

The Effect of Televised Candidate Debates on the Support for Political Parties*

KORINNA LINDEMANN Hertie School [†]

LUKAS F. STOETZER Humboldt University of Berlin [‡]

Accepted Version

Abstract

During campaigns for legislative elections, a large portion of the general public follows televised debates between the front-running candidates. How can the candidates use the public interest in the debates to increase the support for their party? In this article, we argue that especially challenger candidates can improve the public perception of their valence qualities, such as personal integrity, leadership, and competence, and can - as a result - improve the support of their parties. We expect the perceived policy stances of the candidates to matter less, as parties often already have well-defined policy profiles that matter to voters. Building on televised debate experiments during the German Federal Elections of 2009 and 2013, we analyse the effect of the debates on party vote and in how far this relationship is mediated by changes in valence and policy evaluations of the candidates. Results show that changes of candidate valence, but not changes in policy perceptions, of the social-democratic front-running candidates mediate the vote intention for the party. Respondents who perceived the candidates more competent, empathetic and have integrity as a result of the debate are more likely to vote for their party. Our analysis further reveals, however, that this valence effect does not carry-over to vote intention briefly before the election.

Keywords: Televised Debates, Candidate Valence, Voting Decisions, Legislative Election Campaigns

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[†]E-Mail: k.lindemann@phd.hertie-school.org

[‡]E-Mail: lukas.stoetzer@hu-berlin.de

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Televised debates have become a central feature of modern democratic campaigns. The face-to-face confrontation of the candidates offers citizens the opportunity to directly compare the available options and help them to decide which camp to support in the upcoming election. Especially through the in-depth exchange of arguments on a variety of topics, the public can learn about the candidates' competence and experience in addressing different issues. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that original debate formats in the U.S. have been adopted and attract a large portion of the electorate in European systems, for example in Slovakia (Baboš and Világi, 2018), Sweden (Aalberg and Jenssen, 2007), Germany (Faas and Maier, 2004; Maier and Faas, 2011), the United Kingdom (Pattie and Johnston, 2011) and the EU parliament (Maier et al., 2016). One challenge might arise for voters in these countries: Many of the televised debates are held as part of campaigns for legislative elections of the parliament where parties are elected by the citizens. This means that voters will often not find the candidates who compete in the debates on the ballot. Instead, they most often have to vote for one of the candidates' parties in the election.

This raises the question how parties can benefit from the televised candidate debates in legislative elections of the parliament. The total effects of televised debates in the U.S. presidential elections and primaries are well-documented. In a meta-analysis, Benoit et al. (2003) summarise that televised debates impact issue preferences and respondents' attitudes towards the candidates (see also Shaw, 1999; Hillygus and Jackman, 2003; Fridkin et al., 2007, 2019). Debates directly impact the perception about the candidates on the ballot and, thereby, influence the decision which of the candidates is more fit for office. How do the findings from presidential elections carry over to legislative elections? The direct effect of televised debates on candidate evaluation has been documented in legislative elections as well. In elections in Europe, results show that a significant part of

the audience alters their attitude about the debating candidates (Pattie and Johnston, 2011; Baboš and Világi, 2018; Maier and Faas, 2011; Aalberg and Jenssen, 2007).

How the attitude change towards the leading candidates transmits to electoral support for parties has not been a strong focus of the literature. A re-occurring finding for televised debates in Germany is, in this regard, that voters are more likely to vote for the perceived winner of the debate (Maier and Faas, 2011; Klein, 2005). But what aspects constitute the “winner of the debate”? One central aspect is the public image of the candidate. It is clear to voters that the debating candidates are the potential leader of the future government and voters share a desire for leaders who are competent, experienced and sympathetic. So-called candidate valence has been discussed in the literature as a driving factor for voter’s decision making (Adams et al., 2011; Clark, 2009; Stone and Simas, 2010). As a result, parties can gain in support from televised debates, if their candidate is perceived to be more competent, experienced and even sympathetic as the other candidates. Another aspect that could constitute the “winner of the debate” is a positive change in perceived policy positions. Voters are more likely to support a candidate with similar issue stances (Bellucci et al., 2015; Ansolabehere et al., 2008). If candidates manage to reduce the overall perceived policy distance, this can also increase the electoral prospects of the party.

In this article, we argue that candidate valence is a central mediator of the effect of televised debates on party voting decisions. The potential enhancing valence effects of televised debate appearance is likely to transmit to the support for political parties as voters are more likely to vote for a party with a competent, experienced and sympathetic candidate. We further expect that valence matters especially for challenger candidates as they are lesser-known to the public. We also study the perceived policy distance to the candidate as an alternative mechanism. Compared to candidate valence, we expect

policies to be less relevant as the average perceived policy distance to a candidate is more difficult to change and parties often already have well-defined policy profiles that matter to voters. The argumentation reveals conditions under which televised debates can matter for legislative elections. Only if changes in the valence of the leading candidates are persistent over time and matter in voter's decision-making process for parties to a sufficient degree, the effect of increased candidate valence will carry-over to electoral support on election day. In this respect, it could be that televised debates are instrumental to increase the candidates' public image, but those effects do not necessarily transfer to the voting decision in legislative elections.

We analyse televised debate experiments during the German Federal Elections of 2009 and 2013 to study candidate valence and policy as mediators of the effect of televised debates on party voting. In both studies, participants of the experiment are surveyed before and right after exposure to the TV-debate. A control group filled out the same surveys but watched a movie instead. This research design allows us to directly identify the effect of the debates on party preferences. A battery of question about the perceived candidates' competence, leadership qualities, the character and policy stances permits us to analyse whether the effects of the televised debate on voting intention are mediated by the perception of the candidate's image or positions. The experimental design further includes a follow-up survey briefly before the election, which helps to study how long-lasting the short term effects of the televised debates are. To identify the mediation effect, we employ Causal Mediation Analysis (Imai et al., 2011, 2010). The extensive survey allows us to condition on a set of pre-treatment variables that help to meet central identification assumptions of the causal mediation analysis.

The results indicate that valence - but not policy - mediates the effect of televised debates on voting decisions in the short-term. We find that following the debate in-

creased the public image of the two social-democratic challengers, Steinmeier in 2009 and Steinbrück in 2013. The mediation analysis further reveals that there is a positive impact of the televised debate on the intention to vote for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and that this effect is mediated by the increased valence perception among the respondents who followed the debate. We find no clear evidence that the debates changed the perceived policy distance to the candidates, which questions policy as a mediator of how candidates can generate support for their parties. Employing data collected up to shortly before the election shows that the mediation effects of valence perceptions on vote intentions vanish after some time has passed. We still observe an increased perception of the two challengers among the respondents who followed the debate, but this effect is smaller and does not mediate the total effect of the debate on vote intention any longer. While these results suggest that valence can play a major role in the effect of televised debates on voting decisions, the direct impact of following the debate on the electoral fortunes of the parties remain rather ambiguous.

1 Candidate Valence, Televised Debates and Party Choice

Televised debates are central campaign events that put attention on the main candidates of an election. In presidential elections, like the U.S. or France, the presidential candidates debate with each other on who will be the better president for the country. In parliamentary systems, often the leading candidates of the major parties are invited to debate the issues on the campaign agenda. E.g. in Germany, only the two major parties are allowed to put their chancellor candidate on the stand (see e.g. Faas and Maier, 2004). Televised debates offer the unique opportunity for the electorate to not

only learn about the political programs of the candidate’s parties, but they also reveal much information about the candidates themselves. The electorate has the possibility to judge the front-running candidate based on valence, which refers to political dimensions in which voters have a universal understanding of the desired outcome (Stokes, 1963). On valence dimensions, such as political competence, leadership skills, integrity and personnel matters, the electorate assesses who of the candidates is a better fit to lead the future government.

The question remains how the presence of leading candidates in televised debates influence support for the parties. To analyse their role in voting, we rely on spatial and valence voting models. The standard vote choice model specifies valence for a party or candidate as a specific intercept that can bias other rationals, like ideological distance and identities (Groseclose, 2001; Adams et al., 2011). We add the valence and policy evaluation of the leading candidates next to the party evaluation. In this extension to the standard utility model, the utility V_{ij}^{party} of a party of a voter i for party j is a function of the leading candidate’s valence θ_{ij}^{cand} , party valence θ_{ij}^{party} , perceived policy distance between the party platform and the voter $\lambda^{cand}(x_i - p_j^{party})^2$, the perceived policy distance between the candidate and the voter $\lambda^{party}(x_i - p_j^{cand})^2$ and other factors X_{ij} , like socio-demographic cleavages and identities. The specification implies that both candidate and party evaluation matter to the voter.

$$V_{ij}^{party} = \theta_{ij}^{cand} + \theta_{ij}^{party} - \lambda^{cand}(x_i - p_j^{cand})^2 - \lambda^{party}(x_i - p_j^{party})^2 + X_{ij} \quad (1)$$

This extended vote choice model opens up two separate mechanisms how leading candidates in televised debates can influence voting for parties: valence and policy considerations. Figure 1 portrays the causal pathways of our two arguments. Firstly,

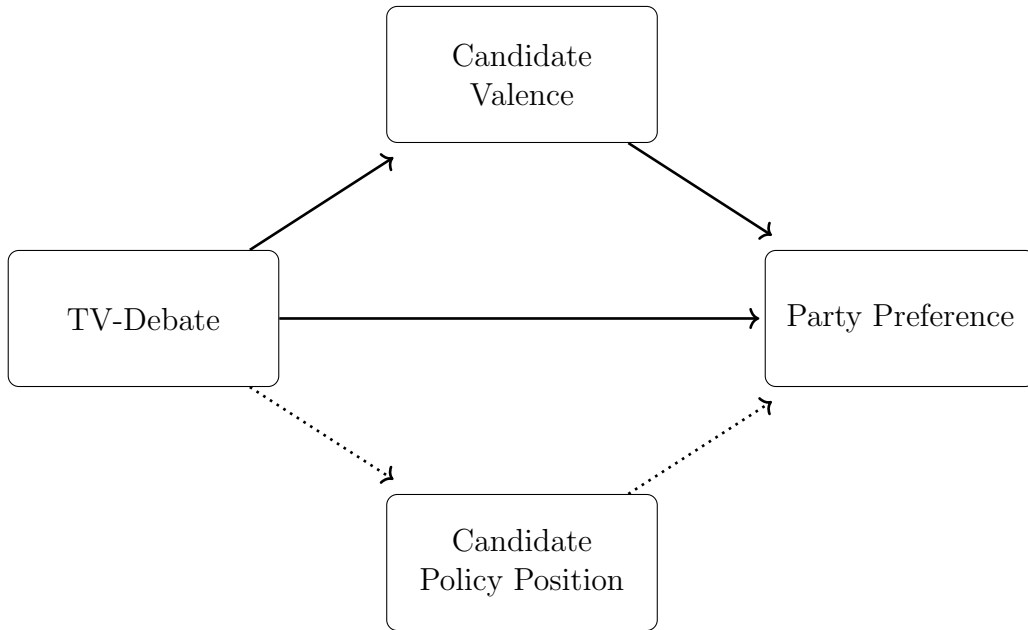


Figure 1: Expected mechanism of televised debates, candidate valence and perceived candidate policy position on party preferences.

candidate appearances in televised debates alter the perceived valence of a candidate which then impacts the expected vote share for the corresponding party. Secondly, televised debates offer the opportunity to learn about the policy positions of the leading candidate. The gained knowledge of these positions on policy issues are then used by the voter to decide whether the party of the candidate is an appropriate vote choice.

With this model, we argue that a candidate’s image acts as the main mediator between televised debates and party preference. Plenty of studies show that televised debates impact the image of candidates. The electorate has the possibility to judge the front-running candidate based on political competence, leadership skills, integrity and personnel matters. In a meta-analysis of ten studies, Benoit et al. (2003, p.341) find a significant impact of the debate in the U.S. on a candidate’s character. Results of studies conducted by Wicks (2007) and Fridkin and Kenney (2011) for the U.S., Maier et al. (2014) for Germany, Pattie and Johnston (2011) for the UK and Baboř

and Világi (2018) for Slovakia and Maier et al. (2016) for the EU parliament further support the existence of debate effects on personality traits of and attitude changes towards the front-running candidate. “[V]alence judgments matter [...]” (Pattie and Johnston, 2011, p.158) and especially the lesser-known and lower-rated candidate has high potential to profit from these debates (Blais and Perrella, 2008; Zhu et al., 1994; Warner et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is clear that citizens value good qualities of a candidate such as personal integrity and competence. They want to avoid corrupt candidates as they cannot control every decision their representatives takes. But in plenty of parliamentary elections, voters cast a vote for a party, not for the leading candidate. Nonetheless, the evaluation of the leading candidates should matter for voters that care about the personal qualities of the elected officials (Arnesen et al., 2019; Bean and Mughan, 1989; Bellucci et al., 2015; Brettschneider, 2002; Garzia, 2012; Laustsen and Bor, 2017; Lobo, 2008; Nyhuis, 2016; Norpoth, 1977). Combining these two points, televised debates change the perception of the front-running candidate and as a result, influence the preference for the party.

- *Hypothesis 1*: Candidate valence mediates the effect of televised debates on voting decisions.

