywords: Short-time work, Conservative parties, Incumbent, Economic Crisis, Grand coalition, Mainstream left

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1) Introduction

A growing body of literature deals with the changing profile of social democratic parties as they aim to attract new voters. One important argument in the literature is that parties have changed their profiles; for example, they have reached out to voters beyond the working class (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2008; Häusermann and Fossati, 2014; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Schumacher, 2015). This literature suggests that these political parties started addressing members of the middle class and individuals affected by new social risks, who prefer policies aimed at actively putting individuals back into jobs over transfer payments to the needy (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). However, this policy shift alienated their traditional working-class constituency, which benefited the most from strict employment legislation and high benefits (e.g., Schwander and Manow, 2016). This estrangement is unsurprising because policies that invest in increasing the employability of jobseekers differ fundamentally from measures that protect those who already have a job. Whereas traditional policies aim to de-commodify workers by granting them a livelihood without reliance on the market in case of need (Esping-Anderson 1990), activation policies aim to re-commodify workers by increasing their labour market participation, either by means of skill development or sanctions (Bonoli, 2013). Furthermore, research shows that social democratic parties' strategies are context-dependent. In dualising countries such as Germany, France, and Italy, social democratic parties still have incentives to cater to traditional constituencies because of the strong labour market dualisation, i.e., the division of the labour market into a primary labour market with stable and well-paid jobs with adequate social benefits and a secondary labour market with precarious and underpaid jobs with very limited social benefits. This labour market segmentation results in diverging preferences, namely, for traditional transfer payments and job security for

individuals who work in the primary labour market on the one hand and social investment and activation policies for workers facing new social risks and/or working in the secondary labour market on the other hand (Rueda, 2007; Emmenegger, 2009; Emmenegger et al., 2012; Fossati, 2018).

In this paper, we analyse how social democratic parties benefit electorally from traditional policy measures to fight unemployment in the context of an economic crisis. In fact, if traditional labour market policy is as important in dualising countries as argued by researchers, this should be a particularly promising background for electoral gains for social democratic parties (Rueda, 2007). Thus, we analyse whether traditional policies that aim to protect workers still produce electoral gains for social democratic parties, focusing on the effect of short-time work policy (STW) on incumbents.

We focus on the German elections that took place in late September 2009. In the 18 months prior to this election, one of the worst economic crises of the post-World War II period hit Germany: the GDP declined sharply, and unemployment increased steeply in some regions of the country. The national coalition government, the grand coalition of the social democratic (SPD) and conservative (CDU/CSU) parties, responded with various macroeconomic policies, including an extensive expansion of STW programmes to avoid a further increase in unemployment (Sacchi et al., 2011). The regional variance in both unemployment and STW rates across Germany and its 299 constituencies was substantial. We exploit this regional variance in an original dataset to analyse the extent to which a) the economic shock and b) the labour market policy response impacted electoral behaviour. The presence of a coalition government makes this case a difficult test to assess the electoral gains of political parties

because the responsibility of parties is blurred for voters (Powell et al., 1993; Giuliani and Massari, 2019; Williams et al., 2017).

Our results indicate that – against the backdrop of a grand coalition – social democratic parties still benefit from specific transfer-oriented labour market policies, such as STW, and they benefit more than conservative parties. Nevertheless, electoral credits for such labour market policies did not suffice to win the election. Overall, our paper contributes to understanding the dilemma of social democratic parties. On the one hand, according to our findings, these parties seem to be rewarded for specific protective labour market policies. On the other hand, we know they receive credits for broader programmes of investment-oriented social policies (e.g., Abou-Chadi and Wagner 2019). The challenge for social democratic parties seems to be finding the right mix of both dimensions.

2) Short-time work policy during the economic crisis

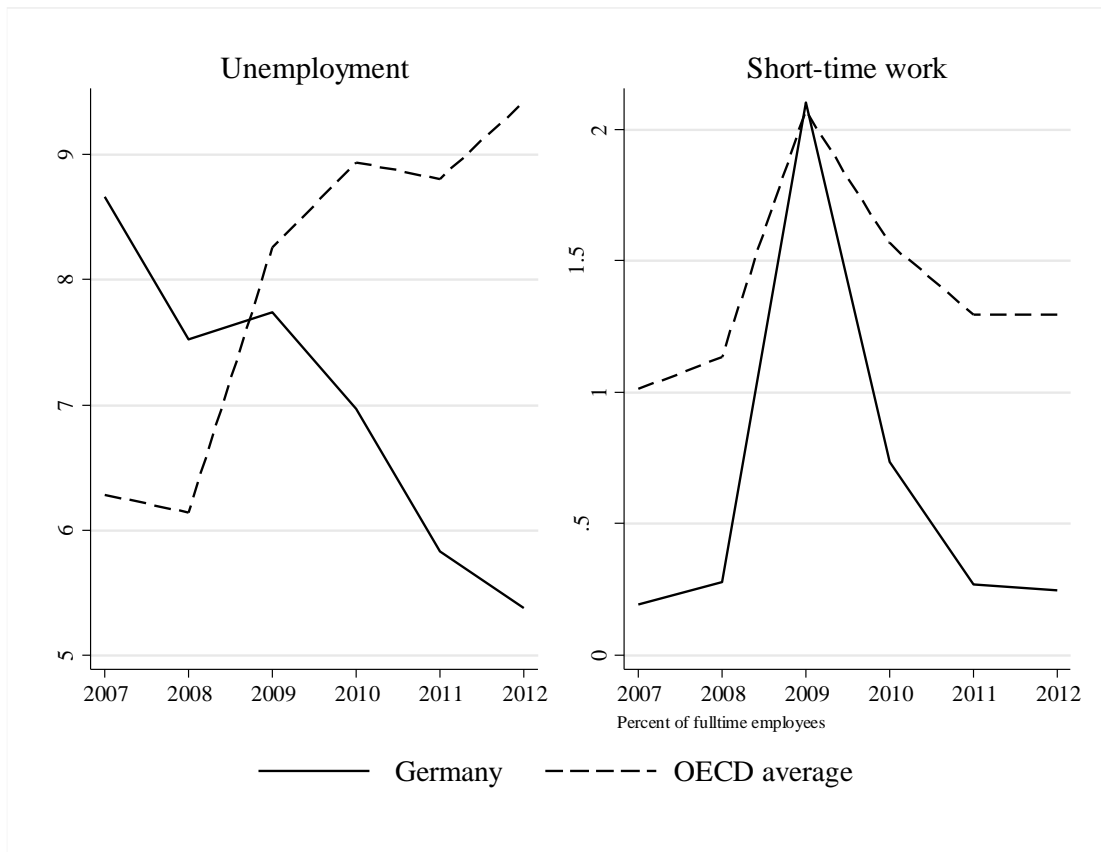
During the financial and economic crisis of 2007-2009, policymakers undertook actions to counteract its negative impacts on national economies in many countries. For instance, governments passed measures to save banks and other financial institutions from collapsing and implemented stimulus policies to restart the economy (Braun and Trein, 2014; Trein and Braun, 2016). In Germany, the federal government responded to the financial and economic crisis with two stimulus programmes. The government decided on the first package of measures (*Konjunkturpaket I*) in November 2008, which contained investments in infrastructure, social and labour market policies, tax relief measures, and affordable credits for small and medium enterprises amounting to a value of approximately 32 billion Euro (Illing,

2013, 57). In addition to the mentioned financial measures, the *Konjunkturpaket I* entailed action to avoid the loss of employment, above all STW (Illing, 2013, 58). In January 2009, the federal government passed a second set of measures (*Konjunkturpaket II*) to stimulate the economy, which were worth approximately 50 billion Euro. This package entailed a new round of investments in infrastructure, support for research in innovative technologies and a 2500 Euro benefit for individuals who bought a new car and scrapped their old vehicle (Illing, 2013, 59). A minimum wage was not part of this package.

Governments in Germany and other Bismarckian-type welfare states, such as Austria and Italy, thus introduced employment promotion programmes to prevent the economic downturn from turning into rising unemployment rates. One particularly effective measure that is typical for these countries is STW, which consists of payments to companies that allow them to compensate workers for reduced working hours instead of laying them off (Sacchi et al., 2011). Consequently, especially in Germany, unemployment rates remained rather stable throughout the demand crisis (2007-2009), whereas STW increased considerably and reached the OECD-27 average in 2009, which was a year when most European countries had to address a recession (Figure 1).¹

¹ Japan had the highest STW rates during the recent crisis period according to the OECD definition. The presented figures include very different types of STW regimes that vary across countries.

Figure 1: Short-time work and unemployment changes, Germany and OECD average



In Germany, STW² is an income replacement scheme paid for by national unemployment insurance to compensate for working-time reduction. It was the most important labour market intervention in *Konjunkturpaket I*, which allowed companies to obtain wage subsidies for their employees if they reduced working hours instead of laying them off (Illing, 2013, 58). These decisions were made by the Ministry of Employment under the leadership of the SPD³ to prevent increasing unemployment rates.⁴ This policy intervention generated a high level of

² For additional information on the STW scheme in Germany, refer to the Supplementary Material page 1.

