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ABSTRACT

The mediatization of politics in general, and of election campaigns in particular, seems to be an obvious consequence of media changes during recent decades and of an increasing interdependence between political processes and mass communication. As in many other European countries, three trends mark such development in Germany: (1) an enormous expansion of supply of new types of media and content genres, (2) the growing importance of television in political communication and (3) the transformation of election campaigning. Based on election studies and content analysis data, this article examines these changes with regard to their impact on voter behaviour. The article looks for evidence of voter mobilization, television dependency and personalization trends, and discusses potential consequences of a changing campaign style. The findings support and, at the same time, modify some implications of the mediatization hypothesis. They concur with recent scepticism about the notion of Americanization. The article discusses the results with reference to changes in campaigning strategies, e.g. tendencies towards the secularization of election research having repercussions on research concepts and results.

Key Words Americanization, elections, Germany, mediatization, political communication

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, the mediatization hypothesis has gained ground in analyses of political communication, especially in studies of election campaigning. According to this hypothesis, the expansion of mass media and the emergence of new media have transformed the entire democratic system (see, for example, Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Mancini and Swanson, 1996; Schulz, 2004). The media have been moving to the centre of the political process. Accordingly, the role of mass media in election campaigns has changed, altering the behaviour of the candidates, the parties' campaign organization and the behaviour of the electorate. These changes result in shifting relationships between the various protagonists such as the political parties, the candidates, the mass media and the voters.

Communication research has produced substantial evidence of the importance of mass media in election campaigns. Election communication became the centre of the study of political communication. However, longitudinal studies comparatively investigating the mediatization hypothesis and empirically examining the changes are relatively scarce.

Studies of longitudinal change focus on different levels. Some research concentrates on changes in the content of election communication (e.g. Genz et al., 2001; Hallin, 1992; Holtz-Bacha, 2000a; Keil, 2003; Patterson, 1993; Semetko and Schoenbach, 2003; Wilke and Reinemann, 2001). A rare example of longitudinal research at the organizational level are the newsroom observations during election campaigns conducted by Blumler and Gurevitch over a period of 35 years (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1993; Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001, 2002). Even more scarce are studies operationalizing the effects of media changes, investigating, for instance, relationships between media use and electoral participation (e.g. Morgan and Shanahan, 1992; Norris, 2000).

Our analysis examines the long-term consequences of media change for voters in Germany. We focus on selected aspects of electoral behaviour according to the availability of data, taking advantage of the improved access to election research databases.

Changing election communication

Changing media

As in most European countries, the development of the media system in Germany during the second half of the 20th century led to an enormous

expansion of supply. The transition of the media system proceeded discontinuously. Some media experienced expansion spurts, while others developed steadily.

A few years after the end of the Second World War, when the period of strict press control by the Allied Forces had ended, almost overnight the number of daily newspapers in Germany mushroomed from around 150 to more than 600 issuing 1500 different local editions. From the 1960s, a moderate development of public radio and a rapid expansion of television took place. In the mid-1980s, the deregulation of broadcasting as well as the implementation of new technologies advanced the development of broadcasting and led to fierce competition in the electronic media market. Up to that point, during the 'golden age' of a public service monopoly, television viewers had only between three and five different channels to choose from. Today, more than 90 percent of viewers can receive up to 20 German channels and, in addition, some 30 foreign channels. The number of German radio channels broadcasting national, regional or local programmes increased from 32 in 1980 to more than 300 in 2003. Recent developments in some sectors of the print media market have followed a similar trend. For example, within two decades the number of popular magazines increased from 271 to 847 and the number of professional magazines from 745 to 1094.[1] With the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, an already abundant supply of media messages was multiplied even further.

As a parallel development, resulting from both the advent of new media and the differentiation of existing types of media and of content genres, the composition of the media supply changed (Kepplinger, 2002; Krüger, 2001; Marcinkowski et al., 2001; Schulz, 2001a). Newspapers with a party political profile disappeared. By far the most successful paper is the tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*, selling about 4 million copies a day. Most radio programmes broadcast music only, interspersed with small talk, brief news bulletins or service information. The new commercial television channels conquered the viewer market with an abundance of entertainment and 'infotainment'. The public stations to a certain degree also adopted the programming formats introduced by commercial television. As a result, the boundaries between information and entertainment became blurred, a trend observed in many European countries, and known as 'tabloidization' (Brants and Neijens, 1998). At the same time, the importance of negativism as a news value increased, similar to what had already taken place earlier in the US (Patterson, 1993).

Different consequences are likely to result from these media changes for both political parties' campaign management and the voters' reactions

to the campaign. Before looking more closely at the voter, we first sketch some obvious impacts on election campaigning. In doing so, we distinguish between positive and negative consequences by taking either an optimistic or a pessimistic position.[2]

Transformation of campaigning

A positive advantage for the political parties' campaign management resulting from the media changes is an extended reach and a multiplication of outlets for election communications. Skilful handling of the different types of media increases campaign salience and therefore raises the probability of campaign contact for the single voter. The more media and presentation formats there are, the more options the political parties have for sending out their campaign messages. There are significantly more options for targeting special segments of the electorate and for fine-tuning campaign messages according to the varying communication needs of different voters. Thus, election campaigning has turned into target group campaigning. Moreover, the high ratings of television have made it possible to address certain groups of voters more easily, who were difficult to reach before. A parliamentary candidate at a campaign rally can reach at most a few thousand potential voters, usually loyal followers. In comparison, the television audience is of a completely different magnitude. Candidates appearing on television can potentially communicate with millions of voters, including a large number of undecided voters.

As in many other European countries, the political parties in Germany have adjusted to these changes by professionalizing their campaign management, starting gradually in the 1970s and implementing more radical measures in the 1990s (A. Müller, 1999). Professionalization of campaigning includes, among others, adopting the methods of commercial marketing, restructuring the party's own campaign planning organization and outsourcing entire task fields to commercial agencies that specialize in advertising and public relations (Holtz-Bacha, 2002; M.G. Müller, 2002). In addition, professional campaign planning specialists, polling experts, media consultants and 'spin doctors' substitute 'party soldiers' and volunteers (Farrell et al., 2001). Elections have increasingly become media affairs rather than party affairs (Esser et al., 2000). Ever since television viewing occupied most of the voters' media attention, campaign managers of all the major parties have focused heavily on television, following long-term campaign manager of the

CDU Peter Radunski, who declared television to be the lead medium of the modern election campaign (Radunski, 1980).