Besides valence perceptions of the leading candidates, a change in the perceived policy positions could also mediate the impact of televised debates on voting decisions. By watching televised debates, voters can learn about policy stances of the debate participants on different issues (see e.g. Benoit et al., 2002; Chaffee et al., 1994; Holbert et al., 2002; Zhu et al., 1994). Research further confirms that policy considerations are an important determinant of voting decisions. The spatial voting model argues that the electorate is inclined to vote for the candidate or party who is ideologically closest to them (Downs, 1957; Jessee, 2009). Bellucci et al. (2015) show that both

candidates' and parties' policy stances are important drivers concerning vote choice. This implies that televised debates have the potential to alter the perceived policy distance to candidates which then impacts the propensity to vote for parties that are represented by the candidates.

- *Hypothesis 2*: The perceived policy distance to candidates mediates the effect of televised debates on voting decisions.

However, we expect that perceived policy distance is less relevant compared to valence as a mediator. First, parties often have strong policy reputations that constraint changes in leading candidate's perceived positions. This makes it more difficult for candidates to reduce the perceived policy distance to the televised debate followers. Second, even if candidates manage to alter their policy profiles, it is unclear how much a candidate's perceived position on policy issues matters in voting decisions for the party compared to the overall policy positions of the party platform. Parties often have stronger control of the overall policy agenda, which means that voters should also value policy positions of the parties over the position of the leading candidates. In the theoretical framework, the two points question how strong the two paths from 'TV-Debate' to 'Candidate Policy Position' and from 'Candidate Policy Position' to 'Party Preferences' actually are (see Figure 1).

Nonetheless, both mechanisms - valence and policy - should especially apply for the challenger rather than the incumbent candidate. The public knows the incumbent and their characteristics to a higher extend compared to the challenger candidate. During the televised debate the viewers have, therefore, the possibility to learn more about the challenger who they know less. This is supported by evidence that shows that especially, the lesser-known and lower-rated candidate has high potential to profit from televised debates (Blais and Perrella, 2008; Zhu et al., 1994).

- *Hypothesis 3*: Mediation effects are particularly visible for challenger candidates rather than for incumbent candidates.

The argument has implications for the strength of televised debates in altering election results. First, televised debates have to change a candidate's public image and their perceived policy positions sufficiently to impact the electoral fortunes of the party. Candidate valence and perceived policy positions need to have a substantial impact on voting decisions in order for the effect to carry over. If the effect of a leader's evaluation or their policy position is not substantial enough, it will not translate into increased voting margins. Bellucci et al. (2015), for example, show that the causal effect of leader evaluation is not as substantial as the impact of policy positions of the parties. Lanoue (1991), nevertheless, argues that leadership "[d]ebates *do* have the capacity to influence voting behaviour" (Lanoue, 1991, p.63). Second, the induced changes to a candidate's public image and policy stances have to be long-lasting. Often the debates are held weeks before the election. Only if the changes in candidate valence remain stable over time, the difference can affect the results on election day. Existing research suggests, however, that debate effects are watered-down in the long run and that the media coverage following the debate might play an important role. Wald and Lupfer (1978) note that the effect from the presidential debate "was only temporary" (Wald and Lupfer, 1978, p.348) and Miller and MacKuen (1979) state that "the public memory is just not very long" (Miller and MacKuen, 1979, p.343). Geer (1988), on the other hand, suggests that although effect changes in candidate preference might not be long lasting, positive or negative performances can "swing the momentum of the campaign" (Geer, 1988, p.489). For instance, the post-debate media coverage about the candidate's performance affects the campaign strategy of the corresponding party, which then might influence the voting decision on election day. Hence, Geer (1988) stresses that voters do

not necessarily forget about the debate, but might just be re-convinced of their original vote intention by the ongoing campaign.

Our article deviates from previous research by explicitly testing these mediation hypotheses. While previous findings underline central implications of the theoretical argument, the specific mediation paths are usually not analysed in the literature. For instance, Maier and Faas (2011) show in their analysis of the German televised debate of 2002-2009 that respondents who perceived one of the candidates as a winner are more likely to vote for the winner's party. Being perceived as the winner of the debate closely relates to the concept of candidate valence, existing evidence, nevertheless, usually does not analyse valence as a mediator between the causal path of televised debates and party voting decisions (see e.g. Aalberg and Jenssen, 2007; Baboš and Világi, 2018; Blais and Boyer, 1996; Lanoue, 1991; Pattie and Johnston, 2011; Schrott, 1990; Warner et al., 2011). Additionally, while multiple studies emphasize the opportunity of learning about the policy views of the leading candidates, a mediation analysis to examine a potential mediating effect on televised debates and vote choice has not been conducted (see e.g. Benoit et al., 2001, 2002; Chaffee et al., 1994; Holbert et al., 2002; Zhu et al., 1994).

2 Research Design & Data

We analyse the relationship between candidate valence as well as policy distance and the effects of televised debates in Germany. U.S. modelled television debates were introduced in the campaign of the German Federal Elections in the year 2002. The front-runners of the two major parties discuss current political issues with the aim to be at their best and win the debate. In 2009, the incumbent Angela Merkel (CDU) and her challenger Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) took part in the debate. The two participants acted as chancellor (Merkel) and vice-chancellor (Steinmeier) in a Grand

Coalition up to this point (Maier et al., 2013). Five television stations broadcasted the event attracting 14.3 million people. According to media reports, the debate did not produce a clear winner. Merkel, nevertheless, ended up with a slight advantage over Steinmeier (Maier and Faas, 2011). Overall, the public perceived the debate rather tame, some newspapers even labelled it as boring (Maier et al., 2013). In 2013, Merkel competed against SPD-front-runner Peer Steinbrück. As in 2009, five television stations broadcasted the debate to a total audience of 17.7 million people (Maier et al., 2014). Even though the debate of 2013 was again a close-run, the media coverage reinforced the image of the underdog Steinbrück as the winner. Merkel, who had been the clear favourite beforehand, could not meet the expectations of the public (Blumenberg et al., 2017).

The central objective of this analysis is to identify the effects of televised debates and candidate valence as well as perceived policy distance respectively on voting behaviour. A common approach to identify such effects is the use of survey data. It might, however, be difficult to detect effects through the use of survey response research designs. Responses are self-reported and researchers cannot be assured of the information accuracy regarding exposure to political events such as televised debates. A further shortcoming is the difficulty of controlling for contextual factors in surveys. It cannot be assured that people who did not watch the debate, did not talk or read about the outcome of the debate. Thus, information about the debate could still influence non-watchers, which could lead to an estimation bias (Blais and Boyer, 1996; Shaw, 1999). Experimental set-ups tend to isolate particular stimuli more accurately and are, hence, more likely to show debate effects (Shaw, 1999).

We use experimental data from the 2009 and 2013 German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). Each study includes a module of an experimental survey set-up of the

television debates. Respondents were invited to follow the debate at one of the different locations.¹ The treatment group either watched or listened to televised debates, while the control group watched a non-political movie instead.² The studies include a pre-test and a post-test, which were surveyed before and right after exposure to the TV-debate. The self-recruited experiment-participants were selected based on a quota scheme.³ In 2009, the quota was considered to be fulfilled. In 2013, the quota for the experimental set-up was not entirely achieved, which leads to the results not being fully representative for the German population.⁴ In addition to the post-wave survey, the dataset includes a follow-up survey that was administered during the following weeks before the election. The 2009 study conducted the follow-up survey during one and a half weeks starting five days after the pre- and post-survey. The 2013 study followed up with a survey during two and a half weeks starting one day after the pre- and post-survey.

We focus on party voting intention for the CDU and SPD as the primary outcome to study the influence of televised debates on voting decisions. We construct two separate dummy variables for the voting intention for the CDU/CSU and the SPD.⁵ We further study two alternative outcomes: First, we will consider the rating scores for the parties that are measured on an eleven point scale.⁶ Second, as an intermediate step, we

¹In 2009, survey respondents participated in Landau/Pfalz, Stuttgart-Hohenheim, Mannheim, Kaiserslautern and Jena. In 2013, the experiment was conducted in Koblenz, Landau and Mainz. For an overview of the group assignment please see Appendix A.1.

²In both studies, the control group is considerably smaller than the treatment groups (please see Appendix A.1).

³Both experimental set-ups included six treatment groups which differed in the treatment-reception. The control group was located in Kaiserslautern in 2009 and in Mainz in 2013. In these two cities, the participants were randomly assigned to the treatment and control group. Comparability between the different groups tried to be achieved by paralleling the variables political interest, age, education, party identification. Appendix A.2 shows that the treatment and control group are more or less balanced with respect to a set of sociodemographic and political indicators. To accommodate concerns that small imbalances drive our findings, we condition on a set of observables in our later analysis.

⁴Please refer to Appendix A.3 for descriptive statistics of the full sample.

⁵In both studies the original survey question asks respondents which party they would give their party vote (Zweitstimme) to.

⁶For the rating scores, the survey includes separate questions for the CDU and CSU. We choose

consider the preferences not for the party but the candidate as a chancellor.⁷ We report on the results for these two additional outcome variables in the section “3.4 Additional Analysis”.

A candidate valence index serves as the first mediator of this analysis. Funk (1996) identifies competence, integrity and characteristic (sociable/empathetic) qualities as different dimensions that influence the perception of a candidate. Analogous to her classification, we build a valence index with three similar dimensions that consist each of two valence-items. The competence-dimension incorporates the items problem-solving and leadership skills, integrity is composed of trustworthiness- and honesty and the character-dimension contains the items charisma and sympathy.⁸ Each of the items is measured on a 5 point scale, creating a 30 points additive index.

The perceived policy distance acts as the second mediator of the analysis. We construct a distance measure of the two candidates to the respondent. The policy proxy consists of a welfare spending dimension regarding welfare services of the state versus less taxes.⁹ We use the quadratic distance between the candidate position and the respondent position as the mediator.

We conduct a causal mediation analysis to estimate a potential causal mediation effect of valence and policy on political behaviour. Imai et al. (2011, p.765) describe “a causal mechanism as a *process* in which a causal variable of interest, i.e. a treatment rating scores for the CDU, as Angela Merkel was the leader of that party.

⁷“Chancellor Preference” is a dummy variable to measure the popularity of Merkel and the challenger as the chancellor candidate.

⁸Wording (translated from German): She/he is able to solve political problems. She/he has great leadership skills. She/he is politically trustworthy. She/he is an honest person. She/he has a pleasing charisma. She/he is a sympathetic person.

⁹The wording of the eleven point scale reads (translated from German): “Some people want fewer taxes and transfers, even if this means less welfare-state spending. Others want more welfare state benefits, even if it means more taxes and transfers. In your opinion, what are the views of the two candidates for chancellorship? And what do you personally think of this question?”. The question was asked pre-treatment and post-treatment, which makes it possible to condition the analysis on perceived positions of the candidates and the respondent pre-treatment.

variable, influences an outcome. The identification of a causal pathway requires the specification of an intermediate variable or a mediator that lies on the causal pathway between treatment and outcome variables”. Following our theoretical discussion, we assume that televised debates influence the outcome variables through a change on the valence or perceived policy position of a front-runner. The aim of the mediation analysis “is to decompose the causal effect of a treatment into the indirect effect, which represents the hypothesized causal mechanism, and the direct effect which represents all other mechanisms” (Imai et al., 2011, p.768). We adopt the approach of Imai et al. (2011) to analyse the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME). For our analysis, the ACME describes how a change in the valence index as a function of following the debate alters the voting intention for a party.

To meet the central identification assumptions of “sequential ignorability” we condition our analysis on a set of pre-treatment variables, including socio-demographic variables (age, sex, education, employment), party identification (with the respective party), party voting intention prior to exposure of the televised debate, a difference in rating scores between the two parties as measured in the pre-treatment wave and the valence assessments of the party’s candidate in the prior wave. In particular, the lagged voting intention for the party and valence index make us confident that we can meet the “sequential ignorability” assumption. We further conduct a sensitivity analysis to examine the potential impact of unobserved pre-treatment confounder on our conclusions from the causal mediation analysis.¹⁰

¹⁰The sensitivity analysis, however, does neither inform nor prevent post-treatment confounding. This could be problematic if the debate changes perceived policy distance and this affects the valence evaluations of the candidates. A reassuring finding to address this concern is that our analysis reveals no clear effect of the debate on the perceived policy distance, which rules out this channel as a post-treatment confounder.

3 Results

Before presenting the results from the mediation analysis, we give an overview of the effect of the two debates on candidates' valence and parties' support to get a first impression of the changes appearing pre- and post-debate. The pre-test survey echoes the general verdict that, before the debate, Merkel led in electorate support over their social democratic challengers in both elections. In 2009, Merkel and the CDU were on average more popular than Steinmeier and the SPD in our sample of respondents. Before the debate, Merkel scored higher on the rating scale, with an average rating of 1.69 versus a rating of 0.32 of Steinmeier.¹¹ 57% of the respondents reported a chancellor preference for Merkel. The same holds for the parties: The SPD held, with a value of 0.54 on the 11 point scale, a slightly lower rating than the CDU with 0.77. In 2013, Merkel was more popular compared to Steinbrück in our sample (mean value of 1.07 versus 0.02), but the SPD held a higher rating score than the CDU (1.04 versus 0.41). A large share preferred Merkel as a chancellor 45%.