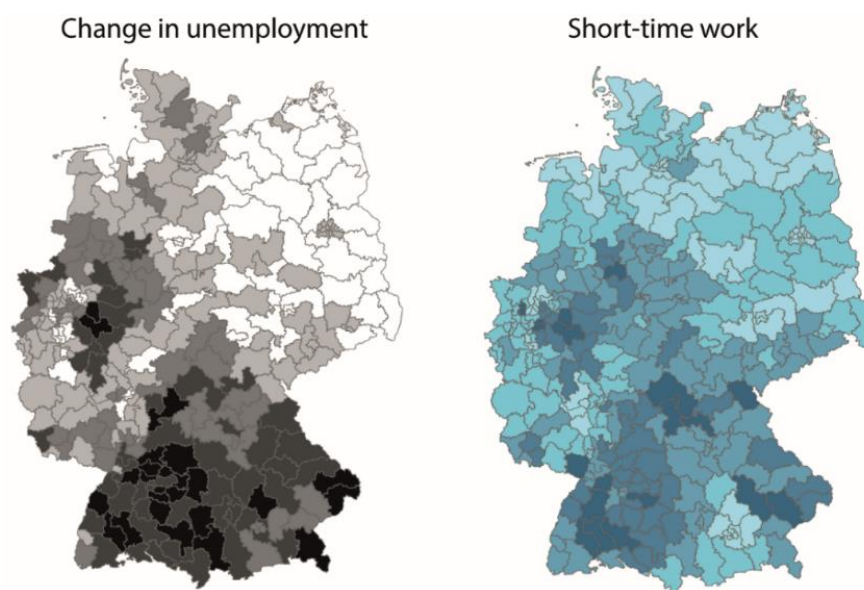
³ Spiegel Online, May 20, 2009: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kampf-gegen-die-krise-bundesregierung-verlaengert-kurzarbeitergeld-a-625925.html>, accessed March 2017.

⁴ Die Zeit Online, June 16, 2010: <http://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2010-06/kurzarbeit-reportage>, accessed March, 2017.

attention in the news media⁵ as well among experts.⁶ Therefore, it is plausible that both governing parties and the SPD in particular profited electorally from the STW intervention.

STW take-up varies regionally (Figure 2). Therefore, this policy context is an interesting case that allows us to assess whether the local variation of these policies influence the aggregate effects of political parties' electoral fortune given that elections to the German national parliament occurred in September 2009, only nine months after STW rates began to increase sharply (Sacchi et al., 2011, 31).

Figure 2: Short-time work and unemployment changes in Germany



Legend: Darker shades indicate higher increases in unemployment levels between September 2008 and September 2009 and higher levels of short-time work in July 2009.

⁵ Spiegel Online, May 20, 2009: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kampf-gegen-die-krise-bundesregierung-verlaengert-kurzarbeitergeld-a-625925.html>, accessed March 2017. Die Zeit Online, June 16, 2010: <http://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2010-06/kurzarbeit-reportage>, accessed March 2017. Handelsblatt, January 7, 2009 <http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/kurzarbeit-puffer-gegen-die-krise/3083748.html>, accessed March, 2017. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, April 15, 2009, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/unternehmen/stellenabbau-kurzarbeit-als-bruecke-aus-der-krise-1790336.html>, accessed March 2017. Bild Zeitung, February 21, 2009 <https://www.bild.de/geld/wirtschaft/massen-entlassungen-arbeitslosigkeit-7456560.bild.html>, accessed March 2017. ⁶IAB (2009): IAB-Kurzbericht: *Verschonung dank Kurzarbeit*, online at <http://doku.iab.de/kurzber/2009/kb1409.pdf>, accessed March 2017.

In the 2009 elections, the SPD lost 11% of the votes compared to the 2005 elections⁷, whereas the CDU suffered only a minor reduction in their vote share. Scholars analysing electoral behaviour in the 2009 elections debated how the crisis impacted the result of the election. Nevertheless, they agree that the economy was a salient issue at the time (Beckmann et al., 2011; Goerres and Walter, 2016; Trein et al. 2017).

Theory and hypotheses

To understand how the economic crisis and STW policy influenced the 2009 German federal elections, we use insights from economic voting research. According to this literature, voters reward incumbents for positive economic developments and punish them for negative ones (Downs, 1957; Key, 1966; Tufte, 1978; Fiorina, 1981; MacKuen et al., 1992; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck et al., 2013a), either by accounting for past or future economic outcomes (MacKuen et al., 1992, 606-7; Erikson et al., 2000). This effect should be particularly pronounced if the responsibility for economic policies is clear—that is, if it is easy for voters to determine who is responsible for economic downturns (Powell et al., 1993; Anderson and Hecht, 2012).

As our main interest is the impact of the STW policy, we adopt a “policy voting” rather than an economic voting perspective. In times of economic crisis, governments cannot remain passive and do nothing as they are aware of scrutiny by the public. Thus, they try to implement measures to address public concerns and ensure their re-election. In times of crisis, governments can focus on either fiscally conservative (Bernder and Drazen, 2008; Giger and

⁷ Refer to Figure S1 in the Supplementary Material for the distribution of aggregate electoral gains and losses in the 299 constituencies for each party (left graph) and for each government party and the opposition parties (right graph).

Nelson, 2011) or fiscally expansive interventions, such as STW (Bechtel and Hainmueller, 2011; Huebscher and Sattler, 2017; Talving, 2017). In the following, we focus on expansive policies and explain *how* STW policies affect the electoral reward for political parties.

3.1) Reward and punishment in the context of an expansive labour market crisis policy

A large body of literature has argued that politicians are aware of and react to popular demands for welfare state provisions (Soroka and Wlezien, 2005; Brooks and Manza, 2006). Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) have shown that public support for the welfare state is particularly high among individuals who expect to benefit from such policies (ego-tropic reasoning) and if there is a *context* of high unemployment (Fraile and Ferrer, 2005).

Following this logic, we hypothesise that incumbent parties profit electorally when implementing expansive labour market policies whenever they face a crisis (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Bechtel and Hainmueller, 2011; Marx 2016; Huebscher and Sattler, 2017). Put differently, a crisis context increases the demand for social protection, and the government has an incentive to expand welfare interventions to counteract its negative effects. Thus, when facing high levels of unemployment, incumbents have an incentive to implement policy responses that address this problem to avoid being punished on election day for not taking the necessary steps to deal with the economic crisis.

In the case of the 2009 German federal election, STW was a promising way of swiftly and efficiently addressing the adverse impacts of the downturn. STW is firmly anchored in the policy repertoire of continental welfare states (Sacchi et al., 2011) and can thus be easily implemented. This is exactly what the German government did: faced with a crisis, the

government quickly expanded the length, targeting and scope of this measure to buffer the economic downturn and prevent electoral backlash. Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

H1a) *Voters in constituencies with higher levels of STW should, ceteris paribus, be more likely to reward incumbents than in constituencies with lower STW take-up (macro-level hypothesis).*

However, an alternative prediction can be made if we follow the literature suggesting that voters prefer fiscally conservative over expansive policies during times of crisis (Durr, 1993; Sihvo and Uusitalo, 1995; Stevenson, 2001). In the context of general austerity and against the backdrop of the International Monetary Fund interventions in many European countries, voters are likely to be sensitive to the necessity of pursuing financial consolidation and avoiding a public debt explosion. Voters will thus also engage in prospective and socio-tropic reasoning (MacKuen et al., 1992, 606-7; Erikson et al., 2000) and disapprove of government if it decides to expand STW, particularly in times of economic slumps. This reasoning corresponds to the more general observation made by Giger and Nelson (2011) that governments, particularly right-oriented parties, may actually win votes when retrenching the welfare state. In line with theories emphasising prospective reasoning, we hypothesise the following:

H1b) *Voters in constituencies with higher levels of short-time work should, ceteris paribus, be more likely to punish incumbents than in constituencies with lower STW take-up (macro-level hypothesis).*

3.2) Partisan differences regarding labour market policies in the context of crisis

An alternative theoretical approach accounts for partisan differences regarding policy interventions. In fact, voters consider some parties to be particularly competent concerning

certain policies and use them strategically to attract specific groups of voters (Petrocik, 1996; Bélanger and Meguid, 2008). Hence, voters support a party because of its policy propositions (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2011; Lewis-Beck et al., 2013b) or because they infer from past experiences (or beliefs) that a party is particularly competent in handling a specific policy challenge (Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). According to the literature on party choice and policy preferences, two competing arguments are plausible regarding the link between voters' party and policy preferences.