The seamier side of this development are the growing demands on strategic election campaign planning. Above all, advertising expenditures rise. Moreover, election communication is becoming increasingly media dependent. As parties take advantage of mass media for communicating their campaigns, they have to adapt to the media's production routines and formats. Adapting to the 'media logic' puts certain constraints on the campaign and diminishes party control over the content and style of campaign messages, e.g. over the media appearance of the political candidates. One of the consequences that has emerged in the US is a 'de-authentization' of communication, indicated by reduced candidate sound bites (Hallin, 1992; Patterson, 1993).

An increasing interdependence of media and politics and, in particular, a 'mediatization' of campaigning is expected to result from these processes (see, for example, Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Mediatization means more specifically, and in accordance with the doctrine of television as the lead medium, adapting to the 'media logic' of television. The presentation demands of television require, in the first place, a high degree of personalization of the campaign. In a highly personalized campaign, the personality and the competence of a party's major candidate is the central campaign message. Ideally, the major candidate personifies the main issues the party stands for. The success of the campaign relies very much on the 'television personality' and the television performance of the major candidate. To what degree the personalization of election campaigns is media driven or a reaction to political changes is an unanswered question. An interaction between both political and media forces seems to be the most plausible explanation (Blumler, 1998: 93). Among other factors, the professionalization of campaigning may have contributed to this development as much as the increasing personalization of election reporting in the mass media. As a result, there is a global trend towards the personalization of campaigning (Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Swanson and Mancini, 1996).

Similarly, the interaction of political and media forces fuels a growing negativity of campaigns (Blumler, 1998). Conforming to the demands of television presentation requires the staging of campaign events that fit the established news values of television reporting. Events with a high degree of conflict, drama and emotion are the most successful. Attacking the opponent is preferable to presenting a party platform to the voters. This explains why campaign managers consider negative campaigning to be a successful strategy of the modern media-

centred campaign. It also explains why an increasing focus on strategy aspects – especially on who is leading in the polls – agrees with the interests of both the political parties and the media. Thus, elections don't make good news, and the 'game schema' becomes the focus of the media's campaign coverage at the expense of political substance (Graber, 1983; Lichter and Smith, 1996; Patterson, 1993). Tendencies that have been observed for decades in the US are spreading globally (Plasser and Plasser, 2002: 346–7).

It became common, particularly among European scholars, to label the transformation of election campaigns as 'Americanization' because many of the changes in countries outside the US seem to resemble American trends. Recent publications, however, have questioned the appropriateness of the term and attempted to specify the exact nature of the convergence. As to the proliferation of American styles and practices, Blumler and Gurevitch suggest a distinction between three different forms: (1) direct imitation, (2) selective importation and adoption and (3) adaptation to an existing set of practices (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001). Plasser and Plasser, in their overview, contrast two fundamentally different points of view, which they call the 'diffusion theory' and the 'modernization theory', respectively (Plasser and Plasser, 2002). The former holds that political communication managers in Europe (and in other world regions as well) adopt strategies and techniques that have proved successful in the US, whereas the latter considers the increasing similarities of campaigning practices to be the consequence of structural changes common in many societies. However, both viewpoints are not mutually exclusive. Instead, it seems plausible to assume an interaction in the sense that, on the one hand, structural changes call for an implementation of new forms of campaigning and that, on the other hand, American campaign professionals satisfy the respective demand; and the importation of American campaign practices contributes, in turn, to the modernization of the importing countries.

As Plasser and Plasser's survey of campaign professionals demonstrates, the American model of campaigning became the standard model worldwide, leading, however, to different degrees of Americanization in different countries and, quite often, to 'hybrid' styles mixing American practices with country-specific traditional campaigning styles (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001). In spite of these differences, Plasser and Plasser identify a number of 'macro-trends' characterizing the development in different countries, like mediatization, professionalization, personalization and the increasing negativity of campaigning (Plasser and Plasser, 2002: 343).

Consequences for voters

The expansion of supply as the most striking feature of media changes seems to have positive as well as negative consequences. On the one hand, voters profit from a rich and manifold offer of campaign messages in several ways. In the first place, they have access to more information resources at lower costs. Greater availability of campaign messages, particularly via television with its ability to reach people without an interest in politics, may contribute to the mobilization of unsophisticated citizens and specifically of the growing proportion of non-voters. In addition, according to Dalton, a new type of voter, characterized by a high level of cognitive mobilization and low party identification (which he calls 'apartisans'), should benefit, making their own political decisions, independently of party propaganda (Dalton, 1996: 21–7).

On the other hand, the expansion of media results primarily in an increase in television viewing. As most people rely on television as their main information source and as television has been moving into the centre of the political parties' campaigns, a growing dependency on television for making voting decisions is presumably the result (Robinson, 1976). Moreover, the increase in the entertainment content in the mass media might distract voters from political communication and contribute to abstention. Political apathy may also result, as an undesired side-effect, because of the emphasis by election communication on the 'horse race' (Brookes et al., 2004). Among other negative consequences is the fragmentation of the public sphere resulting from the growing fragmentation of media publics (Jarren, 1998).

It is quite likely that the mediatization process fosters candidate voting. Both the personalization of campaigning strategies and the media's campaign coverage may make the candidates more salient for electoral choices. In addition, other factors play an important role in this process. According to the most widely accepted model explaining voter choice, the so-called Michigan model, the voters' party identification is the most decisive factor. Preference for a particular candidate is only an intervening variable mediating the influence of party identification. However, since party identification has been weakening in most western societies, the relevance of candidates for electoral choices may have grown. The increasing sophistication of voters may have contributed to this process (see, for example, Vetter and Gabriel, 1998). We have to keep these aspects in mind when looking at empirical data.

A number of scholars blame changes in the composition of the public's media diet and, in parallel, of the tone and style of political

Table 1 Consequences of mediatization

	Consequences for campaigning	*Consequences for voters*
Optimistic vision	More options for campaign communication	Greater access to information resources
	Professionalization of campaign management	Mobilization of unsophisticated citizens
Pessimistic vision	Higher demands on campaign management	Television dependency
	Diminished party control over campaign messages	Fragmentation of the public sphere
	Personalization, negative campaigning, focus on the 'game schema'	Personalization of electoral decisions
		Political apathy, political malaise

journalism for reinforcing or even creating a negative image of politics (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Kepplinger, 2000; Putnam, 1995). If this media malaise hypothesis holds, one should expect a growing number of citizens to become critical or even cynical of politics during election campaigns with its mass of political communication.

Table 1 summarizes the predominant consequences of media change, distinguishing between optimistic and pessimistic visions.