The data of the 2009 televised debate further highlights that Merkel scored higher on the valence dimension than Steinmeier. Figure 2 shows the valence index in the control and treatment group for the post and pre-treatment survey. The left panel shows that Merkel was perceived as more competent, experienced and sympathetic in both the treatment and control group. After the debate, Steinmeier could catch-up among the respondents who watched the debate, which is shown by the positive increase in the treatment group. However, he could not overcome Merkel's valence advantage in the treatment group, although Merkel exhibited no positive increase among the respondents who watched the debate. In the 2013 debate, Merkel had a small pre-

¹¹Please find the descriptive statistics of the candidate and party evaluation from the pre-treatment survey in Appendix A.4

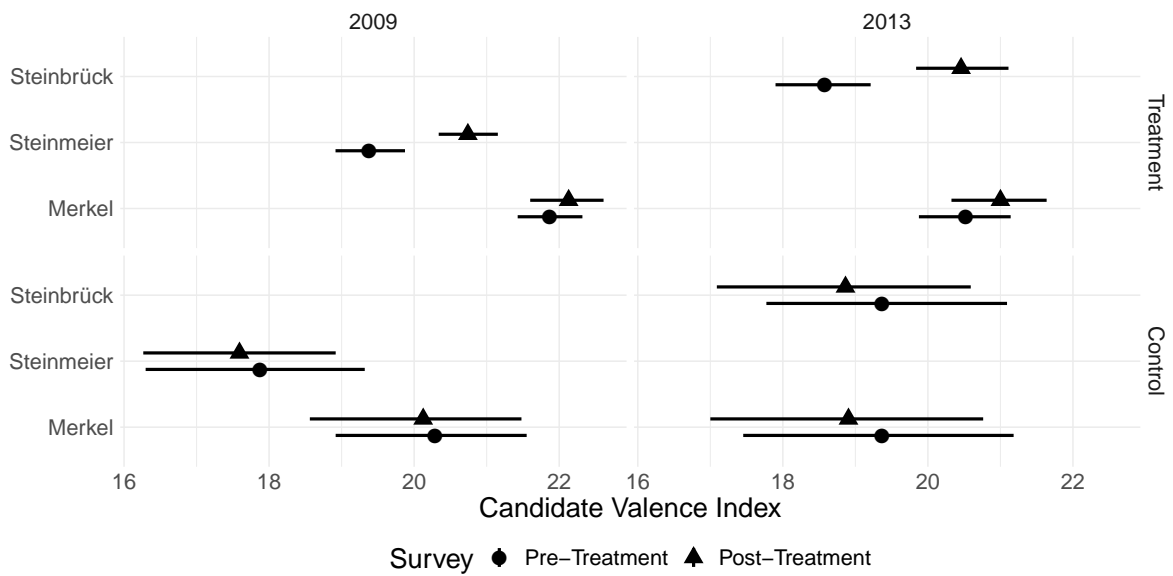


Figure 2: The effect of the televised debates on candidate valence in the German Federal Election of 2009 and 2013. The figure shows the valence index in the treatment and control group for the post and pre-treatment survey. In 2009, Merkel for the CDU/CSU and Steinmeier for the SPD. In 2013, Merkel for the CDU/CSU and Steinbrück for the SPD.

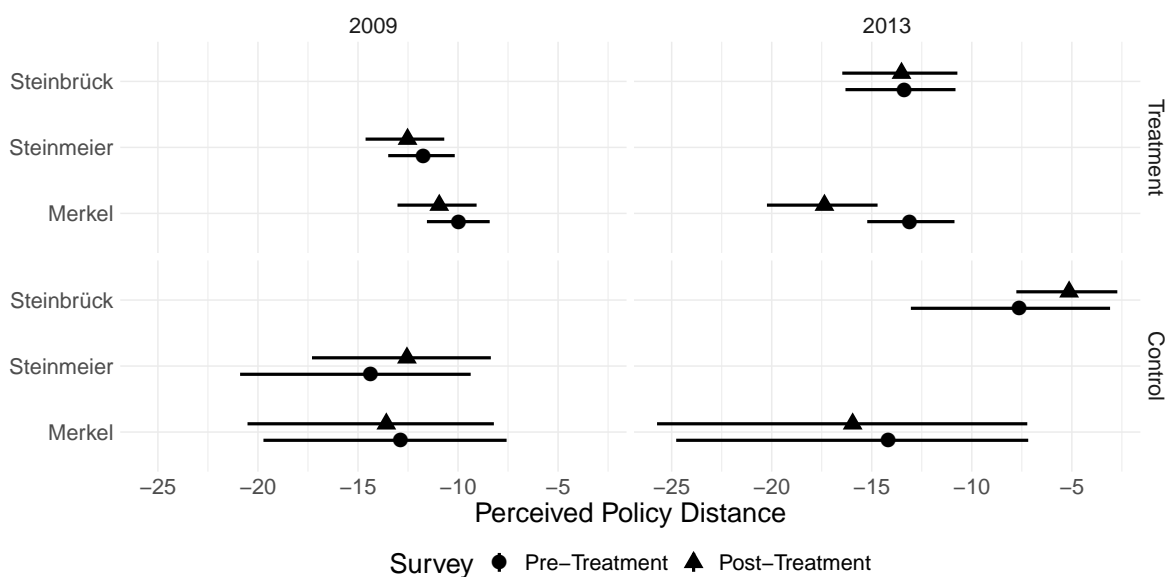


Figure 3: The effect of the televised debates on perceived policy distance in the German Federal Election of 2009 and 2013. The figure shows the perceived policy distance in the treatment and control group for the post and pre-treatment survey. In 2009, Merkel for the CDU/CSU and Steinmeier for the SPD. In 2013, Merkel for the CDU/CSU and Steinbrück for the SPD.

debate valence advantage over Steinbrück in the treatment group. The right panel of Figure 2 shows that while Steinbrück was able to improve his valence assessment in the treatment group, he was unable to overtake Merkel who's valence evaluation did not increase substantially in the treatment group. Both studies reveal that the televised debate affected in particular the perception of the social-democratic challengers in the treatment group. The comparison between treatment and control group further reveals some existing pre-treatment difference between the groups. E.g. both Steinmeier's and Merkel's valence evaluations are higher in the control compared to the treatment group. This makes it important to condition on previous levels of the outcome in the later analysis.

In terms of policy, the data demonstrates that watching the televised debate did not fundamentally impact the perceived policy distance between the candidate and the

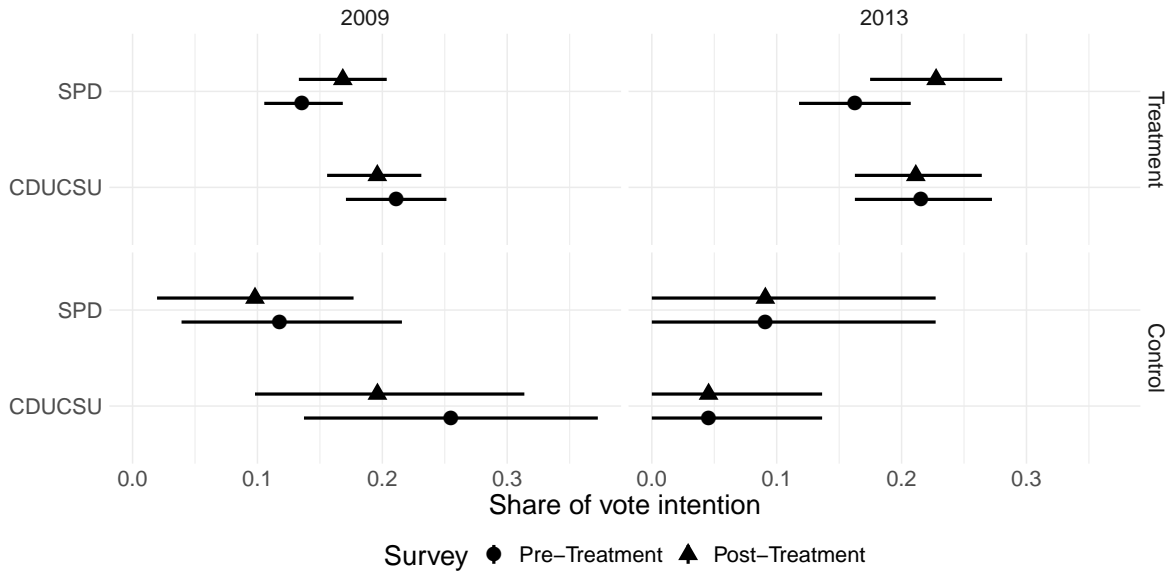


Figure 4: The effect of the televised debates on voting intention in the German Federal Election of 2009 and 2013. The figure shows the voting intention for the SPD and the CDU/CSU in the treatment and control group for the post and pre-treatment survey.

treatment group in most cases. The left panel of Figure 3 shows that in the 2009 debate, Steinmeier and Merkel were not able to shift the perceived distance between them and the respondents. While the perceived policy distance increased by small amount for both Steinmeier and Merkel in the treatment group, the changes are not substantial enough to reach clear conclusions. In 2013 (right panel), the distance remained approximately the same for Steinbrück in the treatment group. The perceived policy distance towards Merkel increased by 4.6 units in the treatment group. But the uncertainty around this provides no clear evidence for effects of policy. We again observe some discrepancies between the control and treatment group before the televised debate.

Do the debates have a direct influence on voter’s decision making? When comparing the share of respondents in the treatment group, we observe an increase in support for the SPD in both elections. Figure 4 shows an increase of 3% in 2009 and 6% in 2013 in our sample, however, the corresponding uncertainty around this are to wide to infer

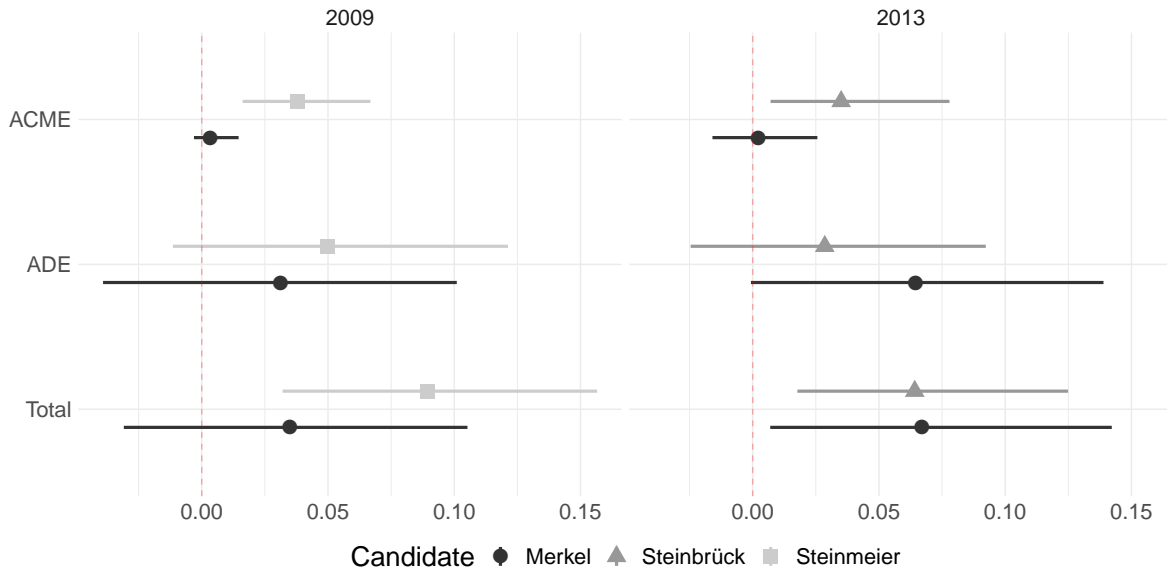


Figure 5: Results Mediation Analyses of the voting intention for the CDU/CSU and the SPD with valence as the mediator. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The candidate valence of Merkel is assumed to mediate the effect of the televised debate on the vote choice of the CDU/CSU and the candidate valence of Steinbrück and Steinmeier the vote choice of the SPD respectively.

clear effects. For the CDU/CSU, we observe no difference in the treatment group after the debate in 2009 and 2013. The comparison to the control reveals clear difference between control and treatment groups that we will need to consider by including pre-treatment variables in the mediation analysis. The descriptive results, nonetheless, give a first indication that increased valence perception of the social-democratic challengers in the treatment groups goes hand in hand with an increase in voting intention for the SPD.

3.1 Mediation Analysis

Figure 5 shows the central estimates from the causal mediation analysis. We report on the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the total effect. Of particular interest is the share of the total effect that is mediated by the valence assessment of the candidate. The figure plots the point estimates along the 95% robust confidence intervals that we obtain using bootstrapping.¹²

The results point out that the valence perception of a party’s candidate mediates the effect of the televised debate on voting intentions, particularly among the two challenger candidates in the 2009 and 2013 study. In the mediation analysis, there is a positive direct effect for the SPD voting intention that is with almost 9% quite sizable. The analysis further shows that Steinmeier’s valence evaluation mediates 30% of this total treatment effect. A small direct effect remains that captures alternative pathways through which the televised debate can impact voting intention. A slightly different effect emerges for the incumbent Merkel in 2009. Neither do we find a total effect of the treatment on the propensity to vote for the CDU/CSU, nor is the effect mediated by a change in her valence perception. We estimate a positive mediation effect, but the bootstrapped confidence intervals do include the null effect.¹³ Similar patterns arise for the 2013 election. Having watched the debate leads again to a 7% higher probability to vote for the SPD on average. 55% of this increase is explained by the changes in valence perceptions of Steinbrück. We again observe a remaining direct effect that is, however,

¹²To calculate the ADE and ACME, we estimate separate linear regression models for the mediator and outcome model and report on the numerical estimates in Appendix B. We further conducted the mediation analysis using logit-regressions for the binary voting outcomes. The conclusions stay the same.