The first argument proposes that social democratic parties tend to represent workers and working-class issues and therefore have the greatest intention to pass protective labour market policies because employment and labour market policies constitute their core competencies. If voters perceive that unemployment is going to be an important problem for the new cabinet, they support social democratic parties in government during an economic downturn because they expect these parties to resolve unemployment issues (Lewis-Beck and Bellucci, 1982; Broz, 2010; Wright, 2012). This characterisation applies to insiders, especially in countries such as Germany with a strong labour market dualisation (Rueda, 2006; Fossati and Häusermann, 2014; Fossati, 2018). In contrast, reforms that reduced unemployment by liberalising the labour market and reducing benefits resulted in declining support for social democratic parties (Schwander and Manow, 2016). Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

H2a) Social democratic parties in government should be rewarded for expanding STW schemes in contexts of crisis (macro-level hypothesis).

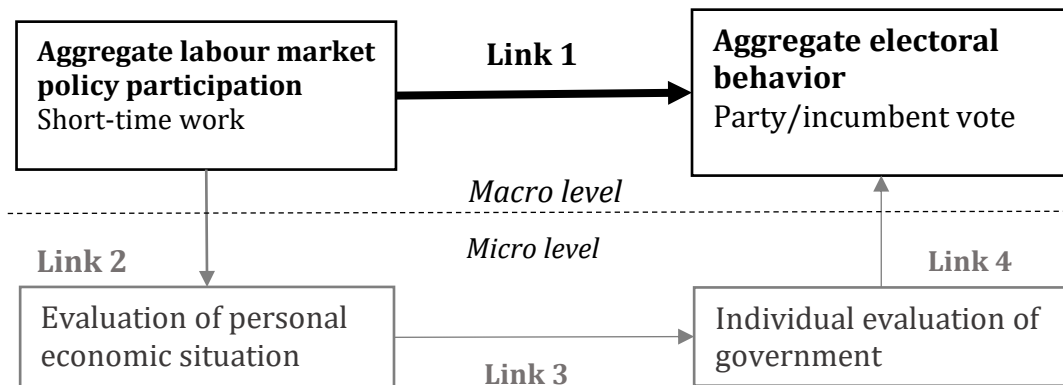
The second argument suggests that conservative parties cater to their electorates by showing competence regarding the stability of prices and financial markets (Hibbs, 1977; Schmidt, 1982), which implies the following as an alternative hypothesis:

H2b) Right parties in government should be punished for expanding STW in crises (macro-level hypothesis).

3.3) Theoretical chain and empirical implications for the macro and micro levels

Even if a relationship can be identified at the macro level, it is important to assess its micro-foundations since the link between the actual economic situation and the aggregate voting decision may not always be direct. From a micro-level perspective, voters need to perform at least two cognitive links, mediating the connection between the economy and their vote choice (cf. Coleman, 1986). First, voters need to evaluate the effect of the economic context on their personal situation or the national economic situation (i.e., ego- or socio-tropic reasoning) (Duch and Stevenson, 2008). Second, voters must evaluate the government's performance and decide whether to hold it responsible for their (the) economic situation. Therefore, they need to identify an incumbent party that is responsible for the negative economic situation or policies they do not approve of (Fournier et al., 2003; Hobolt et al., 2013). Third, based on this performance evaluation, they chose whom to vote for.

Figure 3: Theoretical model linking the micro and the macro levels



At the *macro* level, as illustrated in Figure 3 (Link 1), the reward-punishment hypotheses (hypotheses 1a, 1b) imply that we will find better (or worse) results for both incumbent parties' vote share at the level of electoral constituencies in case of higher STW take-up. In contrast, the macro data should show wins / losses for the opposition parties (Greens, FDP, and *Linke*) depending on whether the expectations of the reward-for-intervention (reward-for-fiscal-consolidation) reasoning apply. According to our alternative hypotheses, we expect that only the SPD should be rewarded electorally for high STW because voters consider it most competent regarding labour market policies, even though the social democrats govern together with the CDU. Conversely, according to this logic, the CDU should not profit electorally from STW because its competencies prioritise monetary and financial policies.

At the *micro* level (Coleman, 1986; Walter, 2010), we connect STW intervention to voters' personal economic situations (ego-tropic evaluation, Link 2), their evaluations of government performance (Link 3), and their vote choices (Links 3). Therefore, a context with higher STW shares should influence the assessment of the personal economic situations of voters, which,

in turn, impact the evaluation of the government's performance. Consequently, the assessment of government performance should result in vote decisions and support for a particular party. This logic varies according to the hypotheses that we discussed above.

3) Data and methods

To test the hypotheses, we use two different empirical strategies, one at the macro level and one at the micro level. The first analysis focuses on the link between STW and voting behaviour at the constituency level, controlling for unemployment and other relevant confounders at the macro level. Note that the electoral outcome, i.e., the seats, is distributed according to the proportion of the vote share that the parties obtain in the second vote (proportional logic).⁸

The second analysis focuses on the micro level and aims to assess the theoretical chain underlying the postulated macro relationship. To achieve this aim, we use cross-sectional survey data from the GLES (Rattinger et al., 2011 and 2014)⁹ and combine the pre- and post-election surveys. The surveys were conducted six weeks before and after the federal election in Germany on 27 September 2009. A total of 4288 individuals were interviewed,¹⁰ and the distributions of survey responses are relatively close to the actual voting results.¹¹ The analyses include only the SPD, the CDU/CSU, the Greens, the FDP and *die Linke*, which are the parties

⁸ For details on the German electoral system, see Falter and Schoen (2005).

⁹ For more information, see <http://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/gles/>.

¹⁰ The results are robust to restricting the sample to the pre- and post-election samples.

¹¹ Table S1 in the Supplementary Material presents a comparison of the actual voting results and the sample distribution obtained from our data.

that passed the 5% hurdle necessary to form a parliamentary group in the national German parliament.

4.1) Constituency-level analyses

The dependent variable at the macro level is measured as the percentage change in the average coalition parties' (CDU/CSU and SPD) electoral outcomes and the average outcome of the opposition parties (Greens, FDP and *die Linke*) compared to that in the previous election that was held in 2005 in the 299 German electoral constituencies (Figure 3, Link 1).¹²

To measure whether labour market policy intervention affects voters' choices at the aggregate level, we introduced a variable that captured the share of individuals who newly registered as working on an STW contract as a percentage of all employees in a specific region between September 2008 and September 2009. We then merged municipal-level data obtained from the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (2010) for the corresponding electoral region with the STW data. To control for poor labour market performance, we included the regional unemployment rate change (September 2008 – September 2009, cf. Figure 2) and the 2009 absolute unemployment level in the 299 constituencies (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2010). The raw data measured STW at the municipal level (Landkreise), and we merged the data to the constituency level using ArcGIS software.¹³ Moreover, we controlled for East Germany, the regional participation level, and the 2005 vote shares of both CDU/CSU and SPD.

For this analysis, we estimated seemingly unrelated regressions, which produced estimates for each party separately but accounted for the correlations among the error terms. This step was

¹² For considerations about the legitimacy of operationalising STW at the constituency level and measuring the effect on national (rather than local) elections, see Supplementary Material page 1.

¹³ A comparison with labour market data that were available directly for constituencies with our unemployment data shows a correlation coefficient of 0.98, which suggests that the re-aggregation was correct.

necessary because the decision to vote for one party cannot be considered independently from the choice not to vote for another party.

4.2) Analyses connecting the constituency and the micro level

The second empirical test analysed the micro-foundations (Coleman, 1986; Walter, 2010) of our argument by running a series of regression models that operationalised the different analytical linkages connecting the macro level to the micro level (cf. Figure 3, Links 2, 3 and 4). The context hypothesis (Link 2) links the constituency-level STW rate (macro) to the respondents' evaluations of their personal economic situations (micro). In turn, this ego-tropic evaluation triggers the individual evaluation of government performance (both micro-level variables, Link 3). The last step involves the re-aggregation of micro-level preferences that are expected to influence the electoral outcome. We tested Link 4 by regressing individual vote choice on the respondents' government evaluations (both micro-level variables). If all these relationships pass the statistical tests, our argument about the macro-level relationship of STW intervention and the impact on electoral outcomes can be corroborated.

We used different dependent variables to test these analytical links. First, we assessed the impacts of context factors on the individual evaluations of personal economic situation (Figure 3, Link 2). As suggested by MacKuen (1992), we included retrospective (vn178),¹⁴ current (vn179) and prospective (vn181) ego-tropic thinking as well as average scores (0=very bad to 4=very good) for all three indicators. Subsequently, we tested Link 3 by regressing the continuous variable of satisfaction with the government's performance (vn112) on the ego-

¹⁴ All the variable names refer to GLES data (Rattinger et al., 2011 and 2014).

tropic assessment, i.e., the previous dependent variable. Finally, concerning electoral behaviour (Figure 3, Link 4), we considered the five main parties and excluded non-voters. Electoral choice focused on the second vote (proportional rule) and combined the respondents' intentions to vote in the pre-election sample (v254_2A) and the reported vote choices in the post-election sample (n169_2A). To achieve this aim, first, a dependent variable distinguishing the governing parties (SPD and CDU/CSU=1) and the opposition (*die Linke*, Greens, FDP=0) was created. Second, we recoded a nominal variable to test for different preferences concerning the incumbent parties by distinguishing between votes cast for the SPD (=0), the CDU (=1), and the opposition (=2). Our sample contained 2545 observations.¹⁵

The micro-level models included a number of possible confounders that account for basic sociological differences among voters (Falter and Schoen, 2005). Specifically, the models controlled for gender (ref. male, v1), age (in years, v436B), and age squared to account for nonlinear effects of electoral preferences. Education was modelled as continuous (5 levels, vn9A), whereas personal unemployment (vn17) and union membership (v337) were included as dichotomous variables. We also included a measure of socio-tropic reasoning by creating an index that averaged the assessment of the expected past (vn182), current (vn184), and future (vn185) development of the national economy. We distinguished individuals with very strong or strong party identification from individuals with average or lower levels of party identification (vn136). Moreover, several political variables, including level of political interest (5 levels, vn217), individual position on the left-right dimension (1=left, 11=right, vn190), and the square of the left-right position, were modelled. Controls were also added for whether the respondent lived in East Germany and for the data sampling strategy, i.e., the pre- or post-

¹⁵ We keep the number of observations constant to ensure the comparability of the results.

election survey wave (recoded from “Erhebung”). To complete the model, we added changes in the STW rate and in unemployment at the macro level.