In the following sections we elaborate on the consequences of media change for voter behaviour, trying to find out whether there is empirical evidence for an optimistic or a pessimistic vision. More specifically, we address the following research questions:

- Has the expansion of the mass media changed voters' use of different information sources? Has this particularly affected those citizens who do not feel attached to a political party?
- Does television dominate election communication and is there a respective dependency on television particularly among the apolitical voters?
- Has the personalization of campaign communication led to an increasing personalization of the voters' electoral decisions?
- Is there a growing political malaise among the voters resulting from negativism in the news?

With few exceptions, we refrain from studying the consequences of the media changes for campaigning, but rather treat them as exogenous factors in the logic of our argument. In addition to the results from our own empirical research, the analysis presented here also draws on databases from surveys among German voters provided by the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research in Cologne (Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung an der Universität zu Köln).[3] Our approach is exploratory rather than hypotheses testing. As is usually the case, the evidence derived from a secondary analysis is limited due to weaknesses of both the available databases and indicators.

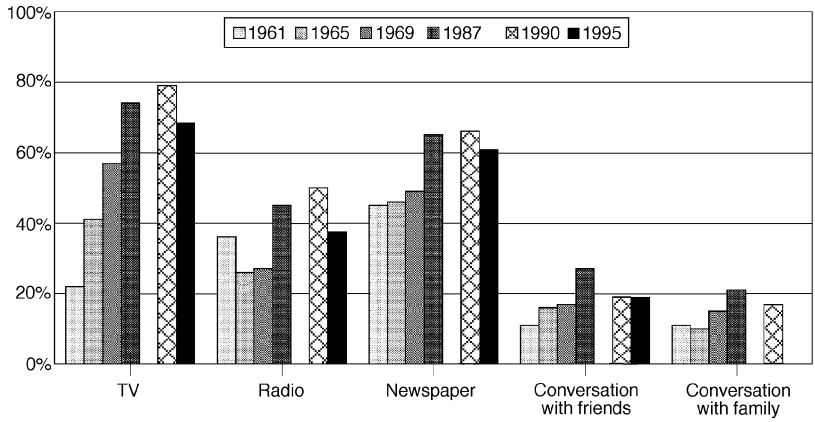
Changing voter behaviour

Access to information sources and cognitive mobilization

The expansion of the mass media system, together with other social changes such as an increase in leisure time and growing prosperity, has led – even if not proportionately – to an expansion of the German public's media exposure (see Berg and Ridder, 2002: 37–49). In principle, the increase in both the number of channels and their usage has extended the political parties' possibilities of media-based voter accessibility. Because of the public's limited attention capacity, it is likely that both interpersonal communication and the means of direct voter address (e.g. through mailings and canvassing) have lost importance over the course of time, and that media-based election communication has proportionally gained the upper hand. When comparing voters' usage of information sources over time we should expect an increase for media sources and a decrease – or stagnation – for non-media sources.

The German election studies provide only a fragmentary basis for testing this assumption. Early surveys did not include questions about direct voter address, and only some studies established the importance of interpersonal communication. Surprisingly, the more recent studies asked only for media sources leaving out non-media sources completely. Therefore, our trend analysis only comprises four election studies between 1961 and 1987, to which we have added results from two non-election years generated by comparable questions (1990 and 1995).[4]

The results in Figure 1 show the sources people mentioned for obtaining information about politics. Obviously, there has been a definite increase in the use of television, which is, at least partly, due to the expansion of television in the 1960s. However, respondents name all information sources – including non-media sources – more and more



Notes: Question: 'I am now going to mention some ways in which one can obtain information about politics. How much would you say you personally learn about politics from [source]: very much, a lot, something, a little, or nothing?'

Figure 1 Sources of information about politics

frequently. Despite widespread fears, neither the expansion of television in the 1960s nor the introduction of commercial television in the 1980s has led to a significant decline in the exposure to other media. On the contrary, there has even been considerable expansion in voters' use of political information. Since this includes interpersonal communication too, the media changes cannot be the only reason for the general increase. Moreover, it is possibly not even the decisive factor for explaining the rise.

During the same period in which the media expanded and television in particular spread, further social changes took place. Most importantly, the level of education rose and the public's interest in politics increased immensely (Schulz, 2001b). Both factors may have stimulated the use of political information more than the increased accessibility of sources. If this were the case, one would expect the trends apparent in Figure 1 to level out if we inserted education and political interest as control variables. Although the data available allow only a partial test, the results nevertheless speak quite clearly against this hypothesis. Controlling for education does not lead to any major modifications of the results.

Thus, there are no obvious indications that media change or the increase in educational level has led to a differential relevance of mass communication and interpersonal communication for election campaigning. On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility that both, media expansion and the expansion of political content, have stimulated

interpersonal communication. Both might ultimately be responsible for the increase in importance of media-based and non-media communication. It is possible that this has occurred in combination with other social changes, such as an overall politicization of the population indicated by an increase in political interest, a process which is part of what Dalton calls 'cognitive mobilization' (Dalton, 1996: 213–19).

Dependency on television and the apolitical voter

The deregulation of the television market in Germany as well as in other European countries and the subsequent expansion of commercial channels have led to a substantial increase in the supply of programmes. Consequently, the viewing habits of the population have changed dramatically. Viewing time in Germany, for example, increased from a daily average of less than 120 minutes in the early 1980s to 210 minutes in 2002.[5] As the supply of television programmes has become much more entertainment-oriented, viewers have allotted an increasingly larger share of their daily television consumption to entertainment at the expense of information programmes. Even information viewing has changed in character since the information programmes on television have become more tabloidized with more emphasis on conflict and drama, on soft news and infotainment formats. This may have affected campaign communication in different ways.

On the one hand, it is possible that it has become more difficult today to reach voters through political messages than it was in the days of the public service television monopoly. Due to the proliferation of diversionary media and content genres, the potential for distraction from political content has grown immensely. As trend data show, the percentage of entertainment-oriented television viewers increased in the 1990s, whereas the percentage of information-oriented viewers decreased proportionately (see Berens et al., 1997).

On the other hand, it may have become easier to target the apolitical and often undecided voters because they are much more attracted by television than by print or other conventional campaign media. Observing these advantages of television, German communication researchers, spearheaded by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (Noelle-Neumann, 1973, 1980), adopted the voters' television dependency hypothesis, which had emerged earlier in the US. The hypothesis allowed German campaign managers to declare television the lead medium in election communication (see, for example, Radunski, 1980). As data relating to the recent Bundestag election show, the notion of television dependency seems valid

still. When asked in a post-election survey of the Bundestag election of 2002 to name their principal medium for information about the campaign, by far the highest proportion of voters mentioned television (56 percent), followed by newspapers (25 percent), radio (8 percent) and magazines (5 percent). Only 3 percent of the voters named the Internet as their main source (Zubayr and Gerhard, 2002).