¹³The literature is divided over the issue whether the total effect of the treatment needs to be significant and if the analysis should be continued in such case of non-significance. Contrary to Baron and Kenny (1986) and more recently Shrout and Bolger (2002), Imai et al. (2010) argue that a total effect is not necessary, as the mediation effect could still be different from zero when it counteracts the direct treatment effect.

not significantly different from zero. For Merkel and the CDU/CSU, we estimate a direct effect, but no average marginal component effect of the debate.¹⁴

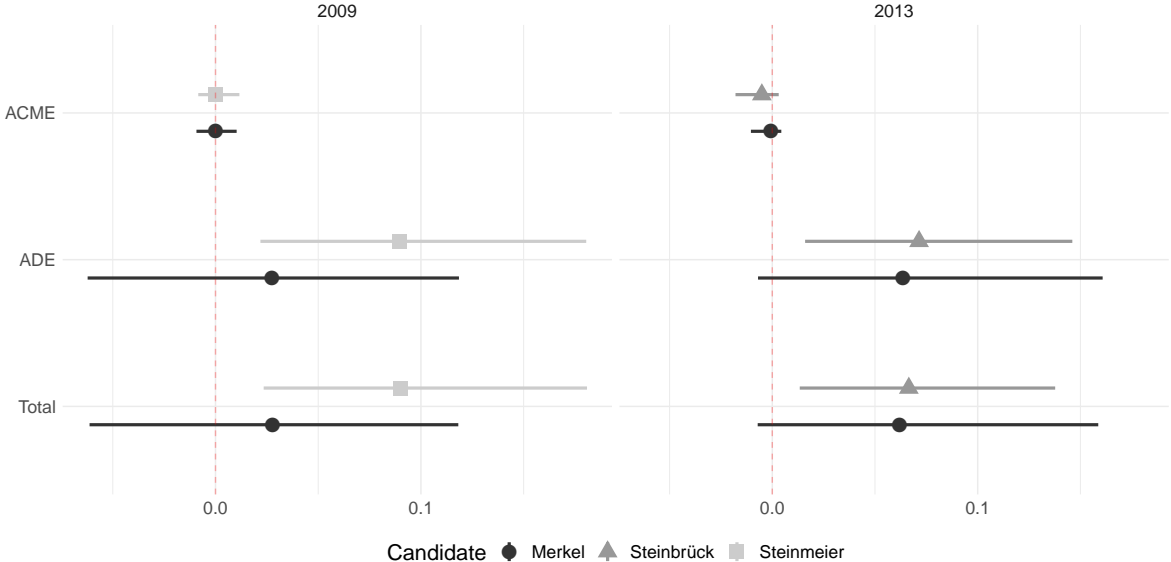


Figure 6: Mediation Analysis of the voting intention CDU/CSU and the SPD with perceived policy distance as the mediator. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The perceived policy distance between Merkel and the respondent is assumed to mediate the effect of the televised debate on the vote choice of the CDU/CSU and the perceived policy distance between the respondent and Steinbrück and Steinmeier on the vote choice of the SPD respectively.

The results show that the perceived policy distance between a front running candidate and the survey respondent does not mediate the effect of televised debates on vote choice in the 2009 and 2013 study. For none of the models, the perceived policy distance to the candidate mediates the effect of the televised debate. Only for Steinbrück in 2013, there is some indicative evidence that the distance negatively mediates the total effect, but the uncertainty around this estimate is too large to support this alternative causal

¹⁴The positive direct effect might be due to remaining imbalance between the control and treatment group. Appendix A.2 shows that in the 2013 study before the debate only 5% in the control group intend to vote for the CDU/CSU while 22% intend to vote for the CDU/CSU in the treatment group.

pathway. This further means that policy cannot work as a post-treatment confounder in our first analysis, which strengthens the robustness of our findings concerning candidate valence outlined above.

Overall, we find that Steinmeier in 2009 as well as Steinbrück in 2013 were able to help the SPD to increase their vote share among the participants that followed the televised debate. The mediation analysis further provides support for our first hypothesis that this increase is influenced by the valence evaluation of the candidates. Because the front-running candidates are perceived as more competent, experienced and sympathetic after the debate, voters consider voting for their party. The results, however, suggest that the perceived policy distance does not act as a mediator. With this, the second hypothesis has to be rejected. As discussed, the mediation effect of candidate valence applies to the challenger candidates Steinmeier and Steinbrück in the respective years, but not the incumbent Merkel. This implies that especially challenger candidates benefit from televised debates in terms of candidate valence rather than incumbents, which supports our third hypothesis.

To determine how sensitive our results are towards unmeasured confounders, we conduct sensitivity analyses for the valence mediator. The estimations suggest that the causal mediation effects can be interpreted cautiously (see Appendix B.4). The sensitivity analysis reveals that the average causal mediation effect for SPD voting intention is still guaranteed to be positive as long as an unobserved confounder does not explain a substantial proportion of previously unexplained variance in either the mediator or the outcome. In both cases, the ACME would change its sign if the product of these two proportions is greater than 0.04, which for example means that a confounder has to explain 20% in unexplained variance in both the chancellor preferences and candidate valence. Given that we control for prior valence and voting intention and



Figure 7: Marginal Effect of following the debate on Candidate Valence in Post-Survey and the Follow-up Survey. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for marginal effect from the mediation model. Candidate valence measured by the valence index. The analysis conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey.

explain already around 50% to 76% of the variance, we take this as an indication that our findings are robust against an unobserved confounder.

3.2 Long-Term Effect

A question that remains unanswered is how the short term effects identified in the section above help the challenger party on election day. The increased valence perception that occurred right after the televised debate would need to be long-lasting to positively affect the electoral decisions. Findings of televised debates in other political contexts suggest that debate effects are rather short- than long-lasting (see e.g. Miller and MacKuen, 1979; Geer, 1988; Wald and Lupfer, 1978). To address the question we re-analyse the data in the follow-up survey that was administered shortly before the election. The outcome of our mediation analysis is the intended vote choice in the

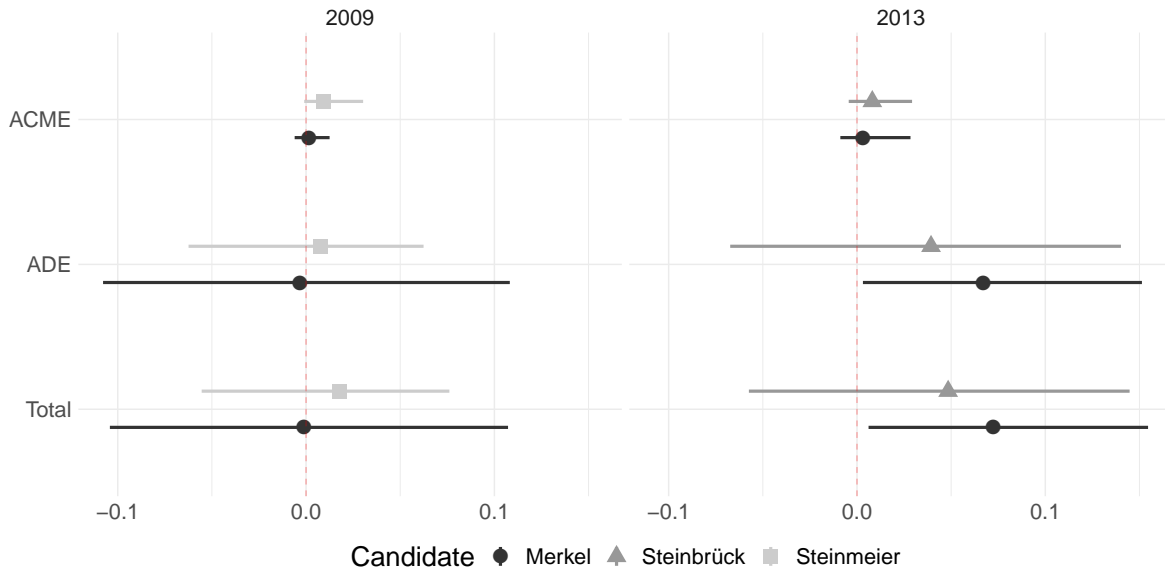


Figure 8: Results Mediation Analyses of the Voting Intention for the CDU/CSU and the SPD in the Follow-up Survey. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The mediator is candidate valence measured by the valence index. The analysis further conditions on the a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The candidate valence of Merkel is assumed to mediate the effect of the televised debate on the vote choice of the CDU/CSU and the candidate valence of Steinbrück and Steinmeier the vote choice of the SPD respectively.

follow-up survey and the mediator is the valence index calculated from the follow-up survey. We use the same pre-treatment control variables for the analysis.

The analysis, first of all, reveals a persistent effect of following the debate on the SPD’s front-runners. For both Steinmeier in 2009 and Steinbrück in 2013, we find a positive effect of the televised debate on the valence perceptions of the two candidates, as Figure 7 reveals. The effect decays in both election from around two scale points, right after the debate, to one scale point after two weeks, but the effect is still significantly different from a null effect. The decay of the effect might be little surprising, as the difference in information about the candidates between the control and treatment group

probably vanished quickly. After the experiment, respondents in the control group are exposed to the same media environment as respondents in the treatment group, making their information environments more similar. But the results show that the live exposure to the debate has a persisting effect above that. For Merkel, we find no clear difference in both elections between the respondents who followed the debate and those that did not.

While this persisting increase in the public image could carry-over to the election, the results of the mediation analysis reported in Figure 8 show that after two weeks little is left of the total effect of the televised debate and the mediation effect of candidate valence on voting intention for SPD. Neither does following the debate have a clear total effect for the two parties after two weeks, nor does candidate valence seem to mediate the effect. Although the point estimates of ACME for the social democratic candidates are still positive, the bootstrapped confidence intervals include zero. The same holds for the total effect: the effects are in the same direction but the uncertainty is too large. Taken together with the findings above, this implies that there only seem to exist short term effects of televised debates on voting intention that are mediated by a candidate's valence perception.

In sum, the overall findings have to be interpreted carefully: Televised debates have the ability to directly shape viewers perception of the leading candidates. The direct exposure to the debate does, however, not necessarily shape electorate fortunes of the parties. After two weeks, we observe neither a total effect of the debate nor a mediation effect of candidate valence.

3.3 Additional Analysis

To support our main finding, we conducted a set of additional analyses. First of all, we consider party ratings as an *alternative measurement of party preferences*. The results in Appendix E verify the robustness of our main finding when using party rating scores as an alternative outcome measure. Directly after the televised debate, viewers increased their party rating for the SPD by a 0.35 scale points on the 11 point scale. A large portion of this increase is due to the greater valence evaluation of Steinmeier. In 2013, the increase in rating scores when watching the debate is with almost one scale point even larger. Again a fair portion of this effect is explained by an increase of Steinbrück's valence index. Similar to the main findings, there is no effect on CDU/CSU support that is mediated by Merkel's valence. The sensitivity analysis (Appendix E.4) further discloses that the effects on party rating are more stable than the effects we find on voting intention.

Second, as the setting of the experiment takes place in a *multi-party system*, examining each candidate and their corresponding party individually seems to be more appropriate than using relative ratings and difference measurements from the two candidates. The decision between multiple parties implies that decision utilities are not zero sum, when we only look at two of the potential parties. We still report on the results when using difference in rating scores of the parties and difference in valence index between the candidates as a mediator in Appendix F. The results indicate that valence mediates the the effect for the 2009 study, but does not in the 2013 study. We find no mediation effect of the difference in perceived policy distance.

Third, an *intermediate step* between the effect of televised debates on party preferences is the *preference of the candidate as a chancellor*. We analyse in how-far valence characteristics of the candidate mediate the chancellor preferences. The results mirror

the main findings: in particular for the social-democratic challengers, valence mediates the positive effect that following the televised debate had on the chancellor preferences. The mediator explains a large portion of this effect and is not sensitive to unobserved confounders, as Appendix G reports. This strengthens a key mechanism of our argument that the evaluation of the leading candidates can help the party because voters care about the qualities of the front-runners and elect the party to help him or her into office.

Fourth, as discussed above, respondents in the treatment group either *watched or listened to the debate*. When we exclude respondents that only listened to the debate the results are essentially the same for the the mediation effects of valence on vote choice for Steinmeier. For Steinbrück in the 2013 debate, the estimate of the ACME is comparable but due to the decreased sample size not precisely enough estimated. We still find clear evidence for the mediation effects when relying on rating scores as the outcome in both elections (see Appendix H).

4 Discussion

What role do televised debates play in legislative election campaigns? In this article, we argue that the main channel through which televised debates can make a difference for party success on election day is the valence evaluation of their leading candidate. When candidates manage to stand out as more competent and sympathetic as their competitors, they can theoretically improve a party's prospect. Empirically, we analyse two experiments of televised debates during the German Federal Elections of 2009 and 2013. A causal mediation analysis reveals that the impact of the debate is mediated by the perception of a candidates' valence traits, but not by the perceived policy distance. These results especially hold for challenger candidates who are not as well-known to

the public eye as the incumbents. These effects are, however, not long-lasting enough to provide substantial evidence for the direct impact of following the televised debates on voting decisions on election day.