The empirical strategy consists of estimating hierarchical linear models that account for the nested data structure (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2008). Thus, we estimated multilevel logit regressions for the decision to vote either for the governing party or for the grand coalition and multinomial logit models with clustered standard errors for the choice among SPD, CDU and the opposition.

4) Results of the empirical analysis

4.1) Constituency-level evidence

Table 1 shows the results for the macro-level analyses. Model 1 shows that a high level of STW take-up boosts the governing coalition’s electoral support. In other words, voters rewarded the incumbent coalition of SPD and CDU-CSU in the 2009 German election, whereas they punished the opposition parties (10% significance).

Regarding the control variables, we find that a high change in unemployment compared to one year prior to the election decreases the coalition’s support. Interestingly, high absolute levels of unemployment do not seem to affect government parties. For the opposition, the situation is reversed: they win when unemployment changes are large but lose when absolute unemployment levels are high. In sum, Model 1 corroborates the expectation that voters favour extensive STW intervention in the context of a crisis.

Table 1: The effects of short-time work at the constituency level on the German electoral outcome in 2009 (Link 1)

| DV: Electoral outcome | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| | Governing coalition (SPD and CDU/CSU) | | CDU/CSU | |
| STW | 0.622*** | (0.164) | 0.219° | (0.124) |
| Unemployment | -2.287** | (0.722) | -1.322* | (0.547) |
| Absolute unemployment | 0.034 | (0.256) | -0.496* | (0.194) |
| East Germany | 11.581*** | (2.137) | 16.877*** | (1.618) |
| Participation | -29.473* | (12.093) | -39.013*** | (9.155) |
| Vote share CDU/CSU 2005 | -19.007* | (8.955) | -34.971*** | (6.779) |
| Vote share SPD 2005 | 56.440*** | (9.581) | 27.033*** | (7.253) |
| Constant | -28.509* | (12.241) | 28.862** | (9.267) |
| R2 | 0.622 | | 0.789 | 0.789 |
| | Opposition (Greens/die Linke/FDP) | | SPD | |
| STW | -1.129° | (0.616) | 0.403*** | (0.106) |
| Unemployment | 6.549* | (2.630) | -0.966* | (0.467) |
| Absolute unemployment | -2.851** | (0.929) | 0.530** | (0.165) |
| East Germany | -4.300 | (8.933) | -5.296*** | (1.382) |
| Participation | 28.919 | (49.364) | 9.540 | (7.818) |
| Vote share CDU/CSU 2005 | 73.378 | (98.827) | 15.964** | (5.789) |
| Vote share SPD 2005 | 34.372 | (93.580) | 29.407*** | (6.194) |
| Constant | 215.979* | (94.673) | -57.370*** | (7.913) |
| R2 | 0.744 | | 0.413 | |
| | | | Opposition (Greens/die Linke/FDP) | |
| STW | | | -1.221* | (0.612) |
| Unemployment | | | 5.852* | (2.622) |
| Absolute unemployment | | | -3.075*** | (0.926) |
| East Germany | | | 0.197 | (8.759) |
| Participation | | | 15.116 | (48.527) |
| Vote share CDU/CSU 2005 | | | -51.582 | (92.403) |
| Vote share SPD 2005 | | | -76.171 | (87.699) |
| Vote share <i>Linke</i> 2005 | | | -530.960*** | (97.242) |
| Vote share Greens 2005 | | | -403.407*** | (92.070) |
| Vote share FDP 2005 | | | -715.580*** | (104.417) |
| Constant | | | 342.200*** | (89.281) |
| R2 | | | 0.749 | |
| N | 299 | | 299 | |
| LI | -2245.445 | | -2986.456 | |

Standard errors in parentheses, seemingly unrelated regressions, macro-level.
 Dependent variable: absolute change in electoral outcome per party (2009-2005).
 ° p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

To analyse the second set of hypotheses, i.e., to test whether there are partisan effects “hidden” in the finding that both incumbent parties are rewarded for STW intervention, we disentangled the party-specific results for the government by modelling the performance of the CDU/CSU and the SPD separately (Model 2). The results indicate a difference between the two governing parties. More STW take-up ameliorates the electoral performance of the

conservative CDU/CSU, although the effect is statistically significant only at the 10% level. The effect is stronger for the SPD, whose voters clearly rewarded them for labour market intervention. In other words, the party lost less electoral ground in constituencies with high STW.

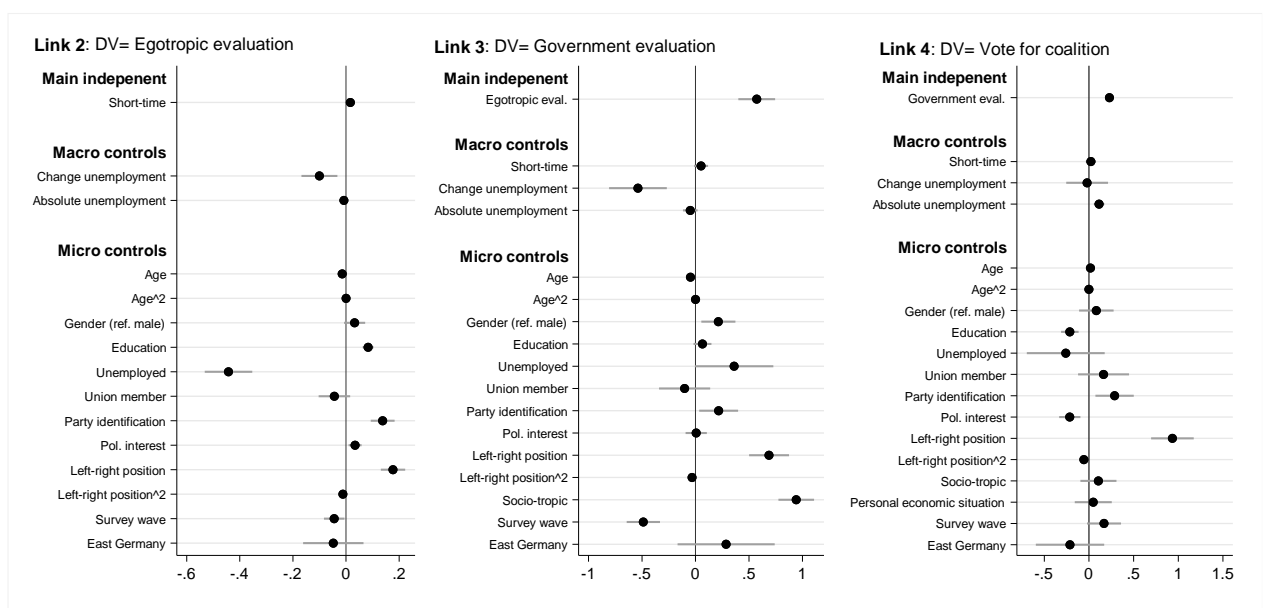
Moreover, the results reveal that conservatives suffered electoral punishment in constituencies with higher levels of unemployment change or with high absolute unemployment levels. As a member of the governing coalition, the SPD also lost electoral ground in areas with high unemployment changes but gained in regions with high absolute levels of unemployment. A striking difference between the two governing parties is that the SPD tended to lose votes in East Germany, whereas the CDU/CSU gained votes in those regions compared to 2005.

Overall, these analyses support a reward-punishment logic for STW policies. Voters reward both governing parties for higher STW, but they make a clear partisan distinction and attribute more credit to the SPD. These results suggest that voters evaluate STW policy action retrospectively and especially reward the party that is more competent and primarily responsible for implementing policies that support insiders (Rueda, 2007; Fossati and Häusermann 2014, Fossati, 2018). In terms of the theories previously outlined, these results show that voters favour extensive labour market policies and reward governing parties for them, especially social democratic parties in government. We did not explicitly test whether voters prefer STW policies over domestic austerity measures, but the findings of this analysis indicate that this could be the case, which will be an interesting venue for further research.