One aspect emphasized by Noelle-Neumann is the seemingly paradoxical hypothesis that the attractiveness of television as an entertainment medium constitutes a substantial part of its political impact (e.g. Noelle-Neumann, 1971). Unlike print media, television reaches the apolitical by its attractiveness and is therefore able to activate and influence large segments of the electorate, particularly voters with little interest in politics. The political parties take advantage of this situation by sending their candidates on discussion programmes and 'talk shows', even on entertainment programmes, hoping to reach as many of the floating voters as possible. Accordingly, German researchers are writing of an increasing 'talkshowization' and 'entertainization' of campaign communication (Holtz-Bacha, 2000a; Nieland and Tenscher, 2002). Buying advertising time on the commercial television channels is another strategy for accessing the apolitical.[6]

The results shown in Table 2 seem to support these assumptions. People with little or no interest in politics use television as an information source almost as extensively as the strongly politically interested. It is particularly noticeable that the apolitical prefer television much more than newspapers as a source of information. This applies to information about both the party platforms and the candidates.

The long reach of the television campaign is, in part, due to the huge importance that political programmes traditionally have in Germany, as in other European countries. During the six weeks before Election Day 2002, for example, the five major public and commercial channels aired a total of 114 hours of campaign-related political information programming, about half of which comprised special election programmes (Krüger and Zapf-Schramm, 2002). This compares well to the 'flood proportions' of coverage by BBC and ITV of British election campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s reported by Blumler and Gurevitch (2001). During the Bundestag campaign of 2002, 52 million viewers followed at least one of the election specials (excluding news, discussion programmes and political magazines). The respective figure for the campaign in 1998 was 47 million (Zubayr and Gerhard, 2002). A remarkable figure of more than 22 million people watched at least one of the two 'television duels', i.e. debates between the major candidates,

Table 2 Television and newspapers as sources of information for voters with differing interests in politics (post-election survey, 1994)

	Voters who are interested in politics –				
	Very interested (%)	*Somewhat interested (%)*	*Not very interested (%)*	*Not at all interested (%)*	*Voters total (%)*
Learn about the viewpoints of the political parties –					
More from television	37	46	45	41	43
More from the newspaper	28	18	12	4	17
From both to the same extent	32	31	29	23	30
Neither/nor	2	4	10	24	7
No answer	1	1	4	7	2
	100	100	100	100	100
Learn about the top candidates of the political parties –					
More from television	44	54	50	45	50
More from the newspaper	23	13	11	4	14
From both to the same extent	27	27	26	22	26
Neither/nor	4	4	11	23	8
No answer	2	1	2	6	2
	100	100	100	100	100
N	(435)	(917)	(447)	(201)	(2000)

Note: Due to the rounding of figures, some percentage sums may deviate from 100. Questions: 'When you now think about the political coverage of the media during the last federal election campaign: Did you learn more about the viewpoints of the political parties through the daily newspaper or through television?' 'And what about the top candidates of the political parties: Did you learn more about the top candidates through the daily newspaper or through television?'

Schröder and Stoiber, in 2002.[7] Studies show that the debates influenced the voters' images of and preferences for one or other of the candidates, particularly through the follow-up coverage, i.e. the broad media coverage of the television events, discussion of the debates in the media and in interpersonal communication (Hofrichter, 2003; Maier, 2004; Maurer, 2003).

These results demonstrate that, even though the market situation has changed, election programmes can still have an impact comparable to

the 'golden age' of television campaigning when a few public channels secured captive audiences. In spite of an increasing fragmentation of the television market, outstanding media events still attract large audiences, particularly if they stimulate follow-up coverage in all major news media.

Television has not yet lost its dominant role as a campaign medium, although the percentage of voters accessible through one single channel has been steadily declining. Market diversification may have produced more selectivity and specialization among the viewers and more sharply profiled audience segments (i.e. segments which have become both more homogeneous internally, and more distinct from one another). This improves the conditions for target group campaigning with regard to all different types of communication media. On the other hand, the example of the television debates during the German campaign of 2002 proves that fragmented audiences do not necessarily lead to a fragmentation of the public sphere, as has been speculated in the literature.[8]

Personalization

In recent years, personalization has become the focal point of a number of German election studies. As Brettschneider (2002b) points out, we have to distinguish between three processes of personalization: (1) personalization of campaign strategies, (2) personalization of the media's campaign reporting and (3) personalization of electoral choices. All three processes are not only interrelated, but also dependent on political and societal factors thus making it difficult to specify the consequences of mediatization for voter behaviour. The political parties increasingly personalize their election campaigns while adapting to the changing media environment. For example, a recent study spanning 12 Bundestag elections between 1957 and 1998 shows that the major German parties have increasingly personalized their advertisements since the 1980s (Keil, 2003). In addition, the mass media not only stimulate a specific campaigning strategy, they also emphasize the personalization elements in covering and framing the campaign. Content analyses of election coverage provide empirical evidence for such a development in Germany during the 1990s (Genz et al., 2001; Schulz and Zeh, 2004; Wilke and Reinemann, 2000). It seems likely that the personalization of campaign communication results in an increasing personalization of voters' decisions. Political and societal changes such as a declining party identifica-

tion and a growing sophistication of the electorate may contribute to this process (Dalton, 1984).

In a longitudinal study of voting behaviour in Germany, Ohr has in fact demonstrated the increasing importance of voters' evaluations of candidates for predicting party choice, even after controlling for party identification in multivariate analyses (Ohr, 2000). Other studies do not confirm a personalization trend. They instead provide evidence for the prevailing influence of candidate preference at certain elections only, depending, for instance, on the candidates running for office and on other situational factors (Brettschneider, 2002b; Kaase, 1994; Pappi and Shikano, 2001; Schön, 2004; Vetter and Gabriel, 1998).

Usually, researchers contrast different aspects of voter orientation in the tradition of the Michigan model of voter choice. As this model does not consider communication variables, empirical tests of personalization regularly neglect campaign communication, including mass media. Due to this deficit, the relationship between campaign communication and electoral behaviour remains uncertain. Following up on these studies, we tried to shed some light on this relationship and to test assumptions implied in the mediatization hypothesis. We looked at the differential strength of candidate preference and issue competence for explaining electoral choices and supplemented the typical Michigan model design with media factors, based on the following considerations.