Our study clarifies the role of televised debates in parliamentary elections. Televised debates can serve an important function in legislative election campaigns. Front-running candidates can benefit from televised debates by improving their public perception, making them appear more competent, experienced and sympathetic. Our research thereby highlights the importance of valence politics in understanding the role of campaign events. Debates can help voters to judge if the party candidates are fit for office and help them to elect suitable personal for the new government. This is particularly relevant to the personalisation of politics. In recent years, parties have put much attention on the primary candidates in election campaigns and more attention to particular campaign events centred around the front-running candidates. Our findings suggest, however, that televised debates would need to fundamentally alter the evaluation of the candidates to make a strategy from a pure valence perspective pay-off on election day.

Although our results suggest that mediation effects seem to disappear, the timing of the debate could matter in this regard. In countries, where televised debates are held only a few days before election, the mediation effects of valence might be substantial enough to make a difference on the electoral outcome. An additional context worth studying are elections that include multiple debates during the campaign. It might be possible that candidates could build on their previous debate performance and more substantial and long-lasting mediation effects might be detected. Televised debates can open up other mechanisms that can influence electoral outcomes. An additional mechanism that has not been studied in this article is the acquisition of general knowledge about the campaign during the debates. It could be a crucial factor in explaining

how debates influence voting decisions in parliamentary elections, when the increased knowledge mobilizes different segments of the electorate.

We would like to openly discuss a few restrictions about the empirical evidence that we present in our study. First, there are alternative reasons why we do not find long-term effects. Respondents who are not exposed to the televised debates can be exposed to the media coverage about the debate during the rest of the campaign. In this way, the difference between control and treatment group might vanish over time as both react to the media coverage. Secondly, the elections we study might be unlikely cases to find substantial effects. Our evidence suggests that while in both debates the challengers candidate could catch up, the incumbents' overall perception was not harmed. This might not be enough for a clear long-term vote swing. Instead, it seems that all candidates proved to be qualified future chancellors. Third, while the experimental research design improved on prior survey evidence, the small control group in both studies impairs the power to detect small and modest changes in voter preferences. More powerful research designs might be able to identify smaller changes in electoral support over time.

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Part Appendix

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A Research Design

A.1 Assignment to Treatment and Control Group

Location	Exp. Setting	Pretest	Posttest I	Posttest II
Stuttgart-Hohenheim	Treatment	99	99	94
Jena	Treatment	75	74	75
Mannheim	Treatment	89	85	86
Landau	Treatment	77	71	69
Kaiserslauterns	Treatment	58	54	54
Kaiserslautern	Control	51	51	51
Total		449	434	428

Table 1: Assignment to Treatment and Control Group in the GLES 2009

The German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) included 449 participants in the year 2009 (see Table 1). The study was conducted in five different locations in Germany: Landau/Pfalz, Stuttgart-Hohenheim, Mannheim, Kaiserslautern and Jena. The treatment group consisted of 398 participants, who were assigned to watch the televised debate between Merkel and Steinmeier. The control group included 51 participants, who watched the non-political movie “Vicky Cristina Barcelona” in Kaiserslautern.

Location	Exp. Setting	Pretest	Posttest I	Posttest II
Landau	Treatment	44	44	43
Koblenz	Treatment	77	77	82
Mainz	Treatment	121	120	121
Mainz	Control	22	22	22
Total		264	263	268

Table 2: Assignment to Treatment and Control Group in the GLES 2013

Table 2 shows that 268 people participated in the GLES of 2013. The study was carried out in Landau, Koblenz and Mainz. The treatment group consisted of 247 participants, who watched the televised debate between Merkel and Steinbrück. The control group included 22 participants, who watched the non-political movie “Vicky Cristina Barcelona” in Mainz.

Depending on the location, the treatment group received slightly different forms of the treatment. While all of the treatment groups were exposed to audio-visual stimuli, some groups were able to use a so-called Real-Time-Response-Measurement (RTR) to directly assess the debate participants during the televised debate. The data from the RTR-measurements were not considered for the analyses, but only the surveys taken

before and after the treatment exposure. Other treatment groups watched a special broadcast that discussed the priorly watched debate. In the 2013 study, an additional treatment condition was introduced. One experimental group in Mainz was allowed to communicate with each other during the debate.

A.2 Randomization

	Control	Treatment
Pre Vote CDU/CSU	0.25	0.21
Pre Vote SPD	0.12	0.14
Pre PID SPD	0.14	0.22
Pre PID CDU/CSU	0.20	0.27
Pre Age	31.20	39.58
Pre Female	0.41	0.50
Pre Educ. Abitur	0.61	0.55
Pre Political Int.	3.43	3.50
Pre Election Int.	3.33	3.61
Pre Chanc. Pref. Merkel	0.52	0.58
Pre Pensionist	0.02	0.16
Pre Rat. Diff. Candidates	0.31	0.22

Table 3: Conditional Means over Treatment Groups prior to Televised Debate in 2009

	Control	Treatment
Pre Vote CDU/CSU	0.05	0.22
Pre Vote SPD	0.09	0.16
Pre PID SPD	0.14	0.28
Pre PID CDU/CSU	0.19	0.23
Pre Age	39.09	40.33
Pre Female	0.55	0.49
Pre Educ. Abitur	0.86	0.70
Pre Political Int.	3.59	3.80
Pre Election Int.	3.27	3.59
Pre Chanc. Pref. Merkel	0.36	0.46
Pre Pensionist	0.10	0.20
Pre Rat. Diff. Candidates	-0.73	-0.65

Table 4: Conditional Means over Treatment Groups prior to Televised Debate in 2013

A.3 Descriptive Statistics of Full Sample

	Mean	SD	N
Age	38.62	16.63	449
Female	0.49	0.50	449
Full Employment	0.31	0.46	449
University	0.57	0.50	449
Vote CDU/CSU	0.22	0.41	449
Vote SPD	0.13	0.34	449

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Sociodemographics and Vote Choice prior to Televised Debate in 2009

	Mean	SD	N
Age	40.22	18.16	268
Female	0.49	0.50	268
Full Employment	0.25	0.43	268
University	0.93	0.26	268
Vote CDU/CSU	0.20	0.40	268
Vote SPD	0.16	0.36	268

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Sociodemographics and Vote Choice prior to Televised Debate in 2013

A.4 Descriptive Statistics of Candidate and Party Evaluation

	Max	Mean	Median	Min	SD
Chanc. Pref Merkel	1.00	0.57	1.00	0.00	0.49
Vote CDU/CSU	1.00	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.41
Vote SPD	1.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.34
PID SPD	1.00	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.44
PID CDU/CSU	1.00	0.21	0.00	0.00	0.41
Rat. CDU	5.00	0.77	2.00	-5.00	2.99
Rat. Merkel	5.00	1.69	3.00	-5.00	2.92
Rat. SPD	5.00	0.54	1.00	-5.00	2.56
Rat. Steinm	5.00	0.32	1.00	-5.00	2.46

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Candidate and Party Evaluation prior to Televised Debate in 2009

	Max	Mean	Median	Min	SD
Chanc. Pref Merkel	1.00	0.45	0.00	0.00	0.50
Vote CDU/CSU	1.00	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.40
Vote SPD	1.00	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.36
PID SPD	1.00	0.23	0.00	0.00	0.42
PID CDU/CSU	1.00	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.44
Rat. CDU	5.00	0.41	1.00	-5.00	3.06
Rat. Merkel	5.00	1.07	2.00	-5.00	3.09
Rat. SPD	5.00	1.04	2.00	-5.00	2.50
Rat. Steinb.	5.00	0.02	0.00	-5.00	2.63

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Candidate and Party Evaluation prior to Televised Debate in 2013

B Main Analysis Candidate Valence as a Mediator

B.1 Results Mediation Analysis

	SPD 2009	CDU/CSU 2009	SPD 2013	CDU/CSU 2013
ACME	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00
	0.00	0.30	0.01	0.72
ADE	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.07
	0.13	0.37	0.29	0.05
Total Effect	0.09	0.04	0.07	0.07
	0.00	0.32	0.01	0.04
Proportion Mediated	0.43	0.12	0.56	0.05
	0.00	0.54	0.02	0.72
N	353	373	235	240

Table 9: Results from Mediation Analysis on Vote Intention in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is candidate valence. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

B.2 Regression Results for 2009

	Val. Steinm.	Vote SPD	Val. Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	2.06 (0.43)	0.05 (0.04)	0.59 (0.40)	0.03 (0.05)
Cand. Valence		0.02 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.72 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.87 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)
Party Vote Pre	0.43 (0.51)	0.67 (0.05)	0.29 (0.38)	0.49 (0.05)
Party ID Pre	-0.53 (0.45)	0.12 (0.05)	0.20 (0.39)	0.17 (0.05)
Cand. Rat. diff. Pre	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.11 (0.04)	0.01 (0.01)
Female	-0.25 (0.28)	0.01 (0.03)	0.57 (0.26)	-0.03 (0.03)
Age	0.02 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.50 (0.31)	0.01 (0.03)	0.13 (0.28)	-0.00 (0.03)
Univ.	0.28 (0.28)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.17 (0.26)	0.05 (0.03)
R ²	0.66	0.55	0.76	0.48
Adj. R ²	0.65	0.54	0.75	0.47
Num. obs.	353	353	373	373
RMSE	2.60	0.26	2.46	0.29

Table 10: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009

B.3 Regression Results for 2013

	Val. Steinb.	Vote SPD	Val. Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	2.25 (0.63)	0.03 (0.05)	1.39 (0.63)	0.07 (0.05)
Cand. Valence		0.02 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.74 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.71 (0.04)	0.00 (0.01)
Party Vote Pre	0.17 (0.63)	0.59 (0.05)	0.52 (0.61)	0.51 (0.05)
Party ID Pre	-0.54 (0.55)	0.28 (0.05)	-0.14 (0.58)	0.30 (0.05)
Cand. Rat. diff. Pre	-0.19 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.20 (0.06)	0.01 (0.00)
Female	-0.18 (0.36)	0.02 (0.03)	0.44 (0.36)	0.02 (0.03)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.03 (0.41)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.80 (0.39)	-0.03 (0.03)
Univ.	-0.39 (0.72)	0.06 (0.06)	0.40 (0.75)	0.04 (0.06)
R ²	0.67	0.72	0.71	0.70
Adj. R ²	0.66	0.70	0.69	0.68
Num. obs.	235	235	240	240
RMSE	2.73	0.23	2.68	0.23

Table 11: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2013

B.4 Sensitivity Analysis

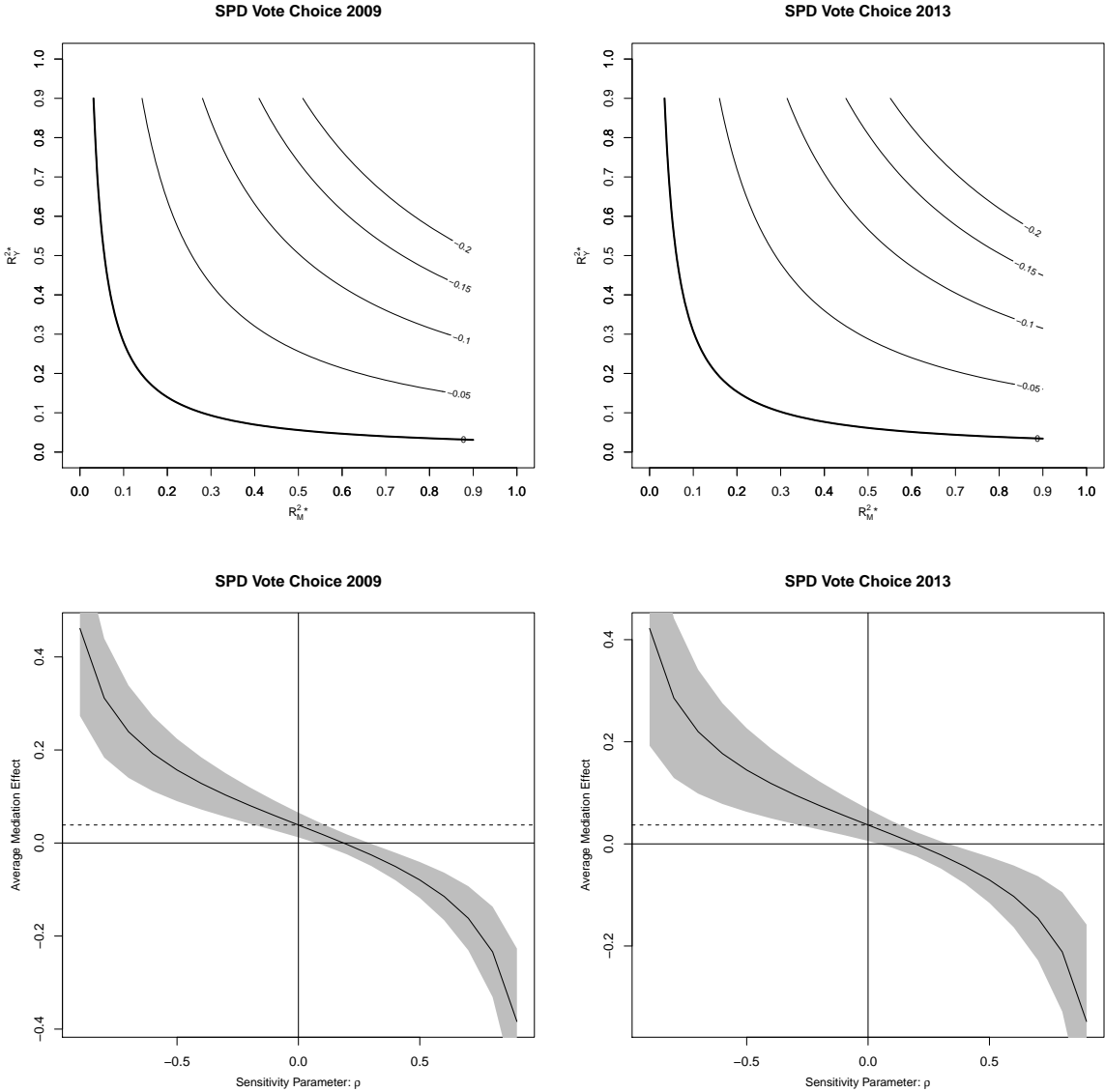


Figure 9: Sensitivity Analysis of Mediation Analysis Main Effect

C Main Analysis Perceived Policy Distance as a Mediator

C.1 Results Perceived Policy Distance as a Mediator

	SPD 2009	CDU/CSU 2009	SPD 2013	CDU/CSU 2013
ACME	0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.00
	0.82	0.99	0.13	0.59
ADE	0.09	0.03	0.07	0.07
	0.00	0.48	0.00	0.04
Total Effect	0.09	0.03	0.07	0.07
	0.00	0.47	0.00	0.05
Proportion Mediated	0.01	0.00	-0.08	-0.02
	0.82	0.99	0.13	0.60
N	348	367	224	234