4.2) Micro-level evidence

We now turn to the analyses of the theoretical chain that connects the macro and micro levels. The purposes of these analyses are to link STW and unemployment to the aggregate electoral outcome discussed above and to test the contextual (Figure 4, Graph 1), individual (Graph 2) and aggregation links (Graph 3) with micro-level data.

Figure 4: Micro-level evidence for the theoretical chain



Notes: Estimation based on Tables S6-S10 in the Supplementary Material

The first graph (Link 2) shows that increasing STW in the constituency significantly affects the evaluation of a respondent's economic situation in a positive direction (see Tables S6-S10 in the Supplementary Materials). In fact, on average, the higher the share of STW is in the constituency, the better an individual evaluates his/her personal economic situation. Concerning the control variables, we find that a high absolute unemployment level (non-significant) and an increase in unemployment at the macro level decrease voters' satisfaction

with their personal economic situation, as do individual-level variables that capture labour market risk exposure, especially personal unemployment.

The coefficients in the second graph (Link 3) suggest that the better voters evaluate their personal economic situation, the more satisfied they are with government performance. Concerning the control variables, a higher STW incidence increases satisfaction with the government (10% significance level). Conversely, a higher increase in unemployment at the regional level and high absolute unemployment levels lower voter satisfaction with government performance.

Finally, we tested the reaggregation link (Graph 3). The model indicates that respondents who evaluate government performance positively are more likely to vote for the coalition than for the opposition (base outcome). In these models, however, the effects of STW and unemployment change are no longer significantly different for the coalition and the opposition, and only a high absolute unemployment level makes voting for the government more likely.

In sum, our analyses at the individual level indicate that the postulated theoretical chain holds as all the different independent variables are significantly related to the previous linkage. We also find that at the micro level, STW affects vote choice indirectly *through* both ego-tropic and government evaluations. However, we do not find a direct effect of STW on voting for the coalition government. Concerning the unemployment controls, the results show that unemployment change affects both ego-tropic and government performance evaluations negatively but that only absolute unemployment change has a rewarding effect on the outcome of the coalition. Overall, our results suggest that both members of the governing

coalition benefit from labour market policy intervention, although the SPD profits more, and both coalition members are generally punished for a bad economic situation.

5) Discussion

In this paper, we started from two sets of hypotheses to explain how labour market policy intervention is linked to electoral behaviour at the macro level. First, we hypothesised that, on the one hand, governing parties profit electorally from higher STW because voters want compensation and therefore expansive policies in times of crisis. On the other hand, voters might punish governing parties for STW policies because they fear their future cost and prefer austerity measures. Second, we hypothesised that there is a partisan difference and that the social democratic SPD especially profits from STW electorally because voters regard them as particularly competent in the matter and responsible for the implementation of these policies.

At the constituency level, our results show that higher STW rates correlate with more support for both governing parties but especially for the social democrats when controlling for the difference and level of unemployment, the region, and the party vote share in the constituency during the 2005 elections. This evidence corroborates the hypothesis that voters support expansive labour market policies during times of crisis (H1a) because they want the government to spend money to protect citizens. Furthermore, the finding supports the hypothesis that social democratic parties in particular profit from higher STW take-up (H2a) because voters associate these policies with the core competencies of this left party.

The individual-level analysis somewhat relativises this finding. We show that higher STW leads to a better individual evaluation of the personal economic situation, which leads to a better evaluation of government, which, in turn, leads to a higher probability of voting for the government coalition. Nevertheless, the individual-level analyses do not show a *direct* link between a higher STW rate in the constituency and more votes for the governing coalition.

Our results contribute to the literature by demonstrating how voters reward governing coalition parties for expansive labour market policies during times of crisis. During the German elections of 2009, the social democrats especially profited from STW policies. Nevertheless, these anti-crisis policies were not sufficient to avoid major losses, which the SPD suffered (11.2%). We demonstrate that STW programmes generated some electoral rewards for the social democrats, but we also show that there is only an indirect influence of STW in the constituency and individuals' intentions to vote for the governing parties. Electoral losses for social democrats were particularly high in East Germany, where the level of unemployment is higher overall¹⁶ (Trein et al., 2017, 421) but STW rates are lower (BWL 2009). Clearly, STW policies address labour market insiders in the richest region of the country, where voters tend not to reward the SPD for these policies¹⁷ (Figure 2; BWL 2009). STW policies signalled to voters in poorer regions that even in times of crisis, the richest regions are served first, for which social democrats received the blame. Our macro-level models support this interpretation as the SPD lost in the eastern part of Germany, whereas the CDU gained in that region (Table 1, Model 2).

¹⁶ Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: 15.1; Brandenburg: 10.7; Sachsen-Anhalt: 15.8; Berlin: 14.1; Sachsen: 9.9; Thüringen: 12.2; percentage of secondary votes lost.

¹⁷ Baden-Württemberg: 10.8; Bayern: 8.7; percentage of secondary vote lost for the SPD.

6) Conclusions

This article addresses the questions of whether and how STW policy affected the electoral fortunes of political parties in the 2009 federal German elections, which coincided with the global economic recession. That election is a particularly interesting case because the two largest German parties – the conservative Christian democratic CDU and the social democratic SPD – formed a grand coalition in the period prior to the election. Furthermore, the election is interesting as anti-crisis policies and economic conditions varied strongly between German constituencies. This constellation allows for the testing of several hypotheses of how STW intervention affects the electoral fortunes of the governing parties in a context of economic downturn. Notably, it permits analyses of whether voters reward incumbents for anti-crisis policies and whether left or right parties in government are treated the same way. We analysed these questions using empirical tests at the macro (constituency) and micro (individual) levels using a unique dataset that combines unemployment and STW rates in the 299 electoral regions with information from the German 2009 pre- and post-electoral survey.

Our macro-level analyses show that the SPD in particular gained electorally in regions with high STW rates. Overall, however, this policy measure was not enough to receive the symbolic reward for a successful anti-crisis policy. Our individual-level analyses demonstrate that there is only an indirect link between STW policy and voting intentions for the social democrats that runs through the ego-tropic evaluation of voters' economic situation and their evaluation of government performance. Therefore, precautionary labour market policies are not sufficient to avoid further losses in votes for the SPD.

Our results are also in line with researchers who suggest that voters reward social democratic parties for labour market insider policies (Rueda, 2006; Fossati and Häusermann, 2014, Fossati, 2018) but tend to favour right parties in times of economic downturns (Barnes and Hicks, 2012; Kayser, 2009; De Neve, 2014; Lindgren and Vernby, 2016). Overall, we demonstrate that social democratic incumbents cannot compensate for losses that are due to their shrinking core constituency against a right incumbent even a context of labour market downturn and with a massive and successful investment in labour market policy. In the German case, the history of Agenda 2010, which alienated voters from the social democrats (Schwander and Manow, 2016), clearly reinforced this dynamic. In fact, the 2009 election, which occurred against the backdrop of a major economic crisis, induced voters to punish the social democrats.

To conclude, this article also opens avenues for further research. For example, as our results are merely correlational, scholars should analyse parts of the theoretical chain to determine causation and posit whether causal effects can be found between STW and voting results at the macro level. In addition, future scholarship should assess how other labour market policy instruments, such as a minimum wage, or tax relief also impact the electoral fortunes of social democratic parties.

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Supplementary Material to the paper entitled *Cobbler, stick to your last? Social democrats' electoral returns from labour market policy*

Flavia Fossati and Philipp Trein, University of Lausanne

Additional information on the short-time work (STW) in Germany

Employees have a claim to STW if there is a loss of earnings due to unforeseen circumstances such as economic crises or natural catastrophes and if the crisis affects at least one-third of the employees in a company.¹⁸ Legally, STW is a situation in which the employer carries the responsibility for halting production, and the work council must agree to introduce STW.¹⁹ In severe economic downturns, STW can be extended. During the 2007-2009 economic crisis, the German government included temporary agency workers in the STW scheme, increased the length of STW from 18 up to 24 months; the government loosened access rules for firms, halved social security contributions for firms or paid for them entirely and extended its scope to include specific groups of atypical workers (Sacchi et al., 2011, 27).

Considerations about the operationalization of the dependent variables

We argue that it is legitimate to operationalise STW at the constituency level and link this to national level election as, although voters read national newspapers, we know that these papers also cover regional developments, and we assume that voters greatly care about those regional issues. In fact, several prominent media sources cover these interventions extensively (e.g. Spiegel Online, May 20, 2009, Die Zeit Online, June 16 2009, Spiegel Online, May 20, 2009;., Handelsblatt, January 7, 2009, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, April 15, 2009, IAB Report (see Literature list in the article). Finally, even tabloid newspapers such as Bild Zeitung discussed this issue on February 21, 2009, making aware the broad public about this issue.

Thus, we are convinced that estimating the effect of regional policy interventions on national elections is plausible because voters refer to their local economic situation when evaluating government performance and attempting to maximize their self-interest.

¹⁸ Code of Social Law III (Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) Drittes Buch (III)), articles 95-96.

¹⁹ German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch), article 615. Works Constitution Act (Betriebsverfassungsgesetz), article 87.