1. If the personalization of campaign communication matters, we should expect candidate preferences to be more evident for voters with high media exposure, particularly for voters relying on television.
2. We expect that the voting intentions of non-partisan voters are more dependent on candidate preference, compared to voters identifying with one of the political parties. Since, according to the Michigan model, party identification is the most important determinant of voting behaviour, the electoral choices of 'identifiers' are more directly shaped by their partisanship (Vetter and Gabriel, 1998). In addition, partisanship facilitates the attribution of issue competence to the political parties. In contrast to this, 'non-identifiers' tend to base their electoral choices on candidate preferences derived from information provided by the mass media. If new candidates appear on the scene, voters have to form fresh assessments of candidates during election campaigns, and most voters rely primarily on television for this purpose (see Table 2).

3. If there is a personalization trend in voting behaviour we would expect the preferences for the major candidates to become increasingly important for voters' electoral decisions.

To test our assumptions we draw on pre-election surveys relating to the most recent Bundestag elections in 1994, 1998 and 2002. Tables 3a–3c summarize the findings of a number of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions specifying the differential power of candidate preference and issue orientation in explaining party choice for different media subgroups. In addition, we contrast 'identifiers' – i.e. voters who identify with one of the political parties – with 'non-identifiers'. The entries in Tables 3a–3c are squared semi-partials, which are equivalent to variance increments contributed by candidate preference after issue competence has absorbed its share of variance and vice versa (and after controlling for several demographics).[9]

With regard to our third expectation, we find no indications of an increasing importance of voting for particular candidates when comparing the variance increments contributed by each independent variable over time (see first row of each of Tables 3a–3c). This concurs with the majority of studies refuting a steady personalization trend of electoral choices in Germany (Brettschneider, 2002b; Kaase, 1994; Pappi and Shikano, 2001; Schön, 2004; Vetter and Gabriel, 1998). On the other hand, the results clearly confirm our second assumption. Candidate preference among 'non-identifiers' is a stronger predictor of electoral choices than among 'identifiers'. This applies not only to the total samples at all three elections, but also to most of the media use subgroups.

However, the results displayed in Tables 3a–3c are only partly compatible with assumptions about an interaction of media use with candidate preference derived from the mediatization hypothesis. Only in 1994 and 1998 do we see a clear superiority of candidate orientations among 'non-identifiers' who watch television news frequently, as postulated. The picture for the most recent election is less clear. While there is still a superiority of candidate preference over issue competence among 'non-identifiers', though less so than at previous elections, television viewing was irrelevant in this respect. Considering the high visibility of the major candidates on television in 2002 and the high degree of personalization of the campaign coverage (Brettschneider, 2002a; Schulz and Zeh, 2004), these results are difficult to explain.

Yet, the visibility of the candidates in 2002 together with an extraordinary volume of coverage not only on television, but also in the

Table 3a Interaction of media use with predictors of voting intention (pre-election survey, 1994)

	Non-identifiers Variance increments explained by:			*Identifiers Variance increments explained by:*		
	N	*Candidate preference*	*Issue competence*	N	*Candidate preference*	*Issue competence*
Total sample	344	0.16	0.06	970	0.07	0.09
Media use subgroups:						
Exposure to political television programmes						
Occasionally or less	134	0.07	0.15	542	0.07	0.14
Frequently	210	0.17	0.05	428	0.06	0.09

Notes: Table entries are squared semi-partials, controlled for gender, age, formal education, residence (East vs West Germany) and interest in politics. Only italicized entries are *not* statistically significant ($p > .05$).
Dependent variable (voting intention): Voting intention is a dummy variable based on the question asking people which party they would vote for if there were a general election next Sunday (–1 = CDU/CSU; 0 = other party; 1 = SPD). Respondents not answering or not naming a party are treated as missing.
Candidate preference: 'And now I would like to know the following from you: [Name of candidates] are the candidates for chancellor of the two main political parties. Which of the two would you prefer as chancellor after the federal election?'
Issue competence: An index built from two questions asking people to name (1) the first and second most important problem facing the country and (2) which political party would be the best to solve the problems.
Both independent variables were recoded into dummies corresponding to the dependent variable.
Party identification: Respondents expressing very strong, strong or medium preference for a specific political party are categorized as 'identifiers', all others as 'non-identifiers'.
Media use subgroups: 'Frequently' includes the answers 'regularly' and 'often', 'occasionally or less' includes the answers 'occasionally', 'rarely' and 'never'.

press, may in fact account for the unexpected results.[10] The 2002 campaign was a special case due to a spectacular media event, the television debates. Not only did the two candidates for chancellor gain an unusual amount of attention from the media and the electorate through the televised debates, but also the issues debated by the candidates may have reached a higher degree of diffusion than normal, particularly among apolitical voters. In other words, the high degree of personalization of the

Table 3b Interaction of media use with predictors of voting intention (pre-election survey, 1998)

		Non-identifiers Variance increments explained by:			*Identifiers Variance increments explained by:*	
	N	*Candidate preference*	*Issue competence*	N	*Candidate preference*	*Issue competence*
Total sample	264	0.16	0.06	768	0.07	0.09
Media use subgroups:						
Exposure to news on public television						
Occasionally or less	38	0.12	0.12	135	0.06	0.09
Frequently	224	0.24	0.02	631	0.07	0.05
Exposure to news on commercial television						
Occasionally or less	106	0.11	0.05	370	0.07	0.06
Frequently	154	0.28	*0.01*	397	0.07	0.05

For notes see Table 3a.

campaign stimulated a relatively even awareness of the issue competence of the parties among the electorate, indicated by a levelling of the explanatory power of our two criterion variables (see first row of entries in Table 3c).

A somewhat weaker test of the personalization of electoral choices resulting from mediatization processes looks at the sources of the candidates' images. If media exposure has an impact on voters' preference for the main candidates, we should find a media influence on the voters' perception of a candidate's image too. Such image effects are a prime goal of the personalization strategies of campaign management. To examine whether these expectations materialized, we look at potential sources of voters' image formation. The number of characteristics a voter can identify with either candidate serves to indicate how strongly developed the candidate's image is. This index is the dependent variable in two regressions, and various indicators of media exposure serve as predictors.