Table 12: Results from Mediation Analysis on Vote Intention in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is perceived policy distance. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

C.2 Regression Results for 2009

	Policy Steinm.	Vote SPD	Policy Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	-0.77 (2.50)	0.09 (0.05)	0.05 (2.51)	0.03 (0.05)
Cand. Dist		-0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)
Cand. Dist. Pre	0.54 (0.05)	0.00 (0.00)	0.67 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.00)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.64 (0.19)	0.00 (0.00)	0.35 (0.19)	0.00 (0.00)
Party Vote Pre	3.52 (2.84)	0.70 (0.05)	-0.20 (2.37)	0.55 (0.05)
Party ID Pre	-1.36 (2.47)	0.14 (0.05)	2.97 (2.24)	0.17 (0.04)
Female	-0.51 (1.60)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.88 (1.60)	-0.04 (0.03)
Age	-0.11 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.03 (0.05)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.01 (1.69)	-0.01 (0.03)	3.07 (1.73)	-0.01 (0.03)
Univ.	-2.19 (1.60)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.84 (1.63)	0.05 (0.03)
R ²	0.33	0.55	0.39	0.50
Adj. R ²	0.31	0.53	0.38	0.48
Num. obs.	348	348	367	367
RMSE	14.50	0.26	15.10	0.29

Table 13: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009

C.3 Regression Results for 2013

	Policy Steinb.	Vote SPD	Policy Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	-5.45 (3.49)	0.07 (0.05)	-2.79 (4.21)	0.07 (0.05)
Cand. Dist		0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)
Cand. Dist. Pre	0.70 (0.06)	0.00 (0.00)	0.75 (0.07)	0.00 (0.00)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.14 (0.25)	0.01 (0.00)	0.07 (0.30)	0.00 (0.00)
Party Vote Pre	1.17 (3.63)	0.62 (0.06)	3.27 (4.05)	0.52 (0.05)
Party ID Pre	5.02 (2.96)	0.28 (0.05)	6.72 (3.77)	0.32 (0.05)
Female	2.44 (2.07)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.92 (2.45)	0.03 (0.03)
Age	0.01 (0.06)	0.00 (0.00)	0.12 (0.07)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	1.18 (2.31)	0.05 (0.04)	-1.57 (2.74)	-0.04 (0.03)
Univ.	-6.31 (3.94)	0.06 (0.06)	9.32 (4.80)	0.03 (0.06)
R ²	0.49	0.70	0.41	0.69
Adj. R ²	0.47	0.69	0.39	0.68
Num. obs.	224	224	234	234
RMSE	14.93	0.23	18.18	0.23

Table 14: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2013

D Long Term Effect

D.1 Results Mediation Analysis

	SPD 2009	CDU/CSU 2009	SPD 2013	CDU/CSU 2013
ACME	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
	0.09	0.59	0.21	0.52
ADE	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.07
	0.82	0.95	0.45	0.04
Total Effect	0.02	0.00	0.05	0.07
	0.61	0.98	0.35	0.03
Proportion Mediated	0.64	0.63	0.11	0.07
	0.64	0.97	0.47	0.52
N	348	359	238	239

Table 15: Results from Mediation Analysis on Vote Intention in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is candidate valence. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

D.2 Regression Results for 2009

	Val. Steinm.	Vote SPD	Val. Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	1.19 (0.50)	0.01 (0.04)	0.30 (0.47)	0.00 (0.04)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.80 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.84 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.01)
Party Vote Pre	0.13 (0.56)	0.74 (0.05)	-0.15 (0.44)	0.60 (0.04)
Party ID Pre	-0.16 (0.47)	0.11 (0.04)	1.25 (0.42)	0.19 (0.04)
Female	-0.41 (0.32)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.31)	0.01 (0.03)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.27 (0.34)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.18 (0.33)	-0.01 (0.03)
Univ.	0.45 (0.32)	0.01 (0.03)	0.58 (0.31)	0.02 (0.03)
R ²	0.64	0.57	0.69	0.60
Adj. R ²	0.63	0.56	0.68	0.59
Num. obs.	348	348	359	359
RMSE	2.91	0.25	2.84	0.27

Table 16: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009.

D.3 Regression Results for 2013

	Val. Steinb.	Vote SPD	Val. Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	1.41 (0.67)	0.04 (0.05)	0.88 (0.66)	0.07 (0.06)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.82 (0.05)	0.00 (0.01)	0.72 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.01)
Party Vote Pre	0.27 (0.65)	0.59 (0.05)	1.83 (0.63)	0.46 (0.06)
Party ID Pre	0.03 (0.55)	0.35 (0.04)	0.43 (0.58)	0.37 (0.05)
Female	0.44 (0.38)	-0.00 (0.03)	0.47 (0.38)	-0.02 (0.03)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	0.30 (0.43)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.83 (0.42)	-0.03 (0.04)
Univ.	0.55 (0.71)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.73)	0.03 (0.06)
R ²	0.66	0.74	0.68	0.64
Adj. R ²	0.65	0.73	0.66	0.62
Num. obs.	238	238	239	239
RMSE	2.87	0.22	2.86	0.25

Table 17: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2013

E Party Rating Scores

E.1 Results Mediation Analysis

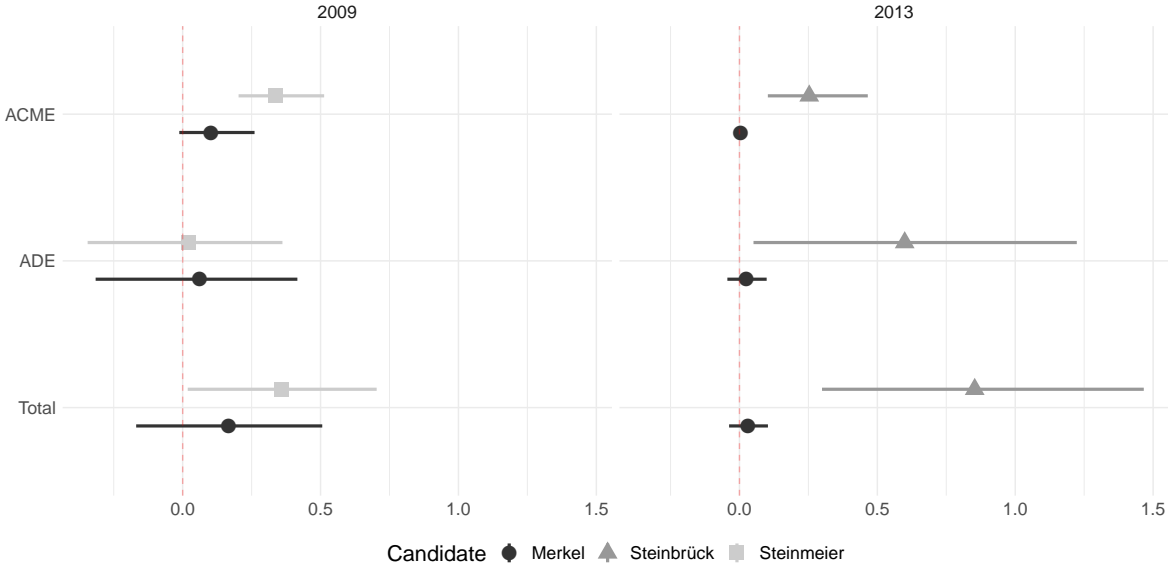


Figure 10: Mediation Analysis for Party Rating Scores. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The candidate valence of Merkel is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the party rating of the CDU. The candidate valence of Steinbrück and Steinmeier is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the party ratings for the SPD respectively.

	SPD 2009	CDU 2009	SPD 2013	CDU 2013
ACME	0.34	0.11	0.26	0.01
	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.23
ADE	0.02	0.06	0.61	0.03
	0.88	0.71	0.03	0.49
Total Effect	0.36	0.17	0.87	0.03
	0.04	0.28	0.00	0.39
Proportion Mediated	0.95	0.65	0.30	0.15
	0.04	0.33	0.00	0.54
N	352	374	235	364

Table 18: Results from Mediation Analysis on Party Rating Scores in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is candidate valence. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

E.2 Regression Results for 2009

	Val. Steinm.	Vote SPD	Val. Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	2.03 (0.43)	0.02 (0.22)	0.57 (0.39)	0.06 (0.22)
Cand. Valence		0.17 (0.03)		0.19 (0.03)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.70 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.03)	0.83 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.03)
Party Vote Pre	0.50 (0.51)	-0.04 (0.25)	0.30 (0.38)	0.09 (0.21)
Party ID Pre	-0.63 (0.43)	0.50 (0.21)	-0.01 (0.37)	0.52 (0.21)
Female	-0.33 (0.29)	0.17 (0.14)	0.58 (0.25)	0.06 (0.14)
Age	0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.54 (0.30)	-0.23 (0.15)	0.14 (0.27)	0.18 (0.15)
Univ.	0.24 (0.28)	-0.07 (0.14)	0.05 (0.26)	0.17 (0.15)
R ²	0.67	0.73	0.77	0.81
Adj. R ²	0.66	0.72	0.77	0.81
Num. obs.	352	352	374	374
RMSE	2.60	1.28	2.41	1.36

Table 19: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009

E.3 Regression Results for 2013

	Val. Steinb.	Vote SPD	Val. Merkel	Vote CDU/CSU
Treatment	2.16 (0.64)	0.61 (0.27)	0.45 (0.41)	0.03 (0.05)
Cand. Valence		0.12 (0.03)		0.01 (0.01)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.75 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.89 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)
Party Vote Pre	0.23 (0.64)	0.23 (0.26)	0.28 (0.40)	0.48 (0.05)
Party ID Pre	-0.25 (0.56)	-0.08 (0.23)	0.64 (0.38)	0.21 (0.04)
Female	-0.21 (0.37)	0.14 (0.15)	0.50 (0.27)	-0.04 (0.03)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.05 (0.42)	0.26 (0.17)	0.27 (0.29)	0.00 (0.03)
Univ.	-0.65 (0.73)	-0.69 (0.30)	0.12 (0.27)	0.05 (0.03)
R ²	0.66	0.79	0.75	0.47
Adj. R ²	0.64	0.78	0.75	0.46
Num. obs.	235	235	364	364
RMSE	2.78	1.12	2.52	0.29