Table S1: Representativeness of pre-and post-election samples

| Second Vote (Percentage of votes) | Results of vote 2009 | Pre-election survey | Postelection survey | Mean pre- and post-election survey |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|
| CDU/CSU | 33.8 | 33.61 | 36.22 | 34.94 |
| SPD | 23.0 | 25.98 | 23.04 | 24.48 |
| Green Party | 10.7 | 13.17 | 14.73 | 13.96 |
| FDP | 14.6 | 11.62 | 10.74 | 11.18 |
| <i>die Linke</i> | 11.9 | 15.63 | 15.27 | 15.44 |

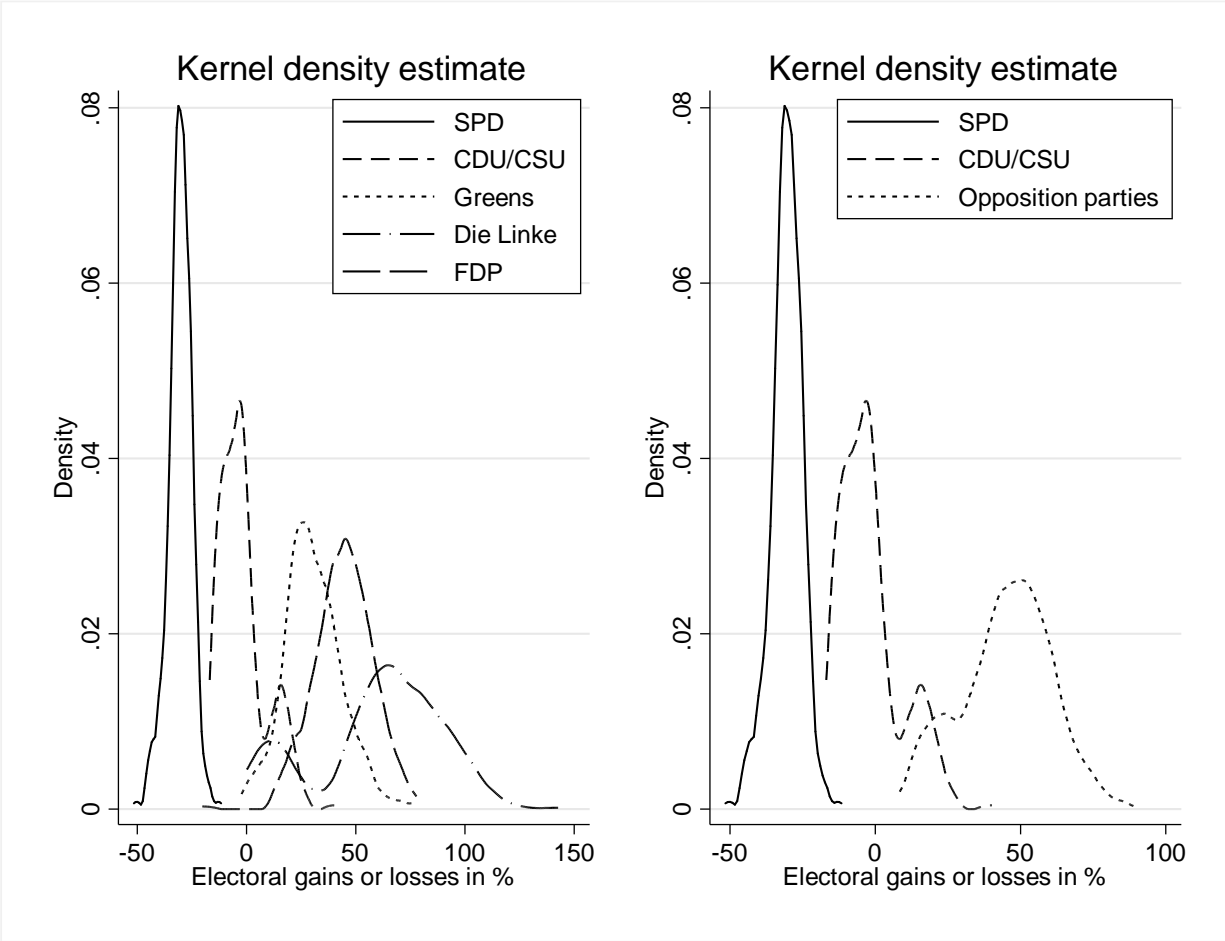
Table S2: Descriptive statistics at the macro level

| MACRO LEVEL | N | Mean | St.dev. | Min | Max |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-------|---------|--------|--------|
| Dependent variables | | | | | |
| Change electoral outcome SPD | 299 | -0.30 | 0.05 | -50.23 | -12.97 |
| Change electoral outcome CDU/CSU | 299 | -1.80 | 10.40 | -16.85 | 40.13 |
| Change electoral outcome Greens | 299 | 30.41 | 13.12 | -2.29 | 76.12 |
| Change electoral outcome FDP | 299 | 44.50 | 13.31 | -20.22 | 77.80 |
| Change electoral outcome <i>Linke</i> | 299 | 60.20 | 29.38 | 0.15 | 143.65 |
| Independent variable | | | | | |
| Short-time work | 299 | 5.20 | 2.88 | 0.96 | 15.40 |
| Control variables | | | | | |
| Change in unemployment | 299 | 0.59 | 0.67 | -1.77 | 3.00 |
| Absolute unemployment level | 299 | 8.05 | 3.12 | 2.93 | 15.21 |
| East Germany | 299 | 0.91 | 0.29 | 0 | 1 |
| Participation | 299 | 0.71 | 0.04 | 0.58 | 0.80 |
| SPD vote 2005 | 299 | 0.34 | 0.07 | 0.18 | 0.55 |
| CDU vote 2005 | 299 | 0.35 | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.60 |

Table S3: Descriptive statistics at the micro level

| MICRO LEVEL | N | Mean | St.dev. | Min | Max |
|-----------------------------|------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| Main variables | | | | | |
| Macro level | | | | | |
| Short-time | 3437 | 5.11 | 2.80 | 0.96 | 15.40 |
| Micro level | | | | | |
| Ego-tropic | 3251 | 1.94 | 0.59 | 0 | 4 |
| Government performance | 3396 | 5.62 | 2.44 | 1 | 11 |
| Party votes | | | | | |
| Vote coalition | 2908 | 0.59 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote SPD | 2908 | 0.24 | 0.43 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote CSUCDU | 2908 | 0.35 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote <i>Linke</i> | 2908 | 0.15 | 0.36 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote FDP | 2908 | 0.11 | 0.31 | 0 | 1 |
| Vote Greens | 2908 | 0.14 | 0.35 | 0 | 1 |
| Control variables | | | | | |
| Macro level | | | | | |
| Change in unemployment | 3437 | 0.512 | 0.73 | -1.77 | 2.98 |
| Absolute unemployment level | 3437 | 8.78 | 3.11 | 2.93 | 15.21 |
| Individual level | | | | | |
| Gender | 3437 | 0.52 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Education | 3383 | 2.99 | 1.11 | 1 | 5 |
| Age | 3437 | 51.63 | 17.95 | 16 | 94 |
| Age#2 | 3437 | 2987.48 | 1850.59 | 256 | 8836 |
| Unemployed | 3437 | 0.06 | 0.24 | 0 | 1 |
| Union member | 3437 | 0.12 | 0.33 | 0 | 1 |
| High party identification | 3437 | 0.40 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Pol. interest | 3427 | 2.97 | 0.95 | 1 | 5 |
| Left-right position | 3113 | 5.38 | 1.91 | 1 | 11 |
| Left-right position^2 | 3113 | 32.61 | 21.29 | 1 | 121 |
| Socio-tropic | 3270 | 1.50 | 0.60 | 0 | 3.33 |
| Survey wave | 3437 | 0.52 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| East Germany | 3437 | 0.34 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 |

Figure S1: Electoral gains and losses per party/block in 2009 as compared to the 2005 German federal elections



Macro-level analysis

Table S4: Macro-level evidence: The effect of short-time work on the electoral outcome (Link 1), government versus opposition

| | (1) | | (2) | | (3) | |
|---|------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| DV: electoral outcome government vs. opposition | Reward | | Reward and controls | | Reward, punishment and controls | |
| Government (SPD and CDU/CSU) | | | | | | |
| STW | -0.814*** | (0.200) | -0.291 | (0.181) | 0.499** | (0.188) |
| Unemployment change | | | | | -3.152*** | (0.826) |
| Absolute unemployment | | | | | 1.841*** | (0.206) |
| East Germany | | | 11.483*** | (2.549) | 5.084* | (2.287) |
| Participation | | | -42.343** | (15.020) | -2.113 | (13.568) |
| Government outcome 2005 | | | 7.185 | (10.842) | 14.962 | (9.454) |
| Constant | -28.055*** | (1.190) | -8.139 | (14.564) | -57.645*** | (13.630) |
| R2 | 0.052 | | 0.325 | | 0.498 | |
| Opposition (FDP, Greens, die Linke) | | | | | | |
| STW | 4.644*** | (0.895) | 0.136 | (0.550) | -1.352* | (0.631) |
| Unemployment change | | | | | 6.965* | (2.775) |
| Absolute unemployment | | | | | -3.015*** | (0.699) |
| East Germany | | | -16.641* | (7.223) | -4.940 | (7.160) |
| Participation | | | 77.679° | (46.132) | 8.618 | (46.554) |
| Opposition outcome 2005 | | | -432.473*** | (33.493) | -422.162*** | (32.732) |
| Constant | 110.961*** | (5.321) | 196.160*** | (33.043) | 267.759*** | (34.910) |
| R2 | 0.083 | | 0.700 | | 0.726 | |
| N | 299 | | 299 | | 299 | |
| ll | -2577.932 | | -2365.939 | | -2320.132 | |

Standard errors in parentheses, seemingly unrelated regressions, macro level.

° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Dependent absolute change in electoral support for the government vs. opposition, i.e., difference of the sum of the vote share of the government parties (SPD, CDU/CSU) and opposition parties (*die Linke*, Greens and FDP).

Table S5: Macro-level evidence: The effect of short-time work on the electoral outcome (Link 1), separate parties

| Model 1 | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| CDU/CSU | | |
| STW | 0.219° | (0.124) |
| Unemployment change | -1.322* | (0.547) |
| Absolute unemployment | -0.496* | (0.194) |
| East Germany Participation | 16.877*** | (1.618) |
| CDU outcome 2005 | -39.013*** | (9.155) |
| SPD CDU outcome 2005 | -34.971*** | (6.779) |
| Constant | 27.033*** | (7.253) |
| R2 | 28.862** | (9.267) |
| SPD | | |
| STW | 0.403*** | (0.106) |
| Unemployment change | -0.966* | (0.467) |
| Absolute unemployment | 0.530** | (0.165) |
| East Germany Participation | -5.296*** | (1.382) |
| CDU outcome 2005 | 9.540 | (7.818) |
| SPD CDU outcome 2005 | 29.407*** | (6.194) |
| Constant | 15.964** | (5.789) |
| R2 | -57.370*** | (7.913) |
| FDP | | |
| STW | -0.344 | (0.242) |
| Unemployment change | 2.554* | (1.069) |
| Absolute unemployment | -0.094 | (0.378) |
| East Germany Participation | -10.638** | (3.301) |
| FDP outcome 2005 | 23.066 | (18.701) |
| CDU outcome 2005 | -273.375*** | (28.362) |
| SPD CDU outcome 2005 | 13.097 | (15.733) |
| Constant | 65.590*** | (13.697) |
| R2 | 30.651° | (18.267) |
| Greens | | |
| STW | -0.552* | (0.256) |
| Unemployment change | 2.344* | (1.116) |
| Absolute unemployment | 0.117 | (0.395) |
| East Germany Participation | 11.698** | (3.652) |
| Greens outcome 2005 | 51.200* | (20.176) |
| CDU outcome 2005 | -136.888*** | (20.809) |
| Constant | 100.146*** | (16.938) |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|----------|
| SPD CDU outcome 2005 | 128.637*** | (15.873) |
| Constant | -75.167*** | (18.610) |
| R2 | 0.457 | |
| <i>Die Linke</i> | | |
| STW | 0.129 | (0.362) |
| Unemployment change | 1.306 | (1.622) |
| Absolute unemployment | -2.968*** | (0.572) |
| East Germany Participation | 1.790 | (5.499) |
| <i>Linke</i> outcome 2005 | -94.520** | (29.749) |
| CDU outcome 2005 | -202.538*** | (27.740) |
| SPD CDU outcome 2005 | 107.345*** | (22.071) |
| Constant | 57.481* | (23.091) |
| R2 | 110.400*** | (32.648) |
| N | 0.774 | |
| II | 299 | |
| | -4982.568 | |

Standard errors in parentheses

° p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Micro-level analysis

Table S6: Micro-level evidence: the determinants of ego-tropic and government performance evaluation (Links 2 and 3)

| | Model 1 (Link 2) | | Model 2 (Link 3) | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| DV | Ego-tropic evaluation | | Government performance | |
| <i>Main independent variable</i> | | | | |
| STW % | 0.013* | (0.006) | 0.573*** | (0.088) |
| Ego-tropic evaluation | | | | |
| <i>Macro controls</i> | | | | |
| Unemployment change | -0.082** | (0.026) | -0.538*** | (0.138) |
| STW % | | | 0.052 | (0.033) |
| Absolute unemployment | 0.002 | (0.007) | -0.048 | (0.035) |
| <i>Micro controls</i> | | | | |
| Age | -0.012*** | (0.003) | -0.047** | (0.014) |
| Age ² | 0.000*** | (0.000) | 0.001*** | (0.000) |
| Gender | 0.023 | (0.019) | 0.214** | (0.081) |
| Education | 0.075*** | (0.009) | 0.065 | (0.043) |
| Personal unemployment | -0.408*** | (0.042) | 0.361° | (0.187) |
| Union membership | -0.013 | (0.028) | -0.102 | (0.122) |
| Strong party identification | 0.104*** | (0.021) | 0.217* | (0.093) |
| High interest | 0.015 | (0.011) | 0.007 | (0.051) |
| Left-right | 0.115*** | (0.021) | 0.687*** | (0.095) |
| Left-right ² | -0.008*** | (0.002) | -0.032*** | (0.008) |
| Socio-tropic | 0.407*** | (0.017) | 0.942*** | (0.085) |
| Pre-election | -0.053** | (0.018) | -0.488*** | (0.079) |
| East Germany | -0.049 | (0.044) | 0.286 | (0.232) |
| Constant | 0.952*** | (0.129) | 1.414* | (0.608) |
| N | 2545 | | 2545 | |
| AIC | 3217.026 | | 10789.890 | |
| BIC | 3328.022 | | 10906.727 | |
| ll | -1589.513 | | -5374.945 | |

Standard errors in parentheses, logit models, micro level.

° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table S7: Micro-level evidence: the determinants of the electoral outcome (Link 4)

| Link 4 | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------|
| DV: Vote for SPD vs. CDU/CSU vs. Opposition | | |
| CDU/CSU | | |
| <i>Main independent variable</i> | | |
| Government evaluation | 0.318*** | (0.039) |
| <i>Macro controls</i> | | |
| STW% | 0.014 | (0.031) |
| Unemployment change | 0.148 | (0.151) |
| Absolute unemployment | 0.068* | (0.033) |
| <i>Micro controls</i> | | |
| Age | 0.034 | (0.021) |
| Age^2 | -0.000 | (0.000) |
| Gender | 0.239 | (0.125) |
| Education | -0.190** | (0.065) |
| Personal unemployment | -0.144 | (0.268) |
| Union membership | 0.026 | (0.179) |
| Strong party identification | 0.145 | (0.147) |
| High interest | -0.140 | (0.077) |
| Left-right | 1.383*** | (0.387) |
| Left-right^2 | -0.066* | (0.029) |
| Socio-tropic | 0.169 | (0.120) |
| Ego-tropic | 0.197 | (0.149) |
| Pre-election | 0.156 | (0.153) |
| East Germany | 0.728** | (0.232) |
| Constant | -9.976*** | (1.459) |
| SPD | | |
| <i>Independent variable</i> | | |
| Government evaluation | 0.165*** | (0.032) |
| <i>Macro controls</i> | | |
| STW% | 0.037 | (0.039) |
| Unemployment change | -0.351* | (0.171) |
| Absolute unemployment | 0.123*** | (0.033) |
| <i>Micro controls</i> | | |
| Age | -0.002 | (0.017) |
| Age^2 | 0.000 | (0.000) |
| Gender | 0.083 | (0.138) |
| Education | -0.364*** | (0.070) |
| Personal unemployment | -0.548 | (0.315) |
| Union membership | 0.199 | (0.189) |
| Strong party identification | 0.176 | (0.141) |
| High interest | -0.113 | (0.081) |
| Left-right | 1.676*** | (0.239) |
| Left-right^2 | -0.177*** | (0.025) |
| Socio-tropic | -0.079 | (0.114) |
| Ego-tropic | -0.105 | (0.137) |
| Pre-election | 0.253* | (0.126) |
| East Germany | -1.076*** | (0.232) |
| Constant | -4.505*** | (0.883) |
| Base outcome: <i>Opposition</i> | | |
| N | 2545 | |
| AIC | 4265.275 | |
| BIC | 4487.267 | |
| ll | -2094.638 | |

Standard errors in parentheses, multinomial logit models, micro level.

° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table S8: Micro-level evidence: the effect of short-time work on the ego-tropic evaluation, alternative specification (Link 2)

| LINK 2 | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| DV: Ego-tropic evaluation | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Independent variable</i> | | | | | | | | |
| STW % | 0.002 | (0.005) | | | | | 0.013* | (0.006) |
| <i>Macro controls</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Unemployment change | | | -0.053* | (0.022) | | | -0.081** | (0.026) |
| Absolute unemployment | | | | | 0.005 | (0.006) | 0.002 | (0.007) |
| <i>Micro controls</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Age | -0.013*** | (0.003) | -0.012*** | (0.003) | -0.012*** | (0.003) | -0.012*** | (0.003) |
| Age^2 | 0.000*** | (0.000) | 0.000*** | (0.000) | 0.000*** | (0.000) | 0.000*** | (0.000) |
| Gender | 0.025 | (0.019) | 0.023 | (0.019) | 0.024 | (0.019) | 0.023 | (0.019) |
| Education | 0.076*** | (0.010) | 0.075*** | (0.009) | 0.076*** | (0.009) | 0.075*** | (0.009) |
| Personal unemployment | -0.405*** | (0.042) | -0.408*** | (0.042) | -0.406*** | (0.042) | -0.408*** | (0.042) |
| Union membership | -0.016 | (0.028) | -0.015 | (0.028) | -0.016 | (0.028) | -0.013 | (0.028) |
| Strong party identification | 0.100*** | (0.021) | 0.101*** | (0.021) | 0.100*** | (0.021) | 0.104*** | (0.021) |
| High interest | 0.015 | (0.011) | 0.014 | (0.011) | 0.015 | (0.011) | 0.015 | (0.011) |
| Left-right | 0.112*** | (0.021) | 0.114*** | (0.021) | 0.112*** | (0.021) | 0.115*** | (0.021) |
| Left-right^2 | -0.008*** | (0.002) | -0.008*** | (0.002) | -0.008*** | (0.002) | -0.008*** | (0.002) |
| Socio-tropic | 0.407*** | (0.017) | 0.407*** | (0.017) | 0.408*** | (0.017) | 0.407*** | (0.017) |
| Pre-election | -0.051** | (0.018) | -0.052** | (0.018) | -0.052** | (0.018) | -0.053** | (0.018) |
| East Germany | -0.007 | (0.034) | -0.048 | (0.035) | -0.033 | (0.045) | -0.049 | (0.044) |
| Constant | 0.986*** | (0.114) | 1.029*** | (0.110) | 0.958*** | (0.121) | 0.952*** | (0.129) |
| N | 2545.000 | | 2545.000 | | | | 2545.000 | |
| AIC | 3222.872 | | 3217.218 | | 3222.464 | | 3217.026 | |
| BIC | 3322.184 | | 3316.530 | | 3321.776 | | 3328.022 | |
| ll | -1594.436 | | -1591.609 | | -1594.232 | | -1589.513 | |

Standard errors in parentheses, linear multilevel regression, micro level.

° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table S9: Micro-level evidence: the effect of ego-tropic evaluation on government performance, alternative specification (Link 3)

| LINK 3 | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| DV: Government performance | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Independent variable</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Ego-tropic evaluation | 0.588*** | (0.088) | 0.577*** | (0.088) | 0.588*** | (0.088) | 0.573*** | (0.079) |
| <i>Macro controls</i> | | | | | | | | |
| STW % | -0.009 | (0.029) | | | | | 0.052 | (0.033) |
| Unemployment change | | | -0.372** | (0.114) | | | -0.538*** | (0.138) |
| Absolute unemployment | | | | | -0.023 | (0.034) | -0.048 | (0.035) |
| <i>Micro controls</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Age | -0.047** | (0.014) | -0.046** | (0.014) | -0.047*** | (0.014) | -0.047** | (0.014) |
| Age^2 | 0.001*** | (0.000) | 0.001*** | (0.000) | 0.001*** | (0.000) | 0.001*** | (0.000) |
| Gender | 0.217** | (0.081) | 0.213** | (0.081) | 0.218** | (0.081) | 0.214** | (0.081) |
| Education | 0.070 | (0.043) | 0.064 | (0.043) | 0.071° | (0.043) | 0.065 | (0.043) |
| Personal unemployment | 0.376* | (0.187) | 0.360° | (0.187) | 0.379* | (0.187) | 0.361° | (0.187) |
| Union membership | -0.114 | (0.122) | -0.105 | (0.122) | -0.115 | (0.122) | -0.102 | (0.122) |
| Strong party identification | 0.209* | (0.093) | 0.217* | (0.093) | 0.206* | (0.093) | 0.217* | (0.093) |
| High interest | 0.006 | (0.051) | 0.006 | (0.051) | 0.006 | (0.051) | 0.007 | (0.051) |
| Left-right | 0.675*** | (0.096) | 0.684*** | (0.095) | 0.675*** | (0.096) | 0.687*** | (0.095) |
| Left-right^2 | -0.031*** | (0.008) | -0.031*** | (0.008) | -0.031*** | (0.008) | -0.032*** | (0.008) |
| Socio-tropic | 0.946*** | (0.085) | 0.949*** | (0.085) | 0.943*** | (0.085) | 0.942*** | (0.085) |
| Pre-election | -0.488*** | (0.080) | -0.492*** | (0.079) | -0.486*** | (0.080) | -0.488*** | (0.079) |
| East Germany | 0.294 | (0.182) | 0.289 | (0.233) | 0.422° | (0.238) | 0.286 | (0.232) |
| Constant | 0.996° | (0.521) | 1.703** | (0.580) | 1.122* | (0.561) | 1.414* | (0.608) |
| N | 2545 | | 2545 | | 2545 | | 2545 | |
| AIC | 10801.211 | | 10790.299 | | 10800.868 | | 10789.890 | |
| BIC | 10906.365 | | 10901.295 | | 10906.022 | | 10906.727 | |
| ll | -5382.605 | | -5376.150 | | -5382.434 | | -5374.945 | |

Standard errors in parentheses, linear multilevel regression, macro level.

° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table S10: Micro-level evidence: the effect of government evaluation on vote choice (Link 4), alternative specification

| LINK 4 | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|--|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| DV: Vote for government (vs. opposition) | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Independent variable</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Government performance | 0.229*** | (0.024) | 0.227*** | (0.024) | 0.230*** | (0.024) | 0.230*** | (0.024) |
| <i>Macro controls</i> | | | | | | | | |
| STW % | -0.007 | (0.024) | | | | | 0.022 | (0.029) |
| Unemployment change | | | -0.084 | (0.099) | | | -0.021 | (0.119) |
| Absolute unemployment | | | | | 0.108*** | (0.028) | 0.113*** | (0.030) |
| <i>Micro controls</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Age | 0.014 | (0.018) | 0.014 | (0.018) | 0.017 | (0.018) | 0.017 | (0.018) |
| Age^2 | 0.000 | (0.000) | 0.000 | (0.000) | 0.000 | (0.000) | 0.000 | (0.000) |
| Gender | 0.077 | (0.099) | 0.075 | (0.099) | 0.082 | (0.099) | 0.083 | (0.099) |
| Education | - | (0.050) | -0.213*** | (0.050) | -0.216*** | (0.050) | -0.215*** | (0.050) |
| Personal unemployment | 0.211*** | (0.050) | | | | | | |
| Union membership | -0.232 | (0.222) | -0.238 | (0.222) | -0.259 | (0.222) | -0.260 | (0.223) |
| Strong party identification | 0.140 | (0.146) | 0.143 | (0.146) | 0.160 | (0.145) | 0.164 | (0.145) |
| High interest | 0.261* | (0.110) | 0.264* | (0.110) | 0.284** | (0.110) | 0.287** | (0.110) |
| Left-right | - | (0.061) | -0.218*** | (0.061) | -0.216*** | (0.061) | -0.215*** | (0.061) |
| Left-right^2 | 0.218*** | (0.061) | | | | | | |
| Socio-tropic | 0.934*** | (0.122) | 0.940*** | (0.122) | 0.935*** | (0.121) | 0.935*** | (0.122) |
| Ego-tropic | - | (0.011) | -0.057*** | (0.011) | -0.057*** | (0.011) | -0.057*** | (0.011) |
| Pre-election | 0.057*** | (0.011) | | | | | | |
| East Germany | 0.086 | (0.103) | 0.088 | (0.103) | 0.106 | (0.103) | 0.106 | (0.103) |
| Constant | 0.056 | (0.106) | 0.051 | (0.106) | 0.050 | (0.105) | 0.048 | (0.106) |
| | 0.187° | (0.097) | 0.185° | (0.097) | 0.170° | (0.097) | 0.169° | (0.097) |
| | 0.279° | (0.155) | 0.236 | (0.161) | -0.221 | (0.193) | -0.212 | (0.195) |
| | - | (0.619) | -4.064*** | (0.607) | -5.030*** | (0.650) | -5.182*** | (0.685) |
| | 4.084*** | | | | | | | |
| N | 2545 | | 2545 | | 2545 | | 2545 | |
| AIC | 2877.439 | | 2876.827 | | 2863.267 | | 2866.640 | |
| BIC | 2982.593 | | 2981.981 | | 2968.421 | | 2983.477 | |
| ll | - | | -1420.414 | | -1413.634 | | -1413.320 | |
| | 1420.720 | | | | | | | |

Standard errors in parentheses, logistic multilevel regression, micro level.
° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.