As Table 4 demonstrates, media exposure had a significant influence on the formation of the different candidates' images. This was most consistent for reading a local or regional newspaper. With the exception of the image of Stoiber (the CDU/CSU [Conservative] candidate in 2002),

Table 3c Interaction of media use with predictors of voting intention (pre-election survey, 2002)

		Non-identifiers Variance increments explained by:			*Identifiers Variance increments explained by:*	
	N	*Candidate preference*	*Issue competence*	N	*Candidate preference*	*Issue competence*
Total sample	267	0.11	0.07	750	0.07	0.07
Media use subgroups:						
Exposure to news on public television						
Occasionally or less	42	0.10	*0.01*	112	0.07	0.03
Frequently	221	0.11	0.08	635	0.07	0.07
Exposure to news on commercial television						
Occasionally or less	99	0.12	0.04	332	0.06	0.09
Frequently	158	0.11	0.08	409	0.08	0.05

For notes see Table 3a.

watching the news on public service television had an impact too. Exposure to news on commercial channels contributed only marginally to the formation of Schröder's image in 2002.[11]

All in all, these results once more underline the importance of news media exposure for the voters' decision-making during election campaigns. The media obviously provide useful information for forming an image of the major candidates. Voters not identifying themselves with any of the political parties in particular tend to base their voting decisions on candidate evaluations. Contrary to widely held beliefs, television is not the most important source for German voters. We even find indications of the superiority of print media in this respect (see also Schönbach, 1996). Our results are at least in part compatible with a generalized mediatization hypothesis. However, they provide no evidence for an increasing determination of electoral choice by candidate orientation and thus speak clearly against a personalization trend.

Campaign style and the image of politics

According to the mediatization hypothesis, modern election campaigns are characterized by an increasing interdependence of media and politics.

Table 4 Formation of candidates' image as a function of media exposure (pre-election survey 2002, multiple regressions)

	Gerhard Schröder		*Edmund Stoiber*	
Independent variables	*beta*	p	*beta*	p
Age	–0.01	NS	–0.02	NS
Gender	0.01	NS	0.04	NS
Residence: West	0.08	<.01	0.08	<.01
Level of education	0.03	NS	0.02	NS
Political interest	0.11	<.001	0.11	<.001
Frequency of reading/watching:				
BILD-Zeitung	0.02	NS	0.01	NS
National quality newspaper	–0.03	NS	0.01	NS
Local/regional newspaper	0.07	<.01	0.08	<.01
Public television news	0.09	<.001	0.05	NS
Commercial television news	0.06	<.05	0.02	NS
R^2	0.05		0.04	
N	1436		1436	

Notes: *Dependent variables* derived from the following question: 'I will read several characteristics to you. Please tell me in your opinion to what extent these characteristics apply to [name of candidate]. A value of –2 means that the respective characteristic does not apply to the politician at all. A +2 value means that the characteristic applies entirely to the politician. With the values in between you can graduate your opinion.' Characteristics: economically competent, sympathetic as a person, politically trustworthy and effective. The number of answers per candidate (excluding 'I don't know') formed the dependent variables.

As the political parties adapt to the 'media logic' they lose control over the content and format of campaign messages, particularly over the media appearances of the political candidates. A 'de-authentization' of communication, indicated, for example, by ever smaller candidate sound bites, may be the result, as has been observed in the US (Hallin, 1992; Patterson, 1993). A study of candidate quotes in leading German newspapers shows a similar trend, though only for recent elections and with some inconsistencies (Wilke and Reinemann, 2000: 128–36). Our own analysis of candidate sound bites on German television reveals quite different developments for the public television channels (ARD and ZDF) compared to the commercial channels (RTL and SAT.1). The former actually reduced the length of candidate sound bites, whereas the latter show a somewhat mixed picture. Overall and despite some exceptions, there is a convergence of the length of sound bites on public and on

commercial television between 1990 and 2002 (see Schulz and Zeh, 2004). Although our findings partly mirror the observations in the US, there are nevertheless considerable differences, particularly when comparing the overall length of candidates' sound bites between the two countries. The candidates in Germany get a much better platform on television than their American counterparts (see also Donsbach and Jandura, 2003). The differences once more remind us to avoid 'glib uses of the notion of Americanization' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001: 400).

Other findings concerning changes in the style of German election reporting teach the same lesson. The media changes in the 1980s altered the presentation formats of politics on television in Germany, as in many other European countries. Negativism in the news became more salient due to an increasing emphasis on conflict and scandal, as several longitudinal studies of German news media demonstrate (Bruns and Marcinkowski, 1996; Kepplinger, 2000; Krüger, 2001; Marcinkowski et al., 2001; Pfetsch, 1994; Semetko and Schoenbach, 2003). These developments appear to be an inevitable consequence of increased media competition and the commercialization of broadcasting. Results of our own studies of election campaign coverage seem to agree with such general tendencies in the news.

When comparing the thematic context in the news of references to the major candidates over a period covering four Bundestag elections we find that stories contextualizing the candidates by political issues have declined, whereas candidate references framed by election and campaigning topics have dramatically increased (see Schulz and Zeh, 2004). The campaign frame includes matters of campaigning strategy and style, poll results and particularly questions about who is in the lead and who might win. This agrees quite well with Patterson's observation of an increasing predilection of the media for what he calls 'the reporters' game schema', i.e. stories highlighting controversies and the struggle for power (Patterson, 1993: 136).

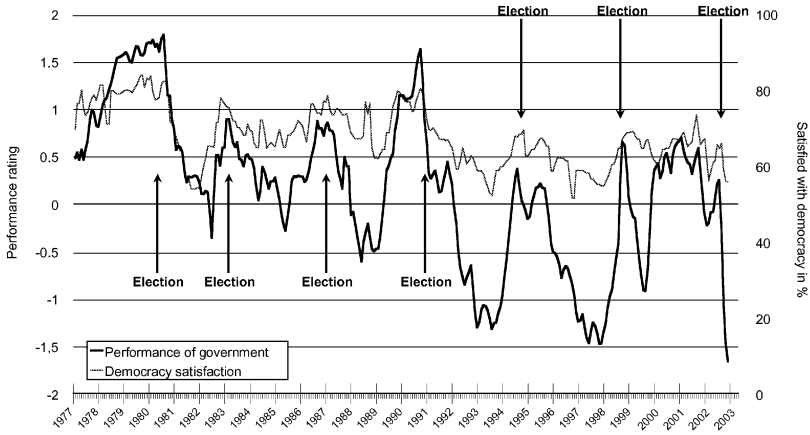
However, unlike the US, we cannot see a growth in 'bad news' coverage of the candidates in Germany. While there has been a slight increase of negative references to both the incumbent and the challenger, we also see that 'good news' coverage and, even more so, stories with a mixed tone have become more prevalent over time. The increase of the latter type indicates particularly that German news resembles the American style only in part, namely by emphasizing controversies and the 'game schema'. Yet, the tone of candidate references in German campaign news has not become markedly negative over time.