Table 20: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2013

E.4 Sensitivity Analysis

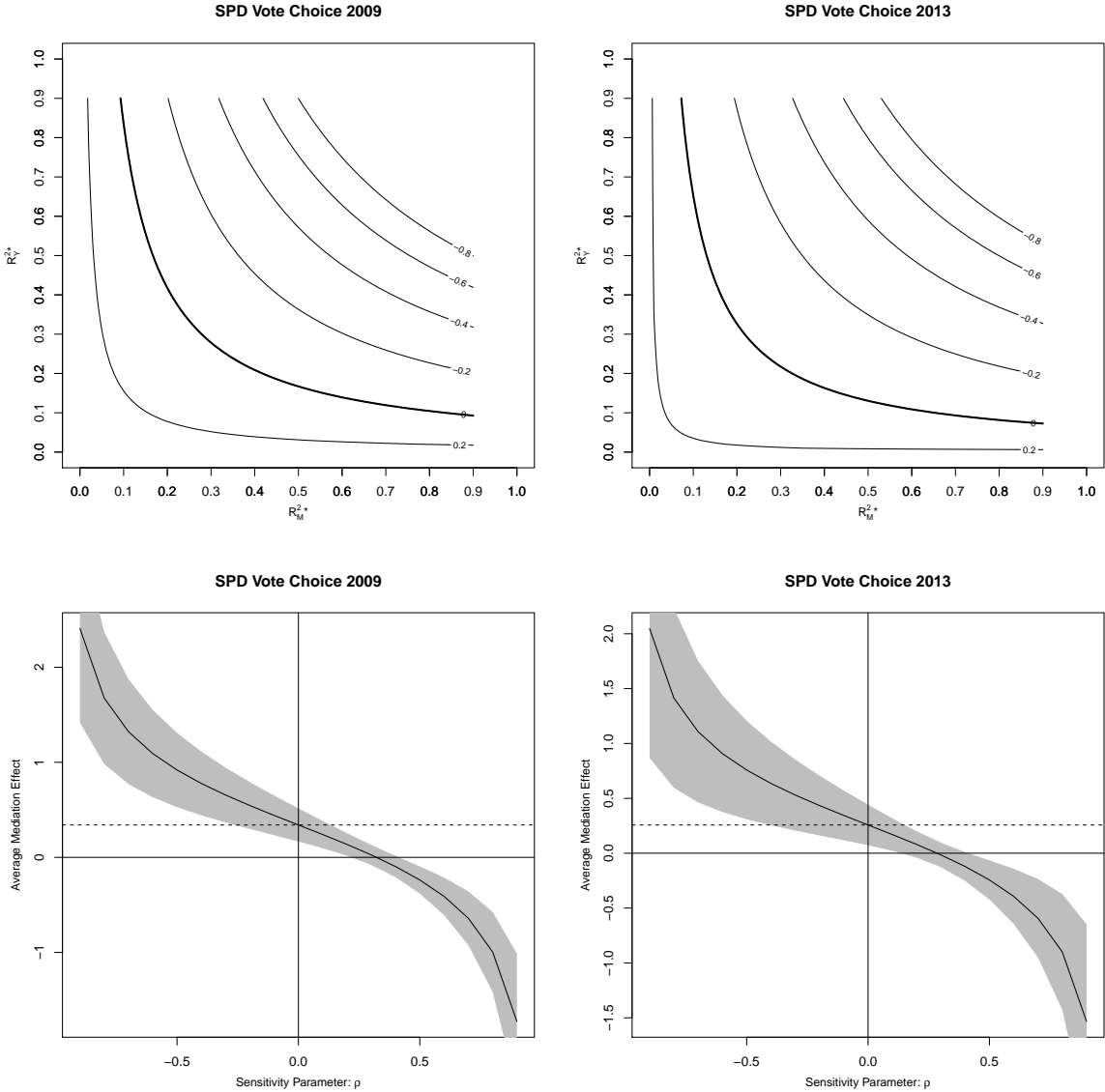


Figure 11: Sensitivity Analysis of Mediation Analysis for Party Rating Scores

F Rating Score Difference

F.1 Results Mediation Analysis Difference Candidate Valence

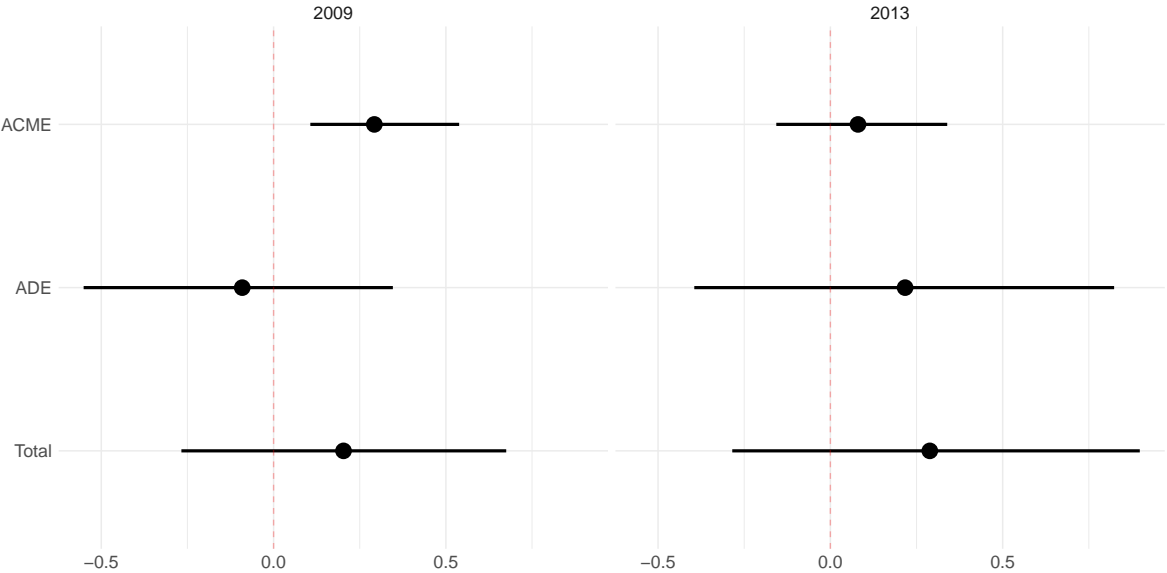


Figure 12: Mediation Analysis for Party Rating Scores Difference. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The difference on the candidate valence indices of the two candidates of the corresponding debate is the mediator.

	Party Rat. Diff. 2009	Party Rat. Diff. 2013
ACME	0.30	0.09
	0.00	0.47
ADE	-0.10	0.20
	0.68	0.51
Total Effect	0.20	0.29
	0.43	0.34
Proportion Mediated	0.89	0.30
	0.43	0.62
N	342	232

Table 21: Results from Mediation Analysis on Difference in Party Rating Scores in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is the difference on the candidate valence indices from the incumbent and the challenger of the corresponding debate. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

F.2 Regression Results Difference Candidate Valence

	Party Rat Diff. 09	Cand. Val. Diff. 09	Party Rat Diff. 13	Cand. Val. Diff. 13
Treatment	-0.09 (0.31)	1.33 (0.65)	0.20 (0.32)	0.65 (0.89)
Party Rating Diff (Pre)	0.71 (0.04)	0.20 (0.08)	0.77 (0.03)	0.37 (0.09)
Cand. Valence Diff. (Post)	0.23 (0.03)		0.13 (0.02)	
Cand. Valence Diff. (Pre)	-0.07 (0.03)	0.73 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.02)	0.67 (0.05)
Party Vote Pre	0.24 (0.32)	0.26 (0.68)	0.45 (0.27)	0.72 (0.76)
Party ID Pre	-0.44 (0.27)	-0.72 (0.57)	-0.38 (0.25)	-0.91 (0.72)
Female	0.19 (0.20)	-0.97 (0.43)	-0.05 (0.18)	-0.72 (0.51)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Full Employ.	-0.42 (0.22)	-0.62 (0.46)	0.10 (0.20)	0.82 (0.56)
Univ.	-0.29 (0.20)	0.18 (0.42)	-0.51 (0.37)	-0.82 (1.06)
R ²	0.78	0.65	0.89	0.74
Adj. R ²	0.78	0.64	0.89	0.73
Num. obs.	342	342	232	232
RMSE	1.79	3.83	1.33	3.75

Table 22: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009 and 2013 Rating Difference and Valence Difference

F.3 Results Mediation Analysis Difference Perceived Policy Distance

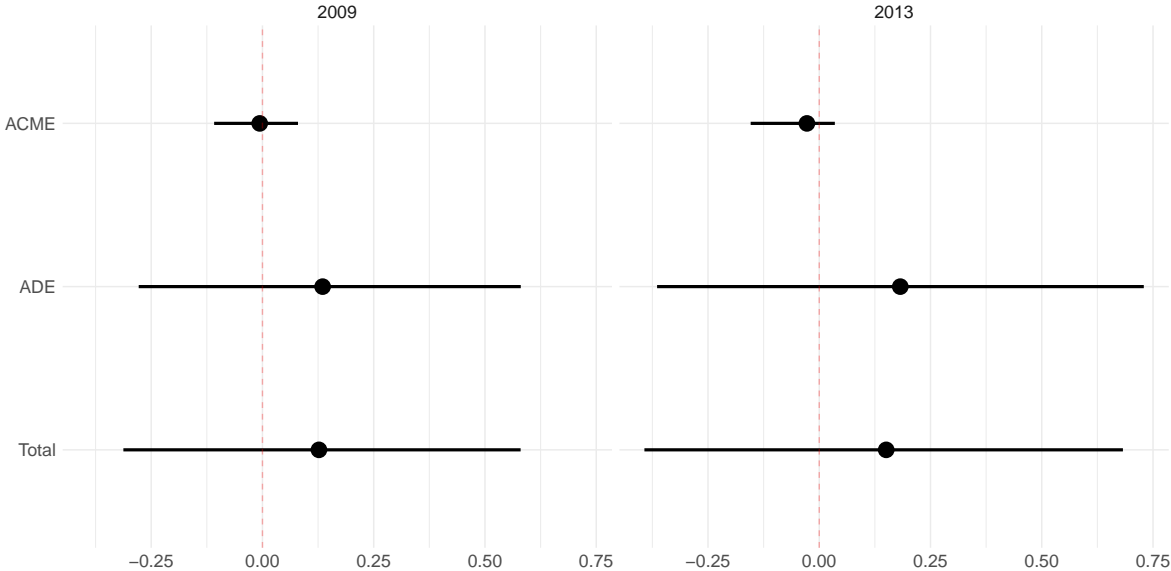


Figure 13: Mediation Analysis for Party Rating Scores Difference. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The difference in perceived policy distance is the mediator.

	Party Rat. Diff. 2009	Party Rat. Diff.2013
ACME	-0.01	-0.03
	0.78	0.39
ADE	0.14	0.20
	0.56	0.46
Total Effect	0.13	0.17
	0.58	0.54
Proportion Mediated	0.01	-0.19
	0.95	0.71
N	365	230

Table 23: Results from Mediation Analysis on Difference in Party Rating Scores in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is the difference in perceived policy distance. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

F.4 Regression Results Difference Perceived Policy Distance

	Party Rat Diff. 09	Cand. Policy Diff. 09	Party Rat Diff. 13	Cand. Policy Diff. 13
Treatment	0.14 (0.32)	-0.81 (3.07)	0.20 (0.33)	-3.12 (5.82)
Party Rating Diff (Pre)	0.78 (0.04)	1.68 (0.35)	0.84 (0.03)	2.18 (0.58)
Cand. Policy Diff. (Post)	0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.00)	
Cand. Policy Diff. (Pre)			-0.01 (0.00)	0.63 (0.07)
Party Vote Pre	0.64 (0.32)	0.04 (3.14)	0.71 (0.29)	2.69 (5.14)
Party ID Pre	-0.63 (0.27)	-3.54 (2.61)	-0.46 (0.28)	-8.11 (4.85)
Female	-0.17 (0.20)	-2.89 (1.98)	-0.26 (0.19)	1.83 (3.40)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.10 (0.10)
Full Employ.	-0.41 (0.22)	-0.49 (2.14)	0.23 (0.22)	2.61 (3.83)
Univ.	-0.38 (0.21)	-1.65 (2.01)	-0.65 (0.38)	-11.87 (6.67)
R ²	0.75	0.46	0.88	0.51
Adj. R ²	0.74	0.44	0.87	0.49
Num. obs.	365	365	230	230
RMSE	1.92	18.68	1.44	25.26

Table 24: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009 and 2013 Rating Difference and Policy Difference

G Chancellor Preferences

G.1 Results Mediation Analysis Chancellor Preferences

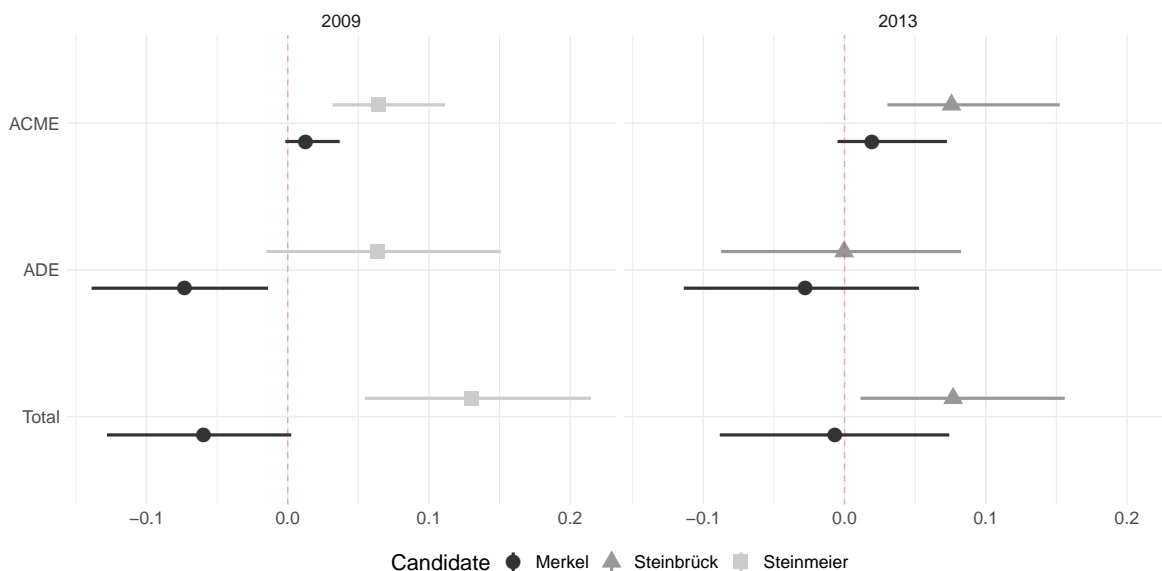


Figure 14: Mediation Analysis for Chancellor Preference. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The candidate valence of Merkel is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the chancellor preference for Merkel. The candidate valence of Steinbrück and Steinmeier is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the chancellor preference for Steinbrück and Steinmeier respectively.