These findings are inconsistent with other German studies, which have pointed to an increasing negativism in the news and related this to a growing political malaise among the audience. For example, Kepplinger argues that changes in the style of political journalism have led to a loss of prestige for the political elite and contributed to a negative image of politics among the population. The 'dismantling of politics', as he calls it, had already started in the 1960s and has proceeded very, very gradually. Through a long-term analysis of the news coverage of three national newspapers, he provides evidence that there is a transformation of political journalism of an epochal nature (Kepplinger, 1998, 2002).

In fact, survey data do demonstrate a growing political malaise in Germany (for a summary of findings, see Maurer, 2003). Indicators of voters' feelings of political efficacy have declined and the image of politics has become gloomy. Ascribing positive characteristics to the political elite has decreased, whereas the attribution of negative characteristics has increased. Further evidence of an erosion of trust in political institutions comes from an analysis of the consequences of media change in the 1990s focusing on media use patterns in the changing media environment (Schulz, 2001b). It is particularly television viewers with a high channel repertoire who develop a negative image of politics when highly exposed to information programmes. This finding seems to indicate that the information formats of commercial channels actually nurture negative political stereotypes.

However, as all these studies refer to cross-sectional data or to survey trends with rather large intervals, their salience is limited. If we examine denser time series data, we get a different and more precise picture. The monthly Politbarometer surveys provide such time series going back to the 1970s for some indicators that are of interest to us (see Figure 2).[12] They do indeed show a remarkable long-term erosion of support for the federal government. Although less pronounced, people's satisfaction with how the German democracy works follows a similar long-term trend. Yet, these trends are periodically disrupted during election campaigns and even reversed. During election years, the approval ratings of both the government and the democratic system are always quite positive. Election campaigns consistently seem to alter the population's negative image of politics.

While the Politbarometer time series are compatible with the assumption of a long-term trend of growing political malaise, they also show that election communication does not contribute to this trend. The opposite seems to be the case. Apparently, mediatized election



Notes: Questions: 'Are you more satisfied or more dissatisfied with the performance of the present [parties in power] government in Bonn (Berlin)? Please answer using this thermometer scale from plus 5 to minus 5.'
References to specific parties in power varied according to the differing composition of the coalitions over time. The trend line shows the average of the thermometer ratings.
'What would you generally say about democracy in Germany? Are you quite satisfied or rather dissatisfied?' The trend line refers to the percentages of respondents answering 'quite satisfied'.
Both trend lines have been smoothed by calculating three-monthly moving averages.

Figure 2 Assessment of government and satisfaction with democracy over time (Western Germany only)

campaigns are not only successful in activating voters, but also in increasing support for the political system. This is consistent with our finding that during election campaigns in Germany both the incumbent chancellor and the challenger receive more positive than negative coverage in the news.

Yet, election campaigns brighten the image of politics for a short time only. Each campaign stimulates a brief frenzy of approval for the political system, followed by a sobering up. After Election Day, the effect vanishes and the ensuing political malaise increases even more each time. As illustrated also in Figure 2, the deflection into the negative of government ratings has steadily increased post-election since the late 1980s. With one exception, the lows in the middle of the governmental terms are becoming increasingly lower. The exception during the Schröder term in 2000 and 2001 is mainly due to a huge scandal involving the opposition party, the CDU. This led to an atypical mid-term approval for the government.

Summary and discussion

According to the mediatization hypothesis certain changes in the style of campaigning and, consequently, in electoral behaviour have occurred because of media changes. The media changes also lead to an increasing interdependence of political processes and mass communication. In our analyses, we have looked at the long-term effects of mediatization on voting behaviour drawing upon data from the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research in Cologne, Germany. In addition, we have presented content analysis findings from our own studies of election reporting on German television. For some of the hypothesized consequences of mediatization, our analyses present empirical corroboration. For others they are not particularly convincing. The limited empirical evidence for the effects of mediatization on voting behaviour may partly be due to the methodological weakness of the available data. German electoral studies have only occasionally measured the media exposure of voters or their perception of the media campaigns. Moreover, in the few studies comprising relevant variables the indicators are hardly comparable across time. Thus, as is the case usually with secondary analyses, our attempts are somewhat limited in scope and in terms of the validity of the indicators.

Despite widespread fears, neither the expansion of television in the 1960s nor the increase in the number of commercial television channels in the 1990s have led to a significant decline in German voters' exposure to other media. On the contrary, there has even been a considerable increase. When looking at long-term trends of election communication it is apparent that all sources of information have become more important over time, including interpersonal communication. Consequently, and due to the large number of possible campaign channels, the percentage of voters accessible through any one single channel is steadily declining. Election campaigning has turned into target group campaigning. However, as the example of the television debates in the German election of 2002 has demonstrated, a fragmented audience does not necessarily lead to a fragmentation of the public sphere.

When voters are asked to rank their sources of campaign information, poll data prove a dominance of television. There is a clear advantage for television to reach the apolitical voters compared with most other media.

Moreover, the results of our analyses underline the importance of the news media for voters' decision-making during election campaigns. This is particularly the case for voters not identifying themselves with any of

the political parties. These so-called 'non-identifiers' tend to base their voting decisions on candidate evaluations, for which the mass media provide relevant information. Contrary to widely held assumptions, the most important sources in this respect are the traditional print media, *not* television. Our findings are at least in part compatible with a generalized mediatization hypothesis, though, like several other recent German studies, we cannot prove that candidate preference is having an increased influence over electoral choice.

Long-term analyses of the German media show that the style of campaign reporting – and of political journalism in general – has changed in a way which seems to mirror the US trend. Conflict and scandal have become more prevalent in the presentation of politics. The mass media project an increasingly negative image of political actors. The 'game schema' has become more salient than political substance in framing candidate references on television. However, we did not find an increase in 'bad news' coverage of the candidates, nor any clear indication of 'de-authetization' due to a trend towards ever smaller sound bites. The evidence for a potential impact of the changing style of reporting on people's vision of politics is mixed. On the one hand, it seems likely that the changes are linked to an increasing political malaise among the German population. On the other hand, German election campaigns noticeably improve people's vision of politics. This reversal of the trend, however, is only temporary.