	Pref. Stein. 2009	Pref. Merkel 2009	Pref. Steinb. 2013	Pref. Merkel 2013
ACME	0.07	0.01	0.08	0.02
	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.10
ADE	0.06	-0.07	-0.00	-0.03
	0.07	0.00	0.99	0.32
Total Effect	0.13	-0.06	0.08	-0.01
	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.79
Proportion Mediated	0.51	-0.23	1.02	-4.14
	0.00	0.07	0.01	0.86
N	360	379	236	241

Table 25: Results from Mediation Analysis on Chancellor Preference in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is candidate valence. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

G.2 Regression Results for 2009

	Val. Steinm.	Pref. Chanc. Steinm.	Val. Merkel	Pref. Chanc. Merkel
Treatment	2.01 (0.43)	0.06 (0.05)	0.69 (0.40)	-0.07 (0.04)
Cand. Valence		0.03 (0.01)		0.02 (0.01)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.73 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.81 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.01)
Pref. Canc. Pre	0.34 (0.42)	0.61 (0.05)	1.27 (0.35)	0.70 (0.04)
Party Vote Pre	0.51 (0.52)	0.11 (0.06)	0.09 (0.37)	0.02 (0.04)
Party ID Pre	-0.57 (0.43)	0.12 (0.05)	-0.12 (0.45)	0.09 (0.04)
Female	-0.22 (0.28)	-0.07 (0.03)	0.58 (0.25)	0.02 (0.03)
Age	0.02 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.51 (0.30)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.21 (0.27)	0.01 (0.03)
Univ.	0.27 (0.28)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.14 (0.26)	0.04 (0.03)
R ²	0.66	0.56	0.77	0.71
Adj. R ²	0.65	0.55	0.76	0.71
Num. obs.	360	360	379	379
RMSE	2.61	0.31	2.42	0.27

Table 26: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2009

G.3 Regression Results for 2013

	Val. Steinb.	Pref. Chanc. Steinb.	Val. Merkel	Pref. Chanc. Merkel
Treatment	2.19 (0.65)	-0.00 (0.07)	1.22 (0.64)	-0.03 (0.06)
Cand. Valence		0.04 (0.01)		0.02 (0.01)
Cand. Val. Pre	0.76 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.69 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.01)
Pref. Canc. Pre	0.31 (0.54)	0.77 (0.05)	1.17 (0.49)	0.80 (0.04)
Party Vote Pre	0.29 (0.64)	0.09 (0.06)	0.61 (0.62)	-0.00 (0.05)
Party ID Pre	-0.04 (0.56)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.29 (0.57)	0.12 (0.05)
Female	-0.12 (0.37)	0.00 (0.04)	0.31 (0.36)	0.03 (0.03)
Age	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)
Full Employ.	-0.07 (0.42)	0.02 (0.04)	-0.77 (0.40)	-0.00 (0.03)
Univ.	-0.46 (0.71)	0.03 (0.07)	0.20 (0.74)	-0.00 (0.06)
R ²	0.65	0.69	0.70	0.78
Adj. R ²	0.64	0.68	0.68	0.78
Num. obs.	236	236	241	241
RMSE	2.79	0.28	2.72	0.24

Table 27: Regression Results for Mediation Analysis German Federal Election of 2013

G.4 Sensitivity Analysis

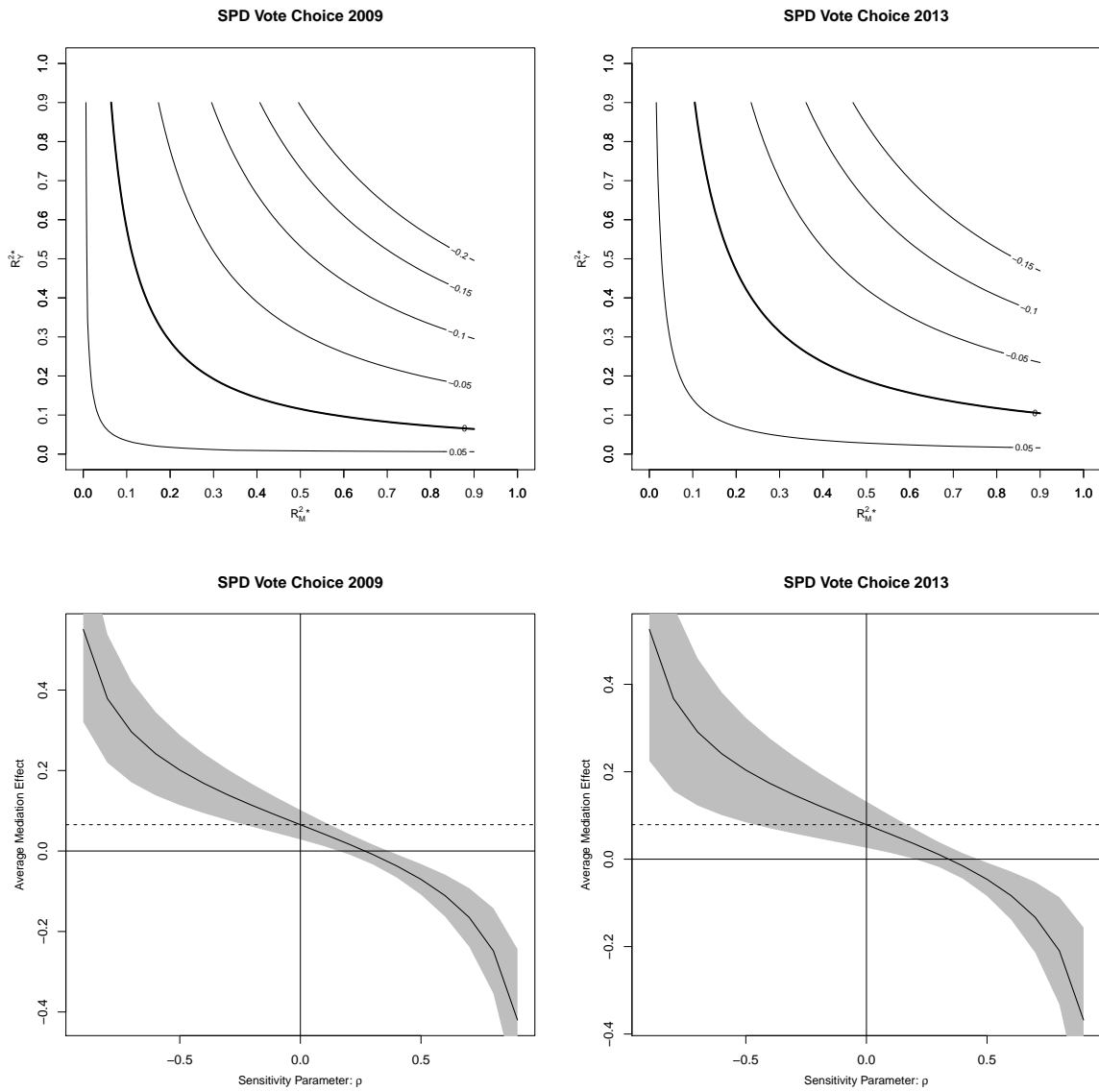


Figure 15: Sensitivity Analysis of Mediation Analysis for Chancellor Preference

H Results Main Analysis Watched Only

H.1 Results Mediation Analysis Candidate Valence for Vote Choice

	SPD 2009	CDU/CSU 2009	SPD 2013	CDU/CSU 2013
ACME	0.04	0.00	0.03	0.00
	0.00	0.48	0.08	0.85
ADE	0.05	0.03	0.02	0.07
	0.25	0.36	0.45	0.03
Total Effect	0.09	0.04	0.05	0.08
	0.02	0.30	0.04	0.03
Proportion Mediated	0.47	0.12	0.53	0.03
	0.02	0.62	0.12	0.85
N	252	268	206	208

Table 28: Results from Mediation Analysis on Vote Intention in the 2009 and 2013 Study (Watched Only). The mediator is candidate valence. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

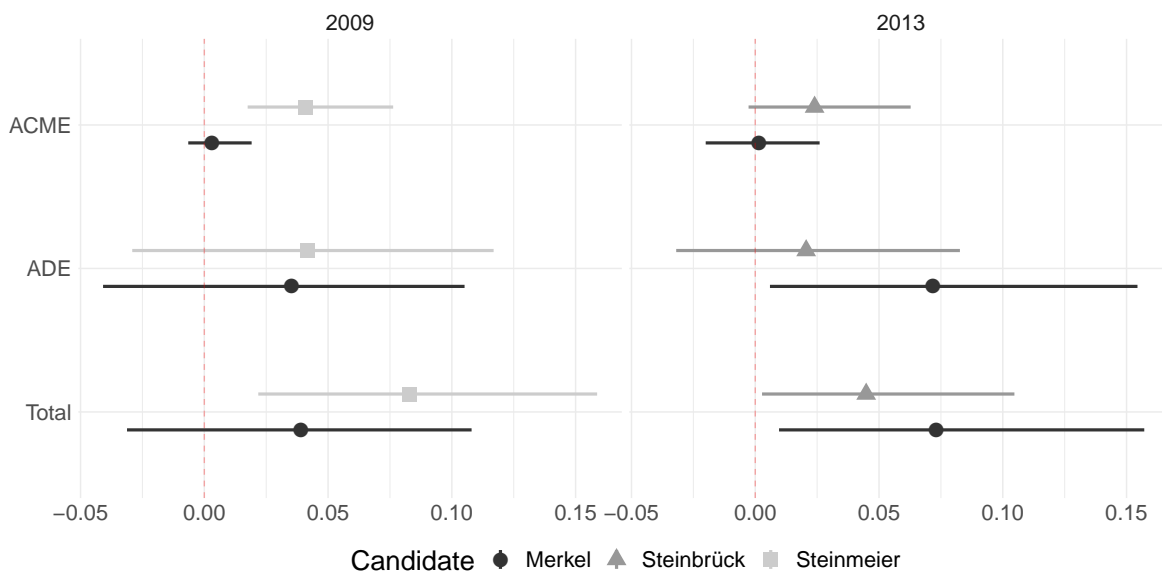


Figure 16: Mediation Analysis for Voting Decisions among Respondents Who Watched the Debate. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The candidate valence of Merkel is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the vote intention for the CDU/CSU. The candidate valence of Steinbrück and Steinmeier is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the vote intention for the SPD respectively.

H.2 Results Mediation Analysis Candidate Valence for Rating

	SPD 2009	CDU 2009	SPD 2013	CDU 2013
ACME	0.40	0.07	0.30	0.01
	0.00	0.29	0.00	0.43
ADE	-0.19	-0.13	0.51	0.03
	0.29	0.50	0.06	0.37
Total Effect	0.20	-0.06	0.82	0.04
	0.24	0.72	0.00	0.28
Proportion Mediated	1.96	-1.16	0.37	0.14
	0.24	0.83	0.00	0.53
N	251	266	206	260

Table 29: Results from Mediation Analysis on Party Rating Scores in the 2009 and 2013 Study. The mediator is candidate valence. The table shows the Average Causal Mediation Effect (AMCE), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), the Total Effect and the Proportion Mediated.

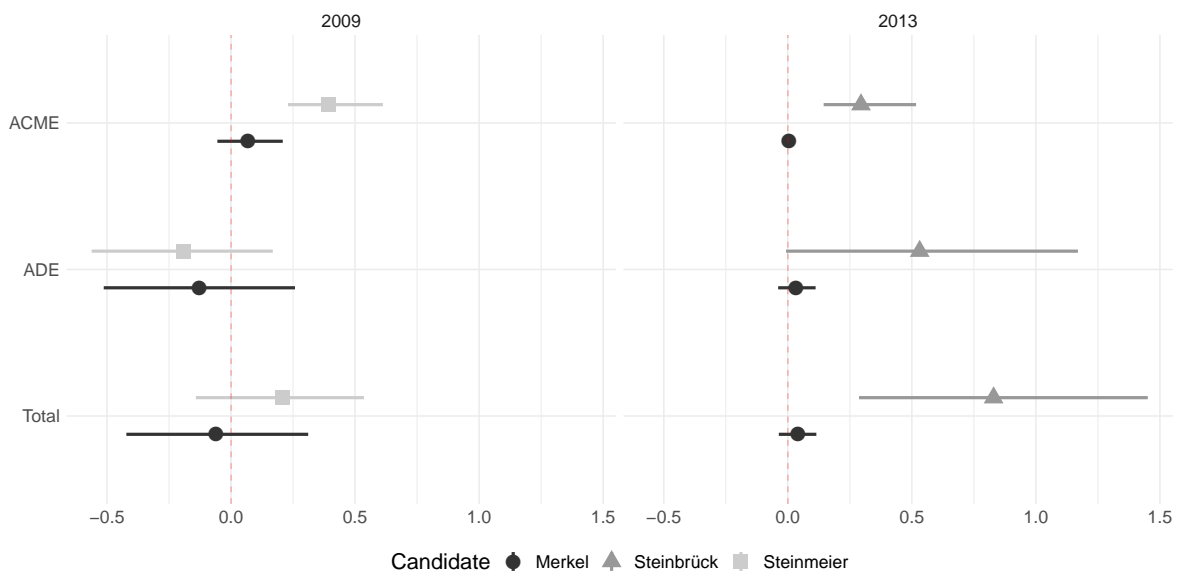


Figure 17: Mediation Analysis for Party Rating Scores among Respondents Who Watched the Debate. The figure reports the point estimates and 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), the Average Direct Effect (ADE), as well as the Total Effect of following the televised debate. The analysis further conditions on the a set of political variables measured in the pre-treatment survey. The candidate valence of Merkel is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the party rating scores of the CDU. The candidate valence of Steinbrück and Steinmeier is assumed to mediate the effect of the debate on the party ratings of the SPD respectively.