All aspects considered, our results speak against a naive adoption of the Americanization hypothesis for a European country like Germany. There are perhaps more differences than correspondences between the US and Germany with respect to both the institutional arrangements and the communication cultures shaping election campaigns (Pfetsch, 2001). Election campaigns are changing in Germany as in other countries. While there is a proliferation of American campaign practices, the particularities of political systems and media systems, as well as differences in voters' mentality, political competence and orientation lead to a 'hybridization' rather than Americanization of election campaigns (Plasser and Plasser, 2002: 343–51). In this respect, our findings agree with recent arguments against the notion of Americanization (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Papathanassopoulos, 2000; Scammell, 1998; Swanson and Mancini, 1996).

Moreover, the political reality is not only more complex than the notion of Americanization implies, it also follows inherent laws that go to some extent beyond the horizon of traditional communication research.

The recent German elections have demonstrated several noteworthy examples.

The political parties, for example, gained quite a bit of attention through some spectacular posters they produced, not to be put up in streets but rather to be presented at press conferences and on the Internet (Lessinger et al., 2003). The themes shown in the posters were widely discussed in the media and, thus, received free, nationwide publicity. Accordingly, it is apparent that election campaign messages can easily overcome the 'genre barrier' between the different kinds of media. Through media multiplication, political campaign messages can become the topic of meta-communication. General tendencies of an increasing 'reflexiveness' – a tendency for self-reference among the mass media – support this. The media, in addition to watching and reporting the course of the campaign, take on a new role 'defined as self-referential reflections on the nature of the interplay between political public relations and political journalism' (Esser et al., 2000: 17).

Moreover, the Internet becomes increasingly important for cross-media strategies by not only supplying original selections of information, but also by serving as an additional distribution channel for print, radio and television. This amplifies the mediatization of election campaigns through a multiplication of messages while simultaneously blurring the borders between the channels of voter accessibility.

The well-known dictum 'After the election is before the election' refers to another development. On Election Day, the elected politicians immediately direct their attention to the next election (which can occasionally be quite soon, due to a large number of secondary elections in the German federal system). Today's professional election campaign management begins with the preparations for the upcoming campaign long before the election date. In the case of some of the tasks, they even begin years in advance. Undeclared early campaigning probably contributed to the fact that the Bundestag elections in 1990, 1994 and 1998 were decided even before the 'official' campaign began. We were witnessing the same phenomenon in 2002, until two extraordinary events reversed the trends: a flood disaster in some parts of Germany and the Iraq conflict. Consequently, election studies covering only a few weeks before the election date – as is often the case – risk missing the decisive developments.

An additional problem that deserves more attention stems from the increasing secularization and instrumentalization of election research. The impact of research in reality leads to a repercussion on research concepts and results. The observed protagonists in the election campaigns in turn

observe their scientific observers and utilize or anticipate their observations. A well-known example is the publication of poll results about voter intentions. During recent Bundestag elections, the media published poll results almost daily. The extent to which this practice has led to voter reaction, to bandwagon or sympathy effects is a question researchers have only begun to analyse. Several indications speak in favour of a bandwagon effect (Schmitt-Beck, 1996). The newer developments raise the additional question of whether or not this permanent self-observation enabled by continuous polling and the publication of poll results has accelerated and reinforced reciprocal effects.

The results of election research are not only part of the voters' definition of the situation. Election research is also an important component in the parties' situation analysis. For campaign planning, election research today obviously plays a significant role in the development of strategies and as the supplier of arguments and slogans. The 1998 campaign provided an informative example of the interplay between the parties, the public and the academic scene. In the beginning of March following the state election in Lower Saxony (which Schröder had declared to be a plebiscite for his SPD [Social Democrats] chancellor candidacy), the news magazine *Der Spiegel* published a lengthy article about SPD plans for the federal election campaign, conceived as 'a campaign following the American pattern'. CDU/CSU politicians immediately snatched up the idea of Americanization as a derogatory campaign concept in their negative campaigning and succeeded in attaching negative connotations to the term Americanization. It became a synonym for all that is for show and fake. The public discussion which followed conversely imposed the scientific analysis of election campaigning and, once again, gave reason to question the notion of Americanization. In this way, the public discussion contributed to keep the concept of Americanization as one decidedly unresolved in the academic literature.

Notes

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1. *Source:* IVW-Auflagenlisten.
2. This differentiation follows in part a taxonomy used by McQuail (2001: 72).
3. Neither the donors of the data (persons, organizations, etc.) nor the Central Archive in Cologne bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretation of the data provided by the Archive.

4. Slight variations in question wording may affect somewhat the comparability over time. The data for the non-election years of 1990 and 1995 come from a longitudinal study commissioned by the German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF (Berg and Kiefer, 1996). Unfortunately, the respective question has been omitted from a more recent wave of this study.
5. Average viewing time per day, people aged 14 and older; data based on television ratings research (*Source:* Media Perspektiven Basisdaten, 1983, 2002). The early figure relates to the former West Germany only.
6. Usually only the major parties allocate part of their campaign budget to advertising on commercial television. For example, during the 2002 election campaign they aired 305 advertisements on commercial channels, compared to the 123 spots on public service television allocated to the more than 20 parties running for the Bundestag (D.K. Müller, 2002). The commercial stations can make airtime available to the parties under two conditions. First, they can only charge their prime costs and not the usual spot price. Second, they have to observe the proportional model as it applies to public television (see Holtz-Bacha, 2000b: 68). Airtime for election advertising broadcasts on the main public channels is free, but strictly limited according to a principle of 'graduated' equal opportunity. The details are compiled in a paper by ALM, a working group formed by the broadcasting authorities of the German *Länder* (see www.alm.de).
7. The audience shares added up to about 45 percent for each debate. It should be noted that these ratings are based on all viewers aged three and older (73 million people).
8. A recent comparative study of political media use, including the Internet, comes to the same conclusion (Wagner, 2004).
9. We assumed that, due to high multicollinearity, beta estimates might not be reliable determination indicators. Instead, we isolated the specific explanatory power of each independent variable. More precisely, we estimated what Darlington (1968) calls the 'usefulness' of the different independent variables for predicting the dependent variable. The drop in R^2 of the model when the respective variable is removed from the model (which equals the square of its semi-partial correlation with the dependent variable) indicates the 'usefulness' of an independent variable. This measure is less sensible to multicollinearity than the beta values. In a perfectly orthogonal model, the 'usefulness' of all predictors adds up to the overall explained variance, i.e. the multiple R^2.
10. For example, compared to 1998 the four leading German newspapers increased their campaign coverage in 2002 by 50 percent (Wilke and Reinemann, 2003).
11. A comparable analysis of data relating to the 1998 elections with Kohl and Schröder as candidates produced similar results.

12. The surveys were commissioned by ZDF television and fielded by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Mannheim. Data sets are available from the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung an der Universität zu Köln.

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